

# **A contribution to the concept of dialogue in Scandinavian organizational action research - dialogue as multiple tensionality**

**Jørgen Bloch-Poulsen, December, 2010**

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List of abbreviations:

AAU:	Aalborg University
B&O:	Bang & Olufsen
CEO:	Chief Executive Officer
CSC:	Computer Sciences Corporation
CSMS:	Citizens Service, Municipality of Silkeborg
DHTM:	Dialogic Helicopter Team Meeting
DSI:	Danfoss Solar Inverters
EDIT:	Employee Driven Innovation in Teams
R&D:	Research & development
TAM:	Team Action Meeting
VP:	Vice President
WRI:	Work Research Institute, Oslo.

## Introduction

My thesis is made of 8 papers or texts. This is paper no 8 which consists of three parts.

In part I I will show the coherence between the texts in order to demonstrate that it is reasonable to talk about them as one thesis.

In part II you will find a presentation of the contribution to a theory about dialogue in organizational action research that I have been part of in the projects described in the first seven papers. To some degree this contribution will be specified and elaborated on in this eighth paper.

Part III will give a critical discussion of the relation between this concept of dialogue and the Habermas-inspired concept behind a dominant part of Scandinavian action research. Besides, it will present a critique of the relevance in organizational settings of the dialogic philosophies of Buber, Bohm, and Gadamer that have inspired papers 1-7.

The first seven papers, among them one book, are:

1. Kristiansen, M. & Bloch-Poulsen, J. (2008). Working with "not knowing" amid power dynamics among managers: From faultfinding and exclusion towards co-learning and inclusion. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Action Research: Participative inquiry and practice* (pp. 463-472). London, Sage.
2. Kristiansen, M. & Bloch-Poulsen, J. (2005). Midwifery and dialogue in organizations. Emergent, mutual involvement in action research. München: Rainer Hampp Verlag.
3. Kristiansen, M. & Bloch-Poulsen, J. (2004). Self-referentiality as a power mechanism. Towards dialogic action research. *Action Research*, 2 (4), 371-388.
4. The Third and the holo movement – a text on Bohm's dialogue concept, not included as expected in text 2 when peer-reviewed.
5. Kristiansen, M. & Bloch-Poulsen, J. (2006). Involvement as a Dilemma. Between Dialogue and Discussion in Team Based Organizations. *International Journal of Action Research*, 2,2, 163-197.
6. Kristiansen, M. & Bloch-Poulsen, J. (2010, in press). Employee Driven Innovation in Team (EDIT) - innovative potential, dialogue, and dissensus. *International Journal of Action Research*.

7. Kristiansen, M. & Bloch-Poulsen, J. (2011, under peer-review). Dialogic Helicopter Team Meetings (DHTM) - a vehicle of Employee Driven Innovation in Teams (EDIT)? (The paper is planned to be part of an anthology of Employee driven innovation to be published at Palgrave Macmillan).

In a summary of the development of action research in Scandinavia, Elsborg (2006), writing about the development in Denmark, characterizes my contribution as "Management Research." I disagree with this label for empirical as well as logical reasons. The author refers to paper no 3 which describes the development of a leadership-programme initiated by a decision made by all employees and managers in the R&D department at Bang & Olufsen. As such it had nothing to do with management. Besides, I think it would be logically impossible to talk about management research within action research as it would be contradictory to the principle of involvement or participation, because management as different from leadership is not characterized by involvement or participation.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, I have chosen the concept organizational action research in order to stress the place, i.e., that it takes place in an organizational frame work as opposed to, e.g., community action research. And dialogic organizational action research in order to underline its specific character as I will unfold in the following pages.

Initially I would like to presuppose that organizational action research, be it in private or public organizations, ought to have as its purpose to present results or knowledge productions at three levels:

- First order results refer to specific improvements in the work life of the participating organizational members, i.e., product or process improvements in the organizing of their work. Examples might be a back up model in The Citizens Service in the Municipality of Silkeborg (CSMS) (text 6), a new estimation process in Computer Sciences Corporation (CSC) (text 7), a model for cross departmental ad hoc review meetings at Danfoss Solar Inverters (DSI) (text 6), and the like.
- Second order results are improvements in the ways you organize processes and discourses in order to facilitate the creation of first order results. Examples of these improvements in ways of organizing and methods could be dialogic helicopter team meetings (text 6 and 7), a new organizational discourse (Pålshaugen, 1998), the establishment of a bohmian dialogue as arena for double loop learning (Isaacs, 1999), etc.
- Third order results are new concepts improving the theoretical understanding of second order results and their relation to first order results, i.e., conceptual or theoretical improvements. They might be the understanding of dialogic competencies as three dimensional (text 2), of employee driven innovation as defined also by improved work life quality (text 6 and 7), etc.

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<sup>1</sup> In this way I do not understand, why the new centre of Action Research in Bristol (ARCIO, Action Research and Critical Inquiry in Organizations) can talk about "management research in Action Research and critical inquiry" for more that university-tactical reasons.

In a newly published article in *Action Research*, Maurer & Githens (2010) characterize my contribution as “dialogic action research”. I agree although my understanding of dialogue differs from their interpretation of my work. As I will come back to in part IV, their interpretation seems to be that my inspiration from Bohm and Gadamer implies a focus on results of second order, i.e., on new interpretations more than specific improvements for the participants (first order) and scientific knowledge (third order). They make a deliberately fluid distinction between conventional, dialogic, and critical action research. In what follows, I will show how our dialogic action research has much in common with the conventional as well as with the critical tendency.

A practical comment: The participating organizational members will on the following pages be denoted as “participant”, “the other”, “the other professional”, etc. All names used are pseudonyms.

## I. Purpose and internal coherence

The thesis as a whole is conceptualized as a presentation of a contribution to a theory about dialogue in organizational action research. The overall purpose of this synthesizing text (8) is to show how dialogue can be understood as a meeting between humans in a multi-tensional conversation with a special quality characterized by share, dare, and care (text 2) in an organizational context. Dialogue, as I understand it, is not a specific type of conversation differing from discussion, as Bohm (1996) proposed, or from negotiation, mediation etc. It is a quality of a moment (Cissna & Anderson, 1994) or a sequence (text 2) in a diversity of conversations. Pearce & Pearce (2004) distinguish between an understanding of dialogue as a noun or as an adjective/adverb (p. 44f.) where I see myself as part of the last category. Accordingly, it would be more precise to talk about behaving dialogically or participating in a conversation with a dialogic quality. Nevertheless, in the following pages I hope to be forgiven when talking about a dialogue – denoting an adjective or adverb.

In this connection I focus on if, to which degree and eventually how, and with which tensions, a dialogue can unfold between participants and actions researchers about the goal or direction, the design, the validation of results as well as the communication of results of an action research process (part II). Similarly, I would like to show how the dialogue between praxis and dialogue theories is in itself marked by tensions. Thus I see Buber, Bohm, and Gadamer as sources of inspiration in practical actions research, as well as an ideological dead end, as the interpretation of their philosophies might induce an exaggerated confidence in the potential of dialogues in organizational settings, like e.g., a belief in I-Thou-relations (Buber), the transcendence of differences – including differences in interests – in the holo-movement (Bohm), etc., in an organization (part III,1).

In order not to expand the frame work unnecessarily, I will compare this contribution to a dialogue theory with a dominant tendency within Scandinavian action research only, i.e., the Work Research Institute (WRI) in Oslo. Here, the dialogue concept seems to have been the focus of only a few independent works. In my interpretation, their dialogue concept seems to have evolved from the practical endeavors with the so called democratic dialogue conferences inspired partly by an ordinary understanding of dialogue and partly by Habermas' concept of dialogue (III,2).

The thesis represents a rather long learning journey including three action research projects within a period of 15 years. The three projects have been carried through in collaboration with my partner, ass. professor, ph.d. Marianne Kristiansen, Department of Communication, Aalborg University, DK.

### 1. The B&O-project: Bang & Olufsen, 1995-1999 – a mentor project

The first project, represented by texts 1-4, took place in a private enterprise, namely in the R&D-department of Bang & Olufsen, Struer, DK during the period 1995-1999. In the process, the purpose was eventually formulated as strengthening the President of

Technology, the Vice President of Projects, his senior projects manager and their technology and project managers as mentors. The mentor function was understood as a supplement to their roles as project managers and/or as professional managers within specific fields of expertise. Apart from these 25 managers, approximately 100 employees participated in different activities in the project.

The background of the co-operation with the R&D-department was an organizational development project lasting several years which I had conducted as a consultant in the production department at B&O through my firm, Dialog ([www.dialog-mj.dk](http://www.dialog-mj.dk)) in the first part of the 1990's. My contribution to this so called Break Point, the purpose of which was to get B&O back on track, was to conduct a process for all the foremen. The hierarchical level between them and the plant managers, the senior managers, had been abolished at the beginning of the Break Point project. The purpose of the process for the foremen was to upgrade them to production managers substituting the senior managers as well as contributing to an increase in productivity and a decrease in stress level (Bloch-Poulsen, 1993).

At that time, I had just finished an unauthorized education as a psychoanalyst so in an essentialist and psychoanalytic way I reckoned that every person, including the foremen, had some unused resources because of their personal and social background. I imagined myself as the midwife of these potential resources. Metaphorically speaking, I saw grownups as one-legged on their jobs, too, which seemed to me stressful as well as unproductive. I was the midwife of the other leg, so to speak. The other leg of the foremen was what we today would call their potential as coaches (the concept of coach did not exist at that time, so to speak). In this way, I tried through the training sessions to enabling them to act as midwives in relation to the unused resources of their employees. As such the foremen as production managers should be able to choose between giving instructions, setting the frame work and the direction, and acting in the role of a sparring partner or a co-inquiring coach, in order to bridge the gap between management and leadership, as opposed to their job as foremen where they acted in the management role almost exclusively, occupied with planning, steering, and control.

In that period I understood knowledge production not as co-production but as extraction of already existing potential knowledge. This might be seen as an individualistic pendant to Gadamer's philosophical understanding of cognition as re-cognition (cf. III,1,3). At that time it also reflected my inspiration from – or perhaps identification with - Buber's teleological dialogue concept according to which a dialogue also contributes to letting the other unfolding himself with his capabilities and resources as he was intended to (by God). These considerations will be problematized in the third part of this text, as mentioned. This goes for my understanding then of the manager or the consultant and later the action researcher, too, as a midwife who, allegedly helpful, exactly as such exercises power over (Göhler, 2009) the employees as well as the participants in the development or action research project.

At an early phase in the project we came across Bohm's distinction between dialogue and discussion or debate (text 4). Dialogue conceptualized as co-inquiry as in the B&O-project, co-inquiry between a manager and his team, between managers as colleagues, or between them and us. And not only co-inquiry but co-decision if possible as I would like



to add. While discussion or debate is seen as the manager trying to convince, give advice or instruction based on his already made decision. In the third part I will argue why this distinction is more properly enacted between conversations with a dialogic quality vs. those without that we characterize as self-referential. In my interpretation Bohm is being seduced by his etymological interest to give the concept of discussion a pejorative or derogative connotation. For the time being I will use his distinction, with my addition of trying to make a co-decision.

Today, I guess it is commonplace that a manager can act in a dialogic as well as in a discussing way. Nearly 20 years ago, it was like a cultural revolution that a foreman in a Danish industrial plant could behave dialogically as you will see from the following sequence from a conversation between one of the foremen, Holger, the plant manager, Jens, and me – told in accordance with my memory:

Holger: Prior to this project, employees called me at 6 o'clock if they were ill so I could arrange for substitutes before 7 o'clock when we started. At 7 o'clock sharp, I told people what to do: 'I want you to fix ... and when you have closed the job, come back, and I'll tell you what to do next'. 'And your job is ...' I called it delegating.

Jørgen: Yeah, I'm sorry I named it instruction.

Holger: I remember, I was pissed off, because of that. Today, the teams take care of substitutes themselves if people are absent. I can see on the screen who are present. They organize their work flow and work division themselves. If you'd asked me before this project, Jens, how many televisions we'd produced, I would have known exactly. Today, I have to check the computer.

Jens: Yeah, that's why I don't ask you, I check it myself.

Holger: And I must admit, there has been a tremendous increase in productivity. My wife tells me I'm less stressed. I remember when we started and you, Jørgen, claimed that the employees probably had some ideas of improvements even better than the foremen's and that they perhaps didn't need all our advice, I thought: 'Oh, my God. He is really airy-fairy.' But time showed otherwise. Some of their suggestions were actually better than mine. Sometimes they don't need my advice but rather a good question when they ask me. It certainly is a new role as manager.

As the project succeeded measured by the initial expectations, the R&D-department asked if we could co-operate about some of their problems, especially caused by the fact that too many employees left the software department. At that time in 1995, we did not have a concept of dialogue or of actions research. Accordingly, we characterized the process as a researcher-training-programme, i.e., a combination of research and training. Marianne entered the project in an early stage as researcher. She was paid by Aalborg University, while I was being paid by B&O as a consultant.

In reality our function was the same. Independently, we had reached a similar idea or hypothesis based in different projects. We thought it should be possible in co-operation with managers and employees to single out these moments or sequences in conversations between them where new knowledge was produced, i.e., where the employees gave birth to new recognition or where their hitherto unused resources were put into function. Accordingly, the whole process was being videotaped as we were on the lookout for what we metaphorically called gold indicators (Kristiansen & Bloch-Poulsen, 1996, 1998).

The inference was that it would be possible to train the managers to create such birth or delivery situations in order to give life to unused employee resources. This way you might create product development through personal development and vice versa as the President of projects called it.

During the process we coined the word gold-digger for the mentor manager. As one can see in text 2, this concept was criticized by the participating managers as co-researchers because gold as a metallurgic metaphor seems unable to think or be involved as an agent in practice. As such the managers contributed with third order results.

Our cognition interest was in harmony with the goal all the employees in the R&D-department had formulated in a Future Lab Workshop (Jungk & Müllert, 1981) that I conducted for them and the management. Accordingly, the managers were to improve as personal managers hopefully reducing the number of resignations in the software department. As mentioned in text 2, it was rather difficult for us as consultants and top managers to involve the employees in formulating the objective and design.

Using a concept we developed en route, the managers were to train or unfold their dialogic competences (text 2; Kristiansen & Bloch-Poulsen, 2004). Besides, we developed an understanding of dialogues as a special quality in a conversation characterized by share, dare, and care; a comprehension of the space and rhythm of dialogue as a caring container; a concept of the action research process as a dialogue process we called emergent, mutual involvement; an understanding of the challenges for a dialogue when confronted with what we termed social concrete blocks, i.e., quasi-material, frozen basic assumptions, as well as the mental or intellectual barriers – organizational and individual, theirs and ours – for opening up and reflecting on one's own apriori categories and apriori ways of relating, that we named selfreferentiality (text 3).

Ideas and results from this project have later been used in training and development processes for managers and employees at CSC, Danfoss, The Danish Railways, Lego, The Danish Defense, The Municipality of Gladsaxe, Vestas, Århus University, some city courts, etc. I have used them as well in my teaching of graduate students at The Communication Studies at Aalborg University where I was a senior external lecturer until 2006 and at the Masters programme in Mediation or Conflict Resolution at the Department of Law, Copenhagen University where I have been a senior external lecturer since 2005. They have furthermore been part of and refined in the following projects:

2. The AAU-project: AAU-Innovation and The Faculty of Engineering and Science 2005-2008 – a project on dilemmas in co-management

The second project, represented by text 5, took place in a public institution in Aalborg, DK. It was two co-operating administrative units at Aalborg University (AAU) with a shared management: the central department, AAU-Innovation with a Network Centre, a Patent- and Contracting Unit, a Fundraising and Project Management Office, and Supporting Entrepreneurship at Aalborg Universitet, and The Faculty of Engineering and Science with the Education Team, Service Team, Information Team, Economy &

Personal Team, and the Management Secretariat. These units expanded from 2 managers and app. 50 employees, office staff as well as academic personal, when we started in 2004/2005 to 5 managers and app. 110 employees when we terminated the project in 2008. The project was financed twice by a national fund: The Centre for Development of Human Resources and Quality Management (In Danish: SCKK) as an action research project. The first part took place in 2004-2006 under the title: “Values in a growing organization.” As stated in the application in 2004 by management and employees, the purpose was to:

... develop a coherent system for value based management founded on one hand on motivating, engaging, and development oriented working conditions for the employees through a flat organization with self managerial teams where employees are actually involved and responsible, and on the other hand an efficient job performance constantly innovative and flexible in relation to continuous demands for re-arrangement and adjustment to organizational growth ...

Our contribution was an action research process titled: “Competence development and knowledge sharing in teams – improved job performance, communication and learning.” Our continued co-operation in 2007-2008 was also financed by The Centre for Development of Human Resources and Quality Management with the title: “Innovation through organizational coaching and creative meetings – on the job learning.”

Analytically, you could say that the B&O-project focused on the mentor-dimension of management where - through, e.g., coaching - the mentor is sensibly oriented towards the long term personal and professional interests of the employee in line with the organizational strategy and not just on short term employee performance which typically is the attention of the project manager. As such the core of the project was the possibility for dialogues between management and employees as well as what you today would call managerial coaching as a leadership dimension.

The AAU-project focused to a higher degree on collegiate coaching. To which level would the employees be able to help each other with their job performance, improved co-operation, balancing expectations, etc.? This attention brought the team organization as such on the agenda: what kind of dilemmas and tensions do you face when working in teams called self or co-managing? Presumably, collegiate coaching has always taken place but what does it mean that it unfolds in an organizational context where the team had taken over some managerial responsibilities? Was it possible for a team to refuse to participate in the action research project based on the argument that they were self managerial? To which degree are dialogues possible in the complex hierarchies that a team constitutes (cf. Bloch-Poulsen, 2006)?

In this project we used the concept of modern dilemmas to designate an important element in understanding dialogues in organizations where some managerial responsibilities are placed in the team in such a way that the traditional dilemmas in the relation between management and employees were supplemented with team internal managerial dilemmas between employees. This conceptualization was later used in the third action research project as well as in a string of development projects in a trade

union for public office workers (FOA), in training high school teachers in Copenhagen, etc.

3. The EDIT-project: Danfoss Solar Inverters (DSI), Computer Sciences Corporation (CSC), and Citizens Service, The Municipality of Silkeborg (CSMS) 2008-2009 – a project on Employee Driven Innovation in Team (EDIT)

18 teams from two private and one public organization participated in the third project. They worked at Danfoss Solar Inverters in Sønderborg, DK (DSI), Computer Sciences Corporation in Copenhagen, DK (CSC), and Citizens Service, the Municipality of Silkeborg, DK (CSMS). The project lasted two years, 2008-2009. Approximately 65 employees, most of them engineers, technicians, and sales personal at DSI, app. 40 employees from CSC, and about 70 office workers from CSMS were involved. The project is represented by text 6 and 7. It was financed by the Danish Agency for Science, Innovation and Technology, the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation and Ernst B. Sund's fond. The EDIT-project was based upon learning from the ideas and results of the first project about unused resources and about team and team dilemmas from the second. Among these ideas was a more relations oriented and more democratic approach. In this way the projects as a whole constitute meta-workplace learning and can be read accordingly.

The process in the B&O-project focused on managerial coaching in order to create useful conversational spaces for managers and employees on a daily basis as well as in employee appraisal interviews. The focus was less on dialogues among managers.

The process in the AAU-project prioritized collegiate coaching creating productive conversational spaces in and between the teams as well – again to a lesser degree – as on dialogues in the teams.

The process in the EDIT-project centered on dialogues in the teams where the team manager as a rule partakes. It seems as if this altered focus changed my understanding of dialogue and knowledge production, too. Less light was shed on the development of individual team member's dialogic competences and more attention was paid to communicative patterns in teams that might constraint or facilitate EDIT. The idea of the slumbering resources of the single team member was enlarged with on understanding of the innovative potential in the team. It might still be unused ideas perhaps formerly refused by some manager in the memory of the team member, but also – and especially – it might be co-production of knowledge, i.e., co-creation of ideas popping up right there in the conversation itself.

Thus, the perspective was changed from past to present, so to speak; from parts of the luggage of the individual employee's work place experience to here-and-now. In this way, the concept of emergence unfolded its meaning as we reflected on the conditions for a team co-producing new ideas for an improved work routine when they - metaphorically speaking - collaboratively put their brains in the container.

This more relational and collaborative understanding of dialogue as a possibility for socially creating new knowledge and not just liberate already existing, potential individual knowledge was founded in a less rigid and self-referential refusal of social constructivism and social constructionism than we had delivered in an earlier phase (Kristiansen & Bloch-Poulsen, 1997; Bloch-Poulsen, 2010, unpublished manus) but also in inspiration from theories conceptualizing innovation as a social process more than the unfolding of the especially creatively gifted individual (Lundvall, 1988). My former more psychoanalytically oriented, individual-essentialist concept of resource dialogued with a more social and relations oriented concept focusing on in-between-here-and-know as a locus of knowledge production, too.

Results of different order were produced in this process. First order results, i.e., specific innovations, comprising a model for co-production of experience and learning in the transition between projects at DSI (Clemmensen, Kristiansen & Bloch-Poulsen, 2009); a backup model for improved citizens service, competence development, and work climate in CSMS (text 6); a model for cross functional ad hoc review meetings at DSI (tekst 6, Kristiansen & Bloch-Poulsen, 2009); a model for project estimation at CSC (text 7), etc.

Second order results, i.e., processes that might facilitate first order results, included Dialogic Helicopter Team Meetings (DHTM) as a supplement – close to yet separated from – TAM-meetings, i.e., Team Action Meetings where you follow up on day to day business (tekst 6; 7; Kristiansen & Bloch-Poulsen, 2009) as well as organizing these meetings in ways that open up for all voices and legitimizes criticism.

Finally, third order results, i.e., concepts which improve our comprehension of second order results and their impact on first order results, especially what we called dissensus approach including dissensus organizing and dissensus sensibility. The inference is that dialogues where you are not keen on a dissensus approach probably won't result in EDIT.<sup>2</sup>

Among other third order results I would like to draw the attention to is the appreciation of the participants as professionals like us usually from another field of expertise; the idea of employee driven innovation as three dimensional including surplus value for the organization, a smarter work organizing, as well as improved work life quality. Here, we try to adhere to an independent employee perspective in order til prevent innovation deteriorating into a new taylorisme based on alleged self management (tekst 7; Barker, 1999).

These concepts, developed in the third project, have been presented in workshops and lectures at Aalborg Technical High School (Act2Learn), University of Southern Denmark, Roskilde University, and Silkeborg Technical College.

In this way, the threads between the projects have been knitted together. I have always been occupied with how conversations – that we en route came to characterize as midwife or coach conversations and dialogues – might create new knowledge. How this new knowledge in some tailor made form can be actionable for the participants as

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<sup>2</sup> Having finished text 6 and 7, I found that Kvale (2006), too, talks about "dissensus research" within the qualitative research interview.

professionals, and how it can be of use for me and through me for others in projects to come. How the relation between them as professionals within specific fields of expertise and me as a professional action researcher can be grasped. Questions about the impact of contexts on the possibility for dialogues were raised with increased strength (Bloch-Poulsen, 2006). They led us to introduce the concept of interpersonal organizational communication (IPOC) in text 2 as different from the concept of interpersonal communication (IPC) that we have co-coined formerly and which was dominant at the Communication Studies at Aalborg University where we also worked.

In what follows, I intend to give a thorough and more self critical presentation of our contribution to a dialogue theory. Simultaneously, I would like to discuss my doubts as to the usability of philosophically based dialogue theories in organizational contexts.

For your information, I will underline, that text 1,2,3,5,6 have been peer-reviewed; that text 4 was cut off in the process of peer-reviewing text 2 but used here for reasons I will address in part III; and that text 7 is under peer-review.

Finally, I would like to mention that Marianne Kristiansen have signed a declaration of co-authorship for texts 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, and 7.

## II. Dimensions in the concept of dialogue

### 1. The how and who of dialogue

In this part, it is my intention to give a survey of the dimensions of the forum, arena or space for different knowledge productions that we denote a dialogic space. In text 2 we have demonstrated how a caring container might be grasped as a combination of this space and a dialogic rhythm. In a dominant tendency within Scandinavian action research carried out by the Work Research Institute (WRI) in Oslo, action research is understood as creating organizational changes through changing discourses as Pålshaugen (1998) writes in his thesis:

The action research strategy therefore aims at reorganizing the established pattern of communication in the enterprise by organizing new forms of discussions and talks – dialogues – between people and groups who normally do not enter into such dialogues with each other within the traditional organizational form of the enterprise’s discourse. Action research that is pursued with this aim in mind, we regard as a contribution to the reorganizing of enterprises through the re-organisation of discourses (1998, p. 22).

Roughly speaking, this is unfolded in three steps, the foundation phase, the project development phase and the institutionalization phase (p. 23). The first of these is also called a dialogue conference intending to result in a ”development organization.” The dialogue conference is a series of dialogues characterized primarily by their subject and participants:

... it may be said that the framework of a dialogue conference is formed by *what* is discussed and by *who is doing the discussion* (p. 30).

Here, to a certain degree, dialogues might be defined through the issues, i.e., the development oriented perspective, and by the participants, i.e., people who usually do not convene.

I do agree with the intention of dialogues addressing issues which are not talked about on a daily basis as, e.g., how to improve work routines; how to cope with unnecessarily constraining power mechanisms; successes or what. I am in line with the idea of gathering people cross departmentally if you want to set up a development organization where it is possible to do back stage reflection (Eikeland, 2006). That was one of the unintended results at DSI in the third project, by the way (text 6).

To me, the first criterion seems critical but not sufficient defining a dialogue while the second criterion seems contingent. Thus the dialogues we tried to facilitate in all the three projects took place among people who talked with each other on a daily basis.

In my understanding, a dialogue (cf. text 2) is a special quality of moments in or sequences of a conversation characterized by share, dare, and care in a meeting between humans. This human meeting is more than a meeting between arguments and an exchange of point of views. It is a space and rhythm where you develop due to the

quality of the relation you have created; where you can speak your doubts; show your vulnerability, your not-knowing (text 1), values, emotions, etc.

If it is a dialogue in a team, including the team managers, share means that no direct decision is made in advance by the manager (or by the employees) and that the parties can inquire into the subject at stake based on their work experience: how could we, e.g., reduce the possibility of repeating the same failures in the new project we are about to initiate, i.e., how can we make sure our learning from the project we are about to terminate will not be lost? And, maybe they might reach a shared decision about a new model in the period of transition they can test and develop as a shared endeavor (Clemmensen, Kristiansen & Bloch-Poulsen, 2009). This is an example of collaborative workplace learning.

Dare implies that everyone is ready to run the risk of being more clever, e.g., by having to question not only the basic assumptions of those of the other team member's but one's own, too, as it happened to us in the conversation indicated in text 7 with the project management at DSI where we had to quit our original project design.

Care means you treat every point of view with respect inquiring into them with open questions no matter how much they might deviate from your own. It is about showing consideration for the other (Cissna & Anderson, 1994).

In the following paragraph, I intend to compare this initial understanding of dialogue from the first project with Plato's dialogue usually seen as part of the cradle of Western culture.

## 2. Socratic dialogue?

It would be outside the frame work as well as my competence to give a qualified presentation of the concept of dialogue in the way it is conceptualized and practiced in the works of Plato.

That Socrates understands himself as an intellectual pendant to his mother who works as a midwife or *majeutic* is fairly clear as you can see from the dialogue, *Theaetetus*:

...I have, in common with midwives, the following characteristic: I'm unproductive of wisdom ... God compels me to be a midwife, but has prevented me from giving birth. So I'm not at all wise myself, and there hasn't been any discovery of that kind born to me at the offspring of my mind. But not so with those who associate with me. At first some of them seem quite incapable of learning; but, as our association advances, all those to whom God grants it make progress to an extraordinary extent ... And it's clear that they do so, not because they have ever learned anything from me, but because they have themselves discovered many admirable things in themselves, and given birth to them.

Still, for the delivery it's God, and I myself, who are responsible (150d).



Reading some of Plato's so called dialogues I have often wondered about the huge amount of leading questions posed by Socrates. Here is an accidental example from Hippias Major:

Then weren't you able to persuade the young men in Sparta that if they studied with you they would make more progress in virtue than if they stayed with their own teachers? (Hippias Major, 283e).

The question does not check Socrates' idea. In my interpretation it tries to persuade the interlocutor to accept the perspective of the asking Socrates. To me, as to Bohm (1996), and Isaacs (1999), dialogue is characterized by a shared inquiry with open questions, i.e., what they call productive advocacy as opposed to leading questions belonging to discussion or persuasion. Isaacs use the concept unproductive advocacy from Kantor to denote this approach as it is not knowledge producing for the person who asks. I am not an expert in Plato. Instead I will present the judgment from an expert, the former professor in philosophy at Copenhagen University, Karsten Friis Johansen about Plato's dialogues in general based upon his doctoral thesis from 1964 on Plato' Parmenides:

This is not the important point for Socrates, one might add. Here too, the main point is to use so many examples that the interlocutor is convinced ... We have seen how he [Plato] is satisfied when the interlocutor accepts the argument ... in fact, that goes for every platonic dialogue: its purpose seems to be to convince one or more persons based in their own presuppositions, no matter if the dialogue is polemic or didactic ... (1964, p. 53, 55, 68f., my translation).

Although an argumentum ad autoritatem, I guess it is fair to assume that Socrates is not conducting or participating in a dialogue according to the concept we have developed based among others in Bohm. He participates as a discussant trying to convince, although Friis Johansen claims that the persuasion has nothing to do with Socrates as a winner of the conversation but is a dimension of the conversation itself (1964, p. 71).

The purpose for me, bringing this unscientific excursion, has been to draw attention to a tensionality that have marked the concept of dialogue since Plato, i.e., the tension between shared inquiry and persuasion that Bohm tried to keep apart as two different types of conversation. Dialogue as inquiry, discussion or debate as persuasion.

