

# Action Inquiry

Learning and developing new knowledge  
by collaboration in the midst of action

Phd. Seminar Qualitative Research Methods

Prof. dr. Jaap Boonstra

**J+**

inspiring  
futures **E**

## Content

- Strategic framework for research
- Guiding principles for action inquiry
- Action Inquiry
  - Design strategies
  - Data collection
  - Data interpretation
- Finding your way in messy problems
- Diffusion of knowledge
- Organizational paradigms

**J+**

inspiring  
futures **E**

## Strategic framework for research



There is no good wind for a sailor who has no idea where to go

**J+**

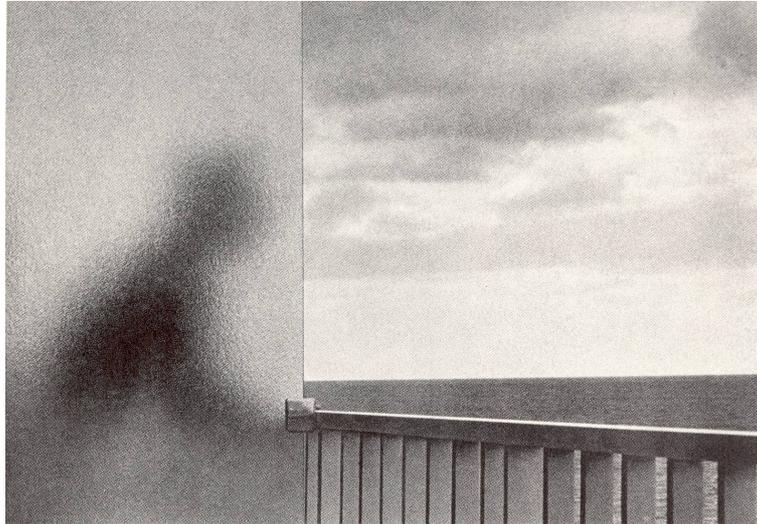
inspiring  
futures **E**

## Strategic framework for research

- Expressing aspirations and sense of desired direction
- Matching context, issues, methods and assumptions
- Inspirations and negotiations in a contested terrain
- Framework for decision making and interaction
- Basis for methodological considerations and choices
- Integrating separate efforts toward a common purpose
- Space for deliberate adjustments and negotiations
- Methodological credibility and responsibility

**J+**

inspiring  
futures **E**



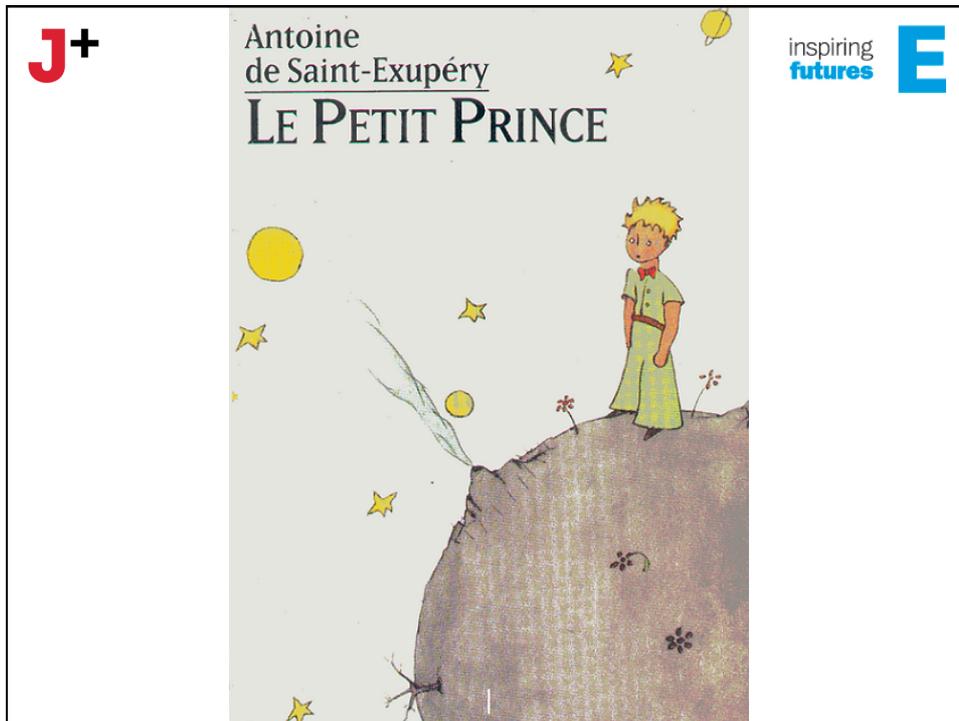
.... important to see distant things as if they were close  
and to take a distanced view of close things

