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# Transference and Subjective Implication: Psychoanalytic Reflections on an Action Research

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## Abstract

This paper aims to use the Freudian psychoanalytic approach to explain the process of interaction between researchers and subjects participating in action research, bringing a new contribution to organizational studies. It is hoped that this research will promote the self-reflection of researchers in this research process, highlighting the complexities of the transference dynamics and subjective implication of field interactions. With this objective in mind, key psychoanalytic concepts are explored and definitions of action research are presented. This is achieved by describing how it was carried out in a waste pickers' association, as well as how the reciprocal influences between the subjects participating in the research are constituted and the constituents of the research and its results, through an analysis of the transference dynamics and subjective implications between those involved.

**Keywords:** Action Research; Transference; Subjective Implication; Organizational Studies

## Introduction

This paper aims to use the Freudian psychoanalytic approach to explain the process of interaction between researchers and subjects participating in action research. More specifically, we

appropriate psychoanalysis to promote our self-reflection as researchers in an action research process, highlighting the complexities of transference dynamics and subjective implication in field interactions (Barbier, 1985; Pichon-Rivière, 1977). Thus, we also seek to reflect on the reciprocal influences between the participants of the research, that are constituted and a constituent of the research and its results.

In the area of organizational studies in Brazil, we did not find any paper that has articulated the concepts of transference and subjective implication with action research. Silveira, Palassi and Paes de Paula (2019), Lodi, Thiollent and Sauerbronn (2017), and Menelau, Santos, Castro and Nascimento (2015) point out that the vast majority of studies that apply action research to organizations in Brazil need further study, as they start from functionalist approaches, focused on solving organizational issues.

Besides, investigations generally exclude three main topics of the method: social change, collaboration through participation, and the autonomy of the research subjects. This article seeks to distance itself from such a tendency, both in relation to the nature of the action research carried out and in the analytical bias, in which we seek here to deepen the intersubjective relations arising from the method, as well as in the self-reflection of those involved, that is, in the capacity of mutual comprehension and in the self-critic, which are specific contributions of psychoanalysis. We understand that the reflections we bring from the psychoanalytic perspective can clarify how the researcher effectively reaches these three main action research topics, as they enable analysis in the sphere of subjective and unconscious phenomena. In the case of this article, such analyses occurred through the concepts of transference and subjective implication, which are fundamental for another level of understanding of these topics, which other methods are not capable of achieving.

In action research combined with the psychoanalytic framework, reflecting on transference relations and the subjective implication on the part of the researcher is an important pillar to solidly build-up knowledge. This leads us to the discussion about subject-object separation. Godoi (2005) argues that the object of psychoanalysis is not objective in the traditional philosophical sense; it is "objectal," in terms of the object of the drive, of what the subject lacks. The subject is constituted only in their relationship with the object, both being interrelated. In this sense, the researcher's identity is constructed from their relationship with the context and the participants in the action research. In this process, the intersubjectivity and self-reflection capacities of those involved are fundamental.

The action research to be analyzed was carried out in a domestic solid waste pickers' association, located in a municipality in the metropolitan region of Belo Horizonte City (MG) (hereinafter referred to as "Association Y"), between March 2014 and July 2016. The objective of this research was to support the democratic management process of the association and the solid waste treatment system of the municipality. During the research, we did not apply psychoanalytic intervention techniques per se. We chose to remain in the management field, using tools of collaborative management technologies (Dragon Dreaming, Theory U and Sociocracy) (Paes de Paula & Souza, 2018) and appropriating psychoanalysis as a hermeneutical reference.

This paper is organized in four parts, starting from this introduction. In the next section, we present the concepts of transference and subjective implication, beginning with a Freudian

approach and also bringing authors who contributed to the interlocution between psychoanalysis and action research. Next, in the third part, we define action research and describe how it was performed at Association Y. In the sub-items of this section, we analyze the transference dynamics and the subjective implication, first, by the research subjects, and then, in what concerns the researchers. Finally, in the fourth and last section, we discuss the analysis carried out and bring some considerations for reflection.

## **Psychoanalysis and action research: transference and subjective implication**

When dealing with the relationship between the researcher and the research participants, the concepts of transference and countertransference, coming from the psychoanalytic clinic, bring important contributions. The notion of transference can be considered as one of the most fundamental in psychoanalysis. According to Molina and Fabrian (2014), when conducting a systematic review of Brazilian publications between 2000 and 2010, the concepts of transference and countertransference address polysemic psychic phenomena, being objects of research in various psychoanalytic schools, and are related to various themes, authors, and lines of thought.

The notion of transference appears in Freud's work for the first time when Freud and Breuer discussed clinical cases in "Studies on Hysteria" (1895/1969), when the neurotic defense mechanism was described. Freud originally identified transference as an obstacle to treatment. However, later in his 1909 text "Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis," he recognizes it as a therapeutic agent, which can become an important process for the analyst to unravel the symptomatic mystery (Isolan, 2005).

The relevance of transference in the therapeutic process acquires additional meaning when Freud presents us with the concept of "transference neurosis" in 1914, which refers to how influences of previous feelings, components of neurosis, occur in the relationship between analyst and analysand. In this sense, it is the tendency to repeat the repressed material as a contemporary experience, a consequence of the compulsion to repeat. In the clinic, when this phenomenon occurs, we can say that the previous neurosis was replaced by a new one. "The transference itself is only a fragment of repetition, which is a transference of the forgotten past not only from patient to therapist, albeit to all the other aspects of the present" (Isolan, 2005, p. 189).

It is important to emphasize that not every transference triggers a loving attitude. In the 1915 text, which refers to transference love, Freud discusses the possibility of positive and negative transference and the attitude that the analyst can assume in relation to the transference feelings of the analysand. Transference relationships, positive and negative, refer to children's identifications and are related to ambivalent feelings directed at parents. Just as a child often reverses the feelings he/she experiences for parents, transferences can evolve, reversing (Freud, 1915, 1969; Pommier, 1998).

