Constructive Practice and Critical Theory: 
The Contribution of Action Research to Organisational Change and the Discourse on Organisations

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This article presents a new perspective on the question of how action research may contribute to improving the discourse on organisations. The three first sections deal mainly with some important features of action research, following from action research methods used in projects that comprise organisational change. On the basis of a distinction between practical discourse and theoretical discourse, the point is made that while descriptive research (like organisation theory) takes place mainly as a theoretical discourse, action research also enters the arenas of practical discourse. What kind of knowledge is required, and what kind of experience is made in practical discourses, is elaborated by one example of an action research from a Norwegian international corporation. It is argued that in order to cause practical change, the power of knowledge is dependent on the power of judgment.

On this basis, the three last sections deal with this question how knowledge and experience from action research may contribute to the improvement of organisation theory. Initially, a short historical account on the development of organisation theory is presented. It is shown that the split of the discourse on organisations, into a theoretical and practical discourse, has had some unintended and unnoticed consequences as regards the style of writing in organisation theory. This style of writing has resulted in a discourse on organisation which is rich in very general perspectives and concepts, but which nevertheless remains too poor in content. Thus, the conclusion is that for the time being, one of the most important contributions from action research to the discourse on organisations will be to