Tore Hafting

The Researcher and the Enterprise

Dialogue and the Potential of Innovation

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Summary:
Dialogue has a central role in pragmatic action research, and is used for ensuring employee participation in enterprise development. The paper deals with a pilot-project on work-related health in a single company. The conditions for conducting dialogues were poorly developed in the enterprise and project team. The purpose is to describe and discuss these conditions in the initial phases of the project. Action researchers have to disclose absent conditions of dialogue and have them changed by an on-going debate in the enterprise. The project was a failure in building up arenas of dialogue as a start conference and development organisation. The scheduled start conference with a group of enterprises in the town was not carried out. The project was conceived in the mind of the executive and not anchored among workers. Learning from failures is essential for improving strategies of action research when the conditions of dialogue are poorly developed.

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Sammendrag: Dialog har en sentral rolle i pragmatisk aksjonsforskning, og brukes for å sikre de ansattes medvirkning i bedriftsutvikling. Notatet behandler et forprosjekt om arbeidsrelatert helse i en bedrift. Betingelsene for å gjennomføre dialog var lite utviklet i bedriften og prosjektgruppen. Formålet er å beskrive og diskutere disse betingelsene i de første fasene av prosjektet. Aksjonsforskeren må avdekke fraværende betingelser for dialog og få dem forandret ved en kontinuerlig offentlig debatt i bedriften. Prosjektet var mislykket i forhold til å bygge opp arenaer for dialog som en startkonferanse og utviklingsorganisasjon. Den planlagte startkonferansen med en gruppe bedrifter i byen ble ikke satt ut i live. Prosjektet ble tenkt ut i hodet på administrerende direktør og var ikke forankret blant arbeiderne. Læring av feil er vesentlig for å forbedre strategiene i aksjonsforskning når betingelsene for dialog er lite utviklet.			

PREFACE

The present working paper is based on the project "Work and Health" which was evaluated by me the academic year 2002/2003 at Hedmark University College, Department of Business Administration, Social Sciences and Computer Science. The evaluation report was published in Norwegian in 2003. The first draft in English was submitted as a paper in spring 2005 on the course 'Action Research – with emphasise on action-oriented co-operative inquiry' given by Hedmark University College, Department of Health and Social Work.

The second draft was presented at The International Employment Relations Association 13th Annual Conference at Aalborg University in June 2005 in Denmark. The paper was presented at Workshop no. 4 on "The variety of working conditions". I got valuable comments on the paper from other paper givers and participants at the workshop of which I am grateful.

The title of the present paper has been changed to "The Researcher and the Enterprise: Dialogue and the Potential of Innovation". Compared to the evaluation report, the project "Work and Health" is discussed in relation to five basic models of action research.

"Work and Health" is a project on the national R&D programme Value Creation 2010 (VC2010) in Norway which is scheduled to run to 2010. There are eleven main programmes all over the country, and "Work and Health" belongs to the programme of the Inland region of South-East Norway.

The Hedmark University College, the Department of Business Administration, Social Sciences and Computer Science, was accepted to join the main programme by The Research Council from the 1st of August, 2002. The main aim of VC2010 is to enhance innovation in the private business

sector. The participation of employees in the enterprise is an important measure to achieve that. The parties of working life and the State have a key role in funding and running the programme.

Rena, Norway, March 14, 2006.

Tore Hafting (sign)

CONTENTS

1. "WORK AND HEALTH" AND DIALOGUE

The present working paper aims at describing and discussing the role of dialogue in action research. It is based on the project "Work and Health", Hafting (2003), rendering supervisors training in personnel management in a single enterprise near-by Hedmark University College. The conditions of dialogue-oriented forms of communication were poorly developed suggested by the workers, management, and the project team. In order to improve these forms of communication, the researchers have to disclose absent conditions of dialogue and have them changed by an on-going public debate in the enterprise, Pålshaugen (2002). The argument refers to the initial stages of action research before a start conference is held with a group of invited companies. The discussion also points to how the project could have been conducted in better ways for meeting the requirements of dialogue, mutual co-operation and broad employee participation.

1.1. Conditions of dialogue

The pilot project of "Work and Health" can be considered in retrospect as a critical test of the merits of dialogue in action research. This was not from the outset the intention of the project. The learning is rather how to do, or not to do, action research when the conditions are in general unfavourable. The researcher did not choose freely among companies, because they showed little interest in joining the project. The attention of the executives in the local community was to a large degree directed at the bottom-line when they were requested to join. The single company joined the pilot project, because the company health service had already agreed upon doing a project there. Democratic dialogue was chosen in the research proposal as a method applied by researchers for ensuring broad participation by management and employees in enterprise development, Hafting, (2004b). Secondly, the aim is to elicit discussion and reflection among the participants

about various pathways to change and innovation. Dialogue has a central role in the pragmatic approach of action research in Scandinavia, Greenwood & Levin, (1998); Gustavsen (2001); Gustavsen (1990). Conditions for using dialogue-oriented forms of communication are pointed to by Pålshaugen, (2001):

- the project is central to the business strategy
- a long-term co-operation with researchers
- employee participation.