In the clinical context, according to Pommier, the inversion of feelings can happen during a session or even during the enunciation of a single sentence. In transference, love and hate are in mutual implication: "A good breeds an evil. Likewise, the more an analysis proves to be effective, the more the positive transference will grow, the more it will risk engendering a negative

transference” (Pommier, 1998, p. 47). Understanding that positive and negative transferences are phenomena of repetition of previous feelings, Freud warns the analyst not to confuse them with true feelings and, on the other hand, to know how to deal with the situation in a way that does not suppress what their patients feel.

As dangerous as it is to consider the patient’s transference feelings as true would be to urge him/her to renounce, or sublimate his/her feelings: “It would be exactly as if, after invoking a spirit from hell, through cunning incantations, we should send it back down, without having asked him a single question” (Freud, 1915, 1969, p. 8). Freud warns that the analyst must know how to conduct the situation in an ethical and sincere manner, without abandoning neutrality.

When dealing with neutrality in the transference process, Pommier affirms that the analyst must keep in mind that positive transference and negative transference are two sides of the same coin, and cannot stick to just one side. In other words, it is not recommended that the analysts be in agreement, or rigid, at all times. They need to know how to present the “edge of this double face,” based on the situation presented to them. Pommier (1998, p. 51) defends, then, the “improvised neutrality” of the analysts, which means not offering an obstacle opposite to the analysand’s transference and knowing how to accept the feelings that are transferred to them, if their analysand attributed it. Pommier speaks of “improvised” neutrality because “zero” neutrality would be impossible for any human being. In this sense, it is only a specific neutral state in relation to the affective demand of the analysand.

When talking about neutrality in relation to the patient, Freud (1915, 1969) mentions the importance of keeping countertransference under control, which would be the result of the patient’s influences on the analyst’s unconscious feelings. Like transference, countertransference, at first, was identified by Freud as an obstacle to the therapeutic process. However, over time, it has also come to be considered as relevant to healing, as it allows the analysts to reconstruct the patients’ unconscious from the feelings that arise in them (Isolan, 2005).

Isolan states that Heinrich Racker’s and Paula Heimann’s studies were essential for the understanding of countertransference as a factor of understanding in therapeutic work. For Racker (1982, cited by Isolan, 2005, p. 191), countertransference is related to the set of images, feelings, and impulses of the analyst occurring in three ways throughout the session: “a) as an obstacle; b) as a therapeutic tool; and c) as a ‘field’ in which the patient can really acquire a living experience and different from the one he/she had originally.” On the other hand, and more broadly, Heimann (1995, cited by Isolan, 2005, p. 191) considers countertransference as the totality of feelings that the analyst has towards the patient. As an analyst’s emotional response to the patient’s projections, the feelings aroused in the countertransference should be analyzed and contained.

The analyst’s attitude towards transference love is put forward by Freud from a fundamental principle:

(...) the patient’s need and desire must be allowed to persist in order to be able to serve as forces that encourage him/her to work and make changes, and that we must take care to appease these forces through substitutes. (1915, 1969, p. 9)

It is up to the analyst to prepare the patient to experience frustration and overcoming in relation to this love, just as in the resolution of the oedipal situation. Necessarily, the patient will experience feelings of renunciation and mourning, but they will need to learn to deal with the search for the oedipal object as a permanent aspect of all their love relationships. This means that all love experiences throughout life are the result of transferences influenced by the oedipal structure, whether they are experienced inside or outside the clinical context (Isolan, 2005).

When an individual loves, they assume a certain way of being loved, which positions the other. Love is constructed from the signifiers that are attributed to the image of the other, as the subject begins to relate to the other. The love experience makes the subject see themselves as a singular being, referring in the beginning to the emergence of the self. Thus, transference, or love, makes it possible to singularize the subject, revealing itself as an important process not only for therapeutic treatment, but also for life in general (Lopes, 2009).

Lourau (1975) as well as Gaulejac and Roche (2012) employ the concepts of transference and countertransference in the context of action research in organizations, recognizing the importance of elucidating these phenomena during interventions. It is necessary to analyze the possible transferential relations by the participants of the research to the researcher. In turn, the countertransference analysis work requires the researchers to ask themselves what the collected material awakens in them (emotionally and normatively), before deciding on its pertinence or obsolescence.

In the context of group processes, Andréia (2006) stresses the importance of the feelings awakened in the analyst, in the process of contracting transference, so that a deeper perception of the group is possible: “for this understanding, theoretical study is necessary, but above all it is necessary to have availability to live with the group all the intensity of feelings, emotions and sensations brought by them” (p. 57).

According to Pichon-Rivière (1977), the attitude of the researcher, or the person who coordinates the group process, can vary between three basic types: authoritarian, democratic or laissez-faire. These attitudes condition the reactions of the group towards it. In turn, the elements of countertransference nurture the researcher’s capacity for fantasy to establish hypotheses about the group and new interventions. In this sense, instead of the bidirectional notion of transference and countertransference in group processes, Picho-Rivière prefers the term reciprocal transference, implying that it is a process of action and reaction, reciprocal and unfinished. On the part of the group, transferences are a source of analysis of resistance and anxieties in the face of changes:

The transference must be understood as the manifestation of unconscious feelings that point to the stereotyped reproduction of situations, characteristic of passive adaptation. This reproduction is at the service of resistance to change, the avoidance of painful recognition, the control of basic anxieties (fear of loss and fear of attack) (Pichon-Rivière, 1977, p. 193).

As for the researchers involved in an action research process, reciprocal transferences influence and are influenced by the degree of their subjective implication in the research context. René Barbier defines the concept of implication as follows:

The implication, in the field of human sciences, can then be defined as the personal and collective engagement of the researchers in and by their scientific praxis, in function of their families and libidinal histories, their past and present positions in the relations of production and class, and their socio-political project in act, in such a way that the investment that inevitably results from all this is an integral and dynamic part of all knowledge activity. (Barbier, 1985, p. 120)

Barbier (1985) differentiates between three types of implication: psycho-affective, historical-existential, and structural-professional. These levels interpenetrate and influence the experience of the researcher in the field. The psycho-affective implication is related to the individual level. Based on human relations in the context of action research, the researchers go through a questioning of the fundamentals of their profound personality. Fear of abandonment and aggression can be two ambivalent components of the relationship with authority, which are very present in action research contexts. On the other hand, the psycho-affective implications must not make the research unfeasible, as it is necessary to circumscribe it to the psychoanalytic path and, even, use it to deepen communication relations.

