

## **Artikkel 4**

Thunberg Odd Arne. World cafes and dialog seminars as processes for reflective learning in organisations. Akseptert for publisering i Reflective Practice Journal, Issue 12.3, juni 2011 (se vedlegg 4).



# **World cafes and dialog seminars as processes for reflective learning in organisations.**

Odd Arne Thunberg

## **Abstract:**

The article, in a comparative analysis of municipal and banking organisations, examines how dialogs, inspired by the World Cafe approach can contribute to developing reflective and organisational learning. Participatory and appreciative action and reflection (PAAR) helps people to understand their circumstances with a view to changing them for the better. This creates opportunities to develop employee communication and shared understanding. Continuous support for a dialogic process of this sort needs tolerance. World cafe can have a long-term and sustainable effect. Reflective learning involves thinking critically about one's situation and "is identified with a potential for change, as it questions key variables instead of just accepting and repeating a given body of knowledge". The basis for the comparative analysis was dialog seminars and an analysis of cafe dialogs. It is important to gain full support for cafe dialogs from an organisation's senior management before expanding them to the whole organisation. Reflective learning is a more complex phenomenon than formerly assumed because the conscious or unconscious participation of senior management can significantly influence reflective learning processes. If increased integrity and mutual respect is attained through dialog it is worth asking how this can also be further developed in different organisations.

Keywords: PAAR; participation; appreciation; action; reflective learning; dialogs.

## **Introduction**

Personal, collective and organisational life benefits from having appropriate guidelines that can be created and clarified through reflection and dialog. Our overall purpose is to discuss emancipatory organisational practice in the form of dialog seminars and world cafes that can free people from repressive working conditions. Such practice seeks fairness, equality and participation in order to give employees the opportunity to influence decisions. Otherwise employees have only a passive voice and this can hinder reflection (Giddens, 1991). The morning coffee break or informal afternoon coffee meeting in organisations can become an empowering experience and a source of reflective learning. If based on integrity and mutual respect, collective reflective learning during the working day can contribute to organisational development (Senge, 1999). When creative ideas generated informally in dialogs are allowed to grow and permeate through the system and when tales of success can be shared, this encourages a feeling of well-being and motivation throughout the whole organisation (Hochschild, 2003) allowing work-related problems to be addressed and solved creatively (Ellström, 1996) through critical reflection (Dewey, 1991). Creative dialogs not only contribute to the individual's personal success, but also create opportunities for employees to develop action plans arising from shared understanding of the organisation (Habermas & Kalleberg, 1999). Dialogs based on self-selected priorities also build personal identity and reputation (Kvåle & Wæraas, 2006). By promoting cooperation and positive experiences at work through dialog, long-term and sustainable effects arise, not merely short-lived inspiration (Ghaye, 2008).

The central research questions addressed by the article are: *How can dialog seminars and cafe dialogs contribute to an increase in reflective learning in an organisation and what influences can the participation of senior management exercise on such learning activities?*

Two Scandinavian studies, a bank and a municipality, provide the data for this article. The Norwegian bank study is a four-year action research project with a focus on *learning amongst office management and employees*. The municipality study is based on a three-year action research project in which leaders and potential leaders in a Swedish municipality volunteered to participate in various dialog seminars (Pålshaugen, 2002) in order to discuss and analyse the *learning challenges* in their organisations. Both the municipality and the bank also invited some of their employees into cafe dialogs in various arenas that provided a reflective atmosphere for exchanging experiences in small groups (Brown & Isaacs, 2005; Senge, 2002).

This concept and practice of every-day learning was appreciated by staff, office management and senior management alike as a basis for positive change and meaningful dialog (Anderson, et al., 2008; Ghaye, 2008; Tiller, 2008). Focus in the bank and municipality study is on dialogs and reflective learning within organisations. However, the significance of daily routines and the influence of management should not be underestimated. Routine activity was thoroughly investigated in order to find in it potential for increased learning amongst participants.

### ***Reflective learning at work: some important principles***

The informal and inclusive cafe dialogs are based on seven principles for the design and implementation of world cafes inspired by the work of Brown and Isaacs (2005).

Table 1. Dialog Principles “The World Cafe”

	<b>Important Cafe Principles for hosting conversations that matter</b>
(P1)	Set the context.
(P2)	Create a hospitable space.
(P3)	Explore questions that matter.
(P4)	Encourage everyone’s contribution.
(P5)	Cross-pollinate and connect diverse perspectives.
(P6)	Listen together for pattern, insight, and deeper questions.
(P7)	Harvest and share collective discoveries

(Brown & Isaacs, 2005).

