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Department of Urban and Rural Development

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Många droppar små...

Communication at the County Administrative Board in Visby

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Abstract

This thesis is concerning the external communication at the County Administrative Board (CAB) in Visby, Gotland. The County Administrative Board is an implementing body in society and as such it is important to reach out to the people affected by the implementation. I have spent three weeks at the CAB in Visby doing participant observation and observed the external communication. As a civil servant working at CAB you meet many different persons concerning different issues. Civil servants are sometimes met with some skepticism from locals and to be able to handle that and their role as implementers they need tools. In this thesis I will present and discuss four of the meetings I attended and give a picture of how the communication looks like. The meetings all concern water in some way. To be able to learn and develop from meetings with people it is important to be aware of how you communicate. In this thesis I will stress the importance of reflection, through reflection you learn about yourself, others and the interaction in between.

Keywords; external communication, environmental communication, County Administrative Board, reflection, water

The title of the thesis is a Swedish idiom. In English it is *Little drops make a great ocean.*

Foreword

This study is my master thesis within the Environmental Communication and Management program at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) in Uppsala.

The empirical material to this thesis was collected during three weeks at the County Administrative Board in Visby, Gotland in the early spring 2009.

I would here like to use the opportunity to thank the entire County Administrative Board on Gotland and especially Sofia Scholler for letting me come there and observe the work they are doing. I would also like to send a special thanks to the ten persons I got the opportunity to follow to meetings. The people working at CAB in Visby welcomed me in the best way and were all very friendly.

During my time at the CAB I learned a lot, but the most important thing for me was that I really could see an environmental communicator working in the field; something that I think completed my master year at SLU in a very good way. I feel much more confident in my role as an environmental communicator after this experience.

Karin Gustavsson
Uppsala, May 2009

Go to the people.
Live with them.
Learn from them.
Love them.
Start with what they know.
Build with what they have.
And with the best leaders,
when the work is done,
the task accomplished,
the people will say,
we have done this ourselves.

Lao-tzu
(Maser 1998)

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Background

Sweden is divided into 21 counties, each with its own County Administrative Board (CAB). The CAB is a government authority and it is a link between people, municipalities, parliament, government and other central authorities. It is an important link in the democratic system. The most important issue for the CAB is to implement decisions about national objectives and establish objectives for the specific region, co-ordinating different interests, promoting development in the county and also safeguarding the rule of law in every instance. The CAB is also responsible for the coordination of the governmental and the municipal work in the region (Länsstyrelserna 2009).

In 1634 the Swedish city government was reformed and the County Administrative Boards were founded. The most important task then was to control that the taxes were paid. During the 400 years the role of the CAB has changed and the most important work at the CAB today is to promote local development in dialogue with the people living in the area. The foundation for this work is the assignment the CABs get from the parliament (regeringen) and from the government (riksdag) elected by the Swedish people. There are a lot of different professions represented at the CAB from biologists and veterinarians to archaeologists and lawyers. The wide range of professions has to do with the fact that the CAB works with issues extended across the whole society (Länsstyrelserna 2009). The geographical area one CAB covers contains several municipalities. Although Gotland is unique since it is one CAB and also one municipality.

To work at an implementing body in society is challenging in many ways. You meet a lot of people with different opinions and perspectives and to inform and consult them about change in some area is important but sometimes not without problems. Sweden is a democracy where the people have the power. From a political point of view the government and the parliament elected by the people makes decisions. But it is also taking place when the CAB is implementing decisions taken at other levels. It is good to let the people know what is happening and how it will affect them before the decision is taken, then they have the chance to impact, not only by voting in the elections, but also concerning issues in their surroundings. In a democratic society it is important to give the people a chance to speak and listen to them.

As a part of the European Union (EU) Sweden has to apply the subsidiarity principle. The principle concerns where the decisions should be taken, preferably as close to the ones affected as possible at the political level which is most efficient (AER 2009). This have an impact on the implementing work in Sweden e.g. concerning the water framework directive (see below) and other rules and regulations.

Since the CAB is an implementing body they get directives from a wide range of ministries and authorities concerning issues about nature conservation, new EU-regulations, inventory of specific species etc. There are twelve ministries in Sweden and several authorities below each ministry. To make the process more democratic the CAB work with the people living within the area of the CAB, that is challenging when the directives from higher levels can be complicated and hard to apply and explain.

The CABs work is going through a change with more dialogue and participation coming into their field and that is what I am interested in. Connecting the people with the authorities is essential and here the communication has an important role to make the decisions as good, accepted and relevant as possible.

The EU water framework directive

One of the things the CAB works with is issues concerning water. An ongoing work with the EU water framework directive is a part of the work at the CAB. The implementation of the EU water framework directive (WFD) created in 2000 (The EU water framework directive 2009) was started a few years ago in all of Sweden (and Europe). The WFD raises a lot of issues concerning the organization of the implementation and therefore the member states (including Norway), and the Commission agreed on a Common Implementation Strategy.

In Sweden the work is now concentrated on creating watercouncils, and where that already has been made to work with the water issues in that area. The watercouncils are created after the area the water takes i.e. along rivers and so on. This creates new challenges for the CAB since they have to work together with each other but also with others, such as municipalities. To get a good result in the work with the water it is important to co-operate and don't let the administrative boundaries be a problem (EU-upplysningen 2009).

Water is important on Gotland

Sweden is divided into five water districts (The water portal 2009) and Gotland is included in the district *Southern Baltic Sea*. So far seven watercouncils have been created on the island. The timetable for the work runs in cycles of six years (Appendix 1) and the work is now focused on writing answers to the referral about the management plan.

Gotland has specific problems with water due to the bedrock on the island which is entirely limestone and that leads to unique problems. There is also a thin layer of soil on the island and that creates problems with making the freshwater stay on the island.

Empirical material

The empirical material to this thesis was collected during a three week internship at the CAB on Gotland, mainly attending meetings and observing the communication from the environmental communications perspective. During the writing and reflecting period literature from previous courses within the program was mainly used, but also some additional articles.

Method

Participant observation

The research done for this thesis has been participant i.e. spending time at the organization making observations and interpretations. My study was done during three weeks at the CAB in Visby, between the 30th of March and the 17th of April. Due to the Easter holiday it was not three whole working weeks in the office, but I used the Easter break to reflect and write about my experiences. One meeting was held during the Easter holiday for specific reasons (see Appendix 2).

