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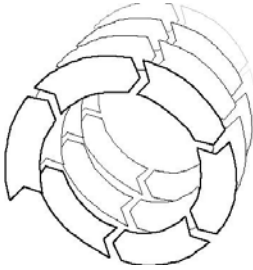
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CONTENTS

Editorial	3
Colin Bradley	
Implementing the Action Research approach in the context of social entrepreneurship learning in Tunisia	9
Zohra Bousnina and Rim Bouhafa Chtioui	
Human resource metrics: Action Research in an Indian firm	31
Kajari Mukherjee	
Insights on using Action Research to change the organisational culture towards a market orientation in an Australian government business enterprise	69
Diane Robyn Kalendra	
A cybernetic approach to understanding the management of social enterprise in Korea	97
Jae Eon Yu	

Participatory community Action Research process addressing employment integration of internationally trained professionals in Canada	118
Nene Ernest Khalema, Rosslynn Zulla, Janki Shankar, Yvonne Chui, and Lucenia Ortiz	
Gaming simulations with Action Learning for community-based disaster reduction training	162
Yusuke Toyoda	
Facilitating appreciative inquiry in combination with the world café method in a low socio- economic environment	184
Elmari Botha Verhage and Susanne Jacobs	
ALARA membership information and article submissions	209
Colin Bradley	

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Editorial

While taking longer than usual to prepare, this issue of the *ALAR Journal* has great variety in the articles that make the wait worthwhile. The articles come from seven nations – Tunisia, India, Australia, Korea, Canada, Japan and South Africa. It is an eclectic mix, from which I hope you find much of interest.

Zohra Bousnina and Rim Bouhafa Chtioui present a case study of a collaboration between the Higher Institute of Management of Tunis (ISGT) and the German International Cooperation Agency (GIZ). The collaboration promotes Action Research with the aim of the renewal of teaching in social entrepreneurship by rethinking the method of training to use interactive education. Bousnina and Chtioui contend that the entrepreneurial project emerges through interactions between the entrepreneur and context and exploration and exploitation of resources. Social entrepreneurship ‘refers to the centrality of learning by doing and learning through experience’ (p. 13) and allows the development of skills during action in each step of the entrepreneurial process.

The collaboration supported the integration of social entrepreneurship through three years of the curriculum, developed tools and methodologies and built capacity and entrepreneurial skills in the teachers. At the conclusion of the project, they found ‘experiential learning caused a change in the behavior of both teachers and students’ (p. 23).

They also found that

the use of AR in a process of change have a positive effect when institutional legitimacy of different actors gives more importance to ownership and justify the value of their shares.. [that meant] adopting changes in the project is not only limited to the conviction of the project leader, but it

also involved the commitment of actors who ultimately ensure the sustainability of such a project (p. 25).

Human Resources (HR) Metrics is usually about the benefit a Human Resources Management function makes to the strategic and competitive edge of an organisation as expressed in financial terms. Kajari Murkherjee's study in an Indian firm is about the effects on practitioners of HR metrics introduced over a long period and its impact on performance orientation and reputational effectiveness. It discusses how the introduction of HR metrics using an Action Research methodology helped the business unit move from short-term operational and personal needs to implementation of long-term value-add operational and developmental activities that have organization-wide implications. This introduction occurred in tandem with significant changes to the services the HR teams provided, a challenge with which I can empathise. The study showed the importance of metrics in managing an HR department, as well as helping HR to reinvent themselves.

The development of simple yet comprehensive metrics that gained calibration over a period provide a lesson that metrics need not be cast in stone nor is there any right time to start measuring. The measures chosen were impact driven and forward looking and highlighted synergy that exists between various streams of the HR discipline. (p. 60)

The next article by Diane Kalendra looks at changing the organisational culture of an Australian government business enterprise (GBE). GBEs are government-owned or government-controlled entities that produce goods and services on a commercial basis. Kalendra describes the three-cycle Action Research process she undertook to change the organisation's market orientation, which also led to her gaining her doctorate. As with many long projects such as this one, she faced waning support, and the dilemma of spoken support not matching the actions of the relevant manager. Her research identified many aspects of the culture that contradicted the stated desire to increase market orientation. For example, management was:

more focused on driving cost savings than on generating revenue growth to increase contribution through changing the organisational culture (p. 92).

Her study found that Action Research could produce organisational change, albeit with caveats around commitment and the time it takes to achieve the outcomes. The research provided a diagnostic tool for changing the culture towards a market orientation, and forecast outcomes of a market orientation for an organisation. An organisation can improve its performance by using the information from this research to realign its organisational culture.

Jae Eon Yu looks at whether a cybernetic approach can be used to understand social enterprises at the normative, strategic and operational management levels, using a social enterprise in South Korea as a case study. Community social enterprises are ones that pursue a specific purpose for the benefit of a whole society, with farming collectives being an obvious example. Often, these enterprises include socially disadvantaged groups, and social entrepreneurship that includes specific identification of these groups as stakeholders within the enterprise.

He uses cybernetic methodology developed from the combined use of Checkland's Soft Systems Methodology (SSM) and Stafford Beer's Viable System Model (VSM) as a means to review the social enterprise, a Local Health Centre. He presents the cybernetic methodology, in which the process of 'learning can be divided into two learning processes of the 'learning loop' for dealing with outer and wider issues of concern and the 'cybernetic loop' for dealing with inner 'structural issues' within the organization' (p. 103). Each loop has four stages – observing, assessing, designing and implementing.

He found that the 'participants appreciated the open-ended process of learning in order to deal with the ethical issues within social practice' and that the 'cybernetic approach was useful to diagnose the problem situation of the LHC social enterprise' (p. 114).

The next article is from Canada, in which Nene Ernest Khalema, Rosslynn Zulla, Janki Shankar, Yvonne Chui, and Lucenia Ortiz describe a community-based participative Action Research (CBPAR). CBPAR 'aims to give voice to the marginalized, and to enable a community to be self-determining and self-sufficient in addressing their issues' (p. 122), with the researcher acting as a facilitator to help the community achieve the desired outcomes. Khalema *et al.* use CBPAR to assess newcomer communities' involvement in addressing the issues of underemployment and unemployment amongst Internationally Trained Professionals (ITPs) in a Canadian city. They illustrate how a community action research process (CARP) resulted in benefits and challenges to the communities. This process shows that a focus on collaboration and individual and collective empowerment shapes the inquiry process and its evaluation.

The project undertaken by Khalema *et al.* was large – over 300 people involved in focus groups and further 200 completing a survey. They highlight that security of employment 'for ITPs requires greater involvement of various actors and substantial social investments presents a strong need for the decision makers at all levels of the employment support spectrum' (p. 144).

The sixth paper is from Japan, in which Yusuke Toyoda discusses disaster reduction training through gaming simulation for the community. This training has much realism and immediacy in a community that had experienced significant earthquakes and other disasters. The study introduces gaming simulation as a disaster reduction tool and then analyses Action Learning components about the gaming simulation. The approach encourages residents to improve their capacity to solve problems by themselves through insight and questioning (reflective learning) and action. Toyoda questions the belief that Action Learning cannot occur in simulations, as Action Learning 'must' involve real time problems. As he highlights, real time disasters are difficult to analyse for learning, and learning is better conducted in a safe environment, though the use of techniques such as gaming simulations.

... to ensure disaster reduction, scientific knowledge and lessons learnt from past disasters are essential, both of which can be provided through simulated gameplay.

... action learning components can be used when structuring gaming simulations so as to allow the participants to experience natural disasters as they may occur in their local areas. This focus on action and learning gives the participants knowledge and skills for their future survival. (p. 175)

Our final paper, by Verhage and Jacobs, looks at using Appreciate Inquiry (AI) combined with the World Café Method (WCM) in a low socio economic environment in South Africa. The study explored the experiences of twelve mother participants and their relationships with their children, and looks at the findings, challenges and valuable lessons learned when using the combined methods.

AI allows a person to move from 'a position of powerlessness to generating change and making a difference in relation to others' (p. 188). The WCM is

a large group facilitation... aiming to derive at multiple and flexible perspectives'... where groups 'of people, who are part of a system or community, are engaged to brain storm and problem solve through positive conversation in a hospitable, welcoming relaxed café setting (p. 188).

'Key lessons were learnt regarding the contextual background of LSEE participants, logistical and literacy constraints, facilitation of WCM as method and participant experiences' (p. 194). The insight gained and described in subsequent pages 'can enable practitioners who are directly and indirectly involved in LSEE to create pathways increasing the effectiveness to support a vulnerable population group' (p. 194). For example, one area highlighted is the need to ensure participation in all sessions, as the AI process builds on each preceding session and an absence can reduce the meaningfulness to the absent participant. Another area to consider in conducting such processes is the creating the environment in which the participants will feel comfortable and willing to openly

contribute (while remaining focused on the question under consideration).

As the year has been a busy one for ALARA, this will be the only issue of the *ALARj* for 2016. We will aim to produce three issues in 2017.

Considered assisting ALARA?

ALARA is seeking additional reviewers and co-editors for the *ALARj*.

The *ALARj* aims to be of the highest standard of writing from the field to extend the boundaries of theorisation of the practice, as well as the boundaries of its application.

ALARA requires the assistance of many reviewers to achieve this goal for the *ALARj*. We also encourage experienced practitioners and scholars to consider being a member of our editorial panel or a guest editor.

If you would like to assist ALARA, please contact Colin via editor@alarassociation.org or the Secretary via secretary@alarassociation.org.

You will find more information about ALARA from page 209 or at www.alarassociation.org.

Implementing the Action Research approach in the context of social entrepreneurship learning in Tunisia

Zohra Bousnina and Rim Bouhafa
Chtioui

Abstract

Looking at the complexity of the post-revolutionary environment in Tunisia, this article proposes a model for renewal of teaching practices in social entrepreneurship in the framework of a partnership initiative between German International Cooperation Agency (GIZ) and High Institute of Management-university of Tunis (ISGT) as a case study for the method of action research. The study embraces a conceptual framework inspired by effectuation theory. Our aim here is to provide an adequate model for the process of co-production of knowledge for social entrepreneurship (SE) learning triggered by the proposal of a training of trainers for teaching within the ISGT in a collaboration agreement with the GIZ.

This partnership initiative allows, at the renewal of teaching in SE, the rethinking of the method of training to use an interactive education method. Drawing from empirical and conceptual findings, the study shows (i) how the process of learning in SE is a reflexive process informed by the changes during the operation itself, and (ii) how actors interact to produce a transformative effect in the learning process. In this respect, our study grasps the micro-macro dynamics in a post-revolutionary context through which people shape what they consider suitable and actionable in their context. Therefore, adopting the effectuation theory to Action Research would foster an interactive process that is adaptable to a contingent environment.

Key words: Action Research, experiential learning, social entrepreneurship, effectuation, partnership

Introduction

Since 14 January 2011, Tunisia has embarked on a democratic process, which is a turning of the political, social and economic context of the country (World Bank, 2014). This dynamic and complex post-revolutionary context has shaped the emergence of social entrepreneurship (SE). Under this new reality, public policy-makers advocated entrepreneurial activity as a new priority of the government. Similarly, decision-makers have been involved in promoting entrepreneurship both on the national and regional level (OCDE, 2012). A SE ecosystem developed, including public and private banking, micro-finance institutions, enterprises, Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), associations, training organizations, networks, and international co-operations.

Under the current transitional context, the entrepreneurship education seems to be gaining ground. The challenge remains in orienting SE to fit the market's needs and the new socio-economic context (Kerlin, 2009). As a matter of fact, the entrepreneurial culture in Tunisia is rooted in training and education (OCDE, 2012) as various international organizations contribute to promote SE education. The collaboration between the Higher Institute of Management of Tunis (ISGT) and the German International Cooperation Agency (GIZ), the focus of our case study, comes as an initiative that promotes the process of Action Research (AR). This partnership initiative aims at the renewal of teaching in SE by rethinking the method of training to use interactive education (Fayolle and Verzat, 2009). As an approach, AR advocates a communal (Stringer, 1996, 1999) and participative (Guillemette and Savoie-Zadj, 2012) approach between different actors. AR is the proper approach, which could foster a better comprehension of collective dynamics in the collaboration agreement with GIZ regarding a training proposal in the SE.

At the interface of education and entrepreneurship, research and practice has made significant progress (Vanevenhoven and Drago,

2015) towards the potential to generate ideas and the co-creation of the impact in the oriented global research (Antonacopoulou, 2010).

The challenge of the universities and individuals tasked with developing and delivering entrepreneurship education is to build sustainable communities of learning that balance the requirements of academic rigor with the realities of entrepreneurship" (Vanevenhoven and Drago, 2015, p: 117).

According to the entrepreneurial paradigm (Sarasvathy 2001a, 2001b), our aim is to articulate the AR process within the conceptual framework of the effectuation theory. The basic premise of Sarasvathy is to show how the decision-making of entrepreneurship is achieved in an environment characterized by radical uncertainty and ambiguity. Sarasvathy's theory underlined the importance of developing consistent associations of ideas and principles to guide entrepreneurial action known as "the logics of action". Otherwise, in education, AR has been defined by:

Action research may be defined as the Study of a social situation with a view to improving the quality of action within it. It aims to feed practical judgment in concrete situations, and the validity of the theories or hypotheses it generates depends not so much on scientific tests of truth, as on their usefulness in helping people to act more intelligently and skillfully (Elliott 1991, p. 69).

AR in education contributes to a new learning (Liu, 1997). Hence, the decision criterion is based on how to approach the experimentation, in which an entrepreneurial process can be causal or effectual (Sarasvathy, 2001a). Unlike the causation process, which focuses on development, the effectuation process is able to account for contingent opportunities and is rather more flexible. Thereby, the effectuation theory presents a fruitful framework for entrepreneurship education.

The transmission of entrepreneurial knowledge articulates a knowing subject and a reflective practice (Morin, 2005). Embedded in a dialectic between action and reflection, effectuation theory and AR provide evidence of the renewal of the learning of SE, which is more in line with the experiential learning. According to Kolb

(1984), experiential learning combines the creation of knowledge and the transformation of experience. Thus, knowledge is constructed in a particular situation and interpreted by effective social practices (Glaserfeld, 1994). Such an approach contributes to the acquisition and development of pragmatic entrepreneurial skills directly related to the environment (Toussaint, 2010). The contribution of this paper has a two-sided goal. It seeks to promote the micro-macro dynamics and to explain how the renewal training is related to the socio-economic environment. Thus, in a pragmatic sense, AR sits well with effectuation theory (Sarasvathy 2001a, 2001b).

Despite the improvement of organizational change by Action Learning and AR, during the process of AR, few challenges have been encountered, like the problem of sustaining the incentive of actors over a long time process or the institutional culture sometimes hindering the sustainability of the project.

Finally, our findings show that the leadership of the project leader is necessary but not sufficient. As a matter of fact, the intensity of commitment of different actors is the base of sustainability in such a project.

Why renew teaching practices?

SE does not currently have explanatory or prescriptive theories that characterize a more mature academic field (Dees and Anderson, 2006), but it appears that the different SE concepts are rooted in their socio-economic, political and cultural contexts (Defourny and Nyssens, 2010). The specificity of the SE resides in its integrated social objective (Austin, Stevenson and Wei-Skillern, 2006), its dual creation of social and economic value (Alter 2007) and its social change through adaptation and learning despite the uncertainty of SE concepts (Verstraete and Fayolle, 2004). Thus, by steering away from traditional methods, which are deemed inappropriate, such as lecturing (Fayolle 2008, Surlemont and Kearney, 2009), educational teaching methods have greatly advanced in SE (Verzat, 2012).

Sarasvathy (2001a) proposes to study entrepreneurship through certain permanent features of the future, in which individuals must master an intelligent combination of cognitive resources and environment information. The process of adaptation requires competency to be constructed in and through experience (Toutain, 2010). Nevertheless, the entrepreneurial process calls for the ability to work with a variety of heterogeneous actors and attempt to renew business practices with recognition of their complexity (Hernandez, 2011). Therefore, knowledge is constructed by the learner (Glaserfeld, 1994) through "learning by doing" (Fayolle and Verzat, 2009). Moreover, Kolb and Kolb (2005) place the emphasis on generating knowledge based on experiential learning. This theory is widespread, applied and disseminated, in attempts to develop practical entrepreneurial skills (Toutain, 2010; Fayolle and Toutain, 2011).

The entrepreneurial project emerges through a process of interactions: entrepreneur and context (Bouchiki, 1993) as well as exploration and exploitation of resources (Politis, 2005). Given these characteristics, the SE refers to the centrality of learning by doing and learning through experience, which can enable the acquisition of knowledge. In fact, Politis (2005) considers that experience advances the type of entrepreneurial skills and as such influences the level of entrepreneurial process. Skills have been contextualized in the sense that they have been assigned to each step of the entrepreneurial process in order to take account of the environment in which they occur. Therefore, the entrepreneurial process will allow the constitution of skills during the action in a relevant situation.

In Tunisia, however, although entrepreneurship training offered projects progress (OCDE, 2012), SE training remains inadequate. Primarily, the entrepreneurial experience is recognized to enable acquisition of tacit knowledge and to facilitate decision-making in an uncertain environment and under pressure, while managerial experience allows easy access to priority information that can be used to recognize opportunities. Sarasvathy (2008) suggests that the opportunity is thought of in terms of the conditions of supply

and demand. In this sense, Sarasvathy (2008) offers new educational opportunities for different approaches to teaching entrepreneurship, according to the effectuation theory, which propose that, '[t]he most exciting part of effectuation is the fact that is learnable and teachable' (Sarasvathy 2011, p. 69).

Action Research Vs effectuation

As a new paradigm of entrepreneurship, the theory of effectuation advocates a pragmatic logic of entrepreneurial action (Sarasvathy, 2001b). Initially the approach of effectuation was launched from the study of organizational learning. To this respect, Sarasvathy's theory underlined the importance of developing consistent association of ideas and principles to guide entrepreneurial action known as the logics of action. The basic principle of the author is to show how the decision-making of entrepreneurship mainly pertaining to business creation is often achieved in an environment characterized by radical uncertainty and ambiguity. Hence, the theory of effectuation upholds that entrepreneurship should follow a progressive and interactive process (Sarasvathy, 2001b). In contrast to the rational logic of dominant causality in entrepreneurial activity, Sarasvathy (2001b) proposes the principles, process and reasoning of the effectuation. As so doing,

The essential difference between the logic of causation and the logic of effectuation lies in the view of the future. From the causal perspective, the future is seen to be a continuation of the past and can be predicted. The effectuation view sees the future as a function of the actions of willful agents. (Bronn, 2014, p: 4).

Therefore, effectuation and causation are not necessarily opposed but can be complementary at different stages of the entrepreneurial process. Under uncertainty, the principles of actions are defined as a set of cognitive processes and common behaviors (Perry, Chandler and Markova, 2011). The process is explained by the interaction between individual experience and ecosystem actors inspirations pre-committed in the creation of the organization (Read, Dew, Sarasvathy, Song and Wiltbank, 2009). Finally, the

effectual reasoning proposes to combine an imaginative set of goals with different resources at the entrepreneur's disposal (Sarasvathy, 2001b).

The effectuation presented by Sarasvathy (2001a), as a general theory of action, provides a conceptual framework for experiential learning in entrepreneurship education. The development of Sarasvathy highlights six key components of experiential entrepreneurship learning (Fayolle and Toutain, 2011). The key learning is asking "why" encourage the development of reflective thinking and "how" to generate an "operational" learning (Kim, 1993, in Fayolle and Toutain, 2011). The combination of the two types of questions allows the transformation of understanding the individual learning process. In this sense, according to the principles of effectuation, contingencies are considered as a source of opportunity from the available resources. Therefore, effectuation can be recommended when existing products seek to address latent demand, or new products seek to create demand through causation, and is better in the case of introducing new or existing products to meet an existing or potential demand.

Action Learning and AR are located in the newer, non-positivist paradigm of reflective rationality (Zuber-Skerritt, 2001). Both Action Learning and AR are:

conceived as a dialectical relationship between action activities, concrete experiences, practical trials, explorations, or applications and 'learning' or 'research' understanding, creating and advancing knowledge through reflection, inquiry and critical evaluation. (Zuber-Skerritt, 2001, p. 15)

Increasingly, AR is gaining ground in academia in different disciplines and under different conceptualization, as means of praxis change. The basic premise of AR is the construction of knowledge by linking thought and action. Since Lewin (1951), AR has developed to be cooperative to designate the improvement of institutions (Petiau and Pourtau, 2011); it may also be communal in collective situation (Stringer 1996, 1999). Then, with a unified design of reflexive educational practice, AR promotes professional development of teachers' learning (Paillé, 1994; Elliott, 1991, 2007).

Although the literature shows different degrees of acceptance of AR approaches, there is unanimity on the changing character, the relationship between theory and action in the production of knowledge, and lastly on the fundamental role occupied by the researcher. Based on the link between theory and practice, AR advocates the change of a given situation.

In this regard, both effectuation theory and AR are practical action that can describe the renewal of teaching methods. They encourage a description of the statements by which actors justify their behaviors and adopt logic of association, pertinent to reflective action.

Our Action Research

This field of investigation is not yet explored in the Tunisian context. Based on participant observation and analysis of the discourse of actors, a qualitative approach by AR can clarify our problem, which can make an original conceptual framework and lead to a new theoretical integration (Miles and Hubermann, 2003). The AR state is built in three stages: observation, planning, and action (Stringer, 1996, 1999). According to Guillemette and Savoie-Zajc (2012), four steps can also be used: observation, reflection, planning and action. The pragmatic sociology finds that AR may function as follows: contextualization phase, phase possibility of agreement between actants and change phase (Amblard et al, 1996, 2005). Referring to Stringer, Guillemette and Savoie-Zajc and Amblard et al, propose that AR can be defined within a spiral aspect (Stringer 1996, 1999).

It is important to emphasize on the role of the authors, the first author is fully committed as she is a researcher, project leader and entrepreneur in the experiment, and the second author is engaged in the third step, namely, mobilization.

Overview of the experience

In Tunisia, the students are trained in entrepreneurship at universities. However, the weaknesses of this education should be noted: it has minimal impact on the students and an almost

nonexistent impact on the new business start-up. There is an absence of statistics tracking the long-term effects on the skills and entrepreneurial skills. The interest in training and in entrepreneurship has increased due to unemployment and regional disparities as revealed after 14 January 2011.

Project leader profile

The project leader (the first author) tried to address the following question: "How to renew the teaching of entrepreneurship?" This predictive intent (Sarasvathy, 2001a) was fed by:

- Her role as a researcher on the topic and participation in societal change.
- The context of democratic transition revealed un-met social needs at the local, regional and national levels.
- In the institution, there is lack of a real learning project for the entrepreneurial culture course (600 students attend this course).

Negotiations on the type of collaboration

Meetings and discussions were held between the project sponsor and the ecosystem composed by stakeholders, factors and supports for entrepreneurship (Suresh and Ramraj, 2012; Isenberg, 2011). On this occasion, an opportunity to offer training on SE had been proposed by the German cooperation agency (GIZ).

In September 2013, a second phase was organized around meetings with GIZ as the project leader and teachers mobilized around the theme of the SE and the construction of an organizational structure. This organizational structure aimed at the promotion of SE in the academic and non-academic, especially in the countryside / regions outside the capital by training educators, coaching social promoters at different phases of their projects. The development of tools and effective methods of training, and the organization SE competition's business models, and business plans are rooted in this context.

During the first meeting, the recurring questions were about the commitment of other actors to support the organizational structure, building capacity internally and durability of the structure. Then a second meeting was held on the statements and explanations of different actors (Amblard 1996, 2005) in order to find a middle ground (Bolantski and Thévenot, 2006). Finally, a third meeting focused on the congruence between the expectations of the ISGT, the demands of the environment and the proposed training.

GIZ proposal

During the month of September 2013, the objectives of the collaboration between GIZ and ISGT for the year 2013-2014 were specified as follow:

- Bring support to the reform of the Module Entrepreneurial Culture and integrate the concept SE through three years of the curriculum.
- Develop tools and methodologies required for teaching courses such as educational tools, coaching students and project evaluation tools.
- Build capacity and entrepreneurial skills of the team of teachers.

The selection of candidates for training was agreed upon between GIZ and the project leader.

The selection criteria were writing a synthesis work on several themes of SE and a cover letter. A multidisciplinary team of 16 teachers was involved in training on entrepreneurial learning methodologies.

Training of trainers

The first session held from 20 to 24 January 2014 involved 5 days of training on the development of the course syllabus tools; exchanges around the experiential learning method; and thinking about sustainability of the social entrepreneurship organizational structure.

Given the enthusiasm and involvement of participants, a second training (26 to 29 April 2014), which was not scheduled in the initial plan of action, was decided by GIZ. This involved training of new teachers already engaged in other activities organized by the department.

New activities and mobilization of students

The training of trainers has created a dynamic to think the new pedagogy, new tools and mobilization of students for the 2014/2015 academic year. After two meetings, several items were discussed: experiential learning, the visibility of the organizational structure through an association, the visual identity of the organizational structure, and students' awareness of social and environmental problems. The organization of a day bringing together social entrepreneurs and ecosystem actors was scheduled for 8 November 2014 with the participation of a student club at ISGT. Then, an "ideas competition" was held on 6 December 2014 with the aim to develop initiative and creative ability of students and prepare them for international competitions. The competition involved 480 second-year students in management, accounting and management information. Teachers were trained, and supervised students following two presets, and a professional jury assessed eight finalists. Teachers preselected students using a grid with 10 criteria: four concerned the oral delivery and six evaluated the written document. All the teachers involved in the ratings choose the number of finalists. Then, the professional juries were presented with an evaluation form on the criteria that were used to preselect the finalists. Finally, the professional jury deliberated.

Findings and discussion of the action research

The different phases of AR are the result of the various meetings and negotiations on the renewal of the social entrepreneurship teaching. Indeed, entrepreneurial skills, the entrepreneurial process and finally the knowledge of the various ecosystem actors are part of a general dynamic that implicates new allies every time. The main results of the AR are presented in two parts: the first part concerns the dynamics observed between the micro and macro

levels around experiential learning. The second component shows that stages of changes correspond to a contextualization and problematization followed by agreements between partners. These agreements are loops of change that prompts an effectual or causal process.

Steps of the research

Step 1: understanding the context

This stage focuses on the analysis of the ecosystem (actors, issues and uncertainties). The purpose of this step was to identify the problem and to understand their perception within ecosystem actors.

Step 2: negotiation and emergence of an effectual process

This phase began in mid-April 2013 and engaged a reflection on the type of trading and the redesigning of the module between university, GIZ and the first team mobilized.

Step 3: planning for change through training.

The meetings took place during this phase in September. At this stage, other teachers joined the team.

Step 4: implementation of training by a causal process

In this process, other teachers were integrated in the multidisciplinary team.

Step 5: changes in behavior of teachers had a dynamic outcome

This stage involved students and other departments in this change.

Step 6: debate on new activities and their implementation in an effectual process

We considered our AR was inductive and spontaneous. AR appropriated adaptive change in a complex environment.

The dynamics observed between the micro and macro levels around experiential learning

After 14 January 2011, the challenges of unemployment and regional disparities have accelerated the development of

entrepreneurial initiatives. Cooperation agencies such as GIZ proposed to define a training model to encourage the teaching of SE. The goal was to promote synergies between actors (GIZ Report and Beyond, 2013).

The challenge is to create a dynamic between the university and the ecosystem, and to contribute to the identification of stakeholders and build agreements to overcome individual differences (Bolantski and Thévenot 2006). However, due to the lack of knowledge about the practices of SE, it is difficult to understand the entrepreneurial process.

The findings show the existence of a dynamic process between the environment and the university about teaching in SE. The entrepreneurial process, by reference to the theory of effectuation, follows a recognition process and a process of discovery opportunity (Saravathy, Dew, Velamuri and Venkataraman, 2003). This requires a more detailed understanding of the various ecosystem stakeholders in a changing context and the university's role as an important decision-maker in this environment. In all cases, the individual-organization interaction is at the heart of the phenomenon, directly or through organizational artefacts (Defélix, Fayolle and Randonson, 2013). In the current context of Tunisia, entrepreneurship education plays a major role. The challenge is to orientate the training needs of the market and adapt to changes in the socio-political and economic environment. The effectuation that is presented here necessarily involves two stages: an encounter phase with stakeholders in the ecosystem and one that is the subject of negotiations resulted in an exercise of problematization by the project leader. The dynamic process shows that an inter-active relationship happens within the reciprocal influence of a plurality of actors in both the organizational context and a specific eco-system.

The role of the project leader

Negotiations are constantly updated. They are expressed by an articulation between the recognition of the past experience of the project leader and the ability to anticipate (Bouchikhi, 1993).

Therefore, taking the opportunity of this convention is not the simple realization of the project leader but also proves to be a progressive construction. This also shows a coherence between the project owner's responsibility and different situations (Fayolle, 2008). The activities designed to meet environmental requirements play a significant role. The emergence of effectual process depends on the qualities of the project leader as: aspiration, conviction and transformative decisions (Sarasvathy, 2001a). This effectual process is marked by the appearance of the first loop of change. It is defined as a chain of interactions between the project leader and the context (Bouchikhi, 1993). Indeed, this intention and the project leader's conviction are the triggers of the situation (Sarasvathy, 2001a).

Causal and effectual process in the experience learning

After concluding the contextualization phase, one has to think about the appropriation of experiential learning to enable the mobilization of five teachers and administrative responsibility for an institution's involvement. The idea of agreement as negotiated between ISG and GIZ concretized in the initiation of the use of active teaching (Fayolle and Verzat, 2009) accommodating to the new socio-economic purposes (Kerlin, 2009). Indeed, the training offers proposed by GIZ presented an opportunity for discovery (Sarasvathy, Dew, Velamuri and Venkataraman, 2003) that responds to a potential or latent demand, which prompts an effectual process (Sarasvathy 2001a, 2001b; Sarasvathy and Kotha, 2001). The unfolding of the various meetings has clarified the expectations of different stakeholders. It was an opportunity to appropriate the experiential learning that resulted in the sharing by the educational team around the new teaching method according to a new loop of change and a first level of intelligibility. The participative process of AR allowed the appropriation of the learning by action of SE. The educational team was positive about this inclusion in this process and the following effectuation process having taken advantage of contingent opportunities.

Opposite to the effectuation that considers the creation, causation provides to assemble the necessary resources. Various factors

explain the transition from effectuation to causation such as identification, target, resources, skills, tools, and training conditions for achieving a predetermined objective (Read, Sarasvathy, Song and Witbank, 2009). Therefore, the selection of teachers, based on their involvement in civil society, marks the emergence of a new loop of change in a causal reasoning. This new loop has expanded by involving other multidisciplinary teachers. Finally, training on experiential learning follows a causation.

The causal process is defined by the fact that the solicitation of training is present. Furthermore, the cognitive behaviors and actions of teachers involved in this process was an opportunity to rethink future activities of the organization. This is the result of a merger between the interests of stakeholders expressed in a new effectual process.

This new method of learning has enabled students to develop innovative ideas for social enterprises as well as to respond to requests by social entrepreneurs. In this context, experiential learning structures introduce entrepreneurial skills in the university. Furthermore, cognitive behavior and actions of teachers involved in this process was an opportunity for the invention of the future activities of the organization. To sum up, experiential learning caused a change in the behavior of both teachers and students with a participatory aspect, which is in accord with the context and ecosystem actors.

Contributions and reviews of the experience of AR

We consider that this contribution could have significant impact on current research in the field of social entrepreneurship education and knowledge evolution in social-economic context offering a model for pragmatic action through the effectuation theory.

