



IN5000 - Qualitative Research Methods Action Research

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Learning objectives

For this topic, you should be able to...

- Describe the basic principles of Action Research (AR)
- Compare AR to other qualitative research methodologies
- Reflect on and discuss the potential relevance of AR for your own research project
- Discuss the relationship between AR and different qualitative research paradigms (e.g., interpretivism and positivism)

Why learn about Action Research?

- Adding to the 'buffet' of relevant methodologies for your own research: May be relevant as methodology for the master project of some of you
- Action Research is a common methodology within Information Systems (IS) research; helps you understand the basis of the academic literature you read
- Helps illustrate characteristics of other methodologies such as case studies with contrasting approaches.

Exercise

Exercise

For one minute: note down some bullet points for the following question:

- What do you think when you hear 'Action Research'?

What's the "Action"?

What's the Action?

Two relevant types of research methodologies:

- Methodologies for exploring 'what is' - ***descriptive or explanatory*** (e.g., case studies)
- Methodologies for exploring 'what can be' - ***constructive or interventionist*** (e.g., action research, design research)

What's the Action?

- In contrast to case studies where we study a system “as is” - in AR, interventions in the system (action) are systematically planned, introduced, and evaluated.
- AR thus involves an interest in participating in *change*, and developing a deeper understanding of a phenomenon through processes of change

Exercise

Consider the following research question:

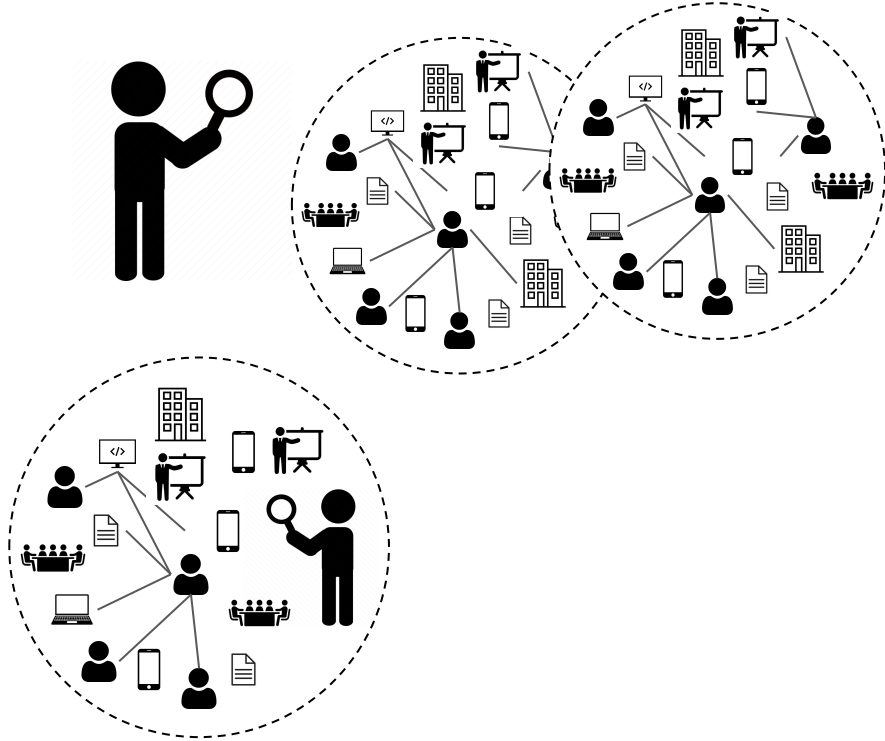
- How can software development organizations strengthen their focus on end-user involvement in their software development practices?

