

***SOCIAL CAPITAL AND THE LEARNING ORGANISATION: A SOUTH  
AFRICAN CASE OF INSIDE-OUT LEARNING***

***Ken Dovey and Jenny Onyx***

## ***Introduction***

The potential for conflict within diverse and unequal societies, as the gap between rich and poor widens during the current era of global corporate capitalism, has invoked considerable interest in the concept of 'social capital' as the raw material with which civil society is built. Recently instated to join financial capital and human capital as part of a trinity of key ingredients required for an economically successful and stable democratic state, social capital has become a topic of increasing interest in recent research (see, for example, Putnam, 1993 and 1995; Fukuyama, 1995; Bernstein *et al*, 1996; Gellner, 1994; Misztal, 1996; Redding, 1996; and Sabel, 1989). An important insight that has emerged from this body of research is that while social capital is not the property of the civic organisation, the market, or the state, all sectors can engage in its production (Cox, 1995). This suggests that the workplace may be an important site for the use and production of social capital.

In this paper, we will explore the concept of social capital and its relationship not only to the development of macro-levels of civil society, but also to its component meso- and micro-level organisations such as the workplace, the family, and community organisations. Of particular interest to us is the dialectic between social capital as a 'product', and social capital as an 'agent' of organisational development and learning. Furthermore we will attempt to show, through the case of learning within a South African manufacturing organisation, that business organisations can be important producers of social capital, especially in societies that have been traumatised by war and oppression, as well as beneficiaries of social capital produced through the multiplex networks of civic organisations in more stable societies.

## ***Social Capital Defined***

Social capital refers to the potential that exists 'within' certain kinds of relationship between people, for 'making things happen' on a collective basis. Putnam (1993, 1995) referred to it as those features of social life-networks, norms, and trust that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives.

In the growing literature on social capital, a number of themes are emerging. All uses of the concept refer to the existence of more or less dense interlocking networks of

relationships between individuals and groups: people engaging with others through a variety of lateral associations which represent an expression of freely-formed mutuality (Latham, 1997). Social capital cannot be generated by individuals acting on their own: it depends on a proclivity for spontaneous sociability and a capacity to form new associations and to cooperate within collectively established terms of reference (Fukuyama, *ibid*). A strong distinction is made between horizontal and vertical relationships for wherever vertical relationships dominate, 'citizens have some of their rights of participation and choice replaced by the exercise of authority and control' (Latham, *ibid*: 6).

The existence of social norms of voluntary cooperation and reciprocal service to others, even if it incurs a personal cost, facilitates prosocial behaviour (Reno, Cialdini, and Kallgren, 1993). According to Coleman (1988) and Putnam (1995), there is little crime and little need for formal policing in neighbourhoods characterised by the existence of such norms. On the other hand, where there is a low level of trust and the absence of norms of reciprocity and voluntary cooperation, people will cooperate in joint action only under a system of formal rules and regulations, which have to be negotiated, agreed to, litigated and enforced, sometimes by coercive means, leading to expensive legal transaction costs (Fukuyama, *ibid*).

Trust is crucial. It allows collaboration to occur in the absence of formal sanctions and rewards. As such, it encourages, within individuals and groups, a willingness to take risks in a social context based on the confidence that others will respond as expected and will act in mutually supportive ways, or at least that others do not intend harm. Misztal (*ibid*) identifies three forms of trust to match three forms of social order: stable order requires trust in the predicability, reliability and legibility of the social reality; cohesive order involves trust based on familiarity, bonds of friendship and common faith and values; and collaborative order involves trust as a device for coping with the freedom of others.

Social capital draws much of its philosophical underpinning from a communitarian position (Etzioni, 1988; Taylor, 1982). As Etzioni (*ibid*: 9) states 'the individual and the community make each other and require each other'. The individual is motivated,

not by utilitarian self interest but by a complex of integrated communal and individual goals, or what is usually referred to as ‘the common good’.

### ***The Relationship between Social Capital and the workplace***

While little attention has thus far been directed at social capital within the workplace, it could be argued that the workplace may be an important potential source of its production. That this is so was empirically demonstrated in a recent Australian study by Onyx and Bullen (1998). A factor analysis of 85 social capital items in a sample of 717 workers identified a strong general social capital factor, which included relations within the workplace, as well as a specific social capital factor relating to the workplace. The study pointed towards a conceptual link between social capital and what has been identified in the literature as organisational citizenship (Organ, 1988, 1990; Schnake, 1991; Van Dyne *et al*, 1994). In reviewing this literature, Schnake (*ibid*: ) defines organizational citizenship as:

functional, extra-role, prosocial organizational behaviors, directed at individuals, groups, and/ or an organisation. These are helping behaviors not formally prescribed by the organization and for which there are no direct rewards or punishments.

