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Democracy, Work and Humanisation: Dedicated to Werner Fricke for his contribution to action research

This is a very special issue of the *International Journal of Action Research*. The reader will soon perceive that all articles are centred on some key concepts, principles and values that have guided Werner Fricke's work as citizen and researcher. Democracy, work/ workplace, and humanisation summarise Werner's commitments to action research as a tool for making this world a better place for all. In the articles that make up this issue, the constant references to his work are no coincidence. They express a deep gratitude for what has been learned with him and through him, and point to the challenges to recreate action research within a historical moment when important changes are underway.

The editors express their gratitude, as colleagues who have had the privilege of sharing his dedication to the *International Journal of Action Research*.

The special issue highlights the key contribution that Werner Fricke has made to the thinking of many different researchers and writers in the field: he is not easy to compartmentalise, and we can trace his influence around the world. As an editor and editor-in-chief he has been committed to the internationalisation of publishing in action research, against a background of different nationally based movements which made few references to work in other traditions. Without his energy and enthusiasm it is unlikely that the journal would have survived. As it is, we are now working with our third publisher, thanks to Werner's persistent efforts.

Throughout his long research career, Werner Fricke has, in theory as well as in practice, argued for social research to have social impact. His engagement as one of the founders and as editor of an international journal of action research (IJAR and its precursors) is strongly based on this ambition. Of course, this is an ambition that in general is shared by action researchers and action research milieus within the overall action research community. However, as for what it means to realise this ambition, and what it means to carry it out, both theories and practices may differ quite a lot within the action research community: this is also reflected in the articles published in IJAR. In relation to this heterogeneity of ways of working with and presenting scientific accounts of action research, Werner Fricke as an editor may be characterised as a 'rigorous pluralist': he has never had any kind of predetermined/ideological bias as to what kind of action research approach is worthwhile to publish results from, but he has always had very strong views on the double set of criteria that are required for articles on action research to be worth publishing. Any article about any kind of action research had to report *both* on what was the practical impact of the research,

and on the new research based knowledge achieved. Manuscripts that lacked either of these, or which presented either of them insufficiently or just vaguely, became subject to clear demands from the editor-in-chief Werner Fricke regarding what deficiencies needed to be dealt with in order to be published. In this sense, Werner's editorial effort over the decades has been also an effort to maintain continuous improvement of action research. It may still be an open question what has been the impact of the action research community on society at large, but no doubt Werner's editorial achievements have had an impact on the action research community.

In German research on work and labour, Werner Fricke has always been there. He reminded the scientific community that labour research is more than an academic endeavor: it is about employees' voice and participation. Often, his constant nudging was overlooked, sometimes ignored, seldom neglected. But, again and again, his serious and stubborn involvement with participation and action research proved to be the one of the more successful roads to modernisation of work and labour, combining a scientific approach with methods of participation, intertwining theoretical foundation and action for organisational change. Although participation in the sense of workers' emancipation, and not only concerned with optimisation of work processes, has lost momentum in German research since the 1980s, Werner Fricke's ideas are still alive and kicking: maybe today more than ever. One reason for that is that workers' emancipation, in modern but neoliberal labour structures, is needed more than ever. The second reason is that Werner Fricke never stopped his commitment to action research. If it were not for him, action research would be somewhat forgotten in Germany.

As mentioned before, the articles that follow are closely linked to Werner's practice of action research. In the opening article, Bjørn Gustavsen revisits the Quality of Working Life Movement (QWL), which promoted major advances over two decades (1970-1990), both socially and methodologically. The author asks what relevant lessons can be learned from this movement for the present situation, when democracy itself is at risk in so many places. At the core of the discussion is the relationship between theoretical constructions and practical experiences. He concludes his article recognising that Werner Fricke may have been the first of the actors within the QWL movement who fully recognised the need to construct the images to guide the actions of research bottom-up.

Stefanie Hürtgen and Stephan Voswinkel argue in their article that workers are not determined by their social conditions, as they are not simply objects of dominant (neoliberal) discourses. Based on empirical study, they show how "normal" workers, in spite of today's precariousness, have not given up normative expectations; they develop their argument differentiating between claims and desires, considering that not all expectations lead to self-empowerment and/or collective action. They remind the researcher that critical social research must take a responsible approach to the discourses and models that are prevalent in society, and must make a clear distinction between the analysis of discourses and the analysis of people's consciousness. The article is dedicated to Werner Fricke "for his coherent and persevering work on concepts of action research" and the authors' gratitude for his collegial interest in their research.

In the article that follows, Peter Totterdill draws on his previous joint work with Werner Fricke, in terms of bringing together as many stakeholders as possible to unleash the

potential to introduce industrial democracy and worker's participation in regional development. Totterdill analyses an attempt to stimulate workplace innovation in the UK, a country, as he remarks, with no tradition of such policy initiatives, through a coalition of regional actors. Although failing to create sustainable momentum in the region, there were tangible business and employee benefits in several participating organisations, and the results served to inspire policies elsewhere. The detailed description of the research process, and the careful analysis of the results, provide important insights for researchers engaged in workplace studies.

The next articles invite us to look at the founding moment of action research, and the need to face the current risks of social research in general, and particularly action research in academic contexts. Marianne Kristiansen and Jørgen Bloch-Poulsen's article deals with Kurt Lewin's concepts of participation, change and action research in organisations. It discusses the discrepancy between the radical contents of Lewin's theories and the Harwood experiments, calling attention to the need to contextualise historically past experiments. The abundant references to Kurt Lewin in action research papers have not necessarily led to more in-depth studies of his work. In this sense, the study is a major contribution to advancing discussions about action research today. The article ends with a reminder to all of us, linking Werner Fricke to Lewin: "Both Lewin and Fricke have the courage to stick to different ways of thinking and doing, the courage to question basic assumptions."

Davydd J. Greenwood starts his article saying that the best way to honour Werner Fricke is to carry on his work. This means taking up the cause and approaches used by Werner for decades to improve working life and social solidarity. In Greenwood's appraisal, "the industrial democracy movement and the welfare state are in retreat under the global neoliberal attack of the past quarter century. Co-determination in many organisations, and certainly in universities, has been destroyed in most countries, and replaced by the casino capitalist model of neoliberal governance." In such context, action research is not only desirable, but necessary, since from past experiences we know its capacity to liberate knowledge, motivation, and solidarity capable of transforming organisations and working lives, in democratic and more sustainable directions.

Emil Sobottka shares his reading of the book *Demokratisierung der Arbeit: Neuansätze für Humanisierung und Wirtschaftsdemokratie,* edited by Werner Fricke and Hilde Wagner (Hamburg: VSA Verlag, 2012). He suggests a reading of this book in the perspective that Karl Mannheim uses for the analysis of utopias, highlighting the description and critical analysis of the situation, indicating the contours of the utopia that the authors seek to foster through their engagement, examining which are the suggested social practices, and who is considered the leading social bearer of this utopia. The book is an important contribution to keeping the utopia of concomitant democratisation of work and of economics alive.

The appreciation shown to Werner Fricke by the contributors to this is issue is all the more ours, as colleagues, who have had the privilege of sharing his long term and restless dedication to the *International Journal of Action Research.*

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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 interes 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, teoria 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»,

participant observer style that did not automatically open the door to wide generalisations. When Emery joined the Tavistock his first major move was to rephrase the early studies into a systems theoretical framework, relying upon concepts like open systems, equifinality, steady state, directive correlations and similar (Emery 1959; his system's theoretical sources can be found in Emery 1969). The early studies pertained to elements of work organisation within larger enterprises and the next step was to expand the systems theoretical approach to cover the organisation as a totality. Since the core concept in this context was the one of «open systems», the focus moved towards the relationship between the organisation and its environment, giving rise to a distinction between different types of environments: the random, placid environment, the clustered envronment, the disturbed-reactive ennvironment and, finally, the environment where turbulence can occur (Emery & Trist 1965). The underlying dimension is the degree of links, or organisation, between the elements, where the notion of turbulence is associated with a maximum of links, ties and relationships. These provide channels for diffusion of disturbances and the potential for accelerating them into major upheavals. Having placed environmental complexity in the centre Emery concluded his theoretical construction by reflecting on how to stabilise situations with potential for turbulence, reflections that gave rise to thoughts about a «social ecology» (Emery & Trist 1973). Such an ecology should provide stable and fruitful conditions for life and work for everybody. At its core would not be another economic theory, but values that are shared between all actors. Among such values could be found willingness to listen to each other, to form trustful relationhips, to refrain from accelerating crises to pursue ones` own benefits, and similar. For such values to be binding for the actors they need to participate in their formation. Commitment to values can take place through voluntary action only, it cannot be enforced on people. Even though the value formation processes would have to span far wider than each separate workplace, Emery saw the workplace as the point of origin for the value formation processes. In the workplace people could relate, share and learn in ways that could set the course for processes also beyond the workplace (Emery referred, among others, to Selznick 1957 on this point). To this can be added, from the perspective of today, that for many people the workplace is the only place where they meet other people not chosen by themselves. In civil and political life everyone can enter an «echo chamber» of people with identical views.

Many elements in this set of arguments can be said to have appeared in a sketchy form: the distance between identifying why democracy is necessary and actually bringing democracy about on a broad front is a long one. Emery can, consequently, be criticised for theoretical excesses and gaps. This kind of critique was, however, seen by Emery as largely irrelevant. He was a radical democrat in the sense that he saw practical knowledge as equal to theoretical knowledge. Academics have no privileged position compared to, say, workers. Emery's view on the need for democracy should, consequently, not be settled in academic discourse, but in the choices people make in their practices, and the ways in which they, themselves, find it reasonable to concretise their choices. This led to the need for a movement that could include practitioners as well as researchers, and that could have the potential for transforming, if not the whole wide world in one sweeping movement, at least major parts of the industrially leading world, and do it within a reasonable period of time.

The general and the contextual

This theory was a strong one, in certain respects even brilliant. In achieving its main importance in the period from about 1970 to about 1990 it was still short lived. This short life was not due to the theory being overtaken by anonther general theory, but to the problems inherent in the notion of general theory, or universal reason, in itself. Even from the beginning it could be seen that the various QWL projects came to show different characteristics. These differences depended upon at least three sets of circumstances: first, differences in the specific, local socio-technical conditions under which the projects occurred. There are major differences between creating autonomy in a process plant versus a banking office.Second, differences in the wider contexts in which they took place, such as the existence and modes of operation of labour market organisations. To this can be added changes that occurred over time as experiences with projects and project design accumulated: in an article from the latter 1970s Elden (1979) writes about «three generations» of work democracy projects. One important dimension in this distinction is the balance between research and those concerned, giving rise to notions like participative design and even user driven change. While, in the early experiments, research performed elements of a directive role, the tendency was to rely more and more on the workplace actors themselves to develop the new patterns. Along with this went other changes, such as a tendency to cover continuously larger parts of each organisation and to make more organisations participate in the same projects (Gustavsen 1992). In this way more actors were reached in each project, and the «mass» of ideas and other impulses in each project could be increased.

It is always possible to hide differences under a highy abstract conceptualisation. This, however, does not change the actual, practical situations within which the projects unfold, and the need to respond adequately to these situations. In spite of these differences being recognised in the QWL movement and its literature, their significance for general theory was not raised and by the latter 1980s the differences had become of such a major importance that the movement fell apart. The last event to take place was a research seminar, held in 1987 as a tribute to Eric Trist when he retired. For the first time the relationship between the universal and the contextual came explicitly on the agenda. The background was, however, not experience from the QWL movement itself, but the invitation of Gareth Morgan as external keynote speaker. Having recently published «Images of organisation» (Morgan 1986) he argued a post-modern and relativistic perspective on organisation, something that stood in sharp contrast to Emery's universal reason. There are, unfortunately, at least as far as this author is aware, no published sources where this discussion is documented and we can do little more than note that it took place and that it was the last organised event in the global QWL movement. Whatever has taken place since has been local, regional or national. The notion of a global movement, initiated and steered through one single reason, was gone.

This story is in many ways trivial. It constitutes one example (among many) of schools of thought in research that have had a promising beginning followed by a high time that was, in turn, followed by a downwards slide. In the light of the wisdom presented by postmodernism, post-structuralism, de-constructivism and similar, this kind of development is to be expected rather than giving rise to surprise. It does, however, leave some questions.

While deconstructivism may be highly relevant from the perspective of critical theory, the same does not apply to action research. For research to enter into action, it is not only necessary to consider something as better than something else, but also to accept a far stronger element of constructivism in the role of research. Research cannot stay content with tearing down what others have put together, it must itself positively pursue specific ideas about what constitutes a better world. QWL theory delivered, furthermore, strong arguments for democracy as a universal order. According to Emery, peak performance even within areas like productivity and innovation can be reached only within a democratic order. To this can be added that the need to examine the performance potential of democacy, and even to act in its defence, is greater than it has been since the 1930s. There is a need not only to take a stand in favour of democracy, there is an equally strong need to identify what action research should do in this context, and what arguments should guide these actions. On these points experiences to which the QWL movement gave rise are still of major relevance.

Levels of contexts

If it is the case that all action in real life is bound by context: how then can we generalise? In spite of the academic originator of the notion of action research, Kurt Lewin, seeing change as a long term process based on a continuous interplay between research and action, the notion of action research was to a large extent redefined into small-scale, short term projects where the broader change was to be carried by texts emanating out of the limited projects. Action research emerged as another way of generating data, but not as a break with textually expressed theory as the main measure in the enlightenment of society. Most of the QWL participants did not fully share this view. Rather, they saw an interplay between action, theory and text as a permanent process, although with a changing relationship between them. In some periods, action projects would be the main activity, followed by the construction of theory, to be followed by still new phases of intensified action, and so on. Even though the notion of permanent action was generally accepted, the dominant view within the movement was that this implied a continuous development of one theory. To help bridge the gap between the one theory and complex and shifting realities, the notion of «paradigm» was called upon (Emery 1978; Ejnatten 1993). Made popular by Kuhn (1967) to help describe such shifts and discontinuities between schools of thought in research that could not be ascribed to logical analysis or new facts, the notion of «paradigm» came, by many, to be used for the opposite purpose: To identify «basics», «fundamentals», «generalities» and similar within a paradigm. This use of paradigm falls, however, subject to the same critique as against foundationalism. As pointed out by, for instance, the historian of science Stephen Toulmin, the general can be reached only by comparing the contextual (Gustavsen 2010). How, then, can we transcend the essentially local projects of the QWL movement, to draw conclusions on a more general level? For most of the researchers involved in the QWL movement, and who wanted to continue their efforts with work reform, the response became to turn national. This implied opening up major new areas for research and development. Two examples:

Following in the wake of the publication of «Silent Spring» (Carson 1962) the debate on the environment emerged, including a debate on health and safety in work, eventually encompassing the whole industrialised world. Throughout the 1970s reforms emerged in practically all industrialised countries. Peculiar to the Norwegian version was an article about autonomy in work in The Work Environment Act that passed the Parliament in 1977 (Gustavsen 1977). By proponents of general QWL theory (i.e. Trist 1981) it was thought that this was a direct imprint of this theory, entering the legislation because of the self-evident truth of the theory. In actual practice the situation was different: for getting this section into the act, research had to argue and demonstrate several major points: First, that the most important threats to health in work can be found within such areas as ergonomics, psycho-social challenges, interaction between separately unharmful factors, long term exposure to low-level hazards, and similar. Second, that challenges of this kind cannot be met through threshold limits and similar specifications, but are in need of workplace based processes of continuous improvement. Third, that employee participation would be crucial to the success of such processes. Fourth, that this participation depended on autonomy in the work role. Finally, research had to help identify what measures could be applied in the making of improvement programmes, including demonstration of how they would work in pracrtice. These tasks occupied about half of the resources of the Work Research Institute over a period of several years.

Another and related area pertains to the agreements between the labour market parties. While the QWL movement generally recognised the significance of the labour market parties, little attention was paid to the more specific nature and characteristics of such measures as negotiations and agreements, and even less to differences between different orders within this area. While it was experienced that agreements that implied co-operation between the parties could be an advantage in launching QWL projects, it was an early experience that the running of specific workplace developments demanded forms of communication that went beyond those of traditional negotiations. Within the Norwegian context it fell to research to interpret these experiences, hold the interpretations up before the parties and help convince them that there was a need for forms of communication that went beyond negotiations. On this background an agreement on development was made, based on negating traditional negotiations to include all concerned rather than representatives only, pertaining to all sorts of topics and not time and money only, and to take place in a spirit of co-operation rather than one of oppositional interests. Research helped, furthermore, formulate criteria for the practical carrying through of these forms of communication: i.e. dialogue conferences, and particiapted in a number of demonstration events (Gustavsen 1992).

Examples illustrating the need to reach different levels in society can be taken from a number of other countries such as Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Holland and Germany. Since the QWL movement referred all practical experiences back to a general theory and not to variable national or other contextual conditions, there were no comparative studies of nations and their differences done at the time. This kind of comparison-based knowledge cannot be recovered today and the individual author is generally unable to offer examples from outsided his or her own context.

The main learning to come out of this is that it is not possible to go directly from workplace cases to universal reason. In-between there are various (meso-) levels that need con-

sideration and specific development strategies. The challenges and possibilities on these levels vary between nations, regions, industries and more. But is it possible to move from this meso-perspective to reflections about a general democratic order? Going by the experiences from the QWL movement there is no theory that will allow us to perform this kind of jump. In a sense this was experienced from an early point in time in the form of a dualist approach to democratisation: on the one hand, democracy was seen as subject to ordinary research: studies that identify the characteristics of democracy, the conditions that bring it forth, and its consequences. These studies are to be expressed in texts and the texts are presumed to further the democratisation process. However, there was also another approach: to organise the democratisation process in such a way that the participants could experience democracy, not only as its end product but in the process itself. Given this, an impact rich movement of democratisation will have to make itself manifest in terms of a substantial number of local developments where the processes expose the participants to democratic experience. What possibilities exist for creating this kind of development today?

Crossing boundaries

When, for instance, Totterdill and colleagues make a summary over a few pages of the characteristics of innovative organisation (Totterdill et al 2016) they can build on research in general rather than one specific school. This reflects a situation within research where yesterday`s sharp dividing lines between theories have largely disappeared, to be replaced by a much stronger element of convergence. Various aspects of autonomy in work are on the one hand conceptualised as autonomy, control, freedom, discretion, empowerment, space for judgment and learning and more, but there are, on the other, considerable overlap and fluid boundaries between what hides under the concepts. This opens up co-operation between researchers needed to transcend single projects, and enter upon the development of a broader social movement. With the link to a specific context characterising all practical action no researcher can, on his or her own, make a broad impact. This can be achieved only by working together

While there is a convergence on the level of more or less general theory, the splits reoccur, however, when turning to the projects that actually unfold under the heading of work research. Worklife development projects have long ago been converted from quasi experiments with a high profile research role to more modest research inputs into processes largely driven by those concerned themselves. The contributions of research become less visible, a development that has given rise to the view that there are no longer any QWL projects at all. Experiences indicate, however, that this is an issue of visibility rather than existence. Projects where research contributes in some way or other to processes implying more autonomy in the workrole actually seem to be ongoing in quite a number of countries. A major move, then, is to make the relevant developments visible. For a development to become visible to a broader audience it needs to become visible to representatives of other developments of a similar kind. A workplace development can hardly be expected to attract global attention when it is unknown to its closest neighbours.

Traditionally, this kind of challenge is approached through comparative studies. Comparative studies are, in this context, the reverse of bringing each case into the realm of a general theory. Instead, the point is to bring to light the characteristics of each case, but do it by by contrasting it with other cases. Bringing to light differences also makes it possible to identify what they may have in common. On the basis of such commonalities, cases can be clustered to form families where some characteristics cut across all cases. The next step will be to compare the clusters, including identifying what the clusters have in common, and so on until the level of the general is reached. While some efforts have been made to support this kind of development, in particular through organising research in programmes, for instance in the Scandinavian countries (Gustavsen 2011), the advances have up to now not been sufficient to initiate a new QWL movement.

The notion of «comparative studies» indicates a process where research is in a leading role, assembling data and performing the comparisons. With the growing emphasis on participation from workplace actors in the process as such, it follows that even comparisons across workplaces need participation from those concerned. Engelstad & Ødegaard (1977) report, from an initiative as early as the 1970s, how comparison of experiences between project groups from different enterprises was used to map out paralells and differences. In a study from the 1990s (Ennals & Gustavsen 1999) the extension of this kind of procedure within a broader European context is discussed and some examples presented. The idea of «learning from differences» is emphasised, against a background where the core point is that learning occurs in language but where language, to become innovative, must identify something new in its context. The richer a specific context is in terms of different phenomena, the more likely it is that new combinations will be discovered. Since this is also a main argument behind multiculturalism in general, which is currently under dispute in many parts of the world, there is a need to add that democracy has to be the organising element: differences without dialogue leads to little but conflict.

In the early versions of QWL thinking, the direct experience of democracy was thought to take place through a redesign of the work role, away from monotonous specialisation to a role that implied variation, self-determination and learning, The problem with this approach was that workplace actors in highly specialised, «Taylorist» work roles would lack democratic competence when the process was to start. However, this went against experience, as it unfolded even in the first projects where the workers concerned played very active roles from the beginning (see for instance the Hunsfos case in Emery & Thorsrud 1976). These roles played themselves out in meetings and other forms of communication. Given this, it was found reasonable to shift the ground for the democracy argument, from the turbulence challenge to the foundations behind the kind of discussions needed for the workplace actors to be able to jointly improve on their conditions (Gustavsen 1992). A new ground could be found in the human rights that constitute a major part of all democratic constitutions: the freedom of speech, the freedom of association, the right to be heard, the prohibition of retroactive decisions, and similar. Not least, the union movement can be seen as an almost direct expression of these rights and it is, consequently, possible to anchor democracy in these rights. These rights need, in turn, to be translated into operational criteria for workplace discourses, the main point in the above mentioned reforms occurring in the 1970s and early 80s. Learning by doing becomes possible rather than being told, by experts and dis-

tant authorities, what «democracy is». One of the first to argue that the workers have full democratic competence from the beginning of development processes was Fricke, who built a project on this assumption as early as around 1970 (Fricke 1983).

This anchoring is historical rather than theoretical. Historical validity is, however, as far as it is possible to come as universal criteria are concerned. Theories promoting the argumentative necessity of democracy may look fascinating, but it is hard to see how they can be empirically substantiated. As the turbulence theory is concerned, there are only two studies known to this author from the QWL movement period where efforts are made to operationalise the environmental categories: one by Stymne (1970) and one actually by this author (Gustavsen 1972). They both demonstrate some of the potential of this theory, but also that it is almost impossible to imagine how this potential can be converted into convincing empirical support for a general notion of democracy.

