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Normative Evaluation of Community Projects: A Multi-Modal Systems Approach*

J. D. R. de Raadt**

Luleå Tekniska Universitet, Sweden

Veronica D. de Raadt

Institute for Management and Social Systems, Sweden

Abstract

This paper introduces an evaluation method for community projects based on the multi-modal systems approach. The method differs from the common mechanistic approach to evaluation in three ways. Firstly, it uses the long-term life (viability) of a community as the ultimate criteria of evaluation. Secondly, it is normative; that is, it focuses on the responsibility of people to their own community and for managing their own lives. Thirdly, it is dynamic; it identifies factors that threaten a community and examines their dynamic link and long-term impact on the community. Fourthly, it evaluates the adequacy of a community activity (good practice) to help ensure its long-term viability. The method is illustrated with a European Union sponsored project.

Keywords: multi-modal, community, viability, sustainability, normative, evaluation

1. Introduction

In a recent call for project proposals from the European Commission, “monitoring, evaluation and benchmarking” were identified as one of the “measures” that should be adopted to attain a local commitment (that is, in municipalities all over Europe) to its employment strategy. The document went on to specify:

Adequate monitoring of strategic approaches depends on effective measurement of progress against targets. The quantitative and qualitative impacts of strategies should be identified and measured *ex ante* and *ex post*... If evaluation can provide answers to the question of what works or does not work, then benchmarking offers a complementary tool to promote collective learning by comparing achievements against the performance of other actors in different local areas. (European Commission, 2001)

The above approach betrays a mechanical view of human behaviour that pervades much of public and private administration. According to this view, if one wants to change some pattern of behaviour in an individual or in a society, one must set up a process. This process takes the existing behaviour as input (“*ex ante*”) and submits it to a transformation aimed at a desired behavioural outcome (“*ex post*”). Evaluation in this context compares the actual and the real outcomes of the process and determines which are the elements in the transformation that lead to success or to failure. Likewise, benchmarking, a technique normally used to compare the performance of mechanical devices such as computers is also included in the tool kit for successful behavioural change.

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** Address all correspondence to Professor J. D. R. de Raadt, 2 Kauri Court, Mitcham Victoria 3132, Australia. Email: Donald@mssinstitute.com

Such “measures” do not address real people but abstract people, conceived within a bureaucratic environment that has lost contact with humanity and specifically ignores two things. Firstly, it ignores the fact that human life is normative, that is, that there is a realm of human responsibility beyond “what works or does not work”. This realm corresponds to what we ought to do and what we ought not to do. Unfortunately, ignoring the normative realm due to a mechanistic perspective is common in most of modern human science, especially in such disciplines as management, economics and operational research. We should not be surprised, therefore, if these have influenced public administration. Secondly, man's economic problems, such as unemployment, do not exist in isolation from his other problems: social, ethical, historical and religious. They are all linked together and vast technological and economic resources will not dispel them if we attempt to deal with them separately.

Therefore, we need a method of evaluation and design that addresses the normative realm as well as including aspects other than economics and technology. With this in mind, the rest of this paper will deal with an evaluation method based on a systems science that has been used in various European Community supported projects.

2. A Case

We will illustrate the evaluation method by referring to TRANS¹, a European Union sponsored project. The aim of this project is to build a mart for the exchange of good practices between different regions in the European Union. In a general manner, a good practice has been defined as an activity that has successfully helped attain an objective in a community, such as a training programme for helping women start their own small businesses. The mart will be a place where people can search and evaluate existing good practices and purchase them in order to transfer and adapt them to the needs in their region. The development of good practices is an expensive exercise and requires substantial subsidies from the European Union. Purchasing good practices through the mart would therefore result in substantial savings for the buyer as well as become a source of revenue for the seller. In addition to these economic incentives, exchanging good practices allows people a greater degree of flexibility and freedom to choose what they believe will contribute most to their communities. By contrast, if they wish to develop a good practice by obtaining European Union funding, they must follow the directives and timing specified in each call for proposal.

To build the mart, a pilot project has been set up involving six partners from six different European countries (Germany, Austria, France, Italy, Spain and Sweden); each partner simultaneously acts as a buyer and a seller of a good practice. This means that they will exchange at least twelve good practices. However, apart from its formal objective, the project can deliver further important contributions. In a globalised world, much of the uncertainties and complexities that we face arise from the interactions of many communities with different cultures. To cope with this, we need social systems to generate understanding about these interactions; TRANS provides a unique laboratory to learn about them. Groups from different countries will often collaborate to solve a single problem. Rarely, however, does one find a group of six different nationalities trying to help each other solve their unemployment problems in six different cultural settings. Through this daunting, yet necessary exercise, TRANS offers us an excellent scenario to refine the tools of social systems analysis, design and management to deal with a globalised environment.

We illustrate TRANS with the transfer of a good practice, Nornet, originating in Norrbotten (northern Sweden) to St. Jean, an administrative department in southern France.

¹ The names TRANS, Nornet, St Jean and Villars are fictitious names and are used to preserve the anonymity of the participants in this project.

3. Criteria for Evaluation

Our criterion for evaluation is the long-term viability of the community. By viability, we do not merely mean economic viability, but a multi-modal viability that encompasses the whole life of the community. We identify four domains in life: natural, intellectual, communal and

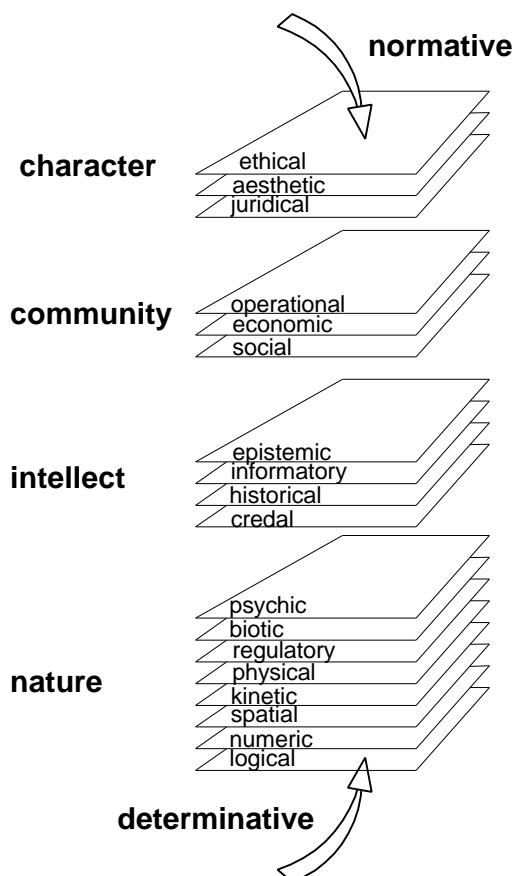


Figure 1: Multi-Modal Systems Framework

and character. While the whole universe operates in the natural domain, only mankind operates in the other three domains. Within each of these domains are the following modalities:

- Character: *ethical, aesthetic* and *juridical*
- Community: *operational, economic* and *social*
- Intellect: *epistemic, informatory, historical* and *credal*
- Nature: *psychic, biotic, regulatory, physical, kinetic, spatial, numeric* and *logical*

The sequential order of these domains and their modalities and the links between them is organised by two forces represented by the arrows in Figure 1. The first arrow is determinative; people cannot change it. It runs upwards and determines or sets each foundation of each domain or modality above it, just as a foundation is set before a house is built on top of it. The second arrow, running downwards, is normative; it addresses our responsibility as humans and tells us how things ought to be. Here again, this

arrow links all the modalities. Each modality or domain provides an inspiration or objective to the modality or domain below it, just as one must first be inspired by the idea of building a house before building its foundation. Lack of space forbids a full methodological discussion of this framework². Yet, an explanation regarding the ethical modality (at the top of Figure 1) is needed here. We live in an era dominated by modernism and its beliefs. People believe, despite the overwhelming empirical evidence to the contrary, that we live in a world that works; that mankind continuously progresses towards a global world order of peace and prosperity built with technology and economic development. Within this setting, people believe in a utilitarian ethic; goodness is what works for their own self-interest and evil is what works against it. Combined together, these creeds sanction the exercise of greed and pride in every realm of culture. This principle drives our economies and marketing, and ensures mankind remains divided into rich and poor by allocating the pleasure to the rich and the pain to the poor.

The multi-modal systems approach takes exactly the opposite stance. It recognises that this world does not work and that its non-viable state is getting worse, especially for those who are

² A full discussion is provided in de Raadt, J. D. R., 1997 and 2000.

victims of the unprecedented globalisation of poverty (Chossudovsky, 1998). Due to this predicament, the ethic that should govern our actions is not self-interest but self-sacrifice for others.³ Sacrifice is essential to compensate for the injustices that will always be present with us. The greater the degree of self-sacrifice in a community, the greater will be its prospect for viability.

4. Viability

If the criterion for the evaluation of a project is the long-term viability of the community, then the transfer and implementation of a good practice requires the evaluation of two things. Firstly, one must evaluate the needs of the community (St. Jean) to attain viability. Secondly, one must evaluate the potential of the good practice (Nornet) to contribute to these needs. This requires in turn the identification of the factors in a community that are critical to its viability and that are under threat.

Prior research (de Raadt, V. D., 2002) indicates that there is a set of common factors among communities in diverse regions of the world that are essential for their viability and which at the same time represent trouble spots that threaten them. It does not make much of a difference whether the community is a tribal village in Africa, a suburb of Berlin or a rural town in Sweden. Due to their strong normative quality, these factors depend more on the common humanity of their citizens than on the diversity of their economic and technological development or geographical location. The application of this evaluation method includes six of these factors – ethics, work, management, social structure, education and belief – although sometimes as an evaluation progresses, these factors may be changed or abandoned and new ones added. Each of these factors operates in a different modality and interacts with the others in a normative and, to a lesser extent, in a determinative manner. Even a relatively small number of factors generate a very large number of potential interactions, running in both normative and determinative directions. For example, six factors can generate up to 21 interactions. Naturally, the higher the number of interactions, the more complex their analysis becomes. Therefore, in addition to selecting the relevant factors, one must select a subset of interactions small enough to allow for analysis and at the same time large enough to represent the most important threats to viability.

