



**The State-of-the-Art in Theoretical
and Methodological Foundations
of
Research in Contemporary Social
Sciences: Action Research Primer**

By

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Theoretical and Methodological Foundations of Research in Contemporary Social Science: A Primer in Deploying and Evaluating Action Research

The following pages/slides (images) focus on introducing the State-of-the-art in theoretical and methodological foundations of action research (AR) in the form of **a primer in deploying and evaluating AR**. This primer is designed to be relatively simple, but mainly **interactive**. We searched both printed references and Internet sites looking for such a comprehensive document, but without any success. Of course, we did find publications that discuss different approaches to action research and different ways of instructing in AR. We have used different elements from these available publications while developing our own system (see references). This document represents an interactive action research framework that is also **context- and client-based**. That is, we discuss the different components of an action research program based on how relevant a particular component was thought to be for the intended context and as a result of the intended process for the clients.

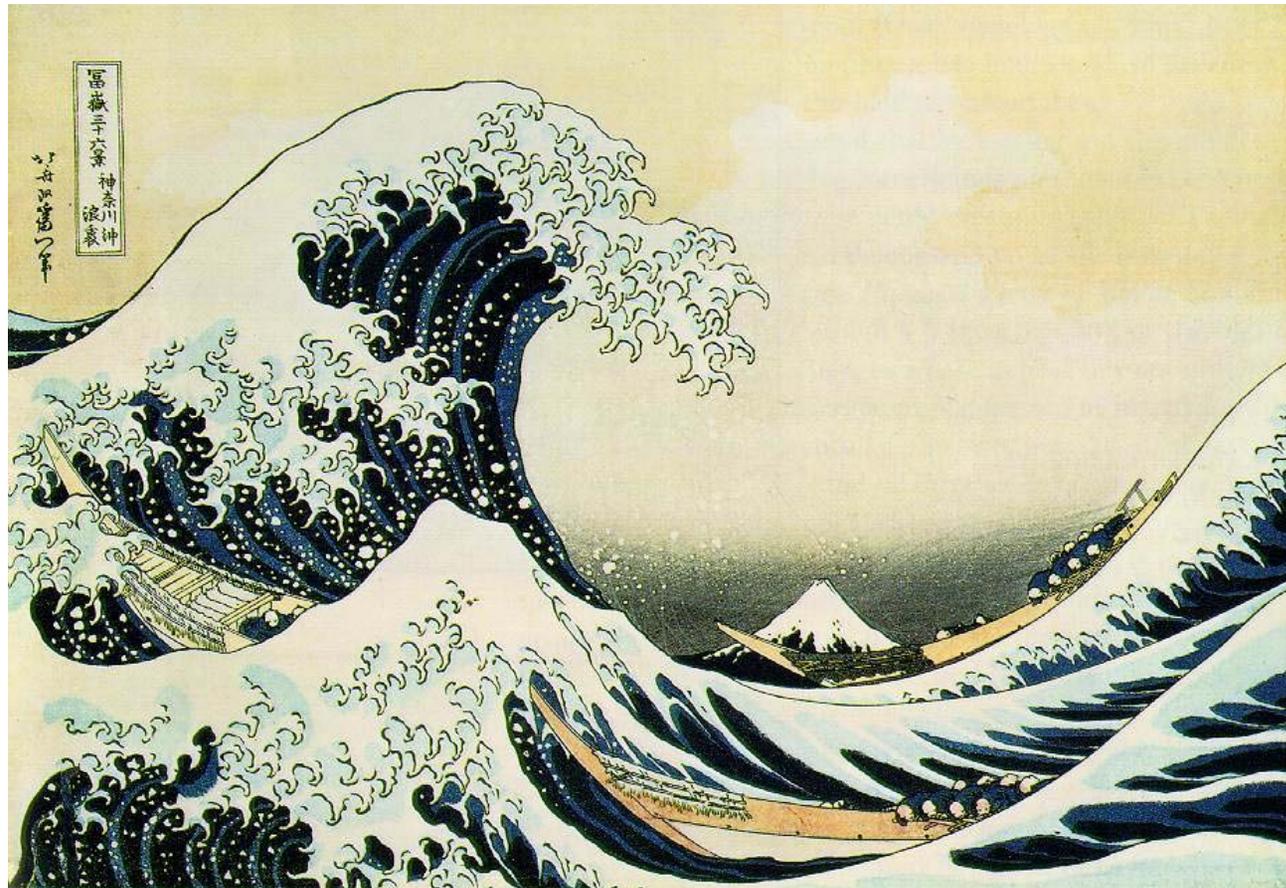
Needless to say, this document will be revised and updated as we receive comments and suggestions from the readers/participants.

