

Contents

Editorial

Democracy, Work and Humanisation: Dedicated to Werner Fricke for his contribution to action research 95
Danilo R. Streck, Emil A. Sobottka, Øyvind Pålshaugen, Richard Ennals, Sabine Pfeiffer

Action Research and the Promotion of Democracy 101
Bjørn Gustavsen

Non-Normal Normality? Claims on Work and Life in a Contingent World of Work .. 112
Stefanie Hürtgen and Stephan Voswinkel

Workplace Innovation as Regional Economic Development:
Towards a Movement? 129
Peter Totterdill

Participation and Social Engineering in Early Organisational Action Research:
Lewin and the Harwood studies 154
Marianne Kristiansen and Jørgen Bloch-Poulsen

Using the Democratic Past to End Neoliberalism in Universities: Action Research,
Socio-technical Systems Design, and the Global Future 178
Davydd J. Greenwood

Book review**Democratisation of work and economy through participation**

Is it possible to relaunch this utopia in neoliberal times?

Comments on: Fricke W. & Wagner H. (eds.). *Demokratisierung der Arbeit:*

Neuansätze für Humanisierung und Wirtschaftsdemokratie. Hamburg:

VSA Verlag, 2012 191

Emil A. Sobotta

Action Research and the Promotion of Democracy

Bjørn Gustavsen

Abstract

A major effort to promote not only workplace democracy, but democracy in general, with the help of action research, occurred with The Quality of Working Life Movement. From around 1970 the movement made major advances, to die out as an international movement around 1990. The major pressure under which democracy finds itself today makes it of interest to recall the experiences from this movement, with a view to what can be learnt of relevance to the present situation. Can action research help promote democracy? At the core of the discussion is the relationship between theoretical constructions and practical experiences.

Keywords: Action research, democracy, innovation, learning from differences, Quality of Working Life, theory and practice

La Investigación-Acción y la promoción de la democracia

Resumen

Un gran esfuerzo para promover no sólo la democracia en el lugar de trabajo, sino la democracia en general, con la ayuda de la Investigación-Acción, ocurrió con el Movimiento de Calidad de la Vida Laboral. Desde aproximadamente 1970 el movimiento hizo grandes avances, para luego desaparecer como un movimiento internacional alrededor de 1990. La principal presión bajo la cual se encuentra la democracia hoy en día hace que sea de interés recordar las experiencias de este movimiento, en vistas a lo que se puede aprender de relevancia para la situación actual. ¿Puede la Investigación-Acción ayudar a promover la democracia? En el centro de la discusión se encuentra la relación entre construcciones teóricas y experiencias prácticas.

Palabras clave: Investigación-Acción, democracia, innovación, aprender de las diferencias, Calidad de la Vida Laboral, teoría y práctica.

Introduction

When Werner Fricke first became known to this author, it was within the framework of the Quality of Working Life (QWL) movement. Triggered by the discovery of the role of autonomy in work performed around 1950 at the Tavistock Institute in the UK (Trist & Bam-

forth 1951), followed by some successful field projects in Scandinavia (Emery & Thorsrud 1976), the QWL movement was made up of actors who wanted to promote the notion of autonomy in work within a wider context: in principle no less than the whole wide world. Main actors in the movement were researchers, but other actors could be counted as well, such as employers, unionists and consultants.

Those who came to join the movement did so from different interests and motives. The most common denominator was, however, the notion of democracy; initially in the version «industrial democracy», later in the form of democracy in general. Threats against democracy were not unknown at the time when the QWL movement appeared. These threats were however modest, compared to those that appear today, when a global democratisation process seems to have stagnated, at the same time as a number of formerly democratic societies are turning towards a kind of post-democratic hybrid. Is this development of concern to social research in general and action research in particular? If so, what can or should be done? Questions of this kind make it relevant to look at the QWL movement: what kind of actions were initiated, on what grounds and with what effects, leading up to the question of what can be learnt of relevance for the situation today.