Once the factors are selected, we must collect information to establish how they are relevant to the community being studied. We have stored this information on the database using SmCube, a special software package developed for this method (de Raadt, J. D. R., 2001). This database stores both theoretical knowledge and empirical data. By theoretical we do not only mean standard theory and prior research, but every available intellectual work that addresses the factors under discussion. Even fiction such as great literary masterpieces may be included, if they effectively argue a point relevant to our analysis. By empirical data, we mean the content from relevant administrative and descriptive documents, published statistics and interviews with people who actively participate in the everyday life of their community. For example, in the TRANS project, we have interviewed administrative officials in each community and people in touch with the community such as policemen, nurses, teachers and trade union officers. We also have attended discussion meetings, presentations about the regions and visited several local business sites. Transcripts of these interviews and documentary data have then been loaded onto the database.

Next follows the analysis of this data in building a qualitative model of the vital factors in the community. The model consists of two parts; the first part describes each of the factors, as

³ The Christian foundation of this ethical principle is fully discussed in de Raadt, J. D. R., 2000.

they are experienced in the community; the second describes the links between the factors and the threats they represent for the community's viability. We will review each of the parts below; however, we must once more state that we are focusing on what threatens the sustainability of the community. This does not mean that there are no positive factors in St. Jean, but that we are interested in identifying what is negative in order to decide what must be done to address it.

5. Factors

Ethics

In an interview, a councillor told us that the ethics motto among St. Jean's officialdom is: "Solidarity not charity, respect not love." This means that the Good Samaritan's personal intervention to help our neighbour in need is regarded as improper. Instead, we must help him through political support of the social structures - such as unions and public institutions - that have become our modern brother's keeper. In a later discussion, it was pointed out to us that this attitude springs from France being a secular state.

The result of it, we were told, is not only the loss of charity and love but also a restricted type of solidarity and respect; a "solidarity-for-some" approach that leaves the outsiders to look after themselves. This affects businesses as well as the community at large. People are closed socially and it is difficult to be invited into homes. Similarly, while close-knit groups such as small villages and farming communities have a high degree of solidarity, it is not open but rather confined to the village. Consequently, there is little support from churches, businesses and groups outside motivated by a sense of ethical concern for those in need.

Work

St. Jean's rate of unemployment given to us at the time of our visit was 11.5%. In terms of numbers, this represented 35,093 persons. These are the official figures, but research about hidden unemployment in official unemployment figures (Migulez, 2002; Mitchell, 2002) as well as admissions in official reports (European Employment Observatory, 2002) lead us to suspect that the real number of unemployed in St. Jean could be far higher than that officially acknowledged. However, regardless of the definition of unemployment, even the official figures dwarf the results of projects to avert unemployment. Unemployment projects in St. Jean, such as retraining and job creation schemes, have, at the most, an impact on around 200 people. In some cases, the impact is as low as fifteen to twenty people.

Of particular concern is high youth unemployment (see Table 1). In 2002, 16.5% of the total number of people unemployed in St. Jean were below twenty-five years of age. It seems though, this figure should be higher. According to a person at the government-run youth mission, only a fraction of unemployed young people registers with the mission to obtain help. Youngsters believe there is no help available for them or they are ineligible because they have not worked. In addition, the respondent felt that many others do not register because they, and often their parents, see the welfare system as humiliating and an institution from which they would rather remain independent.

Work in St. Jean should be understood in the light of the specific characteristics of the region. St. Jean has a very long agricultural tradition in wine production, but like other agricultural regions, St. Jean has been undergoing a transition in recent years. Modern notions of work, especially in young people's minds, have changed the meaning of work and replaced agricultural work. Agricultural production, such as grape picking, is hard and undervalued work and attracts low pay. Young people think of work as being "clean" and technologically

based. This change in attitude in the younger generation is so pervasive there is a shortage of agricultural labour, despite the availability of local unemployed youth. Farmers resort to imported immigrant labour and university students. These changes mean St. Jean is following the same pattern of work attitudes as other regions of Europe.