For 1 minute: note down some bullet points for the following questions:

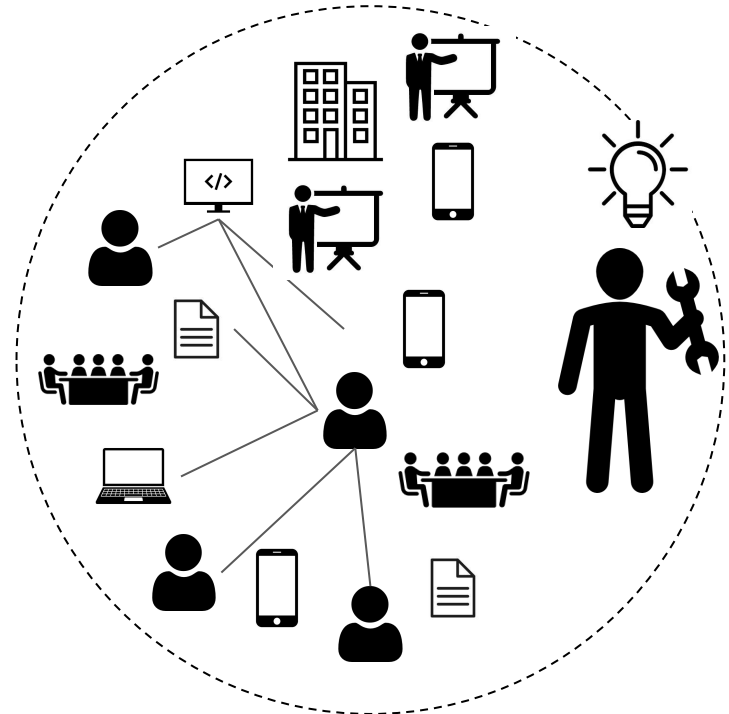
- How could you go about exploring this research question?
- Could it involve AR?

Action Research = interventionist

Case study



Action Research



Action Research = interventionist

Interventions could be:

- Introducing new IT-artifacts
- Introducing new methods, standards, and processes / changing practice
- Competence building / human capacity
- Changing organizational structures / responsibilities / roles
- +++

Action Research = engaged

- Another key trait of Action Research is that it is 'engaged'
- Means that the researcher collaborate with practitioners in defining, diagnosing, and addressing problems relevant to the organization and to research.
- Good for relevance!

Key principles (Davison et al., 2004)

Key principles (Davison et al., 2004)

1. Principle of the Researcher – Client Agreement
2. Principle of the Cyclical Process Model
3. Principle of Theory
4. Principle of Change through Action
5. Principle of Learning through Reflection

1. Principle of the Researcher – Client Agreement

Researcher(s)

