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## The shift from owning to sharing: employing action research to facilitate SMEs' business model transformation

Sebastian Huber and Santidhorn Pooripakdee

**Abstract:** The sharing economy has witnessed tremendous growth in a multitude of industries around the world over the past decade. Access to, and a more sustainable use of, resources, cost saving potential, and a multitude of strategic benefits have been identified as attractive opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to engage in business-to-business (B2B) sharing with some frustration by governments, researchers and practitioners that so little actual B2B sharing can be observed in industry practice. It remains a strategic challenge for SMEs to manage the shift from resource ownership to sharing since that transition requires a permanent change in their business model.

In light of the transformational nature of this qualitative research gap, an Action Research methodology has been developed and implemented in partnership with a selected sample of Swiss SMEs favourably inclined towards B2B sharing activities. While discussing how Action Research might bridge the research gap and develop tangible, empirically grounded management recommendations, this paper also contributes specific Action Research methodology for other cases of transformational nature which present an ever more frequent and common scenario in business management research.

**Keywords:** Action Research, sharing economy, business-to-business (B2B), small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), business model transformation, sustainable development.

### **El cambio de tener en propiedad a compartir: utilizando la Investigación Acción para facilitar la transformación del modelo de negocio de las PYME**

**Resumen:** La economía colaborativa ha experimentado un enorme crecimiento en multitud de sectores de todo el mundo durante la última década. El acceso a los recursos y su uso más sostenible, el potencial de ahorro de costes y una multitud de beneficios estratégicos se han identificado como oportunidades atractivas para que las pequeñas y medianas empresas (PYME) participen en el intercambio entre empresas (B2B). Sin embargo, hay cierta frustración por parte de los gobiernos, los investigadores y los profesionales porque se observa poco intercambio en la práctica de la industria. Sigue siendo un reto estratégico para las PYME cambiar de tener la propiedad de los recursos a compartirlos, ya que esa transición requiere un cambio permanente en su modelo de negocio.

Debido al carácter transformador de esta investigación cualitativa, se ha desarrollado una metodología de investigación-acción, que se ha puesto en práctica en colaboración con una

muestra seleccionada de PYMES suizas favorables a compartir B2B. A la vez que se discute cómo la investigación-acción puede salvar la brecha de conocimiento y desarrollar recomendaciones de gestión tangibles y con base empírica, este artículo también aporta una metodología de investigación-acción específica para otros casos de naturaleza transformacional que empiezan a configurar un escenario cada vez más frecuente y común en la investigación de la gestión empresarial.

**Palabras clave:** investigación-acción, economía colaborativa, business-to-business (B2B), pequeñas y medianas empresas (PYMES), transformación del modelo de negocio, desarrollo sostenible.

## 1. Benefits and obstacles of the B2B sharing economy

Sharing, sometimes referred to as collaborative consumption, mostly appears as a peer-to-peer-based (P2P<sup>1</sup>) activity of obtaining, giving, or sharing the access to goods and services, coordinated through community-based, often online services (Decrop et al., 2018; Hamari et al., 2016; Weiber & Lichter, 2019). In the broader context, sharing can be associated to what is described as a civilizational crisis of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century where scientific and technological discoveries allow for a new relationality by means of re-communalization of social life for individuals and corporate citizens alike (Escobar, 2021; Maffesoli, 2020; Wielecki, 2020). Ownership is substituted by access to resources, while at the same time infrequently used assets are used more frequently, resulting in “shared” use (Botsman & Rogers, 2010). While society and governments face the depletion of planet earth’s resources in the post-liberal market society of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Foord, 2014), sharing could offer a more sustainable alternative to consumption (Daunorienè et al., 2015; Demary, 2014; Georgi et al., 2019; Hamari et al., 2016).

Relatively few cases of business-to-business (B2B) sharing have been described so far, though specific sharing in some industries takes place already (Eschberger, 2020) with a growing global community of pioneers emerging in the post-COVID era (Radjou, 2021). For more companies to actively participate in B2B sharing, a better understanding is needed on the transformational effort required to shift a company’s business model from ownership to sharing (Choi et al., 2014) for which the cyclical nature of Action Research is particularly well suited.

