Contents

Does organisational action research have a future?

Marianne Kristiansen & Jørgen Bloch-Poulsen

Abstract

This is not an ordinary article. It was written in response to some questions that the current and the former IJAR editors-in-chief asked us to reflect on. We did so gratefully, because this was a good opportunity to look back on 25 years of doing AR in organisations.

The article describes four challenges of future organisational action research. Firstly, in the future an increasing number of skilled employees will make it necessary to move from co-influence of how to implement goals, to a greater degree of co-determination. Secondly, the article argues there is a need for an increased focus on documenting AR processes. Thirdly, the article calls for more self-critical reflections on the concrete ways action researchers exercise power. Fourthly, questioning the possibilities of doing AR in organisations will become important in the future, due to socio-economic conditions such as lack of time.

The article is based on a four-year research project that we carried out on various American and European approaches to action research in organisations in the 20th century. It includes, too, a description of our different personal ways into AR and some of the AR concepts we developed along the way.

Keywords: organisational action research, participation, power, documentation of action research processes.

¿La investigación-acción organizacional tiene futuro?

Resumen

En realidad, este no es un artículo normal. Fue escrito en respuesta a algunas preguntas que el actual y el ex-editor de IJAR nos pidieron que reflexionemos. Lo hicimos con gratitud, porque esta fue una buena oportunidad para mirar hacia atrás en los 25 años de hacer IA en las organizaciones.

El artículo describe cuatro desafíos de la futura investigación-acción organizacional. En primer lugar, en el futuro, un número cada vez mayor de empleados calificados hará que sea necesario moverse de la co-influencia de cómo implementar las metas a un mayor grado de co-determinación. En segundo lugar, el artículo argumenta que existe la necesidad de un mayor énfasis en la documentación de los procesos de IA. En tercer lugar, el artículo hace un llamado a más reflexiones autocríticas sobre las formas concretas en que los investigadores- acción ejercen el poder. En cuarto lugar, cuestionar las posibilidades de realizar IA en las organizaciones se volverá importante en el

futuro debido a las condiciones socio-económicas como la falta de tiempo. El artículo se basa en un proyecto de investigación de cuatro años que llevamos a cabo sobre varios enfoques americanos y europeos para la investigación- acción en organizaciones en el siglo XX. También incluye una descripción de nuestras diferentes formas personales de IA y algunos de los conceptos de IA que desarrollamos a lo largo del camino.

Palabras clave: Investigación-acción organizacional, participación, poder, documentación de procesos de investigación-acción.

Introduction

When reporting that we, as we reached the age of 70+, had chosen to stop as action researchers, Danilo Streck and Werner Fricke, the current and the former IJAR editors-in-chief, asked us to answer the questions below, which we were welcome to relate to freely:

1. You have a long and productive trajectory with Action Research (AR). Where, how and when did you come across AR? How did you learn about AR and how to do AR? Were there researchers or experiences that had a special impact on you and your research practice?

2. In your writings, theory and practice are intertwined in a critical and creative way. Could you reflect on this process? What are some key concepts that an action researcher should pay attention to? Based on your practice, what concepts did you develop?

3. What perspectives do you see for AR to play a role in social changes, such as the strengthening or defence of democracy, in the articulation of new visions for humanity, for the people´s organisation in digital work processes?

4. Organisations and companies were in many cases privileged sites for AR, involving the various stakeholders. With the changes in the work context (crowdwork, platform economy, etc.) what could be possible implications for action research?

5. In international social science discussion (Burawoy et al. in USA; Dörre, Aulenbacher etc in Germany) there is a growing discussion about public sociology. Would AR have to play a role in this context?

6. You have recently published the book "Inddragelse i forandringsprocesser. Aktionsforskning i organisationer [Participation in change processes. Action research in organisations]". Could you tell us a little of the background for writing the book and its content?

