Contents
IJAR 2018 2/3 Special issue

**Coping with the future: Business and work in the digital age –
A cross disciplinary conference
The role of action research in social transformation**

New Challenges For Action Research[1]

Werner Fricke

Abstract

From the perspective of sociology of work, the article"New Challenges for Action Research" raises the question: How can dependent employees in heteronomous employment relationships fulfill their elementary need for self-determination, if the progressive economisation of the working and living world shapes their consciousness and even their identities? If utilitarian calculi supersede empathy and solidarity everywhere, and everyone is called upon to become a successful manager of himself under the pressure of so-called "self-optimisation" (Subjectification trap)?

Research in sociology of work and experiments in action research show how dependent workers can escape from the subjectification trap by engaging in processes of collective reflection, and so re-activate their capacity for active and democratic participation, and for self-determined designing their working conditions to regain the ability to act and the power to independently shape their working conditions. Finally, it is asked if and how this process is possible under conditions of digital work in platform economics.

Key words: Action research; democratic participation; subjectification; platform society

Nuevos Desafíos Para La Investigación-Acción

Resumen

Desde la perspectiva de la sociología del trabajo, el artículo "Nuevos Desafíos para la Investigación-Acción" plantea la pregunta: ¿Cómo pueden los empleados dependientes en relaciones de trabajo heterónomas satisfacer su necesidad elemental de autodeterminación, si la progresiva economización del mundo del trabajo y mundo de vida moldea su conciencia e incluso sus identidades? ¿Si los cálculos utilitaristas substituyen la empatía y la solidaridad en todas partes, y todos están llamados a convertirse en un exitoso administrador de sí mismo bajo la presión de la llamada "auto-optimización" (trampa de la Subjetivación)?

Investigación en sociología del trabajo y experimentos en investigación-acción muestra cómo los trabajadores dependientes pueden escapar de la trampa de la subjetivación al involucrarse en procesos de reflexión colectiva, y así reactivar su capacidad para la participación activa y democrática y para el

diseño autodeterminado de sus condiciones de trabajo para recuperar la capacidad de actuar y el poder de configurar independientemente sus condiciones de trabajo. Finalmente, se pregunta si y cómo este proceso es posible en condiciones de trabajo digital en la economía de plataforma.

Palabras Clave: Investigación-acción; participación democrática; subjetivación; sociedad de plataforma.

1.   Posing the problem

How can dependent workers recognise their interests when the progressive economisation of the work and life – world and the so-called subjectification of labor (Moldaschl and Voss 2002) shape their consciousness, their identities? Cost-benefit calculations everywhere take the place of empathy and solidarity. Everyone is called upon to become a successful manager of themselves under the pressure of "self-optimisation". The result is widespread fatigue in the face of a plethora of supposedly unlimited opportunities (Ehrenberg 2015). Therefore, at stake in this investigation are the difficulties encountered by attempts to realise democratic participation in today's economy and society.

Democratic participation in the workplace depends on the commitment and activity of many stakeholders. Their motivation is the interest in participation and self-determination inherent in every human being as an anthropological constant (Fricke 1975, 2004, 2009). However, as our empirical work has often shown, the need for democratic participation and self-determination is often suppressed: in Fordist work situations due to high workloads of physical and emotional nature, through domination and control in the work process, through Taylorist forms of division of labor (Fricke et al.), in post-Fordist forms of work through the subjectification of work (subjectification understood in the sense of Foucault as the conditioning of the subject by social, as well as economic norms). This subjectification is at the heart of a currently successful rationalisation strategy of capital; its success stems from the fact that the management of companies succeeds in using the subjective skills of the employees to an unprecedented extent for the efficient organisation of their work. Employees are given limited freedom to design co-operation and work processes that give them the illusion of working independently. I speak of an illusion of self-determination, because the participation granted by management is limited to executing work, whereas the participation in the design of their working conditions (financial and human resources, time budgets, type of product) is excluded.

After a brief examination of some of the positions of current sociology of work on the thesis of the subjectification of work (Section 2), I will present the concept and my empirical experiences with action research based on Kurt Lewin (Lewin 1951), which aims at the activation of dependent workers (Section 3). Action research is suitable as a theoretically and practically founded concept to release dependent workers from the subjectification trap, inasmuch it develops and promotes their ability to act and their self-determination in processes of collective reflection and subsequent actions. In addition, it will be concerned with the concepts of autonomy and self-determination of the workers. I do not share a naive concept of individual autonomy. The subject is the ensemble of social conditions (Verhältnisse, nicht Beziehungen (relationships) (Marx) and therefore not autonomous as an individual.

