Chapter 3.
What to Do and
How to Do It . . .

At this point, you probably have some ideas of what it is you would like to study, issues you would like to address, and changes you would like to see made. You may even have written parts of your proposal. In order to move forward, you need some practical information on what it is you actually need to do in an AR project. This chapter will give you the detailed instructions you need to complete each step of the AR cycle. Finally, if you are considering using a team or PAR approach, then you will need to learn how to build a good participatory team for your project. As in the last chapter, we use the term *AR* for those items that serve for both and *PAR* for any considerations particular to the use of AR in either a team or participatory approach. Should you need to reference those considerations, we discussed participatory research in Chapter 1.

This chapter will address the following questions:

- What do you do when you do AR?

- What are the practical actions
  in each step of the cycle?

- What do you do in the discovery phase?

- What do you do in the measurable action step?

- What do you do for reflection?

A student wanted to help prevent diabetes in African American women. She discovered the lifestyle risks for the disease. She then wrote and distributed a survey. Data showed that women wanted the information even if they didn't have the disease. She proceeded to develop presentations and classes to meet this need.

- What is reflexion or double-loop learning, and what do you need to do to become a critically reflexive practitioner?

- What are some examples of action research projects that other students have done in business, nonprofit, and public administration?

- What did these students actually do in each of the AR steps?

- What is the best way to build a participatory or team effort?

- What are some tools that can make your AR project easier?

What Do You Do When You Do Action Research?

At this point, you know that there are three steps to every AR cycle and that there may be multiple cycles to an AR project, depending on the size and complexity of the issue and the time you can devote to it. Our students who have to complete the project in a single class often do either one long or two short cycles. This section will go over each step with an overview and then discuss what we have seen students do during each step. This should help you both get ideas and begin to plan.

As examples, business students frequently look at either their own business settings (see Chapter 2 for our discussion on insider research) or work to aid organizations within their communities. As an example, in our current class, we have business

majors working with Big Brothers Big Sisters to aid them in finding male mentors for African American youth and with a green organization, helping them collaborate with others to spread their message in the community.

Students working in nonprofits frequently find the excuse to do a project for school handy as it allows them to research what their clients think of their services. We discuss one student who worked with his church on issues of retention. Other examples of student work include the following:

- Students in the military study the flow of products and services, communication, and supply chains.

- People in aviation study stress on the job.

- Health care providers frequently look for ways of improving practice.

- Public servants address how best to change their operations to meet the needs of a new administration.

- Students acting as citizens study how best to get the vote out on issues within their cities or towns.

What Are the Practical Actions in Each Step of the Cycle?

What Do I Do in the Discovery Phase?
We present the first step in AR as discovery because just the word invokes a sense of new possibilities. When life is full of new discoveries, we are open to

the potential of breaking past our limiting thoughts and taking on new ideas. Like explorers, the first step of AR reminds us to risk the unknown to come to the ideal of what we want to create. During the discovery process, you are generally looking for new ideas about what others have done in similar circumstances. This should include both published, recognized academic papers and a broad range of community resources.

Here are some hints that help the discovery process be exciting and invigorating (as all new learning can be):

1. Ask people in your community or business what they think of your project; collect ideas and opinions, then search the web for their validity in the broader environment.

2. Lay aside your assumptions about what you will find and explore web-based stories of people in similar situations, maybe in different industries, who have faced somewhat similar challenges.

3. Go several pages back in your browser search rankings; discover what tangential topics may be related to yours that you have not considered.

4. Do a library search on first your topic and then on other things by the same authors—what else are they involved in? Look in Google Scholar or EBSCO in your school's database. Look for both self-published and peer-reviewed documents to broaden your search.

5. See if you can find a web address for people whose work you respect. Write them e-mails explaining your ideas and your status as a

student. Ask them questions. They may not answer you—but it is just as likely that they will, and you gain access to discovering the thoughts of experts in your area of interest.

6. Whether or not you have decided to work in a participatory group, you can use part of your activities in the discovery cycle to brainstorm your ideas with others. Take notes, and then search the web for other phrases or connections that they suggest.

7. Search blogs for similar or related topics (http://blogsearch.google.ie/?tab=mb). When you find people blogging on topics interesting to you, be sure to comment—this too can start conversations that will help you discover new potential within your topic.

