

Kurt Lewin's Heritage: A Possible Breakthrough?

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A B S T R A C T

In our competitive world, dominated by fights for markets and power, it can appear untoward to speak about cooperation and humanitarianism. Such words easily turn into empty phrases. Still, the greatest potential for welfare lies in the transformation of societal cooperation patterns in the direction of cooperation and humanitarianism. Our work in Sweden has shown us that new participative forms of cooperation are not only a moral issue, but a necessity for high productivity, the creation of economic wealth, and quality of life.

Kurt Lewin was both a moralist and a scientist. He was deeply concerned about the state of the world. Being a Jew, he had fled



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to the United States and experienced two world wars and two depressions. As a German, he was bewildered by the antidemocratic processes that had happened in his own country. How could ordinary human beings engage in persecution, terror, and systematic extermination of other human beings? In his new home, the United States, he found a vital democracy, but also the same dark strands as he had experienced in Germany. To Kurt Lewin, the moralist, it was important to take a stand against these destructive forces (Marrow, 1977).

As a scientist, however, he could also recognize that the moral position could not be everything. The destructive patterns were not laws of nature—they were created by Man and could be changed by Man. They were mostly self-destructive. Why should people participate in activities that obviously were not in their own interest and that produced suffering for themselves, their relatives, their country, and the survival of mankind? He anticipated that many of these destructive patterns were not caused by a lack of morality, but rather by a lack of knowledge. To him, the destructive processes he recognized were the natural consequences of unrealistic fears, prejudices, and false perceptions (Lewin, 1944; 1948; 1959).

We share Lewin's opinion on this point. We think that moral discussions are overemphasized. We think that developing and spreading more knowledge of social processes and better ways to manage day-to-day social life have a much greater potential for societies than even the expansion of information technology. Progress in research that can deliver these skills and knowledge to the public will lead to important changes in the economy and in the functioning of democracy: It will help with the constructive utilization of technology and resources; it will result in new and more efficient management; it probably will reduce the use of violence as a way to resolve conflicts; it will enhance productivity and create more effective work; it will prevent crime and different kinds of abuse; it will result in better ways of improving the environment; and it will raise the quality of human life. In short, it can produce new hope for a better future, something greatly needed now.

After we provide this overview of the potential of the heritage of Kurt Lewin, we will try to leave the normative and moral aspect aside and focus solely on scientific reasoning related to how knowledge and knowing can be developed and spread, and how research processes such as the ones Kurt Lewin suggested have the potential to change our lives.

Participatory Research

The kind of research we are doing is classified as participatory research. The basic ideas can be traced back to the work of three people: Kurt Lewin, Paulo Freire and William Foote Whyte (Holmer and Starrin, 1993). The term "participatory research" refers to the work of William Foote Whyte (Whyte, Greenwood, and Lazes, 1989); however, there are many independent researchers and groups working in the same direction, but based on different traditions. One important European contribution has been made by Dorothy Stock Whitaker with the support of Galvin Whitaker (Archer, Hicks, Whitaker, and Whitaker, 1994). Another source for this research is the participative traditions that have had a strong hold in Scandinavian societies, including working life, as a political ideology for almost a century. In the 1960s and 1970s, there were many attempts to prove scientifically that this ideology also was effective in the traditional economic sense of the word. During the social democratic regime, we experienced a boom in efforts to change working life and create good working environments. New institutions were born, and action research and action learning were established practices. Participation at that time was the key word for every change. The economic crisis since then has disrupted faith in the ideology as a welfare-producing force. Now the moral issue stands alone.

We have participated in this development as consultants and researchers for many years, and have been inspired by the Research Partnership ideas of Dorothy and Galvin Whitaker in formulating our own approach to participatory research. Oddly enough, participatory research is not well known in Sweden and is not used by the large traditional research institutions. In a current textbook of qualitative research methods, it is described as a kind of research that is interesting and promising, but also something the ordinary student will meet only coincidentally. To find it, you really have to look for it (Holmer and Starrin, 1993). One explanation for this may be that the ideological and moral issues relating to participation have been emphasized more than the practical and economic issues.

For us, who have been inspired by Kurt Lewin, ideology has never been the key issue. Like Lewin we are moralists, but we are also scientists by heart and profession. Our participatory research has grown out of more than thirty years of our own and others' experiences, successes, and failures in the fight for a better, more efficient, and more democratic working life with the larger goal of a higher quality of life in society through participation. Like Lewin, we are convinced that the economic crisis and destructive processes are consequences of a lack of knowledge about human participation.

Our interest in participatory research developed out of our dissatisfaction with traditional research on working life. Traditional research seemed

unable to clarify, describe, and make practical use of the vast amount of experience and the good examples that were available in Scandinavia. This brought us back to Kurt Lewin's old principle that research on social issues should not be only for scientists. Research could and should be an integrated part of real-life events and produce learning as that real life proceeds.

Participatory research, however, is not the same as research on participation. It means that a single person or a group of people in a workplace, an organization, or society conduct a research project on something in their everyday life that they would like to know more about. They may or may not work together with a researcher. They all participate actively in thinking about the issues, clarifying the questions, planning the project, and collecting and analyzing data, and they are active in the presentation of the results.

The traditional role and the controlling power of the researcher are thus abruptly changed. The research will not be oriented towards what the researcher, the management, or those in political power would find interesting to know more about. Instead, it involves those who actually participate in the work itself or in actual real events. Thus, it breaks with hierarchical reasoning and structures, and concentrates on what is actually happening, and how that is brought about by the actions and decisions of real people. The curious thing is that it always also produces value for the researcher, for the management, and for society.

By breaking with hierarchical thinking, the research activates the curiosity of the people involved and their impulse to know more about their own immediate reality. The research starts separate activities whose purpose is clarifying and understanding the consequences of one's own actions. It aims to help people find the realistic limits and possibilities of their own influence. This kind of research, if done well, reduces prejudices and fear, corrects false perceptions, helps participants act more efficiently and purposefully, and creates a platform for better understanding—thus reducing social conflicts. All this is part of the heritage of Kurt Lewin.

