



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 everyday lives', that relating to the 'socio' or 'external' world of participants.

After a tentative start the session got under way and several participants aired their thoughts and experiences, in the beginning rather generally. As session facilitators we perceived that a desire and wish to *debate* and *discuss* developments in society was given priority and possibly interfered with the voicing of pure descriptions. Several participants knew one another and small groups had already been formed, with some conversations already in progress from the start.

Several participants described how they had changed job during the past year. One woman said that on LinkedIn she had received a description of how many in her network had changed job. This caused her reflect to about having done the same thing. Another woman stated that as a lecturer in journalism she perceived that many young students seem to struggle with (over)adapting in order to survive. One "must get your foot in the door – and do whatever it takes in order to get in"! One woman said that we move between different worlds – how do they fit together? Several participants voiced the opinion that organisations change, new assignments are allotted. Colleagues shift; in project work there are often changes. Leadership changes and what happens is often very rapid.

The discussion proceeded to the issue of individualism. The expression, "is this me" was discussed with some levity. Some interpreted it as a positive expression of an enhanced individualism and others perceived it as a problematical expression of a self-obsessed culture. Someone suggested that competition is increasing and an association was made with the 'Job Market' where those who do not fit into society gather, become visible and are scrutinized.

The man in the group informed the other participants that he managed 'Fejjan' (Swedish slang for 'Facebook'. Translator's note.) by blocking and categorizing; trying to control the flow of information. He did so in order to enjoy the possibilities offered through Facebook by balancing the 'cocktail party' and more serious discussions. He expressed some satisfaction with the opportunities he enjoyed in controlling the flow according to his personal needs and wishes. At the same time his wife, who was not as active on Facebook, said that her work colleagues informed her of how her husband categorized activities, e.g. that his blocking affected the flow of information for others in the same chain of communication. A woman in the group joined in and suggested that the new era's network was moving 'sauna conversations' out into the 'open'. The same woman suggested that some things are written under the influence of wine on a Friday evening. What is happening with the social processes in our time? Are they the same old processes in new apparel or are new types of processing and patterns arising in pace with technical developments?

The next contribution concerned the displacement of the generation gap. What did becoming 'friends' with one's parents entail? The group considered the meaning of the word 'friend', that has one meaning on Facebook and another in reality. One woman described how the nature of her

contact with her adult offspring was more of an equal 'friendship' than that she had experienced as possible with her own parents.

Someone raised the subject of changes to the whole of society brought about by crises. Malmö suffered the closure of the shipbuilding industry in the seventies. Today Malmö is an area of small companies. Only a few years after the research department of a major pharmaceutical company was relocated to another part of the world, a variety of new, small, knowledge-intensive firms has appeared. Trade and industry take over a number of organisations previously found in the public sector and cultural borders are displaced. Our way of dealing with major crises was discussed.

Another person then introduced the term, 'survivalist', which describes a movement or new trend where people stockpile tinned food in the cellar. She described a fantasy/daydream that she thought was perhaps her version of this movement: to move to the country and turn to self-subsistence and "growing potatoes". The term 'survivalist' was discussed. Is it possible for me? Someone brought up the idea that the number of vegans in society is on the increase. Someone else suggested that the trade in second-hand goods seems to be increasing or at least that the target group has been displaced. From having been a money issue to being one of identity.

Towards the end there was a discussion about ethics and violations on the Internet. One woman stressed that she did not like it when another woman raised the idea that 'the men' who trawl for little girls on the Internet must be stopped. Her comment was based on her not being sure that the number is really increasing and that it is only men engaging in such behaviour.

Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

In Part 2 the aim was for us to collectively identify the major themes emerging from Part 1. The following represents some of these themes.

We extracted a number of underlying themes from the narratives. It was no simple matter to clearly delineate Step 1 as it had been to a great extent of an explorative rather descriptive character, as mentioned. As we perceived that much of the discussion was characterized by 'on the one hand' / 'on the other hand', we describe the themes in terms of poles.

- Optimism vs. Pessimism
- Visible vs. Invisible Network
- Individualism vs. Collectivism
- Formal vs. Informal roles
- Openness vs. Uncommunicativeness

Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

From our observations and the group's efforts we have formulated the following hypotheses that are partly related to each other.

Hypothesis 1

Innovations arise in a way that we are unable to control. Old structures are smashed and new ones take their place. The illusion of the large public systems as invincible structures offering protection has been shattered. Even if the reports about catastrophes and misery in the world cause anxiety, they are kept at a distance by the possibility of also focusing upon opportunities and signs of positive development. This opens up the possibility of a type of cautious, balanced optimism regarding the capacity of people, nature and society to transform, find new solutions by taking risks, and invest in what one believes in.

Hypothesis 2

The increased transparency leads us to experience ourselves as more visible. It becomes both easier and more difficult to control and govern the picture of ourselves we offer the world around us. It affects our feeling of own identity, feeling authentic, being affirmed and receiving or taking up space. One way of coping with this can be to make oneself as visible as possible, e.g. through social media and in TV-programmes focusing upon the life of the private individual. Another alternative is to create a zone with its own manageable borders.

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