Review

DOING ACTION RESEARCH IN YOUR OWN ORGANIZATION

by David Coghlan and Teresa Brannick. London: Sage, 2005.

Recently a new edition of Coghlan and Brannick (2005) *Doing Action Research in your Own Organization*, London: Sage (157 pages), was placed in my mailbox. I was eager to read the new edition since an earlier first edition was quite useful. The previous action research guide by Coghlan and Brannick (2000) *Doing Action Research in your Own Organization*, London: Sage, (128 pages), was popular with action researchers as it exposed readers to the essentials of action research. The earlier text detailed the action research cycle, the role of the participant (insider) action researcher and the difficulty of undertaking action research within your own organization. The later pages of the first edition described the implementation of the action research project (politics & ethics) via accessible terms and images. The new book has more depth and breadth.

While difficult, it is not impossible to illuminate some of the strengths of this second edition text within this review. First, *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organization* (2005) is a primary text for any person about to embark on an action research project. The allure of such a text is both its clarity and directness. For instance, there are easy-to-follow guides for those conducting an action research project within their own organization. Something most action researchers often require due to the recursive patterns within this research mode that can cause participants and facilitators to lose perspective and a sense of place within an inquiry. Second, the guidance and support for those doing action research projects will surely be welcome as Coghlan and Brannick supply detailed coverage of both theory and modes of action research. Current views of action learning, the role of the researcher within an organization is offered, and there are both exercises and aids to assist with the writing of your research.

Admittedly, this book, like the first edition, is indispensable reading for students however; the second edition will also ably support established academics who may be seeking an entry-point for action research in their own organizations. Three parts make up the text. These include, Part I – 'Foundations' that involve four chapters which review the history and note major contributors to action research such as Kurt Lewin who was a change manager and problem solver using this mode to generate new knowledge. Four steps also emerge in Part I which include, diagnosing, planning action, taking action and evaluating action. The steps are illustrated as a spiral which is recursive in several practical figures (images). Different kinds of reflexivity are presented and it is boldly stated that "action research focuses on knowledge in action" (p. 7).

Part I further details the complex dynamics of action research, as content, process and premise is discussed and illustrated. The text provides timely visuals to assist the reader as they may struggle to process this comprehensive text. Numerous exercises are outlined that deal with journal writing, inquiry skills and a johari window or learning window is offered as a tool for action research groups.

Part II of the text is constructed with five chapters that feature the philosophic elements of action research such as research selection, and managing your project within your organization via the political and ethical stances encountered. Each Chapter in Part II is realistic and helpful as preunderstanding is explored as a means to challenge what insiders believe they know about their organization. Researcher roles are addressed in terms of the duality sometimes encountered in action research efforts and the issue of access is examined in terms of degree and negotiation. The authors put forward the notion of primary and secondary access, and the level of commitment within a project, as key issues that can limit an inquiry.

One exercise located at the conclusion of Chapter 6 is titled: Force field analysis and outlines five steps the researcher can follow in order to realize the degree of barrier or extent of freedom a researcher has within any organizational research effort. Once completed what materializes is an understanding of 'undiscussables', power relationships and/or cover-ups. The last chapter in Part II is seven and contains a useful analysis of framing which is a "complex process" we are told. Certain words are explored such as 'problem' and contrasted with the word 'opportunity' which requires mental effort on the part of the reader since both convergent and divergent thinking is attached to these words and challenges the reader to grasp the meaning and orientation of these words within the action research arena. Chapter seven concludes with a critical warning that you must test and reexamine your decisions as data are gathered. Just to be sure an exercise, one of many in the book, requests that the action researcher ask themselves several questions to ensure that they are 'framing' and 'selecting' in a required action research manner.

Part III undertakes the task of explaining how to manage organizational politics, implement your inquiry and suggests how to select your project. These are not simple propositions since researchers will be confronted with the Status quo, power relations, and authority yet each topic is plainly examined. Sections such as 'determining the need for change' and 'learning by design' send the message that learning comes out of each phase and that reviewing the process and examining emergent questions about content, process and premise enhance learning. We are told that action research is about change and the reader needs to understand how people in organizations resist, which is apparently a normal and healthy reaction to change. First, and second order change is described and the text illuminates the terms "dodging" and "denial", two usual reactions to change. It is refreshing to read about 'change and learning' and be reminded that these two processes are complementary. This is followed by more material that illuminates the process of implementing your action research project. Finally, a much-appreciated section on writing an action research dissertation is included. I found that this section could create problems since I do not believe the process to be predictable nor formulaic!

In sum, this text was demanding and propelled me forward to reread and reexamine my own stance. You will need time to process the print, ideas, depth and breadth of this book. It will cause you to be constructive and realize that some of the new material really does not fit with your current understandings. For instance, "Postmodernism tends to adopt a hyper-reflexivity which focuses on reflexive deconstruction of your own practice "(Coghlan & Brannick, 2005, p. 6). You will however find yourself returning to this text as your own action research effort unfolds in a manner that embraces change and infuses learning.

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