### 3. The what, who, why, and how of dialogue

As mentioned, in my opinion it is not sufficient to define dialogue by its subject and participants. Nevertheless, I intend to use these dimensions as a preliminary demarcation. As far as I can see, every action researcher working in and with organizations is confronted with the following questions about subjects and participants/decision makers, among others:

Who participates in dialogues on and decide about:

- the goal/direction/agenda/action research questions? (3.1)

- the design of the action research process? (3.2)
- the validation of the results? (3.3)
- the action research communication? (3.4)

Or: to which degree can or should the others or the participants be involved in dialogues about these issues? What does the prefix ‘co’ denote when talking about co-production, co-creation, etc.? In practice these questions are inseparable. In the following I address them apart, analytically.

### 3.1. Goal/direction/agenda/action research questions – co-production?

It is fairly complicated to negotiate who is going to partake in a dialogue about the purpose or direction of an action research project, the agenda of its meetings, the research questions, etc. It is a question of ownership, too: Is it the project of the organization? A management project trying to profile the organization as indicated by some employees as a fear when we started the project at CSMS? Is it our project as action researcher, having action research *with* as our espoused value and research *on* as our practice, (mis)using the participants for our academic promotion or profile? A shared project for managers, employees, and action researchers with a common goal? Or a shared project with different, yet compatible goals that we try to meet collaboratively and/or individually? As I hope will become clear in the following, today I tend to understand ‘co’ as an umbrella covering a diversity of meanings.

In a series of organizational development projects I have conducted as a consultant, management typically designated the goals. In Bohm’s conceptual frame work they were up for discussion only. Afterwards, the employees and management design the means. A management might, e.g., have decided which areas of responsibility the teams were to take over in a period of, say a year or two. According to that, the teams and their managers decides in dialogues how they could handle the takeover, in which sequence, based on which type of competence development, etc. (Bisgaard & Bloch-Poulsen, 2002; Bloch-Poulsen, 2006).

#### 3.1.1. The B&O-project: a rather late employee involvement

Initially, it is beneficial with a distinction between goal and purpose or direction. Goal means that is it in principle measurable whether we have fulfilled our project; purpose or direction denotes a process where the results are not reasonably measurable and where the course are to be adjusted in the process. Broadly speaking, the difference refers to divergent tendencies within organizational development approaches: a strategic with goals and an emergent with purpose and direction.

In the B&O-project the goal was originally decided by top management as a reduction in the amount of employees leaving the software department. In practice, this goal did not play a role as it was superposed by a purpose expressed by the top management, too, in this way: ‘We are world class as to products and product development, not as to personal

development. We have to do something about that co-operating with some external consultant' (me, among them). The first goal could have been measured as a percentage within a given period whereas the second was a purpose to be adjusted along the road.

The first goal-oriented approach is situated within a theory about the possibility of planned organizational development processes. The second – purpose or direction oriented – within an emergent approach also characterizing their own work in the R&D-department. They were used to start without a clear cut goal adjusting the process continuously.

As mentioned, top management and consultants tried to sketch a design of a process raising personal development to the level of their product and product development. This endeavor failed (text 2) not because basically it was emergent, but because we as top management and consultants were unable to transform the direction into a meaningful process.

It was not until all employees were involved in a Future Lab Workshop that, collaboratively, we succeeded formulating a purpose called product development through employee development and vice versa. The first phase was to be a combined research- and training process for all managers, a process that we today would call an action research process. The purpose of the organization was co-created by all managers and employees according to which all managers were supposed to be trained as mentors. Our purpose as consultants or rather as action researchers was to inquire into what it takes to facilitate knowledge production in mentor conversations. Thus we had separate but compatible purposes enabling us to pull together. We had been involved in the process resulting in the mentor purpose. They had not been involved in the same way in setting up our purpose of knowledge production but the immediately agreed it was in line with theirs when we presented it.

In practice, this implied a different prioritizing of the work creating first, second and third order results. It meant differences between them and us working with the design of the process (3.2), validating the results (3.3), and communicating the results (3.4.).

### 3.1.2. The AAU-project: early involvement of the employees

You will find the purpose of the first part of the second project at Aalborg University on p. 11 as stated by management and employees. This project on collegiate supervision or coaching in parts of the administration eventually came to focus on the dilemmas of co-management.

The purpose of the second part of the second project was decided by the project management group in the beginning of 2008 (at a meeting on 24.01.80) as follows:

Innovation, creativity, and learning on the following dimensions:

- improved job performance
- better work climate

- enhanced service
- and personal development in relation to these three dimensions.

The employees were involved from the beginning as they were used to in projects prior to our co-operation. In this project it is more precise to talk about a purpose or direction, too.

Our purpose was based on an enlargement of the results from the B&O project. In 1990's we had observed a series of tensional communicative patterns in teams in development projects at B&O, Lego, Danfoss, Nordea, the Danish Railways, the Counties of Northern and Southern Jutland, the Municipality of Græsted-Gilleleje, as well as in trade unions for nurses (DSR) and office workers (HK):

Enthusiasm was decaying into shifting issues; analytically giftedness turning into critical criticism; wealth of diversity deteriorating into polarization; result orientation falling into exclusive detail focusing, etc. It was our presupposition that the last mentioned unproductive aspects of these team communicative patterns could be tackled, i.e., turned the other way around into their productive aspect, e.g., shifting of issues into enthusiasm, etc. The condition for this turnaround was that we would be successful co-operating with the teams in developing what we, in an initial working paper from 2006, called communicative team competences and competences of organizing.

We imagined the team competences consisted of dialogic competences enabling one to listen and relate to individual team members and of competences making one capable of listening to the team as a whole: being sensible to who's (not) doing the talking; address shifts in energy and meeting climate, listen to the unspoken voice in the room, pointing at unproductive communicative patterns. Eventually, the project focused on dialogic competences relating to collegiate coaching. The other competences, just stipulated in 2006, were unfolded in the third project as what we, reflecting on that in 2009-2010, were able to denote as dissensus sensibility (text 6).

The organizing competences have to do with mastering more efficient meetings, e.g., fish bowls. In reality, both the subprojects in the second project focused on dialogic competences as a foundation for collegiate coaching.

It took four years before we, finalizing the third, EDIT-project in 2009-2010, were able to unfold these competences that we have just foreshadowed in 2006 as dissensus organizing (text 6)

On the face of it, it might look as if the employees were involved in setting the course from the beginning, already. It showed out to be more complicated. The competence relation between the management and the project management group was not formalized which in a way reflected the organization being in opposition to (unnecessary) descriptions of functions and work flow. Sometimes, the senior manager participated in the project management group meetings with us, sometimes not. Was the group a project management, as I reckoned or was it just a planning group in charge of all the practical stuff?

In some of the enclosed texts (e.g., no 2) we talk about the importance of meta-communication addressing, e.g., the unspoken (cf. Kristiansen & Bloch-Poulsen, 2000, too). We did not manage to do that here. Who was in charge of deciding whether a team should participate in the process? When we were to initiate the second subproject in 2006 one of the teams did not want to participate. The experience from the first subproject in 2004-2006 was that the project demanded some extra effort despite our endeavor to integrate the process in the day to day business of the teams. The team had been very satisfied with our co-operation in 2004-2006 but they were faced with a tremendous work overload. The tension or contradiction between the logic of production and the logic of development (Ellström, 2002) characterizing all such development or innovation processes came to the surface directly. As action researchers we certainly understood their decision as we had no intention of the project being ours and/or management's and not the employee's. The inference of the team was pure logic: 'we are considered self-managerial, accordingly it is our decision whether to participate or not.' Management, i.e., the senior manager, decided that they should participate. As far as I remember, the project management (?) group was not involved in the decision. We proposed a conversation between the team, the senior manager, and ourselves where it was eventually decided that an improvement in the relation between him and them should have a high priority in the team work in the second subproject.

We appreciated the arguments and point of views of the team as well as the senior manager's. From my current perspective four years later, it seems as if we made a principle mistake as action researchers. During the first subproject we had argued that the term 'self managerial team' was a misunderstanding reducing all management to dialogue. Besides, we considered the term an example of repressive tolerance encapsulating a radical democratic, syndicalist concept. It was our opinion that the term 'co-managing team' was more appropriate, and that you have to continuously negotiate the demarcation of the scope of responsibility for the teams. We fell back theoretically as well as on our practical point of view that it was futile to talk about involvement if the employees were not involved in formulating the strategy not to talk about whether they were to participate or not. It would be right to criticize us for reducing an action research project to an organizational development project. Participation gave way to involvement comprehended as a managerial tool.

### 3.1.3. The EDIT-project: involvement or participation?

The third project on innovation on an equal footing was originally titled: "Innovation and involvement through strengthening dialogue in team based organizations". Employees at CSMS renamed it the EDIT-project, i.e., Employee Driven Innovation in Team. The hypothesis was that every experienced employee, no matter the educational background, has an innovative potential that might be released or unfolded in dialogues in the teams where they work. DSI, CSC, and CSMS had agreed on participating with a certain number of teams. In sum we ended up with 18. The goal or direction was stated differently in the different organizations and by differing groups. In the application of 13.09.07 to the Danish Agency for Science, Innovation and Technology, the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, we wrote:

Approximately 1/3 of the work force in Denmark is team organized. Team organization, employee involvement, flat structures and new forms of management is diffusing into SME's [Small and Medium size Enterprises]. The purpose of this humanistic, organizational project is to strengthen employee driven innovation in teams by involving dialogues and an involving research design. Experiences from former projects at Lego and the Faculty of Science and Technology [project 2] indicates that there is a slumbering potential for innovation and growth in team that might be released without necessarily introducing new technology.

We wrote to the three organizational partners about our expectations to the participating teams (quoted from a mail to DSI/project management from 18.01.08):

We would prefer to co-operate with teams,

- whom you think might improve their innovation, creating improvement in their internal concord, their work flow, their relation to customers or suppliers, or what seems to be most relevant for you and the team,
- who will not refuse to be reflexive and improve the internal and external dialogue, and
- who can be expected to exist as a fairly steady team for the whole year of 2008.

### 3.1.3.1.DSI – a strategic top down purpose?

The contact with DSI was mediated through the CEO with whom we had co-operated in former development processes in different private companies. They constructed a project management group as identical with the top management, i.e., the CEO and his four VP's – in collaboration with us as action researchers. We had asked for a project management group with employee representatives, too, which the top management did not want. One of the reasons for why we did not stand our ground was that we were working under a severe pressure. The financing funds worked as our super-ego, so to speak. They had financed the project to take place within a span of two years, 2008-2009. CSC had just postponed their participation until April 2008. CSMS had not been able to set up the appropriate and expected team structures, so the project was delayed indefinitely in Silkeborg.

The top management at DSI produced their purpose at a meeting in January 2008 (18.01.08) facilitated by us. The minute and the purpose reflect that they were a fairly new organization with many ideas and high energy where it would be possible to strengthen execution and following up:

The overall purpose is to move from the analytically gifted football for small boys to execution. This implies:

- that our energy and spirit shall be maintained
- that we have to execute to a higher degree (less talk about and more action on problems)
- that we will focus on the organization as a whole with cross departmental activities

- that the process have to give birth to something new; some specific improvements that kick ass.

There is a double focus: on results pointing ahead and on an enriched learning process.

It is critical that the project will not be presented as or be carried through as yet another project forced on the employees. The intension is to facilitate activities that we carry on or about to carry on.

The following four teams will be involved [among them]:

Team 1: Product Support (The department of production techniques)

The task for the team is to deliver product and production technical support including a culture and a behavior that facilitates continuous improvements in existing production setup securing a relatively smooth product initiation ... Marianne & Jørgen participates at ordinary team meetings in order to give coaching and sparring and facilitate constructive whole oriented dialogues producing results and learning.

Points to remember:

The purpose will be negotiated with the teams before the first meeting with Marianne & Jørgen on the 21.02.08. The purpose will be send to them before the meeting.

Management had pointed at certain teams where they imagined they would get the highest effect. Team Product Support had not negotiated the purpose with top management before our first meeting. Instead they and their team manager formulated the following direction in accordance with the general frame work set up by the top management as you can see in this clip from the minute from our meeting on 21.02.08:

- Create a mutual understanding about who we are and what our tasks are ...
- Make our tasks visible to the organization ...
- Structure our job performance ...
- Set up clear interfaces and good communication vis a vis the other departments ...
- More internal team work ...
- Improve our meeting culture ...<sup>3</sup>

Initially the team appreciated the general framework of the top management but they underlined that the most important issue to improve was cross departmental, especially their co-operation with the Product Development department. Accordingly the team reckoned bullet 4 as the necessary condition for them to participate in a meaningful way.

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<sup>3</sup> The distinction between purpose and goal showed out not as clear cut as we had imagined. Thus, we asked an independent engineer from Act2Learn to do sort of a test where the teams quantified their goals or purposes when we started and when we terminated the process in order to get an evaluation of an eventual development in the expected direction (cf. Kristiansen & Bloch-Poulsen, 2009).

### 3.1.3.2.CSC – the team’s tactical purposes

Out contact to CSC was the HR-department. In 2006-2007 as a consultant I had run a series of courses for senior managers and managers in Scandinavia titled: “Inspiring others”. Accordingly, I presented my idea to the HR-consultant with whom I had co-operated. He got a green light from his manager and we mailed a project draft to some of the managers who had participated in the courses. Towards the end of 2007, 7 team managers agreed to be part of the project with their teams.

Here, the individual teams decided independently their purposes. Team Airline Delivery (cf. text 7) sat up the following prioritized items to be improved in the process of our co-operation as you will see in the minute from our meeting on 29.04.08:

- Release steering
- Lack of shared goal
- Meeting discipline
- Who’s doing what – division of responsibility
- TAM-meetings [Team Action Meetings]
- Processes around the new platforme.

The 7 teams had no interfaces so in principle this process might have been carried through in 7 different organizations each contributing with one team. There was no possibility of knowledge sharing as was the case at DSI. The project group failed to work because of that. We learned how it created better conditions for EDIT if the processes in the individual teams are part of a coherent strategic process for the whole department or organization where the teams state their goals or purposes and continuously share experiences, e.g., via the project (management) group as it happened when we started in CSMS later on.

The knowledge exchange between the teams seemed important. Sometimes it might be necessary to directly involve the top level of the hierarchy in order to speed up the process. In August 2008 after half a year’s co-operation we wrote to Team Product Support, DSI:

We think we have reached a limit for how far we can get with your purposes as long as we have meetings with your team, “only”.

We imagine it necessary to involve people from top management to catalyze the process as you are part of the whole organization as a team.

We suggest that Heins [CEO] and Anders [VP] participate an hour or so on our next dialogue meeting to discuss some of your points for improvement (especially around meeting culture and communication with the other departments). As agreed upon, we will address the issue of improving the meeting culture in the organization as such on our next meeting with top management.



The reason for this proposal is that we appreciate the progress you have made in relation to your initial points for improvement. But it seems to us as if the process gets to a standstill either because you need some directions from top management or because too many problems seem to be “up-delegated” to Jon [the team manager].

In co-operation with you, we would like to test whether such dialogues with top management might speed up the process. How does that sound to you?

Unfortunately, the meeting was cancelled so we discussed the problems with the top management and the team separately. As part of the agenda for a meeting in October 2008, we wrote to the team:

At our last meeting on 15.09.08 we got a clear impression that the whole idea behind our process about “Involvement and innovation” was pushed heavily in the wrong direction. Our interpretation was:

- that your precautions throughout the last year about the new product wasn't heard
- that management all of a sudden presented a decision, apparently without arguments and not up for a dialogue
- that you haven't been involved in the discussion on initiating the new product
- that it was difficult for you to keep up the spirit when you were constantly been knocked back.

Fortunately it turned out at the meeting in October (13.10.08) that the team had got the feeling of been involved and heard in between. The team had been present at a meeting about renewing an ongoing project. The top management and the project manager had asked us to participate, too and give feedback. All relevant parties across the organization had a dialogue in order to learn from the ongoing project in order to prevent failures in former projects where the distance between the production and the development department had been critical.

### 3.1.3.3. CSMS – the purpose of the project group?

We had no prior connection to CSMS. The contact was established through a third party to the HR-manager to whom we wrote a project presentation on the 14.12.07 addressing the question about a project management, among other things:

We would like you to establish a project management, consisting, e.g., of you, the senior manager and managers as well as team representative from the Citizens Service Department, and eventually other stake holders who continuously can adjust the course in co-operation with us. It is not a traditional research-on project where we, at a proper distance, using a binocular, observe the organizational animals like in a zoo. We intend to carry out dialogic action research where we - in co-operation with you - combine training and research in order to get the results you want for your team and organization.

The letter focused on results of first order which reflected that we for the time being had no precise research question besides our idea that every employee or that every team, in this case the public office workers, had an innovative potential which might be unfolded if time was scheduled for a dialogue, i.e., a shared inquiry where people put their brains together, so to speak.

The project management turned out to be a project group consisting of the senior manager of Citizens Service, the internal HR-consultant, and team representatives. Initially I thought – maybe naïve – it was an independent project management but this was not in line with management who saw the project group as referring to them (cf. 3.2.). This uncertainty is reflected in the following clip from a minute where we use the term ‘project management group’.

At the initial meeting on the 09.01.08 with the HR-manager, the senior manager and internal HR-consultant from Citizen Service we agreed that:

The team specific goals or purposes must be negotiated between the project management group and the teams ... Innovation denotes all kind of improvements, e.g., in relation to citizens, internal co-operation and communication, to management, knowledge sharing, etc.

As a rule the process takes place as training on the job.

At the initial meeting it turned out, the senior manager’s purpose was that the employees should move from being specialist to being more in the role of generalists, and that the employees should have an increased influence.

Naturally, the second purpose was accepted broadly by the teams. The first turned out to be the object of ongoing negotiations between team and management as well as team internally throughout the whole process. The team members worried if they would be able to maintain their high level of expertise within their specialist field if they were to transform to employees in CSMS and not stay as employees working with, say pensions in CSMS.

In reality the employees’ goals sat the frame work of the process. They wanted to maintain their specialist expertise within a specific field and to develop their competences in order to be able to serve citizens at a simple level in one or two adjacent fields. This was stated as specialist+ as opposed to the generalist as envisioned by the senior manager according to which every employee should be able to serve citizens in every field to a certain, minor degree.

In this connection we had a critical discussion with the project group: were the teams to state their goals autonomously or where they to be assessed by the project group and management? The internal HR-consultant wanted the individual team purposes for coordination and evaluation whereas we as action researchers argued in favor of considering the teams as responsible persons in a project dealing with innovation through involvement.

In fact, it turned out to be the teams who formulated the goals or purposes in collaboration with the team manager without following assessment in the project group and without acceptance from the senior manager. This goes, e.g., for Team Children, presented in text 6, whose prioritized purposes were stated at the initial meeting on the 15.04.09 as:

- Guidance/small manuals on maternity [maternity benefit, maternity leave, etc.] and family benefits [child welfare, kindergarten allowances, etc.] ...
- Job performance ...
- Working climate in the team ...

The first bullet implies that employees within maternity should be able to serve citizens at a simple level in family benefits before the 01.09.09 and vice versa. This means specialist+ as the employees were involved in carrying out the competence development. This is opposed to the generalist role where you were supposed to serve within, say passport and driver license, too.

We had a research question in advance in the first two projects at B&O and AAU. As mentioned for this third project we had nothing besides the idea of unfolding employee innovative potential in dialogues. Rather late we formulated a research question also involving results of second and third order: what are the competences and ways of organizing that especially facilitates innovation, or, to put it otherwise, what is the difference between TAM (Team Action Meetings) and DHTM (Dialogic Helicopter Team Meetings) (text 6 and 7) and how might such an eventual difference be conceptualized?

Approximately at that time – midsummer 2009 – we found a special version of a distinction between involvement and participation in Nielsen (2004). The concept of participation, a defining characteristic of action research (Greenwood & Levin, 1998), is used with many different connotations, as mentioned in text 7. In Nielsen's version participation refers to an employee endeavor toward more influence and democracy while involvement refers to a managerial tool aiming at surplus value for the organization.

How did our work reflect itself in this distinction? Who were in fact deciding the goals we followed in our co-operation with the teams? We coined a concept of innovation differing from mainstream understandings that was to maintain this tension, i.e., the three dimensional concept underlining surplus value for the organization, improved work organizing, and a better work life quality as equally valid criteria. Today in DK, it would be unrealistic to carry through a project based on participation only, according to my interpretation. As an action researcher you have to reflect continuously that you are working - trying to facilitate or be part of dialogues - in the tension between involvement and participation.

In accordance with Weick's (1979) concept of sense-making it was not until we were about to terminate the project that we managed to express our purpose - what we had been trying to do - namely in collaboration with the organizations and the teams to create processes that might facilitate the production of employee driven innovations

(results of first order); that – simultaneously – might inquire into which ways of organizing processes that were most beneficial in leading to first order result (the difference between TAM and DHTM as second order results); that – finally – might create concepts like, e.g., the three dimensional understanding of employee driven innovation, enabling an improved theoretical understanding (results of third order).

#### 3.1.4. Resume: a co-produced purpose?

The reflection on the three projects has made it clear to me that the question - who formulates the goal or purpose of an action research project - is highly complex. As well as its corollary: who can be expected to have a degree of ownership to the process. The concept of co-production seems to be but an ideal. Maybe, it could have been a reality in organizations that we have not co-operated with. At least, in the three projects the differences far surpasses the similarities. It seems as if concepts like co-production or co-creation falls short as a description of the complexity around establishing a purpose, direction or goal for an organizational action research project.

We wanted to co-operate with a project management able to state the purpose, and contribute to design, validation and communication of results, etc. A project management with representative from management and the participating teams where decisions could be based in dialogues allowing management and employees to have a sense of ownership to the project. We did not manage to have that in any of the organizations we have co-operated with in the three projects. Sometimes because we fell back theoretically and practically, sometimes because the project management was but a practical project group coordinating, exchanging experience, suggesting changes for the process ahead, etc.

If we set aside our share in this failure I reckon the reduction of a project management to a practical project group reflects the possible level of involvement or participation in the organization. If, on the other hand, we imagined we had had the opportunity to prolong our co-operation with these organizations and teams transcending the actual deadlines, I am convinced we might have worked with such a project management as everybody would have been more in favor of involvement and participation. A quotation from an employee in CSMS illustrates my point:

One of the results of the process has been that to-day we can make our own decisions as a team to a larger extent. We are the ones who have our fingers in the dough; we are experienced and have professional competencies. Management is more inclined to listen to us now. So, we have gained more freedom as a team ... To-day, we can make our own decision about, e.g., the backup model. Our team manager supports our decisions and says “this is good work; we can always adjust later, if necessary”. Our improved co-operation with management has been the best part of the process.

Maybe it is about being realistic as an action researcher, if you as a minimum have discussed your wish for a project management with the organization you are about to co-operate with.

Similarly, the distinction between their development project (results of first order) and our research project (results of second and third order) seems to be inappropriate. We have contributed actively to the production of first order results, including comments of substance if the subject matter was within our field of experience. This was, e.g., the case with the model on knowledge production in project transitions where we contributed with our experience from Roskilde and Aalborg University. Conversely they have contributed to the concept development in the first project around, e.g., the mentioned concept of 'gold-digger', as well as with experience based suggestions on the difference between TAM and DHTM in the third project (cf. 3.2.), i.e., to the production of results of second and third order.

The consequence is that the distinction between practitioner (occupied with practical solutions and results of first order) and action researcher (focusing on results of second and third order) cannot be maintained as cast in stone. Our partners have to different degrees been occupied with results of second and third order as we have been working on first order results.

We understand our partners as expert on their own work life. This does not imply they have a monopoly on stating first order goals and that we are the guys with a microphone. Unfortunately, there was a tendency in that direction in the beginning of the third project where we were so eager to get started. Firstly, the goals have to point in the direction of more involvement or participation and improved work life quality, if we are to participate. Secondly, we inquire critically into their statements of goal. This inquiry is not based in a discussion approach with them endowed with a false consciousness but based in a dialogic belief that, collaboratively, we may end up with more precise statements of goals even if we take our usually restricted substantial knowledge into account.

Goals and results of second order like strengthening communicative competences or improved communicative processes that might be anchored organizationally after project termination seems to a higher degree to be a shared issue, while the more theoretical questions about how to understand the concept of dialogue organizationally and philosophically, the relation between pragmatism and critical action research, etc., seems to ours primarily.

When talking about second order goals and results specifically it seems critical for an action researcher to attend to these questions and bring them to the table. They reflect the structures and possibilities in the organization and they problematize the level of employee involvement or participation as the necessary condition for you to participate.

As mentioned, in several situations, we choose to fall back on our ideals of action research in the specific contexts, e.g. by accepting that employees were not represented in the project management at DSI. Conversely, given their highly stressful situation to the point of survival, I wonder whether we have started, had we stuck to our principle.

A further question about goal and strategy deals with the organizational conditions of the teams. Nielsen, Jørgensen & Munch-Hansen (2008) attempt to sketch an understanding of team shared by many researchers, like this:

A team is characterized as a group of people, who

- have et shared goal and a clearly defined task
- work on a common task
- are dependent upon each other with complementary competences
- have overlapping skills
- work development oriented with a certain degree of self-management (p. 30).<sup>4</sup>

According to my experience, this is an understanding, too static. Many teams are floating entities, so to speak. Several times during our projects it was not quite clear who was or was not part of a team when we asked. As mentioned, we wanted to work with teams in the third project that might be expected to last for a year. In all three organizations, that was considered improbable. In CSMS the team structure was changes three times during the year; several teams got a new manager or another composition. Some employees are members of several teams with problems around identity and loyalty as a consequence (Alderfer, 1986).

One might add that the contextual stability has decreased heavily. Let me use Team Airline Delivery from CSC (cf. text 7) as an illustration. Their working condition questions whether it is reasonable to talk about a shared goal, purpose or direction as Heraclites' old dictum about panta rei seems to be confirmed continuously. In a reflection from one of the DHTMs with the team, we wrote:

The floating team identity makes it difficult to talk about strategy and shared goals as they over and over again ask: "What does our customer want?" Formerly, the customer presented a 2 year master plan. Today, it seems as if they plan using their watch. It makes it unrealistic to talk about a shared strategy and goal. It is more like a direction and concurrent efforts. To cope with this community with a minor degree of sharing eventually became the highest priority for this so called team.

This implies special conditions for dialogue in teams. It is a quality in an ongoing conversation where you have to involve and update new members and cope with emerging burning issues. As such it creates severe difficulties for dialogues grasped as a human meeting where you can openly inquire into the limitations of your own knowledge and experience. Thus we have heard several team members raise the question about how much energy they want "to invest" – sorry for the expression – in new team members.

In this way many teams are about to or have already experienced what have characterized organizational development theories for some time: there seems to be a movement away from the belief of the strategic paradigm than you can plan organizational development processes. A movement more in the direction towards an emergent paradigm with the belief you have to relate openly to what's next as you cannot plan everything. Already in the B&O-project, these considerations made us

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<sup>4</sup> My translation. For the moment, I ignore the fact that many so called teams in organizations do not have a common goal or complementary competences. In my interpretation they are named 'teams' as it seems politically incorrect to talk about departments, offices, etc., for the time being.

formulate the concept of ‘emergent, mutual involvement’ as a description of our approach.

This movement creates yet another tension. On one hand it makes the ongoing dialogue even more important. On the other hand, the conversations must focus on what seems to be realistic in the field of possibilities we for the time being consider acceptable. Especially, when, as Team Airline Delivery, some teams are but a collection of subgroups and individuals with higher reference and responsibility towards their different customers than towards each other internally. Appointments with colleagues have a higher degree of not being kept than appointments with the customer. Thus, such new conditions for modern team work produces tensions about the possibility for dialogues.

### 3.2. Design

The next challenge deals with the question about who is involved and how in the decisions about the design of the process and the continuous changes in this. Unfortunately, a distinction between expert design and participative design based in Elden (1979) is not elaborated upon besides the proclamatory level in Gustavsen (1992, p. 19).

The editor of the journal, *Action Research*, states that:

... core features of action research are that the work happens in the context of action and we have to get into an organization and be engaged with the practitioners there. It operates in partnership with practitioners and we need to discuss and shape our research question and design with the practitioners (Bradbury Huang 2010, p. 98).

In the following I will present my experiences from the three projects on involving employees and managers in the design of the action research process in order to illustrate and problematize what concepts as ”partnership” and ”discuss and shape ... with ...” might mean.

#### 3.2.1. The B&O-project: emergent, mutual involvement?

The idea of a mentor training programme in the first project was, as mentioned, brought into existence in the Future Lab Workshop I conducted for all employees and managers in the R&D-department at B&O. Afterwards we made an agreement with the top management to carry through a programme with approximately 3 modules of 2-3 days with roughly 2-3 months in between. The ‘approximately’ indicates the emergent approach as everybody considered it impossible to know ahead what it would take for the managers to be mentors as we did not know in advance exactly how to define the mentor function or whether it would fit all managers.

We presented a draft for a programme for the first module. It was generally considered futile to plan all 2-3 modules as the coming modules depended on what actually

happened on the former ones. The programme was mailed to all the participating 25 managers underscoring it was a draft to be changed if it was not in line with their expectations. The managers were involved in the design in practice as we considered it contradictory talking about involvement if they had no influence on the design. Furthermore, the whole process was dependent on the managers bringing their hot potatoes on the table as these were supposed to be the substance of the mentor training focusing on results of first and second order. No one questioned that we produced the draft for the programme as we were considered the most experienced in that field. En route it became clear to us that they saw the mentor function as an advisor, primarily. Accordingly, we designed the process in order to strengthening the alternative dimension in the mentor function as midwives. We showed video clips from former modules to discuss and problematize how the concepts (results of third order) we tried to transform into communicative competences for the mentors had been developed. As mentioned, somewhere in the process, they suggested that their employee appraisal interviews were to be part of the programme as direct training on the job. We agreed that managers were to have feedback after these conversations from employees as well as from us as action researchers. The employees on their side similarly wanted feedback from their managers and us which was consequently accepted. The concept – emergent, mutual involvement – we coined in the process was in this way an appropriate description of the processes making the design and the continuous adjustments.