Please send your comments and suggestions to Dr. Nimat Hafez BARAZANGI
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A Primer in Deploying and Evaluating Action Research: Agenda/Index

- Framework and Summary of this AR project (Slides 2), Start Dialoguing (Slides 4-5)
- **Index All Components: Foundational and Interactive Components** (Slide 3)
- **Foundations (A): AR & Local Heritage ; Bridging perspectives** (Slides 6-10)
- **Introductory Exercise: Primer (A) The State of Social Sciences in Syria** (Slides 11-13)
- **Primer (B): Questions, Issues, Answers (Slides 14-21), flash forward** (Slides 56-62)
- **Foundations (B): “Why?” Goals, objectives & self-evaluation** (Slides 22-25)
- **Primer (C): “What?” other approaches vs. Action Research?** (Slides 26-28)
- **Foundations (C): Participatory Action Research and Action Research, Ex.** (Slides 29-32)
- **Primer (D): “How?” Arab/Muslims marginalize soc sciences?** (Slides 33-38)
- **Primer (E): “Where?” Arab/Muslim soc scientist go now AR!** (Slides 39-41)
- **Foundations(D): AR models, Action Researcher, Graphic Representation** (Slides 42-45)
- **Primer (F): “When?” Interdisciplinary research helps?** (Slides 46-50)
- **Primer (G): “Who?” Participants, adv/disadvantage** (Slides 51-54)
- **Primer (H): “How to?” Questions to Answer, Act** (Slides 55-62)
- **Foundations (E): Recommendations, Future-Univ.-Comm. collaboration** (Slides 63-66)
- **Primer (I): “How to?” (cont.);: Tools, Agenda, Results, Next !** (Slides 67-75)
- **References/ Web sites** (Slides 76-77)

What do we make of this photo?



In the Hollow
of a Wave of the
coast of
Kanagawa

By

Katsushika Hokusai

The Ladder of Inference or Jumping to Conclusions

We draw conclusions نصل الى نتائج تبعاً لمعان لدينا

We make assumptions based on our meanings

We add meanings (cultural and personal)

We select data

بناء على قاعدة المعلومات الملحوظة: ما حصل فعلياً - ماسمع - مارؤي
*Based on OBSERVABLE DATA what actually happened,
was heard or seen* (Senge et al., 1994)

What can be done?



Foundations of Research in Contemporary Context-based Social Sciences (A)

Sub-index I: (Slides 6-10)

- **Social Science
Research and Local
Heritage**
- **Social Science
Research and Local
Knowledge**
- **Why**
 - **Ibn Khaldun**
 - **Bridge Perspectives**
- **Expected Results !**
 - **New Framework**
 - **Interactive Exercise**



Social Science and Local Heritage

Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), a pioneer Arab/Muslim sociologist, combined philosophy, sociology, history and the art of historicity, genealogy, literary critique, government, and religious studies in his *Muqaddimah*.

Ibn Khaldun, 1332-1406. Kitab al-'ibar. Muqaddimah. English Title: *The Muqaddimah: an introduction to history*; Translated from the Arabic by Franz Rosenthal, abridged and edited by N. J. Dawood. London, Routledge & K. Paul, with Secker and Warburg, 1967.



Social Science and Local Knowledge

By starting with Ibn khaldun's approach and views of what became known in Western higher education as the social sciences and the humanities, I hope to bridge the Arabic/Islamic intellectual heritage with contemporary social sciences.

Barazangi, Nimat Hafez. Future of Social Sciences and Humanities in Corporate Universities: Curricula, Exclusions, Inclusions, and Voice. Institute for European Studies Occasional Papers. Cornell University. 2001. <http://www.einaudi.cornell.edu/parfem/workingpaper.htm>



Why Start With Ibn Khaldun?

Different interpretations of Ibn Khaldun's work, by both Western and Arab/Muslim scholars explain the need to bridge the perspectives of contemporary Arab/Muslim social scientists with that of Western perspective of modern social sciences and the humanities.



Why Bridge Perspectives?

