ACTION RESEARCH

a Handbook for Students

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The publication was created as a result of the project "Research for Practice. Use of implementation master's theses based on action research for the development of organisations" (original Polish title "Badania dla praktyki. Wykorzystanie wdrożeniowych prac magisterskich opartych na badaniach w działaniu dla rozwoju organizacji").
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PREFACE

This scientific monograph is one of two publications resulting from the project "Research for practice. The use of implementation master's theses based on action research for the development of organisations", implemented between 2017 and 2019 by students and employees of the Faculty of Management and Social Communication of the Jagiellonian University in cooperation with public and non-governmental organisations. The monographs are a series of complementary reflections on action research, seen from two different perspectives. Each of the books published as part of the collection Action Research in Academic Theory and Practice is directed to a different audience. The monograph, *Action Research as an Approach in the Execution of the Thesis Advisory Process*, describes how to change the diploma seminar, aimed at ensuring that the thesis advisory process allows both to develop students' research competences and create conditions for open learning about organisational reality as is, and also leads to the development of emancipatory attitudes of students. The second monograph, Action Research. A Handbook for Students, was created for students undertaking action research and to write a thesis on this basis. It presents a description of the possibilities that the action research approach gives to researchers and, and also shows how a thesis can be created based on action research and what challenges are associated with it.

These books differ not only in terms of intended readers. Their authors tried to show how various theoretical and methodological inspirations can accompany action research. The attractiveness of action research lies, among other things, in the fact that it creates a peculiar frame for researching and transforming reality that is not rigid, but plastic, and can be used in various methodological trends and organisational contexts.

The project that results in this publication could have been implemented primarily thanks to the commitment and courage of students of the Institute of Public Affairs and the Institute of Culture who undertook to carry out action research and on its base to create implementation master's theses. They were (in alphabetical order): Katarzyna Adamczyk, Justyna Bołoz, Kamila Brodzińska, Sabina Bulanda, Katarzyna Ciaputa, Brygida Czartoryska, Bartosz Dąbrowski, Natalia Dziurny, Aleksandra Filipowska, Wioleta Gajeska, Jacek Gołąbek, Klaudia Grygierek, Magdalena Iwaniuk, Natalia Jarząbek, Piotr Kamola, Marta Kąsiel, Dorota Kosno, Aleksandra Krystek, Patrycja Kubarska, Aleksandra Kucia, Paweł Kurleto, Monika Lechowicz, Wiktoria Łukowicz, Kornelia Malczyk, Kamila Marek, Paula Mentel, Piotr Ołdak, Marta Pałka, Dominika Piskorowska, Kinga Przerada, Agnieszka Siciarz, Dominika Sikora, Aleksandra Skowron, Cecylia Sobek, Natalia Wasilewska, Katarzyna Wilczek, Karolina Wójcik, Mariola Wróblewska, Paulina Wrześniak, Roksana Zdunek, Natalia Żabińska, Karolina Żyłowska.

Our students had the opportunity to conduct action research owing to public and non-governmental organisations, which are our partners in this project: The Cracow Library, Diversity Hub, Historical Museum of the City of Cracow, City Office, Social Initiatives Support Center, Cracow Festival Office, Korporacja Ha! Art, Łaźnia Nowa Theatre, Bunkier Sztuki, K. Szymanowski's Cracow Philharmonic, Fundacja Hipoterapia – Na Rzecz Rehabilitacji Dzieci Niepełnosprawnych, Stowarzyszenie Gmin i Powiatów Małopolski, Silesian Museum in Katowice, Stowarzyszenie Rodziców i Przyjaciół Dzi eci z Zespołem Downa „Tęcza", Institute of Urban and Regional Development, Historical Museum of the City of Cracow, Primary School No. 36 in Cracow, National Museum in Cracow, Foundation Bureau of Social Initiative, Fundacja Tygodnika Powszechnego, Fundacja Ukryte Skrzydła, East of Art Foundation, C. K. Norwid Culture Centre, dr Tytus Chałubiński Tatra Museum, MATIO Fundacja Pomocy Rodzinom i Chorym na Mukowiscydozę, District Office in Cracow, Małopolska Organizacja Turystyczna.

The project team that supervised the implementation of the project and co-implemented the research together with the students and partner organisations included employees of the Jagiellonian University: Mgr Monika Antoniuk-Gula, Dr hab. Katarzyna Barańska, dr hab. Ewa Bogacz-Wojtanowska, prof. UJ, Dr Małgorzata Ćwikła, Dr Anna Góral, Dr Beata Jałocha, Prof. Dr hab. Piotr Jedynak, Dr Jakub Kołodziejczyk, Dr hab. Grzegorz Mazurkiewicz, mgr Marcin Mich, dr Anna Pluszyńska, prof. Dr hab. Grażyna Prawelska-Skrzypek, Mgr Sylwia Wrona, Dr Michał Zawadzki.

On behalf of the entire project team, I would like to thank everyone for their great commitment, as a result of which we had the opportunity to understand and implement the idea of action research. I would like to thank the Students for the trust they have placed in us. I am very grateful to the organisations for opening the door for young researchers and giving them a chance to gain priceless experience. I would like to thank the Thesis advisor and the whole Team for two years of wonderful, intensive scientific and didactic work that we have experienced together.

Dr Beata Jałocha
Project Manager

INTRODUCTION

Dear Students,

This book is dedicated to you. It was written by a team of Jagiellonian University researchers to make the process of conducting action research and preparing your theses based on it easier for you. This monograph was inspired by our experiences of collaboration and joint action research within the project carried out with the group of over 40 students and 25 employers.

Our intention was to show you the possibilities which action research provides to researchers. We often hear that the world of academia is removed from the problems of the world and practice, and researchers neither see nor understand real problems of organisations and local communities. Organisations, in turn, do not appreciate an in-depth insight which academic research offers. We believe that it is possible to change that, and one of the ways of bridging this divide is a dialogue conducted by researchers and practitioners through action research.

Action research, as the very name suggests, is a research approach which involves both taking action and producing knowledge or theory based on this action [Coghlan 2019]. Therefore, the result of action research is not only new knowledge, but also a concrete action, a practical outcome upon which the researcher reflects. This approach differs from the traditional way of conducting academic research, focused on understanding the organisational reality without the intention to interfere in its transformation.

Action research is a general term that encompasses an entire family of research approaches which on the epistemological level are connected by the founding principle stating that cognition is possible through action. Usually, action research has an emancipatory character, both in terms of research and topic. Firstly, it is carried out *with* people, not *on* people. Those who are the subject of academic inquiry in the traditional approach, become partners on equal terms in the action research process. Secondly, it enables exploring and changing organisational and social reality for the better.

Theses which result from the concluded action research are different from standard theses based on conventional empirical research. This book aims at helping you better understand this process and — we hope — make writing your master's thesis a wonderful intellectual adventure. Knowing well that action research requires bravery in breaking out of the stereotypical thinking about academic research, knowledge and wisdom of practitioners and the community, as well as researchers' resilience, we do encourage you to take on this challenge.

This book is not a typical handbook, or a recipe for writing a perfect thesis based on action research. Yet we would like it to be an inspiration for you to look at the world of organisations from a different perspective.

The book consists of four chapters.

Chapter 1 discusses the principles of the two approaches to action research: the traditional and the emancipatory one, together with the presentations of their historical context. We analyse both traditions critically, illustrating them with examples of particular pieces of research. These two orientations have become the foundation for developing many other types of action research in the academia.

In Chapter 2, we present the diversity of approaches within action research. We discuss cognitive strategies which researches can adopt, and we characterise main types of action research approaches. A part of this chapter is devoted to data collection methods and data analysis techniques.

Chapter 3 presents the process of action research. We discuss subsequent steps necessary for carrying out a research project, sharing relevant comments and advice. Rather than a compulsory model, it is a suggestion to be tried out by those who take their first steps in this field.

Chapter 4 takes up threads which became particularly pronounced during the action research-based process conducted by the Jagiellonian University students in the years 2017–2019. Therefore, we focus on the issues of researcher's relationship with organisations and people who form them.

CHAPTER 1

THE ORIGINS OF ACTION RESEARCH FROM LEWIN TO FREIRE AND BACK

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this section is to present the origins of the development of action research. As is common knowledge, each story can be told in various ways and there is never one correct interpretation of events. In the case of action research, writing about the origins is quite problematic, since there is no single version of the phenomenon in the discourse; what we have is rather a pluralism of opinions, attitudes, philosophies and consensuses concerning the historical sources of this approach. This is why this story is based on our own research experiences, inspirations from the literature and understanding of action research, confronted with the research community and experts in the field. Due to our rootedness in the Western European cultural context and academic experiences gained in this part of the world, the chapter is based on the Western European perspective , bearing in mind that there exists an entire tradition of the action research literature in languages other than European ones, and accentuating other viewpoints.

The first part of the chapter presents the philosophy of pragmatism which constitutes the foundation of action research. We paid particular attention to the ideas of John Dewey — especially those concerning democracy — who had substantial influence on the development of Kurt Lewin's thought. The latter is the hero of the next part of the chapter in which we discuss his crucial ideas — the socio-technical system, participation in organisational change, group dynamics, and intervention research. he outcomes of research conducted by Lewin's team are discussed as well. The last part of the chapter presents several ideas, events and figures that inspired the development of the second great tradition of action research, namely the critical orientation, in the literature mostly known as participatory action research (PAR), or critical participatory action research (CPAR).

1. PRAGMATISM IN ACTION RESEARCH

Action research is most frequently defined in the literature as a research concept or approach whose purpose is to combine academic research with solving social and organizational problems[Rapport 1970]. It is possible, thanks to interactions between researchers and organisational members, who cooperate in the research process. The desired result of the action research is organisational change related to its culture (change of values, norms, mentality, meanings) or structure (change of organisational structures, change of regulations). Kurt Lewin called this type of studies "research which will help the practitioner" [Lewin 1946: 34].

The roots of action research date back to the beginning of the 20th century and the tradition of pragmatic philosophy which became Lewin's inspiration. Although there are many streams of the pragmatic philosophy, their common denominator seems to be the conviction that individuals give meaning to their lives and the world by active interaction with the social reality which they can shape through their actions [Almeder 1986]. For Charles Pierce or John Dewey, truth is discovered through social actions and is based on interactions and consensus. The truth in pragmatic orientation is therefore not universal nor external to the subject [Joas 1993]. It is authenticity of our social and cultural experience that prove the truthfulness of given statements, and not their analytical and verifiable conformity with the empirics. In this sense, acquiring knowledge and learning is based on constructing truth through deepening the understanding of a given phenomenon.

For American philosopher John Dewey (1859–1952) academic research means relating various elements of a given phenomenon in order to deepen our understanding of the social world [Dewey 1938]. Understanding occurs through the process of acting and observing what happens in the studied context, and then analysing and giving meaning to one's experiences. This can happen thanks to the analysis of consequences of actions, drawing theoretical conclusions and undertaking action again. For Dewey it was impossible to separate action from reflection.

The social dimension of truth is a very important principle for action research: in practice, it means that all actors involved in research can agree on research outcomes and their implications. Pragmatic philosophy initiated the way of thinking about academic research results as an outcome of social agreements between people [Johansson, Lindhult 2008]. Moreover, some scholars claim that pragmatism underpins all traditions of action research since it is not possible to acquire knowledge (learn) in other ways than through action [Greenwood, Levin 1998]. In Lewin's words, there is "no action without research; no research without action." [Marrow 1969, p. 193]

Another pragmatic idea significant for action research is the theory of democracy developed by Dewey [Stark 2004]. For the American pragmatist democracy is inextricably linked to education which can make people free and impact social reforms and progress. Education gives a chance to increase the reflectivity of citizens and their intellectual freedom, which results in the development of civic attitudes and involvement in the struggle for other people's dignity [Dewey 1916]. Furthermore, according to Dewey, the most effective way to resolve conflicts within communities is a democratic communication with all actors involved and working out a consensus together. In this sense, the philosopher indicated the social rather than political dimension of democracy as a method for improving the quality of social life.

Deweyan idea of democracy is extremely significant for action research, particularly for the idea of group dynamics (discussed later in this chapter). Learning about ourselves through the observation of communication processes within a group is the core of Lewin's research. Similarly, Dewey's understanding of democracy as a process rather than a static idea, inspired early action researchers. Democracy as a constant process which includes multiplicity of perspectives and beliefs, coupled with the concern for reaching a consensus [Dewey 1916], is a compass directing action research inquires.

The aforementioned Deweyan idea of diversity was crucial to the development of the dialogical dimension of action research [Greenwood, Levin 1998]. For Dewey doubts or dilemmas are a driving force for reflection, creating diversity of opinions, and even creative conflicts. However, Dewey does not perceive the latter as a negative force which must be eliminated. Conflict is an impulse important for social change and group development but must be controlled skilfully. Inspirations stemming from the idea of diversity and conflict can be found in Lewin's research on the participative organisational change (for more see subsequent sections of this chapter).

2. KURT LEWIN'S CONTRIBUTION TO ACTION RESEARCH

Kurt Lewin (1890–1947), a German-American social psychologist of Jewish origin, born in Mogilno (then Prussia), wanted to combine the world of academic theory with organisational practice: on the one hand he criticised empiricists for their lack of theory, and on the other hand he indicated the necessity to root the social theory in empirical knowledge [Lewin 1951]. As he wrote,

> Socially, it does not suffice that university organizations produce scientific insight. It will be necessary to install fact-finding procedures, social eyes and ears, right into social action bodies. [Lewin 1946, pp. 38]

Action research was for Lewin both the method to solve practical organisational problems and to search for universal laws governing social life. It was possible thanks to the cycle of planning, action and researching data on the results of this action. As Robin McTaggart notes, action research is "the ways in which groups of people can organise the conditions under which they can learn from their own experience and make this experience accessible to others." [McTaggart 1991, p. 170]. We should add that Lewin put significant emphasis on indicating the educational aspect of action research, in particular the learning process of people involved in the research. In his view research, action and learning are three apexes of the same triangle encompassing all parties involved in the research [Lewin 1948] (see Table 1).

Table 1. Kurt Lewin's basic model of action research

Collecting facts concerning the identified problem
Planning ways to solve the problem
Action consisting in the implementation of change
Observation and analysis of the results of introducing the change
Reflection on the effectiveness of the problem resolution and taking further action

Source: own work based on Dickens, Watkins 1999, p. 133.

Lewin's basic model of action research envisages the following stages. After the researchers identify the problem within an organisation in agreement with its representatives, the data collection stage begins with the application of previously established techniques (interviews, surveys, observations, etc.]. After data is gathered, it is consulted on and analysed with the organisation representatives. Thus, a joint position regarding the solution of the problem and a possible change is established. Consultations on the problem with members of the organisation is a good starting point for change – researchers and organizational members design it and implement it together. The next important stage is the observation of the outcome of the implemented change and the analysis of the effectiveness of the problem resolution The final stage is the reflection on the entire process and returning to the action stage: the cycle is repeated until the interested parties agree that the problem has been resolved.

Lewin based his approach to action research on philosophical principles which stood in opposition to the positivist tradition dominating the first half of the 20th century [Peters, Robinson 1984]. The scholar rejected the positivist belief in the necessity for social science and humanities to imitate natural science , and claimed that each discipline has its own, specific set of principles. The social world, according to Lewin, can be studied objectively, but not by transforming it into measurable, physical units of action and reaction, but by searching for intersubjective meanings, norms and values which shape human perception and behaviours. The role of the researcher is to discover meanings and senses which people make during their social actions [Lewin 1946].

Lewin's approach, which he himself called "rational social management" or "social engineering" [Lewin 1946], was the initial step in the development of the so-called industrial democracy tradition, connected with the attempt to involve employees in organisational change. However, Lewin wanted not only to study work processes; through action research he also wanted to increase the self-esteem of disadvantaged social groups and assist them along the way to becoming independent [Lewin 1946]. According to the scholar, the role of social science, including action research, is to support such groups in their struggle against injustice, discrimination or racism. Such an emancipatory assumption, later developed by researchers involved in participatory action research, was undoubtedly connected to the events from Lewin's life. The history of action research begins in 1933 when Lewin left Berlin, escaping from Nazi Germany to the US where he accepted a position at the University of Iowa. It is interesting that the researcher used the term *action research* for the first time around 1934 [Marrow 1969].

An important issue for understanding Lewin's approach is his theory of social change, based on the use of thermodynamic metaphors: unfreezing, changing and refreezing [Lewin 1951]. This model emphasises the static state of an organisation before and after the change. Intervention is an episodic and short-term action, aimed at obtaining the result of a change. Many scholars would later criticize Lewin's approach for not being aimed at long-term change processes (which should be the domain of action research), but only at the short-term effects [Greenwood, Levin 1998]. The reason of this misunderstanding lies partly in false beliefs spread by the consultancy industry: Lewin's theory has been distorted by consulting approaches which reduce his complex understanding of action research only to a three step model and apply his theory of change for strictly economic purposes [Cummings, Worley 2001].

2.1 Participation in organisational change: industrial democracy

The first action research by Lewin was conducted in the American textile factory, Harwood Manufacturing Company in Virginia — Lewin was invited there as a consultant. Cooperation which began in 1939 and lasted for 8 years stemmed from the need to resolve the problem of low work efficiency 300 newly employed and inexperienced workers (mainly women). Factory owners claimed that workers earned more than in their previous jobs, that they were satisfied with their work, yet the staff turnover was too high and productivity very low [Adelman 1993].

What Lewin observed from the outset of his research was a significant disproportion between the productivity goals set by factory owners and realistic production capabilities of the workers. These goals were so unrealistic that they did not feel any discomfort when they did not meet set expectations. The researcher suggested that managers should stop putting too much pressure on workers. Secondly, he proposed to divide the workers into small groups and manage those groups rather than individual workers. Thirdly, productivity goals had to be adjusted to the realistic capabilities of the groups. After Lewin's ideas were implemented and sixty additional, more experienced workers were employed to inspire the new workers — the factory's productivity started to grow [Marrow 1969].

Following the initial success, Lewin suggested to the management of the factory to hire his student, Alex Bavelas, to facilitate the implementation of a more systematic programme on action research and group decisions. The research started from selecting a group of employees who were given the opportunity to join the decision-making processes. They could discuss among themselves and with their superiors new, experimental forms of production and propose new solutions concerning productivity norms. Bavelas met with the workers several times a week for 30-minute informal sessions during which everyone could express their opinions about work methods (as it turned out in the course of these discussions, different people doing the same jobs used different methods, without others knowing about it), or about potential difficulties resulting from the increase of productivity norms. Then, the group could vote on the increase of the productivity norm and set its limit [Marrow 1969]. Recommendations resulting from those discussions and votes were forwarded to the management who promised to take them into consideration when planning changes.

As a consequence, that group — contrary to other groups of workers — noted improved morale, increased work efficiency (the group periodically voted to raise the productivity norm), the speed of learning new tasks, as well as employee satisfaction. It turned out that participation in deciding on the organisational change reduced resistance to change and had a positive impact on work processes, which was later confirmed by other researchers working in Harwood [cf. Coch, French Jr. 1948]. The possibility of making decisions had a positive influence on the relationship between motivation and action. Additionally, in two more groups Bavelas conducted the study on the difference in group motivation when the group was either allowed to make decisions or not allowed to decide, remaining at the discussion level only. The group which apart from consultations was allowed to vote and make decisions was more productive than the one where possible changes were merely discussed [Marrow 1969].

The first research by Lewin and his associates clearly showed that introducing organisational change in a democratic way, including enabling the group to make decisions, is more effective than autocratic imposing of solutions (suggested, for instance, by Taylorism, much criticised by Lewin) and this principle became the foundation of the further development of the action research methodology. Lack of opportunity for a collective discussion on work processes and lack of decision-making power, have a negative impact on motivation for work and productivity; they also generate resistance to change.

Another interesting example of action research conducted in Harwood — this time by John French, a student of Lewin's theory — was a study which intended to change the stereotype regarding older women workers as useless for factory work [Marrow, French Jr. 1945]. The management did not allow the employment of women over thirty despite the fact that during numerous meetings French presented them with research data telling a different story. Therefore, the researcher concluded that in order to change their attitudes, members of the management must themselves discover facts that contradict their erroneous opinions.

French suggested studying the actual costs generated by older women already employed in the factory. From the very beginning the research was shaped and conducted by management representatives who suggested that costs should be studied through the analysis of work efficiency, rate of missing or quitting work or learning speed. After several months it turned out that in every respect older women delivered a better quality of work than younger ones: they were more efficient, they learned faster, quit or missed work less frequently. The results of the research remained in contradiction to the expectations and convictions of the management but this time they accepted and trusted the research results. Another action research idea was developed: when people are involved in the research process, they discover facts about their convictions during the learning process, which make them more inclined to negotiate their beliefs [Marrow 1969].

Experiments in Harwood enabled to develop the crucial thought of Lewin, according to which organisational conditions have significant impact on employee behaviour. This theory, serving as a basis for the socio-technical school was controversial: it opposed the dominant Freudian paradigm which explained human behaviour mostly through individual internal personality traits [Bradbury et al. 2008]. Meanwhile Lewin wanted to show that social behaviours, including organisational ones, can be explained through the diagnosis of social conditions in which a given behaviour occurs. Changing this condition may lead to changing people's behaviour. According to Lewin, each human being has the potential to change, but requires an external impulse to stimulate it.

Action research is a very good example of such an impulse, as it enables groups of employees (with researchers' support) to discuss and create desired changes. Action research involves active participation of people who experience problems that require a solution. It enables monitoring problems and analysing their consequences, and then implementing changes and tracking their effects. If results are deemed insufficient, the group can discuss new possibilities.

2.2 Socio-technical theory and joint optimization

After World War II, one of Lewin's students, British psychologist Eric Trist, launched the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations in London — an organization whose objective was to bring the world of academia and organisations together through the development of action research inspired by Lewin's approach. The first significant project of the Institute was the research conducted by Trist and his colleagues in cooperation with British Coal Board in British mines on the reasons of the low work productivity [Trist, Bamforth 1951]. The topic stemmed from the general social pressure for rebuilding the country devastated by the war. It turned out that despite introducing new production technologies, certain mines remained inefficient. Furthermore, management methods and ideas of production previously used in mines, such as Taylorism, work specialisation or assembly line, did not yield desired results. Trist selected a few mines and divided them into more and less efficient, according to their actual productivity. Then, for many long hours he carefully conducted in-depth interviews with employees, both in pubs and their homes. The interview setting outside of the workplace guaranteed more openness of respondents to the interviewer.

The results of that research became the basis for the development of the socio-technical theory of work processes and the joint optimization concept. In mines with high productivity level, workers formed self-managed groups: their leaders always consulted with others the methods of implementation of technological decisions proposed by engineers. Instead of unquestioningly implementing changes in the methods of production, first they discussed together how to implement them in a reasonable manner — one which would conform with the prevalent working conditions. This strategy made sense since the designers of changes were not always aware of the actual conditions at the underground level of the mines, so unquestioning implementation of their proposals could not result in the desired outcome. It could even constitute a danger to the health and safety of workers.

On the other hand, in mines where productivity was low, an opposite phenomenon could be observed: unquestioning implementation of technological changes proposed by engineers, without the stage of consultations with the rest of the crew. So, while in efficient mines workers developed flexible, multitasking skills through creative, collective and dialogue-based leadership, in mines which had low efficiency workers followed top-down decisions blindly, and their skills remained strictly specialised and oriented towards the performance of narrow tasks imposed from the top. In the first instance workers developed the ability for critical adaptation to the system of new technologies and thus achieved excellent productivity, and in the second case they remained passive in the technology implementation process and only followed instructions, which resulted in low work efficiency [Adelman 1993].

