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Journal of Applied Behavioral Science 1983; 19; 277
DOI: 10.1177/002188638301900306

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Ideology and Political Economy in Inquiry: Action Research and Participatory Research*

L. DAVID BROWN
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The spread of applied behavioral science requires adaptation to new circumstances and audiences, and applications in new settings can generate new insights. This paper examines two traditions of applied behavioral science inquiry—"action research" and "participatory research"—that espouse many similar values and employ common methods in very different settings.

The authors have worked together as applied behavioral scientists in each other's countries (the United States and India), applying common conceptual equipment to diverse cultural, political, and economic settings. We have used both action research and participatory research approaches to inquiry (e.g., Brown & Tandon, 1978; Tandon & Brown, 1981), and this paper focuses on the ideological, political, and economic differences between these approaches.

This article is organized into several sections. The first section defines and describes examples of the action research and par-

ticipatory research traditions. The second section considers the impacts of values and ideologies on inquiry and compares the ideological and value commitments of the traditions. The third section considers the political economy of inquiry and suggests political and economic factors that shape action research and participatory research activities. The fourth section describes phases of inquiry and differences between traditions related to differences in ideology and political economy. The last section considers the implications of those differences for the diffusion of the two traditions and their future interaction.

ACTION RESEARCH

Almost 40 years ago, Kurt Lewin suggested learning about social systems by trying to

*The authors wish to express their appreciation to Jane Covey Brown for comments on early drafts of this paper and for help in preparing it.

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change them (Marrow, 1969). He proposed cycles of analysis, fact finding, conceptualization, planning, implementation, and evaluation to simultaneously solve problems and generate new knowledge (Lewin, 1946). Action research was hailed as an important innovation in social science inquiry (e.g., Chein, Cook & Harding, 1948), and subsequent investigators have elaborated on Lewin's ideas. Perhaps the most commonly used definition of research was framed by Rapaport (1970, p. 499):

Action research aims to contribute *both* to the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and to the goals of social science by joint collaboration within a mutually acceptable ethical framework.

This definition emphasizes the importance of both scientific contributions and problem solutions and stresses the common values and standards that link researchers and clients.

In the United States, action researchers studied business firms (e.g., Whyte & Hamilton, 1964) and educational organizations (e.g., Corey, 1953). But American academic social scientists have not accepted action research (Sanford, 1970) as fully as applied researchers in organizations (French & Bell, 1973). European academics have been more interested. The Tavistock Institute launched a series of action research programs (e.g., Jaques, 1952; Rice, 1958), as have other researchers in England (e.g., Clark, 1972). Nationwide programs have been launched in Norway (e.g., Thorsrud, 1969), and various European organizations have used action research strategies (Faucheux et al., 1982). More recently, American academics have exhibited a new interest in action research (e.g., Susman & Evered, 1978; Alderfer & Smith, 1982; Pasmore & Friedlander, 1982). The following example illustrates action research.

Pasmore and Friedlander (1982) report to work in an electronics plant to discover

why an epidemic of mysterious "sore arms" had struck almost a third of the plant's 300 workers. Three years of prior investigation by traditional research methods had failed to retard the spread of the ailment.

The investigators decided to use a collaborative action research strategy that involved both employees and managers. They did this for several reasons: (1) employees held information critical to understanding the problem; (2) previous studies done by and for management had not solved the problem; (3) initial investigations suggested that employee-manager relationships were key factors; and (4) research methods that re-emphasized existing power relations might suppress vital information.

The researchers created a study committee of employees and managers to guide the research. Together, this committee and the researchers formulated interview questions, acted as participant observers, designed a questionnaire, and planned and delivered feedback about findings to management and later to the plant as a whole. The committee members worked effectively together despite their organizational differences. When the researchers and the committee presented their findings to management, they were shocked by management's antagonistic reaction:

The group worked under the assumption that the primary interest of top management was in resolution of the problem; thus it was totally unprepared for the conflict that erupted at the first feedback session between the group and top managers. (Pasmore & Friedlander, 1982, p. 350)

Managers firmly rejected the implication that their activities contributed to the "sore-arm" phenomenon.

An analysis that emphasized the contributions of individual stress reactions, technical factors of the work, and group dynamics was eventually accepted by researchers, managers, and workers. But the

incidence of sore arms had already started to decline—indeed, the incidence declined steeply throughout the action research project, declined more with the piecemeal implementation of researcher/committee recommendations, declined still further as technical problems were solved and as management changes made the organizational culture more participative, and finally levelled out at a low point several years after the research project ended. The plant also improved measures of material usage efficiency, labor efficiency, and attendance, and managers reported that the work climate of the plant was much improved (Pasmore & Friedlander, 1982, p. 357).

We will discuss this example in some detail in later sections, but now the participatory research tradition deserves equal time.

PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

The participatory research tradition emerged from work with oppressed peoples in the Third World. Variants have been developed in many settings, often independently. Paolo Freire and his colleagues in Latin America, for example, developed widely influential concepts for adult education among the urban and rural poor. Freire's dialogic approach to adult education engages individuals in critical analysis and organized action to improve their situations (Freire, 1970, 1974, 1978). In these dialogues, educators and "students" move toward a critical consciousness of the forces of oppression and the possibilities for liberation.