7. Looking back at your experience as researchers, what learnings for yourself would you highlight? What would you recommend or advise for old and new researchers engaging in action research?

We are very pleased to have been given this opportunity, because we have worked as action researchers for at least 25 years. We do not know enough about action research in general. The following is therefore solely about action research in organisations, from which we have experience. Thus, we do not have sufficient knowledge to comment on the 5th question, nor

A participatory approach to peacebuilding evaluation in Seke district, Zimbabwe

Norman Chivasa

Abstract

Mainstream monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of peacebuilding tends to be mainly practitioner-oriented, while under-reporting initiatives by ordinary people who develop an interest to learn from their own practice. This study aims to fill this gap, by reporting the evaluation of a self-initiated peace committee by ordinary people in the Seke district, Zimbabwe. The study revealed that local communities currently possess the propensity to work as a collective with shared experiences and perceptions, and the linkages between these attributes and participatory peacebuilding initiatives are natural. Furthermore, it emerged that action research can be a useful methodology, with the potential to create space for ordinary people to participate in the design, implementation, M & E of peace initiatives in their villages. Although this study examined the role of self-initiative monitoring and evaluation destined to become an alternative to technocratic M & E, it acknowledges the value of top-down M & E of peacebuilding and does not seek to replace them, rather, to bring bottom-up M & E practices into the mainstream M &E of peacebuilding using local initiatives as a vehicle to create a greater impact on peacebuilding interventions.

Key words: action research, evaluation, participatory peacebuilding, Zimbabwe

Un enfoque participativo para la evaluación de la construcción de la paz en el distrito de Seke, Zimbabue

Resumen

El monitoreo y la evaluación *mainstream* (M&E) de la construcción de la paz tienden a estar principalmente orientados a los profesionales, mientras que no se reportan las iniciativas de las personas comunes que presentan un interés por aprender de sus propias prácticas. Este estudio tiene como objetivo llenar este vacío al informar la evaluación de un comité de paz auto-iniciado por personas comunes en el distrito de Seke, Zimbabue. El estudio reveló que las comunidades locales poseen actualmente la propensión a trabajar como un colectivo con experiencias y percepciones compartidas, y los vínculos entre estos atributos y las iniciativas participativas de construcción de la paz son naturales. Además, surgió que la investigación- acción puede ser una metodología útil con el potencial de crear un espacio para que la gente común participe en el diseño, implementación, monitoreo y evaluación de iniciativas de paz en sus aldeas. Aunque este estudio examinó el papel del monitoreo y la evaluación por iniciativa propia destinados a convertirse en una alternativa al

monitoreo y evaluación tecnocráticos, reconoce el valor de M&E de arriba hacia abajo para la construcción de la paz y no busca reemplazarlos, más bien, busca llevar las prácticas de M&E de abajo hacia arriba dentro del M&E *mainstream* de la construcción de la paz utilizando iniciativas locales como vehículo para crear un mayor impacto sobre intervenciones de construcción de la paz.

Palabras clave: investigación-acción, evaluación, construcción de la paz participativa, Zinbabue.

Introduction

Research that emphasises the participatory nature of action research (AR) is increasingly gathering momentum within mainstream peacebuilding discourses. This follows a surge of interest to employ AR as a strategy to address peace and development challenges in post-conflict societies in the 1990s by international donor communities, peace researchers and practitioners. A case in point was the War-torn Societies project (WSP) which tested the potential of AR in rebuilding the socio-economic, political and cultural challenges in four different countries namely; Eritrea, Mozambique, Guatemala and Northeast Somalia between 1994 and 1998. In these conflict-ravaged societies, the participatory nature of AR was employed to ensure local ownership between different actors involved in rebuilding socio-economic and political institutions (Fagen 1995; Farah et al. 1998; Johannsen 2001; Stiefel 2001). As Johannsen (2001, p. 2) asserts, AR was implemented "in order to render academic research more applicable to the needs of those being studied, and encourage them to actively participate in the research design, methodology and projected outcome." As a scientific method, AR has the potential to assist research participants to better understand problems affecting them and generate solutions to those problems. By implication, scientific methods are seen as a reliable guide towards informed and effective action (Lisa 1984). Consequently, academics and practitioners consider AR as a strategy that brings together different actors involved in addressing peace and development challenges (Johannsen 2001). It is also considered a useful strategy to address immediate and practical problems with a view to contribute to theory and knowledge and to improve practice (Lisa 1984).

