

Working with Insider Action Research

Sunday 2pm-5pm

5th September 2010

Bayview Eden

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When complete members of an organization seek to inquire into the working of their organizational system in order to change something in it, they can be understood as undertaking insider action research (IAR). Complete members are contrasted with individuals who are members of another organization and enter a system temporarily for the sake of conducting research. Insider action research offers a unique perspective on systems, precisely because it is from the inside. Insiders have a deep level understanding of the business context, its dynamics, its evolution and performance. The contextually-based insights coupled with the collaborative inquiry process allow for the generation of new scientific knowledge and simultaneously help the organization to continuously examine existing capabilities and develop new capabilities. As such it bridges the theory-practice gap in a unique manner.

why

Doing research in and on one's own organization means that a member of an organization undertakes an explicit research role in addition to the normal functional role that they hold in the organization. The researcher then has to balance their organizational role, which they usually hope will continue, with the additional demands of a role of inquiry and research. Insider action researchers need to be aware of how their roles influence how they view their world as well as how they are perceived by others, and to be able to make choices as to when to step into and out of each of the multiple roles they hold.

what

There are many issues to be considered for those embarking on research in their own organization or part thereof. From the perspective of individuals who are seeking to do the research in order to achieve academic certification, there are issues of gaining access and receiving permission, and building and maintaining support from peers and relevant sub-systems within the organization. There are issues of selecting a research question and area for study. In such a case, student-researchers, in effect, take on an additional role to their conventional organizational one, that of active agent of inquiry and change. This multiple role identity both complicates and focuses the research project. There are issues around how to attain some sense of objectivity and move beyond a personal perspective by testing assumptions and interpretations. There are the uses of appropriate frameworks for viewing and understanding the data. There are questions about how to write up such a research project, give feedback to one's superiors and peers, and disseminate the research to the wider community. Handling interpretations or outcomes which would be perceived negatively by the organization is a particularly sensitive issue. They are also likely to have access to 'external' academic supervisors who advise and support them throughout their research project.

Insider action research is an exciting, demanding and invigorating prospect that contributes considerably to researchers' own learning and contributes to the development of the systems in which we work, we live and with which we have affiliations. It also daunting, with a high potential for self-destruction, particularly if roles and politics are not managed well. So what does it take to do insider research? This workshop seeks to enable insight into the attributes, competencies and methodological tools that support effective practice.

The workshop will work on the issues in insider action research through questioning and collaborative exploration. Together we will explore the challenges of insider action research as scholarship as practice. Participants will leave with an increased awareness of how to undertake and/or supervise insider action research as a mode of scholarship while increasing understanding of organizations' capabilities to learn and to achieve their purposes.

how

In this workshop, participants will:

- Engage with fellow participants in exploring the questions they bring to the session around their insider action research projects thus helping participants to deepen their understanding of insider action research , skills in its use, and its capacity to develop personal, professional and organizational capabilities.
- Provide opportunities for collective, public reflection and dialogue to mutually examine strengths and limitations of insider action research as a scholarship of practice.

The two facilitators bring wide experience of working with this topic

who

Dr David Coghlan lectures in organisation development at Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland. He is the international scholar who has developed the theory and practice of insider action research through several books, numerous articles and teaching, including [Doing Action Research in Your Own Organization](#) with Dr Teresa Brannick and the *Fundamentals of Organization Development 4vols* <http://people.tcd.ie/dcoqhlan>

Associate Professor Rosalie Holian in the School of Management at RMIT University has also written about the topic and works extensively with managers engaging in insider action research. In 2007 David and Rosalie co-edited a special issue of *Action Research* on 'Insider Action Research'. 5, 1, Mar 2007. www.rmit.com.au/browse:ID=442ik7gad7qo

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