Similar principles of inquiry have been developed in Africa and Asia (Hall, 1981), but the lack of communication channels or contact among researchers has delayed recognition of their common themes. An international network of participatory researchers was formed in 1978 under the sponsorship of the International Council

for Adult Education, and the Secretary General of that organization has summarized the characteristics of participatory research as follows:

Participatory research is . . . an integrated activity that combines social investigation, educational work, and action. . . . Some of the characteristics of the process include [the following]:

- The problem originates in the community or workplace itself.
- The ultimate goal . . . is fundamental structural transformation and the improvement of the lives of those involved. . . .
- . . . the workplace or the community [is involved] in the control of the entire process. . . .
- . . . the awareness in people of their own abilities and resources [is strengthened] and mobilizing or organizing [is supported].
- The term "researcher" can refer to both the community or work-place persons involved as well as those with specialized training.
- [Outside researchers] are committed participants and learners in a process that leads to militancy rather than detachment. (Hall, 1981, pp. 7-8)

Participatory research has increased dramatically in the last decade. The editor of a recent special issue on participatory research concluded,

No single issue of a journal nor any collection of papers can do justice to the richness and diversity of the debate nor give an adequate overview of "what is going on." (Gayfer, 1981)

Much participatory research has been undertaken in developing countries, where problems of adult education and social oppression are particularly acute. But occasional projects have been undertaken in developed nations. The participatory research project described below is an American example, so comparisons to the "sore-arm" project will not be confused by national difference.

Gaventa and Horton (1981) describe participatory research on land ownership patterns by citizen groups in six states in the Appalachian region. A Regional Land Ownership Task Force of local citizen groups and Highlander Research and Education Center staff proposed a study of land ownership patterns to the Federal Regional Commission. The Task Force hoped to gather previously unavailable information about land ownership that would enable local groups to influence regional policies and the activities of absentee landlords. They hoped that the study would provide a model for research adapted to local needs, train local people in research skills, develop a network of groups committed to using the information generated, and mobilize a larger constituency to influence local, state, and regional decision makers.

The political implications of the project made fund raising difficult. The Regional Commission created special requirements for the proposed project and postponed funding until the Task Force threatened to drop the project and "go public with our criticism of the Commission" (Gaventa & Horton, 1981, p. 32).

Once funded, the Task Force held workshops in which researchers and citizen group representatives designed the research, prepared to collect data, and considered land reform strategies. Survey data on land ownership were collected in 80 counties, and case studies based on interviews were developed in 19 counties in 6 states. State and regional reports and case studies were written during the next year. At the same time, Task Force members worked with local groups to plan action to influence local and regional decision making.

The study documented in "overwhelming" detail local citizen expectations about land ownership: ownership is highly concentrated in a few owners; absentees (particularly corporations) hold land and mineral resources; mineral rights are greatly un-

derassessed for property tax purposes. The funding agency delayed dissemination of the reports and refused to issue the case studies (labelled "unscientific") and the state overview reports (labelled "too subjective"). The Task Force independently disseminated its findings to the news media and local citizens' groups. Subsequently, a number of projects evolved to use or expand the study's findings.

The authors concluded that the project succeeded in its information-gathering goals and provided a model of a participatory research project. The workshops offered useful training for participants, and citizen groups had begun to pass on their research skills to groups in neighboring counties as yet unstudied. The project created networks for further action and educated participants about taxation inequities.

The mobilization impacts were most obvious in areas that were already concerned about land ownership and land-use decisions.

The following sections examine some similarities and differences between participatory and action research and their impacts on the relevance of the traditions to each other and to the rest of the world.

VALUES AND IDEOLOGIES IN INQUIRY

Values have been defined as preferences for courses of action and outcomes; relevant values shape choices among perceived alternative actions (Beyer, 1981). *Ideologies* are sets of beliefs that explain the world, bind together their adherents, and suggest desirable activities and outcomes (Beyer, 1981; Brown & Brown, 1983). Ideologies link values and realities, suggesting cause-and-effect linkages that make purposeful action possible (Beyer, 1981). Values and ideologies of particular relevance to research are drawn from professional training and experience as well as

from the larger cultures in which researchers have lived. Values and ideologies are not always recognized as such by their adherents: If individuals know nothing of alternative perspectives, they will likely assume that "all reasonable people" have similar commitments.

Although value- and ideology-free observation and analysis may be possible in the physical sciences, achieving complete "objectivity" in social sciences is virtually impossible—*particularly* if those sciences purport to provide guidance to solving social problems (Diesing, 1982). The values researchers hold and the ideological perspectives that guide them exert powerful influences on choices they make in the course of inquiry.