AR as well as effectuation contributes to the SE learning. The contribution of combining AR with effectuation is evident when the social entrepreneur acts as a change agent by creating and sustaining social values without being limited by available resources. It may contribute to change the current situation under

uncertainty by articulating policy and research that capitalize on opportunity. The social entrepreneurs acquire the necessary skills rooted in context, thus the combination of the AR with effectuation finds maneuvers within effectual processes.

First, our AR provides evidence for the transmission of knowledge on entrepreneurial processes and the acquisition of new skills, which involves both entrepreneurial process and pragmatic action. As put by Morin (2005), knower and reflective practice go hand in hand. Under this prism, we show that effectuation could offer fruitful framework for entrepreneurship education. Thus, the "conversation with a situation" within the meaning of Schön (1994), is a high-level mental activity, which involves, at least when the problem requires, multiple resources to find an original solution (Perrenoud, 2004). As argued by Perrenoud (2004), action "express actor". It relates to his/her identity, skills, personality, as well as cultural background.

Second, referring to the action, knowledge construction frequently interacted with the environment (Fayolle and Toutain, 2011). Thus, we noticed that teachers could have overlapping ties between facilitation and accompanying (Verzat, 2009). According to experiential learning, knowledge acquirement allows for the intelligibility achievement of the actor's network and helps to better grasp entrepreneurial reality in its complexity. So, both teachers and students are more able to identify social and economics problems that occur during actions.

Third, taking the conceptual framework of pragmatic sociology and effectuation theory, we suggest the conceptual model of renewal of the SE learning. As we demonstrated, this model fits better within the framework of AR. Instead of focusing on the outcome, experiential learning aims at understanding the dynamics of appropriation; that is, how individual actions contribute to the construction of a collective agreement (Bolanski and Thévenot, 2006) and the behavior of actors in situations of change. In this respect, SE grasps the ongoing interaction in a complex dynamic system between subsystems environment (Crozier and Freidberg, 1977).

Conducting AR involves the introduction of changes in the system. The researcher plays a role of agent in those changes. It must (i) meet the requirements of action as facilitator of the change process and (ii) reflect continuous evolution of the process undertaken to draw learnings that are needed for the promotion of ideas and actions to change. The tensions caused by this situation (Roy, 2013) are added to the difficulties lived in the interpersonal plan in the relationships of the researcher with his collaborators whose expectations can vary from one interest group to another (Stringer, 2007).

Still, like any empirical approach, this experiment has also some limitations (Petiau and Pourtau, 2011). Despite the changes that were witnessed following the adoption of a new teaching method in the skills acquired by students and teachers, we must question the longevity and sustainability of such an approach in an emerging context. Among the challenges encountered during the AR is the mobilization and sharing of actors over a long period.

In general, the use of AR in a process of change have a positive effect when institutional legitimacy of different actors gives more importance to ownership and justify the value of their shares.

The total intervention is satisfactory, as it has been noticed that the institution as a key player is sparsely interested in the results of the AR, which can hinder the continuity of activity. This can produce a fluctuating enrollment but also a delicate sharing, caused by the distanced commitment and involvement of some members of the group. As a consequence, adopting changes in the project is not only limited to the conviction of the project leader, but it also involved the commitment of actors who ultimately ensure the sustainability of such a project.

The project leader can be also affected by the gap between his reflexive practice and the reflexive practice of the project team who have no new ideas to propose. We cannot think about our practice without taking in account the social world, competition and cooperation networks, organization and work division, and the structure of power and the span of control (Perrenoud, 2004).

But for both project leader and team project, the related experience can be “emancipatory” when "the participants’ transformed consciousness, and change within their organization's existing boundaries and conditions" (Zuber-Skerritt, 2001, p. 19).

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Human resource metrics: Action Research in an Indian firm

Kajari Mukherjee

Abstract:

This insider action research project explores the effects of Human Resource (HR) measurement on the practitioners. Research unfolds in an organization where refocusing and professionalizing of HR practice is in progress. The study discusses how HR metrics was introduced in an organization, what drove the choice of initial metrics, what was the impact of its persuasive characteristics on the practitioners and its signaling effect in an organization. It discusses how HR metrics helped the department to effectively move from attending to short-term, ad-hoc operational needs of managers to implementation of long-term value-add operational and developmental activities that have organization-wide implications. Metrics is seen as a work-in-progress to drive appropriate behavior within the HR team. The study thereafter identifies personal theories in practice. The study argues that maturity in people orientation and sophisticated measurement mechanics are not a prerequisite to start measuring; the initial aim of metrics may be to improve departmental performance rather than enhancing credibility with line managers by demonstrating financial/organizational impact of HR value-add. Such an approach leads to overall salutary effect as influence of HR in many of its own metrics are rather weak and inconsequential. The contribution of this study is value-influence matrix that identifies HR metrics in terms of value to business and influence of HR.

Key words: HR metrics, HR practitioners, value-influence matrix, Action Research

The Human Resource (HR) function adds value to an organization through its four distinct roles – employee champion, administrative, change agent and strategic partner to deliver

business results (Ulrich, 1997). The function battles to justify its existence in an organization (Drucker, 1954), fighting issues of perpetual marginality (Watson, 1996) and powerlessness (Caldwell, 2004). There is a constant challenge for the function to balance between competing stakeholders' interests and values (Thompson, 2011). HR's emphasis on *soft* part of business gets lost in the world of *hard* facts; frequently its practitioners shy away from producing HR value-add through numbers creating dissonance between value that the HR creates and what the business demands (Cascio, 2000; Fitz-enz, 1984, 1990). Identification and application of appropriate measurement techniques that substantiate HR value-add in a language that senior management understands - the language of business (Verma and Dewe, 2008) is the arena of HR metrics.

HR metrics span a wide continuum across enumerating what happened in numerical terms to sophisticated statistical modeling that analyze data as a basis for current business decisions and prediction of future outcomes (Davenport, Harris and Shapiro, 2010; Fitz-enz, 2009; Murphy and Zandvakili, 2000). The emphasis of measurement in literature is primarily about illustrating strategic and competitive importance of HR by expressing the value-add in financial terms (Cascio, 2000; Toulson and Dewe, 2004; Ulrich and Smallwood, 2005). In contrast, the present study is about introduction of HR metrics over a period of ten months and its effects on the practitioners and its impact on performance orientation and reputational effectiveness of the department.

Arena of human resources metrics

HR metrics is an accountability tool that enables assessment of the department's results (Dulebohn and Johnson, 2013). Effective HR management fits HR practices, policies and systems to organization's goals and operational requirements (Tichy, Fombrun and Devanna, 1982; Miles and Snow, 1984). However, the challenge is to show the impact of such a fit. HR metrics hardens the soft information, allows for internal and external evaluation of deliverables and its impact on organizational strategy (Boswell,

2006; Truss and Gratto, 1994). Through HR metrics “managers throughout the firm can understand exactly how people create value and how to measure the value-creation process” (Becker, Huselid and Ulrich, 2001, p. 4). A study by Weiss and Finn (2005, p. 35) reports that Managing Directors want “measures that are more strategic, primarily to enhance their ability to deliver customer satisfaction and operational effectiveness”. However, even with such importance attached to HR metrics, literature reports that very few companies use reliable metrics to measure its human asset value in terms of impact (Bukowitz, Williams and Mactas, 2004; Tootell *et al.*, 2009).

HR metrics also play a great role in clarifying the goals of HR in achieving business performance, drive attention to deliverables, and refocus resources and energies appropriately (Yeung and Berman, 1997). Rigorous, predictable and regular data collection help direct attention to key elements of HR architecture (Becker, Huselid and Ulrich, 2001) and generate pride amongst practitioners as they talk in numbers and experience what Tsui (1984) labels as reputational effectiveness. Meaningful data have transformational power (Davenport 2006). Creating, tracking and analyzing metrics help practitioners to speak the language of business; thus, HR metrics focus attention on the essentials, orienting behavior of practitioners to desired performance or viable behavior patterns (Becker Huselid and Ulrich, 2001; Otley, 1999; Tsui, 1984).

HR measurement research and practice has “focused on developing internally logical measures, simulating measurement procedures that resemble acceptable corporate approaches” (Boudreau, 1995, p. 4). One set of studies have concentrated on showing causal connection between HR policies/practices and organizational outcomes (Mondore, Douthitt and Carson, 2011; Murphy and Zandvakili, 2000; Rucci, Kirn and Quinn, 1998), complicated valuation of human asset in both financial and management accounting terms (Cascio, 2000; Chhinzer and Ghatehorde, 2009; Toulson and Dewe, 2004) or on comparing relative effectiveness and efficiency of HR practices using various

benchmarked data (Fitz-enz, 1984). Another set of studies have concentrated on how to convert a mass of data and information into analytics and intelligence (Falletta, 2014; Shen, 2011). A third set have concentrated on the relative spread of the concept in organizations and practical measurement issues (Fink, 2010; Tootell *et al.*, 2009). It is implicitly presumed that measurement will lead HR managers to make more informed and productive choices about how people are managed and enhance their credibility with line managers. However, one important area of study - how metrics are developed and its effect on senders and receivers – has received very little attention in literature (Boudreau, 1995).

According to Bassi (2011), the reason for creating HR metrics is to improve individual and organizational performance – not to prove the worth of HR. The present study discusses how HR metrics was introduced in an organization, what drove the choice of initial metrics, what was the impact of its persuasive characteristics on the practitioner and its signaling effect in an organization. It discusses how HR metrics helped the operating department to move from “attending to the short-term operational and personal needs of managers and employees” (Tsui, 1987, p. 36) to implementation of long-term value-add operational and developmental activities that have organization-wide implications.

Methodology

Action research is best understood as an orientation towards research rather than a particular methodology (Reason and McArdle, 2004) where separation of understanding (of knowledge) and action is obliterated. It is about transforming inquiry into praxis or action (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000) to “produce practical knowledge that is useful to people in everyday conduct of their lives” (Reason and Bradbury, 2001, p. 2). It improves both capacity and subsequent practices of a researcher who works in partnership with practitioners to initiate a change based on a notion that a change in practice is justified. The researcher leads the process of identifying the problem, the gaps in understanding based on data and opinions drawn from practitioners, and actions to be taken to

improve practice. The researcher jointly with practitioners analyze results, reflect on the actions taken and consequent results and propose new courses of action. This systematic cycle of action and critical reflection about how change efforts are unfolding, continuous refining of methods, data and interpretation of understanding and impact being created “converges towards a better understanding of what is happening” (French, 2009, p. 188) which has meaning and relevance beyond its immediate context. Thus, orientation towards taking action, reflexivity and significance of its impacts, evolving from partnership with practitioners, is the core of action research (Huang, 2010, p. 98).

Increasingly, action research is being done within organization by practicing managers (Bartunek *et al.*, 2000). The present study is about an in-situ experience of the action researcher in a company. It related to introduction of HR metrics, based on notion that measurement improves performance. The researcher was in a unique position – as a practitioner, she was an insider in the company. As a researcher, however, she also brought in a new perspective based on her past practical experience. Being part of the system, the researcher followed ethnographic approach using Stringer’s (1999) continuous spiral of “look, think, act” routine (p. 18). As a practitioner, she was part of the ineffectuality experienced by the HR department. She wanted to change this. As a researcher, she was involved with an inquiring mindset; rather than just being a person trying to improve a system as a participant, she was observing from a distance the quality of outcome of each change interventions. Thus, as an insider, she was looking out, trying to improve the system, but as a researcher, she was looking into the system from outside, where the research question lies. The iterative process of planning, executing, observing and reflecting on events is presented in the next section.

Data and process analysis

Arena of research

The Case Company was one of the leading manufacturers of packaging products/ solutions in India; pioneer in technology and

processes. It had three manufacturing plants located across India and the corporate headquarter in a metropolis – labeled as sites henceforth. This industry was highly fragmented, with preponderance of small family-owned units, because of which professional managers did not prefer employment. Labor-intensive processes were employed even with sophisticated machines – some of the best in the world. For example, printed material was packed and sealed in cardboard boxes manually, instead of mechanical solutions that was both available and economical. Optimum output of machines was low; one reason being workers were not skilled. With a changing labor market, the labor-intensive approach was becoming unviable and creating industrial relations issues. There were lacunae in implementing labor regulations. This was a stumbling block in completing vendor audit, insisted by many clients. Most employees had worked in smaller set-ups in the same industry, before gravitating to this company. They expected to retire from here, considered to be the best in the industry. Overall level of professional management and professional outlook was low, one reason being limited exposure of 1000+ employees to modern management practices. The company was aiming to move from incremental to exponential growth stage, piggybacking on its sunk investment in plants and machines and increasing prosperity in the country that was fueling a consumption boom. A new position of HR head was created to manage people processes such that the company can gear up for rapid expansion. The researcher joined this post.

The HR department had employees with varying years' of experience. Most had worked in similar manufacturing plants. A transaction-based approach to employees was predominant. Basic HR functions like recruitment, payroll, appraisal, exit management were in place. The new HR head initiated or revamped key HR practices, for example, job analysis, hierarchical re-organization, compensation restructuring, goal oriented performance management, skill and competency development and trainee scheme. These interventions were in line with a Strategic HR Framework (Ulrich, 1997) that links business strategy, organizational capabilities and HR practices, as well as with

empirical findings that “managing the selection, development, and deployment of human capital can significantly improve learning by doing and firm performance” (Hatch and Dyer, 2004, p. 1173). Changing systems and processes was easier; the major challenge was that of coaching, tutoring, and guiding existing HR practitioners who were used to a certain pace and way of working and were not conversant with comparatively novel HR interventions.

HR team members were primarily based in the three plants. Day to day administrative and employee support activities kept them busy. These activities spanned organizing drinking water when supply ran dry, finding temporary workers for a rush order, resolving a fight that breaks out at 2.00 am between workers in a plant, and pacifying neighbors when an employee behaves erratically in his rented house. Site HR were expected to have short time horizons and focus on day-to-day operational requirements and serve the local constituency via products (e.g., training programs, benefit details and appropriate forms), services (e.g., problem solving, counseling, information) and advice (e.g., labour regulations) (Tsui, 1987). The existing HR team was happy to do so, but in reality, most of their time was spent on administrative problem solving. Issues that had direct ramification on operational efficiency like recruitment and training and operational effectiveness like employee counseling and labor related advice took a back seat.

The downside of the existing situation was that the HR practitioners were not seen as a key function to be brought into discussion when formalizing monthly plans at a plant; rather considered as a service provider on call. HR team derived its direction from business plans provided to them rather than influencing them in any way. This was similar to what Budhwar and Sparrow (1997) found during their study of Indian firms a decade earlier. The practitioners themselves were seemingly comfortable in this situation – this is how they had worked elsewhere. In a way, it was a comfortable way of avoiding accountability when things went wrong - they were not part of the

decision. However, this also created a sense of passive resistance in case of a HR team leader in one plant against anything new. In the case of another young team leader, the situation created an acute sense of frustration which he phrased as *HR's low-status, seroant's role* in the plant, curiously similar to the eloquent suggestion by Wintermantel and Mattimore (1997).

Creation of HR Metrics

First Stage: The HR head spent the first month taking stock of the situation and visiting all sites to understand the ground reality. She was planning to introduce a variety of HR systems and practices, associated with professional organizations. However, the internal HR team had not worked in such organizations. For the team, each initiative entailed a measure of hard work, reorienting ways of working and learning new skills and competencies. As discussed above, HR team was busy in day-to-day administrative responsibilities, which were necessary and required to run the factory/corporate office smoothly. Such work had a tendency to consume an entire day. Various value-added responsibilities took a back seat. For example, there was a backlog in recruitment in all the four sites, due to both high attrition and creation of new job roles (various quality and process improvements were being introduced by the Chief Operating Officer who had joined some time previously). Sudden absences of workers at factories were an issue. There were serious complaints of medical insurance claims being rejected or settlement being delayed. The primary thought of the HR head was to create a sense of urgency in outcome-based work of the department. She thought that introduction of HR metrics was appropriate as "human beings adjust behavior based on the metrics they're held against" (Ariely, 2010, p. 38).

A HR meeting was held in the second month at the corporate office. Prime discussion topics were burning issues of attrition, recruitment, worker absence and insurance claim settlement. The HR head presented some research-based findings on these topics, for example, attrition is high in initial months due to wrong hiring or problems of employee settling down in new job. Absences

indicated that the employee was not engaged with the work and/or the organization, so he did not care to take prior approval for leave or even intimate verbally. This impacted work process as alternate arrangements had to be made at short notice. The HR team needed to work closely with the line managers to mitigate the problem of absences through targeted counseling, etc. Wrong filling up of medical claim form by employees (especially workers) was the major reason of claim rejection or return. A process where one HR team member devoted a few hours every week to help claimants fill up the form correctly was likely to reduce the problem. In the meeting, the idea of measuring HR's deliverables was introduced. Appropriate performance parameters, in line with the topical issues, were agreed upon and included in HR metrics (Exhibit 1 on page 45).

All HR metrics chosen were either to improve outcome (e.g., numbers recruited) or process performance (improvement in claim settlement time). Data needed to fill up the metrics was available; however, the problem was extracting it in appropriate form. Rearranging existing data, extracting from payroll system, referring back to process documents, and collecting from other departments were enough to start measuring. Some data had a dodgy baseline; these were rectified in subsequent months. Some HR site leaders and team members were not Excel savvy. Some had problems in calculating simple ratios. Some were overwhelmed with this new demand. All of these were overcome in time. Each unit – three plants and corporate office – provided data separately. HR metrics used to come by tenth or even later of next month initially. By the fourth month, it was received by the third of the month. The HR head discussed the metrics over the telephone/in person with each site HR team, including plans to improve or maintain the status quo.

During this period, the HR team across the sites proactively engaged with operations head/managers to understand their requirements regarding recruitment, or target-counsel habitual absentees. They have been working closely earlier also, but to respond to ad hoc operational requests. Changing the mindset of

the operations team took time and patience. Questions like, “What is the likelihood of rush order in the month and when?” did not always elicit an appropriate response. The HR head had to intervene occasionally to encourage the site in-charge (e.g., Factory head) to support their own HR team. The response of operations team varied across sites. Overall, they sensed an enhanced outcome orientation. The local HR team became increasingly firm about not responding to last-minute requirements that could have been flagged earlier.

Second Stage: In the next few months, a slew of HR processes were introduced or revamped. The conceptualization and designing of these was done by the HR head. Employees were re-categorized as workers, staff/assistants, officers, middle and senior management (from earlier three categories). A new performance management system was introduced for management staff that included identifying KRAs at the start of the fiscal year. Broad level job analyses for key positions were completed to help role holders link their performance parameters with KRAs. Designations were rationalized. Compensation benchmarking was done and the compensation structure rationalized. Based on last year’s performance rating, increments/promotions for the ensuing year were completed. Variable pay was introduced from middle management level upwards. It was decided that all new hires would have this component as part of their pay. All these changes were incorporated and communicated in the increment/promotion letter issued to employees. Educating and coaching of site HR teams included concepts of HR underlying each new process. The challenge before the HR head was to engage HR team in implementing value-add interventions (e.g., training, help in identifying KRAs and targets for employees) that rode on the changes introduced.

Many of the employees working in the company had learnt on the job. Over the years, the company had upgraded its machineries which required workers and supervisors to have formal training including the ability to read and operate digitally controlled machines and being computer savvy. Enterprise Resource

Planning (ERP) software had been introduced in the recent past and employees were expected to update the system (the middle-of-the-way solution adopted was to have a set of clerical staff keying in data). Strict process orientation to ensure consistent quality was expected as the customers were becoming very demanding. All of these meant that (a) only formally trained employees were recruited and (b) old employees had to be trained in job, quality and process related skills to ensure optimum productivity.

Another HR meeting was called in September after the introduction of the new salary scheme and settling of the initial hiccups. Regarding HR analytics, one of the very interesting observations came as follows:

We have seen operations people running around at the end of the month to complete the plant performance parameters. It feels nice that we also have running around to do to fill up our parameters.

Building on this comment, another observation was:

Earlier, when I went home, at times I used to think what I achieved during the day. Most of my time was spent running around to sort out day-to-day issues. But, with a far more structured way of approaching operational problems in the plant, I now run around not for ad-hoc activities but for a clear-cut purpose.

The trend across every parameter per location was discussed. Attrition was high amongst new joinees. Anecdotal reasons were put forth. It all boiled down to difficulty in settling down in a new job, as factories were located in remote or semi-urban areas and most joinees were non-locals. The concept of detailed induction was introduced. Issues of worker stress was discussed – most were migrants from other parts of India and stayed without family. It was decided to conduct workshop or awareness session per month on any issue of topical interest, specifically targeted at non-managerial level. Like, managing stress, yoga to manage physical fatigue, spoken English lessons, basic computer skills, principles of management, etc. The decision had already been taken to only

recruit professionally trained people and stop recruitment in staff roles. The challenge was to train existing employees suitably. Training was required to improve (a) technical knowledge (b) process knowledge, (c) soft-skills and (d) management skills (for managerial staff). The introduction of the new salary scheme had sensitized the HR team about the concept of salary cost, including cost of overtime, cost of contract labor and employee productivity.

The additional metrics required to measure effects of various changes in HR process quickly evolved in the meeting. Consciously or unconsciously, every HR team leader felt good that his effort seemed to be having a tangible and measurable impact. This feel-good factor was also due to respect they sensed in eyes of others for their efforts, even though HR metrics was not officially shared with anyone outside the department. The HR head was surprised at the gusto with which various metrics were suggested and debated; measurement process and ease of measurement was discussed. With some help from the HR head in identifying formula for a few measurements and in fine-tuning a few others, the list was ready. The expanded list is given in Exhibit 2 (page 46). The concept of an employee satisfaction survey was also discussed. As many initiatives of the HR team were just being introduced, it was decided that survey will be conducted after HR metrics completed a year.

There were no targets given. Rather, it was understood that some figures ought to progressively improve over long term and some decrease. Some check-metrics were discussed and were to be introduced after a lag period. For example, a skill audit of workers was to be introduced after six months to test and certify (through an external agency) job-skills of workers in batches. The aim of the HR team was to ensure that each worker is appropriately skilled through his in-situ work experience or in-class training, or because of his prior formal training.

As some of the parameters identified in Stage II indicate, measurement in itself does not mean improvement – it is the first step to uncover issues that need rectification, such as addressing attrition. Only a few of the interventions discussed above were

new. The rest of the processes (e.g., training) were already in place in some form. These processes were reoriented and linked to distinct requirements of business. However, if the HR team had to deliver on the newer set of metrics, they needed far more in-depth interactions with and support from the operations team. They also had to engage with each managerial employee to ensure KRA identification. Based on the experience of stage I, the HR head expected that success in each site would hinge to a large extent on the relationship of the local team with respective operations managers.

The second set of metrics had to be created and the data maintained (the ERP was not introduced in the HR department) on an extended list of activities. Overcoming number phobia and spreadsheet illiteracy of HR members continued to be a challenge. A suggestion was made that any future recruit in the department should be specifically tested on his quantitative skills. There also continued to be tendency to mistake mass of data as an end in itself, rather than understanding its implications. This is similar to findings of Budhwar and Varma (2011) who found that competencies related to mining data, generating insights and digital literacy were lacking in HR professionals of India.

Handholding by the HR head was required with the site teams to sensitize every member that each number and each metric has a story to tell. This proved to be challenging. For example, it was expected that insights of exit interview had to be flagged appropriately; however, conducting them was seen as an end in itself. Increased job-related skill training should show up in better work – possibly through anecdotal evidence. The HR head felt that more time would be needed by the team to internalize the descriptive analytics (what happened) before a conscious move to diagnostic analytics (why did it happen) and prescriptive analytics (what should be done about it). She felt that, for the time being, no more metrics should be added.

Third stage: The company worked with many prestigious brands who periodically audited their vendors. Compliance of regulatory requirements was one of the parameters of the audit. India had a

variety of regulations related to labor, safety, health, etc., some of these not in tune with changing times. Overall, implementation of various regulations varied across the plants, partly because scrutiny by local regulatory authorities was lax and partly because implementation required time and effort. It was necessary to streamline the process as a good corporate practice (punitive measures were heavy if lacunae were caught) as well as to meet the audit requirements of customers. In the third HR meeting, held in January, it was decided to complete the pending regulatory requirements on war footing, get appropriate licensing/certification and streamline necessary practices of a good workplace like fire drills. By this stage, it had become accepted by the HR team that important work and initiatives should be measured to ensure unwavering focus. Thus, the suggestion came from the assembled HR team that key parameters related to regulatory requirements should be included in the HR metrics, even though the HR head was not very keen. In this context, one HR team member said:

It is a very good practice to measure important work. Even with so many day-to-day problems in the plant, I and my team know that our respect in our eyes and in others' depend on how the metrics looks.

Some of the parameters chosen were to act as alarm call; once completed, these need not be there; whereas some were to be repeated periodically. The new set of metrics is in Exhibit 3 (page 48). During the meeting, as various to-dos were being discussed to complete regulatory requirements, one HR team leader commented:

A few months ago, for the first time, I submitted a synopsis of the HR metrics to the Plant Head. He was surprised and asked me if such a report will come every month. I am now invited to attend a part of the monthly Plant meeting. I have now graduated from asking what is the requirement from HR (department) based on the monthly plan to being privy to it as it is being shaped.

Exhibit 1: Stage I metrics

Category	Parameter	Measurement formula
Manpower status	Total	In actual monthly number
Leaving	Attrition	Do
	Left within first six months' of joining	Do
	Left as they were asked to leave within first six months' of joining	Do
Joining	Recruitment	Ratio of positions filled to positions required to be filled
	Positions open beyond 30 days	As percentage of total positions to be filled
	Availability of temporary/casual workers as per requirement	Fulfilled (yes/no). Reasons, if not done
Cost related to recruitment	Cost of recruitment	Tabulate based on: Reference or internal resume bank: Free Cheap: Job portal Expensive: Advertisement Very expensive: Placement Agency
	Cost saving/increase on new hire by way of salary for replacement position	Actual amount
Absenteeism	Absent without intimation	As percentage of total permanent employees
	Absent but with verbal intimation	Do
	Approved leave	Do
Medical insurance	Claim pending beyond 30 days	In percentage of total claims

Note: All measurement related to three categories of employees: managers, officers and workers

Exhibit 2: Stage II metrics

Category	Parameter	Comment by researcher
Cost	Productivity per employee	The first three should progressively improve but last should reduce
	Production incentive cost	
	Proportion of pay at risk	
	Overtime cost	
Improvement in quality of manpower	Ratio of contract workers (in actual production) to permanent workers	To progressively reduce
	Percentage of employee with professional qualification (includes formal training / certification at worker level)	To progressively improve
	Training hours: technical, process, management development, soft-skill	No target given. Idea was to start the process and sensitize the team to look at training as need-based and job oriented. It was linked to skill-audit report that was to be introduced after six months to test/certify skill level of workers.
	Awareness programs/Life skill programs	At least once a month
	Percentage of training conducted by in-house trainers	To progressively improve
	Any old positions discontinued	Give reasons (Many positions were no longer required. Some jobs could be merged)
	Any recruitment in staff cadre	Yes or No
Improvement in quality of new hire	Average performance score of new hires of last one year	In number
	Confirmation appraisal completed (to be done after six month of probation period)	Administrative check

Category	Parameter	Comment by researcher
	New hires whose probation period was extended	In percentage
	Midyear review of trainees completed	Administrative check
Attrition management	Induction program: 1. First day induction program 2. Formal meeting by HR site head within first 30 days 3. Formal meeting by Departmental head within first 45 days 4. Formal meeting by HR after 3 months from joining	Completed / Not completed
	Attrition amongst 4 (good) and 5 (very good) raters (based on last year's performance rating)	In percentage
	Attrition that could have been prevented	Qualitative input with reasons
	Mandatory exit interview conducted (managerial staff)	Yes/No
	Need based exit interview conducted (non-managerial staff)	Need based
Performance management	KRAs set (middle management and above)	Yes/No

- Note:
1. Older metrics were retained. However, these were now categorized against five categories: workers, staff/assistants, officers, middle management, and senior management.
 2. Contract workers were semi-skilled and were not suitable to operate advanced machines. There was no significant difference in wages between contract and permanent worker doing commensurate work. However, such workers would continue in functions like housekeeping.

Exhibit 3: Stage III metrics

Category	Parameter	Measurement formula
Regulatory Requirements: Social audit	Factory license related	Percentage of parameters complied with Percentage of parameters being complied with (in process) Percentage of parameters to be complied with (not yet started)
	HR and Administration related	Do
Labour Contract	Percentage of labour contractors with valid licenses	To progressively reach 100%
	Statutory compliances followed by all labour contractors	Do
Safety and Health	Safety training	Any exception?
	Fire Drill	Do
	Annual health check-up of employees	Do
	Any major accidents?	Numbers
	Any minor accidents?	Do
CSR activities	Enumerate	List of activities

Note: CSR = Corporate Social Responsibilities. See Annexure I for further elaboration on this category.

Results and Reflections

The metrics chosen in the three stages were designed to improve job performance and help HR practitioners prioritize the true needs of the organization. By the tenth month, HR metrics had sixteen broad headings, with 112 line items on an Excel sheet. Though the sheer length seems daunting, in actuality, it was capturing data for five categories of employees. New columns were added for every subsequent month. There are a limited

number of metrics suggested in literature to gauge HR's impact on the organization (Brown, 2003). However, in the present case, the long laundry list of parameters was considered as a guidepost in the path to improvement. The design characteristics of HR metrics (*ibid*) is given in Table 1.

Table 1: Design characteristics of HR metrics chosen

Criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aligned with competitive imperatives • Aligned with operational imperatives • Internal audience • Time based • Ratios and absolutes • Team based • For reporting, analysis and course correction
Sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple sources: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Personnel files ○ Documents ○ Other departments • Process based reports • Employee reports (eg, KRAs) • Automated capture (eg, attendance) • Other surveys (eg, employee engagement survey)
Collection Method	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quantitative items <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Counts and ratios ○ Binary - yes/no
Frequency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Per Unit (eg, factory, head quarter) ○ Aggregated

Source: Brown, 2003

Measurement system was seen to be dynamic in nature; it was a work-in-progress. With each new initiative, related metrics were included. Some of the measures chosen were linked to immediate imperatives; aligning data collection efforts with the competitive strategy of the organization (Davenport, 2006). Some metrics were expected to neatly dovetail with measures commonly used in production departments (e.g., wastage and rejections segue with skill improvement). Metrics had an internal logic and consistency (Boudreau and Ramstad, 2004). They reflected possible

combination of HR measures developed by Yeung and Berman, (1997) to increase efficiency, quality and cycle time of HR practices, to build organizational capability and to enhance employee, customer and shareholder satisfaction. They also reflected measures suggested by Becker, Huselid and Ulrich (2001) that spans strategic (progress on challenges and initiatives), customer-centric (satisfaction by users), operational (process effectiveness). Table 2 (page 51) explains the linkage of existing HR metrics with various organizational imperatives; as can be seen, focus was on internal operational improvement, followed by internal strategic requirements.

The range of measures focused attention on pressing issues as well on making the company future ready, being an amalgamation of lag as well as lead measures. Table 3 (page 52) indicates how specific six business challenges were reflected in metrics chosen. Becker Huselid and Ulrich (2001, p. 20) calls these as “strategic behaviors” – a subset of productive behaviors that directly serve to implement the firm’s strategy. As metrics were created as a work-in-progress, it may be noted that in the future, more metrics may be introduced to link with various categories in Table 2 and 3, and some existing ones will be removed.

Crafting this range of measures provided road markers to all site HR teams – they get to know how to mark their pace. Some terms like recruitment cycle time entered common lexicon. A culture of measurement emerged; this segued well with the HR’s understanding of newly created goal oriented performance management and variable-pay system. Record keeping became streamlined. Monthly metrics created a sense of pride and ownership amongst team members, forced them out of ad-hoc-ism and gave them a sense of urgency as seen in other target-oriented functions like sales and production.