Table 1

St. Jean Youth Unemployment			
	Proportion	Total youth	Total all ages
Male	15%	2001	13342
Female	18%	2282	12679
Combined	16.5%	4284	26021
Source: Regional Direction of Employment 31/03/2002			

Management

Government management creates many problems that affect diverse people. Most governments in Europe exercise excessive control over people's lives while at the same time; people are excessively dependent on government structures and aid. Public administration is embedded in archaic structures that do not meet contemporary needs. In France, for example, administrative units stem from post Napoleonic times when the idea was that the border of each department should be reached by horseback in one day's ride. This has resulted in multiple layers of government, at the bottom of which, are thousands of municipalities with inadequate resources to go around. Many are too small to be able to have their own resources and some municipalities group together and share financial resources and taxes. Yet, despite the shortage of resources, it is these small municipalities and their mayors, rather than the department's council (such as St. Jean's), that are highly considered by the people. They value the closeness of the municipality to their community.

We were told that government organises itself in a manner that concentrates political power rather than promotes efficiency, and this results in a lack of co-operation between government units throughout the region. These problems often make the task of those who work in these units so difficult that they necessitate the creation of additional informal organisational structures. Thus, people who work for the St. Jean council and employment committee need to go around official channels and create personal contacts to be able to work together. This results in yet more problems as these informal organisations lack adequate resources to operate efficiently and effectively.

There is also a lack of long-term planning. Planning can only be done for one year at a time, as the funding for each employment committee is for only a year. A six-year regional plan also exists but it is already obsolete when implemented, as changes in employment needs occur rapidly.

Social Structure

St. Jean was described to us as being fragmented and this seems to apply to other social groups as well including families, communities and government organisations. Class divisions segregate communities and the region has both very wealthy and poor agricultural sectors. The people in the higher classes live in the outer suburbs while the lower classes live in the middle of the towns and cities of the region. One of the wealthy and exclusive sectors is Villars, which has many resident artists. It attracts thousands of tourists who visit the area for its unique natural beauty. Unfortunately though, privilege means that those in similar socio-economic brackets co-operate with each other but not with other communities. This results in the wealthier communities being seen by the outsiders as keeping the privileges for

themselves. This privileged mentality has a conservative affect on the youth and there is a tendency in the young population to stay in the region. For example, unlike other places, most youth in St. Jean do not take advantage of the European Union's Erasmus programme that promotes student exchange. One of the respondents felt that this regional outlook applied across the socio-economic brackets and that parents influence these patterns of behaviour.

Immigration and breakdown in the family also create social fragmentation. St. Jean has a large number of migrants and there is a high degree of mobility of people within the region. A respondent felt that the region has an identity problem and this may partly explain why St. Jean was a strong supporter of the extreme right nationalist party in recent national elections. In addition, there is breakdown in the family and single parenthood is frequent with 40% of children being born out-of-wedlock. There are indications, however, of an upward trend for the young generation to marry.

Added to these socially induced differences, there is a widening gap between population groups in St. Jean. Although the proportion of youth is high at present, growth rates for the younger population are much lower than for older people (see Table 2). If these rates continue, the population will become older with time, especially as the region's mild weather attracts the retired and elderly. This has important implications for employment and the economic future of the region.

Finally, government units are fragmented and the community is not actively involved in decision-making processes. The fragmentation between the general council and municipalities has already been mentioned. In addition, pacts are built on partnerships between the unions, employers' federation and government. This excludes grass-roots community groups from the decision-making processes and limits their participation to an advisory rather than voting capacity. This problem and the lack of focus on small community groups are now recognised at the national level. Thus the French Prime Minister, who wishes to reverse this, talks about "France from below" or the idea of looking out for the people at the grass-roots.

Table 2

Population Growth 1990 - 1999

Age	1990	1999	Growth 90/99
0-19 years	121 928	125 960 25%	3,2%
20-39 years	134 602	130 728 26%	-2,96%
40-59 years	112 409	131 491 26%	14,51%
60-74 years	63 827	71 264 14%	10,44%
75 years and over	34 457	40 222 8%	14,33%

Education

Despite the overall number of people in France completing secondary education being reasonably high (statistically) when compared with other European countries, we were told that the quality of education in St. Jean is low. The problem stems, according to one respondent, from the "big machinery" of national education, from which many of the young people from St. Jean are left out. In her work with high school dropouts, she observes that the public education system helps the achievers while it tends to abandon the non-achievers. In a wider sense though, it seems high school dropouts are not the only ones being left behind in the modern educational system. This region, with its traditional focus on agriculture, is also

being left out of the technologically driven educational system. Although the region has a lyceum for agricultural studies and there is a university-level agricultural college, we were told that the modern educational system undervalues agricultural studies. These issues and the proper focus of education are receiving national attention and there is a philosophical debate going on in educational and government sectors. The question being debated is; are schools a training ground for a job, or for life?

Belief

Belief is important because it centres on the driving forces and assumptions on which people base their actions. Like any other European nation, France has absorbed modernism with the intention of liberating people from the former oppression of church and aristocracy. Public life has replaced faith with the ideologies that emerged with the French revolution. Although the powers of the medieval church and aristocracy have been long left behind, there is still a climate of suspicion about the church and religion in general. This suspicion has allowed modernist ideologies to embody themselves, with almost no challenge, in the large institutions of government and industry. These have brought about their own kind of oppression on people. However, despite these beliefs, the state is succumbing to new post modernist beliefs preached by the media and the peer group. An interviewee working with young unemployed people confirmed that the peer group exerts the strongest pressure on youth in the region.