Action research expresses values both in its definition and in the example in the previous section. Action researchers highly value *useful knowledge*. As a saying commonly attributed to Lewin states, "There is nothing so practical as a good theory" (Harrow, 1969). Pasmore and Friedlander (1982) sought a theory to explain the sore-arm problem. Action researchers also place a high value on *developmental change*. They seek to make social systems more efficient and effective, to promote the fulfillment of human potential, to solve the problems of individuals or institutions. Pasmore and Friedlander (1982) sought to reduce the incidence of "sore arms" and to allay their effects on individuals and the organization. Action research combines values often split in other social science research traditions.

Action researchers are often trained in clinical and social psychology and management theory and often share ideological perspectives that emphasize *individual, interpersonal, and group levels of analysis* in solving problems. Pasmore and Friedlander (1982) list technical and organizational variables but emphasize individual and group factors to explain the "sore-arm" phenomenon.

Since action research has developed in the context of the industrialized countries, action researchers also share ideological assumptions rooted in the cultures of relatively affluent nations. Dominant ideologies in the United States, for example, emphasize the *centrality of individuals*, the importance of *efficient and effective task accomplishment*, and "*consensus*" *social theories* marked by attention to common values, social integration, and incremental social reform (Dahrandorf, 1959). Culture-wide ideologies reinforce action researcher attention to the individual level of analysis and to incremental problem-solving approaches within constraints shared by researchers and their clients. Thus, Pasmore and Friedlander (1982) were shocked by top management's resistance to study results because they thought everyone agreed that solving the problem was the first priority. Their training and the cultural context encourage action researchers to emphasize interpersonal and group explanations and to plan change strategies that assume societal consensus about desirable outcomes.

Participatory researchers, like action researchers, emphasize the value of *useful knowledge* and dismiss the abstractions and irrelevancies of more traditional social science (e.g., Hall, Gillette & Tandon, 1983). Gaventa and Horton (1981) and their colleagues focused on the implications of knowledge about land-ownership patterns for influencing policy making rather than on their theoretical implications. Participatory researchers also place high value on *developmental changes*. They particularly emphasize research implications that enable oppressed groups to improve their lives. Recurring value themes in participatory research include equitable distribution of resources, empowering oppressed groups, increasing self-reliance, and transforming social structures into more equitable societies (Freire, 1970; Hall, 1981;

Fernandes & Tandon, 1981). Gaventa and Horton (1981) sought land ownership data to counteract the corporate dominance of Appalachia.

Participatory researchers are often adult educators and community organizers and they tend to analyze problems in terms of *community and social structures*. They draw on the intellectual traditions of sociology, political science, and economics as well as on individual and group theory. Gaventa and Horton (1981) focused on regional patterns of ownership and control, choosing as critical variables political and economic forces rather than individuals and groups. Participatory researchers have also been influenced by the cultural contexts of work with poor people in the Third World, and so conceive of problems in terms of resource inequities, dependence, and oppression. In Appalachia, for example, absentee landowners held many resources and yet paid little in taxes for local use. Participatory researchers conceive of the world in terms of *conflict theories of society* that emphasize fundamental differences of interest among social groups and the dynamics of oppression and change (Dahrandorf, 1959). Gaventa and Horton (1981) sought to expand awareness and to mobilize citizens to challenge the concentration of power and land in the Appalachian region. The ideology of participatory researchers emphasizes large-scale structural forces, conflicts of interest, inequalities, and changes that reduce oppression.

Action research and participatory research share many values. Both traditions value useful knowledge, and both explicitly reject the irrelevance of more traditional conceptions of social science research. Action researchers have argued for alternatives to positivist philosophical underpinnings that are more appropriate to change-oriented inquiries (e.g., Susman & Evered, 1978), and participatory researchers emphasize the conservative social implications of over-

emphasis on social science rigor (e.g., Freire, 1970; Fals Borda, Note 1). Both traditions seek knowledge that will have an immediate impact on social systems.

Both traditions also emphasize the importance of developmental change as a consequence of inquiry. Action research investigators have argued that academically rigorous methodologies may undercut effective action (Argyris, 1968; van de Vall & Bolas, 1977) and they find problem solutions to be as important as the advancement of knowledge. Participatory researchers accord great importance to social change and see most traditional research as actively supporting the status quo (e.g., Mblinyi, Vuorela, Kassam, & Masisi, 1982; Hall, Gillette & Tandon, 1982). Both traditions promote developmental change as an important outcome of inquiry.

So participatory researchers and action researchers—united by common values and shared rejection of established research traditions—may be expected to engage in a lively and mutually enriching exchange of information and experience.

Wrong.

A recent bibliography of participatory research readings (Participatory Research Network, 1981) does not mention major action researchers (e.g., Lewin, Argyris, Trist). And recent reviews of action research literature (e.g., Susman & Evered, 1978; Pasmore & Friedlander, 1982) do not cite the writings of influential participatory researchers (e.g., Freire, Hall, Swantz). The authors learned about the action research tradition in United States graduate schools, but did not discover the participatory research perspective until they became involved in rural development in India.

