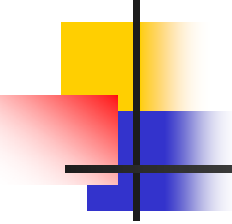


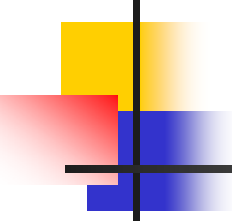
Action Research and Organisational Learning – A Norwegian Approach

CEDEFOP-workshop on
Innovation and Learning in Enterprises,
Thessaloniki, 2011_11_11
Olav Eikeland



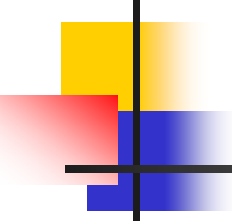
Who am I?

1. Philosopher, PhD in ancient philosophy:
 1. Eikeland, O. (1997), *Erfaring, dialogikk og politikk - Den antikke dialogfilosofiens betydning for rekonstruksjonen av moderne empirisk samfunnsvitenskap. Et begrepshistorisk og filosofisk bidrag*, 3.Edition, Oslo: Universitetsforlaget
 2. Eikeland, Olav (2008), *The Ways of Aristotle – Aristotelian Phrónêsis, Aristotelian Philosophy of Dialogue, and Action Research*, Bern: Peter Lang Publishers
2. 1985-2008 Organisation Researcher at the Work Research Institute, Oslo
3. 2008 – 2011, Professor at the Oslo & Akershus University College, Program for Research on Education and Work



What will I do here?

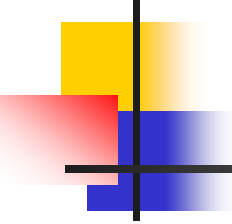
1. Present the main content of the following article:
 1. *Action Research and Organisational Learning – A Norwegian Approach to Doing Action Research in Complex Organisations,*
 2. to be published in Educational Action Research Journal.
 3. Originally a Key-Note Speech at the CARN conference in Cambridge, November 5th, 2010.
 4. Article contains more details and more theory than this presentation

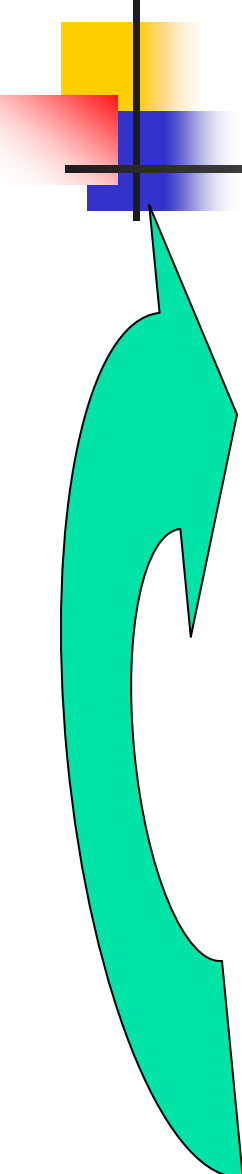


What's in the article?

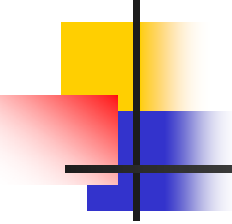
1. My story of the emergence of *a new level of organising* through the growth over many years of a specific approach to organisational learning, based on accumulated and shared experiences from doing action research at the WRI in Oslo.
 1. From 1964 (establishment of the WRI and the industrial democracy program in Norway)
 2. Through 1985, when I started to work at the WRI
 3. To present day approaches

What is Action Research?

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1. Research approach which grew from experimental thinking in the early 1940s, inspired by Kurt Lewin and John Dewey
 2. Moving experimentation / experimental attitude (of formulating hypotheses, testing, correcting action, and learning) from isolated laboratories to social world of communities, work places, schools, families.
 3. Breaking down the segregation between experimenters and experimentees / researchers and researched / knowers and known (which the quasi-experimental tradition does not, springing from same roots [Don Campbell]).
 4. Knowers studying and improving their own practice, experimenting together.
 5. Cf. Engeström (2004): The researcher's task is to identify and conceptualize budding new relations or germ cells, to help them unfold and become visible, (...) developmental research constructs and tests in practice historical hypotytheses concerning zones of proximal development...
 6. As (cf. 1-5 above), in deed, social researchers do systematically in the core discipline of methodology. The methods of methodology = action research = critical, distinguishing dialogue about practically acquired experience (*Erfahrung*)
 7. Cf. Yesterdays comment by Grethe to Ernst: Are you happy with your study methodologically? No, not at all, but we learn as we do things
 8. Often summarised in some version of well-known action research or action learning cycles of: Diagnosing, planning action, taking action, evaluating action (suspending the conventional division of labour):

