

# ACTION RESEARCH

## Emerging themes



- **ACTION RESEARCH** is part of a field of research methodologies
- action-in-research and research-in-action
- approaches to studying our world
- **EVALUATION** is integrated into my action research cycles of QPAR

# Evaluation informs further action research cycles



# What I will speak about today and how...

- A brief, and integrated analysis through presenting and conversing about a number of my evaluations of projects
- that included a focus upon my interpretations of action research methodology and action research philosophy



# Emerging themes

- Context
- Culture
- Politics
- Economic
- Psychological
- Real world adaptations
- Not always according to “textbook” process

# Where do we start ?

*historical foundations, theories, philosophy, values, principles, assumptions*

- Kurt Lewin et al Late 1930s
- Stephen Kemmis et al (contemporary)
- interactive theories of organisational behaviour
- psychology, social psychology, social sciences
- applying democratic participation
- rather than autocratic coercion
- to raise self esteem of minority groups
- to help them to seek independence, equality, cooperation

# Focus

- Social relationships of groups
- Communication, cooperation, nurturing and growing relationships to overcome eg exploitative forces, colonialism etc
- Study of human relations- through discussion, decision, action, evaluation and reflection and revision in participatory action research cycles of greater knowing
- work and/or social existence can become meaningful and alienation reduced.

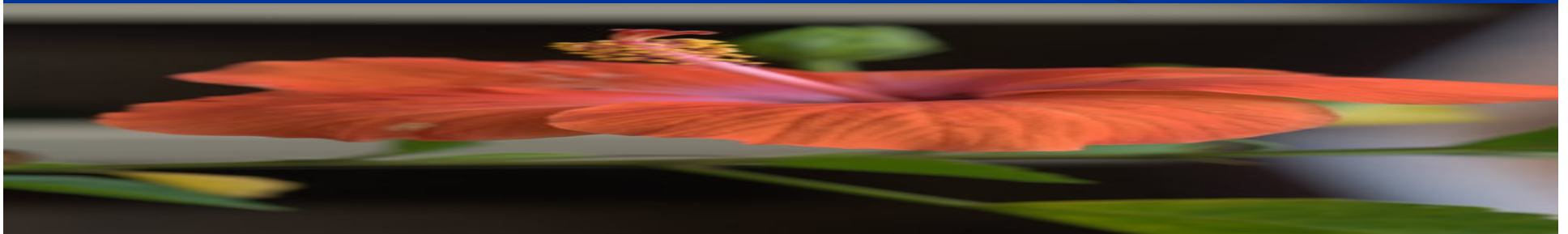


## ■ A STORMY RIDE

- Requires different forms of leadership different philosophies and assumptions and intents
- autocracy – bureaucracy- free democracy
- structured discussion of problems, followed by group decisions on how to proceed
- efficacy of democratic group decision making in the workplace

# Strategies

- Democratising workplaces
- Investigating organisational cultural change
- Combatting stereotyping, prejudice and racism
- Changing agency to reduce behaviours that harm
- Social planning and social action
- Innovation and change
- Researching their own practice
- Professional learning and reflective practice



# Types of action research used as **action** and evaluation

- **Diagnostic action research** social community problems diagnosed and recommendations made including training and development- Cherbourg 1990s-involved the participants for change to happen
- **Participant action research** Combating negative social practices- involvement crucial-managerial issues
- **Empirical action research** record keeping and accumulating journal experiences in health care situations
- **Experimental action research** health care research into how to develop better practice in an aged care organisation- project discovery, dementia care project, cultural change project etc



- AR is not merely individual development-  
“action researching our own practice” Schon’s et al
- AR involves individual growth but for social action it requires connectivity.
- AR is a group commitment. Argyris/Kemmis/Lewin
- Action research is about social change
- Evaluation within action research needs a complex, adaptive, social focus leadership and facilitation

# Action Research Project Examples

- **ACT Teacher pedagogic practices** -eg MARP multicultural action research project Canberra schools 1980s
- innovators with risks that change agents face- nature of the subject - the change required-
- acting as agents of social change and attitudinal development for a system
- **ACT Innovative curriculum action research** – designing, developing, implementing and evaluating a total learning program for 350 participants in a intercultural studies innovation project

# ■ Managerial action research-

- numbers of evaluation- then training and mentoring/coaching projects  
organisational culture change leadership and managerial issues
- eg staff – client relationships, community linkages and communications, innovations in the workplace.
- **Strongly informed by bureaucracy rules, economic, political and power game factors**

- **Victoria** Evaluative action research to diagnose the advantaged and disadvantages of Koori schools- all elements of the human condition
- Political imperatives
- Economic
- Social and emotional and historical legacies
- Bureaucratic and political and psychological egos

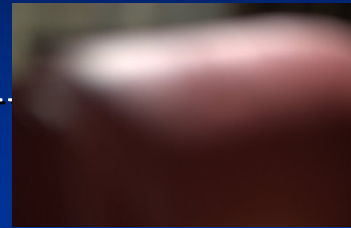
- Qld Leadership action research-report of leading/misleading (inadvertently) school organisational change within an education system.
- social, cultural, political and educational milieu
- *“Like a Kangaroo watching!”*

- Qld Cultural prejudice action research- Aboriginal communities Qld Police and Aboriginal group relationships- post Muirhead, Fitzgerald, Bingham Royal Commissions
- Political imperatives, young change drivers
- Community ferment and unrest- social justice
- Passion and strong white belief for black freedoms
- Geographical distance
- Historical legacies