Setting the context (P1) and focusing on relationships and social situations are prerequisites for the development of reflective learning (Dewey, 2004). Such reflection involves a conscious assessment of the connection between actions and their consequences (Argyris & Schön, 1996) and is facilitated when workplaces create hospitable space (P2) for reflection. When employees learn from dialog and explore questions that matter (P3), Schön's theory (1991) suggests that this learning also can be seen as an interplay between the actual meeting, the “action”; reflection on the action; and an analysis of new possibilities. And most important; that each of us should participate and try to use our abilities to our fullest potential and should obtain fulfilment through the exercise of our realised capacities, as Aristotle suggested (Ghaye, 2010). When all employees participate and contribute (P4) and make use of their own authority it can have a high impact on practice and be highly sought after (Ellström, 1996). A prerequisite for developing reflective learning in an organisation is

that staff needs to be seen and heard. When this is appreciated and confirmed by employees, the organisation gains a competitive advantage (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1996). When employees are offered choices and opportunities to assess their own performance and can suggest solutions to shared problems, this helps to develop creativity (Ellström, 1996). However such creative opportunities depend on a corresponding organisational strategy, since senior managers also have the authority to define and make demands to which others must choose whether or not to conform (Emerson, 1962). Reflective learning involves thinking critically about one's situation, assessing why a specific course of action is preferable and "is identified with a potential for change, as it questions key variables instead of just accepting and repeating a given body of knowledge" (Jarvis, Halford, & Griffin, 2003, p. 70). Employees critically assess opinions, theories and practice from various positions and diverse perspectives (P5) in order to assure quality (Dewey, 2004). Through listening for insight and asking deeper questions (P6) reflective learning influences participation and aids the interpretation of others' actions. Of general interest for organisational development is the extent to which all employees, including senior managers, can develop and share collective discoveries from dialogs (P7).

Consultative and open-minded management is important for initiating collaborative reflection (Boud, Cressey, & Docherty, 2006; Cressey, 2006) and critical questioning of working practices at three levels: the individual employee, the department and the whole organisation (Senge, 1999). Such critical reflection depends on a capacity for organisational learning which involves changing routines or practices, independent of individual actors (Scott, 1992). The following investigation of dialogs from dialog seminars and cafes examines conditions that can be significant for such an activity. Reflective learning requires a foundation of openness, trust and sustained dialogs between the participants. It is aided by focusing more about '*what is understood rather than what is not, and by paying attention to the congruence between what we say and what we actually do*' (Ghaye, 2010; Mobius, and, & Szeidl, 2007). Social networks matter for *generating trust* and what Mobius (2007) calls *social collateral* that can facilitate reflective dialog. Social capital, relationships and trust in the informal arena of the work place are important for reflective learning.

## ***Participation and Critical reflection***

Participation encourages ownership of decisions relating to work and can secure a high quality of learning (Chatman, Wong, & Joyce, 2007).

*We want to participate more in changes and to make our voice heard.*

(Subject, municipality study 2010)

Modern organisations often change their rhetoric according to fashion (Røvik, 2007) and this applies to organisational strategies, activities and reflective learning concepts (Ellström, 2006). Learning strategies that involve reproducing facts and measuring efficiency contrast with those that use dialog between participants to release their learning potential (Bakhtin, 1981). If learning is perceived primarily as the passive receipt and repetition of information, the learner assumes the role of the spectator (Ellström, 1996; Skjervheim, 1996). However, the widespread problem of lack of time and the demand for fast and unreflective decisions is a universal concern in the modern workplace that inhibits reflective dialog (Senge, 1999). 'Modern' self-reflective people perceive organisational functioning in the world of employment in a variety of ways (Giddens, 1991).

Critical reflection in an organisation will naturally depend on participants who are open to and support change in the form of new schemes and actions. If reflection fails to lead to action, for one reason or another, then this creates frustration amongst participants (Nielsen, Nielsen, Munk-Madsen, & Hartman-Petersen, 2010). When participants become aware of problems through self-critical reflection this too can be a painful process for individuals (Dewey, 1991) especially if this reflection is not followed up by needed constructive changes. The introduction of systematic and critical reflection in an organisation may challenge the leadership, reveal power struggles and challenge the existing every-day routines of staff (Nilsen, 2007). A fact of life for many managers and employees is that work absorbs so much of their attention that there is little time available for leisure activities, relaxation or for social life outside the work environment. Any occupations make heavy demands on organisational resources and the individual time of the employees (Thunberg, 2009). However, if organisations desire new ideas, then reflective learning should be encouraged.

Research methods were designed to reveal if and how organisations use different learning approaches to promote change. Organisations that invest in reflective learning activities can provide inspiration for others who are looking for increased work-place learning. However, this is not achieved simply by decreeing new strategies or by means of minor re-organisation (Ghaye, 2008).

