

Action Research

Transformation Of Knowledge Creation



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INTENTION TO OFFER:

Basic definition and elements of action research.

How it contrasts and complements conventional social science.

- **Multi-dimensionality of the work of action research**
- **Emancipatory and practical, not just descriptive, science.**
- **First, Second and Third person research/practice with illustration.**

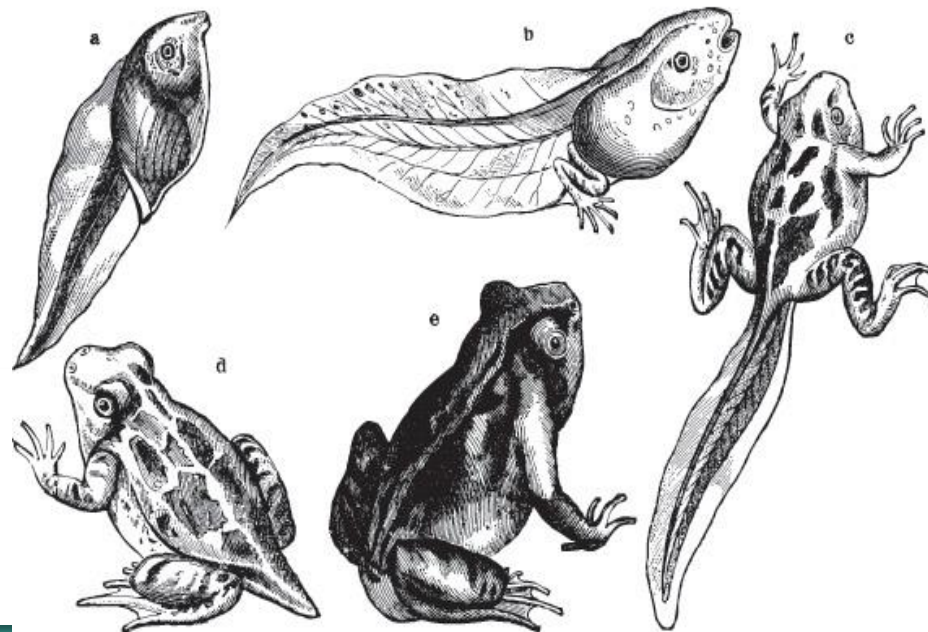
Further: Sage Publications Handbook of Action Research. Eds., Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury.

- **Action Research, a peer reviewed Sage Publications journal.**

Defining Action Research

...seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people.

- Reason & Bradbury, 2001a:1



What is knowledge for? The purpose of knowledge is so rarely debated ...

And what of validity?! See digital poster on “Quality in Action Research.” Or Bradbury-Huang, 2010. What is good action research?

Action researchers act within complex social change from a stance of reflexivity, inter-subjectivity and pragmatism.

SCIENCE BEYOND OBJECTIFICATION



How about some
inter-subjectivity
then?!

**To objectify: to reduce to a
mere object**

**Requires separation,
abstraction, judgment**

**While a subject is active,
with agency, an object is
passive, being acted
upon...**

The primacy of the practical

Eric Trist 1951 asks:

**What accounts for high vs. low production/
how to create more high producers?**

**In 1970 Orlando Fals Borda seeks
liberationist reconstruction that
brings science and popular knowledge
together.**



ACTION RESEARCH CAN ALSO COMPLEMENT CONVENTIONAL SCIENCE

CONVENTIONAL

Descriptive

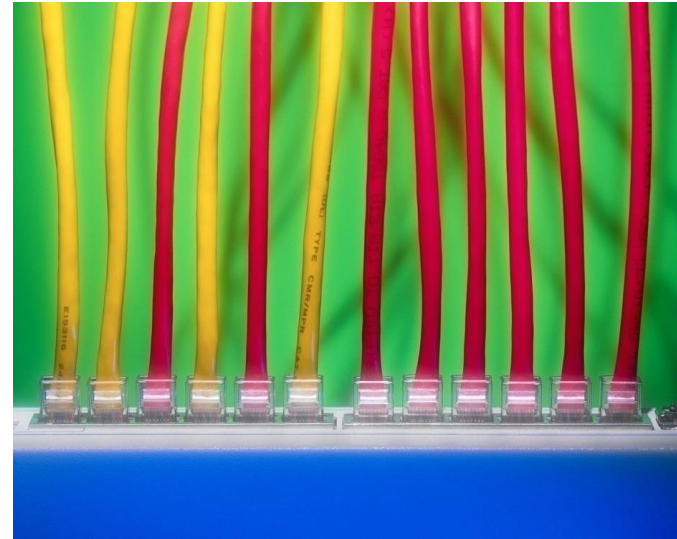
About the past.

Focus on third parties

Aimed understanding

Ostensibly values free

Controlled studies for replication



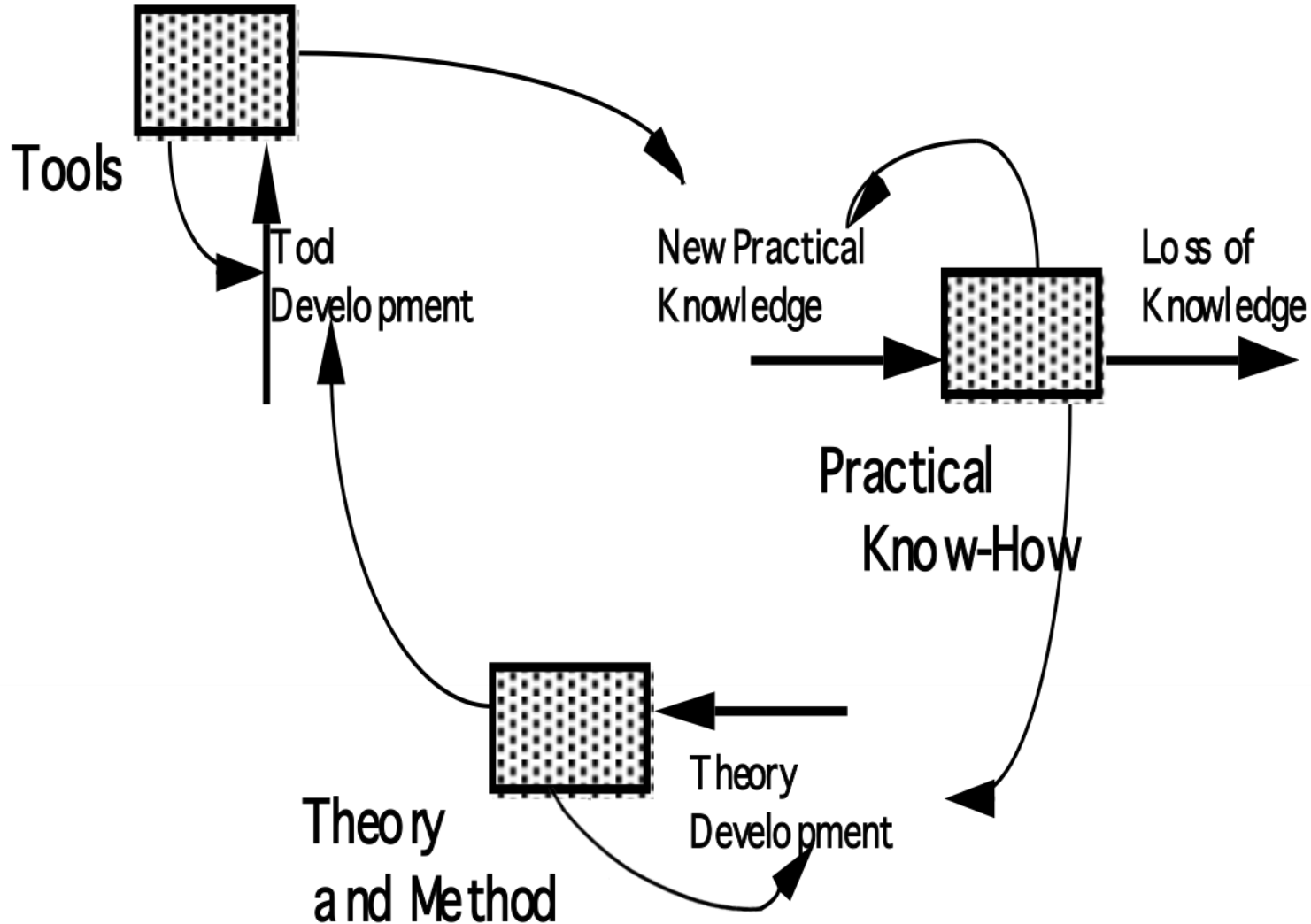
Action research is a critical, transformative science.