The study is framed within discourses on monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of peacebuilding initiatives and participatory M&E practices (impact assessment) (Koltzow 2013). M&E of peacebuilding initiatives continues to suffer from a myriad of challenges resulting from contentions over evidence on the impact of peace interventions. To be specific, the greatest challenge is that peace is a non-linear process, and it defies replicable and verifiable measurements because of its fluidity (Church 2008; Koltzow 2013; Menkhaus 2004). However, while M & E discourses are focusing on elitist/technocratic (standardised) evaluation models of measuring peace (Paffenholz 2011; (OECD) Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2012; Andersen & Kennedy-Chouane 2014), the current study focused on bottom-up evaluation by ordinary people who developed an interest in evaluating their own peace initiatives. In M & E of peacebuilding, what has not received academic attention is the involvement of ordinary people who developed an interest to use scientific methods to evaluate their own initiatives. The aim of this study was to address the identified gap, by reporting on evaluation activities conducted by ordinary people through the AR framework to determine the outcome of a peace committee in ward 8 of Seke district, Zimbabwe.

From silos to inter-professional collaboration:

A mixed methods case study utilising participating action research to foster multidisciplinary teams in a day care surgery department

Gunhild Bjaalid, Rune Todnem By, Bernard Burnes, Aslaug Mikkelsen and Olaug Øygaarden

Abstract

This single case study reports on the establishment of a multidisciplinary day care surgery at a Norwegian University Hospital utilising participating action research design principles drawn from socio-technical theory. Data was collected through mixed methods including stakeholder analysis, document studies, observations of meetings, semi-structured interviews and participating group methods. The senior management at the hospital had decided to implement a department that diverged from organising around professional disciplines, and this decision evoked strong resistance among several professional groups in the first phases of this project. This case follows the implications of the decision to establish a multidisciplinary day care surgery through re-organising location, staff and management structures. The findings suggest that the hospital achieved the vision of creating an efficient multidisciplinary work environment, reducing the culture of tribalism between professions, and creating a work environment with a high degree of knowledge transfer. This case describes how action research can be used to reduce organisational silos and to improve multidisciplinary co-operation.

Key words: Action research, Day care surgery, Hospital organisation, Organisational change, Socio-technical design, Inter-professional teams, Patient-based organisation

De los silos a la colaboración interprofesional: un estudio de caso de métodos mixtos que utiliza investigación-acción participativa para fomentar equipos multidisciplinarios en un departamento de cirugía de un centro de día

Resumen

Este estudio de caso único relata el establecimiento de un centro de día multidisciplinario de cirugías en un Hospital Universitario de Noruega utilizando los principios de diseño de la investigación-acción participativa extraídos de la teoría socio-técnica. Los datos se recopilaron a través de métodos mixtos, incluidos los análisis de los actores interesados, estudios de documentos, observaciones de reuniones, entrevistas semi-estructuradas y métodos de grupos participantes. La alta gerencia del hospital había decidido implementar un departamento que divergía de organizarse en torno a disciplinas profesionales, y esta decisión provocó una fuerte resistencia entre varios grupos profesionales en las primeras fases de este proyecto. Este caso sigue las implicaciones de la decisión de establecer un centro de día multidisciplinario de cirugías a través de la reorganización de la ubicación, el personal y las estructuras de gestión. Los resultados sugieren que el hospital logró la visión de crear un ambiente de

trabajo multidisciplinario eficiente, reduciendo la cultura del tribalismo entre profesiones y creando un ambiente de trabajo con un alto grado de transferencia de conocimiento. Este caso describe cómo se puede utilizar la investigación-acción para reducir los silos organizacionales y mejorar la cooperación multidisciplinaria.