### 1.1. Sustainability

A more efficient use of (existing) resources avoids additional, individual ownership creating economic sustainability at companies and the macroeconomic level (Daunorienè et al., 2015; Demary, 2014; Georgi et al., 2019). B2B sharing prevents the purchase of new assets or resources, which systematically avoids overproduction and depletion of resources, improving ecologic sustainability (Acquier et al., 2017). Sharing goods with a significant CO<sub>2</sub> footprint

1 Peer-to-peer (P2P) and consumer-to-consumer (C2C) are often used synonymously in literature ignoring the fact that two companies could also be considered as peers and would thus need to be included in P2P

# The Role of Action Research in Democratizing Governance: The Case of Bilbao Next Lab

Joaquín Gregorio Oliva Peirano

**Abstract:** The aim of this study is to analyze how Action Research for Territorial Development (ARTD) promotes democratization in governance spaces. Considering the declared democratic intention of action research (AR) (Gustavsen, 2017; Palshaugen, 2014), ARTD is not an exception (Larrea, 2019). However, this specific relation with democratization has not been yet analyzed, nor measured in ARTD. In a context in which the number of countries categorized as *free* is at its lowest level in the 21st century (The Freedom House, 2021), the main contribution of this paper is the construction of a new analytical framework in order to assess the degree of democratization in ARTD processes. This analytical framework can be useful for other approaches to AR as well. More specifically, the most important contribution is the analysis of how ARTD may be facilitating such processes. This investigation studies governance at the Bilbao Next Lab, an AR laboratory focused on urban policy making in the Basque Country, Spain. This process is being facilitated through ARTD by the Basque Institute of Competitiveness – Orkestra in alliance with the local government, the Bilbao City Council and its economic development agency, Bilbao Ekintza. The case shows, together with new democratization dimensions analyzed, a deep and diverse bonding system between ARTD and democratization, in which the democratization factors hold to all ARTD elements. The paper discusses how the core ARTD elements are promoting the development of what are considered in theory as democratization factors.

**Key words:** Action research, territorial development, democratization, governance, urban policies.

## **El papel de la Investigación Acción en la democratización de la Gobernanza: el caso de Bilbao Next Lab**

**Resumen:** El objetivo de este estudio es analizar cómo la Investigación Acción para el Desarrollo Territorial (IADT) promueve la democratización en espacios de gobernanza. Considerando la declarada vocación democrática de la investigación acción (IA) (Gustavsen, 2017; Palshaugen, 2014), la IADT no es una excepción (Larrea, 2019). Sin embargo, esta relación específica aún no ha sido analizada para el caso de la IADT. En un contexto en donde el número de países denominados como *libres* está en su nivel más bajo del s. XXI (The Freedom House, 2021), la principal contribución de esta investigación es la construcción de un nuevo marco analítico para evaluar el grado de democratización para procesos de IADT. Este nuevo marco analítico puede ser útil a su vez para otros enfoques de IA. Específicamente, el principal aporte es el análisis de cómo la IADT puede estar facilitando la democratización en estos espacios. Este artículo se enfoca en el espacio de gobernanza del Bilbao NextLab, un laboratorio de IA responsable del diseño y gestión de diversas políticas públicas en el País Vasco, España. Este proceso está siendo facilitado por medio de la IADT por el Instituto Vasco

de Competitividad – Orkestra en conjunto con el gobierno local, *Ayuntamiento de Bilbao*, y su agencia de desarrollo económico, *Bilbao Ekintza*. El caso muestra, junto con las nuevas variables de democratización analizadas, un profundo y diverso sistema de relaciones entre la IADT y la democratización, en el que los factores de democratización sostienen a todos los elementos de la IADT. El artículo discute cómo los elementos de la IADT están promoviendo el desarrollo de lo que la teoría define como factores de democratización.

**Palabras clave:** Investigación acción, desarrollo territorial, democratización, gobernanza, políticas urbanas.

## 1. Introduction

Democracy is considered as a fundamental aspect for an inclusive human development (PNUD, 2008). However, due to a number of ecological, technological and health changes in recent years, many countries have questioned the idea of whether democracy is the best available model for facing upcoming world challenges, “turning towards a kind of post-democratic hybrid” (Gustavsen, 2017: 102). The Freedom House Institute, an organization which defines and registers the state of civic and political rights in the world, estimates that during 2020, 75% of the world’s population experienced a deterioration of their democracies. This fact reinforces the downward trend in the number of countries categorized as *free*, and an upward trend in countries considered as *not free*, both at their lowest and highest levels since 2005, respectively.