(Why) Does Ar Need to Intervene and Change Things?[1]

Olav Eikeland

Abstract

One of the basic and for many, defining tenets of action research is contained in the "slogan" ascribed to Kurt Lewin: "In order to understand it, you have to change it". The slogan clearly resembles what Francis Bacon claimed for experimental science, however, and also Karl Marx' well known stance in his Feuerbach-theses. In this text I discuss this "change imperative" and relate it to its "pre-history" before action research. Most action researchers are not willing to subscribe to terms like "social engineering" but still call what they do for "interventions". The text argues that what most people spontaneously think of as "change" may not be necessary for calling what is done for action research. Yet, the alternative is not to withdraw to a disengaged, spectator position. The change imperative raises important questions about what kind of change action research initiates, and what kind of knowledge results from different forms of change. The text challenges the "slogan" as to what kind of change is appropriate and legitimate in working with changes in individuals, culture, communities, and organisations, and suggests ways forward through developing forms of practitioner research and native or indigenous research. To illustrate, insights from Aristotle and Hegel are invoked. Action researchers are challenged to discuss and clarify answers to questions about what kind of change is produced, and what kind of knowledge is generated.

Key words: action research, Aristotle, art as craft, Francis Bacon, G.W.F. Hegel, Karl Marx, praxis-research

(¿Por qué?) ¿es necesario intervenir y cambiar las cosas?

Resumen

Uno de los básicos y, para muchos, definidores de los principios de la investigación-acción, está incluido en el "eslogan" atribuido a Kurt Lewin: "Para entenderlo, debes cambiarlo". El eslogan se parece claramente con lo que Francis Bacon reclamó para la ciencia experimental, y también con la postura bien conocida de Karl Marx en sus tesis sobre Feuerbach. En este texto discuto este "imperativo de cambio" y lo relaciono con su "prehistoria" antes de la investigación-acción. La mayoría de los investigadores-acción no están dispuestos a suscribirse a términos como "ingeniería social", pero todavía llaman lo que hacen como "intervenciones". El texto argumenta que lo que la mayoría de la gente piensa espontáneamente como "cambio" puede no ser necesario para llamar lo que se hace en la investigación-acción. Sin

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1   The text is an elaboration based on the presentation given October 10th, 2018 at the conference "Coping with the future" at the University of Agder (UiA), Kristiansand, Norway, organized by the UiA, in co-operation with NTNU Gjøvik, the European Network of Workplace Innovation (EUWIN) and the International Journal of Action Research (IJAR).

embargo, la alternativa no es retirarse a una posición de espectador desconectado. El imperativo de cambio plantea preguntas importantes sobre qué tipo de cambio inicia la investigación-acción, y qué tipo de conocimiento resulta de diferentes formas de cambio. El texto desafía el "eslogan" sobre qué tipo de cambio es apropiado y legítimo para trabajar con cambios en individuos, cultura, comunidades y organizaciones, y sugiere formas de avanzar mediante el desarrollo de formas de investigación practicante e investigación nativa o indígena. Para ilustrar, se invocan las revelaciones de Aristóteles y Hegel. Los investigadores-acción tienen el reto de discutir y aclarar las respuestas a las preguntas sobre qué tipo de cambio se produce y qué tipo de conocimiento se genera.

Palabras clave: Investigación-acción, Aristóteles, el arte como oficio, Francis Bacon, G.W.F. Hegel, Karl Marx, praxis-investigación

Introduction

As in all kinds of practice, action research must differentiate between what a professional expert with years of studies and experience in action research should or must know and be able to do, and what novices in action research can be expected and need to know to get started (cf. Dreyfus & Dreyfus 1986). Of course, age does not automatically correspond to maturity or competence. There's a big difference between a year of experience repeated 20 times on the one hand, and 20 years of accumulated experience on the other. There is no guarantee that old people know and understand more than young. Competence is not measured in time-units but in what I have elsewhere called "pragmadequacy" (Eikeland 2008: 32-33, fn18, 73, 191, 236, fn222, etc.). Hence, to ignore the difference between novices, apprentices, experts, and virtuosos: between amateurs and professionals, or to claim there is no difference in competence-adequacy, to ignore validity-dimensions like good and bad, truth and falsehood, etc. is to undermine action research as a skill and competence. Although there are many legitimate varieties of action research (cf. Eikeland 2012), and choices and adjustments must always be made to the requirements of the concrete situation, anything does not go, not even in action research. Then again, there are advanced challenges concerning where to start with or for novices, which in action research cannot be reduced to mere didactical teaching challenges. Action research itself challenges most taken-for-granted prejudices concerning both research and learning / teaching. Novices in action research tend to start thinking uncritically from such prejudices unexamined, however, as do other conventionalists not prone to critical reflection "outside given frames". On the other hand, there are advanced challenges of a principal character presupposing: or at least more easily available to people with, years of experience and reflection.

When, where, and how, then, can or should someone start doing action research? What do they need to know? Where do we start? Do we start just stumbling along without knowing how, where, or what, or with teaching basic principles as starting points mobilising philosophical authorities as witnesses? There might seem to be a paradox in bringing in Aristotle and Hegel, as the following text does. If action research is a common-sensical approach which anyone can follow, why bother to study two of the most difficult philosophers in history, both of them old, dead, white, European males?

