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This is the published version of a paper published in *International Journal of Action Research*.

Citation for the original published paper (version of record):

Albinsson, G. (2015)

Development-oriented Learning in a project team: Applying an interactive research approach.

International Journal of Action Research, 12(3): 289-316

Access to the published version may require subscription.

N.B. When citing this work, cite the original published paper.

Permanent link to this version:

<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:lnu:diva-45439>

International Journal of Action Research

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Development-oriented learning in a project team. Applying an interactive research approach

Gunilla Albinsson

The overall purpose of the article is to describe a joint learning process where both practicable and theoretically anchored knowledge are in the foreground. The empirical data derives from an EU project. In focus is a group of course leaders and their experiences of carrying out a training programme targeted for a group of individuals with a weak position on the labour market. The author brings out what happens when individuals try to understand perspectives from one another. The results demonstrate the knowledge that is developed when members of a project team are included in the entire research process, from the definition of problems to the analysis, presentation of results and suggestions of change. Further the outcome illustrates how an interactive research approach can be conducted in close co-operation with those concerned. Active participation, a structured learning process, critical reflections and common understanding then became essential prerequisites. Taken together the study reveals that it is possible to learn how to approach complex problems and situations. By communicating experiences and thoughts that could be attributed to interaction patterns in social relations, communication structures, emotions, influence and power, the course leaders and the researcher jointly created a learning environment where reflection, understanding and development-oriented learning were of vital importance.

Key words: interactive research approach, the joint learning process, development-oriented learning, reflecting seminars

Background

The project Klara Livet¹ is a Social Fund Project within programme area 2, which turns to unemployed individuals with a weak position on the labour market. The core activity of the project is an intervention in the form of a training programme, with the objective to strengthen the individual's possibilities and motivation to come nearer to or go back to work, to function in the everyday life and in that way obtain greater influence on the experienced health. Another objective is to make the individual come nearer to working life and to maintenance, either through workplace practice or through an introduction to social or co-operative entrepreneurship. The project was run by the County Council of Blekinge within the framework of the European Social Fund with a budget of 33 120 667 SEK. The project period was 2011-02-01 to 2013-08-31. Co-financiers were the County Council of Blekinge and the Co-ordination Association in Blekinge (FINSAM). Partners in the project were the Employment Office, the Swedish Social Insurance Agency, the municipalities in Blekinge and Bromölla municipality. Klara Livet also co-operated with Coompanion, a business consultant for co-operative entrepreneurship. During the three-year long project period, educational work has been carried out for individuals who were on long-term sick leave, received sickness benefit, whose periods of sickness benefit had expired or who had some sort of impairment.

The training programme Liv i livet²

In the project a structured training concept was applied, which is a Swedish development of the American Chronic Disease Self Management (CDSMP). This model builds on cognitive learning psychology, and is directed at individuals with long-term sicknesses, and how they manage the influence that the sickness has on life and emotions. The training items comprised thematic

¹ The words in Swedish of the project title, Klara Livet, can be translated into "cope with life."

² The words in Swedish of this training programme, Liv i Livet, can be translated into "life in life."

areas such as physical and mental health, communication, emotional competence, self-image, critical reflections on the individual's own thoughts and behaviours, the future and also workplace practice alternatively an introduction to social entrepreneurship. The basic methods used in the training programme were mindfulness, empowerment and psycho synthesis, a method where self-realisation through the liberation of will and creativity constitutes the focus. The programme also included workplace practice and an introduction to social entrepreneurship. During the project period 5 rounds of courses, comprising 20 courses, were carried out at four folk high schools. The number of course participants who completed the course were 296, of which 227 were women and 69 were men.

Ongoing evaluation within Klara Livet

During the last eight months of the project I was an ongoing evaluator in the project. The point of departure was to form a constructive and forward-looking dialogue between me and the participants. As a researcher I adopted a collaborative and active part in relation to the project management team, i.e. the representative of the project owner, the project leader and the project's quality coordinator. Process support was formalised by following the project development and evaluating how the work was conducted in order to achieve goal attainment and implementation. The outcome of the programme logic with emphasis on the causality between the goals and activities of the project was presented in a report, which was sent to the European Social Fund. (Albinsson, 2014).

Besides the above described process support I also worked, as a result of the wishes from the project management, together with the project's fifteen course leaders. In previous professional life they have worked as nurse, physiotherapist, child minder, ground staff of SAS, teacher, trained social worker, recreation leader, computer technician, store manager for a fashion chain store and seller of telecommunication services. All of them had their own experience of long-term sick leave or unemployment. Before the work as trainers started they had to undergo a week-long residential course, "fundamentals," followed by four days of instructor training.

This article illustrates how the group of course leaders, together with the researcher, jointly created a learning environment where understanding and knowledge development constituted a basis. This part of the learning evaluation originated at a first meeting with the course leaders, where it became clear that they wished to go deeper into how they in their courses worked with the course leader role, the individual, the group and the group process.