Table 2: Linkage of HR metrics chosen with organizational imperatives

Clusters of HR Measures	Internal Operational		Internal Strategic		External Strategic	
	Process Measures	Outcome Measures	Organizational Capability	Employee Satisfaction	Customer Satisfaction	Shareholder Satisfaction
Staffing	Y	Y	Y	Y		
Performance appraisal	Y	Y	Y	Y		
Rewards system	Y	Y	Y	Y		
Organization Design	Y			Y		
Communications				Y		
Others	Y	Y				

Note: Employee Satisfaction Survey was not yet introduced. It was to be included after a few months, that is, on completion of one year of HR metrics.

Table 3: Reflection of business issues in HR metrics chosen – both drivers and outcomes

Market Challenges	M	Production Challenges	M	Regulatory challenges	M
Increasing competition in market; clients under increasing margin pressure and hence want the best at cheapest price.		Dearth of appropriate technically trained employees who understand the process and system requirement to produce as per increasingly stringent quality requirements	Y	Variety of short cuts in managing business over the years had led to a quagmire, enough to create high risk of regulatory rulings	Y
Numerous small players available to supply at cheap cost - inability of marketing team to substantiate quality and process fealty of company		Increasing input cost	Y		
Requirement to understand and communicate well the technical specs of innumerable stock keeping units (SKUs)	Y	Optimum production levels from world class machines	Y		

Market Challenges	<i>M</i>	Production Challenges	<i>M</i>	Regulatory challenges	<i>M</i>
		Wastage reduction	Y		
		Traditional approach to hire temporary staff to manage sudden production rush	Y		
Organizational challenges	<i>M</i>	Cultural challenges	<i>M</i>	Future readiness	<i>M</i>
Basic people related processes and practices that needed significant upgradation	Y	Significant number of old timers who have grown with the company; mental block to accept and upgrade to newer ways of thinking and acting	Y	With booming consumerism, entry of foreign players a reality and a threat to the company	Y
Transaction oriented approach in every sphere of activity	Y			Dearth of skilled labor to fuel the growing economy	Y

M = Metrics; Y = Yes, reflected in metrics

HR metrics were inward focused – used by the HR team themselves. Thus, HR metrics could be seen as a change management initiative, to improve functioning of the department. Support of line managers was taken as required to deliver as per various parameters (e.g., collecting requirements of manpower). Operational HR genuinely spent most time in day-to-day routine issues. For line managers, responsiveness criteria were key in evaluating effectiveness. However, these criteria did not find mention in metrics that were loaded towards strategic and medium- to long-term business issues. The conscious thinking of the HR head was not to reward reactive action by the HR team in response to operational demands by the line managers, but to preempt requirements and deliver such that crisis situations (e.g., finding temporary workers to cover for sudden absences or rush order) could be mitigated to a large extent. Some positive changes that were seen in deliveries, priorities and work culture that the researcher primarily ascribes to the introduction of HR metrics are given in Annexure I.

Discussion

In this paper, the use of action research as an approach to develop a measurement system has been explored that is closely linked to improvement in departmental performance. The development of metrics was pushed by the participants from second stage onwards once they saw how paraphernalia related to measurement helped in behavior change among themselves and also among others. The process and not the content changed behavior. The methodology provided a framework for approaching a complex problem (of HR delivery) collaboratively and supportively. The experience was similar to findings across a diverse field such as that of adult learning (e.g., Howell, 1994) or creation of a new assessment tool and care planning process (e.g., Walsh et al., 2014). The success of action research depends on what Wicks and Reason (2009, p. 244) call “opening communicative space”, that is, conditions at the beginning of the inquiry process like establishing relations with an appropriate group of people. In the present case, the HR head was new and came with robust experience. She was brought in to

revamp the HR department in the organization (that is, she had the buy-in of top management). She was the boss yet she needed help of the entire team to make a difference. She was the insider with pre-understanding and access. Her experience of managing the tricky aspect of opening a communicative space, is an addition to existing literature. The study addresses issues like a clear sense of purpose early on, practical orientation, containing chaos and order simultaneously and having a boundary condition (*ibid*). The study also adds to existing literature on insider action research, taken up by manager-researcher (Coghlan, 2001), the novelty being research conducted by a new inductee and not by a dyed-in-wool insider.

Action research investigates practice in action for reflection and creation of personal theory of practice (McNiff and Whitehead, 2000). This low-tech research is not bad research as participants have to live with the consequences, thus providing a reality check (Kemmis and McTaggart 2000). It allows representation of practices to communities of practitioners, “to connect the local and the global” by “reaching out from the specifics of particular situations” to different perspectives and contexts (*ibid*, p. 598). “Action research projects are situation specific and do not aim to create universal knowledge... (however, this disciplined framework) must have some implications beyond those required for action” (Coughlan and Coughlan, 2002, p. 236). The present study allows us to draw a few implications.

First, even in midsize, not-so-professionalized firms, introduction of HR metrics can create an impact. Most empirical studies tend to collect data from professionalized firms practicing modern management practices. HR metrics can be equally useful in small-sized firms that may not even have a separate department earmarked as HR as suggested by Tootell et al. (2009, p. 390) as such firms “cannot absorb HR ‘mistakes’ as readily as larger ones”. As most data came from personnel files and covered basic HR activities, measurement need not be postponed due to perceived or imagined reasons, one of the reasons cited for non-measurement (Toulson and Dewe, 2004).

Second, HR metrics is seen to be more relevant to knowledge-intensive industries, as they compete based on employee-knowledge, compared to traditional industries, where the competitive advantage is gained through processes and machines (Tootell *et al.*, 2009). However, the present study indicates that HR metrics is equally useful in the manufacturing industry, as it can place a value on performance of each member with more ease as each can affect output directly (Brewster, Larsen and Mayrhofer, 1997).

Third, the issue of how well the HR profession is itself equipped to measure has been raised both in conceptual literature (Cascio, 2000; Fitz-enz, 1990) and in empirical research (Toulson and Dewe, 2004; Tootell *et al.*, 2009). The current study suggests that basic background and orientation of HR practitioners does create a bottleneck. One way out is to consciously include people with multidisciplinary background including applied disciplines or partner with departments where such skills reside (Lawler, Levenson and Boudreau, 2004).

Fourth, the right data supports decision making by providing evidence that aids in course correction, prediction and uncovering areas of vulnerability. The difficulty in getting started in most organization is because HR professionals aim at impact measurement –to garner legitimacy for the discipline and to provide the illusion of precision that are useful in gaining political mileage in organizational settings (Pfeffer, 1992; 1997). Wintermantel and Mattimore's (1997) suggests a framework that identifies the current phase of the HR function in an organization and typical measurements that may be relevant. As per this framework, given how the HR was viewed and what they were expected to do in the company where research was conducted, measurements related to activities and outputs were the right start. The aim of metrics was not to tell others that HR was adding value; thus initial opposition or even worse, snickering was avoided. It was not the aim to get metrics perfect at first go, or even identify the definitive set. Rather the purpose was to select measures that serve the purpose for a given period, and was linked

to “the individual corporation’s strategy, organization, and priorities” (Chhinzar and Ghatehorde, 2009, p. 45).

Fifth, on average, HR spends most time on low-value added, routine activities with strategic HR initiatives like employee development, top talent recruitment, training, performance management by practitioners taking a back seat (Lepak and Snell, 1998). Selection of appropriate metrics may help in focusing attention to what business needs; use of metrics is identified as one of the four characteristics that lead HR to become a strategic partner (Lawler and Mohrman, 2003). Appropriate metrics linked to business may lead to configurational HR, a view that highlights the importance of combining HR activities for competitive advantage (Delery and Doty, 1996; Lepak and Snell, 1998).

Sixth, HR metrics developed in the present study can be labeled as descriptive analytics, which describe a phenomenon through different measures that could capture its relevant dimensions (Fitzenz, 2009). Such segmentation of data helps to focus attention and investment in terms of development, risk management, reward and retention (*ibid*). Once the ethos of strong number orientation becomes internalized, it is a short step to delve into statistical methods to draw correlation and causation, and thereafter, confidently move onto predicting positive organizational behavior and outcomes.

Seventh, the “language of business is dollars, not correlation coefficients” (Cascio, 2000, p. vii); thus metrics needs to be linked with money. Toulson and Dewe (2004) mention existence of tension between using HR metrics as an aid in management decision-making and establishing value in financial terms. In the present case, measures were created to aid in decision-making and continuous improvement. The case illustrates that it may be prudent to create a robust metrics system over a period of time, generate acceptance and then get into the sub-discipline of human resource accounting (HRA) that aim to measure HR activities in financial terms - if so warranted. Metrics to money linkage should be an ultimate goal of measurement process and not the starting point.

The issue of collecting, collating and analyzing data for HR metrics can be conceptualized across a continuum of increasing maturity; as a basis for reporting activity (easy) to measuring contribution to organizational goals and priorities (difficult) to analytics (Boudreau and Ramstad, 2004). Fitz-enz (2009) suggests five steps, with increasing value contribution to business – namely, recording, relating, comparing, understanding and predicting. Boudreau and Ramstad (2004) suggests three types of measurement – for efficiency e.g., cost of program, effectiveness, e.g., fit of program with business strategy and impact of HR e.g., through value-add to organizational performance.

The present action research indicates that some metrics are inherently more valuable for both descriptive and prescriptive analysis; some are not. Similarly, the direct influence of HR on measures varies dramatically (Pfeffer, 1997; Toulson and Dewe, 2004). This dichotomy can be represented in the value-influence matrix in Figure 1 that identifies metrics in terms of value to business and the influence of HR on them. It goes without saying that HR metrics should initially concentrate on the two quadrants where HR has strong influence on activities and thus results.

A single case study does not allow the same degree of generalizability as a major survey or experience from multiple sites. The action research was done in an organization where HR practitioners were relatively unfamiliar with modern HR practices. It may be that they were far more enthusiastic about the measurement system as it was closely connected with their gaining new knowledge and respectability. Both qualitative and quantitative research is needed to explore the impact of HR measurement on practitioners as well as receivers of the metrics. Receivers include both “targets”, representing primary target for persuasion or decision support and “observers” who while not being primary target, still absorb signals about what the organization values (Boudreau 1995). Or, an Indian context, researchers may explore the extent of adoption of HR metrics in organizations and a range of issues around the topic like

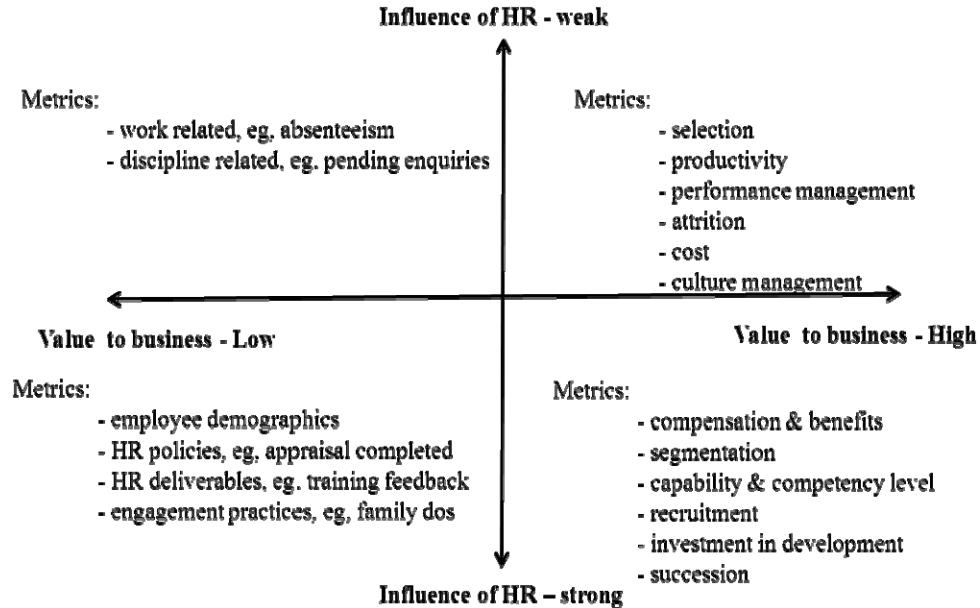


Figure 1: Examples of metrics across value – influence matrix

understanding of the concept, design, acceptance and application of measurement.

Conclusion

The qualitative approach adopted uncovered “complexity, context and persona and their multitude of factors, relationships and fuzzy phenomena” (Gummesson, 2006, p. 167) regarding implementation of HR metrics and its impact in real time. While quantitative methods of analysis are useful in generalizability, the qualitative approach through this case does create an “individualised universal” (Stake 2000, p. 436), and rich description through anecdotes reiterate that though hard data can uncover all kinds of relationships, only soft data can explain them (Mintzberg, 1979). Organizations are measuring (Lawler, Levenson and Boudreau, 2004; Weiss and Finn, 2005), but what is important is that metrics adopted are meaningful in the given context as a prescriptive approach is neither feasible nor desirable (Verma and Dewe, 2008).

The study presents the importance of metrics in managing an HR department, as well as helping HR to reinvent themselves by creating new, more favorable identities (Kulik and Perry, 2008). The metrics creation and aligning of HR practices with organizational requirements went hand-in-hand aiming at an idiosyncratic fit (Becker and Huselid, 1998) that allows for considerable flexibility as well as inimitability. The development of simple yet comprehensive metrics that gained calibration over a period provide a lesson that metrics need not be cast in stone nor is there any right time to start measuring. The measures chosen were impact driven and forward looking and highlighted synergy that exists between various streams of the HR discipline. Metrics need not aim for the driver’s seat; acting as mileposts to enhance organizational capabilities is equally good. Fixation with elegant analysis and exacting measures may be counterproductive if it does not balance between precision and usefulness (Boudreau and Ramstad, 2004). As finance departments collate financial measures, but its key figures worry everyone in company, so should be the approach to HR metrics. The key ones, based on organizational

necessity, should become part of internal lexicon. Pfeffer (1992; 1997) argues cultural change and building organizational capabilities take time; it should be taken as a matter of faith. Intelligent measurements can be added to this paradigm about managing human capital.

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Biography

Kajari Mukherjee is Associate Professor in Indian Institute of Management Indore. Her area of research is Organisation Design using paradigm of Complexity Theory. She also researches on the subject of Corporate Social Responsibility with focus on mandated CSR. She has authored books on complexity theory, corporate governance and leadership. She also has articles, case studies, conference papers to her credit. She consults in areas of change management, end-to-end HR process design and corporate social responsibility.

Before joining academics, she has worked in industry for over two decades. Her experience, in senior positions, spans a wide gamut of industries, both in public and private sector. She was Principal Consultant in one of the largest consultancy firms in the world. She is M.Sc. (Mathematics), PGDRM (IRMA) and PhD from Tata Institute of Science (TISS). She is one of the twelve senior managers of India selected for Chevening scholarships (UK) in 2004.

Annexure 1: Snapshot of positive changes during period under review

Positive changes	Examples of behavior driven because of measurement focus
HR and Operations marching to the same tune	For most metrics, HR had only indirect and weak influence. The various outcome measures were primarily driven by the line. Alignment between operational requirements and HR became strong due to use of a set of data that both found meaningful. E.g., operations manager has to cooperate and set question papers, conduct machine tests and interviews to improve recruitment turn-around time and in the process gets better manpower quality.
Ushering a new culture of professional management practices	Effectiveness of HR metrics lies in its understanding, internalizing and implementing by line managers. The metrics asked questions about implementation of new processes. E.g., a six-step induction program was created, spanning over a period of 45 days, to improve retention; metrics asked a question about completion of all of them, to cement the novel practice - even the workers had to be taken through the process. Insisting on similar induction program for everyone in the plant drove an important cultural change in assigning professional dignity to workers.
Concentrating on critical operational imperatives.	Collection, collation and presentation of data regarding important operational issues jolted HR (and serendipitously plant managers) out of their comfort zone. E.g., metrics on overtime payments, appointment of temporary workers due to faulty planning, attrition rates amongst above-average workers and new workers.
Concentrating on critical competitive imperatives.	Skill and competency development, performance-based culture (as against entitlement culture) and corporate governance (adherence to myriad regulations of India regarding labor) were critical organizational capabilities identified. E.g., metrics on percentage of employees with professional qualifications reinforced that it had to be improved through better recruitment and by encouraging existing employees to get trained/certified.

Positive changes	Examples of behavior driven because of measurement focus
Improving HR operations	Metrics helped in tracking the operational aspects of HR through focus on HR processes, policies and practices, encompassing both efficiency and effectiveness of operations.
Being a conscientious employer	Many corporate governance issues were highlighted through the metrics, e.g., those around liabilities of the company as Principle Employer (as mandated by law), being conscientious employer (e.g., social audit parameters not complied with) and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities. Having CSR as a heading made the plants conscious that one-off activities like blood donation, etc. can be given a more planned shape
Instilling a sense of pride	Monthly metrics created a sense of pride and ownership among practitioners, forcing them out of torpor and activity orientation (than delivery orientation). It also provided them with a sense of urgency as seen in target oriented functions (like sales and production) who have month-end goals to fulfill. The metrics helped to articulate the value that HR can provide, as well as communicate path-dependency between HR activities and deliverables and organizational success factors.

Insights on using Action Research to change the organisational culture towards a market orientation in an Australian government business enterprise

Diane Robyn Kalendra

Abstract

This article describes insights on an action research study I conducted in an Australian government business enterprise (GBE), with the twin aims of changing the organisational culture towards a market orientation and using this research for a doctoral thesis. GBEs are government-owned or government-controlled entities that produce goods and services on a commercial basis. Corporatisation of GBEs has been embraced by governments wanting to transform mostly state-owned monopolies into more commercial organisations while retaining them in public ownership. However, this move has not always improved their performance. At the time of this study, I was the marketing manager at a regional operating division of a national GBE. By the end of the study – which involved three action research cycles, over four years and 42 participants – I had successfully developed a diagnostic tool for changing an organisational culture towards a market orientation and also completed my PhD. This tool will greatly increase the possibility of positively impacting an organisation's business performance.

Key words: Market orientation, organisational culture, Action Research

This article describes an action research study I used to change the organisational culture towards a market orientation, in an Australian government business enterprise in which I was a senior manager. My study also contributed to completing a PhD thesis. The paper is structured as follows: I start with a description of the context for my study and the reasons why the problem addressed in the study was important to the organisation where it was carried out, as well as to me and to the managers reporting to me who became my co-researchers in the study. I will explain then why I selected the action research model that I used in the study. This will be followed by a description and discussion of the research carried out and its outcomes. I will conclude with insights gained from my study.

The setting

Government business enterprises (GBEs) serve key sectors of the economy; including electricity, water, urban transport, railways, ports, and forestry. They control significant assets, generate revenue, and make dividend, tax and tax-equivalent payments to owner governments (Productivity Commission, 2006). Although governments have embraced corporatisation of GBEs to transform mostly state-owned monopolies into more commercial organisations while retaining them in public ownership, this move has not improved their performance. Nearly half of the 85 Australian national GBEs earned less than the long-term bond rate in 2004/05 and 52% failed to earn a commercial rate of return, suggesting that other impediments to improved performance remain.

The setting for this study was a regional operating division of a national GBE. The division contributed about AU \$280 million of the GBE's national revenue and employed around 3,500 staff. The division itself was split into the two major divisions – Commercial and Operational.

Substantial costs had been driven out of the business of the GBE over the five years before this study, with the finalisation of a \$510 million national investment in automation. With an associated

reconfiguration of the network, the GBE could now handle greater throughput while simultaneously increasing service reliability and accuracy, and lowering internal-processing costs. However, while cost savings continued to be realised through this and other initiatives, management acknowledged that substantial revenue growth would be needed to ensure increased contribution at a time when the traditional market of the GBE was eroding as increasing numbers of customers started using alternative technologies.

The problem

I will use the term 'thematic concern' to explain the problem I was addressing during my research. According to Kemmis and McTaggart (1988, p. 9), 'The thematic concern defines the substantive area in which the [action research] group decides to focus its improvement strategies'.

The GBE's concerns

Three major concerns or challenges were identified in discussions with senior managers:

- Inter-functional coordination issues existed due to the organisational structure and there was concern that the recent centralisation of the Commercial and Operational Divisions had the potential to create further inter-functional coordination issues that would impact on customer satisfaction and revenue growth.
- The current sales and marketing functional structure was highly fragmented across the organisation resulting in inconsistency in creating and delivering superior customer value, potentially creating issues for sustainable competitive advantage and performance.
- Retirement, downsizing and a flattened organisational structure were changing the management landscape and a new generation of managers needed to learn about the organisation's customers faster than its competitors and to develop an appropriate style of leadership.

The State General Manager had recently retired and the commercial and operational areas in the state were separated. A wave of other retirements in senior management was impending and a ban on external recruitment was in place. The newly appointed Commercial Manager realised there was an urgent need to teach the senior managers how to work together in inter-functional teams across both Commercial and Operational Divisions to change the organisation's culture from cost saving to revenue generation, and, in turn, improve performance.

My concerns

As Marketing Manager, I realised that a market orientation would be needed to help senior managers cope with the changing nature of the GBE. I had recently embarked on a doctoral program and was familiar with the concept of using action research to manage organisational change. I was also in need of a suitable topic for my research.

Common thematic concern

Taking the above concerns into consideration, with the support of the Commercial Manager, I decided to use an action research approach to change the organisational culture towards a market orientation to improve its performance, and organisational support was obtained for this study.

Research questions

From the thematic concern, I developed the following research questions.

My primary research question was:

Can the performance of a GBE be improved if it became more market oriented?

My secondary research question was:

Can action research be used to change the organisational culture of a GBE towards a market orientation?

Description of the research

The purpose of my study was to use *action research* to *change* the *organisational culture* of a GBE towards a *market orientation*.

Market orientation

Established in the early 1990s, the term *market orientation* is broader than *marketing orientation*: it is not exclusively a concern of the marketing function (Shapiro, 1988); it is less politically charged and more likely to be embraced by non-marketing departments (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990); and it focuses on external markets (Park and Zaltman, 1987). Market orientation ceases to be a function and becomes an organisation's way of doing business (Esteban, Millan and Martin-Consuegra, 2002). It makes reference to potential customers as well as the influence of competitors, suppliers and the environment; it also incorporates inter-functional coordination (Esteban, Millan and Martin-Consuegra, 2002).

Organisational culture

The theoretical model developed from the literature suggests that while organisational culture dimensions that support a market orientation can exist in many different organisational cultures, certain organisational cultures will be more conducive to supporting a market orientation than others. Hofstede's (1984) model for measuring cross-national cultures has been widely adapted to measure organisational cultural dimensions. This model identifies: power distance between individuals; uncertainty avoidance; individualism/collectivism; masculinity/femininity; and long-term/short-term orientation. Hofstede's dimensions were selected for use in this research as they have been empirically tested and business studies, in particular, have used these dimensions.

Strategic change management

A complex of 'emotional' and 'rational' factors (Beer, 1988; 1999), the theoretical model developed from the literature also suggests that strategic change management requires dissatisfaction with the status quo as well as a model and a process for change. Moreover, the multiplicative effect of this dissatisfaction, model and process must exceed resistance to the change and the use of a series of action research cycles is a suitable strategic management process for changing the organisational culture towards a market orientation.

Action research

American social psychologist Kurt Lewin first coined the phrase 'action research' (Lewin, 1946). Lewin, however, did not give a comprehensive definition of action research, and its processes and characteristics. Many later writers have attempted to define and characterise action research (Altrichter *et al.*, 2000, Azhar, 2001, Law, 2002, O'Leary, 2000, Passfield, 2000, Perry and Zuber-Skerritt, 1992 and Thompson, 2003, among others). A working definition provided by Altrichter *et al.*, (2000) emphasises three key aspects of action research: a group of people working together; involved in the cycle of planning, acting, observing and reflecting on their work more deliberately and systematically than usual; and a public report of that experience (such as a report to a sponsor).

Why action research?

The institution where I was undertaking my doctoral studies expected me to complete an action research thesis. As I learned more about action research, I realised that it was the best approach for tackling both my organisation's needs, and my needs as a researcher. Action research has two aims: an action aim to bring about changes in some community, organisation, program or intervention (Carson *et al.*, 2001; McKay and Marshall, 2001); and a research aim to increase knowledge and understanding on the part of the researcher, the client or both, or some wider community

(Dick, 2000). Action research had been used to effect changes in a wide range of industrial and community development settings (Sankaran *et al.*, 2002) including in effecting a change of market orientation in a business (Ballantyne, 2003, Karvinen, 2002). It had, however, not been used to effect a change of market orientation of a GBE in Australia. Thus, action research best suited my work-related as well as my academic concerns.

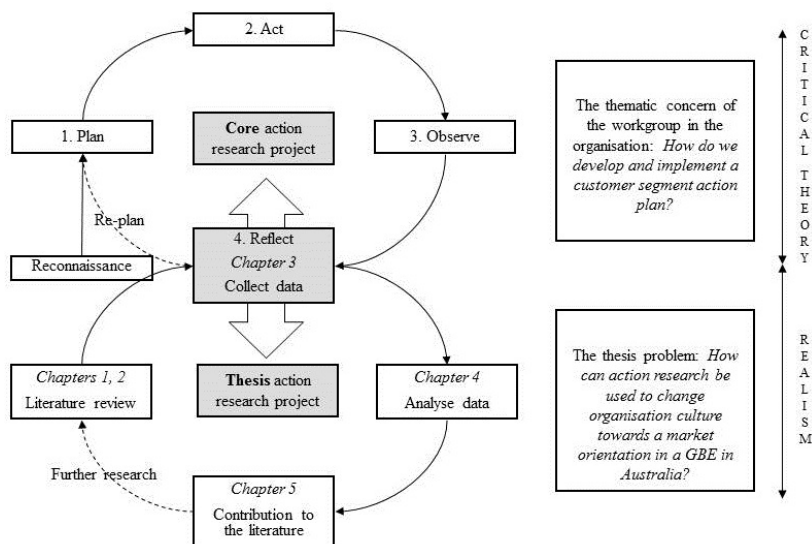
The action research project

The study comprised three action research cycles over four years concerning two projects: the 'core action research project', involving the development and implementation of a customer segment action plan for the regional operating division of the GBE; and the 'thesis action research project', involving the development of the doctoral thesis. Findings from the core action research project contributed to the thesis action research project. Thus, the customer segment action plan was the means to achieving a market orientation. This approach was first outlined by Perry and Zuber-Skerritt (1992; 1994); and has been used in at least three other studies (Azhar, 2001; O'Leary, 2000; Thompson, 2003) (Figure 1).

Participants

I worked in the Commercial Division as the Marketing Manager throughout the study. The sponsor of the study was my manager, the Commercial Division Manager. The participants in this study were all senior managers working in both the Commercial and the Operational Divisions, as well as in supporting functions such as Information Technology and Property Management, operating within the region but reporting nationally. The three action research cycles completed during this research involved the researcher, the sponsor, and a total of 40 other individual participants (some in multiple roles) in a steering committee (eight of the participants), three customer segment action teams (25 of the participants) and seven key project teams (35 of the participants) within the sponsor organisation.

Figure 1: Two projects in action research



Source: adapted from Perry and Sankaran (2002).

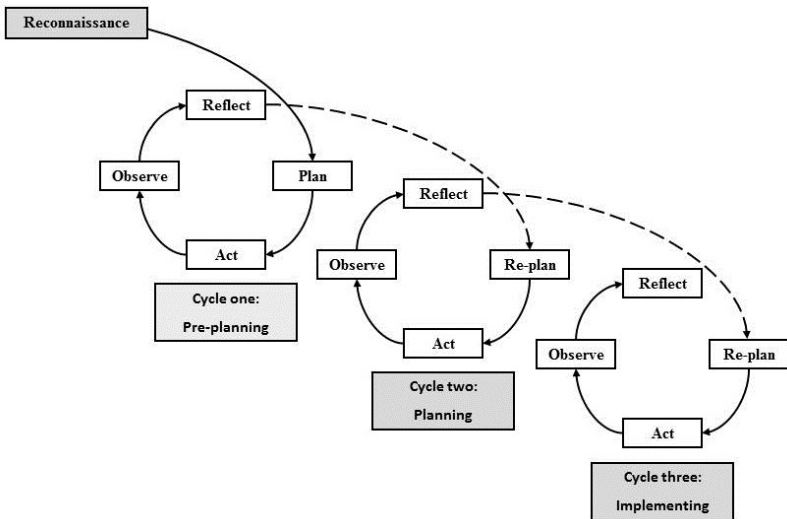
Reconnaissance

The *reconnaissance* phase commenced three months before the core action research. It involved fact finding or examining external reality built by the perceptions of others (Perry and Alizadeh, 2001), specifically the development of a background to the research area (O’Leary, 2000) and the determination of the real-world problem (McKay and Marshall, 1999). It included secondary research for the literature review and a series of discussions with the sponsor, peers and supervisors. I also participated in academic workshops to gain an understanding of action research and to plan the structure of this research project. No customers were added to the participants in the reconnaissance or later groups because the *voice of the customer* was always present through the regular sales figures and market research results that were provided to the groups.

Action research cycles

Data was collected from the three action research cycles (Figure 2) – each with a planning, implementation, observation and reflection phase – two participant questionnaire surveys, a journal and other supporting evidence kept by the researcher. Despite the length of the study, the participants remained relatively stable, with only four participants leaving and five joining.

Figure 2: Action research cycles



Source: adapted from Zuber-Skerritt (2001).

Cycle one: pre-planning

The *planning* phase of the first action research cycle involved determining the parameters of the problem and the strategy for addressing that problem based on information from the reconnaissance (Carson *et al.*, 2001), and included the researcher, sponsor and two key stakeholders.

The *implementation* phase involved a series of discussions about a planned two-day off-site workshop and the development of a

customer segment action plan. Within this process, knowledge was collaboratively created in a systematic way (Riley, 2002). That learning took place is reflected in the sponsor's confidence in briefing the action teams in the planning meeting of Cycle two.

During the *observe* phase, data was collected from a number of sources including notes from meetings, notes from conversations, personal reflections and e-mails between group members. I also compiled documents including the workbooks for the planning workshop.

In the *reflection* phase, participants reflected on and evaluated what happened during implementation. A meeting was coordinated for this purpose in which generalisations were formed. This reflection and the understanding about the practices in the work system that was developed were crucial to the action research project and to enterprise learning (Riley, 2002). Data was recorded at this meeting for the doctoral thesis.

Cycle two: planning

The *planning* phase of the second cycle involved determining the parameters of the problem and the strategy for addressing that problem based on information from the first cycle, and included the sponsor, the researcher and all the steering committee and customer segment action team participants.

The *implementation* phase consisted of the two-day, off-site workshop and the development of a customer segment action plan. That learning took place is reflected in the statement from one of the participants in the reflection phase of this cycle, that he gained '*a greater understanding of the business as a whole and how it works together*'. Further, the sponsor acknowledged the workshop was the best ever, with teams having to work together and also be interdependent.

During the *observe* phase, I compiled documents including the customer segment action plan.

The *reflection* phase was similar to that of Cycle one.

Cycle three: implementation

The *planning* phase involved determining the parameters of the problem and the strategy for addressing that problem based on information from the second cycle, and included the sponsor, the researcher and all steering committee participants.

The *implementation* phase involved seven key project action teams developing and implementing seven projects (Figure 3):

- Lead Generation
- Leadership Development
- Revenue Protection
- Inventory Management and Goods Supply Chain
- Product A
- Product B
- Market Segment Gap Analysis

These key projects were selected based on their importance for achieving customer segment plan objectives and the need to involve people across functional organisational barriers in order to implement the project. Each team was sponsored by a steering committee member, and a team leader was appointed to coordinate meetings, prepare plans, ensure implementation and provide progress reports to the steering committee. Team leaders and members were selected based on the functional requirement to contribute to the project and leadership development criteria. That learning took place is reflected in the positive responses from participants in the reflection phase of this cycle.

