COOKING WITH ACTION RESEARCH
STORIES AND RESOURCES FOR SELF AND COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION

HILARY BRADBURY AND ASSOCIATES
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Hello!

Welcome to Volume I of *Cooking with Action Research: Stories and Resources for Self and Community Transformation*. In what follows you will find tales from the Action Research kitchen. One intention we hold is to make our work more accessible and our writing easy to digest. You will therefore not find footnotes or references inside the tales. However you will find all references in the Resource companion volume and more besides. In the Resources you may expect a “further reading list” suggested by the authors as well as our invitation to our co-labs, aka our kitchen-communities of practice where we cook together!

Join us in raising consciousness of Action Research. *Bon Appetit!*

- *The Cookbook Team*
Global sustainability is an imperative. To get there we need to act from a context of whole systems, and embrace our intergenerational responsibility so as to protect the next generation from this one.

Sustainability progress is not well supported by either our present global economic set-up (short-term capitalism), nor our excessively compartmentalized educational systems that make whole systems thinking the exception rather than the norm. Then there is the moral culpability with our disappointing deviation from devotion to the needs of future generations. Our systems do not well support the whole systems approaches from which the optimal solutions will likely flow.

As a sad result, what the next generations need to create their own wealth and quality of life - human and natural capital – are steadily diminishing. Humanity hasn’t been close to sustainable for over a century and yet we continue to not recognize this, since we know that systems change, and social and economic transformation is now required.

From my ecological economist point of view, the fundamental problem is that the language of capitalism, prices of goods and services, are lies – sometimes wild lies that are 500% wrong. For example, the price of oil does not include the myriad social and environmental costs of its discovery, extraction, refinement, distribution and use. To be globally competitive, private sector businesses must become “externalizing machines” to minimize costs to consumers. If prices don’t tell the truth, capitalism’s advantage of decentralized allocation of resources for optimal human quality of life is lost. Until this is remedied, we need a different way of making decisions.

Action Research is just such a needed change-supportive framework – a flexible foundation for fostering multi-stakeholder collaborations that can shift the approach towards more sustainable solutions.
How do we get better at decision making for sustainability performance? We need to see ourselves as actively learning together in collaborative communities. We can no longer afford to be passive consumers of products that are mispriced enough to cost us our future. This means supporting each other as we attempt to do things never done before. Today international sustainable supply chain management is needed to achieve carbon-neutral products supplied by technologies and organizations that act within a sense of the whole. This kind of transformation needs a transformation in how we collaborate and learn. Hence Action Research as an essential change-supportive framework.

Working within the Action Research paradigm – where there is emphasis on participation, action, research, transformation and reflexivity – we may find ourselves giving the benefit of the doubt to new ways of doing things. Instead of clinging to the old, maladaptive approaches we have inherited, we may embrace continuous improvement from the ground up.

This very strategy has propelled some of the world’s most successful organizations like Toyota and innovative local governments. But it remains rare and needs to be democratized, and abundantly available. As citizens, we remain overly wedded to top-down (aka authoritarian) solutions, even well-meaning ones like “reduce greenhouse gas intensity 5% next year,” when goals/initiatives developed and pursued more organically by the people doing it are more likely to succeed. We need a democracy that is about learning, rather than sham symbolism of voting once in a while for politicians who may not serve our authentic current, much less, future needs.

In my work as a sustainability consultant/warrior, I see that sustainability performance is about (1) attracting the best talent of the world to work on our particular challenges by nurturing them (their souls too, even if most economists will lead it to the Action Researchers to mention that term!) in the course of challenging and innovative work; (2) encouraging self- and group-reflection on what worked and what didn’t; and (3) embracing the global competitive advantages of a more sustainable approach that reflects our personal values and those of our stakeholders.

As I read this stimulating compilation of leading edge thinkers and practitioners of Action Research, I see the rich variety of applications for Action Research to so many systems I know that need this kind of help: from healthcare to environmental think tanks and for-profit enterprises. I see in these chapters an infusion of that essential component of Action Research that is so often missing in other approaches, namely the personal perspectives of the people involved and empowered to love their work, each other and willing to share the struggles inherent in self and system transformation.
Action Research processes might take more time, and in truth sometimes short term fixes are needed. But still, the Action Research approach is likely to be an investment in competitive advantage, especially for managing or simply keeping up with accelerating changes in global systems, capabilities, imperatives and inner movements.

Pursuing sustainability or any other change agendas toward the best that humanity can be requires the best of humanity. How do we “cook” up high quality relational space? Can we overcome our penchant for power with love? Can we overcome our drive to “have it all now” in experiences or materials in order to leave some for future generations, other species, and humans without means? Can we evolve our economic systems and technologies rapidly enough to build, not perpetually diminish, the natural capital needed for life to flourish? These are precisely the questions - inquiries really as they have no easy answers - that propels us toward a more sustainable world.

I am president of the board that funds AR+, which has produced this Cookbook. When Hilary asked me to write this foreword I felt that I didn’t honestly know enough about the details of Action Research. That may seem ironic given that we operate on the board as a learning community. Hilary is persuasive (!) and also supportive in suggesting that I knew more than I realized. So much of Action Research is a flexible codification of good learning practices. How do we find and nurture our personal and collective best in a sustainable manner – i.e. persistent over time?

Many communities, spiritual organizations, and other forward-looking enterprises are now experimenting, often using what I have come to see as part of the Action Research repertoire of techniques and practices. Many, of necessity, have been piecemeal approaches rather than whole systems designed from the ground up. This slim volume helps put things together and offers a sense that we can achieve the synergistic benefits of whole systems thinking inside incomplete whole systems structures. We simply need to orient from the perspective of maximal sustainability progress. Intention matters.

Action Research techniques and systems are all about recognizing the experimental nature of transformation, emphasizing the joyful aspects for people involved who are typically under great pressure to succeed each and every time. And it supports the conscious reflection needed to achieve the “continuous improvement” aims of organizations on a competitive sustainability path.

Most sustainability practitioners come to the conclusion early on that the same approach that created the problem is not likely to be the approach that solves it. Instead, organizational transformations occur incrementally, like an amoeba moving towards a new location, one small “foot forward” at a time. No organization can stop all traffic one day and then start it up again driving on the other side of the road; evolution, like in nature, occurs gradually, learning from experiments successful or failed, painful or joyful.
Each of the experiments shared in the following accounts offer, like each of us as individuals, unique solutions to the problems biting their collective ankles, from healthcare in Sweden, to development projects in New Zealand, from interpersonal learning circles to future organizing reimagined. Each represents fluid learning opportunities applicable to sustainability challenges.

The pursuit of sustainability performance, i.e., maximizing social and environmental performance of individuals, organizations and governments, is inherently about change. There are no recipes in the sense by “color by number.” Ingenuity is needed. So too, inspiration of those who have accomplished something worth learning from. The accounts in this book are worth learning from.

Most important is to learn what we can from each experiment, which also happens to make life more fun, and certainly better than not learning, just reacting.

Our work supporting AR+ is centrally about nurturing, celebrating and communicating the stories of these experiments worldwide. The protagonists are heroes out on the frontier – the frontier of transformation to a world our children will thank us for.

I encourage my colleagues in the field of sustainability - and I hope that means every thinking person, to consider how the Action Research repertoire can help them. And I remind them that the AR+ co-labs, or communities of practice, stand ready to help.

Christopher Juniper,

Board President Action Research for Sustainable Enterprise in Collaborative Communities Network.

Portland, OR, USA.
Preface
How the Apprentice also Becomes a Cook: An Invitation to the Action Research Table

Preface by Danilo R. Streck & Oscar Jara Holliday

Cooking with Action Research is not a conventional textbook of research methodology. Neither is it a book of easy recipes or a set of memoirs by experts in Action Research. It may have a little of all of this, but there is much more too. This more is hinted at with the metaphor of cooking that permeates the whole. The interesting analogy of researcher as chef is scattered throughout the book. It suggests that, as in good cooking, the requirements of research reach beyond the mechanical application of techniques. Art and science, intuition and hard work, freedom to invent and methodical rigor mix, and from this mix creative transformative action and knowledge emerge.

This leads us to revisit the common roots of knowing and flavor (or taste) in Latin, which give rise to the Spanish and Portuguese words saber and sabor, or the Italian sapere. The contributors who collaborated to produce this cookbook were already well aware of the availability of varied literature on Action Research—from big handbooks to consolidated journals, from sound theoretical work to compendiums of methodological tools. This book, therefore, represents a missing link that not only connects the other types of writings and reflections, but grounds them in the fertile terrain of personal experiences.

Cooking with Action Research is an invitation to create something new; to combine distinct elements—ingredients—in the process. As when cooking a good dinner, combining intuition and creativity and carving out sufficient time allows for the creation of an original dish, full of flavor. Here, the rich flavor is the result of combining the experiences of participatory Action Researchers in their challenge to bring originality in response to a host of complex situations. The Cookbook lets us taste results that have been cooked for the right amount of time. We happily receive the flavorful results.

The cooking analogy also has us ponder the education of researchers: certainly we need criteria for outcomes, techniques, and competence with appropriate practices etc. Those may sound, at first, to be suggestions of recipes. However, they are indeed proposals to be recreated anew and in response to any challenge. New experiences, embraced step by step, grow all our creativity. As Paulo Freire puts it:
“the act of cooking, for example, presumes some knowledge concerning the use of the kitchen: how to turn on the oven, how to regulate the temperature, how to deal with certain risks of fire, how to harmonize the use of different spices in an attractive and delicious synthesis. In the practice of cooking, the apprentice confirms some of his/her knowledge, corrects others, and so the apprentice becomes a cook.”

The authors share the premise that Action Research is not a neutral affair, neither ethically nor politically. All make explicit their efforts and their strategies. These cohere with basic principles of Action Research: The key principle being the participation of multiple stakeholders in the process of producing actionable knowledge. However, the reader is not left with an idealization of the real challenges of bringing together different and sometimes conflicting voices. Sharing this challenge makes the book come alive in its relevance. Another important basic principle we see in action is the commitment of the authors, all advanced Action Researchers, to immerse their Action Research in processes of change. They are animated by the intention of creating conditions for a better life, for alleviating human suffering.

There is much in this book for all of us to like. The stories, dialogues, examples, and reflections take us to the heart of what we do when we say we are doing Action Research. The experienced researcher, therefore, will find enough material to mirror his/her own research practices and so an opportunity to step back and reflect. For beginners, this is an excellent book to feel what happens when one is engaged in Action Research. It also shows that there is not only one way of doing Action Research, and yet, even within the great variety of alternatives, there are foundational practices/concepts that hold the family of Action Researchers together.

What is revealed in this book is the indisputable relevance of the Action Research orientation for democratizing knowledge. What makes Action Research distinctive is the involvement of the “common” person in the process of knowledge production, a knowledge that is created within transformative acting. We hear the voices of the patients in healthcare, the students in education, and so forth. Persons are neither just informants nor consumers of research findings created by institutionally legitimized experts. They are, instead, companions in the search for answers to questions they themselves pose and propose.

Remembering Babette’s Feast, the Danish movie from 1987, the chefs have prepared a meal for not-yet-known guests. But as the book abundantly shows, there has already been much joy in preparing this banquet. Our compliments to the Chefs! Buon appetito to the readers and change agents everywhere!
A Blessing on our Action - John O'Donohue

May the light of your soul guide you.
May the light of your soul bless the work
You do with the secret love and warmth of your heart.
May you see in what you do the beauty of your own soul.
May the sacredness of your work bring healing, light and renewal to those
Who work with you and to those who see and receive your work.
May your work never weary you.
May it release within you wellsprings of refreshment, inspiration and excitement.
May you be present in what you do.
May you never become lost in the bland absences.
May the day never burden you.
May dawn find you awake and alert, approaching your new day with dreams,
Possibilities and promises.
May evening find you gracious and fulfilled.
May you go into the night blessed, sheltered and protected.
May your soul calm, console and renew you.
Healthcare Transformation: Action Research Linking Local Practices to National Scale

SKETCH

In *Healthcare Transformation: Action Research Linking Local Practices to National Scale*, Svante Lifvergren and Danielle Zandee describe a successful large-scale experiment with transforming healthcare delivery in Sweden. It developed in a patient-centric fashion, convening key stakeholders of the healthcare system in learning platforms. The results exceed expectations with massive cost reduction, an increase in patient satisfaction and their health outcomes, as well as reduction in stress for the healthcare delivery teams.

MEET THE AUTHORS

**Svante Lifvergren, MD., Ph.D.,** is Quality Development Director at Skaraborg Hospital in Western Sweden. He is also a faculty member of the Division of Service Management and Logistics at Chalmers Institute of Technology in Gothenburg where his research is mainly performed within the Centre for Healthcare Improvement (CHI). A pulmonary physician by training, Svante is the author of numerous studies about healthcare systems transformation. On a day-to-day basis Svante is personally engaged with facilitating patient-centric learning platforms with direct impact at the local and, increasingly, at the national level of the healthcare systems of Sweden. In his spare time Svante leads the healthcare domain of the Action Research journal where he is associate editor. Svante may be reached at svante.lifvergren@vgregion.se

**Danielle Zandee, Ph.D.,** is Professor of Sustainable Organizational Development at Nyenrode Business Universiteit in the Netherlands, where she makes theoretical and practical contributions to organizational change and social innovation. Danielle embraces Action Research for its potential to create both innovative knowledge and new ways of knowing. She conducts Action Research in healthcare, guides Ph.D.
students in their Action Research studies, and facilitates insider Action Research projects of MBA students. Danielle takes a critical appreciative stance in Action Research and currently studies the creation of egalitarian research groups and the nurturing of generative dialogue. She has published about appreciative inquiry as an Action Research approach in the *Handbook of Action Research*, the *Sage Encyclopedia*, the *Advances in Appreciative Inquiry* series and the *AI Practitioner journal*. Danielle is an associate editor of the *Action Research Journal* and a member of the editorial board of the *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*. She currently serves on the executive board of the Organization Development and Change (ODC) Division of the Academy of Management. Danielle may be reached at d.zandee@nyenrode.nl

“I went in and out of the hospital for three years— it was really dreadful. But now the mobile team comes to me and supports me at home— it is deluxe care.” -Lars, an elderly patient who experienced the mobile integrated care that has been developed during a decade of improvement initiatives in the Swedish county of Skaraborg.

In this chapter we explore how Action Research has been a powerful pathway to changes that made the development of integrated mobile (“meeting the patients where they are”) care models possible. We share and analyze the story of what happened to transform patients’ experiences and therefore providers’ delivery of healthcare in the Western Region of Sweden. We do so from our different professional perspectives: Svante a pulmonary physician who has taken part in the transformation from the very beginning (with many others of course), and Danielle a scholar of organizational development. We share a keen interest in the health and healing of individuals and the human systems in which they live and work.

**Svante explains:** I have always been intrigued by the power that lies in truly taking on the patient’s perspective— understanding how things really are when they live, say, with a chronic disease. For me, that means listening attentively for how to improve that patient’s experience. Therefore, at the heart of the story we share below, is our effort to understand how to empower and support the patients and those who are near and dear to them in their everyday life activities. After all, coping with a chronic disease is very much about being able to lead a decent life with loved ones. Patients and providers have a lot in common: we share a concern for having the patient not be admitted to the hospital. Hospital intake for the patient means a (very) bad day and for the healthcare budget it translates into a lot of extra cost.

For both authors, the seeds for change are found in looking with new eyes at daily practice.
VIGNETTE: UNDERSTANDING LARS

In the early 2000s, Svante visited Lars at his home. During a conversation with him and his wife Hilda, some lightbulbs went on. Back then Lars, who is no longer with us, was a patient with severe respiratory insufficiency, dependent on oxygen and only able to take a few steps at a time:

“Lars and I have accepted the situation,” said Hilda. “It’s been a long time now and, somehow, we have gotten used to it.”

Lars added, “Yes, believe it or not, but there are still days when we can really enjoy life, being together, the two of us, reading books, looking at old photographs, solving crosswords... But what really worries me is when I have moments of impairment. There is no one to turn to!”

“Yes,” Hilda filled in, “isn’t it remarkable that, although we have a hospital, and a local doctor and nurse, it is somehow very difficult in Sweden to get hold of anyone to give advice! We often just have to call the ambulance and then we spend hour after hour in the emergency ward.”

Lars added, “Care at the hospital is excellent. But only once you get to it! When you eventually get help, things work perfectly. But why don’t you help us more quickly? Before things get worse?”

Hilda said, “I get so anxious; it is on me to decide what to do in these situations. Who to call and when and what to say. It is such a huge responsibility for me. I don’t know so much about medicine. I long for someone who can give advice and help us.”

This vignette tells the same tale many patients might tell. The story of Lars, together with lessons learned from many other patient visits, became the point of departure for the 15-year (and ongoing) transformation effort. Starting in the county of Skaraborg in West Sweden, those involved used an Action Research approach. For Svante, it was evident that change had to start in the daily life of the patient. But it was also evident that all stakeholders in the complex care system of the Western region—co-workers as well as managers in the communities, the primary care centers, and the hospitals—all would have to collaborate. Taking on the perspective of the patient would incur dramatic transformation.

The organizational perspective that Danielle brings also highlights the power of small changes in daily practice. A focus on how to change interactions between patients and their healthcare providers eventually scales to system-wide transformation. However, those involved then need to find mechanisms to connect the local, small initiatives into what can later be recognized as regional, or even national, change. The work that has been done in Skaraborg is an exemplar of where small improvements have grown into a large-scale, successful endeavor.
In what follows we tell the story of how it unfolded. The Action Research approach that nurtured the emergence of new structures and practices might inspire others to take similar routes. The concept of “clinical microsystems” plays a key role in the narrative. A clinical microsystem is the smallest functional unit in healthcare. It includes various professions (physicians, nurses, assistant nurses etc.) as well as the patients they serve. The microsystem provides care to subpopulations of patients. It has clinical aims, has linked processes, has a shared information environment, and produces performance outcomes. The quality of care can never exceed the care quality delivered by each individual microsystem or how well they are interconnected from the patient’s perspective.

We argue that transformational change always starts and ends with the clinical microsystem and the way it is connected to and gets support from other healthcare system levels, such as clinical management, the hospital management and the primary care management.

In telling the rich story, we interweave our different voices and perspectives—Svante as the physician-leader narrator looking back over the process from the vantage of a quality improvement manager. The voice of the patient is mostly represented by the persona of Örjan, who helped the involved healthcare professionals understand the patient’s perspective. Danielle, in turn, brings the outside Action Researcher perspective. Her voice shows up in comments on the pivotal moments and leveraging mechanisms that enabled a continuous process of healthcare improvement. Then, at the end of the chapter, we return to key reflections in the story to highlight principles and practices that together enabled the transformation.
THE CHALLENGE: IMPROVING INTEGRATED CARE IN SWEDEN

In Sweden, the healthcare needs of all citizens are provided for by the state. The government and the parliament have the overall political responsibility for healthcare, while 20 regions and 290 communities bear the operational responsibility for citizens’ care. The care system is primarily tax-funded. Primary and hospital healthcare are organized at the regional level, and after-care services are organized at the community level. The regions are responsible for the overall specialized and primary healthcare delivered to all their citizens within the geographical area. The communities, in turn, bear a responsibility for after-care services, including home care and care of the elderly in nursing homes.

Sweden’s healthcare system is recognized as one of the best in the world with good medical outcomes at a reasonable cost.

However, as in all European countries, the system faces major challenges to cope with future demands. The key question is how to continue, or even improve the capability to deliver high-quality, equal, and efficient care. This is especially demanding since Sweden has one of the eldest populations on the globe, which inevitably leads to a growing proportion of elderly patients with chronic diseases for whom increasingly more treatments and techniques will be needed.

Although Sweden has a well-developed healthcare system, many shortcomings, particularly regarding integrated care for elderly patients, prevail. Due to the complexity of such care, many improvement and developmental efforts have failed. But not in Skaraborg county! There, a long-term Action Research approach involving key stakeholders in learning and development coalitions has resulted in sustainable improvements for the patients as well as for co-workers in the care providing organizations.
THE WEST SKARABORG STORY: SETTING THE STAGE

In 1999, Skaraborg county became part of the Western Region, which has 1.5 million inhabitants and is one of the largest regions in Sweden. Our Action Research story is situated in the Western part of the Skaraborg county, which has a population of about 100,000. Svante has worked as a hospital physician for many years and is currently the quality manager at the overarching Skaraborg Hospital Group. Lidköping hospital (part of that group) is focal in our account as it is one of the hospitals that provides specialist services in the county. It is an acute ("tertiary") care hospital with more than 160 beds and about 700 employees. The hospital collaborates with the primary care centers and communities in the county.

CREATING A DEVELOPMENT COALITION FOR IMPROVEMENT

A first mission of the newly created Western Region was to translate a 2001 National Plan for healthcare improvement into a regional plan for the improvement of integrated care. The ambition of the directive was to support ongoing local initiatives that aimed to improve integrated care through a closer collaboration among all care providers.

As a response to the directive, the manager of the medical clinic in Lidköping asked the physicians to get more involved in improvement initiatives. He even urged them to visit other hospitals in Sweden, and be inspired by others’ good ideas. Svante, together with colleagues from the clinic, paid a visit to a hospital renowned for its work with healthcare improvements.

Svante vividly remembers how, during the visit, they learned about the “Ester-project.” It was an improvement initiative that involved all care providers responsible for elderly care, namely people from the hospital, the communities, and the primary care centers in each community. Svante recalls:

*My colleague and I finally managed to find this small hospital more than 400 kilometres from Lidköping. I think it took us five hours to drive there!*

*We were cordially invited to the room of the manager of the medical clinic. I still remember this meeting to this day— the manager projected so much energy and inspiration! Nothing was impossible. The manager started by explaining: "We started the Ester project some years ago and it has had a huge impact on how we take care of the elderly patients."

“But how did you do it?” We wondered in response, imagining that it’s not that easy even in a small place.*
The manager told us about “Ester.” Ester is a fictitious elderly patient with complex care needs. Today she’d be a computer avatar. Back then she was a fictional character navigating her personal healthcare maze.

“We invited people—nurses, assistant nurses and physicians from the hospital, the community, and the primary care units. They were asked to map Ester’s path through the care system maze to discover areas of improvement. All from Ester’s perspective. After that, we worked in small cross-organizational groups to patiently improve Ester’s journey through our care system.”

“Just like that!?“

On our way home, we had long and intense discussions. It was obvious that the project had had an impact on integrated care for elderly patients. Somehow, something had happened with the co-workers throughout the learning journey, although we were not sure what, but things had changed for the better, for sure. What could we learn from their experiences to get things going in Skaraborg?

Back at home, we decided to start a similar group. Inspired by Ester we designed “Örjan,” also a fictitious, elderly patient with multiple diseases in need of integrated care from all care providers. The aim of the project was to improve care from Örjan’s perspective. The goal was that Örjan should perceive care as if delivered from one streamlined organization, rather than from the actual three different care providers required. We managed to recruit the primary care centers in West Skaraborg and met them face-to-face to explain the project idea.

Svante recalls:

There were at least five general practitioners and five nurses in the conference room at the primary care center. I remember that my colleague and I were so excited about the idea, although we were also very nervous. What would they think? After presenting the idea about the Örjan project, the manager of the center spoke in a loud and convincing voice.

“A very good initiative!” he said. “We will of course participate! Does someone want to represent us?” Two general practitioners from the center raised their hands. I looked at my colleague and saw a relieved smile on his face.

Eventually, managers and co-workers from the six communities in West Skaraborg were also recruited to the overall Örjan network.
Danielle reflects: The reframing from a medical to a patient perspective places the start of Action Research firmly within the microsystem. The visit to the other hospital was a pivotal moment in the process, because knowledge and experience from “there” were translated to “here.” Since Action Research combines inquiry and change, it always asks for leadership that facilitates the embedding and spreading of innovative research into practice. In this case, the excitement and curiosity of Svante and his colleague were contagious.

At the same time, and as a parallel response to the regional directive, a development coalition was formed. A development coalition steering group was established to lead the initiative. This steering committee consisted of the Lidköping hospital director and the chief senior physician, a senior manager from each of the six surrounding communities, and two representatives from the primary care organization. In addition, a working committee consisting of three persons from the involved organizations was also formed. Seven project-networks were created to improve psychiatric care, rehabilitation, and the information flow between the three organizations.

In 2002, Svante asked the steering committee if the Örjan-network could also be part of the development coalition. Since word of the project had already spread among managers at the hospital, the request was approved without any protests. The Örjan project was thereby adopted as one of seven projects of the development coalition.

Danielle reflects: The adoption of the Örjan project was a pivotal moment. It is an example of leadership that facilitates conditions to make the project a success—creating a mandate and overcoming resistance. For Action Research to be successful, the inquiry that is done within a microsystem needs to gain support from leaders who can enable its acceptance and continuation within the surrounding managerial and organizational context. Creating conditions for micro-level inquiry implies an alignment with similar and perhaps higher-level initiatives. In this case, such coordination was done by the steering committee who connected the different projects and levels of inquiry. In terms of Action Research, these levels can be referred to as first person (within the microsystem), second person (among the projects), and third person (at the county and regional level).

The development coalition (see Figure 1) became an inclusive network in which all key stakeholders were represented, each having a developmental responsibility.
The seven project groups were composed cross-professionally and included representatives from all the three care-providers. As is the norm in a Scandinavian context, a committee consisting of representatives from the largest labor unions was also a part of the development coalition. So too, and much more innovative, was the presence of representatives from patient organizations. Finally, outside Action Researchers were affiliated with the coalition, as well as a political steering committee with representatives from the West Skaraborg regional board, the executive political board, and the six municipalities. The Action Researchers were connected to the local Skaraborg Research Institute and had a special research interest in organizational development of complex systems. Their mission was to give support to key stakeholders in the coalition as well as to capture and document leveraging events during the change process. These early Action Research experiences in the coalition are well documented in the work of Ekman.

**Danielle reflects:** From an inquiry perspective, it is important to note how inclusive an approach you had— the whole system was invited into the room. No doubt that the diversity in perspectives helped to create rich understandings of the possibilities for healthcare improvement. The “outsider” Action Researchers played an important role. Perhaps they acted as “critical friends,” showing both the engagement and distance that allows for zooming in and out on what’s being learned.
THE WEST SKARABORG STORY IN THREE PHASES

With the steering committee infrastructure in place, the story of the Action Research process in West Skaraborg unfolded in three phases: early initiatives of the Örjan group, the establishment of mobile teams and the widening impact of the new local practices.

EARLY INITIATIVES 2002-2007: THE ÖRJAN GROUP

From 2002 to 2007, the Örjan project became a permanent network. It was a source of sustainable creativity and innovation across organizational and professional boundaries, and gave input to the steering committee on broader strategy issues.

The aim of the Örjan group was to jointly map the patient’s journey through the care system to identify areas for improvement from the patient’s perspective. The group consisted of nurses and physicians from the hospital, the primary care units, and the six communities in the West Skaraborg area. Svante recalls:

We were all in all 18 people in the group. Marianne, quality coordinator, and I had convened the first meeting. To our surprise, the first two hours were spent on discussing how we should name the patient:

“We don’t consider our clients to be ‘patients,’” one of the community nurses told the group.

“What do you mean? Of course, they are patients, not clients,” a surgeon responded.

And the meeting went on like that. Soon it became obvious to Marianne and me in our role as meeting conveners, that it was not really about what we called the patient. The participants from the three care providers came from varying backgrounds as well as cultures and did not share the same concept of the patient pathway. This came as a surprise to all of us when we began to see what fundamental differences needed to be engaged. Marianne and I realized that the initial plan for the meetings would have to be redone entirely. During three consecutive meetings, the focus was on involving all group members to eventually agree on values, core principles, and the mission of the project. In hindsight, this “stormy” period was probably crucial for the future performance of the group. (More is written about this in the suggested readings of the Resource volume.)
Danielle reflects: How to refer to the patient seems a pivotal conversation. It shows the variance in bottom-up approaches that you will not notice if you take a top-down standardized route where there may be no dialogue about important work-based understandings. This is where Action Research is different, and initial steps are so crucial in co-creating an understanding among co-researchers of “what this is all about.” When all people present can communicate what is true for them, they are taking steps closer to a shared language, a level playing field, and the personal connections that allow for honest inquiry.

The Örjan project also met other obstacles. For instance, in the beginning of the project, middle managers in the care-providing organizations were unaware of the work. No dedicated project time for coworkers was allocated and several participants of the Örjan network were not allowed to attend project meetings. This was mostly the result of poor communication about the project with the line managers. Therefore, the Örjan project members started to systematically hold meetings with unit managers at the various local workplaces, providing information about project activities. This did generate commitment among middle managers and ensured that patient pathway issues were permanent items on managements’ agendas. Eventually, Örjan members and other groups connected to the improvement activities obtained full permission to allot remunerated time for the project.

Getting the Örjan project as a permanent item of regular workplace meetings was certainly not an easy endeavor. A nurse involved with the Örjan group explains:

“I remember the first time I brought it up— the unit manager just shook her head and said that she had never heard anything about the project! And that there was not enough time. She appeared genuinely uninterested—quite disheartening if I should be honest! But something happened during the autumn. She [the manager] attended the first dialogue conference [a large group meeting connecting politicians, patients, relatives, project managers, union members as well as managers and co-workers from the three care providers during a whole day].

“That meeting really broke the ice— she understood the purpose of efforts and she also got the opportunity to listen to top management from the hospital as well from some of the communities. It truly had an impact on her. After that we regularly discussed Örjan issues at the workplace meetings.”
Danielle reflects: Creating space for Action Research in the midst of daily work is difficult. It is also a political act. The Örjan group members show that they understand the need to connect with their managers’ realities to create necessary conditions, such as time and remuneration. The experience of the nurse indicates the importance of large group meetings (“second person”) to obtain the mandate for microsystem (“first person”) inquiry. We might be curious how to make such meetings appealing for the manager to attend, and how to design for a dialogue to align managerial interests and reduce their concerns.

Still, as in any all-too human system, territorial thinking existed at many of the workplaces across the three care-providers and across different professional groups. The initial conflict that had been apparent in the Örjan group about the patient perspective highlighted what existed at the different workplaces. Therefore, we evolved a “home-and-away” networking approach, where problems, maps, measurements, and solutions were always discussed at the different workplaces for improvement suggestions. The group referred to this method of working as the “accordion principle”— sharing current experiences and plans with the co-workers at the local workplaces and then bringing the comments back to the project group for further action and reflection.

Danielle reflects: This “home-and-away” networking approach appears as an important mechanism to involve professionals throughout the research process. It created a hub for the Örjan members to share their experiences in different places and a way to engage their co-workers in learning in the immediate context of daily work.

Iterating action-reflection cycles was an essential component of the improvement efforts. Generally, a four-step approach was used. First, the patient’s pathway through the care system was mapped. Second, areas for improvements in the pathway were identified. Third, the problems were then assessed and, if possible, measured. Fourth, solutions were tested to solve the problem. Thus, the approach meant that problems were always assessed before as well as after interventions to make sure that the problems really had been solved.

At the end of 2005, the Örjan network presented some key outcomes that indicated that the integration of the care system had indeed improved, for example:

- 100% elimination of waiting times at the reception of the medical clinics.
- A reduction in the number of admissions among patients >65 years of age at the medical clinic by 15–18%.
• A patient survey that indicated a very high satisfaction rate (>95%) among the elderly with their new integrated care services.

• Initiation of process work in many other clinics and care units as a result of the initial Örjan project.

• Increase in staff awareness and learning regarding the patient pathways.

**Danielle reflects:** The measurements play an important role in the success of the Örjan project. They were a natural fit with conventional medical research and thus created legitimacy for the more unconventional Action Research approach. The measurements also created confidence within the Örjan network that their approach was actually working. Later in the story, the measurements will play a pivotal role in the scaling of improvement initiatives from the local, to regional and national levels.

**THE DEVELOPMENT COALITION: TOWARD SHARED GOALS IN THE INTEGRATED CARE SYSTEM**

There were initially expectations of the Örjan network to be THE PROJECT, with a capital “P,” i.e., as if it might solve all the problems along a patient pathway and thus reach final perfection. However, gaining more and more experience in iterative dialogues with the Örjan group, we came to see their activities no longer as a temporary project, but as an ongoing process. **In the words of one member:** “The improvement activities in the patient pathways have to continue forever.”

With a focus on improvement, the Örjan group used quality management tools and other forms of measurement from the very beginning. Keeping track of improvements also became common practice when the balanced scorecard was introduced. This tool is often seen as a management control mechanism, but here it was viewed as an aid to organizational development and learning in the development projects in the different workplaces. With support from Svante, management—the hospital manager, the chief physician, several community care managers, and the area manager for the primary care centers in Lidköping—developed a shared balanced scorecard for the West Skaraborg integrated care system. Long-term goals were expressed in different scorecard perspectives, which together formed the basis of sustainable care. **Svante explains in a report:** “We collaborate across organizational boundaries for our patients who perceive care as being seamless, safe, and of high quality. Our co-workers continuously learn from each other along the patient pathway. Together, we use resources optimally to create space for innovation and improvement that benefits our patients.”
However, members of the committee brought forward that the design process of the scorecard was even more important—trust and equal values developed through a continuous and sincere dialogue.

The steering committee met one Friday every month for almost a year to discuss what the actual goals of the entire care system should be, especially from the perspective of the elderly patient. The last meeting was devoted to reflections on the development of the group during the year as well as the result of the efforts – the scorecard. They discussed what was working and not. Svante recalls:

*The hospital manager: “The process has been really worthwhile, I think we have learned a lot.”*

“Yes, but sometimes it has been difficult as well; I think it was key that we already knew each other when we started – that we trusted each other,” said one of the community managers.

“The continuity has been key—to let it take time to really dig in to the dilemmas. It is quite peculiar that I sense that we have developed a common set of values although I can’t remember that we have ever explicitly addressed ‘values,’” added a manager in primary care.

When asked about key factors for developing trust and reaching common goals, the members brought forward the importance of letting it take time and keeping an even tempo. Continuity as well as the mandate to represent one’s own organization were other important preconditions. Jointly reflecting on what the group had achieved, the members pointed to a shared set of beliefs that helped each other to focus on ensuring that the patient’s pathway through the care system was beneficial for the patient as well as for the care-providing organizations in the long run.

They all agreed that sometimes you just have to skip the rules of reimbursement and take some risks for the greater good of the patient. In the end, we are all winners if we can deliver high quality care that is coordinated and integrated from the patients’ perspectives.

Danielle reflects: The above speaks of two important decisions, namely 1) to take financial chances by halting internal reimbursements and 2) the appointment of permanent facilitators. These daring decisions created necessary space for microsystem improvement experiments and their interconnections within the larger system. They became possible through mutual trust which was both the foundation and the outcome of the group’s process. Clearly, Action Research is not only a cognitive, but also, and perhaps even more so, a relational endeavor.
DIALOGUE FOR COMMON UNDERSTANDING AND THE SHARING OF IDEAS AND GOALS

Obviously, agreeing on common goals among the members of the development coalition was but a beginning of a long-term transformational journey. Svante was involved in dialogues with the external Action Researchers as well as with the project managers and the steering committee. A strong emphasis was put on designing inclusive dialogues, to make sure that all stakeholders could discuss, interpret, and refine the various goals so that they fit their specific contexts. These dialogues took two different but connected forms:

- Yearly, whole-day, large-system meetings to which co-workers, managers, patients, politicians, union members, and researchers were invited. The purpose of these meetings was to appreciatively and together envision how the system might flourish. Updates about all improvement efforts were also given. Goals and critical success factors from the scorecard were shared and discussed.

- Local interpretations at care-providers’ work units of the integrated care scorecard—managers and co-workers were invited to interpret and fine tune the intention of the goals so that it fitted with what was going on locally.

Danielle reflects: Dialogues for change—such as future search conferences and appreciative inquiry summits—are well-established under the common umbrella of dialogic organizational development. What might be different in the Action Research approach of the development coalition, is that dialogues happened within the logic of action-reflection cycles. This ensured that care from the patients’ perspective always remained the common, pragmatic, and concrete focus. Talk and action were intertwined.

Svante participated in all the large-system meetings:

I remember the first meeting in 2002 and that more than 100 people showed up. And the meeting in 2003 also attracted more than 100 persons. It was such a wonderful mix of people: patient representatives, nurses, and physicians from the primary care centers and the hospital, nurses from the communities, politicians, managers from all the organizations, and researchers. And everyone seemed to be in a good mood—you could somehow feel that something new was going on! In the first two meetings, we had small group discussions and then brought these to the large auditorium to share them with all the participants. The external Action Researchers were very helpful here, planning and designing the meetings. The first two meet-
ings were especially targeted on what we together could do to bring integrated care to another level— it was very energizing and appreciative.

But I must say that the third meeting in 2004 was the most inspiring event! And I think that the meeting attracted almost 150 participants. By that time, the project groups could present real results, showing that integrated care had been improved. Patients were more satisfied with care services, waiting times had decreased, unnecessary admissions had decreased, coworkers had visited each other across organizational boundaries, and so on. Somehow it became evident that change was truly possible! The steering committee also agreed to continue the development coalition on a long-term basis as well as on allocating common resources to hire several development facilitators to support development.

The committee still consists of top managers from the three care-providers and it meets every month to discuss long- and short-term issues regarding further improvement of integrated care.

THE SECOND PHASE 2008-2012: ESTABLISHMENT OF MOBILE TEAMS

Through the work of the development coalition, several structures for development had been established and integrated care had improved significantly. Still, an analysis in 2007 revealed that, although arenas for sustainable networking had been established, care for patients with multiple chronic diseases had not evolved sufficiently. The steering committee therefore decided to initiate a mobile integrated team, which would provide care for these patients.

Three co-workers were recruited to the team: Siv, a former district nurse with more than 20 years of experience in care of multiple-diseased elderly; Christina, with many years experience in a medical department at the hospital and as a member of the local integrated care network; and Ulla, a senior physician and specialist in geriatrics.

In the design phase, the team put a lot of effort into examining actual care needs for the patient group. They developed an overview of the elderly population (see Figure 2), which guided them in the design of the care model.
The team started their design with looking at existing evidence-based models and by learning from other healthcare systems. They visited places in Sweden that had initiated integrated care teams. However, it became apparent that most initiatives were not mature nor efficient.

Christina says:

“...we wanted to work in a more profound and embedded way. So, we analyzed our own area including the hospital and the six surrounding communities. We pictured ourselves as a top of a triangle and asked ourselves: From where will we get patients and where will they go when we have stabilized their situation? It is obvious that these patients were everywhere in the system— in the primary care units, in the communities and at the hospital.”

Figure 2: Conceptual figure developed by the team together with the researchers that illustrates the different proportions of elderly people with different care needs in the actual area.
The team eventually decided that four out of six criteria should be met for a patient to be treated by the integrated team model: 1) At least three hospital admissions in the last 12 months; 2) Three or more chronic diseases; 3) More than six standing medications; 4) In need of health care at home; 5) More than 75 years of age; and 6) Dependent on activities of daily life (ADL). Calculating the probable effects of these criteria, the team made several conclusions. These criteria would capture 0.2% of patients in the Lidköping area.

Based on these calculations and with inspiration from evidence collected, the team designed a networked mobile care model. The key idea of the model is that basic care at home is provided by nurses and assistant nurses from the communities. If the patient becomes unstable, the mobile team visits the patient and those who are near and dear at home, and together with the community nurse will develop a care plan based on the patient’s perspective. The plan is symptoms-oriented and aims to empower the patient for an increased quality of life at home. The purpose is also to prevent unnecessary admissions to the hospital. The care plan is communicated to all care-providers around the patient. Each patient also gets a designated case manager from the team who coordinates and integrates care activities from the community, primary care, and hospital to fulfill the needs of the patient. Managers from the three care-providing organizations also meet regularly to jointly support the the activities in the networked system. Emergency beds are available at the hospital although very seldom utilized.

Patients from the “top of the triangle” (Figure 2) are included in the network services through a referral that can come from the hospital (emergency room, wards, and clinics), primary care, or the communities. The referral is then affirmed by the team and the patient is taken out of standard care for some time. The team doctor takes over full patient responsibility for an average of four to eight weeks to stabilize the situation. The patient is then referred to the ordinary care system. The team was estimated to handle up to 20-30 simultaneous patients, which proved to be a correct calculation.

The team evaluated the new care model before, during, and after the intervention. The results of the mobile team’s work dramatically improved care for these patients, significantly increasing quality of life and stabilizing their medical situation. Quantitative assessments pointed to a true relief of troublesome symptoms among the patients. Qualitative evaluation—interviews and focus groups with patients, relatives, and co-workers in the surrounding system—also showed that the care model of the team was well-functioning and that the team’s efforts were greatly appreciated. Moreover, the care model led to decreased resource utilization, not just by the team, but also elsewhere in the system. For example, care consumption among patients taken care of by the mobile team was reduced by a whopping 90%.

Svante acted as an external Action Researcher in this phase of the transformation. He met with the team regularly to reflect with them on what was going on and how to cope with the various challenges that emerged.
Svante reflects: I remember how impressed I was with the team’s ability to network with physicians and nurses in all three organizations. Ulla, Siv and Christina invited themselves to regular workplace meetings in the primary care units, at the hospital, and in the communities. They shared what was going on and how they wanted to work as a mobile team visiting patients at home. They asked nurses and physicians to come up with ideas on how they should work together to benefit the patient. In hindsight, the approach had a genuine bottom-up perspective, inviting co-workers all over the system to design the collaboration. I can’t remember that they encountered any real resistance—people understood the idea and all these years of working in the development coalition probably also contributed to the success of the team.

Somewhere around 2009, a similar mobile team was designed for patients in need of palliative care in the same area. This team also consisted of a physician and two nurses. The two teams shared the same work office and could share ideas and discuss common challenges regularly. A third component—a mobile primary care physician with support from a nurse from the primary care center—was also added to the overall model. The primary care physician took on the responsibility to provide care at home for the “7% patients” in the second top part of the triangle (see Figure 2). This step entailed the final design of the mobile care model that still prevails in 2017 (Figure 3).

**Figure 3**: Outline of the networked mobile care model for patients with complex care needs (Adapted from Bradbury & Lifvergren, 2016).
Danielle reflects: The story illuminates one of the strengths of an Action Research approach. Because practice is the starting point, bottom-up improvement initiatives make professional sense. When successful, they can be scaled into more general managerial policy whilst avoiding a form of standardization that would kill the necessary variation to take care of diverse patient needs. Practice-based evidence thereby informs evidence-based policy. Through continuous dialogue with critical stakeholders and co-workers in the surrounding system, a mobile and flexible team can coordinate already existing care resources in the surrounding system for the stabilization of patients with multiple diseases. Moreover, the team can also enhance a broader system’s understanding, eventually catalyzing an improvement strategy entailing the entire population of elderly people within the area and beyond. This is exactly what happened in the third phase of the West Skaraborg story.

THE THIRD PHASE 2013-2017: FROM COUNTY TO NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL IMPACT

During the last three years of the initiative, a remarkable spread of the care models has taken place in the entire county of Skaraborg as well as in the Western region and to other regions in Sweden. The goal of the network is still the same: to provide seamless, mobile and integrated care for elderly patients with complex care needs, where care is coordinated based on the individual patient’s preferences and needs.

As of today, the model has spread to entail all the communities in Skaraborg. All in all, seven mobile primary care teams, three specialist mobile care teams, and three specialist palliative care teams work together with basic community care to provide integrated care for elderly patients in all 15 communities in Skaraborg.

In 2015, the Regional Healthcare Director proposed that the model should also be deployed in the entire care system of the Western Region. Currently, 30 out of 34 communities outside Skaraborg in the Western region have adopted or are in the process of adopting the mobile care model. In addition, co-workers representing the Skaraborg care model have participated in more than 50 events, workshops, and conferences to share the model with other care actors outside Skaraborg during the last two years. West Skaraborg has hosted visits from key stakeholders from all the regions in Sweden and the care model is currently being introduced in several regions as well. The model is recommended by the National Healthcare Coordinator, as appointed by the Swedish government, as a particularly good example of improving integrated care efficiency.
The work has now been nationally awarded. In 2016, the Daily Medicine Journal appointed The Networked Care Model to the Gold Scalpel prize as the best healthcare innovation in Sweden.

However, are there any effects on quality of life, care quality, and care consumption in the overall system, for instance in the Skaraborg county, where the model has been part of the care system for several years? There is already some evidence. A report of the regional unit for data analysis recently indicated that Skaraborg now has the lowest rate of unnecessary readmissions for patients older than 65 years of age, and that the rate is continuously decreasing from 9.8% in 2014 to 8.1% in 2016. Similarly, the proportion of patients older than 75 years with inappropriate medications is 7.8% in Skaraborg as compared to close to 16% in other parts of the region.

To complete the story, Svante had several meetings with the development facilitators that represent all the three care-providing organizations and that support all the co-workers’ and managers’ continuous improvement efforts and spread of the model in Skaraborg. During several meetings, the facilitators identified key mechanisms on how to move from everyday practices to reach the entire care system. Marianne has been the main project manager since the first steps of the development coalition in the early 2000’s. She is also the project manager for the overall regional integrated care project and participates in several national networks on integrated care. The other development managers represent the primary care organization, the communities, and the hospital group. Together they reflect, according to Marianne: “The model speaks to healthcare coworkers that to provide care that integrates care resources, taking on the patient’s perspective, is a very good idea and what we have fought for all the time. Our colleagues find it very fulfilling to be able deliver care the way it is supposed to be.” So, the design is working!

Some notes from the team:

*Hospital facilitator: Maybe it is also important that the model was brought forward by co-workers with support from managers and not the other way around?*

*Svante: I also know that the engagement and deep understanding from the steering committee has been extremely important. All these years working together—they [the managers] truly understand the model. Every time a manager in the steering committee is replaced there is always some sort of mini-crisis before the new member understands the history of the system, what has been done, and what is going on. But the system has bestowed the introduction of many new key stakeholders, still maintaining its extraordinary development capability.*
Community facilitator: The co-workers have met the managers regularly to get support and the necessary resources to continue the development. Another key issue has been the long-term survival of the development coalition that now ensures all the communities’ and primary care Emergency beds (although very seldom utilized) are available at the hospital centers and the four hospitals in Skaraborg [currently named “The Skaraborg Care Collaboration”]. Politicians are also connected to the coalition and they meet regularly. And the local politicians have connections with regional politicians, which has probably led to the extra funding that we got to develop some of these models during the last years.

Marianne and Svante: We have also put in a lot of effort to create home-and-away learning networks (community and primary care facilitators). Before, we only talked about one learning network, but now we have several networks— the general practitioners, palliative and elderly patients’ mobile teams meet in three different networks. However, we think that we need to take up large-systems meetings again to connect the entire systems— we haven’t had these meetings for many years now.

Marianne: A key factor has been that we have always evaluated what we have done, before and after, using quantitative and qualitative methods. It’s been easier to talk about what we’ve been doing when there are measurements that support our recommendations. And all the visits have helped us gain legitimacy within the system, as well as in the regional system. The award in 2016 were probably also key events that made it possible to get a broader recognition of what is going on.

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PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES OF HEALTHCARE SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION

In the principles and practices resource section, we highlight what we see as the underlying principles and Action Research practices that enabled the spread of healthcare transformation from Skaraborg to the Western Region and beyond. To crystalize them we started by asking: What were the perspectives, insights, and actions that made the Örjan project the starting point of an ongoing and widening process of improvement and learning?

To answer this question, we then built on our earlier reflections to offer a third person conceptualization that may inform and inspire Action Research for transformational change in other contexts. It is important to point out, that although we refer to “cooking” in the title of the book, what we offer is not a recipe. Our insights are an invitation to cooks in a way that adds value to Action Research processes—to play with what we share and to use it freely, yet wisely.

Looking back on how the process unfolded, we distinguish a gestalt of a systemic worldview, with related principles and practices that together form a consistent approach to transformational change through Action Research. Though we present our insights in a linear way, principles and practices are in fact intertwined in iterative loops. Principles (ways of thinking) guide loosely coupled practices (sayings and doings) that in turn may question and renew those principles. Action Research will typically involve the development of new practices. What makes such new actions sensible at a certain point, depends on what co-researchers then think is right and how they see what is happening in the change process. Thus, worldview, principles, and practices provide an interrelated and open-ended repertoire of Action Research possibilities.

Additionally, because in Action Research efforts, it is important to make both the underlying worldviews and principles explicit, we note at the outset the systemic worldview of key players in the Skaraborg story which guided three important underlying principles of this transformational change effort: Seeing the patient as an “attractor,” taking a learning approach, and engaging in a generative process of inquiry. When there is sufficient alignment among involved actors— like the members of the Örjan group or the steering committee— they can make informed choices among available practices that act as leveraging mechanisms in the process. The Skaraborg practices that we want to highlight in the resources section include: quality improvement and measurement, generative leadership, organizing for development, and inclusive, practice-based dialogue.
AR+ CO-LABS foster friendly, person-centered spaces as dynamos of good Action Research in different domains, from education to healthcare, inter-personal relationship, to sustainable organizing.

CO-LABS invite participants to work within the collaborative spirit of Action Research. Each co-lab supports a learning orientation, bringing scholars and practitioners together, prioritizing mutual benefit and cultivating current work and the next generation. We inquire/practice in an integrated way that includes personal/ first-person, interpersonal/second-person and impersonal/third-person inquiry/practice. Involvement in our programs is by donation.

Interested in pursuing similar work in your own system? Interested in learning more about the key principles and practices associated with the work described? Want to have the references and further suggested readings? Check out the Resources companion volume. To find like minded practitioner colleagues, please check out the AR+ Co-labs.
In *Institutional Entrepreneurship: Transforming Management Education for Participatory Human Development in the Philippines*, Ben Teehankee describes bringing insider Action Research into the curriculum of his university’s MBA program in the Philippines. The work to engage all faculty and administration as well as managing the complexity of students’ projects help us appreciate how much of a revolution is required, and one that must be sustained over time, to facilitate the spread of Action Research inside a university.

**MEET THE AUTHOR**

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TIME FOR ACTION RESEARCH IN OUR UNIVERSITY

It is 2007 and I am preparing for a curriculum planning workshop with other administrators of the MBA program of De La Salle University. The dean has asked for a review of the curriculum as he is concerned about dropping enrollments. I am not convinced we need to simply shorten our program, as some suggest. I have a nagging concern about the curriculum itself having led the accreditation effort for the MBA program a few years ago.

Now in the role of senior professor, I have been teaching at De La Salle University in Manila, Philippines since 1983 and in our business school since 1999. In a developing country like the Philippines, the business sector plays a critical role in creating needed economic and social value. For most managers building their careers in medium to large business organizations, the preferred educational training has been and continues to be the MBA. Given this, all of us management educators who are interested in contributing to a more socially responsive business sector need to examine the focus of business school curricula. I feel it’s time to ask more basic questions that go to the heart of our work with students and their impact on their workplaces.

I remember our pride in presenting our mission statement to the accreditors. Two lines in the statement read:

- To develop outstanding professionals and entrepreneurs who exemplify humanistic values and are socially responsible stewards and change agents.
- To create and disseminate practice-oriented business and management knowledge that will uplift society.

As I wait for the others to come to the meeting, I think: Are we really producing managers who are humanistic change agents? From what I know about our students, their main goal is to climb the “corporate ladder of success.” Leading change is furthest from their minds.

Our long-running program is one of the most popular in the country.

We have more students enrolled each term than all the other graduate programs of the university combined. Do we dare mess with the source of our reputation and success?
**BUT WHAT ABOUT THE RESEARCH WE ARE DOING?**

I find myself thinking of a man I never met. Reg Revans was the first professor of industrial management at the University of Manchester in 1955, a post he held until 1965. Revans offered a more practical learning approach to management education as he was an early critic of what are now common technical and analytic features of MBA programs (Pedler & Burgoyne, 2008). Revans anticipated that his methods would be adopted by the university’s new business school. But as British management education sought academic recognition, Revans’ action learning approach— which is not reliant on expert knowledge— did not fit the emerging paradigm which was then being imported from the US. This experience may have shaped Revans’ low opinion of the emerging business school model, prompting him to coin the phrase “moral bankruptcy assured” as the meaning of MBA (Pedler & Burgoyne, 2008).

It’s his questions that resonate today:

“Does it promote uplifting practice as our mission claims?

*Is the research knowledge we produce even practical to begin with?*

**It occurs to me:** Dare we put Action Research in our MBA curriculum? We’ve been teaching it in the doctoral program for more than five years, after all. Why not do it for the MBA? But how will I get the support of the faculty who are quite comfortable with the capstone paper requirement? Where will we get the teaching resources? And how can we do it given the pragmatic concern of having a shorter program to make it “marketable?” How relevant is the MBA program to the needs of our society? How practical and useful are the things that MBAs learn for creating real business and social value?
MBA CURRICULUM: A GAP BETWEEN VISION AND PRACTICE

Navarro **, at the height of the success of MBA programs around the world, led an evaluation of leading US MBA programs and envisioned features needed to improve them. Notably, the recommended features also make MBA programs hospitable to Action Research:

1. **Multidisciplinary Integration:** Curriculum builds on a foundation of multidisciplinary and integrative problem-solving rather than the isolated delivery of “functional silo” disciplines.

2. **Experiential Learning:** Supplant, or at least supplement, the traditional “chalk-and-talk” lecture format with more experiential exercises aimed at real-world problem-solving and student-centered learning.

3. **Soft-Skill Development:** Appropriately emphasize such skills in a world where communications, leadership, negotiation, entrepreneurship, team building, and interpersonal skills are arguably as important as sound data analysis and the rigorous application of analytical management tools.

4. **A Global Perspective and Information Technology Focus:** These are critical features in a world of rapid technological change where the welfare of individual nations and the profitability of the modern corporation are increasingly dependent on world trade.

5. **Ethics and Corporate Social Responsibility:** In a post-Enron world, business ethics and corporate responsibility must occupy at least some portion of center stage.

As Argyris and Schoen famously point out, by way of encouraging us to engage in Action Research: what is espoused is not always what is actually practiced. However, the vision that these recommendations point to offers a generative space in which faculty can intervene in current curricula. The institutional entrepreneurship I describe here may therefore be best understood as a realization of our program’s original intent. After all, and as Navarro’s evaluation concluded, today’s conventional MBA curriculum remains far from the ideal identified in the prescriptive literature. In particular, very few of the schools include an experiential component in their pedagogy despite widespread agreement of the value it holds for students’ learning.
Moreover, there is a sense that with the growing frequency of business scandals and their accompanying public harms, MBA faculty need to step up to offer more ethical guidance.

*Having students undertake experiential learning that also develops ethical commitment is key to Action Research.*

As educators, we understand that when we work with students and stakeholders we are continuously constructing our worlds and ourselves. As such we have the option to make action choices that can make a positive difference in the world even if the effects cannot be completely determined. This is in line with the United Nations Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) program which has been widely adopted in recognition of the significant role that business schools play in promoting responsible management behavior through various educational programs. With more than 500 business schools around the world who have joined PRME—De La Salle University joined in 2009,—it has created a context for Action Research as an institutional intervention.

**RETURNING TO RELEVANCE: A NEW ARTICULATION FOR TRANSFORMING MANAGEMENT EDUCATION**

Before 2012, graduate business education at De La Salle University was fairly typical in design when compared with others in the country: the business function courses (accounting, marketing etc.) and the capstone strategic management course, which allows students to pull things together into final papers. All these features had become entrenched through decades of practice, but persistent problems facing the Philippines socio-economic development convinced us in the business school’s administration to take a critical look at how we were educating our MBAs.
CONTEXT IS EVERYTHING WHEN TALKING ABOUT CHANGE

Understanding the beginning is helpful for understanding how we could find our way back to our original mission of promoting social benefit.

De La Salle University is a private Catholic university under the leadership of the De La Salle Brothers. Established in Manila in 1911, it has been associated with business education ever since. The Graduate School of Business began offering the Master of Business Administration in 1960. Although business education at the college was originally founded on faith-based principles, the curriculum gradually shifted to reflect influences from American business education which had began to emphasize more quantitative analysis and scientific management knowledge in the 1950’s and 1960’s.

When the College became an accredited University in 1975, the emphasis on education for professional leadership and employment became increasingly pronounced. Quality assurance, ongoing accreditation, and, thereafter, faculty research and publishing became dominant preoccupations. This had the impact of diluting the values and faith-based orientations that may have lingered from within the business school. The following decades saw a steady growth in the university, its research endowments, and its physical assets. As faculty we also notice that despite the continuous growth of the business sector in the country and the steady output of business graduates from the university and 15 other De La Salle schools around the country, the Philippines has remained plagued with persistent poverty and social inequality. In the late 1990’s, as the institution approached its 2011 Centennial, the De La Salle Brothers began a review of how faithfully school programs might better serve the faith and values mission.

One of the early promoters for greater social relevance and faith-orientation in the business school was Philip Juico, who served as Dean of the Graduate School of Business from 2002 to 2008. He placed a key question squarely on our agenda:

“How relevant is all this research anyway? Will it affect real people and real lives? Our Founder de La Salle was an idealist, yes, but he was a practical idealist. We have to make sure our research will help our students in practical ways— so that they will not have their two feet firmly planted in midair.”
Encouraged by Juico’s direction for the business school, I organized a seminar on Social Justice and Social Thought for the faculty teaching the basic MBA management course in 2006. This would come to be important in our institutional embrace of Action Research as it supplied the background capacity. It also reminded faculty of their original, loftier purpose for the work they do.

Building on its earlier decision to join PRME, the University then established the Management and Organization Department to be the “heart and soul” of the College of Business. The emphasis on socially responsible management education was now clear. The department articulated its vision as “the leading academic department that bridges faith and management practice through values-based management education and research geared towards promoting integral human development and sustainable value-adding organizations.”

Thus, the stage was set for the curriculum changes in the MBA program anchored in an institutional mission.

**LEANING IN: BUILDING A CHANGE COALITION**

It is April 2011 and we have a decision to make. Our new academic department— the Management and Organization Department— has just been created and we need to have a department chair. We gather together as full-time faculty to talk about options.

I have served in some administrative assignment or another since 1985 and I am weary of doing any more of it: the endless meetings; the problems that just kept coming back; the constant preparation of reports; the disputes with higher administration on directions, priorities, budgets. Just thinking about it is draining, and I have other things I enjoy doing more, such as my advocacy through writing columns and my involvement in the leading professional management association of the country.

But there is something about this new department that makes me think... I read the document that created the department to be the “heart and soul” of the College. It will promote the education of business students on socially responsible management.

During the full-time faculty meeting, I am thinking, “What if we can really make the department special?”
The possibility intrigued me. So when a colleague asked, “Why not be the Chair, Ben?” I saw in it an opportunity—this time to do something more collaborative, yet also truly entrepreneurial. We would enact our own collaborative entrepreneurship to catalyze the same among our students. Over the years, it was imaginable, there would be a positive impact. But the change to practice would be a big one in an institution used to the disconnect between knowledge production and knowledge application.

**INTRODUCING INSIDER ACTION RESEARCH INTO THE HEART OF THE CURRICULUM**

In 2012, the revised MBA curriculum took effect. It incorporated two foundation courses: Business Leadership (which incorporates business ethics and social responsibility) and Management Action Research. These revisions were consistent with Navarro’s recommendations on strengthening the ethics, experiential learning, and soft-skill components of the MBA program.

Shifting a large academic program such as the MBA into a new direction entails building an entire knowledge infrastructure. A critical element was the textbook we adopted. Our department adopted the student-friendly book *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organization* by Coghlan and Brannick (2010) as the standard reference for MBA students’ Action Research efforts, seeing in it support for the humanistic orientation of our origins since it “contributes directly to the flourishing of human persons, their communities and the ecosystems of which they are a part, “-- a key goal of any Action Research as defined by Reason and Bradbury.**”

I needed help. I knew that the students would do well to hear from a known expert in the flesh. I mustered the courage to invite a guru, one of the textbook authors himself. Because of funding scarcity, I needed to have another school share the cost. In asking for that of the Dean of the Asian Institute of Management, we then turned together to invite Prof. David Coghlan, pioneer scholar of insider Action Research from Trinity College Dublin, Ireland as a department visiting scholar. Thus conditions were receptive in more than a few departments for his arrival and teaching which inspired students and faculty alike.
INTEGRATING FIRST PERSON, SECOND PERSON, THIRD PERSON ACTION RESEARCH

The revised MBA program is premised on the belief that adherence to the Action Research and meta-reflection cycles enables students to achieve incremental progress in their workplace change projects while gaining important skills for future problem-solving efforts and enhancing collaborative relationships with stakeholders. Moreover, the MBA program also seeks an important meta-learning or reflective outcome—a transformative learning experience for the student upon completion of the Action Research project. In this way, we expect to track impact over the years, both within students’ lives and as the cumulative impact of all the projects over time.

The new and improved MBA program aims to train students, through an integrative implementation of a change project, in using three broad strategies in Action Research referred to as first person, second person, and third person. **First person Action Research** involves practicing “critical subjectivity” whereby the student learns to “foster an inquiring approach to his or her own life, to act awarely and choicefully, and to assess effects in the outside world while acting.” In simple terms, this trains students to be reflective in their management practice.

**Second person Action Research** enables the student to engage with others in a face-to-face group to enhance their respective first person inquiries. Students learn to engage other stakeholders in the organizational situation they wish to change so that these individuals can be co-researchers and learn and reflect about the action being planned and implemented. This approach develops the communication and collaborative skills of the students.

**Third person Action Research** aims to create a wider community of inquiry involving persons who do not know each other face-to-face and yet can be part of a process of influencing and transforming organizational strategy and even government policy. Students can learn to be part of research conferences where they can share their Action Research experiences.
and engage in dialogues which can encourage others to learn and pursue their own change initiatives. This aspect of Action Research is closest to the scholarly activities that academics typically do. The main difference is that students are not merely consumers of knowledge from the academic production but also contributors through their own recorded experiences.

A key element in third person practice of action is the use of theory and the building of new theory, something often left aside in the press to action with stakeholders. For this we turned to critical realist methodology, pioneered by Roy Bhaskar. Students are encouraged to work with their fellow stakeholders to analyze causal forces influencing the situation they are addressing. Such forces include those operating in the situation independently of the Action Researcher (Bhaskar refers to this as ontological realism) as well as those operating within the belief systems of the stakeholders (epistemic relativism).

The interplay of different forces bringing about the situation can be presented as force-field diagrams originally inspired by the work of Kurt Lewin. Today’s students can use critical realist vector diagrams. In any case, the student, along with other stakeholders, extrapolates a refined causal theory as they connect with their situation and the impact of their intervention at the end of the Action Research project. (Read more about this in Leahy et al.’s chapter in this volume.)

Students are trained to do the three-person practice in their project using the iterative Action Research cycle. Following Coghlan and Brannick, students are guided in their Action Research to reflect on key questions for themselves and in collaboration with others in the workplace. More details can be found in the suggested readings and references for this chapter in the resources section.

**VIGNETTE: AN ILLUSTRATIVE STUDENT ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT**

Rommel, a sales team leader and MBA student, decided to tackle the issue of long-standing physical discomfort of the workers in his digital marketing company (“call center”). He explained why: “There is an increase in the number of employees complaining about their discomfort while working for prolonged periods at their computer workstations. It is an urgent issue, to avert a drop in productivity, but also because it’s a big morale problem which leads to costly turnover.”
Together with volunteer employee collaborators, Rommel explored alternative ergonomic strategies. For example, during the initial action cycle, the volunteers experimented with redistributing their work movements across different body parts across the work day, but this did not yield positive results! Next, Rommel led the group to implement a series of seminars for the employees on ergonomic work habits and exercises, so they might figure it out together.

The volunteer group gained support from top management to relax certain work policies to allow time for the needed preventive exercises. Rommel recorded in his journal: “I feel that my manager strongly supports our goal of performing better while keeping our health a priority. The amount of time that he and our IT manager have spent just to figure out a way in order for us to be more comfortable in our task has made me feel that our team is valued and appreciated.”

The subsequent action cycles did yield improvement in workplace comfort for the employees, with no reduction in productivity. The successful intervention was cost neutral.

Rommel’s evaluation by his professor included the comment: “The student chose to address a common problem in many workplaces which goes mostly unaddressed. The student’s post-project meta-reflection shows an increased sense of self-efficacy in bringing about humanistic change in the workplace, in this case, by addressing workplace physical discomfort. The student also appreciated the improvement in his leadership competencies brought about by initiating and successfully implementing change in collaboration with his work mates and superiors.”

**WALKING OUR TALK: MODELING CHANGE AGENCY IN POLICY**

MBA students, even if equipped with change agency skills, have to work within the power structures and institutional constraints present in business corporations. Philippine corporate law gives broad powers to boards of directors, subject to business judgment, to pursue profits in the interest of shareholders. In 2002, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) issued the Code of Corporate Governance which directed boards to consider corporate stakeholders alongside stockholders when making decisions in the interest of the corporation. This was in the wake of the spectacular governance failures in Enron, Worldcom etc. Unfortunately, this was retracted by the agency in 2009. I appealed to the agency to restore the stakeholder principle, in collaboration with a shareholders’ association, and the agency relented in 2014.
Institutional Entrepreneurship

Policy advocacy to make corporations more sensitive to stakeholders is an important change element for our program. It provides what may be viewed as “air cover” for the change agents in the trenches.

Another venue for supporting our students is that we have weekly columns in three newspaper dailies.

We regularly write articles on business and social responsibility themes. I have written on governance, workplace bullying, management decision-making, and open communication. This multiplies the reach for our message of humanistic management. My columns can be found here:

https://sites.google.com/site/benteehankeesite/home/newspaper-columns

Professional Learning Communities

We have noted a tendency, despite the success of the program, for faculty to revert to the conditioned familiarity of “objectivism” or “positivism” during Action Research final project presentations. This has been a challenging sticking point in our transformation as a school. For example, when including stakeholder comments as part of an evaluator panel, some take students to task for not using familiar (familiar to them that is!) methods. They may also decry the lack of concern for “objective” (by which they usually mean financial or other quantifiable) issues.

Slipping Back to Objectivism

During the early years of Action Research in the MBA curriculum, scenes like this would typically play out after students presented their projects:
**Panelist:** When you identified the lack of marketing as the main problem, weren’t you missing out on other more important core problems? What about the quality of the product? Did you consider that? And what quantitative data do you have to support your analysis?

**Student:** (Dazed and visibly confused) That was our thinking about the situation and we acted on that basis.

**Panelist:** I think you didn’t identify the real problem in your situation. Also, you should have at least run a survey.

As I observed more of these types of exchanges, it dawned on me that panelists were applying positivist criteria to the students’ Action Research projects. They were prescribing their own familiar frameworks from their teaching on the students’ situations. They were also uncomfortable with the narrative evidence being used by students to support their actions.

During deliberation in some defenses, I would say: “They’re the actors in the situation. Don’t you think we should consider their viewpoint on the matter more?”

These discussions did not have much effect.

I invited the senior faculty panelists to a Professional Learning Community (PLC) meeting to share my observations and to review key Action Research precepts.

We have found it helpful to give reminders about concepts of critical realism. These offer a worldview and vocabulary in support of Action Research, which gives additional leverage for nudging faculty towards accepting the legitimacy of a subjectivist epistemology in research. In this way, the constructivist aspect of Action Research is saved from getting lost. Also important has been convening a community of practice for interested faculty; it offers a reassuring platform for dialogue and negotiation which has helped in bringing the effort back to its original intentions.

**ONGOING CHALLENGES**

Among some faculty there is a strong pull to revert to positivist criteria when evaluating the students’ Action Research projects. We understand the faculty dialogue (real dialogue means listening well to objections and better ideas; there is not just one truth) on what constitutes quality in Action Research.

Among the student population is a tendency to choose safe topics for their research, i.e. those that merely entail improving operational efficiency or achieving financial goals—thus missing or undermining the normative and emancipatory emphasis of critical realist Action Research.
We see it as necessary to improve the training of the students so they feel more confident in building a better political platform in their organizations for truly humanistic change projects.

Among accrediting agents, the issue of quality and recognizing what quality is require ongoing attention. The University’s accrediting body raises concerns about the “validity” of the Action Research approach in the MBA program. Therefore, the department needs to carry out rigorous follow-up studies among its graduates to address this concern head on with “objective” data. However, all this happens best where there is a shared understanding of what good Action Research is. Alignment about quality criteria is key. Otherwise we are measuring apples with measuring sticks developed for oranges.

LESSONS LEARNED AND PROSPECTS

The faculty of the Management and Organization Department introduced Action Research as a way of enhancing the relevance of the MBA program to the University’s social mission. The curriculum innovation was successfully implemented due to a timely confluence of supportive developments in the University, including a resurgence of fervor for the social mission, the initiative of key academic leaders, and the availability of intellectual resources in print and in person.

The students have responded enthusiastically to the opportunity to make a positive difference in their workplaces and to obtain a distinct type of MBA education that trains them to be purposeful, reflective, collaborative, analytical, and action-oriented. With continuing dialogue among the faculty and the students, there is reason to be optimistic that the implementation will further improve in the future.

We invite educators interested in similar innovation to join our community of practice on this topic via the AR+ Co-lab on education.
AR+ CO-LABS foster friendly, person-centered spaces as dynamos of good Action Research in different domains, from education to healthcare, inter-personal relationship, to sustainable organizing.

CO-LABS invite participants to work within the collaborative spirit of Action Research. Each co-lab supports a learning orientation, bringing scholars and practitioners together, prioritizing mutual benefit and cultivating current work and the next generation. We inquire/practice in an integrated way that includes personal/first-person, interpersonal/second-person and impersonal/third-person inquiry/practice. Involvement in our programs is by donation.

Interested in pursuing similar work in your own system? Interested in learning more about the key principles and practices associated with the work described? Want to have the references and further suggested readings? Check out the Resources companion volume. To find like minded practitioner colleagues, please check out the AR+ Co-labs.
3 Educating the Action Research Scholar-Practitioner

SKETCH

In Educating the Action Research Scholar-Practitioner, Martin J. Leahy, Aliki Nicolaides, Catherine Etmanski, and Kathy Bishop, each graduate-level professors in different North American universities, describe teaching students how to do Action Research so that their students can produce impactful knowledge of value in their professional lives. Naturally, they do so by bringing an Action Research orientation to the effort.

MEET THE AUTHORS

Martin J. Leahy, Ph.D. is a teacher, researcher, and organizational consultant. Dialogical/relational (Buber, Rogers, Freire) approaches to teaching, research, and leadership are the foundation for Martin’s practice and scholarship. As OD and leadership development consultant, his early and mid-career work, at two medium-sized national firms, involved engagements with many of the Fortune 500. Twenty years ago, he launched his own consulting firm, committed to serve more not-for-profits. Teaching is a second career. A professor of organizational leadership, he has taught doctoral students in organization and management since 2003, currently as Professor, PhD program in Organizational Leadership, The Chicago School of Professional Psychology. He served as his campus Faculty Council Chair and the National Faculty Council Chair. He is the recipient of the school’s 2016-2017 Distinguished Teaching Award for Excellence in Teaching. He is the Board Chair of The Gestalt Therapy Institute of Philadelphia. He holds a Ph.D. in Human & Organizational Systems from Fielding Graduate University. He may be reached at mleahy@thechicagoschool.edu
**Aliki Nicolaides Ed.D.** is Associate Professor of Adult Learning, Leadership and Adult Development at the University of Georgia in the program of Learning, Leadership and Organization Development. Dr. Nicolaides seeks to optimize vital developmental conditions for adults, groups and systems to learn. Through the past decade of research and teaching, she has developed a theory of learning-within-complexity called ‘Generative Learning.’ The results show how adults learn from within the complexity so prevalent in this period of liquid modernity. Her work suggests that encounters with persistent ambiguity evoke learning from the potential hidden within complexity. Dr. Nicolaides pedagogy is grounded in Collaborative Developmental Action Inquiry (CDAI); a methodology which consciously develops adult’s collaborative capacity to better respond to the fluidity and complexity of our 21st century. The complex demands of a rapidly changing, interconnected world require new skill sets. CDAI is part of an emerging learning pedagogy that deliberately helps adults adapt to (and ultimately benefit from) this new global paradigm. Aliki may be reached at: alikin@uga.edu

**Catherine Etmanski** is Director and Associate Professor in the School of Leadership Studies at Royal Roads University in Victoria, Canada. With a background in adult education and popular theatre, Catherine is passionate about social and environmental justice and seeks to incorporate creative elements into her research and teaching. She has published about environmental praxis, teaching participatory research, and the use of arts-based methods in promoting dialogue and democracy. Her recent books are titled, “Food leadership: Leadership and adult learning for global food systems transformation” (Sense Publishers, 2017) and “Learning and teaching community-based research: Linking pedagogy to practice” (University of Toronto Press, 2014). She may be reached at catherine.etmanski@royalroads.ca

**Kathy Bishop** is an Associate Professor and the Program Head for Royal Roads University’s Master’s of Arts in Leadership, one of Canada’s largest graduate programs promoting leadership development. She teaches foundational leadership theory and advanced Action Research in online, blended, and face-to-face settings. Kathy has a background in adult education, experiential and arts-based leadership and learning, social work, and personal and organizational leadership. As a scholar-practitioner with her own consulting business, Kathy also
Cooking with Action Research specializes in facilitation and strategic planning for leaders and teams within various businesses, government agencies and not-for-profit organizations. In addition to a published peer-reviewed journal article defining a multiple ethics paradigm to guide research-based theatre/applied theatre work, she has written and published two books on personal leadership: Vision! Passion! Powerful Action! The World on Your Terms (2005) and Vision Crafting (2001). She may be reached at kathy.bishop@royalroads.ca

Cooking instantly stirs up associations—cookbooks, recipes, and ingredients. Yet, chefs rely on something more fundamental, a philosophy of cooking. They have an invisible foundation, principles and practices, behind the how to. Author Jonah Lehrer shares his:

“Most things in life become more automatic with time. This, after all, is the gift of experience— it allows us to pay less attention, so that we don’t have to think about maintaining our balance on a bicycle, or shifting gears in a car. But with cooking the opposite happens— the more time we spend in the kitchen the more we notice. The act is intensified, layered with new subtleties. The first time I cooked beef stew, I was merely obeying a recipe, counting off the minutes until the mirepoix was sweated and the meat was seared. But now I don’t need the clock—I’ve learned how to smell the dark sugar of cooked onions, how to see when the stew is viscous with the richness of bones. The dish is the same—beef bourguignon is too perfect to ever change— but my sense of it has become much richer.”

In a similar vein, our offering in this chapter is to share what we as educators have noticed as three essential areas for the development of our students as Action Researchers on their own journeys to becoming scholar practitioners.
AN INVITATION

Action Research makes use of various processes, procedures, and techniques for the purpose of creating conditions for change within systems with the people of the system (i.e. for-profit organization, community, group). Action Research is also a philosophy for knowledge construction in action. As in the philosophy of cooking, paying attention to experience at all levels of a system replaces operating on auto pilot. We invite you here into our ongoing inquiry, to catch ourselves in the act of automatic ways of thinking about the teaching and learning of Action Research. We too are in the ever-widening practice of noticing, as we enact our intentions to provide deep supports that help our students and ourselves to grow into impactful actors.

What follows is a taste test, one intended to share with you the cookery of cultivating leaders of change. We start by sharing the question that is driving our inquiry, providing some background on us and our situations, briefly discussing what might well be the central obstruction to Action Research flourishing—an out-dated philosophy of research which idolizes reason and results in disconnection as the hallmark of conventional research—and offer three philosophical practices that we think help to develop our students’ capacity for Action Research. We invite you to explore these three philosophical practices: connecting with self, connecting with others, and connecting with the situation, and to join us for further conversation in an AR+ community-laboratory (Co-lab).

OUR QUEST AS EDUCATORS

As educators committed to the Action Research paradigm, we imagine our purpose is to create potent conditions for human flourishing. We align around a similar question: How might we guide our students to design and conduct scholarly research with people to change situations that limit their power to thrive? Each of us mentors graduate students in leadership, learning, and change.

Catherine and Kathy teach Masters level (M.A.) Leadership students at a Canadian university whose mission is practice an application-oriented teaching and research aimed at helping solve current organizational and community problems. Aliki teaches doctoral (Ed.D.) students in a US college of education at a public, research-intensive university; the focus is on leading change through Action Research. Martin teaches doctoral (Ph.D.) students in a pro-
fessional psychology school with multiple campuses. Recognizing the diversity of the settings in which we each teach, in this chapter, we find similarity (and difference) across faculty, colleagues and students at all kinds of institutions.

We aspire to bridge the gap between teaching and learning about leadership, learning, and organizational change and the practices that lead to change. However, we find that we score hits and misses. When it comes to attaining our aspirational goals in the higher education setting, we note the competing commitments at the institutional and individual levels complicate the freedom to pursue inquiry and action across research paradigms. Faculty members’ aspirations to lead learning that disrupts and transforms continually bump up against the reality of conventional education and the interests of all who have a stake in the fruits of our work.

We work at the boundary between theory and practice.

This boundary appropriately separates and respects the differences in mission, identity, and activities of a university and the variety of contexts that employ our students. It makes sense that reflection is prized in the former and action in the latter. Yet, the two worlds exist almost separately; we lack connections between these worlds. It is our students who remind us that we work at the boundary between knowledge about leadership, learning, and change and the practice of leading, learning, and changing with others in real-world settings. Graduate students represent the strongest connection between higher education and the practice of leadership. It is our students who span the boundary, seeking to overcome the disconnections. Yet, students are too often left on their own to figure out how to bridge worlds of theory and practice. Our primary task as educators who approach leadership, learning, and change from a transformative and action-oriented research paradigm is, therefore, to create stronger connections between what happens when you try to change something (practice) and what scholars say should happen (theory). We therefore seek to bring these worlds together as praxis.
DYNAMIC TENSIONS: OVERCOMING THE DISCONNECTIONS AND CONNECTING

Disconnection is the hallmark of conventional research. We disconnect reason from experience by insisting on an objectivity which separates the researcher from self and the objects of study. The laboratory is considered the “scientific” ideal in that it is a disconnected space that allows for near total control over all the variables under study. Unfortunately, this ideal does not translate well to the study of leadership and change.

We invite you to consider an emphasis on creating connections as the fix for the overemphasis on disconnections. With this comes renewed attention to empiricism—getting our hands dirty in the reality of life—as a correction for the dominance of rationalism, which Michael Taylor (2006) describes as “the ideology of disconnection.” While allowing the conventional difference that has distinguished the worlds of scholarship (reason) and practice (action), we emphasize the need to create connections that transcend and include both.

Separation has also come about because of unmitigated individual agency in Western culture at large. With its positives and negatives, it has naturally also infected higher education culture (e.g. emphasizing individual merit) with its neglect of community (when in real life we do not live or accomplish much alone). As educators we offer a way to hold the dynamic tensions, the good and the bad, between agency and connection. We do this by growing our students (and our own) capacity to remain steady in the relationship, seeking the appropriate and timely balance with both individualism and community, research and practice, all while in action.

Our aspirations to lead learning that disrupts, grows, and leads to transformation can be jolting for students acculturated in earlier educational experiences. From honoring the expert instructor in what Freire referred to as the banking model of education, the student may falsely believe they are an empty receptacle and discount, at terrible loss, their own experience and inner knowing. Naturally, the students themselves may feel disoriented and at times disconnected. Their more familiar and therefore, stable frameworks for learning, research, and leadership appear missing when they step into the territory of Action Research, which may feel destabilizing (see Por, Bradbury, and Uldall in this volume; they distinguish between a conventional “power-over” stance which contrasts with an Action Researchers’ “power-with” stance). We invite our students into unconventional spaces for learning and controversial forms of research. We must also acknowledge the trepidation. One of our students writes of her experience in coming through this destabilization period well; as most of our students do, she went on to do excellent Action Research precisely because she paid attention to the destabilization and transformation she herself underwent.

To support our students in learning in the midst of the disruption of their usual ways of knowing, doing, and being, we offer three practices as we guide exploration of Action Research: Connecting with self, connecting with others, and connecting with the situation.
CONNECTING WITH SELF

In the age of disruption, we find ourselves, as Bob Kegan has put it, “in over our heads” with outdated frameworks for action. Our educational stance at our institutions has been to take up this current state of global context and engage the problems as they show up in ourselves, our systems, and our communities. Grace (not her real name) is one of Aliki’s students and describes entering the space of inner inquiry as she took up her Action Research study and the role of a change facilitator in her government role.

For her doctoral dissertation, Grace convened a group of women peers who met over 12 months to explore their own personal and professional development (seeking to be less “in over their heads” in life). In this evolution, they bumped up against the limits of their knowing, doing, and being. As an illustration of what we mean by “connection to self” we share, with permission, an excerpt from Grace’s reflection. She is describing her inner experience as researcher and peer inquirer in the intentional community of inquiry she convened and getting in touch with the perfectionist who both excels in learning but is also seen— for the first time—as a significant limit. **Grace writes:**

“I held and expressed the group’s collective concerns about competence, getting things ‘right,’ and knowing. As the convener and facilitator, I took on the emotional and practical ‘burden’ and anxieties of the group’s functioning and process. I acutely felt and worried about how the group was progressing, how members were feeling and experiencing the group, and the micro and macro focus and content of the group (at the individual meeting level and overall). While other members held these concerns, I was consumed by them as the primary person responsible for shepherding the group. In the beginning of the group, I spent hours preparing
for meetings, thinking through content and structure. I had a steep learning curve as I had never facilitated a group like this before, nor was I comfortable with the method or technology and other structures we developed. While this certainly manifested as a hyper-vigilance, it also felt fear-based and triggered my perfectionism, especially in the beginning. My incompetence was potentially available for display and comment in a way that other members likely feared regarding themselves in a group of unfamiliar, high-achieving women but that they could avoid as participants only. However, my holding of the group, while simultaneously resting in a space of uncertainty and developing, mirrored for the group our collective potential to experiment with the polarity of solidity and fluidity, or action in the midst of uncertainty.”

What did Grace need to learn to continue with her Action Research and produce her dissertation?

She had to be willing to notice, engage, and nurture this connection with herself from which she first felt aversion. After all, who wishes to truly see their contracted perfectionist? The catalyst for her willingness to stay with this noticing and feel into these perfectionist tendencies emerged into recognition. She realized she had begun to hide behind the observer role. While this is fine in lab conditions it is entirely unhelpful in a study of leadership and self-development. So Grace accepted how she might be in over her own head in dealing with the demands of her Action Research study. She had learned (with Aliki) that the only way to stay in the inquiry was to make transparent her novice knowing, doing, and being. This felt risky, yet she moved toward her peers in the shared inquiry, realizing that she was not merely observing but actively part of growing together into their individual and collective development. Grace realized she needed to expand her awareness of self, connect with that awareness, feel all that was stimulated, share her reflexivity, and discover the gifts of that full spectrum of awareness as an invitation to a next, deeper level of connection, in a process Grace described as “like onions, with ever more layers to peel.”

Contrast Grace’s self-reflections as she both takes up her role as facilitator and researcher with the more conventional and unadventurous research approaches inflicted upon the average graduate student: teaching, learning, and research that favor distance over experience, theory over practice, and the marketplace exasperation about student readiness for timely and actionable construction of knowledge that addresses real problems. Many have been taught that we can only research what we can measure, perfect for bridges and walls, but not so for the invisible material of human systems. That requires a conscious connection with the self first. Quick fix “recipes” that react to the (legitimate) complaints about education not preparing students for practice will likely create more of the same: separating into component parts, speculating about the relationship between them, and measuring the outcome.
Descartes’ experiment, distrusting his senses and trusting his disembodied mind in a room disconnected from other people, continues to haunt us, in part because a surprising number of faculty members are unaware of the ways in which Cartesian assumptions are powerfully behind the scenes causing a replicating of a cognitive system based on fragmentation and “power over.” Our scientific inheritance is a Cartesian worldview which, oops! just doesn’t work when dealing with the rich reality of interpersonal leadership and change. The conventional worldview separates where there is no separation. Humans are not clocks!

“The rationalist cook is oblivious to the years that the skilled chef has spent establishing intimate relationships with... [the] ingredients and tools, and tries to get by in the kitchen solely with what he can glean from a cookbook. As a result, he botches most of the dishes he attempts. However, his repeated failures typically do not lead him to suspect that his fundamental method of proceeding might be faulty. Instead, each disappointment only spurs the rationalist to search for a new, improved, and even more ‘rational’ book of recipes.” - Lehrer.

**TABLE 1.**

**Summary of Practices “Connecting to Self”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Connecting with the self</th>
<th>Development of consciousness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A correction to “the objective researcher” with a fear of research “contamination.”</td>
<td>Notice, engage, and nurture connections with self in the cognitive, affective, and intrapersonal domains.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONNECTING WITH OTHERS

Insider research refers to conducting research in a system where the researcher is a member. This is described well in this volume by Benito Teehankee. For example, the student choosing to perform Action Research in their place of employment is certainly disruptive to positivist research paradigms. Yet, this is encouraged in the Action Research paradigm because insider research bridges academic and real-world domains. Increasingly, as our students do Action Research in their own organizations, they run into issues of power. Power is imminently relevant to students who are often positional leaders in the organizations in which they conduct their research.

As such, their research projects are often rife with complex power dynamics and sometimes conflicts of interest (e.g. Can someone in an authority position truly invite their subordinates and have them feel OK with not being involved?). For this reason ethical guidelines are imperative in the design phase of Action Research. And then there are the “outsider-insiders”—consultants who have a long history of serving an organization they want to study. We cultivate our students’ capacity to take up many forms of power and to consciously explore how power plays a role in Action Research by cultivating their capacity for “connection with others.”

Ruth, one of Martin’s students, recently completed an Action Research study that led to a social service agency transforming some of the fundamental beliefs about what it means to do social work. This was essential since the leaders were dissatisfied with the established way of thinking about social work. It led them to act in ways that served the profession, and the government funders, but did not result in meeting the needs of the homeless people they intended to serve. In addition to this practical contribution, the student also contributed to the literature on leaders’ use of reflective practice as a way to develop “connections with others.”
The biggest challenge for this student was a shift in the role from external consultant to the organization to a graduate student conducting dissertation research and helping members of the organization transform the way they thought about their work. Going in, she assumed Action Research would not be very different from her work as a strategy consultant. In the early phases of the study, participants expected her to provide answers and she needed to shift their expectations.

The expectation she had of herself quickly changed; her self-conception as consultant was not sufficient for what emerged. Coming out of the study and reflecting back, she said, “I had no business doing this.” She simultaneously acknowledged that she would not have gotten through it without extensive coaching and support from Martin who chaired her committee. Does a surgery resident say this to herself after a first surgery: “I had no business doing this?” Maybe so, but how else can one learn? Certainly having the support of a good mentor, in something akin to an apprenticeship relationship, is critical.

The student's reflection raises an important objection to how we train Action Researchers. This is like complaints heard from law students: They do not learn to become lawyers in law school, but only later, on the job. They are thrown into the practice of law having had no practice! Yet, chefs at the Culinary Arts Institute must complete a 15-week externship. Physicians, psychotherapists, and teacher licenses require internships and supervised practice. However, too often graduate schools confer leadership degrees without specifically requiring supervised practice. Graduate schools tend to teach to the cognitive domain and neglect the psychomotor and affective domains, as if the student were a disembodied mind isolated from feelings that will come up in dealing with others. Since leadership is all about influencing action, how do we know that the graduates have this competency? The apprenticeship approach favored by Action Research (albeit sometimes more time consuming for faculty) cultivates a conscious connection with others and models from the student-professor dyad, how the whole system is involved in leading change.

An effective way to cultivate this connection to others is to design courses that integrate experiential learning, such as service learning projects for real world practice, into relatively safe projects where the risk of harm to others is unlikely. From the beginning of the students' program, we provide opportunities to practice the essential skills of connecting with self and others through practices such as: self-reflection; learning how to talk and think together through dialogue; reflexivity as a process for connecting self and other reflection; cycling through phases of action, inquiry, and reflection; balancing managing the process of leading change and allowing for emergence. All of these capacities are best learned by doing in the safe context of an educational institution and supported Action Research.
And, of course, roles are tied up with identity and one’s sense of self. Action Researchers are often required to play many roles, including being facilitators, educators, writers, activists, community organizers, and, of course, researchers. Colleagues in their own organizations or consultants’ clients may not differentiate between the various roles our students are playing, but it is essential for the student to be aware of those roles and maybe even declare which hat they are wearing from time to time. Each role has power associated with it and boundaries to be managed. The student, in declaring the role being played now, makes the rules of engagement clear.

In Canada and the US, institutional ethics boards review proposals for research involving humans following three core principles: respect for persons, justice, and beneficence/concern for welfare. Preparing applications for research ethics review bodies forces the researcher to consider the relationship with participants and the risks associated with power. However, in conventional research, the researcher has power over “subjects,” and in Action Research, we operate based on power with our participants. In many ways, the ethical challenges are far more complex in Action Research since ethics is not something handled once the design is complete, but comes up continually from project design to completion.

Over the years, members of the School of Leadership Studies where Catherine and Kathy teach have developed several strategies to support students in making a difference in their own organizations through their final projects while also attending to these power dynamics and ensuring an ethical approach to their research. Examples include the creation of an Action Research inquiry team and neutral third-party members who can support students who have a “power-over” position with participants in the recruitment and data collection process, and occasionally holding onto consent forms and raw data until it is time to be destroyed.

We ask students such questions as:

- When contemplating the design of your study, how will you reflect on your own position in the organization in relation to those you hope to engage in the study?
- If you engage the support of an inquiry team, how will you consider inquiry team members’ relationships with potential participants?
• For example, do you or members of your inquiry team hold a “power-over” relationship with potential participants?

• If so, how might you design your study to mitigate participant risks?

• How can you ensure that potential participants are informed of the risks and benefits prior to deciding whether to participate?

• How can you ensure that they do not feel coerced into participating and are truly able to freely give their ongoing consent?

• If they choose to withdraw, what will happen to any data you may have collected from them?

In this way, we support students in mapping relationships, developing strategies, and thinking through ethical considerations as they design their research. We hope that by taking ethical considerations around power dynamics and conflicts of interest into consideration, students ultimately become better leaders as they consider how these power dynamics play out even in the context of Employee Engagement strategies they may have previously been using.

Faculty need to contemplate their own power in the relationships with students and other stakeholders. At the most basic level, faculty have positional power over students, the degree is completed only when committee members sign the cover page. And, students at times have relative power over faculty. They can complain to administrators, cry about insufficient time and money, pull on the heart strings to speed up completion, or make the work so frustrating that the faculty member is tempted to do it for the student. Topics, intellectual projects at face value, almost always have their origins in biography and touch on the developmental needs of the student. Some students are keenly aware of the connection and some of those elect to do psychotherapy. For others, the link remains at the unconscious level.

Power is very delicate terrain and how to navigate this boundary is a very sensitive issue. To put it simply, what are the rules for calling students on their “stuff?” And how do we do that in programs where students may be paying a lot of money and experiencing themselves more as consumers rather than as partners? Dissertation chairs may well be Velcro for student projections (especially younger students) and, of course, faculty also need to remain aware of their own (counter) projections. And how do students, in turn, call faculty on their “stuff?” The experience of the chair-student relationship is a source of rich data for learning about the second person or interpersonal domain. Ideally it’s a safe space in which the dyad can experience in their relationship those very issues which will get in the way of their working with others in Action Research projects.
In the beginning, the faculty-student relationship is not one of full mutuality, nor should it be. The goal, however, is to move the relationship from master and apprentice to peer-colleagues. The changing power dynamics can be complex. The chapter by Bradbury and Smith in this volume points to how to deal with some of the deep sensitivities (only compounded by issues of gender and race) when we enter this work seriously. It is not necessarily easy to engage in these conversations and certainly impossible if we succumb to the academic taboo of avoiding all talk about our inner lives and how we relate to one another. Far from tangential to the research, it is critical to use the dyad as a protainer for digesting power relations that naturally arise in the situation of research, but which may not be as appropriate to deal with. The apprenticeship model has the chair and student take on these conversations head on. Ruth and Martin explore the student/chair/committee relationship elsewhere in this book.

In addition to the practices and skills that we discuss above for how to support students learning in “connecting with others,” we offer a few more suggestions. For Action Research projects whose change objectives are less daunting, peer supervision groups, like John Heron’s co-operative inquiry (1996) groups are a promising practice. Students might join one so there is a parallel “process” container, which, if populated with more than the dyad of student and professor, can be easier to navigate and perhaps less intense. One experiment might be having two faculty chairs create a shared group that consists of them and their Action Research dissertation students. Colleagues offer a supportive and challenging environment in which to reflect. This results in personal growth and action plans to help increase momentum in the research.
TABLE 2.

Summary of Connection with Others

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Connecting with others</th>
<th>Co-inquiry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A correction to the Cartesian-inspired taboo that avoids the subjective and relational.</td>
<td>Reflection; learning how to talk and think together through dialogue; reflexivity as a process for connecting self and other reflection; cycling through phases of action, inquiry, and reflection; balancing managing the process of leading change and allowing for emergence.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CONNECTING WITH THE SITUATION

The perceived lack of time is probably the most frequently cited student reason for slow thesis or dissertation progress. And failure to progress is indeed a serious problem since more than 50% of students in the social sciences never finish their dissertation, failing mostly in the unstructured period called “all but dissertation.” As faculty, it is easy for us to operate in a mindset that dismisses this failure as weakness of undisciplined students. The reality is, for the students, time feels like a constraint. Moreover the cost of education escalating is quite worrisome for graduate students, leaders, and indeed anyone who wants to see a good dissertation. In response we accept that we are always facing felt constraints of time. As such, part of being a researcher concerned with meaningful action and participation is understanding what we can do, and what we want to do, in the available time.

Graduate students often contrast the time doing coursework with the thesis/dissertation research phase. They point to the fact that the deadlines in courses provided a structure and a boundary that supported them to complete work on time. In the thesis/dissertation phase, they might create project plans with milestones, but there are really no consequences if they miss them. Here, there is an advantage to undertaking Action Research in that since it is work with people, rather than as the solitary researcher, commitments made to others might provide the limit situation students need to succeed. So, it is true that they do not have enough time and it is also true that they have too much time because constraints support success.

Unlike English, the Greek language has two words for time: Kairos and Chronos.
Chronos refers to the chronological sequencing of events. Kairos, however, speaks to being in alignment with the life force, or flow of life, embracing a moment or season. We have found that it is helpful to balance the Kairos with the Chronos perspective on time. To us, this means that although we can plan a chronological way forward, life in general and Action Research, in particular, rarely unfold in a linear, planned manner. Rather, everything happens in its own time. This is not a rejection of the need to imagine the best way forward, strategize, or plan; however, it is a reminder that there are also valuable insights to be gained in the natural unfolding of events, especially when things don’t go according to plan. Students are often shocked to discover that their graduate research/Action Research does not proceed in a step-by-step process, but involves stepping forward and stepping back to revisit, reconsider, and revise. Engaging rhythms of time and time horizons are ways we support our students to explore beyond the linear problem-solving timeframe with which they are very familiar. Growing their capacity to tune into Kairos is, therefore, integral to their development as Action Researchers, indeed as flourishing human persons.

Completing and defending their proposals and undergoing the institution’s research ethics review process will also be time-consuming. Some students must undergo a secondary review in their own, client, or other sponsoring organization, which can occasionally take an additional month or two. These necessary and valuable, yet time-consuming initial steps generally mean that the student will not have sufficient time to undertake a full process of what is typically understood as Action Research, where co-researchers undertake iterative cycles of observing, thinking, and acting from research design through implementation of the action plan. Perfectionism is not helpful. However, it is useful to point out that the students can build on their work after it is officially complete. Many therefore can springboard from the rigorous basis of their graduate Action Research into further (paid) work with their partnership system.

In recognition of the reality of these perceived time constraints, Catherine and Kathy’s school has devised the Action Research Engagement (“Action ResearchE”) model. This “Action ResearchE” model is derived from the principles of Action Research and is intended to support students in engaging members of an organization in a change project around a topic of inquiry the organization wishes to explore. Action ResearchE is intended to engage a broad sector of organizational stakeholders in the desired change to create the organizational conditions for engagement and the subsequent action plan for change. In designing their research according to the Action ResearchE model, students are encouraged to build in iterative cycles of gathering data, analyzing data, planning action, and evaluating outcomes.

This model focuses primarily on initial engagement that builds change readiness within the organization. Students design projects that bring key stakeholders into dialogue around the topic under investigation and produce recommendations. However, these students normally do not have sufficient time within the confines of their degree to undertake the actions and recommendations resulting from these dialogues. Therefore, it is built into the process to
have an organization sponsor who is committed to implementing the changes. Occasionally students are in a position to implement change, however, the intention is that the initial engagement and relationship-building builds momentum so that the iterative cycles of action and reflection continue well beyond the scope and timeframe of the students’ projects. The degree to which this is the case depends on the student, the sponsor, and the organizational context.

In *The Reflective Practitioner*, Action Researcher Donald Schön defined design as a “reflective conversation with the situation.” He uses the example of architecture, but it is easily applicable to research design. In the traditional view, the architecture student acquires professional scientific knowledge and techniques and applies that knowledge to solve problems. But, in practice, the architect, like the researcher, does not encounter a problem, they come upon a situation. The architect might want to build a house based on some grand design, but must consider the landscape and the location work with those designs. When the situation involves human beings, such as in research, there is likely great diversion of thought on what the problem is, and indeed, whether there is a problem.

The Action Researcher needs to consider the situation and all its aspects— the physical, political, professional, financial, psychological, and social. Concerning the Action Research group, the researcher must also consider what Buber called the “between”— the inter-human realm or intimate space between particular people that has a life of its own and exists over time, not unlike a marriage, a living being that includes and transcends its members. Leadership research has been dominated by attention to individuals using the lens of psychology and sometimes sociology. The following practices can sustain this kind of space: creating Kairos spaces that leave the clock behind, removing yourselves from the distractions of daily work and workplace, allowing time for support with a peer community of practice, letting go of process and outcomes, being mindful of power and purpose larger than self/ego. One of the lasting outcomes is developing a kind of existential trust that you will be able to withstand the heat created by the contending needs to listen and speak, reflect and act, differ and connect, inquire and know. You will be able to stand the heat and can stay in the kitchen.

### TABLE 3.

**Summary of Connection with the Situation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Connecting with the Situation</th>
<th>Development of consciousness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A correction to the disconnections between research and practice, the universal and local.</td>
<td>Doing what’s possible in the time available; distinctions between Chronos and Kairos.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONCLUSION

We opened by sharing our quest: How might we guide our students to design and conduct scholarly research with people to change situations that limit their power to thrive? Old school research philosophy of science (still anchored in the Cartesian revolt against religious dogmatism) is among the most formidable barriers to doing that. Action Research is an approach to knowledge construction of the kinds more adaptive to the contemporary world. We believe more is desperately needed. We have proposed three practices (connecting with self, connecting with others, and connecting with the situation) as habits to be cultivated, like meditation for a monk or nun, that make these practices a lived discipline.

While we have no recipes to guarantee success, we invite you to experiment with these practices. We acknowledge that anxiety may be part of the journey, and suggest turning to it rather than banishing it. From our own practice, we can say that with a supportive orientation, anxiety can just as easily feel exciting! Ken Gergen, in a recent interview, reminded us that knowledge is created by doing something, a tradition that goes back to ancient Greek philosophy. We end with the key question he posed as a fundamental question for all researchers, a question potent enough to have us all practice as Action Researchers (as Ken suggests!).

“If you are going to construct a world, what is worth doing?”
To this we would add: and what would make the learning process exciting and generative of good for all? - Ken Gergen, social constructivist/psychologist.
AR+ CO-LABS foster friendly, person-centered spaces as dynamos of good Action Research in different domains, from education to healthcare, inter-personal relationship, to sustainable organizing.

CO-LABS invite participants to work within the collaborative spirit of Action Research. Each co-lab supports a learning orientation, bringing scholars and practitioners together, prioritizing mutual benefit and cultivating current work and the next generation. We inquire/practice in an integrated way that includes personal/first-person, interpersonal/second-person and impersonal/third-person inquiry/practice. Involvement in our programs is by donation.