On the other hand, it is critical that we did not involve all the employees in the process after the Future Lab Workshop except for the 25 employees participating in the employee appraisal interviews. We were not on the lookout for feedback from them in order to check whether we were on track training their managers as mentors. We stuck to the ongoing feedback from the managers themselves which we would have seen as insufficient, today.

Four years later – in 1999 – when some new managers had been appointed, groups of employees were involved in our preparatory work to set up a mentor brush up programme. Apparently, the employees experienced the mentor function very differently. Seen from an action research perspective such a feedback would have been adequate four years earlier, too. No doubt, we were far ahead as to involvement compared to what they claimed to be used to in 1995. They were satisfied with us changing the agenda in order to match their expectations instead of just sticking to our programme. But seen from my current perspective the involvement or participation seems to have been insufficient. Although the employees had ownership to the programme through the Future Lab Workshop, I don't know whether it lasted.

### 3.2.2. The AAU-project: integration?

Based on the experiences from the B&O-project we formulated the pedagogical principles behind the process for the administrative department at Aalborg University (AAU) in a project draft, before we started in 2004:

The basic pedagogical principle of this process has to do with *integration*:



- *We will integrate the process into you day to day team work.* The main part of the project will be training on the job. We will observe the ordinary team meetings and give feedback to productive and unproductive communicative patterns in the team. It is not a traditional course. Based on our experience we think this will result in the least possible waste of your time and strengthen the possibility of organizationally anchoring the developed competences.
- *We will integrate form/process and content/substance.* Through the training on the job the participants will develop their competences in communication and organizing while working with their ordinary tasks.
- *We will integrate action, training, and research.* In co-operation with you we will grow models you can use for change and development.

Initiating the process we had not less than five meetings with the project group and the senior manager before we got a clear cut picture of their expectations. Although experienced we had not tried such a thoroughly balancing of expectations as to purpose and design before. Afterwards the project group asked the individual teams to decide how they would specify the agreed upon purposes of improving job performance, service, and work climate (cf. p. 19-20). Then we interviewed all teams and created a preliminary draft of tailor made designs for the different teams which were discussed with and continuously adjusted at meetings with the individual teams and the project group.

In the second subproject with AAU it was decided to strengthen the integration. Thus we became part of the project group and the employees entered the project as co-researchers, too (minute from project group meeting on the 24.01.08). Although the teams were obliged to participate, they were more directly involved in the decisions about project design compared to the B&O-project. We had a string of meetings in the project group with representatives from management and teams. Especially the common seminars every year for all employees seemed to demand a series of meetings which questioned my understanding of involvement. The tension between shared inquiry and persuasion that to my opinion have characterized the concept of dialogue since Plato became rather obtrusive for me. I often wondered why they had asked me – in my self-consciousness an expert in processes – when they did not want just to change the programmes in the training situations which I was used to and comfortable with, only, but also to “interfere” in the planning details. I have given many courses on difficult conversations as a consultant underlining the art of acting with more knowledge – and not better knowledge. Here, I certainly had to take my own medicine. And even more: based on the B&O-project, we had underscored the importance of giving up the notion of knowing better (text 1). This acknowledgement and an acceptance of the role as not-knowing, too was (and is) a challenge for me which was accentuated in the AAU-project.

Several times I came to appreciate that the designs and programmes resulting from the dialogues in the project group were more to the point compared to Marianne’s and my initial drafts. We even experienced some of the internal members of the project group presenting suggestions for a programme for the common seminars which we were supposed to comment and develop. In this way I guess that the co-operation around the design illustrates a partnership ahead of the understanding of involvement as I interpret

Bradbury Huang's statement that "... we need to discuss and shape ... design with the practitioners."

### 3.2.3. The EDIT-project: involvement or top-down?

The question about the design of an organizational action research project does not only deal with who is involved, to which degree, and how in the decision processes. It also deals with timing (CSMS) and with the possibilities in the tension between the logic of production and development (DSI).

Thus a central question in the co-operation with CSMS was when to start the project. When the senior manager and the internal HR-consultant agreed upon participating in the project on the 01.01.08 they have not established the necessary, functioning team structure. They were in the wake of the reform of municipalities discussing values as a preparation for working in teams. Accordingly, we postponed they project for more than half a year. At the first meeting with all the ca. 70 employees and managers in the council town hall on the 19.08.08 we acted upon a false presupposition that the team structure had been established in the spring of 2008. Having presented the project idea we asked one half of the audience to split up into three groups. One was to write the positive aspects of the project on a flip chart; the second the problematic aspects; and the third was to write what it would take for them to embark on the project. The second half of the audience was asked to anonymously write their immediate reaction to a mailbox that we could read to their colleagues afterwards. After the meeting all was uploaded to their intranet. Here are the flip chart results:

#### Project strenghts/benefits:

- we maintain our professional level
- improved dialogues
- give and receive positive/constructive critique
- rules of the game are set before we start

#### Project deficits to be changed:

- we don't work in the new teams yet/the teams are not located in the same room physically
- we haven't got the time
- lack of project information
- lack of motivation?
- we have experienced democraship in former projects<sup>5</sup>
- how do we cope with employee involvement in different teams?

#### What will it take for us to participate with all our heart?

- we shall be able to envision the purpose

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<sup>5</sup> 'Democraship' is a word I have coined (Bloch-Poulsen, 2006). It was used in our presentation indicating democracy as espoused value and dictatorship as theory-in-use.

- we need special time for the project
- some of our ordinary tasks has to have a lower priority in a period (which tasks?)
- we must believe in the project – believe in its long-term benefit for CSMS
- our ordinary tasks have to be tackled in an acceptable way.

Here is a typical mail box letter:

Waugh, this is really a unique possibility for us as employees to influence our work conditions ahead.

But alas, somebody is knocking inside my head saying: ‘well, we have tried projects before and honestly, how much was carried through and implemented?’ Is it real involvement or is it just the management group saying the last word? Until now, many issues have been handled outside our scope of competence, but then: they [management] might learn from their failures ☺

We maintained we would co-operate with teams only which were already in function working with their tasks. That was rather tough. The senior manager – and the managers too, apparently – wanted to start as soon as possible. The employees on the other hand wished to postpone the process in order to get their job situation straight as mentioned in the statements from the meeting in the town council hall. In the period ahead we shifted between postponing the process acknowledging the teams were not established and acting as team development consultants in changing team structures we were told to be functioning before we – finally – initiated a proper action research project in the spring of 2009. On the other hand, the process ensured that we established a confident relationship to every employee and manager which facilitated a rather fast co-production of results. Seen from an action research perspective it would have been more in line with principles to have postponed the whole process until the teams had been in function for a period in established structures.

In a way we reproduced or imported the problem characterizing the three organizations: the overwhelming, solutions oriented business of their day to day work situation threatened development and innovation. We were ourselves busy with team meetings with 18 teams, minutes, projects group meeting as well as meetings with our follower group consisting of researchers and CEO’s from small and medium sized organisations. It was day to day business more than research. We seemed to be so eager satisfying the participating organizations and teams that their first order results were prioritized compared to second and third order results.

The competence description for the project group at CSMS states that it, besides the senior manager and the internal HR-consultant, consist of

a representative from each team (appointed by management) ... The project group see to that we are on track with our EDIT-project ...

I have seen this description of competence and responsibility for the project group before, but it is not until now I read the parenthesis, so to speak. Until now, I have just taken it for granted that the teams appointed their own representatives. In principle,

surely I understand why management wants to avoid critical employees with a grumbling tone in such a project group. On the other hand, I consider these critical persons more as the medium for team criticism than as negativists themselves (Alderfer, 1986). Thus, from my current perspective, it was a failure we did not discuss who was in charge of appointing representatives especially because the project foundation is improved involvement or participation. You have to be constantly conscious about these things, as the degree of involvement is continuously up for negotiation.

Our co-operation with the project group took place as meetings in the end of the weeks where we had carried through DHTMs with the teams. The co-operation might be illustrated by the invitation to a meeting on the 07.11.08. It addresses the question about when the team members can move their desks physically in order to sit next to each other enhancing knowledge exchange and production in the teams, etc.:

Project: EDIT  
 Subject: Resume of the DHTMs in this week for our meeting  
 on Friday, 07.11.08, 13.00-15.00  
 To: The project group  
 From: Marianne & Jørgen<sup>6</sup>  
 Date 07.11.08

Dear Cecil, Maria, Mia, Egon, Joan, Ingrid, Sarah and Tessa

Issues from the team meetings this week (04-07.11.08)

Are we on track – things to adjust – shared initiatives?

We take our own medicine, so here is a list of good points and things to be improved:

What has been satisfactory?

The teams indicate that specific useful decisions have been the outcome of all the meetings.

We have tried to listen to critique and act in line with it when possible. This is not cast in stone, but it seems to open up for new ideas and action oriented proposals for shared solutions when we listen to the core points of the critique, i.e., when we go with and not automatically against it. It seems as if critique and power for action is intimately connected.

Generally, the negative or problem oriented approach has been transformed into a more positive and future oriented atmosphere: ‘Certain things must be taken for granted. What can we do to push the situation in the direction we would like?’

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We had good experiences from working in smaller, changing groups allowing everybody to speak up.

We have acted as bystanders and recommend the teams use this function themselves – especially when different perspectives and points of view are on the table.

We have closed the meetings with an evaluation: What went well (one subgroup) and what are we going to improve at the next meeting (another subgroup).

According to our opinion the teams have produced good ideas or proposals for solutions for the problems they have addressed.

What's to be improved?

The agenda have to be balanced with the team in advance. We will phone the contact persons before the meetings to balance expectations around the agenda. We suggest the teams bring their hot potatoes or their burning issues in order to get maximum output from the meetings as a basic dimension in this process deals with involvement, i.e., to take the spoon into your own team-hand, so to speak.

We expect to be informed about important changes before the meetings (in order to avoid the situation this week where we were not informed that the physical establishing of the teams were not in place, which we had expected).

We expect the team manager to participate in the team meetings. You can change the agreed upon time with other teams in order to fit your calendar. At least we expect to be informed.

We expect the management team will prioritize time for our next meeting.

It is vital for the project that the physical establishing of the teams [that the team members sit next to each other] is fixed before the next sessions. In order to secure that, the teams and we wish to postpone the next meetings, scheduled in December to ultimo February (23-26.02.09.).

For your consideration:

We reckon especially three issues having a critical impact of the EDIT-project:

1. We sense that too many employees feel they miss the explanations and arguments behind too many managerial decisions.
2. We listen to a rather distinct resignation about the physical team establishing as it has cost too much time and too much talk. On one side, we appreciate employee involvement might be time consuming. On the other hand, we have difficulties understanding that it has been that slow. We suggest you reflect

on how to facilitate a more efficient and action oriented employee involvement ahead.

3. We feel that too many employees do not in advance reflect on: ‘What do we want from this meeting as a team?’

These three factors have an impact of the EDIT-project. We have embarked on a long lasting organizational development process where some of the employees express they would not have chosen to voluntarily participate in the EDIT-project and that the projects take time from their daily work even though the DHTMs are substituting the TAMs in the weeks they are carried through.

To put it simply: there is a competition going on between the project and the work load on the desks.

We suggest we discuss this dilemma between production and development continuously.

Research question:

In the process this week we found ourselves especially occupied with the relation between critique and action.

We guess the critique include some ideas, actions or solutions. It is as if the energy changes or rises in the moment when concrete possibilities for action came to the table. The new aspect for us is that apparently it is better to go with the critique instead of automatically arguing against it, interpreting it as sort of resistance. Maybe you could say that every critique is pregnant with a hidden action or wish for change?

Accordingly, we are occupied with how in collaboration with the teams to facilitate a team meeting process conducive to new actions and solutions as well as learning. We would like to be able to present a draft for organizing such processes in a concrete way that the teams would be able to use as a method ahead in their daily work

Best greetings,

Marianne & Jørgen

The letter to the project group reflects the transparency we expected in our co-operation where dilemmas between the parties internally as well as in the relation between them and us around tensions on involvement vs. top down management or action researcher steering as well as research questions could be discussed in an open atmosphere.

The tension between involvement and top down management was critical for the decisions about design in DSI, too. The problem was not an un-established team structure. In our interpretation, they fought for survival. From my current perspective,

we had induced false hopes in them about not using extra time and resources on the project, as elaborated upon in one of the dialogues in text 7. In the clear sight of the rear mirror this false hope created a controversy between their top down crisis management and our endeavors pointing towards involvement and innovation.

Thus, after the initial meetings with the participating team in the beginning of 2008 we wrote to the project management as identical with the top management

How much involvement and learning?

At the meetings with the teams we observed the division time allotted for speech, the degree of delegating of task and responsibility, who participated or not. It is strikingly how managers filled up the whole room, so to speak. There are no employee representatives in the project group. Are you generally working in such hurry that employee knowledge, experience, and learning is involved insufficiently, only?

In the minute from the meeting with the project management in April (on the 08.04.08) the discussion is reflected like this:

- Is there a general tendency to up-delegate to many practical issues?
- How do we secure the natural initiative? ...
- Management must be careful not to take over too many tasks – do we have a tendency to take over instead of instructing employees?
- It is critical we change these items in order to walk the talk.

The discussion continues as indicated in our call for the next meeting with project management in May (on the 25.05.08):

Dear Heins, Gerhard, Anders, and Kenn

We write to you because we like you, your organization, and your product. We have co-operated since the 18.01.08, and we have some worries ...

A top down managed organization claiming to be in favor of involvement?  
Do you walk the talk?

We wrote in the agenda for the meeting in April (on the 08.04.08), issue no. 4 that we were not quite sure whether you practiced involvement. We still have that doubt.

An example: as far as we know, the VP for Production gave Team Product Support such a small notice for commenting on his proposal for a definition of their scope of responsibility that it was impossible to come up with a qualified answer. Furthermore, it is our impression that for the moment – a month later – no decisions has been made or informed? ...

Generally, it is our impression that too many decisions are made in a closed management forum without employees having been involved in an appropriate degree.

Having made the decisions, it is our prejudice that the (senior)managers approach employees saying: EXECUTE.

Furthermore, we sense this delivery of duties happens with such a speed that the managers don't use the time necessary for explaining their expectation – and that the employees don't inquire into the challenges – with the consequence that the probability for jumping to conclusions is imminent.

Simultaneously, we fear this pattern has diffused to the co-operation between employees and teams to a certain degree.

As such, we guess that exclamations like "Oh, my God, no!" and fire extinguishing will be the corollary.

To put it differently, we have a well founded suspicion that the employees have got a series of ideas and suggestions for time estimation for tests and projects that are not listened to in your culture, as involvement is an espoused value and the imprecise instruction the theory-in-use.

Now, we might sound like a couple of bank advisors at the same time sales people, but would it be proper to consider dialogue-training for senior managers/VP's and managers?

Best greetings,

Marianne & Jørgen

The meeting scheduled in May was postponed to August 2008. This is a clip from the minute:

Top down management:

- we discussed whether you might speak of necessary crisis management or a sudden shift between involvement and top down management based in the impatience of the VP's
- it is still a point of attention.

We presented the following proposal much in line with the development organization known from the WRI-approach (cf. part III,2):

Improved vertical and horizontal integration:

Vertically:

We suggest you establish a cross functional dialogue group with regular meetings discussing the balance between involvement and top down management. A purpose is to create congruence between the perspectives of the CEO and the shop floor people. Another purpose is to learn even when you are busy.

Horisontically:



We suggest you set up another cross functional dialogue group with regular meetings to discuss the status of integrated product development and co-operation between departments. A purpose here is to get more congruence, too.

This suggestion resulted in a common workshop for the whole organization including teams who haven't participated in the EDIT-process. Experiences where exchanges and decisions where made in order to focus on the cross functional work ahead.

The crisis atmosphere during the project often meant that our meetings were interrupted because one of the team members was to act as a fireman. During such a meeting one of the employees exclaimed: "One more interruption and we stop!" It was production, survival, short term, and crisis versus development, innovation, and long term – straight from the shoulder.

Nevertheless, one of the teams in the production department designed cross functional processes themselves, resulting in ad hoc review meetings with the product development department, i.e., the organizational process innovation described in text 7.

According to my current perspective the failure was on our side. We should have avoided co-operation with a firm under such heavy pressure. As mentioned, we acted on our ideas about the expectations within the project financing authorities without checking with them. The offer to change design in order to include dialogue training of top management was inadequate as crisis management and not dialogue was needed. This does not imply that all changes in communication is organizational development or that organizations are communication, basically. Rather, today I think our suggestion was built on an exaggerated belief in the importance of communication in organizational processes.

In a way one could say the project got proper conditions not before summer 2008 where the organization had survived and did not suffer from the same stress level, so to speak. On the other hand, this experience was the reason why we supported the employees in CSMS in their wish to postpone the project contrary to management desires to start right away.

In this way the organizational and cross functional aspect became a basic dimension in the project. We don't understand a team as an isolated entity but as team-in-organization-in-continuous-changes.

After the meeting sessions with the teams at DSI and CSMS we met with the project group or project management in order to calibrate the course. This was not the case in CSC, a huge organization where it would have been meaningless. The question of design was primarily a question of balancing production and development as described in text 7. It was difficult for them to prioritize the meetings with us, leaving a pile of urgent paper work on their desk using 3 hours on possible organizational process innovation. Down to earth, several attend the meetings without the agenda or the minute from the last meeting; some tried to read the minute discretely under the table when we started the meeting, etc. That didn't make it easier for the enthusiastic colleagues burning for the project. In reality, we made the design. We did the calls for the meetings as well as

minutes. Their feedback was rather restricted given their fight with time, urgent tasks and deadlines.

Our own development as to design had an impact on the process, too. The level of involvement reflected our level of maturity, so to speak. Initiating the process at DSI, we fumbled forward as is shown in text 7 in the conversation with top management about keeping TAM and DHTM apart. CSMS started as a proper action research project not before spring 2009 which meant we had established a design-basis – e.g., the separation of TAM and DHTM – not up for dialogue. The consequence was that their contribution to design was focused on discussions about which already known ways of organizing DHTMs would be most productive for them (e.g., pro and con groups, bystander). Furthermore, they came up with new proposals, like e.g., evaluation the meetings as suggested på Team Airline Delivery, CSC.

It is a question of culture, too. What is the probability for a dialogue with whom about what? Managers in a R&D-department are used to handle emergence, the unforeseen, and the unplanned whereas it was not my impression that all office workers in CSMS was keen on inquiring into the process itself contributing with results of second and third order. They were in a way fully occupied with first order results. Or we did not succeed involving every one. Again, it is important to raise the question: who participates in the dialogue about what? As well as: who wants to participate in a dialogue about what? And: to which degree is it possible to address such questions in the organization?

#### 3.2.4. Summary

You have been presented for a continuum from emergent, mutual involvement to action researcher steering characterizing the decisions, the changes in and carrying through of design, programmes and processes in the practice described. Between these extremes there were many compromises in the field of tensions between involvement and top down management, between employee - , management-, action researcher -, or co-operatively driven processes. In the areas of design, co-production or co-creation seems to be insufficient descriptions of the more or less dialogic processes of decision.

The self critical remarks in this part on design might indicate that it was somehow wrong to co-operate with some of these organizations at the time. On the contrary, I reckon the problems and challenges described reflect the actual conditions in organizations broadly speaking. The correct timing does not exist. You will always be confronted with good arguments for not embarking on a development or action research project. You will always be faced with critical obstacles, not to have been foreseen. Accordingly, the point of departure may be the inverse question: as situations have this complex character what is the probability to contribute to first, second, and third order results in changing constellations of co-operations?

### 3.3. Validating

I am in line with Eikeland's (2006) point that validation of action research is validating in action research. The combination of action and research is characterized by this. The validation in process goes for all the three projects described in the texts. The ideas born in the co-operation between the participants and us at a course module, team meeting, DHTM or at a common gathering has been tested, validated, and discussed at the following meetings with continuous adjustments and improvements.

Nevertheless, the critical question is: who participates in the validation of what? Is it reasonable to use the term co-validation or co-validating?

At the face of it, one might consider validating of first order results as the concern of the participants as they are the best to know what works for them. As in mediation where the parties are considered experts as regards their own lives (Vindeløv, 2007). One might consider validation of second order results as a shared concern for the two groups of professionals. For them, because they are supposed to work in and with these new processes and ways of organizing, like pro and con groups, bystander etc. As such they have to evaluate whether such processes are valuable for them. For us, because we are able to compare these ways of organizing with the results of other action researchers as well as our own former results. Finally, one might consider validating third order results our concern as action researcher in collaboration with other researchers. This idea of split validation is in tune with the distinction between their development project and our research project that I have problematized, already. Similarly, it would be in line we the standpoint we argued in favor of in a philosophy of science debate book on 'enthusiastic objectivity', i.e., that you – following Fenichel (1946) - might distinguish between practical and theoretical truth where practical truth is assessed by the other/the client while theoretical truth is the monopoly of the researcher trainer/action researcher/psychoanalyst (Kristiansen & Bloch-Poulsen, 1997). In what follows I will try to show it is not that simple.

Conversely, one might – as I interpret Eikeland (2006) – assume that both parties are involved in validating all types of results in shifting roles as master and apprentices. He distinguishes between four types of relation between an (action)researcher and the other, called:

- a spectator-astronomer (spectas) paradigm ...
- a manipulator-user (manipus) paradigm ...
- a stranger-visitor (stravis) paradigm ...
- a native-performer-community (napeco) paradigm (p.194).

The first deals with "observing and explaining without intervening". The second with "controlled, experimental intervention". The third with "questioning and close observation with minimum intervention", and the fourth with "doing action research *with*, not *on* others" in shifting roles as master and apprentices.

The fourth form – napeco – seems to be the ideal. Based on my experiences, I don't see this as a tenable ideal, any longer. I will never be a native-performer-apprentice in relation to, e.g., the systems architects in CSC, the hardware specialists at DSI or the family benefit specialists in CSMS. I must admit I understand only part of what they are

talking about. Part of it is outside my scope of competence and I see no reason – personal or scientific – to be able to understand all their expertise communication or become an apprentices.

In the same way, I don't expect them to be my apprentices and participate as such at the conferences for action researchers and dialogue researchers where I meet my colleagues. I don't perceive the master-apprentice-relation as a proper metaphor describing two groups being experts within different fields of expertise. At least, I don't see the relation between them and me in this perspective any longer.

In my opinion, the metaphor of cross disciplinary project work, problematized by Eikeland (2006, p. 217f.), is more to the point. It denotes a specific type of project work between different disciplines, e.g., engineers and action researchers with different purposes. And with purposes, too, reflecting the process of project work (results of second order) as well as creating concepts ensuring an improved understanding of these processes (third order results). With these specifications I am reasonably criticized for breaking up the concept of project work – especially as it is practiced within public and private organizations where – apparently – you are supposed to neglect opportunities for improving the process, obtaining the best possible results using a minimum of time and resources, scarifying reflection on the altar of performance here-and-now. Thus, the example of co-production of learning in the transition between projects is the exception proving the rule (Kristiansen & Bloch-Poulsen, 2009). Accordingly, action research project work is maybe the proper term, although not highly idiomatic.

### 3.3.1. B&O – shifting constellations of validation

On the training modules of the process it was the highest priority of the participating managers to be presented to and train in what we en route came to name as dialogic competences. As mentors, they then used these as “communicative tools” or “skills” in the periods between the modules with follow up and evaluation at the next module. The quotation marks indicate that these tools are useful to the degree in which they are not used as tools (cf. the three dimensionality of the dialogue competence concept unfolded in text 2 as including tool or skill, ways of relating, and ways of being). To some degree, they were co-developing these “communicative tools”.

The good mentor, contributing to employee development through product development and vice versa was a shared concern as a first order result. The day do day work on transforming the action plans on improving dialogic competences between the training modules was their own responsibility in a more or less intimate co-operation with their colleagues, senior manager, and employees. They received continuous feedback from their colleagues and us. After the second module, we wrote, e.g, a couple of pages with feedback to each of the participating 25 managers individually. Here is an example, written in a period when we had not abandoned the concept of gold digging as a metaphor for being a mentor:

Feedback to Aage from Marianne & Jørgen after module 2.

You are supervisor for Erik, and Jens is your assistant  
(Tape B, 1735-2580).

Initially, when Erik is talking to you, we observe no changes in your mimic, gestures, eye contact and no verbal comments. We miss ongoing, spontaneous indications that you listen to what Erik tells you and that it is of interest to you. Instead of helping Erik you keep silent for quite some time. After that – with a certain delay – you show your concern: “It sounds difficult.” Accordingly, we are afraid that people approaching you for help will maybe feel alone. This does not facilitate gold digging.

One of your strengths is to ask Problem-clarifying questions: “Do you know from former occasions?” ... “You mentioned you had some experiences with him, and that there were some reports from colleagues about him?” We appreciate you pose these questions – and stay there.

A little later in the conversations it ends up in gold digging: “It seems to me as if you are irritated on the edge of being angry with him?” Erik confirms your impression and you continue: “Have you told him how you are affected by his behavior?” – This is food for thought for Erik. He looks down, shakes his head, saying: “Ahem, not that direct”.

You stick to the ground: “What do you think it would take for him to change his behavior?” This question makes Erik reflect, too: He looks up, takes a deep breath, pauses and says: “Well, I might ...”

You continue the inquiry with authority: “Would it be possibly for you to tell him directly you are irritated?” We suggest you stick to that. Instead of – as you did – change to the role of the advisor: “You must pay attention to ...” and “Could you not meet him there?” All of a sudden, you have got Erik’s problem. We suggest you let him be responsible for how to handle it. Otherwise you might easily end up moralizing, as you did: “It’s your options and your duty as a manager ... In this way you don’t need to have a bad conscience.”

We would like to see you pose more relation questions: “What do you expect from me in our conversation?” You might tell your feelings, if relevant: “I have been in similar situations ... I remember having a bad conscience myself.” That’s what you do a little later. We suggest you bring yourself and your feelings to the table in an earlier phase in the conversation. We imagined it will strengthen Erik’s feeling of being met or understood. In this way, it would be easier for him to give birth to his own ideas and suggestions on how to tackle the situation.

You are the focus person with Preben as supervisor  
(Tape C, 0000-1191)

You present an emotional problem (you feel “shaky”, “being disavowed”, etc.). Preben asks in a more fact-oriented way (“Do you have any indications ... what is status on your project?”, etc.). We suggest you insist on being treated in line with your emotional challenges, i.e., that you – as it seems – want to talk with your heart more

than with your brain, e.g., by saying: “I would like to stress that my purpose with this conversation is ...” Can you – in other situations, too – contribute to getting what is not right to the point for you because you don’t persistently stress what you actually are on the lookout for? Can you be too modest? We suspect you have some gold you prevent others from seeing?

Suggestions for improvement:

- make sure to establish a contact from the start of the conversation, already, e.g., by continuously and spontaneously marking your interest in the other person
- pose relations questions and express your emotions and impressions at an earlier phase if possible. We think it will strengthen the interlocutors feeling of being in contact and being respected.
- stick to what you want (“I’m on the lookout for ...”)
- be more direct in your statements and feedback.

Considering the fact we are addressing the distinction between advisor and midwife, we would like to have seen ourselves being less advisor-like. Nevertheless, my point has been to show how tailor-made we tried to design these mentor comments. The managers had different strengths and weaknesses and they worked with different points of improvement at and between the training modules in order to become mentors. At the next module, we followed up, discussing what Aage and his colleagues have done and learned since the last module. In this way, we were all part of validating improvements in the mentor function, i.e., results of first order. Basically, the responsibility was theirs individually in the organizational context: Does this work for me? Is this meaningful for me to communicate in this way? Can I see myself as a mentor under such conditions?

One of the managers says in an evaluation session in the middle of the project:

I have learned a lot from asking more questions compared to what I used to do. Pose questions into the core part of the issue the other is talking about and stay there. I can’t remember who said so but it’s in there the gold glimmer. I didn’t see the gold myself but I’m convinced that when you are in there then it’s there, simply, and I think it’s visible for the person you are talking to, too.

Another, more extrovert, manager hints at the importance as a mentor of being in a mode of relaxed readiness, as we choose to call it in text 2:

When I looked through the video from the employee appraisal interview, I carried through it was obvious that I need to calm down. Silence is OK. That’s not normally my way. If no one talks, I do. – And perhaps a less persistent body language [illustrates how he is sitting almost invading the table]. It has an impact on the conversation. I have improved making pauses letting the employee do the talking. I still have to practice, though.

A third manager illustrates congruence – a concept we were inspired by in Rogers (1957) – saying:

And I've learnt you can say: "I can't hear what you mean." And you can get away with it [laughter in the room].

A fourth adds about the same concept:

... and then there is a point where you have to pay attention to how you react to the other person and express that, if relevant. During such a conversation you have to attend to 'What's on my mind? What's going on in me?' while you are listening to the other person. Then, having grasped that, you better try to express it in a reasonable way that enables the other to react. I haven't learned that yet, far from. Yet, I think it might pave the road for a more positive, constructive critique.

Talking about second order results, the initiative and responsibility was ours as action researchers, primarily. We came up with drafts for programmes for the training modules. We tried to create processes where they could improve as mentors as they wished and where we could get an impression about how they could act as midwives and dialogic partners in relation to each other in order to strengthen their mentor function. Yet, it was not our initiative, solely. The programmes were meant as drafts falling back if they had anything more relevant to bring to the agenda. During a module an emergency situation occurred in their organization, which made us change the module into a regular meeting followed by feedback from us to them on their dialogic competences.

