

Social innovation in public sector strategies addressing endangered children

Approaching the basis for social innovation with an organizational learning theory

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Abstract

This paper explores organizational learning as a foundation for social innovation, defined as “*change in the public sector focusing on improvements of social benefits*”. Inertia in the general public sector has been found specifically in relation to socially endangered children. As Drucker (1985, 1998) points to, this inertia may come from a lack of well-defined goals, incentives, and product orientation, or perhaps the form of entrepreneurship that large social innovations have been managed by over the years (ibid.)? Empirical justification for Drucker’s suggestions is evident, but the study of a specific intervention shows that in a time of great complexity further questions must be asked: how does the inertia manifest itself, and what can be done to break with it? The paper concludes that the public sector faces increasing external demands, new working conditions including management styles, and political objectives which may explain the inertia found in public sector innovation. The findings may also guide future research and spur academics, politicians, and practitioners to consider/plan if better opportunities for social innovation could be developed in the public sector.

Keywords: social innovation, organizational learning, practice-based, macro and micro perspectives, implementation

1.0 Introduction

This paper presents a study of innovation in the public sector. The point of departure is the conviction that innovation and barriers to innovation must be dealt with in the field between a macro and micro perspective on work and organizational learning. Here, the macro perspective comprises socioeconomic surroundings, legislation, politics and politics design, as well as target group composition/behavior (Winter, 1998, Winter & Nielsen, 2008, Fixsen et al., 2005), while the micro perspective comprises organizational learning and arrangement of processes for organizational learning (Elkjær, 2004, 2009, Nicolini et al., 2003, Brown & Duguid, 1991, Wenger, 2000).

Today, we see a number of political initiatives, new legislation, and municipalities initiating renewed efforts internally (i.e. municipality) (Brandi, 2008, 2009) and externally (i.e. individual institutions) (Jensen, 2005) without generating the desired effect, and studies support the finding that the Danish municipalities have difficulties generating social innovation (Ploug, 2007, Mehlbye & Jensen, 2009). One explanation may be an identified lack of coordination between the 'social worlds' (Strauss, 1993), dominance of concept and goal uncertainty, and insufficient cooperation between trade groups (Brandi, 2008, 2009, Mehlbye & Jensen, 2009). Yet, other mechanisms also seem to hinder social innovation and these are set routines, workplace cultures, general reluctance to change (Ellström, 2006), a great distance between social worlds (Brandi, 2008, 2009, Feldman, 2003 Nicolini et al., 2003, March, 1991), management (Drucker, 1987), the interaction between top-down and bottom-up (the impact of which is not unambiguous) (Sundbo, 2003), and the connection between organizational learning and latent and manifest power relations (Bradshaw & Boonstra).

The argument of seeking new knowledge about social innovation through the notion of organizational learning is based on empirical data (Jensen et al., 2009, Jensen & Holm, 2009, www.dpu.dk/hpa). This data stem from and the ASP-project, which studies an innovation-oriented intervention in public daycare; 3000 children, managers, and personnel from 60 institutions in two municipalities participated in the intervention. The implementation of the ASP-intervention is based on an organizational learning perspective (see also Elkjaer, 2005) and seeks to improve children's cognitive and non-cognitive competences (Heckman, 2008). The learning processes and results (measured on outcomes on children's development) are discussed (on the basis of quantitative analysis) as outcomes of product innovation, while the analysis of the daycare centers' work with innovation (based on qualitative data) illustrates the possible results of process innovation, i.e. better practices improving the quality of the work with socially endangered children.

The overall argument is that the organizational learning and innovation approach represents a change in the mindset, development and research in the public sector in general and more specifically in early efforts targeting socially endangered children.

The argument will be presented as follows: 1) a description of the conceptualization of the social innovation approach in relation to organizational learning, 2) presentation of the ASP-intervention as a case of innovation in the public sector 3) discussion of case examples of barriers and opportunities for social innovation from the perspective of organizational learning theory, and 4) discussion whether Drucker's claims concerning inertia apply in a late modernity characterized by great complexity (Richards, 2003) or must be confronted with the effect of the interplay between latent and manifest power relations and organizational learning processes (Bradshaw & Boonstra, 2004).

2.0 Innovation from the Perspective of Organizational Learning

As mentioned, this section will describe how the ASP-study perceives the interrelation of innovation, learning, and practice from the perspective of organizational change. An outline of the approaches to the research field of innovation is offered as a means to position the study.