These conditions were by and large poorly developed in the company. The same applies to the project team of "Work and Health" because none of the members were familiar with using these dialogue-oriented forms of communication. It turned out that absence from work was central to the business strategy of management, but not strongly shared by workers. In the project group it was argued that management of prospective participating enterprises at this point of time wanted to work on absence and truancy. The problem was wide-spread and the team should respond positively to the stated needs, and introduce broad participation and long-term co-operation with the College as the project proceeded. This was not achieved during the pilot-project. It was further argued, that the company could save money from absence and later re-invest it into innovation projects. The relationship is not that simple as it seems to be. In the present case, the company did save money from absence and truancy, but at the same time it faced reduced profitability. The surplus money was channelled into the operation of the firm making the deficit less. The evaluation of the pilot-project suggested that conversations on absence did not elicit creativity and willingness to change the state of affairs among employees. The project was strongly infused by the ideas of the business executive on absence and truancy. The project group should have discussed explicitly whether absence is a suitable topic of innovation, and the implications of the fact that the project only was anchored in management.

1.2. Arenas of dialogue

Democratic dialogue in enterprise development is based on the experience with projects on industrial democracy in Norway from the 1950-ies and 60-ies, Pålshaugen, (2002). There are formal and informal arenas where crucial issues of the enterprise are discussed among employees. These public spheres of the company are a prerequisite of sustaining and developing industrial democracy. Formal arenas represent the operation of the enterprise and the aim is to establish a parallel development organisation of which dialogue plays a central role, Pålshaugen, (2001). Examples are the start conference, follow-up seminars and a permanent forum of discussion devoted to improving products, services and organisation of the company. Ideas, suggestions and decisions from the forum are channelled into the formal system for further consideration, handling and decisions.

The present paper deals with the development processes in action research leading up to a start conference where a group of enterprises are invited to discuss topics of common interest. The challenge of the action researcher is to design the project when the conditions of dialogue are poorly developed in the prospective participating companies. The same challenge will apply to dialogue-oriented forms of communication within the project team.

- How to change patterns of communication related to the psycho-social work environment in the enterprise?
- How to create arenas of dialogue among employees?
- How to foster employee participation as a basis of extended dialogue?

The ideas of designing a new project are drawn from the experience of "Work and Health" and the role of theory, action and democracy in pragmatic action research, Greenwood & Levin, (1998).

1.3. Failures in action research

The start conference with a group of enterprises in the community was not carried out as planned in the project. It was a failure in terms of building up

arenas of dialogue as a start conference and development organisation on innovation. Learning from failures is essential for improving strategies of action research when the conditions of dialogue are poorly developed. The present paper is a contribution to improve strategies of the initial stages of action research.

2. MANAGERIAL HEALTH AT WORK

2.1. Health and Innovation

The project 'Work and Health' was designed under the umbrella of Value Creation 2010 (VC2010) in co-operation with the company health service in the region and Hedmark University College, Hafting (2002a), Hafting (2004b). VC2010 is a national R&D-programme on enterprise development and innovation scheduled to run to 2010. The main aim of the programme is to have firms in the private business sector to go stronger in for organisational change and innovation, Program Plan, (2002). The projects are based on broad participation in the enterprise as a vital means to achieve this goal. VC2010 is a tri-partite R&D-programme implying that the State, Labour and Management co-operate on business development and innovation.

Work and Health

The purpose of the project is to increase the value creation of the enterprise by enhancing competence on health among employees. If the company succeeded in doing that, money could be saved from absence and truancy and spent rather on investments in innovation. The project is scheduled to started with a group of firms located in the same town interested in work-related health, Hafting, (2004b). It is based on an unspecified model of action research, the participation of the parties in the enterprise, and a strong interest to join VC2010. The research proposal of the project intended to meet the requirements of tri-partite business development as suggested in VC2010, Hafting (2004a). Researchers and practioners have to co-operate on solving practical problems, which the latter perceive as relevant measures for enhancing competence on health.

The lieutenant of the firm

There were four companies interested in joining the pilot project, reporting that presently the greatest need for enhancing competence is among the supervisors, Hafting, (2004b). They relate to many workers each day and have a key role as their personnel manager dealing with absence from work. These tasks of the supervisor should be given higher priority facing a high rate of absence which necessitated adequate measures. The training of supervisors to handle absence more adequately, presumed a mutual development of their workers as well.

2.2. Managerial health

The "Work and Health" project was evaluated six months after the training programme was closed. The purpose of the evaluation was to get much and varied information from the supervisors who participated in the programme. I conducted eight qualitative interviews with the foremen in a single firm. The focus was on the usefulness of the course in relation to absence and related aspects of the work environment, and in relation to follow up the project, Patton (1997). The bulk of the data presented in this paper is drawn form the evaluation study, Hafting, (2003). The conclusions from the study are drawn from the interviews with eight supervisors. I will therefore make reservations of the limited evidence used in the report for the accuracy of the findings.

