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INTENTION TO OFFER:

Basic definition and elements of action research.
How it contrasts and complements conventional social science.
• Multi-dimensionality of the work of action research
• Emancipatory and practical, not just descriptive, science.
• First, Second and Third person research/practice with illustration.

• Action Research, a peer reviewed Sage Publications journal.
Defining Action Research

...seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people.

- Reason & Bradbury, 2001a:1
What is knowledge for? The purpose of knowledge is so rarely debated …

And what of validity?! See digital poster on “Quality in Action Research.” Or Bradbury-Huang, 2010. What is good action research?

Action researchers act within complex social change from a stance of reflexivity, inter-subjectivity and pragmatism.
To objectify: to reduce to a mere object

Requires separation, abstraction, judgment

While a subject is active, with agency, an object is passive, being acted upon…
The primacy of the practical

Eric Trist 1951 asks:
What accounts for high vs. low production/
how to create more high producers?

In 1970 Orlando Fals Borda seeks
liberationist reconstruction that
brings science and popular knowledge
together.
ACTION RESEARCH CAN ALSO COMPLEMENT CONVENTIONAL SCIENCE

CONVENTIONAL

Descriptive
About the past.
Focus on third parties
Aimed understanding
Ostensibly values free
Controlled studies for replication

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Action research is a critical, transformative science.

It’s not about describing reality or seeking to be an agent of technical mastery.

Relational (therefore emergent, responsive)
Include the future
Integrate personal reflexivity
Coordinate action and understanding
Contribute to human/eco flourishing

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Scharmer & Senge: Community of Scholars and practitioners
• Refers to action research that is conducted face to face in small groups emphasizing learning together
  
  o Can include consulting where there is agreement to share the work through publication. Calls for skill in facilitation and learning processes.
MAS ECOfACTORY: UNDERSTANDING FOR CHANGING. PETER REASON’S LOW CARBON WORKS.
PETER REASON: UNDERSTANDING LOW CARBON WORKS.

Quadrant 1
Individual subjective factors

Quadrant 2
Individual objective factors

Quadrant 3
Collective subjective factors

Quadrant 4
Collective objective factors

Ballard after Wilber

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EXPLORING CONTEXTS - FACILITATING CHANGE

Quadrant 1  
*Individual subjective*

| Ready for action |

Quadrant 2  
*Individual objective*

| Relevant skills |

Quadrant 3  
*Collective subjective*

| Cultural impetus |

Quadrant 4  
*Collective objective*

| Opportunity |

Ballard after Wilber

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The organizational learning history process and product

- Sought multiple perspectives on results to support knowledge transfer.
- Convened cross system stakeholder dialogues in a neutral space.
- Pioneered whole system maps to highlight leverage points for entire system.
- Coordinated action across silo’s where indicated.
- Facilitated and managed new collaborative projects with breakthrough results.
- Shared results; Published case studies
- Grew the regional system into global learning networks

Application

- Used to expand Sustainable Development efforts (e.g., The Natural Step) from Northern Europe to USA
- Used extensively in Carbon reduction efforts in England and The Netherlands.
- Used to support leadership development among physicians at an academic medical center.
3rd person action research/"for them"

- Refers to action research that moves through *populous networks*
  - and/or work made widely available through publication and peer review because it has the potential to inform other distant efforts.

**Exemplar:** Bjorn Gustavsen’s work in Scandinavia on democratic workplaces
  - Including employees in the design of work
  - Evolved to socio technical systems.
Socio-Technical Networks: Only connect!
SEER enabled organizational learning among business leaders using the Port of LA, so that more sustainable practices result.

Led by Hilary Bradbury-Huang.

Workshops

Decision Makers

System Dynamics Scenarios

Alameda Corridor

SEER

VOLVO

WASTE MANAGEMENT

HOLLYWOOD

MATTEL

THE PORT OF LOS ANGELES

2.5 5 10 Miles
Leverage Point...carbon reduction

Systems intervention for carbon reduction
Counterintuitive insights about infrastructure!
Refers to action research with the self that hones self insight and capacity for choiceful action.
  - Situates the self as an instrument of understanding and change, committed to self development.

Key foundations:
  - Heron’s development of humanistic inquiry; relational inquiry; spiritual science.
Palliative care study and the collaborative self

- 12 weeks, daily mindfulness practice with individual and team coaching.
- 100% “highly satisfied.”
- Positive impact at personal and patient and organizational levels.
- Unexpected benefits to “being seated in my groove.”

What approach to science supports your vision of a sustainable world?

Action research offers a prototype of an ‘integrating, transformative science’ in support of a more sustainable world for all.

“We can describe, in ever finer detail, the world we have now, or we can foment a revolution.”

– Paraphrasing Dana Meadows on sustainability.