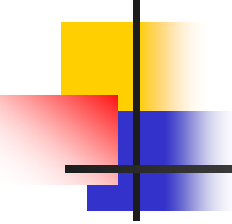


From Eikeland & Berg (1997) Phases in problem solving	Phase-designations	What happens?	Who participates in phases of problemsolving?	
			Traditional based on division of labour	New way – suspending division of labour
Phase 1	Problem-experience	Experience of something not being right	Workers' / users 'experiences	Problemowners in work organisation
Phase 2	Problem-mapping	Investigation, analysis, diagnose	External experts (researchers, consultants, staff)	Problemowners in Development Organisation.
Phase 3	Suggested solutions	Ideal solutions suggested	External experts	Problemowners in Develop. Org.
Phase 4	Decision	Adjustment to realism and decision	Management	Problemowners or appropriate decisional organ
Phase 5	Implementation	Decisions effectuated	Management & employees through several hierarchical levels: transfer problems	Problemowners in work organisation
Phase 6	Evaluation	Evaluation of results and methods against objectives	External experts	Problemowners in Development Organisation



What is Organisational Learning?

1. Not the same as “learning organisation” = a certain kind of unit learning (in different ways)
2. Not the same as “learning *in* organisations / *in* the work place” = a location / a structure where someone learns in different ways (e.g. training, practising, informal learning, theoretical learning, etc.)
3. Organisational Learning = a specific way of learning (collective experiential learning by doing [and reflecting]).



What is Organisational Learning – Learning model (Eikeland & Berg, 1997 in Norwegian)

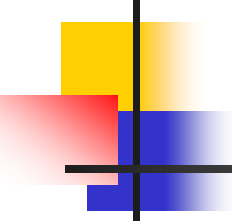
1. Distinguishes between

1. Learning organisations (a unit that learns in many different ways) (**who** learns?)
2. Learning in organisations / work-place learning (a place / position where learning is located) (**where** does learning happen?)
3. Organisational learning (**how** does learning happen?)

2. Organisational learning as a practical concept: A way of learning: i.e. collective experiential / experimental learning (cf. table below).

3. Learning = to become able (individually or collectively) to do things you weren't able to do before or to improve at doing them.

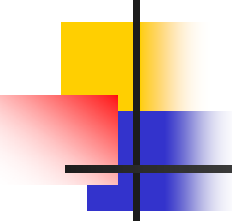
From Eikeland & Berg (1997)	Individual learning	Collective learning
Theoretical learning (Hørelæring) (listening and remembering)	(1) Individual courses, book reading etc. (outside work).	(2) Listening to lectures etc. (didactical settings)
Experiential / experimental (Gjørelæring) (rehearsing, experimenting and discussing)	(3) Learning by doing: Practice / exercise / habituation	(4) Organisational Learning: Focusing on common / shared practice. How do we work in relation to each other (division of labour, power, etc.) and together in relation to solving tasks?



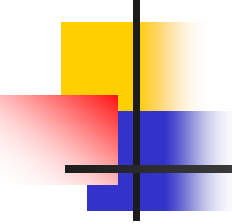
What is organisational learning?

1. Collective learning primarily from, or rather *through*, practical experience – earning by trying to solve tasks better *together*.
 1. As in different ball games, or in orchestras: Somehow, the difference between a disorganised crowd of what could be excellent individual dribblers or players and a top football team or orchestra, is “organisational learning”.
 2. Not “learning by doing” individually,
 3. Not learning in parallel in the same place,
 4. Not learning theoretically from reading or being taught; remembering words or abstracted concepts.
 5. Not ordinary apprenticeship learning by imitating disciplinary masters,
 6. Not learning simply by “hanging around”, i.e. by legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger).
 7. Not just “informal” and serendipitous.
2. There are ways of doing it systematically, or methodically.
3. Organisational learning is learning to do or perform something better – learning by doing and practising, testing and experimenting – *together*, by adjusting to each other as individuals, to the solution of the total task, and mutually to the partial tasks of each other.
 1. More comprehensive and wider in scope than “team learning”, since it may involve e.g. divisions of labour between levels and departments in structured organisations.
4. But it does not exclude any of the forms mentioned. Organisational learning necessarily includes them. Still it is something *more*.
5. It cannot be reduced to either of these forms or to a mere combination of them.
6. But neither “organisational learning” nor “learning organisations” indicates some kind of supra-individual entity learning independently or separately from its members.