This example illustrates the basic idea in the approach we choose to denote emergent, mutual involvement. Another example occurred when, as mentioned, one of the managers suggested that we might include their employee appraisal interviews in the training process. It was his impression that the communicative tools that we had presented and/or developed collaboratively would be beneficial in the more dialogic sequences in their employee appraisal interviews. Accordingly we videotaped ca. 25 employee appraisal interviews and the following feedback sessions between the manager, employee, and us. This was probably the most productive part of the whole process. For them, as it functioned as an eye-opener on how to improve as a mentor; for us, as to conceptualizing how you might establish the conversational space and rhythm that we choose to call a caring container as a context for knowledge production (text 2).

Third order results were primarily our concern as action researchers. Coining concepts facilitating the p.t. most coherent theoretical understanding of the processes, including the relation between first and second order results, was our task, primarily. We presented concepts like emergent, mutual involvement, dialogue as share, dare, and care, selfreferentiality as a mental barrier for dialogues, social concrete blocks as stiffened, quasi-material basic assumptions or values, caring container as a knowledge co-producing context, etc. during our collaboration with the managers. Some were presented later. They were approved by the managers as a proper analysis of what we were doing or had been doing, but to talk about these concepts as dialogic products would be a piece of disingenuousness. Apart from the concept of gold digger which they

critized, as mentioned, we were in our own element. Their function as co-researchers was a sporadic gift to the project.

### 3.3.2. AAU – validating the context, too

The original organizational purposes for the AAU-project was improved job performance, better work climate, and enhanced service, as mentioned. They were continuously being validated pragmatically in the process with the teams. Furthermore, all employees attended yearly status seminars where they followed up in the teams, individually, exchanged learning points, and formulated the direction for their development in the year to come. The following is an example from such a seminar or workshop for all employees and management in September 2006 in Viborg.

Prior to the workshop each team was individually asked, in writing as well as in a 7 minute hopefully creative presentation on the workshop, to address the following questions posed by the project group and us:

- What have we learned so far?
- What has been difficult?
- Where has the process made a difference?
- Which dilemmas have you faced in the process?

Here as excerpts from two randomly chosen teams. Generally, their answers reflected huge difficulties as to team development and team structure. The Network Centre in AAU-Innovation answered, among other things:

We have worked especially with balancing expectations as to a proper behavior in our team ... We have used the tools we saw as a big success at the Hirtshals seminar [in 2005], i.e., our ‘overcoat’ [a colleague who gave feedback on strengths and weaknesses]. In this way we have created more openness in our office legitimizing “constructive confrontations” between colleagues. We have used our overcoats differently. Some has meetings on a regular basis, some just talked when necessary, and others found it annoying.

We have improved a lot from just thinking about what was a point of irritation to talk about it openly. Thus, we have improved our team behavior and internal communication.

The Fundraising- and Project Team wrote:

What did we learn?

- more efficient meeting management (helicopter perspective, bystander, more questions)
- we have learned to say ‘no’.
- we have specified our behavioral norms.

Which dilemmas have we been confronted with?



- to explain our norms around working hours for newly appointed, temporary employees
- working hours as our senior manager expect us to gear up when we have a work overload.

Where did the process produce a difference?

- when distributing the tasks in the team, especially when someone was sick
- as we found out it was legal to use time and resources on these matters, e.g. scheduling a strategy day for our team
- as we have specified our norms and made them visible.

What was difficult?

- to leave the piles on the desk in order to attend to these project meetings. A two hour meetings means two hours work overtime
- that we felt these meetings was a waste of time in the beginning: What were we heading at? How could we use these meetings in our daily work?

Again, the validation of first order results was basically theirs as professionals within their field of expertise. Simultaneously, we were interested in checking whether, e.g., a bystander function could facilitate their meetings contributing to improved job performance, better work climate, and enhanced service, as we consider ourselves as professionals as to team organizing.

At the same time, these comments indicate the grey areas in the distinction between first and second order results. Their first order results include substance as well as process. Did some of the teams, e.g., establish some norms in order to enhance their working climate? Are they comfortable using process tools like, say, bystander, they can use at other meetings without us being present? The bystander is a process tool of second order, too, as it is part of our way of organizing the action research process, hopefully contributing to first order results.

Second order results do not deal with organizing processes facilitating first order results, exclusively. It addresses the organizational opportunities for action research processes in the organization concerned, too. Based in text 5 that we were in the process of writing as our resume of the co-operation with AAU-Innovation and the Faculty of Science and Technology, we gave a lecture for all employees and management at the workshop in Viborg, 2006. The following is an excerpt from our slides, slightly edited in order to increase intelligibility:

Our initial impression after our first meetings with you:

- we were welcomed in a kind and co-operative way
- the meetings started later than planned and overran the deadline
- we listened to many problems
- we heard a lot of words
- when at home we were tired, wondering: what was actually decided?
- it is striking that we often did not react:
  - o we didn't always present our points of view

- we didn't always come forward with our proposals
- did we start to resign?

Our overall idea about you can be summoned in a question:  
has your organization become an eiderdown rich in unused resources?

A vicious circle:

Management talks a lot vs. employees resign:

There seems to be a vicious circle covering the organization as an eiderdown.  
When management talks the employees seem to be on standby mentally.  
When employees jumps into this standby mode management talks even more.<sup>7</sup>

Management:

- use many words
- postpone decisions
- we reckon there is an invert relation between words and decisions. Too many words and too many general statements – management talks 80% of the time and wants involvement. Thus, management enthusiasm seems contra productive.

Employees:

- stop coming up with proposals
- keep quite
- it's our impression that employees fall back on suggestions and critique; maybe even tell halfway truths about their team. Had we been managers, we would have missed suggestions as well as pro et con comments.

It seems as if a fatigue is diffusing.  
We observe you talk at cross purposes.

On the other hand:

A wealth of resources:

You are far ahead compared to many other organizations. The enthusiasm is obvious. We perceive you together as highly resourceful – this could be a really productive work place characterized with work joy ...

Why don't you as teams and management travel around visiting other organizations sharing your experiences with working in and managing teams in order to present a realistic picture of strengths and weaknesses? We think many organizations are fed up with the usual over-positive consultancy image of seven easy ways to success with teams.

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<sup>7</sup> In such presentations we underscore Bateson's point about the arbitrariness of punctuation in order to avoid one part having the monopoly of guilt and responsibility (Bateson, 1972).

Internalizing management: Self-management based on values in teams:  
 From wage-earner to co-worker? To become involved and take initiatives?  
 Is it the consciousness of the small, independent bourgeois identifying with his  
 job, paying no attention to work hours that characterizes the modern team  
 worker?

This presents a dilemma between enthusiasm and strong emotional reactions if  
 the so called self managing team worker is all of a sudden treated like a classical  
 wage-earner with no influence (sorrow, lost confidence, etc.).

Finally, we suggested:

How can you break through the eiderdown?

There seems to be a development dilemma: worklife quality and productivity vs.  
 fatigue.

Furthermore there are two very different perspectives or mind sets:

During the meetings with the teams we listen to quite some criticism of  
 management. When we – with the team's accept and anonymously – present this  
 critique to management, it is as if they haven't heard it before – and  
 simultaneously the teams keep on saying: 'We have told them – nothing  
 happens!'

We have a picture of both parties having switched off their hearing aid.

We reckon that there are experiences and problems on the employee side that you  
 don't hear as management as you present general statements and pose very few  
 questions.

According, in our interpretation, some employees renounce on getting through to  
 management (with team norms, complaints about tasks been given to colleagues,  
 demands for feedback and support, etc.).

We imagine some few changes might produce some important steps ahead. First  
 of all, we suggest more dialogues between management and employees:

Management:

- fewer program statements
- more questions
- more decisions and action

Employees:

- fewer complaints
- more suggestions: 'what we want' more than 'what does management  
 expect from us'

Our apologies to those of you who practice that, already.

The senior manager was obliged to participate in another meeting, so the employees asked us to repeat it the next day. During the presentation, you would have been able to hear a pin fall. There seemed to be consensus we had hit bull's eye and that it would be possible to renew their co-operation: the managers were supposed to improve their managerial style not just observing employee improvement, and the employees were to take more initiatives and give more precise feedback to management.

Thus, second order validation also includes addressing the contexts you are working in. This constitutes an action researcher dilemma that we placed on the agenda in our presentation, too:

Our dilemma:

Can you as employees refuse to participate in this as well as in development projects ahead? Did the project turn out to be an extra work load you could not avoid?

Which side are we on?

We are nobody's. We are in favor of the process – not of either management or employees.

Like walking on the edge of a knife:

- how can we criticize employee points of view without been perceived as making an alliance with management?
- how can we criticize management standpoints making sure they are not loosing face when employees are present?

On the other hand:

- o We are not neutral:
  - we expect that you as employees tell us if you fall out or if your are systematically skeptic (instead of talking over the Xerox that it's a waste of time)
  - we expect that management do not talk 80% of the time.

The critical third order result in this project is the distinction between traditional and modern team dilemmas. The modern dilemmas are, as described in text 5, based in the fact that some managerial functions are delegated to the team. This distinction was offered to us in the editorial dialogue with professor Werner Fricke, the editor of *International Journal of Action Research* to whom we have handed in the article.

During processes like this, usually some questions are posed to the team, as shown, as well as to us: Is this worth the effort? Do we move ahead? Are we on track? As we are all familiar with, it is difficult to observe continuous small changes, some of which we in

the following project were to characterize as incremental, organizational process innovations, in a busy work situation. In the second part of our co-operation with AAU-Innovation and the Faculty of Science and Technology we used a certain measurement – obviously well aware that the team purposes were not measurable goals. Here is an example from the Ph.d.-team doing all the administrative work around Ph.d-education, -scholarships, and –defense. When we started our co-operation on the 07.03.08, they laid down the following purpose for the process within the next two years ahead:

- We want to have opportunities working more proactively and not as firemen, exclusively
- we will no longer use 30% of our time on sending reminders for materials we haven't received. Accordingly, we will set up clear guidelines and deadlines for the departments
- we will be able to take over as a team in case we have absentees
- we will create an electronic application format for Ph.d.-scholarships
- we will establish regular meetings with department secretaries to balance expectations.

At a follow up meeting approximately seven months later (on the 29.10.08) we asked them individually to assess, how good/bad their team was in fulfilling these goals on a scale from 1 (=very bad) to 10 (=very good). The average score was:

Point to improve/purpose:	07.03.08	29.10.08
1. Proactive	1.8	6.5
2. 30% time on reminders	1.8	5.0
3. Take over if absent	3.2	7.3
4. Electronic application	1.0	1.0
5. Meetings with departments	1.4	7.6

Of course, this is not a scientific inquiry, but it presents some practical indications pointing at items to be satisfied with (1,2,3,5) as well as those for reconsideration of renewed effort (4).

Accordingly, we continued this quantitative assessment in the next project. An independent consultant and engineer produced a similar validation with all the teams initially and when we were about to terminate the project. Originally, we planned to work with every team for a year. In reality it lasted from 3 to 13 months (Kristiansen & Bloch-Poulsen, 2009).

### 3.3.3. EDIT – continued overlap between first and second order validation

As mentioned, the first phase of what was eventually to be called the EDIT-process was not without problems. One of the organizations fought to survive; the other had not established the agreed upon team structure, and the third choose to postpone the start for four months. Thus, during the summer period, we formulated a draft for balancing expectations on co-operation including a certain work division on validating results.

Here is a excerpt from the mail we sent to all the teams on the 01.09.08 to be discussed at the following team meeting:

The project runs for one year.

There will be arranged team meetings with us lasting 2-3 hours every 1.5 month – ca. 4 meetings in the spring and in the autumn

The specific point for improvement will be agreed upon with the teams and the project group. Innovation might deal with all sorts of improvement, e.g., in relation to customers, the internal co-operation and communication, management, knowledge sharing, etc. It is up to you.

Practically, the project will be carried through as training on the job, for the most part. We imagine that we give feedback on the training meetings on your communication and that we do dialogue training on the burning issues that you would have addressed anyway at such team meetings.

Rules of the game - a draft: We expect

- that you accept, we tape the meetings
- that we make drafts for agendas in the beginning and that it will become a shared concern later
- that we do the minutes initially and that you take over later
- that you are willing to reflect on and learn from your work processes and the action research process (co-learner, meta learning)
- that primarily you are responsible for carrying through the practical purposes through your actions between the modules with us as sparring partners
- that there will be a research question that we will formulate and inquire into co-operatively
- that we as action researchers have the primary responsibility for securing a scientific work
- that we share the responsibility creating the optimal process, meeting the goals
- that there will be dialogues at the meetings with decisions, agreement on actions, follow up on former decisions, feedback, learning, etc.
- that the meetings will be planned in order to enable you do carry through the decisions between the meetings
- that you are expected to create practical improvements between the meetings

- that there will be systematic follow up on agreed upon decisions
- that the project/process is neither yours nor ours (as action researchers) but ours as a shared endeavor (participation)
- that the presentation of results for your organization is a shared concern
- that the knowledge communication to the relevant target groups is a shared concern
- that the research communication is our responsibility, primarily, and that you will be involved (as critical feedback, with a veto, etc.)
- that we intend to have dialogues with you about all aspects of the project to secure involvement in decision making.

One of the teams in CSC had improvement of their meetings as the highest priority (result of first order). We wrote, e.g., to them after a couple of meetings:

There are many dialogic competences in the team:

- confirmation (where you show your interest instead of a stone face)
- I-messages (where you talk on an equal footing instead of patronizing)
- meta-communication (where you talk and steer the conversation from a helicopter or from the balcony while you are part of the conversation, simultaneously)
- scanning (where you check your ideas instead of acting on unchecked ideas about what the other probably means).

We will ask you to consider:

- How do you handle minority points of view and silence in your team (are they overruled/overheard or met with silence that maybe indicates consensus or ...? Who's responsible for getting the more silent colleagues to participate in another way?)
- could you improve tracking (where you ask into key words in the other persons point of view in order to understand him/her)?
- could you change the balance between productive opposer, where you criticize in a respectful way, and unproductive opposer, where you systematically seem to be on the lookout for failures and shortcomings in order to have more of the first dimension (cf. the enclosed paper on mover, opposer, follower, and bystander)?
- could you improve the balance between analysis and implementing (what was decided and who is doing what when) in order to prioritize the last dimension?
- is it an "innovation" in itself if your extrovert team prioritize reflecting the foundation, *before* you jump to the analysis?

These comments deal with first and second order results as, e.g. that the dialogic competences being trained, developed and evaluated in the action research process

should hopefully be beneficial in their everyday meetings during and after our co-operation, too. Thus, both parties have a stake in validating both types of results.

We enter the dialogue on validating first order results as co-learners and sometimes as co-researchers. We are co-learners as to the substance of their specific improvements, but co-researchers as to evaluating if these improvements count as innovation as we have research based knowledge about positiv stress which is another designation of the criterion about work life quality.

The above mentioned rules of the game were agreed upon as the basis for the further co-operation, with small adjustments. On our part they represented our learning from former projects. Simultaneously, with these guidelines we tried to match the three defining criteria for action research as stated by Greenwood & Levin (1999), i.e., action, research, and participation.

Reason & Bradbury (2001) add the criterion "worthwhile" (meaningful for them and us), and "sustainability" (ecologically as well as anchored in the organization). They chose to talk about "Quality and rigour in action research" (p. 27) instead of validating, with the following sub criterion:

Is the action research explicit in developing a praxis of relational participation?

This is the endeavor that became quite clear to us during the summer 2008. We wanted our partners to be involved in all aspects and phases. In formulating the point of departure and the direction or purpose; in "implementing", adjusting, and anchoring their decisions as when they at B&O wrote "Bystander" in their meeting room in order to remember this function in meetings ahead; in presenting our feedback as questions rather than statements cast in stone; in involving them as professionals in the reflections. We wanted to abandon the pattern where we wrote about them without inquiring into how they actually experienced the process. (A phenomenological approach might have been elaborated upon in text 2).

This pertains to the question on the importance of participation. Practically, I have chosen to use the concepts participation and involvement indiscriminately with the same meaning. To me, they denote a tensional process concept in the field between what Nielsen (2004) calls involvement pointing primarily at a managerial tool and participation hinting more to an employee effort towards democracy at work. As such it reflects the degree of influence in the dialogue inquiring into and deciding about the purpose, design, validation, and knowledge communication of the action research project, within the frame work that our shared effort must contribute to a simultaneously improvement for the organization, the organizing, and the work life quality (differing from traditional innovation research focusing on the first criterion, only).

The relation between involvement/participation and democracy is not transparent in texts 1-7. On one side I don't understand how it should be possible to characterize organizations in Denmark as democratic in the political sense of the word as employees cannot elect their managers. Inversely, one might talk about organizational democracy if it refers to the increased influence on decisions on one's own work situation as is



indicated with the concepts of involvement or participation. In the dialogic action research sketched here, democracy is not an independent criterion transcending participation related specifically to purpose, design, validation, and knowledge communication. This pragmatic approach differs from, among others, Reason's (2006) perspective on action research which considers democracy as a coherent global movement. Let me quote from his inaugural professorial lecture (2002):

In particular it has brought the twin global crises of justice and sustainability. I want to suggest to you that these two crises represent an enormous challenge, and one that cannot be fully addressed within the modern worldview - because it is that worldview that has substantially brought about these crises.

In very simple terms I want to articulate a dreadful warning: we cannot go on the way we have been doing based on the way we have been thinking. And I want to offer a challenge, an expression of hope for a way forward based on a participatory ethos.

I fully agree with this radical-democratic participation effort. Yet, it is not an independent criterion in my research.

Is action research guided by reflexive concern for practical outcomes?

The question is if our co-constructs, e.g., the model for co-production of learning in transition between projects (Clemmensen, Kristiansen & Bloch-Poulsen, 2009) work for them? Do they establish a difference in their day to day work life? We have always paid attention to this but a more systematic follow up would probably be needed in projects to come. The VP for development at DSI told they were using the model and that it was archived as a SOP (Standard Operational Procedure) which is a way of anchoring. On the other hand, I haven't checked if they still use it here 2 years after.

Does action research include a plurality of knowing?

Our action research work comprehends several forms of knowledge. Their practical and often research based as well as our practical and research based knowledge. Their knowledge is founded on their professional expertise, ours on our experiences as organizational development consultants and researchers.

Does action research engage in significant work?

One third of the workforce works in team today. Thus it is important to co-create employee driven innovations including an intertwined improvement for the organization, the organizing, and the work life quality.

Does the action research result in new and enduring infrastructures? ... sustainable change ...?

It is highly important to anchor the project in the organization, as underlined by Pålshaugen (1998), too. The positive aspect seen from this perspective is that all three projects have had so many follow up sessions that e.g., the bystander function could be

part of the daily work situation along and after the projects if they considered it relevant. On the other hand, we are undeniably up against continuous changes in team structures that it feels like working as Sisyphus, sometimes.

It seems to me as if Reason & Bradbury's criteria miss a dimension of third order, i.e., theoretical results. Maybe, it is because I want to maintain a distinction between co-learner and co-researcher. Without that I cannot see how you might argue in favor of a distinction between reflective consultancy work and action research. A co-researcher is occupied with third order results, too, comparing these to other conceptualizations of action research. Is, e.g., the concept of a caring container, developed in the B&O-project, an expression of a non-critical actions research? How, if at all, will you be able to understand a dialogue in an organization from Bohm's dialogue theory?

In our original draft for rules of the game we had a dimension referring to this:

- We don't see you as co-researchers  
(due to the time pressure you work under)
- Accordingly, we don't ask: 'Is it true?'
- but rather: 'Does it make sense?' or 'Does it work for you?'

The question of meaning and actionability is relevant in relation to first and second order result, no doubt. But I don't reckon time pressure as the relevant criterion. Our partners are not action researchers. They are professionals within another field of expertise based on education and experience. They would not have been researchers in the process if they had had more time, just like we would not have been apprentices within their professional fields. To me, it makes more sense to characterize them as co-learners primarily within first and second order, while we have shifting roles on first order as facilitators, co-learners, and co-researchers; as co-learners and co-researchers on second order, and as co-researchers on third order where the prefix 'co' refers to the tension between 'in co-operation with' and 'simultaneously'.

In my interpretation, Reason seems to identify co-learner and co-researcher. At an action research conference "Emergent Approaches to Inquiry Conference, 12" in Hawkwood in September 2008 arranged by the Centre for Action Research in Professional Practice at Barth Universitet he argued that street-children equipped with a camera were to be consider as co-researchers. On the other hand, he (Reason, 2006, p. 189) underlines that action research is characterized by many ways of knowing.

The theoretical action research question in the project was, as mentioned, that all types of employees have an innovative potential and that this might be released in a dialogue. As you can see in text 6 and 7, we had to modify this presupposition. The second order aspect of this presupposition – how can you organize such dialogues in practice – was discussed with the teams late in the project. The third order aspect – how to understand these team dialogues – was our own concern. In an internal work paper from 21.07.08 we wrote:

The dialogic quality implies that we have an understanding of development and improvement as more than change and OD [organizational development]. We comprehend at team and a meeting with a team as energy flow in certain patterns. We

focus on these patterns more than on team members, individually. We try to address shifts in this energy preventing the process towards improvement. If, e.g. the vicious circle between a highly talkative manager and his falling back employees starts running then the energy in the room decreases or the atmosphere is turned down, and we lose our concentration. – It's important to address that openly, otherwise the meeting just continues as usual with no improvement.

We probably have a hypothesis about breaks of communicative patterns as critical to creating improvement. The new point is that we try to anchor this in the design of meetings and actions: More team members play a more active role; more have or use their voice; more are involved in actions between the meetings as breaks of communicative patterns might result in discursive changes, only, which do not satisfy our ambition about contributing to improvements in work organizing, work climate and e.g., service in a sustainable, i.e., integrated way.

The last comment on discursive changes is a critique of the discursive turn in action research that has Pålshaugen (1998) as its spokesman (cf. III,2). We were not satisfied with changes in communication (results of second order, typically) that might hopefully be conducive to first order results, but wanted both types simultaneously.

#### 3.3.4. EDIT – a research question?

Fortunately, we were being helped to formulate the research question – although nearly a year after it started. At that time, I saw this delay as a failure. We ought to have had a research question from the beginning. Today, I see it differently based in the specific character of our action research process and the consequential sort of sense making. Through the former projects as well as in the first part of the EDIT-project we had practiced a sort of explorative method development where we suddenly found ourselves confronted with the question: How can we reasonably make sense of and comprehend our results? – to use an odd expression.

At a meta-level helicopter meeting with Werner Fricke about our project in November 2008, two things became clear to us: firstly, that our concept of innovative potentials had predecessors in Fricke's (2007) concept of innovative qualifications. Secondly, that the theoretical challenge dealt with two questions:

- what is the difference between TAM and DHTM, i.e., what is the special quality of the meetings with us – if there is something special, and
- how can the teams/the organizations transform the best dimensions in these meetings to their daily work situation – not just as specific improvements, but as spaces for ongoing learning?

The purpose is to inquire into questions like:

- What new knowledge do we produce at DHTMs?
- What is the difference between TAM and DHTM?
- What do you feel is different when we are there?

- What are we doing together?
- What did we do collaboratively?
- We can only understand when we are doing things:
  - o How can joint learning become a contribution to theory development
  - o This is validation of theory, or?

Using a concept from the B&O-project, the question is: how can the team and we co-create an organizational anchoring of the caring container that DHTM exemplifies in order for it to proceed when the process with us terminates? To my best knowledge, it is the same effort you will find in Eikeland's backstage development organization including not only a team but a whole organization (meeting with Eikeland, 09.02.09).

Today, I comprehend these questions as related to results of second order where validation of action research is validation in action research in practice. DHTMs and the period between them is part of the validation. To my perspective, as action researchers we are still alone with the challenge of how to understand these processes while it is a shared concern to find the best way to organize them. To put it differently: we shared the methodical dimension with the participants (second order), while the theoretical dimension was ours almost exclusively (third order).

### 3.3.5. EDIT – team involvement in the research question

The meeting with Werner Fricke was critical for the validation of first and second order result. Below, you will find an excerpt from a format of a paper we mailed to all the teams in January 2009 in which questions of third order are referred to the foot notes:

Project:

Innovation and involvement through strengthening dialogue in modern teambased organisations.

Subject: Input to our next meeting

To: Team X

From: Marianne & Jørgen

Date: 15.01.09.

Dear team X

Purpose:

At our next meeting on .... we would like to discuss the following questions with you:

- o Did the project end up with results for your team/your organization? – If yes, which? (results)
- o Have you and we learned from the project? – If yes, what? (learning)

- Can you use these results and learning in your work situation ahead? – If yes, how? (anchoring)

This paper is written to all teams in CSC, DSI and CSMS, participating in the project. Thus, there may be something you are not familiar with (please feel free to neglect the foot notes).

Ideas and principles:

As you know, we work with employee driven organizational process innovation. Focus is on improved work processes and ways of communication carried through by the employees, as well as on conditions for innovation based in dialogues. Everybody proclaims that innovation is the way to go for Denmark. Simultaneously, it is our experience from the project that employee driven innovation based on dialogues has difficult conditions as well as great opportunities:

The difficult conditions preventing innovation relate to several issues we have observed to a more or lesser degree in the three participating organizations:

- Increasingly, time is in short supply
- There seems to be a dominant tendency heading at production, i.e., short term problem solution and fire extinguishing. Employees and management are so exclusively preoccupied with the day to day business that reflections about eventually changing work routines are considered a luxury commodity.
- Generally, you have to shout in order to improve communication between management and employees.
- Some employees do not feel listened to by management and accordingly they abstain from presenting their ideas for improvement.
- Employees and managers are used to having decisions made on a higher level which works contrary to involvement.
- Employees and management do not follow up. As lot of ideas are presented and not implemented, an atmosphere of 'it's of no use to talk about improvements' spreads.
- Some are used to decisions being postponed.
- There is a tendency to present counter arguments, when an idea, a critique or a decision is presented – instead of asking questions and inquire into the idea.

The great opportunities are due to the following:

- Many managers and employees show dialogic competences as to their own working conditions which are unfolded under the appropriate condition, e.g.,

when there is time enough for a dialogue. Maybe, this is a general characteristic for knowledge organizations?

- Thus, we have experienced that there is an unused innovative potential in a team and its members on ideas for improving processes, organizing, work culture, etc.<sup>8</sup>
- As a matter of fact, we are convinced already that managers and employees have the dialogic competences sufficient to produce employee driven, organizational process innovations. Accordingly, the effort is to create the conditions for them to unfold.

Towards a shared research question?

Looking at the meetings with the teams, it is striking how

- The energy has changed from an initial resignation or a funeral atmosphere to a lifted tone and shared action when terminating the meeting.
- There are many dialogic competences on organizational process innovation, if you have the time necessary for dialogues.

Considering the DHMTs for half a year or a whole year, it is generally the assessment of the teams that important improvements have been made in relation to their initial purposes or goal (cf. the quantitative surveys, you made with Ole Wenderby [the independent consultant/engineer]). Of course, there may be reasons for this outside the project.

One of the team managers wrote (on the 24.10.08) prior to a meeting:

Hi, Jørgen and Marianne.

Thank you for a good meeting. It's incredible how great impact it has 'just' because you ask some questions to our routines. It certainly is food for thought for me, e.g., the point about our tendency to postpone :-). Some of the employees have told me, without request, that they think the process is very beneficial. The enthusiasm at our meetings has increased. I really enjoy it.

Another team manager from another organization expressed it like this:

It is as if you lower your shoulders during the meetings with you.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Among others, we are inspired by the German action researcher, Fricke, who defines innovative potential this way: "Unter innovatorischen Qualifikationen verstanden wir die Fähigkeit, Alternativen zu einer vorgefundenen Situation zu denken, zu entwickeln und zu realisieren, d.h. Möglichkeiten über das faktische hinaus zu denken" (p. 377). Fricke, W. (2007) Demokratische Beteiligung – das Fundament einer Unternehmenskultur (nicht nur) mit dem Programm "Humanisierung des Arbeitslebens", in Rainer Benthin & Ulrich Brinkmann (Eds.), *Unternehmenskultur und Mitbestimmung. Betriebliche Integration zwischen Konsensus und Konflikt*. (pp. 373-390). Frankfurt/M.: Campus.

<sup>9</sup> We have chosen to focus on the positive aspects in the quotations. We are fully aware of other consequences, e.g., a split between employees participating and those who didn't.

Thus, we would like very much with you to inquiry into these research questions:<sup>10</sup>

- Do you eventually perceive a difference between the meetings you sat up before, compared to the meetings we have set up collaboratively in this project? If so, how? (results and learning]
- What will it eventually take for the team to continue the project meetings without us? (anchoring)

Maybe, we have to collaboratively change these questions.

This would constitute a new way in our research. We are constantly in the process of balancing research *on* and research *with*, prioritizing the last dimension. In a co-inquiry with you, we hope we all might strengthen our knowledge about:

- your internal relations
- your division of roles
- the organizing of your work
- the working climate in the team
- your meeting culture
- your meeting structure
- your relation to the rest of the organization, etc.

We imagine changes in these aspects might facilitate organizational process innovations. Changes, which hopefully, teams in other organizations might learn from, too.

What were our good experiences before we started our co-operation?

Some years ago we carried through an action research project [the AAU-project] in a public institution. According to the assessment of the participants it produces employee driven organizational process innovation or conditions for these, as, e.g.:

- new ways of solving tasks through improved dialogues
- increased knowledge sharing in and between the teams
- new, more efficient ways of organizing their meetings

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<sup>10</sup> Side leap: research *on* or research *with*?

Traditional action research is characterized by a distinction between development project and research project:

In our case, the development project refers to the improvements the teams want to implement, i.e., the result and learning, they expect from the project. To achieve this is the prime effort of the teams with the researchers as sparring partners.

Similarly, the research project would focus on what it takes to produce innovations. It is considered the primary responsibility of the researcher to inquire into that question – perhaps supported by the teams as informants.

Thus, although you talk a lot about involvement and participation in the action research milieu, you often end up doing research *on* other people, i.e., you, in this case. We have rightfully been criticized for that, formerly.