The analytical focus of organizational change is typically directed at strategic processes, targets and results, whereas the task of organizational learning is to explain and understand the learning processes that form the basis for organizational change, including when and how possibilities for innovation (renewal) arise. Organizational change/development and organizational learning are often thought of as closely related though not identical. Organizational changes may, for instance, come about without the occurrence of learning and vice versa. Despite this difference, a fundamental perception within each of the two research areas is that change and learning are two sides of the same coin. Thereby, the basic problem is to clarify how changes become learning. This basic problem also constitutes the core of the empirical case.

In this paper, the concept of organizational learning takes its point of departure in the crossover of a psychological and sociological organizational learning perception, which is inspired by a pragmatic view on organizational learning (Elkjær, 2004, 2009). From looking at organizational learning from a cognitive and individual perspective (as in Argyris, 1991 and Argyris & Schön, 1996) to looking at learning from a social perspective, it is rendered possible to understand learning as something which happens *through* participation. Learning is a social process. Thus, this approach is an attempt to transcend the dualistic view of the individual and the organization as separate entities. Learning is something that comes into being in a dynamic or almost symbiotic relation between the individual and its surroundings (i.e. the organization). Moreover, learning is understood as something that contributes to the process of formation of individuals cognitively, emotionally, and in terms of stance. This also involves motivation, sense-making, and social relations. Central to this concept is an understanding of learning as something which occurs through participation (Elkjaer, 2004).

A core issue in the pragmatic view on organizational learning is that organizational learning processes occur in interaction between the actors of the organization (i.e. the employees) and the framework conditions (i.e. the context) when organizational habits or practices are no longer perceived to be expedient. They are, so to speak, disturbed in the everyday work. Thereby, the learning process is set in motion. Reflections on possible solutions begin when habits or existing practices are no longer perceived as expedient and an imbalance between the organization and its members' actions emerges. The outcome of the learning process may be the creation of new understandings, which may lead to more expedient habits and practices of dealing with the concrete problems in the organization. The assumption is that if organizational learning is initiated or occurs, innovation is a possibility; i.e. a true renewal sets in.

With a focus on organizational learning, how is innovation understood in the ASP-context?

With reference to Schumpeter's (1934) classical understanding, our overall definition of innovation is renewal directed at improving a previous condition. In innovation research, innovation is often associated with product innovation, which refers to new products that can make an impact on the market (Schumpeter, 1934, 1947) through the application of knowledge for new knowledge production (Hagardon, 2002,) or new forms of learning

(Jensen et al., 2007). Another aspect is process innovation, which refers to the introduction of new production processes (Sundbo, 2003 Arundel et al., 2007), and organizational innovation, which concerns the introduction of completely new forms of organization or new management strategies (Drucker, 1985, Van der Venn, 1999, Lam, 2005). Finally, innovation research is also occupied with the notion of market innovation, which concerns, among others, new strategies for marketing and new collaboration alliances of enterprises (see for instance Sundbo, 2003). Naturally, this narrowing down of the different types of innovation is not exhaustive as the research field is manifold and points in different directions (Shavinina, 2003, Fagerberg et al., 2005). However, the field seems to generally agree on defining innovation as the introduction of something new and applicable and as contributory to a qualitative improvement of a previous condition (see also Høyrup, 2010).

The following analysis will primarily focus on process innovation; that is renewal of work processes and practices in the light of organizational learning. Product innovation is, in spite of its relevance to the case, omitted from the present analysis (for further analysis of the different types of innovation see Jensen et al., 2009 and Jensen & Holm, 2010).

Process innovation and organizational innovation are seen as interrelated. By means of Lam (2005), one can refer to organizational innovation in relation to organizational learning in the following way: *“Innovation can be understood as a process of learning and knowledge creation through which new problems are defined and new knowledge is developed to solve them”* (ibid., 124). Moreover, in connection with the analyses presented here, it is highly relevant to bring up Brown & Duguid’s (1991) distinction between proactive, enacting and discovering organizations. The latter is to some extent (technically and rationally) innovative – though not creating but adjusting to external demands and challenges. With Brown & Duguid (ibid.), the sources for innovation in enacting organizations can be understood with references to Daft & Weick (1984) who state that *“these organisations construct their own environment. They gather information by trying new behaviour and seeing what happens. They experiment, test and stimulate, and they ignore precedent, rules and traditional expectations”* (ibid., 288).