Because it is focused on real events, this kind of research has tangible effects on social patterns, on the personal development of participants, and on the issues studied. Therefore, it often is misinterpreted as consisting of traditional process interventions with respect to education or a consultancy. The difference between participatory research and these activities is that the research also produces valid knowledge for use by non-professionals outside the actual arena in which the participative research is taking place. This knowledge is specific, however. It is useful in a context in which participatory procedures are wished for or promoted. It cannot support hierarchical reasoning and is of no use for what Galvin Whitaker calls "mainstream management" procedures (Whitaker, 1995).

This sometimes confuses discussions. In a hierarchical context, certain

methods of reasoning are taken for granted that exclude the need for participating in data collection, presenting knowledge, and understanding the processes of the work. Hierarchical methods of reasoning make personal knowledge about the work and the situation irrelevant. This knowledge is invisible in such hierarchical organizations. Since it is invisible, it can be used only by the person in the controlling position himself or herself. It cannot be referred to or used by others. Those who do not recognize the existence and usefulness of this kind of knowledge will declare that participative processes are unrealistic. Others who recognize the potential find the same kind of processes realistic, but cannot prove their point.

Participation Is a Necessity—Not a Moral Issue

The new forms of training that Lewin inspired were said to produce better social skills and better leadership. The training facilitated work in groups and teams, and started action learning at workplaces. The activities focused on personal development, experimentation, and participation. They integrated the growing knowledge in psychology, sociology, organizational theory, and psychotherapy in training and in work.

These training events and interventions had one special thing in common: They were all accused of being more or less unstructured. They did break with hierarchical principles, which habitually were taken for granted by the participants, and introduced something different. The strong habitual use of hierarchical thinking at that time made this training look incomprehensible, unstructured, unscientific—and therefore dangerous. In Sweden, the training resulted in great anxiety in those who did not participate, and created heated arguments in the mass media about its hazards (Wennberg and Whitaker, 1976).

The reason for this was simple. Participative procedures then, and often even today, were perceived as being totally arbitrary, leading to chaos and producing events by chance without direction, purpose, or goals, and without any means of controlling what will happen. Wild fantasies were developed about what could happen in situations in which people were allowed to do whatever they wanted. The fantasies, of course, were not true. The training had its own philosophy, its own structure, its purpose, and its specific meaning for those who participated. There were no reasons for one to do odd things or to make a fool of oneself. Structure and order were there but were different.

Since the training was breaking with hierarchical procedures, the effects that became visible, and the experiences people had in training, seemed to many participants to be caused by the training itself. They could not see that they were part of the world outside. This amplified the feeling that the training was something artificial. It was when participatory procedures first started to develop in working life as well that people could see that the

training experience had relevance. Hierarchical reasoning and procedures, however, still have a firm grip on society and make Lewin's breakthrough thinking difficult.

It is now obvious that the traditional hierarchical controlling procedures have lost their power to create wealth and prosperity. The analyses, discussions, proclamations, directives, and arguments produced in meetings and debates both at work and in public are rapidly becoming more remote and abstract. They do not correspond to the experiences people have of events and consequences in real life, and how these occur. Statements and decisions seem to have their own internal logic. The actions are, in our view, often fancy footwork to conceal the fact that those in power find themselves powerless in trying to make the world a better place in which to live.

The impact of the new information technology on working life, fragmented and growing knowledge, the complexity of modern life, and the confrontations among different ethnic, ideological, and religious beliefs all make the hierarchical perspective impractical, and cause conflicts and impasses. Participative processes are therefore not just a moral issue. Human society cannot survive without them. In order to break the hierarchical grip, the heritage of Kurt Lewin is essential for the welfare of the industrialized world.

Making One's Own Understanding Accessible to Others

It is, in our view, of central importance to distinguish between "knowing" as an activity to be done by a group of persons, and "knowledge" as a thing, or "quasi-thing" to be parceled out, passed on, picked up, and exchanged. The Lewin seminars, the origin of the formation of the National Training Laboratories (for a long time the principal organization to conduct the new participative forms of training, such as T-groups), started as an experiment on how to teach and learn "knowledge."

Through our participation in these kinds of seminars and in the research and thinking surrounding them, we have discovered "knowing activities." "Knowing," for us, has become more than just learning. Learning is to understand for oneself. "Knowing activities" represent the additional process of making one's own understanding accessible to others. These two purposes are interrelated. It is an old truth that the best way to understand something is to try to describe it to others.

Hierarchical strategies and control ignore people's own capacity for increasing the skillful coordination of their individual actions through knowing activities. Knowledge and control are distributed from above. Our experience shows that it is realistic to omit the hierarchical control and expect people to voluntarily coordinate their actions if they are able to make their own understanding of the situation accessible to others.

Thus, there is nothing mysterious or mystical about participative procedures. Given that knowing activities produce a common understanding, and make people grasp what is happening, nobody has to be afraid of losing control, or of the common work going to wrack and ruin. Knowing about this potential for human cooperation makes it possible to leave aside hierarchical strategies and reasoning. These strategies are powerless and impractical in our time, anyway. Knowing about this potential also makes it easier to take a firm stand against destructive and harmful actions and patterns that are motivated by authoritarian "control and order" arguments.

Our experience with participative workplaces in Sweden shows that people who take part in knowing activities as a way to control and organize their work find greater freedom of action, more independence, increased self-esteem, and more power to pursue their own goals and intentions. They experience less fear of being misunderstood and attacked or reproved for expressing what they feel or acting as they do.

The kinds of problems that often are mentioned as something to be afraid of if one were to start participative processes totally disappear in these workplaces. In our view, these problems, such as cheating, obstruction, irresponsibility, bullying, and laziness, probably are greatly amplified by the hierarchical strategies themselves. They have to be handled, but they are nothing to be afraid of or concerned about when introducing participative procedures. Backed by a common understanding, each person can more easily act in a way that fulfills his or her own needs, ambitions, and goals and, at the same time, he or she can find ways to consider and support others in doing the same without losing sight of the common goal.