Like all phenomena answering to the notion of movement, the QWL movement was loosely structured, and no specific membership figure can be quoted, nor is it possible to provide an exact picture of its penetration in the various parts of the world. That activities emerged in perhaps as much as 30 different countries, ranging from the US to India and from Norway to Turkey, is, however, reasonably well substantiated (Quality of Working Life Council 1977; Ejnatten 1993). When a conference was organised, in Toronto in 1981, not only was the number of participants around 2000, but many came from industries, unions and employer associations. The hope of a global success seemed realistic. A few years later, however, most of the movement had disappeared. No further conferences were organised, a series of publications initiated by an elected council came to an end. A research seminar in 1987 came to conclude the movement and whatever has taken place later in terms of joint activities has been national, regional or in other ways linked to specific contexts.

Much of these events lie up to five decades back in time. What interest do they have today? Looking at thoughts and events from a historical perspective does not only mean going back in time, it also makes it possible to trace their impact over a long period, and there are aspects that can be uncovered only within such a framework.

Theories and movements

The notion of movement is generally taken to imply a kind of loosely structured, network type phenomenon, characterised by many participants with shared interests but not necessarily a shared specific understanding. When the QWL movement first appeared, it did, however, go well beyond this notion of a loosely formed network. What emerges from a document made by one of the chief architects of the movement for the 1981 conference (Trist 1981) was the notion of a research driven development based on a shared, or general, theory. Largely developed by Fred Emery and Eric Trist the point of departure was the early studies of autonomy in work. These were, however, expressed in an «anthropological»,

Non-Normal Normality? Claims on Work and Life in a Contingent World of Work

Stefanie Hürtgen and Stephan Voswinkel

Abstract

Workers are not determined by their social conditions, and they are no simple object of dominant (neoliberal) discourses. The article shows that, contrarily to widespread beliefs about working people as individualistic “entrepreneurial selves”, workers strongly hold on to ideas about the social character of their life and their world of work, the need for humanity in both work and life, and the basic idea that work, even when it is waged labour, should be meaningful and have a sense for others in society. This is the result of our empirical investigation about expectations on work articulated by “normal” employees (mid-career, medium-level qualification, in relative stable employment). We explored how expectations on work are affected by precarisation, but also by a general rising social insecurity due to permanent corporate restructuring, changes in the social system etc.

The findings show, overall, that normative expectations on work have not been given up. However, not all expectations have the potential to serve as basis for self-empowerment and (collective) action. Here, our distinction between “claims” and “desires” is very important. *Claims* are expectations which are normatively justified. We identified three modes to legitimise claims of work: the concept of performance as meaningful, societal work; the concept of human rights, seeing oneself as a bodily and mental human being; and the conception of a balanced life, seeing oneself as a social being within diverse needs and social embeddings. *Desires*, by contrast, are expectations with no legitimisation in normative terms. Here, expectations are fulfilled by chance or even by individualistic recklessness. Both “claims” and “desires” go along with different perception of society as a whole: firstly as (still) normatively structured and thus shapeable by the workers: or, secondly, as a terrain of fortune and mere struggle. So, whereas expectations on work in general are not given up, we see a shift from claims to desires. Workers are not sure anymore whether their claims: seen as normal and legitimate, can still rely on the normative normality in today’s society.

Biographically, claims and desires are embedded in life orientations, i.e. implicit perspectives on the world, their options and modes to act and influence their life. In all, the article insists on the need to analyse workers as subjects with highly complex and self-confident resources of action and resistance: to avoid worker’s objectivation as a pure appendix to (neoliberal) discourses.

Key words: claims on work, life orientations, meaningful work, normality, social actor

We dedicate this article to Werner Fricke for his coherent and persevering work on concepts of action research and we want to thank him for his collegial interest in our research.

