An Action Research Paradigm for Institutional Research

Presented by:
Michele J. Hansen and Victor M. H. Borden
Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis
Office of Information Management and Institutional Research

AIR Conference – Tampa, FL – May 19, 2003
Overview

- Introduction and Literature Review
- Action Research Paradigm contrasted with Traditional Institutional Research Paradigm
- Applications of the Action Research Model
- Potential Barriers to Action Research
- Implications and Conclusions
- Discussion

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Background and Literature Review

- Kurt Lewin and Colleagues – Linking Organizational Surveys to Action
- Program Evaluation and Educational Reform
- Action Learning and Action Research
- Current Applications of the Action Research Model – Education and Health Care
- Accreditation – Emphasis on Implementing Improvements based on Outcome Evaluations
- Institutional Change – Fostering Support and Commitment through Participation.
Action Research Paradigm

- Continuous cycle of data collection → data analysis → data feedback → action plans → data collection
- Stakeholder empowerment through active and on-going participation
- Data feedback meetings promote collaboration, dialogue, and collective analysis
- Active learning and discovery fostered by critical reflection process
- Data-driven action plans developed = research linked to action
Research Question and Evaluation
Focus

Traditional
• Given to researcher
  – Top-down directive
  – Bottom-up request
• Clarification of request
  – Discussion of context and use

Action Research
• Developed together
  – Requester or researcher
• Specific questions often deferred until vested parties brought together

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Data Collection

Traditional

- Researcher finds and collects data
- Researcher accountable for integrity of information

Action Research

- Stakeholders have role
  - Collecting data
  - Learning about nuances
- Shared responsibility for integrity
Data Analysis and Interpretation

Traditional
• Researchers responsible through dissemination
• May consult with stakeholders to gain insight into the results

Action Research
• Stakeholders involved in stages of data analysis
• Preliminary results presented and discussed
  – Further analyses shaped by those discussions.
Report Presentation and Dissemination

Traditional
• Researcher prepares and often presents results to stakeholders

Action Research
• Presentation and report writing responsibilities shared
• Presentations involve
  – active discussion
  – facilitation of action plan development
Follow-up

Traditional
• Some additional analyses may be requested or perhaps some clarification
• Often the end of the process

Action Research
• Stakeholders design action plan based on results
• Data collection included in follow-up plan
• Further lines of inquiry established for next cycle of research
Application 1: Diversity Indicators

- Research Question Focus - From “summative evaluation” to “formative process”
- Data Collection – Range of sources, iterative process
- Data Reporting and Feedback – Indicators assembled for review and development of a rating system
- Development of Action Plans
- Action – In response to “high priority indicators” reports completed to facilitate dialogue and understanding
- Assessment - Exploratory gives way to confirmatory and formative/summative mix; monitoring implementation of actions taken
Application 2: Evaluation of New Student Orientation

- Research Question and Evaluation Focus – reassessment of goals; incoming students’ needs; impacts on knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors
- Data Collection – focus groups and questionnaires, sought perspectives of all major stakeholders
- Data Reporting and Feedback – meetings with orientation leaders and faculty stakeholders
- Development of Action Plans – facilitation of dialogue and data-driven proposals
- Action – implementation of proposed changes
- Assessment – on-going formative evaluation; re-administration of process and outcome instruments
Potential Barriers

• Role ambiguity and comfort level of administrator (in role of researcher) and researcher (in role of administrator)

• Participation is fundamental and essential, but may not be perceived as positive by all stakeholders (role overload, role conflict and more meetings!)
Potential Barriers

- Emotional barriers
- Political obstacles
- Managerial Control Imperatives

Overcoming Potential Barriers

• Clearly explain roles and expectations
• Establish atmosphere of openness and trust
• Up-build positive affect
• Leverage opposing forces
• Bring external legitimacy to the organization.
Implications

• Useful paradigm for linking institutional data with action
• Effective paradigm for conducting formative program evaluations, meeting accreditation requirements, and implementing organizational change
• Powerful data deployment approach
• Effective approach for minimizing resistance to change
Discussion