Why this mutual ignorance? We believe that the differences in ideology and in political economy of the two traditions shape their interaction. We will consider ideological differences below and then turn to

Table 1
Values and Ideologies in Action Research and Participatory Research

	<i>Action Research</i>	<i>Participatory Research</i>
<i>Values</i>	Useful Knowledge (e.g., causes of "sore arms") Developmental Change (e.g., reduce "sore arms")	Useful Knowledge (e.g., land ownership) Developmental Change (e.g., more absentee taxes)
<i>Ideology</i>	Individual/Group Analysis (e.g., individual stress) Consensus Social Theory (e.g., everyone benefits from fewer sore arms) Efficiency/growth problems are central	Societal Analysis (e.g., economic dominance) Conflict Social Theory (e.g., absentee owners profit at citizen expense) Equity/self-reliance/oppression problems are central

the political and economic forces underlying these differences in the following section.

Table 1 summarizes value and ideological similarities and differences between the two traditions. Participatory research and action research share similar general values, but they differ in ideological beliefs about how these values may be attained.

These ideological differences produce different perspectives on research clients and situations. The two traditions focus on different levels of analysis, use conceptual tools from different disciplines, hold fundamentally different assumptions about the nature of society, and attend to different central problems. Participatory researchers assume that societal groups have conflicting interests and that the plight of disadvantaged groups is a critical problem. Gaventa and Horton (1981) do not expect cooperation from the Regional Commission or from corporate landowners; they assume that those parties will resist the project and they plan accordingly. They believe that increasing the equity of resource distributions and enhancing the self-reliance of oppressed groups is critical, even at the expense of economic efficiency or growth.

Action researchers, in contrast, assume common interests in solving problems by analyses of individual, group, and organizational factors. Pasmore and Friedlander (1982) were surprised by the top managers' resistance to worker analysis of the "sore arm" problem, and they continued to focus on individual and interpersonal factors despite the intrusion of political forces in the situation. The ideological stance of action researchers emphasizes problem solving and the development of knowledge, and they often believe that enhanced efficiency and effectiveness will improve the situation of all system members, even if short-term effects concentrate wealth and power in relatively few hands.

These ideological differences interact with the economic and political forces that confront the two traditions. The political economy of inquiry shapes the development of each tradition and the chances for mutual exchange between them.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF INQUIRY

Political economists study the interaction of political factors (e.g., distributions of authority and power) and economic factors (e.g., allocations and uses of resources)

that affect decision making (Uphoff & Ilchman, 1972; Benson, 1975). Political economists ask questions like the following:

1. What actors have interests in the decision?
2. What authority and resources are relevant to the decision?
3. How will decisions affect actor interests and distributions of authority and resources?

Answers to these questions reveal patterns of influence and interaction that shape decisions. The political economy of inquiry influences decisions made in at least three critical sets of choices in the process of social science inquiry: (a) the definition of problems, (b) the collection and analysis of data, and (c) the utilization of results.

The definition of problems

Definitions of research problems fundamentally shape and constrain results of inquiry. Problem definitions influence the data collected, the results apprehended, the solutions proposed, and the responsibilities assigned for the problem itself. Ryan (1976) argues that social science often "blames the victim" in initial problem definitions, and Lukes (1974) has pointed out that agenda control by dominant groups can turn problems into "non-issues" that never become part of the public choice process. Researchers define problems in traditional social science research on conceptual and methodological grounds, or they are defined by government and corporate interests with investments in problem solutions. Problem definition in the participatory and action research traditions is influenced by the traditions' commitment to "real" problems, for a variety of interest groups may be affected by research results.

Action research clients, for example, have direct interests in the research prob-

lem definitions. But who are those clients? Historically, much action research has been carried out within organizations—particularly in the private sector (e.g., Jaques, 1952; Whyte & Hamilton, 1964). Action researchers in organizations must respond in part to problem definitions posed by organizational authorities. Pasmore and Friedlander (1982), for example, focused on the manager-defined problem of sore arms—a definition that emphasizes worker behavior that undercuts plant performance. Of course, workers did not like sore arms either. But clients with different interests (e.g., employee representatives, OSHA inspectors, local medical authorities, insurance companies) might have defined "the problem" in different terms. Managers and researchers together defined the research problem, with managers providing organizational authority and financial resources, and researchers offering information and expertise. The failure of previous efforts to solve the problem enhanced the influence of any researchers who could offer new approaches to the sore-arm conundrum.

Participatory researchers are explicit about client contributions to problem definition: "the problem originates in the community or work place itself" (Hall, 1981, p.7). Their immediate clients are defined as "a wide range of exploited or oppressed groups" (Hall, 1981, p.7). They also start with the assumption that oppression is a central problem. This perspective has at least three implications: (1) participatory research clients will define problems differently from dominant groups, (2) authority and resources will be controlled largely by other interest groups, and (3) dominant interest groups can be expected to resist or attack problem definitions that threaten their positions.

Oppressed groups often recognize problems, even when system authorities do not see any difficulties. The Appalachian land ownership research project (Gaventa &

Horton, 1981), for example, attacked a problem perceived by the researchers and the alliance of citizen groups, but not by the Regional Commission. The Commission controlled the resources and the authority to support the study, but preferred to define land *settlement* rather than land *ownership* as the research problem. The alliance and the researchers had to threaten public exposure to get the Commission to accept their definition. Problem definition in this project initiated adversarial interactions between actors with potentially conflicting interests.