Van Dyne *et al* (*ibid*) argue that good citizenship within the organisation is mediated by a covenantal relationship which is characterized by open-ended commitment, mutual trust and shared values. A covenantal relationship is quite different to an exchange contract: the latter is an explicit agreement about the fair exchange of goods and services; the former is 'not a bargain but a pledge'. It is a long-term commitment, based on perceptions of mutuality and reciprocity. The more strongly a person identifies with the collective entity; feels valued; and values the connection, the less that person will rely on legal sanctions to resolve difficulties and the more he or she will contribute actively to the well-being of the organisation. Such a contribution may include the contestation of ideas and actions taken by others, and may be adversarial at times, but it will always occur within a framework of assumptions about the ‘shared destiny’ of the members of the organisation. Thus social capital and organisational citizenship appear to be related, both conceptually and empirically

The central dimensions of social capital - trust; norms of reciprocity and voluntary cooperation; networks of mutual obligation; and the value of the common good - are also central features of the team, or task, culture advocated as an ideal for learning organisations (Kofman and Senge, 1993; Dovey, 1997a). Within team cultures, behavioural norms are oriented around collective, as opposed to individual, goals and the generation of *spirit*, through which teams achieve levels of committed performance far beyond those possible from individuals working alone. Such 'team spirit' is a direct function of the strength of the relationship bonds established between team members, and of the depth of meaning that the organisational goals have for the lives of the team members. High performance organisational teams are, thus, strongly oriented around the principles of learning and sacrifice for the common good, and feature a covenantal relationship within which all members commit to 'winning' together or 'going down' together. The development of important features of a team culture, such as the emphasis upon *relationship* in learning and upon *collective* forums of learning, is clearly facilitated by the existence of high levels of social capital within the organisational community.

The role of learning organisations in the transmission of 'internally' generated social capital and learning to family and broader community settings, however, is seldom addressed. Much of the literature assumes business and industrial organisations to be 'stand alone' settings within which members' behaviour is relatively unaffected by their experience in family, community and societal contexts. At best, some recognition is given in the literature to the 'outside-in' dimension of learning through the broad contribution that a 'learning society' (see Senesh, 1991) makes to the development of human and social capital; and in the acknowledgement of the influence of mental models - sets of assumptions about 'self', 'others', and 'how the world works' that individuals acquire tacitly in the various contexts of their life experience - upon workplace behaviour (see Argyris, 1990). Generally, however, the potential of those workplaces aspiring towards learning organisation status to reverse the direction of influence, that is to transform behaviour within the families and community organisations of their members, and thereby contribute to the building of a strong civil society, has not been considered. Through this paper, we are attempting to show that the social context of the workplace is interconnected with the broader

contexts of family and community life and that human and social capital developed within one organisation can contribute significantly to the enrichment of other forms of social organisation. In particular, we are concerned to demonstrate the important role played by successful business learning organisations, especially within societies that have been traumatised by war and various forms of ideological oppression and totalitarianism, in the development of social capital and learning that can transfer to, and subsequently enrich, other life-contexts of the members of such organisations. If our assumptions are correct, such ‘inside-out’ processes of development may provide policy makers with important new strategic options in the regeneration of such societies.

### ***The Learning Workplace as an Initiator of Societal Regeneration: A South African Case***

#### *Background to the Study*

The legacy of almost fifty years of apartheid rule in South Africa, is shattered structures of family life; *bantu education* structures of schooling<sup>1</sup> for most of the population; and the depletion of social capital and collapse of ethical systems in many South African communities. A serious consequence of this legacy is the inability of the conventional institutions of learning to adequately prepare the bulk of the first post-apartheid generation of South Africans for constructive participation in the reconstruction of their country. A vicious cycle has been established in that the collapse of conventional societal institutions of constructive learning has undermined most individuals’ capacity to learn and this, in turn, prevents the development of learning organisations and civil institutions. The emergence of a highly competitive global economy, as South Africa finally achieves its freedom from totalitarian rule, has exacerbated the problem of an apartheid legacy of social devastation - a fact clearly reflected in the results of the annual World Competitiveness Reports since South Africa’s inclusion therein in 1992 (see De Jager *et al*, 1998). South Africa consistently scores last, of the countries surveyed, on the ‘people’ factor and thus the new democratically-elected government is caught in a strategic impasse: it cannot

compete in the new global economy on the ‘low road’ of cost [because of its refusal to return to policies of exploitation which appear to be the bases of competitiveness along this road (see Kaplinsky, 1995)], and neither can it compete on the ‘high road’ of innovation because of its severely damaged human resources [talented people being the key factor in this competitive option (Kaplinsky, *ibid*)].

For most South Africans, the only acceptable choice, on principle, is that of the ‘high road’ and thus they have to face a harsh reality: the apartheid experience has left the country’s institutions of conventional education unable to deliver the kind of education and development processes required by a national economy that is attempting to compete in global markets through the means of innovation. Furthermore, until family life is rehabilitated and a strong civil society re-created, it is unlikely that the structures of formal schooling will improve and a vibrant economy re-established. As each of these domains impacts the others, the country faces the seemingly impossible task of transforming the current vicious cycle of social degeneration into a positive, community-driven cycle of regeneration.