Hierarchical reasoning is single minded. It is based on cause and effect. One action corresponds to only one effect. Life is not that way. One action can do many things at the same time if the actor understands the situation and has enough freedom. With this freedom and an increased understanding through knowing activities, it will be easier for everyone to contribute to an improved quality of life. With this understanding, one can be secure with others even when they act totally independently, as long as one can trust that they do what they perceive as good and right for themselves and others. With this understanding, one can more easily reach agreements that will create win-win situations, no longer being caught in zero-sum games in which one party wins and the other loses.

The tool for knowing activities is language. Through language it is possible to make one's understanding accessible to others. Our experience with participatory workplaces is that knowing activities demand a new linguistic platform and a more developed knowledge based on that platform than is available today. The means to develop our language and deepen knowledge is participatory research on everyday events, in which we all

can observe and take part.

Breaking Away From Hierarchical Reasoning

Kurt Lewin started his research on everyday life events with a curiosity as to how people functioned in them. What made them do what they did, and what skills, interactions, and beliefs shaped their behavior? This puts the "locus of control" in people themselves. In hierarchical reasoning, the initiative, the cause of action, is presented as something outside the individual. In hierarchical reasoning, the individual is reactive, not proactive. Following Kurt Lewin, we have found it helpful to use the concept of "locus of control" to recognize hierarchical reasoning.

A hierarchy can mean at least three different things (Carlsson, 1993). Hierarchy is a way to understand and classify something as a whole and its parts, where one part is the whole for a smaller part which, in turn, is the whole for still smaller parts, and so on. The whole controls, limits, and shapes the events of the parts inside of it. The locus of control is in the whole.

Hierarchy is also a principle of organization in which, it is assumed, every function has its own specialized part that is doing exactly what it is supposed to do. The eye sees, the ear hears, and the legs move the body forward. In companies, the personnel function recruits personnel, the production function produces, the marketing function sells, and the research and development function develops new products. The locus of control is not visible at all.

Hierarchy is also a principle of distributing control: Those people involved in higher order systems control those involved in lower order systems. Politicians at the European Community level make decisions that have to be followed by politicians at the national level which, in turn, have to be followed by politicians at regional levels. In this way, it is a straight line of control from the top to the local level. The only visible individual control is the control of the leaders over each other.

Hierarchical reasoning, which often is called rational or scientific, has its own inner logic. The participating individual, as a unique person who takes his or her own initiative, is ignored unless he or she has power from the system itself. Hierarchical reasoning only handles averages or characteristics of groups of individuals. When hierarchical reasoning is confronted with the necessity of dealing with an individual, the individual is not dealt with as a unique person.

The hierarchical individual is a composite of various traits and characteristics. The composition of one specific individual is, of course, unique, but the traits and characteristics themselves are developed from similarities among many individuals, which makes the actual person disappear. The individual becomes a kind of average "reactor," not a unique person

taking initiatives. Even if the presenter understands that people are proactive, creative, and entrepreneurial, this understanding is not represented in his/her reasoning. That part of his/her understanding is not accessible to others. It is invisible.

Questions about everyday life, in contrast to hierarchical and scientific reasoning, are often dealt with in ways referred to as non-scientific, based on personal values, and sometimes even non-rational. What, then, is the difference between the Lewin way of reasoning and the ordinary, everyday statements about these kinds of issues? We do not want to call any statement irrational or say that it is based only on values. A better distinction would be to call it more or less naïve. We often find that people present as "knowledge" the unreflected consequences of their own actions. They are usually not aware that their reasoning includes many unchecked assumptions about future events and others' intentions, feelings, and the like.

This naïve reasoning leads to obviously unrealistic conclusions about locus of control. Since Kurt Lewin's curiosity was focused on how people functioned in everyday life and their choices, drives, and purposes, he, as a scientist, had to get the question of locus of control right. He had to clarify individual intentions and evaluate the potential actions of the person as well as his own and others' influence on what happened in the event. Our basic point about the kind of research done by Kurt Lewin is that it introduces an additional variable into scientific reasoning: the locus of control. The result of such research is reasoning that involves multiple loci of control. This research is far more complex than that in which one can ignore all human loci of control (research by observation) or operate with only one locus at a time (traditional experimentation with control groups, etc.).

Hierarchical reasoning is simplistic not only with respect to loci of control, but in other respects as well. The actions generated by human beings are consequences of learning. Learning is irreversible. Individual memory makes each human act unique. Descriptions of everyday life, therefore, have to be able to handle not only static and stable relationships with respect to loci of control, but also relationships between individuals and their world which are dynamic, and changing through learning.

Free human actions cannot be foreseen. Observations, including loci of control, must be interpreted, therefore, with an understanding of the specific choice of the actual individual. How and why the individual chooses to do what he or she does is found within the person himself/herself, not the external world. Making others grasp one's understanding, then, has to start with comprehending what one is doing.

An interesting observation is that language mostly supports static descriptions, while doing is dynamic. The production of an act should be described with a verb. Our use of nouns sometimes blinds us to dynamic and interactive phenomena and to how we participate in events. We have

found that it helps us in our research to change our own language from “things” to “-ings.” Instead of exploring “production,” we participate in exploring “when producing” and we talk about “when communicating,” “when leading,” and “when organizing” instead of discussing “the communication,” “the organization” and “the leadership.”

The “-ings” are activities and events in which we take part and to which we contribute. Speaking about “-ings” makes it natural to consider the loci of multiple controls in what is happening. When people grasp the “-ings” to which they contribute, and see how they themselves participate in them, they change. The descriptions through which “-ings” become accessible to participants are the “new language.” They provide a more precise knowledge about the kinds of phenomena and processes that confront people in everyday life, and they raise new questions that generate further research.

Looking at “-ings” also makes it possible to consider human change and learning. From an outside point of view, it is possible to distinguish between more constructive and less constructive, and even destructive, contributions to “-ings.”