Bridging is at the heart of participating in this Action Research (AR) [Primer](#) in order to develop effective social science research while maintaining a relationship to the local heritage and societal issues.



A Primer in Deploying and Evaluating Action Research (A)

Introductory Exercise (Slides 11-13)

- Intention**
- Research Question (RA)**



Introductory Exercise

**This exercise is intended to seek the following
(hopeful) Results**

- **Generate New Framework**
- **Generate new Knowledge**
- **Generate new Network (s)**
- **But more importantly,
an ETHICAL CONTRACT** ([see Barazangi, 2006 for details](#)).

Other results participants might expect !



Assuming the Research Question is: What is the State of Social Science in Syria?

Facilitator:

A. Solicit responses on ongoing social science research in your location:

- **What makes it interesting or frustrating?**
- **How was the research developed?**
- **Who is involved?**
- **Where is it leading to?**

B. Document (in writing) your group responses to share with other groups later.



A Primer in Deploying and Evaluating Action Research (B)

**Sub-Index II (Slides 14-21), with flash
forward (56-62)**

- **Questions to ask (15-17)**
- **Issues to Consider (18-21)**
- **Questions to Answer (56-62)**



Generally, we ask the Following Questions to Systemize the Research

- Why

- What

- How

- Where

- When

- Who



We Ask these Questions to:

- Why? Justify the Priority of the issue.**
- What? Define the Research Question.**
- Where? Specify the community/direction.**
- When? Set the context and time.**
- Who? Determine the Beneficiaries.**
- How? Plan Action (strategies, resources).**

Examples of the “Why?” question

Justify the Priority of...

❖ Social Science Research, at the University?

(لماذا البحث الاجتماعي في الجامعة؟)

Or Justify its relevance to

❖ Population Research?

(وعلاقتها بالبحث السكاني؟)



Possible Research Issues for : University Planning

- ❑ **Why university education is not more effective in the society?**
- ❑ **Why the university is not as relevant to the surrounding community?**

Possible University-Community Collaboration: Population Planning

البرنامج الفرعي لاستراتيجيات السكان

والتنمية الذي تنفذه هيئة تخطيط الدولة بالتعاون مع المكتب المركزي للاحصاء،
وزارة التعليم العالي، (وهي شريك اساسي لصندوق الأمم المتحدة للسكان
في سورية) قد يكون احد المشاريع التي تحفز التعاون بين الوزارت وبين
الجامعة و المجتمع .

برنامج التحفيز السكاني (بالتعاون مع وزارة الاعلام الشريك الاساسي للصندوق)،
لتنفيذ البرنامج الفرعي للتحفيز السكاني تشارك فيه الهيئة السورية لشؤون
الاسرة، ووزارة الشؤون الاجتماعية والعمل، ووزارة الاوقاف والثقافة، ومجلس
الشعب، والاتحاد النسائي وشبيبة الثورة، والاتحاد العام لنقابات العمال
والصندوق السوري لتنمية الريف، ومؤسسة تطوير وتفعيل دور المرأة في
التنمية الاقتصادية (مورد).

مالذي يمنع الجامعات من المشاركة في هذا البرنامج ، وتحقيق التوازن بين النمو
السكاني والاقتصادي والعلمي؟



Other Possible Issues to Address

- ❑ **Effectiveness of research to improve Syrian universities.**
- ❑ **Connection between universities and private sector.**
- ❑ **Communication among researchers, disciplines, colleges, etc.**
- ❑ **Other ???**



Why Syrian Universities are OR are not Prepared for

- ❑ **Communication and networking?**
- ❑ **Human resources utilization?**
- ❑ **Strategic responsiveness?**
- ❑ **Self-knowledge generation?**
- ❑ **???**



Foundations of Research in Client-based Social Sciences (B)

Sub-Index III (Slides 22-25)

The “Why” questions premises

- ❑ Setting the Goals/Aims**
- ❑ Determining the Objectives**
- ❑ Self-Evaluating/Reflection**



Goals, Objectives

- **The goal here is to realize that all *action research* (AR) approaches are built on the affirmation that significant social change occurs only when the capacity for change is in the hands of those who are affected by the change, and who may benefit from it.**
- **The desired objective is to understand that simply getting along better or mediating conflicts is not enough to constitute sustainable social change.**



Self-Evaluation

- **PAR Self Evaluation case-study:**
http://www.eldis.org/rights/guides/ltt/casestudies/final/Nimat_Reflections_final.pdf
- **Reflection and back to other questions**

A Primer in Deploying and Evaluating Action Research (C)

Sub-Index IV (Slides 26-32)

The “What” questions in action

- ❑ What might be the results of different research approaches?
- ❑ What is AR vs. Traditional Research
- ❑ What is Participatory Action Research (PAR)
- ❑ What is Action Research (AR)
- ❑ Example of AR Aim and Results



What Might Be the Results?

