CENTRALISATION - DECENTRALISATION: FAILURE - SUCCESS

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INTRODUCTION

When Wim van der Gulden invited me for a lecture at this meeting, I was at first flabbergasted, as I was completely aware of my utter ignorance of animal laboratories, as much as without any doubt you will be when you heard my lecture.

I know of course that one should rather not talk about matters one does not know about. But then, the invitor dressed his invitation so charmingly that I could hardly resist. Moreover he used an interesting argumentation: it might be refreshing to be exposed to the views of an outsider, more or less in accordance with the Dutch wisdom that children and foolish people may tell truth.

Well, outsider I am, being a sociologist, more especially in the sociology of work and organisation, but without any experience or research in animal laboratories. I had a couple of very stimulating talks in which I could learn from the expertise of Wim van der Gulden and Marianne Kuipers, but for the greater part I had to rely on my social sciences theory and approach.

In sociology, the fundamental processes of organisation are considered to be differentiation and integration, or put in other words: the division of labor and the coordination. And that is where I started from.

What I will do in this lecture is to discuss three subjects along this scheme:

1. Nature of work and characteristics of the operating core:
   - work
   - coordination
   - motivation
   - congruence

2. Organisation of animal laboratories:
   - internal organisation and leadership
   - external organisation and dependences

3. Culture and history.

Of course, I cannot and will not try to be exhaustive on these subjects. I will highlight some points and leave other topics in darkness.
1. NATURE OF WORK AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE OPERATING CORE

The operating core is of course of vital importance to any organisation: that is directly related to the production of the services. The work of animal care-takers and animal technicians is in my opinion characterised by the following 6 properties:

- it is skilled work; it requires a specific training, ample experience and a special feeling, which cannot easily be transfered to other persons.
- the work is a very special combination of technical and social knowledge and skills.
- it is individual work, not directly connected with the performance of colleagues as is the case with conveyor belts or group-work.
- it is service-work (at least the work of the technicians) in behalf of high-status researchers, with whom a relationship of mutual trust should be established; moreover the clients change over time.
- the quality of the performance cannot easily be assessed, leave alone be measured.
- within the organisation of the laboratory the operating core is in the position to spot problems and to initiate improvements in the actual work activities.

I hope this description is at least partly correct, and I will very much appreciate your comments on it.

Now the characteristics of the work have profound consequences for the kind of coordination and motivation that are needed and probably will occur in the laboratory if proper policy is followed.

As for coordination basically there are two types: direct control (or close supervision) and responsible autonomy. It may be expected that in a laboratory as I have in mind in my description of the work responsible autonomy is the most adequate type. More specifically: coordination should rely on mechanisms such as mutual adjustment and improvement of skills. Other types of coordination-mechanisms, such as standardisation of work-process, standardisation of output, direct control by supervisor are hardly applicable.

The nature of the work-task also requires a corresponding type of work motivation. As I see it the animal care-taker and animal technician should, because of the nature of his task, have a work-motivation in which the following 4 traits are well developed:

- appreciation of autonomy, which implies self-confidence and willingness to accept responsibility.
- identification with the task, by which I mean willingness to perform according to the norms of good work, without being controlled and sanctioned directly.
- a combination of service-mindedness and self-consciousness.
- social skills in the sense of ability and willingness to communicate and to establish good relations with changing partners, at the same time with also good but different relations with colleagues and superiors.

Again: I would appreciate your comments on the statements. What I am trying to do actually is to apply the concept of congruence to the social system of animal laboratories. Congruence has to do with the social system