Reinhard Mohn

A Sense of Community –
Bridging the Gap between the Individual and Society

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As a result of National Socialist influences, citizens' rights to self-realization were very limited and clearly subordinate to the interests of the state in the years prior to the Second World War. With the demise of the Third Reich and its world view, a new orientation of the citizen to the state developed. Under the influence of the Western allies, the right to self-realization became a focal point in our educational institutions thereby putting the claims of the state into a relative perspective. This new orientation within society was at first viewed critically by the population, but later willingly accepted as it promised more individual freedom and manifold personal advantages. The idea that citizens have a responsibility towards their fellow men and society – something which is taken for granted in other countries – was practically unheard of in Germany. Any attempt at community orientation was taboo. Thus the consequences of a falsely interpreted definition of community affected Germany in such a way that it actually hampered the development of community-building – something considered self-evident in a civilized society.

The aim of self-realization in those days and the conscious refusal to accept any cultural orientation towards the community created much conflict and friction in many institutions in our society. Parents were no longer able to educate their children and resigned themselves to the circumstances. Schools, burdened

with innumerable regulations, made an attempt at anti-authoritarian education. However, there was no mention in their curriculum about how to establish a sense of community. In the economy, the interests of opposing lobbies were perfected to such a degree that the quantity of rules and regulations became intolerable. Political parties fought mainly to retain their position of power without providing even minimal regulatory conditions.

The ideal of education at the time – to teach individuals to become autonomous citizens – was hampered by the fact that institutions (such as the church or the school) which impart moral and cultural orientation were called into question. However, not only rules and values were questioned – but also ways of doing things. Thus we experienced the creation of a society which was relatively liberal but without structure, in which people "elbowed" their way through, seeking their own personal advantages. Widespread self-centeredness and an ever-growing ruthless egoism affected many areas of society. Without a mutually accepted system of values, it became more and more difficult to achieve consensus about what was right and wrong and to identify with the feeling of civic duty. Issues of subsidiarity, accomplishment and responsibility were no longer discussed. An easier life and a "high risk coverage" were the promises of success upheld in the advertising slogans of the democratic decision-makers.

The unquestionably justified demand for solidarity in this century was combined with citizens expectations which were of a very personal nature. Politicians were not setting a good example in this regard. Making demands and granting requests dominated the agenda of political debate. Promises of more freedom and justice were made without anyone reflecting on the necessary limits of these demands. Issues of redistribution and financial support became the most significant and effective opportunistic ammunition for political parties' election campaigns. At the time no one thought of the inevitable bitter end of this system of politics which renounced any degree of regulatory control.

Considering the consequences of such political misguidance, the question must be raised and an answer found as to whether or not the current objectives of the population and of the state need to be examined and redefined. We cannot progress if we only find blame in past failures. It suffices to merely acknowledge the fact that the resulting situation has become intolerable. Our generation is obliged to reflect upon what has been done wrong and what we can do to remedy the situation. As a guiding principle we must accept that social regulations have to correspond to the individual's perception of himself and society as well as to his living conditions. What conclusions can be drawn from this?

When starting out anew, the most decisive factor is the right definition of targets. In pursuing the objective chosen, management and the system of regulations are the two most significant factors for success. The term "management" can be interpreted here as the suitable personal component involved and the management technique used.

Before reflecting on the choice of targets and the paths taken to achieve these goals, I would like to give a brief historical outline. Up until the middle of this century, centralistic systems of order prevailed in Europe. Acceptance, commitment and discipline were expected of citizens in relation to the state. The political legitimacy of the rulers was hardly questioned. This type of authoritarian state was accepted as a part of historical experience and therefore deemed necessary. Although in former times an appeal was made for justice and ethical behavior, the structures of power themselves were hardly called into question – as they are as a matter of course in our democratic society today.

The developments of the 20th century were tumultuous, stirring up the norms of past cultural epochs, some of which had endured for long periods of time. Completely new preconditions became essential to people's ways of thinking and living. A higher level of education led to autonomous thinking and the ability to criticize.

A much higher standard of living was made possible through the development of technology, science and the economy. This, together with the protection provided by the social security system, produced a feeling of independence and security. The significance of the state thus became less central and people began to query the legitimacy of their rulers. As the question concerning leaders' competence became increasingly urgent in the period following the two devastating wars and the major economic crises, the time had come to establish a democratic political system. This system placed its priority on the welfare and interests of its citizens and not on the traditional ideas of order and hierarchy. As the demands placed on the economy were also changing, the process of a shift in power was expedited. The consequences of this transformation are being felt at present in all spheres of society. Therefore it is not difficult to understand the question raised a few years ago by the Club of Rome, which operates on a worldwide basis, whether our world can still be securely managed in view of these completely transformed circumstances. These reflections resulted in feelings of concern and doubt! In any case, we must assume that stability and success cannot be guaranteed if we do not arrive at a system of order in our society which does justice to people's own self-perception.