**J+**

inspiring  
futures **E**

## Guiding principles for action inquiry

- **Naturalistic Inquiry:**  
Curiosity in real world situations as they unfold naturally  
*“Looking with an open mind, but not with an empty head”*
- **Appreciative Inquiry:**  
Collaborative searching for the best that is and might be  
*“Searching for positive power and sustainable change”*
- **Action Research:**  
A journey through a landscape full of discoveries and new ideas  
*“If you want to truly understand something, try to change it”*



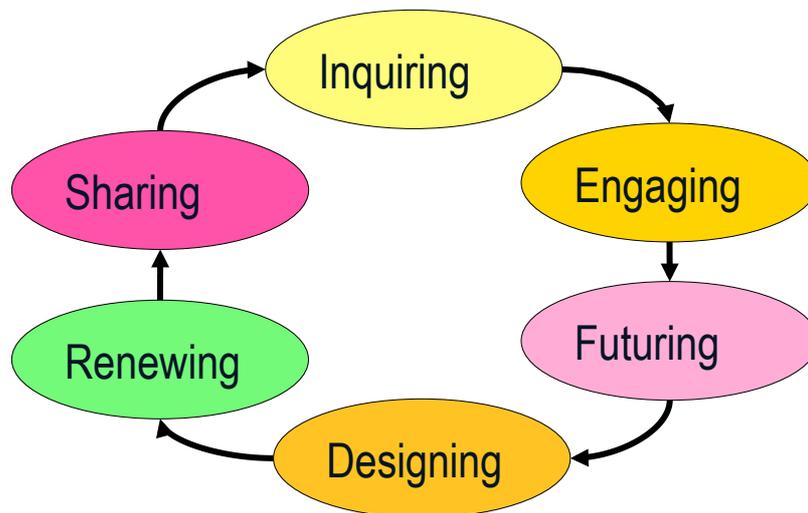
**J+**

inspiring  
futures **E**

## Naturalistic inquiry

- Engaging in a natural setting
- Inquiring with an open mind (not an empty head)
- Identifying ambiguous issues and tensions
- Not solving problems or defining solutions
- Postpone own opinion and views
- Stimulate multiple voices and intense dialogue
- Keep space for multiplicity and differences
- Bring people together for understanding
- Opening up new perspectives and possibilities

## Appreciative inquiry

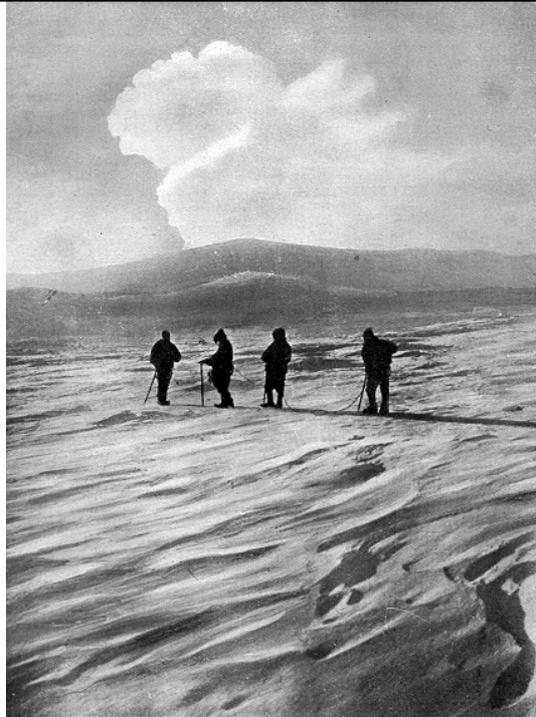


## Inquiring, engaging and futuring

- What gives us energy and power in the things we do?
- What is the very best in our shared experiences?
- What are our distinctive qualities and contributions?
- What are our moments of euphoria and proudness?
- When do I go home satisfied and a smile on my face?
- What are my aspirations, inspirations and ambitions?
- How can we make a difference for the best?
- What can we do realizing a desirable future?
- What can we learn from others?
- What may others learn from us?
- What is the meaning we have for others?

