

RUNNING HEAD: COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND AUTHENTIC SOLIDARITY

The Role of the Outside Change Agent

In an Inside-out Process

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Introduction

True participatory development must be characterized by agent-participant reciprocity. In this paper I will compare Nonaka's model of knowledge creation with Parker Palmer's model of the community of truth. I will relate this model to our assigned reading and will show how it compliments and deepens our understanding of agent-participant reciprocity in community development.

The Basics of Learning

There are many models that help us understand organizational learning. Each model offers a unique perspective and as I explore different models my understanding is deepened. My own experience is more with adult learning models as opposed to organizational learning models. As I have studied in this MAL program I have been exposed to several organizational learning models. I believe that most organizational learning models are built upon adult learning models that have some changes in terminology and structure. This is certainly true for Nonaka's knowledge creation model (Von Krogh, Ichijo, & Nonaka, 2000). Many of the ideas in this model can be traced back to basic androgogical principles developed by the likes of Freire and Knowles.

I would like to consider a model of learning that I believe fits very well with the ideas presented in the Dyck et al article. I believe that it has a lot to offer us in understanding the importance of agent-participant reciprocity.

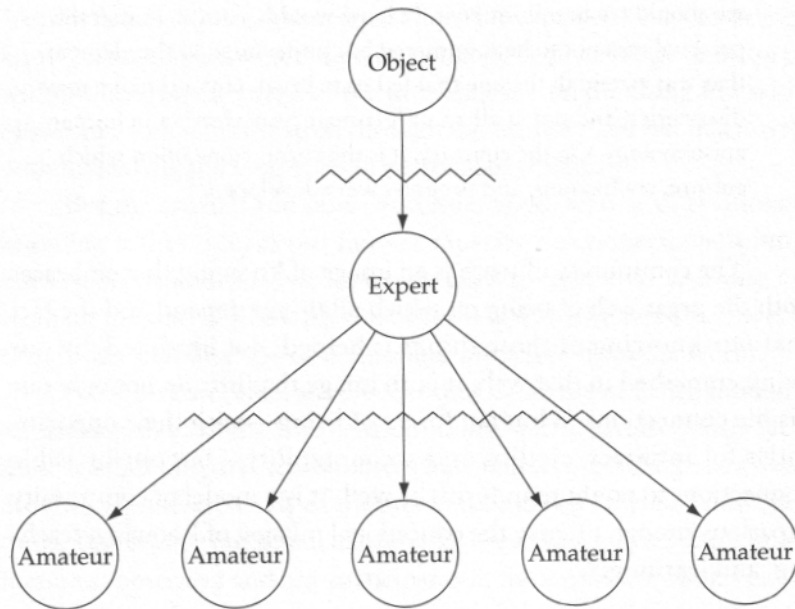
Parker Palmer's Community of Truth Model

Before considering Palmer's community of truth model I would like to consider what he refers to as the objectivist model of knowing which is found in figure 1. I believe that traditionally community development has followed this model. We can contextualize this model

by saying the expert is the outside change agent and the amateurs are the local participants who are going to receive some form of development change.

This model is expert centered and paternalistic. The amateurs do not directly relate to the object but only receive it from the expert. The expert simply hands the object down to the amateurs and does not receive anything back. This is extremely top down. The baffles between layers permit objective truth (for example: objective knowledge about the use of diesel pumps) to flow down but do not allow subjectivity to flow up.

Figure 1. The Objectivist Myth of Knowing (Palmer, p. 100).



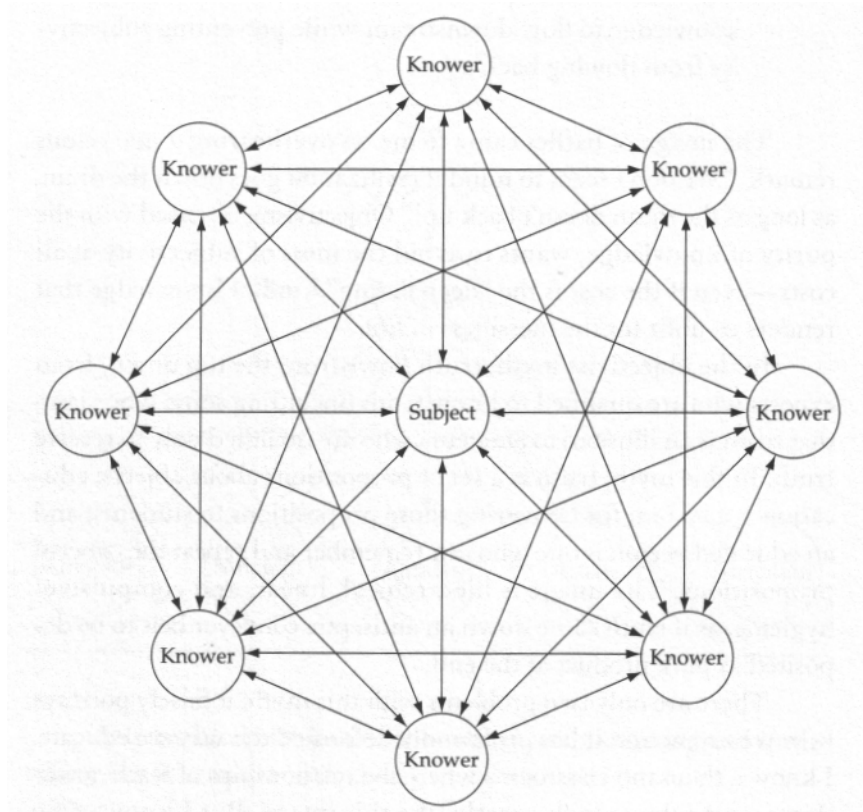
“In the objectivist myth, truth flows from the top down, from experts who are qualified to know truth...to amateurs who are qualified only to receive truth...The image is hierarchical, linear, and compulsive-hygienic, as if truth came down an antiseptic conveyer belt to be deposited as pure product at the end (Palmer, p. 101).”