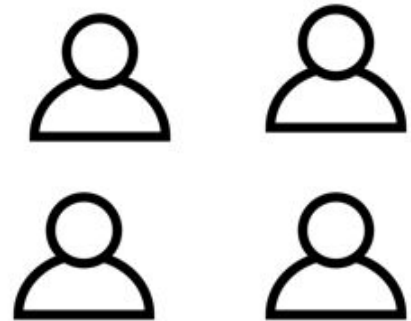


- Competence
- Research interests



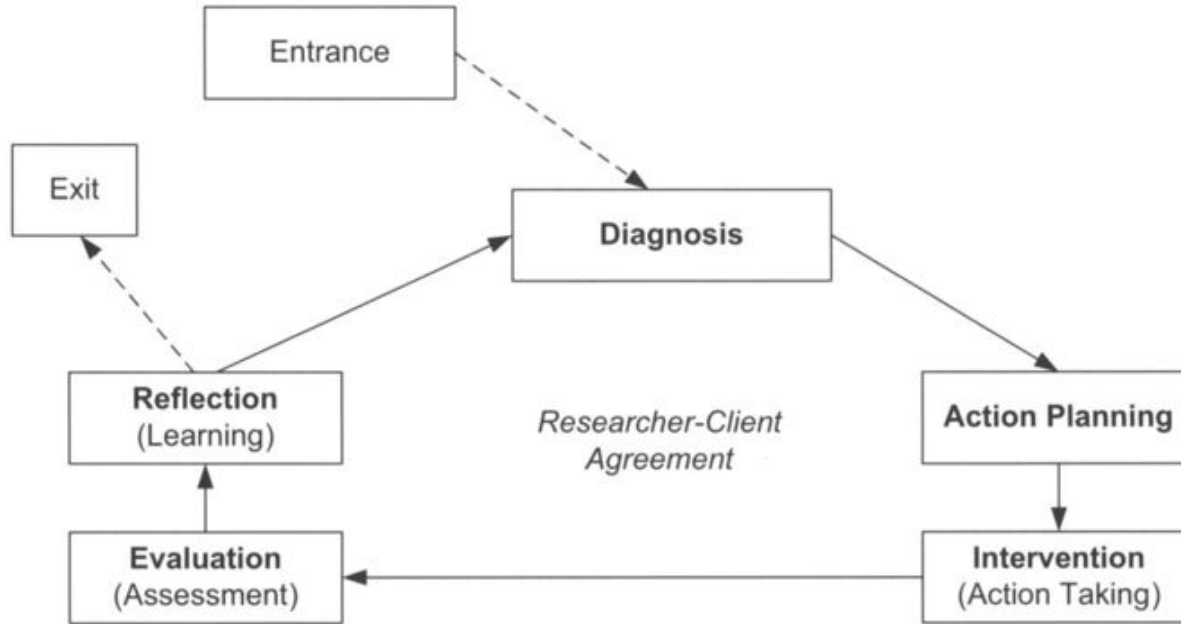
- Mutual interest
- Agreement on practical and academic outcomes
- Obligations and expectations
- Involvement - how
- Dynamic relationship!