¿Normalidad no normal? Reinvidicaciones sobre el trabajo y la vida en el mundo contingente del trabajo

Resumen

Los trabajadores no están determinados por sus condiciones sociales, y no son un simple objeto de discursos (neoliberales) dominantes. Este artículo muestra que, contrariamente a las creencias generalizadas sobre los trabajadores como “emprendedores” individuales, los trabajadores se aferran fuertemente a ideas sobre el carácter social de su vida y su mundo del trabajo; a la necesidad de la humanidad tanto en el trabajo como en la vida; y a la idea básica de que el trabajo, incluso cuando es una labor asalariada, debe ser significativo y tener un sentido para los demás en la sociedad. Este es el resultado de nuestra investigación empírica sobre las expectativas en el trabajo articuladas por los empleados “normales” (carrera media, calificación de nivel medio, en un empleo relativamente estable). Exploramos cómo las expectativas sobre el trabajo se ven afectadas por la precarización, pero también por el aumento general de la inseguridad social debido a la reestructuración corporativa permanente, cambios en el sistema social, etc.

Los resultados muestran, en general, que las expectativas normativas sobre el trabajo no han sido abandonadas. Sin embargo, no todas las expectativas tienen el potencial de servir como base para el auto-empoderamiento y la acción (colectiva). Aquí, nuestra distinción entre “reivindicaciones” y “deseos” es muy importante. Las reivindicaciones son expectativas que están justificadas normativamente. Identificamos tres modos para legitimar las reivindicaciones de trabajo: el concepto de desempeño como trabajo social significativo; el concepto de derechos humanos, viéndose a sí mismo como un ser humano corporal y mental; y la concepción de una vida equilibrada, viéndose a sí mismo como un ser social dentro de diversas necesidades e inserciones sociales. Por el contrario, los deseos son expectativas sin legitimidad en términos normativos. Aquí, las expectativas se cumplen por casualidad o incluso por imprudencia individualista. Tanto las « reivindicaciones » como los « deseos » acompañan la percepción diferente de la sociedad en su conjunto: en primer lugar como (todavía) normativamente estructurada y, por tanto, moldeable por los trabajadores: o, en segundo lugar, como terreno de fortuna y mera lucha. Así, mientras las expectativas sobre el trabajo en general no son abandonadas, vemos un cambio de las reivindicaciones para los deseos. Los trabajadores ya no están seguros si sus reivindicaciones: vistas como normales y legítimas, todavía pueden depender de la normalidad normativa en la sociedad actual.

Biográficamente, las reivindicaciones y los deseos están incorporados en las orientaciones de vida, es decir, las perspectivas implícitas en el mundo, sus opciones y modos de actuar e influir en su vida. En suma, el artículo insiste en la necesidad de analizar a los trabajadores como sujetos con recursos de acción y resistencia altamente complejos y seguros de sí mismos: para evitar la objetivación del trabajador como un apéndice puro de los discursos (neoliberales).

Palabras clave: Reinvidicaciones de trabajo, orientaciones de vida, trabajo significativo, normalidad, actor social.

1. Employees as Social Actors and the Relationship between Work and Life

Research on work consciousness has always aimed to capture the wage-earner’s horizons of meaning, and to understand these horizons in sociological terms in the context of everyday practices and social relations. It is still wage-earners, or currently mainly employees, who

Workplace Innovation as Regional Economic Development: Towards a Movement?

Peter Totterdill

Abstract

Action Research in Workplace Innovation and Regional Development (Fricke and Totterdill, 2004) advocated creating “many low-intensity cases generated by a great variety of actors ... (integrating) the ideas and interests of as many regional stakeholders as possible”, thereby unleashing the potential to introduce industrial democracy and worker participation into regional development processes. This article explores a specific attempt to stimulate workplace innovation in the UK, a country with no tradition of such policy initiatives, through a coalition of regional actors. The resulting programme was successful in its own terms, achieving tangible outcomes and shared learning, but failed to create a sustainable momentum in its own region. The learning and experience from the programme was subsequently absorbed by policy makers elsewhere in the UK.

Key words: Workplace innovation, Public policy, Development coalition, Productivity, Skills utilization, Worker empowerment

La innovación en el lugar de trabajo como Desarrollo Económico Regional: ¿hacia un movimiento?