Research approach

With the point of departure in an interactive research approach this part of the ongoing evaluation assignment aimed to describe and analyse the knowledge building that was developed and the outcome of working together that occurred when the course leaders of the project communicated and tried to understand perspectives of one another. Interactive research is based on a hermeneutic knowledge ideal where a common value system in the participants and researcher is emphasised. The approach embraces several different scientific methods. The multiple qualitative methods are the dominating ones where the researcher adopts a participatory role as an active part in relation to the participants. The democratic dimension, which builds on a knowledge approach of multiplicity and variation, is also regarded as valuable (Aagaard-Nielsen & Nielsen-Steen, 2006; Westlander, 2006; Svensson, Ellström, & Brulin, 2007). Another characteristic for the interactive research approach is that it is practically oriented and that change is seen as an integrated part of the research. The method rather deals with asking questions than giving general answers and ready solutions and with providing a deeper understanding of the phenomenon that is being studied (cf. Olsson, 2002; Westlander, 2006; Svensson et al., 2007).

As a researcher I chose an active role in relation to the participants and acted by those means in the field of tension between closeness and distance, empirical data and theory as well as practice and academy. Closeness refers to doing research with the course leaders in the project, and was seen as a precondition for adopting a critical attitude towards my own role, as well as towards the course leaders while distance meant physical, social and mental distance, which makes possible reflection and the deepening of knowledge.

Early in the research process, finding the balance between closeness and distance became a challenge. Acceptance of the project participants was, thus, important for me to have access to empirical data, at the same time as distance in certain stages was seen as necessary for the practice to be understood from different perspectives. Another challenge was to find relevant angles of approach which made abstraction and development of new practice-relevant knowledge. The field of tension between practice and academy meant that sub-cultures met and thus different linguistic usages, norms and values were put against one another (cf. Svensson & Aagaard-Nielsen, 2006a; Svensson & Aagaard-Nielsen, 2006b;).

In my case the interactive and participatory research approach was a matter of involving those concerned during the entire research process (cf. Svensson et al., 2007). The research process was developed together with the course leaders, and conducted as a cyclic process where the participants were central, from problem formulation to common analysis and presentation of results. Specifically this meant that the course leaders were seen as central subjects in the research process. At an opening meeting with the course leaders there was a discussion about how to form a meeting culture, one that built on equal relations. Joint ideas were further formulated about how to work to learn from each other, with the aim of integrating practical and theoretical knowledge. To focus on the course leader role, the individual, the group and group processes was seen as prioritised areas for the meetings that were planned. Early on in the research process the researcher and the course participants also agreed on compiling a joint final document.

Equal and mutual relations were pursued where both the researcher and the participants worked actively in the formation of knowledge with the purpose of constructing both theoretical and practically usable knowledge. It was also seen as important to early on make clear and confirm the different roles of the research and the course leaders. This meant that the different roles were clarified, which made it possible for me to establish distance to the course leaders in order to obtain a deeper reflection (cf. Hansson, 2003; Denscombe, 2010).

The interactive research approach deals with human meetings and ongoing processes, which makes it difficult to plan and control. This became clear

at the reflecting talks that were carried out together with the course leaders, where a recurrent pattern was that the course leaders often came to talk about other issues than those that constituted the focus for the meeting in question. My role during the research process then became to create a structure for our discussions, at the same time as it was important to be permissive and have a sensitive ear. The research role further included putting words on a process, and serve as a sounding board for how a development-oriented learning could be build up within the course leader group. My ambition was to problematise with the purpose of promoting reflection and new thinking (Albinsson & Arnesson, 2012).

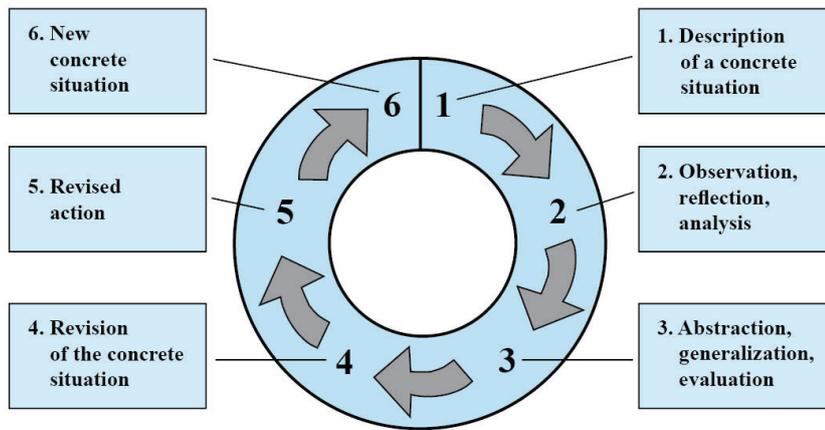
The theoretical perspectives and theoretical reasoning hopefully contributed valuable insights into how experiences may be made use of to create new understanding, which, in the end, leads to new alternatives of acting. Finding relevant theoretical angles of approach, thereby liberating the researcher from practice, became a challenge, which presupposed time and mental distance (cf. Albinsson & Arnesson, 2012). Another ambition was not to appear as an expert, with answers to all the questions that came up during our meetings (cf. Keating & Clemson, 1996).