It's not about describing reality or seeking to be an agent of technical mastery.



Relational (therefore emergent, responsive)
Include the future
Integrate personal reflexivity
Coordinate action and understanding
Contribute to human/eco flourishing

Scharmer & Senge: Community of Scholars and practitioners



2nd person action research/”with you”

- Refers to action research that is conducted face to face in small groups emphasizing learning together
 - Can include consulting where there is agreement to share the work through publication. Calls for skill in facilitation and learning processes.



MAS ECOFACTORY: UNDERSTANDING FOR CHANGING. PETER REASON'S LOW CARBON WORKS.



PETER REASON: UNDERSTANDING LOW CARBON WORKS.



Quadrant 1

Individual
subjective
factors

Quadrant 2

Individual
objective
factors



Quadrant 3

Collective
subjective
factors

Quadrant 4

Collective
objective
factors



Ballard after Wilber

EXPLORING CONTEXTS - FACILITATING CHANGE



Quadrant 1
Individual subjective

Ready for
action

Quadrant 2
Individual objective

Relevant
skills



Quadrant 3
Collective subjective

Cultural
impetus

Quadrant 4
Collective objective

Opportunity



Ballard after Wilber

Organizational Learning History: Example of Second Person ACTION RESEARCH

Documenting success and convening collaborative conversations is key to powerful, long lived transformations ...

Gearty, Bradbury, Reason.
Management Learning.
Forthcoming, 2014.

The organizational learning history process and product

- Sought multiple perspectives on results to support knowledge transfer.
- Convened cross system stakeholder dialogues in a neutral space.
- Pioneered whole system maps to highlight leverage points for entire system.
- Coordinated action across silo's where indicated.
- Facilitated and managed new collaborative projects with breakthrough results.
- Shared results; Published case studies
- Grew the regional system into global learning networks

Application

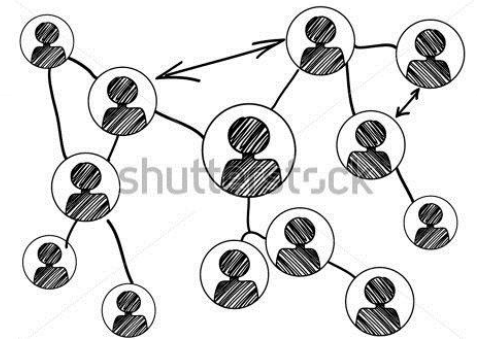
- Used to expand Sustainable Development efforts (e.g., The Natural Step) from Northern Europe to USA
- Used extensively in Carbon reduction efforts in England and The Netherlands.
- Used to support leadership development among physicians at an academic medical center.

