

**"Estonia and the World
at the Dawn of 2012"
Report of a Listening Post
held in Tallinn**



Encouraging The Reflective Citizen

Part 1. THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

In this part of the Listening Post participants were invited to identify, contribute, and explore their experience in their various social roles, be those in work, unemployed, or retired; as members of religious, political, neighbourhood or voluntary or leisure organisations, or as members of families and communities. This part was largely concerned with what might be called, 'the stuff of people's lives,' the relating to the 'socio' or 'external' world of participants.

Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

In Part 2 the aim was to collectively identify the major themes emerging from Part 1.

Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

In this part of the Listening Post the members were working with the information resulting from Parts One and Two, with a view to collectively identifying the underlying dynamics both conscious and unconscious that may be predominant at the time; and developing hypotheses as to why they might be occurring at that moment. Here the members were working more with what might be called their 'psycho' or 'internal' world, their collective ideas and ways of thinking that both determine how they perceive the external realities and shape their actions towards them.

Analysis and Hypothesis 1

The expression of critical opinions (experiences, thoughts and viewpoints) about organisations is 'dangerous'

Analysis: In their narrative, the participants spoke of how their own experiences have had detrimental after effects for themselves. They found that it can even be dangerous in that it can lead to unemployment, the non-sharing of essential information, a lack of invitations to certain events, not being heard, not being taken into consideration, and the like. Almost all of the participants had had similar experiences.

Organisations are continually undergoing great changes (directors change, new facilities are taken into use, new workers are introduced and the like). There is a continual feeling that one does not have a concept of all that is going on. Information is not available, and it has to be pried out of nowhere. One must function with half the needed information and on instinct is not an expression that I know or could find anywhere. This situation results in a feeling of dissatisfaction and creates the desire to judge and criticise everything. The fact that no one wants to listen to, or welcome,

comments is irritating. Honest feedback does not function. Critical opinions create conflicts and various types of tension between people, differences of opinion are experienced as personal insults, and interaction at work is hindered.

Hypothesis: Organisations want to get results relatively fast, and therefore they also attempt to make quick changes. Quick changes demand authoritarian leadership. Carrying through changes in a way that is person-friendly (using a rhythm that is suitable to people) would demand more time. There is no desire to give more time, and therefore people do not understand what is going on or how they must act. People do not get a conception of the changes taking place. The situation makes people feel anxious and out of humor. These feelings are vented in critical speech. The organisation does not provide room for critical speech because it hinders the process of carrying out changes quickly. Although organisations win, in reality, the effect is just the opposite from the point of view of society.

Analysis and Hypothesis 2

Unemployment 'as a social cancer cell' of the family system

Analysis: When someone within a family becomes unemployed, the whole family seems to, more or less, suffer from an illness, 'social cancer'. The mood, indisposition and shame expressed in the speech of the unemployed person affect everyone close to him or her, crippling the family. The system of interaction within the family becomes affected, and all of its members begin to suffer. The interaction within the family members changes. Prevarications appear in discussed topics. The reality of the situation is hidden, everyone is artificially optimistic (but it does not always help), and the successful experiences of close ones are ignored so that the unemployed person will not feel bad. In addition, the anxiety of grandparents is apparent: they call on telephone more and more frequently and are continually asking about how the unemployed person feels and whether or not he or she has found work. After the calls, the person feels even worse. The actual situation is either sugar-coated or minimised. Normal interplay is becomes paralysed. The aid from society is ostensible or nonexistent.

This topic was spoken of a great deal in the seminar since a few of the participants had someone unemployed among their friends or relatives.

Hypothesis: People have a basic need to be of benefit to society (in their own milieu), be valued by society, become known for their own achievements, become acknowledged, be proud of their achievements, and earn money and food for their family through their work. For the most part, these feelings can be felt when people have a job for which they are paid. If there is no work or money, they begin to feel bad, become isolated, remain in the periphery, and feel helpless and embarrassed because of their lack of success. Because of these feelings, they express their anxiety and despair unwittingly to the environment and close ones; at the same time they also push their close ones away. The interaction between everyone in the family becomes detrimentally affected.

Analysis and Hypothesis 3

As the technical tools used for interaction increase, the nature of face-to-face interaction changes

Analysis: As technical tools increase, people are more often (daily use of Skype and Facebook) in contact with each other, sharing information, personal happenings and news. As a result, face-to-face contacts are nowadays more or less different. The joy of meeting with someone is not as great. When a meeting occurs, one feels as if everything has already been said, is already known. There seems to be nothing new to talk about or know, and the subject matter starts to become repetitive. One has the awkward feeling that there is nothing left to speak about. General themes such as the weather or sports become the topic of conversation. It is difficult to begin to speak of how one actually feels or is thinking or about how one feels or is experiencing.

Hypothesis: A change has occurred in the communication between individuals. Above all, in encounters between individuals, discourse involving information, factual speech, and the examination of environmental events acts more or less as a means of 'tuning in with each other', so that one can then actually ask 'How are you?' and speak of personal issues. Nowadays the 'tuning in' process has already occurred elsewhere through technical means, in other words, before the actual face-to-face contact. This circumstance changes the nature of the contact. It was also noted that visits with grandparents have become shorter. This same difference in the timing of the 'interaction series' creates confusion and awkwardness among people and results in superficial discourse. And superficial discourse then leads to people distancing themselves from each other. A peculiar vicious circle is created that results in a sense of awkwardness.

Analysis and Hypothesis 4

More choices – less experience of internal freedom

Analysis: Choices often remain unmade because of too broad a selection of possibilities. There is too much surrounding a person. Money and resources are, nevertheless, limited. Making choices sometimes becomes impossible. Instead people select to leave the choice unmade. In this manner, they buy themselves internal freedom. When they act in this manner, their condition improves. There is too much in shops; it is difficult to choose the correct and most pleasing product. Later, the choice is doubted, and one begins to wonder whether the choice was the right one. There is so much of everything, and the abundance is tempting. Feelings of doubt/ greed/ being without is related to the aforementioned experiences.

In relation to the difficulty of making choices, one of the participants drew the attached picture. He also explained that earlier there were fewer choices, but a feeling of greater freedom, while now there are more choices but a feeling of less freedom.

Analysis: In the face of an abundance of choices, people are as if they are at a crossing in a road, where all the signs indicate enticing places. Must one decide ALONE which road to take? The loneliness involved in choices is distressing and frightening, as is the possibility that a choice may be wrong, regretted or laughed at.

Convener: Marianne Tensing