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THE IMPORTANCE OF ALIGNMENT

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ABSTRACT

Illeris learning model for working life claims that learning only happens if both the individual psychological level and the interaction with the surrounding environment is aligned. With an assumption that a principle-based leadership framework can support and maintain lean initiatives, a conceptual walkthrough is conducted by putting the principles-based framework up against Illeris's model for learning in working life. Learning is a fundamental prerequisite for behavioural change, so by discussing how principles can enhance learning in an organization crucial insight is ggained. This insight will further support ongoing fieldwork on action-based research implementing principles within the construction business. A principles-based leadership framework can help align, activate and increase the overlapping area both on work identity and on working practice and therefore be an important contribution for behavioural change in the construction business.

KEYWORDS

Experimental learning, commitment, action research, continuous improvement and leadership.

INTRODUCTION

The construction business is structured around projects (Ballard and Howell 1998) and every project is normally treated as separate reporting and economical subunits. A common way to test implementation of lean is through pilot projects (Kalsaas, Skaar, and Thorstensen 2009; Mota, Mota, and Alves 2008; Dave, Boddy, and Koskela 2013; Lehtovaara et al. 2019) We observe a tendency that even though many of the pilot projects recognize that the lean system, methods and tools implemented in the projects have had a positive effect, we also see that many of the persons involved in the pilots do not continue to use lean if their next project are not defined as another lean pilot project. This means the behavioural change is not transferred to the next project, even though they claim that the last project gained a clear positive effect related to the use of elements from lean construction. Assuming that lean construction is a fruitful path for improvement, what could be a legit reason for this relapse? It seems like many of the possible answers may be captured within Illeris model of learning in working life (Illeris 2009). Among other it can be:

- Lack of confidence to manage lean outside a pilot (Learning process).

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- Individually difficult to change behaviour after limited experience (Learning process).
- Projects specifications and/or conditions becomes barriers for new thinking and methods (Technical-organisational environment).
- The business culture does not make ground for new learning (Socio-cultural environment).

Many academic writings draw on the importance of learning as a foundation for behavioural change. Illeris model for learning in working life (Illeris 2004b) considers both how the work identity and the working practice becomes preconditions for learning. Kalsaas (2012) apply Illeris learning model to conceive the Last Planner System style of planning to understand how processes of learning take place.

This paper is a part of a Phd research project exploring the form and effects of a principle centered leadership framework for supporting and maintaining lean construction initiatives in the construction business. Acknowledging the importance of learning as a foundation for creating and sustaining behavioural change we analyse how principle based leadership can affect the learning ability of individuals.

METHOD AND APPROACH

This paper uses theoretical conceptualization as the main method. We apply learning theory towards a principle-based leadership framework (Stephen R. Covey 2009; Skaar 2019) to analyse where principles spur or discourage learning. A previous and ongoing fieldwork supports the conceptualization, conducted in one Phd project and several master and bachelor studies done with experimental based methodology. The studies test the use of principles in different contexts and using the principles directly or connected to a strategic/tactical discussion either within a lean house (Liker 2003), towards a purpose driven statement (Mackey and Sisodia 2014; Sinek 2014) and/or a vision (Covey 2009). We are in search for actionable knowledge (Tsoukas and Knudsen 2005; Argyris 1996) so the principles are tested within a contractors environment on project level (Skaar 2019), in production (Bøe and Meland 2019), in procurement, in design phase, in early conceptual phase and on department level (Grøtvedt and Haddeland 2020). The research is starting "bottom-up" with ambitions to expand to project owner and top management level.

THEORY

A PRINCIPLE BASED FRAMEWORK

Principles formed prescriptive and with a guiding ability can be interpreted by the individual and spur action adapted to the contextual setting (Skaar et al. 2020). The use of purpose driven principles are even announced to be the next paradigm shift in leadership capabilities by some authors (Mukherjee 1995; S. R. Covey 2001), even though principle based leadership already has a long history especially within the military (Roberts 2018; Szypszak 2016) and later also business (Rodrigues 2001).

Principles act as guides to fulfil the concept they represent. For a company or organization, the main purpose of the business could be explicitly expressed, and it is often done through a purpose, mission and or a vision statement (Arbulu and Zabelle 2006; S. R. Covey 2001; Wallace, Richard, and Jr 1996; Musa, Pasquire, and Hurst 2016; Skaar 2019)(Arbulu and Zabelle 2006). If a company

forms explicit principles to support their purpose, they should guide so that if employees act upon the principles with the company's purpose and values in mind it should be in an attempt to advance in alignment with the purpose, the “true north” (S. R. Covey 2001).

Stephen Covey (S. R. Covey 2001) represents a concept where the overall vision and mission statement should be made specific both on the organizational, leadership, interpersonal and individual level.

ILLERIS MODEL FOR WORK LIFE

The model captures the interaction of both the individual aspect of learning and the learning environment. It is a model that combines both work practice and work identity into an overlapping model. The model shows how working practice is filtered through the learners work identity before it is processed to learning (Illeris 2009). The model illustrated in Figure 1shows an area where work identity and work practice overlap, in this area the potential for learning is at its largest. The model moreover conceives the impact from the structure made up of the technical organizational and socio-cultural learning environment on work practice and the impact from cognitive learning and psychodynamic om work identity (Figure 1). The dimension on individual level addressing individual’s history and background is not emphasised in the following, which is also the case for the societal dimension regarding the organizational context.

