

## 6 Managing Human Resources at Metaplan

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### 6.1 Metaplan

Metaplan's human resources management is strongly related to the specific approach of its consulting procedure and its consulting concept of organizational change. It is a sociologically guided consultancy with a solid foundation in advanced organizational theories. This has to be explained to make the ways and means of recruiting and training our consultants understood.

#### 6.1.1 The Metaplan Consulting Procedure: Moderating Processes of Reaching Shared Understanding

The Metaplan consulting procedure is a process of group communication. In discussions with groups of people from affected areas, the problems are brought to light which are to be the focus of the consultancy process. The suggestions for solving these problems are also elaborated in group discussions and workshops at which those involved participate.

The consultants intervene in the group discussions either indirectly or directly. 'Indirectly' means that they formulate the questions and propositions which form the subject of the discussions. They intervene directly by taking part in the discussion, introducing their own opinions and recommendations in a provocative manner. They always do this if the indirect method is not successful in breaking open closed thinking and fixed interests. These indirect and direct interventions are the points where consulting takes place: Metaplaners are simultaneously both moderators and consultants.

#### 6.1.2 The Metaplan Consulting Concept of Organizational Change

Three mechanisms interlock in the Metaplan consulting concept. The first mechanism is to create a common conceptual framework to replace the ingrained points of view trapping the members of an organization. This is a prerequisite for communications amounting to more than mere compromise. The second mechanism is

to form viable connections between the participants' divergent interests; this entails a power play. The third mechanism concerns creating trust. The partners should be able to make advance concessions in the hope of receiving returns on their investment in the project at a later date.

### 6.1.3 The Metaplan Consulting Approach Is a Sociologically Guided Consultancy with a Solid Foundation in Advanced Organizational Theories

These are the theories most influential on Metaplan consultancy:

- Decisions in organizations have to be made under conditions of **bounded rationality** and **ambiguity** (*Herbert A. Simon, James G. March*). This opens the door for communication processes in which the participants try to build up shared understanding and an arrangement of their interests.
- **Rule following:** self-generated or social rules are followed in organizations to absorb insecurities of decision-making, even if they are economically disadvantageous (*James G. March, John W. Meyer and Brian Rowan, Paul J. Dimaggio and Walter M. Powell*). Metaplaners are aware of that and ask themselves whether such rules should be respected or challenged in the process.
- Organizations are arenas of **micro-political disputes** (*Michel Crozier and Erhard Friedberg* [in French], *Guenther Ortmann* [in German]). These disputes help to overcome deadlocks in the processes of organizational change. They have to be accepted to a certain degree.
- Subunits and departments in organizations develop specific "thought styles". They might be trapped in "**closed thinking**" which makes it difficult to build up shared understanding between different "thought collectives". (*Ludwik Fleck*, who in 1935 published a sociological investigation of the production of scientific knowledge, coined these terms, which found their way into the Metaplan method of working).
- Organizations themselves cause costs: costs of information, of transactions, of control, and of exerting influence. **Economic theories of organization** allow Metaplaners look at those costs mostly neglected or underestimated by managers (the best known in this field are *Oliver E. Williams* [in English] and *Arnold Picot* [in German]).