Interested in pursuing similar work in your own system? Interested in learning more about the key principles and practices associated with the work described? Want to have the references and further suggested readings? Check out the Resources companion volume. To find like minded practitioner colleagues, please check out the AR+ Co-labs.
Action Research for Environmental Sustainability: bridging stakeholder groups, knowledge systems, and scales

SKETCH

In Action Research for Environmental Sustainability, Marina Apgar and Will Allen describe how they build sustainable Action Research social process capacity in their work in community development and natural resource management. This account offers a rich description of a more inclusive approach to traditional expert-led approaches to research and development initiatives which encourage external goal setting, often in advance of stakeholder input. Their work aims to support efforts to engage the multiple stakeholders involved in more collaborative approaches to develop appropriate and place-based solutions that support sustainable development.

MEET THE AUTHORS

J. Marina Apgar, PhD is a research-practitioner who is passionate about understanding and facilitating the creative space between research and learning processes and development outcomes through engaging in complex adaptive systems. She has spent over 10 years working directly with indigenous peoples and social movements in Latin America on local resilience and adaptation initiatives building transdisciplinary methods. Through her work with the Indigenous Peoples Climate Change Assessment initiative, she has also supported engagement of indigenous and local peoples and their knowledge systems in global policy processes such as the UNFCCC seeking more transformative systems change. She recently led the design of participatory Action Research as the main implementation and learning strategy for a multi-partner CGIAR research program in five countries through her role as Knowledge Sharing and Learning scientist at WorldFish. She is currently research fellow with the participation research cluster at the Institute of Development Studies in the UK.

4 Action Research for Environmental Sustainability

Will Allen, PhD. is an independent systems scientist, Action Researcher and evaluator. He has more than 25 years of experience in sustainable development and natural resource management. Through his work he seeks to bridge local, indigenous and organizational perspectives, and help diverse groups work together to develop a shared understanding around goals, actions and indicators. He also developed and manages the Learning for Sustainability (LfS) website – [http://learningforsustainability.net](http://learningforsustainability.net) - as an international clearinghouse for on-line resources around collaboration and innovation processes. He has worked in both national and international research organisations, and brings experience from working with a wide range of different end-user stakeholder sectors. He may be reached at willallennz@gmail.com

In this chapter on Action Research for environmental sustainability we ask: How do we learn to leverage differences across multiple stakeholders to help us understand and move our individual and collective journeys towards environmental sustainability? We reflect on our experiences as Action Researchers in environmental research and development programs. One of these programs is an integrated catchment (watershed) management (ICM) research program based in New Zealand and the other is an agricultural research program focused on reaching poor farm families in aquatic agricultural systems around the world. Our experiences and learning across these two programs are interlinked through our collaboration over the years, and we hope you will be enticed to take useful insights to your work and perhaps join a community of inquiry/practice.

We begin by offering the words of a program reviewer who evaluated one of these programs:

“One of the things that struck me [in your program] was the personal journeys the researchers and the community members had been on, in addition to your collective journey. There were so many signs of personal growth and I think this was the most inspiring of all the outcomes. It was very clear that the program funders, leadership, community and researchers themselves were all committed to creating space for innovation and with that innovation came both program and personal growth. We would not have seen this without personal interaction with the research and, importantly, community members. The way that discussion between the panel,
researchers and community took place was organic and because of that was not scripted and clearly showed their thoughts. The review panel did well to provide opportunities for this discussion and this was a highlight of the review process and of immense value.” - International Reviewer of ICM-Motueka research program

These words offer an opening reflection on the value Action Research brings to addressing environmental challenges. Our reviewer highlights that there are multiple stakeholders with different interests; community members and researchers have different yet also shared experiences of their aims, processes, and outcomes of working towards environmental sustainability in a particular place. Moreover, community members are themselves part of different communities — policymakers, farm families, Māori (the indigenous people of New Zealand), and representatives from environmental groups. In their words, we hear appreciation that the changes we experience personally and collectively are important outcomes. These are the result of how we interact with different groups and perspectives in the messy processes of collaboration and so often are not valued. After all, most environmental science remains uncomfortable with subjectivity. As Action Researchers seeking to contribute to environmental sustainability, we see our role as facilitating constructive conversations across multiple stakeholders, bringing to light these often unspoken and more personal stories of change that are fundamental to achieving sustainability.

Marina’s story of her entry into an agricultural research program that embraced an Action Research modality illustrates how we feel as Action Researchers entering the often-foreign world of science.

“Arriving in Malaysia in 2012 to take up a new role with WorldFish, I had moved from working at the secretariat of an indigenous initiative on climate change. I had been spending time with Quechua potato farmers in the high Andes and Guna island communities in Panama, listening to how they understood the changes they are experiencing, and supporting local responses— I was comfortable in that space as an Action Researcher. I was now feeling apprehensive about working within an agricultural research institute—playing a role that was defined as being a ‘scientist,’ albeit one using participatory methods, which I imagined was unlikely to be the mainstream approach within the organization. I quickly found comfort in realizing that I had joined an eclectic group of researchers, enticed, like me, by the unusual opportunity the CGIAR (see CGIAR.org) Research Program on Aquatic Agricultural Systems provided for large-scale methodological innovation.

WorldFish focuses on reducing the poverty of people living on the large rivers and flood plains in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific and does this mainly through its expertise in developing aquaculture and other agricultural technologies— similar to
other international agricultural research centers that are part of the CGIAR family. While this work was certainly reaching many farmers and making a positive difference in their lives, there was also evidence emerging that research did not necessarily reach the most marginalized small-scale, poor farmers, and that in increasingly degraded ecosystems in the context of climatic and other global patterns of change, some were becoming poorer.

So, along with other CGIAR centers focused on poverty reduction, they proposed to respond to this challenge through embedding agricultural and technological research into processes of development and change which were understood to have multiple interacting dimensions and agents of change. The thinking was that bringing marginalized farmers into collaborative arrangements and using multi-stakeholder processes to learn together with researchers, were potentially more effective ways to build capacity, improve livelihoods, and build environmental sustainability than simply delivering the technological solution.

Together with my colleagues in the Knowledge Sharing and Learning research team, I found that we were not just token social scientists in an agricultural program. Rather, we were there because researchers in program countries needed advice on how to practically embed agricultural research in ongoing processes of development that they did not, themselves, control. In some cases, they had historically stayed away from the messy processes of development to remain focused on their role as scientists. They were now facing a radically different starting point. While there was some experience with participatory approaches to agricultural development starting with the work of Robert Chambers dating back to 1985, and work of others in the CGIAR for some years such as Douthwaite et al. (2003), the starting point of this endeavor was different in that we fundamentally flipped the way the program designed how to intervene.

We did not start by identifying what research or technology was needed in these locations and then set out to develop it with people; instead, we emphasized researchers engaging with others to first define what the collective and desired change was—the social and environmental outcomes—to then identify where agricultural and other forms of research—enabling processes and technical solutions—could contribute.

My entry point, much to my delight, therefore, was to help design and practically implement a program of agricultural research in five countries with multiple partners as a participatory Action Research endeavor. This meant we were set up to learn across the different contexts and understand better how research could reach marginalized communities as we sought sustainable outcomes.”
THE NEED AND OPPORTUNITY FOR ACTION RESEARCH

Taking such a radically different approach to research and development we believe, is necessary as we seek avenues for environmental sustainability in our current reality of living in the Anthropocene (as Crutzen’s widely adopted term describes the profound influence of human action on nature). Climate change and deforestation are just two examples of the complex environmental challenges we face that span across local and global experiences and scales. There is a growing conversation on the need to nurture deep and intentional transformative change given that current structures seem to make the existing system untenable. We support these conversations and indeed feel that transformational intent is important in all sustainability research. However, we also recognize that to open up opportunities for deeper change for many of the world’s poor and marginalized, there is a need to support more local and incremental forms of change, based on learning and adaptation.

Poor farmers in arid parts of Africa, for example, are today entering yet another drought season leading to the first officially-declared famine in Africa this century. The famine declared in parts of Somalia is described insightfully by Oxfam as the result of “triple failure”: failure to produce sufficient food due to drought conditions, failure to access food due to livestock deaths further decreasing peoples’ ability to purchase food, and failure of political and institutional responses to safeguard those most vulnerable to climatic and political change in the region. On the southern coasts of Bangladesh, a similar complex story unfolds, as increasing salinity of fresh water systems due to sea level rise creates differentiated impacts on local people. On the one hand, increased salinity improves conditions for shrimp farming—a business that those with access to capital and land can take advantage of—and on the other hand, poor farmers who depend upon small household aquaculture ponds are becoming poorer as the increasing salinity is killing off their native fish stocks.
Yet such environmental and development conundrums are not only affecting poorer countries and people. The OECD reminds us that water is becoming scarce in OECD and non-OECD countries alike – and that this is largely a “governance crisis.” Worldwide water demand is projected to increase 55% by 2050 due to growing demand from manufacturing, thermal electricity generation, and domestic use. For example, New Zealand’s freshwater resources are increasingly stressed as land uses intensify and demands for water— especially for irrigation— reach limits of availability. There is now an urgent need to assist different levels of governments and other stakeholders in engaging effective, fair, and equitable water policies and practices in many countries.

Our examples illustrate that the complex environmental challenges we are grappling with are the result of social, economic, and political forces.

Addressing them is not as simple as improving the technical management of resources. Biophysical science has, in the past, guided environmental management using the power of its claim to independence. Yet in the contested spaces of environmental management today, this seeming strength becomes a weakness as it only allows for one interpretation of the problem and, at worst, it may silence those most affected by the decisions it is influencing. Research teams working towards environmental sustainability, must, therefore, work closely with all those who have the power to change practices and policies— operating at their different levels, and developing strong two-way relationships with key stakeholders involved in the problem situation.

Collaborative approaches that bridge multiple knowledge systems, scales, and stakeholders—communities, local and national governments, researchers, and policymakers— are thought to be well-suited to responding to localized and rapid changes which are common in conditions of uncertainty such as climate change (Song et al., 2013), and to supporting adaptation and incremental system change. A new generation of environmental management approaches known as adaptive co-management or co-governance (of which we write about in the resources section) are now encouraging multi-stakeholder deliberation and action. They emphasize learning to support stakeholders as they navigate ongoing change and uncertainty through using various participatory and action-oriented approaches.
The good news, then, is that we have more opportunity now to work and learn together how to build new relationships and interact in different ways toward collaborative environmental management. This is where we, as Action Researchers, come into the story. Our work aims to support a wider group of stakeholders to navigate change, and to open up new spaces for reflection that help us collectively learn our way to more sustainable futures because we cannot predetermine the pathways that will emerge.

You may well wonder how we start to bring about change when the present is so much determined by its own past, and is, therefore, very hard to change. As Bob Dick pointed out in 1996, the one exception to this is the change agent’s own behavior: “By act of will you can change your own behavior. If you change your own behavior in interaction with others, you can then change the relationships, processes, and actions that characterize it.” In short, the Action Researcher can learn to continuously improve processes and relationships and for that they must learn to change themselves.

Will’s story of building space for reflection and learning in integrated catchment management in New Zealand highlights the relational aspect of our work. Will reflects:

“In 1997 I was part of the beginning of a small social research group at Landcare Research, a New Zealand government research institute focused on biophysical research on terrestrial ecosystem management. We were the Collaborative Learning for Environmental Management (CLEM) group. Our underlying rationale was that collaborative and adaptive processes are important components of understanding complex natural resource management problems, and that Action Research provides a useful approach to research in this area.

As a group we worked as a ‘community of practice.’ Our shared field of concern and distinguishing competence was the theory and practice of collaborative learning, and its application to environmental and natural resource management. The creation of one of the early collaborative learning websites was a focal point for our own research and project outputs, and in itself created a virtual community of practice in the wider national and international arena—in turn strengthening our identity as a research group. We did not always work together as a group on projects, but relied on opportunities—formal and informal—to cement and build community by discussing experiences and developing expertise as we worked on capacity building, information systems, empowerment, dialogue, and participatory evaluation.

Over time we worked in a range of research programs, most of which were developed and led by senior biophysical researchers. Often in these programs we had limited input on location and overall direction of research, which had already been set by the funding stream available and the corresponding research output
required. At the same time, as a community of practice, we had our own complementary research agenda based around our own role: supporting collaborative and adaptive learning approaches. This often required building the capacity of multiple stakeholder groups to work collectively. In turn, this required the ability to negotiate with research leaders whose key performance indicators were often set more narrowly by the biophysically-focused funding stream. In the context of a biophysical research institute, as Action Researchers we negotiated an often tenuous but consistent role as we worked on a range of projects to facilitate (and grow our knowledge about how to grow) collaborative learning approaches to natural resource management.

One set of themed projects that illustrates both the challenges and successes that emerge from our participation in different research projects was the Motueka Integrated Catchment Management (ICM) research program. This was a multi-disciplinary, multi-stakeholder research program to improve the management of land, freshwater, and near coastal environments in catchments with interacting and potentially conflicting land uses. The inclusion of a substantial strand of work on collaborative learning made this a relatively unique program. And with a focus on developing and sharing understanding about how catchments function “from ridge tops to the sea,” the program aimed to step beyond the aims of traditional science programs and create a more engaged and responsive research environment that would see researchers and stakeholders more closely linked.”

We have both experienced what it feels to enter multi-disciplinary applied research programs whose aim was not just to develop and provide research information, but to work in a more engaged way with key stakeholders and to seek more sustainable solutions in challenging settings. In both our cases, biophysical science had traditionally been driving the research agenda of the leading agencies and Action Research-type approaches were relatively novel in these settings. In Marina’s case there was a strong mandate from the lead organization to design the intervention and plan the research within it from an overtly Action Research stance. This was possible due to the efforts of many over the years, creating space for more engaging ways of working within the field of agricultural research. Will’s story illustrates how this happens through time, and how the practice often emerges not through mandated spaces but through claimed spaces. While there is no right or wrong or ideal place to begin a project, as Action Researchers, we must remain flexible to make the most of the particular situation we find ourselves in and build appropriate strategies to act as ‘constructive change agents.’ We now explore with you some of the key ingredients from our kitchen.
DESIGNING EMERGENT COLLABORATION: USING CONSCIOUS SOCIAL PROCESS TOCREATIVELY EVOLVE OUR DISHES

Within our respective programs, both of us regarded our main role as Action Researchers to be primarily about opening up and creating spaces for collaboration. In other words, we designed the multi-stakeholder processes through which the collaboration and learning that the programs hoped for would become possible. Yet a challenge in finding one’s footing within the environmental research-driven, organizational framework we were set within is that social interactions are not controllable, as natural experiments tend to be. Consequently, collaboration and learning cannot be prescribed through a step-by-step recipe, but rather, through having a pinch of structured design, a handful of critical process moments to keep an eye on, and a good dollop of improvisation to find and build the collective flow as the journey takes shape. This is often misunderstood by those who work in an area where success is measured by developing the “right” research answer based on having a tightly defined research question a priori, rather than negotiating compromise among multiple social perspectives. Moreover, the processes we design exist within the confines of the current collaborative and other social process activities that we are working within. We reflect on this through our experiences.

DESIGNING COLLABORATIVE LEARNING IN THE MOTUEKA CATCHMENT

A primary goal underpinning the Motueka ICM program was to work with stakeholders and researchers to develop a research program that supported integration “from ridge-tops to the sea.” In the late 1990’s when this program began, the designers were breaking new ground in pursuing such an ambitious and integrated research agenda in New Zealand and had no templates upon which to base its design or activities. The goal and scope of the program were formulated in conjunction with different stakeholder groups. Many meetings were held to get to know each other, share what we knew, and begin to develop work strands. The Motueka ICM framework (Fig. 1) was the product of a 2-year, multi-step design process that saw the land, freshwater, and coastal issues complemented by a collaborative learning focus.
The addition of collaborative learning explicitly intended to improve interactions between science providers and catchment stakeholders, and to maximize the uptake and use of new knowledge and the tools developed. However, the concepts underpinning collaborative and learning-based approaches, which go beyond enhanced bi-lateral conversations, were largely undefined in the early stages of the program. Indeed, despite good intentions, the program began life based on a conventional client-researcher model of communication. The first published iteration of Figure 1 lacked an evaluative feedback loop (the dotted line), any mention that it should also contribute to relationships and networks, and only noted that guidelines, reports, and decision support systems would be the mode of delivery. The notion of operating within multiple learning-based communities comprising researchers, policymakers, and other community and sector representatives emerged later in the program.

Our role as Action Researchers (or social process specialists, as we were often referred to) developed over time. Building relationships and processes to support collaborative learning within the program, within our organizations, and with external stakeholders to support collaboration ‘out there’ around the project was an important starting point. This required the ability to engage people at a range of levels and hierarchies, each providing context to the other.

Some initiatives were based around high-level policy questions, while others were locally-based and dealt with a single issue in a particular stream or river reach.
Over the course of the program these diverse conversations and forums continued. These went beyond the normal meeting format to bridge those communication gaps that are often problematic, such as those between scientific knowledge and management decisions, between agencies and communities, and even between science disciplines.

To support the likelihood of these connections and conversations happening in real time, as the processes unfolded, we designed opportunities—or platforms as we referred to them (see something similar at work in healthcare transformation in the Lifvergren and Zandee chapter in this volume). An iterative Action Research cycle was used to help people to come together to plan, work together, and then reflect and learn in order to feed into a new cycle. Platforms we worked with differed from project to project, but included one-on-one meetings, group-facilitated meetings, learning groups, computer-model facilitated workshops, online asynchronous groups, and an art–science initiative. Some examples of collaborative learning platforms are shared below:

- An Annual General Meeting (AGM) was held each year and was an opportunity to bring the whole research team and key stakeholders together. Setting aside three days of program time each year to focus on collaboration and communication highlighted the emphasis and support that these activities were accorded. These AGMs included sessions open to all stakeholders, sector groups, and Motueka residents. They were aimed at reviewing research progress as well as building networks. Each AGM explored different approaches and topics, and those of us in the social research team facilitated planning and reflection sessions at these. As Action Researchers, we provided our own sessions where different frameworks around social processes were discussed. In the early years of the program these frequently manifested as heated debates on the meaning of “integration,” or “how research and management should intersect.” These AGMs provided for an annual reflection across the range of stakeholder groups involved, and in the later years served to highlight the development of shared meanings around relationships and boundaries.

- A number of Learning Groups were developed to get researchers and wider stakeholders together. Through cycles of reflection and discussion over the course of many facilitated meetings, learning group members explored experiences and ideas, building analyses, alliances, and possibilities for action. For example, the Community Reference Group (CRG) was established as a first point of contact between the ICM program and the wider Motueka community. This learning group comprised 8–10 residents from throughout the catchment (selected initially by expressions of interest), plus up to four researchers and policymakers relevant to the discussion topic of each meeting. While some initial participants left, others joined. They represented a range of geographies, roles, cultures, genders, and ages and included farmers, orchard managers, recreational fishing, Māori (indig-
enous peoples of New Zealand), and tourism perspectives. The CRG met three to six times a year between 2000 and 2010. Its role was to act as a sounding board to discuss the research being carried out and ways of applying the new knowledge gained to improve management of the catchment resources.

- A Sediment Learning Group was an issue-focused dialogue that we ran between 2005 and 2006. The extent and nature of the sediment issue was debated by individuals from various stakeholder backgrounds, including a fishery manager, a landowner, a forestry manager, a member of a local Māori tribe, and staff of government agencies. Side conversations were held through regular phone calls from the facilitator and smaller meetings between two or three participants.

DESIGNING GOOD LEARNING INFRASTRUCTURE IN AQUATIC AGRICULTURAL SYSTEMS

Our first step in the aquatic agricultural systems program was to design the participatory planning and set-up in each of the five locations. The process involved engagement of multiple stakeholders and scoping research. It was first codified in a roll-out handbook—which was, of course, much more a guide than a recipe—with suggestions for a generic process with some key principles which were to be adapted in each location. In 2012, the process was implemented in the first three sites: the Barotse floodplain in Zambia, the Southern Polder Zone in Bangladesh, and the island of Malaita in the Solomon Islands (AAS, 2013). The program teams in each location engaged stakeholders at two levels: (1) at the local-most level with members of selected communities, and (2) with multi-stakeholder groups that together focused on designing a program of work to seek transformative change across the whole aquatic agricultural system—the system level. A learning infrastructure was designed for each of these levels.

The program team used a strength-based, appreciative approach that started with identifying the strengths within communities and the whole system.
We aimed to first understand the potential for change that lay within the aquatic agricultural system and its stakeholders (including researchers) in order to then identify opportunities and responses. An explicit design feature was to start first with visioning in selected communities, such that those most marginalized could define their desired future and set the direction for the program. We layered individual to group visions through a simple drawing and sharing exercise that started with “Draw your dream of what you would like your community to look like in ten years’ time.” The visions and resulting action plans developed by villagers were then used to anchor the planning with system-level stakeholders to ensure that the program would respond to and work with the visions of the local level rather than define top-down what the focus should be.

The overall program vision was codified in a development challenge that identified opportunities to build more sustainable futures in the aquatic agricultural system. For example, in the Barotse Floodplain in Zambia, the stakeholder-owned development challenge was: “To make more effective use of the seasonal flooding and natural resources in the Barotse Floodplain system through more productive and diversified aquatic agricultural management practices and technologies that improve lives and livelihoods of poor women and men.” This challenge framed the co-ownership of the program by the stakeholders involved from the beginning.

Moving from planning to implementation, the co-owned program of work for each site included agreed upon research initiatives. For example, diversifying crops for income and nutrition or improving governance arrangements. These linked community visions to stakeholder visions, linking the local level with the system level. Seeing agricultural research as just one contributing lever towards achieving development outcomes was a considerable shift from normal practice, where research interventions are designed based on researcher interests and questions. Villagers and stakeholders then implemented their action plans through forming their own inquiry groups that brought together relevant stakeholders (such as agricultural or fisheries extension agents, scientists, NGOs, church groups, leaders etc.) as co-researchers to address commonly defined questions. As contextualized and emergent processes of co-inquiry, they were designed to address specific questions and exhibited varying degrees of leadership by researchers or other stakeholders as appropriate.

A third level of learning across sites involved operational and research staff and global partner organizations. At the end of the first year of planning the program in the first three sites, this group undertook a review of the process, and identified ways to improve as we then designed the second round of program-planning through stakeholder engagement in the Visayas-Mindanao islands of the Philippines and the Tonle Sap Lake in Cambodia in 2013. One of the main changes that resulted from this learning from practice was to further contextualize how the program engaged with selected communities through planning earlier with partners on the ground, being more aware of who specifically we were working with in each location, and paying attention to power relations to deepen our understanding of context.
It was not until this stage that we could begin to articulate and codify the overall Action Research design for the program learning cycle in the five sites, and to see that these initial engagement processes were not just about setting up the research agenda, but the beginning of the overall program monitoring and evaluation system which would enable ongoing reflection and learning. In 2013, we could then share what we had learned was working across contexts. The articulated program-learning infrastructure followed overlapping levels of inquiry, today referred to as first, second, and third person Action Research of teams within and across sites (see Figure 2) and drove the monitoring, evaluation and learning system of the program.

**Figure 2:** Learning system based on 1st, 2nd, and 3rd person Action Research practice (with permission*)

As the diagram illustrates, first, second, and third person inquiry bring different but complementary aspects to learning through Action Research. They work together to facilitate knowledge-generation and to fuel change processes. First person inquiry provides an important basis for individual Action Researchers to foster an inquiring approach to their own lives and engagement with the value-laden and political nature of the problem situation in question— to be self-reflective. Second person inquiry focuses on inquiry with others who are asking similar questions about practice (a meta-reflection together), while third person inquiry includes engagement and learning with the broader stakeholders on the development challenge they are tackling.

In both of our examples, inclusive and reflective processes were not part of established program practice and had to be introduced to our co-researchers. Our biophysical science and project management colleagues were used to working with predefined goals and expectations. Accordingly, as we built the structures and processes for reflection and learning, we had to work within their comfort zones while we moved toward ours. For example, in the aquatic
agricultural systems program it was important to work with people so they were comfortable with using the roll-out handbook as a guide and not a recipe. The ICM Motueka example illustrates how such complex programs develop through evolution rather than blueprints. It takes testing and implementing various design options as opportunities emerged throughout the program before we could start to visualize the overall Action Research design. In both cases, we were supported by use of the Action Research cycle (at times implicitly and at others more explicitly) and a core principle of working where the energy was emerging and capacity was evident. Our first key ingredient, then, is to learn your way to your own design in context with others.

A GUIDE FOR BUILDING TRUST: TRUST IS THE BUTTER THAN MAKES EVERYTHING TASTE BETTER

So far, we have talked about design of the processes required for collaborative research to work towards environmental and social sustainability. Our second role then is to facilitate the collaboration as it takes shape, as the emergent inquiry groups form, or platforms for discussion are developed. We know this starts with building relationships because as we build community together, we can begin to see and trust each other. Trust is the central binding ingredient in messy collaborative processes; without it, the flavor is never quite right! And appreciating trust can push people into quite a different way of working, particularly for researchers used to expert knowledge as sufficient for achieving their goals.

In the aquatic agricultural systems program, across the five locations, and with the multi-stakeholder groups we worked with in each of the sites, we were on a shared journey. The learning infrastructure outlined previously meant that by force or by choice we learned about and from each other as we engaged in iterative cycles of planning, implementing, and reflecting together. In the Philippines, the implementation team felt they needed to fully immerse themselves in village life to build different types of relationships than they were used to establishing as scientists. As city-dwelling and well-educated researchers, they knew a major barrier would be the dependency mindset that is common in poorer rural areas, where people expected them to come with solutions and not questions.

While we had decided to engage in building collaborative relationships, for villagers, this was breaking with normal practice and it felt uncomfortable. The teams, therefore, decided to stay in the villages for extended periods of time and to work alongside local facilitators from partner organizations. This enabled them to spend time in the evenings having dinner together and building a more horizontal working relationship. And similarly, in one of our New Zealand settings, the research team preferred to stay in the local Marae (the Māori community building) rather than stay in a motel in order to build relations and learn more from
locals while talking and doing the dishes together in the kitchen. These examples illustrate how we learn our way to new practices by changing our habitual identities.

Collectively exploring how to work together (and not just what to work on) came in part through the use of process-oriented participatory theories of change in the aquatic agricultural systems. During the planning phase, we developed our theories of change collectively, exploring the many possible ways we might support the types of outcomes we were after. We used these to deliberate and identify potential pathways to achieving the desired vision and to tackle the development challenge long term. Different stakeholders brought their own knowledge and experience to the discussion on what outcomes they aimed to achieve collectively—researchers being one group of stakeholders. Facilitators questioned stakeholders to bring to light their often-hidden assumptions about how they could bring about change. Stakeholder social-network analysis further helped explore ways in which different groups could link in different ways to support different types of change. Time and care were taken to help the groups visualize what they were trying to achieve, how they thought they would succeed, and importantly, how they could interact to achieve more together. This built a much deeper understanding of each other and what we could do together.

As co-inquiry groups then implemented their specific agendas, trust began building among stakeholders, and increasingly, teams were able to dig deeper to engage with harder to tackle issues. For example, in the Barotse Floodplain in Zambia multi-stakeholder engagement to improve the fish value chain led to an agreed understanding that it was how the fishery was managed that needed improvement first and foremost. The initial focus on market access became less important, and a process through which traditional authorities and government actors (who had historically been in conflict) were brought together to develop new co-management plans became their central focus. Similarly, in the Philippines, initial discussions identified illegal fishing gear as one of the critical issues in the Balingasag community. Time and working together led to multi-stakeholder dialogue to bring illegal fishers into fisheries management discussions, linking two groups of people that had previously not been able to speak to each other. Both of these examples illustrate how in a short period of time (about two years) trust helped historical conflict to be overcome in the interest of a common goal— and that common goal related to sustainability of the aquatic agricultural system, the land, and water which sustains livelihoods and which people are deeply connected to.

But questioning of power relations is unsafe, particularly for the marginalized, raising important questions around how we manage the ethics of our own practice and safeguard those at risk. Speaking truth to power might be a brave philosophy, but when you are powerless it can be very risky. If you are a fisherman living on the margins of the Tonle Sap Lake, decline in fish stocks is likely pushing you to illegal fishing methods to sustain a basic livelihood for your family. The local leadership turns a blind eye to your illegal practice as long as you pay your monthly fishing dues to them. So, when the same leaders are responsible for poor functioning of the water filter station which is leading to health risks for your children, bringing
to light their corruption publicly means risking your ability to sustain your livelihood. Similarly, if you are a landless and single mother in Bangladesh, pointing to the underlying norms that keep you locked in poverty means putting at risk your ability to at least feed your family through working on land that others allow you to use for a fee. There are no easy answers to how we shift these deeper power dynamics and as facilitators of these interactions we must pay attention to the level of risk people are exposed to.

We found that in many cases solidarity and trust were built through facilitated spaces.

In Bangladesh, for example, women of different social and economic statuses worked together to learn about improving their vegetable seeds on their small plots of land (focused on a seemingly safe technical intervention to begin with). When comparing results in their reflection step in the Action Research cycle that guided the process, questions of relative advantage and disadvantage due to access to land were raised in a non-confrontational way. The inability of poor women to access better quality or sufficient land, meant that even if their experiments were well-implemented with greater precision and care than their wealthier group members, they would not achieve similar levels of production. The solidarity built in this group of women who normally would not engage with each other, led to a new emergent inquiry group aimed at working with villagers to explore how to shift access patterns to help marginalized and landless people have a better chance at the same livelihood options. This shift in conversation about power took trust, which was built over time with both the powerful and powerless listening and learning from each other’s experience. In turn, this allowed for safe spaces to emerge, in which the underlying power dynamics could be brought to the surface and named. Working in these spaces helped open up the opportunity for creative thinking about how to change what the group had power over.

A similar journey of building trust unfolded in the Motueka ICM program through working with the emergent platforms that facilitated collaborative learning. In the early stages, there were many formal meetings, largely to determine work programs and implementation plans. Informal meetings helped build relationships, but generally only comprised subsets of participants (researchers with or without stakeholders). The nine ICM Annual General Meetings (AGMs) provided additional opportunities to bring a broad range of people together for a period of three days each year to share results and ideas both within the project team and with the wider stakeholder community. Phillips and colleagues (2010) provide an interesting reflection on the formal meeting process, and one that perhaps provides an indicator to the
creation of a successful integrative research team. They observe that meetings shifted from being fairly heated and lively discussions in the formative parts of the program (often with some dissension or a few key protagonists holding the floor and others sitting out), to ones where significant amounts of active listening and full participation occurred. A high degree of facilitation in those early meetings, largely by the Action Researchers, helped create this type of working environment.

“The success of the ICM research program is, to some large extent, a result of the inclusion of those social scientists [Action Researchers], who provided opportunities to both challenge and educate traditional biophysical scientists. This awakening and recognition that many environmental problems can only be solved through the shared creation of new knowledge and through social processes that engage the research and management domains has been a key outcome of the research program.” - Phillips et al.**

Both our examples emphasize how collaborations that can help uncover and act upon more sustainable pathways need to be underpinned by trust and respect, a willingness to come together to collaborate in a joint venture, and space to take the time to understand each other. This implies a need to ensure that formal approaches to collaborative environmental problem-solving (e.g. workshops and meetings) are recognized as being supported by related informal engagement activities (e.g. more personal conversations over dinners, or when waiting at airports, or on long car rides, or on the fishing boat) that support long-term relationships and trust-building.
TOOLS WE USE IN OUR ACTION RESEARCH KITCHEN

We have discussed the processes we designed and then used as our main ingredients to facilitate multiple stakeholders to come together and build trust for collaborative learning in environmental management. Yet, we, as do all cooks, need the right tools in our kitchen, and like all researchers and practitioners we come to work with our own box of tools and use them as needed. We share a few illustrative examples of the roles that adapted and well-used tools can play in fueling collaboration.

Frameworks that describe, visualize, and help unravel complex social interactions around the issue in question can be useful tools to understand the social system in which we are operating. When different disciplines must learn to work together, as is necessary in collaborative environmental programs, frameworks about social interactions can be used to introduce new relevant social theories to an initiative, as well as prompt questions and stimulate discussions on how to make progress. They can also support an evaluation process designed to review program achievements.

The Motueka ICM research program explored different frameworks to help those involved visualize different social processes, generate ideas, and develop strategies within the wider program in order to more explicitly reflect upon and understand how they were working. The Social Spaces framework (Fig. 3), for example, emerged out of a desire to better support and promote multiple forms of engagement with a range of stakeholders. It was developed as a tool for interpreting and reflecting on processes of communication, dialogue, and learning—all central to the Action Research approach we were using. It offers a simple typology of important social networks and relationships, which can be used to map current communication and collaboration efforts and plan future efforts.

![Figure 3: Social engagement spaces of the ICM program](image-url)
The Social Spaces framework identified four key spaces for communication and collaboration, each with their own purpose. Each space represents domains of information exchange and knowledge development within the program and the wider environment in which it operates. There is a central collaboration space where scientists from different research disciplines and cultures interact closely (1). There is a transdisciplinary space where researchers, local government, Māori, and key program stakeholders (funders, community, industry) interact to set the overall program direction (2). There is a more general information exchange space which is used by the program to connect (albeit briefly) with the general audience of stakeholders and interested parties in the Motueka catchment (3). There is also the space whereby the program links with the wider ICM community of practice—the national and international linkages where the program intersects with others working on ICM initiatives (4). Second person Action Research inquiry typically happens in spaces 1 and 2, while third person inquiry is more likely to be found in 3 and 4.