There is hardly an either-or here, however. Even Paolo Freire (1970: 18, 31) writes about his inspiration from Hegel but he probably did not talk much about Hegel or try to

The Role of Action Research in Social Transformation: Memories and Projections

Danilo R. Streck

Abstract

The conference "Coping with the future: Business and Work in the digital age – A cross disciplinary conference" (Agder University, Norway, on October 8-10, 2018) had one section dedicated to "The role of action research in social transformation". The text contextualises the theme within the trajectory of the *International Journal of ActionResearch*, and more particularly of the biannual international conferences organised with the support of the journal. It was prepared for opening for the work of this section of the conference, and served as introduction to the presentation of other papers published in this issue.

Key words: Action research, International Journal of Action Research, social transformation, social sciences

La Función De La Investigación-Acción En La Transformación Social: Memorias Y Proyecciones

Resumen

La conferencia "Enfrentando el futuro: Negocios y Trabajo en la era digital - Una conferencia interdisciplinaria" (Agder University, Noruega, del 8 al 10 de octubre de 2018) tuvo una sección dedicada a "El papel de la investigación-acción en la transformación social". El texto contextualiza el tema dentro de la trayectoria de la Revista Internacional de Investigación- Acción, y particularmente de las conferencias internacionales bianuales organizadas con el apoyo de la revista. Se preparó para la apertura del trabajo de esta sección de la conferencia, y sirvió como introducción para la presentación de otros trabajos publicados en este número.

Palabras clave: Investigación-acción, Revista Internacional de Investigación-Acción, transformación social, ciencias sociales.

Some words about the background

As executive editor of the *International Journal of Action Research* (IJAR) and in the name of my fellow editors, I welcome the opportunity for our journal to be part of the conference

"Coping with the future: Business and Work in the digital age – A cross disciplinary con-conference". My opening words will be dedicated to contextualise the theme of this section of the conference titled "The role of action research in social transformation" within the trajectory of IJAR, and more particularly of the biannual international conferences organised with the support of IJAR.

Going back in the history of action research, we realise that since its beginning action research has been concerned with work and transformation, more precisely with the social and economic conditions of workers. Kurt Lewin, in his seminal article "Action Research and Minority Problems" from 1945 refers to "an interview survey among workers in intergroup relations in the State of Connecticut". At his time and context, he was concerned with racial relations and the so-called minority problems, which he rightly acknowledges as majority problems. In this article he sets the basic principle of action research when placing it "within social life", and asking questions that still echo in the social sciences: "When, where, and by whom should social research be done?" (p. 37) Furthermore, he advocates an "integrated approach to social research," which could mean cooperation among disciplines or the amalgamation into one social science. Economics, he remarks, should necessarily be included in this symphony.

Also Karl Marx, whose bicentennial birth date is being commemorated in 2018, cannot be forgotten when dealing with research on work and transformation. In "A Workers' Inquiry" from 1880 he challenges the French republic to have a serious look into the country's working class, and to investigate the "facts and crimes of capitalist exploitation" even with the poor resources that were at his disposal. The novelty of this inquiryconsists in the active role attributed to the workers to describe their reality with the "full knowledge" that only they possess:

We hope to meet in this work with the support of all workers in town and country who understand that they alone can describe with full knowledge the misfortunes from which they suffer and that only they, and not saviors sent by providence, can energetically apply the healing remedies for the social ills which they are prey. We also rely upon socialists of all schools who, being wishful for social reform, must wish for an *exact* and *positive* knowledge of the conditions in which the working class — the class to whom the future belongs -works and moves (Marx 1997).

Right after World War II, in 1946, the creation of the Tavistock Institute represents a landmark for action research and its contribution to social transformation, especially in Europe. In the Preface to the Institute's anthology, *Social Engagement of Social Sciences*, the editors (Trist and Murray 1989) explain that the use of the word *engagement* is not accidental:"The word 'engagement' (which echoes the French Existentialist usage) has been chosen as the best single word to represent the process by which social scientists endeavour actively to relate themselves in relevant and meaningful ways to society". It represents the intention to approximate theory and practice, action and reflection, and connect the micro or personal to the macro or social in consultancy and research with communities and organisations.

From there, it is a short distanceto the Scandinavian countries, where, among so many successful action research practices, we could identify the LOM (*Leitung, Organisation and Mitbestimmung* program in Sweden). Björn Gustavsen (1994, p. 25) highlights the relation of action research to social transformation when, referring to the program, he writes:

Participatory Research in Latin America as Political Engagement

Emil A. Sobottka

Abstract

In a first part the text brings the search of Latin America for its self-interpretation on the base of some selected authors like José Martí, José Vasconcelos, John Mackay and Richard Morse. In this trajectory, the concept *people* changed its meaning from a holistic to a more differentiated one, that supposes a cleavage between local elites and the socially dominated groups. In a second part the text argues that this new interpretation underlies the emerging of participatory research in Latin America, understood by its pioneers Carlos Rodrigues Brandão, Paulo Freire and Orlando Fals Borda primarily as a combination of research and political engagement in favor of *the people* defined as a collective of oppressed social groups struggling for its emancipation.