### ***Research - method***

Both the dialog seminars (Pålshaugen, 2002) and cafe dialogs (Sence, 2002) on which the research was based were inspired by dialogic action research (Nielsen, et al., 2010) and participatory and appreciative action and reflection, abbreviated as 'PAAR' (Ghaye, et al., 2008). Action researchers establish arenas of dialog in which to develop reflective learning based on participation and analysis of employees' experience. When employees, facilitated by researchers, reflect together to improve the organisation, action research is a matter of participation, appreciation and empowerment (Starrin, 1997). Action research that stimulates change within an organisation is based on the participation and prior experience of both management and employees.

Appreciation and involvement in reflective learning strategies must be deeply rooted within the senior management (Nielsen, et al., 2010). If an organisation, a department or individuals do not wish to be involved in a critical and possibly painful process of reflection, action research may not be an adequate approach. The use of participatory and appreciative action research as a method for enabling a reflective learning organisation is not unproblematic because this supposed to be an organisational process for stimulating change (Bergmark, 2009; Cooperrider, 2000; Ghaye, et al., 2008). Existing routines can be perceived in new ways, using new knowledge.

Minor adjustments in routines can lead to improvement, but also entirely new activities can be established. For researchers, data emerging from dialogs is relatively unpredictable, but the data are formulated systematically as a basis for common interpretation and reflection. Increased involvement of this sort can create new ideas and provide increased motivation for learning.



Table 2. Participations in Dialogues

Participation In Dialogues	The bank study				The municipality study			
	8 Dialog seminars (8 of 2 days x 6 hours)		6 Cafe dialogs (of 2 hours)		7 Dialog seminars (of 3 hours)		4 Cafe dialogs (of 2 hours)	
	date	participants	dep. date	participants	date	participants	date	participants
	Feb. 2007	24	1.b) Nov. 2007	11	Feb. 2009	11	Mai. 2009	22
	Apr. 2007	16	2.b) Nov. 2007	9	Feb. 2009	33	Nov. 2009	15
	Sept. 2007	23	1.k) Sep. 2009	45	Feb. 2009	37	Nov. 2009	15
	Oct. 2007	15	3.b) Sep. 2009	14	May. 2009	30	Nov. 2009	30
	Feb. 2008	10	4.b) Sep. 2009	12	May. 2009	36		
	May. 2008	6	2.k) Jan. 2010	43	Nov. 2009	32		
	Sep. 2008	5			Nov. 2009	34		
	Nov. 2008	10						
<b>Researchers</b>	3	(in 6 seminars)	3	(in 4 cafes)	2	(in 7 seminars)	3	(in 1 cafes)
	2	(in 2 seminars)	2	(in 2 cafes)	3	(in 5 seminars)	1	(in 3 cafes)
<b>Employees</b>			71	(individuals)			72	(individuals)
<b>Office Managers</b>	28	(individuals)	4	(total in 5 cafes)	70	(individuals)	2	(in all cafes)
	13	(in average)			30	(in average)		
<b>Senior Managers</b>	1	(in 4 seminars)			2	(in all seminars)	2	(in all cafes)

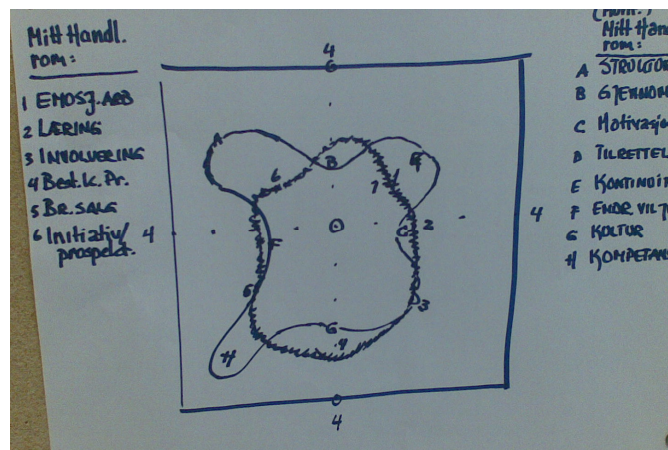
Cooperation and trust between employees, office management, senior management and researchers contributed to a rich data-base from 15 dialog seminars (reflective learning dialogs) and 10 cafe dialogs. The seminars were mainly for the office managers and the cafe were mainly for the employees. Both the Norwegian bank and a Swedish municipality used the same approach for the dialog seminars, and the cafe dialogs. At the dialog seminars the duration varied: two consecutive days (6 hours each) for each of the dialog seminars in the bank study and a half-day (3-hour duration) in the municipality study. The expectations of the participants and questions were explored from the start of the dialog seminars. Senior management participation differed. In the bank study one senior manager attended four of the dialog seminars. In the municipality study two senior managers visited all the seminars. Office managers and researchers facilitated the dialog seminars in both cases.