Table 1.1: Evolution of the state of democracies in the world

Category / Year	2005	2010	2015	2020
“Free”	89	87	86	82
“Partially free”	58	60	59	59
“Not free”	45	47	50	54

Source: Own elaboration. Adapted from (*The Freedom House*, 2021).

In this context, the need arises to reflect on democracies and how researchers can contribute to their sustainability. Due to the declared democratic intention of action research (Gustavsen, 2017; Palshaugen, 2014), this document focuses on AR as an academic tool for deepening democracy. Specifically, this study analyzes the ARTD approach, which also has “the AR intention of democratizing processes where are applied” (Larrea, 2019: 22).

The case study in this paper is the Bilbao Next Lab project as a case of governance in the Basque Country, Spain. This space is responsible for designing and making decisions affecting diverse public policies, such as the Vocational Education and Training (VET) policy making, the Municipal Policy for Employment and Talent and others, and is facilitated through ARTD by the Basque Institute of Competitiveness – Orkestra in alliance with the

# Retrospective Action Research on Facilitating Equitable Learning Outcomes in a Diverse Class

Ariane Janse van Rensburg

**Abstract:** In a South African class with complex diversity, certain student groupings were not performing equitably in relation to their potential. An Educational Action Research (AR) process of designing multiple, integrated practice changes over three years successfully redressed disparities, but the full impact of interventions could only be analysed in retrospect. Combining empirical observations with subsequent data collection to produce a theorised model, a transferable methodology using quantitative triangulation was designed to overcome the challenges of a rigorous retrospective AR study. This article discusses the integrated teaching interventions and the application of retrospective AR methodology.

**Keywords:** action research, retrospective study, equitable learning outcomes, diversity

## La Investigación Acción retrospectiva en la facilitación de resultados equitativos del aprendizaje en una clase diversa

**Resumen:** En una clase de Sudáfrica con diversidad compleja, algunos grupos de estudiantes no estaban teniendo logros que se correspondían equitativamente con su potencial. Un proceso de investigación acción educativa (IA) en el que se diseñaron cambios múltiples e integrados en la práctica a lo largo de tres años ajustó estas disparidades con éxito, pero el conjunto del impacto de las intervenciones sólo pudo ser analizado en retrospectiva. Mediante la combinación de observaciones empíricas y la subsiguiente recolección de datos para producir un modelo teorizado, se ha diseñado una metodología transferible que utiliza una triangulación cuantitativa para superar los retos a los que se enfrenta un estudio de IA retrospectivo riguroso. Este artículo debate las intervenciones educativas y la aplicación de la metodología retrospectiva de IA que se produjeron de forma integrada.

**Palabras clave:** Investigación acción, estudio retrospectivo, resultados de aprendizaje equitativos, diversidad

### 1. The problem context

This project did not start as an educational research study – it was simply an urgent teaching problem to be solved. I had started teaching Architectural Design (AD) to a first-year class in a Bachelor of Architectural Studies (BAS) degree at a South African university, using the pre-existing course, and found that in a class of students coming from diverse lived experiences, students with the same potential were not achieving the same academic outcomes. The learning outcomes were non-negotiable for the accreditation of the degree, the syllabus was set and the variables that I could redesign were the approach, format and content of actual

lectures and tutorials, assignments, student support and ways of teaching. In the context of a previously racially segregated society, epistemological access to university degrees was a social justice issue. My immediate challenges were: How should I change my teaching to give all students equitable access to successful academic outcomes? Equally importantly, how could I equip future architects with a broader social understanding that would enable them to be relevant designers in a diverse society? These problems had to be solved in action, without the time to test them. We tried various, simultaneous, potential solutions, making it difficult to track which teaching changes produced which results. The other key question was whether first-year teaching interventions could create a foundation for ongoing success in future learning.

## 2. Introduction

The process of developing improved ways of teaching AD happened over the three years in which I led the first-year AD course. By the end of this time there was an ever-improving pass-rate in the course, and it also seemed that students who had done the revised course continued to perform successfully afterwards. This merited a formal study, which was accepted as a PhD proposal, and is described in detail in the dissertation (Janse van Rensburg, 2015). The objective of the retrospective study, conducted after the changes in teaching had been completed, was to confirm whether these changes had indeed improved learning outcomes, whether these outcomes were sustained after completing the course, whether equal opportunities could be created by using this model, and to produce a theoretical model that could be applied in similar contexts.

