

# **The Sustainable Application of Leadership and Teaming in HRM- Models for the Today's Organisation's Needs – a Meta-Level Perspective**

Zahid Hussain, Martin Lechner, Harald Milchrahm, Sara Shahzad, Wolfgang Slany,  
Martin Umgeher, Thomas Vlk  
Institute of Software Technology, Technical University Graz, Austria  
M3@ist.tugraz.at

## **Abstract**

In a steady growing world concerning the amount and the quality of information to handle, growing uncertainty on markets, ever more needs of fast adopting organizations and dramatic environmental changes (consumer habits, trends, environment protection, foreign-policy...) individuals, organizations and even whole societies are thrown into a systemic-immanent force to change. Subsequently this pressure is put on workforces, e.g., teams and individuals themselves.

Addressing this issue many methodologies have been invented. Most of these methodologies – however not intended – embrace change using these models in a passive way. Moreover they are used not only passively but addressing only the symptoms of these very issues, neglecting the fundamental structures underlying them. Therefore the current appliance of these models embraces change of 1<sup>st</sup> degree in a Watzlawickian sense, disabling structural and fundamental change (2<sup>nd</sup> degree).

This paper focuses on the main sources of these problems, provides an insight of the underlying variables, the possibilities of reaction on a meta-level. It will determine how change of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> degree interact on this issue – finally section five will draw out which impact these modes of change have and how “Metanoia” – the crucial variable within this process – can be encouraged.

## **Keywords**

Change of 1st degree, Change of 2nd degree, Content, Human Resource Management, Individual Patterns, Metanoia, Organization, Structure, Sustainability, Team-Problems

## **Acknowledgements**

The research herein is partially conducted within the competence network Softnet Austria ([www.soft-net.at](http://www.soft-net.at)) and funded by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Economics (bm:wa), the province of Styria, the Steirische Wirtschaftsförderungsgesellschaft mbH. (SFG), and the city of Vienna in terms of the center for innovation and technology (ZIT).

## **Section 1 - The Model**

The world is changing – that is obvious. It is changing faster and faster – what seems to be obvious, too. This has a lot of reasons – some of the most common concerning this issue are globalization, environmental change and protection, technical improvement and the exponential – if not hyperbolic [Grossmann] – growth of information available.

This puts huge pressure of adoption to these changes on societies, organizations and individuals [wbö]. A lot of literature has been written, a lot of models have been built addressing the very same object – to make these systems able to deal with the environment's application of energy into the system.