#### *The Transformation of the Shopfloor at Mercedes Benz of South Africa*

This case draws from a project that explored the capacity of a South African workplace to engage in creative team-based education in an attempt to develop an organisational culture of learning which would enhance the company’s global competitiveness<sup>2</sup>. Research conducted at the Mercedes Benz of South Africa (MBSA) manufacturing plant (see Dovey, 1997b), showed that learning gained in shopfloor teams guided by leaders enrolled in a transformational leadership course (ILC), which involved action research processes directly related to the achievement of valued workplace goals, led to significant skill, values, and knowledge development in team members. This study of the acquisition of *strategic, procedural* and other forms of knowledge (see Resnick, 1989 and Rogoff, 1990), through team-based learning at the workplace, raised the question of whether such knowledge would be

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<sup>1</sup> *Bantu education* was the specific form of schooling provided by the apartheid regimes for Black South Africans in order to undermine their capacity to compete with the White minority on an equal basis [see Kallaway (1986) and Gwala (1988)].

<sup>2</sup> See Dovey (1997b) for a full account of this process. Although the company’s stated intention was to extend the cultural transformation of the shopfloor to include the entire organisation, this never

welcome in, and contribute to the development of, family and broader South African social settings. If so, we speculated, this type of workplace learning could make a major contribution not only to the economic competitiveness of the employer organisation but also to the transformation and development of South African society. This case describes the results of research into the degree, and effectiveness, of transference of the learning and social capital generated on the culturally-transformed MBSA shopfloor, to the other life-contexts of the workers who were involved in the transformation process.

### ***Exploring the Transference of Workplace-Based Learning into Family Settings***

Three years after the implementation of the MBSA shopfloor culture transformation project, referred to above, twenty randomly selected workers, who participated in the project, were interviewed on their experience of the new shopfloor culture and its impact on their lives. From their responses clear evidence emerged of the carry-over from the workplace of transformed values, assumptions, knowledge bases, and behavioural norms to the home settings of these MBSA workers. In particular, the mediated experience of the ‘meso-level’ workplace cultural transformation, appears to have facilitated new models of leadership and cultural orientation within the ‘micro-level’ organization of the home. Eighty-five percent of those interviewed reported changes in the way power and conflict is managed in the home, and in the interpersonal assumptions and perceptions which frame relationship and communication behaviour between family members.

### ***The Family as a Team***

A profound transformation in assumptions about the *concept* of a family (*domain knowledge* - see Rogoff, *ibid*) appears to have occurred amongst the vast majority of those workers interviewed. Previous assumptions reflected cultural ‘recipes’ about families in terms of power management, leadership roles, and the primary purposes of the establishment of the family as a social unit. The learning gained through the MBSA team experience appears to have led to a critical review of such recipes and the

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happened. Significant improvement in the business results of the company were achieved initially but the failure to transform the culture of the entire organisation, led to these being short-lived.



transformation of family structures of power management from a power hierarchy to an egalitarian unit. This involved the transformation of gender power roles, particularly the assumption that all decision-making power should be vested in the male 'head' of the family (father/husband), as the following workers testify:

There is a dramatic change - as a family man. In our culture - that is, the black culture - the man is the word, whatever he says is always right. Now I know today that I have to listen to what comes from my wife. We sit down and whatever we do, it is by mutual agreement between the two of us. And even with the kids, we have started a system whereby we have monthly meetings, and we are thinking of changing it to fortnightly meetings, with the family sitting together and then with the kids being open and honest in what they are thinking. Now there is a happier relationship in our family, there is better communication and I am also listening to what they say. So I have taken the team concept to our family and it works.

I've also changed with problems like the budgetary issue at home, with the wife. From time to time in the past it was the man who took individual decisions but now there's discussion about what we do, and even planning the children's future for schooling and further education. There's discussion with the wife and planning ahead and having a common goal for them.

Power management has also been transformed in the sense of a change from autocratic (or threatening) use of power to more positive uses of power such as in gestures of encouragement and support for family members:

Myself and my family have a closer relationship now. I'm more of a support to my daughter than a domineering father... one thing is my daughter is now managing herself - instead of *forcing* her to do things, I'm *encouraging* her when she does things. And that in itself has done magnificent things for her schoolwork. I must say it has also assisted me to manage finances better ... you just get into a habit of doing things differently.

The transformation of the management of power was closely linked to radically altered communication styles among family members. Intra-family communication patterns shifted towards an adult-adult model (in the nomenclature of transactional analysis which was introduced to the team leaders in their tertiary-level course) in which rationality, rather than arbitrary 'power plays', became the standard for communication between family members:

When I get home, I'm more relaxed....Now, I have daughters and they're

growing up and they want to go out and they want to go to discos and things. Before, I'd say, 'No. No. Not that. You're staying here!' Now I say, 'With whom are you going? When are you coming back? Where will I find you? Have you got, whatever?' So now I'm a little bit more relaxed.

Ja, what's happening.... For instance, if my wife came with a negative question, I used to answer her in a negative way, but what's happening now is that I try to change her negative question to a positive one. I try to create an adult to adult communication style with her. She is trying by all means now to do the same - not to say that I am saying to her, 'I am trying to do this thing we learnt on the ILC', but she can see the way that I am communicating differently.