Keyword: Participatory research; Emancipation; Latin America

Investigación participativa en América Latina como compromiso político

Resúmen

En una primera parte, el texto reconstruye la búsqueda de América Latina por su auto-interpretación sobre la base de algunos autores seleccionados como José Martí, José Vasconcelos, John Mackay y Richard Morse. En esta trayectoria, el significado del concepto *pueblo* cambió de una visión holística a otra más diferenciada, que supone una división entre las élites locales y los grupos socialmente dominados. En una segunda parte, el texto sostiene que esta nueva interpretación subyace al surgimiento de la investigación participativa en América Latina, entendida por sus pioneros Carlos Rodrigues Brandão, Paulo Freire y Orlando Fals Borda principalmente como una combinación de investigación y compromiso político a favor *del pueblo* definido como un colectivo de grupos sociales oprimidos que luchan por su emancipación.

Palabras-clave: Investigación participativa; Emancipación; América Latina

Introduction

Participatory research in Latin America has emerged in different contexts and has been developed over a very long time. It would be a mistake to describe it as a monolithic unit; it has never become a unified school or something like that. Nevertheless, there are some characteristics that make the different experiences fit without difficulty under this common name, assumed by the protagonists themselves. In this text I want to focus basically on one of them: participatory research or participatory action research in Latin America as an academic-political activity, usually carried out as part of the struggle for liberation from poverty and domination. Therefore, it clearly takes side by, and engages itself with, the dominated. It does so facing the cleavage between dominant and dominated groups that permeate all countries of this subcontinent, in a hardly imaginable dimension for those who live in a well-being, democratic society. This outstanding feature of participatory research reinforces the close relation between science and social context. Or, in other words, it makes once more clear that every kind of research is part and parcel of a specific social formation and influences the balance between social groups.

Before exploring this topic, I will briefly remember, based on few authors, how intellectuals in the subcontinent have tried to establish a differentiation with other regions, with other peoples.[1] Some authors consider that in the late 19th and early 20th centuries Latin America was searching for an identity. An identity that could reveal its uniqueness facing the Other. This Other at first was basically Europe. After the War of Cuba (1895), the United States replaced Europe in a response to the beginning of its imperialist phase in the region.

In regard to this last theme, namely the relation between the United States and Latin America, the manifestations have gone from a romantic admiration that saw in that country an ideal model, to the historically well founded accusation of a long record of political and military interventions, of cultural domination and of repeated attempts of vassalage, against which resistance is called (Tickner, Cepeda M. e Bernal 2015). Mirian Warde brings some historical examples of romantic admirers, like an engineer named Paula Soares, who in 1869 commented the educational system of the USA and wrote "Oh if we could imitate them! If we could forget the old and corrupt formulas to which we are subjugated, forgetting that we also live on the American continent!" (Warde 2000). She also mentions the editorial of a local newspaper from 1835 who says: "The United States was colonised and educated by philosophers; Brazil instead, by rude criminals and degradeds". Thus to this day it is possible to find such self-loathing intertwined with feelings of admiration of the USA.

The United States' successive alliances with sectors of the local elites in combating liberation movements, the recurrent deposition of democratic governments, the imposition and support of authoritarian regimes, and the repeated blocking of the development of democratic states of law, based on citizenship bestowed with equal rights and duties to each member of the respective society, all that contributed to merge the struggle of subaltern

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1   Later it will be explained why, following the use made by the commented authors, in this text *people* is the designation of a collectivity as such, not of several individuals. For this reason it is sometimes used in the singular, other times in the plural.

Democratic Dialogue and Development: An Intellectual Obituary of Björn Gustavsen

Richard Ennals

Foreword

Björn Gustavsen commented on my profile of his work as a Great Organisational Change Thinker, for the Palgrave International Handbook of Great Organisational Change Thinkers (2017). He was already seriously ill with lung cancer. He was concerned with succession planning, so that his work could continue after his own death. This intellectual obituary is adapted from the profile.

Abstract: Björn Gustavsen, with an original professional background as a lawyer and judge in his native Norway, had a formative role in organisational development processes in Norway, Sweden, Scandinavia and the European Union over four decades. Following in the tradition of Norwegian working life research by Trist and Thorsrud, he provided the conceptual framework and practical case studies which have driven major national and international programmes. He learned from different experience of organisational change in, for example, the USA and Japan, but he identified a distinctive way forward for the European Union, where he acted as a senior adviser. In contrast to conventional Taylorist top-down management and reliance on expert consultants, his approach was bottom up and concept driven, with a focus on empowering workers. With a commitment to long-term sustainable processes, he emphasised the importance of capacity building and succession planning, highlighting development organisations. His approach to partnership and coalition building enabled collaboration across sectors, in the cause of creating collaborative advantage. He had a distinctive fluent academic writing style, but spentmost of his time engaged in the design and practice of development, and editing the work of younger colleagues. He saw the role of academic journals and edited books in the development process, so encouraged new publications, but without seeking to dominate. He took ideas of Action Research and case studies, and applied them to national enterprise development programmes, working with the labour market parties. This resulted in a distinctive research and development culture.