We examine a set of theories and practices that came into existence in response to the “liberation” approach currently still being applied in understanding social issues, but resulting in few sustainable change.

- **The liberation concept was originally set in the context of class struggle as practiced primarily in poor countries (the South) and with impoverished groups in rich countries (the North).**
- **Action Research, whether in the form of *participatory research (in the South)* or Participatory action research (in the North), leads to actual attitudinal change, such as :**



Theoretical & Methodological Foundations of Research in Social Sciences (C)

AR vs. Traditional Research

- ❑ Terminology is always complex, and no where more than here. *Participatory research* and *Participatory action research* are different for some researchers. For others, they are two names for the same general kinds of practice.
- ❑ It is necessary to distinguish these practices from what has been known as theoretical vs. applied sociology. In AR approaches there is No separation of practice and theory.



What Is Participatory Action Research (PAR)?

PAR as an important framework for understanding and addressing human problems. In PAR, professional practitioners and members of an organization or community under study join together in research designed to produce useful social action. They strive to connect the academy and the public by encouraging PAR projects and seeking knowledge outside the university.



What Is Action Research (AR)?

AR is a form of research that generates knowledge claims for the purpose of taking action to promote social change and social analysis. This social change involves members to control their destinies and to improve their capacities to do so.

Greenwood & Levin 1998; Barazangi, 2000.



Example of AR Aim

To produce collaboration among participants of opposite sex: i.e., move from androgynous leadership into accepting that sex is not the criterion for good leadership.



Example of AR results

- ❑ **Eliminates fear of being seen as a weak or dominating personality.**
- ❑ **Individual becomes free of being dominated by the “other.”**
- ❑ **Groups become free of “conspiracy theory.” of the “other.”**

A Primer in Deploying and Evaluating Action Research (D)

Sub-Index V (Slides 33-38)

- ❑ **The “How” Questions: How did we (e.g., Arab/Muslim societies) get here (to marginalizing social sciences with time)?**
- ❑ **The Need for AR locally**



Possible Reasons to: How Did We Get Here? (1)

Arab/Muslim societies ignored mostly the social sciences, and, to a certain extent, the humanities in the race for advancing modern basic science and technology.



How Did We Get Here? (2)

Meanwhile, Western societies, especially during the 1930s and 1940s were separating the field of social sciences from the field of humanities with the claim of focusing on societal dynamics visa-à-vies literary or philosophical interpretations of social phenomena.



How Did We Get Here? (3)

Consequently, social sciences became dominated by the positivist model of basic sciences methodology and methods.



How Did We Get Here? (4)

Hence, Arab/Muslim social scientists mostly still operate within this positivist perspective, but without mastering some of its tools.

In addition, some of them feel that old methodology might preserve their heritage !



The Need for AR Locally

Current situation among social scientists and among people in Arabic/Muslim societies: There is

- **Prevalence of apathy.**
- **Lack of interest in self-development.**
- **Resignation, but wanting to dominate.**
- **Resentment to the “new” and to the “other.”**
- **Work against progress if no immediate benefit to the individual is visible.**



A Primer in Deploying and Evaluating Action Research (E)

Sub-Index VI: (Slides 39-45)

**The “Where?” questions: Where can we
(Arab/Muslim social scientists) go now?**

- ❑ AR models**
- ❑ Graphic representation**



Where Can We Go Now? (1)

- ❑ The origin of AR goes back to 1940s, when
- ❑ Kurt Lewin was interested in changing social systems using scientific methodology.
- ❑ The approach was different from the positivists approach by initiating action and recording the outcome: i.e., have people do something as a means to understanding the phenomenon and changing attitude.



Where Can We Go Now? (2)

- ❑ In the AR model, the researcher is visible.
- ❑ The researcher also influences the whole process as an insider, not as an outsider who studied a community like a physical scientist studying a natural phenomenon

(Levin, 1999: 26).