Trist concluded that social and technical systems in an organisation are interdependent: an enormous role in the process of introducing change is played by interactions between people and their needs, and they must not be overlooked when implementing new technology. In turn, a social system cannot remain passive toward technology and should shape it. In the case of efficient mines, the social system was based on dialogue, cooperation and joint decision-making with respect to technological change, which enhanced motivation to work, and enabled introducing change in such a way as to guarantee workplace safety. It was simply well thought-out and effective. In contrast, in mines with low productivity workers felt alienated, not having any influence on the imposed change which also put their health and sometimes life in danger.

The engineers of technological changes did not consider the fact that the implementation of complicated technology in a place where roles are narrowly specialised, where it is dark, noisy and the environment is dangerous, would not succeed if it were not accompanied by dialogue and consultations with those who are to benefit from that change. The results of Trist's research — later confirmed, on the basis of similar observations, in Sweden, Netherlands, USA, India, Australia and Norway (cf. e.g. Norwegian Industrial Democracy Project: Emery, Thorsrud 1976) — can be summarised with a statement that even cutting-edge technology will not work out if it is not combined with the social system which is supposed to use it [Bradbury et al. 2008].

In 1951, Australian psychologist Fred Emery joined the Tavistock Institute and continued to work on the theory of socio-technical creation of work processes, started by Lewin and Trist [Emery 1959]. In his view, the organisation can be defined as people who constitute it, so the most important factor to consider in the organisational management is human needs, and not only requirements towards people — such as those resulting from tasks rooted in the technology system. Tasks assigned to employees should be selected in such a way as to stimulate their growth, enable learning, and should be interesting for them. Therefore, according to the researcher, high levels of specialization at work should be avoided, since it contributes to the distribution of not very stimulating tasks and increases the sense of employee's helplessness in terms of the opportunities to show their own initiative.

Emery believed that technological systems and tasks which result from them should be open and managed by small, flexible groups of employees (8–10 people). Each group should function in a way that would reflect the goals of the entire system. They should also manage themselves and, on their own, be able to use resources to solve problems they encounter. Finally, employees forming those groups should be characterised by varied competences and multitasking skills, in order to efficiently react to emerging problems [Emery 1959].

Table 2. The old and the new paradigm of work organisation

Old paradigm [Scientific Management]	**New paradigm [Socio-Technical System]**
The technological imperative	Joint optimization
MAN as AN extension of the machine	Man as complementary to the machine
Man as an expendable spare part	Man as a resource to be developed
Maximum task breakdown, simple narrow skills	Optimum task grouping, multiple broad skills
External control (supervisors, specialist staffs, procedures)	Internal controls (self-regulating subsystems
Tall organisation chart, autocratic style	Flat organisation chart, participative style
Competition, gamesmanship	Collaboration, collegiality
Organisation's purposes only	Members' and society's purposes also
Alienation	Commitment
Low risk-taking	Innovation

Source: own work based on Trist 1981, p. 42.

The contribution of Kurt Lewin and his team to the understanding of the notions of joint optimization and the democratic character of organisational change is aptly summarised by Clem Adelman who states that

> the pioneering action research of Lewin and his associates showed that through discussion, decision, action, evaluation and revision in participatory democratic research, work became meaningful and alienation was reduced [Adelman 1993, p. 15].

The possibility of shaping organisational change through joint action also has a positive impact on employee morale, as well as their motivation to work.

Conclusions from the research discussed above remained in opposition to Taylorism and the school of scientific management (see Table 2) in in which technology and managerial control have dominant and unassailable authority in the organisation. Following scientific management one should try to find the most effective production methods by dividing people into specialised teams responsible for imposed top-down, clearly defined, partial tasks whose performance is closely supervised by the management. Meanwhile, according to the ideas of Lewin and his colleagues, employees should be included in consultations on changes, take responsibility for controlling their implementation, and should develop broad skills that enable flexibility. It should be added that the Socio-Technical System also opposed the emerging Human Relations school, according to which socio-psychological factors in the workplace should be considered separately from technological changes [Mayo 1933]. Results of Trist's research indicate something completely different: the technical and social system must be understood as complementary dimensions.

2.3 Research on group dynamics

Action research found its application not only in the context of socio-technical systems in the workplace or joint optimization processes, but also in the research on group dynamics. In this regard, Kurt Lewin collaborated with Douglas McGregor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, launching the Research Center for Group Dynamics in 1945. Lewin was interested in the influence of the group on the social behaviour of individuals, as well as the dynamics of changes within a group. He was particularly concerned with such questions as how a leader emerges within a group, how the group atmosphere is created, how decisions are made in a group, how its members communicate, and how group norms are established [Peters, Robinson 1984].

In the summer of 1946 Lewin was invited by the Connecticut State Inter-Racial Commission to assist in designing and conducting research which would indicate the most effective methods of fighting against racial and religious prejudice in particular communities. The request included proper training of the leaders in these communities. This led to the creation of National Training Laboratories in 1947 where the idea of sensitivity training, otherwise known as group dynamics training, was born [Marrow 1969].

Lewin conducted research in training groups [T-Groups] consisting usually of 8-15 people without a clear leader. T-Groups allowed researchers to observe occurring group processes, and participants to self-reflect on these processes. An important role was that of the group facilitator: a person with the authority of a leader, but one who was not active, albeit always present. Due to the presence of the facilitator, members of the group had to tackle the question about their attitude to authority, which enhanced the group's self-reflection on its subsequent direction. In other words, the role of the facilitator was to support all members in their attempt to understand their influence on the functioning of the group (and the group's influence on them), including the dynamics of shaping relationships with other members of the group [Lewin 1948]. Furthermore, members of the groups were invited to evening sessions during which researchers talked about the results of their observations. The participants could interact with researchers and discuss the findings with them. This is how the role of feedback in the study of group dynamics was discovered.

The outcome of action research conducted in T-Groups was the increase of critical reflection of the members on the assumptions taken for granted, concerning the functioning of the group and themselves, which, in turn, enabled more conscious decision-making. Lewin concluded that group behaviours were always the function of both individual people and the social situation in which they found themselves. Personality alone, or the nature of the social situation alone, were not sufficient to explain group behaviour. The group influenced the behaviour of individuals, and individuals influenced the behaviour of the group. It should be noted that several months after the participation in the research and returning to their workplaces, T-Group members observed that they were better at shaping group relationships, more sensitive to other people's feelings and more effective at group work [Marrow 1969].

Another conclusion drawn from Lewin's research is the observation that the role and position of an individual within the group impacts the way other people behave toward this person. In this sense, the group influences its members by treating them with respect, or quite the opposite: by pushing them to the sidelines. Each person is changed by joining the life of the group: similarly, under the influence of the interaction with a new member, other participants of the group are changed, as is the group as a whole. Therefore, a group is a more organic whole than a simple sum of individuals.

In fact, Lewin had studied the phenomenon of group cohesion even earlier, during his Harwood research. Then he decided that it would be very difficult to change the behaviour of individuals in the group until the entire group joined in the process of that change. A person would rather try to adapt to the rules of the group than risk their relationship with the group. The group would try to remain cohesive, and it is this cohesion that actually determined its existence. Lewin drew the conclusion that it would be easier to change the behaviour of the entire group than its individual members [Lewin 1948].

What impacts the cohesion of a group? According to Lewin, the group must enable individuals to realise their individual goals. Furthermore, each member of the group expects from others to meet certain group standards which also has a positive influence on the cohesion. However, it should be emphasised that cohesion does not depend on the similarities between individuals [e.g. of their behaviour], but rather on the dynamics of interrelations between them. Readiness to share responsibilities and joint undertaking of challenges, as well as the ability to mitigate personality differences positively contribute to the coherence of the group.

Although the model of the group dynamics training was criticised for putting people's emotions to the test [Filley, House 1969], they became very popular and are conducted across the world until this day (e.g. at the National Training Laboratory of the University of Michigan, or in Lionel Stapley's group dynamics workshops). Findings from Lewin's group dynamics research served as a basis for the creation of numerous institutions, diagnostic models and management tools that are used by contemporary researchers and managers [Mirvis, Gunning 2006].

An interesting continuation of Lewin's research on group dynamics can be found in the research of an American psychiatrist Morgan Scott Peck [Peck 1987] who studied the process of community forming which consisted of around 50 to 75 people. William Isaacs [Isaacs 1999] developed the research on the framework of group conversations which he called *dialogue*, characterised by the application of elements of quantum mechanics to the life of the group. Just like observing particles impacts quanta around them, observing other people impacts their behaviour and group dynamics. In both cases action research was used as a method that enabled understanding the ability of individuals and groups to understand themselves.

2.4 Intervention research

In 1944, Lewin initiated the creation of the Commission on Community Interrelations (CCI) affiliated with the American Jewish Congress [Marrow 1969]. It was, in fact, the first organisation that used the action research methodology oriented on fighting against prejudice and stereotypes through social interventions. The first major CCI project was the incident during the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur when a gang of Italian Catholics disrupted the religious ceremony in a Coney Island synagogue. Lewin recruited and trained a team of researchers of various faiths and backgrounds: Jews, Catholics, Protestants and African Americans, who knew the action research methodology and additionally could speak the youth slang.

First, Lewin's group obtained the permission to get four vandals out of the police custody and hand them over to the Catholic church for supervision. Then, they tried to involve as many members of the local community as possible in the research. During conversations with its representatives it became clear that the attack on Jews was not a manifestation of organised anti-Semitism, but that it resulted from the more profound sense of injustice felt by the members of the local community. The aggression erupted on the holiday, because during this time Jews were more active and visible.

According to Lewin and his associates, arresting young people was not an effective method of fixing the problem. The real problem to overcome was the sense of injustice, frustration and disillusionment deeply rooted in the minds of the local community. Therefore, the lives of local residents had to be improved by creating new housing, recreation centres, or by providing better public transport. It was also important to organise meetings between people of different faiths and skin colours who would be able to meet in a friendly environment. Lewin's team obtained the mayor's assurance that the modernisation recommended by the researchers would begin, and in turn, researchers were asked to continue with providing consultations for the local community and cooperate with the gang, involving them in the course of the research [Morrow 1969].

Lewin formulated three questions: can a gang learn to behave in a way more acceptable to the local community? Can its group energy be directed at more constructive pursuits? Can negative behaviours of a gang, based on aggression and negation, be changed? In general, all three questions were answered in in a positive way. As a result of action research, the gang stopped aggressive actions towards the Jewish minority, as well as other minorities. There were no more fights in the streets and the neighbourhood became safer. Thanks to Lewin's research intervention, members of local gangs accepted the rules of cooperation established in the local community — and this trend was maintained even after the research had finished [Saenger, Gilbert 1950].

Another important issue taken up by the CCI was the problem of stereotyping African Americans. Shop owners decided that they should not employ African Americans as sales staff because customers prefer to deal with Caucasian shop assistants [Saenger, Gilbert 1950]. The research intervention in this instance involved challenging their assumption and an attempt to eliminate discrimination. The researchers conducted interviews with customers waited on by African Americans and by Caucasians.. To the question "What would you say if all shop assistants in New York were African Americans?" three quarters of all respondents replied that they would not mind. The researchers' conclusion was that store managers made erroneous assumptions which were not based on any evidence or facts. Regardless of their prejudice, customers would readily buy from African Americans anyway, since the type of service in stores was for them a *fait accompli* which did not influence their behaviour. Discrimination, as Lewin noted, is very often the cause of prejudice, and not its result — therefore we should aim at exposing incorrect assumptions on which people might build discriminatory opinions.

When summarizing the action research studies of Kurt Lewin and his associates, four major types of research should be distinguished, which have been developed and applied in organisational settings until today [Marrow 1969]. Firstly, we can distinguish diagnostic action research linked to the preparation of a concrete action plan based on the work of the agents of change in the existing situation who diagnose the problem and indicate ways to overcome it. Secondly, participatory action research, in which members of the community are given the possibility to take part in the study from the very beginning. Thirdly, empirical action research which involves a long period of collecting empirical data in the daily analysis of workplaces and phenomena which occur there. Fourthly, and finally, experimental action research, based on conducting experimental attempts to implement change in a controlled environment.

2.5 The criticism of Lewin's approach to action research

Lewin developed the action research approach, but equally important was the way he directed the research towards the improvement of democratic processes in society. As a Jew and refugee from Nazi Germany, he searched for the possibility to empower disadvantaged groups [Johansson, Lindhult 2008]. His contribution to action research is invaluable: he directed the production of knowledge towards solving particular problems in the organisational and — more broadly — social life. Following his approach, a good theory is the one which allows social problems to be solved. This assumption gave impetus to a stronger anchoring of academic research in the social world. Lewin also changed the researcher's role. A distanced and omniscient expert, involved in learning processes with other participants, became the facilitator.

If we take a look, however, at Lewin's approach to work processes, his perspective seems to be deeply rooted in functionalism: the main purpose of change here is to stay in line with the guidelines concerning the effectiveness of the organisation's operations [Greenwood, Levin 1998; cf. Zawadzki 2014]. Lewin gave little attention to managerial power as an inherent trait of organisational change, neither did he conduct critical diagnoses of social relationships between managers and employees. In fact, his approach does not leave much room for change through the critical emancipation of people. What is mostly visible in his approach is the 'empowerment' through striving for a consensus and avoiding conflict, which could result in adaptation to organisational structures of dominance, and not overcoming them. This is why, as pointed out by Greenwood and Levin [Greenwood, Levin 1998], Lewin's ideas were often used by global corporations in an instrumental manner. For instance, even though companies based in Sweden, like Volvo, Saab, or Alfa Laval adopted the idea of joint, democratic participation in organisational change, they treated the innovation only as a means of increasing the company's economic productivity, and not for improving the level of justice, or increasing social satisfaction in the workplace.

If he had not died perhaps Lewin would have had the opportunity to develop his concept of action research in a more emancipatory direction [1][1]. In fact, as Peters and Robinson emphasise [1984], throughout his life Lewin produced only 22 typed pages directly on action research. A more emancipatory approach was the characteristic of the second, southern tradition of action research, connected to participatory research (PAR) [Brown, Tandom, 1983]. "South" does not mean here only the geographic region where PAR ideas had a strong presence (such as South America), but primarily it indicates the interest in oppressed groups that can exist anywhere (therefore, as Greenwood and Levin note, we can speak of a "south in the north," cf. Greenwood, Levin 1998, pp. 13–34).

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[1] As , one of his friends, Dorwin Cartwright, reports, several days before his death Lewin came to his house and stated excitedly: "Freud was wrong, and Marx was right" [Cartwright 1978].

3. EMANCIPATORY APPROACH TO ACTION RESEARCH: PAR

The postmodern breakthrough in science and the orientation towards social constructivism among researchers in the 1960s reinforced the intervention-oriented dimension of action research. Lewin's concepts became popular. But not only was its usefulness for the organisational practice emphasised, but they were also improved so that they could achieve a more emancipatory potential. It was observed, that due to the fact that action research has an immense impact on changes in organisation, it should be used for helping disadvantaged groups. This help would consist of discovering, in the research process, negative traits of the organisations which do not allow people to develop and to fight against these processes by recommending changes [Sandberg 1976].

Therefore, from the second half of the 20th century, more emancipatory approaches to action research started to form. The purpose of such research is the transformation in the area of human values, including challenging forces that limit humans and developing critical awareness to overcome pathology [Kemmis 2010]. Research in this orientation should involve a creative clash of opinions represented by different sides of the process, such as researchers' or organisational members. It is assumed that the different viewpoints among people involved in the research are natural processes enabling the emancipatory change [Greenwood, Levin 1998].

Participatory action research (also called southern participatory action research, participatory research or participatory community development, [Greenwood, Levin 1998]) emerged on the basis of the universal conviction about the need to challenge worldwide social pathologies, such as colonial exploitation in Africa, South America and South Asia, genocide of Native Americans and economic inequalities in North America and Europe. In many corners of the world, the end of colonisation resulted in re-colonisation related to the oppression on the part of advanced structures of capitalism which reinforces social inequalities [Frank 1970].

Rising social pressures found an outlet in the 1968 revolution, and pushed researchers towards looking into victims of capitalism —oppressed groups such as the homeless, the unemployed, women, economically exploited workers, drug addicts, sex workers, elderly people, people with disabilities, or orphans [Belenky, Bond, Weinstock 1997]. Participatory action research was perceived as an attempt to fight against authoritarian regimes of capitalist social control through the empowerment of the oppressed groups [Greenwood, Levin 1998]. Therefore, the aim of the research is to expand the field of solidarity with victims in order to create conditions for their empowerment [Heron 1996].

Revealing hidden structures of dominance, giving voice to the oppressed groups, or showing alternatives to the dominant methods of organising is an emancipatory aim of the critical orientation of action research [Levin, Greenwood 2018]. In reality, the critical tradition of action research n — just like the previous, more traditional approach — includes many branches and varied approaches (see the next chapter in this volume devoted to various approaches to action research). The next part of this chapter discusses only major (at least in the opinion of the authors of this text) ideas consolidating various schools and authors dealing with the critical orientation.

3.1 Conscientization and critical pedagogy

The critical approach to action research was inspired by the philosophy of Paolo Freire [2018], Brazilian pedagogue who was a pioneer of critical and radical pedagogy . In this approach, the consensus negotiated in the course of a dialogue (typical, for instance, for Lewin's concept), is treated with suspicion, as a manifestation of dominance of advantaged groups, or silencing marginalised groups. This is why in the research process, particular attention should be paid to voices opposing dominant ideologies and their importance reinforced, giving them the opportunity to design change by themselves. If, for instance, action research concerns designing change in terms of university management, we should listen to voices of students who may not agree with decisions of people with academic titles and degrees but who often do not speak up, fearing the repercussions of their disagreement [Wołodźko 2013].

The idea fundamental for PAR is Freire's concept of the so-called conscientization, from Portuguese *conscientização* [Freire 2018]. The term can be understood as "awakening the conscience" through creating appropriate educational conditions necessary for emancipation . As Donaldo Macedo explains,

> Conscientization is an emancipatory pedagogical process developed by the educator Paulo Freire that is designed to teach students, through critical literacies, how to negotiate the world in a thoughtful way that exposes and engages the relations between the oppressor and the oppressed. Its central educational objective is to awaken in the oppressed the knowledge, creativity and constant critical reflexive capacities necessary to demystify and understand the power relations responsible for their marginalization and, through this recognition, begin a project of liberation. [Macedo 2014, p. 179]

The non-oppressive character of conscientization should be emphasised: it is focused not on enlightening people by imposing a more appropriate vision of being or doing, but precisely on a participatory way of creating conditions which would help everyone involved in the process develop critical reflection. This is why conscientization is the central process for participatory action research which relies on strategies of dialogue and group analysis of life and work conditions, as well as learning ways of revealing hidden oppression by giving voice to people who had previously been silent — not on forcing empowerment patterns on the oppressed from the positions of power. This latter, incorrect understanding of conscientization as a form of enlightenment resulted in Freire withdrawal from the use of this term. As Piotr Stańczyk explains, "the opposite of education 'with' the people is education 'for' the people which is manipulative in its nature and determines the 'reactionary,' 'naive,' or excessively 'enlightenment' interpretation of the term *conscientização*" [Stańczyk 2018, p. 16][2]. For Freire empowerment consists discovering a new language of communication, alternative to the language of oppression — but not in imposing emancipatory patterns on people. Furthermore, according to the pedagogue, this process should also lead to the emancipation of the oppressors who would ultimately realise the inhumane nature of their actions.

Freire focused primarily on the diagnosis of educational conditions important in the context of emancipatory processes. His criticism concerns the authoritarian model of education which has the authoritarian teacher in its centre, instead of the students. This model, called by Freire "the bank model of education" [Freire 2018], does not allow students to develop critical awareness, thus it suppresses social change. Rote learning during classes, conformist attitude towards the teachers, or presenting didactic content as free from value and not requiring discussion are the most evident pathologies of education that, in Freire' view, transform students into manipulative and non-reflective customers (Berglund, Verduijn 2018). Consequently, they become objects that are easy to manipulate and can be easily steered for political and consumerist purposes [Czerpaniak-Walczak 2007; Freire 2018].

According to Freire and other critical pedagogues inspired by his views, in order to be able to fulfil its emancipatory tasks, education should be based on a vision of an authority [a teacher, authors of books] as a partner in dialogue, and not as somebody who should be followed without any criticism just because of their social role or academic title [Witkowski 2011]. Conducting critical

[2] This subtle yet enormously significant difference in the understanding of conscientization is worth illustrating with a reference to the university classroom. Stańczyk continues bluntly: "too often in a school or university space we can come across teachers who complain about their pupils and students, grumbling how weak they are, how lazy, disinterested, stupid, unprepared, ignorant, uncouth and ill-mannered. **Disdain for pupils and students resulting from the conviction of their own intellectual and moral superiority is the most brutal consequence of the competence-based view of the process of emancipation**" [emphasis by M.Z.] [Stańczyk 2018, p. 19].

discussions in a classroom supports students' involvement in real problems of the world which become emotional stimuli to take up research and actions that enable solving these problems [Witkowski, Giroux 2010; Giroux, 2014]. Students must be included in the processes of deliberation and treated as equal partners in discussion. It is a necessary condition for the development of conscientization and social change [Achtenhagen, Johannisson 2018].

Freire's critical vision of education featured originally in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* published in 1970 [Freire 2018], as well as his empowerment activities for disadvantaged groups in Brazilvery quickly became an inspiration for emancipatory social movements across the globe [Darder 2017]. As a result of indicating processes of participatory learning as conditions for the emancipation of individuals and, consequently, social change, Freire's concepts also gave impetus to the development of the critical orientation in action research [Park 1992]. A significant role in the development of this orientation, as well as critical pedagogy in general, was played by the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, in particular ideas of Jürgen Habermas concerning the idea of emancipatory reason and theory of communicative action (more detailed discussion of Habermas' ideas in the context of action research can be found in: Kemmis 2010).

Freire's conscientization in action research enables treating oppressed groups as equal partners of interactions. The researcher intervenes in the research process by asking critical questions which unmask social, economic and political mechanisms that create the system of oppression, but it is the oppressed themselves who make decisions about the need to make a change. Critical action research highlights the political character of each research by exposing the illusion of objectivity and value-free judgement in science.

3.2 Participation in the research process

Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda[3] remarked that "regular scientists may discover ways to travel to the moon, but their priorities and personal values may not permit them to solve messy problems for the poor woman who has to walk each day for water for her home." [Fals Borda 2001, p. 29]. According to the sociologist, action research enables researchers to solve common, everyday problems of communities. AR also gives an opportunity to analyse interests of power that constitute oppression, including interests of researchers who often dismiss problems of the oppression as irrelevant for the mainstream academic discourse [Macedo 2014].

[3] The authorship of the term *participatory action research* is attributed to Orlando Fals Borda [Pant 2014].

He notion of *participation* is crucial for understanding the PAR approach which distinguishes this type of research from other approaches (e.g. previously discussed concepts based on Lewin's ideas). *Participation* means having full ownership of the conducted research process. In other words, it is full responsibility for the production of knowledge, designing methodology, or introducing and analysing consequences of changes. It assumes negotiation of meanings between the involved parties — researchers, oppressed groups, and very often also oppressors — in terms of the possibility of overcoming the problem, while no one forces their visions, and everyone strives to reach a consensus. Whereas *involvement* (relevant for more traditional approaches to AR)means including someone in the research process and enabling them to complete actions prepared by others, which causes the problem of the illusion of participation where power remains in the hands of people and groups imposing their ideas. This is why, as McTaggart indicates, "people are often involved in research, but rarely are they participants with real ownership of research theory and practice" [McTaggart 1991, p. 171].

