

Recognition-based Action Research

Inspired by third generation critical theory and dialectic relationship theory

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Abstract: In action research the quality of the interpersonal relationship between the researcher and the practioners is significant, as it affects which knowledge about the problem explored it is possible to obtain, just as the problem itself affects how that relationship evolves. The problem and the interpersonal relationship are thus dialectically connected. Therefore, the action researcher must have a dual focus concerned with generating knowledge and development in both areas. With that in mind, this article develops Recognition-based Action Research, where Axel Honneth's critical, sociological perspective on society is combined with Anne-Lise Løvlie Schibbye's dialectical relationship perspective on interpersonal relationships: with both perspectives grounded in Georg W.F Hegel's thoughts on recognition.

Keywords: Action research, recognition, interpersonal realationship, mutuality, dialectics.

Investigación-Acción basada en el reconocimiento

Inspirado en la teoría crítica de tercera generación y la teoría de la relación dialéctica.

Resumen: En la investigación-acción la calidad de la relación interpersonal entre el investigador y los sujetos involucrados es significativa, ya que afecta qué conocimiento sobre el problema explorado es posible obtener, de la misma forma que el propio problema afecta la evolución de esa relación. El problema y la relación interpersonal están, así, conectados dialécticamente. Por tanto, el investigador-acción debe tener un doble foco de preocupación: la generación de conocimiento y el desarrollo en ambas áreas. Con eso en mente, este artículo desarrolla una Investigación-Acción basada en el reconocimiento, donde la perspectiva sociológica crítica de Axel Honneth sobre la sociedad se combina con la perspectiva de la relación dialéctica de Anne-Lise Løvlie Schibbye sobre las relaciones interpersonales: con ambas perspectivas fundadas en los pensamientos de Georg W.F Hegel sobre el reconocimiento.

Palabras clave: Investigación-Acción, reconocimiento, relación interpersonal, mutualidad, dialéctica.

Action research: a normative research practice

Action research is development-oriented research in a field of practice, and is characterised by two related aspects. Firstly, action research is carried out *with* the subject area: not *about* or *on* the subject area (Heron & Reason, 2001, p. 179). This implies a different relationship between the researcher and the practitioner than the subject-object relationship traditionally found between researcher and research objects. Secondly, action research starts with the normative idea that knowledge about the problem the researcher and the practitioners are working on can contribute to a more free and democratic development of individual practitioners and of society (Nielsen, 2004, p. 522).

In action research, the practitioners become involved with the research, just as the researcher becomes involved with the practitioners. Action research is grounded in a participative world view:

action research is a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowledge in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview, which we believe is emerging at this historical moment. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice while participating with others in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individuals and their communities (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p. 4).

Thus, the normative aspect of action research aims to foster growth for both the individuals and for the community (the social institutions), and considers participation in the processes together with other people the way to growth.

Recognition-based Action Research: a third tradition

In this article, we present a new action research tradition: *Recognition-based Action Research*. This new tradition is based on a dialectic understanding of the connection between individual and society, where mutual recognition, both psychologically and sociologically, is seen as a condition of individual and collective development. This recognition perspective is rooted in the thoughts of philosopher Georg W. F. Hegel and links psychologist Anne-Lise Løvlie Schibbye's dialectic relationship theory with sociologist Axel Honneth's third generation critical theory (The Frankfurt School), even though neither Schibbye nor Honneth are action researchers.

Recognition-based Action Research can be seen as a further development of two action research traditions which, according to Nielsen and Nielsen (2006) and Tofteng and Husted (2014) are also inspired by critical theory: The critical Utopian tradition of first generation critical theory (Adorno and Horkheimer), and the dialogue tradition of second generation critical theory (Habermas).

In the first tradition, the focus is on awakening critical consciousness and on changing societal power structures. Therefore, the dialogues set in motion by the researcher are "understood as scenes for critical re-orientations in a reified everyday life" (Nielsen & Nielsen, 2006, p. 68). The researcher plays an active role in this critical reflection, by contributing with her¹

1 For readability reasons we use 'she' and 'her' when referring to action researchers and practitioners.

knowledge about the problem (Nielsen & Nielsen, 2006, p. 67). By using methods such as experiments, creation of free space, and future workshops, the practitioners can obtain knowledge about the societal conditions and power structures they are subjected to, and about the collective Utopian emancipation prospects². This approach can be seen as an expression of a “communitarian” understanding of freedom (Raffnsøe-Møller, 1999, p. 142), which considers society-level emancipation (from capitalism) as a precondition for individual freedom, and can thus, be criticised for having too little focus on the individual autonomy of the practitioner.

The dialogue tradition is often described as focusing less on the reifying and dominating societal conditions, and instead more on the particular organisational context in which the action research takes place. According to Tofteng and Husted (2012, p. 71), the idea is to give a voice to those that otherwise struggle to be heard in the dominating discourse in an organisation. The role of the researcher is to design and facilitate dialogues in which these voices can be heard, and where the practitioners get the opportunity to speak together and reflect on a common problem, in order for them (and *not* the researcher) to develop new discursive constructions: or, as Nielsen and Nielsen (2006, p. 76) formulate it: “methodological knowledge about how to manage reorganisation of discourses in the organisational world”. The role of the researcher, in this tradition, is not to bring her own perspectives forward but: as Pålshaugen and Gustavsen are cited in Nielsen and Nielsen (2006, p. 75): “action researchers should concentrate on methods and the construction of arenas for dialogues”. According to Nielsen and Nielsen (2006, p. 77), the researcher apparently does not bring her own experiences into play as: “the researchers only concentrate on procedures for dialogue”³. This approach can be seen as an expression of a ‘liberalist’ understanding of freedom (Raffnsøe-Møller, 1999, p. 142), that sees society as a result of the actions of autonomous individuals. It can thus be criticised for only seeing reality as something participants can construct discursively, and thereby overlook societal power structures and conflicts of interest, as well as the psycho-dynamic aspects of interpersonal relationships.