Research design

The data collection was seen as an on-going process, embracing reflecting discussions such as learning and dialogue seminars and interviews in focus groups.

The learning seminar

The learning seminar is a reflective method that has been tried in several different contexts and that is based on a developed model of learning through experience created by Moxness (cf. Moxness, 1984; Albinsson & Arnesson, 2010; Albinsson & Arneson, 2012).

Figure 1: Reflection loop

The reflection loop consists of six steps where the first is the starting point for a learning process. Here it is a matter of identifying, delimiting and describing a concrete situation. By asking the question: What happens?, the situation becomes manageable and the focus is directed at the course of events and change. In the next step the experienced situation is observed, reflected upon and the focus is on why the described situation is happening, what it means and what emotions the situation involves. To reflect upon a situation in this manner leads to understanding of how cause and connection are coherent. Step three consists of abstraction, generalisation and assessment of the concrete situation, building on questions such as: What conclusions can be made? What have I learnt? Through an intellectual processing the different parts are analysed and related to one another. Conclusions about what is specific and general in the situation are made at the same time as the thoughts and explanations of others are questioned. This part of the reflection loop can be seen as a step towards putting together the parts to a comprehensible whole. In the fourth step the situation is revised with new information as a basis. Working hypotheses are formed to be tested against reality. Questions that are actualised here are: How can I use what I have learnt? How can

I learn from my mistakes and my successes? What do I do now? How can my own perspective be developed by means of theory and analysis? How can my own perspective be developed by means of common reflection in the learning group? It is not until an alternative solution has been tried in reality that it becomes applicable. In this step, the fifth, the interplay between learning and action is essential, something that requires one to perform concrete actions, experiment and, not least, reflect upon their outcome. In the concluding step the attention is directed at a new concrete situation (Albinsson & Arnesson, 2010; Albinsson & Arnesson, 2012). (cf. Bateson, 1973; Argyris & Schön, 1978; Moxness, 1984; Fiol & Lyles, 1985; Senge, 1990; Fiol, 1994; Argyris & Schön, 1996; Miner & Mezias, 1996).

Interviews in focus groups

The four interviews in focus groups aimed at producing more robust research knowledge by trying to capture the course leaders' opinions, attitudes and ideas of being a course leader, but also the training programme's strengths and weaknesses. Further, I wanted to come closer to the interaction within the group. The interpersonal factors that I intended to study referred to that which happens when a group reflects together. The point of departure was to learn from each other and make use of individual and collective experiences. The interviewer's role was primarily focused on increasing the interviewee's willingness and ability to more deeply reflect on thoughts and experiences. Another focus was concentrated on creating a structure, problematise and carrying the discussion further (cf. Wibeck, 2010).

The dialogue seminar

During 2013 the course leaders and the researcher met in three meetings around the perspective "the course leader role", "being professional in one's course leader role," and "the communication structure within the courses and the project". These meetings were denominated dialogue seminars, and became both a forum and a method for common reflection on the experience-based knowledge that existed in the group. The seminars built on talks and communication and aimed at developing the capacity of deep listening and

telling, putting words to experiences. Each seminar participant reflected on the chosen fields and related these to practical examples. In the next step experiences were exchanged, with the purpose of increasing the understanding and of being understood.

The joint learning process

In the following section I will show how the learning process has been developed during the learning seminar, the interviews in focus groups and the dialogue seminars.

Empirical examples

Reflection in action and learning

In order for the group to get going with the reflection process and direct the thoughts at action and the knowledge that is implicit in the action, the joint learning process was initiated with a learning seminar. The course leaders prepared themselves by writing a reflection report and were encouraged to work at a chosen situation or phenomenon in the courses which had generated experiences and action.

The intention of the learning seminar was, from the course leaders' perspectives and experiences, to think through the group process in the participants' groups with the departure point in the reflection loop. Four situation descriptions were selected by the group, situations that were of particular importance to discuss. The written reflections were sent to the seminar group, making it possible for everybody to take part of the material in advance.

The first situation concerned the absence in a course, how it affects the morale within the group, and how you as a course leader should approach the fact that some course participants recurrently chose to stay at home. Discussing this proved to be difficult, and on one occasion the situation developed into an open conflict with one of the course participants, which resulted in the person feeling offended, commented the incident on Facebook, and chose to stay away from the course for some days. When the course leader analysed the incident she understood that a high absence rate should not have been

problematised with those who were not concerned. A redefinition of the situation was concentrated on how the absence could have been brought up separately with the participant who had a high absence, alternatively that you as a course leader always have to think about how to express yourself to be able to carry on an open discussion in a group. The joint analysis of the seminar group of the situation was that the conflict had contributed to new learning, for example the course leader's powerlessness in regard to the fact that some course participants regularly chose to stay at home, but also the frustration and the defensive position that an individual may feel in regard to the course leader's cautious question: "How do you think in regard to this about staying at home?"