The programme is strongly infused by the reasoning of business management on absence from work. The supervisors are chosen as participants of the training because they are considered as the 'extended tool' of management. The foreman is supposed to learn how to behave as a 'security valve' and render the workers emotional support. If the behaviour of the supervisors is changed, the effects are expected to have an impact on workers as well, who did not attend the programme on work-related health. The structure of the company and the psychosocial work environment, however, will remain largely unchanged.

The report pointed to that the executive should shift the focus from absence from work to social relationships between workers and managers and the potential of their improvement, Hafting (2003). Top management has the overall responsibility for the strategic management of human resources and this responsibility should be made clear and a strategy should be developed.

The foremen judge in the interviews most positively the topics of the course on conversational techniques, conflict resolution and change of behaviour. They are learning through concrete, relevant examples which can be transferred to their work. When following up the programme on work-related health, one should pay less attention to training of employees and absence from work. More people should be involved, for example management and representatives of employees. The project should lay the basis for discussion and reflection preserving involvement and broad participation. The practical experience of employees has to be utilised more systematically in the project by reducing the extent of teaching sessions.

The company health service endorsed the plan having the course conducted in the way management wanted. The service argued that they did not fully support the plan by the executive and did not share how he perceived absence from work. The focus should be rather directed at presence at work. On the other hand, the course could represent an emerging development process in the firm which could be of value to follow.

In the literature on action research, it is pointed to the importance of getting support for the project from management. The project has to be 'anchored' in management ensuring a smooth running and successful results.

The present case suggests that the anchoring of the project by the company health service was done insufficiently. The project should have been simultaneously anchored among union officials and representatives of workers who volunteered to join the project. The project manager and the researcher did not attend any meetings with management, union officials and workers during the pilot project. The service and the project manager conveyed and co-ordinated information from the enterprise to the researcher.

The project manager should have summoned a meeting at an early stage of the pilot-project with management and the project team. Regular meetings of this kind could have facilitated exchange of information, views, and co-operation between the parties. The co-operation in the project team was marked by the fact that some parties were invisible and absent.

The present project suggests that it was not anchored among union officials or representatives of workers. It is not feasible to let all workers being represented in the project because the group is too large.

The expected effects of projects insufficiently anchored are short-term and the potential of diffusion is limited, Hummelvoll (2003). Involvement by officials and workers was not sufficiently paid attention to, even though these conditions were explicitly stated in the proposal of "Work and Health", Hafting, (2004b).

In action research it has been argued that loyalty resides in action, not in theory, Mathiesen (1973). The action researcher will sooner or later encounter the issue of loyalty in a project which raise the question: "Whose side are we on?" The project team should not only be loyal to business management, but also to union officials representing the workers of the enterprise.

The working principles of the company health service is by far tri-partite, rather the contrary. The management of companies and public sector hire the service on the basis of a 'provided package' which the parties have agreed upon and will pay for. These deals can be re-negotiated and annulled. Due to market competition between the services, the service is dependent on the decisions made by management.

2.3. Management of social relationships

The evaluation study disclosed numerous challenges related to the work environment pointing to changes far beyond absence from work, Hafting

(2003). The context of the company is essential for understanding and solving problems as absence and improving communication among workers:

- the dual role of the supervisor
- the recruitment of the supervisor
- a male-dominated place of work
- unskilled workers
- information to employees
- formal communication with employees
- the priority of the physical work environment
- the growth of the company

The supervisor is a mate and a personnel manager at the same time which causes a role conflict. These tasks have been delegated from top-management and the supervisors report in the interviews that the role is difficult to perform. The supervisors have as a rule been previously workers themselves. Becoming a foreman, entails learning gradually to reason and act as management. While performing the daily tasks, more attention is paid to economic efficiency. The supervisors have also the job telling theirs workers when they have to quit work. During the period of the pilot-project, the company has down-sized twice.

There are 200 employees working in the company and the majority are unskilled workers and males. They will make clear that they 'manage themselves' and do not intend to talk with colleagues about their problems. A worker should not disclose 'weakness' and need some help from others.

The workers have to ask for information from their supervisors. The reason is that information is given too late by management to the workers. The executive argued that this was done because he would prevent that rumours were started by the gossips on the floor. Evidence suggests that conversation between the foreman and the workers are implicit: The parties do not communicate directly about the work conditions. This affects how work is performed and misunderstandings occur more easily.

Top-management communicates in a formal manner with their employees. Informal conversations deal with work performance and written communi-

cation is prevailing. Workers perceive conversations about work as control and will evade this.

During the 1990s the company went through a period of growth and there was a shortage of labour. The company had limited options to select workers of their own choosing. The turn-over was high, the unemployment rate was low and the recruited workers did not fear loosing their jobs. A group of 15 workers from this period represented 'trouble' to their colleagues. The work contracts with these workers have now been winded up by business management.

These examples suggest that absence from work is strongly related to the psychosocial work environment, while management has given priority mainly to the physical work environment. There has been installed new machinery and other devices aimed at reducing injuries among workers. These measures can improve work motivation and well-being of the workers, but hardly the psychosocial work environment.