Recognition-based Action Research, which this article introduces as a new third tradition, is inspired by the critical Utopian tradition, in that action research can contribute to a critical awareness of the dominating societal conditions (for recognition) and of the possibilities for emancipation from this. The critical Utopian assumption, that researchers can and should bring their own knowledge and moral attitudes into play, is another source of inspiration. At the same time, Recognition-based Action Research is inspired by the dialogue tradition’s view that the researcher can and should facilitate processes, in which the different voices of the practitioners are heard with the aim of changing practice. However, the two traditions offer no suggestions for how the researcher relationally can recognise individual practitioners as subjects on a psychological level in relation to the problems that

2 Bladt and Nielsen (2013) is an example of critical Utopian action research in a Danish prison.

3 The dialogue tradition is reduced to a question about changing (constructing new) discourses, when the researchers, from the critical Utopian tradition, describe it (e.g. see Nielsen & Nielsen, 2006, p. 76; Tofteng & Husted, 2012; Nielsen, 2004, p. 534), just as they add to the entire dialogue tradition a consensus perspective (e.g. see Tofteng & Husted, 2012, p. 70). In the meantime, the dialogue tradition also includes perspectives that are neither occupied with discourse alone, nor have a consensus nor have a consensus perspective (see Kristiansen, 2013; Alrø & Dahl, 2015a and 2015b).

the practitioner encounter in their organisational context. It is here, that Recognition-based Action Research offers a particular contribution.

Inspiration from Honneth's concept of recognition

According to Honneth, mutual recognition is at the core of social institutions and it is a pre-requisite of individual development:

... all forms of individual freedom depend in an elementary way on practices of mutual recognition. After all, we can only grasp ourselves as being 'free' to the extent that we are addressed and treated as such by others. Therefore, we can distinguish between various forms of individual freedom according to existing forms of mutual recognition, depending on how we are treated as being 'free' and how we regard others as being 'free' (Honneth in an interview with Willig, 2012, p. 148).

The individual freedom Honneth refers to in the quotation is about developing a positive relation-to-self, understood as "the consciousness or feeling that a person has of him- or herself with regard to the capabilities and rights he or she enjoys" (Honneth, 2007, p. 235). A positive relation-to-self depends on being recognised as a fully individuated person (Honneth, 1995). For Honneth, it is not only about cognitively recognising an individual's presence, but also about emotionally recognising individuals as having worth in themselves, and also as being valuable to the social institution:

Only those who see themselves as having been taken cognisance of positively, in the mirror of the expressive behavioral modes of their counterparts, know themselves to be socially recognised in an elementary form (Honneth, 2001, p. 120).

Involving practitioners is a given in action research, as the practitioners by definition already are recognised as valuable in and to the particular context and problem of the research.

But the way the action research processes are managed determines whether or not the practitioners *experience* themselves as being recognised; i.e. whether the practitioners experience that the researcher is involving herself *in* them, and in the problem they are focusing on. One must, in Honneth's own words: 'take positive note of the other'; i.e. the researcher must have a recognising stance in the relationship.

Honneth (1995, p. 92-130) describes three types of practical relation-to-self: *self-confidence*, the consciousness of being loved; *self-respect*, the consciousness of being acknowledged as a morally respectable being; and *self-esteem*, the consciousness of possessing valuable and unique abilities in relation to social institutions. With Hegel as a point of departure, Honneth links these three types of relation-to-self to three different spheres: the private sphere (the close and family-related relationships), the legal sphere (The State), and the solidarity sphere (the cultural, political and work-related communities). The extent of one's positive relation-to-self

... increases with each new form of recognition that individuals are able to apply to themselves as subjects. In this way, the prospect of basic self-confidence is inherent in the experience of love; the prospect of self-respect, in the experience of legal recognition; and finally the prospect of self-esteem, in the experience of solidarity (Honneth, 1995, 173).

Denial of individual recognition amounts to a moral injury that can destroy fundamental self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem, and lead to a negative relation-to-self (Honneth, 1995, p. 131-139). The development of a positive relation-to-self is not an individual undertaking, but rather takes place in relationships with others:

The freedom associated with self-realisation is dependent on prerequisites that human subjects do not have at their disposal, since they can only acquire this freedom with the help of their interaction partners (Honneth, 1995, p. 174).

Thus, human self-realisation (freedom) is brought about in recognising relationships in a dialectic tension between, on the one hand individual autonomy and, on the other hand dependence on others and on social institutions. Humans cannot realise themselves without being in a relationship with others; i.e. without also recognising others.

Honneth's understanding of society is, therefore, also normative, as it focuses on the recognition conditionalities needed for human beings to lead a good life and realise themselves.

... morality is the quintessence of the attitudes we are mutually obligated to adopt in order to secure jointly the conditions for our personal integrity (Honneth, 2007, p. 137).

The individual is, therefore, morally obliged and responsible, not only for their own, but also for the other's development. The moral duties and attitudes do however vary, depending on the specific inter-subjective relationships, and the institutions people are a part of. It is through the intersubjectively binding rules and symbols of social institutions that individuals become aware of their mutual dependency. "Institutions of recognition are thus mere addenda or an external condition of intersubjective freedom" (Honneth, 2014, p. 49). Human self-realisation (freedom) cannot merely be individual *negative* freedom from external obstacles or *reflexive* freedom of self-determination, but should also be *social* freedom, where social institutions enable mutual recognition. With Hegel as a point of departure, Honneth (2014) concludes "that individuals can only experience and realise freedom if they participate in social institutions characterised by practices of mutual recognition" (p. 49).

Applying this line of thinking to action research, the challenges and problems of practitioners will also always be about relationships of, and institutional conditions for, recognition, and they will be connected with specific spheres of recognition. This will be the case regardless of whether the action research project is about involving citizens in regional development, about leadership development, about the development of personal, professional qualities in working with other people, or about something else entirely. Additionally, the way the researcher relates to the practitioners' challenges will also take place in relationships, where the recognition aspect is key, if development is to take place.