AR principles had been followed from the beginning using a practice mode with a strong secondary emancipating mode (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2003), but the retrospective study required a shift to a knowledge-generating mode which presented additional methodological challenges. This paper also aims to describe the methods that were used to meet the criteria of dependability/reliability and process validity in a situation where student feedback and certain types of evidence were not consistently collected when the interventions started, and where continued outcomes could only be assessed after some time had elapsed. I believe that this can provide a precedent for similar studies where some data can only be collected after the actual interventions have been completed.

The contribution of this paper to the field of AR is therefore two-fold: It addresses the question of how equitable academic success can be facilitated in diverse learning communities, as well as how to produce valid AR in a context where one has to resort to retrospective data collection.

The action outcome of this study was that students' overall academic outcomes improved, and there was a much more equitable distribution of marks in the class, as we developed strategically sequenced educational tasks to build a foundation of social and academic skills while teaching the formal syllabus. This pattern of improved performance continued as these students progressed into subsequent years of study. This research is relevant in many diverse learning communities where disparities in prior experience can polarise or enrich learning, particularly in the escalating context of global migration.

# Healing assessment trauma: an experience of mutuality in Action Research

Reynaldo O. Cuizon

**Abstract:** Learning assessment is a pedagogical reality such as in teaching professional education courses with preservice education students. Assessment problems like horrifying and boring test papers must be addressed because these cause trauma to learners. Using an Action Research Method, I subjected my test materials to democratic critiquing and enhancement process, taking-into account the experiences of my learners and the viewpoints of my colleagues as my study participants. Said materials were utilized as my pedagogical action to address student assessment animosity. The results made me discern that though the contents of my test papers were aligned with the learning outcomes defined by the Commission on Higher Education, they were merely words and sentences in monotone appearance and thus, not eye-catching. Consequently, I crafted a Holistic Written Assessment Guide (HWAG) ensuring in test paper construction the pedagogical values of multiple intelligences, learning taxonomies, grammar review necessity, proper coverage and level of difficulty sequencing and marking, and time-number of items balance. Utilizing this new form and substance of my learning assessment material and engaging with it turned out to be liberating thus mutual healing to me as a transformed purveyor of education, to my students as healthy collaborators, creators and ultimate beneficiaries of learning, and to educators in the global environment as inspirers of democratic, equitable, and lifelong education. With this mutuality, this paper potentially enables leaders of nations to engage in the transformation of the pedagogical landscape.

**Keywords:** Healing from assessment trauma, test material enhancement, experience of mutuality, action research

## **Sanando el trauma de la evaluación: una experiencia de mutualidad en la Investigación Acción**

**Resumen:** La evaluación del aprendizaje es una realidad pedagógica en contextos tales como la enseñanza de cursos de educación profesional para estudiantes de magisterio. Es importante hacer algo en relación con problemas de evaluación tales como los tests horripilantes y aburridos porque generan traumas a las personas en proceso de aprendizaje. Utilizando una metodología de Investigación Acción, expuse mis tests a un proceso de crítica democrática y mejora, considerando las experiencias tanto de las personas en proceso de aprendizaje como de mis colegas. Dichos materiales constituyeron mi acción pedagógica para gestionar la animosidad de los estudiantes ante la evaluación. Los resultados me hicieron ver que, aunque los contenidos de mis tests estaban alineados con los resultados definidos por la Comisión de Educación Superior, eran simplemente palabras y frases de apariencia monótona y, en consecuencia, no llamaban la atención. Consecuentemente, preparé una Guía Holística para la Evaluación Escrita (GHEE), asegurándome que los tests tenían en cuenta los valores ped-



agógicos de la multiplicidad de inteligencias, las taxonomías de aprendizaje, la necesidad de revisar la gramática, cobertura y nivel de dificultad adecuadas de las secuencias y puntuaciones, y el equilibrio entre el tiempo disponible y el número de ítems. Utilizar estas nuevas forma y substancia de mi material de evaluación del aprendizaje y comprometerme con ello resultó ser un proceso liberador y mutuamente curativo, tanto para mi como educador, como para mis estudiantes y colaboradores, creadores y últimos beneficiarios del aprendizaje. También puede ser liberador para educadores en el contexto global que quieran ser inspiradores de una educación a lo largo de la vida democrática e igualitaria. Con esta mutualidad, este artículo podría, potencialmente, ayudar a los líderes de distintas naciones a comprometerse en la transformación del panorama educativo.