During the *observe* phase, I compiled documents including key project action team briefing papers and presentations.

In the *reflection phase*, seven meetings involving the steering committee and key project team leaders were coordinated to help participants with their reflections, from which generalisations were formed. This marked the end of the third and final action research cycle.

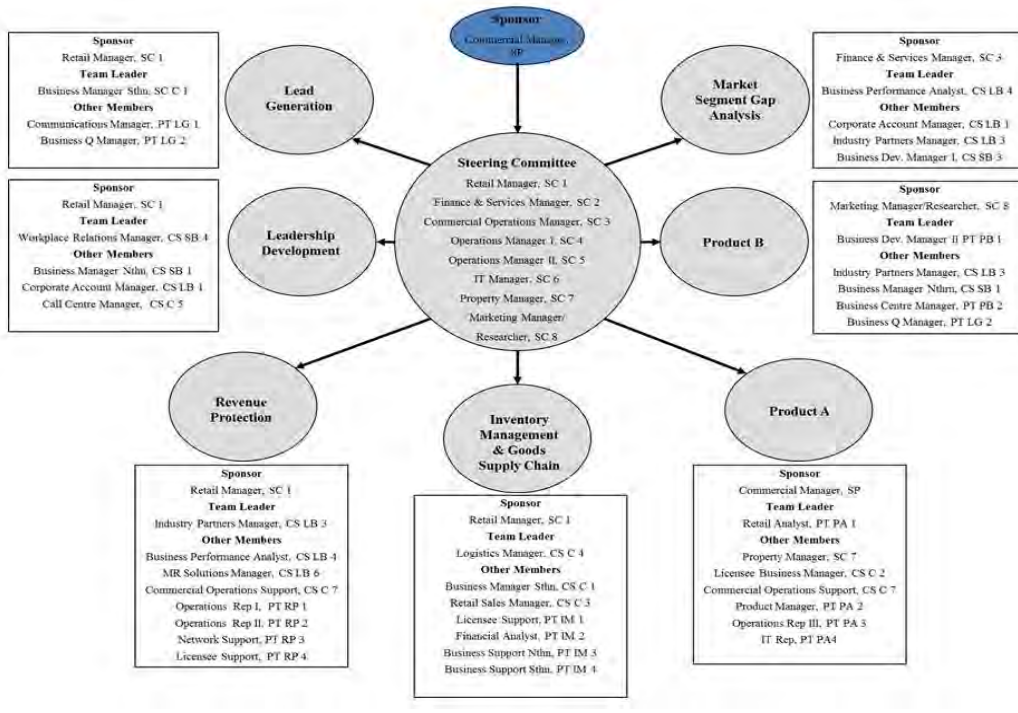


Figure 3: Cycle three: implementation participants

Source: developed for this research based on Abraham (1997).

Data collection

Data collection for the thesis action research project included all the data collected in the core action research project as well as additional data collected specifically for the thesis action research project.

A database of information from the core action research project was collected and kept by the researcher, and forms the chain of evidence that is an audit trail for that project. It includes a variety of documents that demonstrate the quality of this research, such as:

- an action research journal kept throughout the action research process
- contents of meetings and conversations
- the researcher's reflections
- agreements with the sponsor
- the National Customer Segment Plans
- minutes of meetings
- the workbooks for the Customer Segment Action Planning Workshop
- the Customer Segment Action Plan
- the reviewed Customer Segment Action Plan
- the key project action team briefs
- the key project action team presentations
- text of semi-structured interviews
- participant questionnaires

The database also includes documents that were collected during the research process including business performance reports, customer satisfaction surveys and staff attitude surveys because they corroborate interview data and help develop convergent lines of inquiry (Healy, 2000; Yin, 2009). This database is available to those who adhere to commercial-in-confidence restrictions.

Data analysis

Analysing large amounts of qualitative data presents certain risks for a researcher, including: leaping to conclusions based on limited data (Kahnman and Tversky, 1979), overt influence given to vivid (Nisbett and Ross, 1980) or elite respondents (Miles and Huberman, 1994), ignoring of basic statistical properties (Kahnman and Tversky, 1979) and inadvertent dropping of 'disconfirming evidence' (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 540; Nisbett and Ross, 1980). To avoid these problems, a general analytic strategy was prepared consisting of three steps (Thompson, 2003; Azhar, 2001; Miles and Huberman, 1994): data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing/verification.

Data reduction

First, a one-page summary of field notes was made after each of the plan, act, observe and reflect steps of the core action research project. This included official meetings, discussions, consultations, observations and presentation sessions. In addition, notes were made from data gathered in the thesis action research project including: literature review, supervisor input, peer discussion, semi-structured interviews, participant questionnaire surveys, customer satisfaction surveys, staff attitude surveys and business performance reports and helped to achieve validity through triangulation. These sources of evidence were used to assist in analysing the data and provided a basis for reminding the researcher of the context of the action research project.

Next, two levels of coding were used: descriptive and interpretive coding. Twelve descriptive codes were developed from the research questions and attached to the data. Two interpretive codes were then developed that linked together segments of the data within each of these research questions.

Coding was then summarised manually. Consideration was given to using a software program such as NUD*IST to assist in the data reduction; however, these programs were unsuitable for three reasons. First, although they may be useful for iterative coding that

maps a 'constructed' reality within the constructivist paradigm (Neuman, 1994), this thesis research project is within the realism paradigm where the research is more concerned with aspects of the external world, rather than the minutiae of a person's constructed world (Gummesson 2000). Second, the 'chunking' method used can result in 'unavoidable decontextualisation' of data (Healy, 2000, p. 156), impacting negatively on the analysis of this relatively in-depth study. Finally, they are disproportionately time consuming and may affect the creative process in qualitative analysis and decrease sensitivity (Carson and Coviello, 1996).

Data display

Data display involves displaying already reduced data in a manner that helps identify and interpret it (Master, 1999). Data display facilitates effective data analysis and the drawing of conclusions by using techniques that organise, assemble and compress information (Miles and Huberman, 1994). This research used data tables to develop linkages in issues and relationships. Narrative texts and quotations were used to support these displays.

Conclusion drawing/verification

Finally, this research used triangulation to confirm or disconfirm the data and create a foundation from which conclusions could be drawn and verified.

Rigour

To validate the findings from the research, two surveys were conducted of the participants. Seventeen of the 25 participants at the beginning of cycle two of the action research project responded to the first survey and 14 of the same participants at the end of the study responded to the second survey – a response rate of over 50% on each survey, which is satisfactory for business research (Malhotra, 1993). The responses to the surveys were also compared with customer satisfaction, staff attitude and business performance data collected as part of the study's triangulation processes.

To protect participants and the organisation from harm, the research was conducted within ethical guidelines. Informed and voluntary consent was obtained from all participants. Confidential data collection and presentation ensured privacy was protected (Webster, Lewis and Brown 2013).

Discussion

Essentially, this research finds becoming more market oriented can improve the performance of a GBE. A market orientation is culturally based, and organisations evolve towards a market orientation in response to specific environmental conditions. Therefore, it is necessary to identify what organisational culture dimensions currently exist and how to realign them to support a market orientation, if a market orientation is determined to be the appropriate response to changing environmental conditions. Further, action research can be used to change the organisational culture towards a market orientation as it is an approach that can help identify and increase dissatisfaction with the status quo, and its characteristics are conducive to supporting a market orientation. However, its use needs management commitment over the long term to overcome resistance.

An investigation of the organisation's cultural dimensions identified an internal organisational orientation, strong uncertainty avoidance, low individualism, large power distances and mechanistic internal processes (Table 1).

Table 1: Organisational culture of the GBE

Organisational culture dimension	Examples
<i>Orientation</i>	
The organisation was internally oriented and the focus was more on efficient internal smoothing and integration activities to maximise its revenue stream than on investing in differentiation strategies to compete efficiently.	There was no formal national marketing structure to disseminate market intelligence and no national head of marketing. Rather, marketing functions existed in multiple different business units across the organisation, indicating marketing was not mission-critical but merely filled a sales support role.

Organisational culture dimension	Examples
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<i>Uncertainty avoidance</i>	
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There was strong uncertainty avoidance and decision-making tended to be collective. Managers were encouraged to consult widely before making a decision.

For example, a major national advertising campaign intended to generate leads from small- and medium-sized businesses involved collective decision-making across all states as well as Corporate Public Affairs and all national product management groups. It took over 12 months to develop and resulted in a failed campaign – in attempting to incorporate the views of many diverse internal stakeholder interest groups, it failed to address external customers' needs. It also resulted in stress for the project leader that was career limiting for a period of time.

This was also evidenced in the high level of structure. There were very structured monthly report and meeting timetables for management reporting.

Each month, the marketing manager was expected to produce a written report of activities in marketing and attend a State Commercial Business Council, State Public Image Committee Meeting and State Retail Meeting, and prepare comments on marketing-related papers for the National Commercial Business Council, and National Retail Business Council. An analysis of the marketing manager's time indicated 20% was spent attending these meetings, plus an additional 10% was spent preparing for these meetings.

There was also an abundance of written rules, and the language used for these was largely directive.

There were policies and procedure manuals covering all areas of the organisation. Further, breaking rules could result in formal and internally time-consuming counselling processes. For example, in 2005/06, 3% of staff were involved in counselling processes in the Commercial Division in the study, with 6 people formally counselled, 11 warning counselled and 1 dismissed.

<i>Power distance</i>	
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A culture of large power distances was evidenced in the GBE's structure; the organisational pyramid was tall.

In the Commercial Division over 25% of staff were in supervisory roles and large wage differentials ranging from around AU \$30,000 to AU \$80,000, exclusive of executive salaries. Further, the qualifications of the lower strata of the pyramid were relatively low with only 60%

Organisational culture dimension	Examples
Decision-making was centralised to the more senior and therefore more powerful managers rather than functional experts.	<p>graduating from high school.</p> <p>Despite the prior failure of two state-based youth market promotions, a third promotion was requested, indicating that being seen to be doing something in the youth market as directed in the national Commercial Plan was considered more important than generating profitable revenue. According to one participant, managers <i>'won't make a move without direction'</i>.</p>
<p>This was also seen in the importance attached to status symbols, such as offices and cars.</p> <p>Status symbols were strictly enforced despite requests based on other criteria such as functionality.</p>	<p>Offices were only provided to staff at Administration Officer (AO) 7 level and above.</p> <p>One AO6 manager requested an office because he supervised a number of staff and had significant contact with external suppliers, which required a private space to ensure confidentiality. The request was refused because of the manager's AO6 level status.</p>
<p>Similarly, cars were provided only to staff at AO7 level and above, with the exception of sales staff where cars were considered a tool of the job regardless of their level.</p>	<p>Business Development Managers at AO6 level were refused cars despite the need for them as a tool of the job and despite issues created in terms of succession planning whereby AO5 level sales staff would refuse promotion into the AO6 Business Development role because they would have to give up their car.</p>
<p>Managers with the largest number of staff had the most power in the organisation.</p>	<p>Consequently, senior managers in the Retail Network held the most power. Further, it was widely regarded that all other functions existed to 'serve' the Retail Network. These other functions included Commercial Operations, Finance and Services and Sales and Marketing. This belief was based on the number of people in the Retail Network and their perceived responsibility for revenue generation despite the fact they were responsible for only approximately one-third of revenue and existed to service the business contracts generated by Sales and Marketing which contributed two-thirds of the revenue.</p>

Source: developed for this research.

The organisation's monopoly position was under increasing threat from two sources. First, there was a threat of deregulation, although this threat was not assessed as immediate. More immediate was the threat of alternative technologies eroding the organisation's principal and protected source of revenue and required the organisation to find new sources of revenue in competitive and thus more complex markets.

Thus, the market orientation was assessed as weak, and dissatisfaction existed with the status quo. However, while the market orientation strengthened initially, indeed, as one participant commented, *'I gained a greater understanding of my own (customer segment's) financial aspects'*; the organisation's long-term response was not to make changes to the culture to support a market orientation. Instead, it reinforced the existing culture. For example, there was an increased focus on cost savings that some participants believed was distracting them from engaging in revenue-generating activities. As one participant observed, *'While I understand the need to manage costs ... we can't go out and "drive revenues" because we spend all day explaining every cent we're spending'*. In addition, there was concern this cost saving focus existed because it was an easy way to achieve profitability.

There was also evidence that uncertainty avoidance increased. As tolerance for risk decreased, innovation was impacted by fear of incurring costs. As one participant observed, *'We used to be considered the "Innovation State" ... there doesn't seem to be as much innovation happening anymore'*. In addition, there was evidence power distances increased, with some participants concerned decisions were being made without the involvement of the management team.

I don't feel there's a management team here. We get together once a month, we report on activities ... but we don't discuss important issues.

As a result, while management was focused on saving costs to achieve profitability, customer satisfaction and employee morale became issues for managers. For example, external market research indicated eroding customer satisfaction scores in consumer, small and large business segments and customer complaints increased.

In addition, absenteeism increased to record high levels and staff attitude survey scores declined, leading one participant to suggest the increased focus on cost savings by reducing labour ratios was the issue, *'Cutting staff ... it's got to be having an impact on staff morale ... and, ultimately on absenteeism'*.

Further, it was increasingly difficult to get middle management roles filled because of increasing staff dissatisfaction.

We can't get people to fill ... manager roles because they know they're on a hiding to nowhere. They're being asked to achieve revenue targets at the same time as cutting staff. They're working additional unpaid hours just to get essential tasks done. They'll do this for a short period of time, but their good grace will run out.

While many of the participants were aware of the long-term consequences of pursuing a cost-saving strategy, openly questioning higher authority was not regarded as acceptable behaviour. On the occasions when questions were raised, they were dismissed often with references to the need to continue to cut costs as revenues were eroding. Despite their concerns, participants were following orders, driven from above through key performance indicators directed at achieving profitability.

Results from the first participant questionnaire, corroborated the findings that market orientation was weak prior to the implementation of the action research cycles and that some dissatisfaction with the status quo existed. Results from the second participant questionnaire corroborated a re-examination of the organisational culture dimensions as discussed in the previous section: while market orientation strengthened over the study, it remained weak long term, which had a negative impact on business performance including profitability, customer satisfaction and employee attitudes.

Outcomes

The study contributed to both management and research outcomes. The organisation expected management outcomes and

the university wanted to see research outcomes. Table 2 shows an effect matrix that summarises the three types of outcomes from this research – management, research and personal. The columns summarise three types of effects: direct, indirect, and surprises that were not anticipated.

Table 2: Research outcomes

Outcomes	Direct	Indirect	Surprise
Management	A diagnostic tool for changing an organisational culture towards a market orientation, providing forecast outcomes useful for improving performance.	Increased awareness of cultural issues in an existing organisation.	Sponsor's initial enthusiasm for the research waned.
Research	Action research is useful for introducing organisational change.	Able to explore and explain complex systems and relationships.	Despite the length of the study, which lasted over four years, the participants remained relatively stable, with only four leaving and five joining.
Personal	Successful completion of my PhD.	Transition from practitioner to academic.	Became a reflective practitioner.

Source: developed for this research.

Management outcomes

There are three implications of this research for practice. The first is that it provides a *diagnostic tool* for changing an organisational culture towards a market orientation. An organisation can use the information from this research to assist in identifying what organisational culture predominates, what organisational culture dimensions exist and what environmental conditions exist and how they might change in the future. Using this tool to diagnose the situation will greatly increase the possibility of positively impacting business performance.

The second implication for practice of this research is to provide forecast outcomes of a market orientation for an organisation. An organisation can use the information from this research to assist them in deciding whether it is appropriate to develop a market orientation and at what cost.

The third implication for practice of this research is for *improving the performance of an existing organisation*. An organisation can use the information from this research to realign its organisational culture dimensions to move towards a market orientation. Equally, an organisation can use the same information to manage multiple organisational culture dimensions to operate multiple different cultures within the same organisation to achieve multiple different outcomes, simultaneously.

Research outcomes

This study confirms action research can bring about change in an organisation, and contribute to the creation of new knowledge and understanding. It demonstrates the usefulness of the core and thesis action research project process as first outlined by Perry and Zuber-Skeritt (1992, 1994). It also demonstrates inductive or theory-building action research is a practical alternative to traditional deductive, positivist approaches to research market orientation (Perry and Sankaran 2002, Perry 2012). Further, action research may be especially useful to research changing an organisational culture towards a market orientation because the problem requires systems thinking in a learning organisation

(Senge 1990). In addition, action research is a learning organisation approach (Abraham 2012) that is also able to explore and explain complex systems and relationships such as a link between the characteristics of action research and the conditions necessary to support a market orientation.

Personal outcomes

As a result of this study I was able to successfully develop a diagnostic tool for implementing a market orientation in an Australian GBE. At the same time, I was also able to complete my PhD and, in the process, transitioned from a management practitioner to an academic.

Insights

Action research was found to be useful for managing organisational change. This is one of the first qualitative studies about market orientation with particular reference to organisational culture in Australia. However, this study was limited to a single organisation perspective only. Further research could confirm the elements found here.

Action research was originally adopted by the sponsor as a way to differentiate himself from his recent predecessor. However, the sponsor also demonstrated doubts about it. Specifically, the sponsor was concerned that the proposed action research approach was *'too academic'*. Practitioners have long questioned the value of academic research for practice (Pearce and Huang 2012, Perry 2012). With the dual aims of generating new insights that serve both action and research, collaborative action research provides a basis for bridging the gap between practitioners and academics (Brannick and Coglán 2006, Perry 2012). However, managing expectations, communicating the value in terms of practical project, process and learning outcomes (Abraham 2012) for the organisation and individual participants, and building momentum by identifying short term gains and using champions could help.

Finally, while the sponsor initially articulated a focus on a better understanding of customers, eliminating cross-functional barriers

and leadership and development, the evidence suggests he was more focused on driving cost savings than on generating revenue growth to increase contribution through changing the organisational culture towards a market orientation. For example, during the pre-planning cycle he expressed concerns about the cost of taking large numbers of managers out of the workplace for a planning conference.

As a result, another limitation this research faced was in the data collection process, for only a seven-month period was authorised in which to conduct the core action research project. However, this limitation of time was minimised by the careful preparation and planning of the action research project. Thus, while action research is effective for managing organisational change, it is also time-consuming. Therefore, it is crucial to have ongoing top management buy-in for it to succeed. Often, management tends to view action research as “too academic” and, in spite of initial enthusiasm, end up resenting the time taken by participants for the exercise when what they are really after is a quick fix.

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Biography

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A cybernetic approach to understanding the management of social enterprise in Korea

Jae Eon Yu

Abstract

Understanding the social entrepreneurship and active responsibility of social enterprise in society, a cybernetic approach to management is used to explore problematic situations of the organisation and to explore the set of 'what's for improving and appreciating the management of the social enterprise from systemic perspectives. In order to do so, the processes of participatory action research is extended to a higher level of learning processes that explores new sorts of "questions and problems" in a given situation. In this sense, we explore the nature of the process of action-based learning by examining one's own actions and learning about the complexity of social practice from systemic perspectives. The finding reveals a cybernetic approach can be used to examine the problem of social enterprise from the three levels of organisational fitness, namely normative, strategic and operational management

Key words: Social entrepreneurship, cybernetic approach, Action Research, social enterprise

Introduction

In the discussion of social entrepreneurship and responsibility in social enterprise in society, this paper aims to define the social responsibility and governance of social enterprise and the successful execution of social enterprises as sustainable social business within civil society from a systemic perspective. To do so, we will apply cybernetic methodology developed from the

combined use of Checkland's Soft Systems Methodology (SSM) and Beer's Viable System Model (VSM) to diagnose the problematic situations within the organization of social enterprises. In this paper, we will consider the following questions for the application of a cybernetic methodology to examine the problem of social enterprises in the Korean context.

Firstly, to what extent can a cybernetic methodology be useful for dealing with the issue of the governance of a social enterprise? Secondly, social enterprises usually have a complex mixture of goals. For instance, there are three different categories of goals: (1) social goals that aim to benefit the community; (2) economic goals that achieve the sustainability of social enterprises through trading or market oriented economic activities in order to serve a social goal; and (3) socio-political goals that propose and promote a new model of economic development and democratic decision-making which include marginalized parts or groups of the population. To meet these multiple goals, the second question is how the process of systemic enquiry is possible for understanding the management of social enterprise and by the designing of the social enterprise for the socially disadvantaged or marginalized group.

The findings of this study indicate that a cybernetic approach can be used to understand the problem of social enterprise from the three levels of organisational fitness, namely the normative, strategic and operational management levels.

The paper is divided into three sections. In the first section, we will look to the research findings from existing literature on the issues of corporate social responsibility and governance of social enterprises. In the second section, we will discuss the double-loop learning process of the cybernetic methodology, which was originally proposed by Espejo (1987), and has been further developed by Espejo, *et al.* (1996) later on. In the last section, we will introduce the case study, which will demonstrate the application of the cybernetic methodology to diagnose the problematic situations of the social enterprise which operates in Korean contexts, and provide suggestions for future research.

The social responsibility and governance of social enterprise

According to Sienicka and Tyrowicz (2012), a social economy is an alternative which pursues a specific purpose for the benefit of a whole society. As the social economy has gradually become recognised as a 'third sector' since the beginning of the 1990s, the issues of corporate social responsibility and governance of community-based social enterprises became important for a sustainable social economy (Borzaga and Tortia, 2010). In Europe, a community-based enterprise in history has to some extent been a social enterprise. What is different from the private enterprise is that the social element is made explicit and is recognised as being essential to the existence and the day-to-day operation of the enterprise (Borzaga and Defourney, 2001). A major example of social enterprise includes the 19th century establishment of retail cooperatives and mutual operating savings and loans organisations (Doherty, *et al.*, 2009). The Cooperative Society and Building Society in the UK as well as savings and microfinance loans in the USA provide examples, though there are other examples worldwide (Becchetti, 2010; Yu, 2014, pp. 219-224). Community social enterprises are particular examples where trust relationships are centred on a particular 'locality', for implementing collective co-production for different communities and social groups (Farmer *et al.*, 2012). Communes and other collectives with utopian features are also an important historical precedent, which has recently been revived in the context of environmentalism and the organic movement. Also, more recently, there has been a recognition that others should be 'inclusive' of certain socially disadvantaged groups and that the personnel at all levels of social enterprises must be prepared, when the situation requires, in order to meet the challenges presented by certain vulnerable groups coping with the competitive environment (Yu and Lee, 2008; Yu and Jung, 2014). Furthermore this recognition extends to social entrepreneurship that includes the deliberate identification of not only the specific social objectives of the enterprise (e.g. the inclusion of particular groups such as those

with disabilities or health problems), but the specific identification of these groups as stakeholders within the enterprise. Unlike other entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship is initiated by the leader or a group of people who aim to provide job-creation initiatives which have been driving social transformation of the citizen sector (Drayton, 2008). Social entrepreneurship became the new model of how to implement successful corporate social responsibility and community-based initiatives for social change in civil society (Nicholls, 2008; London and Morfopoulos, 2010). Within the macro level, corporate social responsibility is concerned with the specific ethical awareness and governance issues such as corporate entities, and the separation of ownership and management.

In South Korea, the 'market-oriented social economy' regulation dictates that if over 50 percent of income of an organisation is derived from the market, it is generally recognised as having an entrepreneurial basis. In principle, the social dimension comes from the fact that the main aim of social enterprises is not to reward capital or the people who control the organization, but to provide some form of service to the community. In January 2007, the Korean Parliament approved a law allowing the creation of 'social enterprise', and the Korean Government has introduced a law for the operation of social enterprises since July 1, 2007. According to the Social Enterprises Promotion Acts, social enterprises are defined as "companies with social purposes that aim to create and provide jobs for the socially disadvantaged or marginalized groups, and with an economic purpose that aims to ensure the provisions of specific goods and services through economic activities" (Korea Social Enterprise Promotion Agency, 2012: 12).

An 'ideal type' of social enterprises has a complex ownership that is based on the ownership of multiple stakeholders and multiple goal structures and combining various types of economic relations (Martin and Thompson, 2010, pp. 5-6). The aim of a social enterprise depends upon the structure of its ownership in which the social enterprise has a multiple form of ownership, that is, various stakeholders have ownership rights according to their

contributions to developing the legal form of private enterprise. In contrast to the situation in the capitalist form of private enterprises, social enterprises are different from profit maximization or the accumulation of financial capital. For instance, social capital can, itself, be the goal of social enterprise, not a tool as with other enterprises, and it is important that the social entrepreneurship's role is seen as a key to the social enterprise (London and Morfopoulos, 2010).

The three levels of management for organisational fitness and double-loop processes of the cybernetic methodology

The philosophy underlying Stafford Beer's Viable System Model (VSM) is based on the assumption that the current social system has a certain limit and it can be improved to the extent when we are concerned with the desirable social activities which are generated according to the principles of Ashby's Law of Requisite Variety. As Beer (1989) says, VSM offers the cybernetic model of any viable system in which there are five necessary and sufficient subsystems interactively involved in an organization that is capable of maintaining its separate identity within a shared environment. Recent research proved that VSM is useful in understanding the management and operational activities of a social enterprise in practice (Yu, 2012). Within VSM, Systems Three, Four and Five, which refer to the 'metasystem', are capable of maintaining its viability when its components fail (Beer, 1979). This is what Beer calls the design of eudemonic metasystem, as re-interpreted in a new concept of enabling 'systemic management' (Espejo, *et al.*, 1996, pp. 227-246). Espejo *et al.* (1996) provides a conceptual framework for 'systemic management' which has three levels of management and different criteria of organizational fitness within a turbulent environment (Table 1).

Providing some practical experiences, Espejo *et al.* (1996) argue that systemic management should not only focus on responsibility for long-term economic success, but also on social responsibility and

Table 1. Three levels of organizational fitness (after Schwaninger, 1993)

Level of management	Criteria of organizational fitness	Parameters / objectives	Indicators on VSM
Normative Management	Legitimacy	Development Viability	System 5 (Policy making)
Strategic management	Effectiveness	New value potentials	System 4 (Intelligence)
Operational management	Efficiency	Delivering economic, social and ecological values	System 3 (Control)

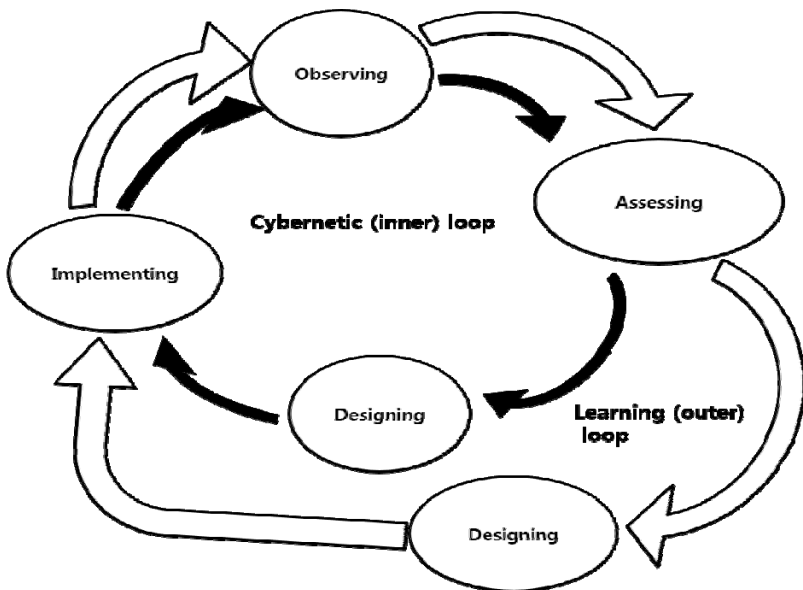
responsibility for the environment (Espejo *et al.*, 1996, pp. 243-248). Social systems, therefore, are open systems, whose effective actions can be dependent on an organizational design which possesses the capability of utilizing effective knowledge diffusion according to the law of requisite variety developed by Ashby (1956).

Beer (1979, pp. 97-98) argues that his statements about the four principles of organization, and the three axioms of management, are capable of justification with reference to the 'natural' law of viability. He also argues that his model, which is based on the laws of viability, is useful to the extent that VSM offers a model for designers to rethink the fundamental issues of an organization concerning its effective design, which also requires the features of a viable system (Beer, 1985). A later development of a cybernetic approach to systemic management in the modern corporation that Espejo has proposed is that the epistemological position of a cybernetic approach should be concerned with multi-dimensions of social, cultural, political and ecological domains and a learning process of the method that takes into account the higher level of double-loop learning (Espejo and Stewart, 1998). The cybernetic methodology was originally proposed by Espejo (1987) and it has developed as a tool for "second-order" cybernetics, that is, social

cybernetics of “observing systems”, which take into account both action and structure (Espejo *et al.*, 1996).

In the cybernetic methodology, the systemic process of learning can be divided into two learning processes of the ‘learning loop’ for dealing with outer and wider issues of concern and the ‘cybernetic loop’ for dealing with inner ‘structural issues’ within the organization (Figure 1). Each learning loop has the four distinctive stages in which participatory learning might occur within social practice (Espejo *et al.*, 1996, pp. 209-217). These four stages can be summarized as follows.

Figure 1. The cybernetic methodology (after Espejo *et al.*, 1996, p. 211)



Stage 1. Observing: finding out about the problem situation

Stage 1 of the cybernetic methodology is concerned with finding out the ‘rich picture’ of problem situations in the organization (Espejo *et al.*, 1996, p. 212). The methods of finding out may be observation or informal interviews. During participatory action research, an appreciation of the collected ‘information’ would be

created and shared to be realised amongst participants through a systemic inquiry of the problem situation being dealt with; no problem situation or decision-making process can be understood without considering the multiple perceptions of problem situations within organizations (Checkland, 1981).

Stage 2. Assessing: structuring the problem situation

In stage 2, 'assessing' is concerned with structuring the problem situation, which is partly for the sake of its connection with the responsibility of the participants as Espejo *et al.* (1996, p. 213) suggested, "when we want to capture the meaning of a situation as it is grounded in a community of observers, we may use the idea of 'naming systems'". Put simply, this stage is concerned with the preparation of 'root definitions' of relevant systems that are developed from the concerned problem situations. A root definition should be a condensed representation of a system in its most fundamental form. These systems express the espoused views or opinions of the concerned observers or participants (Espejo *et al.*, 1996, p. 213).

Stage 3. Designing: studying the cybernetics of the problem situation

In stage 3 of the cybernetic methodology, the 'designing' is concerned with studying cybernetics of problem situations through modelling systems using Viable System Model or VSM (Espejo *et al.*, 1996, p. 213). The focus is not only how to 'read' situations using VSM, but also on how to create new possibilities of 'appreciative settings' in the terms of Vickers (1965) in order to bring about possible changes within organizations. This is possible through the appreciation of multiple levels of management of organisational fitness proposed by Schwaninger (1993).

Stage 4. Implementing: creating conditions to learn how to learn

In this stage, the outer loop called 'learning loop' is concerned with managing the process of problem solving while the inner loop called 'cybernetic loop' is concerned with creating conditions to learn how to learn. During the process of 'implementing', the focus is not on how to 'solve' problem situations, but on how to learn the

process of problem solving in order to create conditions to learn how to learn. It is possible through designing and implementing necessary actions that has to be the production of desirable change within organizations (Espejo *et al.*, 1996, p. 213).