The second described situation was about the follow-up in one course of the activities of practice, alternatively introduction to social entrepreneurship/ "living as an entrepreneur." One of the course participants accounted for her job assignments with great enthusiasm, a presentation that was questioned and assessed in the group. The two course leaders chose not to comment but instead worked on with the situation at another occasion. By means of theoretical surveys, which were connected to practical examples, the group reflected on values, truths, the need to have an influence on others, the individual's choice, actions and behaviours. The course leaders' experiences were that the course participants perceived the exercises as valuable. In this situation there was no need for a revised action. However, the course leaders felt that they through reflection and analysis in dialogue with the seminar group had gained insights, language and tools that would be usable in similar situations.

The third situation that was illustrated was one course occasion where the group was supposed to work out rules that concerned comfort and well-being. Some of the participants showed clearly, both verbally and through body language, what they felt about this assignment whereas others took it more seriously. The course leader observed that the result was a "paper product to hang on the wall" where the group already beforehand knew which keywords that were expected, as for example "turning off cell phones, showing respect and notifying absence." She also noticed that she had to bring the exercise alive so that it would be experienced as more meaningful and more suited to

its purpose. The revised action was to come back to the exercise, now with the working life and the individual's responsibility for the psycho-social work environment as a starting point. The course participants wrote down new key concepts and exemplified with situations experienced by themselves. In a joint analysis the group agreed on that sensitivity is important for the course participants to feel inclusion, as is the adaptation of the assignments to the working life.

The last descriptions from the learning seminar dealt with how a course of events developed and how one in the project group tried to collaborate in order to find a sustainable solution. One of the course participants with a high absence rate conveyed that she was very motivated to participate in Klara Livet and that she wanted to do her practice at a work place that she herself had arranged with. When the situation developed in such a way that the maintenance allowance had to be withdrawn during one month, the project leader and the quality coordinator decided to give the course participant economic assistance in the form of trips to and from the place of practice. The course participant started her practice, but interrupted it during the second day. The revised action, according to the course leader who described the situation, would have been to prioritise counselling and guiding conversations before money for the trips to the place of practice.

The seminar group's common analysis dealt with how important it is to have a straightforward and clear communication with the course participants, something that was experienced as difficult, as the participants often were fragile individuals.

Analysis

The seminar was concluded by a discussion around the meaning of the metaphor "the group as a social arena", the relation between the separate individual and the group, different group processes, group norms, roles and relations (cf. Hogg & Tindale, 2002; Johansson & Lalander, 2010). My role as researcher at the learning seminar was to "disturb" by problematising and to lead the discussions with the purpose of promoting critical reflection and new thinking. An important condition for this was that the group together contrib-

uted to common knowledge formation about the group and the group process. At the comprehensive reflection the seminar group agreed on having created an allowing climate together and on having shared their experiences. The group decided that we would continue with reflecting talks with the purpose of deepening and developing the course leader role.

Elaboration of knowledge – reflection and experience

The four interviews in focus groups were carried out in groups of 4-5 participants and departed from the themes of “the project idea,” “the training programme” and “the role as course leader”. These interviews constituted a basis for the areas that were later discussed within the frames of the dialogue seminars.

The interviewees considered that the project filled an important function, as a complement to other work-preparatory activities. Its strength was a key project idea, something that among other things was reflected in good course evaluations. In the course leader group there was, with some exceptions, a good climate of collaboration and the majority described their course leader role as well functioning. Several of them perceived work with heterogeneous groups as a challenge, something that at times had brought about adaptation of the course content:

In the beginning I used it in a rigid way, read a lot from the course binder and was careful about following the instructions. But the more certain I got the more I could deviate. I then aimed at putting a more personal mark on my course leader role (course leader, focus group interview 2).

It is difficult to apply a concept literally; it feels more like a theme that the course leader should develop. As the conditions for the different courses are different one has to be very flexible to succeed in carrying out the course (course leader, focus group interview 3).

The quotations above demonstrate that there was uncertainty among the course leaders in regard to whether the course method that builds on a structured training programme ought to be carried out in the same way in all courses, or whether there is room for adaptation for each course round.

The course material was understood as a stable platform to depart from and in the beginning the project was applied with few divergences. As the courses have taken shape, there has, however, been an attempt to aim at change and flexibility. The course participants' current state has, for example, often guided the activities that are carried out in the course, which has led to adjustments of the training programme concept in some aspects. According to the course leaders, this view had not been met with sympathy by the project management.

The activity called "Introduction to social enterprising" was in the first courses experienced as an exciting part of the training programme, where the process leader from Companion "planted a seed" and presented a new way of thinking. During the project period the course leaders changed their view partly and now considered that the course participants are not able to manage the activities connected to this concept. One course leader expressed this in the following way:

I think that one has to look at the activity of introduction to social enterprising as an interesting element, a lecture, not more. The course participants are too stressed and rather need a structure in their lives. I think that social enterprising leads to insecurity about what to choose. Some choose to participate during a short period of time, but when they realize that it is much too complicated to find a suitable area they change into a practice. In several cases there is yet one more change (course leader, focus group interview 4).