At the CAB I attended both internal and external meetings. I have decided to focus on the external communication, but the other meetings gave me a broader picture of how the work at the CAB is carried out. It is about much more than natural resource management. Through participating myself I got a picture of how the work was carried out and a better understanding of the organization as a whole. I got information for my study attending meetings with different actors and through interviews with persons working at the CAB. I also spent a lot of time reflecting and I held a reflection session. I followed mainly one person at the CAB. She talked to her colleagues and three of them agreed on having me with them on meetings¹. When I came to the CAB there were even more people offering me to come to meetings with them since they got to know what I was doing there.

Before and after the meetings I held interviews with the persons I followed to the meeting. I asked about what the meeting was about in order for me to be able to put what they spoke about in a context². I also talked about feelings about the meeting and if they had prepared in some way. Afterwards I asked if they were pleased with the meeting and if so, why? Was there anything that surprised them? What and why? This was a small reflection upon what they had done. I tried to have the "after-meeting" as soon as possible, but in some cases it wasn't possible to have it the same week. That could be both good and bad; they could have forgotten some details of the meeting (of course I forgot too) but they could also have some distance to the meeting. And maybe they felt more comfortable speaking about it.

I held a reflection session with five of the persons I had followed to different meetings. I wanted to do that session to make them reflect upon me being there and also upon communication and their views. Further, I also wanted to give them a chance to share experiences from meetings and create an opportunity to learn through discussion and reflection.

I chose not to record the interviews I did because I figured that it wasn't possible, due to time constraints, to transcribe the recordings. Instead I made notes during the meetings and also wrote my reflections in a notebook. I am well aware that my notes are not complete and it is of course possible that I have forgotten some things, but I have the general picture of what have happened.

I have also spent time reflecting about my time on the CAB when reviewing my empirical material. It is hard to reflect by yourself since you easily get trapped into your own way of thinking. I have anyway tried to reflect and try to see things during my internship from different perspectives. I have also shared experiences with my course mates during more informal occasions.

¹ Snowball method; through one/several person/s you get connection with other persons who could be interesting in the study.

² For questions, see Appendix 3

Problems and validity

Direct observations only cover a limited part of what is going on in organizations and do not give light to what really happens "in the head" of people (Alvesson & Kärreman 1995, my translation.). This is something to always have in mind and be aware of. This thesis is written based on interpretations I have done in an organization. I have got a glimpse of what they do and how they work. The picture I have now is shaped through my pre-assumptions and what I have seen is maybe not a representative picture, it is the way I see it.

We can always take the critique too far and you can always criticize the method, you can always do the research in an other way. *We must realize that there are no perfect methods* (Alvesson 1999:20). As a base for this thesis I have spent three weeks at the CAB in Visby. I have learnt a lot and met many interesting people. Those have of course affected my way of looking at the CAB. If I would have had a bad experience I would probably see it differently. When doing a participant observation you have to have that in mind and critically reflect on your experiences to learn from the process.

In this thesis I have decided to focus on meetings concerning the water issues on Gotland. This is of course affecting the validity since I am the one choosing the meetings, but I have chosen meetings that are linked to each other through the topic they are about, water. And as I mentioned earlier all the meetings I have attended have given me a broader picture of the work done at CAB.

Assumptions and limits

What I know in this situation is what I know since before and my pre-assumptions about the issue. My pre-understanding has had an impact on how I have seen things at the CAB. What I know when looking at the empirical material is the relation between me and the other person, not between the other person and the issue. My being at the CAB has most likely been accepted of different persons in different ways and I assume they perceived me in different ways depending on their pre-understanding. This thesis is not giving a full picture of the CAB and the communication done there, it is important to have that in mind when dealing with the material and not make to big generalizations.

Systems assumptions

Before I went to Gotland I had pre-assumptions about how it would be at the CAB. Those pre-assumptions have had an impact on how I interpreted and understood the things I did there. This is what I wrote in my research proposal about my thoughts;

“I think I take for granted that there will be conflicts of some kind. The CAB is an implementing agent and to me that can be problematic to carry out and explain to the actors they are interacting with. How do they handle that? Do they have the feeling that people see them as problematic or is it mostly working fine, without conflicts or discussions? Some of the people have taken the course *Dialogue for Nature Conservation* (Dialog för naturvården). Has that had any impact on how they work? “

My pre-understanding has had an effect on my time spent at the CAB and also my writing of the thesis since I have made the interpretations at CAB based on my pre-assumptions. Awareness of this during the process is important and to reflect and critically question it is also important. To get a picture of the communication in an organization it is a good thing to spend time there, even though my time was limited and I haven't got the full picture I think participant research is applicable.

It is hard to capture the entire experience I have had at the CAB. I have made notes when attending meetings and during the interviews but when making notes there is always something left out. I will thereby lose some factors in interpreting the material, like facial expressions, tone of voice and body language. There are always constraints when collecting an empirical material. I have made it like this and I am aware of that my interpretation and analysis of the material might have looked different if I had captured it in another way or if I had spent more time at the CAB.

Aim

The aim with my study is to describe what is happening in the communication between the CAB in Visby and some external actors. I will focus on the external communication and on meetings concerning water issues. The external communication consists mostly of meetings with local actors such as farmers and landowners on the island. The aim is not to study and evaluate communication at CAB in Visby, but rather to give an example of how this is done.

I also want to learn more about how it is to work at CAB to see the challenges they face and learn more about how the work there is performed. The reason for this is that I am curious about how environmental communication is performed in practice. During my time at the CAB I tried to be as flexible as possible because it is a practice oriented study I am doing. I have to be able to follow what happens within the organization, the organization should not change because of me being there for three weeks.

Research questions

- What is happening in the communication between CAB representatives and external actors?
- Which factors influencing the communicative action of CAB can be identified?
- What can be done within the organization to improve the external communication?

Theory

Central arguments for participation

Participation is important in the work the CAB performs. When implementing a change of some kind it is easier if people are asked what they think before the decision is set and maintain a dialogue. To be able to communicate in a good way it is important to see the main arguments for participation, to make the process more clear. Within EU participatory processes are important, because the decisions should be taken as close to the people as possible (see Background).