2.4. Monologues and objects

The training programme has a limited scale, important to have in mind when giving judgements about it. The course has to be understood in the context of use and other development activities as 'Including Working Life' (IWL) and policies of human resource management of the company. The enterprise joined the IWL-programme when the pilot-project commenced. The main goal of the programme is to reduce absence from work and let workers to a larger extent do their job adapted to their ability of work.

The researcher did not attend the course as an observer. The information on the programme is written memos provided by the company health service. The memos were made available to the researcher before the evaluation study was designed.

There were four sessions of three lessons each with 31 participants and speakers from the enterprise and the company health service. The topics of the programme covered strategies for presence at work, conversational techniques, the management of conflict and change, prevention of injuries and the physical work environment.

The tight time-schedule lead to there was not much time left in the teaching sessions for discussions and reflections of the topics. The role of dialogue was to a limited degree paid attention to by the organisers of the programme. The organisers chose to relate to the participants as 'objects' of learning of work-related health. The approach points to the critique of Skjervheim, (1996) that the researcher has made a choice to relate to people as 'objects'. That is the reason why the practical experience of the supervisors was used to a limited extent during the course.

Teaching per se does not merit any particular 'model of man' in in-house training programmes of employees. However, the model will appear in how the training programme is organised by suggesting values and norms on which it is based.

The alternative is to relate to the participants as 'subjects', living people who are able of reasoning themselves on the basis of their work experience. The sequences of teaching and training are limited in time and balanced against dialogue, discussion and reflection. Workers and management can learn together on equal terms by reflecting broadly on the topics of discussion. This collaborative approach also invites workers to 'put words' on their job experience which they have not done before. The tacit knowledge of workers is elicited which is essential for the development of the company.

2.5. Fine-tuning reiterative experiments

The company health service and the college agreed upon working together on the design of the training programme and have it adapted to new firms joining the project. The idea was to establish a network of enterprises co-

operating on work-related health. The plan was not put into effect to any extent, because there were few companies in the same town interested in joining the programme. The task of the researcher was to do trail research on the project, Lindøe et al. (2002). This was carried out as summative evaluations of effects from the training programme, Patton, (1990). The results from the evaluations were fed back by the researcher to the supervisors taking part in the programme and management. Data from summative evaluations were supposed to form the basis for improving the training programme and having it adjusted to new enterprises. As more firms were joining the programme, the evaluations were a reiterative process, fine-tuning the practice of work-related health.

After a preliminary report was finished in June, the project group had separate feed-back meetings with the supervisors and management. The meeting with the former suggested that little information was added to the qualitative interviews conducted previously in the project. All of the present foremen said something, but they did not elaborate and discuss the points intensively at the meeting. The conclusion from the meeting was that the supervisors were in favour of having more of the same: A follow-up programme on work-related health. After the meeting the researcher sent the foremen a minute and the preliminary evaluation report. The company was at the time of the meeting about to down-size for the second time and this incident can possibly explain the atmosphere among the foremen.

The feed-back meeting with the management of the company left the impression that major decisions were made before the meeting was held. Management did not explicitly mention joining the VC2010 programme, but stated that the company had launched a programme on health, the environment and security. The focus is on protecting workers from injuries, protective equipment and training of employees. The shop-floor steward and the union are invited to join the project.

Secondly, the meeting reinforced the fact that the pilot-project was conceived in the mind of the chief executive. It was reported that the project turned out to be a success in terms of reduced sick leaves and truancy, and the work environment had been improved. A group of workers was dismissed

because they were considered to make 'trouble' to their colleagues and management. After the meeting, management received a minute and the preliminary report from the pilot project on work-related health.

The evaluation of the pilot-project was conducted as a summative evaluation implying that the training programme was judged after it was closed. Summative evaluation was coupled with the idea that 'success' in the pilot-project could be transferred to other firms in a network. There were no discussions in the project team whether it was feasible and desirable to do it in that way. Action research carried out as an experiment is accentuated in the suggested approach, and alternative ways of conducting evaluations will be discussed in this paper.

The major part of information from the evaluation is derived from qualitative interviews with the supervisors who attended the training programme and the feed-back meetings. On the basis of this experience, I argue that conducting dialogues as a rule by means of qualitative interviews and feed-back meetings are inappropriate forms of communication with workers. The alternative is to use search conferences and multi-stage focus groups, Maunsbach & Dehlholm-Lambersent, (1997); Tillgren & Wallin, (1999) built into a design of process evaluation with a special focus on perceived usefulness Patton, (1990); Patton, (1997).

2.6. Learning from failures

It is obvious that the pilot project of 'Work and Health' ran into trouble at an early stage of development. The members of the project team met infrequently, basic assumptions about the project were not discussed, the progress was delayed by down-sizing in the company, and formal requirements in the research proposal were not met. The scheduled start conference with invited companies was not put into effect and a development organisation on innovation was not established.