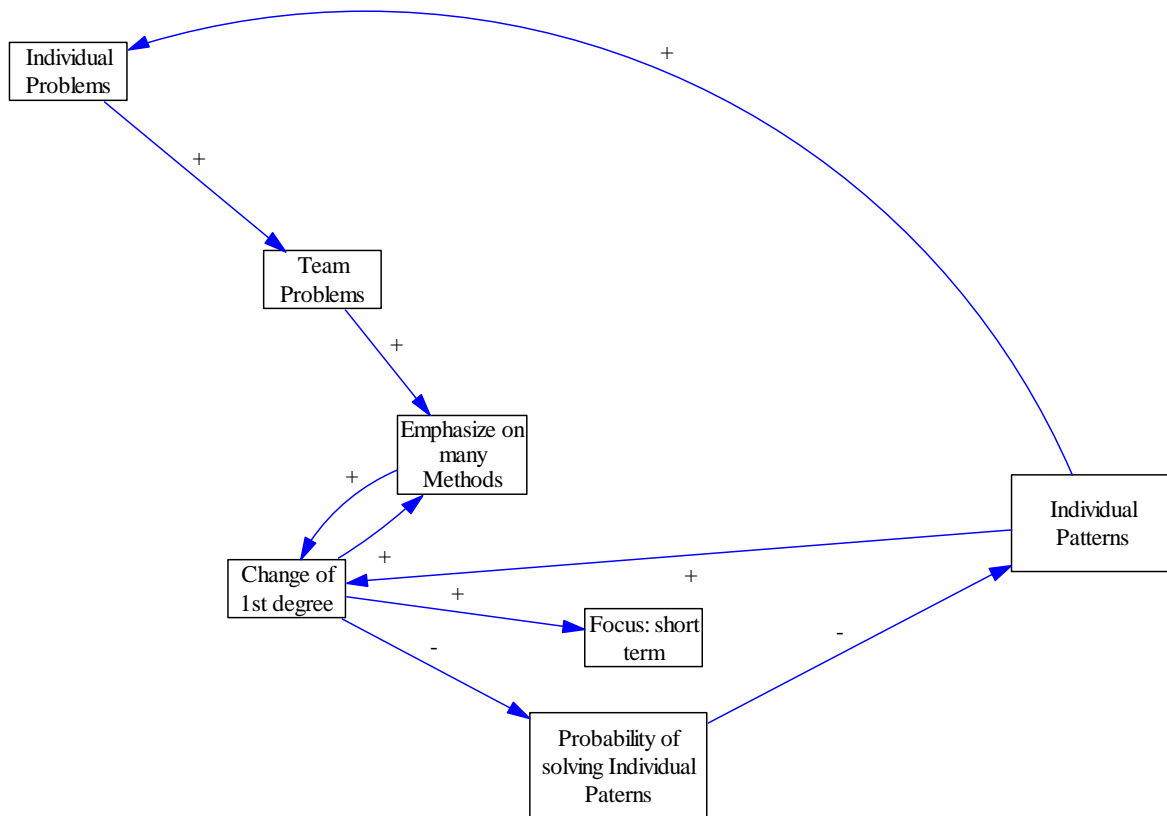
This paper does not want to outline the reasons why this pressure occurs, neither to invent a new model addressing this issue – in our considerations this had been done far enough. A deficit occurs, however concerning the sustainability of the results reached. Therefore we want to outline the systemic coherences, borders and crucial variables using a system-dynamics model addressing this deficit (Abb. 1).

As mentioned above, we do not want to build a new model. Using Vensim Software, we build up an interaction model (Causal-Loop-Diagram) dealing with reasons why team problems occur and how they are managed in the usual way. A side that, we integrated a – less likely – way of usage and implementation of the same models, which however addresses sustainability of the once reached goals. Every following section is dedicated to a certain part of the model, for in the last section all parts of the model are integrated making the final conclusions.



## “I’m part of it”

Every single team member – the authors not excluded – bring certain individual habits, needs, reactions, accents, sex, skin-colour, religion etc. into the team. Since communication is such a crucial variable in teaming, differences become evident quite quickly, since response times are usually quicker than within other processes. Communication is not the best way of addressing these differences, since we simply cannot understand each other from scratch [cf. Brock, 2002:531] it is used everywhere, when two people interact, and may it be limited to body language. Following this, it is to state that we simply cannot not communicate [Watzlawick].



If more than one person is part of a certain workforce, regardless if they talk to each other, the team’s individuals are facing individual patterns. These patterns shall not be judged. The more strict individual patterns however occur, the more often they have to be compared with the patterns of others - eventually they won’t fit. There are however situations, in which personalized reactions to these differences are held back to achieve a certain short term goal (soccer: to pass to your position’s competitor; job: to work overtime hours for free to secure your company’s survival).

During the 'normal' working day people's individual patterns, leading to a certain behavior are put to the test, since quite a load of these behaviors have to interact. This is common whenever people interact (TA), in school, at home, in the job. The more distinct individual patterns (on the very same subject), the more individual problems occur during this interaction. This is so far a problem of the individual – since the individual is part of an interaction these problems become team problems on the spot, since – trivial – the individual is part of the team. This is also true, if the individual doesn't communicate the problem or something else instead, but sits calm on his/her chair eventually escalating to "inner cancellation" [cf. Brinkmann et al. 2005]. Passive aggressive behavior can be even more dangerous and harmful to a team since it disables the members to address them accordingly. (boiling frog philosophy: the most dangerous form of refusal is the delay)

### **“Try to solve it”**

If teaming problems occur now and then people will refer to them as part of everyday's life. If team members say this and feel the same – this will not lead to substantial deficits, but on the contrary is vital for a group to get up in the self-determining scale, solving problems on their own [source]. We won't address this issue – please check the literature in group behavior and – dynamics.