8. Do a similar search in websites such as YouTube, SlideShare, or Cooliris, and so on, to see if there are other types of media that relate to your topic, which will broaden the ideas you will consider.

9. Participate in forums on your topic or establish one in your virtual network (more on this in Chapter 6). Be sure to tell people you are doing research, and ask them if you can quote them whenever they share something that you may want to use later.

Keep notes or a log about what you are learning, and note the resources so that later, for the final report, if you need to cite and reference them, you can easily do so. When you feel ready to start to take measurable action, look over the log to notice and include any new ideas that will influence the measurable action step.

Discovery consists in seeing what everyone else has seen and thinking what no one else has thought.
—Albert Szent-Gyorgyi

The manager at a large company realized the project management software wasn't working. Her goal was to choose project management software that met everyone's needs. She discovered what the industry thought were the key concerns. She also interviewed staff about needs. The suggested software was shot down by the management, leading to the reflection that some opinions counted more than others.

Finally, in nonprofits and public administration, the consumer or client may well bring up issues of past treatment that require investigation by your AR project. This may require a short trip into hermeneutics or the investigation of archived e-mails, meeting minutes, or other artifacts to piece together previous organizational behaviors. These archival data may be the key to your discovery of past circumstances as they pertain to the story that started your investigation.

To further illustrate how the steps in AR work, we have included diagrams of student project steps throughout this chapter. In addition, you may want to consider the story of a businessman who asked, "Will participatory management work in a United States airline?" Utilizing a PAR team, his discovery step centered on finding out more about participatory management to uncover ways in which it could be or has been used. He also measured current practices and found "a festering matrix of poor communication, a general misuse of power that is producing an overall lack of trust and dissatisfaction with the way things were going in general; causing extreme low participation levels beyond any basic job duties" (Rose, 2010).

What Do I Do in the Measurable Action Step?

For measurement to be tied to action, you need to know the baseline, or where you were when you started, and that data has to be recorded. For many people, the first cycle of AR is exploratory. As an example, you may be starting from little or no knowledge or understanding of the things on which

you want to have impact, and therefore, you may want to give a survey to your community to better understand the situation. The baseline would be X (little or no understanding). You would research the topic, and that would take you to Y (enough understanding to make a survey or ask a questions), then you would pass out the survey and get back the data that would take you to point Z. The measurement then is the distance from X to Z. The ability to make that measurement accurately and in a defensible manner according to research standards requires that you take notes (gather data) at points X, Y, and Z.

Our colleagues in Australia have said that sometimes an AR cycle can last a few minutes. We translate that to mean that they have experienced a natural evolution from a new idea into a short measurable action, as we have. As an example, you may be propelled to call upon someone you know in order to verify or discuss something you uncovered in discovery—this could be seen as a measurable action because you first ask questions and then can measure the growth in your understanding as a result. It is not so important what you call your activity but that you keep your eyes on what you are discovering and doing and that you keep protocols for your reflections.

Some hints that help the measurable action process be defensible and concrete are:

1. Keep a three-column log. The first column records the date. The second contains a description of what you did. The third describes the result. You will quickly find that your big cycles are made up of lots of little measurable actions.

Reflective Questions

✦ What are some ideas you have about where to look for information on the Internet?
✦ Who are some people you can contact in your discovery phase?
✦ How do you plan to organize and document your discoveries?

A public administrator was unsure if the systems in place for disaster worked. He wanted to help public servants be more prepared for disasters. Discovering literature outlining the types of difficulties during disasters, he then surveyed all the workers in one section. There, he found confusion in roles and delivery of services. After this, he reflected on the good systems present but also the need for training.

2. Keep your eye on the purpose of your research—what it is you intend to do. You may want to draw a diagram with your baseline at the bottom and your purpose at the top. Write in activities as they make sense somewhere along the scale from beginning to where you want to end up.

3. Ask everyone in your participatory team to keep this kind of record, and start every meeting with a discussion of the measurable actions people have taken.

4. Ask AR virtual network members to jointly maintain a forum thread solely focused on measurable actions. Everyone should be invited to post there regularly.