Although Honneth argues that recognition must be lived out in interpersonal relations (inter-subjectively) he does not address how individuals actually can be helped on an interpersonal and relational level, in cases where there is an absence of recognition. He does however mention that absence of recognition forces a person into a form of emotional tension that can only be relieved when one regains "the possibility for active conduct" (Honneth 1995, p. 138). However, how one through recognition can help the individual to deal with the absence of recognition, and regain the possibility of active conduct, is psychologically only addressed briefly by Honneth. Instead, this can be addressed by applying Schib-

bye's (1993, 2002; 2010) dialectical relationship theory, which gives an insight into how, by recognising the practitioner's experience, a helper (researcher/colleague) can contribute to the other persons' (personal professional) development.

Inspiration from Schibbye's concept of recognition

Dialectic relationship theory is a theory about how relationships have a decisive influence on people's possibilities for developing themselves. A key point is that a person's internal processes are dialectically connected with the processes of that individuals' interaction with others (Schibbye, 2010, p. 37). This means that, what happens inside the individual, affects what can happen when interacting with others, and vice versa: and for this reason, the quality of interpersonal relationships is so important in development contexts such as action research.

As is the case with Honneth, recognition is a cornerstone in Schibbye's thinking, and a key phenomenon in relationships between people. To her, recognition is closely connected with meeting another person as a subject, which, involves meeting this individual as a complete person with an internal world of experiences that should be taken seriously:

The individual has his/her own internal, experiential world of feelings, thoughts and opinions. The individual has his/her own interpretation of the world, his/her views and discoveries, and realises that it would be humiliating to have this internal experience ignored (Schibbye, 2010, p. 33, our translation).

This world of internal experiences: the 'inner-side' of individuals (Billund & Zimmer, 2004), includes feelings, thoughts, perspectives and needs and differs from their 'outer-side'; their appearances, which refers to observable behaviour. Recognition then means taking other peoples' inner-sides into account in your attitude towards them, and in the way you relate to and interact with them: this is what we describe as 'meeting the other person as a subject'. This line of thinking implies that the researcher needs to consider the pivotal role the quality of the interpersonal relationship: the mutual recognition, between herself and the practitioners plays in fostering development. The researcher must be capable of entering into a subject-subject relationship with them, that is characterised by qualities of respect, acceptance and human equality, and where one views the other as a complete person (Schibbye, 2010). Subject-subject relationships are the opposite of subject-object relationships, in which the subject is not affected by the other person's (the object's) experience-related perspectives or, as Schibbye puts it: 'overlooks the inner experience'.

At the same time, we are all both subject and object (Schibbye, 2010, p. 32), and the subject-object relationship will, therefore, always be present in action research. As a researcher, one must maintain a certain distance from the outer world of events. This is the case both while she interacts with the practitioners in the actual situation, and when she later analyses the interaction on her own. But the main point here is that, recognition, and thus development, can only take place in a subject-subject relationship. Development, in this respect, is closely connected with reaching new realisations.

Recognition thus refers to relational processes in which new realisations can arise, when individuals' support each other in 'gaining awareness of that, which is'. To 'gain awareness of that which is', has to do with developing awareness of and connecting with

the ‘inside matters of oneself’: a person’s own experiences, perspectives, intentions etc.; that, which Schibbye (2010), referring to Heidegger, describes as the individual’s ‘Befindlichkeit’. The reason this is key in development contexts such as action research, is according to Schibbye (2010, p. 237) that when a person is ‘allowed’ to have an experience, that alone can make it possible to change that experience e.g. by letting (it) go. Recognition is thus a precondition for new realisations and thereby also for development. Following this, inviting the practitioners’ *inner experiences* into the dialogue about their practices becomes an essential part of the understanding of development that Recognition-based Action Research represents.

Recognition as a way of being

For both Schibbye and Honneth, recognition is connected to an emotional engagement with the other person, that reaches beyond simply keeping to the cognitive aspects of the interaction. Schibbye argues in an interview with Christiansen (2011, p. 16) that while thoughts are naturally important: without an emotional engagement they will hardly lead to significant change. One can find similar thoughts from Honneth: Recognition is primarily about

... an affectively neutral, cognitive stance toward the world but rather that of an affirmative, existentially coloured style of caring comportment (Honneth, 2008, p. 38).

Recognition holds in itself a demand for an existential involvement in the other person’s emotional world. We must, therefore, make ourselves available to the other person, also on an emotional level. This is something we e.g. do when we meet the other person with an explorative or curious mindset, with empathy and with an eye for the other persons’ experiences.

This approach to relating oneself to another person entails moving away from understanding recognition as merely a method or a technique.

... communicative techniques are *not* sufficient. In order to create a common reality, we have to enter into relationships involving feelings, face the treats, and recognise or acknowledge others (Schibbye, 1993, p. 186).

Recognition is a way of being, a lived out view of human nature. As Schibbye (2010, p. 234) underlines, recognition is not something you do. It is something you are.

In that respect, basing action research on a stance of recognition also means including processes of compassion between humans, something which is closely connected with the way the researcher sees and lives out her profession. This is what we refer to as the personal professional dimension (see Billund, 2016; Billund & Alrø, 2017, Billund & Zimmer, 2018).

A common theoretical background: Hegel's concept of recognition

Recognition is a compound phenomenon of a complex nature. A deeper understanding of the concept can be found in its roots in Hegel, whose concept of recognition has been the basis of both Honneth's and Schibbye's theories.

Even though Honneth and Schibbye base their theories on different parts of Hegel's thinking, they are both fundamentally inspired by his ontological point of departure: that human beings are driven towards development, and that development occurs in and by virtue of the relationships into which they enter.