If however people do not want to interact as a group, but unfortunately have to work as one, one cannot expect the group to grow on its drawbacks, since the symptoms of these teaming problems affect the workforce motivationally, psychologically, even physiologically.

Team leaders and 'sophisticated' members will identify these symptoms as teaming problems, which can be addressed using a well established method e.g. mediation, team supervision, job rotation... or new uprising methods like survival camps, horse leading... Addressing the symptoms one can quickly feel some relief – a word of understanding, real teamwork by igniting a camp-fire, or how some statements deeply can hurt people (spaghetti cooking demarco). Especially using mediation as a method this will produce substantial results on the latter. In most of the cases [source] however this problems will reoccur. Since it is perceived that the used method has obviously not completed its task solving problems or for other methods

has not helped the people far enough to solve them on their own, other methods will be used. Leaders themselves will encourage this, since they are judged on how they lead their teams and whether people are productive and confident with their work – dimensions which are even included in performance measurements [balanced score card].

## **Content vs Structure**

In system theory scientist love to talk about aporias [erklären]. We will focus on only one interaction: when we talk about structure, we refer to

- a certain set or setting in which interaction occurs
- a certain distinctive way (recipe) on how to address certain issues
- a plan on how things should work
- a cause or reason for certain actions (symptoms)

whereas when we talk about content we refer to

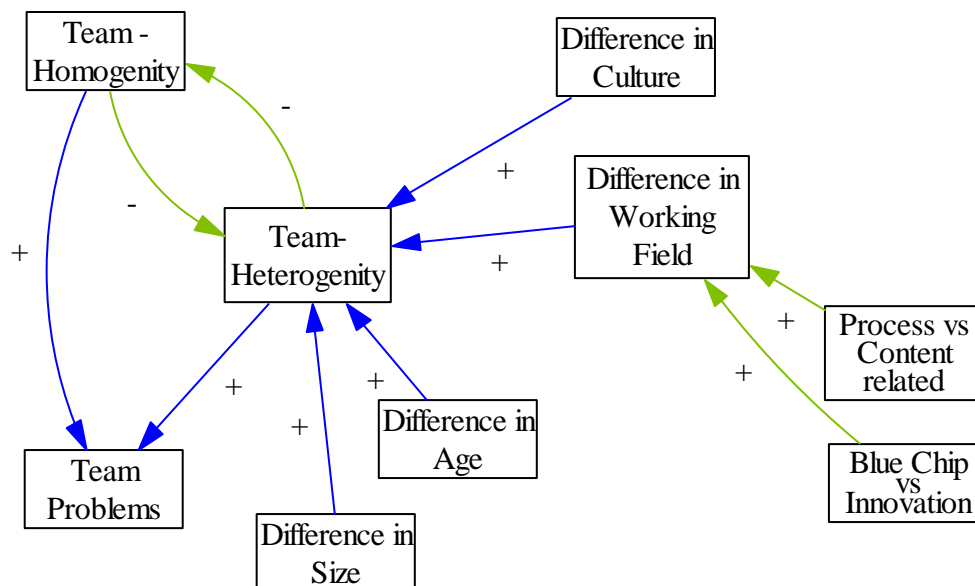
- the interaction itself
- all the blurry things that just happen
- things which work
- symptoms (happening because of certain actions and or reasons)

This is already the very point which is to be made in this section: the more content focused methods are carried out, the more they will address the issue on a symptom-level, the more they have to solve the problem quickly (short term focused), the more likely the underlying structures will keep on producing a certain behavior, therefore the solution will be more dirty. Addressing the content (symptoms) of a certain problem is known as change of 1st degree [Watzlawick], which is not necessarily negative: imagine an incurable cancer disease in the final stage. Using morphine addresses the symptoms (Change of 1st degree) but will help the patient whereas a structural change (remove the brain) is not executable.

Since symptoms are the bad things we feel, since our mental models “one problem one solution” and “get the job done” underline short term solutions and team leaders are paid on short term measures, the team will do business as usual quite soon. The

probability of a structural solution on individual patterns however is deteriorating since Change of 1st degree never reaches this level and on the contrary is supported by the individual patterns themselves. To make things worse, the more different models are used, the bigger is the probability that the underlying patterns are getting stronger, caused by an intensive training (similar to bacteria resistance on different antibiotics).