Linked to this is a decrease in 'selfishness', whereby the male 'head' of the family wielded power in a self-indulgent manner, and the development of a more inclusive

identity for all members of the family:

I've become more family-oriented. I used to tend to go out a lot with friends. Now I tend to come home early. I hardly do go out now, except all together as a family. I think that it sort of rubs off on you - that the way you handle your team at work, your family becomes also a team to you and together you do things as a family, children, wife, shopping, gardening, whatever. When we go out, most of the time we go out as a family.

(Before the team experience at MBSA) I wasn't very mature in my behaviour with my family but now I feel there is a great difference in my life - even with my wife and the way I am acting with my children. You know I was a guy who liked to go out with friends and drink and all that but things have changed ... With my family I'm more with them than with my friends. I'm trying to build my family now ... I'm running it far better. Before I didn't work with budgets and things like that. But now I'm keeping a record of everything I'm buying and my salary ... and things like that. I don't have more money now but I'm spending it better! (laughs) .

This transformation towards a more cooperative stance in relation to other family members is not limited to those who traditionally have perceived themselves as the 'head' of their families. Unmarried participants in the project claim similar transformations in their relationships with siblings and members of their extended

family as a direct result of their learning through the team experience at work:

At home - it (the team experience) has changed me a lot. I had problems with the family before....I was that person who lived his life alone, but it happened that I got that feeling that now I must be part of the family, part of the team.

At home I have got brothers and sisters who rely too much on me for everything. So I shared with them how things can be done as a team, easier ways to solve their problems by taking responsibility for solving them without always involving me. And this is helping a lot, they are learning to take responsibility ... just like at work, I am delegating tasks and responsibilities at home.

Most of the shopfloor team members are the only 'breadwinners' in their extended family and thus are perceived by family members as the one on whom they are dependent - with all the implications that the phenomenon of 'learned helplessness' (that is widespread amongst disempowered people in South Africa) brings to bear on such a relation of dependency. Evidence, provided by the interviews, of the delegation of decision-making responsibility, and the institution of empowerment processes by participants within their extended families, indicates that these processes of reorganising the functioning of families simultaneously involve changing gender roles and age-related roles. As the following quote demonstrates, the delegation of tasks within these families that are moving towards a team culture, is a flexible process and is organised according to the situation of each rather than according to gender and/or age, as occurs in traditional family culture:

Ja, at home I have changed, you know. It really has played a major role at home, just like for instance with the children. Although I am a busy person always doing some studies, you know, I have to take into consideration the children want something to be taught to them ... At home now, everybody has got a set job, not only me looking after my kids and teaching them, but I have a younger sister who is also teaching them, and everybody is involved now. Everybody has got a task to do - cleaning the toilet, doing the gardening, and even then they are flexible now. There is that flexibility.

Another area in which there is evidence of transformation within intra-family communication and relationship dynamics, is that of conflict resolution. While the introduction of adult-adult communication patterns into the family dynamic has improved relationships in general, some participants have been assisted by the team experience, and the theoretical learning gained from their tertiary course (the ILC), to deal with deeply-embedded interpersonal problems that are less likely to be resolved

just through new communication patterns. In this sense, these participants claim that

their MBSA experience has helped them develop effective interpersonal *problem-solving* skills (and the values and attitudes that accompany these skills):

I'll use as an example, situations that arise in my family. Conflict and problem solving. I mean I've learnt a lot from the ILC on the human side of things. How to address problems and look for opportunities. So I have definitely changed in the way I approach people problems ... I had a problem with my son ... I spoke to his teachers and they told me he's so bright but he's lazy ... I tried everything. I tried discipline, I tried talking nicely, and then when I did the course in the ILC, it made me really think about it and I got a lot of new ideas for communication ... And today he's doing really well and so we bridged that problem.

#### *Issues Raised by Evidence of the Generalisation of Workplace Learning to the Family*

The evidence indicates that a similar transformation as that which occurred within workstations at MBSA (see Dovey, *ibid*), occurred in most of the families of those interviewed. An effective team culture appears to have been created in eighty-five percent of the families of those interviewed. This has been achieved through the transformation of the *deep structure* of family life - the mental models carried by the male members (i.e. the interviewees) about family life and leadership within families, and through the transformation of the *surface issues* of the management of power, conflict and interpersonal perception within the family. Changed assumptions about leadership within the family, amongst those interviewed, include the sharing of power; the transformation of gender and age-related roles; the importance of versatility in approach, openness, and skills in intra-family communication and relationship building; win-win problem-solving strategies; the delegation of responsibility and accountability to all family members; and in all family members assuming greater maturity and security-in-self. Leadership practices that those interviewed introduced into their families include greater participation by themselves in the life of the family; taking family life more seriously; becoming less selfish and more cooperative towards other family members; and confronting problems rather than engaging in the strategy of 'false consensus' whereby family problems were ignored or 'swept under the carpet'. Overall, the new practices of the participants

have created a culture of shared responsibility and accountability for family happiness and success.