3rd person action research/”for them”

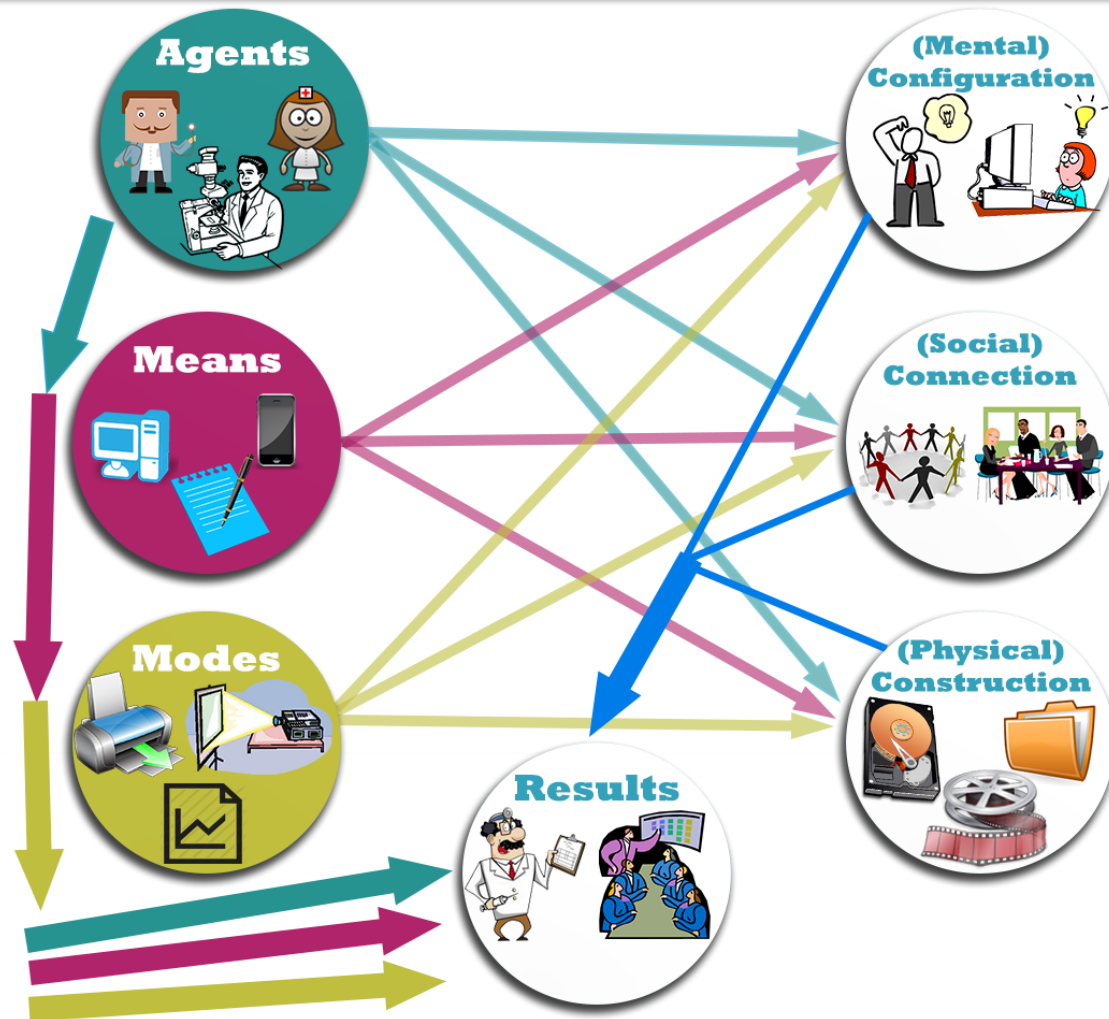
- Refers to action research that moves through *populous networks*
 - and/or work made widely available through publication and peer review because it has the potential to inform other distant efforts.

Exemplar: Bjorn Gustavsen’s work in Scandinavia on democratic workplaces

- Including employees in the design of work
- Evolved to socio technical systems.



Socio-Technical Networks: Only connect!



Sustainable Enterprise Executive Roundtable (SEER)

SEER enabled organizational learning among business leaders using the Port of LA, so that more sustainable practices result.

Led by Hilary Bradbury-Huang.

Follow up reading: Bradbury-Huang, H., 2010. Sustainability as Collaboration: The SEER Case. *Organization Dynamics*. 39(4).