6. Links between Factors (Arrows)

These brief descriptions represent a static picture of the selected factors at the time of our visit to St. Jean. Our next step is to develop a dynamic model describing what may happen in the future due to the interactions or links between these factors. The arrows in Figure 2 represent these links. Again, it has been necessary to make a selection of the most relevant from all possible arrows. Each arrow indicates how one factor has an impact on the other, a black arrowhead indicates that this impact threatens the viability of the community, while a white arrow indicates that the impact strengthens the viability. Since at this particular stage of our analysis we are still interested in seeing how the community's sustainability is threatened, the model focuses on black rather than white arrows. Furthermore, given that we are attempting to establish what may happen in the future, the selection and analysis of the arrows draw heavily upon theory and application of prior research. This is in contrast to the description of the factors, which relies mostly upon the collected empirical data. We have selected the seven arrows described below.

ethics => work

The first arrow refers to the reduction of work opportunities that result from the self-serving attitudes espoused by some in the community. One of our interviewees told us that "in many cases all that young people need is motivation" to be able to find work. What kind of motivation should we look for? Before the rise of utilitarianism, motivation to work used to be based on the ethics of service. Service to our neighbour was the first aim, monetary reward followed from service. In a world where there is much work to be done, such an ethic could be an effective job creator, but our modern ethic has reversed these priorities. People are first motivated by what they can get out of their work rather than what they put in for others. In St. Jean, where there is plenty of agricultural work available, young people will not engage in this type of work, for they do not regard it as well paid. Immigrant workers have to be brought in to the region to do it. Moreover, moved by a spirit of self-interest, small businesses do not

collaborate with each other and do not help new entrepreneurs start their own business. They do not realise that helping newcomers stimulates the economy and in the end, all businesses benefit by this and create more opportunities for work.

work => social structure

A large proportion of the unemployed are young, and there is a pattern for the young unemployed to remain in the region while those who are more qualified move away. Therefore, we can expect that in the long term the sector of society that responds to a "welfare culture" will increase. This is especially alarming when one considers that the population in St. Jean is ageing rapidly. Should this pattern continue in the future, St. Jean will have a large sector of "welfare-oriented" senior population with very few young people to sustain them.

social structure => belief

Many children who grow up in a welfare family tend to inherit their parents' welfare-oriented belief system. Such parents, we were told, "educate their children to think: why bother to work when you can receive from the welfare state?" In addition to their parent's influence, youngsters have their beliefs reinforced by the peer group to which they belong. This generates what Piccone (1998) has called the "state dependent personality" evinced, for

example, by the large group of women in St. Jean who choose to become single parents because of generous welfare support. They believe that this support enables them to live "a comfortable life". Paradoxically, the state dependent personality, while happy to live at the expense of the government, has its pride when it comes to seeking private help. We were told that parents, who cannot afford to pay for their children to attend a summer camp, would rather forfeit such an opportunity to their children than experience the humiliation of asking for private financial assistance.

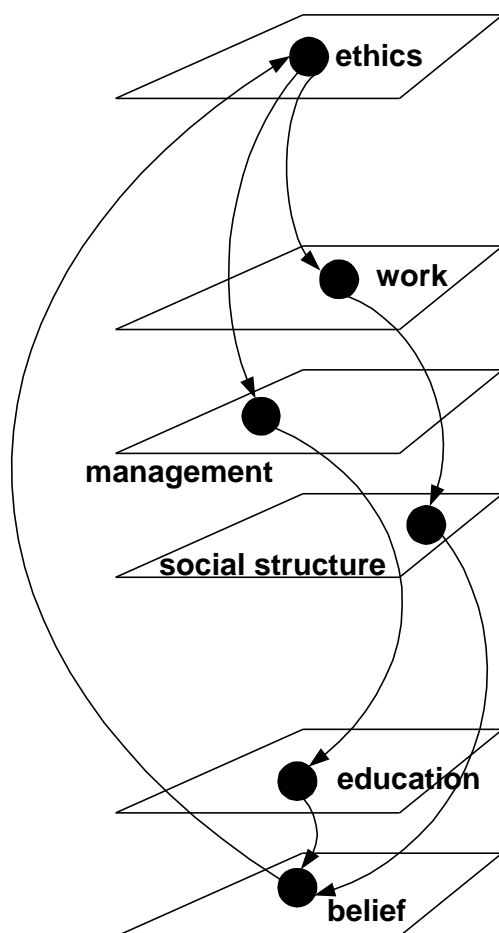


Figure 2: Black Arrows

ethics => management

Utilitarian ethics has three major effects on management. Firstly, utilitarianism gives legitimacy to self-preservation and self-interest in private and public organisations to the point of breaking the law, if necessary. Evidence of this is the recent collapse in both Europe and the USA, of several giant corporations (and their auditors) due to fraud. We have seen similar breakdowns in our public institutions including corruption charges

against the president of France. Secondly, self-preservation in state and corporate managers leads them to dominate nearly every aspect society. Using the media and public policy, they tell people how they should live their lives.

