

An Action Research Paradigm for Institutional Research

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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

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

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

Seo, M. G. (2003). Overcoming emotional barriers, political obstacles, and control imperatives in the action-science approach to individual and organizational learning. *Academy of Management: Learning and Education*, 2(1), 7-21.

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