Key Words: Action Research, democratic dialogue, development coalition, development organisation, labour market parties,

Diálogo Democrático Y Desarrollo: Un Obituario Intelectual De Björn Gustavsen

Resumen: Björn Gustavsen, con una trayectoria profesional original como abogado y juez en su Noruega natal, tuvo un papel formativo en los procesos de desarrollo organizativo en Noruega, Suecia,

Escandinavia y la Unión Europea a lo largo de cuatro décadas. Siguiendo la tradición de la investigación de la vida laboral en Noruega, realizada por Trist y Thorsrud, proporcionó el marco conceptual y los estudios de casos prácticos que han impulsado los principales programas nacionales e internacionales. Aprendió de diferentes experiencias de cambio organizacional, por ejemplo, en EEUU y Japón, pero identificó un camino distintivo de avance para la Unión Europea, donde actuó como asesor principal. En contraste con la gestión convencional Taylorista de arriba hacia abajo y la dependencia de consultores expertos, su enfoque fue de abajo hacia arriba y orientado en conceptos, con énfasis en el empoderamiento de los trabajadores. Con un compromiso con los procesos sostenibles a largo plazo, hizo hincapié en la importancia de la creación de capacidades y la planificación de la sucesión, destacando las organizaciones de desarrollo. Su enfoque de la asociación y la construcción de coaliciones permitió la colaboración entre sectores, con motivo de crear una ventaja colaborativa. Tenía un estilo de escritura académica fluente y distintiva, pero pasó la mayor parte de su tiempo involucrado en el diseño y la práctica del desarrollo, y editando el trabajo de colegas más jóvenes. Vio el papel de las revistas académicas y los libros editados en el proceso de desarrollo, por lo que alentó nuevas publicaciones, pero no con la intensión de dominar. Tomó ideas de investigación-acción y de los estudios de casos, y las aplicó a los programas nacionales de desarrollo empresarial, trabajando con las partes del mercado laboral. Esto resultó en una investigación distintiva y una cultura de desarrollo.

Palabras clave: Investigación-acción, diálogo democrático, coalición de desarrollo, organización de desarrollo, partes del mercado laboral

Introduction

Björn Gustavsen was a longstanding prominent contributor to international research literature, writing frequently at the policy level in Norway, Scandinavia, and Europe. His writing had a consistent purpose and was targeted to particular audiences. The focus of his work and writingwas not academic theory, butengagement in practice in working life.

For Björn Gustavsen, thought and action were closely linked: publications are actions, and research can have a political dimension. Because this approach diverges from North American orthodoxy, he is not easily compartmentalised in conventional academic terms. Accordingly, he may be unfamiliar to many readers. Drawing on Gustavsen's writing and practical interventions, we present his consistent approach to organisational change, illustrated with accessible quotations from his publications. His core themes are democracy, dialogue, and development. We highlight in particular the themes of *development organizations* and *development coalitions*.

Influences and Motivations

Björn Gustavsen began his career as a lawyer in his home country, Norway. At the time, Norway was seeking to find a sustainable way forward after the Second World War. Gustavsen's thought maintained a consistent political direction. He saw democracy as relevant to the workplace and to the political process. This perspective stemmed from his cultural context: Norway held a preference for consensus, rather than conflict. Accordingly, there

The Contribution of Action Research to Industry 4.0 Policies:
Bringing Empowerment and Democracy to the Economic Efficiency Arena

Miren Larrea, Miren Estensoro, Eduardo Sisti

Abstract

The article is written in the intersection of the fields of regional development and action research, which use different languages when referring to development. The first revolves around innovation revenues, market shares and competitiveness while the second focuses on emancipation, democratisation and empowerment. Based on an experience in Gipuzkoa, Basque Country (Spain), the case used in this paper tells us how a regional government, the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa and eleven county development agencies are collaborating in order to avoid small firms falling behind in digitalisation processes. The main argument is that action research can help construct collaborative governance modes which, as well as helping specific firms become competitive, empower territorial actors as a collective subject that decides on its own future.