Members of the project team are the project manager, a representative of the company health service and the researcher, who is the writing person.

During the period the pilot-project was conducted, the project manager was most of the time occupied with heavy administrative tasks at the college. The actual role of the project manager was that of a co-ordinator between the service and the researcher.

The representative of the service had his main tasks devoted to solving on-going problems arising among the member companies. The service spent about 10 percent of a full position a year on 'Work and Health'. The representative was assigned the role as 'door-opener' towards the member enterprises which could be interested in joining the project. The service elaborated memos on the research proposal of 'Work and Health' and the evaluation of the pilot-project.

The researcher was doing action research in a full-time position devoted to 'Work and Health'. On the basis of these memos he wrote up the research proposal, Hafting (2004b), designed and carried out the evaluation of the pilot-project and wrote up reports after it was finished, Hafting, (2003).

There were held five meetings in the project group during the academic year the pilot project was conducted. All the members of the team were present at two of these meetings, the first and last. The researcher had two meetings separately with the company health service and the project manager had one.

The first meeting in November was actually held after the training programme was finished. The company health service informed me before the meeting that the training programme had to start up early in autumn irrespective of the time-schedule of the researcher. The topic at the meeting was the ensuing evaluation of the training programme which was scheduled to take place in November and December. The scheduled evaluation was postponed due to a turbulent situation at the plant. Directors and supervisors had to pay attention to a scheme of down-sizing of the enterprise and regain profitability rather than work-related health. The company health service, however, conducted an internal evaluation of the training programme in this period of down-sizing. The results of the internal eva-

luation of the course were by and large similar with those presented six month later in the external evaluation.

On the second meeting in January between the service and the researcher the topic was the letter of intent between the service and the college. The service strongly wanted such an arrangement before the external evaluation of the programme was planned to commence. The letter of intent aimed at defining tasks, rights and obligations of the co-operating parties in "Work and Health". The parties at the meeting agreed upon that the time limit was 3 weeks for signing the letter. The matter was handled by the office manager of the service and the department director at the college. It turned out that the letter was not signed by the next meeting in April with the service and the researcher. The external evaluation of the programme was planned to start in May, and the service offered to have it done independently of signing the letter. The service stated the arrangement was done in order to prevent any harm to the project and secure the prospects of getting public funding. The researcher was also informed by the service that it was less likely to establish a network of firms located in the same town as previously planned, that were expected to co-operate on work-related health, Hafting (2004b). Finally, the researcher learnt about the current status of the pilot-project conducted in the single firm. The idea of the project was to start in a single enterprise and after it was finished, invite the management to join the VC2010. The participating enterprise started with the crucial problem of absence that supposedly was of importance to management and the workers. After having joined VC2010, the team could in co-operation with the management connect conditions of tri-partite organising and employee participation of ensuing projects. It turned out that the management of the company refused to join VC2010 contrary to the expectations of the project team.

The report from the evaluation of the pilot-project was ready for publication, Hafting (20003) at the time the last meeting was held in August. The topic was the progress of the project "Work and Health" on the basis of the experience with the pilot-project which was now closed. The project team concluded with having a continued focus on the single enterprise participating in the pilot project. Secondly, the aim was to have this company to

join the VC2010 later. Thirdly, the project team planned to invite a group of enterprises in the region and to elaborate an information leaflet on VC2010. The plan was to arrange a start conference in the autumn for those companies showing interest in VC2010. The scheduled start conference was never realised.

The idea of the continued planning of "Work and Health" was that the pilot-project in a single firm could represent a yard-stick of work-related health on which other firms in a network could be judged. The pilot-project was considered as an experiment which was tested in a network of companies.

The team also discussed how the project was organised and the working procedures of the project group. The researcher was highly astonished when the representative of the company health service asked at the meeting: Who is the project manager of "Work and Health"? During the period of the pilot-project, there was not elaborated a meeting schedule and minutes were not written from the meetings. The researcher stressed that the project team has to attend meetings as a group rather than meeting with two by two members. This also applies to meetings between the team and prospective enterprises joining the project.

The practicalities of how the project team was working are important for the implementation and results of the project. When considering these in the present pilot-project in relation to furthering and inhibiting conditions of co-operative inquiry, Hummelvoll (2003), the following pattern will emerge:

- There was no local representative in the firm being responsible for anchoring the project

- the project was not presented and endorsed by the employees

- there was no agreement on co-operation (a letter of intent) between the parties in the project team

- the flow of information in the project group was infrequent and insufficient

- there was no reference group – a broader group of professionals and practioners who discussed crucial issues in the project

- the researcher of the project team had the focus on the research process, quality of data, results and publication

- the role of the project manager was a key factor in the pilot-project. The manager had too much to do with administrative tasks leading to that he did not follow up the project. The project manager did not suggest a substitute relieving the manager in the project.

- An example of inhibiting external conditions is that the enterprise down-sized twice during the pilot-project.