Hegel argues that humans are subject to a paradoxical inner tension. This is a tension between on the one hand having a desire for autonomy and independence, and on the other hand having a desire to be recognised by others, thus being dependent. As humans need recognition in order to become whole persons (develop a positive relation-to-self), humans depend on others, and consequently it is impossible to both receive recognition from others and also be fully independent. Recognition can only arise in relationships that are mutual; i.e. where both parties recognise each other. This implies that I must recognise you, in order for you to be able to recognise me. But this recognition is accompanied by feelings of anxiety, as it involves the risk that recognition given is not reciprocated, and here the paradoxical inner tension between independence and dependence shows itself: in order to be independent, we must be dependent. Hegel (1977, p. 111-119) uses the relationship between lord and bondsman to illustrate how the non-mutual relationship congeals in its own rigidity. The bondsman (i.e. a person which is held in bondage by a lord; who has no choice in working for the lord) has to recognise the lord (by attending to the lord's needs), but as the lord does not reciprocate the recognition, the lord receives recognition from a person who is not worthy of being recognised, as a result of which, the given recognition loses its value. When the bondsman, as the non-recognised, recognises the lord, the lord himself ends as non-independent; i.e. in a contrast. Recognition thus becomes bondage. If the recognition received from others is to have any value, it is first necessary to recognise these other persons.

The way out of this paradoxical inner tension is *mutual recognition*. Recognition in a sense becomes the answer to the question of how people in spite of the inner paradoxical tension still are able to realise themselves.

To achieve that, we need a constructive and recognising relationship with others. According to Schibbye (2010, p. 46), we cannot reason ourselves out of this contrast. It can only be solved in practice, in a directly emotionally experienced, respectful encounter. It requires an affective interaction in which the two partners are simultaneously separate and a complete whole.

Recognition in action research

We argue that action research has great potential for being such a practice, and for facilitating a directly experienced, meeting of emotions. But we also argue that this requires that the researcher herself is recognising within the interpersonal relationships, and in relation to

the problems which are addressed as part of the process. That is easier said than done, as Recognition-based Action Research faces at least two challenges. Firstly with regard to the relationships with the practitioners where, as stated, recognition must be reciprocal, meaning that the action research depends on the practitioners recognising each other as well as the researcher herself. And this cannot be dictated by the researcher. Secondly, regarding the problem, the researcher cannot pre-determine what the practitioners will experience as mutual recognition during the course of their work.

The problem: Recognition of the practitioners work

Let us first look at the last challenge, which reflects the idea that the experience of mutual recognition depends on the individual's subjective experience, and the values of the social institution to which the individual practitioner belongs.

During the action research process, the researcher must continuously explore what the practitioners see as recognition in their work (their problem) and allow the process to adjust itself according to that. Basing action research on a stance of recognition thus means also allowing that, which seems relevant for or affects the practitioners, to affect the action research process. From this it follows that the action research process should not only advance the scholarly interests of the researcher, but also constitute a common sphere of solidarity for both the researcher and the practitioners. The common sphere indicates that the researchers and the practitioners have a shared objective with the action research: and that neither party is forced into the relationship or forced to accept a particular objective. The solidarity aspect indicates that the researcher and the practitioners recognise each other's distinctive qualities and care for these.

The relationship: How do the researcher and the practitioners relate to each other?

The challenge concerned with recognition as a mutual phenomenon has to do with the fact that the researcher cannot (and should not) dictate mutual recognition, but may only invite participants into such a relationship. It is here that the researcher has a central, and challenging task. When we speak about recognition in the relationship between the researcher and practitioners, it is played out in a professional and asymmetric relationship, in which the researcher has a distinctive role with the responsibility of being helper and process manager. The researcher is morally obliged to promote the practitioners' relation-to-self "according to the universal principle of respect" (Honneth 2003, p. 20) and is, in addition, also responsible for putting 'recognition on the agenda'; i.e. to be a role-model by practicing an attitude of recognition towards the practitioners. The practitioners have no reciprocal responsibilities of that nature. Mutual recognition is nonetheless key to the development made possible, as the practitioner, confer Hegel's lord-bondsman metaphor, must meet the researcher with recognition. This in order that the recognition the researcher brings to the relationship can hold any significance for the practitioner.

This means that the professional relationship between the researcher and the practitioners at the human level must be based on regarding each other as being of equal worth, and likewise that their exploration of the problem must be based on a stance of mutual recognition⁴. In spite of this necessary mutuality, the researcher thus has a different set of obligations than those of the practitioners.

Problem and relationship

Recognition-based Action Research involves taking on this set of obligations, and with them also follows the potential for better access to distinctly experience-based aspects of the practitioners' problem. This differentiates Recognition-based Action Research from other types of research, where experiences are not included, and these risk reducing the practitioners to objects. Honneth (2003) speaks of that risk, when there is an "expanding distance between interaction partners" (p. 20). In traditional research, where the researcher with distance cognitively analyses his material composed of questionnaires, statements and interview responses, or video recordings of discussions, this risk is obviously present. The risk of objectification is also present in action research in the critical Utopian tradition and in the dialogue tradition, as both are primarily concerned with the problem, and avoid describing or addressing the quality of the relationship between the researcher and the practitioners. In these two traditions, the practitioners tend to be seen as societally determined and discursively constructed beings respectively. By contrast, Recognition-based Action Research requires and makes it possible for the researcher, throughout the process, to emotionally recognise the practitioners as actual situated subjects, and that reduces the risk of objectification.⁵

Recognition-based Action Research thus involves a consciousness and awareness of the meaning of *both* the recognition, made possible when people meet each other on equal terms *and* the potential for development and change that follow a recognition of the needs, conditions, resources and problems of the practitioner; the problem of the action research. The researcher must thus be concerned with the inner experiences of the others (subjects), in order to be able to connect with them and, through that, also be aware of the recognition needs and -spheres that are relevant for the practitioner. In other words, this type of action research involves a double recognition perspective.

4 On the contrary, the relationship is asymmetrical in the process plan, because the researcher will typically adopt a professional helper role in relationship to the practitioner, and thereby be responsible for establishing the framework and conditions necessary for the shared relationship to arise.