- improved balancing expectations team internally and in relation to management
- a more transparent priority between tasks
- a clearer division of responsibility.<sup>11</sup>

We also know that a co-operation with several teams in a big private enterprise (Lego) ended up in an improved bottom line as a result of halving the number of unplanned machinery break downs.<sup>12</sup> We are thus able to document that it is possible to produce results through dialogues in teams.

What were our intentions co-operating with you?

We don't know how you experience the process. We don't know if there are differences between your own meetings and the meetings organized with us – and what might eventually constitute such differences. Accordingly, we will just mention what we consciously have been trying to practice.

The big picture is that we have tried to design the meetings with you in a more development oriented and dialogic way. The new knowledge for us has been that – apparently – certain ways of organizing the communication on the meetings seem to encourage dialogue, e.g.:

- Hot potatoes:
  - i.e., that your burning issues are the point of departure (instead of the usually uncommitted talk about values and attitudes tending to polarize or lower the energy in the room). It is crucial for us that you as a team set up the purposes you want to pursue collaborating with us (as opposed to top-down).

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<sup>11</sup> Kristiansen, M. & Bloch-Poulsen, J. (2006). Involvement as a Dilemma. Between Dialogue and Discussion in Team Based Organizations. *International Journal of Action Research*, 2 (2), 163-197. Some of the teams in the public organization concerned underscored that the process has been beneficial for them for the following reason – which turned out to be more a sort of an evaluation of us:

- that we work with the challenges of the teams, i.e., their burning issues
- that we do so in a very concrete way
- that we present our communicative comments continuously
- that we make sure everyone is involved
- that we see to everybody trying the relevant communicative tools and shift between different roles
- that we accept if team members don't want to or don't dare to participate in the processes
- that we function as the devil's advocate
- that the team was forced to follow up on decisions
- that we have asked in ways which facilitated team members thinking differently, e.g.: "Do you have any other options in this situation?" or "What what be your attitudes, if we suggested you did ...?"
- that we have found the core of their problems and changed the programme accordingly
- that we respect, if the team wants to work on other issues than scheduled.

The teams thus helped us to express our contribution as action researchers. Nevertheless, we feel there has been too much focus on evaluation our way of facilitating the process. Instead, we would like to address the above mentioned questions.

<sup>12</sup> Bisgaard, P. & Bloch-Poulsen, J. (2002). Kost og spand – om at tage skeen i egen hånd. *Vedligehold. Drift & økonomi*, 4, 16-17. [Broom and bucket – how to become an agent. Bisgaard is the VP of maintenance at Lego].



- Results for you:
  - i.e., that we have been on the lookout for improvements for you as a team (a smarter organizing, a better co-operation, etc.).
- Emergent agenda:
  - i.e., that the agenda is up for continuous negotiation and can be changed in order to work with what emerges for the team as most relevant.
- Bystander:
  - i.e., a function supporting the team being on track, preventing the team running in circles, repeating itself, postponing, talking at cross purposes, etc. This function changes between the team members and demands you are able to cope with substance and communication simultaneously.
- Previous sparring:
  - in order to improve a presentation and avoiding one person being the sole responsible for the points of view.
- 'Hummer meetings':
  - when a person has presented an idea, we have often asked the rest to hum in pairs to make sure everybody having a voice avoiding the very talkative on the usual hunt for failures and shortcomings.
- Shifting small groups:
  - in order to facilitate optimum exchange of ideas involving everyone.
- Pro- et con groups:
  - when a person has presented a point of view, we have often asked the rest to be divided into two sub groups: one was to come up with all the positive aspects of the idea; the other, points for improvement. The purpose has been to make you sense on your own body, so to speak, the impact of positive feedback on the innovative potential.
- Round the table:
  - if there was a "talkative silence" everybody was to contribute in a sequence/circle.
- Continous summary:
  - i.e., that the team – eventually as part of the bystander function – terminates every issue on the agenda with a résumé to secure a shared understanding: what was decided; who is supposed to do what; when is the follow up, etc. In this way we try to balance analysis and implementation as the next meetings starts with a follow up.
- Learning:
  - i.e., that every meeting ends up with an evaluation of what to continue and what to improve at the next meeting. It is our hope that this method, a

suggestion from one of the teams, will help anchoring the process in the organization.

- Anchoring:
  - i.e., that we try to deeply root the process in the organization to secure sustainability in order to support the team carry on the positive aspects of the proces organizing when our co-operation terminates.
- Involving the organization:
  - i.e., that we have addressed cross functional issues with the project group according to an agreement with the teams in order to facilitate solutions to necessary intra organizational problems, as, e.g. about the meeting culture in the organization, the relation between departments or between top management and the teams. Especially, we have tried to be very specific on power issues.
- Action oriented listening:
  - i.e., it has been our intention to listen to criticism of us acting according to it – instead of rejecting it. We think criticism is often sensible and would like to show in practice that it is useful to present a critical point or a new idea.
- Over coat:
  - i.e., that you, as part of the anchoring, can have a buddy among your colleagues functioning as ”positive harassment” on your individual points for improvement (in order to avoid being alone).
- Ongoing feedback on team communication:
  - i.e., comments on distribution of speech, e.g., between manager and team member, the amount of points of view compared to the amount of open questions, lack of attunement about what’s (not) up for negotiation, grey areas as to the decision process, etc.

Summing up, we have tried to co-create a special climate. A special inquiry and development community heading at new ways of handling the problems, more appropriate for you. In this atmosphere it should be possible to address possible taboos or unnecessarily constraining power mechanisms in order to do collaborative thinking. Maybe it is also about lowering your shoulders. In a former project, we called this community a caring container.<sup>13</sup>

What did we intend to avoid?

We have intended not to follow some of these well known unproductive tracks:

- that the project was considered yet another research project, where the teams and the organizations were used by us as cases

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<sup>13</sup> Kristiansen, M. & Bloch-Poulsen, J. (2005). *Midwifery and dialogue. Emergent, mutual involvement in action research*. Reiner Hampp Verlag: München.

- that the project (accordingly) was conceived as ours and not as a shared concern
- that we colonized your way of thinking, trying to force our theoretical understanding over you
- that you were to be gracefully bored during the meetings as you were eager to deal with the tasks on your office desk
- that the sessions would repeat the problems of many meetings, e.g.,
  - that only the usually few talkative persons were heard
  - that you automatically turned to the failures and shortcomings
  - that you turned into the mood of the contrary point of view ...

At the next meeting we would like you individually to consider:

- Has the project produced concrete results for your team/organization? If so, which? (results) – E.g., a new release steering system, skills-matrix, meeting structure.
- Have you learned something? If so, what? (learning) – E.g., that you might save time sparring with others prior to a presentation; that it is valuable to share experience and knowledge.
- What will it take for you to eventually use these results and learning in your job ahead? (anchoring) – E.g., that you will stick to evaluating every meeting in the last 5 minutes; that you could use a bystander.

We are looking forward to hearing your examples. As we are to document the process we will ask you to send us a ½-1 A4-sheet before the meeting.  
Best greeting,

Marianne & Jørgen

Some of the results are reproduced in text 6 and 7.

The letter to the teams shows a disposition for an appreciation of the importance that everybody is allowed to voice their point of view and that critique is legitimate. This disposition is elaborated upon in text 6 and 7 into the concept of dissensus indicating we had to revise our initial supposition about the dialogue's potential for releasing latent innovative qualifications. It is not sufficient to schedule a dialogue. It must be characterized by a dissensus approach, i.e., dissensus sensibility in combination with dissensus organizing. Having finished text 6 and 7 I found other researchers pointing at different kinds of sensibility, as sensibility for wholeness, uniqueness or emergence (Barge & Little, 2002). As far as I can see they are supplementary to each other.

### 3.3.6. Résumé – validation in flux

It will be too much to present into detail the comprehensive discussion of validation and validity within the last couple of decades. Some of the debate is reflected in Denzin & Lincoln (1994). With Guba & Lincoln's (1994) contribution to this Handbook as well as

Bryman (2008) as point of departure, I will try to sketch my understanding of validation. Guba & Lincoln argues that the differences between the quantitative methods and their criteria of validity and reliability and the qualitative methods are such that quantitative criteria cannot be transferred to the qualitative research. Accordingly, they must have their own. I'm in line with this point of view as I have argued in Kristiansen & Bloch-Poulsen (1997). I mean, you cannot, e.g., talk sensibly about a double blind inquiry into the concept of state or republic in the oeuvre of Plato. Inversely, in what follows, I will try to parallelize for the sake of clarity as it seems to facilitate an appreciation of the differences. Guba & Lincoln presents trustworthiness and authenticity as the criteria of qualitative research including the form of action research, I do.

They divide trustworthiness into four dimensions:

- a. Credibility, which to Guba & Lincoln (1994, p. 114) is the equivalent to internal validity.

In my reading, this dimension is identical with communicative validity as presented by Kvale (1997). The validity of a statement is decided in a dialogue with the interviewed persons or, generally speaking, with your partners (the participants, research colleagues, etc.). Referring to interviews, you talk about respondent validity. In action research this dimension refers to the ongoing dialogue with the other professional party, especially characterized by tracking and scanning (cf. text 2) where you collaboratively test if your interpretations are in line with the ideas of the other party. Furthermore, as I will return to in the next paragraph on research communication, it implies the other party's appreciation of the publications (popular or research articles and books, videos etc.) you have produced as action researcher or you have produced collaboratively. Credibility has thus been a natural criterion throughout all three projects.

- b. Transferability, which according to Guba & Lincoln (1994, p. 114) can be understood as analogous to external validity.

Rather than the generalizability of quantitative studies, in qualitative research a validity criterion is the thick, highly detailed, thorough description of the case in question and/or the relatively restricted amount of interviews you have carried through, cf. Geertz (1973). It's an in-depth more than a criterion of width. To my interpretation, it is equivalent to Kvale's (1997) concept of analytical generalizability. As a researcher you are supposed to reflect on what might be the results of similar cases based on an assessment of similarities and dissimilarities. Grounded in my former research, I have argued in favor of the strange generalizability of the single case: the more you work in-depth with problems or challenges in a restricted group of people, the more you are able to express with validity about people outside this group (Kristiansen & Bloch-Poulsen, 1997). Maybe this experience points at a holistic ontology as the question of generalizability in my opinion is sensible only within an atomistic ontology?

We have tried to fulfill this criterion by not just telling about, but actually showing what went on. You will find circumstantial clips from conversations and internal work sheets in our publications in order to make it possible for other researcher to evaluate the

“transferability” – or much better: relevance – of our project and project results for their work.

c. Dependability, as Guba & Lincoln (1994, p. 114) parallels to reliability.

In principle, the researcher in quantitative research is conceptualized as a source of error. Accordingly, you are constantly heading at reducing his or her influence on the results. This is different in qualitative studies where this dependability is a condition that you have to reflect continuously. You might say, you have to create possibilities for virtual reproduction. The research should ideally be produced in ways that enable other researchers to control the result, i.e., the empirical material as well as your interpretations, e.g, by taping all conversations, as we have done in the three projects.

In line with this criterion, we have presented our reflections at conferences and in meetings with especially competent action researchers, as the above mentioned with Fricke, November 2008, and Eikeland, February 2009. In the last project, besides, we had a follow group of researchers and CEO's in small and medium sized organizations, with whom we discussed our problems and challenges, practically as well as theoretically.

On the other hand, everything cannot be reproduced or presented in a genuine way, e.g, the special atmosphere in a training-situation or dialogue. As part of my preparatory work for writing this text, I saw a couple of videos we made in collaboration with the managers at B&O to be used for training of new mentors. It is 15 years ago. I will never be able to reproduce the climate of un-impressed, serious, and generous reflexivity erasing from the video and warming my heart, although, perhaps this atmosphere was *the* decisive condition for the knowledge production, expressing the caring container in a nutshell.

To put it otherwise: I find this criterion sensible, precisely to the degree in which you cannot parallel dependability with reliability, i.e., the apprehension that it is (in principle) possible for another (action) researcher to reproduce the same results (I here neglect that the situation was changed exactly because of the action research, which makes the attempt futile).

d. Confirmability, paralleled by Guba & Lincoln (1994, p. 114) with objectivity.

The endeavor is to fence the research from the personal values of the researcher (Bryman, 2008, p. 379). Having been part of the critique of positivism in the 1970's, I understand this criterion as impossible. To become sensible in my perspective, confirmability must be transformed into an ongoing process of deliberately question and open reflect on your values as an action researcher. It might imply a continuous falsification process as demonstrated in text 7 where we give up our original design.

Then again: confirmability is a sensible criterion in my work precisely as far as it cannot be seen as analogous to the demand for objectivity. Our effort has been to present our

observations and analysis as *questa* rather than data, although I must admit that we did not succeed doing that in some of the feedback sequences presented above. It is not easy to walk the talk here.

Authenticity is divided into the following dimensions by Guba & Lincoln (1994, p. 114):

a. Fairness

This guideline implies that different points of view in the group you have inquired into – or done research with – are appropriately presented in the research communication. As mentioned in the account of the seminar in the AAU-project in Viborg, 2006 for all employees and managers, we depicted ourselves as walking on the edge of a knife between management and employees. We are convinced it was important we stood our point on working with teams in function in CSMS. If we had fallen back and agreed to the managerial wish to start right away, i.e., with teams not in function and, accordingly, not able to see any meaning in the project, we would have lost the employees who might reasonably have criticized us for being unfair. Personally, to me the challenge has not been so much to be fair to the different parties, i.e., managers vs. employees, or team member against each other (text 6). The challenge lay more in being fair to my own theoretical and practical principles in these tensions with a realistic view to the opportunities for action research projects in the organization in question.

On the other hand, there is, especially in the last project, an employee perspective reflected in the three dimensional concept of employee driven innovation. This is motivated in the one-sidedness in the dominant innovation thinking prioritizing surplus value for the organization as the exclusive criterion.

b. Ontological authenticity

This means that as a result of the research, the group of persons you have studied or done research with will have an enhanced understanding of their social environment or conditions. It could, e.g., be a group of employees appreciating how their manager is restricted and controlled by the senior managers. This guideline is not a conscious effort on my part. There have been some scattered approaches pointing in that direction. In text 6, e.g, Team Product Support approaches the Product Development getting an emphatic understanding of their situation. Yet, it has not been a systematic effort in my research. I don't see it as a criterion in projects ahead, either, unless it is relevant to the improvements wished for by the teams, directly.

c. Educational authenticity

You might translate this guideline into empathy, implying the group of people you work with gets an improved understanding of each other's perspective. This is in line with a systematic tendency in the three projects by training dialogic competences as empathy, tracking, scanning – well dialogue, in general. On the other hand, the concept

”educational” addresses the tension between research on (those you can educate) and with (those you can learn with).

d. Catalytic authenticity

This implies that research open up for the others to reflect on the improvements they would like to “implement”. This principle is, of course, critical to action research; not only the reflection, but the actual improvements as are the substance of the following guideline, namely:

e. Tactical authenticity

This indicates empowerment (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 114). It is a pragmatic validation assessing whether the improvements are transformed to practice.

In sum, in my opinion we meet the qualitative validity claims, if I am allowed to characterize them as such, as put forward by Guba & Lincoln (1994), Reason (2006), and Bradbury & Reason (2001). To the degree, they are relevant for the project, and to the degree they are not translatable into the guidelines of quantitative surveys.

Simultaneously, it has become clear to me through the reflection that emerged writing this paragraph how fluid the validity process is. The term ‘co-validation’ is of little use trying to grasp the complexity; how vague the demarcation between first and second order validation, as well as between second order and third order, i.e., between method and theory, is; how undefined roles we and our partners have.

On one hand, I do understand the idea presented initially by the CEO at DSI that the research was ours and that the practical results was to “kick ass” for them. On the other hand, practice has come out to be much more complicated. Even more complicated, than I imagined in the process.

In a way the experience underlines the warning, presented by Reason & Bradbury (2001, p. 454) summing up their Handbook of Action Research against putting up some new philosophy of science template for validity in action research. As such, the concept of dissensus validation that was eventually produced in the process as part of the concept of dissensus sensibility is not to be taken as a check list to follow but more as a point of attention.

### 3.4. Action research communication

An independent paragraph on research communication, i.e., communication of results from the action research project, might indicate I agreed with the ordinary distinction between knowledge production, as e.g., described in paragraph 3.1-3.3 and knowledge communication with the last mentioned dimension being reduced to presentation of

information as diffusion based in transfer. I am not in line with that distinction, here, which serves an analytical or heuristic purpose, only.

Theoretically one might argue that all communication is in itself production. Even the traditional conceptualization of the more knowledgeable teacher or trainer presenting to the less knowledgeable student or trainee includes some sort of activity on behalf of the last mentioned contradicting the passivity in the concept of transfer from the active more knowledgeable to the passive less knowledgeable or not-knowing.

The challenge for me is to contribute co-creating conditions producing the optimum possibilities for knowledge production and knowledge communication to become congruent. In these situations, no one is just information-presenter. It goes for the internal communication in the co-operation with the teams and the organization, and for the external communication, i.e., in relation to other stakeholder as, e.g., other departments in the organization, our readers, conference or course participants or students.

#### 3.4.1. Internal communication as production?

Let us start with the internal communication. At a NordForsk-conference<sup>14</sup> in Tampere in September 2010 on dialogic research communication one of the participants expressed a wish to give back her analysis as feedback to the informants. This would not be dialogic action research in my understanding. It might represent the more extended, conventional sort of action research, distinguished by Maurer & Githens (2010) from dialogic as well as critical action research. As I will return to, the concept of informant belongs to a linear comprehension of communication as information exchange between sender and receiver, i.e., as transfer. I understand the other as participant. This concept is for me meant to point to an appreciation of communication as a process between two or more communicators, co-producing meaning and interpersonal relations in contexts that might simultaneously be changed. Again, I would like to underscore that the prefix 'co' refer to the tension between doing together, doing the same, or doing it at the same time. This means you produce something in between, or that the working together produces different cognition in the parties, or the same cognition, or that the knowledge production takes place within the same time and space.

From the beginning of the B&O-project it has been clear to us that our short lectures at the training modules were to present possibilities, hopefully meaningful to them, more than data and certain or true analysis. Data stems from Latin (*do-dedi-datum-dare*) and mean 'to give'. Accordingly datum or data in plural refers to 'the given.' My endeavor has been to, instead, present 'questa', i.e., open questions based in experience and theory. To use Bohm's distinction, I intended to present and ask in a dialogic way encouraging a shared inquiry rather than as the discussant in the role of persuading. The concept of dialogue, including dialogic competences as a trinity of skills, ways of relation, and ways of being, etc. (text 2) was not known to us before the B&O-project but emerged in the process. It was developed in the process of reflection, co-operating

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<sup>14</sup> Nordic Network for the study of the dialogic communication of research.



with the participants and sometimes without them, e.g., in feedback to midwife conversations just being carried through or based on discussion about video clips from dialogues at the last module. In this way, the concept of peeling an onion was changed into digging gold which was again changed into acting as a midwife as denotations of the mentor's effort to get to the core of the employee universe. In this way, the process was a space for workplace learning where they and we came with suggestions for inquiry and where this communication in itself produced new knowledge.

Initiating the next project at AAU, we were fairly certain about the usability or relevance of the dialogic competences in fields outside B&O, too. We had already used these competences in training processes at Danfoss, The Danish Railways, Lego, etc. Accordingly, this project was more sort of training these competences, already given or taken for granted, with us in the role as teachers or conventional trainers rather than dialogue partners, respecting whether the participants were able, and eventually how, to use them in their daily business in ways adequate to their culture.

If we imagine a continuum between data and *questa*, the dialogic competences were moved from *questa* towards data. The developmental focus – or *questa* focus – was rather on the organizational changes in the dilemmas the teams were confronted with. These include the traditional dilemmas in the relation to management and the team internal tensions due to teams having taken over some managerial functions. We inquire into these in collaboration with the teams, individually, with the management, as well as on the common seminars as the one in Viborg, 2006, as mentioned. You can say, we have more dialogues around modern dilemmas and the possibility for handling them, than about the usability of dialogic competences.

These dialogic competences were important results of first and second order in the first two projects. Simultaneously, they were critical results of third order in the B&O-project. They fell back in the EDIT-project, so to speak. We did not consider them as results, proper, rather as “tools” for increasing the probability of reaching the results that teams envisioned when putting up their goals or purposes (the quotation marks indicate they work, precisely if you do not use the as tools or skills). “Tools” that might contribute to creating results of second order about the relation between TAM and DHTM later in the project. We did some lectures on dialogic competences as well as on Bohm's distinction between dialogue and discussion, but we focused on the results they were on the lookout for, and on ways to organize their meetings that might enhance these results, e.g., all those guidelines (as opposed to rules) we have combined under the umbrella term *dissensus organizing* (text 6 and 7).

#### 3.4.2. External communication: our partners as co-authors?

The external research communication about the B&O-project followed many paths: a book (text 2); some articles (among them, text 1 and 3); a couple of videos in Danish and English (“Can you see the gold?” and “Does it indicate that you ...?”), to be used internally in the education of new mentors and by us – and us alone – at courses training other managers at and outside B&O, as well as to research purposes (e.g., for a

presentation at a conference on dialogues in Alta, Utah in 1998); a booklet for internal use for coming mentors; lectures and workshops; courses, etc.

We produced the first draft for all these kinds of external research communication. Their comments and corrections were usually few. The rules of the game were accepted from the start: every conversation was to be videotaped, and they could veto any kind of publishing. Text 2 was thus distributed in a draft to everyone indicating where he/she appeared under which pseudonym. Nobody wanted any changes. Everybody agreed to have their original name on the colophon. As far as I remember, text 1 and 3 were not sent for similar corrections.

The two videos were produced by a professional based on our unprofessional videotaping the whole process and based on our guidelines about structure and clips. A draft was presented to the managers and employees who had participated in the employee appraisal interviews, midwife conversations, dialogues, and evaluation sessions. Few corrections were incorporated in the final version. At the same time the suggested we produced a 10-page booklet for future mentors enhancing their understanding of the videos. It was produced in 1996 and describes, among other things, different types of midwife questions, e.g, problem clarifying-, goal-, relation-, and frame work-questions. It is written within an understanding of mentors as gold diggers paying attention to a long list of verbal-, para language-, and body language gold indicators. It was presented as a draft, and heavily criticized for its academic tone before it found its final form.

To sum up: the work division in the B&O-project as to external communication of research communication followed a distinct pattern: we produced a draft and usually, but not always, they had the opportunity to comment on it. The further research communication including lectures and communication training at universities, training at B&O and in other organizations, has been our concern, solely.

The external communication of results from the AAU-project found some other expressions. The participants could comment on our draft for text 5 in the same way as they have done with our contributing lectures and presentations to the internal research communication during the project in feedback dialogues in order to secure congruence between knowledge communication and production. The article was at the same time part of the internal research communication/production. Simultaneously, they themselves cared for an external result communication, i.e., an article in KOM, Magazine for Kommunikation [communication] og [and] Sprog [Language], no. 46, March 2010 titled: "Der er plads til det hele liv" [Here's space for your whole life] written by a journalist, Helle Therkelsen. Initially, you may read about the last sub project:

A two-year project on, among others things, coaching has put the mood barometer on beautiful, increased efficiency and co-operation and enhanced the understanding of your colleague.

The worklife quality of the 110 employee at the Faculty of Science and Technology [and AAU-Innovation] at Aalborg University has got a tremendous lift. It's fun

working; efficiency has increased; colleagues care about each other. They haven't reached these result, sleeping. They have worked dedicated for two years and been through severe organizational changes ... Partly, this success is ascribed to the consultants contributing through the whole process.

To me it is an open question if this statement can pass a communicative validation process. At least, I am happy and impressed by their persistent work on improving job performance, service, and working climate.

Finally, they have made a video presentation on You Tube, where I am interviewed, too. (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f4NPE6oNqQ>).

The external research communication got yet a third form in the EDIT-project. Again, the participants were involved in commenting some articles (Kristiansen & Bloch-Poulsen, 2009) and some not (text 6 and 7). An article was written in collaboration with an employee at DSI based on our draft (Clemmensen, Kristiansen & Bloch-Poulsen, 2009). Two other articles were produced in collaboration with all 70 employees and managers at CSMS. Terminating the proces, we interviewed a series of employees, wrote drafts for a couple of articles and got thorough comments from all the teams and managers which were incorporated. We were grateful to the e-mail-system. The first one got the title "Organisationsudvikling - hvornår og hvordan? Erfaringer fra Borgerservice i Silkeborg Kommune" [Organizational development – when and how? Experiences from Citizens Service, the Municipality of Silkeborg] and was sent to the magazine *Danske Kommuner* [Danish Municipalities]. The other was titled "Det er os, der har fingrene i dejen" - om medarbejderdrevne innovation i team (MIT)" [We are the ones with the fingers in the dough – on Employee Driven Innovation in Team [EDIT]." The articles can be downloaded from my website [www.dialog-mj.dk](http://www.dialog-mj.dk). The last article was elaborated on by a journalist, Marie Begtrup, who interviewed some employees and managers, too, and published with the title "Medarbejderne kommer med løsningen" [Employees produces the solution themselves] in a professional magazine for office workers in public institutions, *HK Kommunalbladet* [www.hk.dk/kommunal/kommunalbladet](http://www.hk.dk/kommunal/kommunalbladet), 29.04.10, p. 10-12.

The original articles had employees and managers as co-authors. Finally, on our proposal, representatives from CSMS – a manager and an employee – presented their experiences as we presented ours at a conference arranged by Silkeborg tekniske skole [Silkeborg Technical College] and Social- og Sundhedsskolen i Silkeborg [Silkeborg Social and Health College] on the 18.03.10. To sum up briefly, it underscored that reality is not unison but diverse.

The greater part of the audience consisted of managers and consultants. Accordingly, we presented some of the dilemmas in creating the conditions for EDIT this way:

- There has to be certain tranquility in the organization – but when will you ever experience that?

- It has to be transparent what you are allowed to give a low priority – if you are allowed to, at all (to avoid the struggle between production and development having development as the usual loser)
- Management has to support the process – not just to pay lip service.

Since then, we have, as mentioned, used concepts and results from all three projects in external communication at conferences, workshops, lectures, courses, etc.

Summing up, one may say these forms of external research communication represent a broad spectrum. On one hand, you have situations, where the other professional might read about our interpretation as action researchers about part of our shared projects. On the other hand, you have situations where they are co-authors. This eighth text belongs to the first part as I would find it inappropriate to go back with these reflections. It is already some times since; probably many employee and managers work in other teams because of organizational changes, shifting personnel in teams, etc.

At this point, I will allow myself an excursion:

As mentioned, one of the articles we handed in to the magazine for public office workers was elaborated upon by a journalist. The title was twisted as ‘The employees produce the solutions, themselves.’ As such, it deteriorates into focusing on first order results (=solutions), only. Thus, I would like to bring the original article in my translation in extenso as it presents first, second, as well as third order result. That was, in a way, lucky punch, or unconscious sense making, as the distinction between these different levels of results were not clear to me when we collaborated with the 70 employees and managers on the article:

”We are the ones with our fingers in the dough  
 - on employee driven innovation in team (EDIT]

- 22.10.09

The Magazine for Public Office Workers.  
 By employees and managers in CSMS and  
 Marianne Kristiansen and Jørgen Bloch-Poulsen

In co-operation with 70 employees and 3 managers in Citizen Service, the Municipality of Silkeborg (CSMS), we have carried through a project in the period 2008-09 on Employee Driven Innovation in Teams (EDIT). It is financed by the Danish Agency for Science, Innovation and Technology, the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation and Ernst B. Sund’s fond.

### *Employee driven innovation – an example*

Three employees work on passport and driver license in Team Tax and Passport. Earlier, they were supposed to work at the front desk as well as in the back office. They had to run to and fro. They suggested all gathered in front in order not to waste

time. The organized a special desk for driving instructors, only in order for them to bypass the number system and to phone the employees on their direct call numbers.

The driver instructors are very satisfied with the arrangement. The colleagues in CSMS are not disturbed by Team Tax and Passport running to and fro. This new routine is beneficial to everybody, according to Karen Overgaard Pedersen from Team tax and Passport.

This new way of organizing is an employee driven innovation. We define it as a new, shared routine, suggested by the employees, creating improved service for the citizens, a smarter work flow and a higher work life quality, including a better atmosphere in the team.

### *Three employees in CSMS*

Besides Karen, you will find clips in the article from interviews with Henriette Bang and Lise Sloth from Team Children working with maternity and family benefits. Henriette is working as an expert in maternity and on simple services in family benefits; besides, she is IT-coordinator and responsible for trainees. She tells her trainees that she herself has to learn new things every day, and that she asks her elder as well as younger colleagues for help as she always get a kind and useful answer from them.

Lise is an expert in family benefits and overlaps on maternity. Before the municipality reform (merging the municipalities) she worked as Henriette in Gjern Municipality. Her work area was cash payment help. Lise mentions that time has come for big changes and that she has got a positive attitude to the changes. Since she started working in CSMS, she

... had learned how working in teams is quite different from what I was used to. Here, we have more young people and more trainees. I have never paid attention to differences between generations before. The young guys are brought of in an electronic time with quite another approach to things where we in the elder generation are more knowledgeable and experienced in our field of expertise. I'm convinced combining these differences will end up with a good result.

Besides Karen, Henriette, and Louise, you will find statements from Kirsten Høyer, manager of team Tax and Passport, and Tina Villumsen, manager of Team Children.

### *Changes from below*

The fundamental idea of the project is that every employee, having his/her fingers in the dough, as Henriette puts it, knows how to bake the bread, i.e., have some suggestions for improving work routines.

The principle is that every employee can come up with such proposals as innovation is not the monopoly of the so called creative class or of the employees in the R&D-departments of big companies. In the project we have tried to get these suggestions for new routines on the table on specific helicopter team meetings where the employees had got the time necessary for dialogues, i.e., conversations where you collaboratively put your brains together in the container in order to create some even better routines.