There are three overlapping arguments for participation; learning, democracy and power (lecture with Lotten Westberg 081003). An ongoing learning process is important for the understanding of the world in general. The ones who are affected by the problem should also have the power to affect the solution. How is it then possible to use power to engage? There is positive power which creates learning. Power is always performed; as soon as you try to reach out and change something you are met with a reaction. The reaction is also an expression of power. Authority use power in different ways and power as superiority affects learning. To be in charge of the use of the time is also to have and use power.

In a participatory process you learn about facts, yourself and your own values and values of other people. *Knowledge is not something that people possess in their heads, but rather, it is something that people do together* (Gergen cited in Alvesson 2008:484) It is important to encourage communication between the participants; they will then learn more about themselves and others. It is important for the CAB to communicate and to be aware of how they communicate to improve the participation. In a greater context improving the participation is strengthening the democracy.

We all create our world

To be able to communicate we have to be aware of that we are all different. No one react the same way to an issue or a problem and to be able to communicate we have to be aware about that. In participatory processes we can not have a desired outcome since we all react differently. We have to learn to be open in communication and to encourage people to participate and share their perspective so that we reach a better understanding of how we see the world in different ways. Today the work at CAB often has a desired outcome or a goal to reach even though a participatory process is partially used. I will here give a theoretical background to symbolic interactionism to explain the difficulties we as humans create and face when we interact with and within the social world.

Humans are social. It is a driving force for humans to be social. Charon states that our perspectives are not chosen by us, they are products of the world we live in and interact with (Charon 2007:9). Social constructivists claim that we are constructing our understanding/meaning of the world. We are not in direct contact with our world; we see the world through filter – perspectives. We see and give meaning to the world with our perspectives (Figure 1). To be able to learn, we have to understand each other and to be able to do that we have to take the role of the other (Charon 2007:113). Human communication is symbolic action because we always create the world by interacting with other people. We also interact with objects, things, and that also shapes our world. *Society depends on cooperation and interdependence fostered by social interaction* (Charon 2007:155).

Whenever we speak, write etc we participate in the constitution of our world. *Language use means the construction of the world* (Alvesson 1999:15). It shapes our perception of the world and that can lead to for example seeing nature in different ways depending on what kind of information you read. If the idealistic picture we have of nature is the undamaged pre-industrial nature that will be seen through our actions. Working as a civil servant at CAB you have one perspective and the local population living on the island has another. We have also more than one perspective each, as civil servant at the CAB you can also be and have the perspective of a father/mother, a sister/brother, a fisherman, a farmer and so on. We take different roles in different situations and we have different perspectives in these different roles.

One role that is important to take to be able to interact with other people is the role of the other. Taking the role of the other is one of the most important tasks in what you can call “social intelligence” (Charon 2007:115). When we communicate we imagine the communication from the perspective of the other and we are understood when the other see the issue as we se it from our perspective. (Charon 2007:111) We learn from each other by sharing perspectives. The knowledge created together is sustainable since everyone in the process of the creation is able to see the importance of the knowledge. Therefore this is important to be aware of working at the CAB.

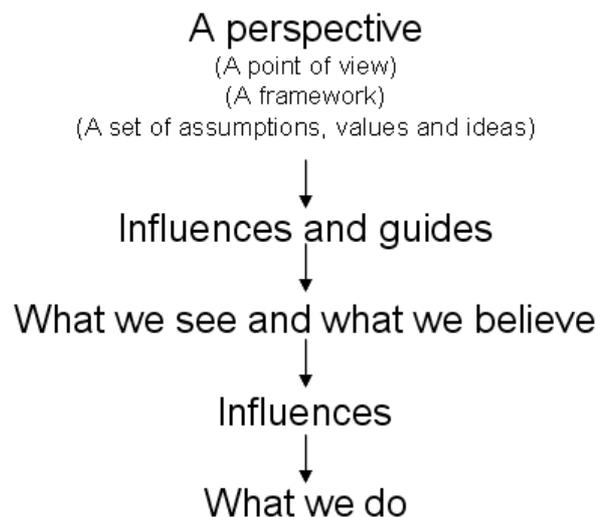


Figure 1. *Perspectives*. (Charon 2007:9)

Only one perspective among others

Symbolic interactionism is just one perspective among others to interpret the things and happenings around us (Charon 2007:27). There are other perspectives within the social sciences. Each one of the perspectives has limits when used to examine the world around us, but they are not completely useless because of that. You have to be aware that no perspective is perfect and always have that in mind.

Symbolic interactionism focuses on the interaction between people rather than on personality, society or the influence of others (Charon 2007:41). It emphasizes that humans *define* the environment rather than respond to it. To be able to reach a more participatory society where the people have more of the power and feel that they are listened to. I find symbolic interactionism is a good tool because it makes you see things you take for granted. You start to question why you

communicate in certain ways with certain people and that is the reason why I have chosen to use and present symbolic interaction in this thesis. Symbolic interaction is in itself a symbol and it shapes the reality as other symbols.

To clarify

I will use the Swedish word “fika” in my empirical discussion because it is a characteristic of the meetings. A fika is more than a coffee break, you also talk and socialize with the people you know since before on the meeting and discuss things. During all the meetings I will present in this thesis there was a break for fika. In some of them I could sense that something happened with the feeling in the room. The people who had come to the meeting got a chance to reflect upon what they have heard and talk to each other about it. The people who attended the meetings were often exactly on time, although there were exceptions, so there were often no talk between them before the meeting. The fika then became an important interaction within the meeting. I would say that a meeting for 2-3 hours in the evening is not accepted without a break for fika.

Empirical discussion and interpretation

In this section I will present each case/meeting separately and after every case I will discuss the occasion referring to theory. The reason for the separation is that the meetings were held for different purposes and I therefore don't want to mix them in this section. I will present the meetings using the same frame, first giving a short background to the meeting and the reason for it. Thereafter I will present the actors who are involved in the meeting, the means/spatial conditions, the purpose of the meeting and then a description of the full meeting, the act.

I attended sixteen meetings in total, thirteen with external actors and three with people within the CAB (see Appendix 2). To give a picture of the meetings I have attended I will here present four of them. The meetings are all concerning water in some way. I will also present the reflection session I held with some of the persons I followed to these meetings.