5 The practical examples in this article were analysed and interpreted based on a hermeneutically grounded analytical model (Alrø, Dahl & Schumann, 2016) where the action researcher does not only take on a stance of distance, but also seeks to be involve herself, by drawing on her intuition and inner experiences, in order to lessen the risk of objectifying the prison officers. Both the relation with the practitioners and the subsequent analytical work is thus grounded in critical hermeneutics (Juul, 2017).

The double recognition perspective: practical examples

Recognition-based Action Research thus focuses on both the relationship between the researcher and the practitioners, *and* on the problems of the practitioners⁶. By combining Honneth and Schibbye, Recognition-based Action Research includes both the 'here and now' relationship between the researcher and the practitioners⁷, a more distanced and analytical perspective on the individual problems, and a combination of both.

In the remainder of the article, Recognition-based Action Research will be discussed with reference to practice examples taken from an action research project.

The action research project concerns the prison officer profession, with focus on their relationship with inmates in a high-security prison (Billund 2016). This focus involves that the prison officers, as part of the project, see themselves as professionals and reflect on their interactions with the inmates (and with each other) with the aim of understanding their own practice better, and of developing new ways to practice their profession. In Recognition-based Action Research, the researcher's role, among other things, is to contribute to the creation of a collaborative environment within the action research group, which is conducive for a desire to learn and which, includes recognising the individuals' inner experience-related dimensions that are brought into play in this personal professional arena. To focus on the inner-side is a way of meeting the individuals and the group, with an eye for relevant spheres of recognition, and needs for recognition which will support development in the interaction.

If, for example, a prison officer experiences significant conflicts between colleagues, or a lack of managerial support and brings these experiences into the action research process, the researcher must, through recognition, address and acknowledge these experiences in order for all the involved prison officers to develop on a personal professional level. By bringing the prison officers' experiences into the dialogue, all the officers are given opportunity to reexamine and explore these. Through that, they can develop a greater reflective capability that strengthens their ability to maintain an overview, and see situations from several different angles, and to differentiate between their own experiences and those of the inmates etc. In that sense, this can support a professional approach.

6 We have not found any action research that involves such a double recognition perspective. The closest we came were the following two examples: The first is an action research project where the problem is acknowledging communication in the health sector, taken from Schibbye (Vatne, & Hoem, 2008; Vatne, Bjørnerem & Hoem, 2009). The second is a practical research project where the problem is recognition within the social sector, taken from Honneth (Moe, Tronvoll, & Gjeitnes, 2014). However, neither of the projects reflects further on the relationship between the researcher and the practitioners.

7 Focus on how the relationships between researcher and practitioners in an action research process can be actualised, refers to what, Torbert (2001) describes as Second-person action research, and is concerned with how the collaboration processes play out practically in action research. The turning point is the researcher's role and contribution to the interaction and the level of collaboration. Second-person action research shows how the communication evolves in the real processes. The conditions necessary to create development-supportive relationships between the participants in action research processes are closely connected to how the researcher operates personally; i.e. First-person action research: "Indeed, as listening through oneself both ways (towards origin and outcome) is the quintessential first person research/practice, so speaking-and-listening-with-others ... is the quintessential second-person research/practice" (Torbert, 2001, p. 253). That perspective is revealed by Billund and Alrø (2017).

In what follows, we will now demonstrate how a perspective that also focusses on experiences can manifest itself, and how it links into Recognition-based Action Research.

The recognition perspective: on a macro and a micro level

Honneth's sociology focuses on how historical-societal features become conditions for the given (poor) recognition relationships and thus negative relations-to-self. It thus takes a macro perspective on recognition. We will seek to demonstrate how recognition manifests itself interpersonally and how it in practice develops on a micro level. Here, we draw on Schibbye's psychology, where focus is on how a (positive) relation-to-self can be supported, in and through interpersonal relationships of recognition.

In the following, based on Schibbye, we will look at how the researcher on a micro level, seeks to practice a stance of recognition in her relationship with the practitioners in the action research process. Then, based on Honneth, we will discuss how the practitioners' problems can be understood from a macro level of recognition perspective. Finally, we will discuss how *relationship and problem* can be seen interacting with each other.

Recognition in *relationships* in the prison project

The following is an excerpt from the action research project⁸ that illustrates how the micro level perspective can be brought into play in the action research interaction. In the excerpt, the focus is on one female prison officer (Sanne) who, a few days earlier had experienced observing a female colleague (Malene) being physically intimidated by an inmate, and where this colleague (Malene) merely reacted by laughing. The prison officer has just described how she saw one of the inmates approach her colleague and touch the colleague inappropriately. The officer continues:

Sanne: Then there was another one, who also did it [had too close physical contact] and my legs really just started to shake, and I just closed down.

Peter: So that brings us beyond the point where this is just an accident.

Sanne: What did you say?

Christian: But maybe they were just about to lose their balance

Sanne: Yeah, that could be [ironic tone]

Christian: So they find support

...

8 The conversation is managed with the help of an audio recording. The sequences are written to Danish standards for statements and the registration of verbal accounts (Dansk standard for udskrifter og registrering af talesprog, 1992). However, signs have been added. Words that are expressed strongly are written in CAPS-TALS. Overlapping speech is underlined. Pauses of more than 3 seconds are indicated in round brackets; e.g. (3 sec). Our explanatory comments on the content are given in square brackets; e.g. [ironic tone]. Unless something else is specifically indicated, the statements come from the person speaking. Where part of a statement is missing, it is indicated by dots ... With the exception of the researcher, all names are made anonymous. If we, in our analysis wish to highlight a particular word, it is written in *Italics*.

Lise: So your legs just started to shake?