The PAR approach applies methodological eclecticism, combining various research methods and techniques, depending on the problem [Pant 2014]. However, researchers try to avoid methods that do not allow for including everyone in the research, such as experiments or surveys. They constitute a kind of oppression towards the people studied, placing the researcher in a privileged position, and not allowing the research subjects the insight into the research aims, or the possibility to shape its course [Alvesson, Deetz 2000]. On the other hand, critical action research practitioners often claim that quantitative research might have greater impetus in convincing those in power to act for the oppressed groups. The presentation of research results with colourful statistics often seems to be a much more reliable source of information for policy makers than a narrative based on qualitative research [Stoudt, Torre 2014]. Therefore, researchers often decide to take the positivist paradigm for strategic reasons. Apart from standard methods (surveys, in-depth interviews, participant observations), inclusive methods are used, such as problematising group discussions, educational games, or participatory visual techniques [Berglund, Wigren-Kristoferson 2012].

3.3 Participatory research: examples

Finnish scholar Marja-Liisa Swantz in her pioneer research in 1970s conducted in Tanzania [Swantz 2008][4] indicated the inadequacy of Western logocentrism for studying Africa's problems. In the late 1960s she became a part of the local

[4] The first use of the term *participatory research* is attributed to Swantz [Park 1992].

Tanzanian community, having been adopted as a daughter of a local shaman who included her in his family and enabled her identification with norms, values and cultural patterns of the locals. This allowed her to understand how important for participatory research it is to identify with the native group with which the research is conducted, and to avoid the way of thinking derived from the researcher's own culture.

After conducting a series of pilot research, carried out by Swantz and local students who were educated for this purpose at the Tanzanian Dar es Salaam University, in 1975 she initiated a large-scale project commissioned by the Finnish Ministry of Culture and Youth and the Academy of Finland [Swantz 2008]. The research conducted in the Bagamoyo district concerned mainly people's resistance to being moved to new villages. The government's intention was to improve people's access to healthcare and education, but due to a strong attachment to their living places, they preferred to stay where they had always lived.

Researchers wanted to learn the opinions of the studied population about the future and their own development. For this purpose, they lived among the locals, sharing their homes. They organised workshops during which the locals worked in groups with researchers and with the representatives of the local government, or other events where local historians shared their knowledge on the village's past. A lot of attention was paid to the integrational character of these meetings, by organising dance events and other artistic activities.

The outcome of the research was the increase in the critical awareness of the local inhabitants in terms of opportunities provided by access to education or healthcare. Not everyone made the decision to move to better situated villages, but as Swantz remarks, thirty years after the research was carried out it is possible to note significant development of the system of managing resettlements to more civilised places in Tanzania [Swantz 2008] Furthermore, the researcher discovered that both students and locals were much more effective in collecting information from people than specialised and educated social studies researchers working in her team. According to the scholar, the process of data collection should be based on local knowledge and local practices. Both researchers and the local population are at the same time practitioners and theoreticians who participate in producing knowledge.

Another classic example of participatory research, this time with a strong emancipatory purpose, was action research conducted by American pedagogue Myles Horton, initiator and co-founder of Highlander Research and Education Center [aka Highlander Folk School] in 1932. The organisation operated in Tennessee and dealt with education for social justice, training future leaders of social movements and empowering people to fight for their rights [Horton 1990].

In his approach, Horton was driven by the idea of democratization. He involved oppressed people (e.g. unfairly exploited farmers) in educational processes, giving them the freedom to express their opinions, and above all, the opportunity to reach conclusions and make decisions on their own [Horton, Freire 1990]. He fought against racial segregation, allowing people of different skin colours to learn all together, which at the time was a criminal offence.

The researcher taught poor, exploited, uneducated people to have faith in their strengths and abilities. He showed them they could trust their experiences and rely on their competences. Participants learned openness to helping others, as well as courage in taking responsibility for their own and other people's lives through participatory decision-making. Horton tried not to impose his own views. In one of the projects with a group of striking employees, one of them put a gun to Horton's head, asking what they should do next. But Horton, guided by the idea of democratic, participatory decision-making, decided to stay silent [Moyers, Horton 1982]. The Highlander Research and Education Center operates to this day, actively working for the residents of Appalachia, empowering them to fight for their rights and better quality of life.

Looking at more recent examples of emancipatory action research, we should point out a particularly interesting project of Elżbieta Wołodźko [2013] carried out in the Teachers College in Szczytno, Poland. The subject of the project which lasted three years was the autonomy of students tangled up in instrumental, neoliberal reforms of a contemporary university in Poland. Neoliberal solutions treat education as a commodity necessary for the development of professional careers, students as customers, and teachers as cashiers providing satisfactory services [Izak et al., 2017]. The corporatization of higher education leads to an illusion of teaching in which students become manipulative consumers with university diplomas.

The objective of Wołodźko's action research was therefore raising students' and teachers' critical awareness, and providing them with conditions for fighting for their autonomy in educational and social processes. The aim of this process includes first and foremost enabling students to adopt civic attitudes in society, related to the ability to care for other people and the ability to oppose the ideas of consumerism, neoliberalism, or economism which are devastating for humanity.

Using a broad range of qualitative methods, such as observation, in-depth interviews, educational games, or problematising group work, and by creating space for critical reflection during classes, including the permission to disagree with the teacher, the researcher managed to elicit a high level of self-reflection among the participants and the sense of independence from instrumental, dehumanizing ideologies. Students and professors alike became more conscious of their responsibility for teaching and learning processes, as well as for other people's dignity and autonomy [Wołodźko 2013].

3.4 Criticism of the emancipatory approach to action research.

Participatory action research is an extremely useful tool for enabling social change and developing common good. By stimulating critical awareness in people's minds, numerous projects of social change, including educational and organizational ones, were completed successfully, which led to the liberation of marginalised social groups from oppression.

He emancipatory orientation in action research, however, faces serious challenges. This type of research does not always fulfil its role in real participation and empowerment of people. Despite the solemn rhetoric stemming from the critical theory, the course of the research, its objectives or results are very often not possible to reach by researchers. One of the reasons is the continuous projectification of contemporary universities [Fowler et al., 2015] and their neoliberalisation which forces academics to collect research projects as means of developing (or saving) their academic career or earning money which happens at the expense of the passion and critical reasoning necessary to carry out good research [Levin, Greenwood 2018].

Another challenge for emancipatory approaches to AR is people's resistance to emancipation. As German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk remarked, the characteristic features of the contemporary world include cynicism and apathy rather than the will to make real change for the liberation of themselves and others from oppressive situations [Sloterdijk 1988]. According to the philosopher our consciousness is already enlightened and emancipated; we know the threats and pathologies that surround us. But we do not do anything to challenge them, justifying our attitudes with the words "it's just the way it is" or "others are worse off."

Furthermore, groups selected for the research may simply not want researchers' intervention, since involvement usually must be long-term (not to mention the high cost of this type of research). This brings up an ethical question: can the research assume in advance the humanitarian vision of change (like in the case of Swantz's studies), or perhaps oppression is already set in contradiction to the will of research subjects and the idea of participation? It remains equally debatable to what extent the researcher has the right to intervene in the research process. It is often difficult for the studied people to become involved in the processes and without a decisive intervention of the researcher a study could simply fail [Pant 2014].

CHAPTER SUMMARY

In summary of the reflection on the origins of action research, it might be useful to compare the traditional and the emancipatory approaches (see Table 3).

The emancipatory approach to action research aims at increasing the critical awareness of participants. Organisational change should occur bottom-up, and not be related to imposing ready solutions top-down. The latter is regarded as oppressive, not taking into account the voice and needs of those who might not agree with such a form. Since the main research objective is the development of reflective insight on the strength of joint learning, we cannot impose our patterns of change on others. In emancipatory orientation power is perceived as entangled in the interests of privileged groups, while conflict is a natural element that might undermine these interests and liberate people from oppression.

Table 3. Comparison of the traditional and critical orientation towards action research

	Traditional (pragmatic) orientation	Critical (emancipatory) orientation
Research objective	Improving the functioning of the organisation	Emancipation, critical reflection
Directed actions	Cooperation, dialogue	Resistance, liberation
Attitude towards power	Power manifests in cooperation and enables action	Power is the manifestation of the interests of dominant groups, we must keep an eye on them
Role of the researcher	Collaborative moderator	Emancipating facilitator
Learning method	Experimental, learning through action, practical knowledge	Reflective, the increase of critical awareness, reflective knowledge
Type of dialogue	Cooperative, action-oriented	Promoting openness to others, bolster-ing voices of the oppressed
Type of knowledge	Knowledge as a practical tool in solving social problems	Knowledge as critical reflection which enables social change
Major representatives	John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, Eric Trist, John French	Paolo Freire, Orlando Fals Borda, Mar-ja-Lissa Swantz, Myles Horton

Own work based on Johansson, Lindhult 2008, p. 102.

The researcher in the emancipatory orientation should adopt the attitude of a critical facilitator. Thus, it is possible to develop reflective knowledge, allowing for the analysis of forces governing a given organisational context, which in return enables more effective action. Therefore, a critical researcher enables other people involved in the research to acquire the capacity for self-reflection which can later turn into transformative action. But everyone must take responsibility for this action themselves, it cannot be imposed top-down. In other words, action research should result in the increase in critical awareness of people involved in the research, which also entails acquiring profound insight into specific, local, organisational micro processes. Democratic communication is emphasised — also with groups holding power — as a way of attaining solutions. In this sense research can serve as a mediator negotiating interests between the parties involved. Helping people to liberate themselves from oppressive structures is a basis for possible change of organisational actions as a consequence of growing critical awareness among employees who take responsibility for change themselves.

The main objective of traditional approach to action research is solving organisational problems for the purpose of improving the functioning of organisations. In this orientation — as researchers in the critical orientation indicate — it is not assumed *ad hoc* that people are in the situation of oppression and systemic domination, so they need to be liberated. Working conditions can be identified only in the process of research, thanks to democratic dialogue and cooperation. Like in the critical orientation, reflection must go hand in hand with decisions and actions, and both of these dimensions (reflection and action) continuously support one another. However, the action phase is reached in a different fashion. While in the critical orientation action is a result of the increase in critical awareness which a given person reaches on their own with the support of a facilitator, in the pragmatic orientation action is a result of a consensus between the involved parties reached thanks to a dialogue.

Research in the traditional orientation is to serve mainly practitioners outside the academia. In this sense, research should be useful for representatives of external organisations which can use them depending on existing problems. People involved in the research process can participate in the process of change by sharing their knowledge, e.g. during so-called dialogue conferences. The researcher is involved in cooperation and dialogue in the research process, avoids distance and supports the main objective of the research, namely learning through action. Power is regarded as a force allowing for a democratic dialogue and cooperation which constitutes a necessary condition for working out a consensus. Action research enables testing various organisational innovations which can be tested in laboratory conditions.

CHAPTER 2

THE VARIETY OF APPROACHES WITHIN ACTION RESEARCH: MULTIPLE ROADS LEADING TO CHANGE FOR THE BETTER

INTRODUCTION

Action research is sometimes metaphorically called a research approach with a "Janus face" derived from Janus, an old Italic deity [Levin, 2012; Coghlan, Brannick 2014].The two faces of Janus symbolise his power over the earth and heaven or, according to other sources, over past and future, which we can understand as a symbol of duality of a given phenomenon. In the case of action research, this duality means that the researcher must at the same time pay attention to important issues and practical problems, while taking care to maintain scientific rigor [Coghlan, Brannick 2014; Levin 2012]. Like many-armed Kali, Hindu goddess of time and death, action researchers get involved in various activities which aim at reaching for *fronesis* – practical wisdom. Action research is not a monolith. It is a living, changing research approach whose essence is the idea of combining research and action. In the previous chapter we described the origins of action research and two major streams within which research is conducted — pragmatic and emancipatory. In this chapter, this subject will be developed by showing diversity and multidimensionality of the approaches within action research. First of all, we will present generally accepted cognitive strategies which action researchers adopt. Next, selected types of action research will be discussed. The chapter will conclude with a general discussion of methods of data collection and analysis applied in action research. The chapter is in the form of a literature review - it discusses the main concept of action research based on the work of multiple experienced authors cited below.The aim of the chapter is not to create new definitions, but to systemize, based on the best literature, key concepts that may be helpful for conducting an AR based thesis.

1. COGNITIVE STRATEGIES IN ACTION RESEARCH: 1ST, 2ND, 3RD PERSON ACTION RESEARCH

Action researchers use various cognitive strategies which are commonly known as 1st, 2nd and 3rd person action research. These strategies show how a researcher, or a group of researchers can carry out a cognitive process through researching, designing and implementing change. David Coghlan and Teresa Brannick [2014] remark that the integrating approach to research includes all three types of "voices and audiences." Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury-Huang [2013] hold a similar opinion, pointing out that the most convincing and lasting action research combines three cognitive strategies: 1st person (which we may name as individual action research), 2nd person (collective action research) and 3rd person (social action research).

1.1 1st person action research

1st person action research is a type of action research in which the researcher undertakes studies on their own practice themselves. This research is conducted with constant attention to intention, strategy, researcher's behaviour and effects of these actions on the person of the researcher and the situation in which they find themselves [Adams 2014, p. 349]. 1st person AR enables the researcher to reflect upon their own actions while observing how their actions impact the environment in the course of these actions [Reason, Bradbury-Huang 2013, p. 6]. David Adams [2014] writes that the source of understanding of an individual action research study should be found in the philosophy of Saint Augustine who created a kind of a model of autobiographical reflection in his *Confessions*. Formally, it started to be used as a research approach only in the 1980s, as a reaction to modernism rejecting subjectivism in academic research. First person AR draws from multiple theoretical inspirations of scholars from various disciplines, including Margaret Mead, John Dewey, or Immanuel Kant [Adams 2014].

As Coghlan and Brannick [2014, p.7] explain, first person AR can take researchers "upstream" (to analyse their basic assumptions, desires, intentions and philosophy of life) as well as "downstream" (when they try to understand their behaviour, ways of relating and actions undertaken). The main premise of embarking on individual action research is to better understand one's own practice in order to improve one's actions. The improvement of actions does not have to be oriented only towards reaping individual benefits. A practicing researcher can carry out action research to support better functioning of their organisation or community. An important element of this process is improving and effecting change, which means that the emphasis is placed on practical rather than theoretical goals. It is an important change in relation to the classic research approach in which the main goal of research is usually developing a theory. In 1st person action research, the researcher is at the same time the subject and the tool of the study [Adams 2014, p. 349].

In summary, 1st person action research is "learning about oneself" [Coghlan, Brannick 2014, p. 8] through taking up research and action, and in this process the researcher seeks the understanding of the problem, to be able to transform reality and their own practice. An example of individual action research is a study conducted by a high school teacher on her own didactic practice, aiming at the improvement of the education system for their students.

1.2 2nd person action research

2nd person action research involves two or more people who take under consideration issues and problems of common interest. Researchers work together to identify and study problems and select ways of collecting information that will enable them to develop solutions [Coghlan, Brydon-Miller, 2014]. 2nd person AR begins with interpersonal dialogue and presumes creating a community of researchers and learning organisations [Reason, Bradbury-Huang 2013].

Groups in which researchers work are usually small and there are significant connections between their members [Coleman 2014]. Usually, members of such groups meet face to face. The fundamental value behind it is the idea of conducting research *with people* and not *on them*. This approach assumes the existence of a form of cognition which concerns relationships between people. So, we can explore a problem when we are trying to understand it together. Despite 2nd person action research's rootedness in rationalism and pragmatism, its key premise is the attempt to reach hidden knowledge which underlies human relationships and can be revealed through collective research [Coleman 2014]. Furthermore, as Gill Coleman [2014] points out, it opposes the well-established pattern in which knowledge, and therefore also power, is held by an external researcher. By claiming to have knowledge about life or practices of other people, an external researcher demonstrates their power and advantage over these people, and thus usurps the right to name other people's experiences in their stead. Involvement in 2nd person action research is a protest against such an approach, as every person involved in the research has the right to understand the situation and speak for themselves.

We distinguish several types of collective action research, such as *action inquiry, co-operative inquiry*, or *action learning* (for more see Coleman 2014, pp. 699–700). They differ in the way group work is organised or the degree of formalisation of the research and action process. However, all types of 2nd person action research require practical abilities which enable groups to undertake research and implement solutions. Another challenge is the organisation of the process in such a way that it does not engender the group's dependence on the researcher or researchers who took up the issue first. Coleman [2014] claims that the very method of sending invitations to the meetings of groups embarking on action research can establish patterns of leadership and relationships which the group will follow. However, this is contrary to the idea which clearly assumes the emancipatory character of actions and equal standing of group members in this process. The agency of all people involved in carrying out the research process is the fundamental premise that distinguishes methods used by 2nd person action research from e.g. focus groups created to acquire specific information which is then analysed by researchers, while study participants lose control over how their statements is used.

An example of collective action research is a study conducted by a group of project team members aimed at improving the communication within the team.

1.3 3rd person action research

In this approach actions are taken to make a reference to processes occurring between people who do not have direct contact between themselves [Gustavsen 2014]. 3rd person action research involves actively using all possible channels, networks, means of communication, in order to influence a particular community without the need to hold face-to-face meetings every time. As Reason and Bradbury-Huang [2013] explain, the objective is to expand relatively small projects of individual and collective action research to increase their impact.

Bjørn Gustavsen [2014] presents numerous ways in which 3rd person action research can be carried out, from the distribution of the results of a project carried out within collective action research in the form of e.g. articles, with hope to distribute its results among a wider audience, to the organisation of a project as a far-reaching intervention. These forms do not differ from ways in which standard research is carried out. What distinguishes this approach is therefore not distribution of knowledge itself, but the way in which this knowledge is produced. It assumes the participation of potential users of the solutions developed in the entire process, while constantly combining research findings with the observation of the implementation of the results. Contrary to 1st and 2nd person action research, this approach is characterised by common interest of a significant number of people in a given problem, and their will to be involved in the process of improving a given situation. It is equally important that the actions take the form of a series of connected acts, and not isolated events.

Furthermore, Gustavsen [2014] states that the main contribution to social action research lies in using new, previously unknown approaches or methods to achieve a wide social reach. What it means is that this type of research can reach far while maintaining permanent contact with the "life world" — through individual and collective action research, without becoming removed from people and the essence of the situation they experience.

As an example of collective action research, we can mention a project launched for the purpose of introducing legal changes in terms of substance abuse prevention, based on a previous, bottom-up action research project.

1.4 The comparison of cognitive strategies within action research

As we have already noted, action research can be considered a research approach for designing change, and not a specific research methodology. At the same time, cognitive or problem-solving strategies described above support the process of scientific inquiry and description of the identified practical problems. The three described strategies are highly dependent on one another. The optimal, desired situation is cognition at each of these levels and the attempt to combine them [Coghlan, Brannick, 2014]. At the same time, the researcher embarking on action research, depending on their needs, decides which cognition strategy is possible and optimal. Table 4 features the comparison of different approaches.

Table 4. Comparison of the types of approach to action research

1st person action research Individual action research	2nd person action research Collective action research	3rd person action research Social action research
Study of a single researcher on their own practice. It has a clearly stated purpose (understanding the problem or transformation). It is characterised by methodological pluralism. It assumes iterative interaction between action and reflection on this action.	The study on a given problem taken up by two or more researchers who know one another. It has a clearly stated purpose (understanding the problem or transformation). It is characterised by methodological pluralism. It assumes iterative interaction between action and reflection on this action. It presumes creating a community of researchers and learning organisations. The challenge is to organise the process in such a way as not to engender the group's dependence on the researcher or researchers who took up the issue first.	The study on a given problem taken up by a broad community of researchers who often do not know one another personally. It is characterised by methodological pluralism. The goal is to expand relatively small projects of individual or collective action research in order to enhance their reach. This type of research has a broad reach while maintaining permanent contact with the "life world" — through individual and collective action research, without becoming removed from people and the essence of the situation they experience.

Source: Adams 2014; Coghlan, Brannick 2014; Coleman 2014; Gustavsen 2014; Reason, Bradbury-Huang 2013.

2. TYPES OF ACTION RESEARCH

One of the main features of action research is that it includes in the research process not only trained, professional researchers, but also those who are usually treated as research subjects. Fulfilling this assumption is possible in many various ways, and the research can be carried out both by practitioners themselves and members of local communities, or in cooperation with them. Among the most popular forms of action research, Herr and Anderson [2015] list: action research, participatory action research, YPAR – participatory action research with youth, action science, collaborative action research, cooperative inquiry, educative research, appreciative inquiry, self-study, emancipatory praxis, community based participatory research, teacher research, participatory rural appraisal, feminist action research, feminist, antiracist participatory action research, advocacy activist/militant research. In the literature, we can also find other approaches regarded as types of action research including critical participatory action research, clinical inquiry, collaborative management research, critical utopian action research or insider action research [Coghlan, Brannick 2014].

Even though these approaches share the main principles behind action research, i.e. the empowerment of people traditionally treated as research subjects, as well as combining research with action, they are very different. Herr and Anderson [2015] explain that they have different purposes, epistemologies, ideological premises and different research traditions emerging from different social contexts. In some approaches it is practitioners that form groups to undertake research and action together (e.g. numerous examples of studies conducted by teachers, or healthcare professionals), in others it is an external researcher who establishes cooperation with research practitioners within the organisation or community [Herr, Anderson 2015]. To present some selected approaches in more detail, we have described them in the following section of this chapter.

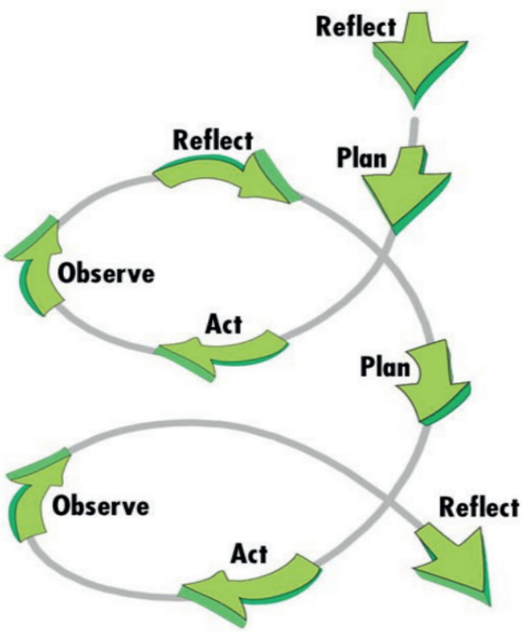
2.1 Action research

Action research is a term used for defining an entire array of research forms combining research with action. We could say that this term is a kind of umbrella which covers a range of action research types, and not simply one of action research types.

Coghlan and Brannick [2014, p. ix] define action research as a "family of related approaches that integrate theory and action with the goal of addressing important organizational, community and social issues together with those who experience them." As Herr and Anderson [2015] emphasise, action research is a form of investigation carried out *by* or *with* people inside an organisation or community, but never *on* them. Action research is always conducted in cooperation with other people. This applies also to forms of research carried out by an individual practitioner to reflect on their own practice and ways to improve it. Also then, it is expected that conclusions stemming from their research would be discussed with other members of the organisation or community, seeking feedback among them. As Hilary Bradbury [2018] writes, all kinds of action research share the vision of people meeting to produce transformative knowledge. According to the scholar, action research is the "methodology of hope" in which researchers get involved in social processes to be able to renew and regenerate their academic research aspirations.