Intervention at the meso-organizational level of the workplace thus has had a clear impact on the micro-organizational level of the home. The principal positive factor in the transformation of family leadership patterns appears to have been the creation of social capital that has facilitated the development of the conditions necessary for

voluntary cooperation in the interests of the common good, and for continuous learning amongst all members of the family. In this way, the experience of the shopfloor transformation at MBSA, and the formal educational processes that accompanied it, seems to have assisted those interviewed in their task of mediating the ‘dislocational’ impact of historical social factors (apartheid and traditional culture) and current social factors (modern and, increasingly, postmodern culture) on the micro-level organisation of the home. The team-leadership skills learnt at the workplace enabled participants simultaneously to create a culture of collective solidarity amongst family members while empowering them in the processes of reconstructing their individual identities, that is of developing negotiated-but-centred identities from which to construct a meaningful life.

### ***The Transference of Workplace-Based Learning to Other Community Settings***

While the introduction of a team culture has been more easily achieved in the home, sixty percent of those interviewed reported some success in the introduction of such a culture to the community organisations in which they were involved. The larger scale of operation of a community organisation (as opposed to a family), and the more complex power dynamics therein, has made this process more difficult and time-consuming and several very capable workers, interviewed in this study, have chosen not to take their newly developed skills and knowledge bases to community forums. Nonetheless, in some cases, the community recognised the development of leadership skills and attributes, that were needed in their organisations, in participants and encouraged them to take up leadership positions therein:

I am involved in our neighbourhood watch organisation. We had a problem there - a lot of break-ins, so with my leadership we approached households and got together from time to time to see if we could solve the problem - and also take into consideration that where we live there are some squatters there and being more pro-active because of what I've learnt about teamwork at work, instead of being aggressive, we decided to look for the leadership of that area and discuss with them and the people of that area how best they could assist us with the problem. Through these actions I became the leader of this exercise.

In other cases it took considerable perseverance and high levels of commitment from the participant before the skills gained from the workplace were recognised by the members of the community organisation:

Well, first of all in my soccer team we set up a 'vision' - an idea I got from the team experience (at work). Our vision was to gain promotion from the local league in Mdantsane to the Premier League run by the province - FAB (Football Association of Border). So, with my team, we discussed what sort of things we need to do to get there - we analysed our situation and developed strategies, and things like that which I learnt through the team concept at work. To be honest, some of the plans we made never materialised because there were some individuals in my team that were not with us in this thing. This resulted in our failure to achieve our vision this year, but we are getting the problem under control for next year.

The transfer of skills to community settings occurred for team members (who only experienced the learning from the ILC indirectly through their team leaders) as well as team leaders:

There is a great difference in my life ... You know I was a guy who liked to go out with friends and drink and all that but things have changed - even going to church, now I'm always in church. And I'm the manager of the 'Saints' soccer team too. My team leader taught us everything he was learning on the leadership course and I used those skills even in managing the soccer team. It's become a *much* better soccer team - I don't know how to express it, but they have improved!

#### *Nature of the Community Involvement of Participants*

In order to explore more thoroughly the transfer of learning from the MBSA workplace to civil society, more detailed descriptions of their involvement in community organisations were obtained through further interviews with five participants whose original interviews indicated their committed participation in a

broad range of community forums. These included sports clubs, political organisations, school committees and PTAs, churches, neighbourhood watches, recreational clubs (e.g. fishing club), dancing associations (e.g. ballroom dancing), and fund-raising promotions for community organisations such as those for people with a disability. In all five cases, participant involvement in civic life had increased since the commencement of the cultural transformation of the MBSA shopfloor. A brief outline of each interviewee is as follows :

*I-1:* White male, aged in his 30s, whose involvement is mainly in the area of sport. He currently promotes and participates in the sport of wrestling, and the promotion is done in alliance with welfare and disability organizations who are the beneficiaries of the profits obtained from the promotions. His task requires the ability to negotiate with senior personnel in sponsoring business organisations and in the media industry. He has been involved in his children's school in the PTA, Governing Committee, and in sports coaching but because of the time demands of work, study, and the wrestling promotion work, he has passed this role onto his wife.

*I-2:* Black male, aged in his 30s, whose involvement is entirely in soccer. He coaches a team in the Mdantsane township league (the township is home to around one million people) and has recently been elected to the umbrella body that controls soccer in Mdantsane. This body recently successfully managed the first National Football League match played in Mdantsane. Many local and national organisers and promoters of the game were nervous about the capacity of this body to do this successfully, and the positive results that emerged from the venture represented a major boost to professional soccer in the region.

*I-3:* 'Coloured' male, aged in his 40s, whose community involvement is very broad within the 'coloured' community. He plays a significant role in his church (committee member); has revitalised a fishing club (actually the MBSA fishing club but it consists entirely of 'coloured' members), and was the founder of a very successful ballroom dancing club.

I-4: Black male, aged in his 30s, who is very involved in the ANC political structures and broad-based community organisations. He requested not to be interviewed on his political involvement but was happy to talk about his involvement as chairperson of the governing committee of a rural school.

I-5: 'Coloured' male, aged in his 30s, who was deeply committed to the political struggle to overthrow apartheid. However, since the attainment of South Africa's first democratically elected government in 1994, he claims that he has become disillusioned with the ruling ANC party because it has lost sight of the problems of the people on the ground. He claims that elected members of the government have become preoccupied with personal power and wealth. As a result, his involvement in political organisations has decreased and his involvement with the church has become greater.