Sanne: Yeah, they just started to shake, because then I of course knew there is something COMPLETELY wrong here, which is inappropriate and so and gone too far. And I somehow manage to get all the inmates checked, and what's it's called. I check with Malene, if there were a couple of them, I couldn't exactly remember having seen. And then she said "Yeah, they all came home [to their cells]". Yes, fine, and I say nothing to her, uhhh. I simply didn't know how to handle it, what I should say to her, so I decided to go to the manager, and, well, then that train left the station.

Lise: What happened then?

Sanne: I end up spending the whole day at work, not being able to pull myself together to do anything at all. I am just there, can't do anything; just sitting there trying to look as if I'm doing something.

At first the colleagues responded partly by confirming that this was a serious situation ("So that brings us beyond the point where this is just an accident") and partly by joking about the situation: "But maybe they were just about to lose their balance so they find support". Seen from a recognition perspective, the researcher (Lise) attempts to get the prison officer's inner-side into the conversation by, in this case, asking questions in a reflective-paraphrasing way ("So your legs just started to shake?") towards the experience that the prison officer herself had introduced ("and my legs really just started to shake").

Sanne connects her emotional experience (her shaking legs) with the acknowledgement ("because then I of course knew") of the inappropriate behaviour that had gone too far. Through that, she stays with what she has been through; she 'gains awareness of that, which is', and that is a condition for her being able to understand and reflect upon the experience, as she does in the example above. Recognition-based Action Research involves that the researcher in the relationship (also), asks about the inner-sides of the practitioners, in order to help the individual (Sanne) explore the practice: the problem, of which she is a part.

As we shall see later, in this way Sanne and the other participants gradually through recognition-based mutual relationships, gain greater local knowledge about the problem: which in the end can also contribute to more general knowledge.

The practitioners' recognition *problem* in the prison project

The following illustrates how Honneth's macro level perspective can contribute to understanding how the given poor recognition conditions affect Sannes need for recognition. In this example, where an inmate has too close physical contact with a prison officer, the perspective can help us understand that action as a physical violation connected with the private sphere, which according to Honneth (1995, p. 133) is "accompanied by a dramatic breakdown in one's trust in reliability of the social world and hence by a collapse in one's basic self-confidence". Moreover, it is a breach of the prison's regulations and norms and, therefore a violation within the legal sphere, that is connected with "the feeling of not enjoying the status of a fully-fledged partner to interaction, equally endowed with moral rights" (1995, p. 133) and is, therefore, also connected with loss of self-respect.

The “inappropriate” and the “gone too far” are not just happening between the inmate and the concerned prison officer, but also affect the officer (Sanne) who observed the incident and as it rendered her helpless: “... I just closed down ... I say nothing to her, uhmm. I simply didn’t know how to handle it, what I should say to her ... I end up spending the whole day at work, not being able to pull myself together to do anything at all. I am just there, can’ do anything; just sitting there trying to look as if I’m doing something.”

In Honneth’s understanding, it is a moral violation or moral injury that harms the prison officer’s (Sanne’s) self-confidence and self-respect: and also her self-esteem so much so that she is restricted in doing her work (in the solidarity sphere) because she cannot depend on a colleague, who demonstrates such a lack of respect for the prison norms by allowing herself to be intimidated. The violation illustrates how the prison officers depend on each other, and raises very basic questions about the norms of their social institution.

Using Honneth (1995, p. 138) this dynamic can be explained by, the subject (Sanne) “being oppressed by a feeling of low self-esteem”, when “a real or imaginary interaction partner” (the colleague) oversteps a moral norm by not reacting:

Hence, the moral crisis in communication is triggered here by the agent being disappointed with regard to the normative expectations that she or he believed could be placed on another’s willingness to respect him or her (Honneth, 1995, p. 138).

Sanne’s possible disappointment could be caused by her feeling deceived by a colleague, which results in a feeling of shame, that paralyzes her. This type of shame:

... represents the emotion that overwhelms subjects who, as a result of having the ego-claims disregarded, are incapable of simply going ahead with an action. In these emotional experiences, what one comes to realise about oneself is that one’s own person is constitutively dependent on the recognition of others (Honneth, 1995, p. 138).

The violation is thus not based in Sanne feeling that she acted improperly herself (a feeling of guilt based on the super-ego), but instead, the violation stems from Sanne *feeling* that she herself is wrong (shame feeling because of the ego-ideal):

In psychoanalytical terms, this means that what is negatively affected by the action-inhibiting violation of a moral norm is not the super-ego, but the subject’s ego-ideals (Honneth, 1995, p. 138).

Honneth’s approach makes it possible to understand how ordinary human dynamics associated with recognition and moral injury can have an effect in complex vocations, as e.g. the work of prison officers. It shows how relationships are built in to the norms of social institutions, and that a violation of those norms will negatively impact both the relationship and the individual (here Sanne’s relation-to-self). In that way, Honneth’s perspective can contribute to action research processes with an understanding of central problems related to local practices, and it can thus give access to knowledge that goes beyond these problems. The problems highlight elements of the profession that further enlighten us about what *kind* of profession it is, what challenges and conditions characterise the profession, and what the emotional consequences of practicing the profession can be.

Potentials in a double recognition perspective

In the following we will see how *relationship and problem* can be seen in interaction, and how this double recognition perspective makes it possible to design action research processes that both have an eye for the importance of recognition in the development of the practitioners (local, practical knowledge), and for insights into the connection between individual development and institutional development (general theoretical knowledge).