Action research is also characterised by the fact that it does not assume that change will be effected in the course of a single cycle. Researchers usually go through a cycle of research, action and reflection phases (the so-called "action research cycle"), composed of four main elements: constructing, planning action, taking action and evaluating action,(cf. Figure 1) [Coghlan, 2019, p. 9]. As during the cycle, it usually turns out that it is possible to improve various elements which e.g. were not taken into account in the primary action plan, researchers move on from one cycle to another. Thus, the so-called action research spiral emerges, which reflects the complex and iterative character of this approach.

Figure 1. Spiral of action research cycles



Source: based on Kemmis, McTaggart [1988] , Coghlan 2019 p.9.

For more see: Coghlan D., Brydon-Miller M. (eds.) (2014), *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Action Research*, SAGE Publications Ltd., London; Reason P., Bradbury-Huang H. (eds.) (2013), The SAGE Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice, 2nd edition, SAGE Publications Ltd., London.

2.2 Participatory action research

Participatory action research (described in a broader context in Chapter 1 of this book) supports empowerment and social justice through transferring power within the research process to its participants [Walmsley, Johnson 2003]. The source of the concept is Paulo Freire's writing [2005]. Participatory action research begins with people. What follows is learning about their problems, their ambitions and what they would like to do. Participatory action research can be carried out in various types of organisations (business, public, non-governmental) as well as in local communities.

Marja-Liisa Swantz, mentioned in Chapter 1, the distinguished pioneer of participatory action research, said in an interview that PAR means conducting research together with people for the purpose of solving problems and building knowledge on both sides: that of academic researchers and that of members of an organisation or community [Nyemba, Mayer 2018]. In this type of action, the emphasis on the word "participation" means that partners embarking on a research project should be involved in the entire research process, even if they are not professional researchers. This is why professional researchers should support all people involved in the project and help them to acquire skills necessary for their full participation in the process of collecting, analysing and interpreting data.

Participation, its form, and the way of involving participants differ significantly depending on the project. For instance, within "The Morris Justice Project" [Stoudt, Torre 2014], researchers from The City University of New York, working in a research along with residents of a New York neighbourhood together created research tools and carried out the research. In the course of this project, during numerous meetings in a local library, professional researchers shared their skills with local residents, so that they, too, could become full participants of the research process concerning their difficult relationship with the police. Previously mentioned studies carried out in Tanzania by Marja-Liisa Swantz can serve as another example. For several years she lived in the village of Zaramo, where alongside other women she conducted participatory action research aiming at the improvement of these women's situation, among others, in the area of eradicating illiteracy [Swantz, 1970]. In this case, a professional researcher joined the local community, becoming one of tribeswomen [Swantz, 2016].

It is highlighted that one of the main problems with participatory action research is the lack of connection between professional researchers and other participants of the study. It is especially visible when researchers are highly educated with already established assumptions about life experiences of participants which means that they do not learn on the basis of local knowledge which these people have [Nyemba, Mayer 2018].

Participation can take many forms. Marta Graça, Manuela Gonçalves and António Martins [2018] identify five basic types of cooperation within participatory action research: egalitarian (participants of the project become researchers); collaborative (participants of the project take active part in making research decisions); cooperative (participants cooperate, but do not get involved as researchers); consulting (participants want to be consulted and informed of actions); and informative (participants are informed about the course of the project). These types belong to a continuum of sorts – from passive attitude of the participants, to interactivity, to full mobilisation. Graça, Gonçalves and Martins [2018] remark that within participatory action research, numerous forms of participants' involvement can work, mainly because of people's varying needs as to their involvement in the research process. Participants of a PAR-based research project can also choose various roles in the process, depending on their skills and interests. The authors of this book illustrate this thesis with an example of their own research carried out with sex workers in Portugal. In that case, professional researchers transcribed interviews, analysed the research, dealt with technological aspects of the project, while sex workers were involved in the process of generating topical areas of the research, identifying priorities, obstacles and strategies in the process of taking action on the basis of the conducted research. Ensuring full participation that allows for equal involvement of all stakeholders in the process is difficult, but it is worth it to make the effort so that the process can become fully egalitarian and emancipatory.

For more see: Swantz M.-L. (2016), *In Search of Living Knowledge*, Mkuki Na Nyota Publishers, Dar Es Salaam; Argyris C., Schön, D.A. (1989), *Participatory Action Research and Action Science Compared: A Commentary*, „American Behavioral Scientist", no. 32(5), pp. 612–623; Fine M., Torre M. a. E., Boudin K., Bowen I., Clark J., Hylton D., Upegui D. (2004), *Participatory Action Research: From Within and Beyond Prison Bars* [in:] P. Camic, J. Rhodes, L. Yardley (eds.), *Qualitative Research in Psychology: Expanding Perspectives in Methodology and Design*, American Psychological Association, Washington, pp. 173–198.

2.3 YPAR – Participatory action research with youth/Youth-led participatory action research

In youth-led participatory action research young people identify a problem of concern, collect data and make recommendations for improving a given situation [Anyon, Kennedy, Durbahn, Jenson 2018]. Their purpose is questioning and transforming systems and institutions towards greater social justice [Cammarota, Fine 2008]. The key principle of YPAR is the fact that research topics are always based on youth's own experiences and concerns. The second principle is the participatory nature of the research – young people collaborate in the research process. Furthermore, YPAR is a transformative process: the objective is always intervention which entails producing new knowledge and changing practices in order to improve the lives of the youth and their communities [Anyon, Bender, Kennedy, Dechants 2018].

An example of such a study is e.g. resolving the problem of school violence, when students define the essence of the problem, study their fellow students' perception of the problem, and then suggest solutions to school authorities [Anyon, Kennedy, Durbahn, Jenson 2018]. Youth can take on more complex subjects, as well, such as fighting climate change in their region in the course of action research carried out in cooperation with adults. Rachel Trajber et al. [2019] describe an example of such actions undertaken in collaboration with Brazilian youth on the issue of the current climate change.

For more see: Cammarota J., Fine M. (eds.) (2008), *Revolutionizing Education: Youth Participatory Action Research in Motion*, Routledge, New York–London.

2.4 CPAR — Critical participatory action research

People embarking on critical participatory action research study their individual and collective social practices to determine how these practices can be irrational, unsustainable or unjust for people involved in and affected by them. If participants discover undesirable social practices or their consequences, they work together to avoid or overcome what is undesirable for them [Kemmis, McTaggart, Nixon 2014]. According to Stephen Kemmis [2010, p. 86] critical participatory action research is research conducted by "participants in order to reach historical self-awareness (or 'historically-effected consciousness') oriented towards the awareness of the historical subject and historicalness of the person interpreting this subject in practice and practice understood as *praxis*." This research is not conducted exclusively for the practical interest, but it also fulfils emancipatory goals, develops individual and collective self-reflection through the opening of the communication space and intervenes in the occurring collective history and adopts appropriate action as its practical purpose [Kemmis, 2010]. CPAR is a social process of shared learning in the name of individual and collective self-education. The main objective of groups working on CPAR is changing "here and now" practices, and not research referring to possible albeit abstract situations [Kemmis, McTaggart, Nixon 2014].

For more see: Kemmis S. (2010), *Teoria krytyczna i uczestniczące badania w działaniu* [in:] H. Červinková, B.D. Gołębniak (eds.), Badania w działaniu. Pedagogika i antropologia zaangażowane, R. Ligus (trans.), Wydawnictwo Naukowe Dolnośląskiej Szkoły Wyższej, Wrocław, pp. 45– 88; Kemmis S., McTaggart R., Nixon R. (2014), *The Action Research Planner. Doing Critical Participatory Action Research*, Springer, Singapore.

2.5 Action science

Action science is a form of action research aiming at producing knowledge which can be used by people to improve individual, group, organisational and other practices [Friedman, Putnam 2014]. Action science relies on the concept of generating useful knowledge which aims not only at explaining the world, but also showing how it can be changed [Chrostowski, Jemielniak 2011]. Action science is also defined as a form of social practice which integrates both production and the use of knowledge for the promotion of learning *with* and *among* individual people and systems [Friedman, Rogers, 2013]. It is assumed that in this approach people create theories to test them later [Chrostowski, Jemielniak 2011]. Key features of this approach include creating a community of researchers in communities of practitioners, building individual and collective theories of action, combining interpretation with rigorous theory testing, creating alternatives for the existing status quo and providing inspiration to change [Friedman, Rogers 2013].

Action science is used in many different professions and areas, e.g. management, human resources management, organisational learning, improving action strategy, conflict management, or supporting negotiators in learning based on their experiences through testing negotiation theories in their own practice, etc. [Friedman, Putnam 2014].

For more see: Argyris C. (1995), *Action Science and Organizational Learning,* "Journal of Managerial Psychology", no. 10(6), pp. 20–26; Friedman V.J., Putnam R.W. (2014), *Action Science* [in:] D. Coghlan, M. Brydon-Miller (eds.), *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Action Research*, vol. 1, SAGE Publications Ltd., London, pp. 15–18.

2.6 Collaborative action research

Collaborative Action Research is a type of action research in which the main principle is ensuring the possibility of joint work of people representing various roles and with various responsibilities, in order to achieve a shared goal [Townsend 2014, p.116–119]. Establishing cooperation to conduct the research between people who are connected in some way means that this type of action research may be influenced by previously existing connections. For instance, there could be issues concerning power relations arising from the fact that the group is composed of members of the same organisation who occupy different posts in its structure [Townsend 2014, p. 116–119]. At the same time, CAR can be an opportunity to change power relations in the organisation (e.g. through greater empowerment of lower-level employees). Sometimes, however, the emancipatory objective will not be achieved, and inequalities can become reinforced and sanctioned. Collaborative action research assumes that groups which take on this type of research benefit the most when they are diverse. This entails involving people with very different views on the studied phenomenon, which should enrich participants' understanding of various aspects of actions taken as a result of the conducted action research [Townsend 2014].

As Richard Sagor [1992] states, in collaborative action research , the goal of the research is always formulated by practitioners, and learning must be the motivation to take up the research while researchers conducting both research and taking action must be able to have real impact on the research subject. Collaborative Action Research in not a monolithic approach. Within Collaborative Action Research ,it is possible to distinguish other forms where formalised cooperation constitutes the core of action research. For instance, one of the forms it may take is *collaborative management research* which aims at expanding scientific knowledge in order to introduce organisational change [Shani 2014]. A form close to collaborative action research is *cooperative inquiry* understood as a way in which people who share similar concerns and interests take intentional and joint action to understand their situation and find a way to change things for the better [Heron 2014, p. 187]. According to the main premise of cooperative inquiry all participants of the process are fully involved in making research decisions.

For more see: Sagor R. (1992), *How to Conduct Collaborative Action Research,* Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Virginia, USA;

Heron J. (1996), *Co-operative Inquiry: Research into the Human Condition*, SAGE Publications Ltd., London.;

Townsend A. (2014), Collaborative Action Research [w:] D. Coghlan, M. Brydon-Miller (red.), The e SAGE Encyclopedia of Action Research, vol. 1, SAGE Publications Ltd., London, pp. 116–119.

2.7 Educational action research

Action research in the area of education has been carried out since the 1950s and it began in the USA [Noffke, Brennan 2014]. It is often understood as teachers' reflection on their practice and as a tool of education [Hardy, Rönnerman, Edwards-Groves 2018]. Newton and Burgess [2008] distinguish three types of educational action research: emancipatory, practical and knowledge generating. At the same time, they claim that most EAR is not primarily emancipatory. Quoting Japie Heydenrych [2001] they remark that educational action research should not assume a simple reflection on the practice and finding ways to improve productivity. It should concentrate on studying educational practices which are often taken for granted and unthinkingly accepted, and then problematise them [Newton, Burgess 2008].

The project, which culminated in this book, is one of the examples of educational action research. The project was conducted by a group of 12 Jagiellonian University researchers, and its objective was to improve practice within one of the didactic activities, namely organising master's thesis seminars. For two years, the group of researchers has been conducting a new type of seminar in which theses were not written in a standard mode but based on action research carried out by the students. The group of researchers did their research, reflected on its findings, introduced changes and evaluated them. As a result of this project, real change was implemented into the system of MA seminars in two institutes of Jagiellonian University's.

For more see: Newton P., Burgess D. (2008), *Exploring Types of Educational Action Research: Implications for Research Validity*, "International Journal of Qualitative Methods", no. 7(4), pp. 18–30.

2.8 Appreciative inquiry

Appreciative inquiry enables building changes based on best practices and discovering assets of a given organisation or community. It means that contrary to the dominant approach in which action research focuses on solving problems and difficulties occurring within the organisation, appreciative inquiry relies on what is good within the organisation. This approach assumes that the best solutions already exist inside organisations, people, teams, or communities, and it is possible to discover them, provided we are sufficiently attentive [McKeown, Fortune, Dupuis 2016].

In appreciative inquiry the researcher is not an objective, external observer, but someone actively involved in the organisation or community studied. Research participants engage in a dialogue during which they discover positive aspects of the organisation and use them as a foundation for planning future changes [Zandee 2014].

For more see: Zandee D. P., (2014), *Appreciative Inquiry and Research Methodology.* [In:] Coghlan D., Brydon-Miller M. (eds.), *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Action Research* [Vol. 1, SAGE Publications Ltd., London, pp. 48–51.

2.9 Participatory rural appraisal

Participatory rural appraisal (PRA) is defined as a family of approaches and methods used to enable members of local (rural or urban) communities to express, enhance, share and analyse their knowledge of life and conditions in which they operate, as well as to plan and act for their development [Chambers 1994, p. 1253]. PRA draws on two traditions: rural rapid appraisal [RRA] and the premises of participatory action research inspired by Paulo Freire's research [Chambers 1994]. PRA is applied especially in such areas as natural resource management (forestry, fishery, wildlife, etc.) and agriculture, health, nutrition, food safety and programmes combatting poverty [Chambers 1994]. In his process, it is important to learn from the members of local communities who are involved in the debate with political leaders and researchers in order to design the best possible solutions [Swantz 2016].

For more see: Chambers R. (1994), *Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA): Analysis of Experience*, "World Development", no. 22(9), pp. 1253–1268.

2.10 Feminist participatory action research

Feminist participatory action research is oriented towards theoretical and practical understanding of gender and women's experiences [Reid, Gillberg 2013]. This approach draws inspiration and its research apparatus from feminist studies, action research and participatory action research. The subjects of feminist studies include various forms of women's marginalisation in social life, or limitations resulting from gender-based discrimination. In feminist participatory action research these issues are subjected to academic reflection, and then transformed into actions which are to assist women in e.g. challenging discriminatory, patriarchal relationships in their communities. Colleen Reid and Wendy Frisby [2008] state that gender and women's experiences are the central element of FPAR in several ways. For instance, they point out how various forms of patriarchy lead to domination and resistance. Furthermore, the authors remark that ideas of participatory action research and feminist studies converge. Both assume as goals the emancipation of underprivileged groups and fighting for social justice. At the same time, PAR has traditionally been conducted based on the assumption that the world is a place of gender neutrality and equality. Therefore, feminist studies enable enriching PAR with additional elements aimed at striving for social justice with the understanding of various forms of gender-based discrimination. FPAR empower women in the process of conducting research.

In the example of their own research conducted with women from marginalised groups in Canada, Reid and Frisby show how FPAR influences the empowerment of women who occupy unprivileged positions and helps them take action. In the cited research project, which they conducted with Canadian women living in poverty, they describe a situation where these women internalised their situation and blamed themselves for being poor. But when they opened dialogue with other women within the FPAR, they were able to recognise how certain family, organisational and social patterns impacted their prevailing situation [Reid, Frisby 2008]. Similar actions have emancipatory influence on research process participants, which can (but does not necessarily) enable them to change and improve their situation.

Another example of an empowering FPAR project is a study conducted by a team of women researchers. The group organised participatory action research in a high-security prison. The team explored how attending college while serving their sentences impacted the incarcerated women, as well as the benefits brought to them by college education . The members of the team were, on equal terms, researchers from the City University of New York and women who attended college courses during their incarceration [Fine et al. 2004], which illustrates the democratisation of the research process.

For more see: Reid C. (2004), *Advancing Women's Social Justice Agendas: A Feminist Action Research Framework*, "International Journal of Qualitative Methods", no. 3(3), pp. 1–15;

Gatenby B., Humphries M. (2000), *Feminist Participatory Action Research: Methodological and Ethical Issues*, “Women’s Studies International Forum”, no. 23(1), pp. 89–105.

2.11 Insider action research

In insider action research, a member of a given organisation undertakes research on processes occurring within it, while remaining its member and fulfilling their assigned roles and tasks. This type of researcher, called a *complete member* by Coghlan [2019, p. 19], is a full-fledged member of an organisation and wants to remain one after the research is completed. It is a different situation from the one where an external researcher wants to solve a problem together with a given social group or organisation, and their relationship with their research collaborators is temporary. As Coghlan [2019] remarks, studying one’s own organisation involves research *within* and *on* the organisation while being its permanent member.

A particular situation of conducting research on one’s own organisation can be placed in the context of Goffman’s ideas of *stage* and *backstage* [Goffman 2011] A researcher who is a part of a given organisation can enter areas which are usually not accessible to outsiders. They have access to the so-called “backstage where they can observe informal processes occurring in the organisation. At the same time, a challenge and difficulty of this research approach is the duality of their role: the researcher is simultaneously a practitioner who studies their professional activity.

For more see: Coghlan D. (2019), *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organization*, SAGE, London.

3. DATA COLLECTION METHODS AND ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES IN ACTION RESEARCH

Action research does not reject *a priori* any of the research techniques or methods. There is no single methodological outline for a researcher to follow when selecting methods and techniques to solve the formulated research problem. The selection of methods is an individual decision for each project and depends on numerous factors. Certain research questions are better addressed using quantitative research methods, other with qualitative, and sometimes mixed methods are the most appropriate choice.

However, one of the premises of action research states that the selection of methods should help reduce separation between professional researchers and people in whose organisations or communities the research is conducted. Therefore, methods should be empowering by enabling the inclusion of all project participants. Sometimes researchers who are professionally prepared for quantitative, qualitative and mixed research transfer their skills by training participants who have no relevant experience in this area. It is illustrated by the aforementioned Morris Justice Project in which researchers from the City University of New York trained the residents of the Bronx in quantitative data analysis methods [*The Morris Justice Project: Participatory Action Research* 2014]. Another example of including the community in the research process is the project *Easy Targets/ Los Vulnerables* carried out in the form of participatory action research by a collective composed of researchers from the University of Utah and a group of young people [*The Public Science Project* 2019]. The project concerned difficulties experienced by the undocumented youth when they want to apply for college. The project applied visual research methods – young researchers used film footage as a method for recording opinions of various stakeholders of the process and to present the project results.

In the case of individual research, when the researcher is concerned mostly with analysing their own practice, the choice of methods is justified as always by the subject matter (Will the selected methods allow me to answer formulated research questions? Are the selected methods suitable for exploring the research problem?) as well as researcher's skills (Can I reliably apply a given method and analyse research results?).

At the same time, we should remember that action research does not occur in the void and often in its course researchers clash with difficult social problems. Emotions which accompany the researcher raising difficult issues, or tackling problematic phenomena (like violence, exclusion, mobbing and inequality in organisations) are very often overlooked in methodological discussions. An involved, or indeed "vulnerable" researcher [Liamputtong 2007] is sometimes a witness to pain, humiliation, or sense of indignity experienced by people with whom they conduct action research. Suitable choice of methods can (although not necessarily) help the researcher build strategies allowing them to conduct the research properly which can otherwise carry a heavy burden due to the accompanying emotional load. This situation is particularly difficult for young researchers, including students who embark on their first action research. Entering the world of real organisations from the level of a pure, idealised image they get from academic textbooks, while sometimes difficult, is an extremely enriching experience.

One of the accusations levelled at action research is that it sometimes does not observe methodological rigour, so its results cannot be considered reliable. To prevent that unjust judgement, researchers who want to solve a given problem should carefully select and then apply data collection methods, and then carry out a transparent analysis of such data. We should remember that methodological rigour can be sometimes determined by attention to data triangulation, adequate transcription of the collected material, or a diligent description of how narratives and interpretations are created on the basis of the collected data [Chen, Huang, Zeng 2018].

3.1 Selected methods of data collection and analysis

Siyu Chen, Fuquan Huang and Wenjie Zeng [2018] analysed academic publications from the years 2000–2014 based on action research. On the basis of this literature review, they indicated the methods most commonly used for data collection and analysis. In their study, they divided the selected methods into 3 types: methods selected by professional researchers, methods used by research participants and methods used by both these groups together. Methods used by professional researchers are those carried out and controlled by academics, but not practitioners. According to the study, professional researchers collect their data in action research by using mostly interviews, questionnaires, observations, field work notes, literature reviews, as well as (significantly less frequently) other methods, e.g. website analysis, oral accounts and documents [Chen, Huang, Zeng 2018, p. 346]. Data collection methods used by research participants are to support the process in which they are the owners of the research process and learn to use tools for conducting research, to be able to study their situation on their own, and not serve as research subjects. According to the analysis by Chen et al. [2018, p. 346] the most popular methods used by research participants are reflective journals/diaries, homework and reports. Others, less frequently selected methods, included e.g. community mapping, rich pictures, think aloud protocols, participatory theatre, modelling, games, Facebook, blogs, drawings and posters. When data collection methods are chosen by researcher and research participants together, they often use such forms as forums, photovoices and workshops [Chen et al, 2018, p.346]. Therefore, we can unambiguously conclude that action research in which studies are designed and carried out by practitioners use an array of less formalised methods, while scientists incline towards the selection of traditional academic data collection methods.

The approach to data collection is somewhat different within CPAR. Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon [2014, p. 69] point out that in this approach people carrying out action research are not so much interested in collecting data (in the scientific sense) as in collecting evidence (in the historical sense). This means that the researcher who carries out their research with a critical perspective should devote particular attention to collecting evidence of the occurring change, the transformation within the conducted project. This evidence should be documented which will enable its analysis, interpretation, reflection and sharing results with others. The relevance of evidence is assessed primarily in terms of whether it enables answering questions formulated in the course of the research process. The research part of critical action research should support the process of self-reflection on practices and their understanding, as well as on conditions in which practices subject to reflection are carried out [Kemmis, McTaggart, Nixon 2014]. The key role here belongs to such tools as the researcher's journal, blogs, research notes, interviews, audio and video footage, photographs, document analysis and surveys.

Data analysis techniques in action research are also very diverse. However, as Chen, Huang and Zeng [2018, p.347] discovered, in most studied cases authors of academic papers did not inform explicitly what data analysis techniques they had used. The main techniques that did get mentioned include thematic analysis, content analysis and grounded theory. We should remember that co-operation between researcher-practitioners and professional researchers in the course of data analysis allow for a better understanding of the collected data, and it validates those research participants who are not professional researchers. Collaboration in data analysis is therefore highly desirable. At the same time, as Herr and Anderson [2015] remark, participatory action research can be participatory at each of its stages, or only during selected phases of the research.

3.2 Collecting data for a thesis and keeping a research journal

The array of research methods and data analysis methods selected by students writing their final theses based on action research can be very broad. Examples of work conducted within the *Research for practice* project show that these methods were usually mixed — qualitative and quantitative methods intertwined in the process of research in organisations. The most commonly applied techniques include participant and non-participant observation, in-depth interview, survey, and focus group. At the same time, research journals were a very important tool in the process of data collection. A research journal is a tool for data collection and reflection on the course of the research process. The researcher writes down their observations, impressions, doubts and questions which emerge in the process of entering the organisation and the studied problem. It is a type of a field work diary that constitutes an extremely valuable source of information about what happens in the studied area, as well as how the perception of a given problem changes in the eyes of the researcher. It can be kept in an electronic form or as a traditional paper journal. Some people prefer carrying it around as a notebook writing down their observations as they come, others – fill it out after a given event, meeting, recording their notes on a computer.

As Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon [2014] explain, keeping a journal helps the researcher maintain discipline through the requirement of regular reflection on what happens in the project, how they react to it and what their thoughts are on the subject. It also enables better visualisation of what has been done, and what the progress is in achieving the desired change. Furthermore, a journal can become a very valuable source of quotations that can be used to illustrate the master's thesis, or an academic paper. In summary, a research journal is an extremely important tool which enables the researcher to steer the process of their own learning, and it should be kept from the very initiation of action research.

3.3 Selection of action research methods conducted with unprivileged groups

A specific situation which requires particular attention in selecting methods of data collection and analysis is conducting research with groups of people who are excluded, unprivileged or experience inappropriate treatment. Often the subject of action research, especially within critical forms of this approach, are social injustices affecting excluded or vulnerable groups. *Vulnerables* are, according to Mary Silva [1995, p. 15, quoted in: Liamputtong 2007] people who experience "diminished autonomy due to physiological/psychological factors or status inequalities". They are usually not able to make decisions on their own that affect their lives, or to be independent. They are tangled in a web of relations that does not allow them to become emancipated, which usually results from the social injustice they experience. What they have in common is the fact that they are often "invisible" groups within society, and their needs are sometimes marginalised. Groups of *vulnerables* may include children, senior citizens, ethnic minority communities, immigrants, the unemployed, religious minorities, addicts, sex workers, the homeless, LGBT community, as well as women and people with chronic illnesses [Liamputtong 2007]. There are also groups whose vulnerability is compounded. For instance, unemployed women from ethnic minorities who are single mothers.

Conducting action research by such a group or by an external researcher collaborating with unprivileged people is a task that requires particular sensitivity, and the application of appropriate research methods. Unprivileged people often experience various difficulties, they are going through or have gone through trauma. Social researchers working with marginalised groups enter these people's lives — an area which is usually not visible and accessible from the outside. Marlene De Laine [2000, p. 67, cited in: Liamputtong 2007] calls these areas *back regions*, meaning "private space, where personal activities take place and only 'insiders' participate." Someone who enters these back regions can bring with them the risk of exposing these people to various difficulties. This is why the researcher should be aware of the extreme complexity of the situation they enter, even though their intentions are usually good.

Research methods used in the research with vulnerable groups are usually qualitative. They are more flexible and fluid than traditional quantitative methods, thanks to which they enable more profound understanding of the meaning given to events by unprivileged people, as well as their subjective experiences [Liamputtong 2007]. Rebecca Campbell [2002, cited in Liamputtong 2007] gives an example of the application of qualitative methods in research conducted with individuals who were subject to rape. According to her, qualitative methods allow the researcher to hear answers of participants more fully than quantitative methods. Among the basic techniques particularly recommended for the research with groups of people experiencing social injustice, we can list in-depth interviews, focus groups, and biographical interviews. Innovative and alternative data collection techniques include photography, journals, and art-based methods as well. Methods used in research projects involving vulnerable groups also include self-ethnography and disguised observation [Liamputtong 2007].

CHAPTER 3

ACTION RESEARCH AND MASTER'S THESIS

INTRODUCTION

The discussion about the university's usefulness is part and parcel of the traditional discourse on the university's role. One of the arguments put forward in this debate is that the activities proposed by universities are not practical and that the university is disconnected from the real world. Although the reflection on the role of the university is one of the key tasks in which the community of academic teachers and students are involved, it will not be analysed here. Let us just say that the diversity of ways in which the university can influence reality is broad but, first and foremost, it is not sufficiently tapped into.

In a sense, this impracticality and disconnection from reality are due to the postulate that academia (i.e. research) should remain separate from politics. This approach might have made sense in certain periods of society's development and of the university as such, and it entailed important consequences for the development of knowledge, but it has never been fully successful. Still, this aspiration gave rise to a dream of creating a scientific approach that would consist in an objective attitude, free from the influence of the system of values. An approach based on this dream was developed. Thus, social sciences modelled their manner of operation on exact science. However, the results were not fully satisfactory because in order to understand the social world, the world of organisations and people functioning inside them one needs to remember about the completely subjective aspects of human life, requiring a different sort of inquiry and of writing, a different map to navigate the world. When taking such a perspective into account, the researcher needs to investigate values, hopes, fears, beliefs and how these elements, including the language, affect reality. The positivist paradigm does not enable drawing up a complete picture of contemporary dilemmas.

It is accepted that social sciences help explain, foresee, and understand the phenomena we are interested in [Frankfort-Nachmias, Nachmias 2001].

According to the traditional paradigm, there are three basic goals of scientific inquiry: creating new knowledge and disseminate scientific propositions, testing the validity of such propositions, and formulating theories. This is an orderly process that typically follows the same, defined steps such as: identifying the research question, defining the objective of the inquiry and formulating research questions, designing and planning the study, gathering the data, deciding on the quality criteria for the study, analysing the evidence, drawing conclusions, linking the conclusions to the existing knowledge, checking the reliability of the hypotheses, explaining the importance of the conclusions for academic and applied purposes, creating a new theory or modifying an existing one [McNiff, Whitehead 2010]. This model has a certain drawback that results from the way in which research problems are generated. Namely, a researcher can pick a research problem without giving any attention to the practical status quo. In consequence, more and more often, researchers are said to be disconnected from reality and criticised for lagging behind the needs of the modern world.

These days many employees, especially in the public and non-governmental sector, feel disappointed with the results of their work that are affected by the context of the work, both by external factors and by internal, organisational solutions. Disappointment, no sense of purpose, fear, anger, and sometimes even guilt (as discussed by Andy Hargreaves who describes the case of teachers as an example [Sagor 2005]) may lead to discouragement or, on the contrary, can motivate people to do something that might turn the situation around. That is exactly how Kurt Lewin — who was interested in such social problems as fascism, antisemitism, poverty, and discrimination against minorities — began doing action research (which actually proves that the need to introduce action research into organisations' practice and to universities has been strong for several dozen years)[5].

Due to the growing gap between practitioners and researchers, one of the problems management theory is facing is that scientific theories and studies play too small a role in improving the state of affairs, inspiring change, and showing sensible directions of action. Action research offers such a possibility and, hopefully, can be a game changer. Action research is conducted by and for practitioners. It creates space for collective reflection and cooperation in order to improve what one is doing. It is a planned, systematic, and cyclical process. The idea is that it should help understand one's own practices to a degree that allows for an informed implementation of changes [Mertler 2006].

The term *practice* is understood here both as action and as research that is focused not on behaviour, but on learning and on the values driving the action.

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[5] See Chapter 1 for more.

Action research focuses on the co-creation of knowledge in practice. It is intentionally political, and it constitutes an important contribution to social and cultural transformations, so important especially in the era of economic globalisation [McNiff, Whitehead 2010]. The role of action research (and of researchers from outside academia and research centres) is growing despite the ongoing discussion on what actually counts as valid knowledge and who can be deemed a researcher with a mandate to pass judgements about reality.

For a few years now, the Institute of Public Affairs in the Faculty of Management and Social Communication has been familiarising students participating in the "Action research as a strategy for the public sphere" course to analyse the classical papers dedicated to action research by such authors as Kurt Lewin, Wilfred Carr, Gerald Susman, Paulo Freire or Stephen Kemmis. The students are also encouraged to reflect on the ways of fixing the modern world and on the importance of action research for our everyday life. We have had some lively discussions on Kemmis's definition according to which action research is "a form of collective self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out" [Kemmis, McTaggart 1988, p. 5].

During the one-semester course, the students prepared a research project in compliance with the principles of action research and they proposed an intervention in an area of life important to them. Obviously, this period was too short to carry out a series of action research studies. Typically, it ended with a promise to try and have the course prolonged. Finally, it gave rise to the *Research for practice* project. Thinking about how to help students benefit academically from the project and at the same time see the practical sense of research conducted for the purposes of master's theses, we decided to offer our students the possibility to prepare a thesis based on action research. We believed that this way they would be able to study things they find important and useful, in an actual organisational reality and in collaboration with other people. We invited a group of employers to participate in the project. They agreed for the students to study their organisation from the inside and to provide help in the research process as well as during designing interventions attempting to mitigate the organisational problems identified during the study. The students involved in the research were invited to combine theory with practice, to improve the practices in the organisations, and they were even asked to take over the decision-making process and to support the professional development of the staff.

The purpose of this chapter is to present the process of action research and how it can be applied for the purposes of writing an academic thesis. We will try to show two parallel processes that people writing their dissertation in accordance with the action research model need to become involved in. The challenge is to address the reflective aspect — i.e. identify problems in the current operations and design interventions mitigating those problems — and at the same time describe the process in a way acceptable for the purposes of an academic thesis.

1. THE PROCESS OF ACTION RESEARCH

A student who is writing a dissertation based on action research on their own faces a difficult task and several dilemmas, because the guiding principles of action research and of thesis writing are contradictory. For one, action research is supposed to be a collective venture[6], while at universities, a dissertation is typically a work of an individual and the author takes individual responsibility for the work when dealing with a reviewer or the committee.

The purpose of action research is not only to generate knowledge about a topic, but also to enable individual and organisational development, i.e. a change that should help improve what is being done. This, in turn, is more probable when these activities happen cyclically, and not on a one-off basis that is typical for a thesis. Indeed, the linear and strictly defined life cycle of a thesis project can be incompatible with the cyclic, multidimensional and multiple-step character of an action research project. It would be preferable for students who decide to write their master's or bachelor's thesis in compliance with the action research model to be aware of these contradictions.

This approach should be particularly interesting for people who hope that their research can translate into specific remedial proposals that can be applied in real life or for people who feel dissatisfied with their situation and would like to have more influence over reality. It is not a different approach to thesis writing; it is a different approach to life.

When writing a thesis in the action research model, the researcher-student has to facilitate the process of communication and collaboration on many levels, in many directions and in various forms. Upon entering the organisation, the student becomes an external researcher studying the character of the organisation and looking for its problems by communicating and collaborating with other people. In line with the theory of action research, they have to invite practitioners to cooperate with them. Practitioners can help them understand

[6] More about types of action research and their characteristics in Chapter 2 (1.1, 1.2, 1.3).

the organisation and conduct the research, but they can also effectively block the process and refuse to participate. The researcher needs to invite them to participate in the research project and facilitate it by resorting to various incentives for participation. The practitioners with whom students-researchers collaborate include the organisation's employees and management as well as its partners and clients. It is highly desirable to collaborate with a person one knows and likes but in such a situation it is practically impossible to achieve. Nevertheless, it is impossible to identify a real, important, practical research problem without establishing at least a minimum level of communication, collaboration and trust. Action research requires collaboration regardless of the researcher's position[7]. An outsider can study an organisation or a community with different attitudes that will affect both the process, and the outcomes of their research. It can be assumed that both us (the researchers) and them (the employees or community members) have some power, that we have no knowledge of the analysed organisation, but we can learn from the people who know it from the inside. We might also believe that only we have the knowledge, and they don't, or we might believe that neither the researchers, nor the employees have the necessary knowledge [Herr, Anderson 2005, p. 39]. Each of the above situations is possible and every one of them affects the relationships and the dynamics in the research process.

Power relations become even more complicated because of the thesis advisor. The researcher's main responsibility is to take care of the interests of the organisation and of its stakeholders. Obtaining access to the knowledge of the organisation that is owned by the stakeholders entails a responsibility that is neither equivalent to nor concurrent with the responsibility that students have towards their advisors and towards their university as a bureaucratic body that protects its interests. Regardless of these difficulties, the first task of student-researchers is to, as Ernest Stringer puts it, set a stage [Stringer 1999].

Everyone who sees how demanding the reality of today, the world of modern organisation, and social life are and who wants to learn how to have an impact on their environment, should try their hand at action research. To succeed in using this format, we should first understand the character, the dynamics and the sequence of the action research process. Although various authors propose their individual modifications and in some respects their approach to the entire process might vary, these diverse propositions are to a certain extent consistent with one universal model. As any rational human act, action research involves three basic stages:

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[7] See section 2 for more about the researcher's placement.

1. action, i.e. the stage of planning and applying the ideas in practice, but also, if the researcher is an outsider, learning about the character of the organisation or community, learning and reflecting on its method of functioning,
2. observation, i.e. the stage of collecting data and building a picture of the action,
3. and finally, reflection, i.e. analysing, interpreting and explaining what the researcher found out about the action and designing recommended changes or specific interventions.

The work can begin at any of these stages but one should be aware that often the transitions between particular stages are not clear-cut, the stages may overlap (we keep working, we are still collecting and analysing data, but we are already thinking about beneficial modifications, we are implementing changes and making analytical efforts to evaluate the proposition). The cycle should be repeated as many times as necessary.

To make this analysis more precise, we suggest that these stages should be divided into six steps. At the same time, we would like to emphasise that the proposed steps are merely a suggestion or a guideline. Along with gaining experience in the field of action research, it is worth experimenting and trying out useful modifications to the procedure, designed specifically for a given research project.

1.1 Reflective action and checking the lay of the land

As already mentioned, apart from the typical difficulties that action researchers need to face, i.e. dealing with action, implementing change or increasing the quality of existing operations and at the same time working on the research, i.e. creating knowledge about one's own practice [Herr, Anderson 2005], students also have to fulfil their roles as participants of a thesis seminar while remaining at the same time in an organisational context that is, more often than not, alien to them. On the one hand, they are constrained by research procedures, on the other, they need to prove their research is useful for the practitioners with whom they have just started working. And the goal of the researcher's work is to propose changes to what these practitioners have been doing for years.

To make it happen, the researcher should focus on understanding the context, priorities and values from the very beginning to be able to become a catalyst of future changes and inspire others to reflect on their own practice. In a perfect situation, the researcher would not perform the analyses and would not design the interventions on their own but would encourage the staff to collaborate with them and participate in the entire action research process.

It is easier if a handful of basic rules are followed. First — relationships. The researcher should look for ways of establishing and maintaining harmonious and equal relationships. They should accept people the way they are and avoid conflicts by encouraging collaboration and not rivalry. Relationships between people improve if the quality of communication can be enhanced. The nature and the mode of communication affect the potential for efficient collaboration and the wellbeing of employees, which has a direct impact on the effects of their work. Communication that supports relationships and the work itself is possible when it is appropriate for the type of activity, for the context and for the people, when it is honest, when the information conveyed is true, and when the recipients understand this information. Quality relationships and efficient communication will not be possible without participation. The level of participation also determines the possibility to understand one's own situation and it determines the level of involvement in the process of problem solving. The researcher's role is to invite others to participate in the actions and offer them a chance to carry out meaningful tasks, learn useful skills and develop a sense of control over what is happening. The next rule of collaboration is inclusion. Action research should offer an opportunity for all the stakeholders to be a part of the process [Stringer 1999, pp. 28–40].

As mentioned, action research can take various forms. The method of involvement presented here is the most appropriate for participatory action research, because we believe that researcher-students should try, to the greatest degree possible, to align their action research projects with this model engaging everyone involved. Such research is carried out by the people concerned with a given problem, and not *on* them. Students doing research for the purposes of their thesis are positioned outside the organisation and are only trying to get to know it, which might be seen as an individual action research project. Therefore, they should be particularly sensitive and embrace the need for broadening the scope of collaboration, inviting people to cooperate, fostering relationships and communication.

1.2 Formulating a (research) problem

The cornerstone of the action research process is to identify such a problem inside the organisation that its analysis will help understand this organisation and the solution will make it possible to take a step forward. This problem will become the research problem underlying the entire research project. The question we ask determines the answers we give, in other words it affects how we diagnose the situation, and, in turn, it will determine the proposed solutions. That is why it is so important to ask the right question to help define the problem. We should not do it hastily. Before we ask the question, we should clarify the scope of operation that our research will address and investigate the existing theories and practices.

Once the question is asked, a process of systematic analysis and deconstruction of the defined problem is triggered. One of the most valuable and intriguing aspects of the action research approach is the decision-making power as far as deciding what the problem is. The power relations in the process of choosing what we believe to be an important problem for people's work and for the organisation is a major element distinguishing action research from traditional scientific inquiry. Practitioners, often supported by researchers (as in the described example), with their in-depth knowledge and using adequate techniques become involved in the process.

Breaking down the entire procedure into phases and stages usually looks good in textbooks and manuals but in real life simple models are hard to come by. The plethora of perspectives, forms and structures, the variability of goals and tasks, and incompatible schedules make the process and the achievement of the expected effects difficult. Deadlines need to be renegotiated and transitions between stages shift. Action research becomes a social process in which the researchers need to deepen their understanding of the complexity of the organisation and of the process, trying to build the picture step by step. When looking for a research problem, researchers should create a communication channel, negotiate their role, identify the key people in the organisation who are useful for the research process, and build their first, preliminary picture of the organisation [Stringer 1999, pp. 43–44]. In the initiative to which we keep referring here, the initial stage is even harder because the researcher's role has already been defined behind their back, so to speak, or with only a small contribution on their part, as students partake in a format prepared *for them*, and not *with them*. The difficult struggle for autonomy and empowerment is also happening on behalf of and for researchers, not only practitioners, and it is all the more difficult because the students' lack of authority is due to the long-standing traditions persisting in education and at universities. It is also rarely challenged by those who have both authority and knowledge.

The art and skill of conducting action research consists in building the understanding of the situation in which the researcher and the practitioners are together (practitioners become researchers, too, if possible). The goal of the shared inquiry in action research is not to reveal the truth or describe the situation, but to showcase various truths and realities and to enable the participants of a social situation to share their own interpretation. Even if they know the same facts, their experience, position or culture will lead to different interpretations. That is why researchers should try to bring to light such interpretations and facilitate negotiations between different perspectives [Stringer 1999, p. 45]. At the very initial stage, particular attention should be paid to sparking the interest of the participants in the topic and building a positive atmosphere to facilitate engagement. So, when entering an organisation to look for a research problem, researchers should not be primarily focused on the problem itself. First, they should get to know the organisation and its people, and only then they can initiate a discussion about a problem (which often turns out to be surprisingly difficult, as people do not want to talk about problems, even though it might be helpful for them).

Experiences, reflections and observations are a part of the research process. To set it in motion we need a question and questions stem from curiosity. Asking a meaningful question takes discussion and time, but, after all, reflecting upon one's work is a satisfactory exercise for most people. There are many questions that can be asked. What is happening here? Why are you successful or why aren't you successful? The conclusions of discussions should be noted down. What do I want to find out? What do I find interesting or upsetting? What works best? What do I have to solve? What can I do differently? What can I find in the literature? Researchers who rush through this step often struggle at the later stages of their research [Sagor 2008, p. 22].

Students working on their thesis have some allies on their side; there are, of course, the practitioners from the organisation, thesis advisors and other academic staff, but first of all there is literature, other research, the Internet, printed press, observations from the organisation, their own notes, conversations with people. It is necessary to conduct a literature review in order to study similar cases and the methods of solving them in other contexts. When carrying out the review, it is a good idea to look for similarities, links between them, gaps in the studies, sources used by other researchers, research methods applied, types of data, and finally to compare the context of previous studies.

Exercising caution while choosing the research topic, area and problem is more than recommended, but it is also good to focus on what is interesting for the researcher, because they will work on it for some time. Working on an uninteresting project can be detrimental to motivation and to the end results. Our suggestion is to pick something we want to change and something we have influence over.

Once we manage to identify people important for the organisation and for the research process, i.e. either people who know a lot, or who are involved in most organisational activities, or people who can serve as *gatekeepers*, that is people who can help the researcher get in touch with other members of the organisation, we should pay them some attention and invite them to a conversation, an interview or a debate. Such moments are important, and they should not give rise to any conflicts or tensions. Instead, they should be intellectually stimulating and increase the interest in the area that seems particularly relevant to the researcher. The researcher should neither criticise nor propose solutions. The best strategy is to ask questions. The purpose of these conversations is to make the problem yet more specific and to make the final decision whether it is worth our attention. Is it important? What do we find fascinating about it?

Once we formulate our research problem, it is time to design research questions concerning the problem we want to solve. We can ask about relationships and connections around the problem, about the history, about the people and groups involved, about the resources and procedures. We can plan questions about how the people with whom we are going to talk perceive the given problem, if they see any other problems, about who has the ability to influence, how the problem is connected to what happens inside and outside of the organisation.

Our research questions reflect what we know about the situation, who we are, and what experience we have in this respect (in the context of a given research problem). Ideally, our motivation should stem from our engagement, be connected to who we are and what matters to us. Sometimes the project might seem interesting, but the researcher will not feel the personal connection. It happens when the researcher chooses a problem they are not interested in and which is not related to their own personal experiences. Although students learn about the principles of scientific inquiry early in their studies, at the end of the studies they are often not yet ready to bravely take on the responsibility for the research that will determine the shape of their thesis. Self-reflection and attempts to grasp how one's individual situation affects the choices related to the research process are indispensable, but very rare. Find out who you are, think how different aspects of your situation can affect the way in which you do research and in which you write, read what you have written and think to what extent this text feels like something you own. Remember that ideas, beliefs and opinions are a result of belonging, be it to an academic discipline or an administrative structure.

1.3 Collecting data

Once we have successfully identified the research problem, we know what we want to improve, we have formulated research questions that will help us find as much information as possible, and when we have carried out a literature review to find out what others have done, what should be avoided and what can be replicated, the next task is to plan the process of data collection and choose the right strategies or tools.

Traditionally, researchers want their results to have the following three qualities: generalisability, accuracy, and reliability. The first will not necessarily be an asset in action research. Generalisation means that the results of the research can be applied to different places and circumstances, and the point of the action research model is to address a very specific case and solve a specific problem that in a different context will require a completely different approach. Accuracy, that is the correct choice of the analysed data, and reliability, that is the precision of the measurement methods, are both relevant for action research [Sagor 2008, pp. 37–39].

Researchers studying the world of organisations face a problem: organisations use increasingly more formal procedures and practices, especially for the purposes of performance assessment for which they use measurable criteria (it is a common practice in modern management). In this way work (or rather its understanding) is broken down into the official job description, the things that happen during a job interview, the recruitment process and then in the everyday practice, and into expectations, i.e. the results that can be measured (in consequence, some aspects of work emerge that cannot be measured). Sometimes those aspects to which the measurable criteria apply do not match the official job description. Rules and tables start to determine one's professional life to a greater degree than the expectations of managers [Schostak, Schostak 2013, p. 8]. In a broader context, specific measurement practices rule contemporary organisations that have become economic and political machines with power over their employees' minds and bodies, since they confine them to limited interpretations. With action research it is possible to broaden the spectrum of analysed data and account for their richness and diversity. At the same time, action research does not require focusing on measurable and objective indicators. It accepts emotion, opinion and experience.

Already at the early stages of research, i.e. identifying the problem and asking research questions, it is good to think how to make sure various sources of information are used. More sources mean more information, but the number of sources matters also because triangulation (using at least three independent sources of data) provides a greater reliability of data. The same can also apply to research methods, tools and researchers themselves. When preparing for the process of data collection or selecting relevant sources or methods, always check if your choices match the values you preach. For example, when you say that employees' participation and opinion matter, think whether collecting data through a computer survey is consistent with the values you want to promote.