Given such a communicative anchoring of democracy it is possible to imagine a movement encompassing successively more people and exposing them to democratic processes as represented by dialogic forms of communication. There will be a demand for co-operation between researchers, but also directly between other concerned actors. For a broad movement on the level of an area like Europe to emerge, there would be a need for support from major political actors, like the bodies of the European Union. Since this union was formed on the basis of the idea of pursuing likenesses and identities: everybody is a player in «the same market», the road towards learning by differences is a long one. Perhaps recent events can promote a European self-reflection and eventually trigger a development based on the simple fact that the Union and its associates is about 30 countries, split into numerous regions and with a large number of different languages but also with a major potential for learning just from the differences that are such an overwhelming characteristic of Europe. A unit such as Europe is more than enough for one single social movement. However, it is not unreasonable to believe that if people in all workplaces all over the world were exposed to democratic forms of workplace discussions, they would, perhaps, express a stronger support for democracy even in civil and political life.

Concluding remarks

While the different schools of thought in social research have traditionally offered alternative texts, a core charcteristic of the QWL movement was that it offered alternative experiences: people formerly existing in non-democratic contexts could experience democratic life and, through this, develop a deeper commitment to democracy. To create a development in this direction as a global movement was obviously not a realistic goal. This does, however, not mean that no transcendence of the contextual is possible. The point is to make the cases talk to each other and bring the participants to form networks that can encompass a continuously growing number of partcipants and networks until a general impact built on experience can be achieved. In spite of its claim to universal reason and short period of existence the QWL movement actually demonstrated that such a development is possible. What is called for from the side of research is a broadly framed co-operation, where each unit works with its own partners in its own context, helps identify

what is achieved through what kind of process, and holds this up against parallel experiences from other contexts.

By locating his leading project in The Humanisation of Work Programme within the specific German discourse on qualification rather than general QWL theory, Fricke (1975) laid a foundation that could be developed through an ascending order of layers in German working life until the international could be reached from a platform of broad experience among many actors. Fricke himself is quite modest in estimating the impact of his own work. However this may be, he may have been the first of the actors within the QWL movement who fully recognised the need to construct the images that are to guide the actions of research bottom-up.

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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

¿Normalidad no normal? Reinvindicaciones 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 estan 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: Reinvindicaciones 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

generate a major part of social wealth through their work in capitalist societies marked by a division of labour. Our basic assumption, therefore, is that learning more about their every-day practices, patterns of interpretation, and horizons of meaning will enable us to achieve analytical insights into a central and relevant part of social reality, and thus into how contemporary societies operate overall

It seems necessary to make this observation at the outset, because a form of critical social research has recently become influential that in our view draws inferences too quickly, from the prevailing *discourses* about the world of work, to how this world and its subjects *in fact* function. Even though its intention is genuinely critical, this research takes up neoliberal "invocations" of maximum marketability, and condenses them into concepts such as the "entrepreneurial self" (Bröckling), which then seem to describe a real practice in the world of work. In the process, the difference between the prevailing and dominant discourses and the practical orientations of the subjects that these discourses purport to describe is in danger of disappearing.

By contrast, the present article seeks to show that workers should in no way be construed as mere "complements" of dominant ideas. Material support for this claim is provided by an extensive qualitative study we conducted, on the claims and standards in terms of which so-called normal employees evaluate their work. The study addressed the question of whether and how economic crisis developments, precarisation, and systematic insecurity due to corporate restructuring are reflected in the expectations of those employed persons who have permanent contracts, who see themselves as still being in relatively secure employment, and whose company environment is not at present directly affected by downsizing.[1]

Our empirical findings and the theoretical categories developed in connection with them, which we present in excerpts in this article, once again provide impressive confirmation of the need to understand employees as *social actors*. Employees are not merely a reflex of problematic "conditions" or objects of ruling discourses, and, contrary to what is often assumed, they by no means internalise neoliberal notions of flexible, market-driven individualism. On the contrary, our findings show that employees are upholding the criteria of a "good" working environment: that is, one which is in a positive sense "normal", in spite of their pervasive experience that these standards of normality are being placed in question by downsizing, low wages, the erosion of the boundaries between work and free time, and so forth. Employees do *not* understand themselves in this context as "monads": our study provides impressive confirmation of this, but as part of a social world that they contributed to producing by drawing upon their resources, and upon their situation and that of their firm and of society. In other words, the employees we studied *act*: they develop recalcitrant orientations: specifically, notions of a good world of work and, connected with

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1   The project was funded by the Hans Böckler Foundation. Our sample consisted of employees in mid-career (30-45 years old) with medium-level qualifications (from skilled and qualified semi-skilled workers, through lower-level employees, to employees with university degrees but without managerial positions) who were working in a variety of sectors (ranging from the automotive industry through mechanical engineering and IT services to the civil service) in different regions in Germany. In a total of 42 highly detailed, so-called prospective biographical interviews, we focused primarily on the interviewees' life history, their work situation, and their expectations for the future (for a detailed account of our findings and observations that go beyond the scope of the present article, see Hürtgen & Voswinkel 2014).

this, of a good life in a good society, through engagement with their lives and in their social contexts. Our findings indicate that employees do not simply give up these orientations even when confronted with evidence that they are in fact being questioned on all sides: and even when faced with discourses that celebrate this questioning as the new modern world of work to which workers have to adapt.

The current, often crisis-prone developments in the world of work, therefore, are specifically not reflected in the retraction of notions of what constitutes good, meaningful, and fulfilling work which makes a good life possible. A particular concern of the present article, however, is to demonstrate that employees are faced with the question of whether such notions of good work and a good life are still generalisable today, that is, to what extent these notions remain the socially valid norms to which one can appeal, beyond personal ambitions, to demand their enforcement or to engage in (collective) struggles for their realisation. As we explain in detail in the article, this doubt finds expression in two fundamentally different subjective orientations that we call, on the one hand, harboring "desires" and, on the other, harboring "claims" (sect. 3). The first orientation does in fact represents an individualistic, as it were "privatised" perspective, because, along the lines of disillusioned realism, it denies that social norms of good work and a good life actually exist. The second orientation continues to appeal to precisely these norms, in spite the feelings of insecurity that are likewise present.

A second preliminary remark concerns the "classical" research on workers' consciousness. In the first place, we cannot take for granted that this research is based on an understanding of employees as acting, self-willed subjects who fill their lives with meaning. In this respect, we certainly see our remarks as continuing a critique of notions of "objective interests" that seem to be necessary consequences of the situation of employees (for an overview, see Langfeldt 2009; for critical conceptual analysis, see Becker-Schmidt 1983). In addition, there is a second way in which we go beyond "older" research on workers' consciousness, namely, by considering "work and life" as being related. Employees should not be conceived from the outset only as workers. On the contrary, production and reproduction, or "work force and life force" (Jürgens 2006), structure each other mutually, and refer to each other: in their factual biographical life context, as well as in the formation of action-guiding norms and actors' conceptions of value (see Alheit & Dausien 2000; Giegel 1989).

In fact, our results show clearly that employees articulate their expectations concerning work against the background of their social *life context*, from which these expectations derive their meaning and weight. As we will show, work is far from being considered merely as a means for earning a living. Such "instrumental attitudes to work," which were at one time attributed: rightly or wrongly, to the "Fordist worker," are scarcely discernible; the emphasis is instead on the criterion of meaningful work. At the same time, employees by no means see themselves, even directly "on the job," only as service providers or labor forces. Rather, they evaluate their world of work in terms of criteria that aim at sociality within and outside the workplace and at the human dimension: that is, the dimensions of physical and psychological integrity, and of respect for workers as subjects. In short, they situate "wage labour" in the context of an inclusive social and biographical existence.

The article is structured as follows: in sect. 2, we briefly outline employees' ideas of the normal: that is, in their view good, work and how they are related to notions of a good

life. In sect. 3, we introduce the distinction between *claims* and *desires,* and explain the associated legitimation process, hence the justification of work-related concerns. Then we go on to explain in greater detail in terms of which values claims on work appear justified, and what this has to do with employees' self-constitution as social actors within and outside work (sect. 4). Whether concerns are conceived as claims or desires should be understood in connection with, on the one hand, employees' biographical life orientations (sect. 5) and, on the other, prevailing conceptions of normality (sect. 6). Specifically in this regard, employees exhibit a profound uncertainty over whether the claims they make on work that they regard as normal are indeed still normal today – or already express a situation of privilege, so that they cannot be justified any longer by appeal to generally valid social norms and rules, and hence can no longer function as claims. In conclusion (sect. 7), we summarise our findings and take this as an opportunity to emphasise the importance of empirical research in providing us with critical protection against overestimating the power of (neoliberal) discourses.

2.   Empirical Highlights and Initial Thematic Approach

Our study clearly demonstrated the importance for employees of those standards of work that in fact still count as "normal": work should be "good," hence it should be appropriately organised both as concerns the result and the employees' expenditure of energy; supervisors should behave fairly and treat employees with dignity (not overload them with work, for example, and also not yell at them); of course, the money must " be right," i.e. sufficient for a "normal life": not a life of luxury, including retirement and "normal" vacations, and working hours should allow sufficient time for recovery and recreation. Thus, the *contents* of these expectations present, in outline, more or less what other studies and trade union surveys regularly confirm about attitudes toward "good work." In addition, our findings show that employees articulate their expectations concerning work against the background of their *life context*, which lends the expectations in question their meaning and weight. Just as employees do not see themselves merely as a labour force, they always also situate work within their social and biographical existence as a whole.[2] Instrumental attitudes toward work can scarcely be discerned in this context. Employees are far from regarding work with indifference, or only as a means of earning a livelihood that is supposed to enable consumption and fulfillment in one's free time. *First*, life for employees also includes other social domains besides work. Thus, women are not the only ones who emphasise the importance of reconciling working life and family life. Men also see themselves as fathers who want to enjoy a family life, and women also stress the importance of friendships and of social commitments and involvements. Accordingly, our interviewees evaluate work also in terms of whether it facilitates this desired diversity of life, and they often complained and criti-

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2   In order to subject the relationship between work and life to scientific study, one must, of course, first assume that such a relationship even exists and focus on it. In the aforementioned project, we made a conscious decision, in contrast to most studies in the sociology of labour and industry, not to take working conditions *per se* as our privileged conceptual starting point, but instead to concentrate on the interviewees' subjective perspective on their work.

cised that forms of work that encroach on free time make their basic conduct of life difficult or even impossible.

But, *secondly*, work and life, in the opinion of our interviewees, are also inseparably related in the workplace itself. Here, too, the employees do not see themselves exclusively as a labour force, even in the immediate execution of their work. They are not "robots," as some of them put it, but human and social beings who, as already mentioned, do not want to be yelled at, and are in different physical shape. For example, sometimes they can "have a bad day," they are deeply affected by family problems that impinge on their work, or they see communication between colleagues at work,[3] a drink to celebrate their birthday, or a houseplant also as part of working life. One's mode of access to work is also shaped by the course of one's (social) life as a whole: shift work becomes increasingly strenuous with increasing age, being in one's "middle years" often means having to take care of family members, and so forth. Work, according to this credo, must not negate these human and social dimensions of life, and only then is it even possible to work well.

3.   The Distinction between Claims and Desires

To summarise, therefore, we can say that our interlocutors have "normal" expectations of work and that they articulate these in the context of their lives as a whole. Moreover, in doing so, firstly, they thematise the relationship between work and other spheres of life and, secondly, they do not want to be reduced to the role of worker, even directly "on the job" and in the workplace. However, our study shows that it is not self-evident whether these expectations are something the employees *claim,* or something they *desire,* and that there is an essential difference between these attitudes.

Why is this distinction between claims and desires of such central importance? As a categorical separation, it points, as we will explain in this section, directly to the dimension of employees as social actors mentioned at the beginning. More precisely, the distinction between claims and desires marks a fundamental difference in how employees, as thinking and acting subjects, constitute themselves and actively approach the (working) world. The transitions are in fact fluid, of course, but the distinction is of central importance at the conceptual level and at the level of (trade union) politics.

In the case of *claims*, employees regard their work-related concerns as legitimate. For our interviewees, they are *justified* concerns. Making claims: that is, having a justified expectation to receive (and, if necessary, to fight for) something from concrete or general social others (one's supervisors, wage negotiation partners, politics, etc.), involves, analytically speaking, two steps: first, workplace and social relations are conceived as normatively structured social orders that function, or at least should function, in accordance with certain rules. The claim that work should be organised in a meaningful way, for example, is based on the putatively general rule that work should produce useful and practical results (cf. Hürtgen and Voswinkel 2014, 163ff.; Nies 2015; Hürtgen 2015; Hürtgen 2017; Voswinkel 2016) and that it should not require excessive or harmful expenditure of one's labour power.

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3   On collegiality, see Hürtgen 2013.

These and other basic social and work-related norms and rules provide patterns on which employees can draw to justify their concerns. Therefore, claims are embedded in the idea of a normative order of society: here, above all, the world of work. The second step consists in seeing oneself as a *component* of this social structure which functions in accordance with certain norms and rules. If the (working) subject is to be able to make claims and justifiably defend them, she must understand herself as someone who contributes to producing the assumed normative connections: for example, by working "sensibly" or "precisely", and not simply working "to rule." Thus, claims also entail "claims on oneself," for example, to be a productive worker. Making claims is a *relational process* that is both self-reflexive as well as being directed to concrete and general addresses of claims: both are inherent components of social relationships and interactions conceived as rule-governed phenomena. To understand oneself as a subject of claims is to conceive of oneself as an actor and as part of social relationships structured by norms. However, this mode of self-constitution, of seeing oneself as a bearer of legitimate expectations, is by no means self-evident: as is made clear by considering the contrasting concept, namely, desires.

Desires are social concerns that are not pursued by appeal to a rule-governed social order or to one whose realisation is regarded as desirable; thus, desires are not legitimised in normative terms. At a first glance, one can desire all sorts of things: good weather, a new love, winning the lottery, or a better boss. The key point is that a desire is not contingent on one being able to believe, by recourse to a norm, that one has a claim to this. Here the self-empowerment involved in being able to legitimately expect and receive something in social interactions and contexts does not play any role. For those who conceive of concerns as desires, notions of (for example) justice of performance or of respect for persons are certainly still present, but they do not function (any longer) as a legitimising resource for raising claims. An "appropriate" salary is something one can desire but not something to which one has a claim. Here the social norms governing (working) life are either questionable: at least in the eyes of the employees concerned, or they have ceased to exist altogether, so that they can no longer serve as a resource for legitimation. Or employees cannot view themselves as part of a normatively structured (working) world any more: for example, if their productivity is so severely constrained by chronic illness that insisting on the observance of the performance principle seems impossible (even though it is still assumed to be valid). Claims can turn into desires, therefore, if the norms that legitimise them are no longer regarded as valid in general or for particular individuals. We will return to both variants later in this text.

This fundamental distinction between claims and desires, developed on the basis of the interview material, should not be taken to imply that the employees are "active" in the first case, but "passive" in the second. Subject constitution and active social conduct are centrally involved in both cases, though in very different directions: the category of claims aims at the general level, at the *generalisation* of norms and concerns, in that it inscribes itself in the normative order or tries to modify it (Honneth 1996). This means that the claims that individual employees make on work and life are indeed raised *also*, but *not only*, for themselves. Rather, the normative legitimation of their own concerns anchors claims in general social orders that also include others besides the subject, and hence necessarily always also legitimises these concerns for others. Claims thematise what should hold in general for those who are (conceived as being) involved in social relationships and in society. As a re-

sult, the category of claims also refers to the (potential) configurability and contestability of society. The very assumption that the (working) world should be configured in a certain way already presupposes that it is possible in principle to reflect on these norms, and thus to bring them within the horizon of reflection and contestability (cf. Ahrens et al. 2011; Scheele 2008).[4] To harbour claims involves empowering oneself to see oneself as an active component of the generally valid normative framework.

Desires, by contrast, are private in character; they refer to an individual or social self beyond normative structures. Desiring something for oneself: without normative anchoring, remains detached from possibilities of generalisation.[5] The interviewees who correspond to this ideal type are sometimes unusually active, determined, and in part "shrewd" when it comes to achieving their goals. However, the advantages in question are only particular ones; they exclude, in part explicitly, any notion that social orders might be configurable or changeable. Here it is instead a matter of realising one's objectives "for oneself" (or one's family).

4.   Modes of Self-Constitution in Relation to the World of Work

How do employees as subjects of claims construe the (working) world and their place within it in normative terms? What, in other words, are central normative dimensions in which they justify their claims?

As already emphasised, the normative dimensions under consideration *go beyond* the world of work. How claims are made on the world of work, and individuals conceive of themselves as part of normative structures, follow from the standpoint of a holistic subject who unites work and life. In our study, we identified three central conceptions of a world of work that is normal in a positive sense and, accordingly, three ways in which subjects constitute themselves as part of this world, though we can present them only in brief outline here.[6]

The first, largely classical normative conception is that performance should be rewarded in the workplace. Here performance is conceived in terms of a "genuine," meaningful contribution, as opposed to how performance is officially represented. Notions of just reward for performance are addressed to both superiors and colleagues; they refer to one's own merit, the amount of work, the aforementioned meaningful organisation of work for accomplishing the task, etc. Norms of just reward for performance are highly ambivalent,

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4   In this context, "configurability" should not be conceived per se in positive terms. As our empirical evidence shows, appealing to the norm of good and responsible performance involves the inclusion of others. However, it also involves the exclusion of, for example, precarious workers, at least some of whom are suspected of not satisfying the criteria of good work, and hence of not belonging to the putative normative relationship of the reciprocal performance principle that would qualify them as colleagues. In principle, however, a "claim" goes beyond what is proper to each individual, so that, from the perspective of the theory of action, it refers to society, and hence to the question of which norms are (or should be) valid here for whom.

5   Claims can be articulated even when they may count as unattainable for a certain time under certain circumstances. The important thing is the certainty that they are normatively legitimate "in principle." Claims are not "private desires" but rest on socially valid norms and values.

6   There are both overlaps and differences in this regard between our results and similar findings; see, e.g., Dubet 2008.; Kratzer et al. 2015.

because they generally also involve factual or rhetorical determinations of who is not contributing enough, for example, a particular colleague, workers from the outside firm, or the boss in the office. The important point here is that, in order to be in a position to make claims with reference to the norm of just reward for performance, one must view oneself as a productive worker and behave accordingly. Employees often speak of doing "good work." Depending on the activity and the work hierarchy, this can include very different things; but in general it is a matter of working conscientiously and reliably without "malingering" and "cheating." This self-constitution as a productive worker then allows employees to expect or also to demand "good money" or corresponding working conditions.

A second normative dimension in which claims are made on the world of work is very different in character. Here employees thematise themselves as *human beings*. Even though our topic was confined to the working world, the "human" played a major role in the interviews. Being a "human being" includes both the necessity that everyone be treated equally regardless of age, gender, ethnic origin, external characteristics, and so forth, as well as a kind of basic right to consideration as an embodied and psychological subject of needs and vulnerabilities.[7] Conceiving of oneself as a psychosomatic human being refers both to limitations and disruptions (exhaustion, illness, aging, physical disabilities, having good and bad days at work, etc.) and to basic bodily and communicative features of the human constitution in general. Relevant features are, for example, gender, one's bodily constitution (size, height, etc.), age, haptic skills and idiosyncrasies, but also language skills (e.g., as a foreigner, not having good command of German) or specific needs, for example, for more quiet in the office. To be a human being at work (see Hürtgen 2013) means being recognised in one's basic psychosomatic integrity. Its violation "makes one sick," as many employees put it, and it is unacceptable because it disrespects or even violates one's dignity. Whether it is a matter of having to work in an unnecessarily dark environment, of not being allowed to go to the toilet, or of being exposed to permanent stress or to the boss's yelling: on this view, one has a claim to different conditions *as a human being*.[8] In justification, employees cite the normative pattern of *human rights*.[9] According to this argument, every individual is entitled to these rights, independently of his or her performance. But human rights also refer to the conception of oneself as a socially respected being who is able to lead a life fit for human beings, and thus enjoys "normal" opportunities for financial and cultural participation. This marks a transition to a second form of legitimacy, which we called the "right to self-care." The right to self-care refers to the permission, as a psychosomatic entity, to be able, and to have a duty, to look after one's bodily and mental health and integrity; one must be able to maintain one's vitality and one is entitled to strive to live an authentic life.

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7   Here we must distinguish between the body as something that is always experienced and lived by the subject [*Leib*] and the body as it is perceived by others [*Körper*]. What for another person is a *Körper* for the subject herself is *Leib*. We use the concept of corporeality [*Leiblichkeit*], because our interviewees speak about themselves, their feelings, illnesses, and sensations, and hence thematize themselves as "embodied subjects" (Schroeder 2009: 193).

8   Thus the statements made by our interviewees cohere with reflections about the need to strengthen the principles of care and sensitivity to human (bodily and mental) needs in the world of work (see Senghaas-Knobloch 2008; Plonz 2011; see also Tronto 1993).

9   Of course, by this we do not mean that they actually use the legal concepts of human rights when they formulate their concerns, but that the normative figure of human rights can be deduced from the interview texts.

The third normative dimension in which social interactions and oneself as part of them are conceived is connected with this: namely, the idea that one is a *social being* in the world, and hence also in the world of work. From the perspective of employees, people have a fundamental right to a balanced life and, above all, to a life that is varied and involves forms of development that are responsive to individual needs. According to this view, social existence must be respected. It must be possible: in financial terms, in terms of time, but also as regards the degree of exhaustion from work, to care for one's family, cultivate friendships and hobbies, be active in associations, take an interest in certain topics or issues, and, more generally, follow the rhythms of life, be it in caring for one's elderly parents or in dealing with one's own problems. Human beings, on this view, are not only workers, and not only human beings in the abstract, but always also social beings who are integrated into society. These conceptions of oneself as a social being, and of a right to care for oneself and to a social existence, culminate, for example, in claims to limits on work and working hours, in claims to a "normal" income, and in notions of collegiality and of how superiors should behave: for instance, that there should be time and opportunities for social communication in the workplace.

Summarising what has been said, it turns out that employees associate three central normative orders with the world of work, and conceive of themselves as part of this world and hence as bearers of claims: the working environment should be structured according to the dimensions of (1) performance, while taking into account that this performance is delivered by (2) individual, psychosomatic human beings and by (3) social beings who find themselves in different life situations. Here we encounter claim dimensions that transcend the world of work, and come into view only if work is conceived as part of individual and social life.

Up to now we have worked out the logics governing the way claims are made in the working world; the "opposite side," that of desire, by contrast, was left somewhat to one side. "Desire" versus "claim" is a theoretical opposition, but in reality desires and claims are the poles of a continuum. The vast majority of our interviewees harboured both claims and desires, only a few of them almost exclusively or predominantly desires. Although the latter also argued in the light of what they conceive as the normality structure of the working world, the supposed "insight" that this structure is not valid (any longer) is central here, so that one cannot appeal to corresponding norms to legitimise one's own claims. Thus these interviewees construed such a normal working world that conforms to certain principles as illusory, and hence at best as desirable, but not as relevant for action.

In order to grasp the variations of "combinations" of demands and desires, and, in particular, to show that claims also turn into desires that cannot appear legitimate (any more), in what follows we would like to address employees' life orientations.

