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Organizational Problems of Our Civilization ¹

Problemy organizacyjne współczesnej cywilizacji

Организационные вопросы современной цивилизации

Speaking about civilization in this paper means:

[...] the degree of development reached by society in a given time period, and expressed in general in the level of material culture, and in particular:

a) in the control over the nature exercised by man, b) in the development of the level of productive forces, and c) in the total of material goods and social institutions accumulated by the people ².

"Our civilization" means the civilization development, and especially the progress achieved within it, in the years after World War II until the present time.

By the organizational problems I understand problems arising and being solved by the people in connection with their striving towards the achievement of goals i.e. connection with the functioning and development of organizations, no matter which these problems and organizations are.

1. My first idea is that civilization and organization developments in the world are occurring parallelly, in a close interdependence, but it

¹ The article includes the main thoughts derived from my paper under the same title which was prepared for the International Symposium on Social and Cultural Problems of the Development of Science and Civilization held May 31 — June 2, 1984 in Lublin to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the death of Maria Curie-Skłodowska.

² See the full definition given in *Leksykon PWN* (Warszawa 1972, page 208), where more explanation of the term can also be found.

seems that the former is getting ahead of the latter. Under this assumption, the organizations on the one hand can be regarded as products of the civilization development, and as such—they must respond to its requirements if they do not want to become too obsolete but on the other hand, through their functioning, development, or even the mere existence, they create conditions indispensable for further development. Shortly speaking, there exist dialectical interrelations between the organization and civilization developments.³

2. Looking at it very generally, the organization development in the last few decades was dominated by a growing variety and complexity of goals and structures. The reasons for that are to be sought in the civilization development, its ways and nature. However, this does not mean overlooking an important role played in the contemporary world by the very small and very simple organizations.⁴

3. In the second half of the 20th century the civilization development in the material sphere seemed to result from three basic human drives (which may be called also human aspirations):

- a) a drive towards satisfying larger in quantity and more and more various in quality — consumption and production needs,
- b) a drive towards increasing the control over distances and space in general,
- c) a drive towards increasing the control over information — their flow, processing and storing.

4. All the three categories of human drives have produced the emergence on a scale not known before of three groups of highly developed technologies, which are:

- a) production technologies, including programming, producing and marketing material goods,
- b) transportation technologies, including various kinds of transportations on the earth and over the earth⁵,
- c) information technologies, including electronic data processing, electronic communication and electronic information storage.

However, one remark should be made at this point. The technologies as differentiated above are overlapping one another. For instance, those belonging to group c) can be used both for getting control over space and for producing material goods. But the differences between all the three

³ See: M. Bartnicki, J. Kurnal: *Próba dialektycznego spojrzenia na organizację* (An Attempt of dialectical approach to organization), „Problemy Organizacji” 1983/1.

⁴ See: E. F. Schumacher: *Small is Beautiful*. Blond and Briggs, 1973.

⁵ The most spectacular achievements in this field are of course at first unmanned, and then manned, space flights.

groups seem to be quite obvious, so that the assumed division is likely to serve as a basis for a conventional differentiation between them.

5. In the development of the technologies mentioned above, the people are usually confronted with various limitations, which I call the organizational barriers. I divide them into five main groups: ⁶

- a) resource barriers,
- b) social barriers,
- c) natural barriers,
- d) bureaucratic barriers,
- e) information barriers.

6. Generally speaking, the organization development on the world's scale should deliver conditions, for the nations, societies, communities and individuals to get along with all the barriers and alternatively, to put them away totally, to diminish them, to keep them up, or — perhaps even — to strengthen some of them. This means that on the ground of civilization development, there appear and exist organizational dilemmas, connected with overcoming the experienced barriers.

7. The very rapidly growing development of civilization in the world in recent decades constitutes a big challenge to the organization development. The starting and the most important organizational problem of contemporary civilization seems to be closed in the question: how to meet requirements coming from the modern technologies of production, transportation and communications? From this basic problem some secondary ones can be drawn. Here are some more important of them.