### A short insight into Teaming Issues [Bibliography]



In the section before we looked into the interactions concerning the aporia of individuals and teams (organizations). Now we take a short step into the aporia of homogeneity and heterogeneity as equivalent sources of teaming problems.

In (recent) [heterogeneity] publications most sources of team-internal problems are connected to the degree of team-heterogeneity. In the first section we also argued from a heterogenic point of view, suggesting a connection between the heterogeneity of individual behavioural patterns and team-internal problems. Subsequently in this section we also use to an extent heterogenic-based arguments: if a new team-member enters a team he/she will not (actively) determine but will (passively) contribute to the differences concerning culture, age, sex, size, work-field origin,...

The above model (pic 3) shows some of these factors. Following the literature [multicultural management] [teaming models] [transdisciplinary-issues] we can state that the bigger the differences within these very factors are, the more likely they will contribute to communication and understanding problems. Again there exist elaborated models (handlungsanweisungen) how to deal with these issues. [name some, source]

In recent years more and more disciplines abandoned the traditional separation of fundamental research and application of its results and started to cooperate in research and practice introducing inter- and transdisciplinary approaches (*processes*), not at least due to the pressure put on the organizations by the environment (s.o.). This is visible in science and research areas (interdisciplinary) but concerning *content* especially also in business (transdisciplinary) (products i.e. medicine, software, ). Therefore more people of different work-field origin start to work together in teams. Concerning the origin of the work field the team has to handle differences in vocabulary, methodology, working-culture etc. The more innovation-related the work fields are the more likely these approaches will be introduced [XP-example "we"] In contrast to the previous sources of heterogeneity which just happen, in this field it is explicitly planned: the tension which occurs here within the team is explicitly wanted and needed. It provides a fertile field for creative thoughts (positive or negative ;) *as is widely acknowledged (that is why it is planned done)*

The advantage of the mixture of people from different fields lies not only in the creation of new ideas out of different paradigms but in a major part within the tension, which forces the people to deal with this differences. This is a huge energy input for into the system which can be used to reach a common goal. This means also that heterogeneity can provide an explosive and dangerous work environment (clash of cultures, behaviours, ideas,...).

Homogeneity on the other side will provide a nice and understanding climate but too much of it will prevent the team from social growth (degree of self-organization) and new ideas because it is likely to suppress creativity (an aggressive force) and the probability to learn and change. Therefore teaming problems derived from homogeneity are hard to identify (if wanted at all, since it seems to be state-of-the-art that teams have to be working smoothly, peacefully and "politically correct").

As homogeneity means that the members of the team identify themselves with the same underlying principles they create their own internal structure and form an unified body of work. Once this structure is build and accept it is unlikely to change.

The system is rooted in every member and every attempt to change this trusted structure will cause resistance. Because of this unity it is hard to find even an leverage-point for changes, which is one of the major reasons why it is difficult to address this issue.

This means that homogeneity as well as heterogeneity have desirable aspects but also lead to different sort of team behaviours and problems. Neither the former nor the latter are therefore recipes for reducing teaming problems, which leads to the conclusion that a combination of both is needed.

Since our mental model is based on a dynamic view a right (static) amount for this combination cannot be given. A dynamic equilibrium forces its elements (people) to a dynamic-stable state in which the quality of each element has to be constantly adapted.

In the next section we provide a combination of ideas how to deal with these issues in a fundamental way.

### **Change of 1st and 2nd degree**

As we stated a single solution for all the problems occurring described in the sections above cannot be given from a dynamic point of view. Since we want to look at this from a meta-level-perspective, we also do not want to cope with single problems and single solutions. This is a big effort since each problem, even rare ones, needs its own specific solution. Single solutions for special problems will most likely only result in a change of 1st degree.

Our Idea is to introduce a meta-template for changes of 2<sup>nd</sup> degree which allows to address the causes of the problems instead of the symptoms.