Resumen

Investigación-Acción en la Innovación en el Lugar de Trabajo y Desarrollo Regional (Fricke y Totterdill, 2004), defendió la creación de “muchos casos de baja intensidad generados por una gran variedad de actores (integrando) las ideas e intereses del mayor número posible de interesados regionales”, desencadenando así el potencial de introducir la democracia industrial y la participación de los trabajadores en los procesos de desarrollo regional. Este artículo explora un intento específico de estimular la innovación en el lugar de trabajo en el Reino Unido, un país sin tradición de tales iniciativas políticas, a través de una coalición de actores regionales. El programa resultante tuvo éxito de acuerdo con sus propios términos, consiguiendo resultados tangibles y aprendizaje compartido, pero no logró crear un impulso sostenible en su propia región. Tanto el aprendizaje como la experiencia del programa fueron posteriormente absorbidos por los responsables de formular políticas en otros lugares del Reino Unido.

Palabras clave: Innovación en el lugar de trabajo, política pública, coalición para el desarrollo, productividad, uso de habilidades, empoderamiento del trabajador.

1. Introduction

In the introduction to *Action Research in Workplace Innovation and Regional Development*, Werner Fricke and the current author argue for a shift in the focus of action research, from single cases to regional development processes or social movements, a trend widely associated with the work of Bjorn Gustavsen. Action research has the capacity to create “many low-intensity cases generated by a great variety of actors . . . (integrating) the ideas and interests of as many regional stakeholders as possible”. This unleashes the potential to introduce industrial democracy and worker participation into regional development processes (Fricke and Totterdill, 2004, pp. 4-5). The selection of cases, and Fricke’s editorial contributions, reflect his strong belief in collaboration between stakeholders as a means of driving an inclusive and democratic process of economic development. Trade unions, universities, policy makers and other actors can each play a key role, if they are willing to change their own internal and external practices. Action researchers have “a crucial, if under-utilised role to play, embedding shared learning within the process of intervention” (ibid, p. 2).

Following chapters describing exemplary and successful interventions from Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Scandinavia, the final contribution describes an emerging attempt to create a coalition of stakeholders in the UK. *The UK Work Organisation Network: A national coalition for working life and organisational competence* (Ennals, Totterdill and Ford, 2004) is a manifesto for the promotion of participative and empowering workplace practices. It explains the rationale for creating UK WON as a voluntary coalition of employers’ organisations, trade unions, policy makers and researchers, arguing that the country lacked a space for dialogue between key actors in which their common interest in more productive and healthier workplaces could be explored. It suggests an ambitious list of actions embracing research, knowledge-sharing, network building and public policy advocacy. Here we reflect on developments in the UK since 2004, and consider the prospects for workplace innovation in post-Brexit Britain.

2. Context

For much of this period the importance of workplace innovation was unrecognised in national or regional policy spheres. Latterly, skills utilisation and its relationship to productivity came increasingly to the forefront of policy discussion, leading to new insights into the importance of high involvement working practices.

2.1 Skills utilisation and productivity in the UK

The problem of workforce skills in the UK is multi-faceted, well documented and has a long history. According to the UK Commission for Skills and Employment (UKCES, 2009):

Participation and Social Engineering in Early Organizational Action Research: Lewin and the Harwood studies

Marianne Kristiansen and Jørgen Bloch-Poulsen

Abstract

This article deals with Kurt Lewin's concepts of participation, change and action research in organisations. It presents a series of experiments conducted by some of Lewin's former Ph.D. students from 1939 to 1946 at Harwood, a textile factory in Virginia, which contributed to early organisational action research.

The article has three purposes. Firstly, it demonstrates how participation occurred to a certain degree in the Harwood organisation where the workers took part in group decisions based on management experimenting with participative management. It shows that the overall goal of the Harwood studies was to increase efficiency through changes in work group dynamics, and that this goal was determined by management and action researchers. The article concludes that participation was enacted as involvement, i.e. as a managerial tool. Organisational action research thus seems to have started as a form of organisational development studies (OD).

Secondly, it shows that the research process was enacted primarily as co-operation between researchers. Workers and foremen participated by providing data and feedback, not as co-producers of knowledge in the research process.