8. **The organization size.** For securing the organizational progress, organizations of different sizes are required: small, medium, large and very big, if we restrict the list to the main types. But what should the proportions between them be in given social and economic systems, and in what directions, when we start from the existing conditions? Does, for instance, the satellite system consist in large or very big organizations linked with small ones on the basis of co-operation, the most promising organizational structure for the times to come?

9. **Elasticity or rigidity of organizational structures?** At the first glance, the civilization progress seems to require more elastic organizational structures, which could be easier adapted to the rapidly changing conditions, both external and internal. But there is a fully justified, in the light of the past experiences, doubt whether the rigid structures, especially those highly hierarchical and formalized, in fact are becoming outdated in contemporary times and the times to come? And if not,

⁶ For a more detailed treatment of this question, see: J. Kurnal: *Decision Making in Difficult Decision Situations — Some Theoretical Concepts*. IIM Berlin 1975, Preprint Series 1/75 — 63.

then in which areas of human activities should they be preserved, or even enlarged or strengthened? Furthermore, what are the prospects for organizations with a differentiated degree of formalization among their parts (subsystems)? And finally, how should the people get along with Max Weber's model bureaucracy and with the bureaucratic reality of their every-day lives?

10. The relation to information. Parallel to the civilization progress, one can notice a big increase of information number being in circulation, a big acceleration of information exchange processes, and a big enlargement of information storage capacity with an easier and easier access to them, all this aiming at their immediate and maximum utilization. At the same time, one can notice quite revolutionary transformations in data processing with a very rapid progress in computer technology. But simultaneously there are growing phenomena in organizations of various kinds and sizes a) of a relative lack or of a relative abundance of information, b) of different disturbances in information flow and processing, c) of diminishing reliability of information. The problem is how to organize properly the flow, processing and storage of information, so that they suit better to the needs of those who require and utilize them.

11. Human behaviours and human relations. As one of the results of the civilization progress, the organizational behaviours of people are becoming more complicated, simply because people's reactions to the experienced incentives of different kinds from outside are becoming more and more differentiated for both biological and social reasons. For the same reasons the organizational relationships between the people themselves are becoming more and more complicated. As a result of these complicated and differentiated reactions and relationships, there are growing tendencies among the people towards, for instance, destructive individualism, desintegration and alienation, stresses and frustrations, individual and group conflicts, The problem arises how under conditions of civilization diseases and social pathologies, to conduct and to manage the organizational behaviours and relationships of individuals and groups of people, with the aim of securing a high effectiveness of organizations which is absolutely imposed upon them by the civilization progress?

12. Organization and its environment. The civilization progress increases the dependence of organizations on both their natural and social environments but at the same time it enlarges the opportunities of their active influence on these environments. Mutual adoptive processes are being enforced upon both organizations and their environments. And as a consequence — there appears a problem how to organize and manage these processes, so that, on the one hand, to protect the natural environ-

ment against the destructive influence of the organizations in action and to gain for them the support of the social environment, and on the other hand, to secure for the organizations a high effectiveness and progress under various constraints coming from the environments, both natural and social.

Conclusion. It is quite evident and natural that the organizational development creates conditions for the civilization development, but at the same time, the former must follow the latter, respond to it, meet its challenge in a differentiated way: in most cases to stimulate the civilization progress, more seldom — to limit it, most seldom. — to hold it up. In this way the organizational structures themselves are becoming instruments of civilization, along with other modern technologies.

STRESZCZENIE

Niniejszy artykuł ma na celu wyjaśnienie współzależności istniejących między rozwojem organizacyjnym a cywilizacyjnym. Na wstępie autor wyjaśnia znaczenia, jakie nadał pojęciom „cywilizacja” oraz „problemy organizacyjne”. „Cywilizacja” oznacza rozwój cywilizacyjny, osiągnięcia cywilizacyjne zwłaszcza po II wojnie światowej do chwili obecnej. Natomiast „problemy organizacyjne” są rozumiane jako problemy, przed którymi stają ludzie w związku z rozwojem i funkcjonowaniem organizacji.