VOLVO

CDM





Alameda Corridor

VOLVO

Workshops

SEER

Decision Makers



System
Dynamics
Scenarios

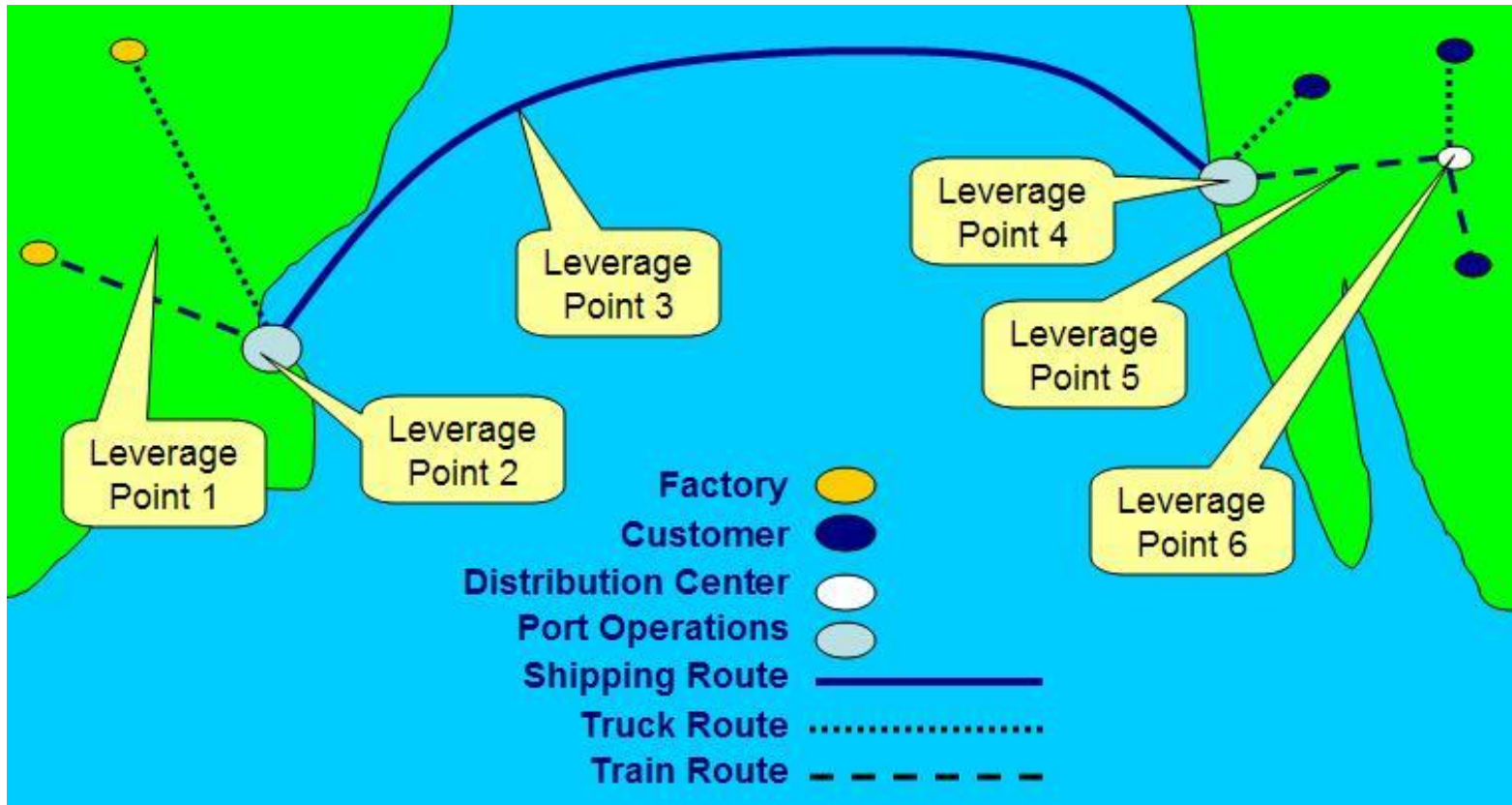


2.5 5 10 Miles



Leverage Point...carbon reduction

Systems intervention for carbon reduction
Counterintuitive insights about infrastructure!