Social innovation (Drucker 1985, 1987) is a third aspect of innovation, which is interesting for the problem area dealt with in this paper. This term contributes to the understanding of innovation in a societal perspective; that is societal change and social innovation arise from the creativity and inventiveness in (one of a few specific) entrepreneurs, who see the potential in a greater social and societal context. Drucker describes management (alias the entrepreneur) as the one, or the few, talented, dynamic, and creative people who initiate innovation. Drucker and Schumpeter claim the creative entrepreneur initiates innovation, but contrary to Schumpeter, Drucker sees innovation as processes whose success is dependent on the involvement of the employees. Thus, Drucker believes the participant perspective plays a central role in the innovation process.

The notion of inertia in the public sector is mentioned by Drucker (1985) and seems to affect innovation. But how is this inertia explained? Drucker’s primary explanation is that the cornerstone of the public sector is budgets rather than achieving results. Consequently, the employees have no incentive to create new products or better services, as they obtain no real benefit or profit. The second explanation is that the public sector must satisfy all, i.e. it cannot afford to lose anybody, and new initiatives are controversial, i.e. the organization is tied to conventions and traditions with which it is difficult to break. The third – and possibly most important – reason is that the underlying principle

of the public sector is a so-called ‘do good’ mission (ibid., 179), wherefore actions rest on normativity and moral rather than economic incentives. Public institutions strive to maximize rather than optimize wherefore the mission “will not be completed” (ibid., 180). Drucker claims the objective of the public sector is too broad and unclear and thus difficult to achieve. Moreover, he claims the public system is conventional with not tradition for innovation that stems from enquiries, risk taking or creative solution models. His point is that innovation may emerge if the organizational interpretation and perception of the task and objective are changed. Yet, a primarily adjustment-oriented approach could be characterized as conventional and will not result in real innovation.

As mentioned, this paper explores organizational learning as the foundation for social innovation, here defined as *‘public sector changes focusing on improvements of social benefits’*, and on the basis of the presented conceptual and theoretical starting point, the paper raises three research questions, which outline the subsequent analysis:

- 1) One research question is the role of the relation between employees and management for effective process innovation. Related questions concern whether management (in a classical financial logical perspective (Schumpeter 1934, 1947)) functions as a powerful top management that instigates changes for the employees to carry out (adjust to), or whether management functions are practiced in ways that lead to organizational learning and innovation (active/proactive organization)?
- 2) Another question is how the aim of the innovation is defined. How precisely should the objective of the given innovation be set and how clearly should it be framed in order to operationalize whether the objective is achieved? Does it make sense for the manager – and for the employees?
- 3) A third question is whether innovation is possible in a public sector, which, in addition to Drucker’s claims of inertia, also faces a range of new challenges, political goals, and administrative demands. How do such tendencies toward external control affect the possibilities for innovation? Will innovation ever be a reality in this field of tension between latent and manifest power relations, as the present time and external control suggest? And in that case, what characterizes innovative organizations?

The subsequent section will explore the following overall question: On the basis of organizational learning theory, how can we understand social innovation in the public sector? And how can theory of organizational learning combined with a power dynamics approach confront and/or elaborate Drucker’s explanations to inertia in the public sector?

3.0 A Pedagogical Intervention Innovating the Public Daycare Sector

– Presentation of the ASP-case

The selected case is, as mentioned, an intervention project called “Action Competencies in Social Pedagogical Work with Socially Endangered Children in Daycare (the ASP-project). The following presentation will touch upon the nature of the social and the learning-oriented challenge, and the characteristics of the participants in the project, including the roles the different actors hold? Moreover, it will discuss the content of the learning process and what initiated the learning process as well as briefly outline some of the overall project findings.

3.1. Challenges

International research holds evidence that a society which sets in with efforts in early childhood education (ECE) and improved quality in the daycare sector enjoys positive effects in the promotion of equality and better welfare for endangered children in the short and long run (Schweinhart et al., 2005). The effects of efforts in daycare are much greater compared to efforts at the level of school, the educational system in general, and further education (Heckmann, 2008). From research we also know that, on the one hand, innovation may be the means to great societal changes (cf. Drucker). On the other hand, innovation in the public system seems to be marked by a high degree of inertia. However, since a new law on the service area in Denmark in 2004 (revised in 2007), efforts for the benefit of socially endangered children have attracted much attention.