Articulated at the psycho-affective level, the historical-existential implication is related to the reciprocal and existential game that is established between researchers and research participants. Not only do the participants suffer the effects of the intervention; the researchers also accept to question their existence, the fundamentals of their orientation, their social class, and their affective and rational options. The researcher engages in the work of personal change, becoming visibly vulnerable, fallible, accessible, and localizable.

The structural-professional implication is related to the mediation of professional activity and its principle of reality. It can often contradict the researcher's existential historical project, as the structural reality of professional action can place economic, political, and scientific limits. In action research, researchers act in contradiction between what they existentially want to accomplish and what the structures prescribe for them as action. Furthermore, they take the risk of being questioned about the role and function of their profession in society, which can mean an interpellation about their system of values and attitudes, on which the balance of their personality depends (Barbier, 1985). Based on the three types of involvement of the researcher in action research, Barbier identifies some situations of involvement, which are related to the systemic dimension and the libidinal dimension of the group. The systemic dimension involves elements from the material, social, communicational, and ideological levels. The libidinal dimension involves the conscious or unconscious affective relationships established between members resulting from transference dynamics.

- Total fusion—occurs when the researchers' involvement (at the three levels presented) is positively related to the systemic and libidinal dimensions within the scope of the intervention, which promotes the fusion of the researcher with the field and eliminates any dialectical relationship between the two. This is detrimental to discoveries in the human sciences.
- Total opposition—occurs when researchers establish the most antagonistic relations with their study context, opposing, point by point, what they perceive in the

intervention field. Although risky and difficult, this situation is more fruitful for scientific discoveries than fusion.

- Opposition to the systemic dimension—the researchers' involvement (either at the three levels or at some of them) conflicts with the systemic dimension of the intervention context. Somehow, the researcher is disturbed by the organizational, economic, political, and ideological logic of the field of intervention. Researchers can become organizational and ideological deviants. However, keeping their implication consistent with the libidinal dimension of the field, the researchers can find secondary benefits that make the conflicting situation bearable.
- Opposition to the libidinal dimension—the researchers' implication (either at the three levels or at some of them) conflicts with the libidinal dimension of the intervention context, but they agree with the systemic dimension. Researchers become libidinal deviants, but have secondary benefits, based on a partial or total agreement with the organizational, economic, political, and ideological logic of the field of intervention. Barbier (1985) states that this is not an easy position, as, to quote Herbert Marcuse, the libidinal dimension is present at every step and has a repressive character in contemporary organizations.

## Action research in Association Y

Thiollent, a Brazilian precursor of action research in organizations, defines the methodology as follows:

The action-research is a type of empirically-based social research that is conceived and carried out in close association with an action or the resolution of a collective problem and in which researchers and participants representing the situation or problem are involved in a cooperative or participatory manner. (1986, p. 14)

According to Desroche (2006), action research can be, simultaneously, research on, for and by action. It is action research on social actors and their actions, transactions, and interactions that aims to assist them with an assumed rational practice, executed and evaluated by the actors themselves. Action research is a self-managed methodology that involves co-management between researchers and the actors involved in the practice. Between these two parts, there must be a relationship of reciprocity and collaboration. However, methodological control is important to avoid over-identification due to lack of distance and distance due to lack of identification.

Action research is a fluid method and adaptable to the context. However, several authors (Macke, 2006; Smith, 1997; Thiollent, 1986) list some basic phases, which do not necessarily occur in a linear way, albeit can serve as a guide for conducting the research.

- Exploratory Phase—part of a participatory diagnosis to identify the possibilities for action and intervention. It covers the first contacts with the research field, probing the possible participants and their expectations. It considers the feasibility of carrying out the research.

- In-depth research—in which various data collection tools are used, which are progressively discussed and interpreted. At this point, triangulation with different techniques is possible, such as interviews, life stories, questionnaires, and other qualitative and quantitative procedures that are necessary. The set of these methods establishes a collective, participatory, and active structure for capturing and processing information.
- Action—starting from the collaborative planning of actions, these are executed by the group, including interventions by researchers. If an action initially considered proves unfeasible, researchers and actors must reorient the investigation process, to understand the blockages and seek new solutions. The results of the research are disseminated, the objectives and actions are defined and proposals are negotiated.
- Evaluation of results—the progress of the actions is observed, redirecting what happens, seeking to produce knowledge during the process. The researchers promote discussions about the knowledge obtained, generating feedback for the group and considerations regarding the theoretical guidelines used.

The action research at Association Y occurred over 27 months, between March 2014 and July 2016. Association Y is a central organization in the waste management system of its municipality, providing environmental and social benefits to the region. Created in 2008, it is responsible for sorting recyclable household waste in the municipality. The income of the twelve associates is obtained from the sale of this waste. Its existence is linked to a broader political context, marked by the social struggles undertaken by the National Movement of Recyclable Waste Collectors (Movimento Nacional dos Catadores de Resíduos Recicláveis—MNCR) for almost twenty years now. The MNCR has been very influential in Belo Horizonte (BH) and in the metropolitan region of BH, where Association Y is located (Institute of Applied Economic Research, 2013).

At the beginning of the research, Association Y received all the waste produced in its municipality on a daily basis, resulting in work overload. In addition, there were frequent internal conflicts between the associates, which seemed to negatively impact the group's productivity and income. In general, the associates desired the implementation of selective collection in the municipality and greater internal organization. Throughout the interventions, it became obvious that the two issues were connected, necessitating simultaneous action on both.

Two sets of actions emerged in this context: the first, focused on the internal dimension of Association Y and on supporting the internal organization of the group; the second, focused on the external dimension of Association Y and on democratically implementing selective collection in the municipality. As the objective of this paper is to reflect on the transference dynamics and the subjective implication of the researchers in the interactions with Association Y associates, we will focus the analyses on the first set of actions.