Meeting in Hemse about the water referral

Background

The EU water framework directive is being implemented in Sweden through the creation of watercouncils. The area the watercouncils is supposed to cover is the area the water (rivers, streams etc) take. It is a completely new way of dividing the land and it creates new problems and opportunities. Now the opinions from the watercouncils have been put together in an action plan which is out for referral until September 1st 2009. The CAB on Gotland have therefore held meetings for the public to clarify what the material is about, it is a rather dense and heavy material to read. The more specific information about Gotland came just a few days before this last meeting. This is the third and last meeting for the public and it is held in Hemse.

Actors

The actors at this meeting are three persons from the CAB (two women and one man) and me. Of the civil servants from CAB two are experts on water and one is coordinator of the watercouncils. One representative (a woman) from the municipality is also attending. There were about 10 persons (all men) attending the meeting, they were either landowners and farmers or only farmer/landowner.

Means

Power-point presentations were held by the CAB to present the background of the issue and to put the new information in a context. Questions were welcome during the presentation. In the beginning of the meeting everyone got a chance to introduce themselves. A ball was sent round to the participants in the end and they were allowed to say some reflections about the meeting (both concerning content and form). The room was arranged with chairs in two half-circles. In the back of the room there was a table with material concerning the issue for the participants to take.

Purpose

The purpose is to have a presentation to make the written material more clear. The purpose is also a responsibility to implement the water framework directive from EU and to engage the locals in issues concerning their water. The purpose in the long run is to have water with good quality enough for everyone and to get people engaged in that issue. The introduction in the beginning made it clear who had come and also gave some information about why they had come. In the end to conclude the meeting the ball was sent round to let everyone have a say about the meeting.

Act

The meeting starts with the CAB asking the persons who have come what they expect of the meeting. A presentation of how the evening will continue was made and it was made clear that questions during the presentation of the action program were welcome. The presentations of the action program were held and somewhat of a disappointment were shown from the audience. They sighed and the tone in their voices changed to be more aggressive, they express a feeling of “this is what always happens when you are asked to participate, you do something but then it is not considered on the right level anyway”. The program is very general and the details concerning the area they are interested in are not presented in the material. They had expected something more specific.

The representatives from CAB say that they too had expected something more explicit and substantial. After about an hour there is a break for fika and the participants have the chance to talk to each other and the civil servants. The table in the back of the room became the point where people got to together and talked, there they had the material related to the topic of the meeting.

During the discussion there were many ideas about how the society in general should be informed about what is happening on the island. Maybe some articles in the newspapers covering this from different perspectives. The CAB encourages the participants to contribute with ideas for their proceeding work concerning the water directive. They point out that they take their views with them and that this is an ongoing process. In the end of the meeting the participants are asked to think in silence for two minutes about two questions; have you understood the issue? And; do you think that it is something missing in the referral?

Discussion

During the meeting the civil servants show that they listen to the participants when they get questions through asking back if they think they got a good and understandable answer. Through the presentation they are altering between close and distance, some things are more general and others more specific connected to the island. Through the questions from the participants they get closer to their perspective.

Meta-communication is not used much, clarifying of misunderstandings but not talk about the form in which the talking is done. My interpretation is that when you come to a meeting like this you don't feel or think you have the mandate to change the form because it is the CAB who has decided to have a meeting with this specific topic, and then they should know how to talk. It is a question of power, it is hard to change an agenda that is already set. In the beginning a question about expectations is posed - there a chance for meta-communication arises. The way the locals see the CAB according to my interpretation is that they have more mandate than the locals. It is said to be an info-meeting and through that people come with expectations of it to be an info-meeting.

The view presented at this meeting is the CAB's view on the material and they have decided on what is important to talk about and what is not important. They are setting the agenda, but in this case they are inviting the participants to have a say in different ways and that is very important. They are setting the stage with their use of language and symbols in the presentation. I am then setting the stage for what I present and write about in this thesis. The purpose with the meeting is to make the written material more clear and that is checked in the end using the ball and also with the questions asked.

Meeting about wetlands in Alskog

Background

This meeting is somewhat linked with the previous meeting in Hemse. To fulfill the EU water framework directive, to get better water quality and to get more water to stay on the island the creation and re-creation of wetlands is one part of the solution. If you want to create a wetland on your land you can apply for subsidies from the CAB. The meeting was also about marine reserves and a consultant hired by the CAB to do a kind of mapping of the sea on some locations around the island was present. He showed pictures of how the world under the surface looks now, with examples of both a healthy and a not so healthy sea. According to the civil servant it is problematic to promote the creation of marine reserves since people often don't know what it means and how it is going to affect them. To create more marine reserves is also a part of the work with one of the environmental objectives, A balanced marine environment. (Hav i balans, Miljömålsportalen 2009).

Actors

The meeting was held by the watercouncil of Eastern Gotland. There were about 20 landowners/private persons attending, all men. Including me we were four who came there to attend the meeting. Two civil servants from the CAB attended, one woman and one man. The man held the presentation. And a consultant hired by the CAB (man).

Means

Power-point presentations, pictures and filmed clips from the world under the surface of the Baltic Sea. Questions and maps of suggested wetland-locations. The room was arranged so that the participants sat in a U facing the board where the presentation was shown.

Purpose

To influence the perspective of other actors about the sea and to explain what marine reserves really are and what they mean to people, what you can and can't do in them. A presentation and a clarification of the wetlands suggested in the plan. In the long run it is to get a more sustainable water use on the island and to have a more healthy sea.

Act

The meeting starts with the secretary of the watercouncil wishing everyone welcome and he also introduces the purpose of the meeting. He explains the background with the watercouncils and in the Eastern watercouncil they think it is their task to spread information and to get people to understand the issues concerning the water better. He introduces the guests and they present themselves. The CAB staff starts the presentation with information about marine reserves. During the presentation there are some clarifying questions from the audience and some reconnection is also made from the presentation to the reason why they are there tonight. After some thirty minutes the consultant continues and talks about his work. He shows pictures and shorter clips filmed in the sea. The presentation takes about 60 minutes and he ends it with a question; *What is worth protecting? The typical or the unique? What we have today or what we had fifty years ago?* After his presentation there is a break for fika.