*Key Knowledge/Skills Gained Through the MBSA Shopfloor Transformation Process that are Relevant to the Needs of Community Organisations*

Participants claim that they have been able to assist community organisations in several key areas of leadership:

The interviews provide evidence of participants' ability to mobilise organisational action in a variety of situations through effective envisioning, planning, strategising, and evaluation of a collective effort. This is summed up succinctly by one participant:

This all comes from what I learnt in our workplace team - having discussions where a vision is created for the group and objectives or goals are set, and action plans for getting there are drawn up - you must have action plans as to how to get there. You can't just have loose thoughts in your head, you must have input from everybody and together know why you are doing something and what we want to achieve from it, and *how* you are going to achieve it (I-3).

An example of this process is that which occurred through the strategic intervention of a participant after the complete breakdown of relations between a community school principal and his staff:

I was elected as the chairperson of the school committee in the area where I stay. ...At the time when I started there were very big problems within the school itself, involving the principal of the school, and his staff. There was a division between the members of staff. I called a meeting



and the committee wanted to know what's going on. At the end of the day I identified the main problem as the school principal still having that 'olden days' culture, and now his teachers that are working under him are pro-changing times and everything ... The leadership skills that I got from the ILC and the MBSA team experience helped me because we gave the school direction, in the end, and we made it clear that first of all, the principal has got to *adapt* to the new changes that are there. That he should involve his teachers in decision-making and that they should work as a team, and him as a leader and not as an autocrat. He should involve the teachers in everything that affects the school itself. And really, at the end of the day it worked. That school is running normally now, there are no problems.... They set goals for themselves and by a certain period they must follow up and evaluate whether they achieved these goals. Really, the deliberations on the leadership course we did on the ILC helped me a lot - it opened my eyes and as a result now I'm taking this knowledge out to the other people as well in the community where I live (I-4).

Central to the mobilisation of collective endeavour is the inculcation of a culture of participative leadership:

One must start by working with the people in the organisation and get their input in terms of which way we have to go. My role then is to help them clarify the direction in which we have to go. After that I involve them in the processes of getting there ... of achieving our goals that we have set for the organisation. I believe even more strongly now in working *with* people in the organisation (I-4).

Certain skills are essential to this style of leadership. The fundamental skill in this area is the capacity to develop trusting relationships and constructive communication patterns with people - something that all five participants, interviewed, claimed they have developed through the shopfloor transformation process:

If there's one area that I have to single out it was developing more constructive relationships with other people ..because doing all the promotional stuff, I meet various people with different personalities, and status in the community, and I have to communicate - even bargain - with them. ..I've been able to manage my relationships by using the techniques we learnt (for example bringing the communication to an adult-to-adult level) - and I use them daily (I-1).

It (the MBSA experience) also taught me to be reliant on *personal* authority and not on *positional* authority ... Not to force somebody to understand me. (I-5)

Out of this capacity to work constructively with people, emerges a broad range of skills which are essential to the strategic action of the collectivity. These include

*envisioning* skills in contexts in which people are operating on a fairly limited intellectual level, as one participant explains:

I used to be a one-sided person but the ILC has caused me to get involved in a lot of things in the community - I was never so involved before. Now I stand up, I can explain things to people in a constructive way. Something I never used to do, I mean things were just loose. I've got organisation skills, public-speaking skills and much more confidence. ... For example, in church there was only commitment to going to church services - the people did not know *why* they went to church. There must be a goal in going to church and if they haven't got that goal they won't be committed outside of just going to church services. So I motivate the people by discussing *why* we go to church. It's the same with fishing - I have discussions with the group on *why* we go fishing. Fishing is not about going boozing, as it used to be with some of the guys in the group who were more into booze than they were into fishing. That's not the aim of going fishing - the aim is to fish! To relax and fish with a group of friends whose company you enjoy. And so we discussed all this and now the group is more focused on fishing because they understand why they are going fishing (I-3).

The capacity to be a *critical* thinker is a skill which the participants also claim to be an important, if sometimes unpopular, quality which they have introduced into their community organizations :

Whenever there is a suggestion made, if I object to it I object to it with reasons and offer another suggestion. For example, I help them to look at the possible consequences of a suggestion. But they give no reasons with their suggestions; don't follow through on possible consequences; and things like that. They don't want to provide a rationale for their ideas and think them through - they just want them to be taken at face value - taken on trust. (I-5)

Another skill is that of *coaching* whereby the participants claim that they have been able to build communal 'teams' and introduce people development processes which satisfy the criteria of the strategic action plans that they learnt at the MBSA workplace:

The strategies that I learnt at MBSA and that I have used to build up my soccer team (that I coach), are working and two of the players in the team have also been elected to the umbrella organisation. My election to the umbrella body is a result of them seeing how I built up my club, so they could see that I am somebody who can build up a club from nothing... In my club there are people who are more educated than I am. They have got degrees but they have not been elected (to the umbrella body) because they don't have the skills that are necessary to be a leader or to be a

coach.... You know, to coach people it is very important that you follow-up with each and every individual to check what he is needing to boost his performance. So you have to have a strategy for each player's development as well as a team strategy - this I learnt on the ILC. Through this you build the morale of the team or the organisation (I-2).