Palabras clave: Investigación-acción, Centro de día de cirugías, Organización hospitalaria, Cambio organizacional, Diseño socio-técnico, Equipos interprofesionales, Organización basada en el paciente.

Introduction

Health-care inflation due to rising costs is worrying Europe's politicians. Standardisation of treatment and the development of patient pathways, reduction of hospitalisation and increasing day care or polyclinic treatments, are all examples of organisational changes with a goal to increase efficiency and reduce costs (Lapsley 2008).

Within this context, a Norwegian University Hospital (NUH) sat out to improve its elective day care surgery department (DCS) provision through establishing a new and multidisciplinary patient-centred department with a focus on how different healthcare professions interact in a greater degree than is traditionally the case, and to provide patients with the best possible treatment (Saha, Beach & Cooper 2008). The hospital management had patient related goals such as more flexible patient care, organize services around patient groups, increase numbers of satisfied patients and operations, and on top of that, increase employee satisfaction through the development of a multidisciplinary department.

This article reports on the establishment of the DCS through its first 18 months of operation. The purpose was to explore if participatory action research design principles inspired by the socio-technical system approach, could facilitate organisational change and help overcome resistance and conflicts in establishing the new multidisciplinary patient-centered DCS department.

The following research questions were explored:

1) How can the use of participating action research design principles drawn from the Socio-Technical System Approach be utilised to prevent and overcome conflicts when establishing a patient-centered multidisciplinary day care surgery department?

2) How can the use of participating action research design principles drawn from the Socio-Technical System Approach be utilised to obtain a good work environment with an efficient task planning that can facilitate ambitious operational goals?

Organisation Development and Socio-Technical Systems Theory

One of the earliest forms of Organisation Development (OD) is the socio-technical systems approach developed by the Tavistock Institute in the UK (Burnes 2014). This approach assumes that to successfully change or improve a system first-hand information about the organisation it sits within is required and this can only be achieved through empirical obser-

The learning web in the systematisation of experiences: An analysis of research processes with Artisan women

Aline Lemos da Cunha Della Libera, Edla Eggert

Abstract

This article discusses aspects of a dialogue with artisan women during the production of their handicrafts. Our dialogical proposition builds on participant research studies conducted in Brazil since the 1960's, to which feminist studies are added and mixed here. The article integrates two groups of female artisans who produced pieces, and simultaneously talked about their craft production processes and their daily experiences. We analyse the broad spectrum of accounts that emerges at the meetings, and the power of self-perception arising from the places of collective speech and listening. We conclude that the alternatives found for systematising the recorded findings provoked new reflections and the recognition, in scale, of other directions and derivations of research practice with poorly educated adult women.

Keywords: participant research, systematization, artisan women, simultaneity.

La red de aprendizaje en la sistematización de experiencias: análisis de procesos de investigación con mujeres artesanas.

Resumen

Este artículo analiza aspectos de un diálogo con mujeres artesanas durante la producción de sus artesanías. La propuesta dialógica se refiere a los estudios de investigación participativa producidos en Brasil desde la década de 1960, a los que se mezclan aquí los estudios feministas. El artículo integra dos grupos de artesanas que produjeron piezas y al mismo tiempo hablaron sobre sus procesos de producción artesanal y sus experiencias diarias. Analiza el amplio espectro del discurso que emerge en los encuentros y el poder de la autopercepción desde los lugares de discurso y escucha colectivos. Se concluyó que las alternativas encontradas para sistematizar los hallazgos registrados provocaron nuevas reflexiones y el reconocimiento, en escala, de otras direcciones y derivaciones de la práctica de investigación con mujeres adultas con baja escolaridad.