5.   Life Orientations: Modes of Self-Constitution in Work and in Life

Life orientations can be understood in very general terms as (also implicit) perspectives on the world that are relevant for action. *The ways in which* claims or desires: or, in most cas-

es, both, are harboured, enabled us to make a distinction between different types of life orientation. Here we will present a couple of them by way of example, in order to clarify how the articulation of claims versus desires can be understood in the context of life orientations.

Mr. Bürtük, a 35-year-old machine operator in a large automotive company, sees himself as part of a family migration project. As immigrants, his parents accepted many privations in order to make a life in Germany. As he sees it, Mr. Bürtük, as the eldest son, now has the task of successfully continuing this migration project by achieving social advancement into the mainstream of society, as part of the family that he also supports financially. Central to his life orientation, which we called the "advancement and prestige" type, is the pursuit of social advancement in this sense and the symbols associated with it (money, a house, etc.). Mr. Bürtük subordinates many things in life to this goal. He has one or two jobs on the side, works shifts, and is building a house for himself and his brother. He sees himself as an extremely productive worker who works hard and responsibly. He stresses repeatedly in conversation that he feels justified in claiming a good income and the fringe benefits provided by the company specifically because he is very productive. In no way does he see himself in individualistic terms as someone who is driven by success; rather, he conducts disputes with the master craftsman along with his colleagues, and is a member of and a representative in the union IG Metall. The temporal vanishing point of his claims to recovery and recreation as a human being, which he repeatedly articulates but repeatedly postpones for the sake of social advancement, is retirement on a pension, which, as recognition of lifelong achievement, is deeply anchored in his normative view of the world. Mr. Bürtük can be understood as an example of an employee who confidently articulates his claims regarding work, status, and life by appealing to a normative world that is profoundly shaped by the performance principle.

Ms. Salzbaum is a 36-year-old surveyor who started out working on overseas projects in Sudan. Although she found the work very rewarding and enjoyed undisputed standing among her project colleagues, she ultimately resigned from this firm. As she relates it, one of the reasons for this, apart from engaging with her identity as a lesbian woman who had to deal with outsider experiences throughout her life, was her need for a closer relationship to nature. Now she satisfies this need by working part time as a therapeutic riding instructor for disabled children. In order to do this she has reduced her working hours, something made possible by a job at a firm for measurement software. She formulates this balance between qualified work and an additional area of life involving commitment as a legitimate claim because she is a human and a social being who has a variety of commitments and interests in life. We called this type of life orientation "self-development and life balance."

The case of Mr. Torwig, a clerk at the bank and a full-time member of the works council, exhibits a contrasting attitude toward work as an attempt to take advantage of favourable opportunities to realize desires for a certain level of income and job security for oneself. Mr. Torwig has observed how, in his organisational department of the bank, the work is being progressively centralised, a process in which he himself is actively involved. In the course of this development he had a "very narrow escape" and he decided to work full time as a representative on the works council, a secure position from which he can now sit out the "downsizing measures." At no point in the conversation does he give the slightest hint

of normative outrage over the many redundancies or suggest that the process, as a collective one, should have been organised differently. They appear to him instead as a matter of fate which he, Mr. Torwig, cleverly managed to avoid. Mr. Torwig also sees the fringe benefits provided by the bank as a benefaction, and his "above market rate" salary not as a reward to which he as an individual or the workforce collectively has a normative claim, but as a matter of good luck for which one must be grateful. In his life orientation, this good luck is what enabled him to escape (until now) the social decline that continually threatens him. This view of the world as permanently risky and threatening, in which one can only survive through skill and struggle, is characteristic of this life orientation: we called it "getting by in life", and its "conversion" of claims into desires.

The light cast on employees' life orientations, therefore, shows that making claims is part of a view of the world that is formed and transformed in the confrontation with the individuals' own personal experiences and with the conditions under which they live and work. As the biographical perspective shows, life orientations are not based on a deterministic relation. They are not simply a result of social "structural features" such as social origin, working position, gender, or ethnicity.[10] It is not as though the interlocutors whom we assigned to the "getting by in life" orientation have more precarious jobs, or are less qualified or earn less than the others in the sample.[11] Something similar holds for the different meaning of the orientation to social advancement, which is by no means pursued by all those on the "lower rungs" of the social ladder. This is not to say that living conditions, social origin or even gender, are unimportant. Rather, what is crucial is the meaning these "structural features" acquire in the employees' active interpretation, and hence in how they approach the world. Life orientations as inclusive, action-guiding perspectives on the world point to the active *confrontation* with social circumstances that is always also situated with the subjects themselves, in our case, in the form of their own biographical experiences. Goals and perspectives are always necessarily subjective, and hence so, too, is the question of how one's relation to a normative order can take the form of self-constitution as a bearer of legitimate normative claims, or not (any longer), as the case may be.

6.   Non-Normal Normality?

Our study examined employees who belong among the "core" of employees, that is, those who are in relatively secure employment and who are not in a precarious social situation. The majority of these employees articulate claims on work, in particular claims they understand as "normal."

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10   Our interviewees were often, though without any prior intention on our part, children of immigrants, not only from Turkey, but also from Romania, Greece or Kazakhstan. This "different" origin plays a major role in the interviews, as does the interviewees' gender or social position in the hierarchical distribution of employment and income; but no specific way of dealing with claims and desires could be deduced from these factors.

11   According to this view, people who are in precarious employment, for example, are by no means less capable in principle of understanding themselves as bearers of claims, as is confirmed by a glance at the relevant literature (Hürtgen & Voswinkel 2014: 349ff.).

Here we must make an analytical distinction between "normativity" and "normality." Although normativity and normality occur together they are not the same thing. Talk of "normality" can refer to what is merely usual or customary, to what is factually given or what is statistically speaking most frequent. But "normality" can also have a very pronounced normative connotation: what counts as "normal" is then what is normatively legitimate, and therefore at the same time worth striving for. This conception can be found, for example, in the formulation: "Normal is when you can live from your work." (For a more detailed account, see Hürtgen & Voswinkel 2014: 29ff.) For the normal employees we surveyed, however, these normative legitimacy patterns ("that is how it should be") are very closely associated with notions of *normality* ("and that is how it (actually) is too").[12]

Our empirical study shows a very complex result with regard to this tension between normativity and normality. The interviewees are no longer sure whether the normative order in which they anchor and situate their claims, and themselves as the bearers of these claims, can (still) count as "normal." We can present our findings in "layers": on a first level, one can say that most employees stand by their claims and regard them as "normal." They repeatedly emphasise that they do not want anything special, that the notions of work and life they cherish are perfectly normal. On a second level, however, insofar as they are employed in permanent jobs, moreover mostly in large companies or in the civil service, they view their situation as exceptional. All around them they see that working conditions are deteriorating: in their companies, staff are now hired almost exclusively on short-term contracts or through subcontractors, hardly any of their friends or acquaintances still have "normal" contracts, or they are unemployed or their income situation is in some other way more precarious, and labour market entry for their own children is often difficult. They assume that they are not able to change their jobs even if they are dissatisfied with them, because they would make their situation worse as a result. Conversely, it is often their hard-won position in the company, their "niche," which they have carved out for themselves by acquiring company-specific skills over many years, and the like, that protects them from the further downsizing that they often consider likely.

In short, even though they conceive of their working conditions as "normal," in fact they see them as being exceptional. The normal employment relationship increasingly turns out not to be normal and general any more, but is instead a *privilege* that is becoming rarer, and is often viewed with envy by others. The interviews indicate that employees are in fact extremely uncertain about whether their claims and the norms that underlie them are still even generally valid. They are unsure how far the normative normality inscribed in the logics governing their claims remains the usual normality.

However, a normative order that is no longer regarded as "normal" leads to uncertainty over whether people can understand their concerns as claims to which they are normatively entitled, or whether they think that they will be able to realise their concerns only by seizing favorable opportunities or by using power, an attitude already expressed by a minority among the interviewees in our sample. If the norm of "being human" in the workplace is no longer generally valid, for example, then invasive working conditions can no longer be rejected by appealing to it. Humanity would cease to be a standard that one could legitimately

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12 This close connection between normativity and normality does not necessarily pertain: we can conceive of movements that struggle for a different normality, hence for the implementation of different norms.

expect to be fulfilled in general and by specific colleagues or supervisors. On the contrary, *not* expecting it to be fulfilled would become a useful tool for the world of work in which the imperative would henceforth be to "get by," even if humane conditions were something that one desired. In such a situation, it would no longer be possible to anchor one's concerns and norms in a general social consensus. Neither the individuals (supervisors, etc.) nor the general conditions (the materialised work situation, the type of contract) that one encountered in the working world could be assumed to satisfy the basic norms of humanity that one upholds oneself. But in that case claims are in danger of becoming desires.

Therefore, the variations in the ways individuals deal with claims and desires, as reflected in their *biographical self-constitution* in the context of their life orientations, are bound up with their capacities to conceive of themselves, *in the process of constituting themselves in relation to work*, as (legitimate) bearers of claims. Both the variations and the capacities in question refer in turn to the social fabric, and the normative structures of society as a whole.

7.   Outlook and Conclusion

This brings us to our concluding remark. Our findings convey a twofold message: "normal employees" uphold their claims, and see them for the most part as being normatively justified. However, they are unsure how far their claims can still count as normal in contemporary society. In this situation, critical social research must take a responsible approach to the discourses and models that are prevalent in society, and must make a clear distinction between the analysis of discourses and the analysis of people's consciousness.

With the concept of a "double hermeneutic," Anthony Giddens (1984: 284) pointed out that sociological concepts and theories take up ideas that are widespread in society and process them in its scientific context, but that these ideas, now in the guise of sociological concepts, then reflect back on social discourses, and as a result develop power potentials and effects of their own. This "double hermeneutic" becomes problematic when it is not subjected to careful empirical controls: that is, when social discourses are accepted as sociological findings without analysing the effects they actually exert, especially on people's consciousness and on their meaningful practices. Doubling discourses in this way has the effect of stabilising them, even when the sociological research in question sees itself as critical.

Thus for many years sociology has been describing developments in the world of work and in subjectivity using concepts such as "employee entrepreneurs" (Voß & Pongratz 1998), the "entrepreneurial self" (Bröckling 2007), flexible man (Sennett 1998), and the like. These and similar concepts take their lead from neoliberal discourses according to which modern workers are forced to be, and want to be, flexible and self-organised and at the same time adjusted to the market. The theories in which these developments are condensed are certainly intended to be critical: they are presented as diagnoses of new form of submission. This is not altogether wrong, insofar as they take up and interpret influential social models, "dispositives" and "invocations" (and hence also central features of empirical reality). However, these theories become problematic when direct inferences are made from them about real subjects and when the latter are subsumed under the corresponding

social discourses by means of theoretical generalisations. This has the effect of doubling the existing "invocations" in a critical language and thereby solidifying further an image of "normality" while nevertheless criticizing it.

Our research has shown that employees are far from being "entrepreneurial selves"; on the contrary, they uphold claims for the most part and understand them as legitimate. But at the same time they are uncertain about these claims. One could say that they reject the "modern" invocations, yet at the same time they are afraid that the basis on which they make this rejection is being pulled out from under them: that, in effect, they are no longer in the zone of normative "normality." In this empirical situation, is it illuminating when sociology describes "entrepreneurial selves" as the supposed norm in the working world? Or does this not instead (also) contribute to imposing this very "normality" that is nevertheless being criticised? This danger exists, at any rate, as long as the analyses of the discursive invocations are not counterbalanced by studies of the empirical subjects, with their claims and their self-understandings.

As we indicated at the beginning, the "old" research on workers' consciousness was long guilty of neglecting workers as acting subjects who bring forth social reality, and instead often deduced their consciousness from "objective" facts and classified it in ready-made schemas. In our view, we are currently facing a very similar problem, only now with discourses and invocations that are presented as objective facts. The problem is the same in both cases: without empirical and conceptual research that grasps everyday acting subjects and their consciousness in all of their complexity and contradictions, and tries to understand them as an interpretation that brings forth reality in accordance with its own logic, sociological debates, however critical their intention, are in danger of reproducing and confirming the dominant discourses. Understanding action of employees, thus, has to analyse day-to-day workers practices as practices of subjects and social actors, i.e. as always conflicting and contradictory effort to overcome objectivisation and to insist on lively capacities while handling and shaping social life.

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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 numero 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):

"Our stock of skills and their optimal deployment fare relatively poorly when compared internationally, according to skills utilisation measures such as labour productivity and levels of qualifications among different workforce groups. Access to opportunities for skills acquisition is uneven, as are their impacts."

The 'British disease' of poor productivity and an economy based on a 'low skill equilibrium' has long achieved cyclical but transitory public policy prominence, though without reaching lasting solutions. Since 2000, the focus of skills policy in the UK began to reach beyond its primary concern with improving skills *supply*. UKCES argued in 2009 that "there has been a shift in focus, to considering how we can ensure that skills are effectively *used*, as well as developed, in the workplace".

Supply-side skills interventions can boost competitiveness and influence individual labour market outcomes; in isolation they have not been sufficient to close the productivity gap with competitor nations (Wright & Sissons, 2012). Research findings (UKCES, 2009; LLAKES, 2012) pointed to:

- a widening gap in the labour market between the number of workers with qualifications at various levels, and the number of jobs that require those qualifications;
- 35-45% of workers with qualifications that are not fully utilised in their current jobs (Wright & Sissons, 2012), but which would be of economic value if they could be put to better use in more demanding roles;
- the tendency for UK employers to require lower educational qualifications for otherwise similar jobs than their counterparts in many other developed countries;
- the slow pace at which UK employers have adopted high involvement working practices, despite long-established evidence that such practices are associated with enhanced levels of productivity and performance.

This provides a partial explanation for the 'British disease'. Even though evidence about the effectiveness of employee empowerment has been around for a long time (Totterdill, 2015), the vast majority of UK companies do not make systematic use of empowering workplace practices. Less than 10% of employees work in self-managing teams, a basic building block of good work organisation (LLAKES, 2012). Less than 30% have a say in how their work is organised. The UK compares unfavourably with several other Northern European countries, against such indicators of employee involvement and participation.

The term 'workplace innovation' is used to describe the introduction of high involvement working practices, empowering employees to release their talent to the fullest possible degree. Workplace innovation now occupies an important place in EU innovation and competitiveness policy, responsible for establishing the European Commission's Workplace Innovation Network[1] (EUWIN) jointly led by TNO and UK WON.

2.2   Defining workplace innovation

Workplace innovation emerged as a unifying concept which brought together work organisation, human resource management and other antecedents (Pot, 2011). It seeks to broaden job roles and employee discretion at individual and team levels, transcend vertical and horizontal demarcations, enable employee-led improvement and innovation, and engage the

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1   http://ec.europa.eu/growth/industry/innovation/policy/workplace/index_en.htm

tacit knowledge of frontline workers as a resource for all levels of decision making. Thus it addresses skills utilisation and development in the workplace. As a recent CEDEFOP (2015) study shows, increasing the complexity of jobs enhances opportunities for workplace learning and development.

Research highlights the importance of internal consistency (Huselid et al, 1997). As Teague (2005) suggests: "Organisations with mutually reinforcing employment practices achieve superior performance as their collective impact is greater than the sum of individual measures." *The Fifth Element*[2] offers a means of providing practical and actionable insights into the research evidence relating to workplace innovation, to enhance productivity, performance and employee health and well-being (Totterdill, 2015).

Extensive survey and case study evidence demonstrates that workplace innovation improves performance and innovation. A review of some sixty US articles shows the effect on efficiency, with performance premiums ranging between 15 and 30 percent (Appelbaum et al, 2000). Extensive Swedish surveys found a very clear link between flexible, participative forms of work organisation and performance: these organisations were more productive (+20-60%), showed a much lower rate of personnel turnover (-21%), and a lower rate of absence due to illness (-24%) compared with traditionally organised operational units (NU-TEK, 1996).

Participative work practices enhance employee motivation and quality of working life, including the reduction of employee stress (Shortell et al, 1994), enhancing job satisfaction and mental health, and improving retention (Borrill et al, 2001). Ramstad (2009a) shows that improvements in quality of working life are associated improvements in economic performance, and may enable them. It can be argued (Totterdill, Cressey and Exton, 2012) that this search for convergence can form part of "a new collective bargaining" in which employees gain trust, empowerment and intrinsic reward, through making their tacit knowledge and creativity available as a resource for organisational improvement and innovation.

If workplace innovation produces tangible economic and employee benefits at enterprise level, it also impacts the labour market and economy. Skills demand is enhanced, because employers need individual workers to embrace wider technical functions and, critically, to enhance generic competencies including problem solving, communication and team working, thereby breaking out of the low skills equilibrium trap.

2.3   The problem

At enterprise level, the limited spread of workplace innovation practices can be understood in terms of several factors (Totterdill, Dhondt & Milsome, 2002; Business Decisions Limited, 2002):

- a tendency to see innovation in terms of technology;
- low levels of awareness amongst managers, social partners and business support organisations;

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2   http://uk.ukwon.eu/the-fifth-element-new

- poor access to methods and resources capable of supporting organisational learning and innovation;
- barriers to the market for knowledge-based business services, and the absence of public support;
- the failure of vocational education and training to provide knowledge and skills relevant to new forms of work organisation.

Resistance to high involvement work practices can be explained in terms of the embedded structures that shape management behaviour. To empower workers, managers may perceive that they have to lose it (Hardy and Leiba-O'Sullivan, 1998), potentially challenging their self-identity and status within the organisation (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Collinson, 2003; Thomas and Linstead, 2002).

The UK enjoys few institutional spaces which enable sustained dialogue and interaction between employers' organisations, trade unions, policymakers and researchers. Ewart Keep (2015) argues that: "the UK turned its back on traditional policy concerns about workplace relations a long time ago ... the underlying assumption was that competitive pressures and managerial wisdom would lead to organisations using workers productively". UK governments have relied on a market-driven approach to workplace innovation, and instigated no policies or programmes to close the gap in productivity caused by the long tail of companies who fail to respond to evidence. This contrasts with France, Germany and some Nordic countries where national and regional workplace development programmes have existed for some decades:

Table 1: Approaches to disseminating workplace innovation

	Market Driven	**State Driven**	**Systemic**
Focus	Enterprise	Enterprise	Industry / National economy
Driver	Business performance	National productivity	National prosperity
Model	Voluntarism Learning transfer	National strategy Workplace projects	National strategy
Enablers	Leadership and management Employee engagement	Employer & employee buy-in based on high trust	Stakeholder engagement based on social partnership
Comment	Weak inter-company learning mechanisms amongst UK companies leading to slow uptake	Strong evidence of impact from other European countries but contrary to market-led ideology in UK	Based on long-term strategic partnerships between government and other stakeholders; such relationships weak in the UK.

Adapted from Wright & Sissons, 2012

European evidence points to the benefits of a systemic, multi-actor approach, based on close collaboration and shared understanding between employers' organisations, trade unions, business support organisations, chambers of commerce and universities (Totterdill et al, 2016). Countries such as Finland, France and Germany, typically combine measures to animate workplace innovation which:

- accumulate, analyse and distribute knowledge of leading-edge practice and evidence-based approaches to change;

- establish closer links between researchers and practitioners;
- use action research to promote workplace innovation;
- develop new learning resources to support workplace change;
- provide knowledge-based business support;
- create inter-company learning networks.

3.   Case Study: The Innovative Workplaces Programme

3.1   The setting

This pilot programme was designed to enhance employee skills utilisation in workplaces through workplace innovation.

Innovative Workplaces was created in a country and a region with little previous history of public policy support for workplace innovation; it will interest other countries with an absence of intervention: the programme produced a substantial return on investment, including well-documented benefits for the participating organisations, their employees and the wider economy. *Innovative Workplaces* demonstrates the potential for effective policy innovation based on collaboration, in this case between an NGO, a national public body, a university and a regional development agency:

UK WON (the UK's Work and Organisation Network) was a not-for-profit body created to disseminate and develop innovative workplace practices, and to stimulate new thinking about the future of work and organisations. Since 2016 it is part of Workplace Innovation Europe CLG[3], a not-for-profit company registered in Ireland with a similar remit at European level.

Acas is a UK government body with a tripartite structure, charged with promoting and facilitating strong employment relations. While much of its work is concerned with dispute resolution, it had become increasingly proactive in disseminating good practice through the provision of training courses, and through instruments such as the Acas Model Workplace[4].

EMDA was the regional development agency for the East Midlands of England, and was established in 1998. It was abolished by the centre-right Coalition government in 2012.

The independent evaluation team at **Nottingham Trent University** (Harris et al, 2011) provided an invaluable source of information for this case study.

3.2   Regional Development and the East Midlands

In England, nine Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) were established in 1998 in fulfilment of the new Labour Government's manifesto commitment. Their legal responsibilities were:

1. to further economic development and regeneration;
2. to promote business efficiency and competitiveness;
3. to promote employment;

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3   www.goodworkplaces.net
4   http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=2806

4. to enhance the development and application of skills relevant to employment;
5. to contribute to sustainable development.

The East Midlands Development Agency (EMDA) was responsible for a diverse region of circa 4.5 million people. UK WON established close links with EMDA, making the case for the stimulation and resourcing of new forms of work organisation as a means of achieving its strategic goals relating to competitiveness and skills. Initially this generated polite interest but no action, reinforcing UK WON's experience that policy makers feel uncomfortable in dealing with work organisation, because it involves challenging management prerogative, can be hard to understand, and does not produce easily quantifiable results (Sisson, 2009). Work organisation occupies an uncomfortable space between skills policy, with its supply-side emphasis, and competitiveness policy which has traditionally emphasised technological innovation and the internationalisation of markets, rather than human factors.

Matters changed when the national policy began to embrace skills utilisation as well as skills supply, and in 2008 EMDA's annual Corporate Plan declared:

"Developing new ways of organising work and utilising more effective deployment of people in the workplace will be needed for businesses to remain globally competitive and ensure business survival. EMDA will focus activity on supporting organisations to stimulate learning amongst their employees and developing collaboration within and between organisations. This activity will seek to change organisational culture and develop strong, inspirational leaders, as well as building effective employee relations."

EMDA commissioned the University of Warwick to explore the relationship between skills and productivity and its impact on regional economic performance (Gambin et al, 2009). The appraisal of the East Midlands economy was of a low skills equilibrium, "trapped in a vicious spiral of low value-added and low skills. Enterprises are staffed by low skilled staff producing low quality goods and services to which the training market responds rationally by providing training aimed at the demand for low skills." Supply side interventions were insufficient to break out of this spiral, "increasing the rate of productivity growth in the region will be dependent upon tackling management capability, innovation, and entrepreneurship simultaneously as a set of inter-dependent issues." EMDA subsequently commissioned Professor Keith Sisson, from Warwick, to advise on work organisation and regional development (Sisson, 2009). Sisson's paper advocated regional policy intervention to stimulate the adoption of participative and empowering working practices, but stopped short of detailed recommendations.

