

Action Research Fundamentals

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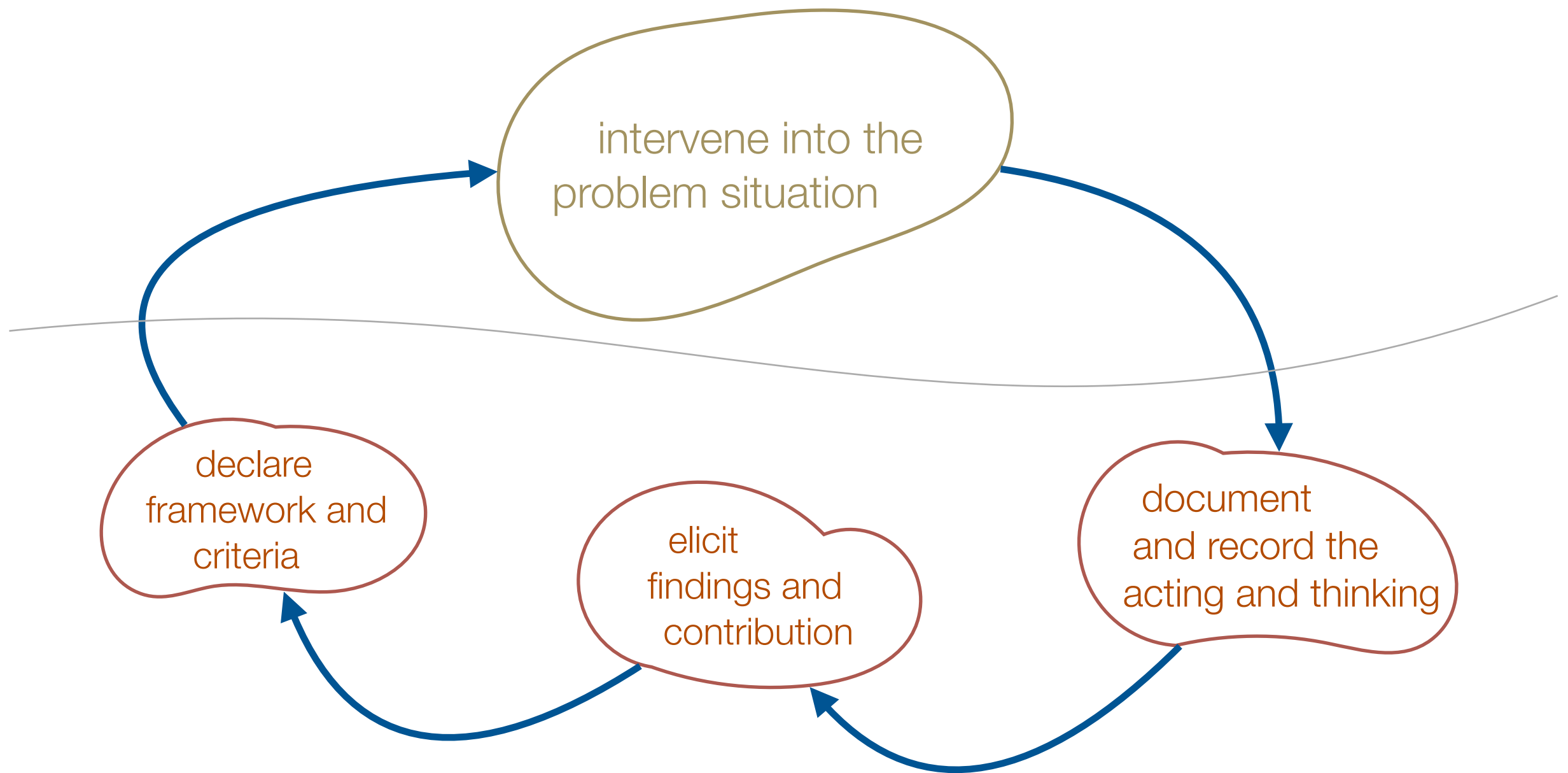
RESEARCH CENTRE FOR

socio-interactive design



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Action research: a study of change



→ dependency

Example: DC in risk management case

- Data collection:
 - directly in the risk tool as part of applying it
 - in action researchers' notes
 - in comments to the different versions of the model and the tool
 - in audio tapes from SEPG meetings
 - in minutes from SEPG meetings
 - in audio tapes from risk assessment sessions
 - in email conversations between partakers
- Quality of data
 - the data cover the broader context of change than just risk management
 - the data were collected throughout all activities and represent a time span of several months
 - the actions taken were, through the SEPG meetings, related to the organizational-level SPI project (the context).