Thirdly, the desire to dominate society has led to disproportionately large corporations and state institutions that are difficult to lead and manage and are inefficient and ineffective.

management => education

Utilitarian management aims at controlling not only how we live, but also how we are educated. This type of management has subjugated the educational system to industrial and state control and established a gap between the classroom and the local community. Piccone states it thus:

The deployment of public education is part and parcel of this dialectic of modernity. While providing some immediate results and solving some important problems, the government's gradual take-over of mass education has contributed considerably to the marginalization of local, particularistic cultures and the disempowerment of local communities (Piccone, 1998)

As we have indicated, the French national education system is regarded as "a big machine" where many "young people from St. Jean are left out of the system". The achievers are able to adapt to the system, but the non-achievers are left behind and eventually drop out. Furthermore, knowledge is presented in a fragmented, compartmentalised manner (Eagle, 2002), because it suits the short term and specialised needs of industry. The outcome of this control over the system of education is not only poor and fragmented education, but also a growing proportion of uneducated people. This is not only a problem in France, but also a problem all over Europe (and the industrialised world). Recent reports indicate that education is in an acute crisis in European countries which claim the most educated population such as Germany (BBC, 2002), Great Britain (Chrisafis, 2002; Wintour et al, 2002) and Sweden (Scherman, 2002).

education => belief

The secularisation and fragmentation of education has split believing from understanding in the mind of the student. This split has undermined the critical examination of beliefs and encouraged gullibility, especially among youth. Many youngsters do not know how or what to believe and believe anything promoted by their peer group or peddled by the media, a state of affairs that the philosopher Ortega (1992) predicted 70 years ago. This has led to the suspicion of religion except when circumscribed to the private realm of life. Exclusion of religion and belief from the intellectual realm and in social dialogue encourages the spread of extremist beliefs, for there are few avenues to openly challenge and discuss them.

belief => ethics

The vacuum in beliefs has impeded challenging worn-out statist ideologies that date back to the same time when one day's horse ride was used as a measure to create administrative departments. The promotion of political solidarity based on the exclusion of mercy will naturally result in the citizens' neglect of their personal responsibility to help the neighbour in need, of whom there are plenty. Likewise, promoting respect without love ignores the close interdependence between them and results in a society where not only is love in short supply, but also human respect. A more extreme syndrome may be the people's confusion between love and pornography, recognised by French MP Charles de Courson (Kirby, 2002). It is this confusion which has been blamed for the 23% increase in violent crime in France during 2001(Kirby, 2002) and the recent incidents of sexual attacks by schoolchildren on other school children." (Coomarasamy, 2002)

7. Black Loops

A closer examination of the above seven arrows as drawn in Figure 2 reveals that they form two reinforcing loops.

- 1) ethics => work => social structure => belief => ethics
- 2) ethics => management => education => belief => ethics

The peculiarity of these two loops is that each feeds on itself. That is, the effect of the arrows

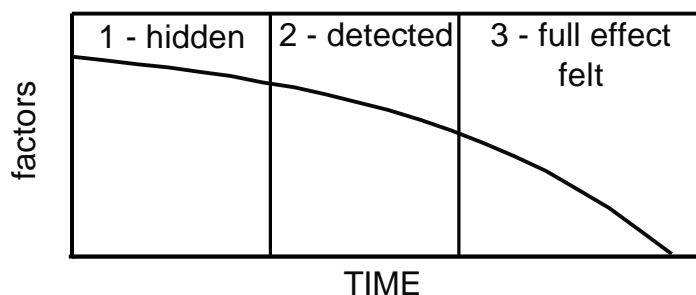


Figure 3: Black Loop

on the factors becomes stronger with time⁴. We refer to loops that are composed of black arrows as *black loops*. The presence of such loops creates an increasing deterioration in the community that follows the pattern shown in Figure 3. It shows that due to their mutual negative impact, all factors decline with time. Like any social change, this decline is slow. Its unit of measurement is not a month or a year, but at least a generation (around twenty years). Three periods can be observed in this decline. In the first period, although the loop is active, its effects are too small to distinguish it from the random fluctuations of the factors. Detection is possible in the second period; this is the time to act and to implement good practices. Since people do not like bad news, often leaders in the community and in organisations will ignore these signals and hope that things will improve by themselves in better times to follow. They seldom do. The third period is when the full effect of the black loop is felt; now no one doubts that the situation is calamitous, but unfortunately, it may be rather late to act.⁵

8. Evaluation Criteria for a Good Practice

It is important, therefore, to respond to a black loop at the earliest time with a good practice. However, to be effective against a black loop and given what we have discussed above, a good practice should meet the following requirements:

- Since the factors belong to the realm of human responsibility, individuals must decide by themselves how to act on threats to them and their communities. To help people as human beings and not abstracts, the most legitimate and influential instrument of change for a good practice is education, information, persuasion and not manipulation.
- It is not sufficient for a good practice to act upon one single factor and to ignore other factors linked to it. For example, it is ineffective to help underprivileged families (social structure) without ensuring at the same time, that there is work for them. A good practice should address at least two factors, that is, providing more work as well as helping underprivileged families. By handling two factors at any one time, a good practice can

⁴ The systems term for this is “positive feedback”. Positive refers to the growing magnitude of the effect of this type of loop upon the system. It does not imply that it is beneficial to the system.