Systems of social order must be upheld by the people if they are to be effective. This is especially valid in our day when it comes to peoples identification with their state or their work. In this era of global systems competition, more efficiency and in particular, more creativity is required of our society. Only a system of order with which the people can identify will enable humankind to come to terms with the future. Let nobody be mistaken: the concept of centralized, hierarchical leadership, which has been practiced for millennia, is obsolete!

Practically every institution in our society has been affected by this process of cultural transformation. Traditional customs were as much called into question as were values, dogmas and norms. In the resulting process of dismantling which took

place within the existing systems, even the value of community for the individual was questioned. There were views held which claimed that any sense of responsibility or commitment towards the state, as well as the necessity of marriage and family, should be denied or even refused. Limitless freedom, egoistical and hedonistic ideas of self-realization were promoted and tested. Thus we were faced with the duality of a collapsing system of order as well as conditions and limits for the establishment of a new order.

We recognized the necessary limits to the new freedom relatively quickly. Society strongly protested against an exaggerated lack of commitment and forming of ties. The conscious process of defining new goals and establishing patterns of behavior which correspond to a sense of community has, however, continued. After all, questions concerning cultural and moral orientation, value systems and goals are being considered to an increasing extent. Social grievances and the individual's own lack of orientation have helped speed up the process. We should now become interested in finding out which forces or initiatives could steer or accelerate the process of rejuvenation of goals and systems. In all probability, the impetus for this new order will not originate from the institutions or hierarchies which have been put into question. There are many indications that people in their daily environment will be experiencing the lack of orientation and norms to an ever increasing extent. The vacuum itself will create impulses to design new systems of order. In the everyday community life of family, school, hometown or work, new convictions and conventions can emerge. It is interesting to note that this process is working effectively in the smaller towns and communities in the U.S.

We can expect, in accordance with the original disposition of human beings, that communities essential to society will create their own sets of rules. This process will take a long time and may be weighed down with controversy and error. It should, however, represent the most probable and most convincing form of new community order to be accomplished.

In attempting to define the social order of the future, we must proceed by keeping the following experiences in mind:

1. People know that a community without order is not stable. They fear arbitrariness and lawlessness. The nature of human beings as well as their cultural experience demand a system of order which is both effective and just.

2. People seek a sense of community and are in need of it. Community imparts on the individual the feelings of joie de vivre, approval and security.

3. The refusal to form community links, an idea which has been propagated nowadays, can be explained by the new living conditions and the resulting self-perception of the individual. It is reasonable to assume, however, that the state will not be capable of replacing all of the traditional communal forms with those of equal value. It is a proven fact today that the state in its alarming presumptuousness has set goals which are unattainable. The reason, however, lies not only in the fact that these goals are not financially feasible, but rather in the fact that the state lacks competence and portrays an image of the individual which no longer corresponds to reality. However, the learning process has begun. We must find out who in a humane society is to take on responsibility for the tasks presented – and what these tasks are. This process will take many years.

4. An attempt to regain a firm system of order by returning to the rules of the "good old days" will not achieve its end. The hierarchical system of order which prevailed then no longer suits the tasks at hand today – and is not capable of development. The preconditions needed for it to be effective no longer exist.

Presently we can observe the many attempts being made to develop new forms of community and to set new goals. Whether these efforts will stand the test of time is yet to be seen. For the most part we still rely on the systems of the past, whose rules and regulations proceed from goals and sets of values now obsolete. The ability to reach a consensus and to solve problems within our society is actually hampered by these systems. The experience of the past few years has shown that the pressure exerted on society – a consequence of our failure – apparently has to be intensified if we are to be able to restructure our society.

Everything points to the fact that the cornerstone for a new order within society will be emerging from the center of our society. It is there that one is most conscious not only of the deficits that exist, but also of the ways in which people today should deal with each other. After years of experience and debate on these issues, it should be possible to develop these reflections into new norms. A more successful guideline in achieving this should prove to be the multiplicity of attempts as opposed to a general standard, binding for everyone, which has been the norm up until now. Examples of such developments exist in many different spheres of life: the attempts at a new cultural orientation in the United States, for instance, or the shaping of corporate culture in the German economy. It is astonishing to see the amount of energy which has within such a short time span emanated from these isolated examples of a new order!