Among the course leaders were also those who considered that the activity filled an important function and that it is "bold and positive that it has been included, as social enterprising is timely" (course leader, focus group interview 4). One suggestion was to offer practice to the course participants in already established social enterprises.

Regarding the activities of practice alternatively individual activity the group of course leaders viewed the later one as a good alternative when an introduction to social enterprising and practice is unsuitable. The common thing then was for the course participant to choose recovery in the form of walks and relaxation. In the activity of practice it was troublesome to find suitable places of practice during a recession. A problematic circumstance

was also that 75 % of the course participants de facto were too physically or mentally impaired to be able to manage a practice.

Team building and feeling secure in the group is especially emphasised in the training programme, but according to the course leaders more work was put into the “I-you”-relation, the group and group processes than what the programme prescribed. Recurrent opinions were also that the course is to be seen as a course in self-help, something that is illustrated by the following quote: “We offer a smorgasbord, no demands or expectations. I think it is of vital importance to make people believe in themselves and in each other” (course leader, focus group interview 4).

The tools that are obtained from the basic methods of mindfulness and psycho synthesis were by the course leaders judged as most useful in the work with strengthening of the individual’s self-esteem and empowerment. This becomes especially clear at different group exercises. According to a course leader, one of the course participants expressed his feelings at a co-operation meeting: “I have some days when I feel down in the mouth, but even then I can make use of the tools that I have learnt to use. I can get out SOAL (stay up, observe, analyse, let go, a tool obtained from mindfulness) in different situations and ask questions like: What am I thankful for? What do I need to work more on?” (course leader, focus group interview 2). Some course leaders thought, however, that they did not had enough competence to work with the psycho synthesis, and would like to have a dialogue with the project management in regard to whether this part is of use.

When the course leaders reflected on the participants of the courses, the changed base for recruiting was especially mentioned. Initially it consisted of individuals on long-term sick-leave and long-term unemployed individuals, but little by little the range was expanded into also including socially burdened individuals. One fear that was particularly brought forth was the imminent risk of falling back into previous behaviours after the conclusion of the course. Another viewpoint was that it often meant an economic problem if a course participant was tied to several authorities.

There was a mutual understanding in the four focus groups about the internal project information having worked unsatisfactorily, with the consequence that participation in how the project had developed had been limited.

This, one agreed on, could have been remedied by having had the course leaders represented in the steering group and in meetings with the project management.

The interviewees also emphasised how important it is that the course leaders communicate the same message to the course participants, something that presupposes that one identifies with the organisation, takes part of the values that the organisation stands for and the actions that are carried out. A recurrent viewpoint was that it is necessary to communicate the project idea with the surrounding world, which was brought to the fore in connection with the recruiting of new course participants, at fairs and at the events of “open house.” The communication between course leaders and course participants was seen as a continuously ongoing process, and a condition for the creating of trust and confidence in the group. By early on tying the course participants closer to each other they could more easily feel allied to each other and create a common “trademark”.

Analysis

The focus group interviews built on having the groups, as far as possible, talk with each other and not with me. The role as researcher, therefore, was to initiate the key questions for the interview, but not, as to the rest, steer the participant process but instead encourage free discussion, interaction and argumentation and try to capture the opinions, values and experiences that appear spontaneously. There was also the expectation that the learning in the focus group would increase the understanding of the perspectives, values and experiences of oneself and of others. My experience was that these focus group interviews were more characterised by what the groups together thought in regard to the problem areas that were discussed, than what the separate individuals felt about the discussed problem areas. The interaction patterns that could be observed were characterised by the course leaders being considerate and affirming and eager to listen and learn from each other. The impression was that several course leaders had developed personal relations with each other. I also believe that the choice of physical environ-

ment, here the folk high schools, was beneficial to the participant's readiness to share their thoughts (cf. Bryman, 2008; Denscombe, 2010; Wibeck, 2010).

After the carrying out of the focus group interviews I sent a summary of the focus group interviews to the course leaders. With the point of departure in this summary I asked them to think about what areas should be prioritised at the following meetings. The course leaders agree on wanting to go deeper into "the course leader role" and "being professional in one's course leader role," but also add "the communication structure within the courses and the project." We also agreed to continue with the reflection talks and try the dialogue seminar as a pedagogical method.

Reflection and dialogue

In principle, each dialogue seminar followed the same pattern, that is, it was introduced by a return to the problem areas discussed at the previous dialogue seminar. Thereafter fields of deeper study were introduced. These were "the communication structure within the courses and the project," "the course leader role", "being professional in one's course leader role" and the "complexity of the project activities"

The first dialogue seminar

At the first meeting, more than half of the assigned hour was used for feedback on the learning seminar and the focus group interviews. When the course leaders reflected upon these they felt that the summary that the researcher had done had added valuable knowledge about both the course leader role and the participants groups. They also meant that it was important that ideas regarding the content of the training programme and the communication structure in the courses, as well as in the project were brought out. These aspects had recurrently been discussed during the project period, but the course leaders experienced that they had not been met with sympathy from the project management and the steering group in regard to points of view, or clarifications about how to work with the training programme.