Change can be observed as a change in “-ings.” When the contributions of one or more persons become more constructive, problems often disappear. Without looking at “-ings,” this potential for change will not be observable.

We can conclude, therefore, through the heritage of Lewin, that the knowledge of today is often presented in inappropriate linguistic forms. These forms are not precise enough to help people grasp the dynamic phenomena of everyday life. The traditional presentation of knowledge as “things” also makes the existing potential for human learning invisible. If that potential could be made visible, mankind would probably find many new ways of solving problems.

The Lewin Distinction

In order to put the locus of control inside the individual, it is necessary to make some distinctions between what the individual is doing and what makes the individual do it. Understanding has to start with the inner world and how that is represented in real-life actions. Lewin saw this representation as the result of two kinds of forces—an inner force that strives outward, and outer forces that influence the inner forces. The forces resulted in a drive—the observable action (Lewin, 1951).

Lewin sought to understand actions in the context of what the individual perceived of as possible or impossible, expected or unexpected, facilitating or limiting, and wanted or unwanted. Lewin made a distinction between what the individual did and what inspired or limited the individual to do what he or she did. With this view, the individual’s actions could be

explored and understandable even if they at the outset might look crazy or totally meaningless to Lewin and others.

We have found it practical to follow Lewin's thinking in this respect, and to look at action as a Gestalt background phenomenon. The outside observable action is represented by the gestalt. The perceived future toward which the action is directed is represented by the background.

Therefore, the individual's perceived future, and not just the actual situation and past experiences, is the context in which the action must be seen to be understood by others.

It is obvious that this distinction, and an active exploration of the roots of an individual's actions, are not ordinarily made by people in everyday life. Without the skill to make a distinction between observable actions and the inner world that produces them, most actions will not be comprehensible to the ordinary person if he or she does not know the individual intimately. Without the skill to explore and grasp the background for the other's and one's own actions, it is not possible for the ordinary person to systematically make sense of his/her own interaction with others, or of the social events in which s/he participates.

A person without that skill is, therefore, trapped in a naïve representation of himself/herself and others, which makes it difficult to have a realistic understanding of the nature of human cooperation. For these people, the risk of making inadequate judgments, falling into prejudices, and relying on false premises is high. They will also find it difficult to change limiting and destructive patterns of thinking and dealing with social conflicts.

Without an ability to make Lewin's distinction in one's interaction with others, it will be of no use to have theoretical knowledge about their "inner world." Presentations of other people's feelings, thoughts, ambitions, sorrows, and purposes may be interesting, touching, and moving, but they will have no practical bearing on one's own choices, judgments, and actions. Unfamiliar social events, such as confrontations with other cultures, religions, or ideologies, also will be easily misinterpreted, puzzling, frustrating, and fear-provoking, even if one is knowledgeable about the other culture, religion, and ideology. Without this skill, one's own actions often will be ineffective and misplaced, even if one has a genuine concern for the welfare of the others and wants to do good.

Our interpretation of training following the Lewin heritage is that in general, it helps people to become aware of the possibility of making specific distinctions between actions and the inner world. These distinctions, however, are of no use in a hierarchical environment. Since hierarchical reasoning makes the individual locus of control invisible, unwanted, and irrelevant, the ability to observe and use this distinction dies out.

In participatory research, the importance of making this distinction between outer actions and inner world is made clear from the beginning. The interest of the research is not just in what happened, but in how the

different actions came about; that is, in the judgments, the experiences, and the beliefs behind them. The participants, in short, are urged to help explore the “backgrounds” of their statements and actions in order to make the “-ing” in which they participate and, at the same time, study, more comprehensible for each other and for the researcher. In their communication with the researcher and each other, this distinction, after a while, will be made naturally. Even if many people lack the necessary skill to be able to make this distinction by themselves during a discussion, it is our experience that once it has been demonstrated, they grasp the point of others trying to help them by doing it for them.

That also explains why exploring will not ordinarily come automatically if people only come together in a group. It often needs to be facilitated by questions and probing from the researcher or from someone else in the group with more experience with this kind of reasoning. In trying to evaluate an “-ing,” people often think that acting “there and then” is most important. Instead, the focus in participatory research is “here and now” presentations in actual settings. Communicating in the group and with the researcher are events that in themselves are actions that reflect the participants’ backgrounds, which also helps in understanding how events and effects “there and then” were produced.

Participating in exploring actions and the nature of cooperation has a profound effect on the self-esteem of participants. Reflective and explorative dialogue usually reveals a much more complex competence and insight than most people recognize in themselves. Easy explanations and superficial solutions vanish, replaced by a better understanding of, and respect for, the hidden knowledge of oneself and others. The only limits to this understanding are the training and skill of the researcher and the members of the group conducting the research.

Example 1: Participatory Research on Traffic Safety

Swedes traditionally place a high priority on traffic safety. Like almost every other country, we have a driver’s license that is issued after a test that consists of both a theoretical and a practical part. The authorities decide on the conditions for issuing a license, produce the tests, and are responsible for the testing.

In Sweden we also have driver education schools where one may learn to drive. The students are almost always people who do not have a driver’s license and take the lessons to pass the test. Their purpose is to have a license to drive, not to have the skill to drive safely.

The question then arises: what makes traffic safe? Research thus often looks at the covariation of external factors or characteristics of drivers with accident rates. Typical factors are speed, the construction of the roads, traffic lights, gender and age, intoxication levels, police surveillance, penalties, and so on. It is taken for granted that everybody knows and follows

traffic regulations, has passed the required driver's tests in training, and has the fitness and experience to drive. Therefore, the interventions to increase traffic safety are focused on new regulations, changing speed limits, introducing new elements in training or in tests, increasing or changing surveillance, and introducing new penalties. Also, a lot of money is spent on information.