The decisive premise for accomplishing such decentralized efforts for finding new orientation and a sense of community is not only based upon people's striving, but also upon the chances of fulfilling their plans. In spheres where conventional regulations are not called into question, there can be no new developments in the offing – the current system is doomed to failure. Development requires freedom for creative thought – and the opportunity to learn. People have the capacity necessary for the task – if only they were allowed to use it! This experience must become a reality which is understood in our

country if we are to regain a sense of community. We must have the courage to extend the freedom of action for the creative individual. This includes the leeway permitted for trial and error. The managerial principle of delegation of responsibility which is required here must be learned and adopted. It must be emphasized once again: there is not a need for more creative people, rather it is the insight and courage lacking to grant these people the freedom they need!

This idea is currently spreading in the business world relatively quickly due to the pressure of global competition. In other social spheres as, for example, the political arena, state administration and the enormous public service sector, such conditions for reform are rarely found. A rather grotesque situation: we have understood what needs to be done but we do not have the courage to do it! There is, however, one realistic hope: empty coffers may teach us a new way of thinking!

Having completed this fundamental assessment of the significance of community in our society, I should now like to discuss some of the important resulting manifestations and preconditions of community life.

**Developing a sense of community
in different areas of society**

The ability of the individual to integrate into the community is a premise for any well-functioning system of order. People have an innate interest in community life, even though not everyone is capable of conforming to this life. The ability to develop a sense of community must therefore arise from the recognition of its necessity and from practice. Institutions responsible for education, like the family and the school, have to again devote themselves to this task. The influence of the state as a guide is also necessary.

Community-building requires learning certain forms of behavior, rights and responsibilities concurrently. Besides being

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aware of one's own personal interests, the demands of other equally entitled citizens must be considered. Living together in observance of an ethical code necessitates a well-founded system of order. The individual has to adapt to these rules and consciously accept the fact that a certain infringement on his freedom and some personal discipline will be required of him. Characteristics such as self-control, good manners, reliability and fairness are needed. On the other hand, there is no room in community life for such traits as self-centeredness, egoism and lack of discipline. Allowance must be made for human imperfections through tolerance, forgiveness and even sanctions.

The family as community

In the history of civilization, the family has played an indispensable role as the keystone of community life. It was the family unit which secured a realm of protection for raising and educating children. It took on manifold responsibilities which we nowadays think the state can better fulfill. This development cannot yet be assessed conclusively. In the area of child education in the schools or child care in the health system for example, better services could be offered by the public sector. However, is the state also in a position to provide the affection, security, understanding and love that a child needs? Can state education dispense with the model function that parents provide? Can one effectively rely on the state with regard to the system of social security? Do we know in fact that the single's lifestyle is in the long run more satisfactory than family life?

In summary one can say that there is good reason to reflect on the significance and responsibility of the family unit as a basis for community living. Never in the history of civilization has there been an adequate alternative to the family. Although the alternatives of today promise more freedom, do they guarantee a more humane development – particularly in regard to

children? It appears that the time has come to introduce these issues into public debate. Many achievements in our society could in fact prove themselves to be errors!

In the process of shaping a community which has been described, the state also carries responsibility – for example in legal matters, and social and fiscal policies. The state can take on a supportive role, for instance, by providing financial aid or building kindergartens and the like. Such initiatives are then commendable when they are not only a result of ethical principles and political opportunism, but rather when they are financed and organized in an expert and humane manner. Thus, there are reasons why politicians should be advised not to undertake too much!

Viewed from a social perspective, it would perhaps be helpful to consider the family more in light of the supportive role it holds in society. Particularly at a time when resources are scarce and the ability of the state limited, we should take a closer look at the family and make use of the possibilities it presents, before we hand over the responsibility to the state. In this context it must also be noted that any task which is taken over by the state will reduce the family's significance, responsibility and ability to provide guidance – a counterproductive effect in my opinion!

The area of politics can and must contribute significantly through the educational system to providing a clear distinction between the demands of the individual and the responsibility of the individual towards the community. Bringing about change in education is incumbent upon the state. Only when this has been accomplished can the family adequately take a hand in educating children to develop a sense of community.