Palabras clave: investigación participativa, sistematización, artesanas, simultaneidad.

Introduction

Based on the experience originated from research activities with women who produce handicrafts, who learned from and taught each other techniques of craft production, we present in this article some of the methodological processes developed with them. Over the past ten years (Cunha 2010; Eggert 2011, 2017) we have been conducting research with artisan women, most of them poorly educated, who produce pieces for their own use and/or for sale. These groups allowed us to spend time with them and, through this interaction, provoked us to think about the forms of systematising the research we conducted, with reflections on current studies, such as this one. The contexts experienced in our investigative practices varied: a) in ateliers, where weaving pieces were produced for sale, which in this article we call the *hand weaving loom* group and, b) in the community spaces of a public school, through meetings organized for teaching and learning staple crochet and other forms of craft production, which in this article we call the *staple crochet* group.

According to Maria Rita Webster (1997) and Elza Hirata Baptista (2004), the hand weaving loom (Figure 1) predominates in the weaving produced in the state of Rio Grande do Sul (Brazil), besides being a more popular, easy-to-handle loom.

Staple crochet is a very old weaving technique that is nearly extinct in Rio Grande do Sul (Brazil); it uses a needle, thread or wool and a U-shaped wooden or metal artifact (Figure 2) in which the piece is woven. Each woven part (Figure 3) can be sewn to another to form a whole piece (jackets, purses, blankets...)[1].

Figure 1.   Hand weaving loom
Note: Image retrieved from
http://www.tecelagemanual.com.br/lojatear/
acessorios.htm

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[1] There are few references to staple crochet in academic texts. Currently, through the Google Scholar platform, two articles are available (Júnior & Junger 2009; Montemezzo & Cunha 2013), two end-of-course monographs (Ferreira 2017; Rufino 2018), two Master's dissertations (Azevedo 2012; Cândido 2015), a doctoral thesis (Cunha 2010) and a book chapter (Cunha & Eggert 2011). Only one of the dissertations and one monograph, both in the Design area, detail a little more about the technique (Cândido 2015; Ferreira 2017). In addition to these, details about the technique and its teaching can be found in the doctoral thesis and book chapter, both in the Education area (Cunha 2010; Cunha & Eggert 2011). The other studies only cite staple crochet as a typology of crochet weaving. The thesis above refers to the study conducted by Cunha (2010), whose experience is part of the reflections presented in this article. That study illustrates the technique of staple crochet and goes into details on questions related to its teaching. Cunha e Eggert (2011, p. 60) suspect that staple crochet "[...] emerged by Chinese influence and was brought [to Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil] by Azoreans. With their fork-shaped hairpins, women wove with what threads they had access to (reeds, for example) in order to pass time." Cândido (2015) reaffirms that staple crochet is nearly extinct in Rio Grande do Sul.

Second language teachers' reasons for doing/not doing action research in their classrooms

Vahid Rahmani Doqaruni, Behzad Ghonsooly, Reza Pishghadam

Abstract

This study aims to explore the extent to which Iranian teachers do research, and their reasons for doing so in the English as a foreign language context, with a special emphasis on action research (AR). The present study used a mixed methods design, i.e. questionnaire and interview, to gain a richer understanding of the teachers' reasons for doing AR. The participants were 65 English teachers from 5 private English language teaching institutions. Despite the fact that many teachers in the present study considered AR useful in solving their immediate teaching problems and improving their teaching practices, the analysis of the teachers' reasons showed that there are serious barriers in the way of conducting AR which are in nature practical (lack of time), logistic (not having enough knowledge and support), and attitudinal (teachers believe that their job is only to teach).