There were no strategies to encounter inhibiting factors of internal origin. The project group discussed the problems in the project after it was formally finished. There were attempts to prolong the pilot-project indefinitely and the members suggested how to improve communication and co-operation in the project team. There were few options for the project team to redirect the course while the pilot-project was running reflecting what the group had learnt.

The researcher took notes for himself on what was going on from all meetings during the pilot-project. I was interested to use the experience as a basis of learning.

3. MODELS OF ACTION RESEARCH

Although there is some confusion about the terms in the literature, four basic models of action research are presented, Hummelvoll, (2003); Reason, (1994). The experiment, action inquiry, co-operative inquiry and participative action research. The advantages and disadvantages of these models are discussed in relation to the experience of the project "Work and Health". In terms of scope and scale of the models of action research, I argue that a fifth model, the pragmatic model is best suited for applying in working life in Scandinavia.

Reason (1994) asserts it is an over-simplification to state that action inquiry is centred on individuals, co-operative inquiry on groups while participative action research is centred on the society at large. I will rephrase this statement by delineating the models of action research on the basis of their different points of reference. Action inquiry, for example, is not only about individuals, but the analysis of action refers to or starts at the level of the individual.

3.1. The experiment

The first model is action research understood as an experiment, Hummelvoll, (2003). The purpose is to test a theory by suggesting how the intervention can be applied in a practical setting. The practioners, for example workers or nurses, are supposed to assist the researcher in implementing the project. In order to have the practioners interested, the researcher has to convince them about its usefulness. The overall goal of the model is to improve established theory by deducing implications from theory to the field of practice. Long-term effects of experiments are rare and participation of practioners is limited. The model is derived from the natural sciences by testing hypotheses based on exact, quantitative measures. The expe-

riment model dominated the practice of action research on working life up to 1980 in Norway, Gustavsen (1998). It was replaced by the practice of the search conference and networks stressing dialogue on an equal footing between the researcher and practioners, Gustavsen & Hofmaier (1997).

The previous discussion of "Work and Health" suggested there were similarities between the project and the experiment model of action research. The disadvantages of the model were paid attention to, because I can see few advantages of applying the model on work-related health. Rather than improving established theory, the actual aim of the project was to improve managerial practice on the basis of successive experiments. The project operated as it did because basic values of the company health service were not explicitly discussed in the project team. Without stressing the point too far, the service has a long tradition of reasoning from the natural sciences by the professions of health. On the other hand, the merit of the experiment model may have more relevance to the investigation of the physical work environment of the company. The model is more appropriate when the realm of scrutiny has changed from 'living people' to the behaviour of 'things' pertaining to aspects of the technical infra-structure, Lundstøl, (1999); Skjervheim, (1996).

3.2. Action Inquiry

The second model of action research is action inquiry. The focus is on practice and how practice can be improved and made more just. The researchers distinguish between espoused theories referring to what we are saying to others. The next term is theories-in-use referring to what we are actually doing. There is frequently a difference between these theories of action and the aim of research programmes is to reduce this difference.

The discussions in the project team elucidate what was going on during the pilot project. The members of the group did not explicitly present their views on action research, employee participation, dialogue, the training programme and how to make judgements about it. The members were working to a large extent independent of each other, and proposals and

demands were presented as the pilot project proceeded. I suggested to the company health service on the meeting in January to invite a group of enterprises to join VC2010. This could be done by inviting to a search conference aimed at scanning problems of interest which could be developed further. The service replied that my suggestion was not sufficiently specific, because the members of the project team should have themselves some ideas to present to the companies. My suggestion was based on the premise that management and trade union officials had many ideas about challenges at the beginning of a development project. The researchers' task was to sort out and respond to the suggested problems from the firms. It turned out that a search conference with interested companies was never held. The company health service informed me after the meeting in November that it was unsuitable to do the evaluation of the training programme in the ensuing month. I was not told the exact reason for this at that time, but six months later the supervisors told me in the interviews about the down-sizing of the enterprise which caused much conflict among the workers. I was informed about the internal evaluation done by the service in December of which I got a copy.

3.3. Co-operative Inquiry

The next model of action research to be considered is co-operative inquiry, Hummelvoll, (2003); Reason, (1994). The researcher and the practioners identify the problems on equal terms, discuss underlying causes and possible measures. The practice of dialogue and other collaborative techniques on teaching sessions and seminars, implies reaching at a new understanding of problems and causes, Gustavsen, (2001); Gustavsen, (1990). The final stage is to design and put into effect an action plan of change which formal bodies have endorsed. The change efforts in the model are anchored and understood among the rank and file of the organisation, ensuring long-term effects and ensuing institutionalisation. The practice of the model can run into trouble when the turn-over is high in the company, because the changes have been a part of the identity of workers and management. Measures to improve continuity of the project are to train new employees who

have been recently hired.

The model of co-operative inquiry applied on "Work and Health" points to the stated conditions in the research proposal which were not paid attention to. The training programme was not understood and anchored among the workers of the enterprise. Management initiated the programme based on an ill-defined problem of absence by a narrow focus on sick leaves and truancy. Being absent from work has to do with social relationships embedded in the work environment of the company. Management and workers should have defined the problem together on equal terms. The parties could choose a couple of aspects of the psychosocial work environment which has been reported previously.