In parallel, EMDA invited UK WON to share experiences of effective interventions to support workplace innovation, in the UK and in Europe as a whole. UK WON's team had previously made use of European Social Fund (ESF) and national funding to experiment with 'collaborative innovation': clusters of circa ten companies engaged in nine or twelve month programmes to support significant workplace change through a tailored combination of taught sessions, action learning, peer exchange and on-site mentoring. The approach was based on earlier experience gained in undertaking formative and summative evaluations of the Irish *New Work Organisation* programme (Totterdill & Sharpe, 1999). It drew on UK WON's growing knowledge of policy interventions elsewhere in Europe, enhanced by a project funded by the South Korean Ministry of Labour which involved detailed case studies of policy interventions in several countries (Totterdill et al, 2009). Cluster-based approaches to support for workplace innovation were increasingly common especially in Fin-

land, France and Norway. Notably Elise Ramstad, a member of the Finnish Workplace Development Programme, showed how a "triple helix" of policy makers, researchers and enterprises working collaboratively had supported innovation at the individual workplace level and built shared capacity to support workplace innovation in the wider economy in Finland (Ramstad, 2009b). In Norway, Bjørn Gustavsen had pioneered collaborative approaches to workplace innovation as architect of the *Enterprise Development 2000* and *Value Creation 2010* programmes, supported by national government (Totterdill et al, 2009).

Previous action research in the National Health Service led by UK WON's Rosemary Exton provided the programme with insights into the potential role of "change entrepreneurs", people empowered to instigate dialogue, mobilise diverse actors and work between formal organisational structures, in securing effective and sustainable change. Individuals need to be able to see themselves as entrepreneurial, and to receive high-level support even when they challenge established practice (Exton, 2010).

During 2008, EMDA invited UK WON to collaborate with Acas in a proposal for a regional pilot initiative, based on its experience of collaborative innovation, UK WON worked closely with the Area Director of Acas in the East Midlands on *Work Organisation for Skills Enhancement*: submitted in late 2008.

EMDA agreed to support the pilot project financially. Funding would be managed by Acas because, by transferring money to another public body, lengthy procurement procedures would be avoided. Acas recognised from the outset that it lacked the internal capacity and the wider expertise in workplace innovation to manage the project on its own. Its internal procurement rules obliged it to seek a delivery partner by means of competitive tender, a process which took place early in 2009, and was won by UK WON. In parallel, a second competitive tender was issued for an independent evaluator, won by the Business School at Nottingham Trent University.

Innovative Workplaces began in June 2009, including the recruitment of ten participating organisations. The final interventions took place in September 2010. In June 2010, the recently elected Conservative / Liberal Democrat Coalition government announced the abolition of the RDAs: this took place on 31 March 2012. The programme intended as a pilot became an isolated case of support for workplace innovation in England.

3.3   Objectives of the *Innovative Workplaces* Programme

The initial proposal to EMDA described the programme as a national pilot project designed to:

- Facilitate long-term organisational change by focusing on developing enhanced management and leadership skills to establish appropriate work organisation, entailing a more committed workforce and increased productivity.
- Capture, record and disseminate lessons learnt and outcomes achieved by participating companies.
- Link the learning of management and leadership skills to practical application in the workplace for mutual benefit, including through career development of the key people.

- Provide a guide to effective organisational change for wider dissemination, based on robust evidence gathered from people and organisations involved in the project.
- Provide an example to other Regional Development Agencies of how Acas, working in partnership with UK WON, can improve productivity and working lives in regional economies.

The project was to benefit a small cohort of business leaders, managers and supervisors across ten organisations, each of which would benefit from long-term organisational change. It sought to break out of the low skills equilibrium by developing and unleashing enterprise skills and competencies of those in work, enabling employees to use their initiative to innovate and create new business strategies and solutions, whilst achieving maximum productivity.

As the architect and delivery partner in the *Innovative Workplaces* programme, UK WON's tender to Acas elaborated these objectives by emphasising the role of action-learning and peer support in encouraging and resourcing organisational change. UK WON argued that the effectiveness of support for companies is considerably enhanced by group-based learning and knowledge exchange, combined with peer-review of change proposals and implementation processes.

As an intended pilot, the programme aimed to capture, record, evaluate and disseminate lessons learned and outcomes achieved by participating companies. These achievements were to be "promoted to policy-makers, stakeholders, and organisations who wish to manage change effectively" while the "economic advantage of enhancing leadership and management skills and work organisation will be showcased."

3.4   Programme Actions

The final evaluation report (Harris et al., 2011) describes the programme of activities:

1. ***Recruiting ten companies.*** In Spring 2009 the opportunity to participate in the programme without charge was advertised through EMDA, Acas and UK WON. A series of open access familiarisation sessions were held for organisations interested in learning more about the initiative. The written application process was light, in order not to discourage applicants. The interview process was robust, to encourage self-assessment and reflection about the suitability of the programme by applicant organisations, while also enabling the assessors to form a judgement.

   A number of organisations from across the East Midlands were invited to face-to-face discussions during May and June 2009, with Acas and UK WON team members. Each set out its objectives in seeking to join the programme and why it would benefit them. They had to demonstrate their commitment to engaging and staying with the programme from start to finish, an important criterion in determining which organisations would be invited to join.

   Eleven organisations were recruited to participate, representing diversity in terms of size, sector and geographical location across the region. Two employees were nominated as "Gatekeepers" by each organisation, to attend the programme and to act as catalysts in developing and implementing workplace innovations with support from Acas and UK WON. One Gatekeeper should represent senior management, lending the

weight of their authority to the change initiative; while the other should be the leading "change entrepreneur", stimulating and steering the process on the ground. Gatekeepers should be proactive individuals who would 'get things done'. One company withdrew from the programme at the beginning of the initial short management and leadership course, leaving ten remaining participants.

2. *Short Course and Action Planning*. An initial short course of three and half days, delivered over three months, was designed to enable participants to:

   a) learn about good practice;
   b) develop their leadership skills;
   c) evaluate their organisations' workplace innovation practices;
   d) formulate an action plan for change.

The short course had been developed by UK WON, and piloted previously with over a hundred organisations in the East Midlands.

Gatekeepers were encouraged to maintain logs throughout the project, to aid reflection and as a record of achievement. Guidance on topics for inclusion in learning logs was provided.

UK WON involved New College Nottingham, a local further education provider, in delivering the course, to be accredited by the Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM). Participants were eligible to receive the ILM Level 3 Award in Leadership and Management.

For those Gatekeepers already well qualified and experienced, the course was designed to help ground pre-existing knowledge in the task at hand; for those without such backgrounds the course provided sufficient actionable knowledge in workplace innovation to inform effective change. The course was designed to orientate Gatekeepers to the core programme values and objectives. The interactive nature of the course built relationships between Gatekeepers from the different organisations, creating the openness and trust required for the subsequent action learning sets.

A summary of the course is presented in the following table:

Table 2: Course structure.

Workshop	Content	Date	Time
1.	**Employment** *Creating a flexible and healthy working environment*	24th June 2009	10:00 am – 4:00 pm
2.	**Skills** *Generating ideas through creativity and innovation*	30th June 2009	10:00 am – 4:00 pm
3.	**A People Centred Approach** *Involving employees through teamwork and partnership*	14th July 2009	10:00 am – 4:00 pm
4.	**Action Plan** *Presentations and peer review*	23rd Sept 2009	10:00 am – 1:00 pm

From the Participant Handbook

Preparation of action plans was a bridge between the course and the rest of the project. The course provided guidance on the content of plans, and further individual support was offered by Acas facilitators. Gatekeepers were encouraged to involve a wide cross section of employees, and this formed part of the discussion during the subsequent peer review process.

Presentation and peer review of the action plans during the final half day of the course in September 2009 started the action learning process. This session was followed in the afternoon by a public event, which attracted some 30 companies from across the region, and included presentations by national keynote speakers and programme participants.

3. *Network meetings and action learning sets*. Gatekeepers took part in monthly half-day network meetings, providing greater understanding in relation to specific aspects of workplace innovation, exploring practical dimensions of the initial course. The content was responsive to needs expressed in the action learning sets and to issues raised by the Acas Facilitators. Network meetings enabled the exchange of knowledge and experience between participants. UK WON organised and facilitated the meetings, some of which were attended by the Acas Project Manager.

Action learning sets facilitated by UK WON enabled participants to reflect on progress, and refine their action plans, based on peer review and the exchange of ideas between Gatekeepers.

This monthly meeting structure provided a framework for reflection on the strengths and weaknesses of existing practices in their organisations, learn from and crucially challenge each other, test ideas and proposals in a safe and supportive environment, and share problems and achievements as their work progressed.

A study visit was organised to a local company known for its self-organised teamworking and continuous improvement methods, providing participants with a real-life example against which to benchmark.

4. *Change Facilitation.* The design of the *Innovative Workplaces* programme recognised the importance of individual support at workplace level, and shared learning provision in securing effective and sustainable change.

In their role as *Innovative Workplaces* Facilitators, Acas Senior Advisors provided practical in-company advice and guidance in accordance with a briefing document prepared by UK WON. In addition to explaining the aims of the project and providing a working definition of workplace innovation, the briefing document summarised the Facilitators' role as follows:

Table 3: Role of the Acas Facilitators

Supporting the preparation of action plans during the course
• Clarifying key messages from the course
• Helping participants to identify underlying causes of problems
• Raising awareness and aspirations relating to the scope of change
• Anticipating and helping participants to address obstacles to change
• Helping Gatekeepers to prepare and present robust action plans.
Supporting the continuing change process
• Mentoring Gatekeepers throughout the change process and helping them to overcome obstacles.
• Helping to maintain employee involvement throughout the process, including the direct involvement of frontline employees in the design and implementation of change, the establishment of inclusive project teams, and the active buy-in of trade unions and employee forums.
• Identifying the need for specialist knowledge, experience or resources and signposting appropriately in liaison with the project managers
• Creating regular spaces for critical reflection on progress involving a cross-section of managers and employees.
Reporting and capturing learning points
• Providing the Project Managers with regular updates.
• Keeping a personal log/diary of key interventions and events.
• Encouraging Gatekeepers to keep records of activities.
• Helping Gatekeepers to prepare progress reports for the action learning sets.
• Helping to identify issues for thematic presentations/discussion during Network meetings.

From the UK WON Facilitator Briefing Paper

Each Facilitator came to the programme with a different level of understanding of workplace innovation. The briefing document and induction meeting played an important role in ensuring that the Facilitators shared a common perspective relating to workplace innovation, and how they could support the development and implementation of action plans in each organisation.

In each case the Facilitator's input began with meetings in the participating organisation to explore and discuss action plans. The Facilitators supported the process of turning ideas and aspirations into practical strategies. In many cases the initial advice was followed by diagnostic workshops and focus groups led by the Facilitator. These generated powerful insights, and provided a sound basis for subsequent development of projects.

The Acas Facilitators provided advice on setting up employee consultative forums, on staff surveys, and on wider policy development. Where specialist workplace innovation advice was required, UK WON provided additional guidance to participating organisations: for example, helping to establish self-organised teams at a manufacturing company.

Acas also made open access training courses available to all the organisations, and in some cases the Facilitator provided bespoke in-company training to support individual projects. One company received training on 'Essential Skills for Supervisors' and 'Training for Workplace Representatives': two others each received bespoke training for their new employee representatives.

5. Evaluation was a key element, not least because it was an EMDA requirement that an independent evaluator should measure programme outcomes. The evaluation led by Nottingham Trent University was interwoven through every aspect of the delivery, diagnostic and learning processes with a view to identifying:

    a) the impact of the programme (including its economic impact) from multiple perspectives within each participating organisation, including specific benefits to participants and their organisations as well as unforeseen outcomes;

    b) the effectiveness of the development interventions such as the course, workplace facilitation and action learning from the perspective of the participants;

    c) transferable lessons for other regions and 'lessons learnt' that might inform future interventions.

6. Dissemination, marketing and publicity activities ran throughout the project. At the outset the emphasis was on attracting and enthusing enough organisations to enable a competitive selection process. During the course of the project the focus was on the creation of actionable knowledge to promote the development of new approaches to leadership and work organisation amongst other organisations in the East Midlands. Later the dissemination focus became national, despite the subsequent demise of the RDAs, targeting policymakers, other stakeholders and employers through events, publications, social media and films[5].

3.5   Impact of the Innovative Workplaces Programme

3.5.1   The evaluation methodology

The approach taken by the independent evaluator focused on:

*   the extent to which intended organisational outcomes were realised;
*   the economic impact and return on investment through performance indicators;
*   the extent to which the wider aims of the intervention had been achieved;
*   the efficiency and effectiveness of the learning and development process and activities.

Interviews took place at the beginning of the programme and six months after it had finished, with a range of stakeholders at each organisation in addition to the nominated Gatekeepers. These usually included a senior manager and/or line manager, an HR manager and an employee representative.

A multi-method research design was adopted to generate both qualitative and quantitative data, to evaluate the programme's impact against its overall aims. Specific outcomes were evaluated from different stakeholder perspectives including:

*   the organisational changes resulting from participation in the programme, including any unforeseen outcomes;
*   the development of the individual Gatekeepers;
*   the extent to which skills and knowledge had been transferred from the Gatekeepers to others within the organisation;

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5   http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=3208

- the extent of sharing learning and knowledge between the Gatekeepers on the programme;
- the effectiveness of the different development interventions provided by the programme from the perspective of the participating Gatekeepers;
- the lessons learnt from the *Innovative Workplaces* programme, in terms of what worked well and less well;
- the cost/benefits to the participating organisations;
- a set of questions designed specifically to calculate the economic impact of the programme.

3.5.2   Workplace innovation in the participating enterprises

All the participating organisations reported that the *Innovative Workplaces* programme had led not only to the achievement of some of the workplace changes sought in their initial action plans, but also to improvements in the wider employee relations climate. For the majority, their aspirations for participation in the programme were achieved, and a range of different, but frequently related, organisational issues were addressed including improved levels of employee engagement, morale, communications between management and employees in different functional areas, workforce flexibility, and the implementation of change.

Respondents from the smaller organisations were especially positive, and more likely to have a shared view within the organisation about the outcomes of the programme and its business benefits. In the SME business context, the impact of what had been achieved was easier to identify and more visible to the workforce. In contrast, the two public sector organisations appeared to experience the most difficulty in clarifying the aims and scope of their action plans at the outset, partly due to the presence of other related, and potentially overlapping organisational initiatives such as a leadership development programme.

Of the eleven companies enrolled, one dropped out at the beginning of the programme, one went into liquidation mid-way through the programme, and one withdrew towards the end for internal reasons. The UK was in recession for almost all of the programme, an economic context reflected both in continuing participation and in the progress of individual organisational projects.

The evaluation report (Harris et al., 2011), summarised key outcomes:

Communication and Engagement

Improved communication was identified by respondents from all the participating organisations as the 'single most important change' resulting from *Innovative Workplaces* by December 2010. This was the view of the managers, employee representatives and the Gatekeepers. In six of the organisations improved communication was identified as leading directly to increased levels of employee engagement. In each organisation, improvements in communication and employee engagement stemmed from the adoption of mechanisms for capturing ideas from the workforce and listening to employees' views. Mechanisms for improving employee voice ranged from the establishment of a workplace forum, to the creation of task groups reporting to a steering committee comprised of both management and employee representatives.

The programme resulted in most of the organisations putting into place mechanisms to stimulate and capture new ideas from employees. The smaller businesses found it easier to provide spaces for generating, exploring and implementing workforce ideas. At five organisations in which Acas set up focus groups, respondents reported increased levels of employee engagement, and a greater willingness to contribute ideas.

The organisational benefits associated with improved communication varied with the issues facing each organisation. For example, participation in the programme enabled one organisation to return to levels of productive, informal communication that had characterised the business prior to its expansion and move to larger premises. At another, participation led to the achievement of one of its main aims in joining the project: a 10 percentage point improvement in the employee engagement score in its annual employee survey.

Managers in half the participating organisations reported that issues formerly referred directly to them were now being resolved at a lower level in the management chain, or by employees themselves. This was identified by respondents as a saving in management time with consequent improvements in efficiency and productivity. Such benefits were identified particularly strongly by participants in the smaller businesses and were seen to be the result of increased employee involvement. One SME manager, a Gatekeeper on the programme, reported a 75 per cent reduction in the time he personally spent addressing workplace disciplinary and grievance issues.

HR policies and procedures

Almost all participants reported the implementation of at least one new or improved human resource policy or procedure, and all had plans for future improvements. The most widely reported were improvements to processes for informing and consulting with employees, and absence management.

Workplace climate

Identifying factors which contribute to improved morale is complex. The majority of respondents identified that workplace morale had improved following participation in the programme, but it was not always possible to identify whether or not this improvement could be attributed directly to it. External events related to the economic climate led to actions such as a pay freeze and redundancies, which made a negative impact on morale.

Management and leadership skills

The majority of respondents felt that improvements in management and leadership skills had happened either partly, or to a large extent, as a result of participation in the programme. Benefits included higher levels of trust between employees and management. This was reported by the majority of respondents, although it did not necessarily represent a shared view of everyone from the same organisation. The reasons for this varied: for example, at one organisation a dispute over pay had led to internal differences between management and employees.

Organisational Change

Innovative Workplaces was held to have acted as the catalyst for organisational change by the vast majority of respondents, the delivery partners and the Acas facilitators.

Key organisational achievements reported by the eight completing organisations:

Table 4: Profile, aims and outcomes of participant organisations.

Organisation	Action Plan	Reported Achievements
Brush Electrical Machines Ltd Manufacturer of heavy electrical equipment.	Improve two way communication. Enhance management awareness of employees' perspectives. Improve employee awareness of management's perspective.	Establishment of a steering committee and focus groups, eg: introduction of lean manufacturing. The introduction of a company newsletter to assist communications. Better equipped to meet the challenges of an increasingly difficult economic climate.
Caterpillar Logistics Warehousing and logistics for heavy plant.	Introduce measures to enhance employee engagement. Increase the employee engagement score in the company employee survey by 10 percentage points. Improve communication between different groups of staff.	Establishment of an Employee Forum. Improved communication between staff groups. Changes to the application of the absence policy. Employee engagement score improved by 10 percentage points.
Liquid Control SME manufacturer of process machinery.	Develop workforce flexibility. Identify skills gaps and employ apprentices to fill the gaps left by employees due to retire. Obtain ISO 9001 by the end of 2010. Undertake a Stress Survey of employees.	Workforce skills analysis. Introduction of developmental appraisals for all employees. Workforce training which has increased flexibility. Recruitment of apprentice(s). Implementation of an employee engagement survey. The introduction of quarterly company meetings. The introduction of weekly departmental meetings.
Northampton College Large public further education college.	Initial action plan – to enhance leadership and management capability. Later action plan – to address issues of employee consultation, communication and involvement.	Outcomes were still evolving at the time of evaluation but were likely to include: Enhanced employee involvement. Development of leadership skills for managers at all levels. The introduction of joint problem solving task groups.
Pendragon Commercial and contract vehicle leasing.	Improve team member engagement. Encourage better team participation & departmental interaction. Improve customer service.	The establishment of an employee forum. Introduction of team building events. Improved employee engagement. Improved employee communication throughout the division. Review and revision of 'housekeeping' policies and practices. Introduction of monthly team leader meetings. Re-introduction of a customer service survey.
Strategic Health Authority Public authority for regional healthcare provision.	Engage staff to maximise the use of the Electronic Staff Records System (ESR). Transfer ownership of personal data to individuals.	Improved facility for 'employee voice'. Increased staff usage of the ESR. Increasing staff ownership of personal development.

Organisation	Action Plan	Reported Achievements
	Enable managers to better maintain employee data. Reduce levels of data handling to enhance administrative efficiency.	More accurate HR information. Improved reliability, productivity and efficiency in the handling of personal data.
The Health Store SME wholefood distributor and warehousing.	Increase employee engagement. Improve two way communication. Establish an employee forum. Elect employee representatives. Encourage employee suggestions for innovation.	Elected and trained employee representatives. Establishment of a joint management and employee forum (production and warehouse areas). Employee representative attendance at monthly management meetings. Improved workplace communication and morale and employee engagement. Significant decrease in the number of disciplinary cases. Improved working practices as a result of employee suggestions.
Thorpe Kilworth SME manufacturer of specialised furniture.	Improve the company's competitive edge. Improve manufacturing efficiency. Enhance employee engagement and communication. Challenge long-held beliefs and working practices.	The establishment of a cross-functional working party. The establishment of a staff consultative forum. The introduction of employee representative training. Enhanced problem solving capability. Re-organisation of the stores Department. Introduction of elements of lean manufacturing and teamworking. Development of an employee engagement survey.

Adapted from Harris et al. (2011)

Personal Development

All Gatekeepers identified personal benefits from participation in the programme as a whole; examples included "more confidence in speaking and chairing meetings", "increased participation in group and team work", "working more closely with senior leaders" and "the ability to utilise tools and techniques". One Gatekeeper was so encouraged and motivated by his introduction "to the world of learning" on the programme that he enrolled on a higher level ILM Level 7 qualification in management and leadership. As he explained: "If it had not been for this project and the insights I gained, I just would not have pursued further development of myself as a manager and I would not be on this ILM Level 7."

The main personal benefits identified by seven of the thirteen Gatekeepers during telephone interviews undertaken as part of the independent evaluation were the ability to "network", and to "share issues, problems and achievements" with other participants on the programme. Learning that other organisations of a different type and size faced similar issues was "reassuring", but also developmental, because the means of addressing these challenges were shared. Several Gatekeepers felt this had "helped their self-confidence", illustrated by the participant who observed that "learning what others were doing helped me to challenge what we were doing". The Acas Facilitators reported that the programme had appeared to boost the self-confidence of the Gatekeepers.

Economic Impact

Nottingham Trent University appointed an independent consultancy (Ecorys) towards the end of the programme, to undertake an analysis of its economic impact using data collated during the evaluation. This reported an overall minimum return on investment of £4 for every £1 of public sector expenditure. Positive impacts were reported in terms of Gross Value Added per employee (including productivity gains) and jobs safeguarded or created.

According to the independent evaluation report, the estimate of economic impact is conservative, because it was not possible to measure all benefits in full. Participating organisations reported that their recession-related difficulties would have been considerably greater without the programme, but were unable to quantify such impacts (Harris et al, 2011).

The overall expenditure by EMDA was relatively high because of the pilot nature of *Innovative Workplaces*. Follow-up programmes would be able to make significant reductions in the start-up and evaluation budgets, leading to an even better return on investment.

