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

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ACTION RESEARCH

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 1

- 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
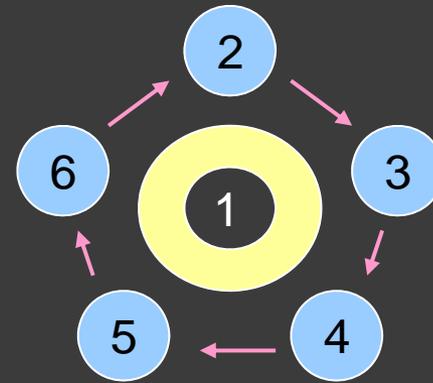
Origins of Action Research 2

- 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

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