In the cafe dialogs the format had been an advertised cafe with a stage for presentations, and round tables for 5 -15 people. The programme lasted for two hours in two parts: the first part lasted 45 minutes and was restricted to information with presentations from different managers and researchers (in the municipality lasting not longer than 7 minutes). The second part started with coffee and food served for 15 minutes, followed by dialog around the table. Each group contained at least one participant who took soundings of the views being

expressed. In the municipality the two senior managers invited the employees into 4 cafe dialogs. One of these cafes had 30 and the other three had 22, and 15 participants.

In the bank study 8 dialog seminars were conducted in which the three researchers and an average of ten office managers volunteered to discuss and analyse the bank's learning challenges. A typical reflective learning activity from dialog seminar teams of office managers in the Bank study articulated and shared their "elbowroom" at work with the purpose of expanding the *room* and achieving more time at work, since there always seems as "a lack of time".

Figure 1. "Elbow room at work" in a dialog seminar



(The bank study 2007)

This exercise was inspired by Berg's model of *free room* (2000) that maps 'scope for action' between the theoretical outer boundary of legality and the internal limit of what is perceived as organisational legitimacy. In between we find some *elbowroom* with possibilities and space for utilization. One office manager involved characterized his challenge like this;

Taking time for reflection is an exercise in itself. There is no time in every-day life to consider fundamental things. I can deal with numbers, but human relationships and learning are the greatest challenge in working life. (Subject, bank study, 2007)

Theory tells us that we have more unused elbowroom than we can see, but it is comfortable not to see. (Subject, bank study, 2007.)

And one year later:

The most important limitation on questioning and understanding is time! There are so many things to do, and is it reasonable to give all tasks the equal priority? That is my dilemma. (Subject, bank study, 2008.)

In this context we debated why continual learning could be difficult, and why it can be hard to change our attitudes and values. How important are my choices of values for my business organisation? And how are we able to assess the strengths and weaknesses of an organisational culture in relation to the value choices of the employees and the managers?

There has traditionally been a culture of measurement for accountability in the bank, and it increased with the introduction of the balanced scorecard as a tool to count and control employees' activities (Kaplan & Norton, 1996). One employee described this frequent measuring of all activities as: "Being timed to the second, every step of the way, even when you run only 100 metres." (Subject, bank study, 2008.)

As a consequence of this exercise (bank study) and further debate about the issue, the high volume of e-mails identified as a time-waster, was soon reduced.

Five cafe dialogs each lasting two hours, were arranged in two sections of the bank. Prior to this development and before the researchers became involved, a section of the bank, had arranged informal coffee meetings for its employees one day a week between 8 and 9 am. The strategy behind the dialog cafes sought to reduce workplace pressure while, at the same time, strengthening reflective learning through positive experiences.

The staff like this way of working and believe that it is a method that serves its purpose well. (Subject, bank study, 2010)

For 2 of the cafe dialogs, food was served in the staff room immediately after work, followed by a half-hour presentation of information by the head of department, input from the researchers and a 45-minute dialog in groups of 6-7 employees arranged around small tables. In the other 4 cafe dialogs, members of staff sat around a large table but followed the same procedure. "This is not new for us: we often do this in seminar situations." (Subject, bank study, 2010.)

Another cafe dialog took development as its theme. There was a relaxed atmosphere and on a scrap of paper beside each coffee cup was the statement: “We ask good questions each day to learn and develop”. The idea was to promote good constructive discussions. The groups comprised people from different organisational teams so that people could sit with new acquaintances. In one example of a shared issue discussed, staff felt that calling busy people by telephone seemed a little too intrusive. A feeling arose around the table that perhaps one should *be a bit more daring* and deliver a *personal touch* reflected in statements such as: “I just call for a casual chat, and a bit of humour and this can provide help in a difficult situation”. (Subject, bank study, 2010.)

After a period of focus on customer surveys, which showed that the bank had too little customer contact, the discussion in one of the cafe dialogs concerned “calling customers”. A good story was told in this cafe dialog, in which an employee had rung a customer (Johanne) who had changed her bank:

Nick on the phone; Hi Johanne! I’m sure you’ve not had a single good night after leaving our bank! After a little pause on the phone, Johanne burst out laughing and Nick was able to arrange a new meeting and got the customer back. (Subject, bank study, 2010.)

After such an inspiring tale, conversation continued over coffee, but the story was shared on the bank’s intranet as a departmental success story. This would perhaps not have been possible without the communication developed in the cafe dialog.

On the other hand such empowering stories are not without difficulties. When employees handle situations successfully among customers their professional pride increases. When the system, with all the managers and colleagues appreciate the job, the loyalty to the team and the profession was confirmed. Such stories presupposing that employees can be a master of the situations, and this give also more obedience to the system.