After the break the discussion from the fika comes in to the presentation, I sense that a more negative feeling in the room towards the issue has occurred during the break. I perceived it as the people attending were questioning the point in protecting the sea at all. The civil servant from the CAB then starts by asking *Do you think it is worth something to protect the sea?*. The answer from the audience is mostly positive, *Of course there is a value in a living sea* but also *People will never agree on unmotivated restrictions*. The discussion then continues about a proposal the CAB have sent out to referral about wetlands. The landowners complain about the proposal and the civil

servant answer that they made a mistake when they send that proposal to referral; it should not be seen as a suggestion on where they want wetlands. It should more give a signal that there is a need for creating a lot of wetlands on the island. The CAB also makes clear that there won't be any wetlands without the landowner's permission.

Maps from the proposal about the wetlands are handed out so that everyone has a chance to see if/how their land would be affected. The secretary makes a suggestion that there will be a focus on the villages and landowners represented on the meeting and CAB agrees on that, he asks them to help him to find the specific locations they are interested in on the maps. Some of the landowners haven't seen these maps before and someone says *Those that are on yellow* [meaning: cropped land] *you can forget immediately....* The chairman of the watercouncil raises his voice and points out that it is important that everyone can have a say about this *even the ones who aren't here*. The different locations of interest are discussed and the meeting comes to an end. The secretary ends the meeting thanking the CAB and the consultant for taking their time to come there and he emphasizes how important it is. They would also like to have two meetings more like this to cover the whole area for their watercouncil.

Discussion

The purpose of this meeting was to make the work with the water and the problems it can create if nothing is done more clear. The presentation was held without much more than questions from the participants as interaction. Through the presentation they altered between close and distance and questions also gave a broader picture as well as changing the perspective.

The discussion that started during the fika about the marine reserves and wetlands gave a clear sign of that the participants then shared perspectives. The feeling in the room was different after the fika, people had then had a chance to talk with each other and had maybe found someone with similar ideas about the issue and felt more confident in speaking for the whole group. After the break there were much more interaction and that was probably also dependent on the maps which were handed out to the participants. It created a discussion and people raised their voices to object and said short comments which I think were meant to be heard but not said out loud. When the civil servant asked the participants if they think a living sea is important he guides them to another perspective. My observation is that after that the mood in the group was better.

The complaint that arises in the discussion about the wetland proposal is met with answers making clear that the CAB understand and take the opinions with them. CAB admits that it was a mistake to send the material to referral. The participants can then feel that their thoughts are taken seriously and that the CAB listens to them. When the maps are handed out and the secretary propose that a focus should be on the areas represented on the meeting the civil servant agrees and ask for the participants help to find the locations. He then sees their local knowledge to make progress in the meeting.

Meeting with two landowners concerning the creation of a wetland

Background

A landowner has applied for subsidies for the creation of a wetland. His neighbor got upset because he thought that it would affect his land. We meet both landowners and walk around the area and discuss this with them.

Actors

One civil servant from the CAB and me, one landowner who have applied for subsidies for the

creation of a wetland and his neighbor (all men except me).

Means

The meeting is held in the area the wetland is going to be created. The civil servant has the papers concerning this issue with him.

Purpose

Clarification and discussion about the wetland where it will be created more exactly and how the land is going to be affected.

Act

On our way out to the place we get to know that one of the landowners doesn't want to come to the meeting. The civil servant calls him and talk with him about it and eventually he changes his mind about it, he will come to the meeting.

When we get there we walk around the area and make clear where the border between the landowners land are in order to get a view of the area. The landowner that are against this (the neighbor) talks about a lot of different things during our walk, he brings up wind power, crayfish, birds etc. The civil servant tries to clarify and to get them to agree, but it is hard and it is always something else that comes up to discussion.

The neighbor don't want any "jobbery" [mygel] and the landowner makes clear time after time that there were no canal or opening to the sea crossing his land in the first plan for the project, it was only a recommendation from the CAB. The CAB is okay with a creation of a wetland without any opening/canal to the sea.

In the end of the meeting the civil servant summarizes the issue and he will write notes from the meeting and send them to both of the landowners. If they accept those, the work with the wetland can start. The neighbor wants an environmental impact assessment (EIA/MKB) to be done but the civil servant says that this project is too small for doing an EIA/MKB on, but he will check that up again with those responsible for that.

Both landowners mentions when the other part can't hear that they have been in the same board as chairman and secretary for several years and that have worked fine. The landowner also says that they have *lost the social part, fika and that*.

Discussion

There is a slight confusion in the beginning of this meeting if the neighbor will show up or not, but eventually he agrees on coming to the meeting. Maybe he realizes that he has more to say if he shows up than if he doesn't. An explanation weren't given to why he didn't want to show up. He used the power he had by threatening with not showing up to the meeting.

It was hard to know what he wanted to point at when he talked about a lot of different things. It could be interpreted as if he was nervous or didn't really have anything that he felt good enough to say against the project. To me his talk was mostly confusing.

The greater picture about creating wetlands is not mentioned much. The landowners talk from their perspective and they are not willing to take the perspective of the other. None of them listens to the other, they are very focused on making their point clear. The neighbor is fine with this as long as his land is not affected and that is what he has right to according to the law. If something happens

with his land he can take it to court and appeal.

Something that I find interesting with this meeting is that both of them mentions when the other person didn't heard it that they had worked together before. What is the reason for mentioning something like that? My interpretation is that they maybe wanted to show the civil servant and me that it hadn't always been like this, that he meant that it gets harder to agree and to talk about things without the social part i.e. fika.

Meeting in Ala about wetlands

Background

The CAB is invited by the watercouncil to talk about the proposal concerning wetlands. The CAB has the consultant who did the proposal about the wetlands with them and he is going to have the presentation about the proposal.

Actors

Two persons from the CAB and me, all women. The consultant who made the proposal about wetlands (man). 29 participants have come to the meeting, five of them women.

Means

Instructions given in the beginning of the meeting that questions should be discussed in the end if they were not very short. The presentations were given showing power point slides and talking. The meeting was held in a big parish house (hembygdsgrd). The people sat around rectangular tables and the room was not rearranged for the meeting. In the presentation after the break the computer was used to show pictures from a GIS-program on the screen. The program didn't start as it should and it took a while to get it going.

Purpose

To inform and change peoples perspective about the proposal and what they can do to make the water situation better in their area and on the island as a whole. Give a historical background to the water situation. Give information about how to apply for subsidies from the CAB if you want to create a wetland and also broaden the picture of wetlands.