Let us continue with the story of the student studying the airline he worked for. As mentioned earlier, he was investigating to what extent participatory management was apparent in his workplace and where it might be considered. In order to verify his team's strong opinions, they took action and measured company communication against variables such as honesty, kindness, and justice, which had been established in the literature as those that equate to high moral and ethical values (Ketola, 2006). By measuring and correlating the ideals of corporate culture against words used in company communication, his team reported, "Just having had the words justness, generosity, etc. in their work life increased their morale at work" (Rose, 2010).

Figure 3.1 outlines the way in which a student filled in his action process log by laying out his actions and his results week by week.

My Action Process Log		
Date	What I Did	The Result
First Week: Discovery	Arranged meetings with key stakeholders to better understand their concerns on the issue.	New directions for discovery result, how others have overcome these same hurdles.
Second Week: Discovery	PAR team meets and serves as inspiration and "center of creativity" for main student researcher.	New research ideas are generated
Third Week: Discovery	AR research is read and diagnosed as to the ways in which they measured outcomes.	Student also met with protagonist about the issue.
Fourth Week: First Measurable Action	Student met with the man he reports to. They discuss ideas and discovery steps to date.	Student receives positive feedback and the permission to move on.
Fifth Week: Action	Lots of actions are taken in the form of meeting with the representatives of all the stakeholders...	...but nothing results
Sixth Week: Action	More meetings...	...but still no results
Seventh Week: Measurement	Finally the project yields results:	Major stakeholder agrees to host meetings to escalate the new ideas and obtain permissions to institute change.
Eighth Week: Reflection	In final reflection the student researcher sees:	1) the planned seminars could not have happened without the deep discovery cycle, 2) having the data from other organizations was one of the convincing factors that helped change the minds of the stakeholders.

Figure 3.1

Reflective Questions

✦ What time management issues could come into your use of the action process log?

✦ If involved in a PAR project, how will your group merge reflections and logs?

✦ What project management protocols will you use to stay on track?

What Do I Do for Reflection?

There are two main parts to the reflective step of the AR cycle. The first is the internal process where you make meaning of what you have discovered and done, and decide what you want to do next. You want to keep your final report in mind, so it is helpful to develop a protocol for regular reflection (one possibility is discussed at the end of this chapter and Appendix A). Remember, this is the portion of the research around which all the other parts circle. Wicks, Reason, and Bradbury (2008) point out that, in their review of AR literature, authors frequently report the "importance of practice and life experiences and these as integrated with—and often preceding—philosophical, political, and intellectual underpinnings" (p. 15). Reflection and reflexion, both of which are covered in this section, become the central hub for those levels of understanding.

The second part of reflection, and the one that is somewhat critical to a university-based project, is your reflection on the role of the literature in your project development. For instance, let us suppose that your topic area is virtual leadership. You have used your library and found several research articles on virtual leadership, some of which have influenced your ideas and actions. Keeping the final report in mind, as you reflect on what you are learning, you tie it back into the literature that is influencing your thought. This should be done in such a way that you capture the citations and references as appropriate. The logic model discussed at the end of this chapter (and included as Appendix D) can be used to keep this type of reflective note.

Some hints that help the reflection step be of the most use to you in your final report include the following:

- Set up a protocol for regular reflection about each part of the AR cycle.

- Assign reminder notices to your calendar to ensure regular reflection throughout the AR process.

- If you are working in a PAR group or virtual network, set up protocols for sharing reflections and determining group consensus of what has been going on.

- Ask yourself: How do I really feel about how it is going? What could I be doing differently? What actions have I taken? Is this getting me where I want to go?

- Ask yourself how these ideas and what you are doing compare and contrast with things you have read. Make notes of the similarities and differences.

- Finish a reflection cycle with a list of next steps that you intend to take.

To finish the tale of our student researcher, upon reflection, he found that participative management is a good idea and its values would change the culture and improve morale. The PAR team quantified the benefits they found in morale from working with him on the project to be a 15% increase in team participation, averaging a new trust level of

31% overall. The desire to participate in their work beyond their required duties had risen.

What Is Reflexion, or Double-Loop Learning, and What Do I Need to Do to Become a Critically Reflexive Practitioner?