The communication between the project's management- and steering group and the operational activities was experienced as unclear. With two

exceptions the group considered that the information had been insufficient and that the content in the information was incongruous, with the result that it had been difficult to determine which information is important:

It has not worked between us course leaders and the project management. It went wrong already from the beginning. That's the way I feel anyway. We haven't been informed about important things, we don't know anything, yes, we actually don't know which information is important (seminar participant 1).

I agree with you, that's how it's been, it has turned into a pattern. I wonder what it depends on. One reason is of course that we haven't physically been at the same place as the project management and then there hasn't been any forum where we could seek information (course leader, dialogue seminar 1).

We're also spread out within our group. It's not easy then to provide information. I'm satisfied, I think that it has worked. I don't agree with you (course leader, dialogue seminar 1).

Neither do I, it has worked well (course leader, dialogue seminar 1).

However, most seminar participants agreed that a communication pattern had developed during the first period of the project that was characterised by one-way communication and the transmission of unclear messages. This became a standard and set the framework for the mutual relation between sender and receiver. There were thoughts in the group about how the project participants from the beginning should already have worked out common routines and brought to the fore questions like: How is the project communicated via email? How often do the project participants attend to their email? Should information be given via a project platform? How can the content in the communication become clearer? How should we work to make common ideas and values constitute the uniting force in all communication within the project? How is the communication structure seen as a leadership ideal, and a project idea which focuses on work in independent and goal-oriented teams?

The remaining time was dedicated to my introduction of different approaches to communication, where one is to regard communication as a transfer of messages, an action where one actor sends a message to a specific receiver. Another approach is to view communication as the sharing of a

message, a means that brings forth people's socially constructed reality. Information, then, is about creating and having an influence on relations but also about promoting shared values and common goals. Communication then becomes more than mere dissemination of information (cf. Berger & Luckman, 1966; Shotter, 1993).

The second dialogue seminar

Five course leaders participated in the second dialogue seminar. Initially, the group reflected further around the concept of communication. One course leader raised the question whether communication can be seen as situation-bound. The group agreed that the concept of transfer was of frequent occurrence, and that one should work towards the approach "both-and" instead of "either-or." This, the group meant, should be transferable to the communication structure in the project Klara Livet. The seminar was thereafter directed towards the course leader role, and towards that which is embraced by being professional.

One challenge, in the course leaders' view, was to make use of the course participants' experiences and individual points of departure. To work with heterogeneous groups was by most of them understood as enriching. The greater part of the course participants are women, which means that they have a voice and dare to take place. When there are men in the group the situation becomes different. As a course leader, one then has to strive after a balance, to "share the right amount of one's own experiences and be open to women's and men's different needs" (course leader, dialogue seminar 2).

Shared course leadership was brought forth as a decisive factor to attain harmony and an allowing work climate in the courses, as was working recurrently with collegial support:

It's so safe working with you x. I learn so much. Our collaboration has developed me and also made me realize my strong sides (course leader, dialogue seminar 2).

Yes, it works so well. We supplement each other, you're so good at sensing the atmospheres in the course, I certainly have a lot to learn, I who don't have that sensibility (course leader, dialogue seminar 2).

The course leaders' understanding reflects how collegial support and shared course leadership is important, and contributes to learning and growth in the interplay with another human being. Through the conversation with somebody else there is also a development of sensitivity, and the capacity to interpret different situations together.

The group agreed that to find a balance between closeness and distance one has to work continuously with the course leader role and a professional approach. Many course participants are dependent on other persons doing things for them. When they, for example, ask for help with writing down the times agreed on for different things, this must be commented. There is an aspiration for clarity and consistency in the course leader role which among other things means not taking up writing applications, filling in time reports and similar tasks. The course leaders illustrate the complexity in the approach like this:

Not being clear and setting boundaries is to do the individual a disservice. I think it is necessary to gradually increase the requirements and emphasize that the course is about offering help to self-help (course leader, dialogue seminar 2).

Sometimes it's not easy though. How much can you demand from the course participants? Many have such bad self-confidence; it's easy to help too much. Does anyone have an idea about how to do it? (course leader, dialogue seminar 2).

I believe that just as you say x we must be clear about the fact that our role is to create conditions for self-help. But you always have to show in your actions that you're in the background cheering on. But you have to defend yourself against becoming a too professional helper (course leader, dialogue seminar 2)

When the researcher and the course leaders analysed "the course leader role" and "help to self-help", these themes became understandable by means of theories about power and the insight that the power aspect is present in all forms of relations and communication processes between people. The concept of professional relations includes all forms of relations that take place between people, where one party's actions are constituted by the exercise of a profession, in the form of salaried work. The relation between course leader

and course participant is of the kind that contains a power asymmetry (cf. Skau, 1992).

The dialogue seminars described above resulted in a compilation for each dialogue seminars. These were sent to the group by the researcher, and together with other summaries they formed the basis for the following seminar.