Act

We are all welcomed by the chairman of the watercouncil. Two persons from the watercouncil present the purpose of the meeting and give a short background to the issue from their perspective. Then they give the word to the CAB who introduces themselves. Since there are quite a lot of people, from seven different villages, attending the meeting the introducer of the meeting ask the people to raise their hand when the name of their village is called out. The purpose is to make a brief presentation of the persons attending. The meeting then continues with a beehive exercise. The participants are asked to talk to the person next to them about why they have come to the meeting for 2-3 minutes. After the beehive-exercise the first presentation about a certain kind of wetland is introduced. After about 20 minutes the second presentation about how to apply subsidies and what kind of information that is needed for that starts. During this second presentation the fika is prepared in one part of the room. The participants raises a lot of different questions and the civil servant give clarifying answers, she also ask back if they were satisfied with the answers. The presentation ends after approximately 30 minutes and then fika is served.

During the fika there is a lot of discussion and the civil servants get many questions about the CAB in general. They get questioned because someone thinks they should represent the entire

competence at the CAB. The discussion is quite intense and they don't have time to finish it because the meeting continues.

After the fika the presentation about the wetland proposal begins. The presentation begins with giving a historical background to the issue. The new material is then brought up and a lot of questions about the method used and the way this should be done are raised. The landowners can see the proposed areas on the screen and some of them raises their voice and ask for an explanation why the proposal for a specific wetland ended up where it ended up.

Discussion

Before we came to this meeting I was asked to be the leader/introducer of the meeting. Since I had been on the CAB for a while (this was the last evening-meeting I attended during my last week) I thought it would be interesting and a challenge to help them with the introduction. We discussed the planning of the meeting before, without the consultant who made the plan about wetlands. He was contacted via phone and we agreed on talking about the meeting when we met in Ala before the meeting. When we got to the meeting there were some people in the room already and there were no chance to talk altogether before the meeting.

The meeting took more time than we had thought when we planned it and it was hard to break in towards the end and try to finish it because the participants were still interested in the issue and raised questions. I got the feeling that there was not enough time for everyone to get their questions asked and answered because people started to pose questions almost at the same time, leaving no time for answers. There were also people who raised questions from a more overall perspective and that took time. Those questions gave the issue some background and put the whole problem in a greater context but at one point the participants of the meeting told the persons asking those questions to "be quiet so that we can get somewhere with this [the meeting]". There were about 2-3 persons among the participants who asked more questions and also questioned the CAB more general. The CAB listened, but didn't mirror and that made the participants to ask almost the same questions over again. To clarify the question and be sure that they share perspectives would have made the questioning less time-consuming. The civil servant also asked after some questions' if the person posing it was satisfied and/or understood the answer. This was done to more specific questions.

Reflection session

Scene

As a summary of my weeks at the CAB I felt it would be good to talk and reflect about experiences. Both the experiences I got being there but mainly the experiences of external communication in the field. I wanted to discuss their experiences of communication and how they handle different situations.

Actors

I invited the ten persons I got the opportunity to follow to meetings via email a week ahead the meeting was held. Five of them had the possibility to attend the meeting, three women and two men. We sat in one of the conference-rooms at the CAB.

Means

The meeting was held during an hour, I had specified the time it would take in the email since I figured more people would consider coming if they knew the ending time. I sent the invitation a

week before the meeting and due to quite short notice I am very happy that five persons had the possibility to attend the meeting.

Purpose

To talk about and reflect upon communication experienced at the CAB i.e. to share perspectives concerning communication.

Act

We started talking about what good communication is and how it is when they have good communication. The things that were mentioned were when they had smaller groups, it was easier and people dared to speak if they wanted to. To split a big group into smaller had also worked well. Someone mentioned that it is not always good to name it "working group" since some may associate this word with something negative. It can be connected with that they have to create some result. How the room is arranged is also important. A circle is good, if it works with the room. Someone mentioned the ball for rounds as a good tool, but then another person mentioned that you can get very nervous waiting for your turn, even if you don't want to say something. It could be good to hand out the permission to speak randomly to avoid some nervousity. Experience with meetings is something you have to practice and you realize you loose some security after a period with no meetings. The course (*Dialogue for Nature Conservation*) is mentioned and there they see meetings as democratic processes, to know your mandate is important and to be clear about the purpose of the meeting. Feedback can be more or less pushed forward by using different methods in the meetings.

Bad things in meetings are when there is a "we-them" feeling and when there is someone who are talking too much and taking over the meeting. It is also hard to both listen and be open to dialogue and break in if there is too much talk. They say that having a person leading the meeting is good, then that person has the mandate to break in if someone talks to much etc. The model with the stairs in the conflict is also brought up³. Someone says that it is hard to know if you and the one you meet are in the same step or maybe you are prepared for a worse case than it is. It is hard to meet if you come to the meeting with one picture and the reality is something else.

I asked if they talk about or discuss how they are being met when they are on the countryside having meetings at the CAB. No one of them say they do, and they think it would be a good idea if they did it at some meeting. Bring how heavy it is to meet people who are negative to the CAB as a whole up to discussion at some meeting

They also mention that the different departments at a higher level do not say the same thing either; the Swedish Board of Agriculture say one thing and the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency say another. It is hard to be consistent because of that. A course in communication would be good, one of the five says and also to exchange experiences about this when they have meetings. You have to be a bit brave to bring up what you want to talk about at the meetings with the teams. There is a certain culture and it is different within the teams in the CAB as well.

Discussion

Reflection is something you don't have time for is my first thought when I reflected upon the meeting. What could be the reason for that? They are not having tools for communication, but yet they are communicating. How do they know their communication work? Feedback in the meetings is mentioned, but at the meetings I attended that was an exception and something you did if there was time, which it most likely were not. The meetings are seen as just information sharing, not

³ F. Glasls model in nine steps concerning the escalation of conflicts.

sharing experiences. If experiences are discussed it is during the fika break. The skepticism that the CAB meets when they are having the meetings is not easy to take. It is exhausting and would probably be easier if they at least shared experiences within the CAB.