Key Words: teacher research engagement, teachers' reasons, action research, mixed methods design, questionnaire, interview

Razones de los profesores de segundo idioma para hacer/no hacer investigación-acción en sus aulas

Resumen

Este estudio tiene como objetivo explorar en qué medida los maestros iraníes realizan investigación y sus razones para hacerlo en el contexto del inglés como idioma extranjero con un énfasis especial en la Investigación-Acción (IA). El presente estudio utilizó un diseño de métodos mixtos, es decir, cuestionario y entrevista, para obtener una mejor comprensión de las razones de los maestros para hacer IA. Los participantes fueron 65 profesores de inglés de 5 instituciones privadas de enseñanza de inglés. A pesar del hecho de que muchos maestros, en el presente estudio, consideraron que la IA es útil para resolver sus problemas de enseñanza inmediatos y mejorar sus prácticas de enseñanza, el análisis de las razones de los profesores mostró que existen serias barreras en la forma de conducir la IA que son de naturaleza práctica (falta de tiempo), logísticas (no tienen suficiente conocimiento y apoyo) y actitudinales (los docentes creen que su trabajo es solo enseñar).

Palabras clave: compromiso de investigación docente, razones de los profesores, investigación-acción, diseño de métodos mixtos, cuestionario, entrevista.

Introduction

One central argument supporting a drive to make teachers more engaged in educational research is that when teachers do research and make pedagogical decisions based on their own research findings, they can make more informed and evidence-based decisions (Borg 2007, 2009, 2010). Consequently, these decisions will beneficially affect both teaching and learning (Hargreaves 2001). Another main reason underlying this drive has been that engaging teachers in research is considered essential for teachers' professional development (Borg 2010; McDonough 2006). In other words, doing research can empower teachers to better understand their work, encourage them to reflect on what they do, lead them to explore different avenues regarding new thoughts, and end up being more autonomous (e.g., Kirkwood & Christie 2006; Tinker Sachs 2000). On a personal level, conducting research has been found to have the capacity to fulfill an academic's curiosity and creativity (e.g., Akerlind 2008; Chen et al. 2006). On a professional level, it can raise professional status (e.g., Akerlind 2008; Borg 2003).

Stimulated by this interest in encouraging teachers to be research-engaged, an emergent strand of research has concentrated on looking at what reasons underlie and drive teacher research or vice versa discourage it (e.g., Allison & Carey 2007; Barkhuizen 2009; Borg 2007, 2008, 2009). The rationale for such work has been that activities to advance teacher research engagement will more probably succeed if they are based on an awareness of teachers' reasons for doing research. This success will in turn bridge the gap between the stakeholders in the field of second/foreign language (L2) education. Considering the importance of such an issue, Borg and Liu (2013, p. 296) state that,

It is essential that initiatives to promote teacher research engagement be informed by insights into such matters [teachers' current understandings of and attitudes towards research engagement]. This will, for example, allow discrepancies between institutional and teacher perspectives on research engagement to be identified and addressed.

Looking at the issue from a general perspective, this is of most extreme significance in light of the fact that "understanding what teachers do, how they do it, and *why they do it* is central to any effort at reshaping education policy around teacher education, teacher professional development, and school reform" (O'Connell Rust 2009, p. 1882; *emphasis added*).

In line with this general attitude toward investigating teachers' research engagement, this study aims to explore the extent to which Iranian teachers do research and their reasons for doing so in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context with a special emphasis on action research (AR). AR is specifically noteworthy as teachers are increasingly being encouraged to carry out small-scale research studies in their own classrooms, and to assume the role of a teacher-researcher (Atay 2006, 2008; Burns 2005b, 2010; Edwards & Burns 2016; McDonough 2006; Wyatt 2011).

Confusion may arise as in education the term *action research* is often used almost interchangeably with another term, i.e., *teacher research*. It should be noted that, however, there are important differences between these two terms. Teacher research refers to all kinds of school- and classroom-based research conducted by practitioners, and is an "inquiry that is intentional, systematic, public, voluntary, ethical, and contextual" (Mohr et al. 2004, p. 23). As a general term, teacher research includes many different methodologies