Foundations of Research in Contemporary Social Sciences (D)

- ❑ Action Research Models**
- ❑ Action Researchers**
- ❑ Graphic Representation of AR**
- ❑ Examples**
 - Problem Definition**
 - Educational Research**



Action Research Models:

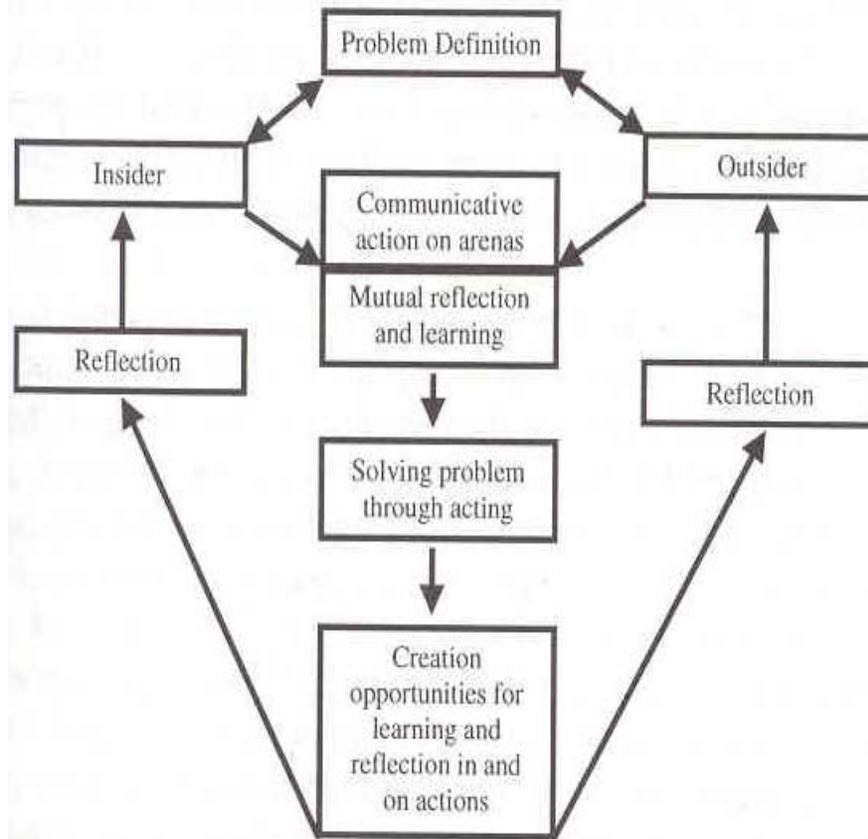
- ❑ ***Participatory Research*** developed through the work of the International Council for Adult Education. The model was value-driven, focusing on democratic social change to “liberate” underprivileged people, and to support them in their struggle for control over their own destinies (Brown and Tandon 1983 cited in Levin, 1999: 27) .
- ❑ ***Action Researchers*** were supporting consensus and conflict-free theories of society, that is, adaptation to existing power arrangements (Levin, 1999).



Other Action Researchers

- ❑ Pay significant attention to the way research questions are formulated. Contrasting paradigm-centred in most social sciences with client-centred research. In AR, participation in research is initiated by a dialogue on what questions should be researched (Greenwood, 1989 cited in Levin, 1999: 28).
- ❑ They also moved from researching others into researching self. The client-centred paradigm is known as the “human inquiry” (Reason, 1988 cited in Levin, 1999: 28).

Graphic Representation of AR



[back to slide 15](#)

[Go Home](#)

The Co-generative Action Research Model (Levin, Morten. Action Research Paradigms:p.33, in Davydd Greenwood, ed. , *Action research*. 1999.



A Primer in Deploying and Evaluating Action Research (F)

Sub-Index VII (Slides 46-50)

- ❑ The “When?” questions: When Interdisciplinary research helps?**
- ❑ Examples from other disciplines or Case Studies:**
 - When doing educational research**
 - When doing Participatory Feminism**



Types of Educational Research₁

- ❑ **Ethnographic** - describe group behavior and interactions in social settings. Relies on qualitative techniques especially observation and careful recording of events and social interactions.
- ❑ **Historical** - Describe and explain conditions of the past. Generally relies on qualitative data such as written documents and oral histories.
- ❑ **Descriptive** - Describe and explain conditions of the present. Relies on qualitative and quantitative data gathered from written documents, personal interviews, test results, surveys, etc.
- ❑ **Correlational** - Explore relationships or make predictions. Relies on quantitative data such as test scores, grade point averages, attitudinal instruments, etc. which can be correlated and shown that some relationship exists between or among them.



