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Title: Staff Rides to provoke urgency for change
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1. Principle

The use of 'Staff Rides' (also called 'Evaluations on Location') is inspired by the principle '*blame free*'.

This principle can be understood in two ways:

1. We postpone our interpretations and judgments when we evaluate an unexpected event. We do that by including multiple perspectives and by asking participants to tell their story in terms of observations.
2. We do not look for guilty parties that contributed to the unexpected event.

2. Situation

As an interventionist I was asked to help the Department of Infrastructure, Traffic and Transport (DITT) in the City of Amsterdam in The Netherlands to improve the collaboration between employees working in different sections in the organization.

The lack of collaboration so far resulted in critical articles in the papers about houses that were sinking because of drilling a tunnel in a misguided manner. It also resulted in the decision of an alderman to resign. He could not explain the failures of the DITT anymore and he was held responsible.

Because of the number of organizations that work in Amsterdam on infrastructural projects and because of the complexity of the projects, the management and workers at DITT have gotten used to things going wrong, fixing problems at the last minute. They shrug when they hear what went wrong this time. They got numbed in a way.

3. Method of implementation

The method 'staff rides' as applied at DITT did have a number of steps:

Step 1: Preparation with management

Looking for (1) the urgency to change, (2) the ambition that is shared by management, (3) the willingness of management to investigate how management contributes to the problems that need to be solved

Step 2: Preparation with employees

Training in blame free questioning and looking for unexpected events that can be evaluated

Step 3: Preparation of the staff rides with the 'owners' of the unexpected events

Helping the owner to articulate his unexpected event by telling about it in observables and images

Step 4: Executing staff rides

In three groups, participants ask blame free questions to three storytellers, who tell from their own perspective about their experiences that led to the unexpected event. The three different sequences of events are written down in chronological order on a large piece of paper. The participants identify the dysfunctional patterns in the chronological story together.

Step 5: Joint analyses and action

Participants come together in a meeting where the common dysfunctional patterns are identified together. Participants try to find ways to break the dysfunctional patterns together.

4. Results

The process of organizing and executing the staff rides led to the following results:

1. Management and employees learnt how to evaluate their (non-)collaboration in a blame free manner.
2. Management and employees became aware and began to understand the dysfunctional patterns that have become part of the organization's culture, habits and processes. Management as well as employees understand how they contribute in maintaining these dysfunctional patterns and as a result of those patterns their non-collaboration.
3. Management and employees were shocked as they learnt about the dysfunctional patterns in the organization and how that effects their work. The staff rides evoked a sense of urgency with everyone, what made it easier to implement the changes that were necessary. The numbedness (temporarily) disappeared.

What I think is difficult in applying this method is that in organizing the staff rides you immediately experience the dysfunctional patterns yourself. As an interventionist I had to be mindful every single minute trying to break every single dysfunctional pattern that I experienced. One day, for example, one of the managers told me last minute that he could not make it to the staff ride. If I could do it by myself? Immediately I gave him the choice to join the staff ride or to cancel the staff ride. An unavailable manager was part of one of the dysfunctional patterns of this organization.

5. Conclusion

The method 'staff rides' is not only useful as a way of making employees mindful and learn from unexpected events. It is also useful as a way of making employees go through and experience the horrible consequences of unquestioned patterns in organizing. It can help to increase the urgency to change in an organization where people became numbed and are no longer aware of the consequences of their actions.