CSMS did some important experiences in the project. We hope they might inspire others embarking on innovation or development project in order to avoid “change constipation.” Here are our four guidelines about necessary conditions for successful employee driven innovations in teams.

*There has to be some reserve of strength and tranquility in the organization.*

Every team from CSMS underscores a fairly steady team structure and certain tranquility as a condition for embarking a development process. As Lise says:

Simply, these last years have been the toughest ones in my whole work life. I have never disliked being busy, but I can hardly describe how it has been. In some ways, it has been awful to put it briefly. I have paid my part of the merging of municipalities. If one is to compromise with what has been the core value of one’s work, then it becomes difficult when you cannot deliver quality service on time ... I have changed from working in a small to a large municipality, from working individually in an office to working in teams, besides having changed my professional field of expertise. I am in favor of changes and am able to accept them, but there needs to be a governing idea of the purpose of these changes. It has been difficult for me to see this idea ... So having certain tranquility and a surplus atmosphere, as we are about to get now that’s highly important. If you feel comfortable and have sort of surplus energy, you get more work satisfaction, automatically. The EDIT-project did not start at the right time. I think, too many of my colleagues were fed up with changes and development. That was a pity.

Henriette adds about the EDIT-project taking place in the wake of other organizational development processes:

We should have started sometimes later ... You need a surplus mode in the organization to get the maximum output from such processes.

Today, the conditions for EDIT are OK, because “now, there’s a proper level of disturbances”, as Henriette puts it.

*The employees must get to know each other professionally and socially.*

Karen from Team Tax and Passport tells that, currently, everybody is familiar with what the team colleagues are working with; at the same time, the social milieu seems to have improved:

We are good at talking to each other in the whole team, and finding solutions to shared problems as, e.g., answering the phone, our shifting working hours, and taking each others duty, if it's going bananas.

Henriette from Team Children seems to share this point of view. She mentions, e.g., that they produced new working routines in the team where they help each other within the other field of expertise, ensuring, e.g., everyone can have a proper lunch. Lise from the same team underlines:

Now, we are better asking for help and then try to learn from any new service. That's where I feel we are becoming a team.

Karen comment on that:

Our competence development takes place in small sub groups in the team, today. It is advantageous as you remember what you learn if you try to do it yourself, e.g., making passports. Our new knowledge is used right away. It is beneficial, because otherwise you forget.

Today the employees develop their competences in fields where they are to serve citizens – as opposed to be generalists, developing competences which are actually not asked for.

To get to know and help each other increases the work joy and surplus. It promotes EDIT.

*It is important management listen, argues and makes space for shared inquiry.*

To listen and be responsible is both sided, as team manager, Kirsten expresses it:

In many meetings I have had the feeling as if the employees were looking at me as if they wanted or expected me to make a decision. I have started playing the ball back again: how can we collaboratively create a solution?

Her colleague, Tina, agrees, and adds:

I always try to pose open questions in order to have them reflect ... I think it is extremely important that employees find their own answers. I am not employed as a manager to be cleverer than they. Oftentimes it is questions about their own work situation. I'm sure they will have a better work life if they can influence that. The employees are supposed to contribute to coping with the challenges.

This seems to be a perfect match with an employee effort, as expressed by Henriette:

One of the results of the process has been that to-day we can make our own decisions as a team to a larger extent. We are the ones who have our fingers in the

dough; we are experienced and have professional competencies. Management is more inclined to listen to us now. So, we have gained more freedom as a team ... To-day, we can make our own decision ... Our team manager supports our decisions and says: “this is good work; we can always adjust later, if necessary”. Our improved co-operation with management has been the best part of the process. [you will find this quotation on page 28, too]

The overall point of view is that employees are to be involved and management must present valid arguments if they decide otherwise.

### *It has to be sustainable*

During the process we have developed and tested new ways of communicating and organizing meetings. Sustainable means that it is possible for the teams to use these ahead if they find them actionable.

One of the ways in Henriette’s team is that, whenever on the edge of drowning in work overload, they pause and reflect: Why do we do it this way? What is the problem? What can we do (otherwise)? The effect is “We are happier,” as she says.

At the EDIT-meetings teams have often been divided into pro- and con groups finding benefits and shortcomings on a certain proposal. They continue using that device in Lise’s team:

We have been divided into sub groups at these meetings. One was to find the positive aspects, the benefits. The other was to sketch the possible failures and disadvantages. Let’s say, three persons in each group. It is a sensible way. We have used it in our team after the project terminated. People know we can do it. Some people feel it’s much easier to talk in minor groups. And the criticism is legitimized as it is presented as shared comments from the subgroup.

### *Fed up with changes or innovative?*

The government expects private and public organizations in Denmark to be world class on innovation. Oftentimes you can read or see in the media that organizational changes sweep over the public sector as sort of a tsunami; that management initiates changes without sufficient arguments or information; that employees suffer from change-constipation.

Our experiences points to employee driven innovation taking another road characterized by certain continuity and tranquility in the organization. Where employees have time to get to know team colleagues professionally as well as socially; where management listen, argues, and make space for reflection; where you maintain and develop your routines *before* you jump into the next organizational change.



Employees and managers in the Citizens Service, the Municipality of Silkeborg, in co-operation with  
 Marianne Kristiansen, Ass. professor, Ph.D. Aalborg University and  
 Jørgen Bloch-Poulsen, senior external lecturer, M.A.Research, Copenhagen University.

#### 4. Dialogue between research with and research on – a schematic summary

Our contribution through these three projects to a theory of dialogue in organizational action research is reflected in the following concepts:

- caring container as the space and rhythm of dialogue (text 2)
- dialogic helicopter team meetings (DHTMs) as one among many caring container's of employee driven innovation (EDIT) (text 6 and 7)
- dialogue as a special quality of a conversation characterized by sharing, daring, and caring (text 2)
- the three dimensionality of dialogic competences (text 2) (skills, ways of relating, and ways of being)
- dialogue as sometimes taking place in interpersonal organizational communication, co-producing meaning and relations, unfolding in contexts eventually changed by the dialogue (text 2)
- emergent, mutual involvement/participation as a possible form of collaboration in action research project work (text 2,6,7)
- dialogic action research as contributing to results of first order (specific improvements for our partners), second order (changing process organizing; methods to cope, e.g, with inhibitive communicative patterns), and third order (concepts facilitating the theoretical comprehension) – processing as an ongoing work place learning (text 8)
- the other and the action researcher as equally worthy professionals (usually) within different fields of expertise (text 6,7)
- selfreferentiality as a possible epistemological barrier to dialogue in both parties (the other as well as us) (apriori categories and ways of relating) (text 3)
- social concrete blocks as quasi-material, organization-cultural dialogue barriers (text 1,2)
- modern team dilemmas as new organization-cultural dialogue barriers (text 5)

- dissensus approach as dialogic innovation facilitator (dissensus sensibility and -organizing) (text 6,7)
- the three dimensional concept of innovation in EDIT (improvements for the organization, organizing, and work life quality) (text 6,7)

In what follows I will try to locate this contribution in a format where the overall distinction between research *with* and research *on* is borrowed from Heron & Reason (2001a) and the specifics are my responsibility. To me, the specifics are tensional distinctions. It is not an either/or binary but a both-and continuum, as I imagine all organizational action researchers use both dimensions – rightfully, so to speak.

I cannot imagine an organizational action research process not sometimes practicing research on, e.g., in (part of) the external research communication, as mentioned above; on the other hand, practicing research on exclusively it not possible within my understanding of action research.

There are four classification criteria: the other, relations, results, and communication. The first two works across the hitherto used analytical distinction between goal, design, validation, and result communication. Besides, I have chosen to add some special items as to results and research communication in this schematic grid.

Research with (not consensus-driven)	Research on	1
The other		
the other as participant (the communication model where communicators “co-produce” meaning, establish relations, in contexts they might change)	the other as informant (the transmission-linear model identifying communication with information)	2
the other as “co-learner” (sometimes even as “co-researcher?”)	the other being studied and/or educated	3
centering the other by centering the researcher (1. person action research as a vehicle for 3. person action research)	centering the other by apparent decentering of researcher	4
Relations		
dialogue (share, dare, and care around the basic questions (goal, design, validation, and communication)) as well as interview, participant observation, etc.	interview, participant observation, etc.	5
participation/involvement (to which degree and in which of the basic questions can the other participate?)	intervention	6
emergent mutual involvement	planned experiment	7

using dialogic competencies		
researcher and the other know different	researcher know more or better (research based knowledge / global vs. experiential knowledge / local)	8
researcher and the other as two groups of professionals knowing differently and learning from each other on an equal (?) footing	researcher as user (extraction) and / or servant (microphone) of / for the other in shifting one-up-one-down relations (an authoritarian personality approach?)	9
researcher and the other as reflective practitioners within different as well as shared fields of expertise (results of 1., 2. and 3. order)	researcher as helper; the other in need of help (patronizing / matronizing and othering?)	10
researcher not in control / being uncomfortable	researcher in control / being comfortable (?)	11
researcher as changer / being changed	researcher as stranger / visitor entering from an outside position	12
“co-creating” a caring container (e.g., at DHTMs)	laboratory for planned data collection and production (experiment)	13
<b>Result validating</b>		
questa (= preliminary “data”) / constructs	data / representations (collecting, analyzing, interpreting data)	14
reflecting self-referentiality on behalf of the action researcher and the other (unproductive thirds, social concrete blocks, etc.)	the researcher reflects within the ordinary scientific frame work (validity, reliability, objectivity, etc.)	15
“co-validating” results of 1.,2.,3. order in shifting relations between the researcher and the other	analysis, interpretation, and validation is the monopoly of the researcher	16
dissensus validity	internal (communicative) and external validity	17
three dimensional innovation criteria as validity criteria	correspondence or coherence as validity criteria	18
Truthing	Truth	19
<b>Result communication</b>		
“co-authorship” (participants somehow involved in internal and external research communication)	researcher = author (the other and the public as audience)	20
showing	telling	21

(thick descriptions) (Geertz)	(often proclamatory on espoused values)	
knowledge production and / as knowledge communication - knowledge production and knowledge communication sometimes as “co-production”	knowledge production separated from knowledge communication - knowledge production and knowledge communication as transfer / transmission (extraction and diffusion)	22

In the following paragraphs I will present my reflections referring to the rows with a figure in parenthesis if the issue has not been dealt with sufficiently in-depth in paragraph 3. As I have questioned the prefix ‘co’ it is “tailored” in quotation marks in the grid.

#### 4.1. Research with and on (1)

Initially, I would like to mention that ‘with’ in ‘research with’ might produce connotations pointing at consensus. The dialogues in action research are to use a dissensus approach enabling criticism to have a legitimate voice; making room for everybody, including the usually silent team members, to voice their points of view. The purpose is to inquire into *whether* it is possible to reach consensus about a result, i.e., a solution to be validated continuously. On the other hand I presuppose the demand for consensus is stronger in organizational action research as the logic of production subject the reflection of the logic of development to a high pressure. I don’t know for sure, though, as I haven’t done action research outside organizations.

As mentioned, I do not understand the distinction between research on and research with as a binary, as well as I consider organizational action research purely as research with as a phantasm. Unless, if you were perhaps working with a group of action researchers and / or communication researchers? On the other hand, the distinction might well serve as a reminder asking: how do you involve the other in the specter between object and subject? (cf. text 2, where it was apparently necessary for us to run through a long process of objectifying the employees before involving them in a Future Lab Workshop). This reminder includes another challenge, too: how do you as an action researcher act in relation to you partner, the other?

#### 4.2. The other (2-4)

Here is a list of widespread conceptualizations of the other, as

- informant
- co-creator of meaning
- co-learner
- participant

- reflective practitioner
- co-researcher
- having a false consciousness/being alienated/reified
- acting in a resisting or regredient way
- master and/or apprentice
- professional within another field of expertise.

There are a lot of questions attached to the grid, above, e.g.:

- What does it mean to attempt to share with the informants?
- What does it mean to give back your knowledge to the informants?
- Can you have a dialogue with informants?

These questions are, in my opinion, based in a research on approach (row 2 and 3) outside action research. Of course, participants in an action research process might act as informants, sometimes. They cannot act in that role, exclusively, as they would be unable to become co-creators of purpose, design, validation, or result communication. The expression – to give back your knowledge – indicates a one-up one down-distinction where the researcher has the monopoly of knowledge production, analysis, and interpretation. In an action research process I would like to see more *questas* (productive advocacy and inquiry) presented as an invitation to participate in a knowledge producing dialogue (14).

Another question related to the format might sound:

Can you have a dialogue with people whom you consider as alienated or reified?

The concept of alienation designates in Marx the transpositioning of the object (originally man made) into the position of the subject (originally man's) as the new agent – without the original man-subject noticing it. The philosophers are the only ones having an insight in this transpositioning process. As such, this implies a distinction between a false or alienated consciousness of other people (be it employees or capitalists/management) and the true consciousness of the philosophers. Transferring this perspective to action research you will have an authoritarian version: the action researcher is, endowed with the true consciousness, supposed to liberate the other from his alienation, as Marx envisioned the philosophers as the head of the revolution and the working class as its body.

Let's assume, action research is dealing with emancipation from all kind of power dimensions and –mechanisms constraining the socially oriented performance of the individual. Then, to me it would be fair to use the concept of alienation as an umbrella for all these kinds of constrainers. It would include selfreferentiality; unproductive communicative patterns, acting behind the back of the communicators, so to speak, i.e., what we termed thirds in text 2; social concrete blocks, preventing certain questions to be posed, etc. Under one very important condition, i.e., the democratization of alienation, which means that everybody, including the action researcher is to be considered as alienated. Then alienation might be a point of shared attention to inquire

into institutions and norms we have shared in creating but which might be taken for granted to day, unnecessarily, and which might constraint our shared efforts.

Row 4 about centering and decentering has in a way to do with this point. To put it differently, it connects to the question of the relation between first, second, and third person action research. Text 3 focuses on the problem: what is the impact of the action researcher's selfreferentiality (first person) on the relations and knowledge being produced in the relation to and with the other (second person), as well as on the external research communication (third person)? As mentioned in text 3 it was a highly unpleasant experience to watch a sequence from a feedback conversation where I treated a young man who had just attended his first employee appraisal interview in an authoritarian way, disclosing how dialogue was but my espoused value whereas discussion was my theory-in-use. As far as I can see it is necessary to address one's own selfreferentiality as an action researcher – be it in encounters with colleagues, participants, or a therapist, etc. This way of centering yourself is a necessary condition for centering the other. If you are not (partly) aware of your own, unconscious, selfreferential characteristics then you might end up like me: centering yourself and your selfreferentiality in a way that decenters the other and reduces the validity of your second and third person action research. In my case the result got an unconsciously auto-communicative twist.

#### 4.3. Relations

Intervention is an often used word among action researchers, consultants, and facilitators (row 6). One of Schein's (1999) points of views is that everything you do as a facilitator – and I reckon it goes for action researchers, too – is an intervention. As Eikeland (2006), I consider this concept as belonging to the research on approach.

Etymologically, it means coming in between which, in my interpretation indicates that you, as an action researcher come from an outside position, as in the paradigms described by Eikeland as spectator-astronomer, manipulator-user, or stranger-visitor. I speak in favor of the involvement or participation of the action researcher where you are part of the game by risking yourself, e.g., by acknowledging your feelings and not-knowing (text 1). This position differs from intervention where you try to disturb the others' mind-sets from an outside position.

I will allow myself to reproduce an example of this distinction from my book about the challenges of dialogue (Bloch-Poulsen, 2006, p. 120f.). The case is taken from a coaching session, not being part of an action research process. Nevertheless, I hope it might illustrate the difference between creating a disturbance in the other person's way of looking at the world and involving yourself with your feelings thereby, perhaps, contributing to create a human meeting. The point is to illustrate this difference, not to discuss the inherent psychoanalytic presuppositions about the vice president, in question:

I'm trainer and coach for a person, Knud who wants to improve as a coach, himself. He brings a certain case to the table in which he was coaching a vice president in a public organization. Allegedly, the coachee is a perfectionist. Knud doesn't know how to relate to him. In their last session he felt incompetent. Knud has sort of an education

within systemic coaching, already. Thus, he tried to produce a constructive disturbance by, e.g., asking: “Are there situations where you could do well with less perfection?” Apparently, the question didn’t work.

I ask if he might use an I-message instead: “I feel insufficient or incompetent. I don’t know how to help you. I observe you have reservations to my proposals and questions.”

Or, perhaps, Knud might virtually jump into the position of the president, saying: “If I were you boss, I wouldn’t know what you are really enthusiastic about or how to give you a task that could satisfy your aspirations?”

It might facilitate knowledge production to express one’s feelings, according to my experience. The presupposition is that the transference of the vice president will present itself in more or less similar ways in relation to his president, employees, wife, kids, etc. – as well as in his internal, probably self-reproaching ‘yes, but-conversations’ ...

To me this example illustrates the difference between disturbance and involvement, between, in my language, to use your brain and produce disturbances and be naked-involved as a human being expressing your feelings.

Row 8 designates the action researcher’s and the other’s different kind of knowledge. Greenwood & Levin (1998) talk about a difference between the local knowledge of the participants and the global knowledge of the action researcher. Heron & Reason (2001b) argue in favor of involving different kind of knowledge, as experiential, presentational, propositional, and practical ways of knowing.

In all three projects our partners were professionals within their specific fields of expertise. They had educations, more or less research based. They had varying practical experiences. As such, I consider them as professionals like myself – in another field. My knowledge is not more global than theirs. Maybe that might have been the case, had I been a sociologist? My knowledge is just different from theirs. In this way, the co-operation takes place on equal footing, although the space is not power-free; this is the reason for the question-mark (row 9). Initiating the third project we offered ourselves as the guys with the microphone at the same time fighting the agenda with the Sales Team at DSI, as described in text 6. I switch as an authoritarian personality type (Adorno, et al., 1969) between a one-down and a one-up relation, although the apriori power discourse was that they needed help and that I was able to help them with my expertise in interpersonal organizational communication (row 10). Slowly, I tried to move into a more symmetrical relation (row 9) allowing us to be involved differently in the various purposes or objectives of the project (row 10).

In text 1 from det first project already, we reach the acknowledgement that maybe it is not until you skip the notion of being the more knowledgeable as an action researcher, admitting your vulnerability and uncertainty about, e.g., the most adequate thing to do within the next nanosecond, that you are able to contribute to creating a space for recognition and learning. As has been clearly demonstrated in my reflections about the second as well as the third project, this acknowledgement positions itself as a lifelong tension vis a vis my self-understanding as an expert in organizing potentially knowledge

producing processes which is not unaffected by me sensing the partners expecting my initiative – an expectation I do not always check before I actually take the initiative. In this field of tension I shift between being the person who intend to create options for change and being changed myself simultaneously, and the person who has the safe outsider position just paying a visit to the organization (row 12), between co-creating a caring container, e.g., in the form of a series of DHTMs allowing us to express our not-knowing in meetings between humans, and observing and giving feedback on eventual differences between their action plans and their actual output (row 13).

#### 4.4. Result validation

Result validation as well as result communication is intimately related to the understanding of the other (paragraph 4.2) and with the relation to the other (paragraph 4.3). For reasons of clarity I have decided to address these issues in independent paragraphs.

Questa (row 14) refers, as mentioned, to productive advocacy and inquiry as presented by Isaacs (1999). It indicates you present your research results for an inquiry in collaboration with your partners, as statements with a dot and an added question mark (productive advocacy) or as open questions (productive inquiry). This differs from the traditional researcher collecting, analyzing, and presenting his data and analysis to the informants.

Row 15 oblige you as an action researcher within the research-on-approach to constantly reflect the alienation on behalf of the other, your selv, and your relation, in order to question and problematize selfreferentiality and unproductive thirds, including social concrete blocks, in the ongoing dialogue. This differs from research-on where you as a researcher, perhaps in co-operation with colleagues, assess your results in relation to criteria of validity, reliability, objectivity, etc.

Dissensus validation (row 17, text 6,7) is a supplement to ordinary efforts to validate results. It deals with enabling tensions and unspoken voices to be highlighted in order to create results with a high degree of ownership and, accordingly, sustainability. Similarly, row 18 underscores usability and actionability as a critical criterion of research-with whereas correspondence or coherence is the decisive criterion for research-on. Usability comprises improvements for the organization, the work flow, and the work life quality of the employees in question.

#### 4.5. Result communication

Above, I have exposed the diverse ways in which the co-operation about internal and external knowledge communication actually took place. From research-on, with knowledge communication as our monopoly and our partners and everyone else as audience (row 20), to cases where we co-authored articles based on our drafts as action researchers. Similarly, the internal knowledge communication is sometimes knowledge production, sometimes they are separated (row 22). Oftentimes, though not necessarily,



there is a tendency for research-on to present itself proclamatorily at the level of telling, talking about the others and the results, whereas we have tried to move on the level of showing, as we think should characterize research-with, in order that our reader can get a grasp on a deeper level of what's going on and hopefully be inspired to reflect, too.

## 5. Summary: the tensionality of dialogue

The text as a whole should, until now, be read as an expression of the tensionality of dialogue. The described dimensions about purpose, design, validation, and research communication, as well as the conceptualizations of the other and the relations between the other and the action researcher are all marked by tensions:

- who is to be involved, to which degree, and how, in stating the objective or direction, the continuous creation of design, the ongoing validation of results (of first, second, and third order), as well as the communication of research results?

These questions address primarily the tension between involvement and top down management, but also between involvement and participation (in Nielsen's (2004) version), as well as between action researcher -, employee -, organizational -/managerial -, or co-operatively driven endeavors.

Furthermore, you have the tensions between considering the other within an object position (informant, alienated, etc.) or different subject positions (participant, co-learner, etc.) This includes tensions in the role as action researcher, e.g., between being the microphone we were on the edge of reducing ourselves to in the beginning of project three, and being the "imperialist" who, non-dialogic and selfreferential, assimilates the other into his apriori categories as was the case with the young employee at B&O attending his first employee appraisal interview. Not to mention the organizational tensions relating to the struggle between the logic of production and development, and finally, the tensions in relation to empowerment and constraint referring to power as property or mechanism, etc.

Given the big picture, it seems as if concepts like co-production, co-creation, co-validation, co-authorship, mutual involvement, etc., covers more diversity and tensions than is immediately apparent in the prefix 'co'.

It is thus reasonable to assume that the conceptualization of the tensionality of dialogue, presented by Stewart, Zediker and Black (2004) is the perfect theoretical match to the result of my reflections from the three action research projects in practice. That's not how I see it, though. Generally speaking, the notion of tensionality is described by them as such a broad concept that it loses its tensionality (sorry), in my interpretation.

### III. Dialogue philosophy and organizational action research.

At a personal level, the title – dialogue philosophy and organizational action research – refers to me, coming home. I have a degree in history of ideas (philosophy) from 1972 and have been as organizational action researcher since, approximately 1995.

The question is: is there anything to come home to – and, if so – what? Or, to put it less self centered: what's the use or relevance of dialogue philosophy in organizational action research – if it is of any use, at all? I have positioned myself in the tensional field between two chairs; between the philosophical preoccupiedness with basic why-questions, e.g. about the descriptive or prescriptive understanding of dialogue (Stewart & Zediker, 2000; Stewart, Zediker & Black, 2004; Cissna & Anderson, 2008), and the absorption of the action researcher with how-questions, i.e., with how to organize processes facilitating improvements in our partners' work life.

I will start with the philosophers I have been particularly inspired by, as discussed in text 2 and 4, i.e., Buber, Bohm, and Gadamer. Do their concepts of dialogue bear special relevance to organizational action research and/or was my inspiration but an ideological dead end? (paragraph 1).

Then, I will address the dialogue concept as coined by an influential tendency within organizational action research in Scandinavia, i.e., WRI (Work Research Institute) in Oslo, as represented by Gustavsen and Pålshaugen (paragraph 2).

The critical purpose of this chapter is to point to the considerable difference between these philosophical dialogue concepts and the actionable concept of dialogue we have tried to create through the three projects as a description of a special quality of moments and/or sequences in conversations in organizations. Here, too, you will find a tension: on one side, I have been very inspired by these dialogue philosophers; on the other side, I'm considerably skeptic about their usability or relevance in organizational action research as they might contribute presenting the organizational complexity with its diversity of power mechanisms as power free conversations in I-Though-relations.

1. The religious, cosmological, and culture theoretical failure?  
- the contribution of Buber, Bohm and Gadamer revisited

Stewart, Zediker & Black (2004) argues in favor of tensionality – and holism – as decisive constituents of dialogue in basic dialogue philosophers as Buber, Bohm, Gadamer, Bakhtin and Freire. Here, I neglect the last two mentioned, as I am not conscious about them having a role in text 1-8.

The concepts of tensionality and holism in the work of these philosophers are determined as:

... two primary habits of mind that are common to these philosophers of dialogue: holism and tensionality ... By tensionality we mean the tendency to understand whatever is of interest ("reality," "the world," "human beings," and especially

“communication”) dynamically and dialectically rather than as a static construct (p. 23).

About this coherent, tensional holism, they write that:

... the sense that the whole each essayed is centrally marked by both a complementary and contradictory quality that renders it inherently fluid and dynamic (p. 27).

This designates an understanding, looking for history rather than nature, potentiality rather than what has eventually been brought into reality, the fluent rather than the static, options rather than conditions. Resuming, they write:

Dialogic approaches to communication influenced by these five philosophers are consistently holistic and tensional ... communicative events are described multidimensional rather than as simply products of rationality, as dynamic rather than static, as emergent rather than as defined in advance, as context-dependent, and as processual. Communication “moves” emphasize the whole that includes both reflection *and* analysis, listening *and* speaking (p. 37).

Tensionality is thus defined here through concepts like dynamic and dialectic (rather than static), complementary, contradictory, fluid, emergent (rather than defined in advance), context-dependent, and processual.

The adjectives, “dynamic and dialectical”, might indicate dissensus more than consensus (Deetz, 2001) conceptualized as development through contradictions/opposites (dialectic) or conflict (dissensus). At least, to me, dissensus is a basis dimension of tensionality. Dissensus indicates an apprehension of development through conflict where conflict means that one (or several) of the parties experience sort of a tension (Vindeløv, 2007). I want to add this specification as Stewart, Zediker & Black (2004) in my interpretation tend to reduce tensionality to relating, or participating in a process, or posing open questions as I will return to in the following paragraph commenting on Buber, Bohm, and Gadamer, sequentially.

### 1.1.Buber: I-Thou-relations in organizations?

Stewart & Zediker (2000) operates with a distinction between a descriptive and a prescriptive approach to dialogue. They locate, e.g. Bakhtin and Gergen in the descriptive, and, e.g., Buber and Bohm in the prescriptive part. Descriptive refers to characterizing dialogue as a defining aspect of man. Thus, in this understanding, dialogue is identified with relational or interactional (2000, p. 225). Prescriptive refers to dialogue as an ideal of a meeting between humans. As mentioned in text 2, we developed a basic distinction between selfreferentiality and dialogue; we understand selfreferentiality as a quality of usual conversations whereas dialogue turned out to be the quality of special conversations, or, more precisely, of moments or sequences in conversations. Thus, we have located ourselves within a prescriptive understanding, as is also apparent from the assumption behind the third project that dialogue – and not the ordinary selfreferential conversations - might be conducive of innovation.

The distinction between prescriptive and descriptive is problematized in Stewart, Zediker & Black (2004), where they have a tendency to focus on similarities between the different dialogue philosophers. Cissna & Anderson (2008) criticizes the distinction, among other things because they interpret dialogue in Buber as an ontological description of man which, as such, cannot be morally prescriptive as it inevitably will show up as an ontological quality. I consider this argument questionable as the I-Thou-relation and dialogue in Buber, according to my interpretation, is characterized precisely as a prescriptive ontology, if I'm allowed to use that phrase, namely an integration of moral and ontology where it is man's essence – in obligation to God – to bring the other and himself to reality as persons and not just as individuals.

Originally, Stewart & Zediker (2000) locate Buber within the prescriptive tendency, considering his I-Thou-relation in which you treat the other as a purpose in him/her self as dialogue-ideal, humans are supposed to strive to improve. I'm in line with that point of view as his concept of the interhuman

is to be found neither in one of the two partners nor in both together, but only in their dialogue itself, in this 'between' which they live together ... The sphere of the interhuman is one in which a person is confronted by the other. We call its unfolding the dialogical ... But by the sphere of the interhuman I mean solely actual happenings between men, whether wholly mutual or tending to grow into mutual relations (Buber, 1965, p. 75).

His assumption is thus that man becomes man not in isolation but in and through the relation to the other:

Man exists anthropologically not in his isolation, but in the completeness of the relation between man and man; what humanity is can be properly grasped only in vital reciprocity (Buber, 1965, p. 84).

This ontological relatedness is translated by Stewart, Zediker & Black (2004) as tensionality:

At one level, the feature of tensionality is evident in Buber's argument that humans orient to the world as relaters (p. 28).

This comprehension seems to me to overtax the concept of tensionality as the only item falling outside the scope of the concept is pure separateness, e.g., an understanding of humans as isolated.

On the other hand, I'm in line with their pointing out another tension in Buber between relating to the other as a means in order to achieve a certain goal as opposed to relating to the other as a purpose in him or herself, i.e., between I-It and I-Thou as underscored in, e.g., Bloch-Poulsen (2006) [my translation]:

A dialogue is ideally based in a I-Thou relation in Buber's sense where the other, the interlocutor is a purpose in himself, not just a mean, as in I-it-relations (Buber,

1994/1923). As such, you might understand dialogue as the basic dimension of modern democracy, as Touraine (1997) writes:

In the past, democracy struggled first for political freedom, and then for social justice. What struggle is it waging today? This book offers an answer: democracy's *raison d'être* is the recognition of the other (p. 190).