The third dialogue seminar

The purpose with the concluding dialogue seminar was to initiate the work with a final document in which suggestions for changes constituted an important part, work that would be carried out by the researcher and the course leaders together. In addition to the course leaders this seminar also included the project leader, the quality coordinator, the employment official and the process leader from Coompanion. In order to get an overall picture of earlier discussions the day began with grouping of the participants and their reading through the compilations that had been made during the joint learning process. The group was requested to think about possible misunderstandings in the rendering and to mark the things in the margin that caused a reaction and that one wanted to discuss. The purpose of this introductory part was for the group to spontaneously take notes and thereafter talk about the experiences that had not been captured alternatively been described in a misleading way. After that the group read the text once more and analysed the compilation, now with the intention to find recurrent patterns. Finally each group presented its result in the large group. In parallel with the patterns that then emerged, the researcher added, in dialogue with the group, theoretical lines of argument. The seminar was concluded by the group reflecting upon which experiences were the ones most pressing to work on and how the project could develop the conditions for a successful implementation of the project idea into practical activities.

During the following months the group continued the work by sending further viewpoints to the researcher, things that had not come to mind during the seminar, and the final document could be put together.

Analysis

The dialogue seminars built on learning from each other, reflecting upon experiences and putting these in relation to central theoretical concepts: all through talks and communication. Through analogical thinking, that is comparison with the experiences of others, a distance was created at the same time as these experiences became open to common reflection (cf. Spinelli, 2005). The ideally typical outcome of the dialogue seminar was to come up to a new position, which all parties of the dialogue could feel just as confident with as with the respective points of departure (cf. Isaacs, 1999; Eriksson et al., 2010). My experience is that this ideally typical outcome was partly fulfilled, particularly at the third dialogue seminar.

The final document

The common work of the course leader and the researcher resulted in a compilation, as presented below.

Communication within the project

According to the group, everybody who works in the project should create a good and allowing communication climate. The expressing of opinions constitutes a condition for this, which requires that one feels safe in the group and it is “permitted to make mistakes.” It is important to evaluate situations where the communication has worked well or bad. This can be done through regular meetings, where the exchange of experiences and an open dialogue constitute the focus. There is a wish for a project platform where the project would be communicated internally. Communication must also depart from democratic values. In regard to this the group thinks that the folk high school as an institution makes possible democratic processes for both course leaders and course participants. Time should therefore be allocated to build up a common view and values to communicate these externally.

The training programme

Generally seen, the course leaders experience that the training programme concept had been gone through thoroughly, especially the developed parts with emphasis on empowerment, mindfulness, psycho synthesis and methods obtained from cognitive behavioural therapy. The concept also fits well with the idea of the folk high school of creating a calm and allowing learning environment. One challenge is that the project's target group consists of people who are complicated to work with. The fact that the course participants many times find themselves in a situation of social exclusion has meant that it has been necessary, on several occasions, to start at a more basic level than what was planned from the beginning.

One suggestion is to rework the content of the course. A concordant opinion is that the first part should be revised and concentrated more on the individual and the group. One should also reflect upon how the clear decrease in the course participants' interest and mood that arise after week 7-8 and 16 in the programme should be met. Another raised issue is if it is possible to simplify the time reporting to the project leader.

The core activity in Klara Livet is a training programme concept and a project idea that emphasise the individual and the group, learning structures and reciprocal learning. One question of importance is how this can be further clarified in both the training programme and in the different parts of the project. The training programme concept also emphasises change, i.e. the starting up of processes that create meaning, where questions like: What is going on here? What does it mean? What should I do now? must be answered. The awareness of the fact that change also includes a number of aspects such as strong and negative feelings, uncertainty, a threatened identity and even anxiety then becomes essential.

The final documentation was analysed from the course leaders' and the researcher's reflections on communication, learning and change (cf. Schön, 1983; Senge, 1990; Johansson, 2003; Ellström & Hultman, 2004; Filstad, 2012).

Perspective of change

Later on the course leaders and the project management discussed the future of the project, and how to keep working with the training programme concept within the framework of social entrepreneurship. Another matter of discussion was the suggestions for changes that the group and the researcher had worked out in regard to the content and implementation of the training programme concept. An agreement was made that the course leaders would send in further viewpoints, in addition to the ones that had emerged in the final document, to the person in the project management group who was responsible for the development of method and the course content.