3.6   Strengths of the *Innovative Workplaces* Programme

The programme was innovative in several respects. It set out to:

1. ***Stimulate workplace innovation.*** This was achieved in each participating organisation with the most positive gains reported by SMEs.
2. ***Develop management and leadership skills*** through a practical, action-oriented approach, rather than by focusing on theory. All Gatekeepers reported positive benefits.
3. ***Provide a unique combination of formal taught sessions, action learning and customised organisational support.*** Ninety five per cent of participants were satisfied with the general content and delivery of the taught course: particularly so because 'tools and techniques' were provided that could be easily transferred back to the business. The majority of gatekeepers viewed the action learning sets as either 'extremely useful' or 'useful to a large extent'. Most respondents perceived the Acas facilitation to be either 'extremely useful' or 'useful to a large extent' while a minority indicated the facilitation had been 'partly useful'.
4. ***Enable an integrated evaluation of the programme*** as a pilot initiative. The independent evaluation report contains a record of all changes that took place within the participating organisations over the life time of the programme, and followed up six months after its core elements had ceased, captured from the perspectives of multiple stakeholders.

The evaluators stress that the impact of the project arose primarily from "the sum of its parts": the cumulative impact of the course, the network meetings, action learning and on-site facilitation. It was the collaborative nature of *Innovative Workplaces* that underpins each of these elements, specifically the sense that participants were embarking on a common journey despite differences in size, sector and initial motivations. Peer support and networking were especially highly valued, providing an important complement to the ex-

pertise provided by Acas and UK WON. UK WON's role focused on facilitation of shared reflection and dialogue between participants, and on sharing of its own knowledge and experience.

The role of the Acas facilitators was highly valued by most participants since they brought practical tools and resources to the workplace as well as a wealth of experience. Their role differed from that in traditional consultancy, because the individual support took place within a wider context of shared learning, knowledge sharing and problem solving within the participant group. Both the collective and individual elements of the programme played a role in securing the final outcomes for each organisation, underpinning its innovative quality.

The outcomes represent a win-win-win combination of personal learning and development for the Gatekeepers, measurable economic benefits for the company and the wider economy, and enhanced quality of working life for employees.

EMDA funding was one of the programme's clear strengths. Enterprises were not required to contribute financially: this allowed programme partners to be relatively selective in choosing participant organisations with sufficient commitment and focus. Although not required to make a direct financial contribution, the commitment of staff time needed to be substantial if the programme was to make an effective and sustainable impact in each organisation.

Innovative Workplaces drew on the complementary strengths of two highly expert and experienced organisations. Acas as a respected public agency brought enormous credibility, organisational strength and project management effectiveness to the programme, as well as the operational expertise and experience of its team. UK WON, although a relatively small NGO, brought strong experience of previous initiatives to the design of the *Innovative Workplaces* programme, international knowledge of workplace innovation and a practical approach to its implementation.

3.7 The scope for improvement in the Innovative Workplaces Programme

The independent evaluation report identified no significant weaknesses in either the design or implementation of the programme, a view shared by the Acas and UK WON teams. Most Gatekeepers were entirely satisfied with the programme's structure and content; a few made specific recommendations, aligned with the reflections of the delivery partners.

Reflections by the UK WON team included the following ideas for improvement in subsequent programmes:

- Allow more time to recruit; this was constrained due to the budgetary timescale. UK WON suggested that a self-assessment questionnaire could be used during the recruitment process to help applicants clarify their objectives, providing the opportunity for internal reflection and dialogue on the outcomes sought from participation.
- Provide more detailed information about the programme once the Gatekeepers had been selected. There was a lack of knowledge about workplace innovation and what it involved, due to insufficient internal briefing from those who took part in the selection process.

- Build commitment from senior managers at the outset. This might have been articulated at the selection stage, but there were instances where it was not evident when the workplace project got underway. This situation was exacerbated by changes in senior management during the programme in some cases. Senior management support was identified as a critical success factor by the Acas Facilitators.
- Introduce mechanisms to discuss progress with senior management, throughout and beyond the project, to sustain momentum and overcome obstacles, for example periodic meetings.
- Extend the short course throughout the life of the programme, emphasising practical tools and means of overcoming obstacles during its latter stages.
- Ensure greater consistency of workplace innovation knowledge and expertise amongst Acas Facilitators.

Innovative Workplaces broadened the scope of Acas's traditional activities and, according to the independent evaluation, undertaking the Facilitator's role was described as "personally developmental" and "very worthwhile". Facilitators reported that they had welcomed the opportunity to work collaboratively, and in depth, with organisations. Having a long time to support workplace projects was seen as an opportunity to make a difference. A key learning outcome lay in the importance of "getting to grips" with the culture of the organisations and the pace at which progress could be made.

The following issues were identified by the Acas Facilitators as areas for attention in designing a future initiative:

- Ensure that Facilitators are more aware of the other elements of the programme. This might include their participation in a comparable short course, as well as better communication between action learning set deliberations and the onsite support.
- Put in place agreed 'terms of reference' for each workplace project before it began, signed off by senior management with the involvement of the allocated Facilitator. This would address the issue of senior level support. Many projects made slow progress in the initial months and 'getting things started' absorbed Facilitator time at the beginning of the programme.
- Involve the Facilitators as early as possible in any future programme, so that they could develop their relationship with the organisations they were to work with as well as an understanding of its issues and culture.
- Consider how facilitation experience and skills can best be developed, particularly in terms of the ability to be flexible, innovative and resilient when things did not go to plan, or organisations are less responsive than anticipated. The level of expertise for the role varied across the team. Sharing learning and specific experiences were considered a vital part of developing appropriate facilitation skills.
- Provide inputs from another experienced Facilitator, including their presence at meetings in the workplace, where there were difficulties or a lack of progress. Some organisations had two Facilitators working with them; this overcame some issues faced by a lone Facilitator.

4. *Innovative Workplaces* as a generative resource for the design of future initiatives

Innovative Workplaces was created in a national and regional context with little history of policies or programmes designed to support workplace innovation. The opportunity to create the programme arose from three factors:

1. Growing policy awareness at national and regional levels of the importance of skills utilisation as a factor in determining productivity and economic growth. At the same time policymakers lacked a clear strategy for addressing the issue, creating an opportunity for policy innovation.
2. The existence of EMDA as an economic development agency with sufficient discretion to commit resources to an innovative pilot programme.
3. UK WON's history of policy advocacy with EMDA, its previous experience in designing and delivering workplace innovation initiatives, and the reputation and expertise of Acas.

These factors each have a bearing on the potential for transferability to other countries. Only a minority of countries and regions currently enjoy proactive policy frameworks designed to promote workplace innovation: these exist in the Basque Country (Spain), Finland, Flanders (Belgium), France, Germany, Norway, Singapore, South Korea and Sweden (Totterdill et al., 2016; Alasoini et al., 2017), whilst in Denmark such initiatives lie within the scope of its social partnership framework. Elsewhere, as in the UK, workplace innovation tends not to be recognised in either skills or competitiveness policy frameworks: this may present a barrier to transferability.

Where public bodies are open to policy innovation, they may be receptive to evidence of the business and wider economic benefits generated by *Innovative Workplaces*, not least because of the positive return on investment generated for EMDA. To make effective use of this evidence, such bodies require the ability to transcend traditionally separate policy domains such as skills and competitiveness, as well as access to discretionary funding and a recognition that many of the workplace benefits generated by the programme will be qualitative, as well as those that are quantifiable.

The third factor relates to workplace innovation expertise, and this requires some caution. Workplace innovation programmes, including *Innovative Workplaces,* draw on expertise and experience accumulated over lengthy periods of time. Such expertise is distinct from that normally offered by universities, because it is action-oriented rather than theoretical, but it is distinct from most consultancy because it is grounded in research evidence, and directed towards root causes and structural change rather than topical intervention. The answer may lie in international exchanges of expertise in which potential facilitators visit countries with longer experience of workplace innovation initiatives for training and development, followed by continuing mentoring after their return home. Collaborative projects which combine national and international expertise may also be helpful.

Following the abolition of EMDA and the disappearance of comparable regional development funding, lobbying and the dissemination of *Innovative Workplaces* outcomes failed to secure the continuation or upscaling of the programme in England. In 2013 how-

ever, UK WON was contacted by senior officials in the Scottish Government, which enjoys extensive devolved economic development powers from the UK, leading to dialogue concerning the policy benefits of workplace innovation. Working in close partnership with stakeholders including employers, unions, universities and NGOs, the Scottish Government launched major policy initiatives focused on Fair Work[6] and Inclusive Growth[7]. A report by researchers at the University of Strathclyde (Findlay et al., 2015), and engagement with international partners including UK WON, led to the announcement by Scottish Enterprise (the country's major economic development agency) of a portfolio of workplace innovation measures [8]. In addition to a programme of awareness raising and informal advisory services, the portfolio includes the pilot *Workplace Innovation Engagement Programme*, directly informed by *Innovative Workplaces* and led by UK WON's successor, Workplace Innovation Europe. Scotland's embrace of workplace innovation as a key component in its national economic and employment strategy is remarkable and welcome, not least because it stands in distinct contrast to the *laissez faire* policy tradition south of the border. The UK Government's draft Industrial Strategy[9], produced in response to the economic problems anticipated in the wake of Brexit, pays little attention to workplace issues.

Three further notes of caution are required in addressing the design of future policy measures.

Firstly, policymakers need to adopt a long term perspective. The impact of programmes in countries such as Finland, France and Germany is closely related to their longevity, in some case covering more than four decades and representing a political consensus that creates resilience even when governments change. Policy funding cycles of two, three or even five years create uncertainty and lead to an overemphasis on short term delivery rather than building sustainable capacity. The legacy of *Innovative Workplaces* was lost in the East Midlands, because no mechanisms were put in place by government to ensure that the knowledge and experience generated by the programme were taken up by the wider public policy community. While the *Workplace Innovation Engagement Programme* is also a pilot, Scotland's approach, embedded within the wider Fair Work and Inclusive Growth policy frameworks, looks more sustainable.

Secondly, Ramstad's article, cited above as a source of inspiration for *Innovative Workplaces*, draws attention to the importance of the wider social learning generated by such programmes (Ramstad, 2009b). Experience from Finland and elsewhere shows that long term dissemination impacts are enhanced when a wider body of stakeholders are actively involved in programme implementation; these stakeholders include employers' organisations, chambers of commerce, trade unions, professional bodies, universities and other public agencies. This helps to ensure that workplace innovation forms a common agenda with a shared vocabulary amongst stakeholder, creating consistency in communication with enterprises and their employees. Scotland's approach to the promotion of workplace innovation is grounded in an explicit commitment to shared learning, both across the public sector and with the wider body of stakeholders.

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6   http://www.fairworkconvention.scot/
7   http://www.gov.scot/Topics/International/Europe/Policies/Inclusive-Growth
8   https://www.scottish-enterprise.com/knowledge-hub/articles/guide/workplace-innovation
9   https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/building-our-industrial-strategy

Thirdly we must consider 'transferability'. *Innovative Workplaces* was created within a specific context, responding to needs and opportunities identified in one region. This case study has identified the broad characteristics and outcomes of the programme, in the hope that *Innovative Workplaces* can become a generative resource for policy innovation elsewhere, but this will need to be grounded in its own specific economic, social, political and spatial setting. While *Innovative Workplaces* informed the design of the *Workplace Innovation Engagement Programme*, it was not a blueprint.

5.   Conclusion

Innovative Workplaces was aligned to Werner Fricke's advocacy of "many low-intensity cases generated by a great variety of actors . . . (integrating) the ideas and interests of as many regional stakeholders as possible" (Fricke and Totterdill, 2004, pp 4-5). It brought a public agency, an NGO, a regional development agency and a university together in an action-oriented coalition, leading to tangible business and employee benefits in several participating organisations. Findings and experiences were shared widely, with other regional stakeholders and nationally. It failed to create a sustainable momentum in the region, because it was built on a fragile policy base, not embedded in mainstream strategy and vulnerable to political change.

The experience and evidence generated by the programme were picked up by policymakers in Scotland actively seeking to learn from diverse sources. Nottingham Trent University's robust qualitative and quantitative evaluation of *Innovative Workplaces* provided evidence which enabled policymakers in Scottish Enterprise to advocate and defend its broad approach, and to adapt it to the Scottish context.

The Scottish *Workplace Innovation Engagement Programme* embeds shared learning from its predecessor in its design; the involvement of the UK WON team in implementation enables the application and further development of the tacit knowledge acquired previously. The challenge will be to ensure that the wider body of stakeholders in Scotland, including trade unions, employers' organisations, companies and researchers, become part of an extended learning and knowledge-sharing community able to increase the "many low-intensity cases"

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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 participacion 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, aa Investigación-Accion 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 capataces 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 teorias 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

connected, because they understood organisational action research as an inquiry by creating changes through participation. In order to find out what this means in practice, the article analyses a series of experiments conducted at Harwood, a textile factory in Virginia, from 1939 to 1946. It discusses if and eventually how participation was enacted in the organisation and in the research process.

The Harwood studies have been understood as the beginning of both organisational development theory (OD) and organisational action research (Burnes, 2007; Marrow, 1969, 1972; Pasmore & Fagans, 1992; Van Elteren, 1993; Zimmerman, 1978). They have also been considered important, because they moved Lewin's research in group behaviour from university laboratories to organisations and played a part in developing his understanding of change (Burnes, 2007).

A new agenda was set at Harwood, which was characterised by experiments in participatory management, semiautonomous groups, and democratic leadership style. As action research, it strove not only for understanding, but also for making changes in the organisation.

The article examines if and eventually how the workers participated in these organisational experiments in the action research process. Based on this inquiry, it presents two points of view.

Firstly, it demonstrates how participation occurred to a certain degree in the Harwood organisation as workers' codetermination in group discussions and decision making based on management experimenting with participative management. The phrase 'to a certain degree' indicates that participation was restricted to discussions of and decisions on ways to increase efficiency, i.e. to 'how' questions of means and methods. The overall goal of increasing efficiency through changes in work group dynamics was determined by management and the action researchers. We interpret Lewin and his associates' understanding of participation as involvement, primarily, i.e. as a managerial tool allowing the workers some kind of co-influence in order to increase efficiency (cf. section III and IV). Thus organisational action research seems to have started as a form of organisational development study (OD) (Burnes & Cooke, 2012). On the other hand, the experiments were visionary. They took place in a time dominated by Taylorism, where workers were told, not asked.

Secondly, the article shows that the research process was enacted primarily as collaboration between researchers. The workers participated in the researcher's field experiments by providing data to the researchers. Apparently, questions of involving the workers as codecision makers in the research process were not raised. The workers contributed as producers of data, not as co-producers of knowledge in the research process. Thus, action research meant that the experiments were moved from university laboratories to the Harwood factory.

We combine these two points of view with a discussion of Lewin's understanding of planned change, which has been criticised for being linear and causal. We conclude that Lewin does not acknowledge a discrepancy between emergence and plan, and that he only talks about planning the first step in action research projects. Finally, we position his understanding of participation and change within a philosophy of science framework, where we discuss his concept of action research as applied change-oriented social science based on a natural science foundation.

Why deal with past organisational action research history at Harwood?

We are not sure that children learn from their parents' experiences. Perhaps grandchildren do? We are not convinced that new generations of action researchers learn from past experiences and history. So why write about early organisational action research experiments at Harwood, Virginia, USA in the 1940's? Is there something to learn when reading about these experiments that took place in the southern part of US, in very different historical contexts a long time ago? We hope two learning points will inspire possible readers. The first point deals with the concept of participation in relation to organisations and research processes; the second with silent questions (see below).

The Harwood studies highlight that questions of participation and efficiency are not new in organisational action research. They have been an issue since the early 1940's, where the Harwood studies examined if it was possible to increase organisational efficiency by experimenting with participative management, semiautonomous groups and democratic leadership style. This article shows that at Harwood, organisational action research started as OD. It describes an instrumental understanding of participation in organisations where workers were involved in discussions of how to implement decisions already made by management and action researchers. Finally, it shows that participation in research meant collaboration between researchers. As researchers within organisational action research, we have come across similar understandings of organisational action research as OD, as instrumental participation with limited employee voice, also in our own work.

During our reading of the Harwood studies, we began asking a number of questions which we missed in the experiments. The questions grew out of our practices and curiosity as organisational action researchers. We call them silent questions. We think the following examples can be read as silent questions in the Harwood studies: What was the scope of the workers' participation in the experiments? Could they say no to participate in the experiments? Did they have a voice in the research process? Who decided whom to include or exclude in the research processes? We began to wonder why the researchers did not mention that action research primarily meant collaboration between researchers, because five years later, Lewin included course participants at a summer school as co-producers of knowledge in research reflections (Kleiner, 2008).

How do you look upon and write about past action research history?

Silent questions imply issues of power, because they ask who has the power to define the agenda of interpretation (Bryld, 2017). While writing this article, we began reflecting on our own power as writers of action research history, what did we choose to in- or exclude in the article? We also began discussing how as researchers, we read and evaluate experiments that took place at Harwood 70 to 75 years ago.

We call our way of approaching past sources critical empathy. Empathy does not mean becoming identical with the other, but balancing between familiarity and difference. It means balancing between looking at the past from within the context of that time, and simultaneously from within one's own context. Critical means that you question their and your own basic assumptions. This definition of critical empathy sounds as if it is possible to distinguish between looking at the past and the present. However, concepts, methods, and the-

ories of that time have had an impact on our own work as described in Gadamer's (2004) principle of 'history of effect' ('Wirkungsgeschichte'). In this way, we share Gadamer's assumption that melting horizons is about cognition as a form of recognition. Simultaneously, this demands that as researchers we try to transcend our own self-referentiality (Kristiansen & Bloch-Poulsen, 2004) and avoid translating and judging the past solely by present standards.

The concept of participation

'Participation' is an ambiguous concept which is susceptible to several interpretations. Different definitions reflect different enactments of power. The article conceives participation as enactment of power in organisational action research processes between managers, employees, and action researchers with conflicting or different interests. With Foucault (2000) and Giddens (1981, 1984), we understand power as a basic component of social practice (Giddens) and social relation (Foucault). Frequently, participation is defined as 'taking part' (Pateman, 1970; Wenger, 1998). Often, in action research, the purpose of participation is to involve different forms of knowledge other than academic knowledge, in order to reach a better understanding of and ways of coping with a problem (Heron & Reason, 2008).

In principle, participation in organisations can be mapped as a continuum from taking part via co-influence to co-determination and full control (Wilkinson, Gollan, Marchington, & Lewin, 2010). It reflects different power balances between management and workers. Simultaneously, some meanings refer to individual participation and others to group participation; some to formal, union-based participation and others to informal participation; some to processes and others to results. Budd, Golan and Wilkinson (2010) excerpt the following quote from Heller, Pusić, Strauss & Wilpert (1988, p. 15) in their research:

Definitions of participation abound. Some authors insist that participation must be a group process, involving groups of employees and their boss; others stress delegation, the process by which the *individual* employee is given greater freedom to make decisions on his or her own. Some restrict the term 'participation' to formal institutions, such as works councils; other definitions embrace 'informal participation', the day-to-day relations between supervisors and subordinates in which subordinates are allowed substantial input into work decisions. Finally, there are those who stress participation as a *process* and those who are concerned with participation as a *result* (p. 364).

Similarly, Wilkinson and Dundon (2010) state that participation has different denotations in various countries, and that there are many different forms and methods:

However, we find employers in different countries use the same terms for employee participation (engagement, voice, involvement, or empowerment) in different ways. Some forms of direct participation coexist and overlap with other techniques, such as suggestions schemes, quality circles, or consultative forums (p. 167).

Nielsen (2004) introduces a distinction between participation and involvement. Participation denotes a bottom-up movement towards increased co-determination and democracy. Involvement is defined as a managerial tool where employees are asked to contribute to, e.g., hearings and consultations within areas delimited by management. Organisational action research is always a managerial tool, because it tries to contribute to some kind of improved efficiency.

Ideally, in our own organisational action research, we define the concept of 'participation' as identical with co-determination both in organisations and in research processes (Kristiansen & Bloch-Poulsen, 2011, 2012, 2014). Participation does not denote situations where employees do not co-decide if an action research process is going to take place;

where they do not co-decide the goals or the design of the process; where they only deliberate and present suggestions, but do not become direct partners in decision making processes; or where they take part in experiments decided by management and researcher. Thus, we do not think that co-influence and taking part are enough to qualify as participation. However, because we work within a capitalist economy, we think there are inherent tensions between participation and efficiency. Participation in organisational action research is always connected with efficiency. As such, organisational action research is also, but not only OD. Participatory projects will always balance between human dignity, improved work satisfaction and economic efficiency. They will necessarily include some kind of involvement. So, we do not consider there is an either-or distinction dealing with either co-determination or co-influence, tertium non datur. We think it is a question if organisational action research is in practice participatory, too, or if it is primarily involvement, no matter how it is categorised by the researchers.

The article consists of the following six parts: An introduction presenting purpose, points of view, questions of learning from history, and the theoretical concepts of participation (section I). It is followed by a presentation of the Harwood studies (section II) and a description of the experiments at Harwood (section III). This provides space for a discussion of the degree of participation in the organisation and the research process (section IV), and of Lewin's understanding of change (section V). Finally, we relate his concept of participation and change to an overall philosophy of science discussion of his conception of action research (section VI).

II.   The Harwood studies

Action research at Harwood

The Harwood Company, which produced pyjamas, was situated in New England. In 1939, it opened a new factory in Marion, a small town in a rural area in Virginia. Harwood was a family business in which Alfred J. Marrow was the third and last generation who worked as a CEO. In 1934, Marrow met Lewin in connection with his master studies and invited him to visit the factory in 1939.[1]

The workforce at Harwood consisted of unskilled female workers who had no previous experience of working at a factory (Marrow, 1969, p. 141). In particular, the factory had problems dealing with low efficiency and high personnel turnover compared with the factory in New England. Lewin did not understand these problems from an individual-oriented perspective. He saw them in relation to the foremen's behaviour and the existing work load. By doing so, he placed the problems within an organisational context and advocated the factory initiated its own research programme.

Although Lewin himself did not conduct the research at Harwood, he participated in a number of meetings at the factory (Marrow, 1969, p. 143). Alex Bavelas and John R. P.

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[1]   Marrow was educated as a psychologist and worked as a CEO at Harwood. Later, he became a member of executive committees of various organisations, e.g. MIT. In this way, Marrow became a central figure in developing OD in the US.

French, two of his former Ph.D. students at the University of Iowa, conducted the research while Lewin worked as a sparring partner (Burnes, 2007, p. 216). Marrow (1972) and Lewin described the research at Harwood as action research:

We agreed that the emphasis was to be on action, but action as a function of research. Each step taken was to be studied. Continuous evaluation of all steps would be made as they followed one another. The rule would be: No research without action, no action without research (p. 90).

This was probably the first time Lewin's view on action research was tried out in organisations outside university laboratories. At Harwood, action research was conducted as a dual process.

Several experiments were initiated to solve some concrete, organisational problems at the factory. Earlier change processes had resulted in lower productivity and high personnel turnover when workers were moved to new tasks which they did not manage as well as the ones they were used to (Marrow, 1969, p. 149). Simultaneously, a research process evaluated continuously how these experiments worked in the organisation (Burnes, 2007, p. 217). Thus, action research became research on how changes were working, i.e. research on the organisational conditions of changes and on how these changes were being carried out. At Harwood, changes were initiated and decided by management and action researchers. Later, we will return to how increased involvement of workers in their daily work seems to be part of the solution at Harwood.