J+

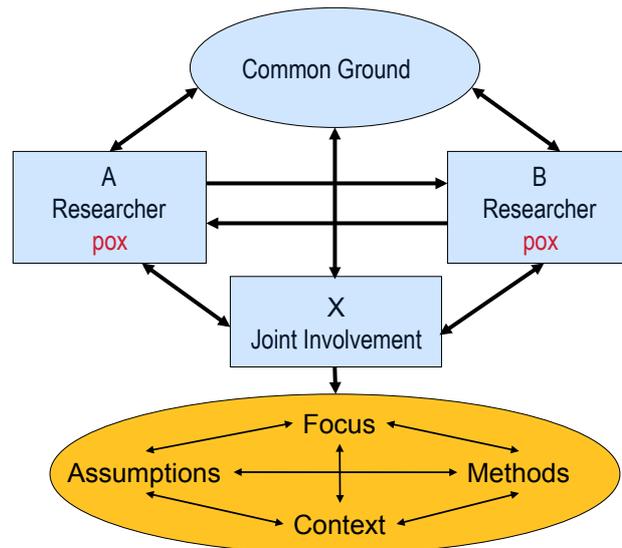
inspiring  
futures E



J+

inspiring  
futures E

## Relations in Action Inquiry



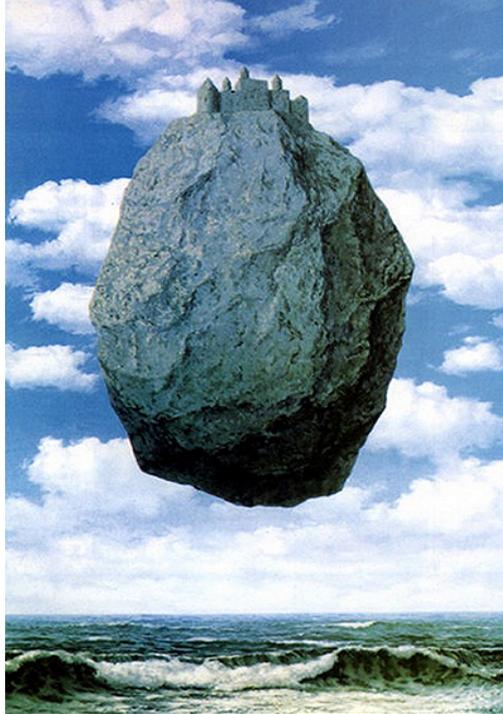
## Design strategies for Action Inquiry

- **Naturalistic Inquiry:**
  - Real issues in real world settings
  - No clear idea of outcomes
  - Focus on mutual discoveries
  - Openness to whatever emerges
  
- **Emergent strategy:**
  - Studying the society you're part of
  - Openness for new paths of discovery in fieldwork
  - Tolerance for ambiguities and uncertainties
  - "Living with the data"

## Design strategies for Action Inquiry

- **Purposeful sampling:**
  - Insights in the phenomenon and the underlying dynamics
  - In depth studies based on genuine observations
  - Openness to critical incidents and information rich issues
  - Case studies, learning histories, life stories, meaningful events
  
- **Active collaboration and mutual learning:**
  - Joint responsibility of the researcher and the researched
  - Collaboration of purposeful, capable and knowledgeable actors
  - Mutual enrichment of social science and practical affairs of man
  - The object is also subject: it talks back!

**J+**



inspiring  
futures **E**

**J+**

inspiring  
futures **E**

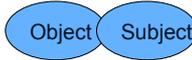
*“On the highland, problems can be solved using tested theories and techniques. In the swampy lowlands, problems are muddled and messy, and there are limited capabilities for regulated approaches and technical solutions.*

*It is ironic that problems in the highland become of less importance for human beings and society, although they might have a technical importance. The most realistic and fundamental problems emerge out of the swamps.*

*In this situation, the organizational professional is confronted with a choice. Would the professional and researcher rather stay on the solid ground of the highlands to work on problems which are not really important for society, or is the professional and researcher prepared to go down into the swamps of crucial problems and to work on messy problems with non-regulated research”*