⁵ This pattern is as applicable to the natural environment as it is to the cultural. At the recent 2002 Earth Summit in South Africa scientists warned that we were at a late stage of the second period.

generate a *white arrow* where one factor (work) will reinforce the other factor (social structure) in a positive manner.

- A good practice should be combined with other good practices to form a *white loop*. That is, it should be possible to incorporate it into an ensemble of good practices that together generate a set of white arrows. Moreover, these white arrows should also reinforce each other and generate a white loop to counteract the effect of the black loop.
- An ensemble of good practices will require the involvement of good practitioners who represent the diverse sectors of the community such as project managers, community workers and educators. This is in contrast to the narrow definition of partnership of the European Union veiled under the misleading terms of “social partnership” and “social dialogue”. Full participation in this partnership is limited to government agencies, unions and employer federations while other sectors of the community are excluded or at best relegated to an advisory and non-voting role (European Commission, 1998).

9. Evaluation of Nornet

We will apply these criteria to Nornet, a project identified by the representatives from St. Jean as showing potential for a successful application in their region. Nornet is a network of twenty entrepreneurs operating in the coastal region of the Pite river in northern Sweden. In the past, most entrepreneurs in this region had a history of competition rather than collegiality. The entrepreneurs saw individualism, different levels of competence and experience, and lack of a platform for co-operation, as obstacles to progress in their businesses. Therefore, the Nornet network was established in February, 2002 to create the necessary conditions for trust, respect and commitment. Its method of work is flexible and established along several lines: network-based measures and practices, raising competence through workshops and displays, informal mentoring, independent thematic working groups, close dialogue between project management and network on a daily basis. The activities performed are closely related to the needs of entrepreneurs. Planning and selection of activities are approved by the group before accomplishment.

The network is made up of small-sized companies and associations, including the local parish church. These associations are proud of their history, traditions and rural identity and are active in art, crafts, experience-based tourism, traditional foodstuff processing and accommodation. These small-scale actors value the tradition of production and direct selling being performed in their own studio or gallery in the countryside. Culture and nature are often reflected in the profile of their business. Members regard their network as being very successful and many activities have been carried out or are planned in the near future.

Our evaluation of this network aims to go beyond its economic and business aspects and examine the special human qualities that have contributed to its success. In our prior analysis, we aimed to draw out the negative aspects in St. Jean. In this analysis, we aim to identify the positive aspects of Nornet that may contribute to the difficulties in St. Jean. This does not mean that a good practice such as Nornet is free of problems, it only means that we are trying to evaluate to see what Nornet can contribute to St. Jean. An analysis of Nornet shows it as a multi-modal system. It possesses the inter-linked qualities we should seek in a good practice. This is illustrated in Figure 4. Nornet has an impact on six factors vital to the community: ethics, aesthetics, work, management, tradition and belief. This impact is delivered through a set of white arrows whereby a good quality in one of the factors positively affects the quality in another factor.

Let us examine the arrows in this figure by starting at the bottom with belief and tradition.⁶ Despite the impact of modernism and secularism in Sweden, rural communities still hold to their heritage through the interaction of these two factors. Swedes cherish their traditions (belief => tradition) and these in turn inspire the beliefs of many in an age of scepticism (tradition => belief). The connection between belief and a sacrificial ethic, however, is no longer strong in Swedish society. For over half a century, Swedes have been told that it is not necessary to love one's neighbour, for the government will take care of them. But, statism has not been able to erase the connection between belief and aesthetics. Most art in the rural areas has remained largely unaffected by political ideology. This has allowed people to channel their beliefs into music, paintings and other artistic expressions and attain world acclaim in some areas.⁷ Piteå has a notable music conservatory that specialises in church music and