Keywords: regional development, action research, Industry 4.0., social construction, participatory governance

La Contribución de la Investigación Acción a las políticas para la Industria 4.0.: trayendo empoderamiento y democracia al ámbito de la eficiencia económica

Resumen

El artículo está escrito en la intersección de los campos del desarrollo regional y la investigación acción, que utilizan lenguajes diferentes para referirse al desarrollo. El primero gira alrededor de la innovación los ingresos, cuotas de mercado y la competitividad mientras la segunda se centra en la emancipación, la democratización y el empoderamiento. Basado en una experiencia en Gipuzkoa, País Vasco (España), el caso utilizado en este artículo nos cuenta cómo un gobierno regional, la Diputación Foral de Gipuzkoa y once agencias de desarrollo comarcal están colaborando para evitar que las pequeñas empresas se queden atrás en los procesos de digitalización. El principal argumento es que la investigación acción puede ayudar a construir modos de gobernanza colaborativa que, a la vez que ayudan a empresas específicas a ganar competitividad, empoderan a los actores territoriales como sujeto colectivo que decide sobre su propio futuro.

Palabras clave: desarrollo regional, investigación acción, Industria 4.0., construcción social, gobernanza participativa

1.   Introduction

Action Research is well known in certain fields like education, health, feminism, and rural development. Its emancipatory and democratising principles together with its goals of empowerment, though not necessarily mainstream, seem to sit comfortably in these fields.

This paper on action research is written in the context of regional economic development. To date, this context has primarily been dominated by the principles of economics and business, where frameworks are defined in terms of innovation revenues, market shares and competitiveness and where emancipation, democratisation or empowerment are not on the agenda. Is the demand for action research in this field worth the effort? We believe that it is, and the rest of the paper is oriented to showing the benefits of this intersection both for action research and regional development communities.

The case we use for our paper is inspired by Action Research for Territorial Development (ARTD) (Karlsen & Larrea 2014; Arrona & Larrea 2018). The reason why we use the term 'territory' and not 'region' is that from the perspective of action research and the co-generation of solutions for specific problems, a multilevel approach is needed where not only the region, but also other territorial levels will work together. Inspired by Alburquerque (2012), who proposed this definition in a dialogue process with policy makers in the context of the AR process we use as a case, we define territory as the actors who live in a place with their social, economic and political organisations, their culture and institutions as well as the physical environment they are part of. Territorial development is the process of mobilisation and participation of different actors (public and private) in which they discuss and agree on the strategies that can guide individual as well as collective behaviour.

In this context, we argue for ARTD not as a methodology for research, but as a strategy for territorial development, a strategy for the mobilisation and participation of the actors. Territory is, therefore, not an object but the subject of territorial development.

How does this connect to innovation revenues, market shares and competitiveness? The main territorial actors we work with are governments and their agencies (a provincial government and eleven county development agencies owned by municipalities) and, through them, small industrial firms.

We believe there are different approaches to interpreting the role of these firms in territorial development. We mostly focus on two aspects. First, they are relevant actors in territorial development because they provide employment and, second, because they often serve as anchors in decision capacity at a local level. However, without any doubt, they are weak actors in the economic system, which is precisely what makes action research useful. Empowering small firms is relevant to help them play their role in the development of the territory.

Concerning Industry 4.0, digitalisation is one of the challenges that industries are facing today and will face in the future. We define Industry 4.0 as the in-depth transformation in work modes linked to digital technologies. The way of doing business is changing and will continue to do so. Small firms run the risk of being left behind in this process. The goal of action research in the case we study is to create a new governance mode, dialogue-based and participatory, where governments will directly work with small firms to help them overcome the digital gap. The goal, as we mentioned earlier, is the development of territories to increase their capacity to decide on their future.

Alternative Learning Frameworks: Workplace Innovation Programmes and Smart Specialisation Policies in the Basque Country

Egoitz Pomares

Abstract

The paper explores alternative learning frameworks addressing the adaptation of socio-economic institutions to emerging technological paradigms. Based on workplace innovation and development programmes, an exploratory model is presented considering multi-level governance issues. The framework can contribute to better policy implementation of smart specialisation strategies, considering workplace innovation programmes as institutional entrepreneurs. In this sense the framework is applied, in a constructivist way, to regional, sub-regional and organisational institutional contexts.

Key words: workplace innovation, development programmes, policy learning, programme learning, governance, experimental institutions, and technologicalrevolution.

Marcos de aprendizaje alternativos: programas de innovación en contextos de trabajo y políticas de especialización inteligente en el País Vasco.

Resumen

El artículo explora marcos de aprendizaje alternativos que permitan abordar la adaptación de las instituciones socioeconómicas a los paradigmas tecnológicos emergentes. Sobre la base de los programas de innovación y desarrollo en contextos de trabajo, se presenta un modelo exploratorio teniendo en cuenta la gobernanza multinivel. El marco pretende contribuir a una mejor implementación de políticas de estrategias de especialización inteligente considerando los programas de innovación en los contextos de trabajo como emprendedores institucionales. En este sentido, el marco se presenta, con un carácter constructivista, a contextos institucionales regionales, subregionales y organizacionales.