At the same time, this condition questions if it is at all possible to conduct dialogues in an organization where colleagues or employees are not just purposes in themselves but means or resources for a certain goal or purpose. Michael Pram Rasmussen, chair of the board in A. P. Møller Mærsk [a bulk carrier company] talks about his time as CEO in Topdanmark [an insurance company] this way:

One of the first problems, I stumbled into, was the personnel policy. It appreciated the employees as our most important active asset. To me, that's just another example of how much rubbish, people say. Accordingly, I told the employees: You are not our most important, active asset. To be a little rude, you are a means, or to be ruder: You are but a necessary evil."<sup>15</sup>

Can you be part of a dialogue if you are considered a necessary evil?

In "Elements of the Interhuman" (1965), Buber presents a series of basic concepts in order to clarify the conditions of dialogue, among others, personal making present, imagining the real, inclusion, confirmation og authenticity (text 2). They have a religious and teleological aim, namely to contribute helping the other to unfold his entelechi, i.e., the purpose God has placed in the single person. Through the dialogue, the purpose for man is to develop in the direction pointed out by God and at the same time contribute to making the world more perfect as is the effort of Hassidism, the lay religion, Bubers adheres to.

It is difficult for me to combine the teleological way of thinking with the emergent dimension that Stewart, Zediker & Black (2004) argues is part of tensionality. As Buber states in the conversation with Rogers in 1957:

I not only accept the other as he is, but I confirm him, in myself, and then in him, in relation to this potentiality that is meant by him and it can now be developed, it can evolve, it can enter a reality of life ... Let's take, for example, man and a woman, man and wife. And he says, not expressly, but just by his whole relation to her, "I accept you as you are". But this does *not* mean, "I don't want you to change". But it says, "I discover in you, just by my accepting love, I discover in you what you are meant to become" (Anderson & Cissna, 1997, p. 91).<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, it is difficult for me to understand, how this conversation with Buber talking in a non-inquiring, selfreferential stile can be comprehended as a dialogue. I am, e.g., astonished by his refusal of considering helping conversations as potentially having

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<sup>15</sup> Pram Rasmussen (2003, p. 36).

<sup>16</sup> To facilitate reading, pauses, hm's, etc., are omitted.

dialogic qualities, as they might have according to Rogers' comprehensive therapeutic experience, without argument, to my interpretation (Anderson & Cissna, 1997, p. 29ff.).

Inversely, I think it is reasonable to talk about a tension between relating to the other as individual or as person, as Thou or it. As Buber states in the conversation with Rogers, he is in favor of person, and against the individual. As is explicit from text 2, and e.g. Bloch-Poulsen (2006), too, I have been inspired by Buber as a human being, an organizational development consultant, as well as an action researcher. To me, he is in line with the ideals of the Enlightenment period of treating the other as an independent purpose. In the former texts I understood dialogue in continuation of Buber as those sequences in conversations, e.g., across the hierarchy between employees and management in which the importance of hierarchy – not hierarchy in itself, of course – was temporarily suspended in the shared effort to inquire into a problem where the validity of your claims was related to your workplace experience, not to your hierarchical level. 'In continuation of' is a piece of disingenuousness, as any hierarchical relation, be it between a teacher and a student, per se excludes the possibility of dialogue in Buber's understanding. So, the continuation connects to my interpretation of the parties treating each other as independent purposes.

Today, I consider my inspiration from Buber as an ideological dead end, too. Buber talks about the relation between humans as if it was context-free. To me, this is an argument against considering his dialogue concept as tensional, as context-dependency was a dialogue criterion in Stewart, Zediker & Black (2004). On the other hand, you might reject 'context-free' as an empty concept as we are always part of, strengthening or changing contexts in relations. Thus, e.g. organizations are to me a fluent net work of contexts. To "transfer" Buber to organizations thus implies reducing the specific, hierarchical relation between an employee and a manager to relations between humans on an equal footing. If we distinguish between a realizable and a non-realizable ideal, I made the mistake of translating the dialogue concept of Buber to a realizable ideal in working with dialogues in organizations. Today, I consider this an ideological dead end as it might induce the false supposition you might carry through I-Thou-dialogues in organizations if only you train and improve your dialogic competences.

For the moment, I consider it impossible to carry through buberian dialogues in organizations. Simultaneously, I think it is fair to use his distinction between I-Thou and I-it-relations to question power mechanisms, unnecessarily constraining within the specter of I-it-relations, as, e.g. when employees are not listened to or asked. Such a problematization is part of the actionable dialogue concept, we have developed the disposition for in the three projects in question. In many ways, it differs from Buber's prescriptive ontological or philosophical anthropological dialogue concept. Similarly, it differs in decisive aspects from Bohm's cosmological dialogue concept. To put it awkwardly, there is a certain distance between on one side God and cosmos (in Bohm etymologically comprehended as the union of universe (as in cosmos) and beauty (as in cosmetics)) and on the other side organizations. Furthermore, it is not just a question of distance from context-free to contextual, but of ideological quality, too, as there might be the danger, these concepts produce false expectations.

## 1.2.Bohm: tensionality or suspension?

As expressed in text 4, the purpose of a bohmian dialogue circle is to recreate coinonia, i.e., the community through which the holo movement unfolds as collective thinking and in which the participants are able to suspend their difference producing thinking and feeling due to their intellectual proprioception.

This conceptualization of dialogue as recreating wholeness by seeing through fragmentation as manmade, i.e., the understanding of dialogue as a cosmological effort to transcend alienation, has been a decisive inspiration for me. Thus, it is not a coincidence that Bohm and our own theory is located in the prescriptive part of dialogue thinking, as it is not a coincidence that Isaacs, a student of Bohm, and we – paralleled – have developed ideas about dialogic spaces as containers. I have presented Bohm's distinction between dialogue as shared inquiry and discussion as persuasion in many contexts as I have experienced discussion so often as consultant and action researcher where dialogue seemed more beneficial to me. The difference is primarily that dialogue in Bohm and Isaacs is a specific kind of conversation, i.e., a noun, and the container consequently something stable (Pearce & Pearce, 2004, p. 44), while I understand dialogue as a quality – as an adjective or adverb – and consequently the container as a flux entity. It is my assumption that a different balance between dialogue and discussion among skilled and unskilled employees at Lego, resulting in a higher focus on dialogue was one of the basic reasons why they succeeded halving the number of unplanned machinery break downs - without being able to prove this point scientifically (Bisgaard & Bloch-Poulsen, 2002).

To me it is like being connected to the most outstanding elements of the culture of antiquity, considering that 'hol' is the shared stem in health, healing, whole and holy. To put it undialogically, I have fought for the whole-connectedness, so dear to me in dialogue. Maybe, my effort was based in a questionable foundation, as I will return to below.

There is a critical tension between dialogue and discussion in Bohm's thinking, as Stewart, Zediker & Black (2004) point at, too. When do you participate in a dialogue, when in a discussion, e.g. in team conversations, or conversations between a manager and a team? When is it appropriate to do what? Imbalanced expectations are, according to my experience, the reason for many organizational problems and innovation inhibitors. Usually the employees perceive the conversation as a dialogue, while management expects it to be a discussion. This is the mis-communication I have formerly presented as democraship (Bloch-Poulsen, 2006).

Today, I think this tension is based in othering. Discussion is a pejorative way of communication, the dark or derogative side of Bohm's prescriptive dialogue-theory. As mentioned, I reckon he is being seduced by his etymological focus. His argument is that dialogue stems from talk/thinking through, whereas discussion means to tear apart or destroy the others' argument. He set up a parallel between discussion and debate, stemming from battle or fight against. But then: what is the use of discussion when decisions have been made and the point is to persuade the other? Today, I cannot see a reasonable answer. Until now, my answer to participants or students has been that

maybe, the decision maker was cleverer through the discussion of background and consequences. But then, again: if so, why doesn't the person in question change his/her decision which takes us back to dialogue?

Currently, I would prefer a distinction between dialogue and non-dialogue (or self referentiality) where dialogue is the special quality of a conversational sequence or moment in which it is beneficial to do a shared inquiry and decision making, in which you might continuously reflect on what 'shared' implies (cf. my comments on the prefix 'co'), and in which you en route might negotiate to continue the dialogue. Thus, in CSMS, management and the coordinating team of specialist responsible for competence development agreed upon having the relation between involvement and top-down-management as a fixed item on their meeting agenda. It was clear to everybody they were embarking on a proces of work place learning: management would not be able to issue a dialogue guarantee. Sometimes they were forced by senior management to make a decision within a second, excluding involvement of e.g, the coordinating team.

Another difference between Bohm's and our concept of dialogue deals with the 'who' of the dialogue, i.e., the subject or agency. As I interpret Bohm, it is not the so called dialogue partners but the holo movement. It is not until the participants skip the idea about themselves as separated from the others – when it is not important who's contributing with what, when the participants truly experience the holo movement thinking through them – that dialogue as collaborative thinking might unfold. That is, when they have recognized their thinking as product of thought. To me, the participants are the subjects sharing their brains in the container, so to speak, based in the idea that collaboratively we are cleverer. Gergen's (1997) attempt to establish a difference between social constructivism and social constructionism according to the locus of knowledge production, be it in the participants as claimed by social constructivism, or in between as claimed by social constructionism, thus seems futile to me. To my experience – to the degree this is a question of experience, at all – knowledge production takes place everywhere, i.e., in as well as between participants; sometimes the same, sometimes different knowledge being produced.

There is a shared comprehension of dialogues as options for questioning your own basic assumptions, cf. Bohm's concept of proprioception and ours about dare. Nevertheless, the perhaps most distinctive difference has to do with the question of the result of the dialogue: what is the purpose or objective of dialogue? In a way you might say that dialogue is its own purpose in Bohm's theory: the recognition of the separateness between men as a manmade failure. Such recognition in the dialogue mini-society might, of course, have implications for your societal engagement. The dialogues I facilitate or am part of in organizational settings have, beyond that, claims for results of first, second, and third order. They have to produce improvements in our partner's work situation, and/or improvements in the ways we organize our meetings in order to facilitate these improvements, and/or a more comprehensive or renewed theoretical understanding of these.

As such, I am unable to grasp the relevance of bohmian dialogue circles in organizational settings, although Isaacs have tried to use them, among others, in US. Accordingly, I am astonished that Cissna & Anderson (2008) considers doing as a



critical criterion of dialogue in Bohm. They perceive this as the important reason for the usability of bohmian dialogue circles in organizational settings. Contrarily, I interpret the holo movement as the fundamental subject or agency:

... most of our thought in its general form is not individual. It originates in the whole culture and it pervades us ... This deep structure of thought is what is common ... (Bohm, 1996, p. 51).

Simultaneously, the bohmian dialogue circles seem to me to be located outside the logic of production with its immediate demand for results. In Cissna & Anderson (2008), I miss a problematization of coinonia, community, or participation as an organizational purpose. Is this a realistic objective in an organizational context characterized by hierarchy and a diversity of power mechanisms? Is coinonia in itself a power mechanism? An ideological dead end in which the golden age thinking at all costs wants to reestablish the community across differences in interests, reducing dissensus to a manmade failure, claiming that differences in interests are but projections of differences in thought and/or unimportant?

The fundamental level in people is the same; the superficial differences are not so important (Bohm, 1996, p. 31).

Basically, the question is if the attempt to establish a third ontological understanding between mind and matter based in energy (holo movement) is but a new ontological idealism in disguise?

To Bohm and Isaacs dialogue is a special kind of conversation as opposed to, e.g., discussion. To me it is a special quality of conversations. To Bohm and Isaacs, dialogue is an inquiry, a questioning of basic assumptions, a second- or third loop learning when your current assumptions are insufficient:

"Dialogue is a discipline of collective thinking and inquiry, a process for transforming the quality of conversation and, in particular, the thinking that lies beneath it" (Isaacs, 1993, p.24).

To me, the dialogic quality might encompass reducing the field of options and making a decision that might be considered undialogically in Bohm and Isaacs (Barge & Little, 2002, p. 376).

Criticizing Bohm's prescriptive theory, Barge & Little (2002) propose Bakhtin's descriptive dialogue concept as point of departure:

When one adopts this perspective [Bakhtin's], dialogue becomes a way of being with others as opposed to a way of thinking through issues and problems (p. 377).

In my understanding of dialogue it is not a question of either-or. Dialogue is a way of being – the quality of the meeting between humans as you might say in a Buber-inspired way – as well as a shared effort to inquire into and eventually make decisions concerning certain issues and problems.

Although bohmian dialogue circles are not relevant in organizational settings, in my interpretation, his theory is a fountain of inspiration: firstly, the understanding of dialogue as a shared inquiry characterized by tensions as presented in the three action research projects; secondly, the comprehension of dialogue as (self)reflection about your own basic assumptions characterized by the tensions in an inquiry suspending these (dare):

Thought lacks proprioception, and we have got to learn, somehow, to observe thought (Bohm, 1996, p. 75).

This adds yet another difference. Through a dissensus approach our organizational anchored dialogue endeavors to inquire into the possibility of reaching consensus about a sustainable decision. In Bohm you find the systematic belief in the superficiality of differences. Dissensus seems to be almost automatically integrated into the common consciousness or collaborative thinking, thus reestablishing consensus. To me, it seems as if this connectedness-enforcement eliminates dissensus in Bohm's thinking. The consequence, as I see it, is that tensionality as a defining aspect of dialogue in Bohm's theory seems to be reduced to process:

If we can all suspend carrying out our impulses, suspend our assumptions, and look at them all, then we are all in the same state of consciousness ... a common consciousness. It may not be very pleasant ... But if people can share the frustration and share their different contradictory assumptions and share their mutual anger and stay with it ... then you have a common consciousness (Bohm, 1980, p. 33; from Stewart, Zediker & Black, 2004, p. 29).

Until now I have presented a series of arguments for being skeptical towards the relevance of Buber's and Bohm's dialogue theory in an organizational context and underscored the difference between their philosophically founded and mine more organizational founded approach to dialogue. On the other hand: they make me remember the extraordinary importance of dialogue in man's relation to society as well as to nature.

Personally, I sometimes forget this importance being absorbed working with concrete improvements in organizations. Not only as a communication facilitating the creation of new ideas. Not only as a communication releasing unused resources. Not only as a communication heading towards improved work life quality. But as a democratic and humanistic effort; democratic indicating participation, community, and empowerment; humanistic indicating how dialogue might unfold man's specificity, i.e., that we develop due to the quality of the relations in the human meeting.

Sometimes it is difficult to stick to this big picture when working in organizations fighting against the increasing number of cut downs, the production-logic's imperialist restriction of the logic of development, the daily media bombardment about reductions in welfare, culture, education, etc.

To sum up: on one side, I have focused on differences and the discussable relevance of dialogue philosophers in an organizational context; on the other side, I would like to underline that our concept of dissensus approach (text 6 and 7) is one among many ways of relating to tension in the whole, to tensionality and holism. We try to create possibilities for everybody to participate; to experience the productive power of a community; to welcome differences, tensions, and conflicts – or at least not reject them automatically. It's important for me to underscore this connection between dissensus approach and tensionality/holism, here.

### 1.3. A question of tensionality?

The differences between the concept of dialogue I have tried to develop through the three organizational action research projects and the philosophically founded dialogue theories is perhaps most obvious in relation to Gadamer. His dialogue designates a relation between man and text based in an ontological understanding of man as an interpreter.

A fundamental concept in his theory is, as mentioned in text 2, effect-history (Wirkungsgeschichte). This means that concepts from, e.g., antiquity is still in function or have an ongoing impact on our conceptual horizon. According to Gadamer, this implies that cognition is basically re-cognition, i.e., the fundamental understanding of the cultural dependency of our own, current knowledge. I am in line with Stewart, Zediker & Black's (2004) interpretation of Gadamer's concept of dialogue as holistic as fusion of horizons to him means comprehending the text in question from a more universal perspective ('Text' is a broad concept here, encompassing the other person). Inversely, I am surprised they interpret his concept of dialogue as tensional, considering his understanding of cognition as re-cognition. Unless it refers to the "tension" inherent in the basic dialogic effort, i.e., to ask an open question considering yourself as *docta ignorantia* (cf. text 2). Stewart, Zediker & Black (2004) write:

Gadamer's project is hermeneutical because it focuses on interpretation or understanding; it is philosophical because it takes understanding to be the human's way of being-in-the-world, and it is tensional because he conceives of understanding happening in context-dependent, always-unfinished, events of articulate contact ... the fundamental event of understanding is tensional in that it "is always the fusion of ... *horizons supposedly existing by themselves* ... the discipline of hermeneutics as one of "questioning and inquiring", tensional discursive events ... (p. 29).

It seems to me as if tensionality is thus reduced to the question-answer-process of the inquiry. As Gadamer (2004, orig.1960) express it:

Auch hier ist eine Spannung gegeben. Die Stellung zwischen Fremdheit und Vertrautheit, die die Überlieferung für uns hat ... *In diesem Zwischen ist der wahre Ort der Hermeneutik* (p.279).

This statement is of no use in a specific co-operation with a team in which the communication is characterized, e.g., by criticism remaining unspoken, by the invisible

conductors of the conversation not being questioned; by open questions falling back due to social concrete blocks, etc. It seems as if tensionality loses the dissensus dimension which to me is a critical characteristic.

Although I am skeptic as to the relevance of Gadamer's dialogue concept in organizational contexts I find important inspiration in his oeuvre, too. An important point is his understanding of pre-judices as not only problematic, as discussed in text 2. He rejects the unilateral comprehension of Enlightenment of all pre-judices as something negative just waiting to be transilluminated by reason. Our hope of transcending selfreferentiality through dialogue was a more or less conscious reproduction of this Enlightenment perception. In concrete action research it means, e.g., to ask both: 'which routines are in need of change?' and 'which are functioning well to be continued?' As opposed to an approach a la Scharmer (2009) where innovation seems to be conditioned upon rejecting all pre-judices:

We have to drop all our old tools and attend to the situation with fresh eyes (p. 56).

It is worthwhile to pay attention to Gadamer's concept of fusion of horizons. It does not denote the merging of the horizons of the dialogue partners. It has nothing to do with consensus or compromise. It means you change your horizon or that you partake in a more universal horizon due to the meeting or dialogue. As such, it is connected to my attempt to problematize the prefix 'co' throughout the analysis, referring to the fact that we, together and simultaneously, participate in knowledge production. 'We' might refer to an action researcher and a team, a team and its managers, a team, etc. It does not necessarily imply we produce the same knowledge – a decision we agree on and consider sustainable. Rather, the implication is that each party changes horizons – or reach sort of an understanding. They became cleverer through the dialogue. Simultaneously, the wish for a consensus decision is basic in dialogues in organizational action research.

To put it differently: the Gadamer-quotation about the apparently separated horizons might easily induce an invalid understanding of the concept of fusion of horizons. In my interpretation fusion of horizons means that recognition is in cognition. The corollary is that understanding the other person and his perspective is inherently the simultaneous understanding of me; not as identical but as sharing a common ground, the tradition – as well as being different. To understand something thus means to reach an improved understanding of yourself. Thus, 'fusion of horizons' is perhaps not the most adequate concept. Gadamer express it like this:

Zum wirklichen Verstehen gehört dagegen, die Begriffe einer historischen Vergangenheit so wiederzugewinnen, dass sie zugleich unser eigenes Begreifen mit enthalten. Wir nannten das oben die Horizontverschmelzung (p.356)

#### 1.4.Summary: partial inspirations and universal dead end

In their interpretation of Buber, Bohm, and Gadamer, Stewart, Zediker & Black (2004) seems to reduce tensionality to relatedness, process, or the internal difference between

assumption/pre-judice and acknowledgement in a dialogic inquiry. I do not disagree in their analysis of these dialogue philosophers. I am only skeptic about using the concept of tensionality as a common denominator as it seems to dilute the concept to such a degree it loses its connection to dissensus that, according to my project reflections, seems to be critical to dialogues in organizational action research. Power and power mechanisms, intimately connected to dissensus, seem to disappear in these holistic tensionality thoughts.

Looking back at what I have written about these three projects and what we did in practice, I think I have let myself be seduced. It's my responsibility alone as neither Buber, nor Bohm or Gadamer have uttered any wish to be used in organizational action research.

Buber's prescriptive-beautiful description of the difference between I-Thou and I-it-relations, Bohm's presentation of the fragmentation-transcending potential of the holo movement, and Gadamer's cultural-theoretical repetition of Socrates' famous *docta ignorantia* has produced an intellectual energy-lift in me. I had them installed, so to speak, as moral-political imperatives and went into organizations in order to create possibilities for human meetings, I-thou-relations, dialogues in which the importance of power was temporarily suspended, spaces characterized by *agape* (care), etc. The inspiring sight was the strength and the weakness, at the same time. The strength, as I have no doubt about having inspired many people with my energy and my belief in everybody's dialogic potential. The weakness, as I was like messiah on a false track. It is not possible to create I-Thou-relations or suspend the importance of hierarchy, etc. Dialogue is immanently a power mechanism – as a practice and as an unrealizable ideal; in the same way as Kvale (2006, p. 484) underscores the asymmetric power distribution in the qualitative research interview.

Accordingly, it has been necessary to develop (dispositions for) a somehow autonomous dialogue theory covering organizational action research – with reflecting inspiration from the above mentioned philosophers as well as from Roger's humanistic psychology, as is evident from text 2.

2. Work Research Institute (WRI): Dialogue as negotiation?
  - A meeting between humans or arguments?

### 2.1. Dialogue as conversation?

As far as I can see, something similar seems to have happened to the dominant tendency within Scandinavian organizational action research stemming from the Norwegian Work Research Institute (WRI) in Oslo. A series of Swedish action research projects, e.g. the LOM-project (Leadership, organization and co-determination) (Gustavsen, 1992) have contributed crucially. Their concept of dialogue is not developed from critical reflections on Buber, Bohm, or Gadamer but in relation to Habermas (Gustavsen, 1992, p.37f.) or –

to be more precise, I guess – in relation to their practice as action researchers (Gustavsen, 2001). It's my intention here to discuss this concept of dialogue.

There are many efforts and tendencies within (organizational) action research in Scandinavia (Tyden, 2006). I have chosen to focus on WRI, in particular their dialogue concept, as this institute has been the leading tendency since the mid-1960s within the organizational dimension of action research in Norway and Sweden. WRI has its point of departure in the effort of developing industrial democracy and is based in a close co-operation between the parties of the labour market (Levin, 2006; Pålshaugen, 2001).

The purpose of the kind of action research being carried through at WRI is to change the discourse of the organization through a dialogue between this and the more theoretical discourse of action researchers. Pålshaugen (1998) states it this way:

Our strategy for coupling the two discourses can be called an interventionist strategy. It is based on the assumption that if research is to play a contributory role in changing the discourse of the company, then its chances of achieving results are far greater if the research perspectives are made relevant within the framework of the *company's discourse* than if the company's personnel acquire the ability to participate in a new discourse on the company, but within the framework of a research-type discourse (p. 25).

The primary purpose seems to be what I have called results of second order, i.e., the creation of another discourse, a new way of organizing processes (cf. Gustavsen, 2001, p. 18). The practical results (of first order) and the theoretical results (of third order) seem to have a lower priority, as Gustavsen (2001) mentions:

In this way the mediating discourse [between theory and practice] was elevated to a core position and theory and what workplace practices to strive for were pushed more into the background (p. 18).

WFI is especially paying attention to having people, normally not communicating in an organization, to talk to each other in new structures or discourses. In a later phase – and in Gustavsen in particular – it has also become a cross organizational, regional, and cross regional endeavor in which the scope, the amount of people and interests and their diversity seems to be an objective in itself (Gustavsen, Hansson & Qvale, 2008).

The basic point in Pålshaugen (1998) is that results of first order might be facilitated if a dialogue between the discourses of the action researchers and the organization ends up in sustainable results of second order, i.e., organizationally anchored dialogues between organizational members in a new organizational discourse:

Rather than trying to bring to light or construct models that simulate 'solutions' of organizational problems in a certain enterprise, such as a factory, from within the social scientific discourse on work organizations, one tries to organize a new type of discourse between management and workforce with the aim of inspiring concrete suggestions about new forms of organization and practical activity in the enterprise.

The establishment of such a new type of discourse may be called a reorganization of the discourse in the enterprise (p. 21) [and]

... we used our theoretical competence, not as a help to organize concrete solutions, but as a help to organize discussions, which, by virtue of the combination of choice of thematic and the composition of participants, might be conducive to the creation of good ideas about practical solutions (p. 117).

Results of second order are the primary focus and results of first order a possible consequence. How about third order results? How about theoretical or research results? I am in line with Gustavsen's reluctance against repeating Levin's action research, apparently theory-driven, planning and implementing an experiment in order to test a theory (Gustavsen, 2001, p. 17). But, where do we find the researcher in this focusing on the mediating discourse between theory and practice? What qualifies these efforts as research, as also Eikeland (2006, p.218) asks? If we assume ordinary consultancy work focuses on results of first order, and reflective consultancy work on results of second order, too, what's the difference between reflective consultancy work and the WRI-version of action research – apart from a different priority of first and second order results? Gustavsen (2001) seems to neglect third order results:

This underlines that research is a partner in a coalition, not a body to gain special knowledge or sit in judgment on the other actors ... The outcome is a work agenda, not an analysis (p. 21).

The consequence is that the researcher has no independent theoretical aims besides participating in the action research as project worker with specific process managing competences (Pålshaugen, 1998, p.46), as stage director or conference designer for the dialogue between the other participants (Pålshaugen, 2001, p. 212, 214), or as dialogue process designer (Gustavsen, 2001, p. 24) in a project with one objective, only, namely to improve the dialogue of the others' – be it one or more organizations or regions. Pålshaugen (1998) states it like this:

Our research interest lies in being able to experiment with dialog-based means and measures under real conditions, not to make the way the company organizes its work correspond as closely as possible to good and attractive concepts. We want to change and improve the situation as it now stands (p. 36).

This understanding differs from mine. To me, action researchers and the other participants have shared and separated purposes – otherwise I don't reckon it sensible to talk about research. It seems as if Gustavsen (2001, p. 24) sacrifices research on the altar of the mediated action (results of second order).

Thus, in the introduction to Toulmin & Gustavsen (1996), Toulmin writes:

Action research and clinical medicine share methodological problems ... *for a reason*. Both kinds of research are aimed at practical effects, not theoretical rigor: both seek the kind of knowledge Aristotle called *phronesis* ('practical wisdom') more than *episteme* ('theoretical grasp'). Participatory action research is judged by practical

results, not by theoretical propriety: indeed, one hope of the present book is to improve its effectiveness, as practice ... (p. 3.).

If you read Aristotle literally, understanding episteme as "scientific knowledge [which] "exists of necessity [and] is therefore eternal" (1968, p. 332/333), you cannot disagree. If we try to translate Aristotle's different kinds of knowledge into a modern comprehension of science and research, then episteme refers to results of third order (research, theory) while phronesis as prudence might be grasped as results of second order. The conclusion seems to me that this kind of action research reduces itself to reflective consultancy with a primary focus on second level results.

The dialogues between the theoretical and the practical discourse – or the discourse of community life, as Pålshaugen (1998, p. 19) name it, too – and the internal dialogue between participants take place in different frame works: as dialogue in the development organization, an organizational supplement to the work organization, i.e., back stage reflection on performance, be it in production groups or in Company development Committees (p. 117), and as communication at the so called dialogue conferences, arranged by WFI as part of the action research process.

I will now turn to the practical presentation of the dialogue concept developed within this tendency. Based in the LOM-programme, Gustavsen (1992, p. 3f.) formulates 13 guidelines for a dialogue. They are repeated in a slightly different version in Handbook of Action Research (Gustavsen, 2001) in which the first principle or guideline reveals a double reduction of dialogue: firstly to negotiation, a conversation where you give and take in order to reach a compromise; secondly to the opposite of a monologue:

Dialogue is based on a principle of give and take, not one way communication (2001, p. 18).

He underscores that these criteria – in what follows reproduced from the 1992-version – are preliminary (p.37). At most, they "can function as a regulatory principle" (p. 109), only, as different from Habermas' universality claims. Unfortunately, the book is characterized more by telling than showing, so it is not always clear to me what a guideline might mean in practice. The corollary is that my comments address these written criteria, not the practice they try to describe, a practice I don't know or haven't experienced.

1. The dialogue is a process of exchange: ideas and arguments move to and fro between the participants.

This criterion – as well as the following – does not specify precisely what differentiates dialogue from, e.g., negotiation (cf. Eikeland, 2006, p. 220f.), or court proceedings, for that matter. It is remarkable how the following effort to make these criteria actionable talks about discussions, conclusions etc, as part of the democratic dialogue. Furthermore, the concept of 'exchange' is located within a linear reduction of communication to information transfer where exchange indicates transfer to and fro. Finally, they refer to the rational aspects of communication, i.e., ideas and arguments; not to establishing relations, cf. our distinction from text 2 between categories and ways of relating. I guess



it is fair to understand this focus as part of the impact from Habermas (Kemmis, 2001, p. 127f.).

2. It must be possible for all concerned to participate.

This criterion is valid for our dialogue concept, too, although not as a defining one, as it might work for non-dialogues, as, e.g., bohmian discussions or debates, too.

3. This possibility for participation is, however, not enough. Everybody should also be active. Consequently each participant has an obligation not only to put forth his or her own ideas but also to help others to contribute their ideas.

This guideline goes for our dialogue concept, too, but I would have liked to see practical suggestions for how to “implement” it, like, e.g., pro et con groups, humming groups, etc., as we mention in text 6 and 7.

4. All participants are equal.

I tend to be more specific underscoring how participants are equals as to human worthiness; that they are different as to competences; that there are power mechanisms in the conversation to be addressed in the dialogue if they function in ways constraining something or someone. Considering these guidelines are meant as an attempt to operationalize the concept of democratic dialogue, to me they seem more like proclamations. Besides, if all participants are equal how come they are not involved as co-authors to a higher degree in the research communication, apparently the monopoly of the action researchers?

5. Work experience is the basis for participation. This is the only type of experience which, by definition, all participants have.