Case Study

Background information

As the part of the action learning project, the author was engaged with the projects supported by the borough office of Dalseo-Gu district in the city of Daegu, Korea. The research team consists of Assistant Professor, Dr Jae Eon Yu, and members of the staff at the centre for starting-up ventures and social enterprises operated at a Korean University. At the beginning of the project, the researchers agreed to select systems approaches to understand problem situations in organizations. As the cybernetic approach can offer a good “observing system” for learning about the problem situation in the organization from cybernetic perspectives, the cybernetic methodology was selected to explore the issues of ‘governance’ and ‘management’ within the social enterprise called Local Health Centre (LHC), which operates in Daegu city, South Korea.

The independent Local Health Centre (LHC), classified as a nonprofit organization, working for the disabled, old-aged pensioners and children, was established in September 2010. The main function of the LHC is to offer social services that look after disabled or physically handicapped people in local communities. The office of the LHC is governed by Western ideology that is rooted in ‘independent healthy living’. The social mission of the LHC includes improvement of the quality in life for poor class families in the local communities through the provision of food and offering private educational programmes for school children after school. The LHC, governed by the managing director, failed to meet diverse stakeholder’s needs and wants as it still was operated by an individual leader with top-down management systems, which is not unusual in other Korean business and non-profit organizations. This is clearly an important issue for the management of the organisation and in particular the social

responsibility of the social enterprise in the strategic management process. To make a democratic and participatory strategic management process, the ethical stance or social responsibility is the extent to which LHC should exceed its minimum and necessary obligations to stakeholders and society at large.

The overall structure of the LHC falls into two forms of service-providing divisions, and each division contains various service-providing units within it. Under this structure, there are two distinctive groups, namely the volunteers group and working staff groups within the LHC. Whilst the volunteers group questions and challenges the corporate policy of LHC, the working staff groups follow the current management system and provide social services to local customers. There are some conflicts between management group and working staff who include volunteers groups within LHC. These conflicts caused consistent “uneasy” situations that evolved and developed from the lack of communication and misunderstandings due to the lack of trust between management group and ‘powerless’ working groups within the LHC. Dealing with these uneasy situations, the research team had to investigate the ‘governance’ and the management system of the LHC, so one had to understand the importance of governance and social responsibility of the LHC. For instance, there are powerful individuals, such as the managing director who exercised her authority and power to enhance her management control over the overall activities of the LHC. On the other hand, the managing director stressed good relations and collaborations among various stakeholders by maintaining adequate hierarchical and lateral relationships within the LHC. It is taken for granted that there is a strict hierarchical system where various service-providing divisions must respect and obey the strategic decisions made by the managing director of the LHC.

The use of the cybernetic methodology

The purpose of using the cybernetic methodology (CM) was to make an enquiring process of systemic intervention that take into account the higher level of double-loop learning (Espejo, 1997, p. 3). The use of CM can be summarized by the following stages. The

methods of finding out a 'rich picture' of LHC were conducted by the study of the written documents, and the informal interviews with the members of staff at the LHC.

Stage 1: Observing: finding out about problem situation

This stage was concerned with finding out the problem situation within the LHC from as many various perceptions as possible. These perceptions were expressed as follows.

Person A:

"Our organization needs to establish a good governance system in order to meet social responsibility of the social enterprise within local communities."

Person B:

"The managing director focuses mainly on the operational excellence in terms of financial criteria. Voluntary workers did not have to interact with other member of staff unless they have to do. Having to deal with a hierarchical structure within the organization, it is difficult to share information and knowledge amongst managers, workers and volunteers in the various divisions within the organization"

Person C:

"There have been little concerns about ethical practice and corporate social responsibility of our organization amongst managing directors, managers and workers within the LHC"

This process involved building root definitions, which are concise forms of subjective interpretations and perceptions of participants involved in the situation. In the identified problematic situation, two root definitions were built. These are shown in the following stage.

Stage 2: Assessing: structuring problem situation

In stage 2, the root definitions were identified to structure the problem situation, and facilitated a debate for capturing the meaning of the concerned situation amongst participants. These are given as follows.

Root definition 1: A good governance system

A privately owned system aiming to create the good governance mechanism and social responsibility of the social enterprise, which also aims to enhance the effectiveness of the cooperative committee (it functions like the board of directors in a private company) between managers and workers and improve participatory decision-making process within the LHC, and by seeking to implement strategic actions

Root definition 2: Communication and control system

A privately owned system aiming to design a good communication and control system in order to facilitate understanding and cooperation amongst managers, working staff and voluntary workers within the LHC.

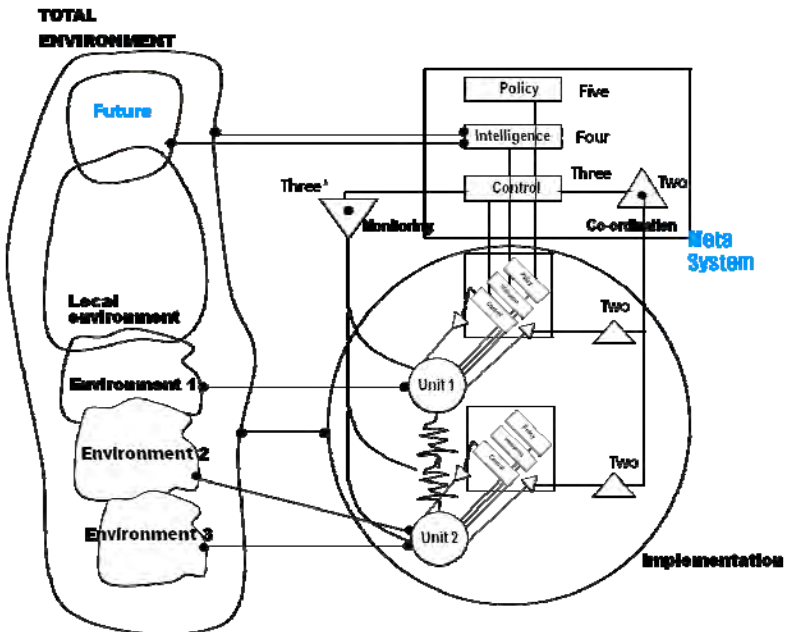
When problem solvers were identifying relevant systems and building root definitions, which provide an insight into the nature of the problematic situations, root defined human activities systems should also be developed according to Checkland and Poulter (2006). However, participants had difficulties in building conceptual models that contained the activities that the system will do, but was not a model of the situation itself. As the Viable System Model has a well-defined guideline to draw the system model in a systematic way, the researcher (Dr. Jae Eon Yu) suggested considering the use of VSM for designing the system model of the LHC social enterprise from cybernetic perspectives, which we discuss in detail in the next stage.

Stage 3: Designing: studying cybernetics of problem situation

Using VSM, we looked at the LHC's management and operation from cybernetic perspectives. As the purpose of VSM diagnosis is to analyse the functions of the organisation that are being studied and comparing them to the VSM to assess that its structures and processes are such to ensure viability and effectiveness (Jackson, 1991, p. 113), the diagnostic mode is applied (Espejo, 1987, pp. 325-327). The mission of the LHC is to provide social services for socially marginalised groups of local people (e.g. elderly people, poor class family) in order to solve social problems such as an

unequal distribution of a wealth within the local community, and by improving welfare of the local community. Establishing the primary activities of three “relevant” systems, namely the production system (System One in VSM), the communication and control systems (Systems Two and Three in VSM), and the image-building systems (Systems Four and Five in VSM) and their structural levels within the LHC is a key strategy employed by the VSM to aid the LHC in coping with the complexity of the tasks. Establishing the primary and necessary functions within the LHC from cybernetic perspectives, according to Ashby’s Law of Requisite Variety, the variety that the organization sees in the environment should be equal to the variety in the organization. In order to meet Ashby’s Law of Requisite Variety, there are five sufficient and necessary primary functions, which are called Systems One, Two, Three, Four and Five within the VSM (Figure 2). The detailed descriptions of these Systems are as follows.

Figure 2. Stafford Beer’s Viable System Model



(1) System One: Implementation function

The implementation function is seen as the “profit-making area” within the LHC. This function is performed by the three operations units of the LHC, namely, the private education unit, Korean cultural development unit and the voluntary work unit. The overall management of the LHC is with by the managing director of the LHC, Ms. Y. S. Kim. Daily operations of the three units are completed by the operating staff and voluntary workers, who are mainly full-time undergraduate students from universities in Daegu. Each of the operational units should have autonomy in its own right. However, all operational working staff and voluntary workers should act within the guidelines of the general principles and the policies prepared by top management.

(2) System Two: Coordination and regulation functions

To handle potential oscillation among operational units and to help facilitate the effective performance of all the activities of System One, System Two is needed as a function of coordination and operational regulation. Senior staff act to improve problematic situations such as conflicts between top management and operating staff or voluntary workers and also deal with complaints from customers. They also listen to complaints from the staff and workers and go to the managing director in order to deal with the operational problems within the LHC.

(3) System Three: Operational control function

To monitor and control the internal affairs within the LHC, the managing director has to intervene in operational situations, which causes concerns among the staff and workers within the LHC. Ms. Kim holds consultations with operational managers at each unit over the wages for staff and decides on how much each staff and workers are allowed to earn. Her accountability is considered as internal control for allocation of resources for each divisional unit, and gets operational information from the various working staff and voluntary workers at System One through herself or the managers and senior staff at System Two. The audit system (System Three) for the operational activities would supplement the

operational control function. Overall, the operational control function of System Three performs well according to the criterion of efficiency as 'operative management' (Schwaninger, 1993).

(4) System Four: Identify the 'intelligence' function

System Four is capable of reviewing overall strategies for the unexpected future. The managing director and divisional managers at each division are in charge of advertising, promoting and functions of the LHC to attract customers from local areas. From the perspective of effectiveness as strategic management, the total environment of the system in focus can be portrayed by the intelligence and strategic development functions.

(5) System Five: Identify the 'policy' function

The managing director looks at the harmony between System Four and Three. In order to do so, she oversees all activities of the LHC and decides the direction and an overall operation of the LHC. She exercises all power in the financial and the personnel affairs at the LHC. She has the right to recruit and employ new members of staff and workers and fire them if she wishes. The missions of the social enterprise should reflect the needs and requirements of external environmental changes. The whole set of a higher management, which refers to the board of directors and representatives from each unit, dealt with corporate levels of policy making through the decision-making process. The managing director formulated the corporate policy on the basis of her purpose to fulfill "the vision of togetherness" within the LHC social enterprise. System Five looks at the balance between systems four and three and manages it. In fact, the managing director used the LHC's vision to achieve her concerns about the profitability of the LHC. When looking at the management of the LHC from cybernetic perspectives, the managing director needs to change her mind and attitude in accordance with 'systemic management' which has the criteria of organizational fitness (see Table 1).

Stage 4. Implementing: creating conditions to learn how to learn

In stage 4, the 'learning loop' is concerned with managing the process of problem solving whilst the inner loop called 'cybernetic

loop' using VSM diagnosis, is concerned with creating conditions to learn how to learn. Comparisons of VSM with the perceived problem situation within the LHC provided insights into possible changes as to whether the activities suggested by the model were actually taking place within the LHC. To do so, the research team made a personal and informal interview with the managing director of the LHC. They discussed the critical issues of governance and social responsibility of the LHC as follows.

Firstly, as the governance mechanism (e.g., cooperative committee between managers and senior working staff) should monitor and control the managerial activities of the top-level manager in the LHC, the managing director as the top-level manager should meet the expectations and purposes of stakeholders who are regarded as beneficiaries (e.g. customers and local communities). To do so, the current management systems should be changed towards more of a democratic participatory system which accepts the voices from 'powerless' working groups (e.g., workers and voluntary workers) in the LHC. Secondly, the diverse interests of stakeholders have a significant impact on the overall cultural and management systems within the LHC. Ethical leadership is required to be responsible for the management of the LHC and how the LHC as a social enterprise operates through the creation of good will and mutual trust between the LHC and stakeholders in local communities. The good 'governance' system would be possible if people work together through the participatory and democratic decision-making processes within the LHC. Considering this possibility, instead of providing the 'solutions' to the problem situation in the LHC, we raised 'questions' or suggested 'problems' for a given situation. For instance, the managing director should not focus on the operational excellence of the LHC. Instead she should consider the multiple level of management (e.g. operational management, strategic management and normative management in the terms of VSM) in order to maintain sustainable social business within the local community. She should listen to the voices of powerless workers and other stakeholders as she needs to meet the expectations and purposes of stakeholders within the society. Why and how the issues of the governance and social responsibility of

the social enterprise are ethically important to the sustainability and viability of the LHC? This kind of question was critical to questioning the current leadership of the managing director of the LHC. As a consequence, this questions or 'problem' led us to consider critical reflections on learning practice.

Critical reflections on learning practice

The 'objective' position of the researcher may lead to the uncovering of taken-for-granted assumptions of the organizational members, often by drawing on alternative discourse and multiple interpretations of others' perceptions. Using 'rich pictures' as a tool for finding out about a problem situation that appreciated various worldviews (*Weltanschauungen*) and made the problem situation meaningful. Using VSM as the system model, it led to the process of studying problem situations that made participants become active participants who think holistically in a given situation, rather than just consider the project they are working on. For instance, in action research, VSM functioned as the tool for 'problem solving' as shown in the case study, the question was raised to challenge the current leadership of the managing director of the LHC and also consider the introduction of a good governance system and democratic and participatory decision-making processes within the organization.

Conclusions

To answer the research questions raised in the introduction of this article, the process of systemic enquiry using the CM was useful in understanding the fundamental nature of management problems from social enterprises that came from pluralist's perspectives. It provided the diagnosis of VSM as the system model to diagnose problem situations and to rethink the role of social enterprise for the benefit of the marginalized group within the organization. In addition, to counter power inequities in the organization, the role of an insider in action research is very critical if it is realized through participants' engagement with understanding of the context and history of the organization in order to bring about change (Molineux, 2006, p. 209).

The outcome of the research led us to consider the research ethics of participatory action research, where “there needs to be a learning process that addresses the subjective world of the learner, challenges the taken-for-granted which maintain the power horizon and thereby problematizes the dominant framework, rather than the individuals within it” (McGill and Brockbank, 2004, p. 115). Using CM, participative and open discussions are important to appreciate ‘appreciative settings’ in which participants used their mental models to understand the problem situation within the organization. Using VSM, ‘primary activities’ can be identified and compared by the problematic situations within the organization. We have asserted that a systems approach to management of the social enterprise through the process of participatory action research is suitable for use in social practice as participants appreciated the open-ended process of learning in order to deal with the ethical issues within social practice. The outcome of the research reveals a cybernetic approach was useful to diagnose the problem situations of the LHC social enterprise from the normative, strategic and operational management levels of organisational fitness.

Exploring the ethical issues within the organization through the appreciative process of exploring the set of values, norms and roles in a given situation, how do we move forward in awareness of research ethics to what makes the problematic situation of the organization towards building a desirable ‘human activity system’ within the organization? Our contention is that the continuous relationship between the two processes of ‘problem-solving’ and critical reflection proceeds within practice. Through this double-loop learning process, participants can appreciate the social and human relationships between powerful individuals (e.g. the managing director and management group) and ‘powerless’ marginalised groups (e.g. the working groups and voluntary workers) within the LHC from cybernetic perspectives. In future research, researchers can explore a cybernetic approach to understanding and examining the problem of social enterprises from the three levels of organisational fitness in other social

enterprises, particularly from other countries with other managerial and social norms.

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Biography

Dr. Jae Eon Yu is a citizen of Republic of Korea and currently residing in Korea. Dr. Yu earned his DPhil degree from University of Lincoln, U.K. after completion of MA and MPhil degrees of Management Systems and Sciences from the University of Hull, U.K. He is currently a full-time assistant professor at the College of Business Administration in Keimyung University, Korea. While a practicing advisor in the Korean company and bank (i.e. Hyundai Green Power, Ltd. and Smile Microcredit Bank), he was awarded the FSC (Financial Services Commission) Ministers' Outstanding Achievement Award in 2010.

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Participatory community Action Research process addressing employment integration of internationally trained professionals in Canada

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Zulla, Janki Shankar, Yvonne Chui,
and Lucenia Ortiz**

Abstract

This paper describes the use of a community action research process (CARP) to understand the lived experiences of internationally trained professionals' (ITPs) unemployment and underemployment in a Community-Based Participatory Action Research (CBPAR) project in Edmonton, Canada. Through a mixed methods design, members of six ethno-cultural communities discussed their challenges, opportunities, and prospects for labour market integration; particularly within the context of an economic uncertainty and downturn as they transition and settle in the western Canadian city of Edmonton. The CARP was utilized through several stages involving a robust recruitment and data collection strategy to facilitate community dialogue about barriers and facilitators impacting ITPs' employment integration, and engage community members in providing solutions to support current ITPs. The CARP stimulated stakeholders to become more cognizant of the contextual issues impacting ITPs, while taking active roles. Key features of the evaluation process focused on the following: communication patterns, engagement process, applicability of recruitment strategies, effectiveness of mobilization strategies and prospects for community engagement. The CARP proved to be an effective strategy for engagement and facilitating inter-sectoral collaborations across a variety of key stakeholders.

Key words: Internationally trained professionals (ITPs), community-based Participatory Action Research (CBPAR), labour market integration, community Action Research process (CARP), experiential learning, inter-sectoral collaborations

Introduction: Participatory research with migrant communities.

Participation of communities in research projects has been emphasized to ensure research objectives and outcomes are salient to these communities. In particular, Fontes (1997) has argued that inclusion of people from the culture or cultures of interest in the research process increases the likelihood that the research will be respectful of those it studies. The involvement of migrant communities throughout the research process has been advocated to bring marginalized voices to the forefront, enable identification of needs and solutions among community members, promote new social connections and increase potential that programs are tailored to the community context (Ganann, 2013). Participatory research approaches (e.g. participatory action research, action research, community-based participatory research and participatory learning and action research) are growing increasingly popular to use among migrant communities who have been characterized as 'hard to reach populations' (O'Reilly-de-Brun, McFarlane, de Brun, Okonkwo, Bokanga, de Almeida Silva, Ogbemor, Mierzejewska, Nnadi, van den Muijsenbergh, van Weel-Baumgarten and van Weel, 2015). However, both challenges and benefits have been encountered when using these approaches. Cited challenges that shape involvement in research has been attributed to past experience (Hugman, Pittaway and Bartolomei, 2011), fear of the consequences from being discovered due to their precarious immigration status (Katigbak, Foley, Robert, and Hutchinson, 2016), language barriers (Johnson, Ali and Shipp, 2009; Katigbak *et al.*, 2016) and lack of time to participate due to work schedules (Katigbak *et al.*, 2016). Conversely, benefits obtained in using participatory research methods include

increased recruitment, increased capacity-building and translational services, interventions and programs.

Participatory research approaches place a premise on having reciprocal relationships between researchers and the participants (e.g. community of interest). Approaches that promote collaboration strive for involvement of participants at all levels of the research process: from issue identification, to implementation of the research to sharing the results. Unfortunately, existing evidence illustrates an array of levels of involvement for migrant communities involved in research. In a review of community-based participatory research projects involving migrants communities, Vaughan, Jacquez, Lindquist-Granz, Parsons and Melink (2016) found over half of studies (52%) directly involve immigrants in the study (e.g. roles included participating in the study design and recruitment, developing and administering surveys, or being a co-researcher alongside an academic). The remainder of the studies (48%) varied in how immigrants were involved in the research process: from co-operating with communities to sharing decision-making responsibilities (Vaughn *et al.*, 2016). A limitation of this review is that studies only focus on addressing specific or broad health issues: limiting knowledge of how other research approaches are being implemented in studies that address other areas related to settlement (e.g., employment).

Community-based participatory action research approach

According to Openjuru, Jaitli, Tandon and Hall (2015), community-based participatory action research (CBPAR) has been defined “as a collaborative effort between academic researchers and non-academy based community members that aims to generate social action and positive social change through the use of multiple knowledge sources and research methods” (Center for Social Concerns, 2015). Its emphasis on the engagement between researchers and the non-academy is the premise for shaping an iterative research and action process. The philosophical groundings of CBPAR has varied and has been connected to

concepts from community development, participatory action research and action research.

Action research (AR) can be characterized as follows:

- (i) producing practical knowledge that is useful to the interest group,
- (ii) creating new forms of understanding that can contribute to human flourishing
- (iii) working with people to engage in collective sense-making and action
- (iv) engaging in inquiry that emerges over time in an evolutionary and developmental way
- (v) acknowledging that knowledge is a living and evolving process that is rooted in daily experience (Reason and Bradbury, 2001).

Likewise, participatory action research has been characterized as

- (i) being an individual and collective project,
- (ii) distributing power by understanding discourse, practice and social organization,
- (iii) changing the culture of working groups, institutions and society,
- (iv) involving iterative components of action and reflection,
- (v) producing knowledge to inform action,
- (vi) producing different forms of knowledge,
- (vii) engaging in the politics of research action,
- (viii) using different methods and/or social theories to gather and analyze experiences, and
- (ix) enabling participants to generate a theory of their own work (McTaggart, 1991).

CBPAR aims to give voice to the marginalized, and to enable a community to be self-determining and self-sufficient in addressing their issues. In CBPAR, collaboration is pivotal in enabling the community to understand itself as it relates to the larger contextual and historical framework in which it is embedded (Fals Borda, 1955). In becoming a researcher, the community can investigate their own reality, develop a conscious awareness of their own situation and subsequently identify their own conclusions (Fals Borda, 1985; Rahman and Fals Borda, 1996). In collaborating, there is a potential to use past knowledge or cultural values and/or beliefs from the community to address relevant issues and mobilize communities (Fals Borda, 1985). Such assets may be useful in designing recruitment strategies in research projects or developing programs. In CBPAR, the role of the researcher is to act as the facilitator to enable community members to be at the forefront of transforming their own reality (Salazar, 1991).

Assessing involvement in CBPAR: Addressing quality

In qualitative research, quality has been an index that differentiates between 'good' and 'bad' forms of research. Quality has been difficult to assess in participatory forms of research (Bergold and Thomas, 2012). Bergold and Thomas (2012), Reason (2006) and Springett, Wright and Roche (2011) have argued quality in research practices should be assessed by the degree to which the project aligns with core values and principles in which participation is at the center. Quality in CBPAR projects has been assessed to the degree to which research practices adhere to participatory action research principles (see Schensul, Berg and Williamson, 2008), and community-based participatory research principles (see Hills, Mullett and Carroll, 2007). In their exploration of three case studies, Schensul and colleagues (2008) focus on four areas that are pivotal to collaboration: training the research team and community members to conduct PAR using a curriculum grounded in the community, maintaining strong relationships among the team that is premised on shared interests and objectives, creating and implementing research methods grounded in the community and mobilizing towards social action at the

individual and collective level. Hills and colleagues (2007) highlight how the CBPAR approach enabled awareness of barriers that hinder the collaborative practices among practitioners.

Context of study

Existing evidence displays an array of differing levels of involvement for migrant communities who are involved in research. Additional studies that adopt a participatory approach are needed to assess the level of involvement and its subsequent outcomes. Such knowledge can help enrich a field that has called for more evidence of the effectiveness of using participatory research approaches among migrant communities (Ganann, 2013). In this paper, a CBPAR approach is examined to assess the involvement of newcomer communities in addressing the issues of underemployment and unemployment within a Canadian city. In particular, this paper illustrates how a community action research process (CARP) resulted in benefits (e.g. critical awareness of issues among the community of interest) and challenges (e.g. time commitment to participate). Figure 1 presented in Appendix 1 illustrates how the CARP process was undertaken. Figure 1 depicts the way the CBPAR inquiry process was implemented in the study. The process involved utilizing a research process grounded in the community as a source of understanding and change. This process illustrates how a focus on collaboration and individual and collective empowerment shape the inquiry process and its subsequent evaluation.

In this study, CARP can be defined as a process that (i) places the perspectives and experiences of community members at the forefront of decision-making and (ii) produces knowledge that promotes social change for newcomer communities. At the heart of CARP is the belief that community members should self-identify issues that hinder the well-being in their communities, understand the processes that produce these issues and develop solutions and/or strategies to address them. In doing so, this process respects and incorporates the values, beliefs, norms and histories of community members into the research process. For instance,

development of recruitment strategies is undertaken by identifying the challenges to participation (e.g. time constraints) and identifying assets (e.g. community leaders) within the community that can communicate the research objective effectively to their members. The implementation of CARP relies on having an 'ongoing flexibility (in project and methodological design, in partnership membership and in knowledge mobilization strategies) and experimentation (an iterative approach)' (Mosher, Anucha, Appiah and Levesque, 2014, pp. 8-9). This approach to implementing the research process has been undertaken by the Multicultural Health Brokers Co-Operative (MCHB) and its sister organization, Edmonton Multicultural Coalition.

Setting of the study

Responding to a plethora of evidence at both the academic and practice level that highlighted the prevalence of chronic underemployment and unemployment within newcomer communities in Edmonton, an NGO¹ working on migrant integration, the Multicultural Health Brokers Co-Operative (MCHB) initiated a CBPAR project entitled: *Unemployment and Underemployment within Ethno-cultural Communities in Edmonton: An Environmental Scan and Database*. This project was developed in response to service users who requested viable support mechanisms for employment security. The overall intent of the MCHB research project was to explore, define, and document the issue of unemployment and underemployment within ethno-cultural communities in Edmonton. Specifically, the project aimed at:

¹ In this context, an NGO refers to a non-governmental organization or non-profit voluntary organization [in this case the Multicultural Health Brokers-Co-Operative (MCHB)] which is organized at a local level to support migrant communities in Edmonton, Alberta Canada. MCHB perform a variety of service and humanitarian functions, bringing immigrant and non-immigrant communities together to advocate for effective service delivery for migrant communities through provision of information, programs and interventions.

- Documenting a brief profile of internationally trained professionals (ITPs) into a database to inform employers of the prevalence of unemployment and underemployment of immigrant professionals in Edmonton;
- Linking and facilitating inter-sectoral linkages between labour market sectors (i.e. employers) and ethno-cultural communities in order to help address the issue of unemployment and underemployment; and
- Facilitating a model to develop individual and collective capacity within the ethno-cultural communities to support the unemployed and underemployed.

The MCHB team approached several funders to support a community-based process at the optimal time where Alberta was experiencing its first wave of the economic downturn. Two funders came on board and pledged to support the project. These included the Alberta Employment and Immigration (AEI) at the provincial level and Skills Development Canada (SDC) at the federal level.

Establishing the research collaborative team

An implementation team of collaborators and the organizational structure (including the research team) for the project was developed with the following qualities and combination of qualities prioritized:

- Members that have current and historical knowledge of the employment landscape and issues impacting ITPs in Alberta; and
- Members that understand CBPAR and community action processes²; and

² Community action process is an active and intense community-based process carried out over a research process. The process involves communities in identifying prioritized problems, strategies and options for dealing with the problems, and a rudimentary action plan describing who, when and what is to be done. Integral to the method is the equal relation between the professional

- Members that can work with a variety of partners and stakeholders in the implementation of the research process.

This research team was chosen to represent a variety of skills to implement this project (i.e. CBPAR skills, community development and engagement, and strategic partnership development). The team included a community-based academic researcher with research expertise in immigrant community development and CBPAR, a public health specialist with background in community development and several seasoned community-based workers (community animators) with considerable expertise in the CARP and community engagement having worked closely with the MCHB. The CARP process was anchored on the practice of cultural brokering which has seen wide applications across North America in various settings (Jason, Christopher, Renee and Davis, 2004; Khanlou and Peter, 2005; Minkler and Wallerstein, 2003). In the United States, community animators are recognized as lay community workers or cultural brokers who due to their knowledge of community serve linguistically and culturally diverse groups and demonstrate cultural brokering in the provision of preventive care, early childhood development, and family support for many immigrant and refugee families.

Through the CARP, an engagement process was designed to stimulate discussion about employment security issues within diverse communities, and community-based workers played a critical role in facilitating that engagement; allowing community members to reflect upon and deliberately create desired actions as a result of the research process. The CARP process therefore was premised from the proposition that when people who experience similar situations, barriers, and opportunities get together to reflect

technical inputs and the community throughout the process. The technical part of the process includes several information workshops geared to engage community members in discussing issues in their communities facilitated and organized by researchers who take the lead in assuring that participants are involved in the process. Much of the planning and discussion is done and steered by the community.

on issues affecting them and collectively sharing, and striving for solutions, this can authentically foster change (Boal, 1988; Cannan, Berry and Lyons, 1992). The CARP therefore stimulated an awareness of employment security issues while situating community members as principal actors to finding solutions and not mere objects. The project also utilized existing partnership networks within the immigrant employment sector to provide feedback throughout the project. A community advisory committee (CAC) was also established to ensure a wide variety of stakeholders remained engaged to offer direction and advice to the research team. The CAC included stakeholders from educational institutions, employment agencies, immigrant service agencies, employers, the chamber of commerce, and community leaders from ethno-cultural communities.

Evaluating research practices within the study

An evaluation tool (a survey – see appendix 3), a schedule when to collect data and a list of responsibilities to implement this data collection were developed for this project. The tool would assess the implementation of the research as it relates to engagement, salience and effectiveness of research design and impact of the project. The evaluation of the research process was undertaken by a group of eight community-based workers (i.e., those who were principal data collectors and facilitators within the six ethno-cultural communities) and six advisory committee members. In particular, community-based workers and the advisory committee were asked to come up with questions that would monitor their activities in the research process. A centralized approach was adopted, with responsibility for the development of evaluation tools and guidelines, cataloguing, data analysis and reporting resting with the principal investigator. This had the advantage of standardizing the process (i.e., all of the participants at which evaluation data were collected used the same evaluation tools enabling comparisons to be made between information from several individuals).

The evaluation of the CARP assessed the learnings in five domains including: communication patterns with the community, the community engagement process, and the strategies used in the engagement process, the effectiveness of those strategies, and opportunities for community action plans. The development of evaluation capacities for the domains evolved throughout the research implementation process and the CAC discussions. The research team took notes of possible ways to evaluate the process and developed these emergent domains as a way to capture the learnings of the CARP process. Questions focused on the following: (i) how community-based workers and members of the advisory committee communicated and engaged; (ii) how community engagement was performed, (iii) whether the chosen methodology in the study was effective and applicable to the participants' context, (iv) what strategies were emphasized by community-based workers in terms of mobilizing the community, and (v) what community actions resulted from the CARP within the scope of the research project. Table 1 (below) summarizes the components utilized in the evaluation. The evaluation offered respondents to share their perspectives about the research process and their participation level via ratings and open-ended questions³.

Table 1: Components

Objective	Descriptors
Examining effective communication strategies with ethno-cultural communities	▪ Engaging within the community as an insider/outsider, formal and non-formal protocols, respect, cross-cultural competency, anti-oppression praxis

³ Detailed descriptions of the domains and responses are included in Appendix 2.

Objective	Descriptors
Examining community engagement processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Focusing on successes and barriers to engage, what are the contextual, subjective, and specificities in each community? (i.e. issues around community organizing, leadership, and champions)
Examining the legitimacy and applicability of methods and strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How can we best use the learnings and the experience of this project to transform policy, the lives of communities, and for community empowerment?
Examining community mobilization strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Effective ways to mobilize communities, the role of cultural brokers/community-based workers, bottom-up vs. top down approaches - what works?
Examining community actions as a result of the research process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Did the research resonate with community members, did the research process assist communities to organize, is there ownership of the issue, how is the issue articulated, named, or framed?

The research process

Creating a recruitment team and process

An initial recruitment strategy invited eight community-based workers to work directly with the target ethno-cultural communities to assist the research team in developing a research plan, recruitment strategy, and research protocols for participant engagement. These community-based workers were members of ethno-cultural communities who worked as cultural brokers and community workers for the MCHB. The community-based workers had diverse skills in community organization and facilitation and each worker was respected in the communities they served. Further, the community-based workers were regarded as leaders, community facilitators, and cultural brokers within their own respective communities. All received a briefing about

the purpose of the research from the principal investigator in the form of an orientation workshop that included an extensive discussion on the purpose, design and processes implemented within the research. Several meetings were held with the research team (staff from the MCHB, the principal investigator, the project coordinator and community-based workers) to explore and develop recruitment plans that were respectful of cultural engagement protocols in discussing sensitive issues. The aim was to target over 500 participants for an online survey and 200 individuals for focus groups.