To go deeper into personal practice, not just as an action researcher but as a person in business working for nonprofits or in public administration, a practitioner needs to also develop ways and means to question his or her own behavior. Writing reflexions (how you respond to the situations you face as part of your research) is the key to this level of personal investigation.

To survive, you naturally build up habitual responses, but without being regularly questioned, these become prejudice, bias, or at the very least, behavioral traits that are taken for granted. Awareness of one's self is a precursor to work in AR and requires a degree of objectivity as to relative emotional intelligence (EI). EI is defined by Goleman (2006) as a set of competencies and skills that entwine four main positive human abilities: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. Cunliffe (2005) makes a striking case for the fact that professionals wanting to boost their professional skills (especially the soft skills of collaboration that are so necessary in modern work environments) require both self- and critical reflexivity.

In Chapter 2, we discussed double-loop learning, where you not only act, reflect, then act again

but act, reflect, and question your underlying motives, then reflect on what they mean to your behavior, and then act again (Argyris, 2002a; Argyris & Schön, 1978). Cunliffe (2005) and others who support reflexive work point out that merely working a regular reflective protocol into your work can indeed help to drive new kinds of practice but rarely touches the personal elements that ultimately control whether and how much any change initiative will work (Fletcher, Zuber-Skerrit, Brendan, Albertyn, & Kearney, 2010; Jones, 2010). Reflexivity requires that we suspend the part of us that wants to drive home an effort at change, recognize our own human fallibility, and open to meditative space to see if the deepest part of our natures can become more apparent and offer deeper insights. This may seem ethereal in light of *bottom line thinking*, but actually, it is touted as necessary in fields as diverse and education, social sciences, and economics, where self-reflexivity is often seen as a precursor to truly ethical and democratic action (Freire, 2000; Spiller, Erakovic, Henare, & Pio, 2011; Wiedow, & Konradt, 2011).
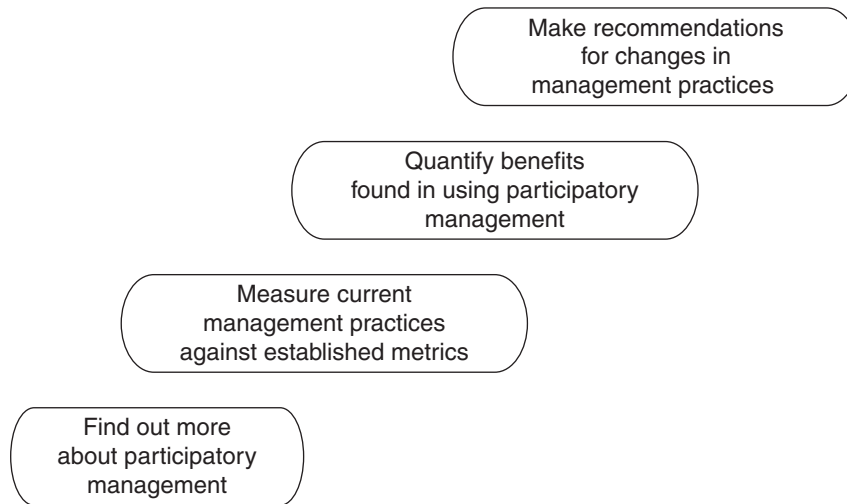
Reflexivity in business may cause you, the researcher, to question issues of power within the organization. Are certain people or clients given special privileges? Where is there evidence of truly democratic ways and means of addressing situations and where are all decisions developed top-down? Where does your position as researcher in the hierarchy color your answers to these questions? What would someone above or below you in that hierarchy answer to the same questions? If you and the entire organization

were operating from the highest ideals of human behavior, how would things change?

Reflexivity in nonprofits frequently focuses on the treatment and inclusion of clients. Where is the organization functioning as a charity, doing things for or to others as determined by historical patterns? Where is there evidence of collaborative problem solving that includes the population that is addressed by the mission of the agency? What evidence exists that the organization is meeting its mission? Where might you, as a researcher, have a positive influence? Where are you driven as a result of your position within the organization, and what might others say if they were addressing the same concerns?