During the interventions, in both action dimensions, several collaborative management technology tools were used to promote greater dialogue, equity, and effectiveness in the interactions. The management technologies applied were: Dragon Dreaming, Theory U and Sociocracy (Paes de Paula & Souza, 2018). In Table 1, we present a compilation of the duration period, the main activities carried out and the conclusions in each of the phases of action research

at Association Y. The data were collected mainly through semi-structured interviews (Bryman, 1992) and recorded in the field diary of the sessions (Roese, Gerhardt, Souza & Lopes, 2006).

Table 1  
**Association Y Action Research Summary Table**

|                           | <b>Period</b>                   | <b>Main activities carried out</b>   | <b>Main conclusions/results</b>   |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------|--|---|
| Exploratory phase         | March to July 2014              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews.</li> <li>• Visits and meetings at Association Y (weekly).</li> <li>• Participation in community meetings.</li> <li>• Definition of days to collect recyclables.</li> <li>• Planning and realization of the 1st Mobilization for the Selective Collection.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to effectively start Selective Collection in the municipality.</li> <li>• Need to articulate the network of actors involved in the collection and disposal of waste in Florestal (acting in the context of Association Y).</li> </ul>   |
| Deep Research             | August to November 2014         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formation of the research team;</li> <li>• Participating observations at Association Y.</li> <li>• Meetings at Association Y (weekly).</li> <li>• Association Y collaborative planning.</li> <li>• Collection of information about the Florestal community.</li> <li>• 2nd Mobilization for Selective Collection.</li> <li>• Evaluation of the research group.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Group of associates as "family."</li> <li>• Formal power vs. informal power and ambiguity at Association Y.</li> <li>• Need to actively involve the community.</li> <li>• Characterization of the collection truck with banners of selective collection.</li> </ul>                  |
| Action phase              | December 2014 to September 2015 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meetings at Association Y (monthly).</li> <li>• Interviews.</li> <li>• Garbage and Citizenship Forum meetings.</li> <li>• 3rd Mobilization for Selective Collection.</li> <li>• Formation of the Permanent Forum on Garbage and Citizenship.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pedagogical role of the research team with the associates.</li> <li>• New waste collection and disposal scheme implemented.</li> <li>• Improvement of working conditions at Association Y.</li> <li>• Difficulty in obtaining the participation of the community.</li> </ul>         |
| Evaluation and monitoring | October 2015 to June 2016       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluation meeting, new planning, and validation of interpretations with the associates.</li> <li>• 4th Mobilization for Selective Collection.</li> <li>• Excursion of students from the municipal school to Association Y;</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improvement in the working conditions of the associates.</li> <li>• Lack of control over the prices of recyclables.</li> <li>• Extension construction on the roof of the sorting power plant.</li> <li>• Need for continuous campaigns to publicize selective collection.</li> </ul> |

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- Meeting of partial evaluation of the actions of the Permanent Forum on Garbage and Citizenship.
  - Initial goal of the Permanent Forum achieved.
- Need for greater support from the municipal administration to Association Y.
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Sources: elaborated by the authors.

Next, we present the analysis of the subjective and intersubjective dimensions that occurred during the action research at Association Y. Such interpretations occurred in tandem with the collection and analysis of data and the performance of actions, becoming quite complex as the researchers immersed themselves in the context of the research. Thus, the researchers frequently talked about their impressions and feelings. In addition, throughout 2015, the project coordinator conducted a personal analysis follow-up, with a psychoanalytical approach, delving further into the transference relationships she experienced in the research. During the analysis, all the names used to identify the research participants were fictitious.

### *The transference dynamics in associates of Association Y*

From the first day we visited Association Y, we were welcomed by associates, who constantly expressed a desire to carry out the project and support the association. However, the bond with the group did not materialize instantly and without contradictions. During their initial encounters and interviews, many associates were shy and distrustful. The project coordinator, in particular, reported a sense of detachment from herself, presumably due to her status as a professor at the university.

*The fourth interview was with Gabriela, 40 years old. She looked a little suspicious about the interview. During her responses, I realized that she was a little superficial. I couldn't get much out of the interview. She was very objective and monotonous in her responses. (Researcher 2, research team, fragment of the March 20, 2014 field diary)*

*Natália entered the room a little grudgingly, looking very shy. I heard Poliana talk to her that she would have to interview—in an imperative tone. Little by little, throughout the interview, Natalia let go. (Researcher 1, research team, fragment of the April 3, 2014 field diary)*

*I feel that they feel more comfortable with Researcher 2. I don't know if I'm too serious or if it's my position as a teacher. (Researcher 1, research team, fragment of the May 9, 2014 field diary)*

In a short time, we noticed that the group, in general, began to accept the team and became open to deeper interactions, displaying more confidence in us.

*We were well received, both by João and by the associates who already knew us and greeted us with enthusiasm. They joked, smiled, and showed themselves at ease. It has been noticeable that with each visit they are more comfortable with our presence. (Researcher 2, research team, fragment of the February 20, 2014 field diary)*

As we established a rhythm of meetings and periodic visits to Association Y, we observed the strengthening of the libidinal relations between the associates and the research team. This was demonstrated, for example, by the hugs we received on arrival, invitations to family parties, and the growing trust in researchers.

*I said that my intention was to support them in some way, but always counting on the consent and participation of everyone. Gradually, as I spoke, I felt that most started to look at me differently. Some were already smiling and showing acceptance of the proposal ... I finished my speech and said goodbye to them saying that then they could go. I was happy to realize that they didn't leave in such a hurry. Some sat there and showed interest in giving ideas and listening to ours. (Researcher 1, research team, fragment of the March 27, 2014 field diary)*

*I think they were waiting for me, because I was arranging the pillows for the meeting and they started to sit down. They seemed interested. Daniela greeted me with a hug. I'm feeling more and more welcome. (Researcher 1, research team, fragment of the August 14, 2014 field diary)*

With the strengthening of libidinal bounds, we also observed that many of the associates were not critical of our interventions, always evaluating them positively. At other times, in situations of conflict, they insisted on telling us their versions of the story. Such attitudes could signal the fear of losing our love, either in relation to the association as a whole or in dispute with other associates.