Types of Educational Research₂

- ❑ **Action and Evaluation Research** - Determine the value of a product, procedure, or program in a particular (e.g., school, district) setting with the goal of improving same. Action and evaluation research does not attempt to generalize results for a broader population.
- ❑ **Causal Comparative** - Explore cause and effect relationships where causes already exist and cannot be manipulated. Relies on both qualitative and quantitative data such as written documents, interviews, test scores, etc.
- ❑ **Experimental** - Explore cause and effect relationships where causes can be manipulated to produce different kinds of effects. Relies mostly on quantitative data such as test scores and measures of performance.

A Piccian, www.hunter.cuny.edu/edu/apiccian/edstat01.html, accessed October 21, 2005.



Types of Participatory Action Research: Participatory Feminism

<http://www.einaudi.cornell.edu/parfem/purposes.htm/>

Types of Participatory Action Research: Participatory Feminism (in case no online)



Purposes

*Patricia Maguire
What is Participatory
Feminism?*

Bibliography

*Yoland Wadsworth
What is PAR?*

People

Nimat Hafez Barazangi (Ph. D.)

A Biographical Summary (January 2006)

Nimat Hafez Barazangi is a research fellow at Cornell University. Her book: Woman's Identity and the Qur'an: A New Reading (December 2004) was labeled by one reviewer as "the most radical book in the last 14th centuries of Islam".

See review articles: <http://www.tcrecord.org/Content.asp?ContentId=11950>.

http://www.news.cornell.edu/Chronicle/05/1.20.05/Barazangi_book.html.



A Primer in Deploying and Evaluating Action Research (G)

Sub-Index VIII. (Slides 51-54)

The “Who?” questions:

- ❑ Who might be a participant?**
- ❑ Who might benefit or not benefit:**

Advantages & Disadvantages of AR



Who Might Be a Participant?

- ❑ **All those who have stake in the particular issue.**
- ❑ **For Example, those who are part of the Univ.:**
 - **Deans; academic/administrative relations.**
 - **Chairs who try to smooth relations.**
 - **Professors who attempt teaching/research**
 - **Students who attempt learning.**
 - **Society who is paying for all the above.**



Ex: change Problem Definition to the advantage of the beneficiaries

- ❑ The **Original assumptions** become **invalid**:
“Ineffectiveness is seen as the result of lack of inclusion, insufficient education, and inadequate infrastructure.”
- ❑ The **alternative definition**:
Lack of effectiveness is the systematic outcome of **suppressing open discussion of many by powerful domestic and international elite.**
- ❑ Unlike standard revolutionary praxis or orthodox labour organizing tactics, **AR** values and relies on the **knowledge, analyses, and efforts of local people.**



Advantages & Disadvantages

- ❑ **Advantages:**

- **Involve community in decision-making.**
- **Encourage action on suggested solutions.**
- **Reduce cost of external experts.**
- **Maximize benefit of local resources.**

- ❑ **Disadvantages:**

- **Reduce the power of the elite.**



A Primer in Deploying and Evaluating Action Research: (H)

Sub-Index IX: (Slides 55-62)

The “How to?” questions

- ❑ Questions to Answer**
- ❑ HOW TO ACT: Plans, strategies, resources, future action—
e.g. , university-community collaboration**



Questions to Answer

- Why

- What

- How

- Where

- When

- Who

- How to



Questions to Answer (1)

Why Social Science RESEARCH?

**Planning requires
social research**

Why ???



Questions to Answer (2)

Why? planning requires social research.

What? setting the goal of particular planning.

Where? might a particular issue affect society.

When? addressing the issue becomes necessary.

Who? might be involved in solving the issue.

How? to reach the particular goal/solution.