Głównym założeniem autora jest, że rozwój cywilizacji i organizacji na świecie następuje równolegle, przy zastrzeżeniu, że rozwój cywilizacyjny następuje nieco szybciej, co stwarza dla organizacji konieczność sprostania tym nowym warunkom. Autor stwierdza, że współzależność ta ma charakter dialektyczny.

W drugiej połowie XX wieku rozwój cywilizacji w sferze materialnej wynikał z trzech podstawowych dążeń ludzkich:

- a) dążenia do zaspokojenia rosnących potrzeb konsumpcyjnych i produkcyjnych,
- b) dążenia do zwiększania kontroli nad odległościami i przestrzenią,
- c) dążenia do zwiększania kontroli nad informacjami — ich przepływem, przetwarzaniem i magazynowaniem.

Dążenia te wywołały z kolei trzy grupy wysoce rozwiniętych technologii: produkcyjnych, informacyjnych, transportowych.

W rozwoju tych technologii człowiek napotyka na różnego rodzaju ograniczenia, które zostały podzielone na pięć grup: 1) bariery surowcowe, 2) bariery społeczne, 3) bariery naturalne, 4) bariery biurokratyczne, 5) bariery informacyjne. Rozwój organizacyjny na skalę światową winien stwarzać narodom, społeczeństwom, społecznościom i jednostkom warunki do pokonywania tych barier.

Gwałtowny rozwój cywilizacji stawia wyzwanie przed rozwojem organizacyjnym. Głównym problemem organizacyjnym współczesnej cywilizacji jest sprostanie wymaganiom wynikającym z nowoczesnych technik produkcji, transportu i komunikacji. Z tego problemu wynikają kwestie dotyczące: rozmiarów organizacji, elastyczności organizacji, relacji wobec informacji, zachowań i relacji ludzkich, organizacji i ich środowisk.

РЕЗЮМЕ

Настоящая статья имеет целью выяснить взаимосвязи между организационным и цивилизационным развитием. Вначале автор объясняет значения, в которых он употребляет термины „цивилизация” и „организационные вопросы”. „Цивилизация” обозначает цивилизационное развитие, достижения, в особенности за период с окончания 2-ой мировой войны по настоящее время. Под „организационными вопросами” подразумеваются вопросы, которые решить человеку в связи с развитием и функционированием организации.

Основной предпосылкой автора является утверждение о том, что развитие цивилизации и организации в мире происходит параллельно, с той оговоркой, что цивилизационное развитие поступает несколько быстрее, что вызывает для организации требование справиться с заданиями в новых условиях. Автор констатирует диалектический характер этой взаимосвязи.

Во 2-ой пол. XX века развитие цивилизации в материальной сфере вытекало из трех основных человеческих стремлений:

- а) стремления к удовлетворению возрастающих производственных и потребительских запросов,
- б) стремления к расширению контроля над расстояниями и пространством,
- в) стремления к расширению контроля над информационным потоком, его переработкой и хранением информации.

Эти стремления вызвали, в свою очередь, три группы высокоразвитых технологии: производственных, информационных и транспортных. В развитии этих технологий человек встречает различного рода ограничения, которые подразделяются на пять групп: 1) сырьевые барьеры, 2) общественные барьеры, 3) природные барьеры, 4) бюрократические барьеры, 5) информационные барьеры. Организационное развитие в мировом масштабе должно создавать народам, обществам, коллективам и единицам условия для преодоления названных барьеров.

Стремительное развитие цивилизации бросает вызов организационному развитию. Основной организационной проблемой современной цивилизации является удовлетворение требований, навязанных современными техниками производства, транспорта и коммуникации. Из этой проблемы вытекают вопросы, касающиеся: размеров организации, ее эластичности, отношения к информации, поведений и взаимоотношений между людьми, организацией и их среды.