
Operational Papers

In the early 1960s, when the socio-ecological perspective was emerging, the socio-technical perspective was already embedded in a conscious national program, the Norwegian Industrial Democracy Program (Emery and Thorsrud, 1970/1976). That program emerged only because some of Norway's leaders shared a vision that saw the employees as a force that was codetermining the fate of their industrial organizations and, indeed, of whole branches of their industry. The socio-technical perspective was manifest in the field experiments but they existed and were supported only because of their position in a much more encompassing socio-ecological perspective; a perspective that had as its unit of change a nation.

As researchers, we were soon privately discussing what we called "Phase C." Phase A had been the study of representative systems in Norwegian industry. Norway was a rich field for such studies (Emery and Thorsrud, 1969). Phase B was the study, by means of field experiments, of the effects of participative democracy in the workplace. The Phase C that we discussed among ourselves—and in the meetings of the Informal European Group, was the likely flow-on from the workplace, if Phase B was successful and widely copied. Given the centrality of the employee role in modern societies, it did not seem possible to us that widespread flow-on effects could be avoided. Persons who daily received reinforcement of their own dignity and competence in the workplace were little likely to accept the top-down delivery of services built into the welfare state, or the derogatory assumptions built into representative systems of governance. Such persons were also more likely to enrich family and community life than to be a burden or to degrade it.

These papers are continuations of the discussions about Phase C. These discussions have become more urgent as progress with Phase B has led at least one nation—Australia—to start serious restructuring of its institutions to accommodate a multiskilled, democratized workforce (Emery, 1994). They have become more serious as representative forms of government still fail to blossom, even in a post Cold War climate (Emery, 1991).

We have not tried to cover all developments that have "operationalized" the socio-ecological perspective. These few cases simply indicate the kinds of problems that open up when we accept that sociological and psychological problems do not have an independent existence—that they are facets of the same problem.

References

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