Practitioners



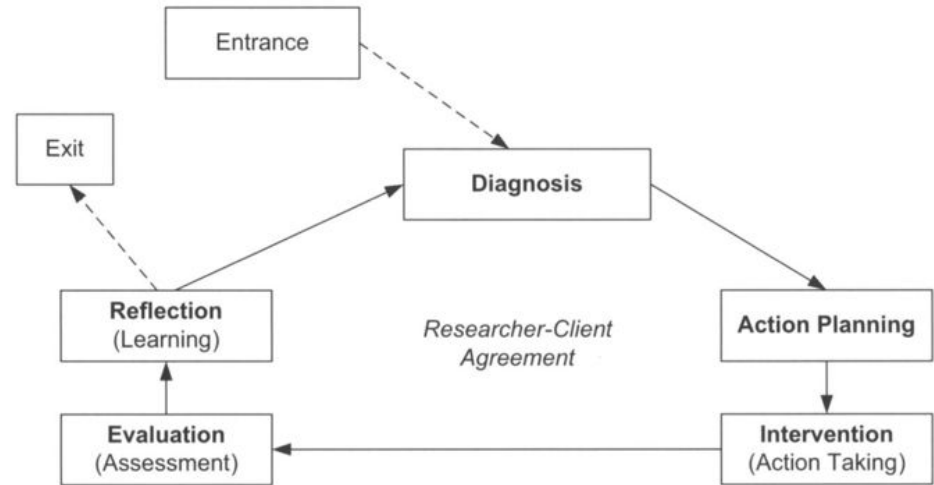
- Competence
- Practical interests

2. Principle of the Cyclical Process Model

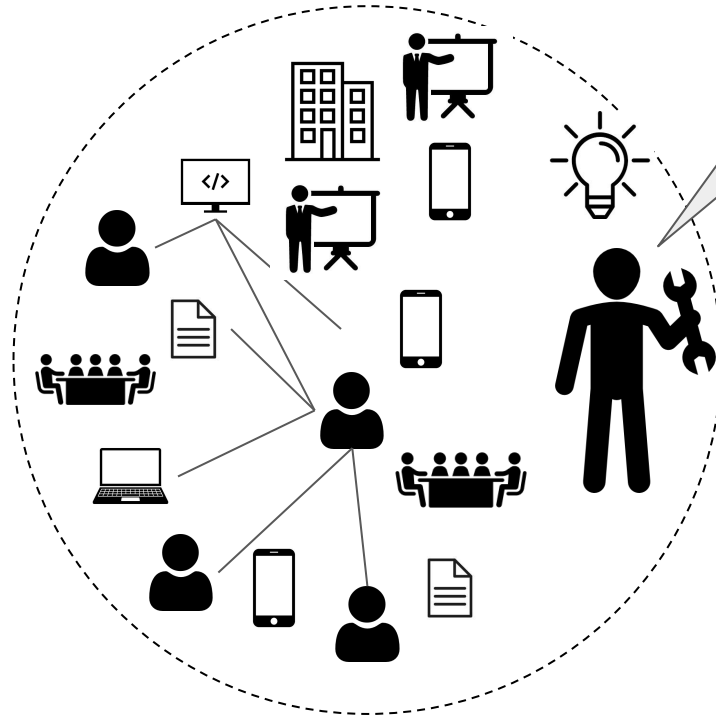


2. Principle of the Cyclical Process Model

- Many specific methods for data collection are relevant within the various stages of action research cycles.
 - Interviews
 - (Participant) observation
 - Document analysis
 - System logging
 - Virtual observation
 - Film and photo
 - Quantitative methods



3. Principle of theory

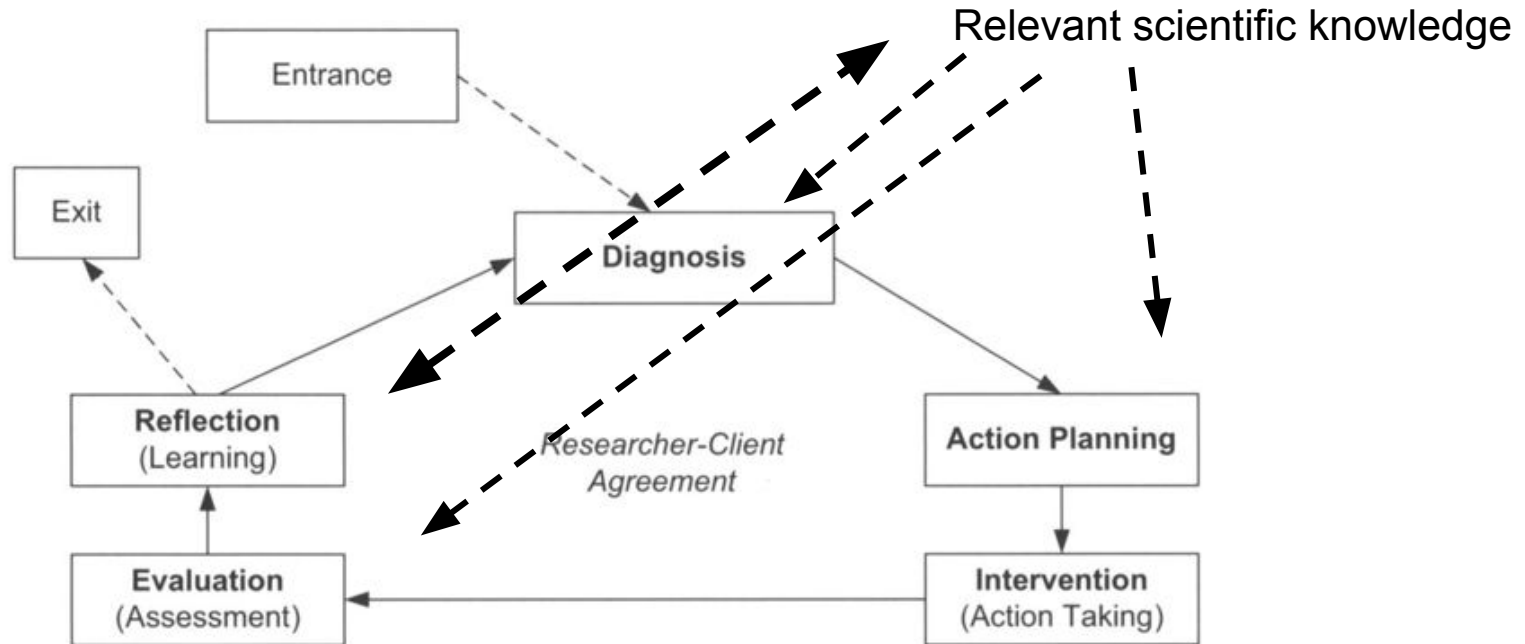


What do we already know from other somewhat similar problematic situations?