Nevertheless, the empirical foundation indicates that this sector is marked by a lack of sufficiently qualified interdisciplinary collaboration and/or the fact that cohesive forms of organization impede the possibilities for developing the work with socially endangered children (Jensen, 2005, Ploug, 2007, Mehlbye et al., 2009, Jensen & Brandi, 2009). The research, political, and societal tendencies support the need for innovation in this segment of the public sector. In the recent years in Denmark, this need has resulted in new legislation, political decisions concerning quality improvements (the Quality Reform and Professional Quality Service), and at the level of institution and municipality a range of development projects including implementation of evidence based methods on a trial and error basis. The latter with little success though (EVA, 2008).

The social challenge consists in seeking possibilities for innovation in a society-oriented and social perspective targeting the problem of social inequality and children in socially endangered positions. *The learning-oriented challenge* consists in finding new ways in intervention based on organizational learning and change in the overall organization, i.e. the daycare sector.

The ASP-intervention project position itself in this twofold challenge.

3.2 Research methodology

Two Danish municipalities participated in the ASP-intervention project. They were selected on the basis of a randomized controlled trial (RCT). From the overall pool of institutions, centers were selected to either participate as an intervention institution or a reference institution. 30 intervention and 30 reference institutions were selected in all. This specific design was chosen due to a wish to evaluate the effects of the intervention outcome for three to six-year-old children – i.e. ‘product innovation’. These effects were measured in the quantitative part of the study’s screening procedures (for further description of the methodological design, see Jensen et al. 2009).

In order to investigate whether the intervention leads to process-oriented innovation, the quantitative part of the study was supplemented with a qualitative part.

The empirical data applied in the analysis of learning and process innovation consist of interview transcripts and documents from the participating actors. In all, the following actors participated in the project: A research group, administrations including administrative managers, pedagogical consultants and consultants from educational institutions (University Colleges), and employee groups from the selected institutions. In this context focus was on management.

3.3 The organization of the task

The ASP-intervention was situated in various forms of fora prepared by the organizers; presentations, teaching (formal knowledge sharing and dissemination activities), and other more informal fora where the employees could exchange ideas, new solution models, and/or attitudinal comments to the participation in an intra-organizational manner within each institution and in inter-organizational networks. Such fora took place in interaction with other forms of practice-based learning and development (the more informal knowledge sharing activities) in both educational institutions and locally in the individual institutions. The task of the institution managers was to organize and facilitate the learning processes.

The intervention was a two-year-long change project (2006-2008) and it was up to the individual daycare center to decide how and how much time they wished to invest in the intervention. The intended change intervention is thought of as a proposal for continuous change (see also Weick & Quinn, 1999) and the participants often referred to the time factor as a strength and opportunity to engage in the project.

3.4 The content and proposed learning processes

The ASP-package consists of three elements: a knowledge element, a reflection element, and an implementation element.

The knowledge element is based on material (The ASP-qualification folder Jensen et al., 2009), which presents evidence-based knowledge about 1) socially endangered children, background variables and the concept of action competence as learning goals, 2) effects of interventions based on international research, and 3) knowledge about legislation on the field (educational learning plans in daycare). The data from these three areas are merged with a fourth field of knowledge, the practitioners' experience-based knowledge, which partly consists of explicit and implicit experiences from practice and partly of theoretical and shared knowledge from the institutions.

The reflection element comprises suggestions for working concretely with reflective processes and strategies in the overall organization; exchanges between the different fields of knowledge are communicated through written material (i.e. the ASP-portfolio) and through analyses of the gap between pre-school teachers' experiences of their competences and the children's competences ('GAP-profiles'). GAP-profiles are analyzed once in the process and serve as a tool for the daycare centers to work with reflective processes to set up their own goals of renewal and improved practice.

The implementation element invites each institution to develop its own procedures in the task of formulating new innovative ideas, aims/partial aims, and strategies for developing new practices. The intervention requests the management to organize the process; external parties have not determined the way in which the individual institution wishes to complete the process and the activities. The institutions can, for instance, choose to work with a pure form of employee-driven innovation (see also Høytrup, 2010) or a model in which the manager organizes and facilitates the learning process. In fact, a number of institutions chose a more traditional model of organization and method of control, where the management plans and controls the processes. Irrespective of the chosen style of management, it is clear the institutions face new challenges regarding style of management and the relations between the management and the employees.

