

Participation as Enactment of Power in Dialogic Organisational Action Research. Reflections on Conflicting Interests and Actionability

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The article focuses on participation as enactment of power in dialogic, organisational action research. The article has a dual purpose: It shows how participation is enacted as power in processes between participating managers, employees and action researchers with different or conflicting interests. It discusses if and eventually how it is possible to handle participatory processes when participation is conceptualised as enactment of power. This is done by reflecting critically on two examples from a dialogic, action research project carried out in two Danish, private organisations in 2008 and 2009. The overall perspective is to bring participation as enactment of power into the centre of dialogic, organisational action research processes and into action research that understands itself as participatory.

The article argues in favour of understanding participation as enactment of power in a project work between different partners (employees, managers, and action researchers) with different interests. This argument is based on a definition of participation as co-determination of goals and means. Moreover, the article argues that combining reflexive and contextualised analyses from 1st and 2nd person approaches with broader 3rd person action research perspectives might make dialogic, organisational action research projects more actionable. Theoretically, participatory processes aim at empowerment. The article shows that co-producing knowledge in dialogic, organisational action research implies ongoing reflections on tensions in the action research concept of 'co-'. In practice, these processes unfold in a field of tensions between empowerment and constraint.

Key words: participation, power, actionability, dialogue, organisational action research