Changes in a Watzlawickian sense \cite{metanoia\_prinzip\_lapp}

- Change of first degree means a change inside the system – preserving the system structure.
- Change of second degree means a structural change of the system itself.

- If change of second degree is needed, change of first degree makes the problem worse

This tells that changes of 1<sup>st</sup> degree are per definition more limited than changes of 2<sup>nd</sup> degree because only solutions based on behaviour already present in the system can be found.

System boundaries can be found for any system (physical, social,...) and can be drawn arbitrarily. For example an organisation can be seen as a system as well as each of its departments (system/subsystem relations).

Both changes can occur in an active and passive way.

Passive means that an outside force the system has to react to forces change. Active means that the system generates its own requirements for a change without being under pressure. An example would be a department that cannot cope anymore with its workload and asks for a new member versus a department which decides to hire someone to explore new markets without actual need.

As a result active changes are more likely to be lasting and readily welcomed because the initiating force comes from within the system itself while passive changes will likely to be met with some resistance. An obstacle may be the communication of motives for such changes which will be more likely accepted by people if imposed from the outside, since active changes on the first spot may have a touch of arbitrariness.

Changes of second degree affect the structure of a system.

Structures are something you can rely on. They build the basis of work-environments.

This means that during “normal operation mode” structural changes are unlikely to occur because of personal restrictions, system restrictions, costs, safety needs, or simply because options for structural change are not likely to be visible.

Changes of second degree are supported by – not limited to – either peace or chaos [Christian Lapp], either by security or extreme pressure. If there is less or no work to do or no pressure, structural changes can be made safely. On the other hand if the

workload cannot be supported by the existing structure any more, structural changes may be seen as the only hope left.

That means that either one of these two extreme states supports changes of second degree. However the quality of this states is not the same. Obviously it is advisable to choose peaceful periods for structural changes.

A change in a peaceful period is likely to be an active one and met with less resentment. Therefore it will have a more lasting effect than a passive change made in an unsafe period.

A way of thinking of changes of second degree is Metanoia.

Metanoia means a radical change of thinking which puts thinking and acting on a new foundation \cite{metanoia\_prinzip\_lapp}

For Metanoia to be applicable the same principles as for change of 2<sup>nd</sup> degree are valid. It can either be done during peaceful or chaotic periods. Either out of pressure and necessity or out of joy and curiosity.