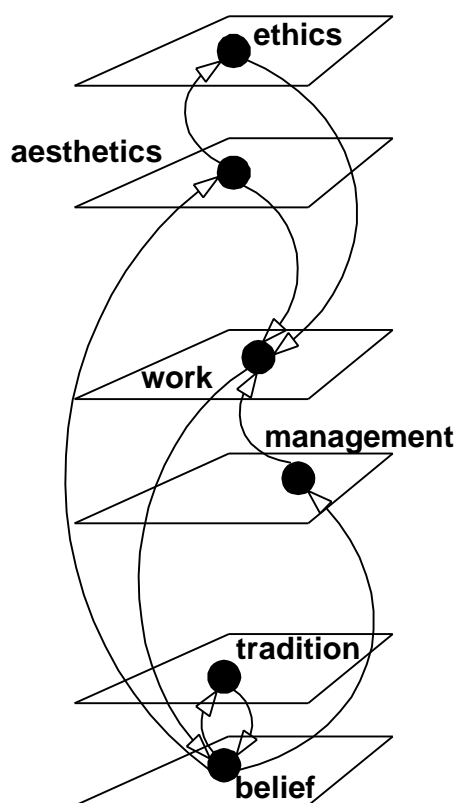


Figure 4: White Arrows and Loops Generated by Nornet

organ performance. Luleå, 50 km north of Piteå, boasts a renowned organ factory. For Swedes, art has remained a channel of the soul.

It is particularly interesting in Nornet, that the link between belief and ethics has now re-emerged in a new arrow: aesthetics => ethics. Beauty has led people to care for each other; this becomes quite apparent as one discusses art and partnership with the members of this network. Their work therefore, not only benefits from their pursuit of aesthetics (aesthetics => work), but also from the mutual support they obtain from their network in doing their job (ethics => work). They expect, for example, that newcomers to the network will be able to gain from the experience of long-standing members and improve the quality of their work.

When talking to the participants in the network, one gets the impression that they believe in their work, that what they produce reaffirms and strengthens their beliefs and encourages them to go further (work => belief). This has an impact also in the way that they manage their businesses. They have made managerial choices that put the quality of their product above the creation of profits, which ensures that their methods of production are sustainable and environmentally friendly even if they are more costly (belief => management). This style of management contributes further to the enhancement of their products and the benefits they produce to the community (management => work). We can observe three main white loops that emerge from these links:

tradition => belief => tradition

belief => aesthetics => work => belief; reinforced by aesthetics => ethics => work

belief => management => work => belief

⁶ This brief examination is based of an extensive analysis of the interaction between factors such as belief, tradition and social structure in the northern Sweden in de Raadt, J. D. R., 2000 and de Raadt, V. D., 2002.

⁷ For example, Swedish choirs are among the best in the world.

Although these loops generate the opposite effect of the black loops, we should expect that the pattern of their effect through time would be similar (see Figure 5). At the beginning, the effect will be almost undetected but with time, it will become more evident. Once more, we must be reminded of the slowness of social change. This is a fact that is consistently ignored by our approach to management, where the time frames of such things as accounting, planning and evaluation are totally out of phase with the historical rhythm of

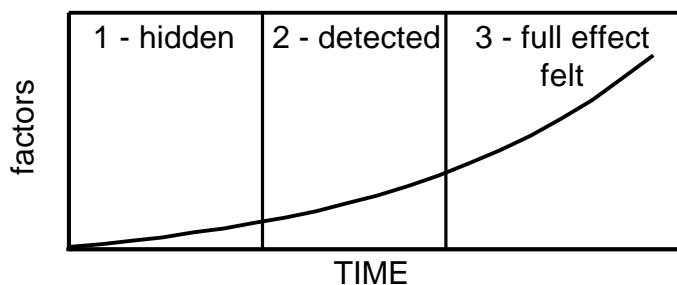


Figure 5: Effect of a White Loop

humanity. Consequently, good practices such as Nornet could be discarded because they do not provide quick results. Yet, given a suitable period of time, and with the necessary perseverance, the presence of these three loops should strengthen their network. As it expands, it should benefit new

members as well as the community, hopefully encouraging other such networks to be formed in Piteå and other communities.

The challenge for St. Jean is to find people who can reproduce the above qualities and who are willing to collaborate in a way similar to Nornet to generate a white loop. This, however, falls outside the evaluation.

10. Conclusions

Normative threats to community viability are as just as significant, if not more so, than determinative threats. Despite the optimistic picture that most administrators and leaders paint, people in private acknowledge that things such as incompetence, lack of caring and dishonesty plague their communities. To deal with these foibles, we must stop pretending that they do not exist and include them in a normative methodology and method for evaluation.

Secondly, a community's decline and the positive contribution that good practices can bring to reverse this decline are both dynamic processes that follow a long time cycle. The evaluation method must be capable, therefore, of incorporating a dynamic model of the community. Moreover, due to the long time span under analysis, the model must include knowledge from other scientific studies and theory to complement the data collected.

Therefore, we must alter the way we evaluate a good practice and a project's effectiveness. Evaluation based on what works and what does not work is no longer adequate. We must primarily evaluate based on what is right and what is wrong from a normative point of view. Nor is there time for experimenting and finding out what is right and what is wrong. When the outcome of the decisions and actions we make today are fully felt, it would be far too late to correct them. The circumstances demand that we decide and act right now. The multi-modal systems methodology and method introduced above has been specifically developed to handle these requirements and to increase the possibility for decision-makers to make the right decisions today.

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