The Norwegian / Nordic context

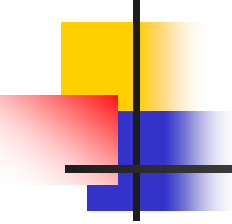


1. Norway is a strongly organised country
2. Wealthy from oil/gas revenues. Has maintained a high level of welfare through the liberalist era internationally (since about 1980). Low unemployment rate / high membership in labour unions.
3. Socially stable with a close cooperative climate between organised labour, capital, and government both nationally and locally. Not merely due to affluence:
4. Basic work life agreement between national labour union and employers association since 1935 (regulates conflicts and negotiations)
5. Supplement to the basic agreement since 1982, cooperate to develop the enterprise organisation. Widespread collaboration in experience based innovation from below, below range of R&D indicators.
6. Organised collaboration between social partners and researchers since 1963. Cf. History of the WRI.



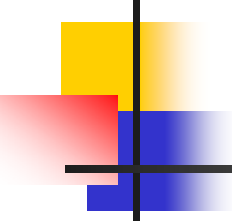
Policy research – Many sectorised “applied” research institutes within different industries

1. WorkResearchInstitute (WRI) since 1964 in work environment and work place democracy.
2. From 1964 until 2002 the WRI was a policy-instrument of the social-democratic Norwegian state in the fields of work environment and work place democracy
3. General approach: Direct participation in small scale decision making. WRI-perspectives have always been more on “how to promote participatory work forms?” than on “descriptive research” by outsiders.
4. Since before 1970, Norwegian tradition of action research in work life has developed within collaborative and organised institutional setting as an approach based on **broad and direct participation** in organisation development projects.
5. Norwegian work-life action-research was never restricted
 1. only to top management levels, as many American varieties are (cf. e.g. Argyris et al. 1985),
 2. or to a unilateral labour-based approach,
 3. or to NGO-initiatives.
 4. Neither has it been restricted to small groups,
 5. nor to individual action research projects done in work places in order to qualify or earn an educational degree as a nurse, social worker, teacher, engineer, or other profession.
 6. Finally, it has not been based on “artificial” laboratory training among “strangers” apart from the work place community as in sensitivity training in encounter groups.
6. It has mostly been done under “real time” conditions *in* the different work places involved, *with* people who work together every day.



Lessons from the field / Learning process / learning trajectories (1)

1. From 1970s to 1980s: Historical development within the WRI from socio-technical analysis (1970s) to "communicative turn" (1980s).
2. From mid 1960s to 1980:
 1. Field experiments – Researcher designed
3. Late 1970s, first half of 1980s:
 1. **From** researcher design (of work organisations) **to** participatory design (of work organisations)
4. Mid-1980s:
 1. **From** participatory design (by a selected few) **to** search-conferences (for all employees)



Lessons from the field / Learning process / learning trajectories (2): emerging new level of organising

5. Second half of 1980s:

1. ***From*** focusing solely on organising work and primary tasks differently ***to*** organising development work / meta-tasks (early 1988: The term “dialogue conference” coined).
2. ***From*** task adjusted “multi-organisations” (of/in the work-organisation) ***to*** the more basic distinction between “work organisation” and “development organisation” (**new level of organising**).

6. Intermittently from the 1970s to the 1990s:

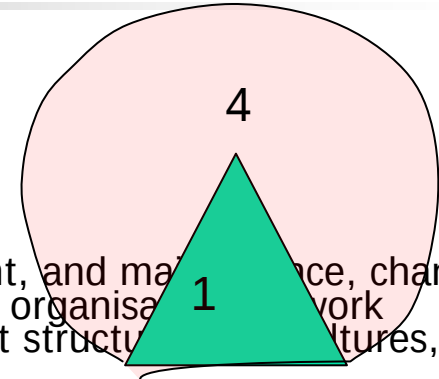
1. ***From*** single departments, and single firms ***to*** industries and corporations, and networks and regional development, including educational institutions.