Before data collection begins, a research agenda should be set; it should contain a list of expectations concerning what we should do to get the data we want. You need to decide what research strategies and tools to use, bearing in mind that in a sense every agenda is an act of violence against the process because it breaks down and oversimplifies comprehensive processes by reducing research activities to something that will be considered feasible. Realising the agenda's impact is an educational process thanks to which the unnoticed or dismissed as unimportant or unrealistic becomes visible [Schostak, Schostak 2013, pp. 13–14]. Nevertheless, it will be easier to set a handy agenda, if we create a visual representation of the research problem, a sort of mind map that will show the problem broken down into smaller issues with the links between them. In this fashion it is easier to match the right tools for very detailed questions. One of the easiest ways of preparing a research agenda is to pick the sources and tools for every research question and write them down in an appropriate table.

The best way to start collecting data concerning a given area is to define and look for data that already exist. We should think about documents and artefacts concerning the problem we are studying. After all, contemporary organisations are overflowing with data contained in their organisation plans, mission statements, periodic and assessment reports, minutes, descriptions, pictures, websites, marketing materials, attendance registers, schedules, newsletters, press releases, notes or reflective journals of people involved in the initiatives of interest to us, in products of employees' work or student works [Craig 2009, Sagor 2000, p. 76]. There are also pictures and films thanks to which we get an insight into historical events during which the researcher was not present. They are aplenty and provide information about the organisation and about people. Sometimes there are so many of them that researchers who decide to use them need to be selective. Such documents can be used both to build the context of the organisation's operations and to look for data concerning the research problem. Thanks to the analysis of documents and artefacts it is also possible to enrich new research tools being built.

After having used up sources containing existing data, other strategies and tools of data collection can be applied. One of the most popular strategies is observation. In this way, we obtain data on the organisation in its current state and place (and about past events, provided we have pictures and recordings at our disposal). Typically, visible non-participant observation is used. The researcher is present during events as a so-called objective observer. They use an observation sheet and, often, a recording device to record what is happening, and they follow a previously adopted pattern. Frequently, the passive observer becomes an active participant and partakes in the group's activities, which affects the ability to record the event and the level of emotional involvement (participant observation). Although observation does not provide insight into the psychological state of the people observed, nor into their motivations and emotions, it does offer a glimpse of the "state of affairs" directly, without the need to involve third parties to get information. One of the most interesting methods of observation is job shadowing. The researcher becomes a shadow of the person observed and they follow them for a given time (one or several hours, one or several days). This type of observation enables the researcher to see the real picture of people and circumstances and it provides an opportunity to naturally experience the situation in which the key people find themselves [Sagor 2008, p. 43]. Job shadowing is used when researchers want to witness a phenomenon from the point of view of another person. They put themselves in other people's shoes to understand a different perspective. One of the basic obligations is to discuss this experience with the person concerned once the observation is over.

The next group of research strategies consists in encouraging people to talk about the topics we are interested in. The two, most commonly used, are a survey and an interview. Creating surveys and doing research using this method is a skill you need to master. Obviously, these strategies require some knowledge about the studied problem. It is impossible to draft meaningful questions if the researcher does not know what to ask about, or if they do not know what they are interested in, or if they do not know what the answers should concern. These methods give the researcher a peek into the participants' mental process (to the extent they allow it, of course). At the same time, especially in the case of interviews, they enable the respondents to cocreate the study. The interviewer can follow up on the issues voiced by the interviewee. These strategies are quite economical and efficient in terms of providing data, in particular if the tools have been designed well. Moreover, the participants get an opportunity to express their opinion on important topics and they have a sense of agency. A similar effect can be achieved with a survey, if its results are presented and people are invited to interpret the results and plan the next steps, i.e. to use the data in the decision-making process.

When planning the process of data collection, we should remember that methodological decisions can affect the accuracy and reliability of the research, and there is no point in collecting data that might turn out to be useless. Especially that in action research the quality of the data collection process is an issue. A practical approach, insufficient time, the nature of the collaboration or power relations inside the organisation make it difficult to ensure the quality of the process, but the aforementioned triangulation technique improves the quality of the results. That is why we should not shy away from the multitude of sources and tools.

1.4 Analysing data

Once reliable data is collected, the stage of analysis can begin. It involves transforming so that it can be used and meaning can be given to what has been collected. During the data analysis researchers are led by key questions. What do I want to find out? What do we want to solve or improve? What is hidden in the data? What important issues do the data concern? What factors affect the story told by the data? Diverse sources offer a variety of quantitative and qualitative data that the researcher has to browse on their own in order to understand the analysed phenomenon. No source or data point as such contains interesting information that will make solving the problem possible. It gets more likely only when various types of evidence are compiled.

Often the enormous amount of data can be worrying and disheartening. In such a case you can trust your intuition looking for a clear picture of the whole. It is not a completely wrong strategy, but you should also carry out a systematic and organised analysis. The data is organised according to a chosen key. Then, you need to try and determine the subject of the data or, in other words, what specific categories the data relate to. The purpose of organising and analysing is to archive the material. Research questions and agendas prepared before the collection of data will facilitate this work. Their structure can be the starting point for the analysis. Building understanding consists simply in interpreting what you see and discover. By interpreting we define the meaning of the observations and get to know the meaning felt and expressed by others.

Thanks to triangulation, data from various sources, possibly collected by different methods, are (or at least should be) available for every interesting issue or research question. Before we compile them to compare the conclusions for a specific issue, we need to organise the data and analyse them within the established categories. Depending on what data we use, we need to analyse them accordingly. Looking at quantitative data (typically these are survey results), we usually look for dominant trends and for gaps. Next, we check the margins, that is, the options less frequently selected by the participants. We compare, we check if the participants' identity affects their responses in some way, we look for possible correlations.

In the case of quantitative data, we look for adequate answers that comply with the criteria, and then we try to build typologies and generalise. To make the analysis possible, first, qualitative data need to be coded properly[8] and organised

[8] Codes are symbols chosen at the researcher's discretion. Typically, the coding process includes the following steps: data collection, data review, proposing categories for data, making decisions

according to the codes. Analysing data and drawing conclusions is like peeling an onion. Looking into subsequent groups of data is like peeling off the next layer of an onion — the next level is revealed. Discovering something usually leads to a new question. A graphic representation of a problem can help understand the links.

It is useful to add subsequent elements to the template prepared before the collection process as the analysis proceeds. As a result, we should obtain groups of data concerning a specific research question. For example, if we are interested in the efficiency of additional classes of a subject organised to increase students' involvement and improve their results, we can extract the following information:

1. attendance rate (based on an analysis of documents such as attendance records),
2. assessment of the appeal of the classes and students' engagement (based on a survey carried out among students),
3. assessment of students' abilities (based on a test and analysis of students' homework),
4. assessment of students' activeness measured as the number of students involved in the work during classes (observation),
5. teacher's opinion (reflective journal kept for one semester during which additional classes were organised).

These are just examples of data that are available at school, if we need information about activities that take place there. As we have already said — we are surrounded by data. Our role is to use them. Since interpretation depends on experience, knowledge, position and other features of the person interpreting the data, it would be good to carry out the analysis in collaboration with various social actors. To facilitate the procedure, we can prepare organised data or even propose preliminary generalisations, but raw data should be made available, too.

Various strategies can be used to analyse processed data. In relatively simple studies, researchers use several questions that make interpretation easier: why, what, how, who, when, and where? Answers emerging from data should help answer the question about the nature of the problem and the most important factors that affect it. Why is something happening? Who is affected, who benefits, who suffers? What is the history of the problem and what are the causes? When

concerning categories and codes, sorting, i.e. making decisions concerning every answer, putting them in appropriate categories and marking with the relevant code, clustering, identifying trends and exceptions, conclusions.

did the problem arise? What goals do the people involved want to achieve? What was the sequence of events? What resources are available? What are the relationships, who is collaborating with whom, who is competing or is in conflict with someone (groups, individuals)? What are the main activities? What is their objective and value? How are decisions made? Where do meetings take place, where do people work? You need to choose questions relevant for a given situation. Choose them thoughtfully because there is no value in asking them all [Stringer 1999, p. 93–95].

Another possible strategy is an analysis from the organisational point of view. If several departments of the same organisation are struggling with similar problems, it is possible to review the entire organisation. This approach is supposed to reveal various interpretations of problematic activities. The point is not to evaluate them, but to show the points where some action can be taken. During a review analysis of an organisation, researchers can focus on its vision and mission, i.e. ask about priorities and the methods of their implementation, they can analyse operational goals, the organisational structure and its functioning, i.e. taking responsibility and efficiency. Thus, the understanding of the organisation and its problems is improved [Stringer 1999, pp. 96–97].

Another strategy of data analysis can be concept mapping, which is useful especially for describing hard-to-solve problems, strongly embedded in the context. Alienation at school, eating disorders, drug addiction or juvenile delinquency are never simple problems. More often than not they depend on a concurrence of chance events and circumstances that are embedded in the social tissue of a given community. They cannot be solved by focusing on a single aspect of the situation. That is why the purpose of this strategy is a holistic, multidimensional approach that includes various individuals able to help solve the problem. First, the problem is described and ensuing key elements are defined. Next comes an attempt to present them visually, including also relationships and processes. Visualisation makes it easier to notice possible leverage and implement solutions that might not necessarily be the best ones to mitigate the problem, but that will be acceptable to everyone or simply feasible [Stringer 1999, pp. 98–100].

The fourth analysis strategy proposed by Ernest Stringer [1999] is problem analysis, which is similar to mapping, but it enables researchers and participants to understand the past events that led up to the existing situation and the emerging consequences. You look for the main problem, describe the antecedents that led to the existing situation, and identify the main consequences. On top of that, you can think of secondary antecedents and their consequences. You can explain this process by asking for *causes* and *effects* (although sometimes it is hard to tell one from the other).

1.5 Report and sharing the outcomes

Data, their clever analysis, and creative conclusions will remain a dead letter, if they are not used to spark a creative reflection, for shared discussion and work on implementing changes. It is necessary to invite various stakeholders to discuss the research results. Organising meetings to present various elements of the project is a way of getting in touch and building communication channels with those who will probably introduce the proposed changes (unless they prove unwilling to). However, in order to get there, you need to first prepare a research report that will constitute information material and initiate a debate starting with "And what now?"

As to presenting the outcomes of their research, researchers have a lot of freedom. The academia has developed a certain model and it is expected that various types of research reports should comply with it, but it is the researcher who has the final say. The crucial thing is for the report to clearly present the necessary inspirations and encourage further action. Still, it is accepted that every report should include a number of fixed elements such as: the introduction, the description of the research process, data analysis and conclusions, plan of action. The introduction should give readers some knowledge of the context. A brief description of the area of operation, people and organisation, and of the problem is essential. The description of the research process explains what was done during the research project. The introduction presents the identity of the people involved, and the description outlays the operating procedure. The analysis of data offers a possibility to present the findings of the study and help readers understand them with the support of the proposed conclusions. And finally, there is the action plan that consists in sharing ideas for improvement which should be discussed with the stakeholders [Sagor 2008, pp. 68–70].

In the project carried out by the Jagiellonian University, a more complex structure was proposed to the participants. The template included expectations concerning the sections of the report dubbed an implementation master's thesis. The first section is the introduction which — apart from the context, definitions, objective and problem — should also include a presentation of the action research approach. This requirement might seem untypical, but it is due to the fact that students have a dual role: they are writing their thesis and at the same time participating in an academic and educational innovation with the purpose of making the character of a master's thesis more practical. Still, their theses will circulate in an academic environment and such an explanation will help understand the authors' intentions. The second section includes characteristics of the organisation analysed. This fragment was shifted from the introduction to a separate section because it was agreed that for a project to be successful it is necessary to understand the character of the organisation. It is one of the points from which the entire process should start, but which practically does not end until the research and writing stop. The third section of the thesis is dedicated to a review of the literature connected to the problem. The fourth and probably the largest section contains a description of the process of the action research undertaken. It should cover both the study of the organisation and identification of the problem, the research design, a description of the process, its outcomes, a proposed implementation (intervention) and a description of the implementation (if it has taken place), and finally the researcher's self-reflection concerning their own practice. The fifth part consists of a summary, including a critical reflection on the process and on the outcomes of the study and of the action[9].

As we have already mentioned, it is not enough to carry out a study and write an exhaustive report. In the case of action research, it is just a small portion of work. The purpose of action research is not only to gather information and generate knowledge, but first and foremost to initiate organisational or social change or change in an individual practice. If we study our own practice and the main idea is to change our own behaviour, it is relatively simple. However, and it happens increasingly often, if the desired change requires some involvement from a group and the participation of other people, the researcher faces a challenge and needs to answer the following question: how to present the results of their study and the proposed course of action so that, thanks to the data provided, their collaborators (or other necessary stakeholders) understand what is going on and want to participate in the next steps?

The presentation of evidence often triggers conflicting emotions. Sometimes it boosts the desire for change, sometimes on the contrary, it weakens it. Data are often rejected when the evidence goes against popular beliefs. The researcher should be prepared to deal with diverse attitudes and avoid defending their results and standing by their conclusions. The crucial thing is to inspire reflection and debate. It can be achieved in various ways. The report can either be simply handed over or fragments from the document can be prepared and the focus could be on presenting evidence without providing any commentary. Next, a handful of people can be invited to participate in a pilot programme, and only later everyone can be encouraged to be part of the change. An effective strategy is to organise meetings dedicated to reviewing the results, categorising, explaining and discussing these results (for example in smaller groups to later

[9] For more see the internal project document *Schemat pracy wdrożeniowej* (Eng. Outline of an Implementation- Thesis).

present the outcome of the discussion to everyone present). During such meetings, participants can set the priorities and next steps and meetings, for example to work on the planned changes (if there is not enough time for it during the first meeting).

1.6 Planning the action (intervention) and implementing the plans

When writing a research report and organising meetings, it should be made sure that people can formulate clear and useful explanations and interpretations concerning their current situation. What is agreed will become the basis for planning specific activities oriented at remediating the situation in a given area [Stringer 1999, p. 112]. The way the outcomes are presented to the members of the organisations and the people involved in planning and implementation determine the final shape of the change. We suggest adopting an open attitude and inviting all the people crucial to the problem to be involved in the process.

Every meeting dedicated to planning or implementing change should have a clearly defined goal, and the data concerning the problem should be logically organised and accessible. The following six questions can constitute a starting point for rational planning. Why should we do something about it? What should we do? How should we do it? Who will take the responsibility and do it? Where should it be done? And when? Various tables or charts that make it easy to note down the deadline, stages, owners, necessary resources, and places are a very efficient planning tool. It enables every person involved in implementing the plan to track every task in the action plan and check what they need to do.

The main goal of this step is to generate practical solutions to problems that were noticed and that were described as the outcome of the study. This stage, apart from generating proposed solutions, should also lead to planning activities supporting the change, its implementation, and, finally, evaluation (and the next cycle of action research in future). At the beginning of this stage (for example during a meeting), the participants should have the opportunity to choose their priorities and to have a brief discussion with the purpose of an intersubjective verification of how they understand what they have just learned. An effective strategy encouraging people to generate solutions can be a presentation of a handful of alternative solutions, ideas for modifications or activities proposed by the researcher. Once we know what we want to do, we need to specify the plan by answering more questions. What materials do we need? How will we get them? What financial resources do we have? How much time do we need? Do we need to involve anyone else, look for additional partners?

In the project discussed here, students often came up with their propositions, but we can say that developing solutions in collaboration with others is a better strategy. In his book, Stringer [1999] underscored that action research is not only a mechanism for introducing informed change based on the inquiry's outcomes, but also (or maybe even primarily) a way of community-building. That is why researchers, at every stage of action research, have a responsibility to constantly reflect on how to increase the participation of others in this venture. Detailed planning is important, but action research is not about high-quality procedures. What matters is the sense of community and focusing on the organisation's main objective while remaining respectful towards other people and oneself. Strategies and procedures help us complete tasks, but we need to make sure that when carrying out agreements and obligations everyone is aware of the system of values underpinning our work.

When we introduce solutions that, we believe, will help improve important things, we should have the wellbeing of the people involved in mind. Good actions and visible positive effects of our work enable us to feel proud, provide an opportunity to showcase our identity, and they lend a sense of responsibility and control over our own life. That is why we need to constantly ask ourselves whether we take care of relationships, communication and participation properly and whether we get everyone involved in our work. The best intentions and plans are always confronted with temporary difficulties and everyday reality, in which it is not always possible to reconcile all the responsibilities. On the one hand, it is normal and happens frequently so it is good to be aware of that, but on the other hand, the people responsible for the process should provide emotional and organisational support (for example make sure there is a support network in place) [Stringer 1999, pp. 122–125].

The action research process should conclude by solving the problem that constituted the starting point. Typically, in everyday life it does not happen. The launched inquiry and actions raise the awareness and lead to discovering new issues. The situation gets more complex, aspirations evolve. The reality drives us to undertake a new cycle of action research.

2. DISSERTATION AS AN ACTION RESEARCH REPORT

When we were preparing these brief recommendations for students writing their theses in line with the action research model, we knew that it would by no means be a "cookbook" that describes in detail the ingredients and the method of writing a thesis. It is very hard to provide a detailed recipe for success, as every project and every inquiry can be completely different from one another. Thus, we will propose only a few suggestions and pieces of advice, because the authors of the theses should feel free to look for the best solutions possible.

According to the traditional approach, master's theses and doctoral theses should expand our knowledge of the world. A thesis prepared following the action research approach has to, on top of meeting that expectation, help design an action (intervention) that can improve the functioning of an organisation. So, a thesis can constitute a case study illustrating a process of collaboration and its results. Action research has only recently been accepted as a reliable method of studying reality. It is one of the reasons for which there is as yet no "best format" of reports that would help communicate the process of inquiry, its findings and effects of action clearly and intelligibly.

The standard approach to thesis writing in social sciences can be described as linear, which is in line with the positivist vision of the world and with the quantitative approach in research. In the traditional approach, the researcher should wait until they know what they want to write, until they have a vision of the whole and can logically organise the text before they start writing. In this fashion, the role of dynamic, creative process of writing is ignored and the researcher's original voice is toned down. In the traditional model, it is possible to adjust all types of initiatives to one format, which, to some extent, reduces the importance of such initiatives. When considering the format of their report, action researchers should not necessarily let themselves be dictated by people with expert knowledge who demand that a recognised scientific format be used [Herr, Anderson 2005]. They can experiment and check the usefulness of various formats, and that is why detailed instructions or guides are not necessarily useful.

Action research is a cyclical endeavour that consists in reiterating certain activities that support a reflection of a practice and the introduction of changes. The role of the research report is to describe this process as a path to freedom and excellence, which is never logical or linear. The process starts with a reflection on prevailing actions and intentionally leads to subsequent actions, which are then analysed. This form of inquiry does not simply lead to an action. It is a whole process concerning an action which is analysed, modified, and analysed again. Changes do not happen only at the end of the process; they happen all the time. As a result, a spiral of actions and subsequent cycles is created. This process, however, is not as logical and orderly as the model showing subsequent stages of action research suggests. Rather, it is open to the necessity of ongoing changes and corrections. When the participants accept ongoing interventions, they become free from the irrational and counterproductive constraints of social structures that adhere to unfair descriptions and interpretations of the world

[Davis 2004]. Action researchers expand the understanding of a given phenomenon and modify this phenomenon at the same time. They combine research and action, although traditionally these are two separate activities. This needs to be included in the report.

The final form of an action research project is to a large extent affected by the literature review. In the case of action research, it does not happen in isolation from data analysis. It is possible to refer to the literature during the entire span of the project. At the early stage it helps formulate the problem and might take more time and attention, but the literature should provide support throughout the process, so the researcher should go back to it repeatedly. Action research and drafting a research report are not linear activities as is the case of a traditional report or master's thesis. Some activities are repetitive, others are carried out simultaneously. It is not absolutely necessary to begin an action research project with a literature review. Tapping into the literature and conducting a data analysis at the same time can give the researcher more confidence as to their findings and conclusions. Thus, interpretations are generated thanks to the analysis of data and evidence as well as of the literature. With such an approach it is possible to use references from the literature not only at the beginning of the report, but in all its sections. In a sense, such an approach to the literature represents the reflexive nature of action research and it shows how the understanding of various phenomena developed through the literature and practice supports the process of proposing corrective measures. Each chapter can become a mix of a narrative, a literature review and data analysis [Herr, Anderson 2005]. Even the conclusions from the inquiry are presented as uncertain, indicative, as something that encourages further reflection, and not as persuasive assertions. After all, the researcher is not an omniscient judge, but a participant and a partner in uneasy attempts to fix reality.

Although the sections of a thesis based on action research may have names similar to the sections of a conventional master's thesis, the guiding principles and the language used differ. In the case of action research, the introduction to the thesis must contain a description of the entire context surrounding the problem; it shows a broader perspective than a traditional introduction. In the literature review, at least theoretically, action research is interested in the deeper meaning so as to reveal tacit knowledge concerning the analysed phenomenon. To achieve that it confronts various perspectives. The methodological part contains an overview of the philosophical assumptions and paradigms based on which the research is built and a detailed description of the data gathering process. It is a good idea to explain the intentions behind the choice of this way of engaging in exploring and changing reality. In the section presenting the data and the methods of implementing change, we construct a new reality. In a way, we are retelling the stories of people we have studied. Often, at this moment of data aggregation, the individual perspective is lost. Action research encourages the empowerment of individual voices. In the final section, the entire process is summed up and what we have found during our research can be compared from the academic perspective. In this way we can set the stakeholders' perspective in a broader social context and think about the implications of public policies and projects in an organisational context [Stringer 1999][10].

Thesis writing should enable or, even better, stimulate critical reflection. The spirally overlapping action cycles of inquiry, analysis and planning become a pretext for reflection that offers a glimpse into the future, because every iteration of planning and action is supported by retrospective reflections.

A radical approach to writing an action research master's thesis means a constant imperative of change and showing what can be done differently. It requires thinking how this piece of research can become a catalyst for a democratic process of transformation for empowerment. Can such courage and ambition be achieved at a university? Even the most ambitious changes can be introduced step by step. Courage in writing consists in constantly demanding the inclusion of excluded stories and interpretations. Eventually, maybe it will also include excluded people, forgotten issues, and organisations that could play a greater positive role than previously.

[10] The structure of a master's thesis based on action research at the Jagiellonian University is described in section 1.5 of this chapter

CHAPTER 4

THE RESEARCHER AND THEIR RELATIONSHIPS WITH (CO-) PARTICIPANTS OF ACTION RESEARCH

INTRODUCTION

This part of the book was inspired by experiences gathered in the course of the advisory process for master's theses based on action research at the Jagiellonian University in the years 2018–2019 in the Institute of Culture and the Institute of Public Affairs. It raises issues which resonated particularly loudly during the research process conducted by the students and which posed for them both a challenge in the course of the research, and a cause for in-depth reflection, and which revolved around the matters of relationships with organisations and its members.

This is also why apart from the literature review, this chapter relies to a significant degree on the experiences of students and organisations where the research was conducted, as well as the experiences of theses' advisors. While working on this chapter we drew from the results of two surveys carried out among students and representatives of organisations participating in the project – [1] in April 2018 – when students were embarking on a research process, and [2] in Q1 of 2019 – at the final stage of their work on theses. Numerous issues, especially in final sub-chapters, are based on elements of self-reflection of this book's authors who were advisors for action research-based master's theses and who participated twice in a self-evaluation study.

1. ENTANGLED IN RELATIONSHIPS

The process of writing a thesis based on action research is not an individual activity, as it is much more entangled in various relationships between the involved people and organisations than in the case of traditional research papers. This chapter will be devoted to processes of building and negotiating relationships as well as mutual expectations with people present within the process of writing a thesis based on action research, to the influence of these relationships on the quality of the process, the research and its results. In this text particular attention was devoted to the role of values such as trust, integrity and mutual respect in building relationships in an action research project.