The way researchers define problems differentiates them from other groups interested in research outcomes and creates the political and economic contexts of inquiry. Because action researchers tend to ally themselves with organizational authorities, they have access to authority and resources relevant to officially sanctioned problem definitions. Participatory researchers generally ally themselves with oppressed groups and opponents of established authorities and so find resources and authoritative support set up against them.

Data collection and analysis

The choices of methods, the types of data, and data collection and analysis procedures are also influenced by interested actors and the distribution of authority and resources. Dominant social science research traditions emphasize data-collection and analysis methodologies, such as experiments and surveys, that require specially trained researchers and complex experimental or data-processing installations (Diesing, 1971). These methodologies allow researchers to control data even when other actors finance the research. But researcher control may prove counterproductive for research intended to influence non-researchers. One study of social policy research found conceptual and methodolog-

ical rigor to be negatively related to impact on social policy making (van de Vall & Bolas, 1977), perhaps because policy makers did not consider the findings relevant.

Action researchers seek "joint collaboration within a mutually acceptable ethical framework" (Rapaport, 1970, p. 499), and so encourage active client involvement in data collection and analysis. Common interests between researchers and system members make mutual trust and the sharing of valid information possible. So action researchers emphasize open relationships with clients (Argyris, 1970), sympathetic participant observation (Diesing, 1971), "empathic questionnaires" (Alderfer & Brown, 1972), or "interviews as catalysts" to system-wide problem solving (Brown & Tandon, 1978).

Collaborative data collection and analysis can provide important contributions to understanding. Pasmore and Friedlander (1982) joined workers and managers to collect and analyze data that substantially advanced understanding of the sore-arm problem. The committee brought together researcher expertise, worker information, and management sanction and resources. But collaboration can also create tensions: the sore-arm investigation threatened to redefine the problem to include management, and the resulting management attack in the first feedback meeting reflected the delicate balance of political and economic forces in the plant. Collaborative investigation that threatens existing balances of authority and resources can polarize actors who have diverse interests, even when researchers are "only trying to solve the problem."

Participatory research explicitly requires client participation "in the control of the entire process" and defines all participants as "researchers" (Hall, 1981, pp. 7-8). But not all interested actors can be participants: solidarity with oppressed groups often

makes participatory researchers adversaries of dominant groups. Participatory researchers use collaborative data collection and analysis strategies with participants, much like action researchers. They develop "education for critical consciousness" (Freire, 1974) and methods of "collective analysis" (Barndt, 1981). But, in addition to this, they seek information from unwilling sources, who use control over vital information to oppress their clients. The participatory research tradition uses "militant observers" (Darcy de Oliveira & Darcy de Oliveira, 1975), investigative and advocacy research (Laue, 1978), and "conflict methodologies" of various kinds (Lehmann & Young, 1975) to extract information from uncooperative adversaries.

Gaventa and Horton's (1981) study mobilized community groups in a data collection process that both educated and empowered participants, but posed a potential threat to absentee and corporate landholders. Since the Regional Commission resisted the initial proposal, questioned the "unscientific" methods used to construct the case studies, and delayed and eventually suppressed publication of some results, Gaventa and Horton saw that it protected established interests more than it supported the research. Participatory research data collection and analysis necessarily uses client resources, since funds to support research staffs are seldom available.

Data collection and analysis decisions reflect differences in the political economies of the two traditions. Action researchers collaborate in data collection and analysis with organizations on the basis of common goals and use sanctions and resources provided by cooperative authorities. They emphasize mutual trust and iterative data collection and analysis to develop shared diagnoses. Participatory researchers emphasize collaboration and consciousness raising to mobilize and educate oppressed groups and to build close links

to those clients. But they also seek information from and about groups with oppressed interests, and so employ adversarial data collection and analysis as well.

Use of results

Access to or control over findings, decisions about dissemination, and choices of how to link results to implementation are important issues for researchers. The political economy perspective directs attention to actors interested in result utilization, distributions of authority and resources among them, and costs and benefits of utilization decisions. When pragmatic consequences of research are not obvious, interested actors may be limited to other researchers or funding agencies concerned with basic problems. Action research and participatory research, however, explicitly seek pragmatic results and so may involve many interests in utilization decisions. For example, contract research supported by government agencies or corporations may involve many interested actors.

The tradition does not specify *for whom* action researchers work, but many groups inside and outside client systems can be affected by project outcomes. Action researchers seek new knowledge to impress professional peers and problem solutions to impress future clients. Pasmore and Friedlander (1982) emphasized the contributions of action-research methods to knowledge and they described the outcomes as both "bottom-line" consequences and reduced injuries. The tradition emphasizes joint use of results by researchers and clients in an interactive process that produces agreement on diagnosis and interventions (e.g., French & Bell, 1973). Action researchers seek solutions that can be supported by consensus among relevant actors: Everyone favored a reduction in "sore arms" in Pasmore and Friedlander's (1982) study, though how they should accomplish the

reduction was more controversial. Ideally, the use of action research benefits all interested actors, at least within the system.