*Donald Schon, 1983*

## Strategies for research

	<b>Academic research</b>	<b>Applied research</b>	<b>Action inquiry</b>
Object	Persons not aware of goals or intentions	People in client system solving problems	Mutual discovery of new insights
Subject	Academic researcher steered by objectivity	Social scientist in a service role	Collaboration in generating knowledge
Product	Theoretical models and prescriptions	Purposeful change and new methodologies	Social change and new knowledge
Application	No responsibility for researcher	Responsibility of client system	Mutual responsibility of all participants
Method	Controlled experiment Questionnaires	Case research Survey feedback	In depth case studies Learning histories
Relations			

## Some personal questions?

- What inspires me to do research?
- What are my aspirations, what is my dream?
- What is my relationship with the academic world?
- What is my relationship with the broader world?
- Who are my companions in this journey?
- What will be my contribution to knowledge?
- What is it in my research work to be proud off?

## Data collection in Action Inquiry

- Qualitative data:
  - Observations and quotations
  - Documents and stories
  - Dialogues and exchanges
  - Learning sessions
  
- Going into the field:
  - Direct and personal contact in own environments
  - Getting close to the situation
  - Social sense of shared experience
  - Engagements, empathy and confidentiality

## Data collection in Action Inquiry

- Empathic neutrality and mindfulness:
  - Engaged, unbiased, open minded, fairness
  - Trustworthiness, honest
  - Multiple perspectives and multiple voices
  - Understanding perspectives and emotions of others and self
  
- Dynamic perspective:
  - Inquiry is an ongoing process and like a documentary
  - Picturing relevant issues needs triangulations of observations
  - Participation in activities generates involvement and tensions
  - Understanding what is going on creates space for new actions

## Analyse strategies in Action Inquiry

- **Unique case orientation:**
  - Observables, meanings and experiences in context
  - Multiple cases and creating rich pictures
- **Inductive analyses:**
  - Inductive: grounded observations  general patterns
  - Creatively synthesizing, sharing and recognizing patterns
- **Holistic perspective:**
  - Phenomenon as part of context and multiple perspectives
  - Careful attention for interdependencies and system dynamics

## Analyze strategies in Action Inquiry

- **Context sensitivity**
  - Place findings in social, historical and temporal contexts
  - Comparative analyses and adaptation in new settings
- **Voice, perspective and reflexivity**
  - Respectful to ownership of perspectives
  - Reflexive on own assumptions and interpretations
- **Collaborate effort in analyzing and experimenting**
  - Striving for shared sense making of events
  - Room for interaction and experimenting new actions

## The case of a group rape

- Irma (14 years) victim of group rape by four boys
- Irma goes home and told her mother of the group rape
- Mother and Irma went to police for declaration
- Two policemen take mother and child in police car to place of crime
- To collect proof Irma was taken to medical police officer
- Physician did internal inspection and cut a lock of hair to collect DNA
- Irma transported to victim support unit and had to tell her story again
- Irma was advised to go to public health care for tetanus and PEP
- Irma in the waiting room was invited by a nurse who spoke loudly: the girl from the group rape may come forward first
- Police collected enough evidence and accused the four boys
- Public prosecutor forgot to eliminate address of Irma from the charge
- Boys started threatening and stalking girl and her mother

## The case of a group rape

- Mother and girl went to police and victim support without getting support
- Social welfare refer to social housing company for another house
- Social housing company was not willing to offer another house
- Irma separated from her mother by youth care and taken to safe place
- Mother went to local political party and ask an aldermen for support
- Mother and aldermen brought the case in city council
- City council and mayor decided to research this case
- The Urban Safety Committee agreed in doing an investigation
- The Child & Safety department accepted the task to do an audit
- One member of the committee called a researcher and asked for advice

What kind of advice would you give?

What kind of strategic frameworks are possible in this situation?