The course *Dialogue for Nature Conservation* is mentioned several times during the meeting. The tools and insights of that course seem helpful, but as with all knowledge it is hard to apply it in the field. That increases the importance of reflection at the CAB. If they would have reflection sessions every other week and discussions about new methods used at meetings it would become a more natural part of their work.

Concluding discussion and reflection

I will in this section first present my discussion and reflection concerning my experiences observing the external communication at CAB. Difficulties and problems will be presented and the importance of communication and reflection stressed. After the concluding discussion a section where I present some things to think about to improve the external communication will follow. Some things that I after my observations think will help the CAB to be better at reaching people and talk with them on the same level, tools to consider in their work.

Communication at the CAB

The external communication at CAB consists of meetings. Many of them organized as giving information. The CAB has the mandate from higher levels to spread information. The changed way of dealing with the implementation of decisions coming from "higher levels" in society with more dialogue is not prepared or thought through well enough in the civil society. The civil servants working at the CAB don't have the right tools for dealing with the new thinking. The course dialogue for nature conservation given by the EPA is a good step for progress. I also found it appreciated by the people working at CAB.

Even though the CAB say they listen to the participants in the meetings there still seems to be a lack of trust between the locals and the CAB. My interpretation of this is that the CAB are suffering from things done a long time ago that have created a bad reputation. That reputation may not be based in something that is true; a characteristic for reputations, but people anyway listens to it and acts according to it. It is not easy to break the pattern and do something different. A thought that comes to my mind about this is the problem with engaging women in the meetings. Maybe that could break the pattern? It has become a problem that the women are not attending the meetings, they have other perspectives that it is important to get a picture of. This is something they have worked with since I left the CAB, the 7th of May they held a meeting with an invitation directed to women especially.

The CAB is an implementing body and has a mandate - power. To be able to have democratic conversation knowing that the mandate to decide in the end is uneven it is very important to be explicit about it. It is important to clarify the mandates and to be aware of the power. The competence we as environmental communicators have is applicable on the problems the CAB has with meeting the locals having dialogue with them. They are often (always) met with more or less skepticism and questioned just because they are supposed to represent "the government" and the locals think that they should have knowledge about all the entire knowledge within the CAB. It is frustrating and hard to be questioned every time you meet locals and to have to answer for the entire CAB is not easy. A more holistic perspective is what we all want, but to get there we have to grab the huge concern the problem with the environment have become. This is not easy but I think we are on the right track when local people with local knowledge are involved in the issues concerning them before the decisions are made.

Communication is important for the CAB and it is something they do continuously. To be open with their work and to inform people will become more and more important because when people see the result of their participation in the implementation of decisions they will see that they are listened to. As it looks now that is not the fact, but small steps to get there is taken every day at the CAB. The course *Dialogue for Nature Conservation* is one step in the right direction and it is also appreciated by the civil servants. The main problem I have seen during the weeks spent at the CAB is that there is no reflecting or sharing of experiences within the organization. If this happens it is

most likely not during organized circumstances, maybe during fika. There is a need for reflection and learning within the organization, to be able to meet the locals and to learn together with them.

Suggestions for the future communication

Democratic conversation

Significant for a democratic conversation is that everyone in the dialogue has an opportunity to influence the direction of the conversation. Both the content of the conversation (what you speak about) and its form (how you speak about it). What is connected to the issue according to the participants in the conversation? It is important to have this discussion since a lot of irritation about discussions off-topic can be avoided. In a democratic conversation no one should be blamed for difficulties, the difficulties should be examined and an understanding reached together. In order to make a conversation more democratic there are some things you can think about. Listen, confirm, pose questions, mirror, speak, alter between distance and closeness and use meta-communication (Hallgren and Ljung 2005:53).

To listen is more than hearing, it is an understanding and an interpretation about what is said. When you have understood the other persons view it is good if you make that clear by confirming, through nodding your head or say "that's right", "aha" and so on. The next important thing is to pose questions and that is important for the common investigation of the discussed subject. There are different questions, to clarify, to deepen, to question and to encourage. When we confirm and pose questions we can mirror to make the other person understand what we have understood. The purpose is to let the other person have a chance to see his own thoughts, it is a good way to stop and think about what you really express when you talk about an issue. To speak is of course important for us to make ourselves understood in discussions, but it is important to have a balance when we speak. To be able to take it easy and let the conversation take time if that is needed and to add information when that is needed. You always have to sort the material and try to focus on what is important in the specific situation.

In a conversation and during meetings we share perspectives. When someone talk about what they think it is from their perspective, how they see the world. In conversation it is important to try to get a picture if the others opinion and to get there you will have to alter between being close and distanced to your own and others perspective. By doing that you will get more close to a mutual understanding and a shared perspective. Last but not least we can meta-communicate, talk about how we talk. To clarify misunderstandings and to maybe change the way the talking is done, the form of the conversation, to improve the communication and increase the understanding. It is also important to meta-communicate to increase the trust in the process (Hallgren & Ljung 2005).

Improvement in the conversation can be reached being more aware of the seven "helpers". I would like to point at especially mirroring and meta-communicate because that is maybe things we forget when we are in the middle of the conversation. It is easy to forget things related to communication and just go on in the same way you always have done. To avoid that it is of highest importance to incorporate reflection within the organization, to always have it there in some way.

To get a more democratic conversation the form of the meetings the CAB has could be changed. Have trust in the participants knowledge and let them form questions in the beginning of the meeting. Be more flexible and adjust the entire presentation for the specific persons who attend the meeting. Is it important to have a presentation in power point? Could it be possible to use

something else that is easier to adapt and change? The seven “helpers” presented above is something to always think about in meetings both within and outside the CAB. To strive for a more democratic dialogue takes time and it is important to be present in the communication situation to be able to both listen on the other persons and mirror/answer/give feedback to make the communicative process and the mutual understanding to move forward.

The importance of reflection

Since we continuously create and shape our understanding of the world through interaction with it, how can we then learn something? How do you learn from something that constantly changes? One way is to always reflect upon our doings, discuss them, question them and share them with others. To reflect is to think about what you have done, if it went according to an eventual plan, why it did/didn't, what you could change to get a different outcome next time etc. Through interaction we learn from each other and combine our perspectives. ...*by showing how other perspectives provide different understandings and, by combining them, greater insight might be achieved* (Alvesson 2008:486). There are different kinds of reflection (see Alvesson 2008) I will not discuss that further here. The main thing is that in the ongoing learning process we are part of reflection is important to broaden perspectives, share experiences and create knowledge together.