Cunliffe (2005) develops critical reflexivity for people in public administration from a post-modern philosophical stance of critical theory, which requires that all assumptions, underlying motivations, and postulates of one great truth for all people are questioned. Also suspect is the use of inclusive language with little or no evidence of participatory work to obtain those claims. Her stance is that, especially in public administration where staff doing AR are in insider positions, the focus of AR is to help in the administration of the laws equally for all people, staff, and administration who need to develop reflexive thinking and to develop reflexive protocols. The focus of outsider research in a similar situation may be to point out errors in the administration of laws to correct them. Figure 3.2 lays out how a student used critical reflexivity and reflection to increase

GOAL: Determine whether participatory
management will work in a U.S. airline

<div style="text-align: center;">

Make recommendations
for changes in
management practices

Quantify benefits
found in using participatory
management

Measure current
management practices
against established metrics

Find out more
about participatory
management

</div>

BASELINE: Unsure if participatory
management would work in a U.S. airline

Figure 3.2

his understanding of himself and the process
throughout his AR cycles.

But, what do we really do to become self-reflexive?
The starting base is to objectively look at your rela-
tive level of emotional intelligence across Goleman's
(2006) four constructs:

1. Asking questions as to whether, in any given
    instance, you were acting from your highest
    consciousness in the best interests of everyone
    concerned or merely reacting to outside circum-
    stances (self-awareness).

2. Asking whether your actions positively influence a fair and equitable outcome (self-management).

3. Asking whether your behavior models what you would hope for as that which creates positive norms of behavior on a societal or even global level (social awareness).

4. Asking whether people involved leave feeling as though they were respected and that their concerns were heard (relationship management).

Then, you will take your practice to what Cunliffe (2005) considers a critically reflexive level when you begin to ask the following:

1. What are the limits of my knowledge and of the norms of practice in my organization?

2. Where are the norms within my organization that work to keep some in power over others?

3. To what extent do our clients hold a different reality about this situation than we do?

4. Are any positions, ethnic or cultural ways of looking at the world, or socioeconomic situations disrespected as a result of any of our organizational practices?

5. What do we assume we know about our clients and the issues they face?

6. Who has more power in the organization than others? On what is that power based, and to what extent does it shut down the potential for others?

7. How do my colleagues and I respond when considering the possibility of power inequities or change?

8. What causes defensiveness, and what underlying assumptions drive that reaction?

9. What activities or rules are never questioned?

10. What assumptions am I making about the stakeholders or other participants in my project, about myself as a researcher, or about the outcomes we desire for the project?

Students interested in delving more deeply into issues of reflexivity are encouraged to investigate the work of Argyris on defensiveness in organizations and to search on keywords that include *reflexion, reflexivity,* and *praxis.*

What Have Other Students Done Across the Three Business Sectors?

Throughout this book, you will find examples that outline different students' AR projects conducted over 8-week periods. These examples include what sectors they were working in (business, nonprofit, or public administration) and the topics of their AR projects. The examples also sometimes include brief descriptions of what they did in each step of the cycles they completed. Taken together, these examples show the breadth and depth possible with AR in just a few short weeks.

The student projects presented in this book range from the selection of project management software

Reflective Questions

✦ What timing and format will you use in your AR reflective protocol for this project?

✦ What questions that help lead to self-or critical reflexion were most appropriate for your situation?

✦ Can you think of other avenues for reflexive discovery that are appropriate to your project?

A regional resource manager had to address the question of whether to support biofuel across five counties. He decided to research the cost-effectiveness of a biodiesel fuel cooperative. He discovered costs from municipalities for the previous year and met with stakeholders to engender support. The figures he received showed cost-effectiveness for local revenue generation. The result was a cost-effective solution for fueling transit that was also good for the environment.

to improving African American women's knowledge about the risks of diabetes. Other examples of student work include: improving risk management in a manufacturing plant, diversity in the aerospace industry, and investigating participatory management in an airline. One student researched the need for an improved communication system during emergencies for special needs clients, and another worked on improving an inventory system in a family-owned business.

These students discovered things such as the following:

(a) the assumptions of their employees as to how things work,

(b) the importance of tone in departmental e-mails and communications,

(c) some shortcomings in business systems and people in their organizations,

(d) and, the transformational potential of AR.