Palabras clave: innovación en contextos de trabajo, programas de desarrollo, aprendizaje de políticas, aprendizaje de programas, gobernanza, instituciones experimentales y revolución tecnológica.

1.   Introduction

Digitalisation is a central aspect of a wider economic transformation that includes robotisation, automation and new production processes. This phenomenon has been conceptualised as Industry 4.0. The term, used by the German government for the first time in 2011 refers to a high-tech strategy. After mechanisation, electrification and information, the 4.0 concept is considered as part ofthe so-called fourth industrial revolution. Phenomena like globalisation and technological change force public and private sector organisations to develop new products, new services and new forms of production.

Technological revolutions represent a paradigm shift for society, business and work that need to be analysedfrom a systemic perspective (Garmann Johnsen et al 2018). In particular amongst others, technological shifts attract political attention due to their direct implications on jobs, work-processes and skills demand and supply. These issues are included in the New Qualifications Agenda for Europe (European Commission 2016) stressing the need for the labour market and national vocational, education and training systems to be able to provide a skilled workforce for the digital transformation. Skill gaps are relevant for companies, as there may be significant shortages in the actual workforce (Fernandez-Macias 2012). In line with this, it is recognised that skill acquisition can be realised through a diverse variety of forms beyond formal initial education, which includes the workplace (Cedefop 2015; OECD 2010; European Commission 2001). Due to the technological transformation, the current societal context requires a new integration of theoretical and practical knowledge on the organisation (Dhondt & Van Hootegem 2015). Skills gaps can arise because workplaces are integrated in dynamic environments, an issue that addresses workplace and lifelong learning (Cedefop 2015, 85-87). For these reasons, workers adaptability throughout working life is considered to be a critical factor (European Commission 2001). In overall the globalisation of the economy, the introduction of disruptive technologies, demographic, social, cultural and environmental changes will shape working life in the next years. Thus two interlinked limitations are identified to mainstream policy (Lorenz et al. 2016): the first refers to tacit knowledge acquired in daily work and problem solving experience; and the second concerns the work organisation and the way this affects employees in their learning and skill development processes.

Technological unemployment represents a major area of concern in the academic and policy-making environments, but as pointed by Lundvall (2013, 51) few attempts can be identified concerning how innovation relates to work processes. Lundvall argues the importance of workplace learning as a factor in the understanding of the how work and innovation processes are linked. Following Lorenz (2013, 86-71) he concludes that in innovation studies research on work organisation and organisational design has been marginal, and points out the importance of institutional framework conditions for learning and innovation, also acknowledging the relevance of micro-policy initiatives, that focus on organisational change and innovation at workplace level.

An exception can be found in some experiences in the northern part of Europe, with workplace development programmes and initiatives launched in the 60's and the 70's. Main topics at that time were focused in the Scandinavian countries and Germany as part of the Quality of Working Life movement and the humanisation and democratisation of work. In

Doing Research Upside Down: Action and Research in Cross Self-Confrontations

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Abstract

This paper highlights three main points. Firstly, it argues that despite the positioning of mainstream psychology as "objective research" i.e. disengaged from taking action in public life, there has always been in psychology a (quantitatively) minor but (qualitatively) strong tradition of intervention, defined as a joint practice engaging researchers and practitioners in social transformation. It shows how this alternative way of doing research affects all dimensions of the researchers' professional practice, for better or for worse. Secondly, it presents a specific perspective on intervention, created in France and used in multiple work settings in the last twenty years, called *Clinic of Activity*. It then introduces and discusses a methodology designed to support development at work through collaborative work analysis and structured dialogue, the *Cross Self Confrontations*. Thirdly, it reports on a research in Cross Self-Confrontations recently conducted in a Swiss factory, and shows how this methodology supports the co-creation of knowledge and the development of dialogue within a group of workers and across the hierachical lines, therefore contributing to the deep discussion and transformation of work practices.

Keywords: Activity Analysis, Activity Development, Cross Self-Confrontation, Dialogue, Dialogical Methodology, Social Transformation

Haciendo La Investigación Al Revés: Acción E Investigación En Trans -Auto-Confrontaciones

Resumen

Este artículo destaca tres puntos principales. En primer lugar, se argumenta que a pesar del posicionamiento de la corriente principal de la psicología como "investigación objetiva", es decir, desconectada de la adopción de medidas en la vida pública, siempre ha habido en la psicología una tradición de intervención (cuantitativamente) menor pero (cualitativamente) fuerte, definida como una práctica conjunta que involucra a investigadores y profesionales en la transformación social. Muestra cómo esta forma alternativa de hacer investigación afecta a todas las dimensiones de la práctica profesional de los investigadores. En segundo lugar, se presenta una perspectiva específica de intervención, creada en Francia y usada en múltiples entornos de trabajo en los últimos veinte años, llamada *Clínica de Actividad*. Luego, se introduce y discute una metodología diseñada para apoyar el desarrollo en el trabajo a través del análisis de trabajo colaborativo y el diálogo estructurado, *Trans-autoconfrontaciones*. En tercer lugar, se informa sobre una investigación en auto-confrontaciones

cruzadas llevada a cabo recientemente en una fábrica suiza y muestra cómo esta metodología apoya la co-creación de conocimiento y el desarrollo del diálogo dentro de un grupo de trabajadores y a través de las líneas jerárquicas, contribuyendo así para una discusión profunda y transformación de las prácticas de trabajo.