The initiative expected of the state presupposes, however, a certain orientation which is still lacking in our society today. The state cannot deal with this social shortcoming by decree of law. It can and must, however, work towards increasing public awareness of the effects of this lack of orientation. The basis for a new ethical foundation can only be established in this way –

however difficult such a task may be for our political representatives! We must admit that for a long time now the acceptable limit to personal freedom has been overstepped and that government support has become excessive. It is now up to the state to demand that citizens once again take on more duties and responsibilities. If this principle of mutual support is not implemented, the future of our society will be doomed! It is a difficult, thankless task for politicians, but perhaps the proverb "necessity is the mother of invention" will be confirmed in this case.

The state can also support the role of the family by clearly transferring the responsibility of educational guidance onto the parents. It is the state which is to blame for the pitiful condition of today's pedagogical system – the result of an anti-authoritarian and excessively liberal education. The state must now assume the consequences and build up a new system of community order – one which works. And we should not be reluctant to name the tools indispensable in education: cultural orientation, role models, social norms, a sense of community and discipline.

Partnership as a form of community

The building of partnership corresponds to given anthropological factors. The way in which this form of community is set up varies from civilization to civilization according to the different perceptions held. Equal rights in partnership – an idea supported by young people today – has been the exception historically. The great demand the principle of equal rights places upon ethical standards proved for the most part to be too difficult. Stability could not be guaranteed. Today, we may be experiencing the same thing – realizing that only a small minority is capable of a truly equal partnership.

The aims and living conditions of our society today generate the feeling in young people that the freedom they are accus-

tomed to will be preserved, even in a partnership. They then suddenly realize that community living requires discipline and a willingness to adapt, and react accordingly by refusing to accept this curtailment of their freedom. Open relationships are no longer the exception; young people are less and less willing to commit themselves to marriage.

As a result of these developments we can observe in society a lack of willingness to form bonds and high divorce rates. A peculiarity has emerged – the meanwhile socially acceptable status of the "single." We have yet to foresee the sociological consequences of this trend as well as the effects it has on the individual and on the stability of society. However, living alone may present a significant problem for mankind, whose natural disposition leans towards community living. On the other hand, the hierarchical structures of community living which were dominant in the past cannot do justice to the self-perception of our modern era, particularly that of women.

With regard to the international trend it must also be noted that in many underdeveloped cultures, people refuse to take on any responsibility in a partnership and therefore do not develop bonds. From our point of view, the effects such practices have on women and children must clearly be regarded as negative. They in no way correspond to our image of mankind and our sense of justice.

The model marriage or partnership today cannot be dictated by the state or the church. Our society first has to learn again how to deal with the new freedom it has been given and to meet the responsibilities it has towards its fellow men. Not a very easy or pleasant task! Rediscovering a form of cultural orientation would greatly facilitate the process of community-building in a partnership. This way of thinking, however, is not very widespread nowadays!

In our search for new forms of fellowship, let us be on our guard against excessive ethical demands. The forming and preserving of a partnership is based on premises which are difficult to assess. Many of the conditions present at the onset of a life

partnership change during the course of it. Sometimes, in spite of the tolerance and willingness to forgive which exists, there are relationships which cannot be upheld humanely. If two people no longer share the required minimum of common interests, it must be possible for them to dissolve their relationship. The resulting grief and the responsibilities to be considered must be regarded in the light of decency and fairness. State regulations are, in such a case, necessary.

**The contribution of schools to the ability
to develop as a community**

The exaggerated sense of community as was propagated by the National Socialists had to be corrected after the war by the educational system. We had to learn once more that the citizen is not there for the state – but rather that the state exists for the citizen! Up to the present day, this rectification has only partly been achieved. The rights of the individual were defined at that time as the right of the individual to self-realization, with no regard to the vital relationship of the individual to the community. At the same time free rights were excessively demanded and granted, which threatened to call into question the ability of the society to function properly.

This phase of individualization in society was strongly challenged by the simultaneous questioning of the traditional ethical values. And in this manner our society has lost its ability to develop as a community, and its consensus on a system of values. The educational system – and foremost, schools – must assign top priority to working on this deficit, which still has not been eliminated. We must regain our sense of civic responsibility, our ability to establish a true community, and this not merely on a theoretical basis in the classroom! Community building must be exercised on a practical level! It is imperative that teachers and parents take on a model role in this learning process.

If our democracy is to become revitalized, we now must again learn how to establish a consensus and how to take on responsibility. Every one of us must realize that democratic citizens have not only their rights, but also their civic duties.

The efficiency of learning is improved through insight and motivation. It is quite normal, however, that not all children possess such a positive attitude towards learning. In the interests of these children and the learning success of the entire class, discipline must be insisted upon once again. Parents are not able to fulfill their responsibility to raise their children if children are not able to obey. In order to ensure a concordance of the educative aims of schools and parents, schools must make sure that a real dialogue takes place between parents and schools.

