

ASA-Kaleidoskop

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Venue: EUREF-Campus 13, Torgauer Str. 12-15, 10829 Berlin

Summary of the workshop “Changing work structures in a global sustainable economy: Co-create our future!”

by Valentina Dillenseger

During the ASA Kaleidoskop 2015 19 participants gathered to discuss working structures and conditions with the chairs Martina Knittel (Grünhof, Econauten) and Peris Wakesho (Ashoka East Africa). Starting from global trends and effects on labor we were asked to draw an icon that symbolizes the globalization of labor for us. Many of the pictures were connected to digital collaboration and new technologies. Participants perceived positive as well as negative impacts of that sphere.

The common starting point was that work and working conditions are changing. During a group working phase with one South participants' working group and two North participants' working groups there were intense discussions on the effects and challenges which globalization of work has on our own life in the context of career, personal life and workplace.

In the discussions we all focused on paid labor and left out unpaid work like child care or care for the elderly. All groups remarked the increasing mobility of persons and a tendency towards entrepreneurship of young people or at least a positive perception of it. The enhanced mobility and tendency towards short term employment leads to difficulties concerning the social life and less rootedness of the individuals. Many discussed aspects led to the conclusion that the perspective on changing working conditions is pretty similar for privileged young people in the North and the South.

However, we had different attitudes towards the term “security”. Because of social welfare systems in the North, the aspect of (financial) security plays a more important role for career choice in the South. Also the liability towards the family was considered as a point of difference between different cultural contexts. In Germany this responsibility starts mostly when having own children, whereas in African countries there furthermore exists responsibility for siblings and other relatives which therefore starts earlier. That leads also to a different prioritization of security which influences the “job selection”. For North participants the job “selection” is seen as a challenge because in the context of self determination and the wide range of professions, many find it difficult to decide on a future career. For South participants security and a steady flow of income is more important in the job selection. We also concluded that for non-privileged people the differences between working conditions in the North and South are bigger than for privileged ones. We noticed that participants from the South see a greater tendency towards young entrepreneurship whereas participants from the North perceived a trend towards more institutionalization.

In the afternoon we focused on what future leadership might look like. Disagreement existed on the goal: Do we want big companies to become more sustainable and accordingly leaders towards that

direction? Or would we rather prefer small companies who act responsibly to become the new big players and gain more power?

As a practical perspective on leadership we reflected on team roles taken during the group working phase and concluded that all the different roles are equally valuable for the team as there are movers (idea givers), supporters (who focus on practical implementation), observers (giving feedback and seeing meta level) and challengers (devil's advocate by questioning goals and showing black spots).

After evaluating different concepts of leadership, we concluded that our perfect concept of leadership would work towards less hierarchy. But in day-to-day work we still favor having a boss over a totally egalitarian or democratic concept.

We also reflected on which competencies and inner mindsets we should develop as individuals to become responsible and innovative leaders towards more sustainability. A wide range of desirable competencies and characteristics a leader should have from our point of view were brought into the discussion: These ranged from "the ability to understand the basics of physics" to "trust", "global citizenship", "respect" and "having an own set of values". Two aspects which were favored by many participants were the value of "empathy" as well as "taking time and reflecting".

Afterwards we discussed four leverage points for leadership towards more sustainability. Concerning the fields of "Law and Politics" there are diverse ideas – from settings impulses for a good work-live balance to let law not hinder entrepreneurship and good initiatives (e.g. motivate corporations to give away food for free by restricting their liability on that). One impulse was that politics should protect good initiatives on country level which would be connected to certain protectionist actions. One point, on which we agreed, was that it would be beneficial to involve all stakeholders in decision-making.

Concerning "Technology" we agreed that low tech helps to communicate and connect. Technology should be used to generate a fair and transparent access to information for all people; an attempt that has to be accompanied by education concerning that topic. We agreed that technology should serve as an interface to connect people and to support new forms of collaboration.

Concerning "Corporate Culture" we concluded that the leverage of big companies is very high and powerful if they "throw sustainable products on the market". It is desirable that companies should use their influence and competencies like advertisement power to promote sustainable products. We controversially discussed how to influence companies towards that direction. Conscious consumption was seen as the most promising way to convince companies to produce more sustainable products.

The statement of one participant led to the forth leverage point "Individual change": "At the end companies consist of people." Since a process of change takes place if people are convinced of an idea we can use our influence by changing our consumption habits and by strengthening the exchange with other countries to broaden and question our own perspective.

The essential point of the workshop was that working conditions are changing anyway. So we should concentrate on shaping that change and consider the less privileged ones.