You cannot be smart against your will

A critical reflection

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Knowledge productivity

An important assertion in Chapter 1 and 2 is that the economy is transforming into a knowledge economy. Therefore, individuals, teams and companies need to develop the necessary competencies to be able to participate in a working life that is mainly based on knowledge productivity. The dramatically increased interest in knowledge over the past decade has given rise to the concepts knowledge-intensive organizations, knowledge workers, knowledge systems, knowledge centres, knowledge creation, knowledge management and citizens in a knowledge society. At the same time it is questionable whether the traditional approaches to management, training and development will provide the learning environment that is required for knowledge work.

When I first formulated the concept of knowledge productivity (Kessels, 1995) I stated that knowledge productivity involves signalling, absorbing and processing of relevant information, developing new competencies on the basis of this information, and applying these competencies to the improvement and innovation of work processes, products and services. It chiefly concerns the way that staff, teams and departments achieve knowledge-based improvements and innovations. In fact, the driving force of knowledge productivity is a complex learning experience. It also expresses that the knowledge that we value in an economic context should be perceived as competencies, as capabilities, as the skills to bring about gradual improvement and radical innovation. The knowledge productivity concept is based on the view that knowledge is an individual competence: it involves a subjective skill that is inextricably linked with the individuals concerned. We first explored the concept of knowledge as a competence in studies of

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successful educational programmes (Kessels, 1993; Kessels & Harrison, 1998; Kessels & Plomp, 1999). Malhotra supports the view of knowledge as a competence: "Even procedural knowledge, when translated into symbols that are later processed by another human, does not ensure that the outcome of his knowledge will rival that of the original *carrier*. Knowledge needs to be understood as the *potential for action* that doesn't only depend upon the stored information but also on the individual interacting with it." (Malhotra, 2000, p. 249).

Therefore, companies, government agencies and institutes should consciously develop a corporate curriculum, an 'open' plan for learning that offers a rich landscape of development, that turns the day to day work environment into a powerful learning environment. Its various learning functions help individuals, irrespective of their formal education, to develop their talents and take part in various forms of knowledge work. As knowledge productivity and the supporting learning processes are so closely related, the corporate curriculum, might become the binding force of knowledge networks, smart communities that heavily depend on shared intrinsic motivation and personal affection with the content of the job.

The management of knowledge

The concepts of knowledge productivity and the corporate curriculum raise also the question in how far knowledge productivity can be managed. The question is even whether the current interest in knowledge, its complex underlying dynamics and the economic significance that we attribute to it might augur the end of the management era. The origins lie in a period of economic activity in which we tried to plan, steer, manage, measure, verify, monitor, assess and evaluate everything we considered important. While knowledge has been important throughout economic history, our desire to manage everything of value to us arose mainly in the previous century. Drucker (1993) argues that the initial application of knowledge to production means and methods gave rise to the industrial revolution. The owners of the production means were the main players; access to the capital factor ruled economic transactions. Subsequently, the application of knowledge to labour brought about the revolution in productivity. Here, a new category of managers has emerged. They cultivate specific knowledge concerning the deployment of production means, use of resources, employee guidance and management of quality and logistics and external markets, clients and the surroundings. The dominant position of the owner-capital provider has shifted to the upper management. In the current knowledge revolution, knowledge is applied increasingly to knowledge itself. The capacity to develop and apply knowledge rests mainly with knowledge workers. These generally highly educated

professionals are beginning to prevail over managers. The transition from the productivity revolution to a knowledge revolution might mark the end of the management era.

The ability to develop strategies, procedures and work processes turned top management into the ruling business class of the 20th century, the power that they inherited from the company owners. In exchange for a salary, security and material support employees did their jobs disciplined and in obedience. When in the 21st century knowledge productivity becomes the driving force, and as this knowledge production will be found at every level of economic activity, the knowledge workers will take charge.

The changing role of managers will have specific implications for what is called nowadays as knowledge management. The origins of the current success lie in a period of economic activity in which we tried to plan, steer, manage, measure, verify, monitor, assess and evaluate everything we considered important. The question is whether the successful management approach from the past is fully applicable to promote knowledge development. Our desire to manage everything of value to us arose mainly in the previous century. In the line of production management, finance management, personnel management and account management, it not surprising that when knowledge becomes of prime importance, we head for knowledge management.