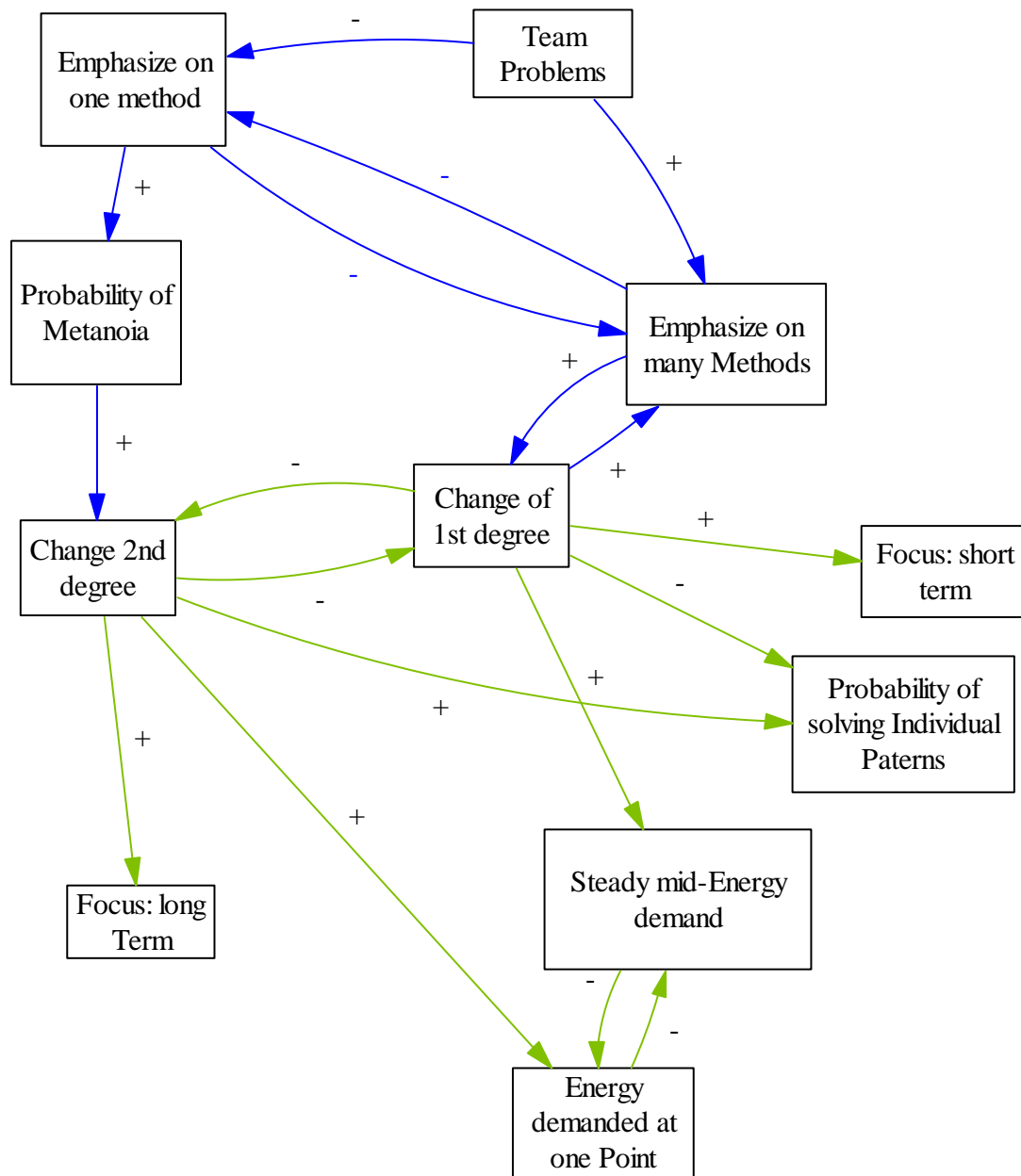
Metanoia will be used as the main tool to accomplish this by providing a fertile ground for new ideas.

### **A sustainable approach**

There are many possibilities how to make changes of second degree within a team. For the remainder we focus on two major aspects: personnel and social team structure.

The personnel structure can be affected by adding, removing team members or changing positions.

A team however surely counts more then the sum of its individuals. For this reason in mediation e.g. we focus also on the explication of the underlying team-structures (“unwritten laws”) for the individual. This means not only that the individual’s patterns are addressed. Another dimension is covered by the individual’s behavior which results out of the confrontation from the individual’s patterns and the established team-structure. For change of second degree we now explicitly focus either on a sustainable change of individual patterns or on a sustainable change of the teaming-structure; not on the resulting behavior (which will be leading to change of first degree).



While the personnel layout can more easily be changed it is in general more lasting and better to change the social structure. Personnel change is accumulated (long-term-focused) more expensive and for innovation-related processes also very dangerous e.g. due to the loss of implicit knowledge. Moreover system-immanent problems cannot be solved by cut-and-run philosophy since they may re-emerge when hiring new people.

On the other hand, changes on individual patterns and the social structure are hard to achieve. People cannot be simply told to change patterns they might not even be aware of – furthermore people might refuse to acknowledge them or are unwilling to

change. Also social structures can be so traditional that they must not be questioned.  
(plains must fly [urs jäger])

Addressing social behavior within a team is mostly done when problems occur, since this is the level where symptoms are visible. Following a one dimensional cause-and-effect-chain a methodology (Coaching, Mediation, Harvard-Concept, Talking-it-out,...) will be applied to solve a certain problem **on this level**. This needs a certain amount of energy (time, money, psychological pressure,...). When the bad symptoms are solved on the behavioural level the methodology has fulfilled its task and is therefore relieved. This sounds also logical, since the team-supervisors who are measured upon short-term goals want to cut the costs and save time.

By obeying to these restrictions core-principles (voluntary participation, no time limit,...) of the methodologies are violated: people are forced to attend or a certain time/money limit is given within the problem has to be solved, otherwise somebody might get fired (even the coach !).