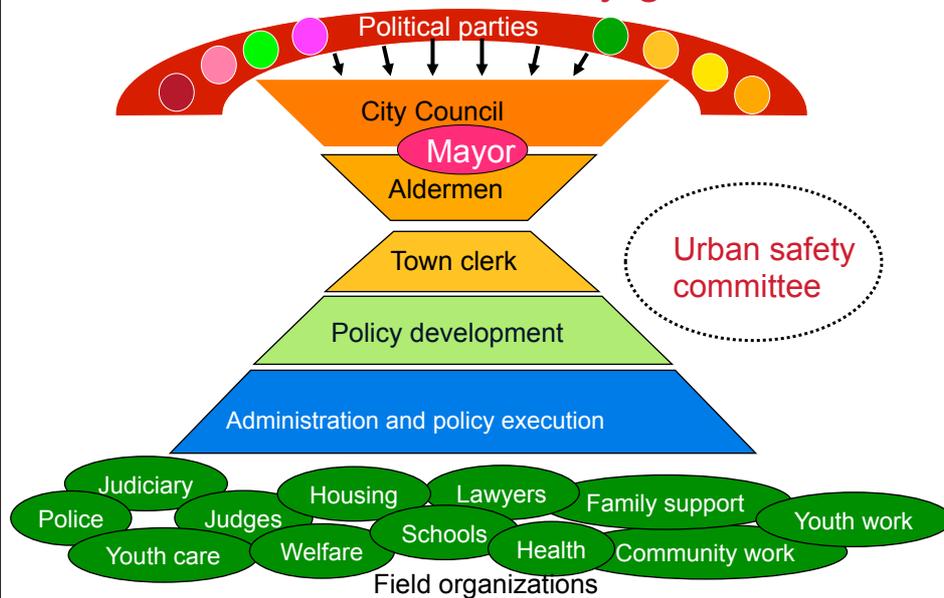
Present a possible design for an action inquiry in this situation

(Research framework – Data collection – Data analyses- Feedback)

J+

inspiring futures E

## Power and conflict in city government



J+

inspiring futures E

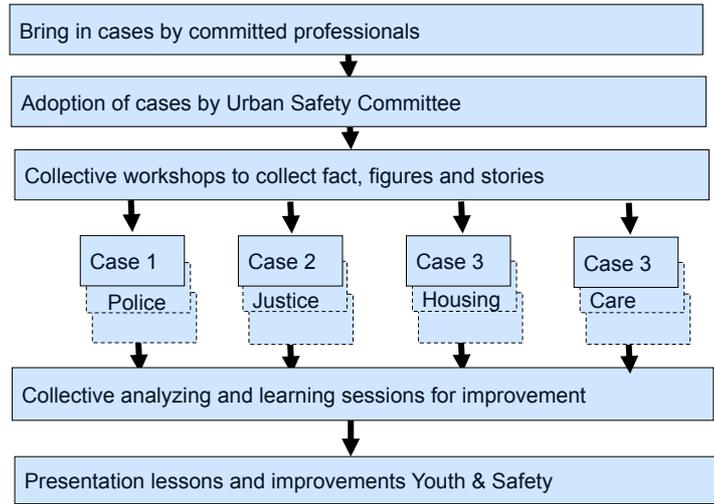
## What to do

### What we don't want

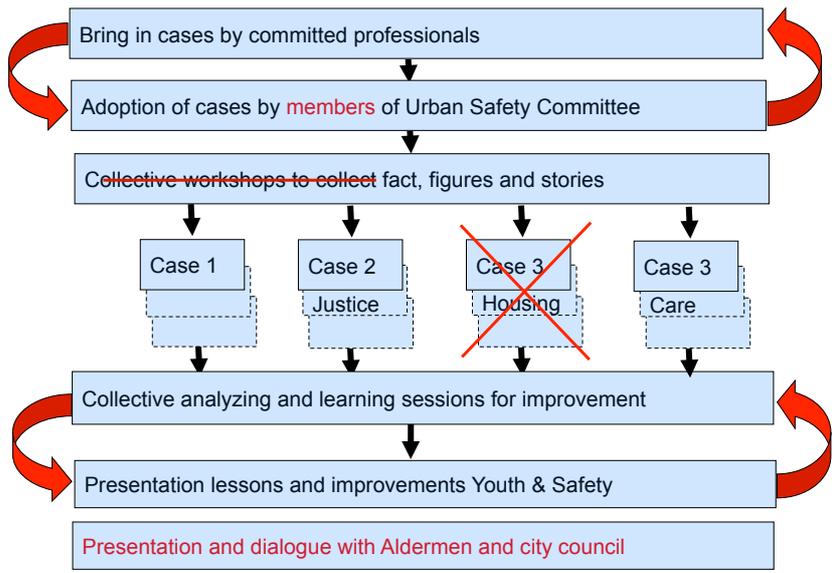
### What we want to do

Blaming and searching scapegoats	Searching for understandings
Looking for culprit and victims	Exploring possibilities for improvement
Focus on one dominant perspective	Respect for different perspectives
Making new protocols and methods	Reflecting on professional practice
Assessing policy and policy makers	Reflecting on professional collaboration
Bulky report	Learning from concrete situations
Investigation of persons involved	Inquiring and learning with people

