

An attempt towards reflexive practice

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Context and approach

- I work in an research and development organisation, in the ICT industry, as researcher, consultant and project leader.
- I write a thesis about a project in which I work, in which we apply ‘human-centred design’: we interact with (potential) end-users.
- A *potential* pro of this research approach: I can tell interesting stories because I combine practitioner and analysis roles.
- However, combining these roles is not easy. However, separating these roles is not easy. I will tell about how I mixed them up.



My question

- How to be a participant/observer? How to combine practitioner and analyst roles?
(maybe my “inner engineer” shows through)
- Old title: “Writing about writing a thesis about a project in which I work myself”
- New title: “An attempt towards a *reflexive* practice”
(Let me try-out this title, to see how it works)

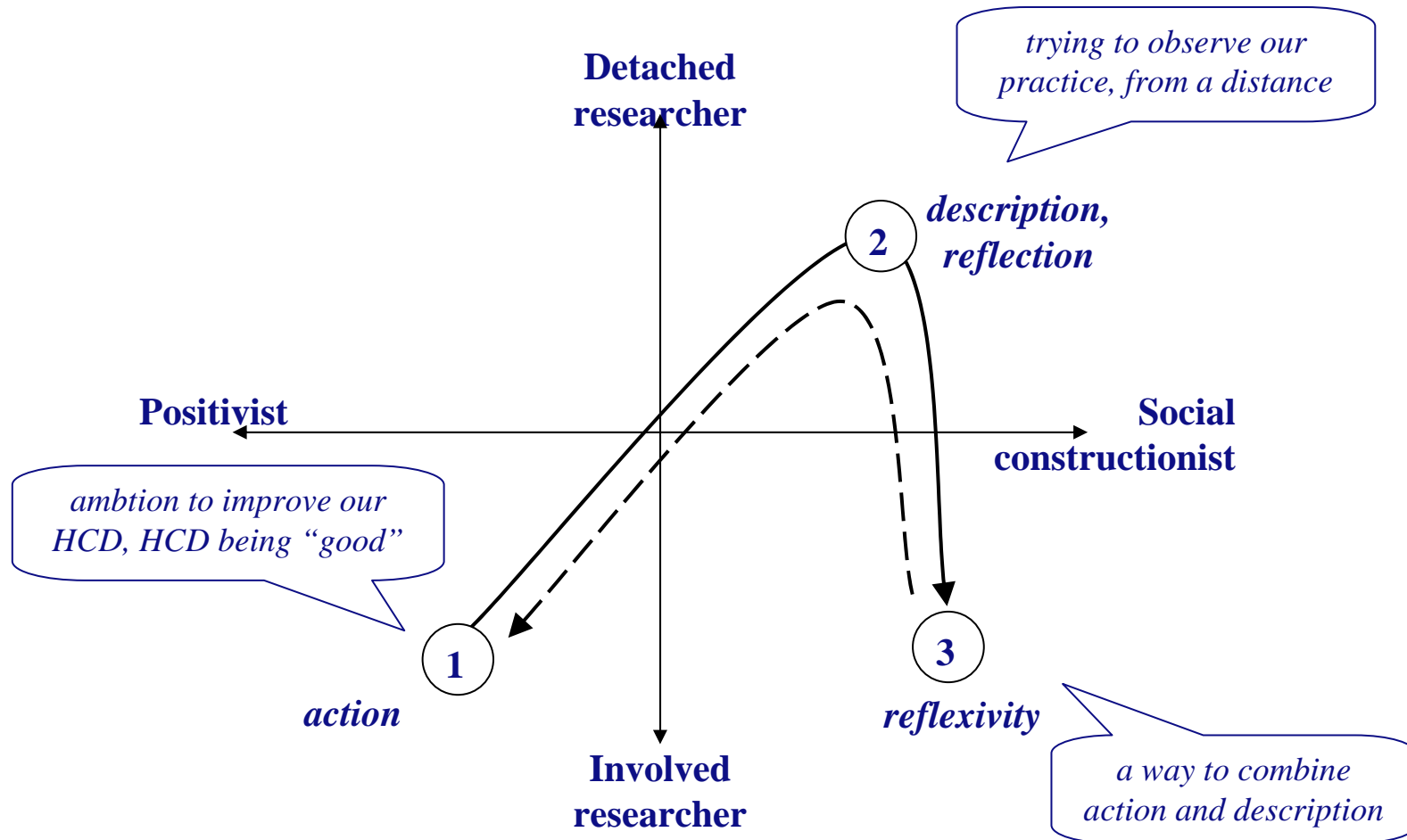
(Later on it may become clearer why I am describing my actions while I am performing them)

Outline of my presentation

- Research approach
- Reflexivity
- Four short stories, trying to talk about *self-other*
- Representation
- About relevance (this track's theme)



From action to reflexivity, and back



Reflexivity in various traditions

- **Autoethnography:** The “crisis of representation”; my story about “them” tells a lot about *me*
- **Ethnomethodology:** Studying other peoples “procedure” is yet another “procedure” – no superior route to scientific knowledge
- **Science and Technology Studies:** Me, studying us, studying them... *reflexivity*: “mutually constitutive nature of accounts and reality” (Ashmore 1989)
- **Essay writing:** Treat thoughts and feelings as material for further study (Montaigne) – “You are your own lab rat” (Letiche 2007)
- **Reflexivity:** a loop of action, description, action, description, etc.

Four short stories – trying to talk about **self** and **other**

1. **An angry police officer:** observations (action); *storylines* about them (descr.); a workshop (action) and their manager's angry reaction; my paper (descr.); my talk, here and now (action)
2. **A crying informal carer:** project (action) with interviews; my 2006 paper (descr.); evaluation meeting (action), Pauline's tells about crying; my paper (descr.); my talk (action)
3. **Critical questions about me:** project (action); my 2006 papers (descr.); evaluation meeting (action), and Mandy's and Martin's critical questions about *my* actions; my paper; my talk
4. **Presenting me:** project (action); empirical data (description); discuss data with peers/supervisors (action), critical questions, about me as project leader, team member, analyst, author; etc.

Representation

(I organized my stories in such a way that they start and end with “action”, rather than with description... maybe my ‘inner engineer’ showing through, again?)

- Representation is **not** a neutral activity: it is about making a picture; and about acting as a spokesperson.
- Questions about the legitimacy of representation, and about how to pose questions and answer questions
- I feel attracted to the idea of storytelling, of performing “a turn in a conversation” (Brown 2006) – rather than making truth claims



Relevance

Problem: The “*innovation paradox*”

- the gap between knowledge creation and application
- the artificial (?) distinction between practice and analysis

‘Keep practice and analyses separated’ still seems to be the guiding principle for good scholarship’, many scholars ‘hesitate to openly cross no-man’s-land between [...] theory’ and ‘what to do’.
(Ganzevles 2005)

Relevance

For practitioners:

- Write about our practice, discuss these with fellow practitioners, as a “turn in a conversation”, and stimulate ‘reflexive practice’
(Writing and talking seem to be in lower esteem than action)

For analysts:

(Sorry for artificially separating practice and analysis)

- Show a practice which is normally hard to access, and which is normally not studied “from within”, provide a “native’s” account

Suggestions

What I would like to see...

- Practitioners (researchers/designers) inviting end-users to speak about their needs and concerns
- Practitioners engaging in critical reflections (or “reflexions”) about their own practice
- Social scientists inviting such practitioners to speak about their practice, and joint scholarship



Thanks for your attention

Questions?

Remarks?

Discussion?

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