1.1. Multiplicity of relations

The action research approach is characterised by a different understanding of the role of the researcher than in the traditional research process. In the late 1980s Stephen Kemmis and Robin McTaggart proposed a definition of action research which draws particular attention to the role of people in this process.

These researchers also emphasise that modern reflection concerning action research accentuates increasingly what is social [Kemmis, 2010, p. 46], thus highlighting the role of collective work and cooperation which is partially in line with previously known research concepts where the emphasis was placed on the figure of the researcher and their role in the research process. Drawing attention to these two aspects of action research highlights the problem of numerous entities which — passively or actively — participate in this process. What follows is the need for the researcher to interact and establish relationships with them. At the same time, it encourages especially young researchers to look at the research process a bit differently, beyond the previously used framework of the curriculum or university. Therefore, referring to concepts found in ecology, the research process — much more clearly than in traditional research approaches — seems to be an action carried out in a certain environment with which certain people are connected, as well as values they share, artefacts they manufacture and relationships between them [Holden 2015].

In the process of working on a thesis based on action research there are a lot of people with whom the researcher will interact. Starting with their advisor who will accompany the researcher throughout the process, to the organisation studied and its members, to perhaps the most complex of all, the organisation's surroundings, the environment in which it functions. Each of these groups plays a specific role in the research process, and their participation and commitment will have significant impact on the final result. A researcher who embarks on an action-based research project must face not only the challenge of identifying all people connected to their research subject, but must also build relationships with them, negotiate shared values and establish rules of cooperation which will enable carrying out research that will be relevant and valuable not only from the perspective of the researcher, but the community involved as well.

1.1.1. The role of the thesis advisor in the action research process

In the process of writing each academic thesis, the student is always accompanied by their advisor present at every stage of producing the work. Traditionally, the essential task of each advisor is providing research assistance to students who write theses, starting from the choice of the topic through discussing methodology and the research process, and finally reading and evaluating the finished work [Zenderowski 2017]. However, this role requires a more profound reflection when we consider theses based on action research where the approach to the research process is different, and the group of research participants can be much larger, or their relationships with the studied organisation and its members varied. This is pointed out by David Coghlan [2019] who emphasises the multiplicity and at the same time complexity of roles the advisor plays in the action research process. The scholar remarks that explaining the advisor's role on the basis of the classic concept of researchers' triangulation in which the research should be conducted by several individuals [Coghlan, Brydon-Miller 2014, p. 207] can be too simplistic and superficial. Instead, he proposes the concept of a *critical friend* whose role is not only supporting the student — the young researcher in conducting their study, but also and perhaps primarily stimulating their critical reflection on the phenomena observed, experiences gathered and data collected in the course of the research [Coghlan 2019].

Dialogue and discussion based on the continuous process of asking questions are crucial in a student's relationship with their advisor in the action research process [Massey, Johnson 2012]. Advisor's persistent questions, encouragement to deepen the reflection and seek answers that are not necessarily simple and obvious enable the student-author of the action research-based thesis to really explore and profoundly understand the studied organisation. Dixie Massey and Rachel Johnson emphasise that such an approach to the advisor-student relationship has an important emancipatory dimension as well.

> Before I studied strategies for conducting my own classroom research, I spend hours studying the findings of others, whose context never seemed to match my own. And while I still greatly value the research and recommendations of others, I've since learned that I too have the means to find answers for my students. [Massey, Johnson 2012, p. 2].

The key support in this process is provided by the advisor — mentor, tutor, consultant who by asking questions, inquiring about sources of young researchers' insights, give them both a theoretical and a practical framework to look for correct answers.

The role of the advisor in the process of writing a thesis based on action research was defined in a similar way by students who undertook writing such a thesis at the Jagiellonian University in 2018–2019:

> The thesis advisor plays the role of a road sign in this difficult task [AS-3]. [The role of the advisor] is delving further, asking question, pushing the work onto the right track, assisting in finding the right literature [AS-9].

It should be emphasised that often the advisor's role is determined also by different contexts in which they can be in relation to the researcher they support. These may result from their relationship with the organisation studied by the student. The advisor can be its member and thus a participant of the research process, or a complete outsider, with no ties, no direct relationship and no insight into the organisation studied. But as Vicki Stieha remarks, regardless of the context in which the critical friend operates, they should concentrate on providing

> "clarity to grey areas and bring a necessary muddiness to something that might have seemed prematurely clear" [Coghlan, Brydon-Miller 2014, p. 207].

Thus, the relationship between the student–young researcher with the advisor should be a partnership based on an ongoing conversation and free exchange of thoughts. The role of the advisor is not imposing any frame of action on the conducted research, or interpretation formulas. As Coghlan's critical friend, the advisor of a thesis based on action research is a guide, a mentor and a tutor who through their constant questions inspires and encourages the novice researcher to think critically and blaze new trails on their own, all the while making sure that the road signs indicated enable them to reach the intended destination.

1.1.2. A researcher in/with the organisation

Action research is defined as an approach where the research process is based on the cooperation between the researcher and the organisation, oriented towards problem-solving. The purpose of this process is, according to Coghlan, both solving problems important for the organisation and generating new knowledge [Coghlan 2003, p. 452]. This premise is in line with the idea of

Kurt Lewin, one of the precursors of action research who postulated "no action without research; no research without action" [Adelman 1993, p. 8]. Such an approach presumes close cooperation between the researcher and the organisation studied. This cooperation, as pointed out by action research scholars, usually consists in the researcher working closely with the client organisation in order to resolve identified problems or achieve specific goals. In this context, according to Greenwood and Levin [2007] the researcher takes on the role of a friendly external consultant who becomes deeply familiar with the studied organisation together with its members and strives for the understanding and joint resolution of particular problems. Referring to the issue of the relationship between the researcher and the organisation Coghlan [2003] introduces an additional notion of an *insider*, an action researcher who is a member or employee of the organisation studied. Contrary to classic ethnographic research, according to Coghlan, *insider* is someone connected with the organisation not only for the period of research, but permanently; a person who is deeply immersed in experiencing the organisation through regular interaction [Coghlan 2003, quoted in: Flyvbjerg 2001], and wants to improve it in the course of action research.

Both approaches — the external consultant and the insider — require the researcher to adopt certain strategies of building relationships with the organisation studied. Coghlan [2003] believes that thanks to the knowledge and experience they already have, insider-researchers are more likely to have a profound understanding of their organisation and its processes on the basis of their own experience, as opposed to external consultants who must gain and reconstruct knowledge about the organisation studied, based on interactions with it and its members during the research.. Yet despite this ostensible advantage, researcher-insiders face a different challenge — reconciling their everyday role in the organisation with the new role of the researcher. They must learn to interpret what is a daily activity for them in a different manner than before, while for external consultants the research perspective is a natural choice.

For researchers, the first challenge in the process of building relationships is the moment of entering the organisation. For external researchers, as underlined by students writing their master's theses based on action research at the Jagiellonian University,

> "bringing the researcher and the organisation closer together, changing their role from the stranger to one of the members of the community created within the organisation" [AS-7]

is often a lengthy process which requires significant effort. In this process it is essential to find the right people within the organisation, the so-called gatekeepers who will be willing to introduce the researcher into the organisation, introduce them to its members, help them become accustomed with their presence and encourage cooperation. This often requires the researcher to be patient, as well as open, flexible and have a positive attitude towards people for whom it is natural to be reserved and withhold trust at the beginning of an acquaintance.

In the case of insiders, members of the organisation studied, the task of entering the environment seems to be much easier than for external researchers. After all, they already have knowledge about the organisation, its history, existing norms and rituals, they know their co-workers and their functions well. Nevertheless, the duality of their role — member/employee of the organisation on the one hand, and the researcher on the other— can cause problems. Because the researcher faces the necessity of finding understanding and acceptance among their colleagues for their new role as well as its separation from everyday employee tasks. According to Patricia Adler and Peter Adler [1987] it often requires the insider researcher to develop new relationships with not necessarily their closest colleagues, or perhaps to change the nature of their existing relationship, as well as a stronger involvement in the life of the organisation than before.

In the context of various backgrounds of researchers conducting action research, Coghlan indicated two different approaches to them: the so-called mechanistic approach, oriented towards solving specific, pre-defined problems of the organisation, usually carried out in collaboration with external researchers, and the organic approach which — apart from problem-solving pushed somewhat to the back burner — aims at gaining knowledge about the organisation and regarding the research process as a value in and of itself [Coghlan 2003, pp. 252–254]. Coghlan [2001] believes that the organic approach to action research is oriented towards the process of long-term and profound change in the organisation, aimed at its improvement.

1.1.3. External environment of the organisation

Depending on the selected type of action research and approach, the researcher faces the dilemma related to specifying who, from the perspective of research objectives, should be involved, who will be the participant of the conducted actions and who will be affected by them. This issue takes on particular significance especially when the conducted research project relates to the issues which are important not just for the internal community of a given organisation, but which have a broader social dimension (cf. critical participatory action research). Referring to the classics of management we can state that the researcher in this situation deals with numerous external and internal stakeholders of the organisation studied. R. Edward Freeman used this term to indicate

"Any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives" [Freeman 1984, p. 25].

Stakeholders also include people affected by a particular organisation – its customers, collaborators, local community in which the studied organisation operates. In this situation the researcher encounters the internal and the external environment created together by very different people and organisations, and their opinions often reflect very different points of view, expectations and interpretations of the reality around them [Hynes, Coghlan, McCarron 2012].

The task of identifying groups and people who are connected to the studied organisation, form its external environment and who should be included in the action research process is a considerable challenge for the researcher. It requires the researcher to have deep understanding of the organisation and its relationship with its environment. But these aspects are not always clear. Naturally, the researcher will see in the foreground entities whose impact on the organisation is the strongest, such as clients or the most frequent recipients of the organisation's activities. Entities with a weaker impact on the organisation will be less visible to the researcher. This applies to both internal and external environment and stakeholders of the organisation.

The process of identifying, particularly external stakeholders of the organisation important from the perspective of the research will often require the researcher to be determined, insightful and open to what happens around them. While the researcher will encounter internal stakeholders — employees of the organisation studied — during subsequent visits, identifying stakeholders who belong to its external environment will require the researcher to conduct an in-depth analysis of the organisation's operations, and often also to participate in them in order to meet the local community personally. For example, if the researcher conducts action research in a museum, they should participate in current openings, go and see available exhibitions as a visitor, or attend possible open lectures or workshops. Thus, they can see for themselves who really benefits from the museum's offer, interact with those people and learn their opinions. Perhaps these people will be willing to get actively involved in the museum action research project and thus contribute to the improvement of this organisation.

1.2. Building and negotiating relationships with the organisation in an action research project

Building a relationship with internal and external stakeholders of an organisation participating in action research can be considered the key to its success. Ross E. Gray et al. [2000] point out that action research is essentially based on various relationships built between the researcher and research (co-)participants representing various interest groups in the research. Their type and quality have unquestioned influence on the final result of the research work.

This assumption of collectiveness is an important feature of action research. This means that contrary to research conducted within the positivist stream, the researcher establishes relationships with members of the organisation studied not only to collect information from them, but above all to actively include them in the research process. Building a team for the researcher to collaborate with — which should be a collective process as well — requires them to understand relationships, structures, and various roles fulfilled by people in organisations. Erving Goffman [2000] emphasises that roles of people in organisations and their consequences can vary, and understanding them requires an in-depth reflection. Establishing relationships skilfully with members of the organisation studied , and building a team together with them is, from the standpoint of action research, extremely important for the success of the project, regardless of its objectives. Issues concerning the identification of shared values, as well as norms and rules that will govern the functioning of the team considered as a research community are crucial for this process.

1.2.1. Identification and analysis of stakeholders

Embarking on an action research project the researcher must face the task of identifying individuals, groups and organisations which will be directly or indirectly affected by the project. The process entails the need to identify resources, the level of impact and the scope of power of particular stakeholders, as these will surely affect the course of the research and its results. The purpose of this action is not only gaining better understanding of the environment of the organisation studied, but also initiating participation processes which will mark further course of the research.

As Jacques Chevalier and Daniel Buckles [2013] emphasise, the very process of stakeholder identification and analysis can be communal, as the scholars claim that subsequently discovered individuals and interest groups can, or even should be included in the process by the researcher. An example of this action was the project focused on preventing evictions on the outskirts of Mumbai [Buckles at al 2013] when residents of a Mumbai slum designed and carried out the project together with the researchers. In that project residents in danger of eviction by corporate developers decided to gather arguments and evidence to convince local authorities to stop the demolition of homes of thousands of people in the area. Older residents took it upon themselves to identify all people in danger of losing the roof over their heads and collecting documents confirming the legality of their settlement in the neighbourhood. In the course of this action, they also discovered numerous entrepreneurs and NGOs interested in participating in the project and protecting their premises. Similar actions were undertaken by the researchers from CARUDEP (Catholic Archdiocesan Rural and Urban Development Programme) who, as part of the action research project dedicated to the adaptation to climate changes occurring in the region, together with the villagers from Kwaikong in Nigeria, created a map of stakeholders — both those influenced by these changes and those who could influence them [Nigerian Environmental Study/Action Team (NEST), Woodley 2011].

Chevalier and Buckles [2013] suggest various strategies of identifying stakeholders in action research projects:

- Strategy based on opinions of experts, e.g. researchers, members of the organisation studied who have extensive knowledge about the organisation's environment, so they can indicate key stakeholders for the project;
- Strategy based on the researcher's own selection. Relying on the analysis of the organisation's operations and by organising open meetings for everyone interested in the project, the researcher selects their (co-) participants in the research;
- The snowball strategy, in which the researcher invites two or three people to the project who, in turn, are asked to indicate the next people who should be included, and those people suggest more participants whose contribution they deem valuable for the success of the action research project;
- Strategy based on widely available data and records. This enables the researcher to take a comprehensive look at the community studied and invite the representatives of all groups that form it to the project.

The next stage of the stakeholder analysis process is characterizing them. Researchers advise that it should be based on three categories: legitimisation of action, level of power and level of interest in the problem [Reid 2000; Chevalier, Buckles 2013; Coghlan, Brydon-Miller 2014]. In this way, the researcher can determine what impact particular stakeholders may have on the conducted project and then, how to build relationships with them.

1.2.2. Building a relationship: challenges and action strategies

The process of building relationships always involves the issue of identifying shared values around which mutual relations can be shaped. The value which is the most pronounced in the context of action research is trust. Researchers emphasise that trust is, in fact, the foundation of valuable action research. According to Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt [2005, p. 54] "honesty, and respect are pre-conditions of the search for truth/truths."

As we have already underlined, very often the researcher is an outsider, so they must first earn the trust of the members of the organisation participating in the research. This process is not easy. Reid [2000] emphasises that often the researcher is automatically assigned the role of a consultant — supplier of certain services which imposes a certain distance between them and the (co-) participants of the research. That is why establishing rules of cooperation and identifying shared values at the very beginning of the process is so important for its development. However, there is no single pattern this process should follow. Based on the challenges most commonly encountered by researchers, Jill Grant, Geoffrey Nelson and Terry Mitchell [2008] propose several action strategies that support building relationships with action research (co-)participants. They are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Building relationships: challenges, action strategies and competences of a researcher

Challenges	Action strategies	Necessary competences of the researcher
Mistrust for outside researchers	Openness and honesty	Communication skills
Inadequate preparation of researchers to conduct the research	Formalization of the cooperation (contract, agreement)	Ability to conduct an honest and open dialogue
	Gaining the most comprehensive knowledge possible about the community studied	Social competences, including especially empathy
	Building informal relations	
	Maintaining regular contact with the organisation	

Source: own work based on Grant, Nelson and Mitchell [2008].

What is crucial in building relationships with members of the studied community is basing the relationship on openness and honesty which allow to clearly state mutual expectations from the very start. This process can be formal and take the form of agreements (e.g. an agreement on information and data confidentiality, an agreement specifying mutual expectations and obligations of the parties), or it can be worked out naturally and informally within daily exchanges. It should be emphasised that building relationships with stakeholders, based on mutual trust and honesty, according to Grant, Nelson and Mitchell [2008], supports true involvement of the employees of the organisation studied and the local community, their empowerment, as well as democratisation of the entire research process, which is an equally important objective of action research.

Often establishing details of the relationship between the researcher and study participants does not occur during their first meeting, as it necessitates taking action aiming at identifying "[...] issues and problems in action research which require an ethical code of practice to be negotiated between the researcher and the participants" [Meyer 2000, p. 9]. This, in turn, certainly requires time and thus also patience. Apart from familiarising oneself with the organisation through traditional methods like analysis of documents and websites, regular meetings with members of the organization, informal conversations and clearly communicated willingness to get to know each other by people who are to cooperate in the research are definitely conducive to this process. The frequency of contacts of the researcher with members of the organisation is an individual issue influenced by e.g. the level of hierarchisation of the organisation or mutual relationships between its members. For example, the researcher should use the opportunity to attend both formal, weekly meetings of the members of the organisation, and — if possible — informal occasions, like having a meal together or going out for a coffee after work. This will allow the researcher to become a member of the group with which they will be working within the research.

Often processes of building relationships can be regarded as a waste of time, since instead of conducting actual research activities drawn from traditional methodological approaches, the researcher spends time on meetings, informal conversations or exchanging pleasantries. However, the time used for strengthening bonds will pay off in the future when the process of solving together the problem identified in the organisation begins.

1.3. Research community

The idea of participation in action research is understood by researchers as conducting joint research or conducting studies with people and not on people

— the latter is typical for positivist research [Hynes, Coghlan, McCarron 2012 quoted in: Reason, Bradbury 2008]. The important issue is that the phenomenon of participation in action research is considered as more profound than mere participation in a certain action. Geraldyn Hynes, David Coghlan and Mary McCarron [2012] point out that assuming the epistemological approach, collective participatory process of conducting action research is characterised by all participants understanding the process in which they are involved, and the fact that meanings are given to the observed phenomena together — and not only from the perspective of the knowledge and experience of the leading researcher. By emphasising this as the principal idea behind action research, Albert Cherns, Peter Clark and William Jenkins [1976, p. 35] challenge "the position of the social scientist as privileged observer, analyst, and critic."

Participation according to this definition means full involvement combined with mutual understanding and acceptance of diversity and competences of the process participants. The characteristic feature of action research is acknowledging the capability of every process participant to carry out every stage of the research, and accepting their right to make decisions, especially those which can influence their future in the organisation. In this sense, according to Kemmis [2008] action research has a socio-political dimension.

By adopting this assumption and understanding of participation, the researcher embarking on action research decides to co-create a research community in which they will be involved at each stage of the research process. Together, they form a particular community of practice. Yonthan Mirzahi defines it as a group of people who are involved in a certain action to both solve a specific problem and for mutual learning through regular interactions and exchange of thoughts [Coghlan, Brydon-Miller 2014, p. 135]. Going a step further in the attempt to define the community of practice, and referring to the organisation studies and knowledge management theory, we can present it as a community of people who not only share their passion and willingness to solve certain problems, but they also want to expand their knowledge through mutual community learning [Jeon, Kim, Koh 2011].

The characteristic feature of each community of practice is collecting, producing and exchanging knowledge together. For numerous researchers this is even more important in action research than solving a specific problem [Coghlan 2001]. Processes of exchange between (co-)participants of the research can occur overtly and directly, as well as unconsciously and indirectly, when various tasks are performed together. It should be clearly emphasised that the advantage of research communities comes from acknowledging their great diversity in terms of the knowledge, education and practical experience they have. Awareness and acceptance of this fact definitely allows for enriching the research process. Naturally, for the researcher it means the need to acknowledge that their competences are no better or more important than those that other community members have, and only when combined, they form a particular added value which determines the exceptional usefulness of action research, both for the world of science as well as for management practitioners. Fully tapping into the potential of research communities often depends on with whom and how we, as researchers, build relationships in the environment of the organisation participating in the research.

In recent decades many new technologies and IT tools have emerged which, from the practical point of view, significantly facilitate researchers creating and managing research practices. With increasing frequency researchers use the Internet, as well as social networking platforms, e.g. Facebook (which allows for creating a shared discussion group), or tools for storing and sharing resources (like Dropbox which facilitates file sharing), as well as Blogger (which enables sharing the record of one's reflections with other users, and engaging them in a discussion). Considering the fact that often members of a research community represent various interest groups or even organisations, which poses a logistical difficulty to holding regular meetings, using the Internet enables staying in touch and regular exchange of thoughts which is crucial for the essence of the research community.

2. ETHICAL ASPECTS OF ACTION RESEARCH

Both the process of collecting information, and its application require researchers to act according to the so-called best research practices, i.e. taking into account ethical principles of conducting scientific research. Every researcher encounters numerous dilemmas and ethical challenges in their practice; it is an inevitable part of the work. As Jakub Niedbalski emphasises [2016, p. 15]

> an intrinsic aspect of social scientists' work is moral asymmetry which means that they find themselves in an ethically ambiguous situation. On the one hand, scientists try to achieve the best possible result of their research, but on the other hand, they must constantly struggle with numerous difficulties resulting from direct contact with research participants.

This is why the researcher is tasked with the particular responsibility of maintaining balance between acquiring information necessary for the research process and respecting the rights of the people participating in the research [Stec 2005].

Telling examples of the role of ethics and morality in conducting research are provided by universally known experiments carried out by Stanley Milgram or Philip Zimbardo, which inspired a wave of criticism from experts on ethics and the scientific community.

It should be pointed out that the characteristic feature of research conducted in social sciences is the duality of the researcher's role. On the one hand the researcher is an observer, but on the other hand, a participant of the surrounding social reality. In the work of a researcher taking up action research, due to the high level of interaction between the researcher and research participants which is typical for this process, these aspects become particularly pronounced. Ethical sensitivity marks especially studies in which participants share their emotions, experiences, needs or motivations. Subjects discussed in the course of such research often include very intimate issues from participants' private lives, so it requires the researcher to approach them gingerly and delicately. Often the research results in acquiring sensitive and confidential information which prompt the researcher to reflect on the way it is used and possible consequences of such use.

At the turn of the century researchers made the effort to define the rules of scientific conduct which could help them to maintain balance between quality and reliability of the research, and the well-being and comfort of another person — the research participant. For this purpose, they created various systems and ethical codes which were supposed to serve as signposts. This subject, as well as ethical aspects of collecting, processing and presenting data collected in the course of the research will be discussed in this section. We will also point out potential consequences of the researcher's actions, both for the organisation and individual research participants. To illustrate the discussed issues, we will feature examples of ethical dilemmas encountered by students carrying out action research project at the Jagiellonian University.

2.1. Selected ethical systems

Honesty and moral integrity are desirable qualities in all human activities. Science is not an exception in this regard. In the most general sense, we could say that ethics is an area of study devoted to discussing what is "good" and "right", and what is "evil" and "unacceptable." The framework of this evaluation is traditionally determined by various disciplines, primarily philosophy, as well as religion. Even before the study begins, every researcher faces the dilemma concerning how to carry out research to ensure the protection of their own rights and safety, as well as the rights and safety of the research subject, participants and other members of the community.

The concept of ethics according to Aristotle was based on the quest for good. In the introduction to *Nicomachean Ethics,* his greatest work, the philosopher emphasises that

> Every art and every investigation, and likewise every practical pursuit or undertaking, seems to aim at some good: hence it has been well said that the Good is That at which all things aim [Aristotle 1990, 1094a].

His definition of ethics stems to a large extent from the theory of being he developed, as well as from practical observations. It should be emphasised that according to the philosopher human souls are exceptional and unique, so good is a subjective concept influenced by many different factors. Therefore, not everyone can be satisfied.