- Qld Nursing practices- a “discovery” project about mental health care
- Nursing practitioners
- Institutional agenda –smartly tailored to individual nurses and practitioners for individual and collective professional development and esteem
- Clever crafting of the linkage of institutional objectives to individual development

# ACTION RESEARCH APPROACH

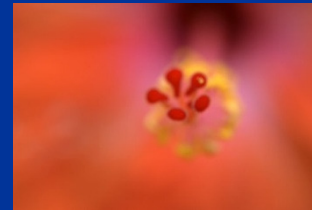
■ Question



■ Plan



■ Act



■ Reflect



■ Cycles



# Action research activities

- awareness
- strategy
- complex adaptive systems
- problem, idea
- plans and structures
- data
- critical
- refining
- sharing
- networks
- cycles

# My action research approaches

- Participant-as-researcher
- Professional learning
- Empowerment and democratisation
- Theory generation and testing
- Organisational, group, individual results

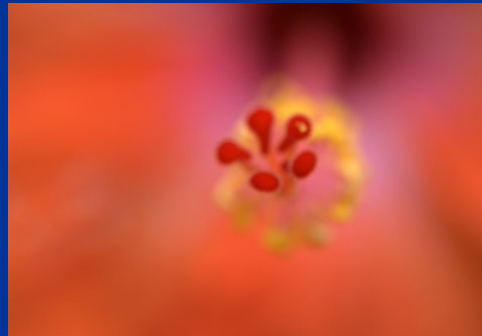
# Strongly context-driven

- Different goals -different strategies
- Guided and underpinned by similar values and philosophy
- Practitioner's empowered
- Change cultural norms and values in their settings
- Problems and issues arising from participants' themselves
- Institutional research- issues for empowerment

# Significant challenges for action research methodology and philosophy



- Setting a culture of facilitative leadership within the unfriendly “crucibles” of action
- Creating a climate of nurturing within often non-people-oriented workplaces





## ■ Several Cautions

- arm of managerial development and “corporate excellence”.
- contextual realities
- who wants it done? who is driving the research? why?  
who has the power/serious methodological and evaluation questions
- Evaluation by reflecting- journaling is difficult for some professions

# What happens in action research ?

- Educational journey within itself
- Improving of practice
- Understanding of complexities of practice, complex human situations, political, social and cultural situations
- Creating of opportunities
- Smarter, more “withit” understandings of contradictions and inconsistencies within the workplace



- **Caution**
- action research is participative
- collaborative
- connective
- about groups, teams, and organisations- ideologies, stereotypes, interactivity that govern intergroup relations are anchored in group theories, cultural standards, assumptions and values- and their stability and change depends upon the iterative happenings in groups and the underlying assumptions and decisions of people in these groups

# The ongoing Challenge of Democratisation

- A real suite of cultural challenges
- Paradigm busters needed!
- Much change in many professions and organisations is not informed by the philosophies and methodologies / approaches of participatory action research
- True reflexive thought needs to be tested in joint and reciprocal action
- against stated criteria of evaluations of action research within the real world of contexts and constraints

# Next Steps for action research evaluators

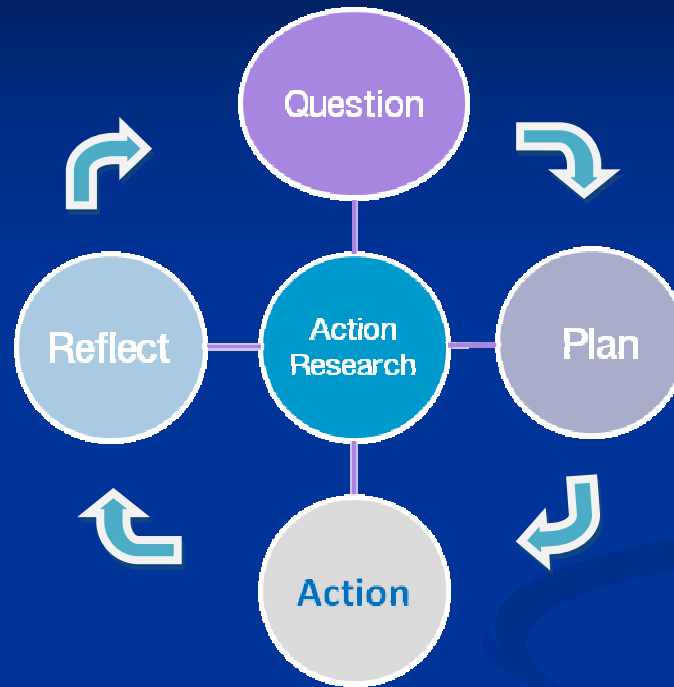
- **Newton and Einstein et al  
quantum physics...**
- **Complexity theories,**
- **Leadership, change and the new  
sciences,**
- **Complex adaptive leadership and  
complex adaptive management**

# As a future action researcher...evaluator

- Ecological models
- Natural leadership
- Birds, bees, insects etc and what these mean for change in organisational, group and individual behaviours
- Platforms of understanding required about organisations, how these change, how people change in groups and individually;
- Learn how best to lead, how best to manage
- Understandings will better inform an action researcher's work when evaluating projects

# **ACTION RESEARCH**

For Leaders and Organisations



A Handbook by Dr Mervyn Wilkinson \$35.00

[www.catalystofchange.org](http://www.catalystofchange.org)