HOW TO ACT (1)

- (A) Action Plan**
- (B) Strategies**
- (C) Resource**

(A) Action Plan (1)

- **Productive Communication: each individual**
 - **Listen (for content and feelings)**
 - **Validate feelings**
 - **Paraphrase**
 - **Check for understanding of content**
 - **Clarify, don't challenge**



HOW TO ACT (2)

(A) Action Plan (2)

- **The Ground rules for Dialogue**
 - **Speak to understand, not to score a point.**
 - **Listen to understand and to learn.**
 - **Suspend judgment.**
 - **Listen to yourself listening, and discover your assumptions.**
 - **Ask questions for clarification only.**
 - **Everyone should have a chance to speak, but not everyone has to speak if choose not to. (Martin, 2002)**



HOW TO ACT (3)

(B) Strategies

- **To deliberate:**
reflective dialogue vs. controlled discussion
- **To network:**
group action vs. individualized reaction



HOW TO ACT (4)

(C) Resources

- **Means of communication.**
- **Means of Transportation.**
- **Security for sustainable deliberation.**
- **Individual creativity.**
- **Group cooperation.**



Foundations of Research in Contemporary Social Sciences (E)

- ✓ **Recommendations**
- ✓ **University-Community Collaboration**
- ✓ **Results and Next Action**
(To be determined by participants)



Recommendations

One possible strategy:

Each university choose the focus in its own community, then solicit the participation of its members.



University-Community Collaboration

P U R P O S E

To begin to codify the learning that is emerging from the experiences of faculty, students and community members in various forms of university-community collaboration at X University !



University-Community Collaboration

A G E N D A

- **Small, Mixed Group Discussion**
- **Brief Report Outs**
- **Organization of Small Group Work**
- **Next Steps**



A Primer in Deploying and Evaluating Action Research (I)

Sub-Index X: (Slides 67-75)

The “How to?” Questions (cont.):

- ❖ **Tools**
- ❖ **Develop Agenda**
- ❖ **Record Results of Dialogue**
- ❖ **Determine the Next Action**



Tools

- ❁ **The Task of climbing down the Ladder.**
- ❁ **Small Group Discussion Instructions:**
 - **Instructions I: General – Group**
 - **Instructions II: Discussion Leader**
 - **Instructions III: Recorder**
- ❁ **Univ-Comm Collaboration: Agenda 1-2**
- ❁ **Univ-Comm Collaboration: Agenda 3-4**

David Driskell & Paula Horrigan. Cornell Participatory Action Research Network Consultation Series, 2004.



The TASK IS TO CLIMB DOWN THE LADDER:

- ❖ **Be aware of your own thinking.**
- ❖ **Make your thinking visible to others.**
- ❖ **Inquire: what did you see and experience?**
- ❖ **Do we agree on the data?**
- ❖ **Explain what led to your assumptions.**
- ❖ **Inquire of the other: how did you get from that data to your assumptions? (Senge et al., 1994)**



Instructions I: General -- Group

- ❖ **Select a Discussion Leader and Recorder**
- ❖ **Begin relating experiences around the question posed above**
- ❖ **After fifteen minutes or so, go around the group (person-by-person) to make sure everyone has had an opportunity to speak**
- ❖ **In the last 10 minutes, identify the themes (up to 5-6) for each category (“Foster” and “Frustrate”) that are suggested by the specific items that have been raised**



Instructions II: Discussion Leader

Lead group through process outlined below

- **Make sure everyone has an opportunity to speak**
- **Make report out back to larger group**
- **Monitor time and advise group**



Instructions III: Recorder

- **Use one flipchart page for “Foster” and one for “Frustrate”**
- **Verify that what you have written is accurate (i.e. “Is that what you meant?”)**
- **Print listing of themes**



Univ-Comm Collab: Agenda 1-2

- Small, Mixed Group Discussion

“From your direct experience, what has fostered and what has frustrated collaboration between X University and the community?”

- Brief Report Outs



Univ-Comm Collab: Agenda 3-4

- Organization of Small Group Work

Participants will use affinity diagramming (clustering) of the material generated by small group discussions.

- Next Steps

The overall group will discuss scheduling and design of the next Forum.



Results and Next Action

- ❑ **Potential results if things go as proposed**
 - **Improve relations between local people and elites.**
 - **Begin actual progress in structural development.**
- ❑ **What to do next: Start the dialogue process.**

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Selected web sites

- <http://www.tishreen.info/>
- (UNFPA:population in Syria)
- <http://www.einaudi.cornell.edu/parfem/>
- http://www.eldis.org/rights/guides/ltt/casestudies/final/Nimat_Reflections_final.pdf
- <http://www.alarpm.org.au/resources/>