> For the goodness or efficiency of a flute-player or sculptor or craftsman of any sort, and in general of anybody who has some function or business to perform, is thought to reside in that function; and similarly it may be held that the good of man resides in the function of man, if he has a function [Aristotle 1990, 1097b25].

Aristotle understood good and virtue as striving for the perfection of the soul. He believed that achieving lasting happiness and virtue (*eudaimonia*) is possible only when the soul reaches the optimal form for a given individual.

In his work, he outlined a path he thought people who want to achieve ultimate happiness should follow. In his deliberations, Aristotle attempted to prove the relationship between virtuous life and happiness. In his view, only the ability of practical reasoning combined with virtue can allow people to achieve wellbeing. However, we should point out that for Aristotle ethics was more than knowledge about what is good; it was, above all, the ability to manifest good with one's own life and everyday actions.

Another great philosopher, Immanuel Kant, constructed his ethical system in a similar fashion, starting with defining the notion of "good".

> Nothing can possibly be conceived in the world, or even out of it, which can be called good without qualification, except a *good will* [Kant, 2005, p. 55].

However, unlike Aristotle, Kant's deliberations led him to different conclusions, both in terms of the structure and content of the ethical system he proposed.

The notion of good will which Kant proclaimed throughout his entire life became the foundation of his ethics. This view resulted from his attempts to combine into a coherent whole the postulates of ancient philosophers — the ethics of Plato and Epicureans. Plato claimed that good exists objectively and it should be judged based on objective criteria. Kant rejected this proposition as he believed that overlooking motives of human actions was the ancient philosopher's great mistake. He similarly rejected the Epicurean view that the main motivation of human behaviour is the pursuit of pleasure [Piotrowski n.d.]. For Kant none of the attributes of either body or mind — which significantly distinguishes his system for Plato's views – possess moral value in and of itself. They have value only when they are combined with good will. Kant emphasised that what distinguishes ethical conduct is our human autonomy and freedom, both in establishing moral principles and living up to them in our everyday lives.

He believed that moral rights, like any other laws, should be absolutely imposed on all people. According to him, these laws should take the form of a categorical imperative. The basis of the imperative should be composed of three fundamental moral principles:

> never to act otherwise than so that I could at the same time will that my maxim should be a universal law (...) So act as to treat humanity, whether in thine own person or in that of any other, in every case as an end withal, never as a means only. [...]
> Act according to maxims of a universally legislating member of a merely possible kingdom of ends. (...). [Kant, 2005]

Categorical imperative introduced by Kant established the ultimate criterion for judgement which applies to the strict definition of morality understood as a distinguishing feature of a human being, and if we were to suitably reformulate the criterion — to morality in the general sense [Piotrowski, n.d.].

Yet another view of ethics is proposed by John Stewart Mill who begins his greatest work *Utilitarianism* with the following words:

> From the dawn of philosophy, the question concerning the summum bonum, or, what is the same thing, concerning the foundation of morality, has been accounted the main problem in speculative thought [...]." [Mill, 2000, p. 7]

Like Aristotle, Mill founded the edifice of his thought on the observation of the reality around him and on science.

> The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals, Utility, or the Greatest Happiness Principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure. [Mill 2000, p. 14]

According to Mill, utilitarianism can be both altruistic and selfish. Meanwhile, the foundation of human happiness is the ability to achieve balance between peace and strong emotions sought out by human curiosity. Interestingly enough, Mill believes action is more important that the motive. If, for instance, someone saves another person to be able to torture them later, this does not taint the act of saving, as torturing is a separate, evil action [Napierała, 2014].

John Mill emphasises that while judging pleasure it would be ridiculous to consider only its quantity without taking its quality into account.

If those who are adequately familiar with both pleasures favour one over the other so much that they prefer it even though they know that pursuing it will leave them greatly unsatisfied, yet they would not be willing to relinquish it for the biggest possible dose that can be experienced of the other one, then we are justified to acknowledge the qualitative superiority of the chosen pleasure whose quality outweighs the quantity of the other so much that the quantity in question, in comparison, loses its importance. [Winiarczyk, Górniak 2006].

According to Mill, moral feelings are not inherent, and utilitarian ethics is an individual issue, although society is inextricably linked with the existence of individuals. It is worth paying attention to Mill's approach to the ethics of justice, which the philosopher considers as uncertain, as everyone understands justice subjectively. Similarly, Mill treats the principle of intention and harm as well as the fiction of the social contract as not particularly apt ideas of philosophers attempting to uphold the premises of the ethics of justice. Considering the commonly known 'an eye for an eye' principle to be an example of uncertain ethics, Mill believes that the rightness of an action can be determined in a sense only by its social utility.

Action research can be treated as a joint approach of the researcher and (co-)participants of the research to the issue of morality, decision-making process and professed values. These premises reflect the views of major philosophers: respect for knowledge and experiences of others expressed by Aristotle and Kant, involvement in democratic processes postulated by Mill, as well as the involvement for greater equality and social justice in communities studied.

The featured ethical systems represent various outlooks on the issues of ethics and decision-making processes. Exploring them, as well as numerous others which could not be fitted in this book, should be the base for the researcher's reflection on their own conduct, as well as inspiration for discussion with research (co-)participants on their practice within the action research project.

2.2. Ethics as a common concern

Mary Brydon-Miller [2008] points out that in their work action researchers encounter numerous difficult issues that require in-depth ethical reflection. She invokes Susan Noffke's definition of action research stating that it is

"a moral and ethical stance that recognizes the improvement of human life as a goal" [Brydon-Miller 2008, quotes in: Noffke, 1995, p. 4],

to emphasise that action research is not only a classic research process based on collecting and analysing data concerning a given subject, but first and foremost a form of morally committed action aiming at improving the situation of specific people and organisations they form. As idealistic as Brydon-Miller's vision of action research may seem, it highlights an extremely important issue of the need for an in-depth reflection on ethical and moral aspects of the researcher's work.

The participatory aspect of action research further makes ethical issues more than just the researcher's problem; they become a common cause for all people involved in the process. Therefore, it seems to be critical in this context to not only jointly define important values shared by the participants, but above all, to agree on their common understanding. Boser [2006] and Brydon-Miller [2008] emphasise that only this approach to research ethics can be considered as an indication of the willingness to democratise the research process. Only understanding that the need for ethical reflection goes beyond the researcher's individual actions and their particular research efforts enables building comprehensive relationships within and between communities, organisations and their members involved in the research process.

Treating ethics as a common concern requires researchers to be more sensitive to such issues as social justice, or cultural differences and their impact on the approach of the participants of the research process to ethical challenges which they will be facing at various stages of the research. Attention must be paid at all times to ethical implications of their work, as action researchers aim at introducing positive changes in analysed systems and engage in repeated cycles of action and reflection which determine their practice. Researchers emphasise that the foundation of covenantal ethics between the researcher and research (co-) participants should be built on the following premises [Brydon-Miller 2009; Hilsen 2006; Reason, Bradbury 2008]:

- experiences of marginalised groups are significant for designing and conducting the research, as well as analysing the obtained results;
- one must be aware of the influence of subjective knowledge (of the researcher and the participants) on ethical and moral aspects of the conducted research;
- power relations within the studied environment constitute an important part of the research;
- when conducting action research, we should aim at achieving social justice.

Knud Ejler Løgstrup, whose views AR scholars invoke, developed a concept according to which people are "handed over" to one another so there is no possibility to objectively indicate the limit of kindness and care for another human being, because individual conscience is the only authority passing judgement in this instance, and the "ethical demand" concerning the care for our fellow human beings is inexpressible, unlimited and unverifiable [Coghlan, Brydon-Miller 2014, p. 195]. These views, even if they may sound a little radical, became the basis of creating the concept of an "ethical covenant" in the field of action research, the authorship of which is attributed to William May [1980]. It should be understood as an agreement between everyone involved in the action research project, that regulates how to deal with ethical issues that may arise in its course.

In practice, the researcher taking up action research should consider three crucial issues: (1) how the concept of the research is conceived, (2) how to ensure that the established ethical agreement is understood and accepted by everyone, (3) how the research team actually deals with ethical issues emerging during the research project. The researcher plays an extremely important role in this process, as the person who is responsible for explaining to other team members what action research is, what their roles will be in the project and the responsibility it entails. This also relates to such questions as, for example, indicating who will be responsible for conducting surveys and organising meetings with stakeholders, or who will be preparing reports from meetings of the research team each time. When carrying out these tasks we should be particularly sensitive to the issues of power and situation of marginalised groups and people who are, even if unwittingly, left out in the assignment of tasks, while their involvement could significantly impact their level of activity in the project and support the struggle for social justice.

We should also remember that the content of the "ethical covenant" can change in the course of action research which can result from facts newly discovered in the process or stem from the analysis of research results. This requires researcher's constant attention and sensitivity to issues arising during the project.

Anna Inga Hilsen points out [Coghlan, Brydon-Miller 2014, p. 196] that action research is a joint exploration of an unknown landscape in which both the researcher and research participants make a significant contribution to building knowledge on the relevant subject. Covenantal ethics means the constant need of verification and scrutiny of what they experience together and how these experiences impact them. The awareness of these processes is extremely important for the success of action research, especially if we care for their truly participatory dimension.

2.3. Selected examples of ethical problems occurring in action research

The literature devoted to research ethics in social sciences indicate several major rules which researchers should follow [Babbie 2006; Czajkowska, Hinc 2005; Chomczyński 2006]. They include:

- the necessity of obtaining permission of the participants to take part in the research project combined with the researcher's obligation to give them full information on the process itself, as well as the method of further analysis and presentation of the collected information;
- the necessity of ensuring full comfort to the participants, especially confidentiality of the provided information, and not acting to the detriment of the participants;
- not allowing for deliberate omissions or manipulations in the process of collecting and analysing the research material.

What is important, the indicated obligations apply not only to research participants, but also to the research community which the researcher represents. Despite certain obviousness of the presented ethical rules that researchers should follow, in practice, they are often a stimulus for additional reflection, since these are issues which we often encounter. Due to the participatory and involving character of action research, often in their course these problems become much more pronounced than during "traditional" research.

Example 1

In her research Sue Gair focused on experiences of adoptive parents, looking both at adoption processes in which they participated, and their first experiences with the new members of their families. The researcher decided to hear out their numerous emotional personal stories and share with them the difficulties and joys they encountered on the path to adoption [Gair, 2002].

When conducting research, researchers spend a lot of time in the organisation, create bonds with its employees, often participate both in its daily routine and in special events and various celebrations. Thus, they acquire vast knowledge about its functioning and with time start to understand also its customs and rituals. Intense time spent in the organisation can make a researcher feel like they are its member, so they start to empathise with other employees, share their everyday emotions, joys as well as concerns related to their work and the functioning of the organisation. On the one hand this can make collecting research material significantly easier, as the researcher treated by employees as "one of them" meets with more trust and openness. But on the other hand, this entails the risk of blurring lines between the role of the researcher and the member/employee of the organisation. Therefore, in the research process the researcher must face the dilemma of how to deal with these emotions. How can they be used in the research work, without losing detachment necessary for analysing data, or without hurting research participants? How to find the right distance between researcher's and participants' emotions on the one side, and the analysis of the collected material on the other?

The researcher experiencing strong emotions, as Krzysztof Konecki [2000], among others, notes, is nothing extraordinary in field research. They can be triggered by various factors: researcher's involvement in a particular situation, witnessing a difficult event, or the need to make a decision which will significantly affect research participants. This is why feelings that accompany the researcher in the process often include "aversion, anger, or pity for the members of the observed group" [Konecki 2000, p. 152]. It inherently raises the question of whether, and if so — how much emotion the researcher can allow themselves to feel . There is no simple answer, but it is certain that experiencing emotions is typical for every research process which involves human interaction. Ewa Nowicka [2005, p. 194] emphasises that "without a certain emotional range, it would be difficult to expect the understanding of feelings, motivations, desires, ambitions and impressions other than our own, which we encounter in different cultures."

Clifford Geertz, as well [2003, p. 39] writes that

> in anthropological fieldwork [and this is primarily what we deal with in action research — author's note], detachment is neither a natural gift nor a manufactured talent. It is a partial achievement laboriously earned and precariously maintained. What little disinterestedness one manages to attain comes not from failing to have emotions or neglecting to perceive them in others, nor yet from sealing oneself into a moral vacuum.

Both the nature and the intensity of these emotions change during the research process. The deeper we delve into the organisation's reality, the more we get to know its employees and the closer we become, the more emotions intensify, making it increasingly difficult for the researcher to keep their distance and maintain emotional neutrality. Sometimes researchers perceive these emotions as a bad thing, an obstacle to the research process, in particular to the analysis of the collected material. However, Konecki [2000, p. 152], an experienced researcher himself, remarks that

> emotions themselves are nothing wrong and feeling them during observations seems not only natural, but advisable, as a tool for an in-depth immersion into the life of the studied community.

Obviously, these emotions should not dominate in research activities, or we risk unintended manipulation in describing the studied reality. But they should not be shunned altogether either. They can become valuable research material which the researcher can successfully use in the analysis of the collected material. Jakub Niedbalski [2016] emphasises that emotions often make it easier for researchers to understand situations in which they participate, and to grasp nuances of interactions between members of the organisation studied.

Example 2

Rachel Jewkes and her associates decided to study the problem of rape in South Africa and Namibia. They invited to the study mothers and daughters who went through that traumatic experience. Although initially the researchers had the impression of a wall of silence and shame existing among research participants, after it was overcome, the research, in particular gatherings of its participants, became more of a group therapy which helped them cope with difficult experiences [Jewkes et al. 2012].

A research journal, described in more detail in section 3.2 of this monograph is an enormously useful tool for dealing with emotions in the research process. It provides a space where the researcher can freely write down situations and events experienced, together with the description of accompanying feelings. The important thing is that usually the research journal has the form of personal notes which nobody else is given access to. From the research perspective it ensures the confidentiality of information pertaining to the organisation participating in the research. Pouring emotions on paper or screen of a journal provides an outlet. Returning to these notes after some time, at the stage of analysing the collected material, enables the researcher to look at the experienced emotions and interpret them from a distance as appropriate for research work. Then it will be easier to analyse the recorded feelings not only in the context of individual experiences, but what is equally important, through the perspective of the organisational reality which is the subject of the analysis.

Example 3

During action research conducted among drug addicts in New York, Eloise Dunlap and her team decided to pay out small sums of money to its participants in exchange for being interviewed. Even though initially drug addicts were motivated to participate in the project by money, eventually the opportunity to tell their story in a safe environment, without harsh judgement typical for support centres known to them, turned out to be of much greater value than money [Dunlap et al., 1990].

Although it is not always immediately visible, the studied communities vary greatly. The researcher's deep understanding of the organisation and identifying real and important problems worth solving to improve its functioning requires establishing relationships with the representatives of all social groups that form it, not only the dominant ones. The larger the organisation, the greater its internal diversity. Diversity can be analysed considering the hierarchy of positions and resulting relationships between people, by looking at the structure of education, gender, sexual orientation, skin colour, religious denomination, or nationality. These are just few examples of criteria used for assessing diversity within an organisation. Usually in the process of exploring the organisation, the researcher first meets members of dominant groups, as its representatives are willing to act, they feel confident in their role and often want to mark their presence through their activities. It is a challenge for the researcher to reach minorities, marginalised groups whose voice is not as loud and whose members have numerous concerns about stepping out of line and sharing their experiences, insights and ideas. Learning the needs of these groups in the organisation and involving them in the action research project can be extremely valuable for the researcher in the context of fulfilling project objectives — identifying real problems, suggesting their solutions and thus aiming at improving the organisation. Challenges which researchers wanting to involve marginalised groups must face usually relate to building trust, keeping participant data confidential, not allowing for the stigmatisation of these people or manipulation of the collected data.

Example 4

Research conducted by Erich Goode among Fat Civil Rights organisations provoke much discussion among researchers. Goode admitted to having sexual relations with participants of the research, and one of them became pregnant as a result [Goode, 2002].

Often ethical dilemmas among researchers concern the level of their involvement in the relationships with research participants. The rather extreme example 4 presented above illustrates these quandaries. In such cases, the researcher as well as the academic environment they represent start asking questions about the level of scientific rigor in the conducted project, the reliability of its results, and above all, whether the researcher's conduct was appropriate when trying to achieve the intended result. According to Konecki [2000] research practice shows that the will to gain knowledge about particular nuances and phenomena of a given environment requires the researcher to really delve deep into it. The researcher who experiences intense familiarity with the participants has much greater opportunity to enter and empathise with the situation which is the subject of scientific inquiry. Thanks to this, as Izabela Ślężak [2009] believes, the researcher has foundations for more thorough interpretation and more detailed understanding of events in a given environment, and to discover mechanisms driving behaviours of their participants. Nevertheless, the level of intimacy between the researcher and other participants should be subject to careful reflection, especially with regard to possible harm the researcher could cause to people who have decided to trust them.

3. HOPE AND FUTURE

For the advisors and students of the 2nd cycle studies in culture and media management at the Jagiellonian University, the advisory process and conducting action research, respectively, were completely new experiences. We had to face all difficulties and challenges together, which was not always easy. We often felt like we were stumbling around in the dark. But we experienced many good moments and celebrated small successes, as well, especially when "striving for change" and "problem solving" — key words which emerge at the beginning of the project — really did happen.

This chapter was supposed to point out the most common dilemmas plaguing student-researchers conducting their first — and hopefully not the last, action research projects. But this process was not the attempt to tackle the organisation — an entity seemingly familiar from management theory, which in reality turned out to be a mystery. Despite numerous obstacles and difficulties, now, going through completed master's theses based on action research, we see this process as a period of hope and consideration of the past; both by young researchers and participating organisations. It was also a time of hope for us — advisors of action research-based theses who see this process as an opportunity to change the way of thinking about the role of a researcher in the organisation, and who look for meaning in their didactic work in higher education.

In our opinion as advisors, young people taking up action research during over a year-long cooperation with organisations experienced change, although they were not always aware of that. The process of getting to know the organisation can be described as "safe". From numerous handbooks and academic literature students of management and social policy learn what organisations are and what their characteristics are, they participate in meetings with representatives of various organisations which share their experience, and they participate in student internships themselves. But all these processes are controlled — due to the supervision of a professor and thanks to the kindness of various organisational partners of the university. The opportunity to write a master's thesis based on action research gave the students a chance for something new — experiencing the organisation as a living organism in its proper environment which turned out to be completely beyond the control of either the advisor-professor or students. Young student researchers found themselves in an ostensibly familiar, and yet strange organisational reality whose representatives, despite declared willingness to participate in the project, did not always make their work easier. Organisations often turned out to be unpredictable, difficult, and getting to know them resembled a frantic stagecoach ride across the Wild West, where the only safe haven was the research journal to pour out one's emotions, or the office of an advisor who tried to help in navigating this difficult terrain.

Stories of young researchers show that the process of working with an organisation was a difficult experience. Not everyone emerged victorious and completed their research projects. But we could see that each researcher experienced the desire for a critical reflection on the organisational reality. It was not always in-depth, but even the researchers' attempt to understand their experiences in the organisation is a signal that the project was meaningful. These experiences were certainly humbling for students, highlighting their limitations and imperfections, and showing the need for continuing learning and reflecting on events in which they participated. The initial conviction that the previously acquired academic knowledge would be their strong asset showed that it does not always "win" against the experience of practitioners, and cooperation between these two worlds could be the key to success.

Thanks to the action research project, change affected not only student researchers, but also organisations where these projects were carried out. Even the willingness to open up to the idea of cooperation and conducting research was a seed of change. On the one hand it was surely an expression of curiosity and the will to participate in something new, but on the other hand it could be interpreted as a sense of responsibility toward one's organisation and supporting its development. Expectations of organisations' toward young researchers, as well as AR, varied and were not always mutually aligned. Students did not necessarily have specialist knowledge and experience required for conducting advanced research, which organisations expected. Another challenge was employees of organisations who, despite initial openness, turned out to be in many cases distrustful and reluctant to cooperate in terms of sharing knowledge and experiences. Not always could these obstacles be successfully eliminated, and the communal action research process fully completed. However, time spent by the most resilient researchers in organisations enabled them to gradually build trust among employees who, with time, started to open up, to cooperate, share their reflections on the surrounding reality and express willingness to strengthen bonds and develop the community they started to form not only with the researcher but with one another, as well. The execution of action research had an emancipatory dimension not only for students and young researchers, but also for employees of the organisations studied who often only in the course of the project had the opportunity to share their thoughts on their work, and the chance to at least have a conversation. In some cases, there was also opportunity for actual action which improved their work environment, or the effectiveness of the activities conducted.

Will these experiences be used by students and organisations participating in the project in the future and how? At the time of writing this book we do not have the answer to this question. Only the hope remains that indeed, experiences from the execution of action research projects enabled students to improve their expertise, both as researchers and as competent employees of organisations who can not only easily find their way around their future workplace, but also have the knowledge and competences which facilitate understanding this reality.

Meanwhile, for the organisation it will contribute to continued in-depth reflection on its development, and in the purely human dimension — a reason to pay more attention to the condition of individuals in its ranks and the possibilities to improve it.

CONCLUSION

Dear Students,
Modern organisations experience numerous problems which require interventions. This is an opportunity for you: young go-getters who can bring in a breath of fresh air these institutions need. Action research discussed in this book can assist you in this task. It is a wonderful time for such action within the university that is currently opening to establishing relations with its external environment. Action research is a bridge between the world of academia and the reality of other organisations. Together, we can use it to change the world for the better!

Action research gives you, and academic teachers, a chance for more pragmatic education. But what we mean by that is not the subjugation of learning processes to the requirements of the job market. Just like for the experts studying higher education [e.g. Alvesson 2013; Wright, Shore 2017], for us, too, the idea that the university should primarily meet the needs of the market is an illusion. University is an institution with the potential to resist, and its fundamental mission is democratization of the social life, including enabling us to develop critical reflection [Freire 2018]. We would like you to become critically thinking citizens responsible for the common good, and not manipulated consumers oriented towards the fulfilment of selfish interests. Let us be those who take responsibility for the public space and their political choices.

Action research can help us become better citizens, as well as more conscious agents of change. As we try to show in this book, action research enables democratic inclusion of various social stakeholders in the process of organisational change. Together with your teachers you can work with employers, to learn withe them how to solve organisational problems. This process can be beneficial to everyone — you can learn new ideas from one another.

Action research gives us the opportunity for joint participation in the democratic dialogue with other people for the purpose of developing solutions oriented towards the common good. This approach runs counter to the contemporary "radar" orientation adopted as the dominant logic of being in which another person is important only when they can fulfil our selfish interests [Bauman 1996]. Instead of a community of interests, we would like to create with you a caring community responsible for human dignity. Action research provides us with tools to keep an eye on the authorities and challenge the reproduction of the unethical status quo.

Action research is a chance for self-reflection, including improving the process of preparing us for the role of democratic citizens [Levin, Greenwood 2018]. Creating space for critical discussion in a university classroom and freedom in proposing organisational change enable us to gain confidence in ourselves, our agency and the value of our reflection. It is an opportunity to break out of the vicious circle of the educational consumerism, based on the ritualization of the illusion of gaining knowledge and bringing education to the role of a black box whose output is exactly the same as the input, without expanding our knowledge and social competences in any way.

For you, however, it will be different. You have enormous potential for making changes in the world of organisations which currently requires particular attention. Educational processes can help us become critical citizens, capable of humanising management and organisation processes. Together with you, we want to educate ourselves in taking responsibility for the common good: Action research will enable us to forge this objective into actual actions.

This is why we encourage you wholeheartedly to start or continue your adventure with action research. If you dream of initiating real change in the world, this methodology is for you. Because you are the most effective agents of change in this world!

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