

## Crisis

During the last 6 years I have observed how we have been struggling worldwide with what is called the financial crisis. It started with the collapse of the banking system, first in the USA and a bit later in Europe, where it concerns financing objects like houses and buildings in a risky way. Packages of financial arrangements with risks were transferred between financial institutions until it showed to be much riskier for the well-being of banks and consumers.

Governments had to interfere and save the big banks from getting broke. In Ireland, Portugal, Spain, Italy it gave a major blow to the economy. A high percentage of unemployed people, sometimes for the younger generation up to 50 %, and little chance to find jobs, resulted out of this crisis. This crisis was influencing private households, business companies as well as government arrangements to a wide extent.

I also observed how in a growing number of countries there is a crisis on the level of religious fanaticism resulting in destructive battles and wars that destroy the country. Especially in the Arabic and African and Asian countries we see this tension and the chaotic workings it has on societies.

I have seen in big countries like Russia, Brazil, China, India and USA how the corruption has entered the public life. We cannot be sure that politicians, cultural leaders, company CEO's are not part of a corrupt system. They seem more and more to be a part of this corrupt system and have numerous ways to enrich themselves. There is an ever-growing distance between the rich and the poor all around the world and all those in between experience the insecurity that arises out of threatening developments and moral crisis in the leadership.

I have also observed in the well-established fully organized countries that there is a crisis on the level of sense-making for people in working life. We are in an ever-continuing growth process that has put a lot of pressure on people and households to hold path with this growth. The stress has been growing and also the frustration with managers and professionals about the sense of the work they are doing. Ambitious goals have to be reached and people have to sacrifice their own ideals in the continuous rat race they are part of. Here we see an inner soul crisis arising.

One could well conclude that the world is becoming chaotic for all of us and all of us are more or less searching for a new sense to deal with these chaotic realities that influence our life.

Behind each door these crises are part of the life of people and we cannot escape them anymore. In each soul there arises the sense-making question: why are we doing, like we are doing?

Maybe the biggest crisis is in our trust in the way we are used to handle problems in the past and today and to see that these ways of handling problems do not work anymore in the actual world situation. How did that happen?

## Changes

We have seen the world change in the past 50 years to a complete different level of existence. Technology has created a worldwide net of connections. World economy is realised, everybody is serving everybody. Traditional beliefs and values have become obsolete in carrying the inner world of people. It leads to anarchism and fanaticism. The old religious and spiritual institutes cannot answer any more people's life questions. We all have been thrown back on our own life situation and personal values and we all have to deal individually and also together in our life communities with questions and issues there are no solutions for and no clear ways of handling them.

The main crisis we are facing might be a worldwide crisis in leadership and how the leadership handles the issues in the community it is part of.

Lets look then to a possible new perspective for leadership in handling in a different way the crises of today in the community. What could be the difference between the traditional leadership way and a new leadership way of handling the questions and issues?

## Traditional leadership

The tradition of leadership is based on a few principles that made it acceptable for the community over many centuries. One can describe these principles in the following way.

*The first principle* is that of hierarchy. There are people in a top position, in the middle position and in the lowest basic position. The top is responsible for the whole of the well-being of the community, its destiny, the middle has to manage the issues and reach the goals. The basis is the professionals that deal with the work towards clients and work together to get the work done. In this hierarchy things go top – down and bottom – up.

*The second principle* is the organized and functional arrangement in which specialized tasks are done by people working in and paid for their function. We have reached a totally differentiated world, full of specialists and special processes. We all have become organized beings and we all are dealing with all organized aspects and processes of the modern life.

*The third principle* is that the top responds to the ownership and set the goals for the community to be achieved. This is done in a vertical way. The professional responds to the clients to be served on their needs. This is done in a horizontal way. The middle management has to make the connection between vertical and horizontal processes and balance the different interests of the people involved.

These principles are working on all levels. They work in the society construct, the organization and in the private household. We are still fully embedded in these principles, have our place and role in this. We expect solutions from above, we have to fit ourselves in these constructs and except what decisions are made by those who govern.

However when it comes to the point that we face crisis in our organized life we are suddenly thrown back on our own basis and have to start to deal with these issues. We are challenged to show our own leadership. It can be the patient in the hospital, the child in the school, the father at work, the citizen in the local government. We all face early or later situations of this kind we have to deal with ourselves in a wider context we are part of.