Measurable actions ranged from asking questions of stakeholders to completely revamping organizational systems. Some students used surveys, and others used interviews to gather data. Some students even created their own measurement tools specifically designed for their projects.

Reflections are often about power, the need for AR, and shortage of time. Reflections sometimes focus on the topic of the AR project and other times on

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the actual workings of the project itself. Sometimes, the reflections indicate a positive resolution to the initial problem, and other times they indicate newly discovered problems or issues.

What Is the Best Way to Build a Participatory or Team Effort?

Some of you have decided that the best way to proceed would be with a team or, better yet, to include your clients, customers, or other people in your wider stakeholder group, bringing them to the table as equals with you in your research. While there may not be hard and fast rules for building a PAR group that supports you, there are general guidelines you may want to consider. PAR is both a team and more than a team-based approach to research. On the simple level, working in a PAR group brings up all the same issues as are common on other teams, and so we start this section with some reminder notes on basic team process. Yet in its best moments, a PAR team brings the unheard voice to the table in a democratic moment of equality—the funder, the client, the "other" is given a voice, not only to be heard but also to share in the process as equals. We will cover those issues in the section below.

What Counts in Team Building?

Building great-working teams to help solve problems is not hard as long as all the participants care about finding new and sustainable solutions to the issues at hand rather than advancing their own opinions about what is necessary. One painful

In light of the perception that his church was losing members, a local pastor wanted to increase retention of his congregation. PAR added ideas, but the research would cost him time. To lessen the impact on his time, he implemented a web-based survey. On it, he found that situations are different in other parts of the world. This led him to start an outreach program.

Reflective Questions

✦ Which of these student examples is most interesting to you and why?
✦ What new ideas do you have after reading these examples?

example illustrates our point. In the 1980s, there was a wave in Colorado of philanthropic organizations demanding collaborative work when they funded causes. One such organization generously set up collaborative teams all over the state to make a positive difference in teenage pregnancy but demanded that all the points of view in the communities were represented on the task forces they funded. One team failed completely when a major abstinence-only organization sent representatives who stayed only as long as it took to adopt the point of view that there would be no condoms distributed, then they stopped showing up for the meetings. They were not interested in building diverse solutions that served the whole community but rather in having their opinion win (Easterling, Gallagher, & Lodwick, 2003). Therefore, look for people who are flexible and willing to work, are willing to learn, and will seek a number of viable options targeting solutions to your issues.

We think that diversity becomes the second most important consideration in a great team. Every human context brings with it both wisdom and blind spots. A great functioning PAR team includes diversity among these outlooks. As an example, one team based in a school wanted to develop new practices for students experiencing frequent moves due to homelessness. One of the members of their team was an old-time citizen of the neighborhood. He was concerned that they did not know enough about where these children lived or their impact on the entire community, and so he mapped the

locations of low-rent apartments. This ultimately led to having a nonprofit organization design a neighborhood-based community service. Without his point of view, all the services would have likely remained within the school. Diversity of team members may include culture, age, outlook, position, and organizational differences.

Finally, look for team members who are committed. The student story in this chapter of the man who was investigating retention for his church was a sad story for the student. Every meeting, he had a different group of people who would come, thus creating delays in his project because steps had to be repeated to catch everyone up.

What Are the Optimal Numbers of Players?

How long will your project run? The longer the project, the more people you should recruit at the beginning as you will experience a natural attrition due to competing responsibilities or transfers, diminishing the number who can attend. A long-term project will need to have a number of members who have the historic memory of the entire project.

On the other hand, there can be difficulties getting a large number of people scheduled to meet, and fewer numbers may mean having well-attended meetings. People need to know that their time is an important contribution to the whole. As a facilitator, it will be your task to ensure that everyone's opinion is heard.

Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision. The ability to direct individual accomplishments toward organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results.
—Andrew Carnegie

How Should You Include Various Stakeholders?

Many kinds of people may be stakeholders for your project, some of whom you should consider asking to be part of your group. These groups may include your customers, clients, or others who benefit from your work, or those that have control over it in some way (the public, legislators, owners of your companies, etc.). In many business settings, these are also people from within your organization who hold different positions as they relate to the topic of your research or in the hierarchy of staff positions.

