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

Marianne Kristiansen and Jørgen Bloch-Poulsen

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Preface

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

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

I. Purpose and points of view

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Why deal with past organisational action research history at Harwood?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The concept of participation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

II. The Harwood studies

Action research at Harwood

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Silencing of Harwood Studies

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

Sources

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

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

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

III. Experiments at Harwood

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

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

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

Experiments with participative group decisions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Experiments with leadership training and participative management

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

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

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

> At Lewin's suggestion, French initiated an experimental leadership training programme for all line managers. The first set of six training sessions was conducted by French between December 7, 1944, and January 25, 1945. French introduced the first session by saying, 'What we will try to do is make it not a lecture, not a class, but a clinic where we will bring in the problems that are bothering us for discussion.' He then asked the participants to address three questions:
>
> 1. What is the most frequent problem you meet? I don't mean problems that have to do with the machines or sewing in a straight line, but the personal problems that bother you.
> 2. What is your most difficult problem?
> 3. What is the most distasteful problem you meet?
>
> The answers provided the basis for two role-play exercises, the objective being for them to gain insights into their own and other people's behaviour (J. R. P. French, 1945). In the following sessions, various other scenarios were enacted, and between meetings the participants would try out different approaches to the problems they faced, and the results of these would be discussed in the following training session (p. 220).

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

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

Experiments overcoming resistance to change

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Three basic issues dealing with participation and involvement

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Workers as collaborating partners in the research process?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Participation and power in the organisation and in the research process

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Preliminary findings

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A change-oriented social science on a natural science basis

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

It is a type of action research, a comparative research on the conditions and effects of various forms of social action, and research leading to social action. Research that produces nothing but books will not suffice (p. 150).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Action research as the social engineer's applied science

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Conclusions

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

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

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

Acknowledgement

We would like to thank the editor, Danilo Streck, the peer reviewer, as well as our colleagues in the Research Group 'Centre for Dialogic Communication' (CDC) at Roskilde University, Denmark (www.ruc.dk/dialogic) for inspiring comments on earlier versions of the article.

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The authors

Marianne Kristiansen
Associate professor, emerita, Ph.D.
Department of Communication and Psychology
Aalborg University/Cph.
A.C. Meyers Vænge 15
DK-2450 Copenhagen SV
Denmark
Email: marian@hum.aau.dk
+45 20275655

Jørgen Bloch-Poulsen
Associate professor, Ph.D.
Department of Learning and Philosophy
Aalborg University/Cph.
A.C. Meyers Vænge 15
DK-2450 Copenhagen SV
Denmark
Email: jbp@learning.aau.dk
+45 40177352