Integrating a CBPAR approach with the development and implementation of a robust research design was challenging in the beginning of the data collection phase. Several steps were adopted to ensure that the participant recruitment research process was responsive to the potential participants. A team consisting of eight community animators; the principal investigator, the project coordinator, and an ad hoc team of advisors from the CAC provided advice on best methods and strategies to engage the community. Through this process, it was ensured that the potential sample to be conveniently recruited was representative of the targeted six ethno-cultural communities. Although no magic formula on numbers to represent the sample was decided, members of the research collaborative team advised the researcher about the importance of inclusiveness in terms of gender, ethno-cultural community, length of stay in Canada, professional designation, immigration status, and age as key elements in developing a recruitment strategy. Further, the research team was advised by the CAC that conducting a series of focus groups was the best method to ensure community input into the research process. In engaging with the community to participate in the overall study, several strategies were utilized to recruit participants utilizing community-based workers and social work students.

The first strategy included the involvement of social work students from a local university to assist in the recruitment efforts for both the online survey and the focus groups. As part of their final

assignment in a community-service learning social work research and evaluation course that the principal investigator taught, fifty students were given an assignment to recruit two participants each to experientially learn about community engagement protocols within ethno-cultural communities. Students were asked to first identify ITPs based on a criteria developed by the advisory committee and the research team. The students were encouraged to attend community meetings and engage with agencies that support ITPs as part of their learning objectives of CBPAR. While most students relied on available resources, the principal investigator provided them with opportunities to further engage by inviting members of the research team or the CAC to guest lecture in the class. As a result of these efforts, students recruited 119 participants for the online survey. Stagnation occurred however where recruitment to the online survey was dormant for a month and a half resulting in a second recruitment strategy that involved the combined efforts of student recruiters and community-based workers. Community-based workers assisted students with community entry that included recruiting participants informally in their natural settings (i.e. in their homes, community gatherings, churches, mosques, public events, etc.). A total of 240 participants completed the online survey through the collective efforts of the students and community-based workers. Also, the collective efforts of students and community-based workers resulted in recruiting 315 individuals for focus groups. These participants represented each target community (i.e. African Diaspora (continental Africa), Eastern European, Latin American (Spanish speaking), Filipino, Chinese (Mandarin speaking from mainland China), and South Asian (mostly Indian, Afghani and Pakistani)] participating.

Data collection

In this study, an online survey and focus groups were used as data collection methods. The idea of conducting focus groups in a natural setting chosen by community-based workers and participants was crucial because it ensured participation as community members could organize transportation and child care

amongst themselves. The focus groups were conducted in English and if required the community-based workers and researchers used the language of origin of the participants in various venues chosen by the participants. Each target ethno-cultural group, three to four focus groups each consisting of 8-12 participants per group. Table 2 below breaks down the sample of focus groups.

Table 2: Participation in Focus Group

Ethno-cultural Community	Number of Focus groups	Number of Participants	%
African Diaspora <i>(From the continent of Africa)</i>	5	65	20.6
Chinese <i>(Mandarin speaking from mainland China)</i>	4	52	16.5
Eastern European <i>(Mostly former USSR and the Eastern block)</i>	5	56	17.7
Filipino	2	23	7.3
Latin American <i>(Excluding Brazil)</i>	5	66	20.9
South Asian <i>(From India, Pakistan, Afghanistan)</i>	4	53	16.8
TOTAL	25	N=315	100

In each focus group session, ITPs were asked to reflect about their employment experiences in Canada. A facilitator moderated each focus group discussion, and the electronic (audio) recording of the discussion was backed up by the note-taker's notes. A set of open-ended questions prompting participants to reflect was utilised. The questions ranged from reflection on their current employment status to barriers in access to employment as well as strategies utilised in accessing resources for employment security. The focus

group process was similar for each group in that when questions were asked, participants were prompted to respond to each question and equal opportunity was given to teach participants to respond in each focus group. The research team with the facilitation support from community workers inquired about participants' knowledge of employment support and associated factors. The topic of underemployment and unemployment was introduced and their perspectives were sought. Finally, the team inquired about participants' knowledge and opinions regarding possible solutions to integrate ITPs into the labour market and their role in that process.

Data Analysis

The researchers supported by community workers analyzed findings from the survey and the focus groups. The textual data was analysed using content analysis methods to draw out the key themes emerging from the study. Hsieh and Shannon (2005) maintain that content analysis as a research method for subjective interpretation of the content of text data, enables a "systematic classification of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (p. 1278). Content analysis utilised in this study enabled flexibility in analysing text data. Overall, analyses showed that ITPs suffer from chronic underemployment and unemployment. In particular, disparities in employment opportunities for ITPs include addressing both individual and structural barriers to labour market participation, which include and are not limited to employer attitudes towards ITPs, inadequate capacity on the part of ITPs in terms of their knowledge and skills of the labour market and lack of culturally responsive policies and programmes addressing employment integration of ITPs within systems and institutions. Additionally, the ITPs' employment profiles acquired through the online survey (*Edmonton Immigrant Skills Inventory*) reveals similar trends of underemployment and unemployment amongst ITPs reported in the literature. Further, in context of economic uncertainty, ITPs are impacted negatively indicating what Galabuzi (2006) frames as a growing "economic apartheid", a reflection of their low employment security status. The findings

that indicate low employment security for ITPs are similar to those shown in many other studies (see Reitz, 2001; Basran, and Zong, 1998; Phillion, 2003; Walani, 2015; and Bascia, 2006). Baseline data from this study however set the stage for the CBPAR dialogue in the community, illuminating the reality of unemployment and underemployment amongst ITPs qualitatively and quantitatively utilizing the community process.

Sharing the findings: Knowledge forums

Two community forums were organized by CAC partners to share preliminary and emerging findings. The community forums served a purpose of member checking or respondent validation (Doyle, 2007; Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson and Spiers, 2002) to increase trustworthiness, accuracy, and credibility of the data and to reassure the participants that the lengthy process they engaged in had resulted in a tangible set of actions based on their recommendations. These forums emphasized community involvement in defining issues of interest to the community and developing effective strategies for taking action.

The first forum was attended by over 200 people including ITPs representing the six target communities and beyond. Additionally, community stakeholders working on employment integration of ITPs were invited to participate in this dialogue. In this phase, participants were first encouraged to identify the issues and problems their ethno-cultural communities face with regards to underemployment, unemployment, and workplace health. Sample questions included, 'Have there been previous efforts to engage the issues? What have been the successes, failures?' The second forum brought together ITPs from diverse backgrounds to identify key individual and community strategies within each ethno-cultural community to develop capacity to address gaps for ITPs in securing employment (i.e. what were the assets within each community to build collective capacities for empowerment? What unique narratives characterize each of the six ethno-cultural communities? Who are the formal and informal leaders and opinion makers that can move the process forward?). The second forum also extended the discussion beyond just an opportunity to

offer solutions, but also provided ITPs an opportunity to share successes through a facilitated narrative process. Thus, the forum brought the community (which was extended not only to ITPs, but also other stakeholders such as government, service providers, educational institutions, etc.) to create an opportunity for dialogue, and engagement. This point of contact brought key players together at the same time, painting a portrait of combined local perspectives and utilizing an open process that allows participants to provide a wide range of responses and thus providing the opportunity for deeper and richer discussions of the issues (Denzin, 1999).

Participants were briefed about the purpose of the data sharing process, including the anticipated outcomes of the forum. The forums were designed to be informal and the animators and the researchers assisted the group members to relax, open up, think deeply, and consider alternative responses to the discussion questions. The research team used an interview guide. Questions in the interview guide flowed from general to the specific in order to invite openness and avoid bias. If needed, consent was requested if pictures or videos were taken during the consultation process. The process of community engagement and a variety of culturally responsive approaches were utilized to bridge the ethno-cultural communities and the project, facilitating successful community mobilization, participation and engagement.

Developing action: Creating strategies to address employment issues

Involvement in the research project enabled community-based workers and participants to build action plans or strategies for transforming their lives and their communities. Study findings were used to begin the development of these action plans. This vision involved a conversation around what people want to see being created; what partnership possibilities exist here to put into motion their vision, and what strategic partnership ought to be forged to create outcomes that have the support and full commitment of stakeholders. The engagement process provided an opportunity for participants to reflect on what they have learned

through the sharing of stories, thus moving the newly acquired knowledge from the vision into action by creating and designing sustainable schemes for empowerment.

Reflecting on the research process

As a result of this CBPAR process, more than 550 volunteer hours were generated; more than twenty five community focus group within the targeted ethno-cultural communities were conducted; two successful community forums that brought together different stakeholders with over 120 participants in each were held; and the CARP produced detailed recommendations that focused innovative solutions aimed at addressing specific labour integration issues (i.e. how to strengthen communities and address real local needs, and current/future possibilities for collaboration and partnerships).

Six out of eight community-based workers and five out of six advisory committee members including the project coordinator completed the survey. Respondents self-identified with different memberships: they participated as community members, liaisons for agencies and/or were representatives of their ethno-cultural communities. Facilitators and challenges encountered in implementing CARP are summarized in Appendix 2. Benefits and challenges encountered throughout the project are highlighted below.

Nature and level of involvement in project

Both the advisory committee members and community-based workers were satisfied with the research process. Most advisory committee members agreed that their time was effectively used when they attended meetings. They also confirmed that their suggestions were respected in the implementation of the project and that they were consulted or informed each time a decision about the project was made. In terms of their contributions to the project, the advisory committee members approved and acknowledged that their duties and expectations as advisory committee members were clear and that the “project activities fit

the priorities of my organization / community / sector". These agreements are illustrated in the following quotes:

We were able to illustrate the effectiveness of the community approach to reaching the "hard to reach" - i.e. immigrant and refugee community members. Both the action research process and the tapping into the natural channels for information dissemination (ethnic media, community websites, key community "hubs" where people naturally congregate...) are processes unique to our communities. The challenges have been for some animators, they are already overburdened with other commitments and therefore unable to undertake the process in a timely fashion.

(Advisory Community Member).

Provided strategic leadership and coordinated the operational activity of the project with limited human and financial resources. I also joined the project mid-cycle and was able to ensure that timelines and deliverables were met.

(Advisory Community Member)

In particular, the majority of participants learned about the importance of an inclusive approach to research that facilitates principles of community empowerment whereby all partners including the community-based workers, research team, and advisory committee are involved in all aspects of the research, from planning through dissemination of results.

Challenges

However, written narratives illustrated challenges in implementing this inclusive approach.

Originally, we have conceived this research process as a participatory action research, which required timely action taking during the process. Yet, we didn't have the resources (financial and human resource) to actually do it. This has caused a sense of lack of responsiveness or lack of momentum on the part of the animators and community participants

(Advisory Community Member).

The majority of both the community-based workers and advisory committee members indicated that they would like to participate in a future research project in the same capacity. When asked to explain why they would like to continue their roles, several indicated community/agency connections as the key.

Because now I know many people in our community, I know their problems, needs, interests etc.

(Community-based workers)

I believe that being as a community worker and assistant; I can contribute and contrive the research into success plan.

(Community -based workers).

This is possibly one of the most important initiatives in terms of its efforts to tackle the most essential issue affecting the economic and social wellbeing of immigrants. It is also important because for the first time it is done from the perspectives of the communities and immigrants.

(Advisory Community Member).

Quality of recruitment

Community-based workers indicated a variety of approaches to recruit communities to participate including community gatherings in peoples' homes, personal phone calls, emails, and home visits. Both community-based workers (n = 5) and advisory committee members (n = 7) found that the level of participation for the community within the project was good. However, examination of written responses revealed recruitment challenges for specific ethno-cultural groups.

Overall the quality of all targeted community participation was satisfactorily good. But specifically African community's quality participation, in my view, I rate Satisfactory. The reason is we did not actively and aggressively enough persuaded members of African community to participate the project.

(Community-based worker).

Community-based workers indicated that the timeline for community engagement was "good" to "excellent" and that they

enjoyed their role as community-based workers. Of great challenge was “getting the focus group together” and “getting people to be part of the project”.

Using a community engagement process in collecting the data

All community-based workers indicated that data collection methods (i.e. online survey, focus group, and community forums) were an effective way to collect data. In particular, the use of focus groups and community forums were highlighted as the best way to engage the community. There was variation, however, in terms of perceptions on whether the research team was effective in engaging the community. Written responses illustrated support from advisory committee members that the community-based approach was utilised effectively, while others felt more could be done to engage the community. For those who felt more could be done, they pointed to how community workers are pivotal in engaging with communities and ought to be utilised more.

I learned that the community animator approach was crucial for the community engagement process and participation in this project. By having community leaders working with their own communities showed community ownership and trust. I also recognize that the advisory committee played a key role on bridging connections with other organizations to help accomplish the objectives of the project.

(Advisory Community Member).

I became more familiar with the community action process and gained an appreciation of the role of the animator in facilitating community linkages. Working with six ethno-cultural communities allowed for an exploration of a variety of community engagement strategies – it was interesting to observe the differences and similarities. I also learnt that establishing trust is fundamental to developing community partnerships.

(Advisory Community Member).

Recommendations to improve the research process were offered by community-based workers. In particular, they suggested having a more focused strategy for community engagement:

I have changed my expectations – my expectations to relevantly affect change through the research process have diminished over time. I think ensuring key policymakers are around the table to influence policy change, establishing an inclusive process for providing feedback to the community members, and ensure the role of the animator highlighted and duly compensated would contribute to the community action process.

(Advisory Community Member).

Mobilizing the findings

Both community-based workers and the advisory committee felt that there needs to be a community action process to move the research findings into action, whereby connections are made between professionals, professional associations, and employers. In moving to the next phase of this project, all participants were committed to being involved in the same capacity.

As a community-based worker, I recommend that we have to engage and mobilize our community more aggressively than before. I have to convince most members of African educated community to participate in the project and be part of the research.

(Community -based worker).

I would like to see first how the information that was collected in Phase I and the database would be used and by who. What kinds of strategies are being expected after project phase I completion. What are funders' expectations in terms of the findings of this project? Is there anything new that they didn't know? If a phase II is funded I would like to ask how we are going to deal the community's expectations.

(Advisory Committee Member).

Despite benefits associated with adopting a participatory approach to research for migrant communities, more evidence of quality is

needed to learn how to implement these approaches. Collaborative approaches such as CBPAR offer a means to better understand the social context in which research occurs. Undertaking this task requires engaging in an iterative process of action and reflection that is grounded in the perspectives of community members with the researcher acting as a facilitator. In doing so, CBPAR offers ways for communities to (i) engage in issue identification individually and collectively, and (ii) identify strategies to address these issues and transform their own realities.

Creating relationships

Both AR and PAR emphasize working with the community to engage in issue identification and resolution. In doing so, there is an emphasis to re-dress power relationships within the inquiry process (McTaggart, 1991) so that the researcher becomes a facilitator. Accordingly, fostering relationships on shared dimensions remains key in participatory research projects (Muhammad, Wallerstein, Sussman, Avila, Belone and Duran, 2015; Jacobson, Altenberg, Barnes, Cusson, Rowley and Mckinnon, 2005; and Schensul et al., 2008). In their Urban Women's Development PAR project, Schensul and colleagues (2008) identified working with organizations: (i) whose mission was similar to the objectives and outcomes of the research project, (ii) were dedicated to social action in addressing the issues affecting the community of interest and (iii) represented the gender and ethnic diversity of the community of interest. In this study, the primary partner organization, MCHB is dedicated to addressing the health and wellbeing of 25 different cultural and linguistic communities in Edmonton. As well, the diverse membership of the research team and Steering Committee helps to ensure that the community directs input into the research process. Fostering relationships among members of a CBPAR project is pivotal to addressing power dynamics (Schensul et al, 2008). Facilitators of relationships can be illustrated in shared goals, work histories, facilitation skills and language (Schensul et al, 2008).

Goals of improving employment opportunities and outcomes were shared by members of the research team and the Steering

Committee. As well, both the researcher and community-based workers have shared work histories in addressing settlement issues and mobilizing communities (individuals and groups) to be self-sufficient as they adapt to their new country. In particular, many of these community-based workers have developed lengthy relationships with their own ethno-cultural community and thus have a nuanced understanding of the language and the culture (Hanza, Good, Osman, Capetillo, Hared, Nigon, Meiers, Weis, Wieland and Sia, 2016). All members of the research team were fluent in English. Similarities in shared goals, work histories and English fluency helps to promote a co-learning process. These prior relationships help the researcher to become familiar with and understand the context, the people and their culture (Cargo and Mercer, 2008), As well, prior relationships with the community of interest helps to navigate potential logistical issues (e.g. recruitment) that emerge in the project (Katigbak et al., 2016).

Developing research methods

Promotion of critical consciousness and being able to develop resolutions is key to PAR processes (Fals Borda, 1985; Rahman and Fals Borda, 1996). In PAR, using methods that are tailored to the community (Ganann, 2013) helps them to gather, analyse and reflect on their experiences (McTaggart, 1991). Accordingly, the selection of research methods must facilitate a dialogical process as well as promote the emergence of indigenous knowledge. The creation of research models involves engaging in a process that (i) reaches consensus on the causes and solutions of the problem, and (ii) incorporates the local knowledge of the community into understanding causality and change (Fals Borda, 1985; Schensul et al, 2008). In their Urban Women's Development PAR project, Schensul and colleagues (2008) used small group processes to identify and/or clarify causal factors and outcomes. Various data collection tools were used to engage directly with communities and produce rich information that deepened their understanding of the complexity of issues in their communities (Schensul et al, 2008). Likewise, presentation of findings to a diverse group of stakeholders (e.g. study participants and allies) helped to reinforce

group membership and a resolve to take action (Schensul et al, 2008).

A CARP process shaped the research design in order to create recruitment strategies, data collection methods and dissemination strategies that were tailored to the preferences of ethno-cultural communities. First, issue identification was defined in response to service users requesting support to address employment security among newcomer communities. Second, recruitment strategies relied on the skills and knowledge of community-based workers and social work students. Expertise from the research team helped to ensure that participant inclusion incorporated a variety of factors that shape employment experiences of newcomer communities. Expertise from the CAC and preferences of community-based workers and participants shaped the selection of focus groups as a means to collect data and for participants to share their employment experiences.

Social change at the individual and collective level

Action lies at the heart of both PAR and AR approaches. In AR, knowledge production must be practical, useful and contribute to human flourishing (Reason and Bradbury, 2001). Schensul and colleagues (2008) suggest that PAR can be considered doing research at the first-person level (e.g. attaining personal development and reflection), at the second-level (e.g. gaining group consciousness and mutual support) and third-level (e.g. organizing for action) (Reason and Bradbury, 2001). In this study, focus groups and community forums discussions enabled increased awareness and mutual inquiry. Focus groups enabled newcomer communities to share their thoughts about underemployment and unemployment and identify solutions to integrate immigrant professionals into the workforce. In doing so, focus groups were used as a means (i) to give voice to a group whose voices may not be otherwise be heard and (ii) develop a collective understanding of shared problems and potential solutions (Wilkinson, 1998a). However, attaining these outcomes requires conducting focus groups with a sensitive understanding of the lives of the community of interest, a skill that can be

obtained through learning the language and the relevant concepts that are pertinent to the community (Wilkinson, 1998b).

Community forums enabled a deeper and richer understanding of the issue of employment among participants and key stakeholders involved in employment integration of ITPs. In doing so, this enables participants and key stakeholders to (i) have a common understanding of the causal factors and processes that can promote and hinder employment integration of newcomer communities and (ii) a respect for each other's situation, assets and encountered challenges. Creating spaces for dialogue between managers to discuss mutual experiences, challenges and opportunities was used by Ataöv, Brøgger, and Hildrum (2010) to identify ways to integrate immigrants into the workplace. Despite these benefits, challenges in recruitment illustrate the task of creating these spaces for dialogue. For the research team, bringing a variety of stakeholders together for a collective effort was a demanding and time-consuming process and required an active participation of each research team member with a number of individuals to help with recruitment and data collection at both the qualitative and quantitative phases of the research. Nevertheless, such efforts are needed given the problems of underemployment and unemployment among ITPs is multi-sectoral in nature and thus requires hearing the perspectives of various stakeholders to identify a coordinated and integrated approach.

The realization that employment security for ITPs requires greater involvement of various actors and substantial social investments presents a strong need for the decision makers at all levels of the employment support spectrum (i.e. employers, NGOs, service agencies, civil society organizations, licencing bodies, educational institutions, and ITPs) to establish and/or strengthen linkages already made in the lifespan of the project discussed in this paper. Thus, through such public-private collaborative efforts, each stakeholder can be involved in programme implementation on the basis of expertise and comparative advantage. Working collaboratively to deliver responsive interventions requires an engagement process that acknowledges the complexity of

performing research to action (Balcazar, Luna Hollen, Medina, Pedregon, Alvarado and Fulwood., 2005).

Mobilizing research findings into action can be a challenging task especially when stakeholders require ample evidence of outcomes in the implementation process. Mayan and Daum (2016) emphasize that evidence must be relevant and must be represented in a form that is familiar to the target community as knowledge and as a means to introduce change. Nevertheless, several lessons were learned from this study that illuminated the importance of effective communication and engagement, methodological relevance, culturally competent/safe strategies for engagement, and community actions. Specific lessons include:

1. Utilizing community-based workers as cultural brokers and resources in framing the different stages of the research process from initial discussion about funding to data collection to data analysis and finally to the dissemination. This enabled community-based workers to act as conduits from the initial project development phase, providing the necessary cultural scripts beyond the researchers' reach for the community.
2. In this study, it was agreed that an action process whereby communities are empowered to identify their problems, analyze their causes, outline opportunities for improvement, and to plan, implement, monitor and evaluate community-based activities was essential from the onset. The community action process allowed communities to take an active role in the initial identification and analysis of problems and opportunities for development.
3. Disseminating research information requires a humility effect on the part of researchers to communicate research findings in reachable ways. Thus, during member check forums, information could have been presented using simple formats that a diverse audience could capture. This facilitates a process in which the community can engage in

non-threatening dialogue and learning with the research/implementation team;

4. Planning of community forums/consultation by the research team and community-based workers to use diverse methods that are responsive to their respective communities to recruit participants (for both the quantitative survey and focus groups). Tracking such micro level strategies requires highly intensive planning from the research team. At times, establishing a similar strategy was challenging, given the diversity in engagement methods adopted by community-based workers. Tracking such culturally embedded engagement processes were not fully captured nor collected on a regular basis, which limited the possibility to learn from community-based workers and the extent to which they felt limited in the recruitment phase.

Discussion and Conclusion

CBPAR approaches in social care research are very critical in better understanding the social context in which research occurs. Involvement of community partners and various stakeholders in the research process helps to provide a nuanced understanding of the underemployment and unemployment challenges faced by ITPs as well as to identify potential solutions to address these issues. In this project, we focused on fostering relationships, using recruitment and data collection methods that were guided and implemented by the community and used data collection and dissemination tools that enabled change at the individual and collective level.

Given that the issues of underemployment and unemployment facing ITPs are multifaceted, deliberate interruptions are needed at the multi-sectorial level. The CARP is a process that can identify strategies that are grounded in the perspectives of diverse stakeholders who are presently working to address these issues. In particular, this study has provided very useful methodological information of understanding complex barriers to employment security issues impacting ITPs; ensuring the policy and practice

relevance of findings, and insisting on recommendations to help promote structural changes that can improve employment prospects for ITPs. Given the complexity of the CBPAR design, engaging the community in activities at the planning stages of the project before intervention requires a strong relational component of building partnerships. This is anchored by a commitment and trust at all levels that another world is possible. In this study, CBPAR provided that opportunity to engage, dialogue, undertake actions, and understand what engagement in the research process means. The CBPAR stimulated individuals to become aware and conscious of the issues while they regard themselves as principal actors in carving solutions and deliberate interventions.

Limitations and addressing quality

Assessing how this project aligns with CBPAR principles helps to provide more knowledge about how to implement these approaches within diverse communities particularly among those who are known to be 'hard to reach' groups (e.g. refugees). In assessing the conduct of CBPAR, this study focused on the level of engagement as well as the degree of decision-making responsibilities given to the community of interest. However, these dimensions do not necessarily engage deeper into the influence of power and privilege in shaping participation levels as well as shaping the inquiry process. Since relationships in research are built on trust that span across differences (e.g. racial, ethnic, gender), Kerstetter (2012) argues that the researcher needs to reflect on one's own identity and statuses, as these elements will ultimately shape the research context and process. In a study, the researcher is often navigating in a multi-dimensional space called the 'space between': a space that moves between an insider/outsider stance. In this space, a researcher's identity and social position are continually changing as the power in relationships with participants is continually being constructed based on the differences between the researcher and the participants. As such, it is important to be continually attentive to these dynamic processes particularly how power is constructed

and negotiated in relationships as this can ultimately shape the inquiry and inform subsequent outcomes.

Accordingly, examining positionality remains important especially when CBPAR processes focusing on emancipatory goals are desired. Investigating the influence of power and privilege helps to minimize the potential for re-colonizing voices that are often not heard. In their study, Muhammad and colleagues (2015) investigate how their positionality as researchers with intersectional identities grounded in the academy and in the community can have an impact on the decision-making process, the co-creation of knowledge and the representation of a diverse group of communities. Throughout these explorations, Muhammad and colleagues (2015) offer strategies for researchers to address the influence of power and privilege as they conduct their research. Accordingly, future research that implements CBPAR approaches within ethno-culturally diverse communities should illustrate how research practices align with principles of PAR and in particular, should provide more nuanced understanding of how to address the influence of power and privilege.

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Biographies

Prof Nene Ernest Khalema is a former Chief Research Specialist at the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) in South Africa and currently an Associate Professor of Community development at the Department of Built Environment and Development Studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. Professor Khalema also holds an Adjunct Professorship at the Centre for Health Promotion Studies, School of Public Health at the University of Alberta (Canada). He holds a PhD specializing in social epidemiology/medical sociology, minority health, and social policy. Before joining the HSRC in South Africa Professor Khalema served as assistant professor of Social Work at the University of Calgary in Canada and taught in numerous universities and colleges in Canada since 2001. Dr Khalema's international research experience is extensive having led a number of community-based action research projects as a PI in the areas of public health, health disparities, migrant wellbeing, and community development. In terms of academic citizenship, Dr Khalema sits on the editorial

boards of two high impact international journals (i.e. Pan African Medical Journal and Health Sociology Review) and occasionally reviews for Criminology and Sociology, Global Public Health, Urban Education, and Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health. Dr Khalema' publication record includes authoring numerous conference presentations, book chapters, books, technical research reports, and referred journal articles.

Dr Shankar is an Associate Professor of Social Work at the University of Calgary's Faculty of Social Work in the northern region (Edmonton). Her areas of expertise include anti-oppression praxis, mental health and integration, supportive education, and community-based approaches to research.

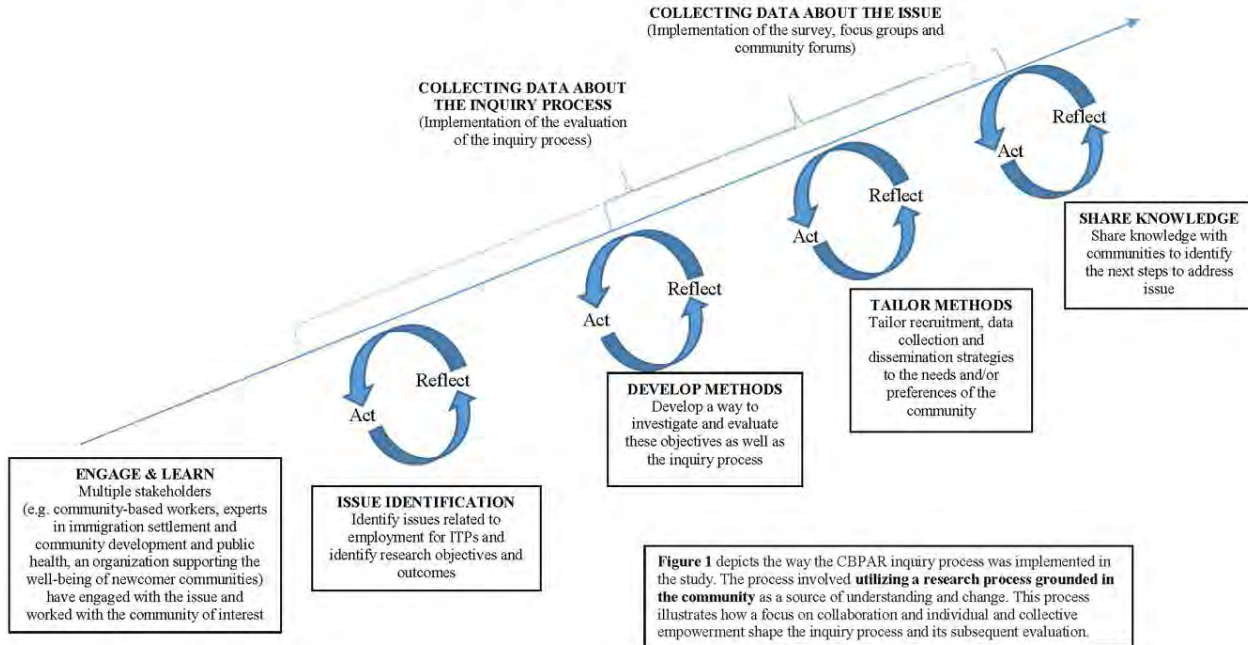
Ms Yvonne Chui is executive director of the Multicultural Health Brokers Co-Op. She has years of experience in the non for profit sector, particularly developing integration programmes for newcomers.

Dr Lucenia Ortiz is co-executive director of the Multicultural Health Brokers Co-Op. Her areas of expertise are in immigrant integration, health promotion, and community-based research. Dr Ortiz has taught in a number of institutions in Alberta and currently works as a planner for the City of Edmonton community services.

Rosslynn Zulla is a PhD candidate from the School of Public Health at the University of Alberta. She was formerly a community-based worker and has contributed to a number of projects on immigrant integration including those that engages community participation and action research.