Thirdly, the article situates Lewin's understanding of participation and change within a philosophy of science framework and characterises his concept of action research as applied, change-oriented social engineering, based on a natural science paradigm. The article argues that action research as applied research reduces the scope of participation.

The article reflects critically on how to understand past experiments without translating the past into the present, and discusses a discrepancy between the radical contents of Lewin's theories and the Harwood experiments.

Keywords: Organisational action research, participation, involvement, Kurt Lewin, organisational development.

Participación e ingeniería social en la Investigación-Acción organizacional temprana: Lewin y los estudios de Harwood

Resumen

Este artículo aborda los conceptos de Kurt Lewin de participación, cambio e Investigación-Acción en las organizaciones. Presenta una serie de experimentos realizados por algunos de los ex-alumnos de doctorado desde 1939 a 1946 en Harwood, una fábrica textil en Virginia, que contribuyó a la Investigación-Acción organizacional temprana.

El artículo tiene tres propósitos. En primer lugar, demuestra como, hasta cierto punto, se produjo la participación en la organización de Harwood, donde los trabajadores participaron de las decisiones de grupo basadas en la experiencia de gestión con la gestión participativa. Esto muestra que el objetivo general de los estudios de Harwood era aumentar la eficiencia a través de cambios en la dinámica de los grupos de trabajo y que este objetivo fue determinado por investigadores de gestión y acción. El artículo concluye que la participación fue realizada con involucramiento, es decir, como una herramienta de gestión. Por lo tanto, la Investigación-Acción organizacional parece haber comenzado como una forma de estudios de desarrollo organizacional (OD).

En segundo lugar, se muestra que el proceso de investigación se realizó principalmente como co-operación entre investigadores. Los trabajadores y los capacitados participaron proporcionando datos y devoluciones, no como co-productores de conocimiento en el proceso de investigación.

En tercer lugar, el artículo sitúa la comprensión de Lewin sobre la participación y el cambio dentro del marco de la filosofía de la ciencia y caracteriza su concepto de Investigación-Acción como aplicación y la ingeniería social orientada al cambio, basada en un paradigma de la ciencia natural. El artículo argumenta que la Investigación-Acción como investigación aplicada reduce el alcance de la participación.

El artículo reflexiona sobre cómo entender los experimentos pasados sin traducir el pasado dentro del presente, y discute la discrepancia entre los contenidos radicales de las teorías de Lewin y los experimentos de Harwood.

Palabras clave: *Investigación-Acción organizacional, participación, involucramiento, Kurt Lewin, desarrollo organizacional.*

Preface

The article is a contribution to this special issue of *International Journal of Action Research*. It is dedicated to the former editor-in-chief, Werner Fricke for three reasons. Firstly, we have had an inspiring dialogue about participation in organisational action research in the journal with Werner Fricke (2013), who differentiates between democratic and instrumental participation. Secondly, we are in debt to Werner and want to thank him. Through this and other dialogues with Werner, we have come to appreciate the extraordinary quality of his arguments and feedback as a reviewer and an action research friend. Thirdly, we think it is important to go back to the roots and inquire into what we can learn from Lewin and his colleagues, who initiated this tradition. By doing so, we hope to give a little action research present to Werner.

Both Lewin and Fricke have the courage to stick to different ways of thinking and doing, the courage to question basic assumptions. This seems to be an important reminder to those of us, who carry on the tradition. Like Lewin, Werner has the quality of assessing and inspiring the work of others. Thank you very much.

I. Purpose and points of view

This article deals with Kurt Lewin's understanding of participation, change and action research in organisations. To Lewin and his partners these three concepts were intimately

Using the Democratic Past to End Neoliberalism in Universities: Action Research, Socio-technical Systems Design, and the Global Future

Davydd J. Greenwood

Abstract

Honouring Werner Fricke means carrying on his work. This essay argues for the applicability of the lessons and strategies learned from the successes of the “socio-technical systems design” and “industrial democracy” movement to the reconstruction of universities as stakeholder – designed and managed organisations. Universities must now conduct research and teach in ways that promote social mobility and solidarity, and prepare new generations to reclaim welfare states from the global inequality and environmental collapse created by neoliberalism. Doing this means fundamental organisational change away from Neo-Taylorism by means of approaches learned in the previous generations of the industrial democracy movement.