We may describe the above mentioned model as R&D initiated innovation (cf. Jensen et al., 2007), since the content is based on expert knowledge and policy papers (top-down). The aim of the ASP-intervention is also to allow local interpretations of objective and task to influence the initiated processes (bottom-up). The intention of the ASP-model was to design an intervention that could connect the ‘top-down’ with the ‘bottom-up’ impetus, and blend the two types of knowledge.

Empirical data has proven that by combining a technical rational learning principle, called the STI-mode (Science, Technology and Innovation), and a pragmatic learning theoretical principle, called the DUI-mode (Doing, Using and Interacting), the most effective types of innovation emerge (Jensen et al., 2007).

3.5 What initiates the learning process?

The learning process, which is sought initiated by the ASP-project, must be understood broadly as something which can target behavioral change, change in perceptions and values, and changes in existing practices. It is thus a process where the participants must be willing to work with the examined organizational processes. In this context, the learning focus of the ASP-project is how the development of the intervention (which is characterized by skill development of employees and managers) merge and influence the existing practices and experiences in the field in the participating daycare centers. Through analysis and interpretation of frameworks, organizational forms, and cooperative relations etc. we may gain insight into and optimize the existing practice of working with socially endangered children; we may understand which factors, both individual and contextual, promote and impede this learning process.

On the basis of the applied pragmatic theory of organizational learning and innovation, the ASP-project has rendered shared learning processes possible by including all the employees in the examination of the current practice and routines, with the purpose of critical reflection and creation of new knowledge and perceptions. The new practices and perceptions emerge as disturbances in the institutions. If the employees embrace this disturbance as a new way of understanding their work, organizational learning, as in innovative thinking, and new and possibly more ‘enacting’ organizations may emerge. In this case, the implementation of the pedagogical intervention is presumed to be more likely to achieve positive results of innovation. However, as the analysis will illustrate, the participating institutions relate to this type of disturbance in many different ways, and the complexity in which the institutions are positioned affect the innovation potential in numerous ways.

Consequently, we work with both the learning results and the learning processes that lead to the results. Yet, in the qualitative part of the research project we pay special attention to the organizational learning process and the core elements that characterize this process. The organizational learning is primarily measured on the basis of effects or observed changes at child level and secondarily on changes in the perceptions and practices of the participating institutions. Put differently, we discuss the learning of the organization (i.e. the daycare centers participating in the ASP-project) at two levels. Firstly, in relation to the effects on the children, and secondly in relation to the institutional understanding of the work with socially endangered children as well as the impact of intermediate forms.

If the organizational learning at the institutional level leads to process innovation, it is presumed to indirectly affect the product innovation (i.e. the child level effects) and is

thus referred to as the context or the institutional framework conditions for the effects at child level (for further analysis of framework conditions see Jensen et al., 2009 and Jensen & Brandi, 2009).

3.6 Main results

As a main result the project has identified three types of organizations. The types are categorized according to the impact of the relation between management and employees on innovation, the experience of and work with the aim of the project, and the way external pressure, framework conditions, and power relations are handled (for a more detailed analysis, see Jensen et al. 2009).

- Type I (the innovative) embraces the project and takes ownership. The manager establishes a framework in which the collective institution can initiate, maintain, and further develop proactive types of innovation and learning processes. Thereby, internal as well as external conditions and work procedures are changed. This type is also characterized as ‘enacting organizations’; they develop their own models for innovation on the basis of project proposals and overcome the issue of top-down management, which is implicit in both the project and the external demands.
- Type II (the compliant) commits to the task, acquires knowledge, work procedures, and achieves changes – but by means of adaptation. In line with Brown & Duguid, we may characterize this type ‘discovering organizations’, and they may be defined as conventional in their creation of innovation. They are affected differently by external terms and conditions, but common to all is that they comply.
- Type III (the resisting) either never commences with the task or the development is very slow and discontinues after some time. The ASP-project is opposed and the relation between internal and external impetus is fully disregarded. The relation between management and the employees is marked by seemingly insuperable imbalances. According to the managers, the ASP-intervention is not the cause of the opposition but the pressure inherent to the interplay of difficult internal conditions, external pressure and power relations.

The following sections discuss the results of the study in relation to central analytical themes.

4.0 Barriers and Possibilities for Social Innovation in the Public Sector - a discussion of the ASP-case

As mentioned, the project employed a pragmatic organizational learning perspective and a fundamental principle in this understanding of learning is that organizational learning processes are initiated when habits, behavior, and ways of thinking are disturbed; the disturbance is the starting point of the process.