Palabras clave: Análisis de actividad, desarrollo de actividad, trans-autoconfrontación, diálogo, metodologia dialógica, transformación social

1.   What shall we do? About intervention in psychology

Kurt Lewin, commenting on the problems of intergroup relations in the United States in his foundational paper on *Action Research and Minority Problems* (1946), reported being in contact with a wide range of professional organisations and parties, which would make most of today's psychologists envious. He added: "Two basic facts emerged from these contacts: there exists a great amount of good-will, of readiness to face the problem squarely and really to do something about it. If this amount of serious good-will could be transformed into organised, efficient action, there would be no danger for intergroup relations in the United States. But exactly here lies the difficulty. These eager people feel in the fog. They feel in the fog on three counts: 1. What is the present situation? 2. What are the dangers? 3. And, most important of all, what shall we do?" (p.34). Although we might be less optimistic than Kurt Lewin on our possibilities as researchers to dispel the fog, the question: "what shall we do"? remains. It resonates with some today's urgent social issues, from social inclusion, migration, and the rise of nationalism across Europe, to the global threats of climate change. According to Kurt Lewin, research has the power to organise good-will into efficient collective action, in so far as it adopts a "social management or social engineering" agenda: "It is a type of action-research, a comparative research on the conditions and effects of various forms of social action, and research leading to social action. Research that produces nothing but books will not suffice." (p.35). How? By the close integration of action, training and research, all based on an underlying principle: the wish to face reality collectively, with appropriate methods, in "co-operative teams formed not on the basis of sweetness but on the basis of readiness to face difficulties realistically, to apply honest fact-finding, and to work together to overcome them…" (p.42). Lewin considers that efficient action requires "objective standards of achievement", collectively established in order to evaluate our actions.

Twenty years before, Vygotsky had been opening the way for a new practice of psychology, engaged simultaneously in active theorising of a revolutionary psychology of human development, and in tackling social issues with an urgent commitment to implementing new social practices and institutions. The relationships between theory and practice are at the core of his reflections. He suggests that we establish success, or failure, of our ideas in practice as an official standard of achievement for theory, as explained in this extract through a colonial metaphor: "Previously, practice was a colony of theory, depending in all on the metropolis; theory in no way depended on practice; practice was the conclusion, the appendix, to put it simply an excursion outside the limits of science, a para-scientific, post-scientific operation, which began where the scientific process was

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> *The big wheel keeps on turning*
> *On a simple line day by day*
> *The earth spins on its axis*
> *One man struggle while another relaxes*

Hymn of the big wheel (Massive Attack, 1991).

Based on the close relationship between the nature of work and the productive structure of society, the University of Adger organised in Norway, together with NTNU Gjøvik, the European Workplace Innovation Network (EUWIN) and the International Journal of Action Research (IJAR) a conference based on dialogue with a clear theme: to combine atomised discourses about the future from the perspective of digitisation and the sustainability of work, organisations, social models and the emergence of a new social contract. The seminar held between October 8th and 10th was titled *Coping with the Future.* In this scenario that summoned researchers, students, practitioners and people from the business world the book that carries the same title was presented.

Coping with the future is a book that starts from the academic tradition and is aimed at a wider community of professionals with a concern for the transformation of society, business and work. With a certain foundation and orientation based on philosophy, the book can be considered an epistemological manual, as a guide, which offers a solid overview of the current way of thinking based on historical trajectories. The book delves into the reflection of strategies that, based on sustainability, contribute to the exploration of uncertainty and disruption. The central discussion of the volume focuses on the exploration of the potential contribution of the social sciences from a systemic perspective in search of reasonable present itineraries looking to the future. Thus, it deepens into the options and possibilities of formulas to work in the present and prepare for the future. For this purpose the editors and 25 contributors pose a *big picture* turning it into a *wallet size*. These photographs, called by the authors "*Kodak moments*", refer to situations and positions that, taken for granted, change from night to morning. Based on these snapshots, the book explores the challenges of structural changes in the economy and global order. Mainly based on a Nordic perspective, models of cohesion and social development are reviewed and proposed, taking into account the technological revolution and innovation of our society. It is precisely the dialogue-based tradition of these countries that determines the present itineraries that will affect the work, organisations and the society of the future.

The book is organised in three sections. The first part of the book "*Future political, social and institutional landscape*" delves into the pressure on the structures and institutions that exert the disruptive changes generating an understanding of the past, the responsible