Action research projects sometimes produce outcomes that threaten powerful actors. Pasmore and Friedlander (1982) chose a data collection and analysis methodology that involved and implicated management in the problem. But everyone realized that any use of the results depended on continued sanction and resources from management. The researchers were able to reassure defensive managers that the research did not seriously threaten management authority, and the final "model-of-the-injury process" did not mention management style or specific managerial behaviors (Pasmore & Friedlander, 1982, p. 355). Management chose to implement a few piecemeal changes in response to research findings. But the incidence of sore arms began a steep and continuing decline at the *beginning* of the action research, so the existence of the project itself may have created an important change. Increased communication about worker problems may have reduced worker stress and thus improved the situation. The project improved communications and revealed technical problems without disturbing the existing political economy.

Participatory research explicitly calls for improving the lot of oppressed groups, and participatory researchers seek research outcomes that will change the status quo. So at least three sets of actors have interests in research outcomes: the researchers, their clients, and their opponents. Opponents often monopolize formal authority and resources; researchers have training and expertise; client groups have information, energy, and time. Participatory researchers are less "schizophrenic" than action researchers: The latter must respond to both research audiences and client systems, while the former join their fates with oppressed clients. The Appalachian land-

ownership study reflects researcher-citizen integration even in its authorship: Gaventa works for the Highlander Research and Education Center, and Horton works for the Appalachian Alliance.

Participatory research promotes research use to benefit oppressed groups—a choice that is often inimical to the interests of other groups. Gaventa and Horton's (1981) project demonstrated that land ownership is concentrated in a few absentee landholders—a fact already recognized by poor residents but not by government policy makers. The project also sought to create new actors, such as trained citizens, informed networks, and mobilized regional constituencies. The researchers expected new data and new actors to strengthen the representation of poor people in negotiations with such established interests as major landowners and the Regional Commission.

Participatory researchers explicitly join one set of actors in a social system fragmented by conflicting interests. That choice is expensive, for their opponents often have more access to authority and resources. Participatory researchers seek "fundamental transformations" of societies, and the price may well be conflict with existing authorities and resource holders.

Comparing political economies

Table 2 summarizes some characteristics of the political economies within which the two traditions are embedded. Those political economies encourage choices that produce very different research analyses and problem solutions.

The political economy of action research emphasizes interdependence between researchers and client systems and thus encourages inquiry in which researchers and client leaders cooperate to define problems, collect and analyze data, and develop interventions and problem solutions designed to be accepted across the system. The political economy of participatory research,

Table 2
Political Economies of Action Research and Participatory Research

	<i>Action Research</i>	<i>Participatory Research</i>
<i>Actors</i>	Researchers Client Systems	Researchers Client Groups Established Authorities Third-Party Funders
<i>Resources and Authority</i>	Researchers Provide research expertise Client Systems Provide sanction insights information	Researchers Provide research expertise political awareness Client Groups Provide information energy insights Established Authorities Provide sanction power funds and rewards Third-Party Funders Provide funds protection
<i>Impacts on Phases</i>		
1. Problem Definition	Shared by researchers and client system Benefits provided to whole system Resources and sanction from system leaders	Controlled by client group Benefits provided to client group Resources received from clients or extracted from system
2. Data Collection and Analysis	Collaborative with whole system Iteration to system-wide shared diagnosis	Collaborative with clients; adversarial with authorities Iteration to educate and mobilize client groups
3. Uses of Results	Systemic consensus on goals of intervention Problem solving with systemic benefits	Client consensus on goals of intervention Negotiation to improve client situation

in contrast, allies researchers with oppressed clients in opposition to existing authorities and resource holders. Action researchers work *with* "the system"; participatory researchers often work *against* it.

DIFFUSION AND INTERACTION OF RESEARCH TRADITIONS

Some investigators argue that political economies largely determine values and ideologies and so should bear the brunt of analysis (e.g., Benson, 1975). Others suggest that ideologies and values shape recogni-

tion of political and economic factors and that understanding the latter is impossible without analysis of the former (e.g., Starbuck, 1982; Weick, 1979). We will not resolve that controversy here; instead, we argue that ideology and political economy *interact*, so that either—or both—potentially influences research. Ideology and political economy frequently reinforce one another in inquiry.

Action research ideology and political economy, for example, are mutually supportive. Consensus assumptions justify collaborative inquiries that unite diverse interests; commitment to productivity dove-

tails with the concerns of organizational authorities. Building broad consensus about problem diagnoses and about incremental reform strategies are basic themes in action research (e.g., Alderfer & Brown, 1975; Clark, 1972). Action research ideological assumptions and political-economic expectations, however, are not always correct. In client systems riddled with distrust and conflicts of interest, for example, action research may fail (e.g., Lewicki & Alderfer, 1973). Big landowners and poor farmers could not have collaborated to investigate land ownership patterns in Appalachia. When action researchers do not recognize major conflicts of interest within their client systems, their activities can easily damage the interests of less sophisticated and powerful actors—such as oppressed groups.