“If it’s not in the logbook it didn’t happen.”

–Peter Naur

Data collection and documentation

- Challenge:
 - Data is collected while in the midst of action
 - Later some of the data become documentation for particular research findings

Data collection

- Research purposes
 - What is going to be documented? Why?
 - How is the action going to be documented?
 - How is the thinking about the action going to be documented?
- Triangulation of data can increase validity
- Data collection techniques
 - Diary writing: own reflections
 - Recording action: problem-solving practice, working with ideas, discussions, decisions-making
 - Debriefing: group reflections
 - Interviewing: others' interpretations and reflections
 - Document studies: minutes, specifications, artefacts
 - Evaluations: w/IT artefacts, w/IT artefacts in use, w/sociomaterial
 - Collecting other data: observations, ideas, events, decisions, and actions

Diary writing

- Contents:
 - Process notes
 - Reflections on action, interconnection between F_i , C_i and action
- Benefits:
 - Better practices
 - Enhances understanding
 - Clarifies problem-solving situations
 - Useful for evaluation of situations and conditions

(Jepsen et al. 1986)

Diary writing, contd.

- Advice
 - Make the intention clear
 - Be disciplined and careful
 - Make a checklist of issues
 - Be selective and thorough
 - Decide on when to write the diary
 - Reflect on how to write the diary

Recording action

- Record problem-solving meetings
 - MP3 recorder
 - Transcribe either selected parts (less searchable, less work) or all (more searchable, more work)
- Benefits:
 - Tracks important events and ideas through time
 - Provides better data on relevant context
 - Useful for evaluation of problem-solving capabilities and outcomes

Debriefing

- Researchers talking their way through some action and reflection
 - Problem-solving meetings with practitioners: ½ hour after ½ days meeting within 24 hours
 - Researchers' meetings: 2 hours every 2nd months
 - Record, write minutes, transcribe

Interviewing

- Develop an interview guide
- Record
 - MP3 recording
 - Transcribe all (much work, but the data is focused)
- Benefits
 - Provides insight into different actors' perceptions

(Patton on Qualitative Interviewing)

Document studies

- Contents
 - Study documents: minutes, specifications, designs, products, architectures, ...
 - Study IT artefacts: information systems, devices, ...
 - Observational
- Benefits
 - Traces of actions taken
 - Focus on the artefacts and results of actions taken
 - Provides feed-back on actions taken

Contextualism

- Change processes should be studied in the context of change at another level of analysis
- Studies should reveal temporal interconnectedness.
- Context is a product of action and action is a product of context.

(Pettigrew 1990)

Pettigrew, contd.

- Truth is the daughter of time
- Comparative methods and the choice of research site
 - Go for extreme situations, critical incidents and social dramas
 - Go for polar types
 - Go for high experience levels of the processes under study
 - Go for more informed choice of sites and increase the probabilities of negotiating access
- Observation and verification
 - Processual, comparative, pluralist, historical
 - In-depth interviews
 - Documentary and archive data
 - Observational and ethnographical material

Example of data collection

- Nielsen & Nørbjerg
 - 7 interviews, duration 2 hours, transcribed, loaded into Nud*ist
 - Minutes from the 7 interviews
 - Report analysing the findings
 - Recording of several later meetings/workshops
- Strengths:
 - very focused, very informative, high level of experience, verification of findings in a meeting, practical implications of analysis, leading to intervention
- Weaknesses:
 - not contextual, time and processes only in retrospect, little verification with other material

Reflection

- Write a note to yourself on
 - *How is this relevant for my study? (5 minutes)*
- Discuss 2-and-2
 - *Mention 1-2 things that you now need to reflect on and perhaps re-frame in your own PhD study?*