3.4. Participative Action Research

The final model called Participative Action Research (PAR) is based on co-operation with the participants, critique of the social order and the raising of consciousness. Paulo Freire is an outstanding example of the practice of PAR, and the model is usually applied in developing countries among poor people. The purpose of theory – as oppression, alienation and social class – is to make closer links between theory and practice. It aims at providing descriptions and predictions and the researchers assist the practioners to identify and clarify basic problems through consciousness raising. In the projects the participants are usually poor and illiterate and hold the norms, values and world views of their oppressors.

The model implies political liberation and ultimately revolution. The limitation of PAR is how theory is conceived. The point of departure is not experience and data from the projects as in participative inquiry based on grounded theory. The endeavour is directed at refining received theory which is usually derived from Marxism. When the researcher is using theory in an inflexible way, incidents are understood and explained in the light of hindsight.

The PAR-model is the most difficult to apply on the "Work and Health" project. There is, however, a research tradition on working life based on critical theory, Burrell and Morgan, (1979); Kemmis, (2001). The model implies liberation and political revolution and I question the realism in a Norwegian context. Business managers represent the interests of their owners and would turn down any development project based on these values. On the other hand, there were no doubt observations from the interviews with the supervisors pointing to oppression, alienation, and the workers belonging to the lower social classes. Work-related health is not an evenly distributed phenomenon among social groups of industrial society. Research suggests that workers are more exposed to mental and physical illness than clerks, business men, and public officials, Karasek and Theorell, (1991).

The co-operative inquiry model is the closest to the ideas of action research outlined in 'Work and Health'. The model refers to groups – the project group, management, and workers – and how they are supposed to co-operate on an equal footing with each other in the project. There is a difference pertaining to complexity between the model and 'Work and Health'. The ambition of the latter is not only to co-operate with a single enterprise on occupational health, but a group of enterprises sharing a common interest in the topic, Hafting (2004b). After having achieved that, the plan is to form a development coalition on work-related health with networks of enterprises, and people from public agencies. The fact that 'Work and Health' is one out of many projects on VC2010 at the regional and national level also adds to complexity. The project is from the outset related to many stakeholders as the parties of working life, enterprises, researchers, colleges and policies of the Programme Board. In my view, these differences are suggested in the 'Project Department of Teaching', Hummelvoll (2003). The researchers were working on a single ward of emergency psychiatry aimed at preserving treatment and care, enhancement of competence, and providing students a relevant learning environment.

The suggested model of pragmatic action research is different from that of PAR which has been discussed previously in terms of democratic reform and political revolution respectively. We have pointed to the differences

between the models of action research in terms of scale and scope. My argument is that pragmatic action research is in terms of scale and scope best suited for application in working life in Scandinavia. The programmes require a minimum of scale in order to reduce the effects of failed projects and ensure sufficient dissemination of innovations.

4. PRAGMATIC ACTION RESEARCH

The model of pragmatic action research is based on three dimensions: Theory, action and democracy, Greenwood & Levin, (1998). In daily life being pragmatic implies paying attention to the consequences of action and their usefulness. The solutions arrived at are the best possible for the time being due to available resources. This refers to politics, power, the parties of working life and the business community.

A pragmatic stance in action research does not imply, for example, that the manager of the company from the outset is 'the enemy of the working class' and is excluded from the project. Sessions of dialogue will reveal how the manager is reasoning and acting in terms of industrial democracy in an action research project.

4.1. Democratic processes

The model is derived from pragmatic philosophy claiming that a concept is true by referring to its practical consequences. The philosophy of pragmatism rejects basic truths and abstract philosophical systems. An outstanding example of the tradition is the philosopher of education John Dewey, Greenwood & Levin, (1998). He claims that people are entitled to participate in democratic processes in all walks of life. The rise of specialisation and professions are vital threats to a democratic society. Knowledge is produced in action only and all people are basically researchers. Dewey asserts that universities and colleges do not produce science because action is absent. The philosophy of Dewy was directed towards the processes of democracy exhibiting diversity and conflicts rather than outcomes.

Examples of democratic participation in the practice of pragmatic action research are the guidelines for conducting dialogue sessions, Gustavsen

(2001). All participants have the same rank on the arenas of dialogue and they have to understand fully the topics under discussion.

4.2. Action: Search and variety

There are a variety of methods in the social sciences available in action research, and pragmatic action research is no exception. Action research is not linked to particular sets of methods because it is a research strategy on par with grounded theory and deduction. Researchers or other actors in the project should not impose specific methods of any kind on the participants, Greenwood & Levin (1998). The participants have to agree upon the choice and application of methods in the project. They must understand their ramifications and use them themselves. In short, all decision pertaining to the project has to be made in a collaborative way.