The political economy and the ideology of participatory research are also mutually consistent. Concern with societal-level analysis encourages attention to political and economic analyses and an awareness of many interested actors. Conflict assumptions prepare researchers to extract information from reluctant opponents as well as to cooperate with oppressed groups. Educating and mobilizing oppressed groups to solve their own problems is consistent with beliefs in self-reliance and in the redistribution of resources. Like action researchers, participatory researchers run into trouble when their ideological assumptions and political/economic expectations are not met. Participatory research on the sore-arm problem would probably challenge management exploitation of workers—even if the workers themselves did not question management legitimacy—and thus alienate all the parties.

Action research and participatory research subscribe to similar values, but their ideologies and political economies encourage very different patterns of inquiry. What do these differences imply for the international

diffusion of the two traditions, and for their interaction with each other? Will action research continue to be used largely in Western or developed countries while participatory research is used largely in Third World settings? Will the two traditions continue to remain insulated from each other?

The diffusion of action research

When is action research appropriate? Action research emerged from World War II, when few questioned the legitimacy of national authorities, and social scientists concentrated on solving practical problems. The tradition was later adopted by the private sector, which has resources and authoritative sanctions for solving recognized problems (Whyte & Hamilton, 1964; French & Bell, 1973). Action research assumes that problem solutions acceptable to many parties are possible. This assumption is reasonable when the distribution of resources and authority is generally accepted as legitimate. Consensus solutions are much more difficult to achieve when the legitimacy of current distributions of power and resources is challenged and when solutions that benefit one party are rejected by others. Even the subtle questioning of management authority posed by the sore-arm diagnosis threatened the continuation of that project—even though workers accepted the legitimacy of management authority (Pasmore & Friedlander, 1982). So legitimate authority and resource distributions are critical to the action research tradition.

Action research also depends on acceptance by diverse constituencies within the client system. Lack of sanction and resources from system authorities (e.g., Clark, 1972), or suspicion and resistance from middle levels (e.g., Alderfer & Brown, 1975), or challenges from lower levels (e.g., Lewicki & Alderfer, 1973), can all scuttle action research projects. Maintaining acceptance by multiple inter-

ests may call for researcher skill in managing conflict. Pasmore and Friedlander (1982), for example, had to manage tensions between managers and workers to keep the sore-arm project going.

Incentives for researchers to combine problem solving with research are important underpinnings for action research. Some researchers (and some clients) do not accept the consensus assumptions implicit in action research (Fauchaux et al., 1982); others have no institutional support for action-research activity. Pasmore and Friedlander (1982) worked from the security of university positions, and thus were not seriously threatened even if the project collapsed.

The observations can be summarized in a hypothesis about the use of action research:

HYPOTHESIS 1. *Action research strategies will be appropriately employed when distributions of resources and authority are accepted as legitimate, when the relevant parties accept researchers as credible, and when rewards are available for integrating problem solving and research.*

What are the prospects for international diffusion of action research? Does Hypothesis 1 imply that action research will be restricted to developed countries? Certainly not. Organizations and institutions that meet these criteria exist in most countries, just as most countries also have organizations and institutions that do not. In many Third World countries, researcher skills and incentives for combining research and problem solving are important limiting factors. But action-research strategies are increasingly employed in other nations. In India, for example, action-research projects have been undertaken in a number of settings (e.g., De, 1977; Pareek, Note 2; Sethi & Dubey, 1978). But India, more than most

Third World countries, has the personnel and the institutions to support action research. Action research emerged in the developed countries, but has much to contribute in the Third World, given the appropriate political, economic, and ideological contexts.

The diffusion of participatory research

Participatory research has developed from social-change efforts in Third World countries, in which poverty, conflict, and oppression are commonplace. Power and resources are often highly concentrated in Third World countries, and as poor people come into more contact with the outside world, they are more likely to challenge the legitimacy of those concentrations. When the legitimacy of present arrangements is questioned, the stage may be set for participatory research. Gaventa and Horton (1981) found that prior arousal and organization made county groups more ready to undertake the land ownership research and more able to use their findings effectively.

Oppressed groups are not always ready to join such projects, for they risk much and often know more than their would-be helpers do about the costs of failure (e.g., Huizer, 1978). Client-group commitment is crucial in participatory research, for resources for research and action must come largely from these groups. Gaventa and Horton (1981) managed to get funds from the Regional Commission, but the actual data collection relied heavily on volunteer willingness to record and analyze data. Participatory research projects need more than client tolerance; they require active commitment of time and energy.

Participatory researchers themselves often run substantial risks, for challenged authorities may attack their institutional bases, their professional standing, or even their physical safety. Participatory researchers are more motivated by commitments to

social change and social justice than by the hope of professional and institutional rewards, for the resources and authority of established institutions are often set up against the interests of their clients. Gaventa and Horton (1981), based in a small research and education center and in the citizens' group alliance, respectively, were much less politically and economically secure than the large landowners they challenged.