Discussion

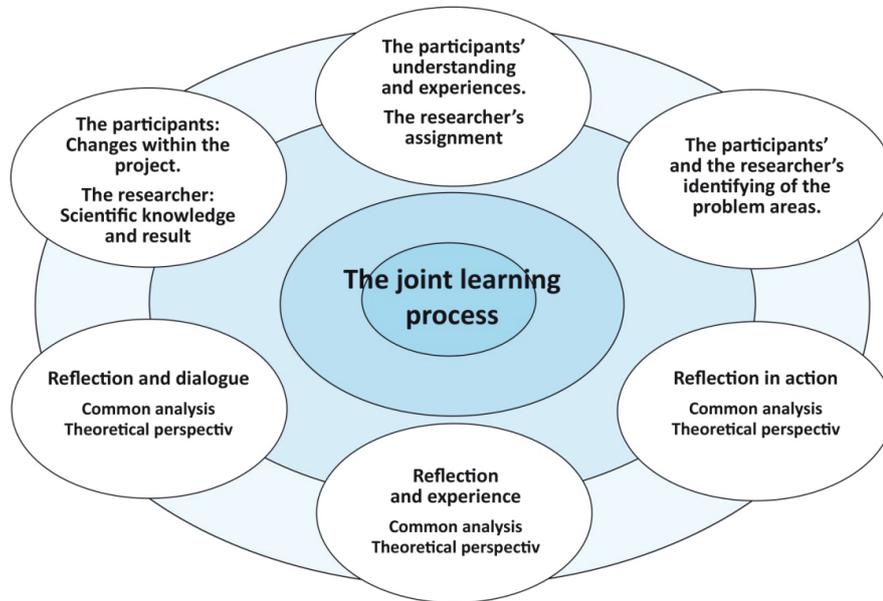
The ambition with the research project described in this article has been to work from an interactive research approach. This meant that research was conducted in a joint learning process and in close co-operation with a group of course leaders in an EU-project. The approach strongly requires that the researcher adopts an attitude that invites dialogue, reflection and the identifying of problems. The interactive research approach described in this article is illustrated in the Figure 2.

The joint learning process, where critical reflection and identification stood in the foreground has above all been a matter of not fully solving, but rather “breaking up,” the problems that were identified. For the course leaders, and to a certain extent also for the project management, collective knowledge formation came to be the unifying force from which a way of acting together could take place and therefore had an important function. The joint learning process also became a way for the individual to learn how to approach complex problems and situations together with others, increase the understanding of processes that took place within the training programme and thus make the existence more comprehensible, manageable and meaningful.

One difficulty is that researchers and practitioners have different interests. In this study, however, the differences of perspective and outlook have created the conditions for a developing collaboration. By making problems visible, facilitating reflection, giving critical distance and deepened under-

standing of problems, the researchers have been able to analyse the outcome of working together and distinguish that which is specific and general in a situation.

Figure 2: The interactive research approach



Early on in the research process it became clear that it was important to create forms for both an individual and a common learning. The methods of learning seminars, dialogue seminars and interviews in focus groups, became means of assistance for the production of the interactive research process and show how the researcher and the course leaders worked in a research process, where the intention was to create equal and mutual relations. Through an active participation, recurrent analysis and feedback situations a result was generated where the researcher and the concerned parties contributed with both theoretical and empirical knowledge.

Within the project Klara Livet, an ongoing process dealt with the understanding of a common reality and with the adapting of one's actions with regard to different perspectives. The understanding of the complexity of the

communication resulted in several suggestions for change. In the common final document, compiled by the researcher, it was clear that the communication within the project was incongruous, and several suggestions for how to work out common routines for an improved communication were given.

In regard to the training programme concept it was suggested that the course content should be concentrated more on the individual and the group, on reciprocal learning and perspectives of change and also that the training programme should be more flexible and adapted to each course round. The outcome of the course leaders' suggestions for changes so far is that the project member who is working with the development of the course content has come back with information about what had been revised. Furthermore a letter has been written to the course leaders where their role is clarified and descriptions added of how certain course items is to be carried out.

At present the project finds itself in a prolonged implementation phase, something that among other things means that new courses are planned. Hopefully the project members will take advantage of the suggestions of change when the project is further implemented in practical reality.

The empirical data indicates that the course leaders and the project management came closer to an understanding of existing problem areas within the core business of the project. If the course leaders and the project management had lived up to conditions for mutual understanding a constructive problem solving would have been in force. The attainment of common goals would then have been possible. Instead, when different interests met, the social relations created misunderstanding. The exercise of power that existed within these relations was formed by communicative acting and became clear when the course leaders and the project management constructed realities that were not shared. This angle of approach makes possible to understand the complexity of the communication. It also shows the importance of trying to create a collaborative inquiry in which those concerned and the researcher are working together with problem areas in order to seek explanations and understanding (cf. Schön, 1983; Argyris, Putman, & Smith, 1985).

Conclusions

The most significant conclusion is that an interactive research approach can support the development and dissemination of project experience. Further the article illustrates how to deal with complex problems and situations. By communicating experiences and thoughts that could be attributed to interaction patterns in social relations, communication structures, emotions, influence and power the project team gained new insights which resulted in an intensified communication with the project management and changes in the training concept as a consequence.

The study raises the research question of how learning, knowledge, practical experiences and competence can be developed into being interaction processes, in daily practice and in professional work. The challenge lies in the organisational aspect such as common goals, communication and transparency, but also trust and willingness to share knowledge at all levels within the organisation.

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About the author

Associate Professor and Senior Lecturer in Sociology at Blekinge Institute of Technology. Her research mainly focuses on understanding the relationship between organization and power. Currently her research deals with the learning organization, interaction patterns, social relations and emotions.

Author's address

Blekinge Institute of Technology
Department of Industrial Economics and Management
SE-371 79
Sweden
E-mail: gunilla.albinsson@bth.se.

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