We return to the action research project in the prison: From a follow-up question from the researcher about what management did with regard to Sanne, it becomes evident, that it is unclear, how the process will be handled in the future. The other prison officers continue discussing what happened in the ward on that particular day after Sanne went home; among other things, that the concerned officer was confronted with the situation. The prison officers focus on that chain of events, and on intentions and causes. Sanne's experiences and feelings fade out of the conversation, which quickly shifts to addressing a problem like this in their daily work: to how they can ensure that the inmates get less power and how they can increase the feeling of security within the ward. It is discussions like these, that can help generate ideas for new practices and, therefore, they are entirely relevant to the action research project. It does however also mean that the immediate focus drifts away from the experiential aspects, that can often be seen as 'difficult subjects'. Such a problem-related displacement can mean that the process also drifts away from the development potential inherent in personal professional reflections. Because the researcher and the practitioners have agreed to focus on the personal professional aspects of their job, the researcher subsequently attempts to include Sanne's more experience-related sides back into the conversation:

- Lise: I just wanted to ask you, Sanne, now that you are sitting here and hearing about what happened in the ward yesterday. How does that feel? What happened, and Malene and?
- Sanne: Well I, I, yes, well I know that I did what I was supposed to do. What I'm thinking about now is: can I stay in this ward?
- Lise: Hm, hm.
- Sanne: Because I do realise that they [the inmates] will go after me now.

In Honneth's terminology, Sanne assesses cognitively that she acted like a morally dependable person by keeping the appropriate rules, and by going to the management. However, she continues by telling what is also on her mind, which is whether she can stay in this ward when the inmates now will go after her: because she is seen as having 'grassed' to the management (which results in a tightening of the rules and changed conditions for the inmates). To 'go-after' in the prison context means that the inmates will get revenge on her through different forms of harassment. This can be interpreted as Sanne beginning to talk about her inner-side; i.e. what worries her. This can be whether she will be allowed to stay in the ward (if, for example, management decides that she is now a hazard to her own safety and to that of her colleagues) and that she is threatened by the inmates. Seen through a recognition perspective, Sanne is not expressing doubts about the way she cognitively sees herself (and is seen) as a morally dependable person (the legal sphere), but can with good reason be worried about being violated (possibly both physically and mentally) by the in-

mates and, thereby lose her self-confidence (private sphere), and for not being allowed to stay in the ward and thereby losing her self-esteem (the solidarity sphere). Therefore, Sanne is weighed down with some particularly difficult recognition conditions; possibly made even worse by her uncertainty about the future actions of the management.

That the managerial actions related to the vulnerability of the individual are unclear in crisis situations like these, can be connected with the prison culture, where the 'hard' is typically given priority over the 'soft' (Minke, 2010; Nielsen, 2010; Billund, 2016). In prison there is no culture of expressing feelings, neither directed towards inmates or between employees, as that can be seen as a weakness with regards to doing your job. In that perspective, Sanne is very open about her worries and vulnerability.

After Sanne has expressed her worry, a few minutes of discussion between the officers follows. They focus on what happened, how grotesque the situation is in the ward, and also on sympathies and concerns for the officer who has now been revealed in, what the others understand as having her boundaries violated. Again, these discussions are important for handling and reflecting on the situation back in the ward, but at the same time Sanne's experiences fade out of the conversation, and with that, also the development potential connected with being helped to embrace and reflect on these. In order to maintain a balance between problem and relationship (the double recognition perspective), the action researcher again brings up Sanne's situation: this time by including the other participants:

- Lise: What do you think about Sanne's situation?
 Lotte: I don't think they [the inmates] dare. I don't think they will be allowed to [by the strong inmates].
 Peter: But that changes nothing if you are feeling uneasy about being here.
 Sanne: Yes, yes, yes.
 Christian: Yeah, but definitely. It affects both your health and then.
 Sanne: I just want to be allowed to continue to do my job, and that is all there is to it.
 Peter: Yeah, but you must feel OK while you are doing it.
 Sanne: Yeah, I know.
 Peter: Also, even if there is no obvious pressure or harassment, you must
 Lotte: feel confident in the people you work with.
 Peter: But you are not alone: I am also one of those who has put his name to something.

The sequence shows that the other officers, in a sense, take over or continue the action researcher's recognition of Sanne's inner-side where, earlier, they had joked ("maybe they were just about to lose their balance so they find support") and had their focus on the outer-side (the inmates). The colleagues help underline that emotional experiences should be taken seriously, by insisting that Sanne's health is important; "even when there is no obvious pressure or harassment, you *must* feel confident in the people you work with". Her colleague says indirectly that the emotional aspects *must* be included: "you *must* feel OK while you are doing it (your job)". In contrast with the prison culture, the action research process seems to enable mutual recognition (*social freedom*). It can be argued that officers are expressing the view that the problem is not only Sanne's, but common to all of them. The conversation is not only about Sanne's *negative freedom* (the inmates won't dare to go after Sanne), or her *reflexive freedom* ("I just want to be allowed to continue to do my job"), but

also that the prison as a social institution: and not only the action research process, must provide means for mutual recognition (*social* freedom) and that this includes an inner-side that has to be recognised. In that sense focus is on both the relationship between the participants in the action research process *and* on the problem of the practioners and their social institution (the double recognition perspective).

The support Sanne receives from the action-researcher and the colleagues can, in addition to supporting her self-esteem, also help to build her self-confidence, thereby functioning in a quasi-therapeutic way.

One can, for example, also build self-confidence with the help of certain groups that function as therapeutic agents. ... Groups very often have the power to function as quasi-therapists so that, inside the group one gets exactly the stimulations that one needs in order to cope with the traumas one has had. (Honneth's answer to Jensen, 2006, p. 87, our translation).

Honneth does not elaborate on what he means by "stimulations", but if following Schibbye's line of thinking, this would include emotional recognition of the inner-side. Similarly, Honneth (2009) (referring to Freud) argues that self-appropriation cannot only be about the subject cognitively recognizing the repression, but also allowing for possible emotional inclusion:

we should ... understand affective acceptance of repression as the goal and endpoint of self-appropriation. ... it is the only way that we can learn after the event to mentally reorganize the content locked within it and to give this a propositional form (p. 114).

After the group supported Sanne, the researcher continues:

Lise: When I ask about things concerning Sanne, I think that the system also has responsibility for you, and the system also has responsibility for ensuring that you are looked after in this situation and receive the help that you need. Because you can certainly risk needing help.

Sanne: Hm hm.

Christian: Certainly.