The intervention forms the starting point, the disturbance, and the focal point for the various learning tracks in the participating institutions. So far we have seen factors that affected the institutional learning processes. Thus, a natural question is now: what did the institutions learn? Based on the analysis of institution manager interviews, the results indicate two tendencies in the notion of renewal.

4.1 New perceptions of socially endangered children

One tendency is a new perception of socially endangered children, which the analysis showed several of the institutions worked intensively at several levels to develop. For the majority of the institutions, this learning process resulted in new contextual and innovative perceptions of socially endangered children. Other institutions were on the brink of reaching this innovation in perception and working on rooting the new perception in the institution. Lastly, few institutions saw no reason to change their perceptions, either because they believed they were already acting according to the contextual and innovative understanding of endangered children or because they did not find the given understanding expedient.

A fundamental outcome of the qualitative analysis shows that the latter group did not welcome the intervention as something, which should disturb existing procedures, nor did they see or exploit the opportunities for organizational learning generated by this disturbance. One may thus deduce that in projects of intervention and organizational change, the overall aim must be to create some form of '*necessity of change*'. Those who undergo change must learn to distinguish the disturbance from the change, and thereby be capable of initiating an organizational learning process in which habits and practices are challenged by new ways of doing and understanding activities and tasks.

4.2 New habits and routines

The other tendency is the creation of new habits and routines in the pedagogical practice. A clear outcome of the organizational learning processes is a focus on creating new practices on the basis of the disturbances. A striking result in the context of organizational learning is the proposal of the GAP-analyses to engage in reflective learning processes. According to the institution managers, the fact the GAP-analyses proved to be a meaningful tool, which lead to surprising results and were easy or interesting to apply is one reason why they contributed to the change of practice in the institutions.

The qualitative part of the study focused on the intervention generated changes in the employees' practices and perceptions of socially endangered children. While the quantitative study described the outcome of the intervention at child level the purpose of the qualitative part is to clarify how the institutional framework affects the learning process and the results at the organizational level. The descriptions of the institutional frame and the changes in practices and perceptions are based on analysis of qualitative interviews with institution managers in a baseline measurement and a second measurement one year after the first measurement. The analysis is carried out as a thematic meaning condensation centered on recurring patterns or main categories.

4.3 Institutional preconditions

The analysis found minimum three institutional preconditions for a successful implementation of the intervention.

One precondition is that the institution must be able to see that the pedagogical intervention (presented by the municipality and consultants) can contribute to the further qualification of the staff. At the same time, *the change must make sense for the participating institutions*. Regarding attitude and motivation to participate in the intervention project, an important factor was clearly that the content, structure, and objective were made explicit to the institution managers. A number of informants noted this was unclear at the beginning of the implementation but became clearer for some institutions (Type I and II) while it stayed unclear for others (Type III). Turning to research in orga-

nizational change we see that this particular factor is ascribed great importance as a success criterion/measure of success in changes achieving/fulfilling their aim.

Another precondition is that the resources and framework must match the task. The qualitative study found that in many ways the institution managers experienced a correlation between the project resources and the tasks they were given in order to complete the intervention. A related result of the analysis was that the time factor also plays a fundamental role for the implementation of the intervention. Consequently, it is presumed important for interventions that the development process allows enough time for the objectives, the new perceptions and practices to settle in the participating institutions. To ensure effects at child level, it is equally important that the time from the organizational level is reflected in the time the individual institution can prioritize internally and in the collaboration with external consultants and colleagues in connection with the actual developmental work. The analysis also showed that the institutions, which resisted the intervention, all had other projects running parallel to the ASP-project – projects which had been initiated externally via the municipal administration. A couple of institutions opted out because of a relatively high turnover of staff – a factor which several informants mention as crucial in relation to understanding the attitudes to the project. Thus, in the qualitative interviews staff turnover emerges as an inhibiting fundamental condition for the implementation and is categorized under the main theme ‘determinants’.

Institutions which were unable to implement the intervention were all characteristic of a recent relatively high staff turnover. And, for institutions, which estimate they had had a high staff turnover, it was indeed a factor that impeded the implementation process. As noted by some informants, in some institutions the core of the problem was the degree of resources and energy spent on introducing the new employees to the principles and tools of the intervention.

One of the most important preconditions was the institution managers; *management style plays a crucial role* in ensuring a uniform implementation process and thus a comparable qualification of the pedagogical practice in the institutions. The manager must navigate between the administrative management and the employees, and in this navigation communicate or translate objectives and values from one level to the other. This is an important task which not all managers felt able to handle sufficiently.