### **The municipality seminars and cafes**

Seven dialog seminars were conducted in which three researchers and 70 office managers volunteered to discuss and analyse the learning challenges faced by the municipalities. The dialog seminar affects leadership styles and is a complex new way of working for everybody involved.

We did not believe anything had happened, that we'd achieved anything. But something has happened! Something happened in terms of attitudes. Polarisation is beginning to vanish. We have established a dialog. (Subject, municipality study, from the assessment, 2009.)

I would be pleased if everyone who works here was aware of the direction in which we are going. If we were sensitive and listened to each other; if we attempted to talk with and not to each other; if we could work on the basis that everyone has the best intentions and that we were solutions-focused. (Evaluation subject, municipality study 2009.)

Employer development is based on what the municipality staff as a whole believes and wishes. (From the invitation, municipality study 2010.)

Table 3. Participations in the municipality

<b>Participation In Dialogs</b>	<b>The municipality study</b>
<b>Customers/Citizens</b>	600 (individuals in 12 cafes)
<b>Researchers</b>	1 (in all cafes)
<b>Office Managers</b>	2 (in all cafes)
<b>Senior Managers</b>	2 (in all cafes)

The municipality has gained experience from 12 different cafe dialogs involving all together 600 citizens during year 2009 - 2010. The idea of cafe dialogs arose naturally in an interview that two researchers conducted with a senior manager, in connection with the municipality's vision of "positive people who inspire each other to generate new ideas".

Figure 2.

“Employees’ summary - from a cafe dialog”



(The municipality study homepage 2010 - accentuated words)

Unions – information – management – education – municipality – engagements – discussions - youths – decisions – active people - co-operation – nice – summer holiday – assembly room – together – important – people – parents – difficult –

Surveys indicate that the employees have too little influence. Formerly, there were usually five or six participants who posed questions at meetings. With a cafe dialog, everybody is able to take part. When dialogs are followed up and given priority this creates a ripple effect. This is the kind of increased influence is what we wish to see from all employees, and over a period of time we too can change our attitudes. (Subject, municipality study 2010.)

The results of the cafe dialogs are presented in an official document in the hope that these ideas and perspectives will be taken into account in the continued development of the municipality. Three examples of statements made during the cafe dialogs indicate a strong interest in taking part:

Only certain people have access to information – it doesn't get out.  
 We want the top manager to come to us and meet us in our daily work!  
 The leadership has to be present, not necessarily active the whole time, but giving a signal that this is important. It would be difficult to arrange these cafe dialogs without the two top managers. (Subject, municipality study, 2010.)

Lately the authority has focused on the results from the first cafes. And especially the renovation work of the houses for the elderly citizens has been received with thanks

Data collection was spread over a three-year period as the author worked with three other researchers to collect data. For this article I have used records of dialogs along with the analysis of strategic learning documents. All the data from dialog seminars and meetings were transcribed, in addition to written summaries from dialog cafes. In the bank, together with two other researchers, I took part in 6 cafe dialogs consisting of 71 employees and four middle managers in two departments, each cafe lasting two hours. Three written communications from researchers, expressing a wish for an hour's interview with the CEO

concerning learning met with no response from the bank. One of the senior managers of the company, however, did participate regularly in a special group together with the three researchers. In the bank the dialog cafe was organized as a pilot in two departments.

In the municipality I participated together with two other researchers in 7 dialog seminars each lasting four hours, for a total of 70 leaders including 10 potential leaders and 2 senior managers. In addition to this, I attended a two-hour cafe dialog with 22 participants, and analysed written summaries from 15 other cafe dialogs. The material was categorised and analysed with the help of Nvivo 8 (Bazeley, 2007) in order to reveal comparisons (similarities and differences) between the dialogs in the workplace, and how employees understood them. Because four researchers were involved, researcher triangulation strengthened the analysis of the data collected at different levels of the organisation.

## ***Discussion***

The cafe dialogs for employees form part of a leadership offensive in the municipality study. But sharing such collective discoveries is not straightforward. A problem is that the process is very time-consuming and the incoming signals require administrative follow-up if credibility and motivation are to be maintained until the next meeting. However, a positive outcome of the cafe dialogs is that everybody is more motivated by this kind of open and inclusive communication.