DISCUSSION ON WORK IDENTITY IN A PRINCIPLE BASED FRAMEWORK

COGNITIVE LEARNING

The arrow between learning content and dynamic (se figure 1), refers to how an individual psychologically acquires learning. Where the dynamic side considers the individual's motivation and emotions, the learning content considers the individual's knowledge and skills. Our ongoing testing of principles show that the framework is not intuitive. The use of principles must be explained, and a purpose, vision and mission seem to have different motivational effects from individual to individual. Our observations indicate that due to the principles often logical and common sense-based character, they can easily be agreed upon, it is though harder to get everybody motivated for daily use. A crucial point in understanding the use of the principles is that they should challenge the status quo continuously, “never accept status quo” is an important principle in itself (Macomber and Davey 2018). So, by thinking of implementation areas and experience with the use of principles a mindset can be built, and knowledge can be gained from the learnings made. Knowledge might in the long run be defined as wisdom, a higher-order tacit knowledge. (Nonaka and Takeuchi 2019)

Knowledge and skills are part of the competence, and the use of principles should be built alongside the trade specific knowledge needed in the work situation. Competence combined with character and integrity forms the prerequisite of empowerment (Covey 2001).

EMOTIONS AND MOTIVATION

Learning is important for behavioural change (Zanone and Kelso 1992; Lim and Yazdanifard 2014). Both knowledge, skills and motivation are important factors for behavioural change among employees. Since the topic in this paper is a leadership framework the motivation for the employees should be spurred and supported by the

framework. Research indicates a positive relation between empowerment and motivation (Drake, Wong, and Salter 2007), so a principle cantered leadership framework should seek empowerment as part of the vision (S. R. Covey 2001). Empowerment needs commitment from the employee, and commitment and motivation reach a higher level of intrinsic motivation versus extrinsic motivation (Johnson, Chang, and Yang 2010). An individual and personal commitment to the purpose, might be important for many individuals to create the right alignment. Covey (2001) suggest that mission and vision statements are made on a personal level also in organizations to have a more dedicated personal compass in everyday tasks. Personal vision and mission statements have been tested in different workshops and feedback from this shows an immediate positive reaction, but the long-term effect has not been tested yet.

DISCUSSION ON WORK PRACTICE IN A PRINCIPLE BASED FRAMEWORK

THE TECHNICAL-ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

A principle centred leadership framework will directly be a part of the organizational environment when implemented. But here an important definition occurs, because lean principles are often interpreted as "common sense" and can easily be interpreted as something that is already a part of the working practice.

The line between what is and what is not a part of the technical-organizational learning environment is not easy to define and should therefore be explicitly stated as an important part of the business framework to remove doubt. Our observations indicate that leaders get results when they ask for answers from principles but if they don`t ask, the frequency of initiatives drops very fast (Skaar 2019). These observations are made on project level in an organization, where the project as an organization is not familiar with extensive use of principle based leadership. In these contexts, defined and written principles have been used in order to legitimize and make them a part of a periodic routine to trigger the use of them (Bøe and Meland 2019). Some of the master and bachelor thesis connected to this research also use a "lean house" as a place or symbol in order to build a common understanding of the meaning of purpose and the principles that support it (Grøtvedt and Haddeland 2020). The research indicates that the principle centred framework must be an undisputed part of the projects and/or organization's structure in order to take out a higher potential at least in the implementation phase of the framework. A clear purpose behind the principles will give an aligned understanding towards a "true north" (Covey 2001).

THE SOCIO-CULTURAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

"Culture eats strategy for breakfast" is a phrase attributed to Peter Drucker (Ellender 2016) that becomes a metaphor for how important culture is for strategic deployment and improvements programs in an organization. Illeris also emphasizes the socio-cultural aspect of learning. Even though the construction business can be interpreted as a cultural community, every project can also be interpreted as its own standalone community. To answer the overall challenge to make lean construction a consistent way of working the improvement and learning must be brought from one project to the next. A continuous improvement culture is necessary for making this happen. The construction industry is project based so investments done cross projects in the construction business is relatively low. Every project is therefore expected to deliver, and interviews indicate that the project management fear a potential "loss project" more than they feel motivated to

increase margins in the project, this might reduce effort to innovate in the culture. To create a culture that foster improvement rather than fear of losing is important for a principle based framework.