Start with some reflexive practice (as discussed earlier in this chapter). Who are your stakeholders? Who embody the unheard voice or represent views that you know are not included yet in your project? How much power do they have over you and the project? How interested would they be in your results? How much do you trust their ability to be flexible? The answer to these questions determines to what extent you offer stakeholders active participation in your PAR team or how often you report your results to them. There are no right or wrong answers, but stakeholders have power to support your results or squash them, so planning from the beginning to elicit their help brings long-term, sustainable results.

Asking the "other," in whatever form these differences may come, to your table as a participant in your research is a bold move and one that, when handled well, can help your research rise to the top.

To make it work, though, some human concerns must be addressed: How are you going to be able to convince them of your sincerity? What is in it for them from their point of view? What guarantees will you be able to offer that this will not be a waste of their time and resources? Finally, do they impress you as a person as someone who is willing to engage with you in the reflective and reflexive process without defensiveness (or being willing to work beyond defensiveness) on both sides?

Once you believe you have identified stakeholders who will add to your project, you need to invite them to do so. Be prepared to share your hopes and dreams and to listen to theirs. It has been our experience that these relationships fall into three camps, the most rewarding being when, together, you can share the human side of what you do. A solid working relationship will still be workable if both of you are invested in the outcomes and show up on time to get your mutual work done.

Intergroup hostilities may arise and tie to our later discussion in Chapter 5 about power dynamics. The tradition of AR recommends embracing the resistance and moving toward the concerns to listen actively to alternative views. Active listening frequently allows the richness available in opposition to emerge. If all points of view have been explored and still no release of tensions is apparent, then we recommend you seek advice from your professor and consider canceling the work while looking for another alternative, such as gathering data and cross-checking points of view in individual interviews. As

the facilitator, it is your responsibility to clarify the expectations of the group, allowing participants to come and go freely depending on if those expectations will allow them to commit to their participation. Remember in tense situations that the guiding light is the principle of beneficence, covered in Chapter 3.

What Facilitation Skills Should You Keep in Mind?

A successful PAR group is characterized in two ways: active participation by the majority of people involved (although the specific people involved may shift over time) and effective decision making. We will consider each.

> **Teamwork is no accident. It is the by-product of good leadership.**
> *—John Adair*

Active participation depends on to what extent participants are invested in finding answers to the questions you are asking and solutions to the problems you are addressing. It is their responsibility to examine their personal contributions and whether they believe their input will be meaningful and a good investment of their time. They may not have much time and may be concerned that, once the group starts to find solutions, these will involve more work than what they are willing to commit to. The trick in facilitating these issues is to discuss them with participants prior to the first meeting and then ask the group to discuss them during the first meeting. Also, be sure to use techniques such as the tossed salad method quoted below to ensure that everyone contributes right from the beginning. Those who do not contribute will often be the first

to leave the group. The following can be used for any task that needs group input.

> Tossed Salad: Place a large bowl on the table. Give out small slips of paper and ask everyone to write down one idea per slip, putting them in the bowl. When people have finished writing ask someone to mix up the slips. Pass around the bowl so that each person can take out as many slips as they tossed in. Go around the table and have them share ideas before discussing and refining the most promising ones together. (Bens, 2008, p. 55)

Effective decisions are those that efficiently create results, costing the least in time, energy, or resources while moving the AR project forward in measurable ways. Consensus is great but takes time to build, and not every decision requires it. For instance, if your group has a selection of options, the members may decide to divide into subgroups, each working on the solutions that appeal to them. Prior to taking off on their own, all the team members should agree on which measurements they will consider evidence of success.

The no vote is the winning vote in those situations that demand consensus. For example, consensus should be used when deciding what to publish in final reports on the project. Baseline rules for participatory research are that all members ethically need to agree on the final report because all their names will be on the document as authors and so their personal integrity stands behind what is published there (see cautions from Columbia University in the previous section on ethics).

How Do You Maneuver Past Known Obstacles or Political Issues?