Using the Brown and Isaacs' (2005) important cafe principle 'hosting conversations that matter' in the analyses of both the dialog cafe and dialog seminars is challenging. However the purpose of using Pålshaugen's (2002) dialog seminars is also to analyse the learning challenges in organisations. Even though the dialog seminars for the managers were more formally organized than the cafes for the employees, the goal of the dialogs was to provide a free space for reflection (Ghaye, 2008) and to allow participants to relax a little. The goal of these critical reflective exercises in the organisations is to identify potential for change (Jarvis, et al., 2003). Seeing the potential for change by means of reflective dialogs within an organisation promotes an interest in building long-term, positive working environments. Courage is needed to describe one's failures, but perhaps even more to describe one's successes, and participants in the dialogs need to support and encourage each other's

openness (Tiller, 2006). Routine activities were thoroughly investigated with the help of researchers in order to find potential for increased learning amongst participants. In both organisations existing routines could be perceived in new ways, drawing on new insights. It can be healthy to make minor adjustments in routines for the sake of change, but entirely new activities can also be established. Increased involvement in data collection from dialogs can create new ideas and provide increased motivation for learning. Organisations that invest in reflective learning activities can provide inspiration for others who are looking to increase reflective learning.

For researchers, establishing adequate routines is also desirable as in the case of regular cafe dialogs that assemble employees in the canteen for informal dialog about specified and unspecified issues. The researchers and leaders were able to have impromptu meetings while the employees were having their dialogs.

The 4 cafe dialogs involving altogether 72 employees were conducted in the municipality study. At the same period, 6 cafe dialogs involving altogether 71 employees were carried out at the bank study. Such informal learning arenas for dialogs encouraged everyone's contribution. This represents a relatively low level of participation amongst the 1500 employees of the municipality and the over 700 employees of the bank. Nevertheless, the pilot studies provide a basis for discussion about increased reflective learning (Jarvis, et al., 2003) individually, by departments and for the entire organisation (Senge, 1999). When the dialog cafe is put in place and overseen by a consultative and open-minded management it appears to promote critical reflection and productive discussion. It also seems that different cafe dialogs with different forms of leadership may provide contexts that yield different levels of involvement (Nielsen, et al., 2010).

The municipality study provided cafe dialogs to increase reflective learning in the workplace and to increase choices for individual employee (Ellström, 1996). The freedom to comment in a cafe dialog, remedies situations where only two or three participants can put questions to the leadership and as a result the sense of ownership of organisational decisions felt by employees was strengthened. When senior management invites increased influence on the part of all employees, this strengthens their motivation towards change (Giddens, 1991) exemplified by statements such as "We want the chief to come to us and meet us in our daily work". The engagement in cafe dialogs can create a *ripple effect*. However the involvement



of senior management creates an expectation that something will happen, but if there is no follow-up to collective reflection about improvements, then there is a danger that this creates frustration amongst the participants (Nielsen, et al., 2010).

The municipality study uses dialogs as a new communication tool for dialog with employees as well as with local residents and representatives of local business. In addition new residents, older residents, local business and families of the municipality were invited to the other 12 cafe dialogs. Political and administrative senior managers host the sessions and, together with the researcher, they move regularly between the tables. Municipality office managers were sent written invitations and participated in all cafe dialogs, including the 4 with the staff. The dialogs were deliberately open and not necessarily restricted to topics derived from the information given in the introduction. Recently, the municipality has focused on 'working conditions and quality' following the earlier personnel-related theme that revealed child care as a central issue. The outcome of the municipality study is that additional relevant cafe dialogs have been arranged for a greater number of citizens during 2010. In the *second wave*, the focus has been on the results and the follow up work from the first round. This communication has been received positively. The dialog between the employees, managers, and the citizen seems for some situations both effective and motivating.

The bank featured in the study is a sales organisation with a solid tradition of telling its success stories as a part of the learning process. In particular at sales and kick-off meetings, success stories are used as a source of general inspiration, in which new voices are also allowed to be heard (Hochschild, 2003). Establishing regular informal, work-related learning situations of this sort is not straightforward because it involves prioritising, planning and organising the use of time (Senge, 1999). When employees in their daily work get more time to think about fundamental issues, the reflection involves a conscious assessment of the connection between actions and their consequences (Argyris & Schön, 1996). This can be a matter of even more prioritising, planning, organising and using time. Informal world cafes such as those to which the four middle managers invite people (Brown & Isaacs, 2005) allow dialogs that create new learning based on their experience. The tale from a learning cafe in which '*Nick phoned Johanne*' contributed to critical reflection with the potential for change (Jarvis, et al., 2003). When such every-day stories are exchanged and discussed over a cup of coffee, without anyone at the table or in the cafe directing the process, the opportunities for reflective learning are increased. The leaders regarded these reflective processes as

meaningful. When this is experienced as a positive story of joint success, the whole department become motivated (Hochschild, 2003). And when this knowledge is passed on to new colleagues via the intranet this contributes to collective creativity and learning throughout the organisation (Senge, 1999). The dialog cafe in the bank study is based on office management restricted to two departments thus limiting the general application of decisions and statements (Nielsen, et al., 2010). In one department of the bank the informal cafe dialog continues on a weekly basis even though the office manager responsible has left, indicating that a locally-established learning initiative can function independently of management changes and of senior-management interest.

