Modes of Deacons' Professional Knowledge – Facilitation of the 'Space of Possibilities'

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The core concerns in diaconia as a research discipline are: What is diaconia? What does, should or could it be? And, consequently, what should deacons do? However, there is scarcely any research on what deacons actually do in their everyday practice and what kind of knowledge they really need in their professional practice. This article contributes to the understanding of deacons' professional knowledge in their everyday practice. Findings show that deacons use their professional knowledge in and between three modes: (1) 'recognition' and 'expansion,' (2) 'being' and 'becoming' and (3) proximity' and 'periphery.' Together the modes facilitate a 'space of possibilities' in the search for the well-being of the participants. The analysis of deacons' professional knowledge draws on a sociocultural perspective where knowledge is understood as tool-based mediation.

Keywords: empirical, deacons, professional, knowledge, tool-based mediation

> *The deacon: There is not much light here, Arne.*
> *Arne: No, I do not look out the window; I look only inwards.*
> – Quotation from a home visit to a man in his late 40s

1. Introduction

There are many ideals found within the research and practice of diaconia regarding what diaconia is, should or could be and, consequently, what deacons should do. Many deacons experience tensions between the theoretical standards and the complex reality they experience in their everyday practice. In addition, there is scarcely any research on what deacons actually do and what kind of knowledge they use and need in their everyday practice. Therefore, a valuable approach is to analyze what diaconia actually 'does,' instead of only analyzing what diaconia 'is' or 'intends to be.'[1] In this article, I extend the focus on what 'diaconia does' to what 'deacons do.'

This article represents an analysis of deacons' professional knowledge tools employed in interactions with participants[2] in various encounters. The article is based on ethnographical fieldwork,[3] consisting of participative ob-

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1 Wyller, 2013a, p. 27.
2 The deacons are obviously also participants in the interactions; but by "participants", in this article, I mean people that the parish deacons are interacting with who are not professionals or volunteers.
3 Fetterman, 2010; Silverman, 2011a, pp. 113 ff.; 2011b, pp. 15 ff.

servation and interviews of five deacons in the Church of Norway from the fall of 2011 to the fall of 2012.[4] Ethnography was chosen as the research strategy because it enables the analysis of the complexity of the deacons' practices and reflections over time and between different sites. Findings show that deacons' knowledge in interactions with participants is characterized by facilitating 'spaces of possibilities.' But what characterizes their use of knowledge tools?

When analyzing deacons' professional knowledge in interactions with participants, I argue that it is necessary to extend the analytical unit from the individual mind to *interactions between the actors*, focusing on recourses, i.e., tools that are used in the space between the actors.[5] Consequently, what was needed was an epistemological approach that locates knowledge not primarily in the individual mind, but in the interactions that take place between people as well as between people and material and symbolic tools. Therefore, I draw on a sociocultural perspective of knowledge, understood as tool-mediated processes.[6]

Tools can be understood as both material and conceptual resources. Most tools have symbolic meanings.[7] The theory of tool-mediated processes used here is based on Vygotsky's ground-breaking work on mediation. Human activity is understood in terms of the dynamics between human actors and tools.[8] Human actions and knowledge are trialogical dynamic relations between actors, tools and reality.[9] In this article, the trialogical relation consists of (1) deacons (2) tools and (3) participants in diaconal activities. This perspective provides an analytical focus on the knowledge through the tools used by the deacons and participants.[10] Subsequently, my analytical focus lies on the interactions between the deacons and participants *through* the use of tools in activities.[11]

More exactly, the purpose of this article is to analyze what kinds of tools deacons use and how they use them – and not how research on diaconia should or could be applied in practice. The intention is to provide an empirical and a theoretical contribution to deacons' professional knowledge. In order to do this, I analyze one situation from the empirical material in detail. The situation is representative of how deacons use professional knowledge in

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4 This ethnographic study is a part of the LETRA project. LETRA seeks to describe and critically analyze the process of learning and knowledge development in congregations in the (Lutheran) Church of Norway.

5 Edwards, 2010, p. 49.

6 Afdal, 2013b, pp. 33–35; Y. Engeström, 2008, pp. 128 ff.; Wertsch, 1998; Wertsch & Semin, 1991, p. 18.

7 Edwards, 2010, p. 101; Wertsch, 1998, p. 31.

8 Edwards, 2010, p. 157.

9 Afdal, 2013a; Paavola, 2005, p. 545.

10 Edwards, 2010, p. 101.

11 Paavola, 2005, p. 545.

my empirical material. It represents important information when we 'clarify the deeper causes'[12] of interactions through the use of tools. The situation is this: A deacon is going on a home visit to see a man who is struggling emotionally. They talk and share Holy Communion, and the interactions between them provide a good example of sensitive and difficult tool-mediation.

The professional knowledge of deacons is more or less an empirical open field. Little research has been done regarding how they use their knowledge in everyday practice. However, Engel[13] conducted empirical research on diaconia in the Church of Sweden, and Angell[14] as well as Angell and Kristoffersen[15] researched deacons' identity and understanding of diaconia in the Church of Norway. Pyykkö, Henriksen and Wrede[16] conducted empirical research on jurisdictions of parish diaconal work in Finland. They have all empirically analyzed deacons in parish contexts, though none of them analyzed directly how deacons use their knowledge in everyday practice. Analyzing the deacons' knowledge can provide valuable insights into how deacons work, what diaconia 'does,' what kind of knowledge is important, how it is used in a complex reality and what the needs are of future research.

Thus, my research question is as follows: *'What characterizes the modes of tool-mediated knowledge that can be established in the interaction of deacons' with participants?'*

By 'modes,' I mean patterns of tool-processes in trialogical dynamic relations, here between the deacon, the participant and the tools.[17]

In the next sections, I present theories of tool-mediation, the methodological approach, the situation, and an analysis and the findings from the situation. I argue that deacons have three modes of professional knowledge. Together the modes facilitate a 'space of possibilities' in the search of the well-being of the participants. However, deacons may both open and close the 'space of possibilities' depending how they use the tools in the respective modes. For validation, I expand the empirical material with two other situations and analyze whether the modes from the first situation emerge in the other situations. Finally, I reflect on the possible implications of the findings for further research on diaconia. I do not focus on the power situation in the asymmetric interactions between the deacons and participants.

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12 Flyvbjerg, 2010, pp. 78–79.
13 Engel, 2006.
14 Angell, 2011.
15 Angell& Kristoffersen, 2004.
16 Pyykkö, 2011.
17 Afdal, 2013a.

2. Theory

What is knowledge? Knowledge is ambiguous, and "extremely meaningful, positive, promising and hard to pin down"[18]. Knowledge can be understood as a package of content sent between people, as something isolated, outside us - as 'facts.'[19] However, according to Kvale there has been a shift from defining knowledge as an objective reality to defining it as a social construction of reality, which involves interactions with the social world.[20] When analyzing knowledge, and contextualized professional knowledge, I argue that it is necessary to extend the analytical unit from knowledge understood as a frozen package of facts to   knowledge as the interactions between the actors, focusing on recourses, i.e., tools, used in the space between the actors.[21]

A sociocultural perspective provides foci on the 'bits and pieces,' the tools, in the interactions with the social world.[22] This builds on Vygotsky's conception of mediation. He emphasizes that human activity is always mediated activity. Humans do not react directly to the environment, rather the activities are mediated by tools. That is why the interaction is called 'trialogical': It concentrates on the interactions *through* tools.[23] Tool- mediation emphasizes how tools shape the way human beings interact with reality.[24]

> 'The individual could no longer be understood without his or her cultural means; and the society could no longer be understood without the agency of individuals who use and produce artifacts.' (Y. Engeström, 1999)

Tools, or artifacts, can be both conceptual and material in nature and have symbolic meanings. One of the most important conceptual tools is the spoken language.[25] Language is often used in interactions between deacons and participants, and it reveals patterns of knowledge. Nevertheless, material tools, such as the Bible, the Holy Communion, poems etc., are also important in the interactions.

A key insight into sociocultural theory is that tools are neither instrumental nor neutral.[26] The same tool may have different meanings under different circumstances. Further, tools may facilitate processes of empowering and enabling actions, provide meaning and coping mechanisms, and improve forms of thought and actions; however, they may also limit and con-

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18 Krogh, Ichijo, & Nonaka, 2000, p. 5.
19 Gustavsson, 2000, p. 13.
20 Kvale, 1996, p. 268.
21 Edwards, 2010, p. 49.
22 Afdal, 2013b, p. 21.
23 Paavola, 2005, p. 545.
24 Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2006, p. 70.
25 Wertsch, 1998, p. 31.
26 Afdal, 2013a.

strain.[27] The material form and shape of the tool have only limited power to determine its actual use.[28] Therefore, tools can only be understood in use.[29] How tools are used may say something about the potential deacons negotiate the tools with.[30] Through the use of tools, patterns of implicit professional knowledge in practice may emerge. From the perspective of the discipline of diaconia, tool-mediated processes may sound like instrumental processes. However, analyzing tools can allow 'engagement with, and revelation of, knowledge, its use and its generation'[31] in nuanced and dynamic interactions in the space between deacons and participants.

What is professional knowledge? The concept of 'profession' can be understood in various ways. In this article, I understand professions as knowledge cultures.[32] Hence, professions arise through their particular ways of engaging with knowledge. The forms of knowledge, the tools provided for professional practice, and the traditions and methods for knowledge production give professional communities an integrative power.[33] Here, I analyze the professional knowledge of deacons as tool-mediated knowledge used in their professional practice.[34]

What characterizes a deacon's dynamics and patterns of tool-mediated professional knowledge in interaction with a participant? I have chosen two analytical foci in order to establish different modes, namely, tools and processes. Tools are understood here as being both conceptual and material; processes are understood as *how* the tools are used and what they create between the deacon and the participant. To answer the research question, I have three analytical questions:

1. Which tools are used?
2. What and how do they mediate?
3. What characterizes the tool-mediated patterns in the deacon's interactions with the participants?

3. Methods

The empirical material was established through ethnographical fieldwork consisting of participative observation, semistructured qualitative inter-

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27 Wertsch, 1998, pp. 38–39.
28 Y. Engeström, 2007, p. 35.
29 Afdal, 2013a.
30 Y. Engeström, Pasanen, Auli, Toiviainen, Hanna, Haavisto, Vaula, 2006, p. 9.
31 Edwards, 2010, p. 101.
32 Jensen, 2012, p. 27.
33 Jensen, 2012, p. 28.
34 In this article, I do not discuss the understanding of deacons' work as a profession.

views and reflection dialogues with five deacons in the Church of Norway.[35] Ethnography is a method based on direct observation, and I observed the participants as they moved over time about and between the different contexts that form make up the this part of their work.[36]

Before the empirical work started, I determined that the theoretical focus should be on the deacons' professional tool-mediated knowledge processes. A variety of sampling methods where chosen to observe the complexity in the deacons' everyday practice and to listen to their reflections.

The strategy of selecting of samples was an information-oriented selection to maximize the utility of information from small samples.[37] The sampling criteria were (1) deacons in the Church of Norway (2) with a formal diaconal education (a Bachelor's Degree or the equivalent of the Bachelor's Degree and a Master's Degree in diaconia, or one 1 year of theological studies and one 1 year of diaconal studies). The deacons I followed had backgrounds in nursing, social work, theological education and Child Welfare Officer and diaconal theological further education. The deacon in the situation of the home visit had been educated both as a nurse and a social worker as well as in diaconal and theological studies.

After the data collection and transcription of the material from the Dictaphone had been completed, I read through all the material (about a 1,000 pages) several times. The analytical focus was to determine motions between both deductive and inductive approaches, in other words, an abductive process between the material and theoretical interests.[38] However, the analytical process had in fact already started in the field, and I tested my initial thoughts on both the material and the theoretical perspectives. I coded in Atlas.ti[39] with codes made from hunches, patterns from the material and theoretical codes. The coded material and the codes were used in a thematic analysis.[40] The aim of the analysis was to contribute to an increased understanding of the modes of deacons' tool-mediated professional knowledge in use-knowledge.

Patterns of tool-mediated processes emerged, and I chose one situation that was limited in time and place. As mentioned, the situation describes Deacon David on a home visit, who administers Holy Communion to an isolated man, Arne. This situation was selected because it represents a good example of patterns of tool-mediated professional knowledge in use.[41] The purpose was to clarify the deeper patterns in a given practice, and I argue

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35 Fetterman, 2010; Silverman, 2011a, pp. 113 ff.; 2011b, pp. 15 ff.
36 Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 39.
37 Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 79.
38 Afdal, 2010, p. 114.
39 Friese, 2012.
40 Bryman, 2012.
41 Fetterman, 2010, p. 97; Flyvbjerg, 2010, pp. 78, 79.

that it is appropriate to select, as mentioned, one good example for its validity and richness.[42]

In the analysis, I had to leave out predefined theoretical concepts of tools. I looked deeper into the text with a more open approach to the empirical material, looking for how tools are used and what they create between the deacon and the participant. Finally, the patterns in the use of tools revealed new modes. Language, the Holy Communion and the poem emerged as important tools in the home visit. They all represent crucial dynamics of tool-mediated professional knowledge. I do not claim that the findings are empirically representative for all deacons' work – only for the deacons I observed.

The home visit was a sensitive situation. We visited a person in a vulnerable position – in his home. As an ethnographic researcher, I become part of the material. This requires ethical reflections about my role as researcher and my influence on the deacons, the participants and the material.[43] At the home visit, I was confronted with the dilemma of how to simultaneously observe and 'participate.' Even though I view my role as participant-as-*observer*,[44] I released that I could not just observe. On the one hand, I wanted to facilitate an informal situation by being a part of the communication. On the other hand, I did not want to dominate the communication between David and Arne. Therefore, I decided to participate in the small talk and in the Holy Communion. I took part without any tools such as pen, paper, Dictaphone, computer, etc., but I did make notes on the sequence right after. The purpose was to not bring any more 'disturbing' tools into the interaction other than myself. Of course, my presence influenced their interaction, and I can only speak about the material with this in mind. The main focus in this article lies on the tool-mediated interactions between the deacon and Arne. Thus, (1) I do not emphasize my own small talk in the material, and (2) I only sketch the deacon's preparation and evaluation of the visit without analyzing that.

I myself was educated as a deacon, which presents both pros and cons. On the one hand, I easily connected with the deacons in their complex everyday practice. I am aware of the deacons' implicit use of knowledge and can observe nuanced details. On the other hand, my positive pre-understanding of the field may have made me search for success stories. However, I have been aware of presenting the difficult parts in the interactions between the deacon and the participant, and I have chosen a situation representative for deacons' knowledge in use.

The man we visited was informed in advance and accepted my presence. He was also informed about the focus on the deacon's use of professional

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42 Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 78.
43 Miles & Huberman, 1994, pp. 288 ff.; Silverman, 2011a, p. 101.
44 Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 85.

knowledge. The situation was anonymous, and the deacon has read through the presentation of the situation and has seen the reconstruction of the table (explained below). He confirmed that these documents reflect the incident situation experienced.

4. The first situation – home visit with Holy Communion

I follow the deacon, David, on the home visit to Arne, a man in his late 40s who lives alone. He is struggling emotionally. Arne is interested in the Christian community, but he has trouble getting to church. The deacon has been visiting him once a month for a year and, in the beginning, he asked whether Arne wanted to take Holy Communion. He did, and the deacon prepared the visit at his office by bringing a communion set, non-alcoholic wine, wafers, a Bible, the communion liturgy, a hymnal and a poem the deacon had written.

We arrive, ring the bell, and enter. Arne has left the door open for us. The hallway smells of cigarette smoke; it's dark and quiet in the apartment. The deacon calls out 'hello' and we hear 'hello' from the living room. In the living room, Arne is sitting on the floor between the couch and a coffee table. He rests his elbows on the table and is smoking a cigarette. The deacon smiles to at Arne and says 'Hi, Arne, it's so good to see you.' Arne smiles back, but is still sitting on the floor, leaning against the table. The deacon turns to me and says in a friendly voice that 'Arne likes sitting on the floor.'. Arne remains on the floor, and we are standing about two meters from him in the living room. The curtains are drawn, and there is just a very little daylight in the apartment. The deacon says, 'There is not much light here, Arne.' 'No, I do not look out the window; I look only inwards,' responds Arne.

Then we move towards Arne and shake his hand. The deacon sits down in a chair on the other side of the table, and I sit between them on a sofa. We sit in the dark, and David chats with Arne. He invites him to the Christmas Eve celebration at the church and a Bible group, but Arne would rather stay at home. Then David says he can pick up Arne with a car and take him to the group. Arne still hesitates. The deacon continues and says that Arne is important for the group with his valuable insights and contributions. Nevertheless, Arne does not want to participate.

After a while, we begin with the Eucharist. The table is crowded with things. The deacon moves aside the cigarettes, candle, ashtray, tablets, Q-tips, and a half-eaten banana. It looks like he has done this before. He prepares the communion, and Arne wipes away the cigarette ash from the table. The deacon pours the wine into the chalice. We gather around the table. They concentrate and Arne is silent, focusing on the liturgy.

After the liturgy, Arne says that the most important thing for him is that they talk about life and faith. Before we go, the deacon gives Arne a poem

Figure 1: Picture of the table (reconstructed)

he has written about Maria. 'I give this poem to my friends, Arne.' Arne's face beams. For the first time, he gets up from the floor, goes over to the bookshelf and finds the Bible. 'I have also written poems,' he says, as he takes a few poems from his Bible. Arne tells us about his previous girlfriend and how much she liked his poems. He is almost crying. He continues, saying he loves to read the Bible. Arne is more open now and is wondering about the food at the Christmas Eve celebration, how many are going, how the tables will be arranged, etc. The deacon replies that 'we would be very happy if you come.' Arne says he will think about it.

After the visit, David says it is hard to include Arne in the community, because Arne often withdraws himself. David continues: 'Nevertheless, I do not want to stop inviting [him], but at the end of the day, Arne is responsible for his life.' Finally, I asked David: 'What do you think is important to know when interacting with Arne?' David answered: 'Knowledge about psychology, psychiatry, social work and theology is important. Because I work in the Church, people often expect and ask me to bring them something from the Gospel.'

Arne did not come to the Christmas Eve celebration.

5. Analysis and findings

5.1 Invitation to the community – the use of language tool

When we enter the living room, Arne is sitting on the floor in the dark between the couch and the coffee table in the smoke-filled apartment. David approaches him, friendly, smiling and looking at Arne, saying, 'Arne, it is so good to see you.' David uses the language tool to *recognize*.[45] He relates to Arne by focusing on Arne's importance to him, and his body language corresponds with the words of recognition.

Arne smiles back but remains on the floor. He keeps his distance, and his response communicates an ambiguity. The deacon's visit probably mediates both *recognition and a challenge* in to Arne's isolated life. David turns to me saying 'Arne likes to sit on the floor.' Again, David uses the language tool as an acceptance of what could otherwise be considered 'strange' in the situation. The deacon expresses acceptance according to 'what matters' to Arne.[46] There is no need for change, and the language mediates recognition of Arne's *way of being*, his particular kind of presence in the situation.[47]

Arne remains on the floor. The deacon introduces me, and I walk towards Arne, shaking his hand and take a seat next to him. David continues, saying, 'There is not much light here, Arne.' Once more, he uses language tools, and is now challenging how Arne makes it so dark in the living room with the curtains drawn. He is talking in a friendly but questioning tone, looking at the windows. The statement with the questioning tone is *ambiguous*. David points at something trivial, the light in the living room. Simultaneously, it may refer to Arne's possible socially isolated situation. David's ambiguous language *challenges* Arne to respond and be a part of the conversation in despite of the physical distance and his motionlessness. It challenges Arne to be a participative agent in the dialogue and to use his language tools. However, David's use of tools may also cut off the interaction. He is risking that Arne may interpreting the ambiguity as critique.

Arne responds in a monotone voice, and says 'No, I do not look out the window; I look only inwards.' The answer is open to different interpretations and is as ambiguous as David's question. Presently, he is sitting on the floor, with a huge window behind him and is looking into the dark of the living room. His tone of voice and lack of motion point to possible interpretations of emotional and social difficulties in his life. Arne brings something both trivial and emotional back in to the interaction with David. His response – his few words with the massive and unspoken content – becomes the key

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45 Honneth, 2003, p. 110.
46 Edwards, 2010, p. 15.
47 Jarvis, 2009, pp. 198, 207.

content in the interaction between them. This is a turning point. The deacon sits down in a chair on the other side of the table from where Arne is sitting. He answers Arne's ambiguous response as an emotional expression, and stops talking about the darkness in the living room. Instead, he asks 'How are you, Arne?' Arne says 'I am not so good, but not that bad either.' Then, David invites him to the Christmas Eve celebration and a Bible group in the congregation. He extends his use of the language tool, challenges, and expands the possibilities for Arne to *become* a part of the community instead of just 'looking inwards,' sitting in his living room. Here, 'become' or 'becoming' is understood as 'being what I might be.'[48] *'Becoming'* carries with it a future potential.[49] In other words, David uses language to expand the possibilities of 'the future potential of being what I might be' in the community. The language tool may enable actions and change the reality of the situation. Further, David facilitates the possibility of Arne's 'becoming' in the community around what Arne earlier said he is interested in. He invites and opens by referring to, for instance, to the Bible, which he knows is important for Arne; but Arne does not want to participate. The use of language tools to facilitate new possibilities has various options. Arne can both open and close the language as an expanding tool, and he closes the possibilities.

However, David still continues with the language tool, which challenges and gives space for further possibilities. He says he can pick up Arne with a car, take him to the group and stay with him there. In addition to facilitating the transportation, he offers relational support. As a relational agency, he shows a capacity to attune to Arne's needs.[50] The language tool, besides challenging by facilitating expanded possibilities, also assists with motion between the *periphery* and *proximity* to the community in the congregation. David acts on Arne's marginalized situation.[51] His use of language tools facilitates motion between Arne's marginalized situation, 'looking only inwards,' and a possible inclusion into or proximity to the community. However, Arne still hesitates, and David's use of language to challenge and expand the possibilities of 'becoming' in the proximity of the community does not open up a space in the community where Arne wants to participate.

Nevertheless, the deacon continues, at the risk of pushing too hard. Again, he uses language to recognize. He says that Arne is important to the group with his valuable insights and contributions. Here, David is emphasizing Arne's resources. Arne is important to the group, not only the group to Arne. David combines language for challenge and recognition with an underlying acceptance of Arne's way of 'being.' Arne is valuable as he is. David uses tools

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48 Afdal, 2013b, p. 103.
49 Jarvis, 2009, pp. 197, 198.
50 Edwards, 2010, p. 15.
51 Wyller, 2013b, p. 1.

to facilitate Arne's status as an agent in the community.[52] Here, a change appears in the use of language tools: he combines language tools to both challenge and recognize.

Still, Arne does not want to participate, and it seems difficult for David to establish a space for interactions and communion with others. David stops suggesting new possibilities and accepts Arne's answer indicating his wish to maintain distance from the community. The expansive use of tools can enable actions but may also limit and close actions if it is too expansive.[53]

What kind of tool-mediated dynamics emerge in this sequence? David uses the language tool to both *recognize and challenge* by expanding possibilities. Here, recognition is used as a response to Arne's isolated situation as social acceptance or solidarity.[54] David uses language for concrete approval and affirmation of Arne's 'qualities of significant value to a certain community.'[55] Recognition is seen as a driving force of communion formation and for establishing the 'I in we'.[56] However, David also uses tools in a dynamic relationship between recognition and expansion and combines them. Expansion is understood here as using tools in processes of creating and developing new possibilities.[57]

Further, he uses language in a dynamic motion between and in a combination of *'being' and 'becoming.'* 'Being' carries a sense of the present, and it is about our human existence at any point throughout the duration of our lives. 'Becoming' also carries a sense of time and of the future.[58] Becoming is about lifelong learning to fulfill our human potential.[59]

Finally, he utilizes language to facilitate motion between the *periphery and proximity.* Here, periphery is understood as being in an isolated situation, and proximity refers to the community in the congregation. A special mandate in diaconia is to identify mechanisms of exclusion in both society and church, and make room for new concepts, language and practices where the situation 'of the voiceless and disempowered is defended.'[60]

The dynamic use of tools is not only combined within, for instance, 'recognition'[61] and 'expansion,'[62] or 'being' and 'becoming,'[63] or motions between

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52 Høilund, 2007, p. 27.
53 Wertsch, 1998, pp. 38, 39.
54 Honneth, 2003, p. 113; Høilund, 2007, p. 27.
55 Høilund, 2007, p. 27; 'Evner av grundleggende verdi for et konkret fellesskap'.
56 Honneth, 2012, p. 206.
57 Paavola, 2005, p. 539.
58 Jarvis, 2009, pp. 197, 198.
59 Jarvis, 2009, p. 197.
60 Nordstokke, 2011, p. 47.
61 Honneth, 2003.
62 Paavola, 2005.
63 Jarvis, 2009; 2010, pp. 119–120.

'periphery' and 'proximity' as 'siding with the marginalize[64] and facilitating 'mechanism of inclusion,'[65] but also across such actions. For example, David uses the language tool to expand the possibilities for 'becoming' in the 'proximity.' With the 'dynamically across use' of tools he may balance, for instance, tools for recognition with tools to expand, both for being and becoming in the proximity or the periphery. The direction of the use of tools seems to be a search for Arne's 'well-being' and 'well-becoming,' and the process has various possibilities. The deacon suggests some possibilities, which may open or risk closing interactions. Arne decides what he wants to do. David continues to use language tools, but in the following, I focus on The Holy Communion as a mediating tool.

5.2 The Holy Communion as a mediating tool

David suggests starting with the Holy Communion, and he opens his backpack with the communion set. Arne had already lit a candle before we came our arrival, and he now places it in front of us. They are collaborating in preparing the table. The deacon moves Arne's things on the table towards one end and lets them stay there. With his movement, he creates a new, open space on the table for the Holy Communion. Arne brushes away the ash from the cigarettes with a used paper towel. Still, Arne's everyday tools are a central part of the table, and they are accepted as a part of the holy space they are creating between them. David includes Arne's everyday tools as a part of Arne's 'being' in the moment.[66] This may mediate recognition of the 'being' in the situation – Arne's everyday life as it is. By recognizing Arne's tools and materiality in the interaction between them, the deacon mediates an acceptance of Arne's social and contextual 'I in the We.'[67]

Further, the deacon has brought the Holy Communion from the church to Arne's home, and this may facilitate proximity to the inner church tradition in Arne's isolated situation. Arne can belong and participate in a church tradition in the periphery of the community. The deacon goes to the kitchen, preparing the wine in the chalice, and comes back. He asks if I want Holy Communion, and I say yes. He puts the communion set, wine, wafers, the Bible and the book with the communion liturgy on the table. Together, they are creating a new space, which combines Arne's everyday tools and the inner church traditional tools as the Holy Communion.[68] The Holy Communion is

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64 Wyller, 2013b, p. 1.
65 Nordstokke, 2011, p. 47.
66 Jarvis, 2009, p. 198.
67 Honneth, 2012, p. 201.
68 Afdal, 2013b.

loaded with religious meaning, and the atmosphere changes from small talk to a silent concentration around the ritual.

David starts the liturgy. The liturgy defines to some extent the processes of interacting; we are eating the wafers and drinking the wine. The candle is lit. However, the everyday things are still on the table, and Arne is still sitting on the floor. The combination of the Holy Communion and the 'rough' life creates a hybrid space. In hybridity, ingredients from different contexts are combined into something new and unfamiliar.[69] It opens a new space that allows negotiation of meaning in ingredients from different contexts – a social and a sacral space.

The deacon uses the possible fluid parts to open up a space towards Arne's situation and what matters most to him.[70] He asks Arne, and Arne responds with trust, talking about difficult things he wants to pray about. Arne's well-being is the focus. When the liturgy is finished, Arne says quietly that it has been peaceful and good to be a part of.

With the Holy Communion, David brings new and expansive tools to Arne's living room. David says he uses the Holy Communion as a response to Arne's wish to talk about life and faith, but even more as a possibility for *acting* on life and faith. The Holy Communion emerges as an expansive tool, providing an enhanced practice at home. Further, it lets Arne define his distance or proximity to the community. The deacon's use of the Holy Communion facilitates both recognition of the 'being,' the life as it is, and 'becoming.' It facilitates 'becoming,' because it opens a space that allows negotiation of meaning in ingredients from different contexts into something new and unfamiliar. The direction of the use of tools seems still to be the search for Arne's well-being and 'well-becoming' oriented around what matters most for him.

What kinds of tool-mediated dynamics emerge here? The deacon brings in material and symbolic tools from the inner church tradition and combines them with tools from everyday life. In other words, he uses hybrid tools and, together with the participant, opens up a hybrid space with ingredients from different contexts. Still, he uses these tools to recognize and expand the possibilities of both 'being' and 'becoming' in motions between the periphery and proximity. The tools are not used only to talk about life and faith, but to act on life and faith. David facilitates a space where Arne is an agent who also acts 'within God's project.'[71]

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69 Akkerman, 2011, p. 148.
70 Edwards, 2010, 2012.
71 Nordstokke, 2011, p. 46.

5.3 The poem as a mediating tool

Finally, the deacon provides a new tool. He shares his poem and combines it with a stronger recognition of 'social acceptance' than was previously expressed. David expresses not only that Arne possesses qualities of 'significant value to a certain community,'[72] but that he is recognized as a friend. David says: 'I give this poem to my friends, Arne.' The deacon reads the poem. Arne's face beams, and he rises for the first time. He goes to the bookshelf and finds his own poems in his Bible. He stands and talks about his previous girlfriend and how much she liked the poems. He expresses that his own skills have been valuable to others.[73] He says that this is one of the most beautiful experiences of his life. He is almost crying. Maybe without planning it, David is using a tool that recognizes Arne's resources and 'being.' It gives Arne associations to some of his most positive experiences from the past, and the poems brings some of Arne's resources from the past in to his present 'being.' Arne's recourses emerge in the interaction.

It opens a dynamic space for 'being' and also a possible space for 'becoming.' Apparently, poems are a common tool with positive experiences for both of them.[74] The poem creates a turning point in the interaction between them even though we have come to the end of the visit. It creates a turning point regarding Arne's motivation for 'becoming' a part of the community. When David again invites Arne to the Christmas Eve celebration, Arne is more open, asking about practical things such as the food and how many might attend.

However, David did not use the capacity of the poems as tools for expanding Arne's 'becoming' as a part of the community, for instance, by inviting him to read a poem at the Christmas Eve celebration or asking if whether Arne would be interested in having contact with others who share his interest in poems. Apparently, the poems have the potential to express that Arne's skills are valuable to others.[75] Therefore, it is probable that the poems could have been used to a larger extent as expanding tools which could open new possibilities and provide meaning and a way of coping for Arne.

What kinds of tool-mediated dynamics emerge in the final section? David uses a self-made tool, a material conceptual poem that combines faith and life and says he gives it to friends. This is what Waldenfels calls 'productive practice,'[76] that is, practice characterized by not following the rules and thereby producing something new.[77] This opens a way to develop a change

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72 Høilund, 2007, p. 27.
73 Honneth, 2012, p. 207.
74 Edwards, 2011, p. 39; 2012.
75 Honneth, 2012, p. 207.
76 Waldenfels, 2006, p. 60.
77 Wyller, 2010, p. 191.

that is unlike the 'change connected to the rules and regulations'[78]. In this productive practice, David uses the poem to recognize Arne's 'being' as a friend. The combination of the use of tools as 'recognition as a friend' in the productive practice, and as common tools that express Arne's previous experience where his skills are valuable to others, may contribute to 'an unfolding interpersonal relationship.'[79] Consequently, the use of poems has a huge capacity as expanding tools, even though in this situation they are not used to their full potential.

5.4 Structures of the findings

The deacon uses various tools from different practices, tools from the inner church life, and from the social sciences and from everyday life. The tools are used to recognize, challenge and expand possibilities for 'being' and 'becoming,' and for motions between the proximity to the community and the periphery. These dynamics of using tools can be systematized in three modes of tool-mediated professional knowledge in use-knowledge:

1. The first mode includes motions between and combinations of *recognition and challenging/expanding possibilities.*
2. The second mode includes motions between and combinations of facilitating *'being' and 'becoming.'*
3. The third mode includes motions between and combinations of *'proximity' and 'periphery.'*

The first mode:
Recognition is understood as the use of tools in interaction with the participant to confirm recourses, show acceptance and recognize. Within the part *challenging or expanding possibilities*, or both, tools are used to expand new possibilities and balance the recognition. Both too much and too little recognition can unintendedly be seen as disrespect.[80] Too much recognition can reveal a 'compassion that wounds.'[81] To only use tools for recognition can undermine new possibilities. On the other hand, too much challenge can close possibilities. Nevertheless, to challenge and expand possibilities can also confirm recourses. Consequently, the dynamics between recognition and challenging or expanding, or both challenging and expanding possibilities, can facilitate 'recognition as the middle between too much and too little.'[82] Thus, the deacon needs to manage the different tools related to what

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78 Wyller, 2010, p. 191.
79 Petherbridge, 2011, p. 241.
80 Petherbridge, 2011, p. 245.
81 Petherbridge, 2011, p. 248.
82 Petherbridge, 2011, p. 247.

and how they mediate. It requires sensitivity to the situation because it can both enable and limit actions.

The second mode:
'Being' is understood as his way of 'being present' in the situation.[83] *'Becoming'* is understood as 'becoming more me' and 'becoming who we might be'[84] and carries future potential.[85] Further, 'being' and 'becoming' are understood as relational processes, as who I am and may become in relation to others. The use of tools for 'becoming' is distinguished from the use of tools for 'challenging/expanding possibilities' because one can use tools to 'challenge/expand possibilities' both for 'being' and 'becoming,' and for motions between the 'proximity' and 'periphery.'

The third mode:
Periphery refers to social marginalization, but may also refer to physical distance from the community. The concept of *proximity* refers to the community or communities. This mode emphasizes the 'importance and impact of including the stranger ("der Fremde")'[86] and to side with the oppressed and marginalized.[87] Here, tools are used for facilitating motions from the periphery, such as the marginalized situation, towards the community. It may facilitate belonging and/or participating in the community and/or the inner church tradition outside the community as Holy Communion at home.

'The space of possibilities'
The use of hybrid tools in the three modes of a deacon's professional knowledge in use seems to be driven by a search for the participant's experience of well-being or 'well-becoming' and an understanding of human beings as relational. The deacon's three modes of professional knowledge in use create hybrid spaces that combine different practices. The three modes in these spaces facilitate a *'space of possibilities.'*[88]

In this empirical material, the 'space of possibilities' is characterized by possibilities of being recognized but also as well as challenged and given tools for expanded possibilities. In addition, it facilitates 'being' and/ or 'becoming' in proximity to the community and/or in the periphery with the

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83 Jarvis, 2009, pp. 198, 207.
84 Afdal, 2013b, p. 103.
85 Jarvis, 2009, pp. 197–198.
86 Wyller, 2013a, p. 40.
87 Wyller, 2013b, p. 1.
88 Afdal, 2013b, p. 166. 'Space of possibilities' is understood as a space where the tools and activities enhance the participants' possibilities for 'be-coming'. 'Be-coming' is related to what the participants experience as 'the good life'; Afdal, 2013b, p. 35.

possibility of belonging and participating from a distance. However, tools may mediate a huge variety of processes.[89] Tools may mediate processes of empowering, change the reality and open up new possibilities, but they may also limit and constrain actions.[90] Consequently, deacons may open possibilities but also risk constraining possibilities. In the following, I present an illustration of the three tool-mediated modes in the 'space of possibilities.'
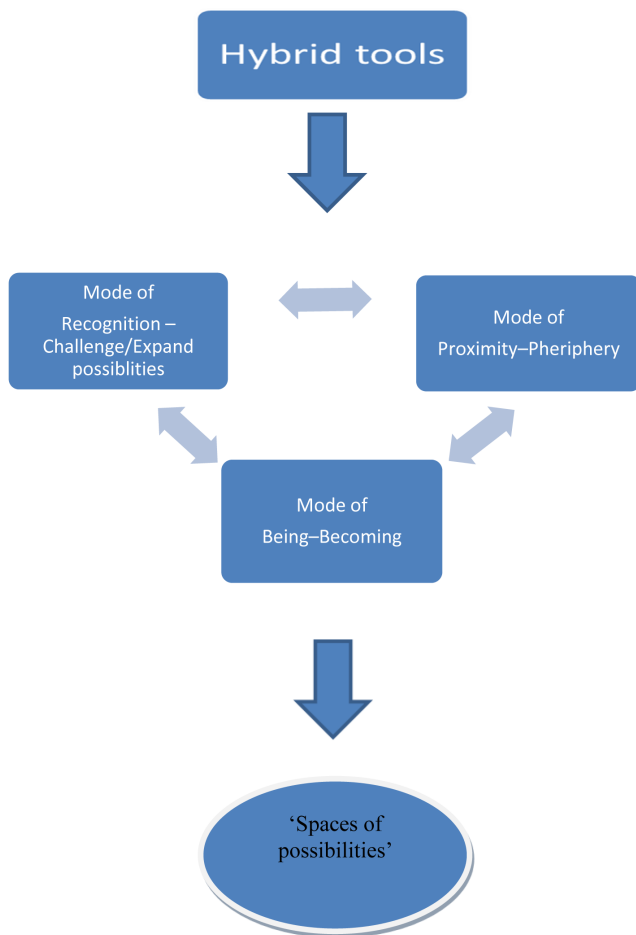
Figure 2: A simplified illustration of the three tool-mediated modes facilitating the 'space of possibilities'.

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89 Afdal, 2013a.
90 Wertsch, 1998, p. 31.

5.5 The second situation: The deacon William–Bible group for foreigners

When I observed the Deacon William, he was leading a Bible reading group with a focus on teaching Norwegian to foreigners. There are about five persons participating in the group, both Muslims and Christians. Everyone said they want to learn more about the Norwegian culture, faith and language.

In this group, William uses hybrid tools, such as the Bible, a dictionary, pen, paper, other books, coffee, cookies and language. Here, I focus on the language tools. William talks with them in Norwegian, English and an African language – he has previously worked in Africa. He uses the different languages to both recognize their learning skills and expand possibilities for learning Norwegian and as well as more about the Norwegian culture and the Christian faith. Further, he recognizes their 'being' by creating a positive focus on their different cultures and resources. Simultaneously, he uses the languages to expand their possibilities to 'become' more integrated into Norwegian society. The use of languages in the reading group creates for marginalized people a space in the parish center. When I observed William, I meet one of the participants working as a volunteer at the congregational office. Another volunteer ate lunch with us together with the staff. The use of language tools creates motion between the periphery and proximity and also changes the staff's working days as they collaborate and talk with the volunteers.

William creates a hybrid space where different practices intersect. The direction of the use of tools is the search for the participants' well-being and 'well-becoming' and creates the 'space of possibilities' both for the participants and the staff.

5.6 The third situation: The deacon Katie – Lady begging on the street

A year before I observed Katie, she had invited a lady begging on the street into the parish center for a cup of coffee. She knew that the members of the congregation had passed the woman with skepticism, but she invited her despite the fear of what the staff and congregation might say. The invitation generated tensions and discussions in the congregation, and the deacon experienced both critique and support.

A year later, when I am sitting in the deacon's office, the lady, Elena, comes in and sits down. Katie finds the cash box and gives Elena money, as a gift for her work. Elena's face beams. Katie says that Elena is cleaning and doing practical work. While I am sitting in the office, Katie uses hybrid tools such as a Romanian dictionary, money from a flea market and the language to invite Elena to the candle-lighting ceremonies. Katie is using language to recognize Elena's 'being,' saying Elena is an excellent worker and that she can recom-

mend her to anyone. Katie has facilitated expanding possibilities as work and has contributed to Elena's expanded 'becoming' from being a beggar on the street to being a working person. In the beginning, Katie had used the everyday tool of coffee to bring her from the periphery, the marginalized position on the street, in to the center of the community. Those who passed her on the street with skepticism are now working, drinking coffee and eating together with her. Despite the tensions, the deacon's tool-mediated modes have, together with Elena and people in the congregation, facilitated a hybrid 'space of possibilities' for both Elena *and* the community. Through the tool-mediated modes and in the 'space of possibilities,' it has emerged as a collective 'becoming.' Many people in the community have shown renewed interest in the needs of people outside the congregation.

5.7 Summary of the findings in the three situations

What characterizes the modes of tool-mediated knowledge in use that are established in the deacons' interaction with the participants? I argue that the three modes from the first situation are also established in the second and third situations. In addition, the second and third situations strengthen the understanding of the starting point as the participants' needs in their everyday lives and the search for well-being. Often, this calls for 'productive change,' where change brings something new.[91] Productive change requires that hybrid tools are used with flexibility, sensitivity and empathy.

6. The findings' implications for research on diaconia

The 'space of possibilities' is a complex space with for the dynamic use of hybrid tools within an interdisciplinary field, and the deacons may at the same time open up possibilities but also risk closing them. The deacons' use of hybrid tools shows that they need knowledge about social science and theology. The deacons as social workers deal with cultural and social changes in an 'increasingly complex and changing society.'[92] On the other hand, knowledge about theology and church life is often based on long historical and epistemic traditions. In the 'space of possibilities,' the deacons face the challenge of negotiating and combining ingredients from these different contexts. The empirical findings confirm that the deacons have a 'go-between' role between complex situations. They face unfamiliar situations with various options for solutions, working in 'circles and lives where congregations do not reach.'[93]

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91 Wyller, 2010, p. 188.
92 Askeland, 2006, p. 167.
93 Nordstokke, 2011, p. 47.

The deacons are constantly transferring tools and knowledge between an increasingly complex and changing society and the church's long historical and epistemic theological traditions in the 'spaces of possibilities.' Thus, on the one hand, the deacons have a valuable position, being the ones who can introduce elements of one practice into another. On the other hand, their position is challenging, because they are easily seen as being in at the periphery.[94] The deacons constantly need to use and probably create new tools in unfamiliar situations. Subsequently, I argue that there is a need for more empirical research on these dynamics in the 'inter-spaces'[95] between the human lives as they are found in a changing society and theology and church traditions. Empirical research on the combination of multidisciplinary knowledge and theology in use would be of importance for deacons and probably for other people working in the church and in Christian faith-based practice.

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94 Akkerman, 2011.
95 Edwards, 2010, p. 43.

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