1st person action research/"I/me"

- Refers to action research with the self that hones self insight and capacity for choiceful action.
 - Situates the self as an instrument of understanding and change, committed to self development.

- Key foundations:
 - Heron's development of humanistic inquiry; relational inquiry; spiritual science.
 - Choicefulaction: <http://peterreason.eu/Papers/choicefulactionandquality.pdf>

Palliative care study and the collaborative self



- 12 weeks, daily mindfulness practice with individual and team coaching.
- 100% “highly satisfied.”
- Positive impact at personal and patient and organizational levels.
- Unexpected benefits to “being seated in my groove.”



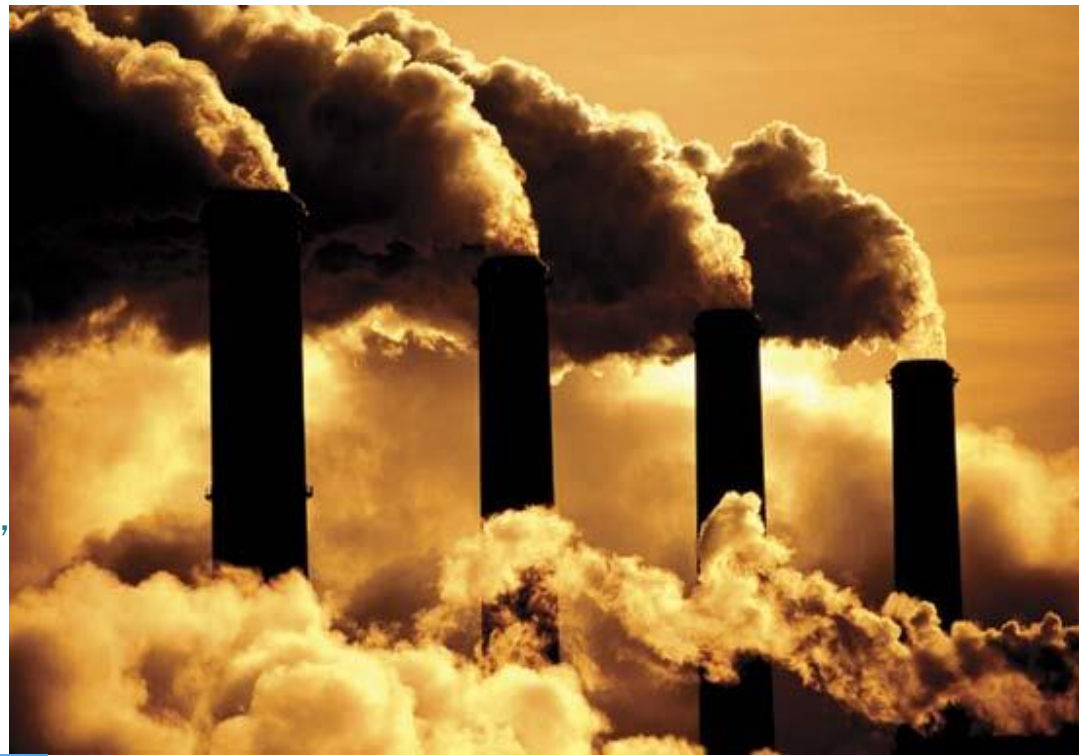
Bradbury-Huang, 2014 (forthcoming). Collaborative Selflessness: Toward an experiential understanding of the emergent ‘responsive self’ in a care-giving context. *Journal Applied Behavioral Science*.



What approach to science supports your vision of a sustainable world?



Action research offers a prototype of an ‘integrating, transformative science’ in support of a more sustainable world for all.



“We can describe, in ever finer detail, the world we have now, or we can foment a revolution.”

-- Paraphrasing Dana Meadows on sustainability.