Silencing of Harwood Studies

The Harwood studies are seldom mentioned in connection with the experiments and theories which traditionally are regarded as the basis of organisational development (OD), such as, e.g. the Hawthorne studies, Maslow's pyramid of needs etc. (Burnes, 2007). This is strange, because the Harwood studies ended in the expected results about a positive relation between, e.g., participation and productivity, while the results of the Hawthorne studies about a positive connection between the quality of work relations and productivity were produced by coincidence. Moreover, some researchers claim that the experiments at Harwood have had a greater influence than the Hawthorne studies on OD in developing the concepts of participative group processes, participative management, and resistance against change (Dent, 2002).

Sources

The article is based on primary and secondary sources. Lewin did not write in length on the Harwood studies. Thus, our work draws on several articles written either by Lewin in cooperation with his former Ph.D. students, or by these students themselves to document the Harwood experiments and put them into perspective (Lewin, Lippitt & White, 1939; Lewin & Bavelas, 1942; Lippitt & White, 1947; Coch & French, 1948; French, 1950). We also draw on Lewin's (1947a, b, c) three articles on group dynamics to define his views on participation, action research and change.[2]

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2   We do not address the question if Lewin developed the three steps change model (unfreezing, change, re-freezing) normally ascribed to him (Cummings, Bridgman & Brown, 2016).

The article draws on other articles and books as well. In a biography of Kurt Lewin, Marrow (1969) wrote about the Harwood studies in a chapter titled 'Action Research in Industry'. Later, he wrote a chapter titled 'The effects of participation on performance' (1972). Burnes (2004, 2007) describes how the Harwood studies contributed to the ways Lewin developed his theories of the field, group dynamics, change, action research and democracy. In contrast to Burnes (2007), Moreland (1996), Adelman (1993) and van Elteren (1993) argue for a critical perspective on the Harwood studies.

III.   Experiments at Harwood

Marrow (1969, p. 217) writes that the Harwood experiments dealt with the following:

- group decision (Bavelas)
- self-management (Bavelas)
- leadership training (French)
- changing stereotypes (French)
- overcoming resistance to change (French & Coch).

We follow this sequential order in the subsequent parts below, but we do not deal with questions of changing stereotypes, because we consider this subject less relevant for the purpose of the article.

Experiments with participative group decisions

Bavelas performed repeated experiments with a small group of the most efficient machine operators. During a period of 5 months, he had a series of 30-minute-long informal conversations with these operators:

Therefore, in 1940–1941, when Bavelas was asked to conduct experiments to increase productivity, he was already primed to use a group-based participative approach. He selected a small group of the company's most productive operators and met with them several times a week. These were brief, 30-minute, informal meetings. The group was asked to discuss the barriers to increasing production. They began by discussing their individual working methods. In so doing, it became clear that workers doing the same job often used different methods. The group talked about why this was so and the merits and drawbacks of their different approaches. They also identified changes that the company's management would need to make to improve productivity. These were accepted by the company (Burnes, 2007, p. 218).[3]

Bavelas used various methods such as group discussions and voting of suggestions. The machine operators discussed their individual work methods and the differences between them, the pros and cons of these methods as well as necessary changes in the organisational work flow. These methods stemmed from an earlier experiment with three different leadership styles (autocratic, democratic and laissez-faire) (Lewin, Lippitt & White, 1939). Apparently, this method contributed to solving problems with decreasing productivity. Burnes (2007, p. 218) adds that Bavelas tested Lewin's hypothesis of group discussion as being in-

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3   Unlike us, Burnes has had direct access to the archives of the Harwood studies. We have chosen, therefore, to use his transcripts of archive documents in this section.

sufficient unless such discussions were concluded with democratic decisions. Thus, workers had to have both a voice and choice (Cornwall, 2011). This could anchor changes because they were 're-frozen' by group decisions:

Lewin explained, 'Motivation alone does not suffice to lead to change. This link is provided by decisions. A process like decision making, which takes only a few minutes, is able to affect conduct for many months to come. The decision seems to have a "freezing" effect which is partly due to the individual's tendency to 'stick to his decision" and partly to the "commitment to a group"'(Marrow, 1969, p. 144).

We shall return to Lewin's (1947a) conceptualisation of change in section V. Bavelas' experiments represents a dilemma. Seen from a 1940s perspective, they were far ahead, because the workers codetermined the means. Seen from our present view, we notice that management decided the goals, and that Bavelas chose the design and the participants.

Experiments with leadership training and participative management

Lewin's (1946) theory consists of a combination of research, action and training. It includes training of consultants and action researchers. At Harwood, there also seems to be training of managers in participatory democratic management (Burnes, 2007). Here, the researchers started to inquire into the connection between participatory democratic management and productivity. This implied training of the managers' interpersonal communication skills, as these were considered important for group dynamics. Bavelas and later French (1945) were in charge of this training which, according to French, was based on the following principles:

- Managers are not to be given lectures or attend classes. They are to participate in a clinic, i.e. to train
- Training is emergent
- It is problem oriented
- It uses role play
- There is continuous follow up between training meetings.

Burnes (2007) gives this account based on transcripts from the training sessions:[4]

At Lewin's suggestion, French initiated an experimental leadership training programme for all line managers. The first set of six training sessions was conducted by French between December 7, 1944, and January 25, 1945. French introduced the first session by saying, 'What we will try to do is make it not a lecture, not a class, but a clinic where we will bring in the problems that are bothering us for discussion.' He then asked the participants to address three questions:

1. What is the most frequent problem you meet? I don't mean problems that have to do with the machines or sewing in a straight line, but the personal problems that bother you.
2. What is your most difficult problem?
3. What is the most distasteful problem you meet?
The answers provided the basis for two role-play exercises, the objective being for them to gain insights into their own and other people's behaviour (J. R. P. French, 1945). In the following sessions, various other scenarios were enacted, and between meetings the participants would try out different approaches to the problems they faced, and the results of these would be discussed in the following training session (p. 220).

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4   The following information is taken from the notes of these sessions in the Marrow papers in the Archives of the History of American Psychology.

It is our interpretation that these experiments point at a certain ambiguity in the first line managers' or foremen's co-determination. On one hand, we think French's distinction between class/lecture and clinic/training is a modern understanding of the relationship between learning, emergence and planning within organisational action research, especially when the year (1945) is taken into account. It seems that the first line managers themselves are responsible for defining the problems that obstruct productivity. As late as the 1990s, we have encountered first line managers in Denmark who considered such an understanding of the relationship between learning, emergence and planning as too unstructured and radical. On the other hand, apparently, first line managers were not asked if they wanted to participate, or what they would suggest as the goal of the change process. The goal of the change process seems to have been stated by top management (Marrow) and the action researchers (Lewin, French). The goal concerns the first line managers implementing a more participatory, democratic management style.

Experiments overcoming resistance to change

After Lewin died at the beginning of 1947, Coch and French (1948) worked with experiments trying to overcome resistance to change, here French served as a researcher and Coch as a personnel manager. The workers were against frequent job changes implying new job functions. The company wanted the action researchers to develop methods to cope with and counteract this kind of resistance to make sure that changes did not result in a decrease in productivity (Burnes, 2007).

Coch and French (1948) and later French (1950, p. 88) used what they called a 'democratic participatory method' to overcome this resistance. They set up some experiments to test how you can reduce the probability of resistance to change. Coch and French (1948) used groups with three different kinds of participation to inquire into the relationship between participation and resistance. They found that there seemed to be an inversely proportional relation between participation and resistance. French (1950, p. 90) concluded that after the changes, not only was productivity of the three types of groups proportional to the degree of participation, but the amount of aggression expressed towards management and the turnover rate also varied inversely with the degree of participation.

Coch and French (1948) wrote that they drew on Lewin's work and his understanding of resistance. Lewin emphasised that it is not the single worker, but rather a field of coherent forces and conditions that might prevent change processes. Thus, Lewin's concept of resistance does not relate to an individual-oriented approach, but rather to an understanding of the field or the organisational context.

These experiments placed the relation between participation and involvement as an item on the agenda and raised a silent question of the degree of participation in the research process. It seems that French and Coch were alone in designing these experiments. We have not found sources indicating workers acting as co-designers of research processes. In our own projects, we have been struggling with tensions between participation and involvement. We have often asked: "Do we only involve employees in experiments which we have already decided with management?" Apparently, French and Coch do not reflect on this. The silencing of possible tensions in the Harwood studies can be interpreted as a power question. As such they are important when talking about what we can learn from history.

History encompasses both what is spoken and unspoken (Bryld, 2017). Based on our own experiences as action researchers, we have learned from what the Harwood researchers do not talk about, from what in a sense is not there, and from what they actually talk about. We consider this to be an example of enlarged empiricism, so to speak.

Adelman (1993) presents a critical discussion of Lewin's contribution to the origin of action research, problematising his direct linkage between organisational action research, efficiency, and democratic participation: 'Action research was the means of systematic enquiry for all participants in the quest for greater effectiveness through democratic participation' (p. 7).

IV.   Discussion of Lewin's view on participation in organisations and in research processes

This section focuses on participation in organisations and in research processes. Participation in organisations deals with the relation between democratic participation, styles of management and productivity. This includes practical how-questions such as does this work, is it actionable? Participation in research processes questions if and how workers participate in researcher-driven experiments. This includes theoretical why-questions such as why do we experience connections between these two parts? We discuss both fields in relation to tensions dealing with questions of power and in- and exclusion.

Below, we discuss the Harwood experiments in relation to Lewin's understanding of participation, change and action research. We also draw on the researchers who conducted the experiments at Harwood. We acknowledge that it is not possible to equate their practice with Lewin's theoretical understanding, and that participation, change, and action research can only be differentiated analytically.

Three basic issues dealing with participation and involvement

In retrospect, the Harwood experiments raise three basic issues dealing with participation and involvement. The first is about if the researchers think the workers are going to have both voice and choice in decision making processes. As mentioned earlier, Bavelas tested Lewin's hypothesis that it was not enough to discuss and present suggestions. Discussions must result in democratic decisions in order to become embedded. The second issue deals with how the researchers examine participation as involvement by focusing on emergent and problem based processes where workers contribute with their experiential knowing. The last issue is about how the researchers understand the workers' so-called resistance against change. Do they understand them as individual-psychological and/or as work-related reactions? Lewin argues in favour of a systemic or field based understanding.

Maybe, it is the first time in early action research history that researchers ask these basic questions. When seen within their own contemporary historical contexts, we think they are answered in radical ways that anticipate later discussions in action research history. Does participation as involvement deal with voice and deliberation, i.e. with co-influence? Or does it deal, too, with voice combined with choice, i.e. with co-determination? Is it in general possible to plan action research ahead? Is it only the initial phases of an action research project that

can be planned? Or is action research always about emergent and experiential processes? Can action researchers use theories developed in advance like, e.g. theories of resistance, to understand present reactions among workers? Or do they try to make sense of them by talking with the workers, relating their experiences to the field and asking new questions.

The Harwood researchers do not call attention to their radical ways of doing action research. Then, it was not possible for them to know what their work was going to mean for posterity and us. To a higher degree, they focused on how democratic methods could become a means to increase organisational productivity, i.e. on classical OD question.

Participation as involvement and/or as humanising processes at Harwood?

Already in 1920, Lewin (1920) wrote about the psychological meaning of work for the workers:

Erst eine genaue Untersuchung der seelischen Faktoren der verschiedenen Arbeiten vermag überhaupt die konkrete Aufgaben und Ziele der Erhöhung des Lebenswertes der Arbeit im einzelnen herauszustellen, die dann, sei es direkt mit psychologischen Mitteln, sei es durch allgemein technische Verbesserungen zu lösen wäre (p. 20).

We think Lewin's understanding of "der Erhöhung des Lebenswertes der Arbeit" can be interpreted as a humanising approach where work has a value in itself and not only as a means to increase productivity.

In his writing, French (1950) raised a major question dealing with a possible connection between democratic methods and productivity in the Harwood experiments. He understood democracy as co-determination, meaning that it was the group of workers who decided the methods rather than the foremen or the managers (p. 84). Apparently, democracy and co-determination become identical. In this way, French seems to understand democracy in organisations as a means to increase productivity.

Coch also conducted an experiment to examine the relation between democratic participation, work methods, and productivity. Coch wrote about 'a total participation technique' as 'the highest form of participation' (French, 1950, p. 90). This meant that the groups were being told why change was necessary and that they participated in developing new methods and in setting their piece work rates:

… all members of the group received an explanation of why the change was necessary, and participated in designing the new methods and setting the new piece rates (p. 90).

Thus, it seems as if 'the highest form of participation' meant that the workers exerted an influence on means and methods, but not on the goal which had been decided in advance. These experiments resulted in 'an increase in production, reaching a level of approximately 15 per cent higher than their production before the change' (French, 1950, p. 90). Apparently, goals such as change of jobs or increase in productivity were taken for granted as points of departure. This is also evident in a distinction French (1950) makes between laboratory and field experiments where he understands the latter as a means to solve practical goals in organisations:

… the dominant objective of industry is production and this objective cannot be subordinated to the research objectives of a field experiment … Most fundamentally, it must render a service which helps the practitioner to achieve his practical objectives (p. 91).

French (1950) adds that it is not only about an increase in productivity, but also about an increase in job satisfaction through participation:

> Not only was the productivity after change of the three types of groups proportional to the degree of participation, but the amount of aggression expressed towards management and the turnover rate also varied inversely with the degree of participation. Thus we see that greater participation leads to both greater productivity and greater satisfaction in the group (p. 90).

We are inclined to assess the relations between managers and workers as more complicated than hinted at in the quotation above. Less aggression towards management might, e.g. reflect that workers suspect action researchers will proceed to inform top management, and thus they withhold their criticism. Less personnel turnover might contribute to both an increase and a reduction in productivity. It might also reflect that job opportunities are poor in the local neighbourhood. Thus, we are not convinced that less pronounced aggression and lower personnel turnover can be interpreted as valid indicators of higher job satisfaction in work groups.

Summing up, workers participate in discussions and co-determine methods and means to obtain goals and changes decided by top management in advance. Democratic participation seems to work as a means to increased efficiency in these experiments. Based on this reading, it is our interpretation that participation works as involvement rather than as a humanising process in the organization. Thus, it seems like Lewin's original humanising agenda disappears to the benefit of an efficiency agenda at Harwood. As mentioned earlier, this points, too, at organisational action research starting as a kind of organisational development studies (OD).

Workers as collaborating partners in the research process?

If we turn from participation in the organisation to the research process, a key issue that emerges is determining whether the workers and foremen worked as collaborating partners, or as producers of data in the researchers' experiments.

In 1920, Lewin (1920) criticised Taylorism for turning informants into guinea pigs ('Versuchskarnickel'). He distinguished between misuse of workers within Taylorism and psychological experiments trying to develop trust in informants:

> Bei den Psychologen, die in Deutschland übrigens dem Taylorismus aus sozialpolitischen Gründen immer mit Misstrauen begegnet sind, beginnt sich die Erkenntnis Bahn zu brechen, das eine fruchtbringende Untersuchung des Arbeitsprozesses der Unterstützung, ja der direkten Mitarbeit des Arbeiters bedarf. Wie bei psychologischen Experimenten überhaupt, so besteht auch hier eine wesentliche Aufgabe der "Versuchsperson" darin, "Selbstbeobachter" zu sein, d.h. Aufschluss geben zu können über die näheren Eigentümlichkeiten ihrer Arbeitsweise unter bestimmten Versuchbedingungen. Der Arbeiter braucht darum nicht zu befürchten als Versuchskarnickel in schädigender oder entwürdigender Weise missbraucht zu warden (p. 19).

An important question emerges. It deals with what collaboration between researchers and workers means and how it is practiced. Are the workers only meant to give the researchers 'Aufschluss', i.e. information, data etc.? If we examine Bavelas' experiments with participatory group decisions, they point at the researchers selecting a group of the most productive operators. Not all of the workers are involved as members of the groups or in deciding how these will be composed. Apparently, they were not asked if they wanted to participate, or what they would suggest as goals. Co-production of goals does not seem to have been an is-

sue. We think an important learning point is implied in these silent questions. They point at how the research process works as exercising powers. Generally speaking, workers and foremen contributed to the research process, by participating in experiential and problem-based group discussions and decisions which formed the basis of the researchers' choosing the next step in the research process.

Lippitt (1947), Lewin's partner, wrote that Lewin began to conceptualise collaboration between researchers and workers as an intimate co-operative relationship between two skilled groups of practitioners and researchers:

… Kurt Lewin came to see more and more clearly the necessary relationship between action personnel and research personnel in carrying out fruitful experimental designs … It became obvious to him that for many types of experimentations a very intimate working relationship between highly skilled social practitioners with an interest in research and highly skilled researchers with an understanding of social action was necessary (p. 90).

Here, Lippitt sketches some suggestions of understanding collaboration in the research process as more than taking part in the researchers' experiments. Moreover, Marrow (1969, p. 88) gives many examples of how Lewin practiced brainstorming (in German 'Quasselstrippe') and dialogue, not only with his students, but with everybody he came into contact with. Many of the persons interviewed in Marrow's biography emphasise how Lewin related spontaneously and engaged democratically with other people. Therefore, we assume that Lewin had a special gift or competence of relating and creating inspiring spaces of inquiry in research processes.

Although the intimate working relationship between skilled groups of researchers and practitioners that Lippitt mentions might have been present in these experiments, we did not find evidence of workers being involved in the research process, or instances in which the absence of the workers' participation as decision makers in the research process was mentioned as a limitation or a problem.

Van Elteren (1993) offers similar reflections on limited participation:

A closer look at the successive experiments reveals that in each case a predetermined goal by management was at stake with which the researcher(s) and the group leader(s) seem to have agreed (p. 346).

In this action research also a certain 'domestication' of the workers took place … due to participative methods within the tradition of 'democratic social engineering', to which Lewin committed himself soon after his arrival in the USA (p. 351).

We have not been able to find examples of analyses that show how the collaboration process was performed in practice either in the organisation or in the research process. Thus we are not able to assess if 'domestication' actually occurred. We think that workers might, e.g. have developed their technical or personal competences during the experiments, but we do not know.

Participation and power in the organisation and in the research process

Basically, the degree of participation in organisations and in the research process can be conceived as a question of power, regardless of whether participation is being understood as influence, involvement, or co-determination. Who defines the change agenda? Do balances of power between owners/managers, action researchers, and employees change during the process? Who is being in- or excluded (Clegg & Haugaard, 2009; Gaventa & Corn-

wall, 2008; Kristiansen & Bloch-Poulsen, 2014; Lukes, 2005)? Van Elteren (1993) claims that the Harwood studies meant domestication and taming of workers rather than liberation or emancipation. Similarly, Adelman (1993) claims that Lewin and his partners did not address questions of economic power relations between managers and workers:

However, Lewin's ideas on democratic participation in the workplace did not include any critique of the wider society, particularly the range of economic relations between worker and employer, capital and labour. Indeed a fair observation would be that although Lewin and his co-workers demonstrated the efficacy of action research for improving productivity, they did not develop conceptual structures that took explicit account of the power bases that define social roles and strongly influence the process of any change in the modes of production (p. 10).

Lewin, a Jew who had left Germany in 1933, was theoretically and practically occupied with social discrimination. This is manifest, for example, in his theoretical understanding of members of the board of directors, CEOs etc., working as gatekeepers in organisations with the power to decide whom to in- or to exclude (Lewin, 1947b):

Gate sections are governed either by impartial rules or by 'gate keepers'. In the latter case an individual or group is 'in power' for making the decision between 'in' or 'out'. Understanding the functioning of the gate becomes equivalent then to understanding the factors which determine the decisions of the gate keepers and changing the social process means influencing or replacing the gate keeper (p. 145).

Thus if we think of trying to reduce discrimination within a factory, a school system, or any other *organized institution*, we should consider the social life there as something which flows through certain channels. We then see that there are executives or boards who decide who is taken into the organisation or who is kept out of it, who is promoted, and so on. The technique of discrimination in these organisations is closely linked with those mechanics which make the life of the members of an organisation flow in definite channels. Thus discrimination is basically linked with problems of management, with the actions of gate keepers who determine what is done and what is not done (p. 146).

It is obvious to ask which gatekeepers have the power to in- or exclude (which) participants or workers during a process. However, we did not find examples or cases where Lewin or his colleagues applied this view on power to understand what happened between managers, action researchers, or workers in the organisation or in the research process during the Harwood experiments. However, we found examples from the summer school of interracial relations at Bridgeport, Conn. in 1946 where Lewin and his colleagues at first accepted a single participant, and then all participants, to join evening staff meetings as co-learners in which they and the researchers discussed experiences from the daily workshops (Kleiner, 2008). The participants included, e.g. their own experiences also when these contradicted the researchers' assessments. So in this case, research became participatory. Did Lewin have the power as a gatekeeper to include the participants in the research process at Bridgeport in contrast to his possibilities at Harwood (Kleiner, 2008, p. 26)?

Preliminary findings

At Harwood, management decided the goals of change, e.g. an increase in productivity, and the workers had a voice and choice in the means or the methods used to carry out these changes. Thus, participation became involvement.

In the action research process, top management and action researchers decided the goals and designed the experiments. Workers and foremen did not co-determine the goals or the design and evaluation of the project. They took part in the research process by giving infor-

mation and feedback in research-based experiments decided by researchers and management. When applied to workers and foremen, participation meant taking part in something. As mentioned, we do not have primary sources to document what actually happened in practice. Overall, it is our interpretation that the Harwood experiments and early organisational action research can be described as a limited and consensus-based form of participation.

However, if we assess this degree of participation from the perspective of that time, we are convinced that the experiments embodied early and radical innovations (Burnes, 2007). Within the Tayloristic paradigm prevalent then, workers were not asked, they were told:

Therefore, for the way that organisations would be managed, Harwood marked the point at which the era of autocratic management started to give way to the more participative approaches that began to characterise academic thought and managerial practice in the 1950s and 1960s (Burnes, 2007, p. 228).

If we assess participation from our present perspective, based on 30 years of working as action researchers in private industries and private and public knowledge organisations, we think employees to-day in general would not accept never being able to co-determine the goals of a change process. If this is not the case, they would probably experience themselves as guinea pigs. We have learned that it is important to start our action research projects by asking the employees: 'What do you want to improve or change, if you want to change anything at all'? (Dalgaard, Johannsen, Kristiansen & Bloch-Poulsen, 2014).

V.   Discussion of Lewin's theory of change between planning and emergence

Lewin (1947b) understands change processes as the object of action research. The results of action research are obtained by studying experimental change processes with three foci of attention:

This type of experiment, whether laboratory or field experiment, has as its objective the study of three situations or processes, namely: (a) the character of the beginning situation, (b) some happenings designed to bring about certain change, (c) a study of the end situation to see the actual effect of the happening on the beginning situation. A diagnosis of the before and after situation permits us to define the change or effect; studying the happening should be designed to characterise the factors which brought about the change (p. 151).

