

9 A Case Study from the PAAS Project - the Insurance
Employees Union and EDP in the National Insurance System

This case study is based on three elements. First, it is based on the research approach developed in the ALC's PAAS project (PAAS is the Swedish abbreviation which directly translated means "Perspective on Analysis, Tools and Working Methods in Systems Development"). Essentially PAAS aims at creating action relevant knowledge and activating structures useful for trade unions in developing policies on EDB and work organisation (Especially of professionally skilled, middle level, salaried employees). The second element is the Swedish National Insurance (i.e. Social Security) System which has become quite large, complex and expensive to administer and so has made extensive use of EDB systems to make services more cost effective. Plans are now being developed for new computerized systems that will be operational in the next 10 to 20 years. The participation of the Union of Insurance Employees (Försäkringsanställdas Förbund or FF for short) in determining the content of these plans constitutes the case's third element. These three elements inter-penetrate since the FF's participation relied on the approach of PAAS as applied in the National Insurance System. ⁴⁵⁾

9 1 The PAAS Project-Methods for User Influence in
Systems Development

The term "action research" has been used to describe a number of dissimilar attempts to break down the dominant approach in the social sciences which is inspired by natural science theory. ⁴⁶⁾ We would like to present here the definition

that the PAAS project has given to the term "action research".

Change Through Understanding

A number of the current conceptions on the part played by research in bringing about change can be summarized under the three headings "understanding without change", "change without understanding" and "change through understanding".

"Understanding without change" represents the ivory tower ideology, according to which the researcher should be a completely objective observer removed from all practical considerations. After work the researcher climbs down from his ivory tower, but at work he regards people and society in the same removed perspective as a nature researcher regards different parts of nature. Most people realize that this is an impossible dream, but parts of the ivory tower philosophy often emerge concerning the relationship of research to society.

For us the term "change without understanding" refers to the normal application of expertise where the expert acquires knowledge on some part of human reality and passes his knowledge on to some decision-makers who initiate a process of change without regard to those who are affected by it. From the point of view of the people affected, this is change without understanding. The changes are not the result of the knowledge and experience of the people concerned, they are the result of other people's conception of the situation.

"Change through understanding" means for us an activity aimed at increasing the ability of the parties concerned

themselves to solve their own problems. As opposed to action research it is not (in the first place) a matter of providing assistance to 'implement a specific action resulting in a limited target. It is a matter of performing the Socratic task of paving the way for a long-term process of change to be performed by the parties themselves. Necessarily these types of processes take their time to implement. It is not possible to change routines established over many years in one night (if one wants to achieve good results). It is not possible to change people with a stroke of the pen.

It is these types of long-term self-change processes that we want to contribute to in the working life sector. From the employees' point of view a fundamental requirement for a new computer system (for example) could reasonably be that it is compatible with the fundamental values and experiences integrated in the trade union tradition. Bringing this type of problem to the fore is an important part of the research and investigation activities that ultimately result in a new system being installed. The traditional lines between research, investigation work and training must be exceeded to some extent. 47)

Starting Points for the Pedagogic Work

The researcher's work becomes a matter of providing knowledge and experience so that those people subject to a change can better understand their own position, develop their own concepts and find alternative courses of action. The project's pedagogic work has been guided by the following basic factors:

