Action Research

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What is Action Research?

- Not consultancy!
- “Action Research is an orderly and disciplined manner of seeking, gaining and conveying insight about the fundamental nature of empirical results and their relationship with one another. The researcher’s interest in a particular occurrence and desire to understand its deeper meaning and structures is at the centre of the research activities”
- Eden and Wheaton 1980
What is Action Research?

Action Research aims to “contribute both to the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and to the goals of social science by joint collaboration within a mutually acceptable, ethical framework”

- Rapaport 1970

- Action research is...
  - Future oriented,
  - Collaborative,
  - Focused on system development,
  - Designed to generate theory grounded in action,
  - Agnostic,
  - Situational

- Susman and Evered 1978

Why do Action Research?

“Nothing as practical as good theory” Lewin

“In theory, theory and practice are the same, in practice they are not” Einstein

- Significant and repetitive calls for rigour and relevance
- ‘Obvious?’ way of engaging with practitioners to develop theory
- Very cool to design something that is used and continues to be used and is theoretically sound
- Get to work with some amazing people and have some unique experiences
- Capitalise on circumstance e.g. doing a DBA/doing a part time PhD
Challenges of Action Research?

• Willingness to engage with practitioners over a long period of time
• Demands a deep understanding of the theory with respect to its implications for practice: operationalising is a severe test of theory
• Never ending cycles
• Challenges re publications
• Ensuring the client recognises it is research not consultancy
• Time management, it is longitudinal and multi-disciplinary
• Data management, multiple sources, triangulation
• To be both part of the research and outside of it – objectivity, validity

How to do Action Research?

Eden and Ackermann, 2018
How to do Action Research

• Application: operationalise an idea/theory/concept through an explicitly stated/design method
• Action: apply the method
• Reflect: understand the use and impact of the method
• Explore: look for theory to explain outcomes
• And so further develop the method and the theory – redesign the method etc (iterative).

How to do Action Research

• Use of focal concepts and theories attractive to both researchers and management
• Encompassing new theory is a fundamental part of the cycle
• Requirement for an inter/trans-disciplinary approach to the application of theories in the management and organisation sphere
• Practice becomes increasingly more complete as it is applied in practice
• As well as increasingly becoming more relevant and so advances our understanding of organisational research
Readings

- **Action Research**

- **Additional**
  - Pearce, J. L. and Huang, L. (2012). The Decreasing Value of Our Research to Management Education. Academy of Management Learning and Education, 11: 247-262