4.4 The relation between the management and the employees – different patterns

The analysis of *management* as the determining factor for creating changes comprises a broader understanding of management, i.e. the administration of the intervention. With this we also touch upon the theme of political, referred to as top-down management in which organizational research. For many of the institution managers the intervention was a classical example of a top-down change process with no regard for the practical knowledge and experiences. Consequently, some institution managers did not experience ownership of the intervention which led to inertia in the implementation processes. In research in organizational change changes are either initiated from the top or the bottom, and the most successful method is subject to continuous discussion. It is, however, often the assumption that organizational change should involve top-down decisions combined with bottom-up initiative in order to optimize the success of the of the intervention, as we saw exemplified in the Type I institutions.

The qualitative study shows that the starting point of the institutions varies greatly, and these differences seem to affect the implementation work. Moreover, the study shows

that the three preconditions are interpreted and solved in very different ways. In all, it appears that the management in particular is the key actor in terms of translating conditions and intervention in pedagogical actions to organizational learning. The baseline analysis showed that the management task tends to be vaguely formulated. Moreover, a previous study of the role of the daycare centers in the societal problem of social inheritance “Can day-care centres make a difference?” (Jensen, 2005) showed that in the field of daycare the question of management is not clearly defined. The tendency in daycare centers is to follow the tradition and perceive all as ‘equal’; on this ground the institution is built on a ‘flat structure’ with soft management values. The same result, i.e. a tendency toward soft management styles, also emerged in the second measurement in the qualitative study.

In many ways, the results of the ASP-case are comparable to Sundbo’s results from his comprehensive research project on innovation in both private and public enterprises (Sundbo, 2003). This also concerns the meaning of a top-down company and a company characterized by anarchistic management styles (a type of bottom-up) where all the members wish to function as entrepreneurs. In an innovation perspective, none of these management styles are productive; no results are achieved, whereas a combination of the two results in better options for innovation, as is illustrated in the ASP-project.

With Winter’s integrated implementation model (Winter & Nielsen, 2008, p. 18) we can supplement the interpretations of our findings with an understanding of management as not simply a person at the core of the implementation of the learning process. The manager coordinates tasks concerning conditions internal in the institution and in relation to the organization’s way of coping with external terms and conditions. Put differently, management operates in the field between the micro and the macro level. In the ASP-case, the learning processes in all the institutions are clearly affected by the external socio-economical surroundings and conditions. Yet, in this context the interesting finding is the identification of the institutions’ different reactions; some reactive by acting (Type I), others by compliance (Type II) and others by resisting (Type III). This finding calls for further exploration of these differences seen in the light of power relations.

4.5 The dynamics of power relations

Inspired by Bradshaw & Boonstra (2004, 283), the analysis also looked into the connection between the three organization types and latent and manifest power relations, which are often concurrent and operate at both a personal and structural level. The analysis identified four types of power relations that appeared relevant to organizational learning. In brief terms, the four types cover external control, ‘the power of definition’, the role of the workplace culture, and internal conflicts of interest and actual power struggles. This paper will only discuss selected aspects of the four types of power relations.

One aspect is that a sense of strong external control will lead to a feeling of powerlessness and lack of ownership, and the energy to work with organizational learning and innovation tends to disappear. Some (may) adjust to the given terms while others oppose them (Type II and III), but the intended organizational learning does not occur in either of the cases. The power of definition concerns matters of discourse, objectives and terms; whose terms make sense and how does that affect whether institutions renew their perception of endangered children (Type I) or adopt the views presented by the project (Type II) or maintain their approach to the problem (Type III). In the latter, the institutions have no interest in redefining the task, which excludes the possibility for innovation. The critique of the power of definition could, however, become a productive force, but it requires cohesiveness, which is not present.

Another aspect of power relations is the workplace culture. If established traditions, opinions, values, and practices permeate the culture they are likely to impede the possibility of innovation. Institutions that are not willing to be ‘disturbed’ are typically characterized by a longstanding workplace culture with set procedures and values, which include the experienced ‘old hand’ but exclude the ‘newcomers’. Attitudes, values, and perceptions are strongly rooted and constitute the tacit foundation of the institution. The members are typically not ready to be confronted with new proposals or enter into reflective learning processes as the ASP-intervention suggests. Consequently, the intervention is perceived as threatening and resistance is the end result (Type III).