Due to the tendency that the underlying patterns and/or the systemic structure have not or hardly been affected the same or similar problem will reoccur and again force the management to react when the pressure from upper-management or the staff is too high. Most likely another coach, mediator, consultant will be hired because the previous did not solve the problem or for the same reason another methodology will be applied. This is another strategic failure, because the person/methodology will be blamed for the failure and not the misuse. (If the same person/methodology will be applied one has to face the question why it did not help.) The new applied "medicine" will probably lead to the same outcome, resulting in an often experienced grief and total de-motivation of the people based on the assumption that nothing will help.

The more team-problems are addressed short-termed, the more likely quick and dirty solutions (change of first degree) will be applied, making the problems in the end even worse. Compared to a change of second degree the energy demand is less on the first spot; accumulated over time however it is more likely to be larger.

The first major structural drawback for the whole system is that people will not reach a level to face their personal patterns. The probability to reach this level even decreases by shifting-the-burden on methodologies or coaches when the number of trials increases. The second major drawback is that the application of quick-and-dirty approaches will decrease the system's capability to generate change of second degree regardless if the demands for changes come from the in- or outside.

As stated before individuals have a certain set of behavioural patterns which are used in certain situations. Any methodology (may it be to talk about it) will deal with the visible symptoms. It is crucial to see that the **very same** methodology has the capability to look beyond the behavioural level: the level of personal patterns or the systemic structure behind it. This important (or call it “final”) step is exactly what Metanoia is about. Applying Metanoia for the occurring problem may lead the individual to a level where he/she is confronted with deeply settled personal patterns or from the systems perspective will affect “core sentences” of the system (s.o.) Metanoia is the crucial variable to make the combination of structure and patterns which lead to a certain behavior visible. Metanoia is not change of second degree, neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for it, but is the identification of crucial parameters which can be changed by leaving the purely behavioural level.

The probability of Metanoia is increased by several circumstances (s.o.) especially when the concerned people stick hard to one method asking why certain aspects of the method are not helping. However it is to state that Metanoia increases the probability of change of second degree but usually at high cost: such processes are time (years) and money consuming. Also it binds the individual's/group energy reducing the productivity for the time of the process. In the long run these costs are however lower than those of applying changes of first degree.

## **Conclusion**

Team problems have many sources - we do not think that a single-problem-single solution approach is efficient in any way.

Productivity was for a long time the main source of problems consultant firms had to deal with, using a broad variety of methods. In the last decades more and more attention is laid on workforce-contentment, not at least because of its coherence with productivity.

But regardless which motives stay behind: with a mental model of a single cause-and-effect chain the symptoms which lay on a behavioural level are addressed successfully to a certain extent. The re-emerging of such or similar problems refers to the assumption that the underlying cause – whatever it might be – has not been touched by the methodology. Since behavior results from a combination of individual

patterns meeting an established team structure such approaches suppress in the long run the addressing of the underlying forces not at least due to shifting-the-burden on the methods or the coaches.

Using the method right means also and especially to elaborate those aspects where it has failed. Instead of applying a new method or coach we suggest to spend an extra effort on these failure-aspects. In doing so one gets the probability to look beyond the behavioural level to structural issues (Metanoia) – may they affect the individual or the organization (team).

Exploring new dimensions of structural solutions will therefore be more costly on the spot but cheaper in the long run compared to change of first degree solutions. Moreover they will provide an additional insight of either personal patterns or team related core sentences.

Therefore we suggest an open organizational environment enabling its members to deal with Metanoia in order to find elegant and sustainable solutions.

## **References**

Brinkmann, R. & Stapf, K. (2005): „Innere Kündigung. Wenn der Job zur Fassade wird.“, C.H. Beck Verlag, München

Brock, B. (2002): “Der Barbar als Kulturheld - Bazon Brock III : gesammelte Schriften 1991 - 2002 ; Ästhetik des Unterlassens, Kritik der Wahrheit - wie man wird, der man nicht ist.“, DuMont-Literatur-und-Kunst-Verlag, Köln