*In the end, Cláudia came to talk to me that she was very sad about what Alice said about her on the day of the meeting with the mayor ... She kept talking about it continuously for about ten minutes. She seemed to want to improve her image and make me believe her version. (Researcher 1, research team, fragment of the November 29, 2014 field diary)*

*All evaluated the project positively and said that there was nothing to improve on our part. On their part, it was important to fulfill what was said. (Researcher 1, research team, fragment of the December 12, 2014 field diary)*

Monica gave me a hug and said she loves me. Claudia also "declared" herself to me. I feel that the associates want my love and sometimes even dispute it when fights occur (they want me to side with them). (Researcher 1, research team, fragment of the June 20, 2015 field diary)

We interpreted the establishment of transference relationships as creating an opening for effective changes in the group, in the sense of a displacement of group dynamics towards less conflicting and more harmonious, realistic, and productive relationships, in an analogous manner to the therapeutic process (Freud, 1915, 1969; Pommier, 1998). Such openness was observed when the associates recognized the importance of dialogue and the construction of an internal organization based on shared objectives, both of which were defended by the research team.

*Thus, the tasks became appearing. I found it very interesting and rich. They were really interested in building the planning. They asked me to use my meetings to follow the planning. I said yes, of course, that the meetings were for that very reason. (Researcher 1, research team, fragment of the October 19, 2014 field diary)*

*When we talked about the rotation of tasks, after discussing Poliana not wanting to teach the other associates, it was decided that there should have a rotation in the press. Cláudia and Daniela were willing to teach. (Researcher 1, research team, fragment of the August 13, 2015 field diary)*

*Mônica arrived on time and said: "I think it's good to have the meeting, so they can talk and put everything on clean plates." (Researcher 3, fragment of the November 16, 2015 field diary)*

However, from the beginning of 2015, during the action phase, we observed an increase in conflicts and contradictions in the group. The main contradiction lay between wanting and not wanting a clearer division of labor, which was related to the conflict between planning and then effectively executing the actions, while accepting their consequences. This contradiction could be due to the transference with the research team, which sought to support Association Y's internal organization. Thus, the demand for order from some associates was reinforced by our common desire, while others, in order not to lose our love, ended up saying that they wanted order, but basically, they refused to change their daily lives. In general, the group feared and resisted most of the changes envisioned by the associates themselves.

In the evaluation phase, we held a meeting to discuss the research results with the associates. They acknowledged the group's contradiction between needing order and, at the same time, not accepting the changes that this order would bring.

*They agreed on resistance to the rules, as they feel they don't work in the association. The group prefers common sense. I said that the lack of clear rules creates conflicts. They agreed, but they don't think they can create the rules. (Researcher 1, research team, fragment of the October 24, 2015 field diary)*

*Mônica said: "There should be no rule. Everyone should help everywhere. But it goes like this: "Shall we go?" "No, I won't." Then the other one says: "One didn't go, I'm not going either." (Researcher 3, research team, fragment of the October 24, 2015 field diary)*

We believed that we had done everything possible to help the group reach a mutually accepted arrangement, one that would connect them in a more realistic way to the task and one that would reduce wear and tear from conflicts. However, we also respect the group's option to reject that order. Such rejection could arise not only from resistance to change, but also from resistance to the task's reality, which, despite the improvements, was still very tiring and precarious. Therefore, the libidinal structure based on poorly elaborated emotional discharges, or forms of evasion from reality, was still prevalent.

We note, however, that throughout the interventions, these forms of evasion of reality have weakened at certain times and displaced to more stable and homogeneous dynamics. Such displacement did not occur in a linear and non-contradictory way, however, we did observe a change in recurring patterns of relationships. In general, we can say that the displacements observed occurred from the reciprocal transferences experienced with the research team (Pichon-Rivière, 1977). When performing collaborative planning and dialoguing about the possibility of improvements in the group, an unconscious assumption of messianic waiting for better days was generated, albeit without the subjective implication of effective changes in behavior (Bion, 1970). Thus, the group wanted our presence, because we represented hope, but refused to be involved in the changes that were proposed by mutual consent. They liked the meetings, but often did not change attitudes and behavior in their daily work. The team came to be perceived as the "savior" of the group, as it rejected autonomy to save itself.

*Cláudia said that it is because of us that the association is improving. (Researcher 1, research team, fragment of the March 26, 2015 field diary)*

*Pâmela, once again, said that they, from time to time, think that I should meet there again every week, because they miss me. My presence brings peace to the group. She said that Catarina also said that. I told them that peace is within all of us and that we need to cultivate it. Pâmela said that it was impossible there. (Researcher 1, research team, fragment of the July 16, 2015 field diary)*

*The group was concentrated today. They seemed to feel missing a meeting. Luciana said they were waiting for me to bring peace. (Researcher 1, research team, fragment of the September 18, 2015 field diary)*

Despite the expectation for improvements, better days could not be achieved in the group, because what stabilized it was the very climate of hope. In this way, this assumption becomes paralyzing and brings resistance to the expected improvements themselves (Bion, 1970). In the most recent meetings we held, the associates demonstrated that they were aware of the resistance of

the group regarding better and more harmonic days, by the metaphor of the “macumba” or by recognizing that the conflicts were discharge paths for the energies released by the reduction in the workload obtained after the implementation of selective collection.

*Pâmela said that there must be some macumba, something that would prevent peace. There was always a fight. I asked if the fights involved different people or if they were always the same. They did not answer. I found this silence interesting. (Researcher 1, research team, fragment of the September 18, 2015 field diary)*

*Pâmela said: “Before, we didn’t have time to fight. It had a lot of service. I am really short-tempered, very ignorant.” (Researcher 3, research team, fragment of the October 24, 2015 field diary)*

Despite the resistance observed throughout the research, we cannot overlook the moments in which the associates demonstrated maturity and capacity for self-analysis of their own patterns during the dynamics and discussions proposed by our team.