The last aspect of power relations to be discussed here is latent and manifest power struggles between individual employees and manager but also between the personnel group and their manager. Such internal power relations obstruct innovation. The problem manifests itself differently; some employees leave the institution or go on long-term sick leave, while others, e.g. a newly employed manager, must abandon the aim of facilitating the ASP-intervention as intended. In the latter case, the managers typically saw the ASP-project as a means to generate necessary changes in the practiced pedagogy, but were met with a strongly rooted workplace culture, which was not open for new ways of thinking.

Summing up, the last part of the analysis indicates that we have only seen the ‘*tip of the iceberg*’ in terms of understanding power relations in the public sector. It would be very interesting to apply a multi-perspective approach to our understanding of power relations (cf. Bradshaw & Boonstra, 2004) and seek more in-depth knowledge of how these dynamics are entwined with organizational learning and innovation.

5.0 Conclusion

The findings of this study are in line with much international research in organizational change and demonstrate that in spite of willingness and strategies to change in the organization, the result of an implementation process is often far from the intended aim (Beer & Nohria, 2000; Boonstra, 2004; Leppitt, 2006; Pettigrew, 1987; Whittington et al. 1999, Fixsen et al., 2005, Winter, 1998). This situation is typically associated with the procedural, organizational, and structural aspects of change.

To sum up, this paper is an attempt at answering the overall research question: how can we understand social innovation in the public sector, and how can theory of organizational learning combined with a power dynamics approach confront and/or elaborate Drucker’s explanations to inertia in the public sector? The analysis has shown that to generate new knowledge and better tools is one thing, but to implement this development in practice in order to generate innovation in the public sector is a very different matter. And only through organizational learning can social innovation truly become a possibility. We can conclude that innovation in the public sector is to be understood on the basis of a pragmatic theory of organizational learning.

The analysis has thus demonstrated that institutions can create innovation when they truly succeed in establishing intervention processes resting on the principle of organizational learning. We refer to these institutions as the innovative or, as Brown & Duguid, the ‘enacting organizations’. Innovative organizations do not simply translate the tools offered in the ASP-intervention to new knowledge, but employ the overall objective for

the purpose of renewing the concepts of socially endangered children, the existing practices and creating new collective actions. In this context, the outcome of the process innovation is new habits and conducts. In addition to the changed knowledge and practices, the learning processes of the employees translate into a new self-understanding professional identity. Compliant organizations which for various reasons give up or resist the intervention never reach the stage where innovation is a possibility as organizational learning is never in play.

From an organizational learning perspective, we have also seen that the style of management is crucial for innovation. It is not simply a matter of management seen as the entrepreneurship of the individual (Drucker). The management's involvement, motivation and concrete managerial activities increase the likelihood that the organizational learning processes (micro) will lead to social innovation. Of similar importance to this process is naturally the manager's ability to handle and administer external relations and terms (macro). Though Drucker's explanations to inertia in the public sector are not dismissed, the present analysis has shown a need to confront and supplement his claims with more recent empirical observations of a public sector which faces increasing external demands, new working conditions, and political objectives. Consequently, the employees as well as the overall organization are left with a sense of increased control and top management. According to the presented theoretical perspective on social innovation in organizational learning, compliance and despair are two types of reactions that are at variance with the notion of innovation.

The presented findings demonstrate that innovative organizations are characteristic of the following three preconditions: 1) A management which is capable of handling the task, which takes responsibility of the task and ensure involvement of the employees, 2) a workplace culture open to interpretations as a response to disturbances and changes – not resorting to compliance or resistance, and 3) a collective institution, which is organized and prioritized in ways that prompts ownership of the situation, influences the surroundings, and becomes an 'enacting organization'. Presumably, the findings of the study (not least the role of power relations in an organizational learning perspective) apply to other sectors beside the public, whereas the challenges of the public sector do not seem to apply to the private sector, at least not without further research.

In conclusion, it should be stressed that the qualitative analysis, which serves as the starting point for this paper, may be further explored by questions concerning the impact of latent and manifest power relations on process innovation. In relation to the present case, it would also have been relevant to incorporate product innovation into the analysis. However, within the scope of this paper it is not possible to discuss the consequences of such approaches, as it is a matter for further research to analyze the connection between process and product innovation (see also Jensen et al., 2007). The results of such analyses are likely to have far-reaching implications for the design and exploration of future interventions in the public sector. Yet, they may also contribute to further comparisons of innovation processes and effects in the private and public sector.

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