Inside Story: Inside IDE

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The purpose of publishing inside views is to provide insights otherwise rarely possible. Simultaneously to my writing this inside story, the 'official' IDE story is being distributed intercontinentally through the worldwide channels of Oxford University Press (IDE 1981a, 1981b) as well as through journal articles. So, I ask myself, what then is the 'unofficial', and hitherto untold, IDE story? In attempting to answer this question I find myself involved in a peculiar process which can be likened to peeling an onion: the first layer is often easy to peel off, it won't make you cry - in a sense it is the official, outside part of the story (see IDE 1981a, 1981b). With the second layer you usually reach the onion's heart with its pungent smell and your eyes and nose begin to water - you reach the story's emotional dimensions. Finally, with the third layer you start cutting into the heart, your eyes may begin to hurt – you delve into intimate parts of a project history. Not being a masochist, or too much of an exhibitionist, I intend to limit myself to the second layer.

Two inside aspects of the inside IDE story strike me as being particularly important:
- group maintenance over several years, and
- the significance of a German as international coordinator.

Group Maintenance

On the surface, the IDE International Research Group ('the Group') has been remarkably successful in presenting itself as a homogeneous entity. Not only a crucial test but also a symbol of this homogeneity has been final agreement by all members to collectively author all international publications, to waive all personal royalty claims, and to direct all potential royalties to a newly created association, the Industrial Democracy in Europe Fund, to support further research on participation and industrial democracy.

But, of course, nobody could or would claim that 'the Group' displayed total equality among its members throughout its phases of development. After all, there were some 25 members with different national, religious, and cultural heritages; among them were extreme introverts as well as extreme extroverts; engineers, psychologists, sociologists, philosophers; colleagues more than a generation apart in age; colleagues representing politically and methodologically rather diverse outlooks; people who were internationally well known in their field and others who were beginners; some were absolute masters of the English language and others were on a level equivalent to second-year English language students. Hence, any person with a minimum knowledge of group dynamics and organizational behaviour will rightly suspect that such differences would influence the internal role structure of `the Group'. The research topic itself was power and influence processes in organizations; we were vividly aware that these phenomena were present within our own group. No doubt, we had 'central group members' as well as 'peripheral' ones. At one point in time we even began to objectify this internal structure by means of sociographic techniques.

How then, and this was always a crucial question, could we ensure the basic unity of 'the Group' in spite of existing internal differences, distances covering thousands of miles, and a time period spanning more than seven years? (I do not entertain the hypothesis that unity was possible *because* we were so far apart and only met as a group for limited periods at a time!).

One important factor was certainly that 'the Group' liked and enjoyed itself. There seemed to be no unbridgeable personality clashes. Personal and intellectual styles matched. Without a doubt this was

necessary, but certainly not sufficient. In retrospect I can clearly see that we were always aware of the need to make conscious efforts in group maintenance. What do I mean by that? Five aspects may be distinguished here:

1. Preparation of meetings

One of the responsibilities of the Berlin team was to prepare the agenda of each of the thirteen plenary meetings that were held during the project's life time. I remember that we often spent several sessions planning the sequence of agenda items and discussing the way each item ought to be introduced in order to avoid potentially disruptive reactions from team members. For the same purpose we used subcommittees of the international team as sounding boards to test the likely reaction of the whole team. I believe that this careful planning contributed considerably to smooth plenary sessions. But in the event that a plenary session became stormy anyway, it was a second element that helped to guarantee common purpose and group identification.

2. Conference technique

'The Group' had among its members not only excellent chairmen but also people who had been weathered and seasoned by long years of sometimes strenuous committee work. They knew the 'ins' and 'outs' of when to speedup the decision-making process, when to slow down and allow an airing of opinions by participants, and when to call for a life-saving break. I distinctly remember one international session in which we risked losing two or three country teams over methodological issues. It was then that expertise in the whole gamut of conference and committee methodology paid off. A break was called, subcommittees went to work, the main antagonists met with a senior colleague to explore constraints and overlaps of their positions. The evening found us united again.

3. After-hours servicing

Our international plenary meetings were deliberately scheduled to last at least four or five days. In other words, the whole international team spent a total of about 2-3 months (not counting the frequent subcommittee contacts and occasional meetings at other international conferences) working together in one location. Almost from the outset we recognized that, beyond professional contact, we needed personal contact in order to steer this giant project to success. The relatively long plenary meetings provided ample opportunity to encounter colleagues as persons. A conversation over a glass of Old Genever or young Slivović must have helped to verify many an opinion: improvised after-dinner speeches, charades, and sketches helped to articulate many pent-up feelings, thus clearing the air for next day's work sessions.

4. Social contract

Apart from such informal means of reducing tensions we also tried to anticipate many possible problems by formally discussing and reaching an agreement on such issues as acknowledgements, data ownership, authorship, and royalties. We even envisioned arbitration procedures in case of conflicts over such issues. We have not yet found it necessary to implement such procedures but the consensus reached in our 'social contract' certainly has helped to alleviate many anxieties that frequently undermine similar projects. It has provided the formal normative frame within which work and collaboration could be pursued.

5. The image of the common enemy

Finally, we managed to instil in ourselves a healthy sense of competitiveness with other real or imagined parallel and ongoing projects. I think some of us (occasionally) played up the threat that 'the others will be earlier on the market than we' in order to set time constraints for our own work and to speed up action by the team as a whole. And 'common enemies', whether they be time pressures or real or imagined rival projects, induce group cohesion…

The total fabric of these factors, I believe, explains, to a large degree, why, against all odds, we managed to maintain basic unity in 'the Group'.

A German as International Coordinator

Here I may primarily be expressing my own personal feelings or, at best, touching the Group's sub- and unconscious feelings, rather than addressing something that was consciously shared by the whole international team. Nevertheless, they seem important enough to report because it is likely that the underlying dynamics characterize any European or international collaboration with German participation.

By the age of nine, at the end of World War II, I had experienced hunger, bombings, evacuation, and flight in horsedrawn carriages through several European countries. Indelible images remain of thousands of Theresienstadt concentration camp evacuees stumbling and falling along the road towards the West. I thought I knew something from my own experience of what that war meant and I believed I could imagine what it still means to other Europeans who had gone through it. Thus, without being burdened by personal guilt I belong to a generation of Germans that appears permanently and inextricably affected by the events caused in the name of Germany.

As a research fellow at the Berlin-based International Institute of Management (IIM) I had been able to muster some internal and external funds to help the development of the IDE project. Given IIM's institutional support and the funds obtained it seemed logical to ask me to continue in an administrative capacity as International Coordinator of the project. In retrospect I realize how naive I was in taking this action for granted. Only with time did I learn that in addition to our Israeli colleagues the team also included several other colleagues with Jewish backgrounds and emigrant experience. What the German occupation of Holland and Norway must have meant I learned only much later from my Dutch and Norwegian colleagues' evident elation when they told me how they had celebrated the actual day of liberation and how they still commemorate it. Only little by little did I find out some biographic facts of one colleague's life as the son of a national resistance leader in Yugoslavia and what it still must mean to have oneself been a member of the resistance movement as a teenager. Did this unusual constellation in the IDE team manifest itself in any way? I think it did. It showed in jokes (for instance, an urgent request of mine to 'the Group' might be answered by: 'So, the Führer wants ...'). And I will not forget the sleepless night which followed a session when as chairman I tried to reconvene the participants by saying: 'Let's get back to work' and someone spontaneously responded: 'Ja, Arbeit macht frei'. It was also evident in my own uneasiness when the whole team, spellbound and fascinated, happened to watch Yugoslav liberation day festivities. Other, maybe less tangible, examples might be given. Some of my IDE colleagues, however, may be totally unaware of such events, not to mention of my own personal reactions. In this sense I present here genuine 'inside' views, which were part and parcel of our collaboration. Inasmuch as we were successful, as an international team, in producing a collective product that will - hopefully - be found by colleagues to constitute an important research contribution, so will we also have shown that such collaboration is possible against all odds of heterogeneity in team composition and historical legacy. However, the final balance sheet should also contain the results of inside learning processes - regardless of how painful they may be at times - which will hopefully provide deeper insights into the European condition.

References

IDE International Research Group, 1981a. *Industrial democracy in Europe.* London: OUP.

IDE International Research Group, 1981b. *European industrial relations.* London: OUP.