*Gabriela said that she had already fought a lot because of that, but that today she approves this discount, as absences are overloading those who come to work. (Researcher 1, research team, fragment of the February 6, 2015 field diary)*

*The focus of the conversation was the fights. I talked for a long time about the importance of conversation, of emotional control, of empathy. They heard me. Daniela, Mônica, and Cláudia cried. I felt that the group entered a more sincere level of interaction. All started to participate remembering the fights and talking about them without getting angry. (Researcher 1, research team, fragment of the October 24, 2015 field diary)*

At other times, we observed the emergence of the group’s self, the ability of the members to reach common agreements on their own and to make demands to the city hall. It is through this group’s self that Association Y could organize itself in a more harmonious and stable way, since the group was linked to the reality of its task. Thus, Association Y could have a voice in the city, looking forward to obtaining external recognition so necessary for the improvement of its working conditions.

*They said they came to the conclusion that it would be best to order a press. Poliana spoke on their behalf. Indeed, the shed was with huge mountains of cardboard, because the press had been broken for days. Thus, their income ends up being low. I found it interesting that they talked and concluded this. I think it is an important sign that there is a dialogue between the group on its own issues. (Researcher 1, research team, fragment of the May 15, 2015 field diary)*

*Cláudia took the floor and said that the members had decided that the cash would be divided between them every day 15, leaving only R\$100 for the purchase of tape and materials. I found interesting her leadership posture and the sign that they talked about it among themselves. (Researcher 1, research team, fragment of the September 18, 2015 field diary)*

When asked if they would like to do another plan for Association Y, the associates said no. They claimed a lack of responsibility for the tasks and that the group was not engaged in changing attitudes.

*Me: "Are you guys finishing planning now?" They said yes and they don't want to continue. I asked, "Why can't we finish the tasks?"*

*Mônica: "Lack of animation, lack of people ... Only at the time of the meeting they say they'll do and then it doesn't change anything."*

*Poliana: "Responsibility. When Researcher 1 arrived, everything was beautiful. Afterwards, she would leave and nothing changed."*

*Daniela: "Lack of commitment." (Researcher 3, research team, fragment of the June 6, 2016 field diary)*

We can understand that the group, by refusing to carry out another plan, rejected the assumption of messianic waiting (Bion, 1970), demonstrating some awareness of the transference in relation to the research team, allied to its resistance to the planned changes. Therefore, from the analyses of the transference processes observed during the action research at Association Y in the light of psychoanalytic concepts, we notice the complexity of the libidinal structure and the various contradictions between it and the desires in order—desires of the associates themselves and desires of our research team.

### *Transference and subjective implication of researchers at Association Y*

When analyzing the transference relationships of the research team with the group of Association Y associates, the central ethical, theoretical, and epistemological points of the research revealed themselves as assumptions taken a priori and that aroused certain emotions and expectations in the researchers. Action research interventions were directed towards the search for the integrity of the association and the belief in the effectiveness of the group. Such positioning aroused several emotions throughout the intervention process: joy in the face of success, sadness in the face of difficulties and anguish in the face of threats of fragmentation of the group.

*What is the root of the association's difficulties: the neglect of the city hall or the internal fights, the disorganization? How can we help? I'm feeling alone ... Who wants the association to continue? Just me? (Researcher 1, research team, fragment of the March 03, 2015 field diary)*

Throughout the interventions, we noticed feelings of love and hate among the researchers regarding the associates. We admired those who contributed to the group and worked well. We hated those that caused turmoil and hindered the work of others. As we talked about these feelings, they were controlled and analyzed. The analysis of the research team's transference relations was important because it relativized the interventions, allowing the researchers to become aware of the feelings and expectations that were being projected in the group.

Thus, we created the space to deal with the group's reality: the heterogeneous set of unique subjects gathered there and the phenomena uncontrollable by the intervention techniques. The group's reality was incomprehensible by the theories we study. At this point, there was a central element of psycho-affective implication (Barbier, 1985) on the part of the project coordinator, which was worked on during her personal analysis. When faced with the realities of Association Y, she became more conscious of her personality structure, which is based on the desire for knowledge, the search for meaning, and for learning. Thus, the reality of the group brought her great anguish, as she was unable to make sense of it, which was not symbolic, she escaped her theoretical and methodological control. To realize this, the researcher had to review the deep foundations of her personality, detach herself from the need for control, and open herself to experience and spontaneity in interventions.

*We extended the conversation for a long time. I threw all planning down the drain, as I felt the dialogue was being productive. I thought the group was managing to see its own behavioral patterns with some distance. (Researcher 1, research team, fragment of the October 24, 2015 field diary)*

*I passed the speech stick, but the group had difficulty speaking concrete tasks. They said abstract things, like "more group unity," or they couldn't say anything. Naturally, the group started talking about the association. I let the conversation go more freely and the tasks started to appear in their speech. (Researcher 1, research team, fragment of the October 25, 2015 field diary)*

In the dynamics of reciprocal transferences with the group of associates, we observed that the performance of the research team took two different positions, despite maintaining a democratic attitude (Pichon-Rivière, 1977). In the first two phases of research, exploratory and in-depth research, the direction of interactions during the meetings was more intense due to the collaborative technologies. This was a crucial time to experiment with the tools and to deepen our knowledge of their potential and their limits. In addition, the application of the tools made it possible to promote meaningful interactions, better understand the group's demands and develop solutions in a dynamic and participatory way.

In the two subsequent phases of the research—action and evaluation as well as monitoring—the research team started to have greater contact with the group’s realities, with the inherent complexities and with several obstacles to the planned solutions. Thus, in view of the greater clarity of transference relations, the research team changed its operating strategy. The use of collaborative tools was reduced, as well as the frequency of meetings, allowing more space for the group to organize itself and for individual or group demands to emerge. Consequently, the intervention process at Association Y began in a more structured manner, directing changes in the form of group interaction, which concluded more openly, allowing group reactions to these changes to be observed.