## Research framework



## Research framework





## Data collection

- Documents, files, records, statements, reports
- Facts, figures, critical incidents
- Stories, histories, experiences, emotions, quotations
- Interviews based on first impression of data
- Network analyses of actors involved
- Collecting and sharing positive experiences
- Exchanging professional aspirations and ambitions
- Recommendations for colleagues, policy makers
- Reflections and recommendations for managers
- Lessons for professionals



## Data analyses

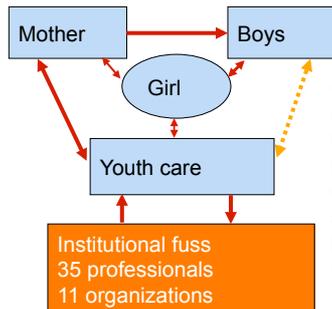
- Primary in depth case analyses in task forces with outsider
- Sharing of findings in learning settings with all involved
- Creative impressions of findings and analysis for sharing
- Collective learning session to search for improvements
- Developing specific recommendations for each case
- Formulating recommendations on videotape
  
- Collecting all improvements by research team
- Developing general lessons by research team
- Presenting analyses and general lessons to task forces
- Presenting analyses and lessons to Safety Committee
  
- Sharing lessons in collective sessions with all involved
- Specific session for city council

## Analysis youth care: Sexual offence

Mother streetwise and demanding

Boys attentive and charming

When was progression?  
Team leader youth house  
Teacher attentive in school  
Direction by health care



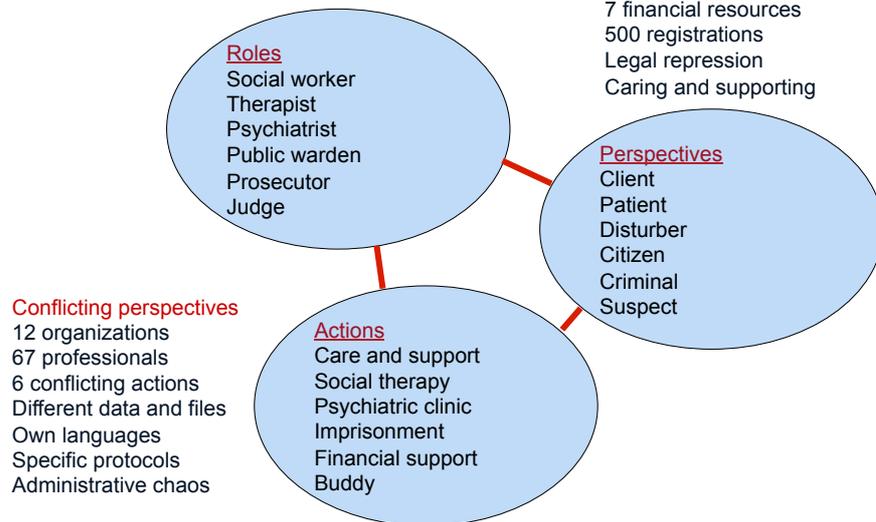
What went wrong?  
Changing guardians  
Unclear direction  
No complete view  
Copying diagnoses  
Conflicting views  
Product offerings  
Financial perversities

Professional distance and protocols – Personal attention and commitment  
Offering standardized care products – Sensitivity for personal needs  
Formal indications – Own financial budgets  
Protocols and controls – Creativity and professional space

## Sexual offence: recommendations

1. Continuity in guarding: one person for the whole family
2. Integral history of youth care, health care, family care and policing
3. Support school and teachers in their supportive task
4. Collect signals in the neighborhood continually and share this
5. Activate local supportive networks (school, friends, family, police)
6. Reduce paper work, strive for direct contact
7. Being fully present as professional (sensitive, respectful, responsive)
8. Knowing and collective acting by all professionals in the family
9. Stimulate 'own strength' conferences and local networks
10. Guarantee safety for professionals around the family
11. Restraint reaction of politicians on media hypes

## Analysis police case



## Practical knowledge and improvements

- Development of professional collaboration in networks
  - Case Police: 31 professionals in 12 institutions
  - Case Judiciary: 39 professionals in 13 institutions
  - Case Youth care: 35 professionals in 12 institutions
- Reflections on tough issues and messy situations
- Professional reflections on ambitions and aspirations
- Learning experiences 105 professionals in 33 institutions
- 12 lessons from and for professionals en managers
- Specific recommendations for specific situations
- Personal recommendations of participants on DVD
- General recommendations for policy makers and politicians