**Palabras clave:** curación del trauma de la evaluación, mejora de materiales para tests, experiencia de mutualidad, Investigación Acción

## Rationale

Learning can be traumatic. Conversely, trauma hinders learning. Learners, either in micro or macro classrooms, often succumb to learning assessment trauma. Neither they nor their teachers can face it alone and not even the world can impose what the curative measures are. The healing action tried out in this study was mutually experienced by the learners, the teacher, and the educators in the global learning environment radiating with the sustainable development goals for education.

This study explores on what shapes the assessment trauma in learners and what mechanism is adaptable to address it. It appreciates the insights of the teacher and students being both instigators and beneficiaries of learning emerging from their assessment trauma and sharing healing experiences. Correspondingly, their healing is imperative to the attainment of the global targets for quality education. Hence, this study does not only determine assessment trauma as a classroom problem and create a curative response to reverse its devastating effect on learners, but also attempts to spread the healing experience instigated by democratic action in a minute educational classroom to a traumatic global educational environment.

In drawing out the viewpoints and insights emerging from experiencing the problematic learning assessment, from observing how it shatters learners, and acknowledging the healing effect of Holistic Written Assessment Guide undertaken as intervention, this study applied and consequently attested the value and usefulness of so-called first, second and third person dynamism of Action Research. In this venture, the dynamics of mutuality is articulated along the processes of diagnosing the problem, action planning, taking-action, evaluating the action, and specifying learning. These processes were undertaken by 37 students as direct study participants, the teacher as the researcher, and 3 invited co-teachers as process observers.

## A slow and steady journey with Action Research

Interview with Malida Mooken

Malida Mooken, Danilo Streck, Miren Larrea

### **Danilo and Miren:**

You are from Mauritius, you studied in Scotland, and you live in Canada. How do you think this has influenced your perspective on the global challenges we are facing nowadays?

### **Malida:**

My perspectives of current global challenges are indeed shaped by where I come from, where I have been, and where I am: geographically and also culturally, philosophically, and emotionally. I often find myself positioned in more than one place or space, living in-between, back and forth, unsettled.

After my first degree and subsequently working for a few months in an offshore management company, I left Mauritius to undertake a Master degree at the University of Birmingham, in England. That was in 2007. The Master programme had a strong basis in industrial economics and I gained a critical appreciation of capitalism, globalisation, governance, and the impact of those on the competitiveness, and socio-economic development of industries, localities, regions, and countries. The scholarly work of Roger Sugden and Keith Cowling, especially *Transnational Monopoly Capitalism* had a significant influence on my thinking. My enhanced understanding of those issues led me to take a more critical look at the socio-economic development of Mauritius, which is often portrayed as an “economic success story in Africa” and I read about development in other small state economies. My concerns were centred on the effect of globalisation, activities of transnational corporations, and premature deindustrialisation. Those concerns were also tied in to my personal observations (from a young age) of changes taking place, for example in the textile industry, and the more general and increasing emphasis on the service sector in Mauritius.

I later moved to Scotland for my doctoral studies. There, I found myself mostly interested in reading philosophical texts by John Dewey, Jürgen Habermas, Paulo Freire: to name a few. A significant and lasting influence on understanding socio-economic issues has been the human development and capability approach (HDCA) developed by Amartya Sen and other scholars such as Martha Nussbaum, Sabina Alkire, and Ingrid Robeyns. A fundamental concern of the approach is with freedom and human flourishing, inspired by the works of Aristotle, Adam Smith, Rabindranath Tagore, among others. From reading Sen, I got interested in *On Liberty* by John Stuart Mill and the much less discussed book of Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. The “human” substantive individual and collective freedoms, relational aspects, value judgments, choice, action and consequences became more central in my thinking.

An offer of a postdoctoral research position at the University of British Columbia brought me to British Columbia in Canada. My experience here has triggered reflections about the in-