Articulated with the psycho-affective implication, we also observe the historical-existential implication of the research team when relating to the group and the context of Association Y (Barbier, 1985). The differences in socioeconomic conditions between researchers and associates raised profound questions about social justice. In addition, in the first visits to the association, the estrangement regarding the working environment of the associates was inevitable, as it was something never before experienced by the researchers. The record of my first visit to the sorting power plant illustrates this strangeness:

*The place is open in the middle, with buildings at the side and a balcony at the bottom. The middle part, uncovered, was full of garbage bags. The smell is not pleasant. Many flies. The women looked at me curiously. (Researcher 1, research team, fragment of the October 1, 2013 field diary)*

*I first arrived at the Association with Researcher 1 at around 3:30 pm. Before entering, I already noticed a little precariousness in the part of the environment that I visualized from the outside. A truck had just arrived and they started dumping all the garbage in the yard. The smell was not very pleasant. (Researcher 2, research team, fragment of the February 12, 2014 field diary)*

As the relationship with associates deepened, the research team’s learning and personal growth became increasingly clear. We learn to recognize and respect differences, without denying them and without feeling guilty about them. In addition, the process of getting closer to the reality of the members led us to break personal barriers, to overcome shyness and prejudice. Allowing the group’s reality to form necessitated us to deal with feelings of vulnerability, fallibility and helplessness. In addition, many research participants mentioned greater engagement and concern with the separation of waste in their homes, demonstrating the appropriation of the research as a personal project.

*I learned a lot from watching the meetings and from living at Association Y. (Researcher 4, research team, celebration on December 11, 2014)*

*For me, the most important thing has been the contact with the work in the association, being able to receive the affection of the associates. Seeing the evolution of the project,*

*people showing up, things happening, has been very rewarding.* (Researcher 5, research team, evaluation meeting on December 11, 2014)

*I learned to see the world in a different way. Before, I didn't give so much importance to the garbage issue. I didn't know what was behind everything I put in the trash. From the moment I discovered that there were people who dealt with it every day, I was impressed and started to think about it more and encourage people to do the same.* (Researcher 6, research team, evaluation meeting on December 11, 2014)

In addition to the growing involvement of the research team with the members and the desire to improve their working conditions, we were confronted with the challenges and limits posed by the principle of reality, resulting from the structural-professional implication: the prescribed scope of our scientific and professional performance as well as the political and economic specificities of the region (Barbier, 1985). The reality of professional performance was apparent at the end of the evaluation phase of the research, in December 2015, when the project coordinator left Brazil for nine months. This trip resulted in a break in the relations established with the associates, although Researcher 3, from the research team, continued some follow-up activities. This separation proved to be important because it allowed the necessary distance to expand our reflections.

Regarding the specific reality of the municipal context, several obstacles prevented the full realization of planned dreams. From the slowness in the processes to the problem of the resource crunch, through implicit resistance, revealing that relations with the municipal public administration were ambiguous and complex. While we obtained support in the actions (printing of pamphlets, availability of space for meetings, participation of representatives from different sectors, among others), the limits of the municipality's performance were always pointed out as barriers to the success of the project. Those who lived in the city pointed to the existence of political resistance emanating from a local political leadership.

*João said that if we wait for the city hall, we will do nothing, because the mayor is out of funds. He would be suffering a boycott by the former mayor.* (Researcher 1, research team, fragment of the October 14, 2014 field diary)

*I learned (...) that it is not easy to depend on the city, no matter how much the intention is to help them improve the city in which they manage.* (Researcher 7, research team, celebration of December 11, 2014)

Based on our observation of the psycho-affective, historical-existential, and structural-professional implications encountered during the research at Association Y, we identified our situation of implication as being diametrically opposite to the systemic dimension of the association (Barbier, 1985). Notably, in the first two phases of the research, when implementing management technologies, we came into conflict with the organizational logic of the association. The interventions aimed to establish a new form of structuring for the interactions between the

associates, as we believed that the present pattern of relationships could be more productive and equitable. The conflict between our proposals for structural change and the associates' desire to remain as they were, however, was mitigated by secondary gains obtained by our psycho-affective involvement, namely by the libidinal relationships built between researchers and associates.

Table 2

**Subjective implication in action research in the context of Association Y**

| Type of subjective implication  | Experiences in the context of Association Y  |
|---|--|
| Psycho-affective  | <p>Questioning of her own personality structure by the research coordinator when faced with methodologically uncontrollable situations.</p> <p>Openness to more spontaneous interactions and vulnerability, based on feelings of love and trust.</p>   |
| Historical-existential  | <p>Questioning about social justice from the observation of the great socioeconomic differences between researchers and associates.</p> <p>Greater engagement and concern on the part of researchers with the separation of waste at home.</p> <p>Desire to engage more actively in the fight for Association Y.</p> |
| Structural-professional   | <p>Limitations in the professional performance of researchers, caused by project deadlines, by previously scheduled activities (coordinator's trip) and by the action research methodology itself.</p> <p>Political obstacles to planned actions found in the context of Florestal.</p>                              |
| <p>Situation of implication at Association Y:</p> <p>Opposition to the systemic dimension</p> | <p>Coherent implication with the libidinal dimension of the group of associates, but in conflict with Association Y' organizational logic.</p>   |

Source: Elaborated by the authors

**Unfinished discussions and considerations**

Our objective in this study was to start from Freudian psychoanalysis as a framework to understand how transference dynamics and subjective implication occur in the action research process at Association Y. As action research is a method in which the interaction between researchers and research subjects is intense and profound, in which researchers not only collect data but also support researchers to find solutions for their contexts, we understand that the understanding of such dynamics becomes of great relevance to reflect on the results obtained.

As we acquired the trust of the research team, we observed a growing relationship of transference love towards the research team. In general, transferences were positive. The associates' behavior ranged from gentle to loving and even to disputing the love of researchers. Faced with such sentiments aroused in the group, the research team sought to maintain an ethical position, without questioning the authenticity of the feelings, but also without taking advantage of

an allegedly advantageous relationship to impose our perspectives on the group (Freud, 1915, 1969).

