

DRAFT – BOB WILLIAMS/ROBYN BAILEY bobwill@actrix.co.nz

HOW TO SELECT A SUITABLE OCCASION TO USE ACTION RESEARCH

This is a work in progress. Suggestions welcome.

Background

For three years, the New Zealand Department of Labour sponsored an action research project called CEDAR. The purposes of CEDAR were to improve the relationship between policy and practice in relation to community based economic development. It has involved working with several government agencies, community groups, local authorities, community workers, policy workers and social researchers.

CEDAR had some spectacular ups and some distressing downs. Our conclusion is that some situations are more sympathetic to an action research approach than others. The question is whether we can “predict” these in advance.

This tool – still very much a work in progress has emerged from this idea.

FOCUS OF QUESTION	Ability to promote or undertake <i>Action</i> informed by critical reflection	Ability to promote or undertake <i>critical reflect</i> informed by action
The People involved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do the roles, divisions of labour, job descriptions permit people to act ? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do the people involved have the ability, interest or potential to reflect critically ? • Do the people involved have the imperative to reflect critically (motivation and/or pressure to deliver) ? • Are they open to their assumptions being challenged ? • Do they have autonomy and freedom to move within the task ? • Do they have access to other people doing similar things ? • How close are they to the edge of their skills ? • Is the technology available to those involved suitable for critical reflection (ie able to keep in touch with each other, able to track what is going on etc) ?
Task/Situation/Problem that is the focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there some action that can be intentionally informed ? • Are there adequate skills, resources, time, tools that permit action on critical reflection ? • Is there an imperative to act ? • Is there an urgency to act ? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the situation/task “fuzzy” and constitutes a puzzle (ie neither the “problem” nor solutions are immediately obvious) ? • Are there adequate skills, resources, time, tools that permit critical reflection by those involved ? • Is there a strong imperative for the issue to be resolved creatively ? • Is there a clear purpose for doing the task ? • Is the task challenging – tough but not too tough ?
The Environment within which the People and the Focus is located	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the historical environment promote action based on critical reflection or other forms of , norms, support resources) ? • Do the environmental norms promote action based on critical reflection or other forms of , norms, support resources) ? • Is the technology available to those involved suitable for action (ie able to keep in touch with each other, able to track what is going on etc) ? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are people allowed to admit ignorance ? • Are people pressurised into providing quick fixes ? • Are there places for formalised learning processes (as distinct from technical training) ? • Does critical reflection tends to be individualised and occur off the work site ? • Is the technology available to those involved suitable for critical reflection (ie able to keep in touch with each other, able to track what is going on etc) ? • Is the environment safe for critical reflection ? • Historically has the environment favoured fitting old ideas into new settings, rather than creating new ways of doing things (ie patterning rather than puzzling) ? • Is the wider political, legislative and administrative environment able to handle project that evolve in unexpected ways, with objectives and activities shifting focus ?