Furthermore participants do not claim special status as the one who brought new skills to the community organisation - the concept of '*servant leadership*' (see Kofman & Senge, 1993) that was taught on the ILC, is articulated by them as an important aspect of participative leadership:

I have no problems working on these committees because on these committees they need everybody's involvement to make it a success so I am only one of many people who must be giving ideas. So what I learnt about being a team player at MBSA is useful to me here (I-2).

#### *Acceptance and Resistance within the community Organisation*

In general, community organisation membership has responded positively to participants' knowledge and skills where these are *clearly* beyond the capacity of any other member(s) to deliver, and where the benefits for the membership of the organisation are fairly obvious:

Within my wrestling organisation, my skills are welcomed and they give me a platform from which to exercise these skills. You know, they've seen that I've been able to get things right that they've been trying unsuccessfully for years to get right. (I-1).

Resistance to the transfer of skills appears to take two forms: the first is resistance fuelled by the competitive motives of other members of the community organisation who are jealous of the participant's skills/knowledge and who view these as a threat to their own power interests within the organisation:

As somebody who is not a highly educated somebody I will be having some problems because there will be those with degrees who are jealous of my position in the organisation (I-2).

They say 'that is where you have a problem, you always want to counter, you always want to challenge our ideas'. They are afraid of my critical capacity because they are afraid that I will expose their own personal agendas and power needs. (I-5)

The second is resistance motivated by the fear of change and, with it, the loss of power amongst those who have run the organisation along 'traditional' lines:

I have had to overcome a lot of problems, like players who are not committed enough and drink too much or do not want to train hard enough. I have also had to overcome resistance to my new training methods and match tactics from officials who want to keep things the way they have been done in the past.... They want to stick to the old ways and they are resisting the new tactics that I am introducing to overcome the old problems that they have been unable to solve before. ... It's going to take time for the benefits of the leadership training to have a big effect on people in the townships. People resist us because we work with whites and learn these skills from whites and they are afraid that we will change the African culture. But slowly they are realising that our culture has got to be changed. It has got to adapt and learn from other cultures (I-2).

In all cases, participants are sustained in their efforts to introduce new ideas and knowledge to the community organisation in which they are involved, by the success their efforts are gaining. The pace of this process is dependent upon the level of resistance from others:

But as the team has improved, it has become easier and there has been less resistance from officials and greater commitment from the players... it is clear that the representatives from other clubs are impressed by the success that I have achieved with my club and they would like to achieve the same success. So they see what I am telling them is the way that I made my club successful. So those that are jealous or resistant to my ideas are in the minority (I-2).

I got everyone to say something about this and the person who has been most opposed to me in the past, agreed with me. The next day people phoned me and asked 'how did you get it right? That is a most problematic person'. So by being consistent as a person and by being resilient, I am starting to overcome this opposition. (I-5)

Their openness to the advice of others is an important part of the development of their social insight with respect to the motives of those who oppose their efforts within the community organization :

The coordinator is straight forward with me and keeps telling me, 'in the meetings, be focused.' She is a brilliant leader and I respect her advice. The opposition actually has come mostly from her husband and this is problematic for her... He might not understand the reasons for his own resistance to me in our group and this causes him to attack without any logic behind it. (I-5)

### *Issues Raised by Evidence of the Generalisation of Workplace Learning to Community Organisations*

The evidence of the attempts of those MBSA staff interviewed, who are involved in community organisations, to transfer the learning gained through the ILC and their experience of the transformation of the shopfloor culture at MBSA to these organizations, raises several important issues :

#### *The Need to Transform the Deep Structure of Community Life*

The picture portrayed by the evidence, is of a community culture of under-development, poverty, and inter-personal/inter-group conflict. While this is clearly the legacy of forty-years of apartheid atrocities, there are strong indications that there is also a confused *melange* of elements of traditional, modern and postmodern culture. As a consequence of these political and social pressures over a significantly long period of time, social capital within the community has been destroyed. Autocratic power-management (in spite of the politically correct democratic rhetoric that is recited at appropriate moments), often in the style of warlord-type gangsterism, is the prevailing organizational form and conflict is either avoided through strategies of false-consensus or it is resolved through coercive means:

People have fought for a long time and been involved in community struggles and, at the end, what I've seen is that people have got a lot of expectations. For instance, people have been promised jobs and then there is a new project coming in where maybe security people are required. And so the people think, 'I have been a marshall (in the old ANC structures) - I think I will be the one who is taken there'. But unfortunately they are not taken - they take other people. This creates friction and then they organise a small party to attack those people who get the jobs...The guys being attacked are those who got the jobs and those who are attacking them are those who had high expectations that they would be the ones who would be getting the jobs. The man who is in charge of that project is my neighbour - he is a man who when there is a graduation party in Mdantsane, he appears in an academic gown although he never went much to school ... (laughs) ... but he's a man who is involved in community politics. So he took mostly guys from our area for that project ... everybody is wanting to jump on the 'gravy train'.