As we have presented throughout the book, Chris Argyris (2002a) used double-loop learning and reflexive practice to help overcome defensiveness, which along with power issues, make up the myriad of personality disputes that derail AR projects. Fortunately for the student, the short time allotted by classwork seldom brings these to a critical level. Obstacles that have to do with lack of access to resources or materials held by those in power are discussed throughout AR literature, being as they are a mainstay of the long history of AR in increasing democracy in situations through listening to the unheard voice. We will come back to this in Chapter 5 where we talk about working with people and groups and when we discuss the complexities of power as they play out in AR and PAR. No matter what obstacles you face, honesty is the best course of action, with a sensitivity to both the expected and potential unexpected outcomes of your work. You want to surf the fine line between your integrity and honesty and not cause harm to others. Situations may call for: (a) early debriefing prior to publishing results, (b) group meetings to discuss ramifications of your actions or findings and how to defuse any potential outcry (even the best results will have those who don't support change), and (c) publishing positive outcomes in such a way as to gather support or, conversely, in such a way as to continue public debate.

These are situations that frequently have silver linings. It is often when, through disagreement, we reflect upon the subtleties of power and personality

that we rise above both and add truly wonderful out-comes to our own lives as well as to AR. It is best to keep in mind the potential for reaching beyond the focus on improving techniques of practice to address the broader questions about how work influences the context in society, becoming a vehicle for critical debate to improve our world. As we discuss in Chapter 8, AR achieves its full potential only when we reach beyond where we are and toward a critical view of what causes the obstacles we face, better able to speak for the needs throughout our businesses, nonprofits, or offices of public administration.

What Tools Are Useful for Action Research Student Researchers?

Chapter 3 has outlined how to proceed with the different AR steps and what students have previously accomplished using AR for class projects. To con-clude this chapter, we offer you a couple more tools.

Action Research Reflection Tool. This is a simple form (see Appendix E) that has all three steps, and our students find it useful for weekly reporting and reflection during the AR process. In its simplest form, you just give yourself three headings on the page: Discovery, Measurable Action, and Reflection. You keep it on your desk and make notes, writing them up once a week as a log. We find that sometimes it is hard to know where to put a given event. Do not worry about it; you can always re-sort the items later. What it does is give you is a form where, by tracking the steps week by week, you will later have the data you need to

Reflective Questions

- ✦ Do you feel confident to run a participatory team?
- ✦ If so, what seems exciting or holds potential? What are you nervous about?
- ✦ What support would you need to make this a viable option in your circumstance?

Nothing has such power to broaden the mind as the ability to investigate systematically and truly all that comes under thy observation in life.
—Marcus Antoninus Aurelius

document what you discovered, what steps you took, and their outcomes. Your reflections will often lead toward the conclusion section of your final report.

Action Research Logic Tool. This form helps tie literature to action and measurement and has been found helpful by students for organizing their thoughts and actions. While the use of the logic model is outlined in more detail in our first book (James, et al., 2008), we introduce it here to help you merge your literature review with your discovery process for the purposes of academic defensibility. The first column is your research question for that cycle (they may change as your project goes on), and in the second column, you list the citations of other work that was influencing you. The third column lists the variables or ideas from that author that are of interest. In the fourth column, you note what you can do to measure those ideas in your setting, and in the fifth, you note how you will analyze your data (most likely coding if qualitative and one of several statistical tests if quantitative). Qualitative and quantitative issues are covered in more depth in the next chapter.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have gone over what it is that you will actually be doing in your AR project. We have covered the practical steps to be taken in the discovery, measurable action, and reflection stages of your project and given you examples of projects done by other students. These examples should have given you

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a good idea of some of the possibilities that are out there for you in completing your own AR project. If you are planning on using a participatory approach, we have included some tips on how to build the best team possible. Finally, in this chapter, we have presented several tools that are available to help you in successfully completing your own AR project.

Take Action

You are now well armed with ideas, so the next step is to take action. This might include the following:

- Calling others and getting a team together.

- Investigating if the business you want to work with has research protocols for permission, filling out the forms, and submitting them.

- Enrolling the help of a librarian in your web research for your discovery step.

- Making up the forms you need so you are ready to capture ideas as they come to you.

- Doing a literature search to locate experts whose work focuses on the same issues you face—and writing them e-mails to ask key questions related to your project.

Additional Readings

Daley, A. (2010). Reflections on reflexivity and critical reflection as critical research practices. *Affilia*, *25*(1), 68–82.

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