Lise: And I'm also thinking with the history of pressure you have been under for the past year, and this simply adds to it.

The researcher meta-communicates about why she has asked about Sanne by bringing the social institution's co-responsibility into play in relation to the outer-side ("that *you are looked after*") and inner-side ("and receive the help *you need*"). She acknowledges that Sanne has vulnerable sides ("you can certainly risk needing help").

In Schibbye's understanding, recognition from the researcher and the colleague can support development for Sanne. The same is the case in Honneth's understanding, as the group practices – and confirms – the social institution's norms by giving "quasi-therapeutic aid" (Honneth, 2012, p. 212), which supports Sanne's self-respect and self-esteem: "Neither self-respect nor self-esteem can be maintained without the supportive experience of practicing shared values in the group" (p. 214). This can be seen as "a case of solidarity", as the group demonstrates "felt concern" for Sanne, as well as sympathy, which is a condition for realizing shared goals (Honneth, 1995, p. 129).⁹

9 This is in agreement with the dialectic view of the relationship between individual and social institution, which also appears in Honneth's (2012) basic understanding of groups as "a social mechanism that serves the

The researcher brings the problem into a wider organisational context by introducing the co-responsibility of the social institution (“the system also has responsibility”). With that, she acknowledges that the social institution (i.e. management) has a responsibility, which can be seen as recognition of the prison officers’ right to demand something from their management. *This is recognition in relation to the problem.* The researcher underpins her opinion by referring to the difficult conditions that all officers have been faced with during the past year (“the pressure you have been under”), and thereby setting their difficult recognition conditions in a historical context.

The sequence thus demonstrates the double recognition perspective: The action researcher meets Sanne’s inner-side with recognition and recognises the problem of the practitioners and their social institution.

When the researcher introduces the management’s co-responsibility, it is not about recognising the prison officers’ inner-side (in Schibbye’s understanding), but about the researcher (in Honneth’s understanding) bringing her own moral perception to light in relation to the recognition conditions of the social institution to which the officers are subjected.

In terms of action research, this is then criticism of the existing recognition conditions that can bring about increased awareness, and lead to collective action. This can be seen as an indication that the researcher’s use of the “recognition framework in, for example, thematic stimulations in group discussions” can lead to “a certain conscious expansion effect around the dimension, which is often under-stated or neglected”, according to Honneth (in an interview with Willig and Petersen, 2001, p. 105, our translation). In that sense, one can say that the researcher’s inspiration from 3rd generation critical theory comes into play here, as an expression of recognition of the institutional *problem* that is being addressed.

In a follow-up group interview, one year after the action research processes had taken place, the prison officers explain how they benefited from the double recognition perspective. Christian says that the action research processes: “always were about us and our ward. The things that concern us in our daily life, those were the themes”, i.e. the *problems* of the practitioners. The officers explain this has to do with the *interpersonal relationship* between them and the action researcher: “It’s because Lise always let us choose for it to be that way”. Lotte elaborates by explaining how the action research processes gave new and different positive conditions for recognition than those usually found in the ward, as they together openly could reflect on their own concerns and feelings, without this becoming an individual problem:

There was room for saying what you were thinking and feeling, in contrast with how things are on the ward. I had the feeling this was a place where you could unload and also discuss things, so you weren’t just thinking: “Oh, I feel sorry for myself” but that you actually took something away from it. It was actually nice to hear it from the other side as well. You really talked things over with both you [the action researcher], but also the colleagues and this is in contrast with the supervision we have now, where I, like Peter, am thinking about what I want to say and what I don’t want to say, and I never think that here. So I have gained a lot from it, that’s for sure.

interests or needs of the individual by helping him or her achieve personal stability and growth” (p. 203) and “a primary ‘source of humanity’.” (p. 214).

Peter adds that it was the “safe environment” of the action research processes, where the officer’s problems were taken seriously in the interpersonal relation:

You knew that what you said was reflected on. And you weren’t made a fool of. You could say what you wanted.

The prison officers’ experiences with the action research process thus relates to both how it prioritizes the problems that were important to them (*problem*): even though it was sometimes at the expense of the research interest of the action researcher, and it relates to the interpersonal interplay between them and the action researcher (*relation*). And finally, it points to the conclusion that the knowledge and the experiences the prison officers were motivated to share in the action research processes, were closely connected with a feeling of interpersonal security and trust.

Conclusion

Recognition-based Action Research sees the relationship between the individual and the social institutions as dialectic. The individuals’ development towards freedom is inseparably bound to relationships with mutual recognition. The individual cannot develop a positive relation-to-self (to be free and ‘flourish’) without being acknowledged, and without acknowledging other members of the social institution. Recognition relationships are not individual undertakings. They are part of, and dependent on, the norms and practices of the social institution; i.e. the organisational and institutional recognition conditions. If the social institution is to develop itself in an emancipatory direction, its practices and norms must enable and support mutual recognition relationships.

Therefore, Recognition-based Action Research is about the development of the individual practitioner, and of the social institution, being inter-connected. The researcher helps the practitioners by exploring a problem that is important to both the individual and the social institution. She does this by creating a space in which the practitioners’ experience-related aspects of the problem are explored by the researcher and the practitioners, through relationships based recognition. In this way, the practitioners obtain local, practical knowledge about which recognition relationships and conditions will support their development, just as the researcher can obtain a more general knowledge through analysis and theorising. This knowledge can be about the connection between relationships and problems in the action research process, and in the practitioners’ work-related praxis (solidarity sphere).

Recognition-based Action Research thus argues that mutual recognition between the researcher and the practitioners, and between the practitioners themselves, is crucial to ensuring that action research can lead to development and new knowledge: both practical and theoretical. Recognition-based Action Research makes it possible to reflect experience-related dimensions both in the relationship between the researcher and the practitioners, and in the problems so that the essential recognition potential in relation to human individual and social institutional existence is not missed. It is precisely here the combination of Schibbye and Honneth is powerful.

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