## The future of leadership

The future of leadership might be based on a fundamental change in our leadership paradigm and that is that leadership is not based on the top leading the others in this traditional operational way but that all of us show leadership, top – middle and basis in the processes we are doing, in dialogue with each other and that we see this different kind of leadership appear in a horizontal dialogue process on the questions and issues we have to face. These questions are ‘slow – questions’ that arise in the muddy grounds we are operating on in the practice of our life. Leadership becomes a dialogic process in which the practical but also moral dimensions of our existence are shaped and reflected on. This requires our ability to live in processes, be able to dialogue and take personal responsibility for our thoughts and actions.

To be able to do leadership in this way we must become aware of the difference in our operational lives and our development live. We are all acting in organized contexts and we are all part of the wider system. This directs our behaviour to a great extend and we all have to act in a disciplined way to perform our task as workers and as consumers. This is mostly familiar ground to us as society and organizations are formed like this during more then a century. New is however our participation in the development process in the family we live in, the organisation we work in and in the society we are participating in. Here we become part of creating the future destiny of our organized life in that we show personal leadership in a common community process. In this process we become the co-creators and we take personal responsibility for our contributions in the leadership process.

In the society we are invited to take sensible initiatives that respond to the needs of others. We can open our eyes to these needs of others but also become aware how others help us to create a sensible life. We can be the partner that supports the sense making of the neighbour next door or persons that are living thousands miles away.

In the organization we can open our eyes for the processes we do, how they work out on our client, how we can improve them and work together in them.

We can see these two dimensions, operational and development, at work also in the process we do as private consumers, as clients of organizations. We are responsible for the decisions we take as consumer, for the effects it has in society, for that what we maintain or that what we do not support anymore. Also here we are challenged to take leadership and deal with the moral dimensions that are part of our decisions. This require a dialogical ability, a process awareness, a biographical sense making.

In many different ways we can become process owners that contribute to the well being of our communities by showing horizontal leadership. This gives us a sense of fulfilment; it contributes to the happiness of the others and ourselves.

## Horizontal Leadership

The key to create this change in leadership can be the changed awareness of top leaders that they are not anymore the powerful leaders that decide on the destinies of the others and the community they are leading but that they are leaders of a community process in which the people can participate all in the development process, experience what it means to be

responsible and come to moral judgements and decisions on future issues that will define our future life and that of those who come after us.

In our life practice we have seen many examples where top leaders of organizations, heads of units, heads of teams and professionals together dialogue on the real issues that their organization is facing, coming up with clear experiences and views on how things could be made different. They dialogue on the basis of their personality, their personal leadership and that is why they understand each other and find common ways to change practices that lack a sense.

We also see many examples of families that act out responsibility for all the decisions to take on the level of consuming, personal development and cultural involvement. Parents and children show leadership.

We see some political, cultural and religious leaders that show their awareness for this new style of leadership in the way they dialogue in society and include and involve people in stead of closing them out. There is a very slow growing awareness of the workings of their decisions in society. It creates a great sense of life to do this together.

## Summary

Organizations are confronted with the financial crisis worldwide. The usual behaviour of managers like to invest more and finance more so that the turnover will increase and the profit will grow as there is more production and more consumption, these securities are challenged. It challenges the management repertoire concentrated on growth, organizing, new technology introduction, cost control. When things stagnate, there is less profit, there is insecurity with the management and the professionals, there is a lack of good ideas, how to act then?

There is insecurity on how to handle the crisis. This might show that there is not only a financial crisis but there is also a moral crisis. Leaders and professionals ask themselves the question: "Why to keep doing it like we do, and how to do it differently?"

We see that the existing management repertoire is not good enough to handle the crisis. There is growing need to look for alternatives for the way we lead, the leadership. We see three points of a change in behaviour for the leadership:

- A continuous intensive dialogue with the clients and suppliers in the economic chains by leaders and professionals,
- A different way of steering the money by leaders and professionals, giving us an insight in the real money streams and start to steer on them by leaders and professionals,
- A different way of co-operation between managers and professionals over the boundaries of their departments and units, related to real issues of change and development.

Here we touch on the key economic factors that can make the difference in how we handle the crisis in our own organized lives.

## **Let's do it**

Here I see the key to finding new ways of creating and being society. We have to look for examples of people that act new leadership, are able to break through the traditional leadership patterns and think, feel and act in a dialogical moral way with the communities they are responsible for. We have to create and be these examples ourselves.

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