These interventions are always energetically debated since there seldom are strong covariations between accident rates and interventions. Most of the reasoning also fails to make obvious a reasonable cause-effect relationship between intervention and effect. The association of driver education schools is then confronted with the problem that their members, teachers, and students often intuitively oppose the reasoning behind the cause-effect proposals and therefore also question the appropriateness of the interventions and the usefulness of the training.

The interventions also often lead to contradictory and confusing results when systematically investigated. One example is the decision to make training in driving on a slippery surface compulsory. There are many such training tracks in Sweden since we need to be prepared for winter driving. An investigation showed that those who trained on those tracks had higher accident rates than those who did not train. This, of course, was contrary to what had been hoped for in creating the legislation. Whatever the explanation of this odd and unexpected result, this example illustrates the kind of issues that produce confusion, mistrust, and conflict among officials, teachers, students, and researchers. The differences between the official stance and their own and others' experience of what in reality constitutes traffic safety make it difficult for teachers to fulfill their educational task effectively.

It is obvious to the teachers that there is a difference between being able to handle the car, understand and correctly identify traffic rules verbally on a test, and being able to drive safely in traffic. It is also clear that neither the theoretical tests nor the driving tests reflect the teachers' intuitive knowledge as to what the focus of the testing should be in order to produce traffic safety. Since the schools are private enterprises, they are eager to be able to tell their customers that they do a good job in helping customers get licenses and drive safely in traffic. How could the invisible skill, or competence of the teachers and schools, be recognized by officials, students, and the public?

In participatory research, we leave behind the traditional research based on statistical covariations among different factors, and look at every accident as one that is unique and produced by judgments made by human beings. The chain of events—the participation in the “-ing” of traffic—can include everything from engineers' habitual designing of roads or cars, actual and habitual judgments of the drivers concerned, and the reasoning in the legal proceedings and mass media reporting afterwards. All these

influencing factors are important in understanding the judgments of ordinary drivers and limitations they could have in their anticipation (their "background") of what could happen. These factors therefore affect their driving.

These limitations can be recognized by the teacher through observing how students handle different traffic situations during training, and by probing and questioning them about why they are doing what they are doing. With knowledge of the kind of chain of events that could lead to accidents, and observing how students handle a car in traffic and deal with the probing questions, the teacher gets a feeling for which student produces safe driving and which student is a greater risk in traffic. The teacher can then monitor progress in the learning process and make judgments about what interventions should be made to increase learning. Effective teaching, however, cannot be done without knowing about the "-ing" chains.

Based upon their reflective knowledge of the "-ing" chains leading to traffic accidents, teachers, therefore, have a deep but invisible and often unexpressed understanding of traffic safety that in some cases contradicts the logic of officials, lawmakers, testers, researchers, and marketing agencies involved in interventions for increasing traffic safety. If the knowledge of traffic teachers were to be visible to more people outside their own profession, this could benefit traffic safety. In cooperation with official testers, it would then be possible to differentiate better between safe and risky drivers by observing how they drive. In the schools, it would be possible to monitor the progress of students and to evaluate the efficiency of the training.

By going more deeply into the knowledge of the teachers, it also should be possible to get new leads for more research in order to identify interventions for traffic safety that go beyond the interaction between teacher and student, such as changing the habitual designing of roads, the reasoning at courts, or the reporting in the mass media. This would then include participatory research with those participants. This type of research is now in progress in Sweden.

Example 2: Primary Drug Prevention

To take drugs, and thus start to become an addict, is a personal choice. What can prevent this first choice and the continuing choices that in the long run can lead to dependency on drugs and to eventual self-destruction? The first choices by non-addicts cannot be understood by only studying addicts and their choices late in their dependency. In order to prevent personal choices of that kind, it is of little help to know about the statistical selection of characteristics or situations that are indicators for high risk. Statistics do not tell us anything about a specific person and his or her choices.

Just studying the actions of a person, such as going to rave parties, does not tell us much about his or her future choices, either. The same action, going to the party, can be the result of many different beliefs and perceptions about the future. One set of beliefs and perceptions may present a high risk for drug addiction and another set may present no risk at all. How would it be possible to discriminate between them? Inspired by a project initiated by ARIPS, we have been involved in participatory research about these issues.

Our part of the research started with discussions with field workers involved in drug prevention programs at a local level. They told us that they were very frustrated by the fact that the whole responsibility for dealing with the problem in the national health program had been delegated to local institutions. The reason was that national, hierarchical measures, such as trying to get rid of drugs by legislation, police actions, better customs control, more information, anti-drug programs, and so on, had been only marginally effective, and the state had to save money. The official stance was that interventions at local level could be more targeted and effective. To cut total costs, responsibility and money were distributed in smaller lumps locally instead of being spent on national programs.

In the view of the field workers, such a strategy demanded more local knowledge of the deeper nature of the problem in order for them to be effective; for example, how the choices to take drugs were made in everyday life, and how such choices could be prevented. The field workers also experienced conflicts among themselves and in their cooperation with nationwide and hierarchical organizations both on national and local levels. In many cases, the same kind of "old," nationwide programs as the former national programs were launched at the local level, which resulted in pressure for even more money than before, money that was not available, thus leaving the field workers in a state of despair with neither enough money nor enough research support for their important work.

Together with a group of field workers and other resources such as former addicts, youth, and health officials, we have searched for the "-ings"; that is, the series of events or processes parallel to the "drug-ing" which makes the transition to the drug culture, and the first choice of taking drugs, easy and natural. Clarifying these "-ings" would make it possible to explore the background for people's participation, together with actual participants and field workers.

This clarification would make it more likely that the field workers could explore actual local cases, and it would provide those concerned with a fuller understanding of how their interventions for primary prevention can be effective. This research program is still in its initial phase and has temporarily been stopped due to lack of funds.

Example 3: Participative Research as Evaluation of "Methods"

In our practice, we have come across people and teams who get astonishing results in education and therapy; immigrants, for example, have learned Swedish many times faster and better than with ordinary procedures; patients with severe psychological disturbances such as anorexia have gotten out of their isolation; depressed elderly people have started to find their spirit of life again; and stroke patients have been almost fully rehabilitated in less than a month.