The community of truth model found in figure 2 gives us a far more effective model of community development. This model is rather messy. In it we as change agents come around the

subject of development along with the communities we serve. Each of us brings a unique perspective. Each of us is changed because of knowing the other and knowing the subject. We as outside change agents are simply one of many knowers. We do not have the apparent control that we have if we come in as the experts. In this model we recognize everyone as an expert in his/her own right. Both Nonaka's knowledge creation model and this model require some level of creative chaos (Von Krogh et al., 2000).

“As we try to understand the subject in the community of truth, we enter into complex patterns of communication—sharing observations and interpretations, correcting and complementing each other, torn by conflict in this moment and joined by consensus the next. The community of truth, far from being linear and static and hierarchical, is circular, interactive, and dynamic (Palmer, p. 103).”

Figure 2. Community of Truth (Palmer, p. 102).



I believe this model, with its focus on community, is particularly powerful when we consider that most of the cultures found in the South place a higher value on the community than the individual. This is also inline with Nonaka’s knowledge creation model.

“...knowledge creation is a social as well as an individual process. Sharing tacit knowledge requires individuals to share their personal beliefs about a situation with other team members. At that point justification becomes public. Each individual is faced with the tremendous challenge of justifying his or her true beliefs in front of others—and it is this need for justification, explanation, persuasion, and human connectedness that makes knowledge creation a highly fragile process(Von Krogh et al., 2000).”

In this model there is mutual respect. Last week I had a great experience of mutual learning, respect and reciprocity with my Quechua colleagues. I was spending the week with the

leaders of a local CBO going over their strategic plans for 2007. We needed to develop performance indicators and so I began explaining in my abstract, North American way, what performance indicators are. But my rural Quechua colleagues were struggling with the concept until one of them came up with a great concrete example. He asked, “Is it like when we are growing potatoes we check the quality of the leaves in order to gauge the growth and quality of the potatoes under the ground?”

This profound comment from this man changed me. Not only did we all suddenly understand the subject better but I was also humbled by the fact that I was simply an outsider with very little inside knowledge even though I had already dedicated six years of my life to understanding the Quechua culture. These men and women are all experts. My role as outside change agent still has its place. But instead of having its place above the participants its place is alongside the participants. The participants are also change agents and not simply participants.

Implications of these Models

Perhaps the greatest implication of these models to development is that solidarity must increase, not decrease. This solidarity requires us as outside change agents to enter into the local context, to spend time building relationships, to learn the local language and culture. We must enter into their struggles and daily lives and in the same way, allow them to enter into our struggles and daily lives. Only in this way will we all be changed.

“Solidarity requires that one enter into the situation of those with whom one is solidary; it is a radical posture...The oppressor is solidary with the oppressed only when he stops regarding the oppressed as an abstract category and sees them as persons who have been unjustly dealt with, deprived of their voice, cheated in the sale of their labor—when he stops making pious, sentimental, and individualistic gestures and risks an act of love.

True solidarity is found only in the plentitude of this act of love, in its existentiality, in its praxis. To affirm that men are persons and as persons should be free, and yet to do nothing tangible to make this affirmation a reality, is a farce (Freire, pp. 34-35).”

The greatest act of solidarity by an outside change agent has to be the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Jesus left behind heaven and became a simple human being. Yet he did not stop there, he poured out his whole life in the service of others. Likewise, we as outside change agents need to be able to enter into the local culture as authentic servant leaders. In this way we will have the greatest potential to affect positive, sustainable change.

Yet if we are to follow these models and have true authentic reciprocity, we will need to loosen our grip on the controls of development. We will need to allow those we are serving to be equal partners with us. I have often struggled with this. It has been difficult, at times, to let go of the controls of our literacy program. But it is absolutely essential if we want to see sustainable change. Paulo Freire understood this when he wrote, “...the pedagogy of the oppressed, a pedagogy which must be forged *with*, not *for*, the oppressed (whether individuals or peoples) in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity (p. 33).”

Conclusion

In this paper I have compared the model of knowledge creation with Palmer’s subject centered model of the community of truth. I have shown that we as outside change agents must not view ourselves as the experts introducing change from the outside. We must enter into the local context and work together with those we are serving as equal partners. We must allow ourselves to be changed in order to affect change. Only in this way will sustainable change be grown from the inside.

References

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