Keywords: industrial democracy, Neo-Taylorism, neoliberalism, socio-technical systems design, universities

Usando el pasado democrático para acabar con el neoliberalismo en las universidades: Investigación-Acción, Diseño de Sistemas Socio-técnicos y el Futuro Global

Resumen

Honrar a Werner Fricke significa llevar adelante su trabajo. Este ensayo aboga por la aplicabilidad de las lecciones y estrategias aprendidas de los éxitos del movimiento de “diseño de sistemas socio-técnicos” y “democracia industrial” en la reconstrucción de la universidad como organizaciones diseñadas y gestionadas por los actores interesados e involucrados. Las universidades deben ahora realizar investigaciones y enseñar de forma que promuevan la movilidad social y la solidaridad, y preparen a las nuevas generaciones para recuperar los estados de bienestar de la desigualdad global y el colapso ambiental creado por el neoliberalismo. Hacer esto significa un cambio organizativo fundamental alejado del Neo-Taylorismo mediante enfoques aprendidos en las generaciones anteriores del movimiento de la democracia industrial.

Palabras clave: Democracia industrial, Neo-Taylorismo, neoliberalismo, diseño de sistemas socio-técnicos, universidades.

Introduction

This essay honours Werner Fricke but not with a retrospective encomium. What has happened in the global system under neoliberalism is so destructive that taking up the cause and approaches Werner has used for decades to improve working life and social solidarity is the most meaningful way to celebrate his work.

I have known Werner since at least 1985. We met during the first meetings of the LOM programme¹ in Sweden and then again, we worked together in the AR training programme that grew out of the LOM experience between 1993 and 1995. Throughout this time, Werner's long experience in both industrial AR and in negotiations with the "social partners", his broad education, and his intellectual rigour made a significant impression on me. I found that, despite our coming to these issues with very different training, experiences, and cultural backgrounds, we both were trying to square the circle between a belief in democratically inspired social research for social change and the need to confront the lack of methodological and intellectual rigour and ambition too common among action researchers. What impressed me most was Werner's belief that doing social "good" requires doing research that meets the highest intellectual standards, not merely having admirable values and interesting stories to tell. From that time on, I heeded calls from Werner to collaborate and he has been generous in encouraging the kinds of dialogues among action researchers that I tried to promote (Greenwood, 2002; 2004).

Industrial and organisational democracy work has a long and, for a time, successful history in transforming industrial and service organisations into team-based, more collaborative systems that produce better results than they did under Taylorism and support an improved quality of working life (Greenwood and Levin, 2007: 13-29). However, these approaches have been rarely applied in analysing organisational pathologies in universities and for promoting processes of participatory social change there (Babüroglu, Emery and Associates, eds. 2000). Attempting to do this has become the focus of my own work over the past decades, though I began doing action research in an industrial context.

Morten Levin and I recently published a book that applies action research as a way to "recreate" universities, both as collaborative workplaces and as key contributors to reinforcing civil society (Levin and Greenwood, 2016). This perspective is strongly influenced by the work of the LOM programme and a succession of industrial democracy and enterprise development programmes in Norway as well. Given this focus, I will develop my arguments about organisational democracy by referring to the academic context I have been working in. However, this work is based on our learning that the LOM and enterprise development approaches and lessons apply, with appropriate modifications, to all organisational systems in both the industrial and service sectors.

1 LOM is the acronym for the Swedish enterprise development programme "Leadership, Organization, and Co-determination". Based on a network approach linking labour market parties in a combined workplace and enterprise development effort over a 5-year period with a budget of \$9 million, it engaged with some 150 enterprises and public sector organizations and involved over 60 researchers. The aim was to combine improvements in working life and organisation with enterprise development through the collaboration of all the relevant stakeholders (Engelstadt and Gustavsen, 1993).