The diagnosis of the beginning situation includes an analysis of the forces that promote or hamper a change process. It is Lewin's point of view that poor influence of the workers and authoritarian management telling workers what to do seems to hamper changes in an organisational context. In contrast, a high degree of worker participation and corresponding participative management are forces promoting and anchoring change processes. Thus, there is an intimate connection between Lewin's field theory about forces at play in the field, group dynamics, change, and action research.

A diagnosis allows for a plan. As far as we can see, this is the basis for Lewin's (1947a, b) idea of planned change. Planned change can be understood as the opposite of dictated change. The latter is the type of change where management presents the goal and tells the workers how to go for it without further explanation. This seems to take place without previous managerial reflections on the conditions of the change processes, i.e. without considerations of forces promoting or hampering change.

Lewin's theory of planned change has been criticised for being mechanical, linear, monocausal or short-term intervention (Kanter, Stein & Jick, 1992, p. 10; Greenwood & Levin, 1998, p. 18). The term 'planned' might produce such connotations. Lewin (1947b) defines 'plan' and 'planning' in this way:

It is important, however, that such a plan be not too much frozen. To be effective, plans should be 'flexible'. The flexibility of plans requires the following pattern of procedure: Accepting a plan does not mean that all further steps are fixed by a final decision; only in regard to the first step should the decision be final. After the first action is carried out, the second step should not follow automatically. Instead it should be investigated whether the effect of the first action was actually what was expected (p. 147–148).

Apparently, Lewin does not comprehend planning and emergence as opposites, he views them as being related. Only the first step in an experiment is or can be planned. After this, researchers must pay attention to feedback from the action, i.e. pay attention and react to emergent facts:

To be effective, this fact-finding has to be linked with the action organisation itself, it has to be part of a feedback system which links a reconnaissance branch of the organisation with the branches which do the action (p. 150).

Moreover, Lewin (1947b) does not comprehend social life as linear; he views it as being circular and analogue to physical, self-regulatory feedback systems:

Organised social life is full of such circular channels. Some of these circular processes correspond to what the physical engineer calls feedback systems, that is, systems which show some kind of self-regulation (p. 147).

Based on our reading of Lewin's own writings, we do not think that the criticism of Lewin's change theory for being stationary, and implying you can make changes from a stable reference point, is valid (Kanter, Stein & Jick, 1992). In contrast with such criticisms, Lewin (1947a) wrote about 'Quasi-stationary equilibria in group life'. In this connection, he adds that group life is never stationary:

Change and constancy are relative concepts; group life is never without change, merely differences in the amount and type of change exist (p. 13).

VI.   A philosophy of science discussion of Lewin's view of action research

A change-oriented social science on a natural science basis

In this section we will discuss experiments, participation, and change in relation to a philosophy of science view on Lewin's understanding of action research. Lewin's theory of action research is part of a coherent theoretical whole consisting of his field theory and theories of planned change, social conflicts, and group dynamics (Burnes, 2007). Lewin (1947b) comprehends action research as a certain kind of social science. Action research has grown from simply describing social problems to trying to change them and has developed methods for carrying out this endeavour. Thus, action research is research that deals with social actions and changes:

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. 150).

Research in social changes is being conducted as experimental research and has moved from university laboratories to the field. Like French (1950), Lewin (1947b) makes no basic distinction between experiments in or outside laboratories, e.g. in organizations:

Field experiments are basically not different from laboratory experiments. An experiment as opposed to a mere descriptive analysis tries to study the effect of conditions by some way of measuring or bringing about certain changes under sufficiently controlled conditions. The objective is to understand the laws which govern the nature of the phenomena under study, in our case the nature of group life (p. 151).

These two forms of research distinguish themselves in regard to location, but not in regard to understanding research or methods. They both make use of controlled laboratory studies testing the effects or results if a researcher alters some independent variable. When Bavelas, e.g. altered the degree of participation in groups, he inquired into the difference between discussions and decision making in groups in relation to anchoring of changes. Correspondingly, French (1950) examined the relation between making use of democratic methods and productivity, where democracy referred to group co-determination as opposed to managerial decision making:

So the first step was to study the effect of one aspect of the total complex we call democracy—namely, decision making by the group rather than by the leader (p. 84).

The overall purpose, both in the laboratories and in the field, is to understand the laws regulating the relations tested in the experiments. This takes place through an inquiry process including fact finding, feedback, and learning. Fact finding means testing the effects of different independent variables. As such, fact finding produces feedback when evaluating experiments. As a corollary, this means that action research works as a learning process, as is evident in the following Lewin (1947b) quotation:

Realistic fact-finding and evaluation is a prerequisite for any learning … To be effective, this fact-finding has to be linked with the action organisation itself: it has to be part of a feedback system which links a reconnaissance branch of the organisation with the branches which do the action (p. 150).

Lewin (1947b, p. 152) underscores that every action research program must be guided by a precise description of the necessities of the organisation. Thus, he argues that action research must be contextualised and anchored in the organisation.

Overall, his version of action research can be comprehended as change-oriented social science on a natural science basis, which he describes as 'social engineering'. As natural science, action research endeavours to explain 'if-so' relations between cause and effect. What is, e.g. the effect on productivity if management at Harwood starts practicing participative management? Action research is a specific form of social science. In addition to enquiring into and describing relations, it also tries to create social change. This occurs by using new methods, such as, e.g. participative group decisions and participative management. These social techniques are used within a natural science framework, where the researcher conducts controlled laboratory experiments in order to test his or her hypothesis stated in advance. In this way, it is possible to try to formulate general laws.

Action research as the social engineer's applied science

Accordingly, the Lewinian version of action research can be interpreted as a form of applied science in which the researchers contribute to solving organisational and social problems by using a pre-established hypothesis about cause and effect. We understand this as a 'positivistic science of change'. This concept is both a contradiction and perhaps the most precise characterization of Lewin's scientific approach. Lewin (1947b, p. 147, 150) used the term 'physical engineer' as an analogy, i.e. a social engineer working on a systemic rather than on a traditional if-so basis. When applied to the Harwood case, this could mean that the social engineer makes drafts for plans after the overall goal of a change process has been decided in cooperation with top management. The workers or the first line managers seem to have no influence on the design of the research process or on deciding the goals. It looks as if there is no room for participation here.

Later, Habermas (1963, p. 257) criticised the concept 'social engineer' for being an expression of the colonialisation of social science by a technical-rational reason-based approach. Habermas' criticism does not refer to Lewin and cannot be applied to understand his thinking. Even if Lewin's early humanisation endeavour in the 1920s seems to give way to an efficiency agenda at Harwood, his willingness to include the participants at the interracial summer school in Connecticut in 1946 points in the opposite direction.

Lewin's (1947b underscored that action research on the social life of groups is ideally carried out as group research or as co-operation between researchers:

Research in group dynamics is, as a rule, group research ... One cannot overemphasise the importance of the spirit of co-operation and of social responsibility for research on group processes (p. 153).

Lewin points at co-operation between researchers, but not at co-operation between researchers and workers in the research process. It looks as a limited form of participation that only includes the researchers. As mentioned, Lippitt emphasises that Lewin was about to develop a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the cooperation between researchers and so-called practitioners in the research process, just before he died.

Though we acknowledge that positivism was the dominant paradigm in the 1940s, we are surprised by the apparent difference between the radicalism of Lewin's theoretical understanding and his use of natural science experiments. Lewin's theory of group dynamic is, e.g. marked by a broad and complex understanding. It conceptualises groups in organisations based on a holistic perspective focusing on many interacting forces. These groups are seen as contextually anchored in the organisation; as more than the sum of individuals; as potentials for solving social conflicts through democratic discussions; and as feedback systems and learning. This theoretical understanding points towards systems theory, cybernetics, a holistic comprehension of groups and learning theory. It differs from the use of researcher-designed experiments in organisations as in a natural science study which we understand as an example of change-oriented positivism if we use a contradictio in adjecto.

Marrow (1969) argued that Lewin's social psychological approach broke with mechanistic principles of organising in organizations:

… Lewinian methods helped the shift of industrial management from mechanistic engineering approaches to social-psychological concepts. The great interest in recent years in the humanization of industry stems in large measure from Lewin's emphasis on the dynamics of groups at work (p. 151).

Lewin (1947b) pointed at a series of challenges for researchers that we think are relevant today:

The social scientists, perhaps more than the natural scientists, have to learn to be unafraid and at the same time fair-minded. To my mind, fair-mindedness is the essence of scientific objectivity. The scientist has to learn to look facts straight in the face, even if they do not agree with his prejudices. He must learn this without giving up his belief in values, that is, without regressing to the pre-war cynicism of the campus. He has to learn to understand how scientific and moral aspects are frequently interlocked in problems, and how the scientific aspects may still be approached. He has to see realistically the problems of power, which are interwoven with many of the questions he is to study, without his becoming a servant to vested interests. His realism should be akin to courage in the sense of Plato, who defines courage as wisdom in the face of danger (p. 153).

It is our interpretation that at the beginning of the Harwood studies, Lewin showed this kind of courage. Where Marrow, the CEO, tended to explain low productivity, high rate of absenteeism and personnel turnover as dependent on the personalities of the female workers, Lewin questioned if the managerial style of the first line managers and the work pressure might have a significant influence.

These kinds of questions, in which action researchers problematise basic assumptions, are also critical today. In our opinion, there is a heritage to live up to after Lewin, because class conflicts and other differences of interest seem to give way to so-called dialogue based consensus thinking: long ago, for example, the term 'worker' was substituted by 'employee'. In line with the broadening of so-called autonomous teams, self-management, knowledge work and New Public Management 'employee' seems to be about to be replaced by 'stakeholder', which implies working on an equal footing with other stakeholders, e.g. managers, shareholders or political decision makers. When using this discourse, differences and class antagonism seem to be dissolving. Thus, to-day, we think it is necessary that organisational action researchers enact a kind of Lewinian courage by addressing such differences and opposites. We hope this might contribute to preventing them from being deported to cultures of silence (Freire, 1970) and reducing action research to a means, contributing mainly to productivity increases by practicing participation only as involvement in line with other organisational development theories (OD).

Lucio (2010) presents three reasons why participation understood as involvement has become a central item on today's political agenda:

… participation … is seen as an essential ingredient of the way organisations may harness employee creativity and commitment for the cause of economic success … Second, participation facilitates a sense of belonging amongst workers. It responds to a sense of justice in that one is addressed less as an employee and more as part of an organization, as a stakeholder … Third, the role of participation is critical in terms of legitimacy … Participation allows management to be seen as justified and reasonable in its actions (p. 105).

Conclusions

Our homage to Lewin and his colleagues is based on their courage of questioning basic assumptions. Besides, we think they were ahead of their time: they involved workers in deciding means and they let workers participate in practical training sessions, not in lectures at a time dominated by Taylorism reducing workers to muscular appendances to machines.

On the other hand, we have argued that their concept of participation can be questioned, and that there seems to be a discrepancy between their democratic and participatory discourses and their practice. Firstly, we have shown how participation is practiced as instrumental participation, i.e. as involvement or a managerial tool. Workers are involved in suggesting means of fulfilling efficiency goals decided by management. Thus, it seems difficult to make a distinction in practice between early organisational action research and organisational development studies (OD). Secondly, participation in research processes meant that workers and foremen provided data and feedback to the researchers. We did not find any reflections on workers being able to participate as co-producers of knowledge. Thirdly, we have shown how Lewin and his colleagues conceptualised action research as applied, change-oriented social engineering based on a natural science paradigm. This, too, contributed to reducing the scope of participation, because goals, design, and evaluations were decided in advance by top-management and action researchers.

We think the Harwood case and Lewin's concept of organisational action research leave modern researchers in the field with a question: is it possible to balance participation and involvement, and if so, how?

Acknowledgement

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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 programme[1] 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.

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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 (Engelstad and Gustavsen, 1993).

Given recent political events, 20 years of neoliberal attacks on civil society and the re-emergence of the radical nationalist political right, it could seem that the industrial democracy and enterprise development programmes in Norway and Sweden were naïve about the possibilities for participatory democracy and social solidarity. If we believe that, nothing prevents us from joining a race to the bottom in a global dystopia. The cataclysms of the 20th century showed us where the bottom is and repeating that would be a major human tragedy. Like Werner, I choose to believe that professors, academic administrators, and students would be happier, more effective, and make better contributions to civil society if universities were organised as participatory democracies. Currently they are increasingly structured as if they were neo-Taylorist investment banks operating mainly for the benefit of a few senior administrators and their private and public sector allies.

I am not naïve about the situation. I have watched some academic stars climb over colleagues and practice an academic version of the free agency of professional athletes. I have dealt with some academic administrators who are so power hungry that they enforce their will by promoting conflicts over resources within their universities because these conflicts allow them to operate as apparent referees. They really are disengaged, self-interested, well-paid bosses. I have watched students trudging from one department to another and from one professor to another, while receiving "deposits" of unrelated and indigestible bits of specialised information imparted by non-interacting professors from disciplines that do not speak to one another[2].

Consistent with Norwegian and Swedish experiences, I do not believe that these selfish and organisationally destructive behaviours reveal unchangeable laws of human nature. The root causes of these ills are a combination of organisational pathologies driven by power hunger, greed, the repression of academic freedom, and the imposition of neoliberal meritocratic regimes in academia and beyond. My analysis is inspired by the same democratic intellectual and political traditions that Werner Fricke has worked in for so long. My focus is on universities but, in my view, the current degradation of universities is a key example of the pathologies of neoliberalism when applied to any kind of public or private sector service organisation.

Power, inequality, and conventional academic social research in the organizational environment of the neoliberal university

Conventional social research approaches fit into and support different power structures and construct social persons of quite different types (Holland and Lave, 2009). For this essay, I focus on the direct relationship between positivism, Taylorism, and authoritarianism and

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2   The elements of this critique are not new or unique as the extensive bibliography in Levin and Greenwood, 2016 shows. Bourdieu made many of these points in *Homo Academicus* in 1988 (Bourdieu, 1988). The difference in our argument comes from the industrial democracy and enterprise development experiences, especially from "socio-technical systems design" (van Eijnatten, 1993). We link these pathologies to the neoliberal reorganization of universities as neo-Taylorist hierarchical, authoritarian systems, something the earlier literature does not engage.

the pacification of academic social research as a silent partner of neoliberalism, specifically in the context of universities as organisations.

Academic social scientists are trained in, and mainly obey, the hegemonic disciplinary structures in their universities. Many of those employed by or in the private and public sector generally view their work as fee-for-service analysis and "decision support". In both cases, rocking the boat with democratically-inspired social critiques or actively promoting social reforms, even in the flush times of academic, private, and public sector growth after World War II, is rare and is often punished (Ross, 1992; Furner, 2010 [1975]; Price, 2004). The exception was the short interlude in the late 1960's. The immediate sequel was the neoliberal Thatcher/Reagan counter-attack and the collapse of social democracy as we had begun to know it.

The academic silos that straitjacket academic behaviour are not accidental products of history. They are the result of an authoritarian system of management and control to manage and channel knowledge creation and dissemination in socially-passive directions. The positivist and quantitative theoretical and methodological choices that have led the social sciences into a socially-passive role did not take place in an organisational or political vacuum. Despite this, relatively little sustained organisational analysis has focused on these organisational choices. The abundant critiques of the disciplinary sclerosis of academia, the inability to study multi-dimensional systems problems, the constant and unheeded calls for multi-disciplinary research do very little to pin down the causes of these problems (e.g. Krause, E., 1996) and the forces that sustain them.

Decrying the political domestication of the disciplines, and the role of disciplinary territorialism is commonplace. Its history is too long to tell here (Ross, op. cit.; Messer-Davidow, 2002; Madoo Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley, 1998; Price, D. op. cit). Denunciations of the negative effects of disciplinary silos abound (Messer-Davidow, op.cit.) but the explanations for the institutionalisation of these silos are few. In contrast to the critiques of Taylorism in industrial organisations, explaining how we academics came to live in such a dysfunctional organisational system has been little explored. Some exceptions I know of are Christopher Newfield's, *Ivy and Industry* (Newfield, 2004) and Chad Wellmon's *Organizing Enlightenment* (Wellmon, 2016).

Another part of this story is told in a less direct fashion in Dorothy Ross' *The Origins of American Social Science* (Ross, op. cit.). Ross' history sets the stage by narrating the origins of the various social sciences and history as academic specialties in the US within the broader field of political economy in the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century. She also chronicles the domestication of these new social sciences and history by means of often brutal political repression.

Newfield adds the important insight that universities adopted the Tayloristic manufacturing model as their organisational system at the founding of the research universities (starting with Johns Hopkins University). This makes cultural/historical sense, because of the hegemony of Frederick Winslow Taylor's "scientific management" in both the organisational life of major companies and in the public imagination (Banta, 1993) at that time. In addition, at the time, research universities were basically elite institutions for the children of the wealthy and powerful. The public university systems had yet to really make their mark, and so the Tayloristic model was set by the elite private institutions.

Wellmon's book adds a crucial dimension to the story because it helps explain how a group of smart and educated academics came up with an organisational system that is so dysfunctional. Those of us who are dissatisfied with the disciplinary bunkers, the self-regarding, competitive behavior of the disciplines, sub-disciplines, and the academic departments they spawn have not offered solid explanations for these organisational ills and their persistence.

Understanding this requires starting from the premise that the real world is a complex, dynamic amalgam of interacting open systems. Therefore, dividing the world into non-interactive specialised boxes to study how it works is a fool's errand. Weldon, given this background, explains how and why academia went on this fool's errand, by detailing the problem the disciplines were created to solve.

Simplifying his interesting argument, Wellmon holds that prior to the emergence of the disciplines, the organisational model for knowledge organisation and transmission was encyclopedic. This meant that scholars were not specialised. Rather they attempted to organise and keep track of the broad array of emerging knowledge by publishing encyclopedias of human knowledge. The difficulty was that knowledge generation had multiplied exponentially with the emergence of the print media. Ultimately, the project of keeping track through comprehensive encyclopedias was bound to fail. Wellmon documents the various attempts to make the encyclopedias work and how they increasingly failed to accomplish their goal.

This dilemma motivated the search for organisational solutions capable of handling the explosion of knowledge generation, of organising, documenting, and critiquing knowledge with the requisite training needed to evaluate what was being learned, etc. Not surprisingly from about 1860's on, the solution hit upon was precisely the same one used to organise the emergent mass production system industrial manufacturing: Taylorism. Universities divided the real world into specialised subject areas, assigned each those areas to academic specialists, organized the specialists into separate academic units (the disciplines and departments), and set up a chain of command that forced all the units to report upward toward the institutional apex. The hidden assumption was that this would add up magically to a "universal" understanding of the way the world works and what it all means. This classification of knowledge in silos gave us the disciplines that dominate academia worldwide now. Predictably, the consequences have been negative for both knowledge generation and teaching. These negative consequences are also the reason that the critique and reforms advocated by the industrial democracy movement are relevant to university reform and reconstruction.

The disciplinary solution was aimed at managing an increasingly complex and diverse array of knowledge and techniques, to make them fit into some kind of orderly academic command and control structure. While this organisational decision might not have appeared to be misdirected at the time, importing the Tayloristic industrial model into academia had nefarious organisational and human consequences. Rather than universities being a community of scholars students, and staff members, this organisational design converted them into an array of separate and often competing constituencies, departments, fields, divisions, and colleges engaged in academic commodity production. Each of these units has to have and defend clear boundaries, a leadership structure, hierarchical internal organisation, a history, and internal quality controls. All the stakeholders were and are disciplined to follow a

meritocratic path in their behaviors, to eschew solidarity, and to follow orders. Organisationally, each of the units so created operate in relation to the other units around them. Professors are managed from above by being encouraged to fight intellectual and political incursions by non-specialists, and to compete for resources with each other meaning that collaboration in studying large system problems is all but impossible.

I want to emphasise here that, as a work organization, this university transformation did not create real Taylorism. Rather it created a simulacrum of Taylorism that Levin and I call "Neo-Taylorism". Individualised experts in bounded units report upward to a boss (dean), who report upward to a central administration, that reports upward to a board of governors, and perhaps state authorities of various sorts. Resource allocation decisions flow from the top down. Decisions are made by bosses who are remote from the organisational contexts they control. Units are discouraged from co-operating, and any emergent coalitions among them are treated as a threat to the system. Most key decisions about academic life and the all-important allocation of institutional resources are made by people remote from the academic world they dominate, on the basis of poor and even erroneous information. These academic leaders are increasingly parachuted into the universities by executive search services, and are on a purely administrative personal career track, jumping from one institution to another.

We call this simulacrum of Taylorism Neo-Taylorism for various reasons. First, we learned long ago that the Tayloristic industrial commodity production fails when applied to any service organisation where the product is not a "thing" but services and relationships. Universities are service organisations. For the most part, they are not commodity producers but rather service providers that teach, conduct research, and engage in writing. We do not build cars, new forms of elastic for underwear, athletic shoes, or the latest video games. These services we provide do have a market and quality of service matters but the Tayloristic commodity production model does not work in this context. In education, the general service sector, and in the public sector, good quality human services and education, not commodity production, are the goal and product, not commodities (Behn, 2001). A brief look at the empty generalities about what universities do that are regularly produced by the senior administrators and policy makers show that they actually have no idea what their "product" is. Taylorism and neoliberal management without a clear product is "Neo-Taylorism".

Trying to make this simulacrum of Tayloristic commodity production work has given rise to a mass of accountancy/accountability measures. These pseudo-scientific methods obscure the radical inappropriateness of this design. They allow incompetent leaders to pretend they know what they are producing, and justify the authoritarian exercise of power that is the inevitable consequence of neoliberalism. Since Thatcher and Reagan, neoliberals have tried to convert education and social services into fee-for-service commodity production to make money for the wealthy, and lower the taxes the wealthy pay at the same time (Espeland and Sauder, 2016). They have done so at the expense of universities serving as sites of significant social mobility and as training grounds for the next generation of participants in civil society.

These approaches have been a disaster for students, professors, and social service users and for education in general. The winners have been the accountants, administrators, sponsors of the accountability systems, the private sector beneficiaries of the public goods purloined from universities (that were paid for by public taxes), and the politicians who use

these measures to coerce organisations while they profit from pretending to live in a perfect *laissez-faire* world.

These simulacra have created a set of organisational pathologies. Here my narrative now links back to Werner Fricke and the industrial democracy movement. The industrial democracy movement demonstrated clearly that Taylorism was an inefficient, anti-democratic, and unsustainable industrial system that created a poor quality of work life and shoddy products. They demonstrated that it could be changed successfully to be more democratic and humane, while also being just as or even more productive.

In the case of universities, because academic knowledge is not similar to manufactured goods, the imposition of Taylorism in academia actually is based on a double error: the application of a coercive industrial model, and the application of this model in a non-industrial service setting. None of what universities do is captured in the concept of a commodity, no matter how much the neoliberals want to believe it is possible and a good idea. Using surrogate numbers to pretend these activities create a "product" (e.g. numbers of publications, prestige of journals and publishers, number of citations) does not work. The experience with these procedures shows that they promote a competitive race to the bottom in which individual students, academics, departments, colleges, and universities all pit themselves against each other in a zero-sum competition, as a way of acquiring resources at the expense of competing individuals and units (Brenneis, Shore, and Wright, 2005).