These results are extraordinary compared to what traditionally is achieved in education, care, and therapy. The "methods," however, are not new. The same kind of results during the last twenty years have been reported elsewhere, and the way these people work is not in itself unknown or obscure. The educational result was facilitated by so-called suggestopedy—an accelerated learning approach inspired by the Bulgarian Georgi Lozanov (1978). Therapy for anorexia patients was facilitated by horseback riding. Depression of the elderly was reversed through the use of music and art, and training for stroke patients was facilitated through special arrangements in the patient's own home, where the team also worked with the patient.

The common factor in all these cases was that the procedures were seen and evaluated as "methods," and that officials and managers demanded "proof" that the methods were "effective," even though they were well known and accepted by professionals in the field. The interest of the officials, the managers, and others were focused on the relationship among different elements in the teaching and learning, between the use of horses and the cure, between the use of music and art and the recovery of spirit in the elderly, and the practical arrangements at the patient's home and the rehabilitation.

To us, as outside observers, as well as to the professionals themselves, it was clear that these were superficial and uninteresting cause-and-effect connections. The teaching tools were not producing the learning, the horses were not curing the patients, the music itself was not enough to make the elderly recover, and to stay in a familiar situation such as one's own home was not enough by itself to rehabilitate the stroke patients.

Even if their results were extraordinary, the traditional description of what these competent professionals and teams were doing was therefore of such a nature that it could not be correctly valued and integrated into their organizations. The educational success did not get any follow-up, in spite of the obvious possibility of using the learning from this experience to drastically change the conditions for many more immigrants. Instead, less-qualified educators, claiming that they used the same "method," were hired to do the job in the same context as before, with only a small difference in results. One is then back to square one.

The therapy with horses was threatened with closure because of the odd

approach. Horses do not fit in hospitals. Where should they have their stables? The use of music was blocked by the fact that so many of the personnel in the homes for the elderly saw themselves as nonmusical, so of course it was impossible to use the "method."

The rehabilitation of stroke patients was a project of limited duration and now had to be evaluated. The team was afraid that the findings from the project would be misused in the political process and the team disbanded. They had met the political view that the "method" of rehabilitation of patients at home was better than doing so in hospitals. The responsibility for rehabilitation, therefore, should be transferred from hospital care to municipal social care in order to shorten the time at the hospital.

This view, however, did not take into consideration that the success was not an effect of the "method" of caretaking at home, but rather relied on a special and unique competence of the team. This competence was, in turn, a result of their integrated and combined work at the hospital. Such competence could not be available, and could not be developed, in the traditional framework of municipal social care. The political suggestion would be a wrong solution.

The common theme is that overall solutions and decisions would be ill-advised if they relied on thinking in terms of "methods" instead of competencies. Superficial and inappropriate analyses could result in dismantling competent teams and destroying the invisible knowledge they had built up over time. This would likely be done at a time when the need to cut costs was high, and the kind of results these professionals demonstrated was most needed both for economic reasons and for the quality of life of those who depended on them.

We have found that the communication difficulty in organizations that must integrate and develop this kind of personal competence among their personnel lies in the fact that evaluation of procedures loses track of the locus of control completely by focusing on external factors such as teaching tools, horses, music, or local arrangements, or just to some extent, by placing the control entirely with the educator, therapist, nurses, or caretaker at the elders' homes. The basic notion is that the student, patient, or pensioner "reacts" to the outside world and to actions done by these people and because of that, gets better.

It was obvious, however, to the professional people concerned that the effects were not "reactions." The people made themselves better. Descriptions of the "-ing" that made this possible should and must put the locus of control with them. The descriptions should provide an understanding of how these people were enabled to learn and change their lives in cooperation with a competent educator who placed them in contact with new and interesting teaching tools, a good physiotherapist who helped them become acquainted with horses, with a good caretaker who used music to stimulate their memory of good times, and with a professional medical

unit using well-known situations at home to practice and recover basic, everyday functions.

Each of these people and methods is different and, on the surface, they are using different tools. Out of these differences, it would be possible, however, to find common themes that can be recognized and understood by people outside the actual processes. This understanding would be essential for further training of personnel, evaluation, and the integration of these competencies into a larger framework.

Together with these professionals, we have found that the common themes have little to do with teaching tools such as horses, music, or "home." Instead, they are connected to a chain of events of learning and recovery that a skillful educator, therapist, or caretaker can learn to observe and integrate into his or her work, whatever that work may be.

Therefore, we have started participatory research programs designed to evaluate those types of "methods" in order to gain a better grasp of what kind of understanding the professionals seem to have. In these programs, we first of all involve those who have benefited from the procedures to explore what made it possible for them to change; that is, the students, the patients, and the elderly.

Their statements are documented and checked with those who are interviewed. We then also involve those who had been active in implementing the procedures in order to explore the statements more deeply with them, and to understand the statements from their perspectives. These revised statements are then checked with the students, patients, and the elderly.

We then involve colleagues and outside experts to explore ways these experiences could be described to make them understandable and useful in their professional fields. Finally, we involve managers, decision-makers, and planners in order to explore ways these specific competencies and their related potential could be described in order to be more easily integrated and seen as an asset to the whole organization.

Example 4: Participative Research to Facilitate Dialogue Between Management and the People Working in the Field in Service Organizations

In Sweden, many companies work with rather superficial concepts that often become diluted without any deeper meaning to them. One of these is the concept of customer orientation. This concept, of course, is used especially frequently in the service sector: companies doing cleaning, catering, security work, transportation, and repairs.

It seems easy enough for anyone to understand that these types of companies have to adjust to customer needs more than production-oriented companies. In very small companies, these adjustments to the customer are natural, but in larger companies, organizational effects of size and hierarchy make it extremely difficult to get the flexibility and the adaptation that is needed. Many of these companies often arrange special educational

and marketing campaigns to make their personnel more customer-oriented. Our analysis shows that this is a case for participative research.