Are there concepts that can be useful to guide our understanding?

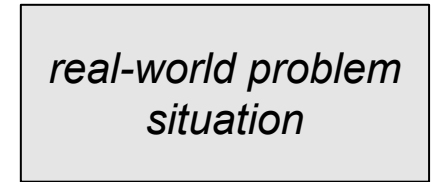
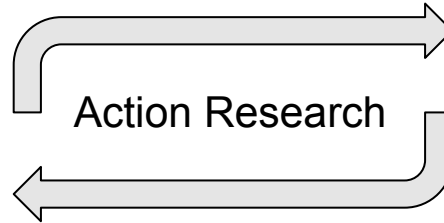
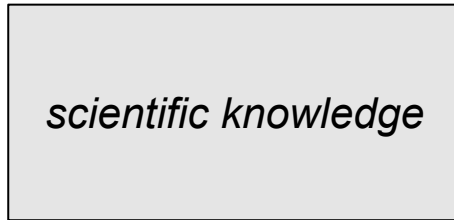
3. Principle of theory

E.g., theory on systems integration is used to guide diagnosis, action planning, analysis in evaluation and reflection + contributed back to following reflection



3. Principle of theory

What is going on here?
What kind of situation is this?
Why is X happening?
How do Y emerge?



Findings and conceptual schemes on similar problem situations

relating specific real-world situation to 'abstract' type of situation

Empirical data on the nature of the problem situation

“abductive leap” (Van de Ven, 2007), “alternative casings” (Timmermans et al., 2012)

4. Principle of change through action

- (Positive) change related to the problem of focus is obviously the goal of 'action' in action research.
- "A lack of change in the unsatisfactory conditions suggests that
 - there was no meaningful problem,
 - that the intervention failed to address the existing problem(s),
 - or that the existing situation could not be altered because of political or practical obstacles that were neglected when the RCA was established."
(Davidson et al., 2005)

Informs further cycles of AR
- or research design! (we will
return to this later)

5. Principle of Learning through Reflection

- Learnings for both the client organization and related research is a key element.
 - To inform further action within the system/organization of study
 - Action in similar contexts
 - General knowledge about the problem and domain
 - On the methodology
- Research articles and theses
- For the client, continuous communication of learnings from the project is important.
 - Project reports (potentially co-written)
 - Workshops
 - Presentations

How to approach AR and engaged research more generally?

Difficult to plan for AR

- Real-world problem situations and collaborations with practitioners are highly dynamic
- Knowledge interests and possibilities for collaborations evolve
- Difficult to know in advance whether AR will be relevant and feasible
- Also, conditions may change rapidly during a project

A way of organizing engaged research, including AR

- Begin by framing collaborations as “engaged” and using descriptive/explanatory, e.g. case study-framing initially
- Based on a common interest in a problem situation relevant to research and practice
- Later, evolve into AR or other types of constructive/interventionist approaches when relevant
- Either way: co-formulation of problems!

Exercise

Exercise

For two minutes: note down some bullet points for the following questions:

- Could Action Research be relevant to your research project? Why (not)?

When and why?

- When there is a desire, relevance, and opportunity to explore 'real-life' problems by testing out potential solutions in real-life contexts
- Active collaboration between researcher and practitioners or «engaged scholarship» can benefit research and have direct contributions to practice.
- Practitioners are experts on the 'real world' situation, while researchers have time and space to reflect on practices and challenges in light of theory and related research
- **Possible:** frame as “engaged research” and start descriptive and turn into AR if relevant (e.g., case study to serve as part of the *diagnosis*)

Research Paradigms: Ontology and epistemology

Exercise

For two minutes: note down some bullet points for the following question:

- Are the following research paradigms (views of the nature of knowledge and nature of the phenomenon of examination) is compatible with AR?

Positivist?

Interpretivist?

Critical?

Other?