To me, the participants might have relevant experiences from fields outside their work experience. Besides, I am unable to grasp the practical-regulatory value of this rule of the game?

6. At least some of the experience which each participant have when entering the dialogue must be considered legitimate.

I agree, although I understand this guideline in more communicative terms focusing on the dialogic competences and dissensus sensibility in practice showing if one considers the other's experiences as legitimate.

7. It must be possible for everybody to develop an understanding of the issues at stake.

In a way, this criterion is obvious to such a degree it problematizes itself: why is this item characterizing a dialogue as differing from a conversation between a teacher and a student, etc.?

8. All arguments which pertain to the issues under discussion are legitimate. No argument should be rejected on the ground that it emerges from an illegitimate source.

From my perspective, this is a dialogue criterion, too, although not exclusively as it might pertain to subject oriented negotiation (Fischer & Ury, 1991), too. Furthermore, I do not know how it is intended to be practiced.

9. The points, arguments, etc. which are to enter the dialogue must be made by a participating actor. Nobody can participate “on paper” only.

A reasonable principle demanding people prioritize to participate.

10. Each participant must accept that other participants can have better arguments.

I think most, if not all, participants we have co-operated with in the three projects described will endorse that. The problem is what “better” means. Habermas talks about the better arguments’ astonishingly force free obligation, but that criterion presupposes an ideal situation where but arguments count. If we use the initial phase of the EDIT-project in CSMS as an example, management, employees and action researchers had different arguments and different standards for assessing them. To decide what is to the best only based in arguments would presuppose an Archimedean point from which that would have been possible. Usually, such a point is not to be found in organizational action research. To me it seems as if you have to accept the argument with a reasonable degree of consensus in the complex situation; try it out and continuously question the degree and quality of the consensus as well as the implementability of the argument as a decision. The alternative is to accept that consensus is not to be reached in which case a managerial decision is to be expected.

11. The workrole, authority, etc. of all the participants can be made subject to discussion – no participant is exempt in this respect.

I agree and I would like to see some estimate of the changes of this to actually happen. We have tried, ourselves, to illustrate a dissensus approach, including a dissensus sensibility intending to facilitate this, but I can never know if a relevant critique of some constraining authority remains unspoken as dissensus sensibility is never equivalent to mind reading.

12. The participants should be able to tolerate an increasing degree of difference of opinion.

Again, I agree as we have tried to handle this through a dissensus approach. At the same time, it’s my appraisal that the rationalist apprehension of dialogue behind these criteria tends to destroy itself. To me, it’s not sufficient the participants have an intellectual tolerance towards points of view deviating from theirs. Besides, they have to be able to contain their feelings about these differences or deviations through suspension or in some other way.

13. The dialogue must continuously produce agreements which can provide platforms for practical action. Note that there is no contradiction between this criterion and the previous one. The major strength of a democratic system compared to all other ones is that it has the benefit of drawing upon a broad range of opinions and ideas that inform practice, while at the same time being able to make decisions which can gain the support of all participants.

Gustavsen reckon how this dialogue concept hasn't got Habermas' universalistic tone but reflects the democratic tradition in Scandinavia at the end of the 20. Century:

"The dialogue criteria are, for instance, not claimed to be general but rather a contextual interpretation of democratic traditions as these lend themselves to an interpretation of Scandinavia towards the end to the twentieth century. They are, furthermore, seen as a point of departure, open to change and restructuring in the light of experience." (p. 112).

At the same time this criterion (no. 13), especially, seems to reflect an understanding of dialogue as the special kind of negotiation between the parties developed within the Norwegian labour market. Gustavsen mentions how the LOM-project is an attempt to fulfill the Co-determination Act (1992, p. 111). To him, it's more like a negation of the principles for negotiation on the Norwegian labour market as it:

...involve all concerned, accept less well-structured objects and create a co-operative setting (2001, p. 18).

I, too, see this difference between representative and direct participation as decisive. Nevertheless, it does not remove the most important perspective in this context, i.e., that the 13 criteria are guidelines for negotiations more than dialogues. Furthermore, this negotiation seems to be subordinated to the consensus obligation of the logic of production, so to speak. It is not a dissensus approach as in our dialogues inquiring into the possibilities for consensus. It has to create consensus. Gustavsen addresses problems related to this understanding suggesting the term 'agreement' rather than 'consensus' which, from my perspective, is no solution.

To sum up, I respect these criteria developed in and through practice (Gustavsen, 2001, p. 19); trying to establish a new discourse heading at more democracy; questioning whether democracy is an option in an organizational context (Gustavsen, 1992, p. 109). Basically, though, I think their concept of dialogue creates more confusion than clarity:

Firstly, as talking about democratic dialogue have non-democratic dialogues as its condition, to me a *contradictio in adjectio*.

Secondly, by reducing dialogue to negotiation - to me more or less democratic - apparently reflecting the Norwegian labour market model. Using Fischer & Ury's (1991) concepts, dialogue is identical to case or subject oriented negotiation. There may be dialogic moments in such negotiations, but the concept of negotiation does not grasp the defining dialogue criteria as stated by dominant dialogue philosophers, as, e.g., Buber, Bohm, and Gadamer.

Thirdly, they talk about the equality between researchers and participants (1992, p. 114) while, at the same time, the argument – the basic criterion of the research discourse – is turned into the criterion for the dialogue between researchers and participants and between participants. This seems self-referential to me as the democratic dialogue is intended as mediating the theoretical and the practical discourse on an equal footing (Gustavsen, 2001, p. 19; Pålshaugen, 1998, p. 25).

Fourthly, within dialogue philosophy dialogue is comprehended as more than a meeting between arguments and points of view. In Buber, e.g., it's a meeting between humans. This rationalist reduction of dialogue to an argument meeting indicates an inspiration from Habermas. Actually, Gustavsen (2001, p. 22) talks about dialogue conferences as a "Relationship-building event", but it seems to be relations between arguments, tolerance for different points of view in which focus is on creating networks; more partnership conferences than dialogue conferences. This brings a decisive difference to the table: I understand dialogue as a reflexive and in-depth inquiry into the fundamentals in order to reach the optimum point of departure for co-creating the expected improvements, whereas Gustavsen (2001) talks about the lack of originality in trying to position yourself as a possible partner:

The need to declare interest, tell the others who 'I am', also explains another aspect ... their lack of deep originality (p. 23).

Nielsen' (2006) critique of the dialogue conferences follows this track:

The original point of departure on the work environment and organizational development was, over two decades, transformed to concepts of enterprise development through innovation, networks and regional partnerships. As such, the Action Research changes its focus from the critical action oriented changes of organisations towards market driven business innovation in networks and regions, but still with a focus on dialogue based democratic development (p. 99).

I don't know if this critique is tenable. The corollary is invalid as it is dependent upon whether you talk about market driven or employee driven innovation, as well as upon your innovation criteria. The presupposition is that the democratic endeavor is subordinated to the market. I am in favor of another interpretation of Gustavsen (2005) where innovation and democracy are vehicles of each other.

Nevertheless, the question of power seems to lose its importance. The inspiration from Habermas is obvious in Gustavsen's description of dialogues as discourses on the edge of power free conversations. Based in Foucault he expresses it like this:

Since power manifests itself in the discourse, the problem of power becomes – as a point of departure – one of differences between discourses – between those infected by power and those which are not (1992, p. 110).

I tend to read Foucault otherwise as if all discourses are infested by power. Accordingly, dialogues to me are special conversations where you might continuously address the

constraining dimension of power mechanisms (but maybe this is just based in a different understanding of 'infested'?)

In their survey on leading dialogue philosophers, Stewart, Zediker & Black (2004) excludes Habermas as he, allegedly differing from Buber, Bohm, Gadamer, Freire, and Bakhtin has not addressed the concept of dialogue directly. Of course, this is a questionable point of view, but maybe it is one of the reasons why the concept of dialogue is not elaborated upon in the Norwegian action research tradition, although Gustavsen (1992, p. 109) presents the democratic dialogue as the essence of the LOM-project. Perhaps their attention has been drawn to the democratic aspect more the dialogic? Gustavsen's attempt to be aligned to the ordinary understanding of dialogue, e.g. as the opposite of monologue and not to the dialogue philosophers, may be interpreted this way (1992, p. 109). Maybe, the term 'democratic conversation' or 'democratic negotiation' would me more to the point? Gustavsen, Hansson & Qvale (2008) try to base dialogue in the societal tradition, which to me point in the same direction:

The point in this context is to ground the notion of dialogue in the order of society and not in existential or psychodynamic mechanisms. The ability to master dialogue is identical to the ability to enter into discourses of reason and fruitfulness with people one does not know. The reason lies in procedure, not in personal knowledge (p. 70).

The choice of the concepts "existential or psychodynamic mechanisms" seems to be just as undialogic-pejorative as Nielsen's (2006) assertion about the WRI-critique falling back because of the market. The concepts have no affinity to the dialogue philosophers presented in this text (but might be used trying to understand Rogers' contribution).

Finally, I would like to underline that my critique does not imply skepticism in relation to the work carried through by Pålshaugen, Gustavsen, and their colleagues in Norwegian and Swedish action research. On the contrary, I am sure we share the same endeavors when working differently and in different contexts. Thus, I am in line with Fricke (2006) writing in his editorial on text 5 about Marianne and me:

They are devoted to Thorsrud's and others' vision of industrial democracy and democratic dialogue (Gustavsen, 1992) in a realistic way (p.145).

My critique is a problematization of their concept of dialogue, exclusively. Maybe, as mentioned, a critique addressing my interpretation of their presentation of this concept, and not the way it is enacted at dialogue conferences. The following statement by Pålshaugen (2006) might be interpreted in that direction:

In their [Kristiansen/Bloch-Poulsen] definition of 'dialogue' we recognize the close (and positively valued) relation between participation – or involvement – and dialogue, which is one of the main vehicles of participation. Dialogue is not only an instrument in creating involvement; it is in itself a medium or a forum of involvement. This positive evaluation of dialogue, and the intimate relation between dialogue and involvement/participation, is not peculiar to just Kristiansen/Bloch-Poulsen. Rather, it is a quite common perspective in action research (p.155).

Whether or not dialogue in practice means democratic conversation/negotiation in the WRI-version, we share:

- a belief in the importance of strengthening dialogue,
- a belief in enhancing innovation through dialogue (Pålshaugen, 2009; Gustavsen, 2005; text 6 og 7),
- a pragmatic approach facilitating the creation of practical results,
- an effort to develop dialogue based in what works in practice, and
- a tendency to reject theory driven action research, i.e., the idea of using a theory in practice as it was apparently the case in the socio-technical testing of theories as field experiments.

## 2.2. Critical or pragmatic action research.

Nielsen & Nielsen (2006) presents a critique of Pålshaugen's version of pragmatic action research founded in a contrast to their own version based, among others, in critical theory:

... we follow two trends in Scandinavian Action Research: the pragmatic one represented by the dialog[ue] tradition and the critical one represented by the critical utopian Action Research (p. 63).

Basically, the difference lies in the relation between word/discourse and action/practical improvements, between what I have termed as results of second and first level. Nielsen & Nielsen claim that the pragmatic approach implies a unity between these two aspects:

In the so-called pragmatic direction of Action Research, the unity between interpretation and action has become a basic belief ... The direction of Action Research based on Critical Theory has a different interpretation of the hermeneutic dialogues. They are not necessarily understood as either cultivating processes or as development-oriented dialogues about practical issues. They are understood as scenes for critical re-orientations in a reified everyday life. Here action and dialogue is connected, not unified (p. 67-68).

As is obvious from the reflections presented above, the pragmatic version of action research as the WRI-institute stand for represents a linguistic turn based in a fundamental belief in the impact of discourse changes on organizational changes (Pålshaugen, 1998). Nevertheless, the quotation from Pålshaugen (1998), I have used already, seems to me to invalidate the critique from Nielsen & Nielsen:

... we used our theoretical competence, not as a help to organize concrete solutions, but as a help to organize discussions, which, by virtue of the combination of choice of thematic and the composition of participants, might be conducive to the creation of good ideas about practical solutions (p. 117).

A clear cut distinction is introduced here between discursive changes, i.e., new ways of organizing the conversations, and possible practical changes. As such, Pålshaugen has a clear distinction between what I have termed results of second and first order.

In this way, it is difficult for me to accept the ontological difference between the pragmatic and the critical action research as claimed by Nielsen & Nielsen (2006):

... ontological assumptions ... We see a constructive controversy in the discussion between a linguistic inspired Action research and a materialistic and psychoanalytically inspired Action Research (p. 68).

In my opinion, Nielsen & Nielsen (2006), stick to this distinction using an othering process. Concretely, it takes place by twisting Pålshaugen into a naïve, ontological idealist by this selfreferential remark:

Making actors in organisations use other words is making them practice work in a different and more reflexive way (p. 76).

I don't know if it was meant as a comment to this critique, but I remember Pålshaugen initiating his key note at the action research conference in Groningen in the same year underlined that the concept of dog cannot bark.

On the other hand, one might accuse Pålshaugen (2001) of inviting this kind of critique by the title of his article in the Handbook of Action Research: "The Use of Words: Improving Enterprises by Improving their Conversations," but not if you read the text, stating, e.g.:

And, as we know, the bridge between what is said and what is (afterwards) done is often very fragile, and sometimes there is no bridge at all ... the relation between talk and action. The other overall purpose of a dialogue conference is to contribute to an increased awareness of this relation, in specific ways which may pave the way for better task performance. In short: better practice (p. 212f.)

Talk and action are clearly separated. Thus, Nielsen & Nielsen (2006) seems to produce a selfreferential misinterpretation of Pålshaugen. The implication is not that there aren't any differences between a pragmatic approach to action research and an approach based in critical theory. As Johansson & Lindhult (2008), I comprehend the distinction as a continuum with many mixtures. The difference lies, among other items, in the following, as stated by Nielsen & Nielsen (2006):

Critical Theorists are closer to Marx in the interpretation of the strength of reified social structures while pragmatists are closer to Skjervheim in his interpretation of possibilities of democratic change within existing social structures (p. 72).

As I see it, this interpretation poses the already mentioned decisive question: is it possible to have a dialogue with people whom you consider alienated? A positive answer is – according to my understanding – founded in an authoritarian relation between action researcher and participant if the concept of alienation is used as in

critical theory. The revolt of critical theory against authoritarianism is itself authoritarian in my perspective. Nielsen & Nielsen (2006) introduce a difference between alienated and reified as alienated according to their understanding might be grasped as "mental feeling" (p. 67). They present no arguments, and their point of view has no affinity to Marx (Bloch-Poulsen, 1970).

I haven't found the concept of alienation in the WRI-version of Pålshaugen and Gustavsen. The above mentioned dialogic guidelines (4,6,11) indicate a comprehension of the transformation of the subject into an object. The belief in democratic processes that we share with the WRI-institute as well as our concepts of unproductive thirds and social concrete blocks – understood as quasi-material frozen basic assumptions that we are part of, too – points at shading the contrast between critical and pragmatical. That was the reason why we located ourselves in text 6 and 7 in the critical part of pragmatical action research with the inherent tensions.

Nielsen & Nielsen (2006) claim that the WRI-approach excludes itself from the designation 'critical':

In our opinion, the results of such Action Research do not meet the obligation of being critical. To be critical, the researchers have to draw attention to substantially excluded issues or suppressed subjectivity if he or she sees or feels it and creates space for expressions. If the researchers only concentrate on procedures for dialogue, they will not allow themselves to relate to excluded or dominated subjectivity (p. 77).

The dissensus approach developed in text 6 and 7 is exactly coined to facilitate the voice of the excluded and dominated. As mentioned, in Gustavsen and Pålshaugen I haven't found a closer description about how they eventually secure such voices, but a series of their dialogue guidelines (2,3,4,8,10,11,12) indicates an attention to this problem, probably removing the validity of Nielsen & Nielsen's critique.

On the other hand, it seems to me as if the dialogue conferences of the WRI-version as well as the Future Lab Workshop, one of the preferred methods of the critical action research, share a problem about power, including, e.g., the exclusion of dominated voices. Both parties seem to believe that discursive rules can eliminate or prohibit power. Nielsen (2006), writing about the Future Lab Workshop, puts it this way:

... the workshop is facilitated by specific rules of communication in order to create communication on an equal base and eliminate the influence of power relations in the communication between the participants (p. 103) and

The Future Workshop's principle of communication is very restricted in order to establish a dialogue, where power structures that exist outside the workshop are forbidden during the workshop. This opens up the possibility for placing value on all the participants in the workshop experiences, and providing an atmosphere of collaboration on every idea. Few other methodologies intervene as directly in the communicative power structure as the Future Workshop (p. 106).



I came across the same belief at the action research conference in Groningen, 2006 when in a workshop asking Pålshaugen how they coped with power issues at the dialogue conferences. The answer was, according to my memory: “Using rules of the game.”

To me it is not a question of rules or discourses. Power and power mechanisms are uneliminable. As an action researcher and as any other participant you may try to speak out some of the constraining expressions of these power mechanisms. You can never know if you are successful. To believe you might prohibit power mechanisms by discursive rules seems to me at best to be naïve, at worst to constitute a directly suppressive power mechanism.

Nielsen (2006, p. 111) seeks to present a survey of methods having been used within Scandinavian action research. The point of departure is Thorsrud’s search conference, supplemented by the pragmatist WRI’s dialogue conferences and the critical approach’s Future Experimental Workshop. As to “communicative orientation”, the first is described as characterized by “Theories of dialogue”, the second by “Theories of discourse”, and the third by “Theories of equal communication.” It seems difficult not to interpret this survey as canonizing the Future Experimental Workshop or Future Lab Workshop of the critical approach as *the* politically correct version of action research. This is a problem for several reasons: Firstly, because it introduces a distinction between dialogues, discourses, and equal communication without any argument. Secondly, the concept of dialogue is removed from the democratic dialogue in the WRI-approach, again without any argument. Thirdly, dialogue and action research is reduced to a method, excluding the three dimensionality of the concept of dialogic competences we have argued in text 2. Fourthly, dialogue is drained of every meaning pointing as a human meeting. It is difficult to see how this concept of dialogue has any resonance within dialogue philosophy.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> In a currently released basic book about qualitative approaches by Brinckmann & Tanggaard, Nielsen & Nielsen (2010) thus locate their contribution about action research under the headline “Methods.”

#### IV: Dialogue as multiple tensionality?

'Dialogic, organizational action research' is probably the most appropriate term for the efforts unfolded in the B&O-project, the AAU-project, and the EDIT-project presented in these 8 texts.

'Dialogic' designates the specific aspect, where dialogue is at once "method" and subject. The quotation marks denotes that dialogue is more than a method and dialogic competences more than skills, i.e., a human meeting or a way of living in and through the relation. Dialogue and dialogic action research in organizations thus illustrates what Marshall (1999) calls "living life as inquiry."

'Subject' means that we continuously try to develop our dialogue approach (results of second order) and dialogue comprehension (results of third order). As mentioned our disposition for a dialogue theory includes the following dimensions:

- a caring container as the space and rhythm of dialogue
- dialogic helicopter team meetings (DHTM) as a caring container of employee driven innovation (EDIT)
- dialogue as a special quality of a conversation marked by share, dare, and care
- the three dimensionality of dialogic competences (skills, ways of relating, and ways of being)
- dialogue as, in my work, interpersonal organizational communication, co-producing meaning, creating relations in contexts probably changed to some degree by the communication
- emergent, mutual involvement/participation as the co-operational form of action research project work
- dialogue as an action research approach heading at results of first order (specific improvements for our partners), second order (proces organizing, changing inhibitive communicative patterns), and third order (concepts for a more comprehensive and in-depth theoretical understanding) – unfolded as an ongoing work place learning process
- the other and us as equal professionals (usually) within different fields of expertise
- selfreferentiality as a possible epistemological dialogue inhibitor in the other and in us (apriori categories and apriori ways of relating)
- social concrete blocks as quasi-material, organizational-cultural dialogue inhibitors
- modern team dilemmas as new organzational-cultural, potential dialogue inhibitors

- dissensus-approach as dialogic innovation facilitator (dissensus sensibility and - organizing)
- the three dimensionality of the concept of innovation as regards EDIT (improvement for the organization, organizing and work life quality)
- the three dimensional result structure of dialogic, organizational action research projects (first, second, and third order).

In this general text I have tried to address some of the tensions attached to the possibility, the use, and the understanding of dialogue in organizational action research. In a way, I think it's fair to claim that tensionality is not only a characteristic in the more philosophically founded dialogue concept as demonstrated by Stewart, Zediker & Black (2004), but also in the more organizationally founded dialogue concept, I have taken part in developing with more or less critical inspiration from these philosophers. Finalizing this text I tend to maintain some of these basic tensions:

1. Tensions between the logic of production and the logic of development
  - Possibilities for dialogic, organizational action research.

The fight between the logic of production and development seems to have been more tightened up within the 20-25 years I have worked as an organizational consultant and action researcher.

Is it sensible to talk about dialogues about purpose of an action research project in a team when team composition, team manager, and team work fields are often changed? Are team members still inclined to "invest energy" in new colleagues as demanded by a dialogue? Are you able to continuously open up to so many new team members? Are dialogues realistic when emergence seems to be the condition, constantly characterized by unforeseen situations?

On one hand, questions like these indicate how dialogues are more important than ever. On the other hand, they point to the fact that the conditions for dialogues seem worse than ever. The consequence is difficult conditions for dialogic, organizational action research as there is a tendency to cut off development de facto, while, simultaneously more and more people talk about innovation as the only hope for, e.g., Denmark.

Action research is thus faced with heavy dilemmas: how do you secure time for reflection in an organization focusing on short term production solutions? This implicates timing being decisive: when is the least bad time for initiating an organizational action research process? – If we assume it's still a fertile Sisyphus work, so to speak?

2. Tensions in the possibilities for dialogues about purpose, design, validation and result communication
  - Is co-production, co-creation, co-validation hot air or ...?

As demonstrated, tensions seem to be the common denominator for purpose, design, validation, research communication, the conceptualization of the other, as well as the relation between the other and the action researcher:

- Who's to be involved, to which degree and how in stating the objective or direction, the ongoing process design, the continuous validation of which kind of results (of first, second, and third order), in production/communication of research results, etc.?

Primarily, these questions deal with the tension between top down management and involvement/participation, between the action researcher -, the employee - , the organizational/managerial - , or the co-operatively driven processes.

Furthermore, you have tensions in the understanding of the other between different kinds of object status (informant, alienated, etc.) and subject status (participant, co-learner, etc.); tensions referring to the appreciation of the relation between the two groups of professionals, as, e.g, emergent mutual involvement versus planned experiment; tensions about empowerment and constraint attached to power as possession or mechanism, etc.

To sum up, it seems as if concepts like co-production, co-creation, co-validation, co-authorship, mutual involvement, etc., include more differences and tensions than the prefix 'co' might indicate on the face of it. Co-production, co-creation, etc., is insufficient to describe the complexity in organizational action research about purpose, and design.

Similarly, co-validation is inadequate to catch the fluid condition in which the other and we as action researchers have different roles and validates different results without cast in stone distinctions between first, second, and third order results; fluid conditions that won't allow us to stick to the distinction between their development project and our research project.

3. Tensions in the comprehension of action research in organizations
  - about episteme and phronesis

In the initial phase of the EDIT-project our work was – as mentioned – in danger of being reduced to (reflective) consultancy as we were so eager to get things going, co-produce results for our partners and fulfill the expectation we reckoned the financing authorities had to us. Prioritizing between results of first, second, and third order is a field of tension within action research as such. To me it seems important to warn against a tendency to let episteme give ground for phronesis, as I interpreted Toulmin's considerations about the democratic dialogue in action research. I don't know if there is a proper balance between the three kinds of results and I have presented many grey areas in between. I would like to run up the flag and warn against reducing action research to reflective consultancy focusing on first and second order results, reducing research to methodology, why to how, as we, e.g., saw in Nielsen (2006).

I understand action research as a special form of project work between two or more groups of different professionals with compatible – shared and separated – objectives heading at results at all three levels.

4. Tensions between a philosophical and an organizational founded dialogue concept
  - God, cosmos and the holo movement in organizations.

There is a critical tension between the philosophical dialogue concepts in Buber, Bohm, and Gadamer, and the actionable dialogue concept we have tried to develop through these three projects as a designation of special conversational sequences or moments. On one hand, I have been very inspired by these philosophers. On the other hand, I am skeptic as to their relevance in organizational action research as they might contribute presenting the organizational complexity and its diverse power mechanisms as I-Thou-relations focusing on the undifferentiated whole in which tensionality has lost its dissensus dimension. Power and power mechanisms related to dissensus seem to disappear in these holistic tensionality theories. Here is an example from Scharmer (2009), who – with appreciation – reproduce this quotation from Jeffrey Hollender:

Leadership is about being better able to listen to the whole than anyone else can (p. 20).

A beautiful quotation, sure, but who determines the whole?

5. Tensions between selfreferentiality and dialogue

Finally I would like to address the basic tension in all dialogic endeavor namely how you relate to the other. Until our “meeting” with Gadamer (text 2), we saw selfreferentiality as negative, i.e., as a prejudice in an Enlightenment perspective. After that, we understood selfreferentiality as a preliminary foundation for our own ways of thinking, too. How do you maintain your own way of thinking and points of view while simultaneously relating to the other in an open-listening way? Pearce & Pearce (2004) points at:

... realizing the value of remaining in the tension between standing one’s own ground and being profoundly open to the other (p. 55).

As far as I can see, this tension is the fountain of development – if you dare listen to the other, including – as underlined in text 6 and 7 – the other’s silent and critical voice; development including personal development as well as employee driven innovation.

6. Dialogic action research in organizations

The term ‘ dialogic, organizational action research’ is, as mentioned, meant to indicate that dialogue is an independent field of reflection in our work; as opposed to the WRI-institute where they create a democratic conversation or negotiation which might well be

described without the concept ‘dialogue’; and as opposed to an action research approach inspired by critical theory as you cannot have dialogues with people whom you consider reified or alienated, in my opinion. At the same time, it is important to underline how dialogue in itself is a power mechanism, as practice and as an unrealizable ideal; a power mechanism continuously problematizing itself when functioning in a constraining way, e.g., by not being aware of the restricted potentials of dialogue.

Maurer & Githens (2010) operate with a fluid distinction between conventional, critical, and dialogic action research locating our contribution within the last category.

The distinction is based in a grid with two scales. One indicates “the emphasis on methodological” issues, the other the “level of criticality” (2010, p. 274).

On the first scale, the conventional and the critical action research has a high score while the dialogic version has a low score, according to their understanding.

But a key distinction between dialogic and the other two approaches ... is the role of professional inquiry ... dialogic approaches *abandon the concern with classic scientific method* which characterize the conventional and to some extent the critical approaches (p. 278).

To me it is different, as results of third order are an integral part of the dialogic action research I do. In my opinion it is not a question of abandoning the ordinary research standards, as, e.g., reliability and validity, but to reformulate them according to the specific subject and context of organizational action research, as I have tried to contribute to in this text 8.

On the other scale, indicating the level of criticality, they locate the dialogic version between the critical (high score) and the conventional (low score). The criteria seem to be Habermas’ distinction between three cognition interests (as mentioned earlier). The technical, cause-effect-explanation, apparently characterizes the conventional understanding of:

... AR as a problem-solving technique aimed at improving organizational performance (p. 275).

The hermeneutic-interpretative cognition interest, allegedly characterizing the dialogic version, thereby becoming a horizons problematization, if I am allowed to twist Gadamer’s concepts, is marked by the shared inquiry into basic assumptions:

... double-loop-learning ... the overarching ‘method’ of dialogic research is the concern with inquiring into our values, assumptions, and preconceived notions about what is important (p. 278f.).

The critical is marked by an emancipatory cognition interest:

... that questions underlying ideologies and power structures ... (p. 277).

I must admit that I fully understand how our inspiration from Gadamer and Bohm (they refer to Isaacs) might give rise to locating us within the dialogic version. Gadamer's contribution is a cultural-theoretical or philosophical hermeneutic, refusing methodological questions; working at the third result level, only. As mentioned, I am thus unable to see the relevance of bohmian dialogues in an organizational context.

Nevertheless, I am not in line with Maurer & Githens (2010) interpretation. A very important purpose for me in this text 8 has been to distanciate my work from these fountains of inspiration in order to underscore that an organizationally founded dialogue concept is not only about a meeting between humans, where you can relate with your feelings and restricted knowledge, relationally developing each other; not just about collaboratively questioning basic assumptions and horizons, etc. That dialogue deals with creating results of different kinds in an integrated way, too. Practical results of first order, as the conventional version do, too, apparently; results of second order as new methods, ways of organizing processes, new discourses and horizons, as especially prioritized by WRI; as well as results of third order, i.e., theoretical concepts enabling a criticism of basic ideologies and power mechanisms, thus not a specialty of critical action research. Bradbury Huang (2010) describes the emancipatory, critical aspect of organizational action research this way:

The emancipatory aim, however, is often the trickiest and the most alluring to scholars ... In more familiar organizational inquiry it may mean empowering employees as members of knowledge creation efforts that will inform their efforts to take the work forward, thus leaving them stronger (p. 98f.)

In this way, a non-revolutionary interpretation of Marx' eleventh Feuerbach thesis (1968, orig. 1845/46, p. 341), has always been a moral-political-scientifical motto for me:

Die Philosophen haben die Welt nur verschieden *interpretiert*; es kömmt darauf an, sie zu *verändern*.

Our dialogic action research seeks to honor these critical and emancipatory efforts, as mentioned, as well as the research standards adequate for the specific subjekt we are collaborating on, i.e., the simultaneous improvements for the organization, organizing, and work life quality.

With these clarifications, I understand dialogue as a special quality of a conversation, marked by sharing, daring, and caring, unfolding – in my work – in an organizational context characterized by multiple tensionality – at once a meeting between humans and a shared processing of and learning from burning issues.

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