Emergence of a new / different level of organising / Popularised basic distinctions as means of embedding collective experiential reflection in organisations (Eikeland & Berg, 1997)

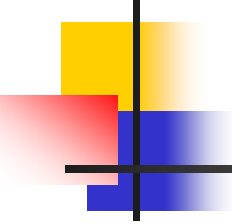
1. Through the distinctions between

1. Work organisation (running primary tasks)
2. Organisation of decisions (collective decisions)
3. Project organisation (temporary tasks done once)
4. Development organisation (permanent meta-tasks)

Metatasks = e.g. quality development, improvement, and maintenance, change, learning, and innovation of both products and organisation, work environment, divisions of labour, management structures, cultures, individual performance, strategic planning



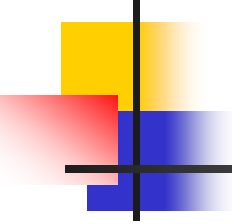
2. The distinction between 1.1 (work organisation) og 1.4 (development organisation) corresponds to distinctions between
 1. Playing roles "on stage" (oikos / askholía)
 2. Discuss, design, change, switch, improve roles / tasks "back stage" (free space and time for reflection) (pólis / skholé / tà koiná)
3. Alternation between 2.1 og 2.2 encompasses everyone in an organisation – broad participation
4. By making the arch a visible part of an organisation (1.4) we liberate ourselves from bonds and unnecessary contradictions between different versions of 1.1



Institutionalisation of action research / of reflective dialogue / of free spaces relieved from immediate action exigencies

1. Alternation between “back stage” reflection and “on stage” performance similar to alternation in action research cycles where we identify problems, plan, take action, evaluate, restate the challenge, plan again etc.
2. An attempt at an organisational institutionalisation of dialogue and action research cycles as systematically and permanently embedded at every level and in every department of work life organisations as a collective and collaborative endeavour trying to improve collectively and individually at solving tasks.

How do we do it?

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1. Instead of focusing on reorganising the work organisation directly, we focus on establishing the general organisational preconditions for learning and changing through the systematic performance of meta-tasks = establishing back-stage fora as a development organisation.
 2. Development work now normally initiated with a dialogue conference for most/all employees, gathering for one or two days, discussing questions like “where are we?”, “where do we want to be?”, and “how do we get from here to there?” working in groups, issuing in a number of substantial sub-projects and a main project (establishing a DO) to pursue after the conference. Re-organising means basically to sort, reconfigure, and relate activities into a) a “work organisation”, b) a “development organisation”, c) a “decisive organisation” (organising collective decisions), d) different temporary “project organisations”.
 3. Meta-tasks are handled mainly through different forms of communication and exchange, more or less systematic, among employees at and between all levels.
 4. Focus has increasingly been directed at 1) ways of communicating, 2) formal and informal places to meet and talk; how (e.g. rhetorically, didactically, dialogically, deliberatively) and for what purposes; 3) such places that already exist, 4) which ones could be used or created for housing dialogue and reflective learning and for other purposes (providing information, making decisions, allocating work tasks).
 5. Even such meta-tasks can be *more or less* organised and more or less *adequately* organised, and the challenge is to organise them appropriately. They should no longer be reduced to, or remain merely as part of, the “informal”, unattended, and almost subconscious side of an organisation.

Ways of speaking

What dialogue is *not*

1. Not rhetoric (the art of persuasion / seduction to action / decision)
2. Not polemical fighting with words (eristics to "win" a debate)
3. Not deliberation (phrónêsis) (where "professional" frames / competence / objectives / principles are given)
4. Not didactics (teaching / instruction)
5. Not formalistic reasoning / inference (syllogistic)
6. Not revivalist preaching (protreptical)
7. Not negotiations (compromises based on power balancing) (nec-otium / askholía / not-leisure)
8. Not cosy, comforting talk (with sedative, tranquilizing objective / effect)
9. Not an interview (in order to collect / map opinions / characteristics of interviewees)
10. Not necessarily a conversation between several people