Appendix 1

Figure 1: Implementing the CARP Process



APPENDIX 2: Summary of Key Domains in Describing Facilitators and Barriers in the Community Action Research Process

KEY DOMAINS	PROCESS EVALUATION INDICATORS	
	SUCCESS	BARRIERS
1. Effective engagement strategies with ethno-cultural communities, stakeholders and partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus groups, evaluation forms and so forth • Number of participants reached through the Community Animation process • The attendance at the community forums, Collaborations • Partners helped us in reaching some members of the target groups • Makeup of the Advisory Committee provided valuable insights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The web-based database (might it still not be the most effective way to involve immigrants?) • No representation of community leaders within the advisory created some obstacles in engaging some communities
2. Community mobilization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phone calls, emails, bringing all ethno cultural communities together • Interests shown by others (within the formal systems) toward the research documents (which is capturing the process and the different dimensions of the research process) • Community animators were familiar with their community members, and were well aware of the needs of the community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community animators had limited reach within their communities • Some community leaders also perceived some animators as a threat to their roles as leaders within the community • Inconsistent key messaging • The process was effective and applicable to some of the communities of interest and not to others

KEY DOMAINS	PROCESS EVALUATION INDICATORS	
	SUCCESS	BARRIERS
3. Legitimacy and applicability of methods, approaches, and research strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passionate and enthusiastic community animators with networks within their communities • Experienced research consultant informing the project team • Community animation process effective in mobilizing community members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The format of the focus group discussion questions seemed unclear for some • The research approach in terms of messaging created misconceptions • Other research methods could have been explored as well versus only focusing on the community action research process
4. Networking opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connection with employers • As result of this project, networking among the ethno cultural communities became reality • Connection with ERIEC and AEI as key stakeholders • Good rapport established with funders – allowed for open lines of communication • The focus groups and the wrap up event provided opportunities for networking • Community members expressed that this was a great need – developing networks and welcomed these opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Still English is the barrier for some community members • Collectively as a group of colleagues involved in this project, we lack the time and energy to create effective connections in a timely fashion with other essential stakeholders • Too much emphasis was being placed on the database and reaching target numbers • Child care availability was minimal • Limited refreshment budget • Limited employer representation • Key policy makers in employment integration were limited

KEY DOMAINS	PROCESS EVALUATION INDICATORS	
	SUCCESS	BARRIERS
5. Developing a community action process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connection with others communities, professional associations, and employers • Involving Community-based workers in bringing forward the participants' (immigrant community members) sense of relevant and impactful actions; • Great input from the community animators and advisory committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committee members seemed overburdened with other commitments, and unable to meet as a full group in a timely fashion to develop an effective community action plan • No process established to continue to maintain the trust developed with communities

Appendix 3 - Unemployment and Underemployment Project

Process Evaluation Form (Advisory Committee)

Key elements of the evaluation: *communication, engagement process, applicability, mobilization strategies, community action*

Advisory Committee member: _____ Sector or Organization _____

1. Level of participation: [circle the appropriate title(s)]

Community Leader Community Member Program Leader Agency Liaison Government Other _____

2. Overall, how would you rate the quality of your participation in the project?

Poor Fair Satisfactory Good Very Good Excellent

Why?

3. Please rate the process of engagement in each of the following areas:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. My time has been used effectively when I attended meetings	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. I felt my suggestions were respected in the implementation of the project	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. I was consulted or informed each time a decision about the project was made	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. My duties and expectations were clear as an advisory committee member	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. The project activities fit the priorities of my organization/community/sector	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. The research project team effectively used a community-based approach to engage the community	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. I will volunteer again to be part of the advisory committee in the next phase of the project	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

4. What did you learn through the research process about partnerships and community engagement process?

5. What have you changed or what will you change as a result of being part of this research process?

6. Would you like to participate in a future research project as a(n):

- Animator
- Research Assistant
- Advisory Committee Member
- Project Leader

Why?

7. Please summarize key successes and barriers you have observed as a result of being part of this research process.

KEY ELEMENTS	PROCESS EVALUATION INDICATORS	
	SUCCESS	BARRIERS
1. Effective engagement strategies with other stakeholders and partners		
2. Engaging with the community		
3. Meeting the funder' objectives and priorities		

KEY ELEMENTS	PROCESS EVALUATION INDICATORS	
	SUCCESS	BARRIERS
4. Legitimacy and applicability of methods, approaches, and research strategies		
5. Networking opportunities		
6. Developing a community action process		

8. Are there any recommendations you have as an advisory committee member that will inform the next phase of project in terms of your role, the process, and next steps?

Thank you for filling out this evaluation

Gaming simulations with Action Learning for community-based disaster reduction training

Yusuke Toyoda

Abstract

In this paper, gaming simulation is used in an action learning environment to deliver community-based disaster reduction training. Through the presentation of a community-based disaster reduction activity, it is demonstrated that using gaming simulations can be an effective method to promote disaster reduction. Although the causalities require further investigation, it is shown that action learning can be incorporated into gaming simulations to find potential disaster problems and improve a community's coping capacity in the real world. This is in contrast to previous studies that have claimed that simulation is not appropriate for action learning because action learning is based on the pedagogical notion that people learn most effectively when working on real-time problems occurring in their own work setting.

Key words: Action Learning, community, disaster reduction, gaming simulation, virtual experience

Challenges to community-based disaster reduction

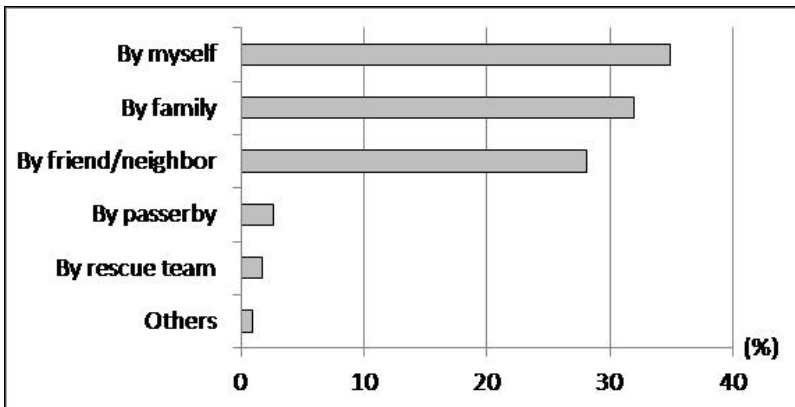
Local communities¹ have been shown to be the most important resources in times of natural disaster (Ye, et al., 2012; Izadkhan and

¹ In this paper, "local community" is defined as a group of residents living in a specific geographical area such as neighborhood association, regardless of their participation in local activities. To specify the residents who participated in the community activities, these are called "participating residents," "participants" or other terms to differentiate them from the "local community."

Hosseini, 2010). For example, when the Great Hanshin-Awaji earthquake hit Kobe at 6 am on 17th January, 1995, one of the coldest days in Japan that year, neighbors and friends were the first responders and were instrumental in rescuing those who had been buried alive (Japan Association for Fire Science and Engineering, 1996). While the Japanese government had amended the Construction Act in 1981 to ensure that all subsequent buildings were resistant against earthquakes, many of the previously built houses that had not been renovated collapsed, crushing or trapping the sleeping residents.

Figure 1 shows how these residents escaped or were rescued from their houses. People either helped themselves or were helped by family members (self-help) or were helped by neighbors and

Figure 1: People rescuing those buried alive in the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake



Source: Adapted from the Japanese Association for Fire Science and Engineering (1996)

friends (mutual-help). Publically funded rescue teams (public-help), however, were responsible for rescuing significantly less people, primarily because it was difficult to get to the affected areas, so it took many hours before public-help was available. Further, the size of the earthquake, the massive infrastructure damage and the many fires meant that the limited number of

rescue personnel were unable to cover all areas at the same time. This earthquake demonstrated the importance of residential or local community cooperation in emergencies and particularly in the earthquake response phase. The crucial role of mutual-help in these situations has also been highlighted in other natural disasters, such as floods and tsunamis.

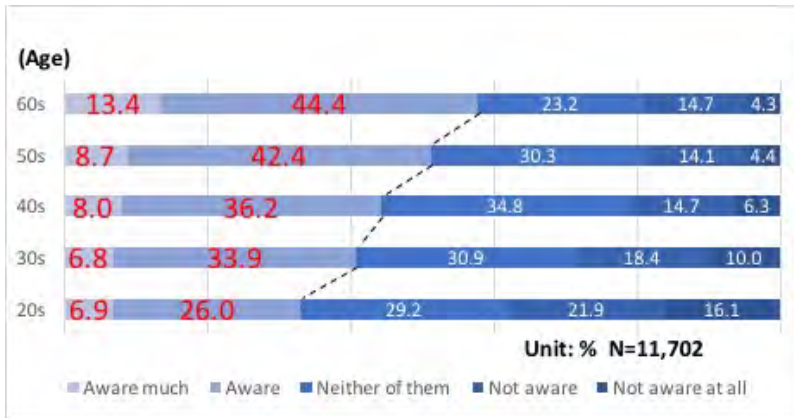
Disaster preparedness and response also require mutual-help. Kurata (1999) reported that the rescue activities in the “intimate” communities in the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake tended to be smoother than those in the “less intimate” communities and felt that this was because community-based disaster preparedness required resident cooperation and coordination, indicating that an effective response essentially required effective preparedness.

Nonetheless, even though local communities can differ in terms of the geographical and socio-cultural aspects, local governments cannot focus on these specific characteristics due to personnel and budget limitations. Therefore, it is essential that the local community understands how to cope when faced with natural disasters and when public-help is not available, as shown in Figure 1. As has been found, an efficient and effective response to natural disaster emergencies requires residential and community participation. Therefore, it is vital that these residents have knowledge about how to reduce the adverse effects of these events and the preparations needed to overcome the effects, particularly in situations where public-help is not immediately available.

Recognizing this importance, however, does not always mean that the community acts in an appropriate manner. In most Japanese cities, the most active community residents are people aged 65 years or older who are also the first to be evacuated in emergencies. Figure 2 shows the differences in disaster awareness across different age groups. As can be seen, younger residents are less aware of disaster reduction and therefore are less likely to participate in community activities (Fire and Disaster Management Agency of Japan, 2009: for the Tokyo Metropolitan Area). Further, many residents in urban areas often do not know their neighbors,

meaning that in disaster situations, there is less mutual-help in the community to rely on.

Figure 2: Awareness of natural disaster reduction measures



Note: The survey was conducted by Zenrin in 2014 with Japanese people using the internet (2014)

Another problem is that the disaster training is less than adequate. While training is generally held for residents once a year, the type and focus of the training has not changed, so the same training and advice is provided each year (such as Omachi, 2001).

Against this backdrop, some innovative residential training has been developed and implemented such as Participatory Map Making (Shaw and Takeuchi, 2010) and the Disaster Imagination Game (DIG) (Maiko High School, 2006). As an alternative to these ideas, this study introduces gaming simulation as a disaster reduction tool to overcome the challenges described above. This tool uses an action learning approach which encourages residents to improve their capacity to solve problems by themselves through learning and action. In the next section, the importance of disaster education for community-based disaster reduction is discussed and the gaming simulation concept is introduced as an effective tool for community-based disaster reduction. Then, the logical connection between gaming simulation and action learning in disaster contexts is shown and an example from Kyoto is provided.

Community-based disaster reduction education

As local community actions have been shown to be vital before, during and after the disaster, knowing what community activities to organize and how to develop appropriate reactions to disasters is important.

Many community organizations have tended to rely on administrative emergency organizations such as firefighters or local government crisis management staff to deliver disaster training. However, this training tends to be standardized; therefore, while covering all necessary areas, it does not focus on the specific problems faced by local communities. It is essential that local communities understand the unique challenges in their own areas so that they can organize activities to overcome them. Disaster reduction activities also need specialist technical support, so it is important that local communities work with specialists when conducting disaster reduction activities.

As each disaster and the subsequent damage are unique, communities are often faced with unexpected situations. As observed in the Great East Japan Earthquake that hit the Tohoku Region of Japan in 2011, it is important to be flexible in emergency situations. Therefore, the policies developed for taking action and attitudes towards such actions are often more important than the specific skills. Unfortunately, conventional training generally focuses on developing participant skills for rescue and fire emergencies but provides local communities with little awareness about how to react flexibly during and after the disaster event.

Disaster education is often discussed in the context of disaster reduction for children; however, it should also be discussed in the local community (Shaw, Shiwaku and Takeuchi, 2011). Along with learning the skills needed to save lives, residents also need to learn how to organize effective local activities and how to develop coping behaviors for local disasters.

Gaming simulation as an effective tool for disaster reduction

As mentioned in Section 1, some tools for community-based disaster reduction have been developed and introduced in local communities. In this section, the strengths of gaming simulation for community-based disaster training are discussed. Gaming simulation is a tool by which participants² experience crises in the game world and learn lessons from the experience (Toyoda, Kanegae and Sakai, 2014). Gaming simulations on disaster have tended to focus on disaster education; however, gaming simulations can also be used for direct community-based disaster training through the development of focused activities. The following subsections introduce gaming simulation and demonstrate its usefulness as an effective tool for disaster education³.

Virtual disaster experience using a dynamic model and role play

Gaming simulation allows participants to experience important lessons in a game world or a virtual world, where the virtual world refers not only to a computer-based world but also to any world created by games. In disaster reduction gaming simulation training, participants as players can experience a crisis that they would otherwise not be able to experience (Crookall, 2004). This experience may not necessarily be a physical experience but can be any experience, such as when a game piece is killed by a collapsed house and the participant learns that retrofitted houses are safer. Participants can also go through these experiences without safety issues; thus, they are able to react without undue stress, thereby

² In this paper, participants describe those that *come to play the game in the real world*. On the other hand, the term players is used which refers to the people *playing games in virtual worlds*.

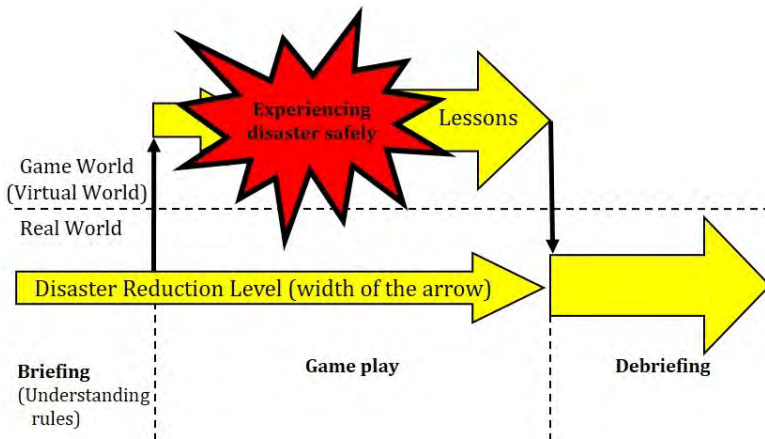
³ For the educational aspect, refer to Ambrose, Bridges, DiPietro, Lovett and Norman (2010), as the principles introduced in this book were based on extensive experience from educators, so the principles cover a wide range of study fields and educational levels. These principles are also not limited to Western culture.

learning how to cope without panic. Advances in gaming simulation allow for the development of dynamic models of the real world in the game which allows players to understand the model through experience or learnt lessons. While dynamic models are often more difficult for some people to understand than ordinary lectures, gaming simulations allow players to understand the model holistically (Duke, 1974). As the model is a simple representation of a real society, important aspects or disaster reduction phases can be focused on, thus making the game world simpler to operate in. Ambrose pointed out that if a participant was expected to implement several tasks at the same time, performance could degrade (Ambrose, *et al.*, 2010). However, in a gaming simulation, the complexity of the society can be altered to a relatively simple model to ensure effective learning.

Another important aspect of gaming simulation is that it is role play that allows participants to experience the lessons from the view point of other people (Toyoda, Kanegae and Sakai, 2014); for example, a resident can be the mayor in charge of overcoming a catastrophe. By going through these steps, players can learn important lessons through doing (experiencing). In community-based disaster reduction activities, there are often only a few residents who participate regularly. The non-participants, therefore, have less awareness about disasters and less information about disaster reduction in their own communities, such as the evacuation site locations. When conducting disaster-focused activities in the community, most participants have always been community members who are well versed in disaster reduction and management procedures. The problem, therefore, is difficulties in understanding what would happen in a real disaster phase where the non-participants also evacuate without any information and preparation. Using role-play, non-participants with little information about disaster reduction activities would be located in the game world (roles played by a participant) and exposed to disaster situations. They can experience complex simulations based on the decisions made and their interactions with other players, each of whom would have a specific role, making a game world closer to a real disaster situation.

With these specific situations and roles, players can recognize or become aware of the weaknesses and strengths in their groups (Boin, Kofman-Bos and Overdijk, 2004), allowing them to test how a player (or a group of players in the game) reacts in a certain situation. For community-based disaster reduction, the players are residents, so it is important for them to imagine and understand the characteristics of their local community “in crisis” so as to prepare for the disaster collectively. The gaming simulation process for disaster reduction is summarized in figure 3 (Toyoda, Kanegae and Sakai, 2014).

Figure 3: Gaming simulation for disaster reduction conceptual structure



Source: Adopted from Toyoda, Kanegae and Sakai (2014)

Reflection on and recognition of learning

As the participants experience the dynamic model, they are expected to develop solutions based on the game situation and their real life as residents in a certain area. The most important part of the gaming simulation is the debriefing when the participants come back to the real world and summarize what they have learnt in the game. In this phase, the facilitator explains the game’s purpose and also assists the participants in recognizing what they have learned from the game if they are not sure how the role-play

experiences or results apply to the real world. Subsequently, they compare the game world and real world to determine if they have the knowledge or ways to overcome similar challenges in the real world. If they feel that the situations are somewhat different, the participants are encouraged to identify any possible obstacles and make decisions to overcome them. This aspect of the gaming simulation training is related to what is known as training “transfer” (Ambrose, *et al.*, 2010), which is the ability to apply the skills (or knowledge, strategies, approaches, and customs) acquired in a certain context to new contexts. The whole gaming simulation is aimed at applying the skills acquired in the simulation to different real life situations in which these skills could be useful. During the debriefing, the facilitators need to promote this training “transfer” by comparing or elucidating the commonalities between the virtual and real world. Further, the debriefing should provide opportunities to the participants to consider the results and revise any errors. To achieve this, facilitators pose questions or ask why the players got such results and then encourage the players to work in groups to decide how to improve their performances. This is one of the effective ways of learning from feedback (Ambrose, *et al.*, 2010).

As a basis for comprehensive problem solving, gaming simulations provide participants with a common arena in which they discuss the issues presented in the exercise. They can also increase the players’ disaster coping capacities better than other tools that just inform them about what they need to “know” and “understand”, without any “experience.”

Knowledge accumulation and fusion

Pedagogical knowledge is built across four main knowledge areas as follows: “declarative knowledge,” “procedural knowledge,” “context knowledge” and “conceptual knowledge” (Ambrose, *et al.*, 2010). Declarative knowledge refers to what a person knows; procedural knowledge indicates how to apply procedures, methodologies, theories, styles, and approaches; context knowledge is identifying when to apply knowledge; and conceptual knowledge is understanding which knowledge is

appropriate in which situation. Gaming simulations allow for the application of all four knowledge areas because of the nature of the game and the types of situations that the players are faced with, which requires them to apply knowledge and make timely decisions. Gaming simulations, therefore, unlike lectures or audio-visual education, are more than just learning; they are experiential and action oriented. Ambrose, *et al.* (2010) indicated that new information is more easily learnt when structures are provided in which the new knowledge should be inserted. Gaming simulations provide relatively comprehensive experiences for players, which forces players to confront and understand the relationships between their own knowledge and new knowledge. From these experiences, they can build new knowledge structures to put new knowledge in order, which is then consolidated in the debriefing.

Gaming simulations can also imbed the three knowledge domains important for disaster reduction: scientific knowledge, experiential knowledge, and local knowledge (National Research Institute for Earth Science and Disaster Resilience of Japan, 2010). Scientific knowledge refers to the specific knowledge about the science of emergency situations, such as earthquakes, floods or fires; experiential knowledge refers to the knowledge gained from past experiences; and local knowledge refers to the knowledge of their own unique area. In a gaming simulation, players play a game with the lessons structured around scientific and experiential knowledge. In the debriefing, the players are encouraged to logically connect their local knowledge (and experience knowledge of disaster) and experience with the new information gained from the gameplay. A vital part of gaming simulation is to ensure that the new information is integrated with previous knowledge such as their past experiences or information related to their daily life. In other words, gaming simulations allow the participants to use new knowledge alongside their own knowledge to learn from the comprehensive experiences. As mentioned above, Ambrose, *et al.* (2010) stated that new information can be learnt more easily when structures in which new knowledge can be inserted are provided. As residents need to know how to deal with the hazards in their

own unique areas, this is vital for community-based disaster reduction gaming simulations.

Connection between gaming simulations and Action Learning

Gaming simulations are strong tools for community-based disaster reduction training. To explain this learning model, in this section, the connections between gaming simulations and action learning are explained. Although there is no one right or final way to describe action learning (Pedler and Abbott, 2013), some important aspects of action learning are discussed here.

Action learning is an approach to individual and organizational learning. While working in small groups known as “sets,” people tackle important organizational or social challenges and learn from their attempts to improve things

(Pedler and Abbott, 2013, p. 9)

Gaming simulations are tools for the attainment of the goal explained in this quote. Gaming simulations for community-based disaster reduction, therefore, have a great deal in common with action learning as they allow the local community participants to face challenges that do not have any specific solutions.

Learning through alpha, beta, and gamma systems

The alpha, beta and gamma systems are the first important aspect of action learning. Revans (1971) proposed a theory of action learning based on these three interacting systems.

System alpha – the use of information for designing objectives; system beta – the use of information for achieving these objectives; system gamma – the use of information for adapting to experience and change.

(Revans, 1971, p. 33)

System alpha and beta are utilized in gaming simulation debriefings. After the gaming experience, the participants recognize or have become aware of certain problems, so they then

discuss the situations they may face in the future in groups or with facilitation (so design objectives using system alpha). As action learning is committed to the expansion of the participants' *self-awareness* and is concerned with making new ideas tacit by placing them into a natural experience (Raelin, 1997), gaming simulations also allow players to understand tacit scientific knowledge through their experiences in the game world and become aware of this knowledge on their own accord. Then, they seek consensus as to what to do based on the situations in their own community (ways to achieve the objectives or system beta). System gamma is related to the actions taken after the debriefing, whereby the participants implement their decisions, and based on the results, they discuss what is to be done next (adapting to experience and change in system gamma).

Programmed instructions and questioning in gaming simulations

The next aspect is learning resulting from the independent contributions of programmed instruction (designated as P) and spontaneous questioning (designated as Q).

“P constitutes information and skill derived from materials already formulated, digested, and presented, typically through coursework. Q is knowledge and skill gained by apposite questioning, investigation, and experimentation

(Raelin, 1997, p. 22)

In a gaming simulation, P is mainly gained while playing the game while Q is gained through an interaction with other players in the game, questioning and discussing with facilitators and other participants in the debriefing and in the actions taken after the debriefing.

Critical components of Action Learning practice in gaming simulations

Another important aspect of action learning is putting the components into practice. According to Marquardt (2004), action learning requires; “a problem,” “a process of insightful questioning

and reflective listening," "coaching," "groups or teams," "an action taken on the problem" and "a commitment to learning."

Obviously, community-based disaster reduction gaming simulations are conducted to address a present or future *problem* induced by a natural hazard. To solve these problems, gaming simulations allow participants to experience problems or problematic situations stemming from the original problem. During gameplay, the players face unexpected situations, so they need to discuss these with other players and engage in reflective listening from others "in the game", allowing for what is known as social learning, that is, learning from other players or participants (Coughlan and Coughlan, 2011). Reflection is conducted in the debriefing phase, in which participants discuss and share their experiences with other participants; further, a facilitator reflects on their decisions in gameplay. *A process of insightful questioning and reflective listening* is therefore achieved. While the facilitator is usually a specialist or scientist in the area of the game's focus, the debriefing session could also be seen as a type of *coaching*. Gaming simulations can have only one player; however, for community-based disaster reduction, the gameplay usually involves more than one player, thus requiring players to work together and engage in *teamwork*. Further, the ultimate goal of gaming simulations for community-based disaster reduction is to make the community safer and more resilient⁴; thus, it is essential that participants are motivated to work out their problems and implement their suggested solutions, that is, *an action is taken on the problem*. This action is then tested in the real society or even in the next gaming simulation, so participants can learn whether the actions used in the gaming simulations do or do not work. In the real world, these actions can only be implemented in disaster situations. This means that it is often difficult to assess whether the lessons learned can be applied in the real world; however, further gaming simulations

⁴ Some gaming simulations certainly aim to raise the disaster awareness of participants only. In this case, the actions are outreaches of the gaming simulation. Setting gaming simulation goals depends on the game designers' objectives and the needs of the communities.

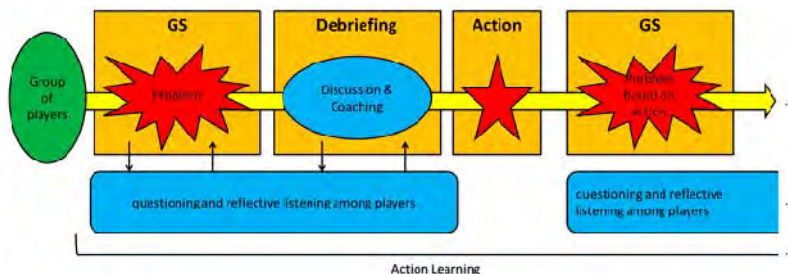
can also be used to assess the success of the decisions. Rather than a single knowledge source, participants gain mixed knowledge from the gaming simulation experience and can also learn lessons from these experiences. Therefore, gaming simulations allow the participants to be *committed to learning*. Revans (1971) felt that *simulations* were not appropriate targets for action learning and Raelin (1997) felt that action learning was based on the pedagogical notion that people learnt most effectively when working on *real-time problems* in their own work setting. When it comes to disaster reduction, however, gaming simulations can easily incorporate action learning to reveal the *potential problems in future disasters* and allow participants to understand the improvements needed in their own communities.

Challenges resolved by the people who face them

When focusing on overcoming challenges, Revans (1971) insisted that difficult problems and challenges that have no concrete answers can never be resolved by experts but can only be resolved by the people who actually have these problems and face these challenges. As mentioned in the previous section, community-based disaster reduction should be pursued by the local community, as they are the only people who know the strengths and weaknesses of their community. Further, as has been outlined, the local residents are most often the first responders to a disaster situation, so they need to know how to face these problems. However, to ensure disaster reduction, scientific knowledge and lessons learnt from past disasters are essential, both of which can be provided through simulated gameplay.

As mentioned above, action learning components can be used when structuring gaming simulations so as to allow the participants to experience natural disasters as they may occur in their local areas. This focus on action and learning gives the participants knowledge and skills for their future survival. The above explanation is shown in figure 4, which is a further development of figure 3.

Figure 4: Gaming simulation with action learning conceptual process



Note: Time goes from left to right. The solid yellow arrow shows the process that the participants (players) go through, while the thin black arrows show the interactions with other participants (players) and facilitators.

Gaming simulation practice with Action Learning

This section discusses a community-based disaster reduction gaming simulation case study that was implemented under the conceptual action learning umbrella. This case was first introduced as part of Toyoda, Kanegae and Sakai (2014); however, in this paper, the analysis of the action learning component is refined.

Evacuation simulation training

Evacuation Simulation Training (EST) was designed to evaluate community evacuation procedures. What differentiated this from other conventional evacuation training were the roles and situations involved as it was focused on an evaluation of community evacuation rather than individual evacuation.

In the EST, first, certain roles that evacuees were expected to face in an earthquake evacuation were randomly assigned to the participants; for example, a person who is injured by falling furniture and unable to navigate a street blocked by bricks or an individual who goes to the wrong temporary evacuation site. Prior to training, questionnaires were distributed to all households in the area, and around 50% of the responses were collected. From

these answers, we were able to gain information about the preparedness in the case study area in terms of preventative actions and acknowledgment of the evacuation site locations. Therefore, the roles were developed from the survey's results. The participants as players were asked to act as their roles required them to do so in the virtual world.

The simulation involved the players evacuating their homes and encountering some situations that evacuees would be expected to face after an earthquake such as streets blocked by bricks. The players' final goal was to reach the designated evacuation site despite these problematic situations and the unexpected behavior of the other players.

As indicated above, this training was designed to evaluate community (collective) evacuation. Conventional training had instructed trainees regarding where to evacuate and what to do when they encountered residents asking for help during fire situations, so the individual trainees understood what *they as individuals* should do. When we have conducted this kind of training, the participants are often aware of and well prepared for disasters. However, in real disaster situations, residents who are not aware of and have not prepared for disasters are also evacuees, so conventional methods are unhelpful. When using the EST, however, participants can be assigned to roles, such as being injured by falling furniture, so realistic situations can be generated for the game. Players can therefore experience this simulated world and understand the issues *their community* might face in disaster situations.

The training was conducted with 25 participants over one day in February, 2012 in the case study area in Kyoto, Japan, in which there are about 400 residents and 200 households. This area is divided into three neighborhood association units; however, none of the areas has a community association. A paper outlining the specific roles was distributed to the participants in the briefing session and the rules explained by the facilitator. The numbered situation posters had been attached in the area prior to the training. Figures 5 and 6 illustrate the EST scenes.

Figure 5: Situations numbered and attached in the area



Figure 6: Scene in the game



After the evacuation in the game, the participants had a debriefing (reflection) session. They were told that:

The importance of this training is not for you to know what would happen in the sites but to keep in mind that such situations could happen in any sites in your living areas, and they could make evacuation more difficult than you expect. Mutual-help among residents is essential for safer

evacuation and so is communication on ordinary days to promote mutual-help.

The explanation of the EST objectives was followed by discussion and a question and answer session for which the participants were divided into three groups according to their living area. The gaming simulation took about 4 hours.

During the discussion following the explanation by the facilitator, the participants shared the problems they had encountered during the evacuation. The discussion revealed some important risks that needed to be addressed. For example, one player had evacuated to a temporary evacuation site in her living area; however, she did not find anyone else there, even though it was the correct site. In fact, the other players had left the temporary evacuation site before she had arrived because they did not know she was coming. In this situation, if the player had been injured and was unable to leave her house, no one would have found her or rescued her.

Based on this problem that had been experienced and shared in the game and the debriefing session, the participating residents overcame their concerns about privacy and decided to make a resident list. Sharing this risk created concerns about the necessity to know which residents were expected to come to the temporary evacuation sites. If a list was distributed to all residents, everyone would know who was expected and therefore who was missing. The participants developed this idea and came to a consensus for implementation. As mentioned earlier, it is not uncommon that residents in Japanese cities do not know their neighbors very well, such as how many people live in the house or how old they are. Moreover, it is difficult to collect private information in Japan because of worries that this information may be given or sold to fraudsters. However, the participating residents decided to share the information with all residents who had provided them with private information within the *Kumi* unit, which was made up of several households but was a smaller unit than the neighborhood association unit.

Since the simulation and debriefing, the participants have started to prepare for implementing their ideas. Moreover, because only a

few residents had joined the activities, a “Disaster Reduction Walk” was suggested in which the participants and other residents just walk from their own homes to the evacuation sites to get to know the way to promote communication. It was expected that more residents would be willing to participate as it was only for a short time and no preparation was necessary. This idea arose from participants based on the situations in the community-based disaster reduction activities.

Action Learning in and after the evacuation simulation training

During and after the EST, the participants decided what to do to ensure a safer evacuation or to develop the resident list (system alpha). Then, they came up with how to do it: that is, to make the list for each *Kumi* unit and make decisions about the kind of information that needed to be shared with residents (system beta). After the EST, the participants recognized the importance of getting more residents involved, so they designed and implemented the “Disaster Reduction Walk” based on their experiences (system gamma).

As to learning, P (programmed instruction) was provided in the briefing and debriefing with the facilitator, while Q (spontaneous questioning) arose during the debriefing and led to the suggestion for a residents list which then led to further discussions and the suggestion for the “Disaster Reduction Walk.”

Finally, critical action learning components were adopted for the EST. “A problem” was posed in the briefing for safer evacuation and this risk or problem was shared with the residents. “A process of insightful questioning and reflective listening” took place during the game and after the debriefing, allowing residents to come up with solutions. “Coaching” was provided by the facilitator as needed and “group or team” cooperation was designed within the EST. Then, “an action taken on the problem” was prepared for implementation, and at the same time, “a commitment to learning” was seen in the suggestions based on their experience in the game and in real activities.

All critical aspects of action learning were embodied in the EST and the expected outcomes were achieved. However, the causality was not clear, as there may have been other factors between the community activities or meetings which affected the results. Nevertheless, the EST training clearly indicated that gaming simulations with action learning are suitable for community-based disaster reduction training.

