“A Critical Perspective on Action Research as a Method for Information Systems Research”

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Structure of this presentation

- Origins of Action Research
- Description of the method
- Problems with the method
- How to use it (and avoid the problems)
- Summary
Origins of Action Research

- Developed in the socially troubled time after WWII
- Lewin is credited with developing the method, in order to study social psychology within the framework of field theory.
- Tavistock institute: Psychological and Social disorder
- Scientist and Therapist; trying to understand and cure at the same time
Origins of Action Research 2

- Action research - a paragon (model) of the post-positivist research methods
- Checkland: Uses Action Research in the study of systems development and introduced Action Research to Information Systems (IS)
- Action Research is today mostly used in IS studies.
Description of the method 1

- The method in principle contains two stages
  - Diagnostic
  - Therapeutic
Description of the method 2

- **Scientific rigour demands more structure**
  1. Client-system infrastructure
  2. Diagnosing
  3. Action planning
  4. Action taking
  5. Evaluating
  6. Specifying learning

![Diagram showing the six stages of the method](image-url)
Problems 1

- Action Research grew out of social sciences but has not been adopted widely by this field

- Adopted by IS, that traditionally uses positivistic quantitative methods, therefore it has failed to compete well for funding
Problems 2

- IS research has been criticised widely for methodological issues and sloppy execution

- Specific problems: Lack of impartiality, lack of rigour, consulting masquerading, context-bound

- Three dilemmas: Ethics, goals and initiatives
How to use Action Research 1

- The text tries to justify Action Research and claims that many of the problems are common to other research methods too. Nevertheless the challenges are real and must be met:
  - Consideration for the paradigm shift
  - Establishment of a formal research agreement
  - Provision of a theoretical problem statement
Challenges continued…

- Planned measurement methods
- Maintain collaboration and subject learning
- Promote iterations
- Restrained generalisation
Summary 1

- Action Research is regarded by many as the ideal post-positivist social scientific research method for IS research.

- The present scientific institutions in IS favours the current philosophy of the natural sciences.
Summary 2

- Action Research is confronted by a number of problems
- Still action researchers can achieve scientific rigour through a number of strategies
- Action Research fits IS and its role can grow in this field