The most important organisational decisions are made by leaders who do not perform the services involved and increasingly lack the expertise to do so. The key producers of education and the key consumers of education (the students) and the public have little say about how these universities operate. To be blunt, this "accountability" is a fraud. In this segmentary, adversarial system, the main beneficiaries are the well-paid leaders who run the system and their increasing armies of accountants, deans, "deanlets", "deanlings", enrollment managers, secretaries, building managers, etc. and the private sector actors who benefit from the stripping of public goods from universities. They are only accountable to themselves and their political backers.

Thus, the Neo-Tayloristic university created under neoliberalism is inherently dysfunctional. Since the dysfunctionality of the Tayloristic model of organisation of industrial production was the driving force behind the emergence and early successes of the industrial democracy movement (Trist, E., and K. Bamforth. 1951; Emery, F. 1959; Emery, F., and E. Thorsrud. 1976. Emery, F., and E.L. Trist. 1965; Herbst, P. 1976; Trist, E. 1981), the two stories link here.

Industrial democracy engaged in the redesign of the industrial workplace into team-based groupings by sub-assemblies and product groups. These changes involved multi-skilling team members to be able to understand and often perform the jobs of other team members, and they converted leadership into a co-ordinating function. Organisational democracy does not rely on the imposition of authority, but on collaborative and solidary team relations. These were the central ways the industrial democracy movement overcame the pathologies of Taylorism.

Industrial democracy work eventually generated what is now called "socio-technical systems design (STSD) (Eijnatten, 1993) and team-based matrix organisations. Hierarchies are flattened, communications increased across what becomes a "matrix organisation", and

communication with the world outside the organisation occurs in many different locations in the company (manufacturing, sales, advertising). This is the state of the art in successful manufacturing companies and has been for at least a generation. It is a repudiation of the logic and organisational pathologies of Taylorism and it is the reverse of what now is passed off as "business-like" management in Neo-Taylorist universities.

Despite the eclipse of Taylorism in industry, universities, as if caught in a time warp, remain wedded to key elements of the Tayloristic model: hermetic units, hierarchical authority structures, decisions at the greatest possible distance from the context of application of the decisions, and increasingly large and well-paid upper level administrations. It is as if these academic administrators never awoke from Henry Ford's failed dream, despite the successful challenges coming from Toyota, Nissan, Mazda, and Kia. Ford Motor Company awoke, but Harvard University and the University of Cambridge have not. Instead, disconnected from the actual process of academic value creation and teaching, the combination of neoliberalism and the greedy consolidation of power and money in university central administrations has actually intensified the pathologies of Taylorism. Academic Neo-Taylorism now embodies the worst features of mid-twentieth century industrial mass production.

In a way, the inapplicability of the commodity production model required for Taylorism has given these neoliberal academic bosses an even freer hand to create organisational pathologies. Since they do not know and cannot define what they are producing, they deliver high sounding and non-operationaliseable mission statements and "white papers". Then they deploy their accountants and public relations managers to force their "employees" and "clients (students)" to do as they are told, so the university can pretend to live up to these homiletic mission statements and advertising broadsides. By claiming the mantle of making universities more "business-like", these university administrators have perpetrated a coup on their institutions, augmenting competitiveness among the units that report to them as a way of consolidating their power, enhancing their personal careers, and inflating their salaries on their way to a position at a better university, a senior executive sinecure in a philanthropy, memberships on boards of directors of wealthy corporations, etc.

Many universities now have as many or more middle and senior administrators as faculty, a situation that would not survive a quarterly fiscal review in the real industrial sector. Most are stripping resources from their institutions by occasionalising the faculty, subcontracting key functions (buildings and properties, dining, campus store management, investments, etc.), and using their positions to enrich themselves. They are recreating universities as casino capitalist investment funds.

The beneficiaries of this resource stripping are not the universities. Rather than returning the profits extracted this way in the form of lowered tuitions for students, better education, better salaries and working conditions for faculty and staff, these profits are eaten up in increased administrative salaries, signature building programmes, and a variety of business ventures to reap more profits and to cause the institutions to rise in the pseudo-rankings. Many private sector actors have gained windfalls from this process of farming out of university functions to powerful non-university businesses, thereby further despoiling the taxpayers and students whose monies have subsidised these institutions for generations.

This is a dysfunctional approach in any kind of organisation. It is also an incompetent way of organising fields of inquiry and action that deal with what are inherently dynamic, multi-dimensional systems problems. In the case of the social sciences, the result has been a coup by positivism and pseudo-objectivism, resulting in work of little interest to anyone other than the denizens of the disciplines and with little or even dangerous applicability to the external world (such as Milton Friedman's structural adjustment theories). The exception is contract research for power holders who like to use the results of polling, focus groups, and other devices to assist them in selling their products and political designs. The humanities have joined the armies of the "have-nots" and the sciences and engineering exist to the extent they bring in outside monies for research and patentable discoveries to enhance university budgets. The sciences and engineering are tolerated so long as they attract grants and private sector money, and produce applicable or patentable results.

The past can usher in a better future

I do not believe in the cyclical view of history or myths of eternal return, but I do believe that the past can improve the present when used as a source of tested and successful ideas and strategies. What is more recent is not necessarily an improvement particularly when the recent past has seen the greatest increases in social inequality and ecological destabilisation in human history. There is no doubt that neoliberalism in the public and private sector is ascendant. There is also no doubt that it promotes injustice, inequality, brutality, and environmental destruction on a global plane.

Many of us optimistically have awaited a Polanyi "counter movement" (Polanyi, 1944) in which the social fabric would reassert itself to heal some of the worst depredations of this form of casino capitalism. However, there are few signs of such a counter movement. While there are many protesters against this regime and the documentation of the disasters of the neoliberal system is well developed, concerted collective action against this system is not.

The Occupy movement seemed to offer some hope, but mostly sputtered out in a cloud of rhetoric as business as usual reasserted itself. The most visible collective actions emerging from these global pathologies are, as Polanyi feared, fascist and chauvinistic. They include terrorism, racism, and anti-immigration vigilantism, blaming the dispossessed, and a variety of rather antique and antiquated regionalist and nationalist identity movements that can only be characterised as exclusionary and authoritarian (Polanyi, op. cit.). What we do not see is a counter movement based on democratic values and improvement of the democratic welfare state.

This is where I return to Werner Fricke and his generation of colleagues who toiled long and hard in favor of industrial democracy and action research. I do so because we know that the principles learned in the industrial democracy movement and applied more generally in socio-technical systems design offer better ways forward than any other approach currently on the table.

Action research and universities

Action research, in any of its numerous varieties (Greenwood and Levin, 2007; Reason, P., and H. Bradbury (eds.). 2001; Reason and Bradbury (eds.), 2008; Bradbury, H. (ed.). 2015; Coughlan and Brydon-Miller (eds.). 2014), is always a systems approach. AR is motivated by the values and practices of democracy, justice, and sustainability. This means that AR as practiced in Europe and the US in its heyday was the expression of the promotion of organisational democracy and the democratic welfare state.

We all know that the industrial democracy movement and the welfare state are in retreat under the global neoliberal attack of the past quarter century. Co-determination in many organisations and certainly in universities has been destroyed in most countries and replaced by the casino capitalist model of neoliberal governance. This is not because these neoliberal models are correct, but because they support the interests of the power elites, and because the ideologues of neoliberalism have succeeded in making most people believe that there is no other option (Gibson-Graham, 2006).

We know from decades of practice that action research can liberate knowledge, motivation, and solidarity capable of transforming organizations and working lives in democratic and more sustainable directions. We have Werner and his colleagues to thank for this knowledge. Now it is up to us to find a way to apply it to universities.

Universities are complex work organisations providing a multiplicity of services. Applying action research to universities is a good way to reopen the more general subject of democratic work re-design and organisational change. It also is strategically necessary to take on universities. Universities have now become part of a "pipeline problem" by producing poorly educated, radical individualist, and only apparently skilled "new" proletarians for the global neoliberal system. If universities are not transformed, it is unlikely that we can succeed in transforming any of the other key organisations in our global society in the future, because we will not have a younger generation prepared to take this on. I think this is why the neoliberals have attacked public universities with such fury.

Morten Levin and I have combined our 70+ years of university experience in our book, *Creating a New Public University and Reviving Democracy: Action Research in Higher Education* (Levin and Greenwood, 2016). We lay out this kind of action research process out in, and we believe universities are ripe for a democratic counter movement. The overwhelming costs, dysfunctionality, and irrelevance of what universities do systematically undermine not only, but leave new generations of citizens with a learned incapacity to address the large-scale problems of the global system. Current universities are only good places for a privileged few. The rest of the stakeholders are "zombified" (Whelan, A., R. Walker, and C. Moore, eds., 2013).

Against this zombification, AR is a heterodoxy capable of mobilizing those excluded from the elites. This is because the current organisational system and its associated ideologies are dysfunctional for most students, faculty, lower and middle administrative staff, and parents of students. Put another way, there are many stakeholders who would benefit directly from a democratic change process. We think there is reason to believe that lots of trapped energy for democratic change exists in these organisations. The issue is how to mobilise it.

As the neoliberal movement loses momentum, the world is beginning to find that the current generation of neoliberal business leaders, financial elites, politicians, and academics mostly do not have a clue about what to do to recreate the civil societies, humane work organisations, responsive political systems, and meaningful social goals they have destroyed. They cannot rebuild what they dedicated their lives to destroying for personal profit. Indeed, their recipes are to intensify the neoliberal processes that have led to massive increases in inequality and environmental destruction.

This is where people like Werner Fricke, his colleagues and the people they have mentored in the practices of action research and organisational democracy through these difficult years, can contribute vital elements to a process of democratic social reconstruction. Even though AR, social democracy, and the welfare state are now in retreat, these institutions do not have to be re-invented from zero. We know how they once worked (quite imperfectly) and how they can be made to work again and better. Rather than a being a historical footnote, this network of action researchers can be a key part of the democratic future.

Can action researchers do this? It remains to be seen. For certain, the rather civil, even rationalist tone of the industrial democracy network's approach to action research and STSD from the past decades would have to change. After a generation of presenting reasoned arguments for alternatives to neoliberalism, giving examples of positive outcomes, and designing programmes based on co-operation and collaboration among willing parties, these reformers are now ignored. The time has come to be more aggressive. The neoliberals aggressively took over the world and they have wrecked much of it. We action researchers must now attack them frontally with empirical data, showing the vast majority of stakeholders that the claims about free-market utopias are not only false but have proved to be oppressive and exploitative. We must encourage the 99% to assert their rights to a more humane and prosperous existence. It is time to get past being angry and disillusioned.

We need to get busy. Starting such a movement would be a fitting tribute to Werner Fricke's lifelong efforts.

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Book Review

Democratisation of work and economy through participation
Is it possible to relaunch this utopia in neoliberal times?

Cooments on: Fricke W. & Wagner H. (eds.). Demokratisierung der Arbeit: Neuansätze für Humanisierung und Wirtschaftsdemokratie. Hamburg: VSA Verlag, 2012.

Emil A. Sobottka

Werner Fricke, together with Hilde Wagner and a group of collaborators, some years ago published a book with the title *The democratisation of work: new approaches to humanisation and economic democracy* (Fricke and Wagner, 2012). The book contains results of a debate originally encouraged by the German Metalworkers' Union (IG Metall) about the question, "whether there could be new opportunities and potentials for democratisation of labour and economy, considering dominant developments in financial market capitalism and post-democratic trends" (p. 9). The authors, practitioners in NGOs, trade unionists and researchers, share the conviction that there is a close internal connection between democratisation of work and broader economic democracy: economic relations on both levels are intertwined, and have the same actors as subjects.

If we take into account how much neoliberal reasoning has penetrated in many countries today, the title seems somewhat pretentious. While democratising labour relations already sounds like a daring goal, aiming to humanise and democratise the economy seems to be a far-reaching project.

The book presents a state of the art, centered on the situation prevailing in Germany, to which Werner Fricke, honoured in this edition of the International Journal of Action Research, has dedicated the best of his professional activity: the democratisation of working conditions and, by extension, of social relations in the economic sphere in general, through research and action involving the direct participation of workers.

Although a good review has already been published (s. Höhn, 2014), I would like to suggest a reading of this book in the perspective that Karl Mannheim (1976) uses for the analysis of utopias. This reading can highlight the description and critical analysis of the situation, indicate the contours of the utopia that the authors seek to foster through their engagement, examine which are the suggested social practices, and who is considered the leading social bearer of this utopia. Finally, and transcending Mannheim's suggestion, it is important to ask how much this utopia can be made concrete under the given conditions of widespread neoliberalism.

Almost all the contributors to *The democratisation of work* depict a very challenging reality in the sphere of work, determined mainly by factors external to companies. In recent decades both global competition and the global financial market have become the central

reference for business decisions. Decisions are increasingly oriented on the global stock and finance market and on expectations of yield for investors. In the distribution of a company's economic results, the investors who own shares and financial products like debentures are disproportionately privileged. This privilege comes to the detriment of the remuneration of the workers that generate the value and of the communities that host the companies, contribute with resources and support externalised costs. The social function that legitimates the capitalist model of organisation of economy loses more and more of its relevance. Market requirements are transferred almost without mediation to all parts of the organisations, and marketing becomes one of the most powerful departments within companies. As a consequence, prices of products or services are defined according to what the market agrees to pay, reducing working conditions and wage policies to dependent variables. While work is seen primarily as a cost factor, cost-containment policies make work relations precarious, and induce a state of permanent uncertainty for workers. Whole branches of industry, individual enterprises, departments within them, and even individual workers: all of them become subjected to globalised competition. As a consequence, workers increasingly sacrifice claims and social rights in the attempt to secure their workplace. The self-exploitation goes so far that employees work free overtime, and replace their leisure with allegedly voluntary commitments in social projects, in favour of the company's image surplus. Trade unions complain that collective bargaining is increasingly being undermined by parallel negotiations. Formal institutions of the labour unions are fundamentally represented as a hindrance for competition, and often felt so even by the employees themselves. The authors remark alarmingly that the omnipotent dictum of the depersonalised market as a decision maker increasingly replaces political democracy for the balancing of interests, conflict management, and for the definition of the general framework for the economy. It increasingly becomes the decisive reference in structuring the macro-economy, legal order and the policy decisions of governments.

Recognising the lack of discussions and social transformation processes concretely oriented to face these developments, and to advance in the democratisation of the economy, Fricke, Wagner and colleagues choose the strategy of contextualised processes and small steps towards the far goal. So it seems coherent that the book focuses primarily on the democratisation of labour, aiming, through it, to improve the broader goal of an economic democracy. To a certain extent, the expressions *humanisation and economic democracy* in the subtitle demonstrate the authors' utopia, while *democratisation of work* as title indicates their strategy for the necessary social transformation.

The delineated strategy, to start with small steps of a struggle for democratising work to reach the far utopia of a humanised capitalism and democratic economic relations, reminds us of the classical sociological dilemma of the relation between the micro and macro levels of social life. Where should transformation processes start, in order to be more effective? As close as possible to the interpersonal level, where face-to-face relations strengthen the ethical commitments that could then be formalised in institutions at the intermediary level, and so finally renew an entire sphere of social life and, why not, the whole of society? This choice is likely to imply a more long-lasting trajectory, because it places a great burden of responsibility on those individually involved, and requires from each one, and from all members of the concerned group, a commitment to the ultimate goals, as well as to

the intermediate resources that are permanently activated. Personal engagement, however, depends on intensive mobilisation, conscientisation and learning processes. And even if a mobilisation becomes successful in a favorable context, its stabilisation on a high level for a long time is a very difficult task. Both the trade union movement and pluralist social movements of civil society have constantly been confronted with this challenge.

Or should the effort for social transformation be primarily directed to the broader level of structures and regulatory frameworks? This strategy would apparently be more comprehensive, and would lead more quickly to the ultimate goal. However, the political capacity to act at this level supposes the access to institutional power, or at least the mobilisation of sufficient support in the public sphere to induce institutional power holders to act favourably. Individual direct participation has only a secondary relevance in this strategy, if it has one at all. Whether the circumstances are favourable, and whether the capacity for political action of the subjects interested in this transformation is sufficient or not, can only be answered for and in each specific situation. For the authors collected in *The democratisation of work,* the option was clearly to start at the micro level. Following the reasoning of Dieter Rucht (1998), it could be said that they choose to implement projects in society on the way to a new society as a project.

A basic thesis in the book is that, because employees are subject to "asymmetric power relations" and "suffer under undemocratic conditions" (p. 10), they need themselves to develop both the disposition and skill for the political struggle that will build up democracy. According to the editors, three thematic focuses can be found in the texts to highlight the centrality of workers' participation in this struggle. Some authors emphasise the workers innovative qualifications as the source of their own interest, in a broader policy that improves self-determined engagement on tariff policies, work councils and company's strategies, as well as on the internal life of the worker union itself. Other authors highlight the interest of workers in contributing, with their technical abilities and innovative initiatives, to ameliorating conditions in the workplace and the competitiveness of their company. Finally, some authors focus on the tensions between direct participation and already existing traditional institutions of co-determination through representation. But there is a consensus that without the democratisation of work there can be no democratisation of the economy, and that participation must involve co-determination.

When Fricke states emphatically that democratisation of work is up to the dependent employees themselves, he looks back on his own long-standing experience with initiatives aimed at increasing participation and democratising work. This German experience helps to explain why, both among academics and members of the trade union movement, there is a clear defense that all transformation in the world of work must have the workers themselves as central protagonists. But besides satisfying successfully achieved goals, the experiences were also accompanied by a series of ambiguities and tensions, even within the protagonist groups themselves. Of the various topics raised by Fricke concerning this question, I would like to highlight just two, which other authors also discuss in the book. To a certain extent both topics are interrelated.

At the time when some of these projects were still running or had just been completed, Johannes Weiss published an essay entitled *Representation: reflections on a neglected sociological category* (Weiß, 1984, cf. 1998). He emphasises the social importance of this

kind of action, although not without pointing out its weaknesses. It may be that sociology neglected this concept. In the working world, especially in trade union activity, representation however was not only a long-maintained political demand, but also an established and legally protected everyday practice. The over-emphasis on representation as a delegation of power, however, has sometimes allowed autonomy of representatives, away from their base. This loss of legitimacy and trust, in turn, allowed companies to co-opt workers through direct negotiations, bypassing representative institutions. In such cases, participation ceases to be a democratic value, and simply becomes a managerial strategy.

There is a clear perception that the traditional conception of trade unions as mediating organisations, between the social bearers of labour and those of capital, can no longer be sustained. On one hand, demands have widened towards the most diverse fields of social reproduction. On the other hand, as Gerd Peter remarks in his text, life in companies is increasingly interfered with by other organisational modalities such as international organisations, social movements of various orientations, NGOs and lobbies. For the authors, representation and participation do not have to be treated as excluding alternatives. What is necessary is to rediscover the proper balance between them. As Stefen Lehndorff, among other authors, explains, representation may recover legitimacy, provided that it is connected with decision-making relevant channels of direct participation.

The researchers, trade unionists and NGO activists who contributed to the book combined their expertise in their fields, an ethical stance engaged in the cause they advocate, and well founded theoretical reflection. Even so, it is necessary to ask whether the utopia for which they struggle can realistically be relaunched today, when in many countries, including Germany to some extent, neoliberal reasoning is colonising not only the world of work and the economy, but increasingly also many other spheres of life. In countries with a tradition of welfare, wage policy and working conditions were traditionally defined through collective bargaining agreements of general validity. This allowed a general improvement in life conditions, and avoided predatory competition between companies. As correctly put by Lehndorff in his contribution *Better instead of cheaper*, this model had its validity in economies where national or sub-national governments had reasonable regulatory sovereignty over the economy. The authors themselves are aware that the multiple forms of renunciation of this sovereignty in favor of the market sovereignty have brought predatory competition not only up to the level of companies, but even to the individual level.

As Wendy Brown (2015) analyses, with the advance of neoliberalism, not only democracy is being threatened by money and markets. Individuals, citizens and workers have been transformed into self-entrepreneurs, all competing with everyone in everything. For her, neoliberal reasoning is becoming ubiquitous in almost all the spheres of life, transforming them into economic spheres. In the classical field of economics, basic civility and the rule of law are emptied and lose validity. In Germany, for example, Agenda 2010, implemented during Gerhard Schroeder's administration (1998-2005), was a turning point in welfare policies towards policies of precarious working relationships. In countries such as France and Brazil, legislative changes are underway that place negotiations at company level above labour legislation. But perhaps the most telling example of the new times, and close to the context to which the texts of the book refer, is the practice described in the documentary

Die Rausschmeißer – Feuern um jeden Preis [Bouncers – fire at all costs].[1] It describes the supposed practice of the German lawyer Helmut Naujoks, who allegedly specialised in involving trade unionists, representatives of factory committees and other law-protected workers in ambushes to produce evidence against them and lead to their dismissal. If the long tradition of designating capitalism as savage makes some sense, then it certainly applies to these new situations.

Brown uses the Foucauldian concept of governance to describe the specific mode of governing that is evacuated of agents and institutionalised in processes, norms, and practices, emptied of any ethical content. Referring to Thomas Lemke, Brown (2015, p. 124) argues that the new governance involves a shift in the analytical and theoretical focus from institutions to processes of rule. Governance divorces democracy from concrete politics and economics, transforming it into a merely procedural powerless operation. Participation is increasingly emphasised, but receives new meanings. Instead of co-determination and deliberation, participation is reduced to involvement in solution finding for already given ends, and under the pressure of externally defined benchmarks. According to her (2015, p. 129), '"stakeholders" replace interest groups or classes, "guidelines" replace law, "facilitation" replaces regulation, "standards" and "codes of conduct" disseminated by a range of agencies and institutions replace overt policing and other forms of coercion. [...] Governance becomes a race to reach and surpass benchmarks set with increasing demands by a hand that the "participants" will never be able to see.' Political questions are reduced to technical problems while governance depoliticises life and undos the bonds of solidarity that are fostered by the common search for solutions. But neoliberal reason places on the increasingly isolated individual the moral responsibility for eventual failure. Thus, while participation is withdrawn from its capacity for autonomous contribution, the weight of an eventual failure overloads it unreasonably with guilt.

With the book edited by Werner Fricke and his colleagues, the reader feels refreshed by his hope of a democratised society when he learns of the successful experiences and the strength of the mobilisation cultivated in IG-Metall. But he also feels the lack of a broader strategy of resistance and bolder steps towards a more humanised capitalism and a democratically regulated economy, despite living in times of the predominance of neoliberal reasoning. In order to increase the hope that the utopia of a humanised society and an economy subject to regulations, decided democratically by those directly affected by it, is still viable, much research, engagement and direct participation of all citizens will still be needed.

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