Once again we can look at it as a language question. In the small company, customers are known as unique persons or units, each with an individual identity, and they are treated as such. In the larger company, the philosophy of the business reduces customers to non-persons. Hierarchical language fails to represent numerous customers in a way that includes their locus of control, and has to treat them as collectives.

People out in the field, where the service is produced, cannot use this approach. They are dependent on the individual customers and have to meet them as unique human beings. They have to face the fact that the customer one meets makes his or her own choices, depending on his or her purposes and perception of the future. These cannot be understood without experience of the individual customer's actions. From the chain of events, interacting with customers, people in the field get an intuitive understanding of customers' preferences and the limitations in their understanding of the service being offered. These data are not available to the management and thus do not enter into their plans and their reasoning.

The people working in the field have to adjust to a situation in which interaction with the customer needs to be understood as a "multi-locus of control" situation. The people in workplaces, therefore, are confronted with situations in which it is not possible to foresee or plan what will happen, while the management wants to organize, lead, and control operations. Communication between the people in the field and the management is conducted in a language that excludes the knowledge of the people working in the field, and makes it irrelevant to management actions and decisions. The tendency of management to put the "locus of control" solely within themselves produces a mismatch in reasoning and mistrust between management and fieldworkers.

As long as management uses hierarchical reasoning, and isolates itself from the knowledge of the people working in the field, it is lost. Managers are blind. Management has no way of understanding what is happening at the front end of their service without getting descriptions from the field that are customer-oriented; that is, descriptions that place the locus of control with the customer. It is not enough to take account of customers' opinions through simple questionnaires about quality, needs, and so on, since customers' actions are produced out of their own purposes and perceptions of the future.

These cannot be identified by asking questions rather they have to be explored through the actions of the customers. The basic information for such understanding has to be collected from the people working in the field, through their interactions with the customers. In their various meetings and contacts, they have the possibility of finding out what lies behind specific choices and how the customer views the relationship be-

tween them. To be able to present this type of information, the people in the field need to grasp the Lewin distinction. This is a true customer orientation.

Traditional campaigns will have no effect on this problem. Therefore, in the beginning, we recommended that our clients start participatory research projects that involved people working in the field who were exploring their customers, and their interactions with them, in order to help themselves and the company to gain a better grasp of the nature of the "serv-ing." In one of these projects, the issue of the mismatch in reasoning between field and management was raised, and the dialogue between people working in the field and the management has since become the focus of our activities in the research projects on service organizations.

To facilitate this dialogue between field and management, people working in the field were asked to explore and describe critical incidents in interactions with customers and how these interactions developed over time, what had contributed to this, and how would it be possible to make sense of the series of events if one considered the customers' "locus of control." In the project, these presentations became the starting point for a dialogue. The goal was to develop a common reasoning about how to manage the "servic-ing" of the company in the best way possible.

Example 5: Psychosocial Work Environment in Social Work

One municipality in Sweden had to lay off personnel and, at the same time, become more efficient. The management and the unions agreed on actions to improve the work environment in order to avoid harm to the workforce owing to psychological and social stress factors. One typical way, often used in Sweden, to increase workplace efficiency and create the necessary conditions for a better work environment is to delegate much of the day-to-day planning and decision-making about how the work can be divided to the working group itself. In planning their own work and taking responsibility for the results, the group becomes more flexible and productive.

The change is combined with on-the-job training and job rotation to enable each person to perform many different tasks. In this way, people are able to back each other up and switch tasks according to the situation and its complexity. These arrangements make the workforce better equipped to solve problems regarding production and the work environment. The multiple competence and the delegation of planning and problem-solving are necessary conditions for arranging work in a way that avoids serious risks.

At least two new kinds of management problems arise from this arrangement. At first, it is important for management to make sure that the members of the group are capable of handling both dynamic processes that may occur in a participative situation such as this one, and also that

they correctly understand the health hazards, and know how to reduce the risks, through rearranging the work. To solve this issue, teams were involved in team training with special emphasis on forming new working relations based on greater responsibility, with a focus on how to manage work-related environmental issues.

Since most of the day-to-day planning, problem-solving, and decision-making are delegated, the potential for management to interfere with the work is less than before. Problems may arise without the management being aware of them and without knowing what they are all about. Destructive patterns may occur, especially in times of personnel cuts, that need management's attention. The question became, how could management monitor and understand what happened in the groups without interfering in the day-to-day work, and be able to detect destructive patterns and evaluate whether the group was capable of dealing with difficulties that came up?

To solve this issue, the groups and group leaders were involved in a participatory research program to explore the nature of stress in the workplace, and to present ways for management to detect workgroups suffering from destructive patterns and stuck with such difficulties that they needed management's attention. From this participative research emerged the idea that the best indicator was to observe communication.

If the communication included the type of reasoning that placed the locus of control outside the group, or only put blame on someone in the group, this was an indicator of difficulties that the group at that time could not handle. If, however, the communication pattern reflected a multi-locus of control in which the members actively participated in the search for answers and understanding of the issues, the outlook for the group was good.

Example 6: Participatory Research As a Way to Set Standards

In large organizations, it is important to have standards against which it is possible to measure and evaluate results or performance. Results do not tell the whole story, however. In a changing world, good results can occur through distant events that have nothing to do with performance. An extremely good performance, however, can have mediocre results if the situation is difficult. It is also important for management to set standards for capability. Capability is the range of different demands and tasks that a person or group is able to handle under more or less difficult circumstances.

Training off site is always directed toward situations that have not yet occurred and that the student is expected to be able to handle in real life. In spite of that, most school-based education measures performance on curriculum-directed tests whereas instead, the training should meet standards of capability. The tough questions are how to set such standards

and how to observe that a given training has provided the students with the necessary capabilities.