HYPOTHESIS 2. *Participatory research strategies will be appropriately employed when the legitimacy of power and resource distribution is questioned, when client groups are aware and mobilized to influence their situation, and when researchers are ideologically committed to social transformation.*

Do such research strategies have applications outside the Third World? This question has already been answered in microcosm by the Appalachian land-ownership research. But more generally, conditions for participatory research exist worldwide. In the United States, for example, long-term trends to concentrate power and wealth in a few hands (Blau, 1974) can combine with increases in popular cynicism about business and government to create widespread conditions for participatory research.

Disillusioned populations in developed countries are often well educated, politically aware, and accustomed to organizing. The bottleneck to the spread of participatory research may be the lack of researchers with appropriate skills and ideological commitments, for developed countries have well-developed reward systems to encourage social scientist support for the status quo.

Interaction between the traditions

Action research and participatory research share some values and employ similar

methodologies, so the potential exists for mutually productive exchanges between them. But those exchanges will also be shaped by differences in their ideologies and political economies.

Action researchers work best in client systems that have a consensus—or at least no overt conflict—about goals and values, making collaborative problem definition, data collection and analysis, and research utilization feasible. Action researchers can thus be expected to appreciate participatory researcher cooperation with client groups. In 1982 the U.S. Academy of Management, long interested in action research, held a symposium on international participatory research activities. Symposium speakers emphasized the information and insights available through the cooperation of workers. *The Journal of Occupational Behavior*, a European academic journal, has just published a special issue on participatory research for English-speaking social scientists. So action researchers attend to participatory research activities that fit action research assumptions—such as cooperative relations with clients.

But action researchers can be expected to pay less attention to aspects of participatory research that challenge their assumptions. Participatory researchers seek to transform the existing order and its oppressive consequences, while action researchers believe in basic consensus and incremental reform. So action researchers can be expected to avoid or minimize the revolutionary aspects of participatory research. The Academy of Management symposium included speakers from several developed countries, but none from the Third World. Most speakers emphasized cooperative rather than conflict-based aspects of participatory research. *The Journal of Occupational Behavior* special issue reports on projects in developed countries, largely within organizations, rather than on Third World or community projects. Action re-

searchers may have difficulty recognizing or accepting the real differences between the traditions. And so they may remain blind to political and economic conflicts of interest that the perspectives and methods of participatory research might help resolve (e.g., Brown & Kaplan, 1981; Lewicki & Alderfer, 1973).

Participatory researchers are often more committed to explicit ideological perspectives than action researchers, for such commitments in large part fuel their work. Alert to conflicts of interest, they pay attention to the political and economic forces that separate them from other social scientists. Participatory researchers are critical of most social science (e.g., Hall, Gillette & Tandon, 1983), and they sometimes explicitly reject action researchers as "tools" of dominant groups—persons who are naive at best, and who sometimes act to support oppression (e.g., Mblinyi et al., 1979).

But automatic rejections can be costly. Participatory researchers can profit from the experience of action researchers. The consensus assumptions of action researchers fit relations between participatory researchers and their clients, so action research methods and perspectives could be useful in that limited context. Wholesale rejection of methods and insights from other social science traditions causes researchers to surrender important tools for gaining and managing information. Information control and management has become increasingly crucial for social influence, and such tools are too important to give up in unconsidered reflex rejections (e.g., Tandon, 1981). A tribe in India recently blocked government exploitation of their forests by recruiting researchers to challenge and then revise the sophisticated ecological models used in government decision making. These researchers adapted sophisticated research tools to the purposes of an oppressed group—and won their case.

HYPOTHESIS 3. *Interaction across traditions is shaped by differences in their ideologies and political economies:*

- *Action researchers will incorporate cooperative aspects of participatory research, but will resist recognizing the importance of power differences and conflicts of interest among actors.*
- *Participatory researchers will reject action research, and will resist recognizing its relevance to cooperation with client groups or the utility of sophisticated research tools for influencing decision making.*

Consensus and conflict intervention strategies are *both* relevant to promoting constructive social change (e.g., Gricar & Brown, 1981), and the same can be said for different approaches to inquiry. Action research is appropriate when parties have common interests and accept present power and resource distributions as legitimate. Participatory research is appropriate when party interests conflict and parties disagree about the legitimacy of power and resource distributions. In principle, researchers could use either action research or participatory research methods, depending on how they define their clients and the political economy of the situation.

In practice, ideologies and political economies shape definitions of clients and problems. Possibilities for productive exchange between action researchers and participatory researchers should not obscure their fundamentally different perspectives. Action research focuses on incremental problem solving and knowledge development within an accepted social consensus. It promotes *reform* within a client system. Participatory research mobilizes, educates, and empowers oppressed groups to challenge illegitimate distributions of power and resources. It promotes *transformations* of the system that affect both its clients

and their opponents. The ideologies and political economies that underlie the two traditions are fundamentally different. More exchange, challenge, and cross-fertilization between the two is intellectually desirable—but ideologies and political economies of inquiry will continue to reproduce present differences and communication difficulties.

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