Gaming simulation with Action Learning for community-based disaster reduction

In this paper, it was first explained why it is necessary for the local community to be trained in disaster reduction for which gaming simulation was introduced as an effective tool. Then, the theoretical connections between gaming simulations and action learning were outlined and an example of such an activity was provided. However, the effects of the action learning in the example were not clear, so causality needs to be investigated further. This is a limitation to this study and to the action learning in community-based disaster reduction contexts.

Nonetheless, it was shown that the use of gaming simulations embedded with action learning objectives can be effective in stimulating disaster reduction actions by local communities, an area which has not been previously discussed. In addition, although action learning was part of a *simulation*, its use was based on the pedagogical notion that people learn most effectively when they work on *real-time problems* in their own work settings. Therefore, as shown in this paper, simulations can incorporate action learning objectives to find *potential future disaster problems* and improve real-world community disaster preparedness.

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Biography

I have been engaged in action research on community-based disaster reduction. When conducting these disaster activities, I recognized the importance of participant capacity building and decided that action learning would allow participants to learn and practice to make the community safer against natural disasters. Action learning can assist in the capacity building of the participants while gaming simulations and other tools can expose participants to real-world situations and make them more aware of the actions they may need to take.

Facilitating appreciative inquiry in combination with the world café method in a low socio-economic environment

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Jacobs

Abstract

This article highlights the use of combining appreciative inquiry (AI) and the World Café method (WCM), two popular and widely used approaches, not yet utilized as a methodological combination to facilitate change and gather information within the contextual background of a lower socio economic environment (LSEE) in South Africa, where people are mostly underprivileged. This qualitative study explored and described the experiences of twelve mother participants and their relationships with their children. AI, as a theoretically informed approach to life training practice, in conjunction with WCM facilitated an integrated process of transformative learning, although challenges were experienced. Participants indicated awareness and co-construction of experiences affecting cognitive, emotional, behavioural and social dimensions. Understanding the dynamics of lived experiences through appropriate methods of investigating can assist in designing research 'for change' and facilitating effective support methods. Applications yielded recommendations on their use in combination with participants in LSEEs which could be of use to other professionals and organizations working in similar settings.

Key words: Appreciative inquiry, low socio-economic environment, positive psychology, World Café method

Introduction and problem statement

The aim is to report on the facilitation regarding the challenges, as well as valuable lessons, of appreciative inquiry (AI) and the World Café Method (WCM) utilized as a methodological combination. AI and WCM have been successfully applied in rural communities globally but limitations were reported regarding the facilitation of these methods. The goal of this larger qualitative study, consisting of two research phases based on the AI process, was to discover, explore and describe mothers' experiences regarding their relationships with their children in a low socio-economic environment (LSEE). The aim is not to report on the larger study, but rather to make known the findings, challenges and valuable lessons learned that emerged and stood out during our facilitation and application of AI and WCM as a methodological combination in an LSEE.

In 2011 nearly half (45.5%) of South Africans were living below the poverty line, and even though the poverty rate in South Africa dropped by 11.7% from 57.2% in 2006 to 45.5% in 2011 (Statistics South Africa, 2014), the numbers remain unacceptably high. Although statistics on families living in poverty are available, the number of women living in low socio-economic environments (LSEEs), a worldwide phenomenon, is not known (Okafor, 2012).

People from an LSEE are often poor and regarded as from *lower socio economic status* (Bergin and Bergin, 2015) referring to social position, the level of family income and education, poor living conditions (overcrowding in small dwellings often without water, electricity and sanitation), family structure (vulnerability to family violence and alcohol abuse, elevated levels of early adolescent pregnancy and learning disability) and the neighbourhood in which the family lives (Msall, 2009). People have low income from low-skilled jobs and are mostly underprivileged.

Until recently, researchers addressing problems regarding people in poor communities first tended to find and understand the issues individuals faced (often emphasizing the problems) and then address identified problems by teaching a skill or providing a

service (Whitney and Trosten-Bloom, 2010). In contrast, understanding the dynamics of life and lived experiences in an LSEE through appropriate methods of investigating can assist in designing research “for change” and facilitating effective support methods (Cooperrider, Whitney and Stavros, 2005). AI begins with the premise that communities are centres of relatedness, and that the extension of strengths within communities invokes a reserve of capacity to reshape the images of community such that previously viewed challenges can be confronted in radically different ways (Boyd and Bright, 2007).

Appreciative Inquiry (AI): Principles, process and conditions

AI, developed by Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987), rests on two pillars: Firstly, as an appreciative perspective, also seen as a strength-based approach (Merriam, 2014) that simultaneously induces and facilitates change management (Whitney and Trosten-Bloom, 2010); and secondly, as a method of inquiry (Hammond, 2013) in organisations, communities and education globally and locally (Abdul, Aziz and Rahman, 2013). AI is also likened as a mode or reconfiguration of action research due to its cyclical process (Boyd and Bright, 2007) co-constructing the design, relationship building, planning, skills application, reflection and evaluation. AI is a collaborative approach to studying and changing social systems, such as groups, organizations and communities (Lewis, 2011).

AI as an exploratory research method and a solution-based management approach (Cooperrider, Whitney and Stavros, 2005) moves away from what is broken (Hammond, 2013). New awareness of strengths, positive views and envisioning a purposeful approach to change in an existing system such as an organization or family is generated (Lewis, 2011). By discovering what is working in a system, people might envision a changed, better and desired future (Van Tiem and Rosenzweig, 2006). Energy is heightened as positive emotions such as joy, excitement, pride and passion are liberated through optimistic communication, grounded on principles that enable creativity and knowledge

within the study environment (Lewis, Passmore and Cantore, 2011; Whitney and Trosten-Bloom, 2010). Principles include:

1. *Constructionist* (reality is socially constructed through language);
2. *Simultaneity* (change begins from the moment a question is asked);
3. *Poetic* (the choice of what is being studied determines what is discovered);
4. *Anticipatory* (the image of the future shapes the present); and
5. *Positive* (positive questions lead to positive change) (Cooperrider, Whitney and Stavros, 2008).

A four-dimension (4-D) consecutive cycle or phase is used to implement AI using powerful questions:

1. *Discovery* by imagining and sharing wishes about experiences in order to identify existing strengths, through story-telling;
2. *Dream* by sharing hopes for the future regarding the topic;
3. *Design* by being better aware of strengths, sharing specific strategies to achieve the desired vision;
4. *Destiny* by implementing action plans, celebrating positive changes and innovations resulting from the AI process and making plans for personal commitments and going forward (Cooperrider, Whitney and Stavros, 2008; Whitney and Trosten-Bloom, 2010; Lewis, Passmore and Contore, 2011).

Moreover, AI is a tool that can be utilized to empower individuals and systems to become self-sufficient and confident (Boyd and Bright, 2007). Six essential conditions or freedoms are related to AI:

1. *To be known and offered opportunities within a relationship, work setting or system, building towards strengthening relationships;*
2. *To be heard* (opening channels of communication), and being recognized by sharing information and exchanging ideas to reduce isolation in an environment which cannot be changed;

3. *To dream* in the community and direct attention towards the future;
4. *To choose to contribute*, inducing excitement and being creative, determined and committed;
5. *To act with support*, creating a sense of self-confidence, learning and innovation; and
6. *Focusing on the positive*, what gives life, and on what works by moving away from searching for problems (Whitney and Trosten-Bloom, 2003).

A person thus follows a journey of liberation and social emergence, from a position of powerlessness to generating change and making a difference in relation to others (Graham and White, 2015).

Applied in rural communities in India and Malaysia (Ashford and Patkar, 2001; Yuliani, Adnan, Colfer and Indriatmoko, 2014), AI became a powerful tool for building self-reliance, empowering communities towards development, stimulating creative and innovative strategies and motivating active participation (Yuliani, Adnan, Colfer and Indriatmoko, 2014). Abdul, Aziz and Rahman (2013) state that AI could be an appropriate method to assist in empowering rural communities as it does not make use of technology or require participants to read text-based instruments. However, limitations were derived from the challenges posed by complex language used; some communities experience the process as overwhelming. Although the effectiveness of the method itself has not been in question, critiques of AI report concern of the facilitators' understanding and experience of the application of the method (Ashford and Patkar, 2001; Wood, 2016).

The World Café Method (WCM)

World Café (WC) is a large group facilitation method around a chosen topic of importance on issues that matter (Brown, Isaacs and The World Café Community, 2005). WCM is a strength-based approach aiming to derive at multiple and flexible perspectives. Groups of people, who are part of a system or community, are engaged to brain storm and problem solve through positive conversation in a hospitable, welcoming relaxed café setting. The

topic can be modified in terms of the context, number, purpose, location and question choice (Brown, Isaacs and The World Café Community, 2005). The WCM is based on the understanding that conversation is the core process that drives personal, business and organizational life and is more than a method, a process or a technique; it is also a way of thinking and being together. Collaborative engagement is sourced in a philosophy of conversational leadership (Bridger, 2015). Conversations are designed that can generate multiple points of view; ultimately unique, diverse and collective discoveries are connected, conceptualized and cross-pollinated (The World Café Community Foundation, 2015).

Conducting a WC requires café table hosts to be assigned by a facilitator to assist the groups (about four people each, seated at three to four café-style tables) by setting and clarifying the context and parameters of the topic within which the dialogue will take place. Everyone is motivated to participate, share, write, doodle or draw ideas on paper tablecloths. A similar question, to be explored within 20-30 minutes is posed to all groups. Upon completion of the initial round, the table host remains while other members 'travel' and blend to form new groups at other tables. Traveling participants 'carry' insights that emerged from the previous dialogue to a newly-formed group conversation upon which the table host shares key insights from the initial conversation with new participants to link and build upon gained insights. The process can be repeated two or three times and is followed by a whole-group discussion where insights, actionable ideas and recommendations are shared (Brown, Isaacs and The World Café Community, 2005).

Methodology

The aim is to describe the application of AI and WCM as methodological combination indicating the practical connection of the AI to the WCM and to make recommendations on their use in combination with participants in LSEEs. The study was undertaken in three monthly consecutive focus discussions,

reflecting the AI process as well as experiences of participants on the AI and WCM.

Sample and context

A total of twelve white women, between the ages of 30 and 55, in an LSEE within the East Rand of Gauteng Province, South Africa, participated and were representative of a vulnerable community who face a range of challenges: women living in poor conditions such as overcrowding, low education levels, sole parenting, low intellectual abilities and having low income due to unemployment. All were proficient in Afrikaans and English, all had between three and five children and had children in middle childhood, attending the same special education government school as they went to. One participant had a Grade twelve certificate, most had Grade eight; the average age for having their first child was twenty, most were single or cohabitating. Seven were unemployed and financially dependent on child grants and five worked part time in a low income job. Participants were purposively selected on the basis of willingness and participated in all three discussions.

Ethical considerations

Ethical consent was obtained from the North West University (NW-00125-11-S1). Special ethical considerations had to be applied during this study as participants selected were representatives of a vulnerable community. Mother participants had limited emotional support and opportunities to voice challenges and expressed a dire need for assistance. They seemed to experience stress regarding their living conditions and financial situations; they had all experienced past traumas. Benefits would however outweigh risks, due to opportunities to participate in the group (Greeff, 2015).

Women have been excluded from research for many years due to their vulnerability and this has caused a lack of data needed to promote women's health (Department of Health Republic of South Africa, 2015). However, it is important to note that vulnerable populations should not be excluded from research as these populations are most in need of being served and understood (Sieber and Tolich, 2013). This vulnerable group of women entailed

that the research question could merely be answered by using a vulnerable population. Although the topic was sensitive (Klocker, 2015) it was not traumatic. Also, when engaging in community research, effort was made to consider ethical considerations (key norms and standards) as indicated by the SA Department of Health (2015) pertaining to relevance and value, scientific integrity, role player engagement, fair selection, fair balance of risk and benefits, informed consent, ongoing respect, including privacy and confidentiality and research competence. In addition the key principles of ethics (respect for autonomy, beneficence to do good, non-maleficence, justice and equality) were adhered to. There was a possibility that participants could experience emotional discomfort initially, because they might fear being judged. Potential benefits that the study might hold for the participants were the opportunity to improve self-esteem since their opinions were regarded as important in contributing to future research; and the opportunity to be heard fulfils a need that mothers as community members might have had. Klocker (2015) stresses the obligation researchers have not to harm participants in any way.

Design

AI is mostly associated with action research, case studies, narrative, evaluation methods and portraitures (Norum, 2008) and is a form of applied research. In this study, AI was used as the method for basic and applied research. AI was firstly utilized to gain basic knowledge of participants' experiences (appreciative perspective, that simultaneously induces and facilitates change management) (Whitney and Trosten-Bloom, 2010) thus applying information gained in a practical way to a troublesome situation; and secondly as a method of inquiry (Hammond, 2013).

A qualitative methodological paradigm with a phenomenological interpretative research approach (Merriam, 2014) was utilised in order to study occurrences in their natural setting; also authentic for studying intense human experiences containing affective and emotional components, making the design suitable. The questions were developed by the researchers based on literature on AI and WCM, integrated to focus on positive aspects (Stratton-Berkessel,

2010) in rural and poor communities, ultimately to answer the main research question of the study.

Data collection, procedures, analysis and findings

Twelve participants were divided into three groups of four, using the WCM process (three consecutive focus group discussions over a three-month period). The venue (large unused classroom) was accessible to participants, as focus groups were conducted at the school that their children attend, reducing transport difficulties.

The WCM was conducted by the researcher, who was familiar with the participants and their contextual background; and the research supervisor who supported the facilitation of the groups. The overall process and findings of the first two discussions are briefly given in order for the reader to understand the recommendations.

During the first phase of the research (WC first focus group discussion), the study explored, through the *discovery* phase of AI, the experiences of mothers' relationship with their children: "What are your experiences of your relationship with your children?" Briefly, participants conveyed affection and closer relationships in spite of hardships when these were shared; communications were described to be around day to day events, but when there was physical touch these were more meaningful; reciprocal affection is appreciated; challenges in dealing with their adolescents' behaviours are experienced. Moreover, most participants doubted their competency being good mothers (Botha, 2016). Participants received "homework"; the assignment was to make a collage together with their children, using scraps of paper or drawing, on how they dream about their future relationships; they also had to think about two matters relating to the topic that they would like to share with the group during the following group meeting.

In the second discussion, a month later with the same participants, the aim was to explore, describe and gain insight into the next three consecutive cycles of AI, thus how mothers dream (what might be); what the world is calling for (envisioning results); in order to design (what should be); their destiny (to empower and

sustain) their relationships with their children in LSEE: “How would you describe your relationship with your children now; What do you and your children talk about lately; What do you dream your relationship with your child would be like in the future; In which way can you make your dream regarding your relationship with your child become a reality?”

Briefly, findings revealed that boundaries are over or under realistic; dreams are clouded by parenting issues, however strong emotional interactions and wishes to fulfil children’s needs through open respectful communication and friendship exists. Insight was gained that togetherness influences relationships and that the present influences the future. This time “homework” was to make a collage using scraps of paper or drawing, together with their children, designing their future relationships. Participants had to note what they would like to share with the group at the next meeting.

In the third discussion, a month later, participants were asked about their experiences (reflection) of being part of groups in the WC: “Tell us about coming here and talking to each other about your relationships with your children. Tell us more on how you experienced being part of a group like this”. Participants revealed unique individual as well as collaborative strengths, enabling future expectations and visions for positive and long-lasting relationships, sharing future plans for support.

A fourth group discussion (not part of data collection) was held a month later. It was requested by the participants, as they wanted to hold a “craft meeting” where they could talk and make items for the fundraising market. These meetings took place regularly; the participants organised it by themselves.

Data collected included: 1) visual notes (on paper tablecloths as written text while talking and discussing questions); and 2) audio and video recordings. Rich deep discussions were thematically analysed, appropriate for developing a detailed descriptive account of a phenomenon according to the six steps of Braun and Clark (2013). For this article, conclusions were derived through

engagement of researchers in critical reflection following the sessions in the AI/WCM process. Reflective practices help towards engagement in a process of continuous learning, especially when working in a challenging field (Niesing and Spies, 2015).

Findings and discussion

This article focuses specifically on outcomes and experiences regarding the facilitation of a combination of AI and WCM in a vulnerable community, as observed during the data collection process. Key lessons were learnt regarding the contextual background of LSEE participants, the logistical and literacy constraints, facilitation of WCM as method and participant experiences. Insight gained can enable practitioners who are directly and indirectly involved in LSEE to create pathways increasing the effectiveness to support a vulnerable population group.

Participants from LSEE

Poverty is a dangerous mix of stress and inadequate resources (Lötter, 2011). The shortage of economic capacities spreads much wider throughout a person's life; influences are complex (Botha, 2016). Since contextual factors have an influence on how people live and interact, the stress that an LSEE poses induces signs of anxiety, leading to withdrawal, feelings of being incompetent with little energy to parent and, consequently, being more critical in interactions with children (Jankovic, 2008). Feelings of hopelessness are accompanied by a negative attitude to life (Uddin, 2011). The adversities experienced by participants living in contexts of poverty tend to immobilize rather than encourage individual and collective agency (Wood, 2016).

Disadvantages that may be experienced by specifically women, who live in LSEE's, thus from marginalised and disadvantaged groups, are compounded by multiple factors, amongst others, intersectionality, gender, individual subjectivity and domination (Collins and Andersen, 2015). The feminist theory challenged the notion that "gender" was the primary factor determining a

woman's fate. Marginalised groups often gain the status from being "other", if one is different to the "norm", thus anyone that differs from the societal schema of an average white male. It establishes a person as unacceptable based on a certain criterion that fails to be met (Collins and Andersen, 2015). Domination always involves the objectification of the dominated; all forms of oppression imply the devaluation of the subjectivity of the oppressed (McCall, 2005).

In this regard, Collins and Andersen (2015) state that individual subjectivity is a concern for marginalized groups. Differences can be used as a weapon of self-devaluation by internalizing stereotypical societal views, thus leading to a form of psychological oppression. Having a sense of self-value and a stable self-definition not obtained from outside influences, helps to overcome these oppressive societal methods of domination.

WCM as method in LSEE: Logistical restraints

Participants from the LSEE context found it difficult to keep to their commitments to attend WC focus group sessions, amongst others, challenges were travelling difficulties, supervision of younger children and falling ill. To decide on dates too far in advance became problematic. Although participants want to attend the meetings, because these create opportunities to voice ideas and learn (Wood, 2016), it is not always possible to do so.

The implication, when using AI as a method of inquiry, is that if consecutive sessions might not be attended, the process requiring participation in all phases for outcomes and methods might not be meaningful. AI is designed to follow a customized and sequential 4-D process with each phase building on the next (Stratton-Berkessel, 2010; Whitney and Trosten-Bloom, 2003). Care should be taken with logistical planning, prior to and after each session, it is important to stress participation in all sessions when consent is obtained initially. However, participants should constantly be reminded of their freedom to withdraw.

It is suggested that participants are contacted individually to confirm, offer or negotiate solutions towards dates that suit

everybody. All participants owned mobile phones. Participants need to be aware that they will be accommodated according to their logistical needs regarding dates and transport, to and from the research site, free of cost.

After a focus group discussion participants should agree together on a next date that suits all; taking along a written note and having created a cell phone reminder with the date for the next discussion. The facilitator should be part of the WhatsApp group to simply arrangements.

Potential barriers that need to be considered are the capacity and ability of different stakeholders that participate, levels of community infrastructure, literacy and numeracy levels and dominance of oral culture (Niesing and Spies, 2016).

WCM as method in LSEE: Literacy constraints

Initially participants struggled to verbalize thoughts, to focus on the topic and to share their stories. They kept talking about everything that came to mind, verbalising in lower level and simple language unrealistic thoughts, not being able provide ideas towards realistic implementation or having a clear vision about the future: *“You can't even explain your dream to yourself...how can you explain it to someone else...”* Participants were also hesitant to write or draw on the paper tablecloths during the discussion and consequently battled to summarize information.

Battling to verbalize thoughts raised a question about the ability of people from LSEE to participate. Reynolds and Fletcher-Janzen (2002) correlate low socio-economic status with learning difficulties, which implies low reading levels, inadequate verbal skills and difficulty to focus. Ashford and Patkar (2001) recommend that questions should be constructed around “who, what, where, when, how and why”; in some communities, these questions are more easily understood. In undergraduate programs limitations were centered around misconceptions about statements made especially when students had not written or animated their ideas clearly on the tablecloths (Farr, 2013).

Non-participation could be a reflection on the suitability of WCM as method in a low literacy environment. It showed that participants from a LSEE found a group discussion to be a strange situation. Participants are more used to one-on-one conversations. Care should be taken to explain the process. It could be useful to present a visual display so that participants can become familiar with the procedure in advance.

The WCM guidelines state that after a conversation around a table has been completed, the participants should “travel” to form new groups at other tables, allowing them to carry new insights that have emerged from the previous dialogue to a newly formed group conversation (Brown, Isaacs and The World Café Community, 2005). The table host shares the essence of the previous conversation with new participants.

Challenges were experienced as participants had difficulty conceptualizing ideas and to summarize information as answers to questions posed, although concepts had been chunked down at the onset of the discussion, and the topic was one on an “issue that matter”.

Farr (2013) recommends that the host should make own notes for accuracy and be given the responsibility to provide feedback. However, the duty of the table host is to engage in conversation, rather than to facilitate (Brown, Isaacs and Café Community Foundation, 2015). A solution is to appoint research assistants who are familiar with the setting and who can perform the duties of the table hosts, firstly to minimize uneasiness of participants and secondly to ensure accurate feedback. Making use of WCM in an LSEE setting thus requires more facilitators and / or assistants.

The World Café resource guide (The World Café Community Foundation, 2015) recommends that groups should not be smaller than twelve participants, and, with regards to table seating, not more than four participants. The researchers found that the smaller groups were easier to manage, as after initial reluctance and “shyness” was overcome, all wanted to share their story. This posed a challenge to facilitate the discussion and keeping within

the time limit of 20-30 minutes, with all participants having had a chance to speak. According to Hawkins (2015) 20 minutes to achieve dialogue is perhaps too little, and it needs to be balanced with conversational goals.

Participants however struggled to stay focused on the topic. They found it difficult to write or draw on tablecloths while talking. Not much data was retrieved from table cloths. What came to the fore is that focus group discussion is appropriate for the participants as they are allowed freedom to share experiences regarding their relationships with their children who were important to them (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011).

Participants were involved in setting the agenda for the second and third group discussion. They were given “homework”, with practical activities, relating to the topic, and on their level. Firstly, it served as an overview of the last discussion; secondly, setting the stage for the next discussion; and thirdly, as participants had to go and talk to their children about their dreams, conversation between participants and their children could be on a next level, talking about dreams and the design thereof instead of merely “how was your day”.

WCM creating a comfortable environment

The WCM provides a hospitable and relaxed environment that makes it easy to participate in dialogue (Brown, Isaacs and The Café Community Foundation, 2005). However, this environment was at odds with their usual environment; WCM seemed “formal”, creating reluctance and being “shy” to participate. The facilitator shared experiences with regards to her own children which initiated discussions. The participants were soon ‘drawn in’ by the relaxed environment and “grabbed” the opportunity to share and voice experiences, even when these were initially unrelated to the topic. Realizing the environment is supportive instead of judgmental they started sharing freely ideas about similar problem situations such as battles with disciplining their children. Nonetheless, challenges were experienced as groups did not want

to employ a table host and the researcher and facilitator had to alternate between the three groups.

Promotion of participation has been considered fundamental in academic movements, which aim at intervening in real life situations (Hawkins, 2015). One of the principles of the WCM is to encourage everyone to contribute (Bridger, 2015; Brown, Isaacs and The World Café Community, 2005). The facilitator must strive for emergent participative decision-making and collaboration so that the inquiry becomes cooperative (Hawkins, 2015). In order to keep conversations on track, the researchers recommend that participants should be refocused on the topic, but care should be taken as we found that participants seemed to need to share their current issues. Their contributions elicited responses that they were being heard, supported and allowed to contribute (Whitney and Trosten-Bloom, 2003; Graham and White, 2015). It is suggested that, in communities where there is a great need to voice challenges and where a lack of support exists, the group discussions should be held prior to starting the topic of focus. This could provide participants with the needed opportunity to talk about matters on their foreground as it is difficult to focus on a topic when distracted by many pressing issues experienced. Participating in self-awareness methods helps to preserve the self-esteem of the group that is being oppressed and help them avoid any dehumanizing outside influences (Collins and Andersen, 2015). Also, strategies for quickly identifying unacceptable emotional burdens for researchers and interviewees ought to be built into participatory research (Klocker, 2015).

WCM and facilitation

The researcher, the facilitator of the overall process, and her supervisor (overseer and table host), assisted the three group discussions. The researcher is familiar with the setting, as she has been working in the particular environment as a social worker for at least five years. She knew some of the participants. The supervisor was not familiar with the particular community and its context.

Stories shared by participants were overwhelming and facilitating such a process could become very tiring and emotionally draining if one is not familiar with the types of issues that people from LSEE experience. When working in LSEEs, assistants and facilitators should first familiarize themselves with the individuals and the context before conducting group discussions. More supervision is needed for this type of participant. Ashford and Patkar (2001) applied AI in a rural community in India. They emphasized that creative and energetic facilitation is required for the successful application of AI, and that energy levels should be kept high during the conversations. Facilitators must make sure communication is open, showing understanding and provision of solution strategies with careful listening (Niesing and Spies, 2016).

The facilitating researcher has three fundamental and interdependent issues to consider (Heron and Reason, 2006). Firstly, it is imperative that group members are thoroughly orientated and inducted into the methodology so that they can accept it as their own. An orientation phase that addresses this imperative should therefore be built into the research project. This consideration empowers participants cognitively and methodologically (Hawkins, 2015). Secondly, the facilitator must strive for emergent participative decision-making and collaboration so that the inquiry becomes “democratically” cooperative. Thirdly, a climate of mutual respect, warmth and trust must be created to allow open and free expression to empower participants emotionally and interpersonally (Heron and Reason 2006:151).

WCM as method in LSEE: Participant experiences

Experiences are linked with the principles and freedoms of AI as indicated by Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010). Change begins from the moment a question is asked (simultaneity):

It was nice... I did not know that other mothers battle with their children to do their homework, and that they don't listen, and never want to listen...I am not alone.

Moreover, reality is socially constructed through language:

Can we come again... can you help us with discipline... I see now that I am not a bad mother... I see my child is not so naughty, others mothers battle also.

In addition participants benefited, their reflections reveal that they have learnt more about themselves:

I did not think I am going to learn so much here... it is so nice to talk about our worries about our kids

I can see that I am not different to other mothers, we scold our kids because we want the best

I must not be so tense, I can relax a bit.

The choice of what is being studied determines what is discovered:

Can we please talk next month on what you can talk with when they are six years old and when they are 12 years old?

You need to take time and put effort in your child, not say now you can't watch TV because you were naughty...it helped me to talk to my child... you must talk things through so that he can understand and then he will listen better...not throw rocks

I want more tips.

Participants realise that the image of the future (anticipation) shapes the present:

My things look dark but I'm thankful that I am in a relationship now with my child, I see now that after we talked last time that special time works with a child.

Channels to dream and direct attention towards the future are seen:

I know that what you say now is coming back to you in the future...I want them to be there for me, in a good relationship, and I want to be there for them.

Although an LSEE is inundated with problems, AI creates opportunities to strengthen relationships by being heard. Information and exchanging of ideas to reduce isolation in an environment which cannot be changed are communicated:

I am not the only one that has big problems, there are others...when you listen to someone else, you realize that that person has bigger problems than you do.

Participants opted to render support to one another by making suggestions or sharing what they found worked in situations they encountered earlier. They were also excited and willing to share positive stories about their interactions with their children and chose to contribute, inducing excitement, committed to act with support:

I want to do WhatsApp...if you need me let's talk and we help each other.

In addition, the cell phone message group was created to be able to share inspirational quotes every morning.

Evidence exists indicating the successful application of AI in rural communities (Ashford and Patkar, 2001; Yuliani, Adnan, Colfer and Indriatmoko, 2014). However, with participative action, there is not always a successful ending as it can be fraught with difficulties (Kotzé, Seedat, Suffla and Kramer, 2013). Although also seen as a “capability approach” development can only occur when people are in a position to make choices that enable action to improve their lives (Wood, 2016, referring to Sen, 1999). Members of the community can affect the situation in all stages of the process, due to their worries, needs, values and knowledge, which needs methodological adaptations and reflection throughout the process. Constant effort must be made to sustain mobilization (Klocker, 2015). Action research involves researching *with* people to create and explore change throughout the research process (Hawkins, 2015; Wood, 2016).

Seemingly positive questions lead to positive change. Ultimately, the goal is to enhance quality of life focusing on the positive, what gives life, and on what works by moving away from searching for problems. The choice to contribute is liberating and strengthening.

WCM as method in LSEE: Critical reflection on what facilitators learned (observations)

As facilitators, we desired the best possible results, hopefully that new insights would be gained by all. We felt empathy for the mothers as they revealed their thoughts, challenges and daily struggles in an emotionally and physical demanding environment; not really knowing each other (other members of the group) well. We could sympathise with initial hesitation to participate. Initially we wondered if the group discussion was going to work at all. We continued probing and gave personal examples of battles with communication with our own children. Throughout we showed sensitivity to their issues, offered support, and steered conversations away from negatives into “good” discussions. We realised that participants might experience “unequal power relations”. It must be remembered that the facilitators enter into an engaged, intersubjective process with participants, and together they hold up “mirrors and magnifying glasses” to themselves and each other over a sequence of cycles so that more and more desirable changes may be a result of the inquiry (Hawkins, 2015). We had to rephrase and reflect ideas and improvise. It is clear that personal flexibility (Wood, 2016) and adaptation is necessary; the café host must be a skilled observer with ‘compassionate consciousness’ (Hawkins, 2015) to subtly enhance group dynamics.

Limitations

The small scale of research, involving only twelve participants (Afrikaans speaking whites) from one societal context in one province, thus excluding the application of these experiences in other provinces, more affluent communities and other cultures cannot be generalised to the population at large and is limiting the findings. However, based on rich descriptions provided, the findings might be transferable to similar settings by readers and professionals.

Conclusion and future work

Facilitating this combination of approach and data collection has not yet been analyzed in the literature in terms of problems and recommendations for LSEE areas and vulnerable populations, where challenges are constant, circumstances do not change and problems cannot be solved easily. Lasting effects of a positive outlook might be short-lived since trying constantly to survive in the context makes it difficult for mothers to stay positive and focus, especially when they do not have the necessary support. Going back to an environment that is stressful and exhausting could diminish energy and the focus on problems. Constant follow up sessions and long-term support to develop empowerment skills, assist families and create awareness of possible strengths are recommended.

Recommended strategies have not been tested; they are observations on how things that went wrong might be corrected in future application and should be further researched, in other similar environments with larger samples in all groups of the community over a longer period of time. Community members should be trained in skills using AI in the WCM to be empowered to conduct group sessions themselves.

What we found that is significant is that throughout this study mothers felt that they were not alone, felt heard, understood, and supported. A support system was created to return to once the groups had disbanded. We found that mothers felt they belonged in a community of mothers, problems were generalized, and a sense of well-being was created: *"I am okay, I'm not the only one, I can talk to someone who understands"*.

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Biography

Dr Botha Verhage has 15 years' experience with children and families ranging from corporate, working in schools, private practice and children's homes. She is currently a therapist at a special school for epilepsy and learning difficulties, in a low socio economic environment.

Dr Susanne Jacobs is a member of the Department of Health Sciences. Her qualifications include a Masters in play therapy and a PhD in education. Her interests are towards the use of a positive psychological approach in supportive and nurturing relationships that have an influence on psycho-social and relational well-being of families, learners, peers, teachers, parents, making use of, where applicable, Appreciative Inquiry.

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