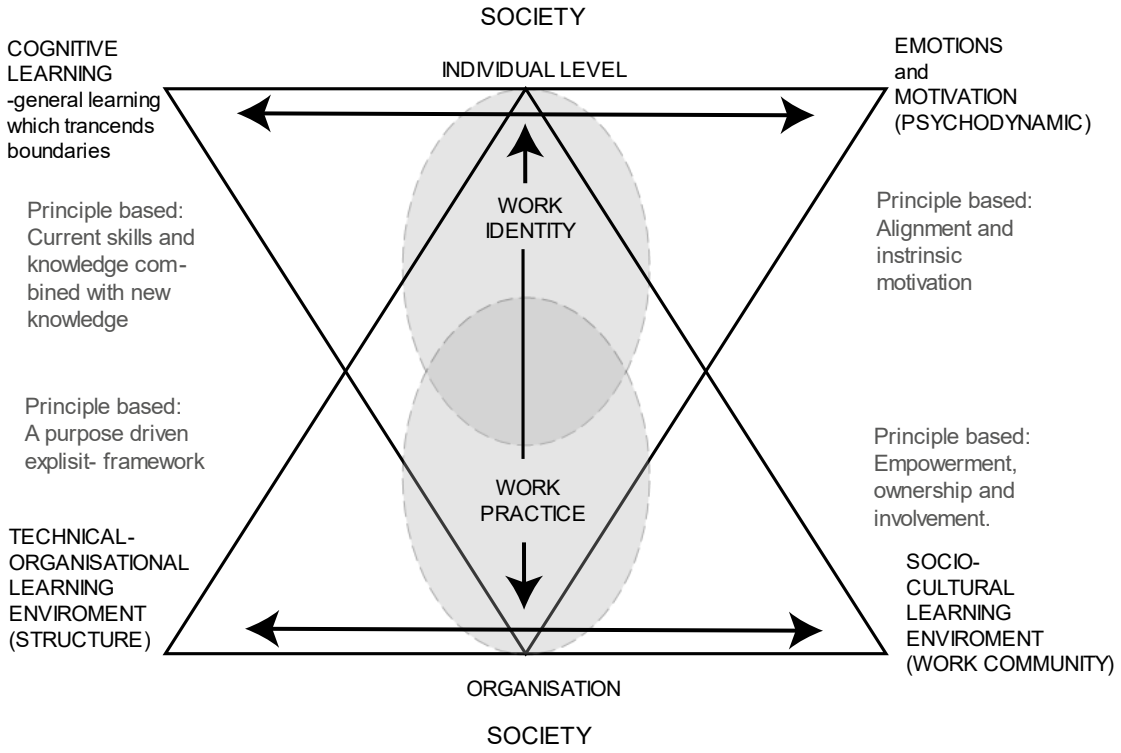

Figure 1: Workplace learning (Adapted and translated from Illeris (2009)). The grey text is added to the original model as contributions towards a principle - based leadership framework.

REFLECTIONS ON PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

START WITH WHY

By working with all conditions in the Illeris model, the purpose, leadership ownership, employee's motivation and skills gets attention. But how can this be translated and affect the project level? In a project you have stakeholders with a variety of motivation, the owner, contractor, subcontractors, architect, and consultants all have their own opinion and motivation. Using the principle “Start with the end in mind” (Macomber and Davey 2018) the common purpose might be considered as the first piece of the puzzle. Start with “Why” (Sinek 2014) is a way to find a common purpose, “Why do we build this project? Every construction and gathering of people in a project team can be challenged to find a deeper meaning that can motivate the entire group across companies. Building the “best” product of its kind or creating the “best” team environment can be stretch goals for most situations. Finding principles that support these goals put are recommended (Structure). Ex. If the goal is the best team, "Build relations with everybody” can be an example of a principle the project can strive to master (Work community). The leaders must then own the principle and ask for answers (Work community), all employees can be challenged to learn colleagues across companies (Cognitive learning) and find their own ways to interact (Psychodynamics).

INTEGRATION OF INTERESTS IN THE CONSTRUCTION VALUE CHAIN

The project can be conceived as the organization and each project will develop/emerge its specific technical organizational learning environment and socio cultural the like.

Projects with relational contract are likely to have an advantage to achieve a fruitful socio-cultural learning environment due to the impact from involvement in planning and control. On the technical organizational part relational contracts may be based on sharing risk and gain which is likely to increase trust and motivation to the best for the project. In other words, less incentives for suboptimization.

To support a holistic learning environment the project management would organize learning sessions for project staff who is new to the actual way of working (cognitive learning - Figure 1)). Learning on project level will also be stimulated by taking the time to mutual reflections and application techniques like Plan-Do-Check-Act or Kolb's learning circle.

Negative feelings by individuals in the project teams affects the learning potential (Psychodynamics - Figure 1), hench it is important for the management to have a style of leadership which apply the possessed power to correct unwanted/negative behaviour to build or to prevent trust to deteriorate (Sørhaug 1996). A successful project will moreover make effort to pick its people to have individual match between work identity and the work practice we want to establish or have.

CONCLUSIONS

The illeris model is a challenging model that contributes to a good depth in discussing the prerequisites for learning. The model challenges the different aspects of learning and thereby becomes a good model that a leadership framework can test its capabilities against. Key takeaways are the emphasis needed on alignment to purpose, training of knowledge, making the framework explicit so it can support a culture of empowerment and involvement. Most of all the Illeris model learns that all of these learning points are dependent on each other, so in order to implement a principle centered leadership framework all aspects of the model have to be taken into account.

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