**J+**

inspiring  
futures **E**

## 1. Accept complexity of situations



**J+**

inspiring  
futures **E**

## 4. Realize empathic professionalism



**J+**

inspiring  
futures **E**

## 12. Guts and support of management



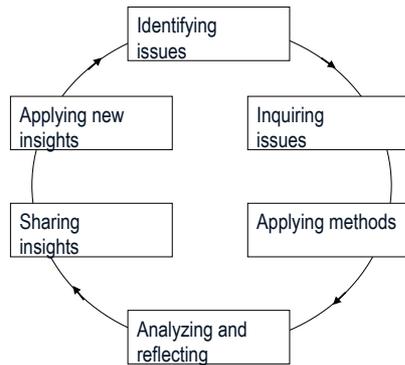
**J+**

inspiring  
futures **E**

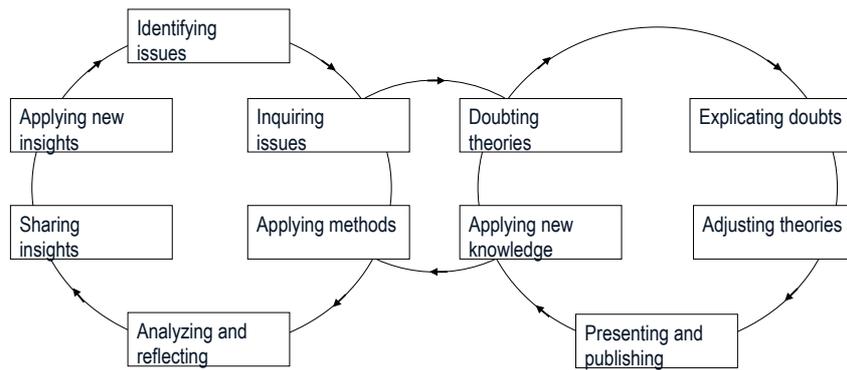
## Scientific knowledge and diffusion

- What are interesting scientific issues to reflect on?
- What are possibilities for diffusion of knowledge?
- What are possibilities for generalization?

## Action inquiry and action research



## Action inquiry and action research



## Scientific contributions

- Dynamics of stagnation and dynamics of innovation
- Conflict and collaboration in organizational networks
- Power and politics in organizations and social institutions
- Change strategies for collaborative action
- Process design to stimulate inter-act-learning for innovation
- Inter-dependent relationships in patterns of learning

## Organizational paradigms

### Subjective world

Names, stories  
Sensemaking  
Action research  
Voluntarism  
Encounters



### Objective world

Structures, patterns  
Causal relationships  
Scientific research  
Determinism  
Protocols & methods

J+

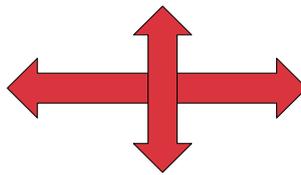
# Organizational paradigms

inspiring  
futures **E**

## Subjective world

Names, stories  
Sensemaking  
Action research  
Voluntarism  
Encounters

Radical Change  
Structural conflict  
Modes of domination  
Contradiction  
Emancipation  
Potentiality



## Regulation

Status quo  
Social order  
Consensus  
Social integration  
Actuality

## Objective world

Structures, patterns  
Causal relationships  
Scientific research  
Determinism  
Protocols & methods

J+

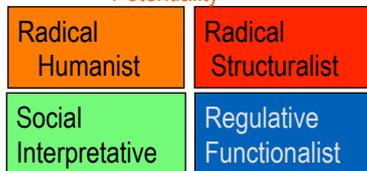
# Organizational paradigms

inspiring  
futures **E**

## Subjective world

Names, stories  
Sensemaking  
Action research  
Voluntarism  
Encounters

Radical Change  
Structural conflict  
Modes of domination  
Contradiction  
Emancipation  
Potentiality



## Regulation

Status quo  
Social order  
Consensus  
Social integration  
Actuality

## Objective world

Structures, patterns  
Causal relationships  
Scientific research  
Determinism  
Protocols & methods

*To us, art is an adventure  
into the unknown world,  
Which can only be explored  
by those willing to take the risks*