To help program stakeholders to more clearly recognize these different engagement spaces, we facilitated an exercise within the 2007 ICM annual general meeting for around 30 people. Researchers, local government staff, and other stakeholders from across the program verified together the framework, and then used it to interpret the communication and engagement events they had individually and collectively taken part in, as a participatory evaluation. Participants broke into groups to use examples (stories) of projects or activities that they thought matched the goals and needs of each of the social spaces, and these were put up on the wall. Using the framework in this way provided a chance for participants to recognize the scale of the communication and collaborations they had been involved in, and to see the inter-linkages and purpose behind many social events. It also allowed participants to see across the whole program in a social sense, and to make visible the intangible relationships within the program, in other words, making collaboration visible and explicit. Furthermore, the nature of the workshop was such that in itself it contributed to the strengthening of relationships between the ICM program participants. By founding the workshop around “storytelling” it tapped into the creative contributions of all participants, unconstrained by more formal means of information exchange.

In the aquatic agricultural systems program, we used a simple and versatile tool to emphasize reflection throughout the entire implementation process. The After Action Review (AAR) was used systematically after all key activities. AARs were structured simply so that they became a tool accessible to all through asking, “What worked well? What did not work so well? And what did we learn?” They supported the practice of reflection to become part of the culture of implementation. Together with stakeholders, through reflection over time, researchers engaged in questioning whether what they were doing was achieving change or not by asking, “Are we doing the right thing in relation to our goals?”
Annually a reflection workshop was held in all five hubs in villages and with system-level stakeholders that expanded the basic AAR principle into a three-day facilitated reflection and learning process. This workshop anchored the hub learning system. The workshops started with first noting the changes (outcomes) that had been achieved, and then analyzing those changes had been achieved by reflecting on the implementation process and the learning from it. This retrospective use of theory of change is a methodological innovation linked to the Action Research cycle that embraces understanding change as it emerges rather than monitoring predefined indicators. Facilitators played an important role in supporting critical reflection not just on what was achieved, but in the interest of who and in relation to what other goals. Having outlined impact pathways through the initial theory of change exercises during planning, multi-stakeholder groups could then revisit their initial plans and assumptions of how change would come about, based on what had actually happened. The power in this approach is that stakeholders were able to appreciate change both from their own experience and in real time, as it was evolving.

**JOURNEYS OF TRANSFORMATION ARE ALWAYS ONGOING**

The complex environmental challenges that are the focus of our Action Research experience in this chapter are perhaps never resolved entirely. What we can hope is for all involved to find new pathways to more sustainable ways of engaging together. This incremental change, brought about through learning and adaptation—the focus of Action Research—can open up potentially transformative ways of working for those involved. Additionally, as some of these people work differently to keep a progressive and transformative agenda alive, the collaborative learning experiences that we’ve described in the last two sections continue to fuel impact beyond the years of explicit project work. As noted in the words of the program reviewer with which we opened, these learning experiences are perhaps the most important outcomes for continuing to fuel our discovering of more sustainable solutions to complex environmental challenges in the Anthropocene.

In New Zealand, after the 10 years of collaborative research, the wider Motueka ICM research team has developed a high degree of trust, respect, and friendship, which in turn have supported the quality of work across biophysical and social sciences and brought in other forms of knowledge for more trans-disciplinary engagement efforts. We see a visible increase in the capacity of a range of key stakeholder groups (including the research team) to participate
in integrative collaborative activities. Furthermore, the New Zealand National Policy Statements of 2011 and 2014 now explicitly call for integrated catchment approaches to be used by regional government. Although we have used the (2000-2010) Motueka ICM research program as one of our examples here, the reflections on the program also build on the next cycle of Action Research that it starts. Will’s work has carried on through the subsequent (2011 – 2017) Wheel of Water research program which works directly with regional government efforts to involve the wider community in determining acceptable limits to water extraction and quality. This involvement is an explicit recognition that government and industry cannot address New Zealand’s freshwater challenges without significant engagement and collective action from wider catchment communities.

Similarly, while the aquatic agricultural systems program came to an end in its original form in 2016, the Action Research design and experiences continue to some degree in the five countries and beyond. The program closure report names fifteen other agricultural research programs that build on our learning in the five countries; much of this learning concerns the Action Research processes we built. There is now more emphasis on working directly with communities through participatory Action Research, and within those communities, an aim to undertake more critical gender analysis to build more inclusion and get better at equalizing power relations. Beyond the immediate influencing of the way in which agricultural research was conducted, the experience of stakeholders working collaboratively in some countries built new alliances and new relationships that continue. In Cambodia, for example, the network of local NGOs came together to form the Aquatic Agricultural Systems Alliance and adopted an Action Research methodology for ongoing collaborative learning with communities and other stakeholders in the Tonle Sap and other parts of the country.

As Kemmis and McTaggart remind us, Action Research is about acting, observing, and reflecting “more carefully, more systematically, and more rigorously than one does in everyday life: and to use the relationships between those moments in the process as a source of both improvement and knowledge” (1988). Our journey as Action Researchers working in environmental sustainability continues beyond the two projects we’ve discussed as practical examples in this chapter. So, in answering our main question— how do we learn to leverage differences across multiple stakeholders to facilitate and help us understand our individual and collective journeys towards environmental sustainability?—all the key ingredients we shared with you: emergent process design; facilitation emphasizing personal relationships and trust building; and the creative use of tools to support reflection and ongoing learning, continue to be important in our pantry. We hope that one of the key messages you take away from this chapter is that we must all be eclectic cooks to make a difference, and putting similar ingredients together in different contexts will necessarily always produce a unique dish with flavors that are more than the sum of their individual ingredients!
A CONCLUDING COMMENT

The growing use of Action Research within environmental research and development initiatives explicitly recognizes that natural resource management and sustainability issues are not characterized so much by problems for which an answer must be found, but rather by issues which need to be resolved and will inevitably require one or more of the parties to change their views. The underlying assumption of these approaches is that effective social change depends on the commitment and understanding of those involved in the change process. In other words, if people work together on a common problem, clarifying and negotiating ideas and concerns, they will be more likely to change their minds if their joint research indicates such change is necessary. Also, it is suggested that collaboration can provide people with the interactions and support necessary to make fundamental changes in their practice that will endure beyond the research process. Thus, the Action Research approach seeks to influence the phenomena being studied during the Action Research process itself, in the belief that the true nature of social systems (social, cultural, and institutional considerations) becomes most evident when you seek to make changes to the systems.

Those interested in learning more with us or in developing your own work in ways aligned with what we have described are invited to meet like-minded colleagues in the AR+ Co-labs.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Action Research initiatives, such as we describe here, are not possible without the support and goodwill of all those involved, and we record our appreciation for the efforts of all those who have put time, energy, knowledge, and relationships into the CGIAR research program on Aquatic Agricultural Systems during its implementation and the ICM Motueka and Wheel of Water programs in New Zealand. Work on this chapter has been supported by the following: New Zealand Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment funded Wheel of Water research project (CONT-24535-LFR-AQUALINC), and the Participation Research Cluster at the Institute of Development Studies.
AR+ CO-LABS foster friendly, person-centered spaces as dynamos of good Action Research in different domains, from education to healthcare, inter-personal relationship, to sustainable organizing.

CO-LABS invite participants to work within the collaborative spirit of Action Research. Each co-lab supports a learning orientation, bringing scholars and practitioners together, prioritizing mutual benefit and cultivating current work and the next generation. We inquire/practice in an integrated way that includes personal/first-person, interpersonal/second-person and impersonal/third-person inquiry/practice. Involvement in our programs is by donation.

Interested in pursuing similar work in your own system? Interested in learning more about the key principles and practices associated with the work described? Want to have the references and further suggested readings? Check out the Resources companion volume. To find like minded practitioner colleagues, please check out the AR+ Co-labs.
Transformation Action Research at Large Scale: Global University for the Future As A Global Action Network

SKETCH

In Transformation Action Research at Large Scale: Global University for the Future as a Global Action Network, Steve Waddell and Oguz Baburoğlu offer grounded utopian thinking to help reimagine the socio-political architecture capable of allowing organization around complex global problems (such as climate change) at the requisite scale. They combine their efforts with Steve’s Global Action Networks and Oguz’s University of the Future to suggest a model that can get us from our current fragmented social architecture toward the kinds of collaborative, large-scale organizing needed to address systems level issues for which, to date, the United Nations seeks to fill the yawning gap. The University of the Future organized as a Global Action Network in effect democratizes the global organizing needed for us to flourish in an increasingly interdependent global society. This chapter contributes to our necessary and fundamental re-orientation toward a “gaia,” environmentally-based civilization.

MEET THE AUTHORS

Steve Waddell, Principal - NetworkingAction. For over 30 years Steve has focused on multi-stakeholder large systems change to address critical issues. His does this as a researcher, consultant, educator, and through personal leadership with a range of clients and partners globally. He has a PhD in sociology and an MBA. With Future Earth and Transformations2017, he is currently investigating formation of the SDG Transformation Forum. He is author of many publications, including the books Societal Learning and Change: Innovation with Multi-Stakeholder Strategies (2005); Global Action Networks: Creating Our Future Together (2011) and Change for the Audacious: a doers’ guide to large systems change for a flourishing future (2016). Steve is a Canadian-American living in Boston.
We feel compelled to address big, complex, transformative challenges in our Action Research. This compulsion is related to a conviction that the world requires radically innovative action to meet our sustainability (dare we say continuance of civilization?) imperatives. These imperatives involve increasing turbulence environmentally and societally. Key responses must be transformation that produces resilience and societal learning: not just working outside the box, but questioning fundamental assumptions and goals— in effect, challenging the idea that there is a box at all. For many sustainability challenges, technical fixes won’t be enough; incremental change within the current ways of approaching issues also will often be inadequate. Addressing carbon emissions through incremental energy efficiency approaches in the traditional economic paradigm are necessary but insufficient. Support is required for the fundamental re-orientation to a “gaia,” environmentally-based civilization.

The big issues require new ways of seeing, acting, interacting, and structuring that are indeed novel.
Therefore, our work like others in this book is about invention and growing the new on a big scale—rewriting our societal DNAs to integrate the sustainability imperative both environmentally and socially. To encourage others to do this through Action Research, in this chapter we 1) present stories from our transformation work experiences with Universities of the Future (UofF) and Global Action Networks; 2) describe how this led to integration of these two experiences to develop a global UofF to address transformation; 3) the action steps to advance the concept; and 4) the ingredients this produces for transformational Action Research. Readers are invited to join with us in this, in an AR+ Co-lab, so we may apply Action Research approaches such as those outlined to further push our resilience/societal learning frontier of knowledge and tools (visit AR+ for details, actionresearchplus.com).

VIRTUAL PARTNERSHIP

Introduced virtually by Cookbook Editor Hilary Bradbury in late 2016, we chapter authors began exploring our common interests. Our lives are quite different. Steve is a Canadian-American living in Boston who works on “large systems change” issues; typically, he speaks with people who he thinks may share his sense of priorities and explores the possibility of developing work together.

Oğuz is a Core Faculty member of the School of Management at Sabanci University in İstanbul, Turkey. He is one of the first practitioners of Action Research in the country; a pioneering consultant in the development and implementation of micro-democratic communities and participatory decision-making processes; and the owner of two companies: one in management consulting and one in executive development and training. He has been a key design consultant for three brand new universities and the repositioning of eight universities.

We have Action Research orientation as a common interest, as well colleagues in common. We realized from describing some work that particularly motivated us, that we share a common interest in working with a diversity of people and organizations over a period of years to support innovation with a positive public outcome. Certainly we aim for our work to benefit individuals, but we focus on transforming societal infrastructure and systems to support people, and to help them realize their highest aspirations and greatest potential. In many areas of life, this involves transformation. We describe below two of these experiences that are leading a new, large-scale-change, Action Research initiative.
1) UNIVERSITIES FOR THE 21ST CENTURY - OGUZ

I led a retreat in the Fall of 1994 on the Turkish shores of the Mediterranean, which drew about fifty participants, with the goal of exploring the future of the Sabanci Group—Turkey’s leading industrial and financial conglomerate. The event was organized as an Action Research Search Conference, which was novel for the participants. They thought it a success because it not only produced significant decisions about the future of the group, but also a decision to start a University that should be a model in its own right. On the bus after the retreat while discussing follow-up issues, as lead organizer of the event, I proposed the same Search Conference approach that was used to design the future of the group for this project: to develop the philosophy for a new Sabanci University.

A search conference, sometimes called a “future search”, is an organized gathering of stakeholders of a social system to – collectively in a design process and dialogue – forge an imagined future and desirable ways of bringing it about**. When the proposal was shared with Sakip Sabanci, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Sabanci Group, they decided to plan for an international Search Conference to design the philosophy of “an ideal university for the 21st century.” Participants would include the world’s best scholars from the best institutions as well as some businesspersons and students from Turkey.

The invitation to them specified the intent as “to design a world-class University that you have always dreamt about but were not able to do in your own University.” Some 60 participants from 25 different countries worked for three days and nights to lay the foundations of a University as a think tank for the region and a transformer of society and industry that offers students maximum choice; even to switch from social science to engineering and vice versa, by designing a curriculum that enables such flexibility and to be the place for academic freedom.

The Sabanci philosophy puts practice at the same level as theory, brings interdisciplinarity beyond rhetoric to reality, makes all responsible and responsive to internal and external stakeholder demands with a scope that covers local, regional, and global issues, and develops paths for self-managing and sustenance in an effort to institutionalize ideal-seeking.
The University design processes took four years before the university admitted its first students in the 1999-2000 academic year. The vision of “creating and developing together” was core to the design. It is about having a university that is embedded into the society, into the NGOs, in industrial districts, in government agencies, and in companies for mutually beneficial knowledge-generation, learning, and making significant improvements to the way things are. We designed the University so that it operates around projects and especially around projects of all kinds: Civic involvement projects that all students are mandated to do at least once in every year, free projects that the students can apply for funding of, company action projects, contracted research projects with highest per faculty research funds, independent study projects, as well as the more conventional “projects within courses.”

The civic involvement projects are now emulated by some 50 different educational institutions. Yes, there was some anxiety that there may not be enough interest in generating projects. For instance, the first year of launching the MBA program, we called for projects, and thought we might not get any. We formed six to seven teams and needed that many projects. We ended up having 150 projects proposed by companies; mostly in companies from my previous contacts. Of course, having the Sabanci affiliation provided important networks and drew attention—people were interested in being associated with such a university initiative associated with such a successful company.

Twelve years after implementing this model of higher education and research, the University was rated number one among all 190 universities in Turkey on the innovation and entrepreneurial scale and has stayed in the top for five consecutive years as of 2017.

The University of the Future Idea: This led to the idea and practice of the “University of the Future” (UofF), which was also integrated into the founding in 2008 of Ozyegin University and in 2010 of another highly successful university, Abdullah Gul University. At Ozyegin, it was the sectoral solutions that were embedded into the four-year program which enabled each student to be familiar with as many industries as possible initially, but to express mastery as one moves to senior years. The UofF takes the societal change mission much more
seriously with Abdullah Gul University. Rather than focusing completely on the conventional mission areas of service, teaching, and research, the UofF uses these in service of actively supporting the improvement and the development of the society as a whole. This is done by redesigning the core curriculum in such a way that it runs vertically through the four years as opposed to the more conventional first years in a typical so-called liberal arts program. The core curriculum is one that each student within a team takes on global challenges by learning how to blend changing, learning, and producing knowledge throughout their four-year program. The kinds of global challenges that are stipulated in the UN sustainability goals are taken on with the local stakeholders, such as the development agencies and municipalities, to tackle the redesign of their own university.

The University gets new design options each year to be considered by the faculty and the administration.

Within this societal development goal, the UofF focuses on a particular societal challenge. In the case of Sabanci University, the focus is on business, individual development, innovation, and social responsibility with a global science and technology base. Ozyegin infuses a fresh breath of air into the entrepreneurial potential of all students by embracing the sectors throughout. AGU on the other hand was founded by Kayseri City Council and other civic notables to focus on the city’s development vision.

To respond to these particular societal and situational challenges, there is an explicit assumption that development takes place by bringing in stakeholders from all parts of the all parts of the real life projects into the processes of education and research real life projects into the processes of education and research. Search conferences weave the casual texture of the context-enveloping research and education together for the future of Kayseri and for the future of the University in order to discover goals. One desirable transformation identified is to move toward a smart city, a theme that not only generates many research projects for engineering and architecture faculties, but also engages the students in project-based learning in a tripartite collaboration with faculty and the staff of the Kayseri municipality.

The UofF concept emphasizes action learning taking place within Action Research projects where the civic or the entrepreneurial benefit is transformational. For example, a high-tech company designed a software that predicts failures in machines. It was a start-up, and they said, “We don’t know how to market this. We don’t have a business model.” A group of Sabanci University students was interested in start-ups, and this was fantastic. They were with the
board, day and night, for six months. And they even moved on to implement the marketing plan. This all has an Action Research orientation—in making things happen and causing things to change in the real development needs of the practical business. In three years, the company was able to raise early stage investment, venture capital, and private equity largely as an outcome of the students crossing the conventional boundaries of learning, work, business, and managerial practices in a highly innovative way.

Why not go to traditional consultants? Either the company doesn’t have the funds, or they have already worked with them and have not had a satisfactory outcome. The companies want fresh minds to look at their problems. And they like a university approach with research methodologies and inquiry.

The action learning approach’s most significant departure from current common operational reality takes place in pedagogy and the roles between student and professor. In contrast to passively structured classroom settings, learning depends on creating environments of active learning, which maximizes learning through interaction and by doing. Professors become enablers and facilitators as opposed to knowledge and truth holders. They guide, coach, and provide knowledge inputs as the learning advances. The knowledge acquisition is done before the class meeting through technology, and the class meeting can therefore be a medium for learning through synthesis and reflection. The UofF develops methodologies of blending engagement, education, and research as can be found in any Action Research inquiry. See also Teehankee’s and Leahy’s et al chapters on education and learning in this volume also.

Students are increasingly empowered to structure and organize their own learning and degree-attainment processes; there is active self-design.

Learning takes place where and when it is needed, embedded within real-life circumstances and real-time conditions. This implies structuring curriculum in a very different way, by utilizing advantages of different technologies—online and on-the-ground—and nurturing the reflective and transformational capacity for learners, their respective organizations, and the organizations they are engaged in.

Reflecting Action Research, all stakeholders beyond students and faculty engage in knowledge creation. Research is driven by global, societal, and industrial needs and challenges. These needs are integrated and embedded in ongoing projects of institutions and agencies that are central actors in those domains. Research is not contained within the walls of the
university; rather, several avenues such as open innovation and collaboration are embraced. In this sense, processes of knowledge-generation are participatory, can crop up anywhere needed, are jointly produced by stakeholders, are multi-disciplined, and use a variety of methodologies.

This approach breeds a different infrastructure where universities and stakeholders in their focus issue come together to create a dynamic system. Technology transfer offices, techno-parks, science centers, taking a part in research consortia, societal impact hubs, social entrepreneurship programs, continuing education, online programs, and neighborhood development are some examples of activities beyond the insular traditions of university teaching and research missions. These practices are ongoing 21st century responses that are disseminating across the world and adopted by many universities.

Broadly speaking, these practices are increasingly referred to as third mission activities. Murphy (2009), borrowing from the Russel Group Report**, defines “third mission” as supporting the structures, processes, and outcomes of interaction between universities and the wider community. He adds, “Via third mission activities universities seek to generate, apply, and use knowledge and capabilities outside academic environments. The third mission covers not only the commercialization of academic knowledge through collaboration with industry, patenting and licensing, and creation of spin-off companies, it also includes participation in policy-making, and involvement in social and cultural life. The complexity of this issue reflects the richness of the bounds linking to the society at large.” The University of the Future intention is to go further than the third mission in a way that reverses the direction and brings the flow from the social, cultural, technological, and economic changes back into academia to blend the transformational context of development into knowledge research and education.

2) GLOBAL ACTION NETWORKS - STEVE

It was 2007 at the Global Water Partnership offices in Stockholm. I was sitting with eighteen people from various European and North American locations who gathered without quite knowing why. It wasn’t for the weather— that wasn’t a draw to Stockholm in February! It was, in part, simple curiosity. Over several months we’d had various virtual conversations facilitated by me as “Lead Steward” of something called Global Action Networks Net— an organization of Global Action Networks (GANs). We had learned
a little about each other, and decided a meeting was a good idea so we collectively set its agenda. Most participants came because they were going to meet other people working in GANs and on communications issues.

The meeting began with a ten-minute introduction about GANs as a new type of organization: Glocal (global+local: neither top-down nor bottom up, but global) change networks embracing multi-stakeholder approaches to address a range of transformation challenges. Then people shared about their own work which included:

- **The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (The Fund):** A multi-billion dollar entity that was not just providing money to fight the diseases, but changing health care into a multi-stakeholder rather than government affair.

- **The Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC):** Focus is on bringing fundamental change to peace-building efforts with civil society as partners rather than contractors.

- **The Global Water Partnership (GWP):** Changing approaches to water from a government top-down approach focused on narrow perspectives about water to an integrated management approach, engaging diverse stakeholders with a broad range of interest.

- **The Access Initiative (TAI):** Giving life to countries’ commitments through work as the largest network in the world dedicated to ensuring that citizens have the right and ability to influence decisions about the natural resources that sustain their communities.

- **The Global Reporting Initiative (GRI):** Businesses, governments, and other organizations understand and communicate the impact of business on critical sustainability issues such as climate change, human rights, corruption and many others.

While describing their work, some haltingly and with a little discomfort used the phrase “…as someone working in a GAN…” It was the first time they had ever referred to themselves that way. Participants spent two days sharing the unique kind of communications issues that arise for GANs because of their innovative nature. By the end of the meeting, they were confidently using the term GAN to refer to their organization, and relishing the uniqueness, newness, and power the identity provided. It liberated them from earlier feelings that they were an odd NGO or a weak (IGO) organization that did not really live up to the standards of those organizations. They embraced their oddity, realizing that they are at the forefront of developing a new type of organization to address critical global change challenges, in the face of the manifest inadequacy of traditional ones to do so. They left with new friends in the work of inventing their new approach through collective interaction. A community of practice became a framework for their next steps.
The GAN Idea: The concept of GANs grew out of a modest contribution I made in a report for UN Secretary General Kofi Annan in 1999 on the future of global governance. Annan was looking for alternatives to traditional approaches to government-as-governance for public goods production. Some alternatives were identified in “Critical Choices: The United Nations, networks, and the future of global governance.” The core concept behind the report was “global public policy networks” (GPPNs), developed earlier by the report’s lead author Wolfgang Reinicke. The report provided guidance to developing the UN Global Compact, which is a GAN integrating 10 core UN principles into the workings of corporations (Waddell, 2011b; Waddell, 2004).

The report was basically about innovative approaches to public governance: ways to collectively set directions, allocate roles, and undertake action. Given the rise in globalization and the severe limits in the ability of organizations like the UN to address global public goods production, I felt that these forms of governance deserved further investigation. I raised some money and created a team to further investigate networks that were global, many included in the GPPN report. Our new research framework was “case studies.” This involved conventional research to “study” the networks as “objects,” with interviews, observation of meetings, and other activities.

Some of the case studies I came to understand were simply global examples of traditional, more geographically-restricted networks gone global such as the Climate Action Network, Amnesty International, and the World Bank. Some, like the World Economic Forum and the World Resources Institute, looked like crosses between networks and institutions. But the case studies revealed a new type of organization with distinctive characteristics and potentials. They didn’t associate with the “policy” core of GPPNs. They wanted to make change in innovative ways. This led to the GAN name. Their shared, distinctive characteristics that reflect what is innovative about them are:

1. **Global and multi-level**: They are local, regional, global; they always take action with a “global” framework; an important role is to create work “spaces” that can cross political and geographic boundaries.

2. **Diversity-embracing** Core to their ethos is the activity of collaborating across sectors—business-government (including inter-governmental organizations) -civil society,— languages, ethnicities, north-south, and other boundaries.

3. **Entrepreneurial action learners**: GANs are “inventing” solutions to transformation challenges and essentially represent large-scale experiments; their very global, diversity-embracing characteristic/strategy reflects this. Some, like the Forest Stewardship Council, have pioneered certification strategies; others are pioneering innovations in humanitarian assistance and emergency relief; this all requires developing new tools, processes, and relationships.
4. **Inter-organizational networks:** Individuals have a role, but organizations are the key participants; neither hierarchy nor markets provide the principles, values, or capacity.

5. **Public goods producers:** As in all successful networks, participants must derive benefit in terms of their individual organization’s goals; however, this must be done in a way that produces public benefit.

6. **Systemic change agents:** The goal is not to have as many participants as possible in the network, but to bring together those committed to transformation and changing the bigger “system” of participants; including those not committed to transformation undermines a GAN. For example, Transparency International aims to influence the activities of the “system” with respect to stakeholders influencing corruption.

7. **Voluntary leaders:** Participants make commitments to push the boundaries of enhancing environmental, social, and economic outcomes. (Waddell, 2011a)

Today there are a few dozen GANs, (AR+ is a GAN), almost all formed after the 1990’s, including IUCN and The International Red Cross.

The case studies also revealed the potential importance of GANs: they can mobilize the diversity of resources of business, government, and civil society in a highly innovative and low-cost way to address critical challenges.

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Key is the ingredient that they connect existing efforts and support their amplification, rather than starting a “new” initiative in the traditional sense.

GANs’ potential importance pushed me to rounds of Action Research activities. I participated in GANs’ meetings and spent time talking with their participants. In discussion, key questions of the GAN participants were identified about their own and GANs’ developments. We created spaces—virtual and like the Stockholm meeting—to come together around questions such as leadership and strategy. GAN leaders were brought together in workshops about leadership issues associated with GANs; those involved in evaluation were similarly connected as those in the communications vignette.
They were formed into communities of practice with meetings, exchanges around particular issues, and collaborative investigations into particular questions. One product of this was the identification of eight competencies GANs required to be successful, and a description of how they differ from competencies of other organizational forms. Some GANs, such as the UN Global Compact, requested specific workshops and reports describing them as GANs to share with others who kept on treating them as odd NGOs or IGOs. This grew into a collection of activities referred to as GAN-Net: a network of GANs. Unfortunately, because of funding and GAN-Net leadership issues, the network ended around 2010.

The most important contribution was to support the networks’ distinct identities as ingredients by understanding that they are new, innovative types of organizations— not government, business, or civil society, but whose core work involves weaving together all of those. For example, The Forest Stewardship Council comprises three categories of business, social NGOs concerned about social impact of forestry, and NGOs concerned about environmental impact; although TAI comprises only NGOs, its core strategy is to work collaboratively with government where possible to experiment and build capacity.

Participants in GANs come from a business, government, or civil society organization, and they naturally use that organization as their reference point in how the GAN should work. This tends to be society and the legal control mode of government. Each of those modes includes weaknesses that limit capacity to address challenges. Indeed, it can be argued that they give rise to the challenges GANs are addressing. For example, business on its own has a maniacal focus on money-making to the detriment of other impacts; government creates great theoretical legal frameworks that simply prove irrelevant; and civil society on its own can easily become a bleeding heart advocate with no real impact. The innovation is to bring together these strengths to address the weaknesses and weave together society for cohesive action (Tulder and Zwart, 2006; Waddell, 2005; Waddell, 2002).

COMBINING THE “NEW” FOR TRANSFORMATION

From discussing our work, we (Oguz and Steve) realize we are both addressing profound change, rather than simply improving on current organizations in incremental ways. We are interested in challenging core assumptions and traditions to produce greater societal benefit. This connection was undoubtedly also a product of a time when change is perhaps the core theme underlying current public discussion, as seen in the 2016 US Presidential election and the actions associated with a near coup and its aftermath in Turkey, as well as the Brexit and other votes. We are experiencing hyper-change technologically, in climate and in the basics of how to make a living and who comprises our community.
For Oguz, turbulence is a key concept. **In exchanges Oguz wrote:**

A highly turbulent environment causes an increasing interdependency, complexity, and uncertainty. There is, for any institution, a serious challenge to survive in such environments. An organization needs multiple avenues of connectivity. Universities of the future need to have redundancy of connectivity, which means they have to develop a network-centric organization. This type of organization will adapt to the turbulence of the environment. The digital technologies and the social media that is crafted around it actually have the improved technological capacity to enable this connectivity (while coming with new challenges).

I co-authored an article recently that looks at turbulence in the operating environments of business; collaborating and improving feedback processes are key ingredients to try to address uncertainty. This means shifting attention to the broader operating environment. The UofF is integrated into its operating environment in a much more profound way than traditional universities (Selsky, Ramírez, and Babüroğlu, 2013).

**Steve wrote:**

I see societies as evolving, in general, toward greater specialization and diversity of identities—think of a black lesbian from Senegal now living in New York who is in high tech and has become a Buddhist; such an array of identities leads to ever greater challenges to support social cohesion. GANs are a new way of integrating diversity globally and in terms of stakeholders.
The continually increasing pace of change is overwhelming traditional government institutions’ ability to handle the change. They are products of societies that are very different from those of the 18th and 19th centuries.

So, we asked ourselves:

If we hold up both UofFs and GANs as ways to address these challenges of turbulence, diversity, and rapid change, can the ideas be combined helpfully for new practice and actions? How might the two concepts—UofF and GAN—interact to mutual benefit? Was there something here that would lead to an innovation?

In video conversations, our first exploration was about the need for the GANs to develop specific competencies, and the universities as ways to support them to do this. GANs needed distinct leadership capacities, and the universities could provide programs for them. They could co-develop the programs, maybe starting with a university Oguz was working with that had an international focus and some GANs operating in Turkey.

By chance we both were in London at the end of January, 2017 and a face-to-face meeting helped gradually emerge a refined idea and ingredient: Rather than thinking of the universities as providing a service to GANs, it would make more sense to emerge something like an integration of the two, with a space that reflected the principles of both. The entity would be a GAN itself and reflect its seven characteristics, but organized around a mission to support change globally as a UofF. In this approach, GANs would be a natural constituency for the UofF and would certainly be engaged in its development, but the mission would be broader than just supporting GANs. It would be about supporting an array of transformational activity and the emergence of new governance approaches.

In further video calls, Steve talked about his work on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by countries with the UN for the year 2030, and the need for transformation to realize them; this includes the need for Action Research approaches as a core element. This need is recognized by the Future Earth global science network and Transformations2017 conference which Steve is working with. Another idea arose, about the possibility of organizing knowledge and capacity-development activities around each SDG, or around the transformation imperative, that would be a global-networked expression of the UofF. Maybe even the UN university network would be engaged in such an undertaking. Certainly, there are many networks already existing that are trying to deal with the need for new knowledge-action-societal change approach. There’s the Global Compact’s PRME, the Global Leadership for Responsible Investment, Impact Hubs...
This gave rise to more details developed through various drafts. The idea of a GAN-structured UofF (GAN UofF), with the GANs being co-owners of it along with other possible stakeholders like other “users,” institutes, and universities. By definition GAN UofF has to be network-centric. It comes together with “users” (e.g. GANs) connecting their capacity-development needs and action projects to GAN UofF programs that are highly flexible—sufficiently so, to meet a wide range of needs and differences between learners. With GAN UofF, users tap an existing body of knowledge that can easily be retrieved and learned just-in-time to generate capacity, action, and new knowledge. There needs to be an online and on-ground hybrid platform.

There would be an integration of action learning and Action Research, to produce systems (rather than just cycles) of diagnosis (identification of needs), action planning, action taking, reflection, and assessment, together with reporting to the GAN UofF stakeholders. This will comprise the core process of the GAN University. Learning can be organized into degree and/or non-degree programs. Core competence involves weaving and splicing action knowledge with existing bodies of knowledge and deep reflections to develop new capacity and knowledge. This could include competencies in resourcing transformation (financing), assessment and measurement, transformation stewarding (similar to leading, but focused on supporting emergence), developing structures to support transformation (e.g. social innovation labs, GANs, communities of practice), and communications to mobilize the scale and support the diversity required. Different and interchangeable roles will emerge: “students” may be project leaders and “faculty” may be a practitioner consultant or university faculty—the key quality is capacity for action learning and research.

Figure 1: Ecology of Learning
As a university addressing the societal need for transformation that integrates the environmental and social sustainability imperatives into societal DNA, GAN UofF does not have to offer the range of programs commonly associated with traditional universities. The overarching framework is the development of an “ecology of learning”** that includes a range of activities (**Figure 1**) that can be face-to-face and virtual and organizing around particular learning streams. Programs may be associated with sustainability management, and change/socio-technical/socio-ecological network design and emergence. Such an approach should offer programs such as GAN governance, large-scale system change, systems thinking, stakeholder management, project-management, strategic planning, social network theory, transnational organizations and governments, design thinking, clinical economics, politics, and international relations.

We invite you to more details on our work, along with an outline for a Transformation Action Plan in the companion Resource Book. And we welcome those interested in joining the AR+ Co-lab, or community of practice around these concepts.
AR+ CO-LABS foster friendly, person-centered spaces as dynamos of good Action Research in different domains, from education to healthcare, inter-personal relationship, to sustainable organizing.

CO-LABS invite participants to work within the collaborative spirit of Action Research. Each co-lab supports a learning orientation, bringing scholars and practitioners together, prioritizing mutual benefit and cultivating current work and the next generation. We inquire/practice in an integrated way that includes personal/first-person, interpersonal/second-person and impersonal/third-person inquiry/practice. Involvement in our programs is by donation.