### Reflective learning in two different organisations

A prerequisite for developing reflective learning in an organisation is that employees need to be seen and heard. When this is appreciated and accepted the organisation gains a competitive advantage (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1996). The two organisations with different goals organised their dialogs in different ways. The dialog cafe in the municipality study focuses on communication, whereas in the bank study operational matters are the focus. In the municipality study, two senior managers promote the learning initiative and visit all the cafe dialogs. The bank organises and operates the cafe dialogs through four middle managers, without any visits from senior management. Cafe dialogs assume that there is a general expectation of increased productivity in working life (Giddens, 1991). If they also aim to reduce stress factors, then there is a dichotomy. Providing a place in which to meet informally within working hours without pressure on productivity can be regarded as an inefficient exercise, whilst, at the same time, it offers opportunity for reflective learning for the participants. The facilitation of learning arenas that are distinct from the operational focus of work-related discussions is a difficult task. The two studies demonstrate that cafe dialogs in an informal meeting place are easier to organise when the senior managers invite employees in person. The presence of senior management makes the event more binding and makes participation more legitimate for the employees. At the same time, a departmentally-based dialog cafe is not without value and can form an important contribution to reflective learning in the rest of the organisation, for instance through sharing learning stories like *Johannes*. Café dialogs organised at department level make it possible continue irrespective of changes in middle managers and without the participation of senior management. Initiatives of this type seem to be sustainable (Ghaye, 2008). Individual learning, appreciation and the competence of relations, form the basis for the further discussion.

## ***Main learning points from the research***

Reflective learning can be regarded as a more complex phenomenon than formerly assumed because the conscious or unconscious participation of senior management can significantly influence reflective learning processes. It helps if cafe dialogs are fully supported by an organisation's senior management before proceeding with their wider use. Although the leaders of the two organisations in the study articulated a vision of positive change, the use of these emancipatory reflective processes was not without its difficulties. Where organisations or participants do not have the opportunity to contribute critically to the process of reflection, participatory and appreciative action research will not necessarily be an adequate solution. Whether organisations use the same or different learning approaches is of interest in terms of choice of research methods.

From a critical viewpoint, the explanation of the phenomenon that the obedience among employees is increasing is necessary to explain. The success stories became legitimate within the system in a reciprocal confirmation between the system and me. Through such stories confirming the system, and when the system applauded the story uncritically, your risk is to be a hero for a second, but a slave of the system for lifetime. That's why the idea with the reflective learning is not only to cultivate or simply develop the individual's own success but to ensure their action plans interact congruently on commonly-defined situations.

To be able to perceive a range of opportunities for change is, in other words, a prerequisite for reflective learning within an organisation. Perceiving opportunities for change enables long-term and successful processes of reflection to be built throughout the organisation. If senior management takes the initiative and organises cafe dialogs, this innovation spreads rapidly to the whole organisation. Once cafe dialogs are sufficiently embedded they will be sustainable even without the participation of office managers or senior management. Placing a high value on experience and ground-level cooperation develops reflective learning within an organisation. Finally if increased integrity and reciprocal respect are attained through collective reflections as in the best of the cafe dialogs, then we can ask how this can also be further developed in different organisations.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- Anderson, H., Cooperrider, D. L., Gergen, K., Gergen, M., McNamee, Watkins, M., Jane , et al. (2008). *The Appreciative Organization*. Chargrin Falls: Taos Institute Publications.
- Argyris, C., & Schön, D. A. (1996). *Organizational learning II theory, method, and practice*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley.
- Bakhtin, M., M. (1981). *The Dialogic Imagination*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Bazeley, P. (2007). *Qualitative Data Analysis with NVivo* (Second ed.). London: Sage Publications.
- Berg, G. (2000). *Skolekultur*. Oslo: Gyldendal Akademisk.
- Bergmark, U. (2009). *Building an Ethical Learning Community in Shools*. Phd, University of Luleå Luleå.
- Boud, D., Cressey, P., & Docherty, P. (2006). *Productive reflection at work - Learning for changing organizations*. London: Routledge.
- Brown, J., & Isaacs, D. (2005). *The World Café : Shaping Our Futures Through Conversations That Matter*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.
- Chatman, J., A, Wong, E., M, & Joyce, C. (2007). When do people make the place? Considering the Interactionist Foundations og the Attraction-Selection-Attrition Model. *Working paper, Haas School of Business, University of California, Berkeley*, 65-88.
- Cooperrider, D. L. (2000). *Appreciative inquiry : rethinking human organization toward a positive theory of change*. Champaign, Ill.: Stipes Publishing.
- Cressey, P. (2006). Collective reflection and learning: From formal to reflective participation. In D. Boud, P. Cressey & P. Docherty (Eds.), *Productive Reflection at Work - Learning for changing organizations* (pp. 54 - 66). London: Routledge.
- Dewey, J. (1991). *How we think*. N.Y.: Prometheus Books.
- Dewey, J. (2004). *Democracy And Education*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc.
- Ellström, P.-E. (1996). Rutin och reflektion, förutättningar och hinder for lärande i dagligt arbete. In S. Larsson, B. Gustavsson & P.-E. Ellström (Eds.), *Livslångt lärande* (pp. 309 s.). Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Ellström, P.-E. (2006). The meaning and role of reflection in informal learning at work. In D. Boud, P. Cressey & P. Docherty (Eds.), *Productive reflection at work* (pp. 43 - 53). New York: Routledge.
- Emerson, R. M. (1962). Power-Dependence Relations. *American Sociological Review*, 27(1), 10.
- Ghaye, T. (2008). *Building the Reflective Healthcare Organisation*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Ghaye, T. (2010). In what ways can reflective practices enhance human flourishing? *Reflective Practice*.
- Ghaye, T., Melander-Wikman, A., A. Kisare, M., Chambers, P., Bergmark, U., Kostenius, C., et al. (2008). Participatory and appreciative action and reflection (PAAR) - democratizing reflective practice. *Reflective Practice*, 9(4), 361-397.
- Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and Self-Identy, Self and Socity in the late Modern Age*. Cambrigde: Polity Press.
- Habermas, J., & Kalleberg, R. (1999). *Kraften i de bedre argumenter*. Oslo: Ad notam Gyldendal.
- Hochschild, A. R. (2003). *The managed heart: Commercialization of human feeling* (20th anniversary ed.). Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press.
- Jarvis, P., Halford, J., & Griffin, C. (2003). *The Theory and Practice of Learning* (2 ed.). London: Kogan Page.
- Kaplan, R. S., & Norton, D. P. (1996). *The balanced scorecard translating strategy into action*. Boston, Mass.: Harvard Business School Press.

