Essay for the Ackoff conference

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Over the years I have been working in organizations with an authoritarian style of management. In Russia it is common to speak about levels of management, automatically recognizing the priority of the government’s interests over the interests of people and specific organizations. Totalitarian consciousness is not only an effect or consequence, but also a cause of the emergence of totalitarian forms of management. This “administrative mechanism” excludes using democratic methods in human resources management. The totalitarian and democratic approaches to management confront each other as two conceptual and institutional systems with diametrically opposing views of a person and his/her place in society and the state. In totalitarian thinking government and its ideology, laws and institutions provide the basis for any organization. In totalitarian management systems a person must fit into standard schemes, deriving from the schema of government management, and this inevitably leads to depersonalization of management and its degeneration into abstract rules.

Currently Russian organizations are going through a transition, which requires the development of a new conception of management based on the study of the personal characteristics of workers, external and internal conditions of the organization’s work and essential organizational activities, such as improving the effectiveness of work. The task of managing this dramatic transition in the style of management is aggravated by a lack of effective day to day management in Russian organizations.

From the books of Russel Ackoff I know that reforming and transforming are not the same. (Ackoff, 2004) Reforming means changing the system of achieving goals. Transforming means changing both goals and the system of achieving goals.

I also know that changes in management methods in the Twentieth Century have been driven both by rising levels of education among workers and by new technologies. Russell Ackoff suggested (Ackoff, 1982) that changes in management thought can be described using three metaphors. Organizations can be viewed as machines, as organisms, or as social systems. As workers became more highly skilled, organizations came to be viewed as social systems. Managers recognized that workers have their own ideas about what the organization should be doing. It became the task of managers to create an inspiring vision to motivate and excite workers to fulfill the organization’s goals.

These ideas have inspired me to try to apply some insights of the best management scientists in the practice of management education. Accordingly, management education has to be systemic. Programs of education should be complex, including many ways of working with managers during the time of training.

The Executive Training Center I and my colleagues created for the West-Siberian Railroad System provided

* a modern business culture as a way of creating its education environment;
* continuous process improvement of the Center’s activities on the basis of feedback;
* technologies of corporate education;
* metaprograms of education;
* innovative methods of education;
* teachers familiar with innovative education technologies;
* and a mechanism of adjusting to the external environment.

The Center’s activities in the field of management can be described under three headings:

* Education and training
* Science
* Real-production intervention (process improvement)
* Written papers based on analysis of real-production problems and experience in training prospective managers
* Initiation of innovative teaching methods for developing management education in Novosibirsk and Russia.

I have experimented with several methods for engaging in change management – quality improvement methods, group facilitation methods, and service learning exercises. We have found that these methods, which involve the active participation of employees, can help Russian organizations move from an authoritarian style of management to a more participatory, information-sharing, cooperative style of management.

On the basis of this experience in trainings and making changes in organizations as well as using R. Ackoff’s, Fr. Capra’s, P. Senge’s, S. Umpleby’s and others ideas I have developed an extended systems approach to change management in labor relations.

The most important publications:

Medvedeva T.A. An extended system approach to social and labor relations in the context of economic globalization: monograph / Т.А. Medvedev. - Moscow: TEIS, 2016. (in rus.)

Medvedeva T.A. A Multi-Disciplinary View of Social and Labor Relations: Changes in Management in the U.S. and Russia as Examples // T.A. Medvedeva, S.A. Umpleby // Cybernetics and Systems: An International Journal – 2015. – Vol. 46 – Issue 8 – с. 681-697.

Medvedeva T.A. Problems in introducing of innovation in Russian enterprises: organizational and personnel aspects / TA Medvedeva // Scientific studies of the Faculty of Economics. Moscow State University. Electronic journal. Volume 5. Issue 2. - 2014. - P. 15-24. (in rus.)

Medvedeva T.A. Developing an Innovative Style of Thinking and Innovative Behavior / T.A. Medvedeva // Systemic Practice and Action Research. – 2012. – V. 25, № 3. – P. 261-272.

Medvedeva T.A. Constructing new world views by practicing new management methods: a constructivist approach to education / T.A. Medvedeva // R. Trappl (ed.), Cybernetics and Systems. – 2010.