As previously stated, the transference relations established were necessary for the associates to be receptive to the proposals brought by the research team. Such proposals were made with the intention of building collaborative and dialogic relationships capable of establishing a consensual order of work organization at Association Y. In some moments of the research, the transference dynamics in relation to the research team appear to have contributed to the associates' seeing themselves as a singularized group, capable of having a collective voice and action (group's self), analogous to the singularization of the subject in transference love cited by Lopes (2009). Furthermore, this dynamic also seems to have contributed at times to self-reflection and individual awareness by some associates.

However, during the action phase, when the subjective involvement of the associates was more necessary, to effectively alter behaviors and attitudes, the transference love towards the research team was not enough for the planned changes to occur more significantly. In this phase, we observed a possible repetition of asymmetric love relationships, in which the associates were viewed as passive in the face of the desired changes, in an inert state of hope.

The group started to project its hopes and capacity for action on the research team. However, as the associates realized that the actions could only be carried out by themselves, we observed the emergence of a feeling of mourning or resignation (Isolan, 2005), for example, when they gave up the changes, they themselves proposed or started a new planning process.

Regarding the countertransference by the research team in relation to the associates, we had greater contact with ambivalent feelings, which were initially related to our own expectations and projections established from the action research. As we assumed the continuity and effectiveness of Association Y, feelings of joy, sadness, anguish, love, and hate emerged in the face of different events, both positive or negative for the association. When we became aware of these feelings, we began to relativize them, to the point of loving the associates in their uniqueness, regardless of their relationship with work and Association Y. In this sense, we were able to relinquish theoretical-epistemological control at times and deal with the anxieties in the face of possible failures and frustrations.

Our countertransference towards associates has evolved. First, as an obstacle to relating to the group's reality and to each individual as being integral and not just part of an association. When we became aware of this, countertransference became a therapeutic instrument (Racker, 1982 cited by Isolan, 2005) for the research team to identify its unconscious relationship patterns and modify its attitude towards the associates. The awareness of countertransference dynamics has also provided us with living experiences, with greater dedication to what emerged during the interactions, in a process of mutual learning with the associates.

Understanding countertransference in the action research process also clarifies our relationships with subjective implications regarding the progress of research. Thus, it became possible to establish new hypotheses and new interventions, starting not only from the collected material, but also from the feelings that were awakened in the field. We observed the obstacles and possibilities that the strong psycho-affective implication (Barbier, 1985) offered us, taking care to distance ourselves from immediate emotions. We also reflected on our historical-existential

implication (Barbier, 1985), which brought to the research team great learning from the coexistence with the associates and their ways of thinking, seeking to control feelings of guilt allied to impulses for more active postures on behalf of Association Y. We understand that the action should start with the associates, limiting ourselves to the scientific principles of action research. Such a limitation is part of the structural-professional implication (Barbier, 1985), because we were inserted there in the field as a priori researchers. Feelings of friendship, indignation, and the desire to fight for improvements went beyond our role. Such feelings and desires became more intense as the researchers became aware of the political obstacles to the execution of the actions. At certain times, choosing to continue with the research or being actively involved in the cause of Association Y was a source of great conflict in our team.

Action research at Association Y, based on a democratic stance with the use of collaborative management technologies, therefore, triggered a series of reciprocal transference relations between researchers and participants (Pichon-Rivière, 1977). From our ethical, theoretical, and methodological premises, our subjective implication in the field resulted in a systemic opposition, because we were aligned with the libidinal dimension of the group (we were loved and accepted), but our interventions questioned the organizational logic of the association, evidencing needs for changes in the patterns of work organization that were not accepted in the daily life of the group. Thus, such a form of implication, on the one hand, has enabled us to interact more closely with the associates; on the other hand, it has often placed us as organizational and even ideological deviants (Barbier, 1985).

The understanding of the action research process based on psychoanalysis concepts has allowed us to have greater methodological control, seeking improvised neutrality (Pommier, 1998) and promoting a more conscious balance between identification with the group of subjects and the distance needed for scientific research. Thus, we recognize that our simple presence in the sorting power plant already influenced the behavior of the group of associates and the contact with them influenced us in our ways of acting and thinking. During the action research, the research team and the associates established an interdependent system. We can say that all the changes observed in them and in us were the result of reciprocal transference dynamics. Becoming aware of these allowed us to focus on our scientific purpose, but also to understand that the consequences and results of our research go far beyond what has been scientifically documented.

This article, therefore, contributes to opening the possibilities for deeper reflections on the processes of action research in the field of organizational studies, highlighting the subjective influences on the interaction between researchers and subjects. We understand that such reflections are relevant to effectively achieving social change, collaboration, and autonomy among action research participants (Lodi et al., 2017). From a psychoanalytical perspective, such objectives would be achieved only by involving the participating subjects in action that promotes changes, both in personal and collective or social spheres. To do so, it would be necessary to overcome repetitious and compulsory behaviors, displacing relational patterns towards more collaborative attitudes, linked to the reality of the situation and to collective solutions.

Analogous to the therapeutic process, transference dynamics play a very important role in this displacement, as it enables the subject to be singularized and autonomized, based on experiences of hope, frustration, and overcoming. A closer look at reciprocal transferences allowed us to better understand how and when such displacements may or may not occur during action

research. Therefore, to researchers interested in action research, we recommend reflection on the reciprocal transferences that are established in the field, paying attention to their dynamics from the beginning to end of the research. Such reflection allows a greater distance from the theoretical-methodological projections inherent to the scientific process, opening space for researchers' sensitivity in relation to the group's reality to be considered in the generation of effective actions. In this sense, it is extremely important to prepare and monitor the research team members, based on open dialogues about expectations, desires, and needs considering the research.

Furthermore, we understand that a minimum alignment is necessary among researchers about what is expected from the research and what its ethical, methodological, and theoretical principles are. Dialogue and team alignment can be gained from the initial participatory research planning. The preparation of field diaries also proved to be a very valuable tool in this process, providing rich material for discussion among the research team.

We anticipate that further future applications of action research will be guided by the perspective presented in this paper, bringing other experiences in the process of intersubjective interaction between respondents and researchers in organizations in different contexts. By recognizing and analyzing the affective dynamics resulting from this interaction, we believe it is possible to better understand the results and knowledge generated by the research.

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