- Kvåle, G., & Wæraas, A. (2006). *Organisasjon og identitet*. Oslo: Det Norske Samlaget.
- Mobius, M., and, & Szeidl, A. (2007). Trust and Social Collateral. *National Bureau of Economic Research*, 50.
- Nielsen, D., L, Nielsen, A., K, Munk-Madsen, E., & Hartman-Petersen, K. (2010). *Fleksibilitet, flygtighet og frirum*. Roskilde: Roskilde Universitetsforlag.
- Nilsen, E. A. (2007). *Oversettelsens mikroprosesser om å forstå møtet mellom en global idé og lokal praksis som dekontekstualisering, kontekstualisering og nettverksbygging*. Tromsø: Universitetet i Tromsø, Det samfunnsvitenskapelige fakultet.
- O'Reilly, C. A., & Chatman, J. A. (1996). Culture as social control: Corporations, Cults and Commitment. . In B. Staw & L. Cummings (Eds.), *Research in organizational behavior* (Vol. 18, pp. 157-200). Greenwich, Conn: JAI Press Inc.
- Pålshaugen, Ø. (2002). Dialogkonferanser som metode i bedriftsutvikling. In M. o. K. Levin, R (Ed.), *Forandring som praksis. Læring og utvikling i organisasjoner*: Fagbokforlaget.
- Røvik, K. A. (2007). *Trender og translasjoner ideer som former det 21. århundrets organisasjon*. Oslo: Universitetsforl.
- Schön, D., A (1991). *The reflective practitioner - How professionals think in action*. London: Ashgate.
- Scott, W. R. (1992). *Organizations. Rational, Natural, and Open Systems* (Third ed.). New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Sence, M. (2002). Verdenskafeen - aktiv involvering gjennom meningsfulle konversasjoner. In M. o. K. Levin, R (Ed.), *Forandring som praksis. Læring og utvikling i organisasjoner*. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.
- Senge, P. M. (1999). *The Dance of change: The challenges of sustaining momentum in learning organizations*. New York: Currency/Doubleday.
- Skjervheim, H. (1996). Deltakar og tilskodar *Fra deltakar og tilskodar og andre essays*. Oslo: Aschehoug.
- Starrin, B. (1997). *Empowerment som tankemodell*. Stockholm: Gothia.
- Thunberg, O. A. (2009). Emosjoner på konto. In T. Tiller, R. Jakhelln, E & T. Leming (Eds.), *Emosjoner i forskning og læring* (pp. 197-220). Tromsø: Eureka.
- Tiller, T. (2006). *Aksjonslæring - forskende partnerskap i skolen motoren i det nye læringsløftet* (2. utg. ed.). Kristiansand: Høyskoleforlaget.
- Tiller, T. (2008). *Ti tanker om skolen, brev til Storm*: Høyskoleforlaget.