Interested in pursuing similar work in your own system? Interested in learning more about the key principles and practices associated with the work described? Want to have the references and further suggested readings? Check out the Resources companion volume. To find like minded practitioner colleagues, please check out the AR+ Co-labs.
Future Organizing:
Connecting Self and Systems Transformation

SKETCH

In Future Organizing: Connecting Self and Systems Transformation, George Pór, Hilary Bradbury, and Bjørn Uldall offer grounded utopian thinking, drawing on examples of successful experiments already afoot, to reimagine the future workplace and with it, organizing in general. Connecting purpose and structures of interpersonal power allows for our human creativity to rise, and with it our capacity as organizational and business leaders to respond sustainably to social needs.

MEET THE AUTHORS

George Pór, is a researcher in collective intelligence and strategic learning partner to visionary leaders in business, government and civil society. He is the Founder of Enlivening Edge, the online magazine and community of “next-stage” organizations, and serving as an evolutionary-Teal mentor to several of them. His teaching and Visiting Research Fellow posts included London School of Economics, Universiteit van Amsterdam, INSEAD, California Institute for Integral Studies, UC Berkeley, and Université de Paris. He is the Director of Community Intelligence, a transformation agency based in Brighton (UK). George served as the lead consultant to the “communities of practice” strategy of the European Commission. His clients included: Alberta Research Council, AT&T, Campus of International excellence – Southern Catalonia, Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, Dutch Sustainable Trade Initiative, Electric Power Research Institute, Ericsson, European Commission, European Investment Bank, Ford Motor Co, Future Considerations, Global Leadership Academy, Hewlett-Packard, Intel, International Center for Organization Design, KaosPilots, Motorola, Procter & Gamble, Shell, Siemens, Swiss Re, UN Development Programme, UNEP/Wuppertal Institute, and Unilever. His publications and presentations can be found here https://independent.academia.edu/GeorgePór. George’s life journey enabled him to combine European values with American “can do” spirit” and ancient wisdom traditions. He may be reached at george@enliveningedge.org
Hilary Bradbury, Ph.D., is a scholar-practitioner focused on the human and organizational dimensions of creating healthy communities. A professor of organization studies since 1998 (Case Western, USC and OHSU), today she is editor-in-chief of Action Research Journal (Sage). Hilary was born and bred in Dublin, Ireland and educated at Trinity College proceeding to Divinity Schools at Harvard and University of Chicago. She earned her PhD at Boston College’s School of Management with a focus on change and transformation. Author of numerous journal articles and editor of the successful Handbooks of Action Research, her latest book, is Eros/Power: Love in the Spirit of Inquiry (Integral Publishers, 2016, with Bill Torbert). Hilary is the convening hubstress and CEO of AR+, the global virtual community for participatory Action Researchers “accomplishing more good together.” AR+ convenes community of practice ‘co-labs’ in support of participative inquiry/practice in education, healthcare, development, relational action inquiry and organizing. Hilary, who enjoys formal affiliations with the Institute for Development Studies (IDS), Business School Lausanne (BSL) and California Institute for Integral Studies (CIIS), was named 2018 Jubilee Professor at Chalmers Institute of Technology, Sweden. In addition to her work as a scholar, Hilary is a member of the teachers’ circle at Zen Center of Portland. She may be reached at actionresearch-plus.com.

Bjorn Uldall, Ph.D., has sustained a passion for exploring more meaningful ways of leading and organizing since the turn of the millennium. His quest has included an Action Research Ph.D from UWE, in Bristol, UK. In this he ran a number of collaborative inquiry groups with business leaders, exploring the notion of ‘meaningful leadership’, and how 1st person practices of meditation, 2nd person practices of dialogue, and 3rd person practices of systemic Action Research support this. Bjorn is partner in Scanlead where he has worked as an executive coach for individuals, management teams, and organizations for many years. His background includes an M.Sc. from Copenhagen Business School, and an early career in Carlsberg and in Mckinsey & Company. His education also includes 5 years of Body and Gestalt psychotherapy training. Currently he also takes part in the emerging international movements exploring the future of organizing along with innovative ideas and practices for reinventing organizations as the Action Research Lead at Enlivening Edge. (www.enliveningedge.org)
“Imagine what organizations would be like if we stopped designing them like soulless, clunky machines. What could organizations achieve, and what would work feel like, if we treated them like living beings, if we let them be fueled by the evolutionary power of life itself?”

WHY WE CARE

We want to share and perhaps inspire fellow organizational change agents with our sense of what we call ‘future organizing.’ We present this democratic form of organizing in the tradition of Action Research as a way to invite more intelligence from all associates who make up the organization. The dynamo for this responsive intelligence is cultivating a conscious connection between personal development and organizational or systems development. Making this connection, we will suggest, is a way of “cooking” the kinds of future organizing that we believe results in accomplishing more good. Key to its graceful efficiency is learning to share power.

For this “cooking,” and as a central requirement, we recommend the basic tools of Action Research, namely cycles of action and reflection in small groups. The small group is perhaps up to 20 or so people, not too large or too small, making it possible to transform power relations toward mutuality and learn from its mistakes and successes. Groups link with other groups as needed. In this way, they make space for increasingly responding to and even anticipating stakeholders’ needs in mutually beneficial ways.

The kind of transformation of power we think is important starts with individuals coming to terms with their own blind spots around how they use and relate to power.
In what follows we offer some concrete examples of this and how it leads from fostering self-liberation to the redesign of whole systems. We start with our own “coming of age” stories where we recount first seeing through our deep conditioning of power as something that imposes itself as an external authority: a “power-over” to which we all submit with varying degrees of awareness. Our learning from experience allowed us to reimagine power as a more convivial collaborative social good: “power-with,” which in turn allows us to become responsive with our stakeholders, in our own lives. Figure 1 offers an image of the well-known pyramidal power structure we are so familiar with and contrasts it with the newer “power-with” structure that is increasingly evident among knowledge workers and cultural creatives. We encourage you to try this in your home organizations. By way of assistance we end with an invitation to join a community of practice, the AR+ Future Organizing Co-lab.

We write at a time when many people are seeing through “power-over” and finding the convivial “power-with” more in tune with how they wish to live. Perhaps it’s that vague feeling of being simply fed up with conventional organizations that waste our lives. With so much material abundance, the paycheck is not the carrot it once was. Yet killing one’s soul to make a living is the fate of 68% of the employees in the US and 87% worldwide, as illustrated by Gallup’s 2016 “Worldwide Employee Engagement Crisis.”
There’s a growing recognition in the world that something better has to be possible for humanity. We believe we see this “something better” gathering momentum in the Action Research inspired experiments of self-managing employees that began with Eric Trist’s work with the British coalminers of the 1950’s. Today we see the same spirit reflected in the evidence-based structures and practices of what we call future organizing. It goes by many names, such as “reinventing organizations,” “responsive organizations,” “corporate rebels,” “adaptive organization,” “Holacracy,” “U.Labs,” “freedom at work,” and many more. Their elements fit in for-profit, but also nonprofit, volunteer, and spiritual communities. We are in desperate need of adaptive organizing efforts for more sustainable ways of living, working, and partnering. We believe that the grasp toward new ways of organizing appears to arrive just in time. For us, future organizing can help us accomplish more good together for more stakeholders by liberating deeper democratic structures in response to our social-ecological crises today.

We illustrate with a few examples of future organizing. For simplicity’s sake we select just one liberating structure— Embodying Timely Inquiry— which helps describe how to connect self-transformation and systems transformation. This is an integrative inquiry (inspired by Bill Torbert) that requires us to take a step back into reflection before coordinating together what’s next in action. The practice of reflection for action in small groups is what’s important and it may take many forms and use many practices. Our elaboration is consciously developmental, unleashing a liberating kind of power in the form of friendly collaborations.

**OUR PERSONAL STORIES**

*George writes:* A student of sociology in the 60’s, I was confronted by a hypocritical system of governance in my native Hungary, which proclaimed to be a power of the people, but in reality, it was a narrow layer of the elite’s power over the vast majority of the population. Inspired by the student movements in the West, and for the sake of my self-respect, I felt it was not enough to be disgusted by the system; I needed to do something. The resulting “something” was a Hungarian leftist student movement against the so-called socialist government, which landed me in prison for 20 months. Having a lot of time on my hands, in the jail, I discovered spontaneous meditation, without knowing anything about its existence as a formal discipline. That was the beginning of my inner journey that didn’t replace my social engagement, but only deepened it.
Years later, I came across the saying by Martin Luther King, Jr.: “none of us can be free until all of us are.” I fell in love with the beauty and profound truth of that statement that had and has meaning for me in the spiritual, political, and economic sense, all at once. It became a teaching device for the rest of my life.

I intensely enjoy my work, and want to have my beautiful little granddaughters live in a world where everybody can feel the same way, because work is organized for the flowering of the best in us. Fortunately, there’s a worldwide ecosystem of movements of various flavors aimed at the same. I am partial to the “reinventing organizations” movement, inspired by my favorite management book of the same title, from which the opening quote is taken. It reflects the spread of three intertwining breakthroughs in next-stage organizations: discovering and listening to the evolutionary purpose, practicing self-management, and preference for wholeness.

As I wanted to work in such an organization, inquire into its practices, and contribute to spreading them, in 2015, I founded such an organization, first as a magazine, *Enlivening Edge: News from Next Stage Organizations*. As of today there are 2,000+ subscribers, 54,000+ visitors, and 500+ articles. It supports and is also supported by online communities. In practicing what we preach here, we have also formed a Participatory Action Research Community (PARC), and we’ll describe one of its projects below.

*Hilary writes:* Back in the 90’s I had the formative experience of walking in an old growth temperate rainforest in Oregon. I walked with a guide—whom I secretly called Yoda—so as not to get lost. At first, all the trees looked alike and every direction seemed similar. Back then I would describe the forest as a bit like the jungles we see in documentaries but not so hot. I remember it as simultaneously silent, buzzing, and sun-dappled. At the start my eyes were drawn upward to the tops of the tallest most powerful-looking trees. As I walked deeper into the forest, it became interesting at all heights, including what appeared to be the deep layers of moss and composting trees beneath my feet on the forest floor. And, as if not already perfect enough, there was also a sparkling creek, as in fairy tales. Yoda spoke little. What he did say confused me thoroughly enough to remain with me all these years. He taught through experience; he had me place my hands on a tree alongside his and he said, “This is not a tree.” He played with his fingers in the water, inviting me to do likewise. And he said, “This is not a stream.” He smiled at the chipmunks playing around and said to me, “Those are not chipmunks.” I was somewhere between confused, cowed by my confusion, and imagining I’d have to ask for my money back to hire a better guide!

Walking back I decided to try for a little more clarity. I started by admitting my confusion: “I feel how serious your words are,” I said to Yoda, “but sorry, they just don’t make sense.”
He smirked and then explained in more conventional terms: “It’s all Forest. Tree is but one expression of Forest. Chipmunk is an expression of Forest. Water too. Forest, it’s all Forest, not a collection of different objects, trees, chipmunks. They’re all connected as one.” I had understood my first experiential lesson on whole systems thinking.

Synchronizeistically, I would meet a different-looking version of the same systems thinking applied to organizational life when I started as a graduate student of organizational development. I worked closely with Peter Senge (of Fifth Discipline Systems thinking fame) and Bill Torbert (of Collaborative Developmental Action Inquiry fame). In combining these bodies of work, along with my own deep concern for retrieving our spiritual sensibilities in everyday life, inquiry, and work, I have become deeply curious about how we might reimagine organizing in a way that recognizes how interdependent we are. Future organizing is much like a forest.

Despite the atrocities that hover on the edges of our civilization there is a beautiful order to be more thoroughly tapped into, helped into being. Key for me in this work is transforming how we experience the value of inquiry so that reflection-in-action becomes part of everyday life and work (as opposed to being relegated out to universities and science experiments). This sense that inquiry as lived cycles of reflection-in-action is what has led me to devote so much of my life to sharing Action Research practices, so that more of us grow more choiceful about our work lives. We don’t merely wish to fix the current system, we mean to transform toward better ways of living and organizing together. It’s not conceptually hard— at the heart of the matter is being in dialogue for action with colleagues—but it is transformational.

**Bjørn Uldall writes:** At the turn of the millennium I found myself with a promising conventional business career as a management consultant in McKinsey & Co. Then a leadership development coach asked me a fatal question: “Bjørn, what is your passion?” I was stunned to realize I couldn’t answer this, and knew that I needed to find out. The high-paced, exhilarating, prestigious but stressful, performance-driven consulting environment didn’t cut it for me as the place to find the answer to that question. Six months later, in the midst of a 10-day silent meditation retreat, I was struck by the following thought: What if we have built up our whole way of understanding and organizing our economies and businesses on some fundamental assumptions that are not sustaining and supporting a fulfilling, meaningful life— even for many of us who can be said to belong in the privileged elite of western society? **Could there be a better way?**
On the third day of the initial gathering to kick-off the collaborative inquiry group, I introduced the idea of distributed leadership and mutuality of power by resorting to reading aloud from Reason and Heron’s “Layperson’s Guide to Co-operative Inquiry”***. After that, I passed a talking piece around the circle of successful business executives and asked for reactions. It was then that a significant transformative moment occurred: A participant and personal friend of mine exclaimed, “I am annoyed with myself and with all of us for just following along Bjørn’s program and exercises like obedient sheep. If this is to be our own collective inquiry, like Bjorn talks about, we need to take charge of our own agenda and decide how collectively we want to lead this.”

His exclamation completely transformed the dynamics of the group and unleashed a surge of energy, initiative, and deep human connection.

Only then, as I went for a solitary walk in the break and felt tears running down my cheeks, did I realize how much responsibility and anxiety I had been holding, and how restricted and alone I had been. This was the first of many practical lessons in mutuality, the power of inquiry, and the interwoven nature of personal and interpersonal transformation.

While the cooperative inquiry helped many of the executives find more meaning in the personal and interpersonal realm, most of them felt derailed, drained, or disillusioned by the corporate structures and cultures they were operating in. At the time, they and I didn’t have the imagination and audacity to attempt to change them. Today I believe we find ourselves in a different situation. The pioneering examples that we discuss show us that we can indeed reinvent our way of organizing. And I now see what I couldn’t see 15 years ago: Not only can Action Research approaches like cooperative inquiry groups be vehicles to assist us in this re-invention effort, they can also in themselves be prototypes for future organizing. The basic tenets and organizational practices of cooperative inquiry seek to build self-organizing collaborative cultures of personal authenticity and trusting relations. This all allows people to work together in emergent ways in pursuit of a shared purpose. In this way, they employ some of the very practices that we need for our future organizing of larger institutions, such as businesses and social systems. They do this by providing personal, interpersonal, and organizational experiences and insights into what future organizing demands of us and may offer us in return. The following is a story that provides an illustration of this and also offers the first of seven elements we present as key to future organizing.
1. “IT’S ME THAT HAS TO CHANGE!” FUTURE ORGANIZING AS PERSONAL/FIRST PERSON WORK.

The following excerpt is written by a business owner, Peter Brownell, who took part in the Enlivening Edge Participatory Action Research Community (PARC), a 3-month long co-operative inquiry, led by Bjørn. We share with permission.

Peter writes:

The PARC process asks each participant to engage in their own directed enquiry, and share the results. The enquiry begins as a question; this was mine:

“How do I recognize and facilitate the personal changes required for an individual to become an effective member of a decentralized team?”

It did not take me long to realize that the question I had asked at the beginning of my enquiry was wrong. Bjørn pointed it out in our very first call. The question that it was important for me to answer in this process was:

“How do I recognize and facilitate the personal changes required for me to become part of an effective decentralized team?”

Over the course of this Action Research, I essentially started again. I am now starting a new company and attempting to model it [future organizing] with each interaction. It’s hard. On days where I am sub-optimal, the need to be present and open is very difficult. The awareness that each moment matters, however, means that I pay attention to so many things that would have been ignored six months ago.

Taking the advice of others in the PARC, I have begun my process of forming the new team by spending time really focusing on what it was that we wanted to achieve in our lives, diving deep into conversations about values and meaning. These conversations have revealed something interesting. I have often seen self-development presented as the centerpiece of the [future organizing] way, and when you have these conversations then that is exactly what happens. The conversation creates the future.

In the six months since taking part in the PARC, so much of my life has changed. I owe a debt of gratitude to those who participated with me, and asked me all those difficult questions. I’ve learned so much about my relationships, faced childhood fears, and been able to see how my management style was often just hiding my issues with self-esteem. The whole self is not something we have ever been encouraged to reveal anywhere, definitely not at work.
Being able to create an organization that can exist at a “Teal” [or post-conventional] stage will require a style of leadership that operates in a way so different from that which I have experienced before. The ability to model a way of being that can lead without force or domination, that accepts the leadership of others and can create an environment for whole selves will not be easy.

But, I know that I don’t have to do it alone. I know that I can make mistakes and that I just have to keep asking the right questions.”

The term “Teal” in Peter’s story refers to a stage of organizational and personal development well described by Laloux. It is characterized by three breakthroughs: evolutionary purpose, self-management, and wholeness. They are also building blocks of future organizing and you will see them recurring in our stories. (In brief, the Teal paradigm refers to the next stage in the evolution of human development. Read more about that on the “Teal Organizations” page of the Reinventing Organizations wiki.)

In his personal account of his experience as member of a PARC project, Peter was telling us about overcoming his fears, seeing through how his personal issues affect his management style, and accessing more of his potential, all in a professional setting. His participation in the Action Research continued to show up more in his wholeness and learning to lead without domination. It also illustrates how the preference for wholeness, one of the key ingredients of future organizing, can expand from the personal sphere and affect the organizational.

2. DISCOVERING EVOLUTIONARY PURPOSE: FUTURE ORGANIZING AS TEAM/SECOND PERSON WORK.

The following vignette describes imaginative reflective practices that George has developed, which illuminate how purpose is not defined in Teal organizations, but listened to and discovered. It also shows the link between inquiry and action with regard to what’s next in creating lasting value in what the organization is offerings to its clients. Employees, called associates, can think out loud together in this type of setting.
George describes: We start the meeting by reconnecting with who we are, e.g. “we’re a startup transformation agency focused on facilitating radical innovation in organizational structures and cultures.” We want to support our learning partners (aka clients) in discovering their evolutionary purposes, and realize we can’t do this unless we find our own.”

This meeting is convened by inviting those inclined to inquire into the organization’s vision and purpose, looking for how our company’s evolutionary purpose may reveal itself to us.

Sounding a call to an intriguing meeting is key. While any member can convene a meeting, it has to sound attractive and feel worthwhile. If not, people vote with their feet. Good coffee and treats at the meeting never hurt. Have a seasoned practitioner energize the role of facilitator or mentor. Some exercises are offered: e.g., starting with a brief guided meditation, those in attendance get to meet their wiser, future self, the one who is 10 years older than today. Each participant can pose three questions to that older self. A first question might be “What was my gift that I brought to the world? What had a large-scale, positive, and lasting impact?” This can allow the participant to see the need to continue or change her/his role now. Participants can exhale and go deeper into innate knowing. Then the younger self grabs a pen and starts journaling.

When the exercise is over, the mentor might speak: “Treasure what you discovered, and also, your muscle of deep intuition that you’ve just strengthened. You will need it. In the next exercise, you will read the headline of a story reporting on the success of our company, in the 10th anniversary issue of the Enlivening Edge magazine. What does the headline say? What strikes you about that? What was the greatest and most lasting value that our readers received from us?”

The members discuss this in a circle, and share with each other what they “bring back from the collective future” i.e., they share the inspiration they have found in imagining the future. As they talk about those magazine headlines, the threads of some of the stories start weaving together... The evolutionary purpose is slowly emerging like a collective painting or a photograph developing... The chemical in the developer, in our case, is the good chemistry between us, which inspires us to listen with great curiosity to each other’s “future” stories, and fire up our imagination about what these stories can add up to. It is important that it is likely to change over time.

When the meeting is over the associates go to their friendly neighborhood pub to celebrate the purpose that just found them.
Next we turn to a different context to look more carefully at the startup stages of future organizing that such inquiry and dialogue enables. From the following we can learn about some of the promises and pitfalls of self-management.

3. SUPPORTING SELF-MANAGEMENT: THE HEART OF FUTURE ORGANIZING.

“And suddenly, we were living in a new culture... How did that happen?” ponders Dr. Katrin Muff, who by the end of this brief case will be both dean but no longer the only dean as power is shared, self-management reaches toward new human centric structure, and the purpose of transformational learning becomes central enough to allow difficulties be met and transcended.

Katrin is dean of the Swiss Business School of Lausanne or BSL, where Hilary, the second author, is Visiting Professor for Action Research for the doctoral program in Sustainability. This is a business school that is situated in perhaps one of the world’s more impactful spheres: management education. In the following, the dean describes the transition of power (and titles) inside BSL. On September 30 2015, BSL formally implemented self-organization as its new way to organize itself. The practice they first selected to help them on this journey is called ‘Holacracy,’ which Robson,** a Holacracy designer, describes as a set of “governance rules and practices” to encourage experiments with self-organizing and team-based management. Now, almost two years later, the associates are looking in disbelief at having become a living and breathing organism with its own distinct culture and sense of purpose. Katrin describes the steps:

**Step 1: Initializing the circles**
Implementing Holacracy came with a tremendous good will to learn this new system. I think every single one of us put in discipline, time, energy, and an open trust. We learned the technique of Holacracy, got burned by what it unveiled in us regarding how judgmental and close-minded one is, and we stopped and wondered, does this work? Some of us masterminded a massive systems-change that we proudly introduced in December 2015: from two circles, we shifted to five circles— in one go [a “circle” is something like a “department” or “business unit,” those roles that work together organize in a circle]. Only later would we learn that this is absolutely not the way to go!
Step 2: Darkness
We lost our previous natural sense of how to maintain personal relationships as a part of our professional collaboration. Suddenly, everything felt mechanic, cold, and distant, and there seemed to be no place to connect from person to person. We didn’t know what to do. Critical colleagues raised concerns saying we have a big problem.

Step 3: Addressing dormant people issues
We had learned to talk straight and to listen to one another. Our dialogue culture enabled us to openly address pain points that we didn’t have the courage to address before. We realized that not everybody would make it and we made generous offers to those that would not be able to dance this new journey of self-responsibility and co-creation with us at a much-heightened innovation speed. The problems were in the open and things looked and felt bleak.

Step 4: Inventing a new recruitment process
Quite unknowingly, we stumbled into a number of new practices that entirely overhauled our recruitment process. We started to ask very different questions to candidates, asked them to write an essay about how they might do in a self-organizing structure, and we used new strength-based assessment tools. We formalized a policy that the committee should consist of concerned colleagues that were intimately knowledgeable of and concerned with the roles a new-hire would take.

Step 5: Questioning the performance evaluation and bonus system
[Realizing the evaluation structure we had in place was not working well,] we called to those among us to self-organize and propose a better system for the coming year. This is an excellent example of what is called “safe enough to try.” The goodwill and the trust were back— in a very new and different way. Not a trust in a boss or a hierarchy, nor a need to plead for personal favors, a trust in our way of making decisions, a trust in the ability for everybody to speak up and be respected, a trust that the others cared.

Step 6: New-born authority
The question arose as to what to do with our old titles, in particular, “the Dean.” We recognized that our outside world demanded such a title and position, even if, internally, we had delegated its accountabilities into a variety of roles and circles and the Dean was no longer a reality for us. There were four of us with external roles that at times resembled what is traditionally called a “Dean” role. In a governance meeting, we discussed, argued, considered, reflected, rejected, improvised, and eventually agreed that the “Dean” title is available to those who have an external representation need, clarifying that four people can use the title in four different special areas, such as academic programs, executive education, thought
leadership, and applied research. The website adjustment is still underway and shows how hot a potato titles are. And last but not least, our newly redesigned Gap Weeks have transformed the way the administration and the faculty interact with the student body, something that was palpable at our Holiday Season Party, which was a huge success. We are closing the year on an unprecedented high. Welcome 2017—we are ready to embrace whatever is thrown our way!

Katrin concludes: “Were these six steps necessary? Could we have anticipated or planned for them? Can you learn something from these? Do these steps provide insight into cultural transformation? I am not sure. Yet, I am curious to continue with our ‘Action Research’ to see if there is anything we and others can indeed learn, if only in hindsight.”

We might say that continuous reflection on action will doubtlessly slip into difficulty and back out, but that the very process of up and down, reflection-in-action dialectic that Katrin describes is, we believe, at the heart of future organizing. We particularly value this case study because of its impact on so many through the students’ future work lives. We are so used to only hearing the happy stories of organizational change (or their opposite, if later exposed as somehow corrupt), which is remarkable when in fact over 80% of change efforts are estimated to fail.

Here we see what is closer to the truth: there is good and bad, there is muddling through rather than a confident leap to the next stage of future organizing.

What is most interesting, we feel, is the relative emphasis on human process and structure. So often case studies of new organizing emphasize structure as if there were no people present! New organizing is profoundly human centered, it is not afraid—perhaps it is even drawn to—uncover the dormant issues that keep people mired in old patterns of dysfunctional power.
NOTE Dear Reader. Consider with us that those who have been previously marginal in the design of command and control organizations, e.g. women & minorities, may be particularly important in this transition. Future organizing is a post-patriarchal endeavor. We referred at the start to “power-over” systems. This goes back to the Roman Era in the West (much like our railways in Europe continue to follow the paths made by Roman centurions). We are humbled by how resilient these old structures are. Perhaps those so-called minorities who enter the conventional world as ones who never assisted in the original design of “power-over” have been culturally marginal. Until now.

Next we offer a story from a large-scale “healthcare system transformation” project from Sweden. (See also Lifvergren and Zandee in this volume. We offer this as a “natural” example of what can happen where team reflection is given space enough to transform an entire field of practice. Remarkable results ensued, not least of which was saving millions of Swedish kronor, a result so impressive that the Action Research is being adopted on a national scale. In this context, the space for group members’ reflection-in-action is called a “learning platform,” which regularly convenes a rotating dozen or so healthcare stakeholders to reflect and coordinate next action together. Importantly, these learning platforms include the patients, alongside physicians and other healthcare providers. While it may seem obvious to those not in healthcare that including the patients is important for designing responsiveness in a healthcare context, in fact it is quite rare. Compelling key indicators of success (e.g. an 80% reduction in emergency visits was particularly effective at cutting costs, keeping patients happy, and reducing stress on all involved) helped bring increasing support to the transformative efforts even among those persuaded most by financial success.

4. INVOLVING KEY STAKEHOLDERS. FUTURE ORGANIZING AS INSTITUTIONAL/THIRD PERSON WORK.

Hilary describes a visit with a healthcare “learning platform.” Svante, the physician-facilitator for the healthcare learning platform meeting called the dozen or so in attendance to convene from the coffee station where they had refreshed themselves upon arrival from all over the service region. Today’s meeting was about cancer care and how to improve cancer patients’ experiences. The group had decided in advance to focus on the earliest stage of the process, specifically the patient’s experience of a new cancer diagnosis. The coordinating process owner, a healthcare provider with 20% of her time paid for project coordination, had prepared by experimenting with the Action Research practice known as “photovoice.” In this, she had invited stakeholders to take photos on their phones to share their experiences just
after hearing their diagnosis. And so the group started by watching patients’ photographs projected onto a screen describing their life immediately after diagnosis. A key theme was the emphasis on changes in their social life (participants had perhaps been expecting more focus on medications?). The learning platform included hematology and oncology professionals so the conversation about patient experience allowed them to see places for improvement, expanding beyond sole consideration of health to include the patient’s social context. Following this, there was an update on the region’s cervical cancer screening rates. The rate had been significantly improved since discussions that encouraged the process owner to involve more local immigrant group leaders. This learning platform discussion included the thorny issue of sharing control for healthcare education with immigrant groups heretofore not yet trusted by the healthcare providers.

**Authors’ reflection:** The small experiments raised and discussed in multiple and ongoing learning platforms, allow for implicit knowledge to become explicit in conversation. Experiments are continuously formulated, never pushing the system too far, too fast. In this way, the learning platforms permit genuine dialogue and discourage posturing and defensiveness. That the learning platforms accelerate the development of the actual care system is evident in the fact that busy stakeholders agree to participate within otherwise busy professional lives. Moreover, a rich mix of personal and interpersonal learning is made possible in the learning platforms, what contemporary Action Research refers to as “the potent integration of first, second, and third-person research practice.” Personal, first-person practice/reflections bring a purposefully critical perspective to improvement initiatives not frequently encountered in the practices associated with improvement science. This close-up, non-defensive, self-inquiry in the company of colleagues, with trust dynamics building over time, may be a key point of value creation from the learning platforms.

Linking this vignette to the concepts and practices of this chapter, we note first the obvious: establishing a regular meeting of stakeholders to allow for learning together is a crucial, but not so easy, first step. In a system where people’s time is enormously valuable, it can at first be difficult to gain traction. We believe that sometimes it may be useful to meet by video conference so as not to scare people with too much travel time. However, once underway, the new experiments that each platform cooks up are naturally undertaken as opportunities for learning. Moreover, to inform the whole system, these experiments are tracked so that successes may be amplified and failures discontinued.

At the heart of the platform we see people listening to each other and coordinating next steps together.
All perspectives are valued (including patients!). Facilitators in these efforts pay attention to trust building and timely interventions, e.g. curtailing or redirecting overly critical commentary. We might even be persuaded that Scandinavian culture is a particularly attractive context for the kind of natural deliberative dialogue and inquiry in action that we’re advocating as the basis for future organizing. In Sweden there appears to be accepted cultural norms around listening to each other. These may harken back to Viking culture where a shared mug was passed around for all to drink a moderate amount, certainly not too much. This middle path, Swedish “lagom,” is said to influence the Swedish moderation in many parts of culture. The ever-present coffee breaks (“fika”) also help, in that they naturally allow for bonding and redirection of conversations. In a nutshell, we might all wish to emulate the Scandinavians!

However, the simplicity belies the cultural work behind the scenes. And also its uniqueness. To convene such open meetings in a healthcare system even in Sweden was truly transformational. Hilary, while a board member of a healthcare insurance company in the USA, shared the results of the Swedish work only to hear: “Well, we could never do that in the USA, too many vested interests, it’s all about the money here.” Such resignation to the difficult status quo—while entirely understandable—cannot encourage transformation. What can be stepping stones in the right direction? Certainly, the leaders who catalyzed the learning platforms described did not succumb to resignation. They were what elsewhere in this volume is called “institutional entrepreneurs.” Attentive to what was possible, they may also be described as developmentally mature and able to create opportunities when openings arose.

**PRACTICE: EMBODYING TIMELY INQUIRY IN ACTION**

At the heart of future organizing is reflexivity, both practiced alone and together, where it looks like dialogue. The overall result is experiments of responsive, timely action. This has many flavors and we choose to anchor in the practice of “action inquiry” (Torbert), which is a kind of social science that can generate timely action, thereby bringing systematic attention to not just past results, but also to the present and future. Additionally, it is a form of inquiry/practice that is conducted simultaneously on oneself (the first-person action inquirer), on the second-person relationships in which one engages in the organization, and on the third-person culture and systems of which one is a participant. It is this, we believe, that allows action inquiry to become a cycle of inquiry/action.

We find particularly useful a model at the heart of Torbert’s action inquiry, namely the Four Territories of Experience wrapped around inquiry and advocacy. Applied to organizational life and useful for individuals, organizations, and indeed what we understand of inquiry itself, it can help us transform our daily lives to the point of practicing ongoing timely inquiry and action. Like any dynamo it takes effort to start it up before it self-perpetuates.
In Figure 2 you see four distinct but interweaving “territories of experience” which include:
1) The outside, physical world in which I act, 2) My ongoing thinking, 3) My own inner sensation and feeling, and 4) The realm of attention/intention/intuition.

We live as William James famously said in the blooming, buzzing confusion of life; these four territories of experience seek to capture more of life as phenomenologically accessible territories of experience that exist simultaneously. More often our models of inquiry treat us as disembodied brains. In truth, most of us ignore our embodiment most of the time and with it many signals from the environment. We are asleep, say the gurus, as we remain distracted from experience, caught up in idle chatter of the mind. Nonetheless the more we continuously practice staying attuned to the territories of experience—which is a simple way of saying the more we embrace our own development—the more we become attuned to the fit, or incongruity of fit, between different territories. Discerning this fit or not-fit gives us access to a wealth of intelligence as we enact our system in real time. We suggest that working with these territories is the key to developmental self-organizing. Usually, in organizational/daily life, we take our attention and our categories of thought for granted, and apply them to judging what actions to take and what observations to make of the outside world. In action inquiry—which we are highlighting here as a particularly useful and relevant form of Action Research for future organizing—we attempt to question all these taken-for-granted processes.

Each of the four territories is also unpacked more in the Resource Book.

Figure 2: Embodiment, Thought, Sensation, Attentive Intention. (Bradbury’s interpretation of Torbert’s Four Territories).
5. COLLECTIVE INQUIRY AS COLLECTIVE ACTION

Initiatives for collective self-reflections to rethink the system are essential, but not enough. Organizations that embody future organizing are also introducing transformative structures. One of them is the variety of meeting formats specific to different functions, for example tactical versus governance meeting. Tactical meetings are operational in that people report on the projects that they are working on and, more importantly, name organizational tensions between “what is” and “what it could be,” and address what they need to resolve that tension. In future organizing, members of the organization have the important function of sensing tension. It’s important because the organization has only the collective intelligence of its members to become healthier and improve its effectiveness.