We always reflect, Schön writes about knowing-in-action and reflection-in-action. He gives an example of reflection-in-action with a jazz musician. The musician is able to improvise through the use of reflection-in-action. He is evolving the music at the same time he is performing it. *When someone reflects-in-action he becomes a researcher in the practice context* (Schön 1991:68). To be comfortable with reflection makes you more open to uncertainty, you are more open to the unexpected since you are aware of the reflection-in-action. If you have a view of yourself as an expert it is more static and you might get more nervous when reflection is needed.

One way to promote reflection at the CAB is to provide the civil servants with a notebook. In the notebook they are asked to write about experiences from meetings, feelings, what went good/bad and why, questions etc. Once a month a reflection meeting could be held and there they can share their thoughts. To increase knowledge, share perspectives and learn trough interaction. It is important that it is a part of their work as civil servants to reflect upon what they have done and why they are doing it in this way to learn from mistakes and to develop.

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Internet resources

- Environmental objectives/Miljömålportalen (2009-05-07) <http://miljomal.nu/Environmental-Objectives-Portal/>
- The County Administrative Boards/Länsstyrelserna (2009-04-14) <http://www.lst.se/lst/en/>
- The EU water framework directive (2009-04-29) http://ec.europa.eu/environment/water/water-framework/index_en.html
- EU-upplysningen (2009-04-29) <http://www.eu-upplysningen.se/Amnesomraden/Miljo/EUs-vattenpolitik/>
- Sveriges kommuner och landsting (2009-04-29) <http://www.skl.se/artikeldokument.asp?C=5457&A=543&FileID=153310&NAME=2006004.pdf>
- The online Water portal/Vattenportalen (2009-05-12) <http://www.vattenportalen.se/>
- Assembly of European regions (AER) (2009-05-27) <http://www.aer.eu/main-issues/subsidiarity.html>

Timetable for the Water framework directive cycle

2006 a monitor program were started

2007 a mapping and an analysis of the water in the districts should be made

2008 a proposal to a management plan with requirements of the quality and a programe for action should be proposed (and send out to refferal)

2009 decision about the manegement plan shall be made with the requirements of the quality and the action programe.

2010 the starting point of the implementation

2015 good ecological and chemical status of the water should be reached

(Sveriges kommuner och landsting 2009)

Compilation of meetings 30 March – 17 April

v.14

30 March	Presentation-meeting with the Water and fisheries team. (internal)	09.00
31 March	Before /introduction-meeting about extinction of the crayfish	10.00
	Before /introduction-meeting about the water-referral	11.00
	Meeting at the Environmental and health protection office (Miljö och hälsoskyddskontoret) about the extinction of the crayfish	13.00-14.00
	After /reflection meeting about the crayfish	14.30
	Meeting in Hemse about the water referral	19.00-21.00
1 April	Before /introduction-meeting about the environmental objectives and pesticides in the waters on Gotland (2 before meetings in one)	13.00
	Before /introduction-meeting about wetlands	17.30 (on the way to Alskog)
	Meeting about wetlands in Alskog.	19.00-21.30
2 April	Meeting about the environmental objectives. (internal)	10.00-12.00
3 April	After meeting/reflection about the meetings concerning the water referral. (all three meetings, I was asked to "lead" the meeting)	08.00-09.15
	Meeting about pesticides in the water on Gotland	Officials 9.30-11.30, pressconference 11.30-12.00, Municipality, LRF, Lantmännen mfl 13.30-15.30
	After meeting about the environmental objectives and the pesticides in the water	16.00-16.30

v.15

6 April	Internal meeting with the nature conservation team	08.30-10.15
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	about time planning. (internal)	
	Before /introduction-meeting (walk) concerning a project about nature- and culture tourism in Bäste träsök/Ar.	10.25-11.00
	Meeting about nature- and culture tourism in Ar.	12.30-16.30
7 April	Meeting with the suggested chairman of the Northwestern watercouncil before the creation of that watercouncil the 8 th of April. Before /introduction-meeting to that meeting as well.	13.30-14.40
8 April	Meeting with the entire water team (internal)	9.00-11.00
	Meeting with persons engaged in the nature- and culture tourism project (the municipality, ALMI, Gotland university)	13.15-15.00
	After meeting about Ar, nature- and culture tourism (2 aftermeetings in one)	15.10-15.40
	Watercouncil meeting in Stenkyrka	19.00-22.00

v.16

13 April	Meeting with the people living in Ar about the project	13.00-15.30
14 April	Meeting with 4 landowners about the creation of a nature reserve (before and after meetings in the car)	9.00-12.30
15 April	Meeting with two landowners about the establishment of a wetland (before and after meetings in the car)	9.00-13.00
16 April	Before meeting about wetlands in Ala. Planning the evening meeting.	08.30-10.00
	<i>Reflection meeting about experiences of communication in different ways and how to work with different experiences.</i>	10.00-11.00
	Meeting about wetlands in Ala. (<i>I was the "leader/facilitator" in the meeting</i>)	19.00-22.15
17 April	Meeting with the municipality about the water-referral	9.00-10.40
	Short and open/brief meeting/reflection with Sofia Scholler about my time at the CAB.	16.00-16.20

Appendix 3

Frågor inför och efter möte.

Inför.

Vad handlar mötet om?
Vilka är inblandade?
Varför har ni mötet?
Har ni mött dessa personer förut?
Hur känns det inför mötet?
Vad förväntar du dig av mötet?
Har du förberett dig på något sätt inför mötet?

Efter.

Hur kändes mötet?
Varför kändes det bra/dåligt? Något ni kunde gjort för att motverka den känslan?
Vad fick ni ut av mötet?
Fick ni fram det ni ville ha sagt? Hur togs det emot?
Kommer det bli fler möten?

Questions before and after meetings

Before

What is the meeting about?
Who are involved?
Why do you have the meeting?
Have you met these people before?
How do you feel about the meeting?
What do you expect of the meeting?
Have you prepared in some way to the meeting?

After

How was the meeting?
Why did it feel good/bad? Could you have done anything to change that feeling?
What did you get out of the meeting?
Did you get to say what you wanted? How was it received?
Will there be more meetings?