This was not the case in the project on work-related health. The conditions for joining the VC2010 were unclear to the participants. The project group has to convey in a clear way what the terms are. The conditions of "Work and Health" are stated in the research proposal, Hafting (2004b) and they are the point of departure for joining the project. A strong interest for joining VC2010 refers to that the company is wiling to invest money in the project. Most of the costs are derived from working hours spent by employees.

The researcher argued that a start conference was of vital importance for ensuring continuity in "Work and Health". The project team was supposed to invite managers, trade union officials and workers to a conference based on dialogue, Engelstad (1996), Greenwood & Levin (1998). In the invitation the team should have in mind an emerging network of enterprises. The team should therefore invite a group of enterprises located in the same area. The seminar should not exceed one day and the purpose is to sort out those firms complying most with the stated conditions of the research proposal of "Work and Health". After the conference, the team could work with each company on an individual basis. In this period the team has to disclose absent conditions of dialogue and have them debated in the com-

pany, Pålshaugen (2002); Pålshaugen (2001). The next step is to invite the participating firms to a search conference based on collaboration and dialogue, Greenwood & Levin (1998). The aim of the search conference is to specify problems at hand in the enterprises and how they match with each other. This method implies that the decision on which topic to work on is made at the search conference in order to anchor the project in the companies. In the "Work and Health" project such a procedure was not followed, because it was assumed that absenteeism was perceived relevant on the basis of feed-back from managers of prospective, participating firms.

I have pointed to that I would have collected data and done the evaluation of the training programme in another way. The suggested methods would better preserve the development processes which we have to have in mind. Teaching and training are adequate measures in a project on the condition that the participants have agreed upon that and the activities are based on discussion and reflection. I would have summoned the participants on each training session and conducted conversations in multi-stage focus groups. The purpose of doing it in this way is to discuss and reflect on the topics under way and open up for doing corrections of the programme. My experience with information intensive, qualitative interviews with the supervisors did not work as intended. The researcher will refrain from being condescending, but the supervisors did not provide much information on the training programme. There are a many reasons for this, but my assertion is that this method does not fit well for this group of people. Supervisors and workers do not talk together as people do in academia. Many incidents and things of interest are taken for granted and some respondents answered with a couple of sentences. We must also have in mind the gloomy situation of the company at the time the programme was implemented. The interviews did suggest the heavy strains that down-sizing of the company represented to all employees.

The use of multi-stage focus groups is coupled with a design of process evaluation, Patton (1990). The democratic processes of the project is put centre-stage and therefore this approach fits well with this. The contrary was the case in "Work and Health", the results were put centre-stage and a summative evaluation was done after the training programme was finished.

This approach was implicitly decided on because the project group (the researcher exempted) was of the opinion that the project was to be considered as an experiment. Finally, I would couple process evaluation more specifically to design pointing to the value of use for the participants, Patton (1997). This was done in the evaluation of "Work and Health", and according to my observations with success. The supervisors were asked about the utility of the course for performing their work and how to design a development project in the future. I would advocate the same approach in a new project as sketched in this paper.

4.3. Theory in action

The requirements of theory are as high as traditional research, but the procedure to sort out theory of relevance is different. The problem at hand and the discussions with the participants are decisive for later choosing relevant theory, Gustavsen, (2003); Hafting Tore (2002b). After the pilot project was closed, the researcher conducted a review of literature on the topic work-related health, Hafting (2004b). Theories are derived from 'action' and are drawn in principal from the field of practice rather than theory. This point leads us to the final section of the present paper which is the relationship between theory and practice in social research and higher education.

The relationship between theory and practice in higher education and research has been debated for many years in the social sciences. There are recent trends in Norwegian society supporting closer links between theory and practice. Public reports are paying more attention to co-operation between regional private business and institutions of research and education The politicians argue that private business will face increased competition and restructuring, and in order to survive research-based knowledge is essential. The research community is supposed to provide knowledge making enterprises able to launch new products, services and forms of organisation. The transfer of knowledge from the research community is not a simple one-to-one relationship, but has to be made relevant and applicable in a specific context. By turning public grants towards this end, researchers

are encouraged to do research on a variety of topics within business development. An example is the previously mentioned national research and development programme Value Creation 2010 (VC2010).

The theory-practice relationship is dealt with in the programme plan of VC2010, Programme Memo (2002). Researchers will strengthen the quality and relevance of organisational research and teaching with specific emphasise on areas having a direct impact on development and innovation in enterprises. Relevant knowledge of organisation and management is produced in collaboration with the practioners in the field. Reports and journal articles from the projects serve as a basis for teaching students which will meet the local 'criteria of relevance'.

4.4. The researcher and the enterprise

In the project 'The Department of Teaching' there are reflections on the potentials of having the project institutionalised as a practice of action research, Hummelvoll (2003). The project "Work and Health" clearly suggests that we are far from any institutionalisation of action research. Presently, I think this is the case to a varying degree as far as universities and colleges are concerned, Levin & Greenwood (2001). There is a long way to go from the philosophy of John Dewey to making action research to the stated purpose of a core activity of academia. The author of the present paper will have this in mind while planning the next action research project.

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