

Mobilising and Nurturing Collaboration in Research – the Value of a Focused Imagination¹

Petter Ahlström, Fredrik Nilsson, Nils-Göran Olve

Establishing and nurturing contacts are important and time-consuming elements of interactive research. It is usually the researcher who has to establish and nurture collaboration with practitioners – a task that is not normally part of traditional research. A mutual interest in the subject of the research is a prerequisite for collaboration, but there are quite often other factors that explain why collaboration begins and endures. On the basis of the experience gained in a number of interactive research projects, we address the conditions required for an effective and lasting interplay between collaborating partners. Theoretical inspiration has been provided by studies of so-called imaginary organisations.

Key words: Interactive research, collaboration, imaginary organisations, strategy map

Introduction

Interactive research is characterised by close collaboration between researchers, funders and the subjects of the study concerned. The term

¹ This paper is based on a chapter that will be published in an anthology in Swedish in the series “Arbetsliv i Omvandling” (Working Life Transformation, our translation). The authors wish to thank the participants at a seminar on interactive research, arranged in connection with this book project and held at Sättra Brunn on 6-7 December 2006, for their valuable comments on a very early version of this paper. Very useful comments were also provided by the editor of *International Journal of Action Research*, Lennart Svensson and two anonymous reviewers.