In Sweden, education is supposed to follow a curriculum. The curriculum forces everyone to study at the same pace and in the same way. It leaves little room for teachers and students to experiment and to find learning strategies that are more efficient in light of the situation: the existing knowledge of the students and their study conditions. Many forms of education for adults and in universities are also closed loops of learning. The teacher teaches what s/he has the capability to teach. The students learn what the teacher finds important to teach. The teacher then sets tests according to what s/he has taught, and the students pass the tests when they have learned what the teacher is able to teach. The potential of teacher and teaching development is lost.

Some time ago, the Swedish army needed their training to become more efficient. A program was introduced based on the following idea: If one could set standards for capabilities in a way that would make it possible to relate capabilities to the obvious demands of a future war, the soldiers would not only be better off when fighting, but would also have more faith in the army. This faith would reduce stress and strengthen their capabilities for withstanding stress and pressures.

If the standards for capability could be set in a way that could allow them to be generally observable from outside, then the educational process could be liberated from the fixed curriculum. The educators then would have to expand their skills and their own personal capabilities instead of being bound to "methods." Many educational roads could then lead to the same goal.

If, at the same time, the standards of capability could be formulated in a way that made them easily understood by the students, and could function as their learning goals, this would produce faith in their education, and the teachers could allow a higher degree of freedom in the learning process. Educational arrangements in such a situation could be a case of participation in which the combined individual skill and insight of the educator and the individual resources of the students could be utilized in full. With such standards, the result could be evaluated by educators, students, and outside observers. Different educational approaches could be compared. A new way of exchanging experiences and making education more efficient would then be available.

Setting standards of capability is a perfect issue for a participatory research project that also has a wider potential for the whole organization. In the army, for example, to set standards, the officers, from their experiences and intuitive knowledge of the demands of war, needed to work together to explore their best assessments of the requirements of each unit. These activities generated a better understanding for all involved of the nature of war, and what should be expected of them and their men. The require-

ments gleaned from the officers were then pooled with the experience of good educators to create a way to classify capability goals.

The classification is based upon experience in the sense that different groups of educational goals demand different learning strategies. The classification thus has the capacity to become a tool for establishing educational goals for each unit and for communication between teachers and learners.

For many years now, the standards and classification have been the "language" for planning training and setting training-related goals in the Swedish army. The next step is to use and develop this language in a way that enables the training to be carried out using procedures that are similar to those of participative research. The objective is that the men themselves be able to participate in exploring the demands of war, set the educational goals for their unit, and participate in planning how learning goals could best be met, considering their unique knowledge, their former experience, their group composition, and their practical conditions.

Some Words About Methodology

We hope that the examples provided show that our aim with respect to participatory research is to contribute empirical facts and descriptions that will help people make more productive interventions in the processes in which they participate. That goes for the persons working in the field as well as for top managers. The results are also of value in making one's own actions understandable to others. With this knowledge, it is easier to come to common understandings and good agreements. With better insights into what goes on, prejudices and fears are reduced.

We expect that a participatory research approach also could be useful in resolving both small and large-scale conflicts. We have not been able to test this assumption, as the research approach demands more trust than does ordinary research, and this is, of course, difficult to establish in a conflict. It would also require an intense involvement by more people.

In traditional research, those who are research targets need only a superficial understanding of the purpose, the procedure, and the use of the results. In participatory research, however, there are much higher demands as to how information is handled and how purposes and statements are formulated. Therefore, it takes a lot of work to organize the research and build up trust. It takes a great deal of care to formulate and present views, thoughts, suggestions, and experiences in a way that will not be a threat or degrading for anyone and yet will keep the basic information and messages intact.

To be able to do this, it is also often necessary to have close relations with people in the field, and a deep knowledge of the practical problems that confront the participants. Only with that knowledge and trust is it

possible to probe and check their reasoning and statements.

To generate this trust, and to keep contact with all the participants, we avoid tricks and exercises, and keep arrangements very simple, open, and understandable. We have developed a technique during group conversations to document what is said, using paper on the wall. This makes it possible for everyone to see that we have correctly heard his or her message, and to see how we paraphrase it. He or she can make amendments and additions to the text. To be sure that we have the underlying essence and the messages right, after the discussion we always write down our own version of the interviews or the discussions for the participants to comment on, change, or rewrite.

Discussion alone, however, does not automatically lead to interesting data and new knowledge. The task of a participatory researcher is to facilitate the “research-ing” activities. That means that we help the participants and the group to focus on the “-ing” that seems important for them to explore.

We participate actively by suggesting interpretations based on our own knowledge and experience. We systematically probe the statements in terms of “locus of control”: We try to come back to and explore where a statement comes from and in which direction it is pointing.

We validate the descriptions by testing the reasoning with new groups, checking them against existing knowledge and research, and introducing them to experts, decision makers, or other users to see whether the reasoning is understood and useful.

We have found that this approach can be useful on any scale. It could be done in a short meeting of a few hours, or it could be a project with hundreds of people involved over a long time. The interesting thing is that participatory research combines research, education, and organizational development.

In science there is often an animated discussion of methodology since a good, correctly applied method is in many cases a guarantee of good science. The problem is that scientific methods today are diverse, and a researcher often needs a great deal of practical experience with a method before being able to judge how it is used and whether it suits the research purpose.

Outside scientific professions, it is also necessary that statements and descriptions can be accessible in everyday life to people who do not have the skill to understand sophisticated methodology. One then has to rely on observations that people can recognize, their own thinking, and their own experiences. We, of course, are then back to Kurt Lewin and research on everyday events. Trustworthy research must leave a fixation on methods and connect to that which people can recognize and comprehend from their daily life.

This does not imply that single subjective experiences should replace

empirical facts. To draw conclusions just from one's own experience and intuition, which is frequently done in management and politics today, is never enough, regardless of the issue or question.

Kurt Lewin showed us that such conclusions are often misleading if one does not take the time to explore the systematic patterns of one's own thinking, penetrate one's logic, find contradictions and loose ends, and make necessary connections with what else is known about the matter at hand. One has to be able to research and explore real life events as Lewin would have done.

Maybe participatory research, as we have described it here, is one of the processes that could make this personal exploration possible, and will start the necessary cooperative "know-ing" activities.

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