Within the interviews, the deep structure is reflected in various assumptions, values and behaviours reported to be prevalent within community structures: these include resistance to ideas which are perceived to have 'white' origins [this strategy is ironic

in that the contradictions are not apparent to community members within a soccer club (soccer was originally a ‘white’ idea) when rejecting strategic thinking processes because they are ‘white’ ideas learnt at MBSA!]; resistance to participative leadership styles [also ironic given the rhetorical commitment to ‘democracy’]; and parochialism [people from one area in Mdantsane viewing people from another area of Mdantsane as ‘foreigners’]. The development of social trust and voluntary cooperation towards the common good through participation in overlapping civic organizations (churches, sports clubs, choirs, school committees, etc.) is extremely difficult within a social landscape dominated by sectarianism, familialism, and competitive individualism, as one worker explains:

In any organisation - work or community - if people don’t work together they will achieve nothing. They have to have an objective and work together towards this objective. There is definitely a need for this skill out there in the community. Most people find it very difficult to focus on a specific objective and to work towards it together because they see themselves as having different interests in life and therefore they struggle to work together to achieve anything.

Furthermore, the nature of the structures of formal education within black townships, and South Africa generally, rules out any contribution from institutions of education, at least in the short term, towards the transformation of the deep structure of community life.

The evidence presented in this case provides, however, some hope for the role of appropriate workplace education and experience in this regard. Through the sustained application of team-based strategic action cycles learnt at the workplace, most of those interviewed appear to have made an impact on the ‘mental models’ of the members of various community organizations. This process, however, seems to be heavily dependent on these strategic action cycles (of which community members are suspicious initially) delivering desirable results - whether they are victories for soccer teams; money for charities; or genuine harmony with a school community. Failure to deliver results appears to lead to rejection of new ideas and reinforcement of old assumptions about ‘self’, ‘others’, and ‘the way the world works’. Many of those interviewed have been able to transform important aspects of the ‘deep structure’ of thought within the community organization in which they are involved.

In particular, new forms of relationship and communication, more participative leadership styles, and a greater openness to ideas and learning appear to have been introduced into these organizations. In the process, jealousy and fear, the two most entrenched behavioural manifestations of the old 'deep structure', appear to be beginning to be transformed into trust and voluntary cooperation with the view to win-win solutions to community problems.

*The Critical Role of Leadership Capable of Mobilizing Effective Strategic Action within Community Organization.*

The prevailing culture within the community embodies assumptions of personal inefficacy, helplessness and an external locus of control. These assumptions debilitate community members in their attempts to transform their situation. The MBSA employees who form this research sample generally have learned through the ILC and the MBSA workplace team experience that they are capable of transforming very difficult social situations. They thus bring to community organizations not only the objective bases of strategic knowledge but also subjective dimensions thereof, such as confidence and an internal locus of control, which are essential to the success of strategic action. They have learnt through the team experience the dialectical relationship between 'theoretically-informed-action' and 'action-informed-theory' and have developed a capacity to learn from a variety of sources of knowledge and experience.

Furthermore these MBSA employees appear to have brought to their community organizations procedural knowledge. Through experiencing successive cycles of strategic action on the MBSA shopfloor they have learnt how to 'organize' - both in the mechanical and in the social sense of the word. The development of 'people skills' is fundamental to the capacity to organize - not just the 'soft' skills of encouragement, affirmation, recognition, etc., but also the 'hard' skills of constructive confrontation, behaving with integrity under pressure/provocation, and overcoming resistance from some team members. The skills, values, and attitudes entrenched in the procedural knowledge that those interviewed appear to have brought to the community, appear to form the basis of their capacity for transformative social action.

### *Conclusion*

While the evidence outlined in this case shows that knowledge and skills gained at the workplace have been transferred to family and community settings, it only touches on the more macro dimensions of power and politics in community life. On the micro level of the home, according to those interviewed, workplace-based learning appears to have been very influential in the transformation of family culture towards that of a team: there has been greater power-sharing, more constructive communication and conflict-resolution strategies, and evidence of voluntary cooperation towards the common good of the family.

The evidence documented in this case presents an encouraging sign that workplace learning can transfer, with considerable success, to family and community settings. The research sample, however, was limited and the scale of the study, itself, was small and thus further research on this issue is important with the view to substantiating the evidence generated by this study.

The issue of the relationship between macro power interests and the transfer of transformative leadership capacity from the workplace to the community has not been addressed adequately. This is an important topic for future research because transferred skills and embryonic team cultures cannot be sustained unless they are endorsed and nurtured by those with high degrees of formal power within the community. A team culture, with its value of equality and shared rewards, may well threaten those whose power is vested and entrenched in the prevailing community and political structures, in spite of any rhetoric to the contrary.

Nonetheless, there is considerable hope in the realisation that social capital that is generated in one arena of society becomes available for use in other arenas. More specifically, the social capital that is generated within an effective learning organisation, can, if nurtured, spill over to create a positive flow on effect to other micro and meso level organisations, and ultimately benefit the fabric of civil society. For a society such as South Africa, this may signal a potential means of transforming the vicious cycle of social degeneration into a virtuous cycle of regeneration.



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