A good example of processes that help behavior become better fit to future organizing is the Integrative Decision-Making described by Goldminz, (2014). It is currently applied by _Enlivening Edge_, and indeed many organizations, as part of their operating system for self-management. It does away with the limitations of both autocratic and consensus decision-making, by introducing the concept of “valid objection” to a proposed decision. Its validity is tested by the question “Do you see any reasons why adopting this proposal would cause harm or move us backwards?” Only valid objections are taken into account and they are used to improve or reject the proposal. That practice does not only free us from holding back the organizational momentum by some members’ self-centered objection, but also, it helps develop the new behavior and competence in distinguishing valid and invalid objections. Once George asked Brian Robertson, the founder of Holacracy, whether his method of self-management requires people with unusually well-developed consciousness to apply it? He replied, no but it certainly helps to have people, especially those concerned with their own development, as leaders developing such consciousness, as it provides a greater capacity to care for more stakeholders’ concerns.

Inquiry is so important because it helps in redirecting our attention to its source, which in turn allows a different reality to be seen. Having a structure in place that balances inquiry with action is necessary. And not all inquiry is at the same level of complexity. We might say that there are three basic types of inquiry (which is, of course, a too simple framework for the blooming, buzzing confusion!): 1) single loop (“fix our current system”), 2) double loop (“rethink our guiding values”) and 3) triple loop (“reciprocal recognition and shaping of our social-cultural context”). As we saw in the PARC example, first person inquiry was rethinking values. And as we saw in the BSL example, second person inquiry was reshaping the entire system because triple loop change was at play.
6. PROTO-INSTITUTIONALIZING STRUCTURES FOR SHARING LEADERSHIP: “POWER-WITH” AS THE NEW NORMAL.

With today’s conditions of increasing volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity facing most work organizations, and in order to transform organizational work life in the direction we are suggesting here, we need individuals who can lead the transition. This raises the question of how more of us can develop this capacity, becoming proactive instead of resigned to status quo. “We are more and more convinced,” write leadership and mastery experts, Anderson and Adams (2015), “that the level of consciousness required [for future organizing], if we are to successfully usher in a thriving planet, is integral level leadership.” They further assert, “only those leading from Integral Mind are capable of creating and sustaining business transformations.” Leading from “integral mind” is short hand for showing greater capacity with the very elements required of future organizing as evident in the vignettes above:

- Concurrently sustaining mutuality and autonomy
- Learning through inquiring in the midst of action
- Using collaborative inquiry for decision-making
- Using a variety of distinctive, self-improving structures to express the organization’s purpose and deliver results
- Appreciating and welcoming creative friction and generally “playing well” with others
- Coordinating work through a system of roles and accountabilities designed and performed by those undertaking them, including helping to develop those people

Thus, in whatever way the group of associates choose to structure their work for mutuality to be achieved, power must be influenced by stakeholder feedback. Self-cultivation (as in the practice of embodying timely inquiry) may then be a prerequisite for the new structures of purpose-driven self-organizing coming into being. This implies a mindset that grows beyond conventional self-centered adulthood to one that relates well with and engages others. Thus there is both an increase in empathy and a deeper sense of fulfillment that comes with engaging oneself more deeply with others with a sense of belonging to life itself.
The journey of development calls us to make more of ourselves “object” to ourselves.

This necessarily involves getting to know the self, and quite probably feeling some revulsion for things we have done or not done. The authors tentatively suggest—based on our own consulting, coaching and self-reflection—that it is necessary to learn from the most difficult times, the mistakes, the suffering. Unfortunately, many people are simply not willing to go there. We are conditioned not to, we may feel safer not inquiring into the tensions we feel and instead remaining reactive. So while it is simple to say, “Let’s be reflective!” it is often rather painful, embarrassing, and time-consuming! It is not unlike doing psychoanalysis at home, (or, better, in a group; see Bradbury & Smith in this volume where they describe “Relational Action Inquiry”). Development calls us to harvest the gold from our “shadow” aspects of the self. The shadow, as Carl Jung explains, developed as a persona (mask) early in life to deal with the very anxieties that the ego needs to manage. To develop, then, essentially means peering behind the mask.

Up until now such self-cultivation in groups has been mostly an individual spiritual, philosophical, or therapeutic pursuit of the few so inclined, or usually of those so forced by their life circumstances. These people may have found support in their own communities but certainly not in dominant organizations. Yet, we believe that future organizing will change this dramatically. We see Action Inquiry Associates’ (see http://www.williamrtorbert.com/) and Robert Kegan’s and Lisa Lahey’s 2016 call to “Deliberately Developmental Organizations” as particularly helpful resources.

AN INVITATION TO DEVELOP THE PRACTICE OF ACTION RESEARCH FOR FUTURE ORGANIZING

Action Research has played a significant role in corporations and other work organizations since it first appeared. Our conception of “future organizing” suggests a pursuit of evolutionary purpose through self-organization by members acting from their own and their collective wholeness. This is congruent with and in fact is an outgrowth of the fundamental principles and practices of Action Research/action inquiry. In Action Research, there is a transformative learning orientation that couples knowing and doing, which pushes power and decision-making into collaborative cycles that involve more people. Where separating knowing from doing
in the “power-over” paradigm led to clear divisions between line and staff, managers and workers, women and men, in the new “power-with” emergent future organizing, there is an appreciation that learning/doing is part of all roles. Therefore all have a role to play. The work of organizational development is building that capacity, so often unseen and therefore not taken seriously.

There has always been a tight connection between Action Research and organizational development. Many of the fathers and mothers of Action Research were active in the world of Organization Development. Their success often lay in bringing notions of learning and reflection to conventional profit-seeking organizations as formulated by Chris Argyris and Donald Schön. Today, the learning orientation associated with Action Research engages more than just the executive layers, as more employees show themselves to be capable of and even demanding of having more voice in offering creative contributions. When there are too many cooks in the kitchen, a new kitchen design is required. Leaders (the chefs!) are indeed needed, but their role changes, and leadership is disseminated to all who can offer it effectively.

Instead of subordinating the real values of Organization Development to corporate logics that are fundamentally harmful, future organizing is the expression of what Action Research originally sought through its organizational development efforts since Eric Trist. However, our contemporary era may be the first time that corporate and organizational forms themselves are in a position to profitably align with basic principles of Action Research, which have always stressed human-centric, participative processes. This time around there is a less masculine and privileged hue— an important difference, given that part of what makes us feel alive is liberating ourselves from the very socialized oppression that conventional organizations have required.

THE MARRIAGE OF ACTION RESEARCH AND ORGANIZING

We can point to the upsurge in Action Research-inspired Organizational Development of the 1970’s. There we saw the large-scale success of Bjørn Gustavsen’s Industrial Democracy dialogues that normalized democratic workplaces and expectations (not always met!) of participative learning. This work occurred in the Scandinavian unionized environments, which made power-sharing normal and reached across the industrial world. The economic democracy agenda of workers participating directly in
ownership of their workplaces, however, was abandoned in the 80’s by the Scandinavian worker unions and the social democratic parties. Up until now we find perhaps the best example of fruition of the cooperative organizing movement in the Mondragon Corporation, which offers us the most contemporary successful “co-op” model of worker-owned businesses in the world. At this time of writing, however, there is a resurgence of global interest in taking up and reinventing the co-operative ownership and governance structures because in some ways they promise to provide more appropriate structures for the kind of future organizing that we write about here.

Today, we also see a direct link to the success of the Action Research efforts of the Center for Effective Organizations established at the University of Southern California to work with iconic companies.

Related, and starting in the early 90’s, we see the “learning organization” practice/concept articulated by Peter Senge (1990). Known for his success in bringing systems thinking to iconic corporations, from Ford to Nike, Senge’s systems thinking continues to reverberate today beyond the corporations and influencing schools and healthcare systems throughout the world.

Following closely in spirit and influence is today’s expression of these democratic systems: David Cooperrider’s Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and Otto Scharmer’s sibling success with U-Labs. Both are grounded in the experiential learning theory of David Kolb, which describes a pragmatist approach to learning as the transformation of concrete experience through reflection and dialogue, and importantly, links new concepts to the next stages of better action. AI and U-lab appear today as the most popular forms of Action Research in the corporate world.

In this trajectory we see an ever-deeper engagement with individual development—what Peter Senge referred to as “personal mastery”—which seems also to account for the wide resonance with the work of Frederic Laloux, which brings adult development, self-organizing, and successful business together. Still further stretching into transforming of power relations (daring also to touch on Eros directly; see Bradbury and Smith chapter in this volume), we sense an ever-deepening appreciation for human-centric organizing which calls for awareness of interior experience for next stages of self- and organization-management.

Together, these Action Research-inspired efforts (and no doubt one might, and even should argue that we trace a too simplistic line of argument!) are becoming increasingly whole. This started with the inclusion of the rank-and-file in democratic dialogue, embracing a big picture “systems” orientation that allowed organizational members to see their fit in the organization and the world. Today, the concern for entertaining the desires of the heart and its search for purpose is ever more pressing.
In a reflective interview, Edgar Schein, an eminence grise, describes this shift from conventional business that was all about transactions, to a new way of relating to each other as actual human beings. We might laugh at the simplicity of that shift to where we get to be what we are, actual human beings no longer trying to be machines. In truth, the command and control paradigm insisted on an “I-It” (i.e. subject and object) relationship with goals to accomplish. Changing that inside a large culture (organizations rest within social cultures) is, to put it simply, not easy! Human culture itself is called to be upgraded toward “I-Thou (i.e. subject and subject) relating. The organizing we describe here is decidedly ‘not your father’s’ organization and it may only still be possible in micro-cultures, perhaps those where post-patriarchal diversity is already flourishing. However, we suggest that future organizing is also arising as part of a potential wider individual as well as cultural evolution toward post-conventional structures of meaning-making and identity, which we will go on to describe in the following section.

7. PRACTICE WITHIN A FUTURE ORGANIZING CO-LAB: INVITATION TO DO THIS AT WORK AND AT HOME.

We have outlined some key elements (in Table 1 below) of future organizing and sketched a trajectory from the early years of Action Research in advanced economies. The vignettes illustrate the different shapes it may take. We have introduced a conceptual model that links reflection and action to give life to the convivial practice/inquiry that resides at the heart of self-organizing. We end with an invitation.

DEVELOPING FUTURE ORGANIZING

1. “It’s me that has to change!” Future organizing starts as personal/first person work.

2. Discovering evolutionary purpose: Future organizing as team/second person work.


4. Involving key stakeholders. Future organizing as institutional/third person work.

5. Collective inquiry as collective action
6. **Proto-institutionalizing structures for sharing leadership:** “as the new normal.

7. **Practice with others in a future organizing co-lab.**

Future organizing is present in many hundreds of companies, non-profits, and other organizations. Many more enterprises are experimenting with some aspects of it. If you want to engage in Action Research that goes beyond a problem-solving orientation and explore “possibility and positive potential can be sensed in the texture of the actual...” as Cooperrider & Srivastava put it in 1987, there has never been a better time to do that than now.

The price of entry lies in recognizing that personal and systems transformation depend on each other mutually, and in gearing up for both. It’s not too high a price if you consider that Action Research into future organizing is a generative, adventurous, community art form.

Action Research informing future organizing is generative. As Danielle Zandee has written, “When we take a generative stance, we ask what might be the noblest possibilities for human existence on earth and commit to engage with one another and the larger world in relational processes that bring those possibilities within reach” (see Zandee’s chapter in this volume with Lifvergren). We know that a key distinction of future organizing is that it has an evolutionary purpose defined as the organization’s highest potential gift to the world. It’s not a surprise that with Action Research that brings a deeper inquiry, associates adopt a stance of aiming at the noblest possibilities for all involved.

Action Research into future organizing is adventurous. There can be great adventure in the process of inquiry. How many action-researchers today return from our explorations refreshed and revitalized? Some of us don’t even seek to return. We’re thrilled to participate in the ongoing dance of future organizing practice and theory, reflection and action, a dance where each round leaves us more inspired and energized.

Action Research for future organizing is actually a community art form. Organizing cannot be done alone. To hone your craft, you need the company of fellow practitioners.
AR+ CO-LABS foster friendly, person-centered spaces as dynamos of good Action Research in different domains, from education to healthcare, inter-personal relationship, to sustainable organizing.

CO-LABS invite participants to work within the collaborative spirit of Action Research. Each co-lab supports a learning orientation, bringing scholars and practitioners together, prioritizing mutual benefit and cultivating current work and the next generation. We inquire/practice in an integrated way that includes personal/ first-person, interpersonal/second-person and impersonal/third-person inquiry/practice. Involvement in our programs is by donation.

Interested in pursuing similar work in your own system? Interested in learning more about the key principles and practices associated with the work described? Want to have the references and further suggested readings? Check out the Resources companion volume. To find like minded practitioner colleagues, please check out the AR+ Co-labs.
Relational Action Inquiry:
To the Heart of the Learning

SKETCH

In *Relational Action Inquiry: To the Heart of the Learning*, Hilary Bradbury and Shakiyla Smith flesh out the personal and interpersonal skills and mindsets required for action research to be developmental and ultimately transformative of self and community.

MEET THE AUTHORS

**Hilary Bradbury, Ph.D.**, is a scholar-practitioner focused on the human and organizational dimensions of creating healthy communities. A professor of organization studies since 1998 (Case Western, USC and OHSU), today she is editor-in-chief of Action Research Journal (Sage). Hilary was born and bred in Dublin, Ireland and educated at Trinity College proceeding to Divinity Schools at Harvard and University of Chicago. She earned her PhD at Boston College’s School of Management with a focus on change and transformation. Author of numerous journal articles and editor of the successful Handbooks of Action Research, her latest book, is *Eros/Power: Love in the Spirit of Inquiry* (Integral Publishers, 2016, with Bill Torbert). Hilary is the convening hubstress and CEO of AR+, the global virtual community for participatory Action Researchers “accomplishing more good together.” AR+ convenes community of practice ‘co-labs’ in support of participative inquiry/practice in education, healthcare, development, relational action inquiry and organizing. Hilary, who enjoys formal affiliations with the Institute for Development Studies (IDS), Business School Lausanne (BSL) and California Institute for Integral Studies (CIIS), was named 2018 Jubilee Professor at Chalmers Institute of Technology, Sweden. In addition to her work as a scholar, Hilary is a member of the teachers’ circle at Zen Center of Portland. She may be reached at [actionresearchplus.com](http://actionresearchplus.com).
Shakiyla Smith, EdD, MPH is a longtime public health practitioner who has worked in the field of violence and injury prevention for nearly 15 years. Throughout her public health career, she has taught, conducted and coordinated research, and served as an organizational leader and manager. She is also a scholar-practitioner in adult education and organizational development. More recently, she has been assisting public health practitioners in taking a systems perspective around complex, adaptive public health challenges and developing the necessary individual and group capacity to address these challenges. Beyond her professional life, she is a yoga instructor and energetic healing practitioner. She received her Master of Public Health degree from the Rollins School of Public Health at Emory University and her doctorate in Adult Education from the University of Georgia. Her scholarly and practice focus areas include Action Research, collaborative and adaptive learning approaches, adult development and transformative learning, and collaborative developmental action inquiry. All of her professional and personal work and practice centers around supporting individuals and groups as they grow, and as they grapple with change and adaptive challenges.

“The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference.”
- Audre Lorde

We have much to learn about cultivating the relational space for success with our action research. Our starting premise is that the question of how to cultivate spaces in which we can show up as our best and invite the best from one another, has mostly been overlooked, especially in the professional realm. Yet it is a crucial inquiry for good Action Research, and at this time in particular. In the following pages, we sketch some ideas on relating well so that more of our Action Research efforts are sustainable. In order for our change work to have effect and not simply pop back to the status quo as soon as we have accomplished something together, we must address the transformation of power and cultivation of love (more on this later) in the relational space.
Collaboration and effective community organizing—which assume relationships of mutuality and empowerment—are key to good Action Research. In turn, the Action Research contribution to pressing and complex issues can be potentially transformative—for self, others, and society. Collaboration and effective community, however, require that we cultivate and then maintain relationships so that mutuality can develop. In other words, if we are to develop ourselves and others—the goal of transformative learning—we need to pay more attention, becoming more mindful and choiceful about how we make and break relationships. This is what we call relational practice toward relational quality, which is fundamentally about how we cultivate self with others.

We are all shaped by early relationships of power and love. Family and school provided our foundational, often haphazard, and low-quality learning experiences.

What we’ve learned, often unconsciously, tends also to be quite gender-differentiated (e.g. playing football versus playing with makeup) in ways we may remain blind to. In fact, we don’t have much shared fluency about the importance of, much less the ingredients for, creating the high-quality learning spaces we need in transformative relational spaces. As such, we draw immediate attention to the fact that, when given a chance, we—flesh and blood, emotional, well-meaning persons—must not rely solely on our technologies and theories (though they help), nor our structures (though we create them). We must rely instead on a capacity to meet and elevate ourselves and others, which must be developed through ongoing practice and learning.

In what follows, we write from inside the practice of our efforts in cultivating high-quality relational spaces in which unilateral power develops towards collaboration and invites a co-creative—even playful spirit of love—which we call Eros. We need to piggyback on some concepts of personal (leadership) development and introduce some ideas about relational action logics (all will become clear shortly) so that we have better language. The whole point of our effort is that we’re seeking to enact more mutual collaborations, in inter-gendered contexts, across various other differences and often power-related divides. We do this with application to the real world in mind and bringing real examples from our work, separately and together. We also invite, you, Dear Reader, to try this at home or in the kinds of interpersonal, everyday laboratory conditions we suggest as crucial for creative development in a group setting. We also offer suggestions for cultivating a safe space in which to try creative
experiments. Whatever arises (and it is usually juicy and almost always meaningful), we learn
to tune our attention to practicing being real together. Isn’t it funny (and sad) how being our-
selves in company of others turns out to be a rare art? We agree with the great Miles Davis
who noticed: “Man, sometimes it takes you a long time to sound like yourself.”

SHAKIYLA’S VIGNETTE: EROS-INFUSED WORK

Shakiyla writes: As I hung up the phone, I felt myself in a familiar manic state, almost
unable to physically hold the energy and excitement of the idea churning in me. I pushed
away from my computer and stood up from my desk—needing to move. Who could I share
and process this with? Here, at work, it’s usually one of two people, one, a female colleague
who teleworked most days of the week. I would tell my other colleague, a male, who was
almost always in the office and available when I needed him.

I walked the short distance down the hallway to his office and felt a slight uneasiness and
guilt. Am I “always” disturbing him? Barging into his office unannounced and stealing his
time from his other, “more important” work-related tasks? And he is my superior, twice
removed. My perception in our context, is that you can’t just regularly step into the office of
someone in a higher position for a random, extended, and unplanned conversation unless
your relationship or the person’s style sets a different precedent. Plus, everyone is so busy
with meetings. It keeps the introverts happy too! And yet, I do regularly enter his office in
such a manner. I can’t seem to help myself. My guilt is not a deterrent and this time is no
different. As I entered the office, he literally spun around from his computer screen to face
me and greeted me with his usual, chipper, “Hi you, sit down,” pointing toward a chair, his
expression open and welcoming. I began recounting to him the details of my phone call and my excitement about a new partnership that involved doing amazing, bold, and important action inquiry with a group of public health practitioners from across several states. It was the culmination of years of relationship and work together with this group of practitioners. Even though my work is so different from his, as an epidemiologist, he shared my excitement (I was ecstatic) and immediately set about helping me think through and visualize the possibilities and details on a sheet of blank paper that he pulled from a pile.

A quick and sharp thinker with amazing listening and synthesis abilities, he was, as a full thought partner, keen on and skilled at making sense of and helping me refine my stream of consciousness ideas—and usually in the form of pithy notes and a visual summary, which he would either keep or give to me for later conversations. How does he always make me feel like the brightest person with the best ideas in the room? Even with all of his knowledge and experience? Our planning and delineating morphed from one project discussion to another to our larger purpose and mission. There was even a bit of philosophy thrown in. We buzzed along like that for a couple of hours until we had followed every thread and tied it up for the moment. It felt a bit like we had devised new and potential solutions to all of the world’s public health problems, or at least had enough good and needed work and scholarship to last us the next few years. He passed over the “planning sheet” with his remarkable and clear synthesis of my initially half-formed ideas, swiveled back around to his computer screen, and I returned back to my cubicle to tick off some more mundane administrative tasks.

**Hilary reflects:** Shakiyla, lucky you! You’re blessed to have formed such a deeply generative and productive working relationship. Really it is a form of Eros—I sense the soul surging forth (you write you’re ecstatic; who knew this could be the case when working for the U.S. government!) where you feel connected both to your work and your colleagues in a shared endeavor. Likely the key is that you feel connected with a deeper purpose. Not a bad way to spend the day! There is clear mutual love and care for each other that extends into improving your work and perhaps also beyond your work. As a taxpayer, I am grateful! Perhaps because the three of you (I am now including the female colleague who teleworks and who is also a part of this work collaboration) create this holding environment, this “protainer,” that we discuss below, you can engage in meaningful work connected to your hearts’ desires. Speaking of heart, I am coming to believe, and certainly see evidence of this in your vignette, that at the heart of the matter is you get to be seen and valued. We deeply long for that. We have to offer this to each other. Also, while this work is connected to the work you’re hired to do, it goes beyond that. We can’t be paid to bring what is fully voluntary, creative, and energizing, and what is set to potentially have a meaningful impact in any field. Any attempt to mechanize that fails.

What I notice also is this Eros flourishes in a workspace that almost seems designed to kill it off—cubicles for some and invisible “do not disturb” signs for others. Yet, it doesn’t much matter in that you manage to create a generative space where there is welcome pause for
a truest self to come to work in this designed-for-transactional-work space. Organizational position, race, gender, and differences in knowledge and power vary among you, yet none of these things get in your way. So mutuality of power and learning arise and all benefit. It feels good! That exemplifies how Eros and power move from being separate—as we feel them to be in conventional terms—to interweaving.

I know from talking with you that your intellectual and work-related discussions naturally mix together with family updates and mental/emotional check-ins. A fuller self gets to come to work. You are whole to yourselves and with each other. Being admired or fully seen and valued gives you the space and safety to explore unknown intellectual terrain. I’d say your vignette, from what is a fairly typical work week, illustrates how Eros and attending to the relational space in both subtle and direct ways, creates high-quality relational space (or lovable collaborations) which in turn grow the emergence of brilliance (and creative “solutions”). It’s not rocket science, but it’s too rare!


WHY DRAW ATTENTION TO QUALITY IN “RELATIONAL SPACE?”

Hilary: Help me here, please, Shakiyla... Are we nuts to bother so much with considering the quality of relational space? It’s pretty subtle stuff. I guess I am really asking how do we draw attention to this topic—which is about trust and so much more in the energetic fields between us—without sounding slightly too esoteric, or worse, in our offering to fellow Action Research colleagues, impractical?

Shakiyla: Let’s start with how we both love the Audre Lorde epigraph for our opening. She writes both beautifully and rightly to connect the varied ways that joy (and Eros) expresses itself. How it yokes us to each other in our individual and shared human experience and expression. In that quote, which I took from a longer essay about the uses (and misuses) of the erotic, she makes the case that joy—and deep feeling more generally—is a vital part of all human connection and interaction. It not only connects us in love, leisure, and pleasure, but also in work and difficulty. In fact, she suggests, it makes all our pursuits—particularly the difficult—more possible. We resonated with that as a useful framing.

Hilary: We are joining a conversation that started in earnest some decades ago! Isn’t it wonderful to retrieve Lorde’s brilliance? She was before her time. What a delight we feel when we find another in our growing tribe of those concerned with genuine human contact, beyond the ritual of being polite and guarded.
**Shakiyla:** Yes, we’re drawn to explore what is between us—in this intersubjective space, what has been popularly called the “we-space.” And while it’s subtle, why should it be hidden? Especially in our work as Action Researchers? We, humans, are social beings—embedded within intricate social networks and systems through which we organize and ex-press ourselves; exchange love, care, and mutual benefit; accomplish minor and major endeavors; and enact power (in generative and destructive ways). So, we are not starting from scratch, so to speak, in cultivating this space. We are in many ways hardwired for relationship, even as we find ourselves so often astray.

**Hilary:** As Action Researchers we espouse the need for collaboration and much of our work is conducted with others for the intended benefit of society and social systems. Unfortunately, our collective lack of cultivation of the relational space between us Action Researchers—that is, the shared field of experience among those in inquiry together—stops us short.

**Shakiyla:** We need to understand that we are the instruments of our research and practice. Akin to the biologists using microscopes, we use ourselves. Action Researchers must inquire into and cultivate our capacity to skillfully play in the relational space with more genuine mutuality, creativity, and effective collaboration. This is why this consideration matters.

**Hilary:** We’ve been trained by science to look to the externals for where “truth” lies. But as Action Researchers we realize we have to also cultivate the internal, the space between us, as a precondition to anything of value arising. It’s not the after-thought as much as a precondition.

**UNILATERAL POWER AND THE GIFTS OF EROS: BEYOND THE STATUS QUO TO CO-CREATIVITY.**

There’s a lot to consider within the relational space; however, to cultivate relational space we have to start by confronting the elephants in the room—power and, its shadow sibling, Eros. Properly interweaving, they produce convivial, co-creative relationships. Yet, power and Eros are both taboo to discuss openly. We hope that by putting them together, rather than multiplying the affront, we can open up a space of curiosity beyond the too many ritualized ways we make contact. Ironically, we likely think about power and Eros all the time. Biologists tell us that large sections of the brain are devoted to interpersonal intimacy. But our efforts to get anywhere productive and explicit are mostly attended by vaguely muddled feelings of upset or attraction. How rarely do we discuss power and relationship with the very ones we have on our mind!
And before we begin to sound too Pollyanna-ish or naïve in our discussions, let us properly acknowledge the difficulty or rather the risks of engaging these topics openly. We mentioned earlier how so few of us have healthy modeling and early experience in the relational space. Oftentimes, many of us find ourselves in relational spaces (both in organizational and familial contexts) that feel the opposite of Eros. Sadly, many of our spaces are characterized by misuses of power and by competition, mistrust, self-protection, and conflict. This often results in low desire and under-developed capacities with which to engage in (let alone discuss) “proper” interweaving of Eros and power. From this space, it can be difficult to even imagine another alternative or where to begin.

Related, we would be remiss not to at least mention the shadow-side of Eros as well, which, incidentally, Audre Lorde discusses beautifully in her essay. Eros can be quite problematic for many and often confused with sexual desire, or worse pornography (the exact opposite of Eros, as Lorde argues). We have not yet learned how to acknowledge and metabolize the strong emotions and attractions (or “surging toward,” as Hilary has written) generated by Eros without confusing them with sexual attraction or energy that we must act on sexually.

Given this, often our only options appear to be to have sex or repress our erotic yearnings.

This is a shame and a missed opportunity to explore the full range of relational space that can be generated between people. Furthermore, it is a critical conversation to have as we confront and address the misuses of Eros and power, particularly as it relates to sexual harassment and abuse, and ensure the safety of our relational space. While we do not directly address the issue of abuse and misuse here—that could be an entire chapter on its own—we do want to
explicitly call attention to it as part of the elephant in the room, and as part of what creates unsafe relational spaces (especially for women) and holds us back from exploring these areas adequately. Bottom line: we must become more comfortable with this topic and not fear it so much, because it turns out that as we get comfortable we can feel less compelled, safer, more choiceful, and then more creative.

EROS, POWER, LOVE: A FEW (UN)PROBLEMATIC TERMS

**Hilary:** To work then. What are core ingredients as we cook high-quality relational space?

**Shakiyla:** My thinking around this is very much informed by first and second person research and practice. We could say that’s the subjective and intersubjective in combination. Of course, the relational space is typically thought of only or mostly as interpersonal, as second person. I invite us to include considerations of the first person in here too. So we are asking, what is the space that is created between two people that is more than just one plus one added together? And yet that space that also includes each one?

**Hilary:** There is a great Sufi quote—it stays with me since I came across it when writing about relationality at the start of my academic career, almost twenty years ago: “You think because you understand ‘1’ that you must understand ‘2.’ Because 1+1 makes two. But you must also understand ‘and.’”

**Shakiyla:** The assumption we are making is that by attending to (and practicing in) the first and second person space, we will have an impact in the third person space (i.e. in the world and in the realm of Eros and power) that is qualitatively and practically different than if we just attend to the “reality out there” as if entirely external to us. Which is unfortunately where most people prefer to stay. I like that Action Researchers, from Kurt Lewin to Otto Scharmer, talk about social fields. According to Scharmer, a field is: “the structure of relationships among individuals, groups, organizations and systems that gives rise to collective behaviors and outcomes.” He offers that: “Issues and events (level 1) arise not only from systemic structures (level 2) and the self-interest of nation-states (level 3), but also from the deep structures of social fields (level 4).” And at one point he writes: “Systems change is personal; it is, as my colleague Peter Senge puts it, an inside job.”

The heart of the matter is how we relate to one another, how we talk, and how we create together. And as Scharmer points out, the third person systemic issues and challenges of our societies are deeply connected to—indeed, in part, created by—the social field. So, I find it useful to consider this concept of the social field when thinking about high-quality relational spaces and the energy of those, and what gets added to them from the first and second person interactions. Hilary, now it’s your turn to explain core ingredients. Can you say what we mean
by Eros and power and how these figure into the relational space? Also, as we know, the term Eros is so loaded—it’s pretty much a sexualized term, as we mentioned earlier...um, do we really want to use the term Eros?

**Hilary:** I know the term Eros is awe-full. It’s been usurped by the pornographers! Probably we’d be better off using a different term, but let’s give it a chance. We imagine fields of rational minds coming together, which is all about what’s between the ears (rather than what’s between our hearts!). I know that others—in the presumably small population who choose old Greek words—prefer the more chaste “agape” which signals solidarity. That’s certainly important, but Eros really is the technically appropriate—albeit quite culturally inappropriate—term for what we want to add to the discussion. It’s more vivid and juicy too. Eros also comes from the Greeks—Plato writes famously about it in the Symposium.

Since Freud and Jung, it describes a life-energy, a kind of yearning to develop, a calling to a greater integrated well-being of body and mind. It’s not such a personal quality as a field of energy, of co-creativity, to be cultivated. Of course Eros does express itself also, and most concretely, in sexual ways. But we can’t get stuck there (although if we do, it’s as good a way station as any!). Eros as creativity populates the planet. Importantly, now that drive can attune to the possibility of co-creation: “Co-creation beyond procreation!” And this is where power gets involved, most frequently as an obstacle. Like addicts we may need to start by admitting that we are bad at co-creation because we are so bad at sharing power. This is especially the case between men and women. All of which is made worse by typically having very different gendered experiences with power early on, learned by boys in sports (score!) and by girls in their more circle-like conversational style. Relational creativity needs to bring these modes together and elevate both to include the masculine drive of differentiation with the feminine inclusivity.

**Shakiyla:** All this touches on love and connection; bell hooks has some good ideas. She argues that love and a love ethic are not only crucial to our individual survival and healing, but that they must be the foundations on which our transformations of society are built. She writes: “Addressing love, we proclaim our full and complex humanity...To return to love, making it a central issue in our efforts for collective recovery and healing is not a move away from political action. Unless love is the force under-girding our efforts to transform society, we lose our way...Without changing structures of domination, we leave in place the culture of lovelessness...Love is profoundly political.”

This is intriguing to me—especially as a woman of color, a feminist, and a Buddhist, like hooks. And honestly, I am still in inquiry around it. I agree with hooks in my gut, and yet something about this sentiment can jar or rub. I continue to debate it with dear friends and family members of mine who are deep thinkers, activists of color, and critical race theorists, people who I trust and respect deeply. They don’t believe that a return to love (or Eros) is warranted, or rather, will make a difference. “It’s too “soft” and unrealistic,” is a sentiment
often used against people of color by those in privilege. A return to love doesn’t address the ways that systemic oppression and privilege structure behavior and interactions in ways that even the most aware of us slip into. They tell me that you can’t convince or love someone out of oppressing you; that the powerful only understand or respond to power. I fundamentally disagree, but I do have to hold at least the possibility that they may be correct, looking at history.

We have to be willing to having these messy inquiries and conversations that are really un-resolvable.

We usually just agree to disagree, and still love and respect each other. It is also noteworthy that the people this occurs with are men. Often, it seems to be the men who speak strongly of taking power back through the use of power, through force. But my concern is not so much around taking power back, but around what happens after? And what kind of social field will we have created then? What will be the quality of our first and second person experience and space? To get back to hooks, how will our structures be different, if we continue to base them on power alone (simply changing one landlord for another)?

The post-colonial experiences of Africa, Asia, and Latin America are cautionary tales. Many of the freedom-fighters (or leaders) who came into power after they tossed out the colonizers and gained independence for their countries became some of the worst abusers of power and oppressors (of course, this is much more complicated and does not address the larger global, systemic structures in place which didn’t actually change and often support these leaders). In any case, what I’m speaking to is a concern about not attending to first and second person navigations of both power and love. I do believe that this is the next stage of human interaction/social structure and perhaps it is those of us who have not gained benefit primarily through power (e.g. people of color, women, LGBTQ folks etc.) who can show us the way... like hooks and Lorde, who are rare in their nuanced discussions about love and Eros (again, black and woman and lesbian in Lorde’s case).

**Hilary:** Me too, though I should point that being a Viking Dubliner I am drained of color and consequently privileged and no doubt a little blind to that. But you make me wonder about those who live at the margins of our conventional society, be it people of color, gay people, women, anyone really who is not the male White Anglo Saxon Protestant standard. From the margins we get to develop a capacity for witnessing our own “othering” which in the early years is hard, but which becomes a developmental advantage if you can stay in the painful inquiry about the shifting distance between margin and center.
Creativity seems likely in this space between margin and center. I think DuBois calls this oppressed advantage a “double consciousness,” as if holding both the standard view and our own different, second view enriches us.

