Week 6 Weekly Notes

Week 6: Organisational dynamics in action research

Key Reading

Here is the required reading for this week:

Module Texts

  - Chapter 5, ‘Designing and Implementing Your Action Research Project’
  - Chapter 6, ‘Interlevel Dynamics in Insider Action Research’
  - Chapter 7, ‘Using Frameworks to Study Organizations in Action’

Introduction

This week you are introduced to the notion of designing your action research project. Coghlan and Brannick (2010) Chapter 5 focusses mostly on organisational change and introduces some overarching frameworks for you to consider while designing action research, such as whether the scale of change that you are considering is limited, focussed or holistic, and whether the approach you are considering is one of directed, planned or guided change. Considering these factors, however provisionally at this point, should help you think strategically about your possible dissertation project.

Reflection for praxis

Activities like Coghlan and Brannick (2010) Exercise 5.2 are of vital importance and are worth repeating often during your academic programme and throughout your practice of action research. Such activities challenge you to reflect before and after action, anticipating what you intend to do and how it actually works out, and what you think about it. What is particularly salient about such exercises is how the questions a) challenge you to think about action, and b) challenge you to think about theory.
Remembering that action research is about action and research, such activities are central to the process of action research.

**Interlevel dynamics in insider action research**

Coghlan and Brannick (2010) provide a general framework that integrates a number of people-focused themes in organisations. The authors describe four levels of engagement in an organisation: individual, team, interdepartmental group and organisational. The term *interlevel dynamics* refers to how each of these is interconnected with each of the others. It is the interlevel dynamics that are often the critical features in organisational change and strategy.

**Levels of analysis**

Levels of analysis are commonly used as frameworks for researching, understanding and intervening in organisational systems (Harrison, 2005). The term *levels of analysis* refers to the identification of issues as units of complexity, such as the individual, the group, the intergroup and the organisation. Levels of analysis are important dimensions in action research. Chapter 6 of your Coghlan and Brannick text extends the traditional focus of levels of analysis beyond a target for research to the notions of levels of aggregation or interlevel dynamics. The authors explore how interlevel dynamics are important in doing action research in your own organisation.

**Using frameworks to understand organisations in action**

Levels of complexity—including individual, group, intergroup and organisational levels—are frequently used as frameworks for understanding organisational processes. Chapter 7 of Coghlan and Brannick (2010) opens up a discussion of how you might use frameworks to help you understand what is going on in your organisation. As the opening paragraph notes, there is no shortage of frameworks. Every textbook is full of them; some you may already know and find useful. General frameworks map the relationships between elements such as purpose, strategy, structure, rewards systems etc. Within particular fields there are more specific frameworks. However, in your research, you cannot simply adopt a framework because you like it or find it useful. You need to be able to critique it and demonstrate its strengths and weaknesses. You should have insight into how your framework as a way of seeing is also a way of not seeing. The chapter points to systems thinking particularly as an important framework. Exercise 7.2 at the end of the chapter provides an opportunity for you to explore your understanding of your organisation in systemic terms.
References