The importance of the ability to build communities in the working world

In the economy, the basic premises of work have changed completely in recent decades. Work processes can no longer be centrally controlled, due to the increased complexity and need for innovation. Responsibility must be delegated and the creative potential of employees tapped.

As a result of this, executive management must learn completely new management techniques. No longer can everything be mandated with the help of rules and regulations, but rather, middle management and employees must learn to think and act in terms of the entrepreneurial aims of their company. The prerequisite for the success of the system of delegated responsibility is the conviction of all those involved that the aims and prescribed working conditions are appropriate. This means: the competitive firm of today must become a community, taking on responsibility and being creative in accordance with the aims of the company! The adaptation of all those involved to the new corporate concept is difficult and

time-consuming, however, it is inevitable if corporations are to be successful! The community spirit required presupposes that the performance of the corporation for the good of society as a whole is accepted as the highest goal, while at the same time the subordinate goals of capital, management and employee self-realization must be respected.

**The contribution of the state to the ability
of our society to form a community**

One important pedagogical aim of our state must be the realization that in addition to leadership tasks, services must be offered in accordance with the will of a democratically constituted society. It follows, then, that citizens are to be respected as "customers," and given the same courtesy expected of any service industry! The state must also learn to allow its services to be evaluated by the citizens! The sole aims of ensuring equality and law and order are no longer enough. In our day and age, the state must be efficient and capable of innovation – and able to convince its citizens of the quality of its performance. The instrument of competition is a good advisor in conjunction with the services the state provides.

These objectives demand other management techniques than the "work to rule" principle. The state must enjoin its management and employees to think independently and give them a say in matters. Without the creativity and motivation of state employees, the willingness to perform and to learn which is imperative today will never be achieved! Politicians and the administration will be faced with enormous changes in terms of management practices and the perception of their tasks. All those involved must learn to take their places in the performance-oriented society. In industry, this system of order is called ''corporate culture." In our state one could speak of a culture of state administration. Their creed could be:

> "To serve the citizen by taking on responsibility, and demonstrating performance and progress."

A prerequisite for the identification of employees with the state, necessary for any reform, is the acceptance of the goals and the means of achieving them. The state, and especially our politicians, must establish this leadership base.

In order to make the objective of my presentation clearer and more practically applicable, I have summarized the same in the following theses on the ability to develop a sense of community:

"Ten Commandments" for the ability to form a community:

1. Belonging to a community is a basic human quality. The community brings happiness, provides support and security. Individual self-realization without regard for the rights of the community is an error.

2. A well-functioning community presupposes the appropriate amount of common dispositions, views and interests. Affection can strengthen this base, however, it cannot replace it.

3. The community must allow freedom for the personal self-realization of the individual. Differences in disposition and development can be mastered through tolerance and fairness. Mutual respect and an open dialogue facilitate acceptance.

4. The capacity to form a community must be learned. Parents and teachers are just as responsible for this as are the regulations of the state. The striving for personal realization is limited by duties and the consideration for others.

5. Equal personal rights within a partnership are not called into question by different duties. A community based upon equal rights requires a large amount of understanding and common consent.

6. There is no adequate substitute for the family unit for the development of a child. The current striving for individual independence does not take into consideration the consequences children are forced to suffer as a result.

7. The rules of behavior for living together in a community are determined by tradition, human nature, and the existential premises of the times. Common convictions and a respect for certain norms facilitate living together. The community must enforce the rules it sets for itself.

8. Intrinsic motivation, arising from a sense of identification with something, is more valuable with respect to success and the ability to develop as a community than obedience. Nevertheless, we cannot do without discipline! The examples set by parents and authority figures should ease the implementation of orders.

9. Honesty and dependability are the basis for trust and sustain the stability of a community. The knowledge of human fallibility makes it easier to understand and to forgive.

10. Communities pursue goals which have been set by themselves. The times can change or annul them. A community has not failed when it faces the consequences of the past.

Conclusion:

The re-establishment of a sense of community in our society is the most important precondition for securing a positive future. In order to tackle the task, a cultural orientation must be re-claimed.

We are all obliged to assist in developing the rights and responsibilities guaranteed in a democracy so that people can once again come to terms with each other. In the crisis we are experiencing at present concerning values and ways of life, the rejuvenation of community life must emerge from the center of society. We have the freedom to act! We must use it!

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