Shakiyla, I am fascinated to be writing together about power and Eros in relational space at a time when this conversation is exploding around us in popular culture. So many movies about race today are helping us see how much the present is shaped by the past. We may start to understand that the past is very much alive in the present and that it demands to be seen. Our efforts to be loving won’t work until we tell the truth about the past. Clean up our relational space, so to speak. That cleanup is really about acknowledging where we have privilege that has exploited, or actually “psychologically milked,” another group. That is me when I see how my whiteness enables me to move freely in life. That is not me when I confront the very real violence (structural, physical, sexual, emotional etc.) that women of all races meet. If I don’t acknowledge that and create a space of retreat to be a conversation between us then it only compounds the moral/physical/emotional theft that frames how we meet. But when we stop pretending that “it’s all just fine” and move beyond the willful silence about the complex dynamics that are unfolding, then we can be real. Then power can give way to co-creativity. It’s not possible all the time, but it’s increasingly possible to have these conversations. What do you think?

Shakiyla: I completely agree. In truly mutual and loving relations, there must be space for the whole person and to engage these difficult, messy dynamics. I think that it warrants saying that even as we engage in this relational practice together, we will not be perfect at it and our “stuff” (e.g. your privilege, these histories) will show up in the space. What I hear you suggesting, as the place to begin, is that we be willing to address those disconnections outright as part of our transformation of Eros and power and in doing that, make space for one another. Related, I also think it’s important that we’re clear that this Eros/power is an aspiration, for our collective future. It’s mostly beyond, but nonetheless occasionally hinted at even in our current cultural training. We’re easily aware of it as if we’re called to a more beautiful way of living together. Jung’s insight on this comes to mind: “Where power is, there can be no Eros; where Eros is there can be no power.” I have resisted this as too either/or as I believe we can deepen and elevate both power and Eros so that there is a mutual infusion that leads to the possibility for collaboration. Martin Luther King Jnr was more brilliant, I
believe, when he told us that power without love is blind and dangerous, and that love without power is anemic. He knew that they needed to go together hand in hand. So we can add a few ingredients to our first recipe for relational space: namely a big dollop each of power and of Eros. They may appear at first to have nothing to do with each other. But then we put them in a pot—what you often call our protainer—so that each can react to the other, softening the one, temper-ing the other. Part of this alchemy of Eros and power coming together is a need to create a clearing about the gender, race, and cultural truths that are already in the spaces in which we set our protainer.

INVITATION TO DEAR READER: PAUSE FOR EXERCISE

There’s a new saying we find useful: “Sitting is the new smoking.” We could apply that to our effort here to suggest that much theoretical pondering needs to be exercised in response to the reality of practice. In real life! So we invite you, Dear Reader, to pause here—if you will—and move to consider your feelings about and considerations of the relational space. Consider especially your professional collaborations and partnerships. What comes to mind, what feels particularly juicy or important or simply upsetting to you, when you bring to mind salient relationships in your day to day? How did Eros and power function and manifest in the space between you and these key people? How does that manifestation impact the outcomes of your collaborations? What works, what doesn’t?

DEVELOPMENT THROUGH AND IN RELATIONSHIP: THE PRACTICE OF RELATIONAL ACTION INQUIRY

Hilary writes: Let’s define convivial, co-creative relating. Can we agree it’s present between us when we:
1) engage in some kind of shared work;

2) feel a surging toward one another (which does not have to include sexual);

3) wish to become more intimate;

4) make a commitment to develop;

5) passionately yearn for the other, but do not seek to possess them;

6) experience ourselves as on a quest together, increasing our loving mutuality;

7) recognize the significant role of the “third” in any love relationship—the mutual friend or community of inquiry

From Bradbury and Torbert, 2016. *Eros/Power: Love in the Spirit of Inquiry*

Martin Buber is known for writing of the relational move from I-It to I-Thou relationships. He writes when two people relate to each other authentically, God is the electricity that sparks between them. I think allowing, or even inviting in, Eros accomplishes this all important move; that invitation brings with it a relational electricity. To stop treating the other as an object, however, we must first be aware of our greed and instead encourage the other to arise as a subject with us.

The love that is spoken of as “agape” or “filia” (brotherly love) alone can amount to a white-washing, a constraint, and therefore a loss. While we may find words like “agape” more congenial, we must ask if it isn’t precisely because it’s a term that’s been desexualized.
Anything that brushes against sexuality makes us profoundly uncomfortable, and really it’s women who are made to feel and become responsible for that discomfort.

As if public space, to be congenial (for whom?), must hide women’s influences (sometimes under dark veils). Yet, I am also willing to admit that the word Eros may be almost irretrievable, so Orwellian a term has it become within our pornographic culture (how have we let that happen?). We are certainly not alone in speaking of Eros. Levinas writes that Erotic intention amounts to a “sublime hunger” for the other, the more foreign the more delectable (yes, he was French). There is so much wisdom from Teillhard de Chardin and A. H. Almaas whose sense of that sublimity is of a divine Eros. Can we agree that retaining its real power of provenance may be important? If I may, let me finish my vindication of the erotic with a quote from John O’Donohue (from whom we also take the opening blessing for the book). He connects our talk of Eros directly to daily life. He reminds us, if we are lucky, and remain open, Eros may be quite near:

*It is always astonishing how Eros can strike. No context is love-proof, no convention or commitment impervious. Even a lifestyle which is perfectly insulated, where the personality is controlled, all the days ordered and all actions in sequence, can to its own dismay find that an unexpected spark has landed; it begins to smoulder until it is finally unquenchable. The force of Eros always brings disturbance; ...in the concealed terrain of the human heart Eros remains a light sleeper.*

- John O’Donoghue (Anam cara)
Shakiyla adds: I have an experience at the first and second person levels of how development happens through and in community, and the necessary ingredients. As part of my dissertation research, I convened and facilitated a collaborative developmental action inquiry group with six other women of color living in the US and Southern Africa. We met virtually for 12 months (once or twice each month for two hours) for the stated purpose of exploring our own evolution of consciousness.

Really we were all struggling with our lives in some way, and struggling to scaffold the demands of “adulting.”

It was a kind of relational action inquiry, but we didn’t know it at the time. It’s funny, really. We came together wanting the support of other women who were dealing with similar struggles and hoping to get some relief, maybe some advice for coping better, but in the beginning we mostly saw ourselves as a collection of individual women in a kind of community of practice. None of us knew what we were up to. It took us nine months to get cooking. By that time we had gotten in our own way, gone through some relational drama, and lost two members who exited the group (one rather uneventfully earlier on and another in a blaze of drama). It was the most difficult work in a community that I have ever done, certainly the most difficult research I’ve ever done, and it was quite juicy and compelling. The dissertation reveals the full story and even the methods we used (there’s quite a bit to say!). To connect it to what we are discussing here, I offer a short list of pithy take-homes, not in any particular order:

1. Intentional facilitation of the group and its process matters.

2. Friendship and connection matter and are the ground of developmental work in community. By friendship, I don’t necessarily mean affection or “like,” but rather the affiliative bonds of warmth, care and concern, and knowing, a willingness to see and be seen, to relate. In fact, it was desire for and commitment to friendship and connection that kept us going—even through the difficulty that arose.

3. Mutuality or shared power matters. In my facilitation of the group, I was constantly aware of and committed to enacting a mutual power. This was truly the only way to invite growth for myself and my co-inquirers.

4. Time matters. I mentioned that it took us almost nine months to get cooking. This is not fast, easy work. It takes time in the form of longevity and regular meetings (at least monthly for more than an hour).
5. A developmental focus and inquiry matters. Consideration of developmental stages, or rather ways of knowing, for us individually and collectively was an important shared lens and language for us (more on these momentarily). It provided a useful perspective for us to see and know ourselves and each other. We also included specific practices as part of our work together designed to facilitate and support development.

6. Expect and prepare for fear, ambivalence, avoidance, shutting-down, irritations, and other challenges to arise as you pursue this work. It is to be expected and in some ways, is good news. Build in individual and group structures and practices to manage and work with these.

Obviously, this is not all that we learned, but it does support the point that we have been making that it is not only possible, but necessary to fuse Eros and power together if we are to build our own and each other’s capacity and co-create together. Through our process, not only did some of us grow individually, but we experienced a sort of evolution of our collective, “we” space and capacity. In fact, the growth and strengthening of the collective space served as a holding environment—or protainer—for each of us individually.

_Hilary:_ Shakiyla, you quickly mention how fear, ambivalence, irritations, avoidance, and the like arise in the relational space and suggest that we build in structures to manage them. What are one or two practices that have made the difference in your ability to cultivate good relational space?

_Shakiyla:_ Well, first let me say in your mentioning this, that there are many skills, capacities, and practices needed both individually and relationally in order to cultivate high-quality relational space. Some of these are obvious, and have been written about extensively—self-management and emotional regulation, listening skills etc. We don’t need to repeat them here. I would say that, for me, meditation or some sort of personal mindfulness/awareness practice has been the ground of everything. It has been crucial to and the backbone of all of my developmental and relational practices. I know you are also a longtime meditator and have found this to be true. Yet, this is perhaps talked about less. In the dissertation group, we built in time in every meeting for a little mindfulness practice at the beginning (no more than five minutes). This not only served the function of centering us for our time together and bringing us into the “meeting space,” but I wanted to start to cultivate mindfulness as an intentional practice for everyone as part of our work. We each came from different spiritual/religious backgrounds, and so had diverse experiences with mindfulness practices, but we understood and committed to the idea that our work together would address both first and second person inquiry and practice. So, I would offer that anyone engaged in any type of change work or work in community/relationship incorporate some type of regular, first person mindfulness/awareness practice into their lives.
This practice can take many different forms. Obviously, meditation is one form, which I think is highly effective and beneficial. There are so many studies coming out about the emotional and physical benefits of meditation. We also don’t need to spend time here describing mindfulness/awareness or meditation practices. There are so many high-quality and diverse teachings and books on this subject for those who want to learn more. The primary point is that this is a key aspect of seasoning oneself as an instrument of your Action Research and relational practice. Without a basic capacity for self-awareness and to notice your own intentions, strategies, behaviors, and outcomes (or what Torbert describes as the four territories of experience; see Por et al, in this volume), your attempts to do this while adding others into the mix fall down quite quickly. It really is a lifelong practice, not something one “masters” once and for all.

One does not develop these “higher-quality” relational skills and capacities overnight or after one reading or training, right? You wouldn't try to run a marathon without logging many miles of practice. Meditation has often been referred to as mind-training.

Another important practice for me, which also worked for the group, is the use of Torbert’s four parts of speech. The four parts of speech is a second person, conversational practice that is a key aspect of action inquiry and meant to ensure mutuality, “more about which is in the resources volume.” It includes framing, advocating, illustrating, and inquiring, which in combination, help us to communicate with others in ways that surface and test the validity of our own and others’ underlying assumptions and perspectives. Briefly, framing involves stating the purpose or context of the conversation or meeting; advocating involves expressing an opinion, thought, feeling, or perspective; illustrating provides more detail or description around the information or data we used to arrive at our opinion, thought, feeling, or perspective; and inquiring is where we invite others to add their perspective and confirm or disconfirm our assumptions or advocacy (see the Appendix for more detail and resources around this). By using the four parts of speech, we invite mutuality through transparent and open communication and a willingness to test and revise our perspectives with others. In this way, they are much more than a way of speaking or conversational technique.

For me (and others), the four parts of speech have also been a helpful first person practice.
Specifically, it has been an illuminating discipline for me to pay attention to my speech acts in conversation. I have noticed, for example, that I tend to “over-advocate” and engage in less inquiry when I feel threatened or challenged in a heated discussion. A friend of mine notices her own tendency to not advocate at all and rely predominantly on inquiry during professional discussions out of a fear of being seen and expressing an unpopular viewpoint that may cause her to lose face. This awareness can come in the moment—when we are really practiced at being mindful and self-aware—or upon later reflection. The awareness, however, is the beginning of the possibility for new action—for new ways of communicating and engaging with others. In this way, the four parts of speech are also a developmental practice that over time can help us grow our personal and relational capacity. In the dissertation group, we learned and intentionally practiced the four parts of speech inside and outside of the group as a developmental practice and to support healthy, mutual relational space. Several of the other women in the group found this to be a powerful first and second person concept that helped them in their personal and professional lives. I, personally, use them in verbal and written (e.g. email) communications and find that they very often change the quality and outcome of a conversation. Furthermore, they have helped me pay attention to myself in a very different way.

EROS-INFUSED FRIENDSHIP AND COMMUNITY

Crystalizing what we’ve presented so far: We’ve said that Eros-infused friendship and its creativity can arise anywhere, in the context of paid (even government!) work, in our neighborhoods, in small friendship circles, or in specially convened efforts on behalf of desired outcomes. Attending to the quality of relationship, the space between, and allowing ourselves to yearn and then seek to cultivate something other than what Buber called the “I-It” rela-
tionship, our deepest concerns for quality of relationship turn out to be highly relevant for our practice of Action Research. It’s also scary and implies self- and others-development, an evolution from our early tendencies to be defensive and self-protective/demanding when what feels familiar begins to change. Yet, if we can continue anyway, cultivating high-quality relational space and doing so with inquiry and curiosity, we find good things begin to happen in those relationships we cultivate. Ironically, it’s not that we engage in relational inquiry in order to be more effective, but by placing relationship at the heart of what we do, we end up in more effective relationships. Both of us have witnessed this in our own and others’ experience.

Now we introduce relational action logics.

GROWING TOGETHER: RELATIONAL ACTION INQUIRY AS A DEVELOPMENT OF ACTION LOGIC OVER TIME.

As Rooke and Torbert (2005) suggest, the developmental stage is an important construct to keep in mind when we think about any coherent change efforts. Rooke and Torbert highlight the importance of the degree to which those involved are self-aware, showing a strong relationship between awareness (measured as ego development) and the successful outcome of an organizational change initiative. Because we are interested in what supports creative collaborative process to fruition with others, we piggyback on their work to suggest that cultivation of relational space can itself be a developmental activity which equips people with increasing resilience for acting collaboratively amid the complexity of contemporary life and organizations. Similarly, we suggest that relational space develops in stages, interdependent with and supportive of the development of those involved.

A developmental view suggests that the developing self can become less self-centered which allows for relationship to be cultivated.

In truth, it is already a developmental leap to pay attention to “the space between,” because for the truly self-centered self, there is only “me, me, me!” It is a path to creative collaboration. To date relationship—a perennially “feminine” concern repressed in women and men within a larger context of patriarchy and usually more oppressive of women than men— has
resided mostly in intuition and silence. Social scientists usually deconstruct relationship to its individual parts with relational space treated as a kind of billiards table of collisions of self-interested egos. But times are changing and egos are evolving. We feel we are called now to speak of relational space because we must learn to cultivate more mutuality.

Denigration of relationship— where the other is treated as mere object— causes great damage. An immature ego is always in relationship with objects, not subjects. This is a time of globalization and escalating technology that makes this objectification all the more dangerous. Without more attention, we may not adapt as needed. Torbert (2017) encourages us to aspire a little higher:

“... teaching ourselves how to create cultures of wonder (of collaborative inquiry and of mutually-transforming power) rather than cultures of hate (of blame and coercive power). Anyone can begin this learning process in their work teams, their families, and/or their friendship circles by devoting some proportion of their time (e.g. two hours per month) to developing cultures of wonder together and practicing how action inquiry can gradually dissolve cultures of hate.”

It is the relational extension of Bill Torbert’s “action logic,” which describes the thinking-feeling-action approach we take at a given moment. Our action logic has developed throughout our lives. Most children’s action logic concentrates, during the first ten years of their life, on gaining some control in relation to the physical, outside world— learning to walk, to bicycle etc. During their teenage years, most youths’ action logic concentrates on learning how to control their own behavior in ways that emotionally align with and/or break the invisible norms of the behavior of their family, school class, and peer group(s). In their late teenage years and early twenties, many young people’s action logic (especially those in college) concentrate on learning how to discipline their thoughts in order to become relatively expert in a craft or profession.

By their late twenties and thirties, a relatively large proportion of the population have stopped developing in action logic, but a third or more learn by their late forties and fifties how to be more practically successful by bringing their partial and relative control over the outside world, their own behavior, and their own thoughts into alignment with one another, so that they can reliably turn plans into congruent actions that yield the intended results in the outside world. Only 10% or less of the adult population currently ventures to yet more comprehensive action logics which increasingly engage a post-cognitive, embodied awareness (Bradbury & Torbert, 2016).

The concept of relational action logic extends the notion of action logic to the feeling of kinship we have with those we are with. It is also related to the timeframe that action logics work
with. Much like early action logics are correlated with age, so too at the earliest moment of relationship, we are acting as if in our early stages on the lookout for nurturance. Questions of trust and bonding, and therefore, whom to trust are salient. We call this relational space “projective” space. We do this by drawing on the psychoanalytic tradition which informs us about how much we are—mostly unconsciously—shaped by our earliest relational interactions with our mothers and other caregivers. We reflexively seek nurturance outside ourselves (and many of us fear that it will be withheld and act accordingly). In other words, we enter into relationship in a dependent state, which is attended by a lot of (often consciously unacknowledged) anxiety. This may last literally for just a moment or longer. The latter may be the case where we are unaware of psychological projections, something that we think in part at least explains how tenacious racial and sexist dynamics remain.

We’ll begin to inquire into why we say or do or feel a certain way in a group context, especially one of mixed race or gender. Remembering Levina’s suggestion that the bigger the difference, the more creativity possible, we want to encourage movement far beyond the protective and projective start. We notice an oscillating pattern of merger and differentiation (which replicates the individual dialectic that Torbert, Kegan, and Cook Greuter have noted). The diplomat relational space is one of merger, or bonding, where there is a predominant energy of paying attention to our similarities, essentially ignoring our differences, as if with kinfolk. Typically groups will become dysfunctional if they can’t get beyond this because, although this is a key and necessary stage in creative work, it is a precursor only. Until we work with our differences, first by simply allowing them (differentiating) and then by appreciating them (achieving), we won’t start to become truly creative together.

A center of gravity of real creativity kicks in when we allow ourselves to redefine the status quo (redefining).

In work terms this often sounds like a mixing together of professional and personal information and affect. Recall Shakiyla’s way of interweaving personal and professional check-ins with her colleagues. At this redefining stage we are no longer quite so anxious, i.e. reactive and defensive. Instead we have begun to make figural what we want to do together and are drawn by the potential more than our fears and anxieties. After this redefining phase we may begin to surrender to the flow of a new “bigger than me” energy where we literally “get over ourselves” in service to the collective space. This is not the groupthink of the diplomat stage (with its danger of mob mentality), but a more elevated space in which creativity takes the group into flow. It is infused by differentiation which allows differing perspectives to come into play, with our reactivity monitored as we listen more than react to what is difficult to hear.
So a designated facilitator, even for small groups, is helpful. Redefining may be best known in teams who excel in sports, but generally it is there in those endeavors where we begin to accomplish more together than we can alone (synergistic). In the final and altogether rare alchemical moments, life itself is accomplishing through us and something entirely new is created (transformational mutuality). This is where there is a group “Eureka!” that serves the family of all sentient beings. Perhaps it was just such a moment when the Arab Spring was inaugurated in the Algerian collective (and by Algerian women!). Or in the women’s marches when two million gathered in the aftermath of President’s Trump inauguration, not so much as a rebuke of him, but a clarion call to a new future where women’s contributions would be honored. These suggest the emergence, altogether surprising and unmanageable, of spaces where the individual “I” is surrendered to a superior “we.”

**RAIR VIGNETTE:**

The following is drawn from the RAIR (Relational Action Inquiry Research) community that meets monthly, mostly online, to learn and practice relational action inquiry, namely how to cultivate relationships of timely creativity. The calls use creative facilitation that integrates basic Relational Action Inquiry process and guidelines (see Appendix). Each of the dozen participants shares an experience to present, if they choose, and others help deepen insights about it.

“When sleeping women wake, mountains move.”
- Chinese Proverb
**Mei-ahn:** Five minutes before our RAIR call, I read an email in which a new colleague, Jim, attempted to erase the ownership of something I have infused my Eros into my very life energy into for nine years. I had repeatedly said, “No, don’t do this!” and he just went ahead. I arrived in a dazed state to our call. What happened then in the call, especially the sharing with Karl in our trio break-out room from which we were then transported into the large group, felt surreal. I feel now as if it healed something of great significance.

The receptivity and the quality of Karl’s attention and then the attention of the whole group, gave me enormous space to be fully immersed in my experience [the bonding of diplomat, deepening **]. The sense of the significance of my experience of being “ripped off” by Jim is that, in sharing it with others, I got to realize it is a collective experience. It’s the experience of any “colonized” person. I am beyond grateful that it got transformed with Karl.

Perhaps I had never articulated the insult I felt. Before I have been simply too upset to talk about it well. Before, this “insult” was more of a background [protective/projective] on the canvas of cultural context I was born into. It was collectively shared [diplomat]. Whereas this incident is direct, personal, while echoing with the collective. And so in sharing what I really felt, every single cell of me is smiling back and says, “Thank you for hearing!” Wow! The space opened up for me is impacting me a great deal [redefining]. That’s it, I am taking active steps to protect my right to my work and heal this wound that surrounds feeling ripped off. Bringing compassion both to me and all concerned [mutually transforming]. I am integrating this new-found power that has broken loose from the underground.

Karl, this is relationship-at-work! You heard the voice as a loving witness to the colonized part of me screaming to the colonizer [differentiating from diplomat]. Thank you for responding to the energetic frequency of my consciousness. Every single cell in me was broadcasting even if wasn’t well-formulated. You not only heard it; you reflected it back fully and lovingly [synergizing]. This is the first time I had the experience being heard at the cellular level in such a difficult moment [alchemical awareness].

**Sophia:** I hear Mei-ahn’s sharing about her complex and difficult experience as a gift to the group. My own sense of engaging with what appears today as Mei-ahn’s story is that it is also a story of one (Asian) woman’s Eros getting stolen by an oblivious (American) man. But really it’s also everywoman’s experience. Or every colonized person’s experience. Mei-ahn had shared generously of her creative ideas to Jim. I can’t help but notice that in surface ways Karl represents an American/White Anglo Saxon Protestant man taking witness. Jim is trying to milk Mei-ahn’s efforts for his own benefit. Karl is helping transform that.
Mei-ahn: It is more like Jim is milking my desire to co-create and manipulating the situation against my wishes. He says he wants to co-create but he does not have the capacity to listen to the terms I ask for co-creation. He poses as an expert in manifesting things in the world, and ignores how I want to steer with my own vision of manifestation.

Sophia: It’s a colonizing behavior which abuses the original erotic desire to co-create. Instead of having gifts to share together, there is a “unilateral taking from,” rather than a more mutual “doing more together than you could do alone.” I feel too many of us know this story all too well. I feel, with Mei-ahn, that generally the kindness of less differentiated (feminine) people/cultures is prey to abuse by those more (masculinely) self-protective and “expert” orientations. Surrounding this whole difficult issue with a willful silence as to the complex dynamics that are unfolding. What if we look for the Eros that is thwarted here?

Karl: Like all of us, I was touched by your reflections in the moment as Sophia helped frame what Mei-ahn was feeling. Not just for Mei-ahn but perhaps any woman or colonized person (and perhaps we all). So this was a delicate moment for us as we learn how to talk about this without blame.

For my own part in it, I found myself at first feeling protective (of Mei-ahn), upset for her. And on some level I was also upset by her. I was feeling a need to be protective and wondering about the impact her sharing would have upon her. Would she feel too exposed [projective]? Would I [protective]? Then as I listened more intently, I gave up my [protective] thoughts. What came was simple wonder, beyond Mei-ahn’s and my pain. I could then hear her voice screaming for recognition, respect, and value [re-defining]. And I felt implicated. She was the colonized raising a voice to the colonizer (which is not at all how I like to see myself; it’s a kind of “not me” even though culturally I do play this role). So I heard myself shouting, “This is not right! I want justice, not oppression, for all of us!” I didn’t have much of any background or facts regarding the situation, but I could feel the universality of this story [mutually transforming]. It’s the same story of how American culture treated Native Americans and downhill all the way to today. But then I listened into the “impassive voice” behind Mei-ahn’s pained voice as she explored her own power. I was moved and grateful for her courage. As she infused power, I could let go of my former sense that I need to protect [re-defining], which inadvertently also stops this healing conversation from happening. Instead we fell naturally into to a place of partnership [mutually transforming].
**Shakiyla reflects:** What a powerful story this is, and there’s quite a bit to unpack in here. I’m especially moved by the way that power transforms and the potential for healing when Eros and vulnerability are added to the relational space. I’m also intrigued by the possibility of us serving as proxies for an “offending” other (e.g. Karl served as a proxy for Jim) for the purposes of relational clearing—reminds me a little of [Burt Hellinger’s] constellation work. This is about working with the intersubjective or second person.

*It’s another level of complexity and is a question of how “I” relates to “we” which lies at the heart of the matter.*

What if both are inescapably intertwined? Hilary’s detailing of the different moves and flips through the various relational action logics is helpful here and makes more explicit different layers of maturity that arise in a group setting. These include early stages of development such as protective voice, which is often the most powerful. And then a creative, more elevated center of gravity is met when there is also a witnessing of the emotions at play. First person/”I” is balanced. The ego is always “I” oriented, but seeing that can release the “I” a little and allow a team or group to move to and even beyond a redefining space, which is necessarily a putting aside of the “I” as we explore what can be accomplished together.

The experience of how inquiry deepens when vulnerability rises shows that power is not just the unilateral strength we possess or think others have over us. It’s like what I was saying earlier about the social field and the interaction between the first and second person. Mei-ahn and Karl created a different social field, which arose out of their first person triggers and then vulnerability, which then invited a qualitatively different relational space. Clearly, they both had a certain level of personal capacity. They likely wouldn’t have even been attracted to the RAIR group otherwise. However, this is where capacity meets vulnerability and Eros to create high-quality relational space.

**Hilary:** The careful, (or even not so careful!) reader will notice that the vignette (which I wrote up as convener of the meeting in question) tells of a transformation without the presence of the original offending party (namely the guy who uses Mei-ahn’s work against her explicit request). In other words, while there may be a transformation—and we believe there is—what about the “bad guy?” There is a book upon which we piggyback here and which I co-wrote with my mentor Bill Torbert. Our book starts with a scene that, like the one Mei-ahn describes, caused great consternation. The book is our effort to speak honestly about it, and to repair and grow from speaking what’s true about very difficult matters of privilege and power. We are both transformed in the process. It mirrors Mei-ahn and Karl venturing into this collective healing first by owning their own experience.
So we might say that the work of transformation, when taken on consciously, doesn’t even have to include all parties. Our point is not to “fix past wrongs,” it’s to notice— as Mei-ahn did— how “present day wrongs” feel toxic in part because they are enduring and collective. Somehow we have learned to not talk about them, and so they fester. Our work together is making these obstacles to mutuality more discussible. It takes willful (but gentle) insistence to go to the place of vulnerability and let in and then look at the distressing feelings.

*What makes the transformation possible here?* A combination of magic: Note how Karl talks about “surrendering the protective stance” as if there is a natural drive to wholeness among us. But it is the work of maturity. In the beginning, it may be safest to do this work with ourselves alone; we can journal, talk in therapy. Bringing the fruits of such inquiry can then help a group space realize much deeper learning together. It’s multiplicative. We leave the last word to Mei-ahn whose story this is:

*Mei-ahn reflects (a week after the fact):* Just want to add another layer of this vignette. Right before this incident, in a routine meditative practice, I was struck by a strong intuition that a situation with intense emotional upheaval was about to unfold in the near future. This intuition perhaps even helped “precipitate” this event from the field of possibilities around me. Even though Jim’s blindness to the systemic injustice between us was very hurtful at the moment of impact, in the longer run, this event really serves me. And perhaps him. Without it, I would have gone down a path which would potentially lead to an expensive professional breakup. But I was empowered to take action just in time to prevent being entangled deeper in a situation that no longer serves me. This incident also illuminates an intuition: our “weakness” or “under-developed self” is precisely where evolution will execute her agency. In this case, Jim’s unconscious trying to “exploit” (a vulnerable Asian woman’s work) was deflected back onto himself. His action and choice ended up being “used” by evolution to catalyze a giant step of growth. Having seen this deeper layer has helped me heal from the wound much faster. It released me from feeling “the victim,” and any burden of needing to blame/judge him.
INVITATION TO DEAR READER: PAUSE FOR EXERCISE

As a practice we invite you to sketch your own vignette, say of a recent difficult/interesting moment and referring to the Table and Appendices, discover: 1) What stage—sometimes just for a moment—was the relationship entering/exiting/stuck in? 2) What is the center of gravity of the relational space? Are you satisfied with that? 3) How does knowing the stage(s) help you? 4) What’s next in terms of development to allow for redefining?

PROTAINER

We have introduced the term “protainer” and now wish to devote some words to explaining it more and offering some ideas for cultivating it.

The term protainer, informed by the psychoanalytically-inclined Tavistock Institute, means we consciously create a space safe enough to learn together for cycles of feed-forward action in our different domains. Giving and receiving developmental feedback inside is what is best termed a “protainer” of regular meetings. Such a “protainer,” alongside systematic inquiry on chosen topics, may be expected to cause, alternately, consternation and delight.

Hilary adds: The term “protainer” is closely related to what in the USA is referred to as a “safe space.” As we move from an essentially diplomat environment where meetings are rituals of affirmation and no one really learns anything (staying in the sterile polite zone) to more learning-oriented efforts in which we expect our meetings to be useful, (see Pór et al. in this Cookbook), then we must allow that human anxiety is no longer well-contained. People will be emotional and unpredictable, that’s the downside. And the upside is they get to be real and therefore be creative. Our whole point is that co-creation can’t really happen till we venture beyond the polite (essentially ego-defensive) routines.

To be human is to know anxiety as a constant presence. In evolutionary terms it appears that we evolved to be anxious, and it kept us alive on the Savannah (presumably the non-anxious carefree ones were eaten by larger predators!). Google’s data on what makes teams work or not points to feeling safe as the number one ingredient for relational creativity. And its opposite, toxic relations at work, is the number one reason to leave a job.
At the heart of the matter of relational space is sensitivity to ensuring safety and encouraging ourselves and others to risk a little more, so that authenticity can allow for real learning beyond fear. In the meetings that we share—we the authors meet regularly in a community of inquiry practice called RAIR that appears in the vignette above. It’s a co-lab that meets monthly. It’s been important and enjoyable to pay attention to warming the protainer. We find there is great sensitivity to early conditions. The simple guidelines and process in the Resource Book may be a fruitful start for those wishing to do likewise.

See the Resource Book for guidelines that create a protainer.

A CLOSING INVITATION: YOU ARE INVITED TO AN AR+ RAIR CO-LAB

We’ve suggested that relational space is necessary for the mutual and generative use of power and the deeper transformation of our social systems. This is not only our work as action researchers, but it is our next evolutionary work as humans if we are to save and restore the planet from ourselves. And what does this look like practically speaking? In the resources section that follows, we offer some concrete approaches and practices to support relational action inquiry. However, on a gross level, it looks like working simultaneously in the individual and interpersonal/relational space as a way to have larger impact.

It involves engaging in loving and disciplined inquiry into and action in the nature of love and mutually-transforming power in communities of inquiry and practice.

This love and practice is not mere sentimentality or child’s play, so to speak. It must be an ongoing practice and we must be committed and fierce in our enactment of it. It is the ground of everything, otherwise we risk becoming consumed and co-opted by the misuses of power that we are fighting against. Being in ongoing inquiry and practice around this alone and in community is important because there are no ready-made “solutions” and change/transformation, like all birth, it is a process and is hard. Our egos and systems rebel and develop allergies to it. We do not yet have the imagination, tools, or capacities for the ways of being
we seek or desire and so we have to learn and practice our way into them—with tenderness and ferocity. This is not only an intellectual endeavor, it involves our hearts and minds; our action and inquiry; our engagement and commitment; and our willingness to empower our Eros, as well as our outrage.

We therefore invite those interested to join an AR+ RAIR co-lab to learn and design together better relational spaces, where power is subordinated to collaborative conviviality and more creative outputs are ensured. This work is not for the timid, but—either fatigued by platitudes and too many bad meetings, or aspiring to live up to our collective capacity—the RAIR co-lab is one space for exploration of this largely invisible, nebulous, and inordinately important matter.

We give the last word to bell hooks:

“Our deepest revolution will come when we understand this truth. Only love can give us the strength to go forward in the midst of heartbreak and misery. Only love can give us the power to reconcile, to redeem, the power to renew weary spirits and save lost souls. The transformative power of love is the foundation of all meaningful social change. Without love our lives are without meaning. Love is the heart of the matter. When all else has fallen away, love sustains.”

- bell hooks.
AR+ CO-LABS foster friendly, person-centered spaces as dynamos of good Action Research in different domains, from education to healthcare, inter-personal relationship, to sustainable organizing.

CO-LABS invite participants to work within the collaborative spirit of Action Research. Each co-lab supports a learning orientation, bringing scholars and practitioners together, prioritizing mutual benefit and cultivating current work and the next generation. We inquire/practice in an integrated way that includes personal/first-person, interpersonal/second-person and impersonal/third-person inquiry/practice. Involvement in our programs is by donation.

Interested in pursuing similar work in your own system? Interested in learning more about the key principles and practices associated with the work described? Want to have the references and further suggested readings? Check out the Resources companion volume. To find like-minded practitioner colleagues, please check out the AR+ Co-labs.