However, I expect that in a while we will view knowledge management as an anachronism, as the link between two units from different eras. I am not alone in my criticism of knowledge management. In the recent publication by Von Krogh, Ichijo and Nonaka (2000), the authors are similarly reticent about knowledge management and prefer to promote knowledge development without an imperative steering perspective. Malhotra (2000) deals extensively with the question as to whether knowledge management is an oxymoron, a combination of two opposite concepts. He concludes that the management perspective is ineffective with knowledge development. Nonetheless, he has high hopes for the self-steering "knowledge intrapreneur," although this insight does not lead him to abandon the knowledge management concept.

 Knowledge management, control and steering relates more to the 'formal' curriculum, as knowledge productivity encourages the innovation and creativity of an 'open' plan of learning. It will be extremely difficult to organize learning in an open way, especially in a highly competitive environment where predefined outcomes and targeted performances are valued. Therefore, strategic capability (as described by Harrison, 2000), knowledge productivity and the quality of the corporate curriculum are less directed towards specific improvements and innovations, as these are not

the knowledge that concerns us. The ability to achieve such improvements and innovations matters most. A specific innovation, improvement or invention – possibly patented – may be of great economic value, but the true value lies in the *ability* to generate such improvements and innovations rather than in the actual innovation.

Self-regulation of motivation, affinity, emotions and affections.

One of the learning functions in the corporate curriculum supports self-regulation of motivation, affinities, emotions and affections. Nobody can talk somebody else into curiosity, motivation, interest and ambition. The assumption is that people are only clever if they want to be. You cannot be smart against your will. In a traditional economy a manager could say: Joseph work harder, or run faster. In a knowledge economy it is useless when a manager says: Joseph, be smarter or show more creativity! Being smart and creative depend heavily on personal interest. Affections, affinities, and emotions play an important role in knowledge work. I cannot be inventive in a domain for which I am not motivated. What is meaningful work for me and how do I become committed? Finding out what emotional and affective drives employees have and how they can regulate these will probably be an important aspect of designing a work environment in a knowledge economy. Therefore, it is important for knowledge workers to identify personal themes and ways to develop them. In view of the earlier statements that knowledge is a personal skill, that can thrive in inspiring knowledge networks and communities of practice (Wenger, 1998; Wenger & Snyder, 2000), we might search for different strategies to develop knowledge productivity.

The core conditions as formulated forty years ago by Rogers (as cited in Chapter 2) such as self organization, creativity and open dialogue, individual responsibility, control and authority, extensive and open information exchange, a climate of trust based on mutual respect an genuineness, unconditional positive regard for other people, and an ability to communicate all these to others, now have gained an explicit economic interest.

Promoting knowledge productivity requires the competence to work systematically on the social context as well as on the subject matter component. Previously, this was the chief responsibility of instructors, trainers and managers. Over time, these roles have become those of mentors, coaches, facilitators and inspirers. The desire to guide, manage, control and monitor is becoming increasingly difficult to fulfil. Many curricula, schedules and instructional strategies cannot avert transfer problems. Many knowledge workers are not in the need for their managers and arrange for support independently. The growing interest in self-

guidance is apparent in both work and learning contexts. This leads us to ask how we can tempt each other towards knowledge productivity.
The main objective is to acquire the competence to design a workplace that develops sustainable instruments useful for dealing with future issues: the competence to become cleverer, learning to learn, organizing reflection, increasing reflexivity and basically applying knowledge to knowledge development.

Reciprocal attractiveness and passion

 Employees are becoming increasingly aware that their economic appeal depends primarily on the power of knowledge productivity. They will see the need to tempt each other and the surroundings they select to cultivate these competencies. This temptation does not result from power, coercion, status or position. Instead, it arises from the perceived need to work, design and learn together. This process is not automatic. Tempting for knowledge productivity is inviting rather than imposing. Such competence encourages reciprocal attractiveness and makes judicious use of the energy contained in everybody's passion.

The moral dimension, as discussed in the Chapter 1, sheds new light on the concept of reciprocal attractiveness in a context of knowledge work. It does not only apply to the individual members of self-organized teams, but also to managers and to the firm as a whole. In a knowledge economy values such as loyalty, commitment and trust cannot be bought by paying a salary. It is even a question whether these values contribute to knowledge productivity. Loyalty and obedience may be welcome and valuable support systems for overcoming a hurdle or an impasse. Without any substantive drive, however, they are likely to merely foster stupidity and lead to mediocrity at best. To develop this substantive drive it is important to explore the relation of individual life themes to meaningful work. Reflective skills are probably crucial in this process as they help to understand what matters in the personal development of a professional. Co-operation and joined knowledge work is feasible when participants each choose their community based on reciprocal attractiveness, passion, involvement and identification with each other's expertise.

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