

# **Action research in the HRM field: A critical perspective and Guidelines**

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Action research, founded by Kurt Lewin in 1940s, departed from the idea that people are more likely to adopt new ways of working if they actively participate in the decision making process. An original formulation of action research included ‘consisted analysis, fact-finding, conceptualisation, planning, execution, more fact-finding or evaluation; and then a repetition of this whole circle of activities; indeed a spiral of circles’ (Lewin, 1946). Between 1920s and 1950s, in the US there was a growing interest in the application of scientific methods to study social and educational problems, when Lewin introduced the term action research, which he portrayed as a spiral of steps, each of which is composed of a ‘circle of “planning”, “action” and “fact finding” about the result of action (Carr, 2006). However, as action research could not meet the methodological requirements of rapidly growing positivism, it became marginalised and went into rapid decline. The second stage in its development is seen as in the 1970s in the United Kingdom. There came another version of the action research: from the notion that theory can inform practice, towards the notion that theory should be generated through practice, and, that theory is really only useful insofar as it is put in the service of a practice focused and achieving positive social change (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003).

Action research is a widely used research method in different academic fields such as information systems, operations management, healthcare management, education management, and finance. However, the HRM field does not benefit yet from all advantages of this method - empirical studies based on the HRM action research are at any rate, uncommon.

In this paper we aim to develop guidelines for the HRM scholars to conduct action research-based empirical studies. We do so by differentiating between diagnostic, participant, empirical, and experimental types of action research; and by assembling HRM-specific principles for conducting this type of research.

We argue that the HRM field can exponentially gain societal relevance from challenging knowledge in action, where social change and validity “tested in action by the most at-risk stakeholders” (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003).