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ACTION RESEARCH, PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH, AND THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF INQUIRY

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The spread of applied behavioral science requires adapting 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 very diverse cultural, political, and economic settings. We have used both action research and participatory research approaches to inquiry work (e.g., Brown and Tandon, 1978; Tandon and Brown, 1981), and this paper focuses on ideological, political and economic differences between them.

The paper is organized into three sections. The first section describes action research and participatory research traditions, presents examples and identifies similarities and differences between them. The following section examines the political economy of inquiry that affects the two traditions. The last section considers implications of their political and economic differences for the international dissemination of the two traditions and their future interaction.

I. Action Research and Participatory Research

This section describes and illustrates each tradition, and then compares them in terms of values and ideologies.

A. Action Research

Almost forty years ago Kurt Lewin suggested learning about social systems by trying to 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 and Harding, 1948), and subsequent investigators have elaborated Lewin's ideas. Perhaps the most commonly-used definition of research was framed by Rapaport:

> 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 (Rapaport, 1970: 499).

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 and Hamilton, 1964) and educational organizations (e.g., Corey, 1953). But action research has never been as well-accepted by academic social science (Sanford, 1970), as it has been by applied researchers in organizations in the United States (French and Bell, 1973). European academics have been more interested. The Tavistock Institute instituted a series of action research programs (e.g., Jaques, 1952; Rice, 1958); as have other researchers in England (e.g., Clark, 1972). Country-wide programs have been launched in Norway (e.g., Thorsrud, 1970), and action research strategies have been used in various European organizations (Faucheux, et al., 1982). More recently U.S. academics have exhibited new interest in action research (e.g., Susman and Evered, 1979; Alderfer and Smity, 1981; Pasmore and Friedlander, 1982).

Action research is illustrated in the follo ing example of inquiry in an electronics plant:

> Pasmore and Friedlander (1982) report wo k in an electronics plant to discover why an epidemic of mystrious "sor arms" had struck almost a third of the plant's three hundred workers. hree years of prior investigation by traditional research method had failed to retard the spread of the ailment.
>
> The investigators decided to use a coll borative action research strategy that involved both employees and man gers for several reasons: (1) employees held information critical to un erstanding the problem, (2) previous studies done by and for managmen had not solved the problem, (3) initial investigations suggested that employee-manager relationships were key factors, and (4) resea ch methods that reemphasized existing power relations might s ppress vital information.
>
> The researchers created a studies commit ee of employees and managers to guide the research. This Committ e and the researchers together formulated interview questions, acte as participant observers, designed a questionnaire, planned and deliver d feedback about findings to management and later the plant as a whole. The Committee worked effectively together in spite of their organi ational differences. The researchers and the Committee presented their findings to management. They were shocked by management's antagonist c reaction: "the group worked under the assumption that the primary nterest of top management was in resolution of the problem; thus it was totally unprepared for the conflict that erupted at the first feedback s ssion between the group and top managers" (Pasmore and Friedlander, 1 82: 350). Managers firmly rejected implications that management activit es contributed to the "sore arm" phenomenon.
>
> An analysis that emphasized the contrib tions 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 act on research project, continued to decline with the piecemeal imple entation of researcher/Committee recommendations, decli d still further as technical problems were solved and as managem nt changes made the organizational culture more participative, an finally levelled out at a low level several years after the research pr ject formally terminated. The plant also improved on measures of materi l usage efficiency, labor efficiency, and attendance, and managers repo ted that the working climate of the plant was much improved (Pasmo e and Firedlander, 1982: 357).

What does this example illustrate about act on research values and ideologies? Values have been defined as preferen es for courses of action and outcomes; relevant values shape choices amon ; perceived alternative

actions (Beyer, 1981: 167). Values of action research are expressed in both the definition and the example. Action researchers place a high value on useful knowledge. "There is nothing so practical as a good theory," is an expression of this value commonly attributed to Lewin. Pasmore and Friedlander (1982) sought a theory that would 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 potentials, to solve the problems of individuals or institutions. Pasmore and Friedlander (1982) sought to reduce the incidence of "sore arms," and allay their impacts on individuals and the organization. Action research combines values that are often split in other research traditions.

Ideologies are sets of beliefs that explain the world and bind together people who share them (Beyer, 1981). Ideologies link values and realities, suggesting cause-and-effect linkages that enable purposeful action (Beyer, 1981). Action researchers draw some ideological assumptions from their professional training: clinical and social psychology and management theory provide underlying disciplines for much action research, and action researchers often conceptualize problems in terms of individual, interpersonal, and group factors. Pasmore and Friedlander (1982) listed technical and organizational variables but eventually emphasized individual and group factors to explain the "sore arm" phenomenon. Action researchers also draw ideological assumptions from the larger culture. Dominant ideologies in the United States, for example, emphasize the centrality of individuals to efficient and effective task accomplishment, and "consensus" explanations of society that emphasize 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 constrained by standards and goals shared by researchers and their clients. Thus, Friedlander and Pasmore (1982) were shocked by top management's resistance to study results because they thought everyone agreed that solving the problem was the first priority. Training and cultural context encourages us action researchers to emphasize interpersonal and group explanations and to plan change strategies on the assumption of societal consensus about desirable outcomes.

B. Participatory Research

The participatory research tradition has 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 their recognition has been delayed by lack of communication channels or geographical contacts among researchers. An international network of individuals interested in participatory research 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:

- o The problem originates in the community or workplace itself.
- o The ultimate goal ... is fundamental structural transformation and the improvement of the lives of those involved....
- o ... the workplace or the community [is involved] in the control of the entire process....
- o ...the awareness in people of their own abilities and resources [is strengthened] and mobilizing or organizing [is supported].
- o The term 'researcher' can refer to both the community or workplace persons involved as well as those with specialized training.
- o [Outside researchers] are committed participants and learners in a process that leads to militancy rather than detachment. (Hall, 1981: 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 a U.S. example, so comparisons to the "sore arm" project will not be confused by national differences.

> 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 local 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 threated to

drop the project and "go public with our criticism of the Commmission" (Gaventa and Horton, 1981: 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 landownership were collected in 80 counties and case studies based on interviews were developed in 19 counties in six 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; land and mineral resources are held by absentees (particularly corporations); mineral rights are greatly underassessed for property tax purposes. The funding agency delayed dissemination of the reports, and refused to issue the case studies (unscientific") and the state overview reports ("too subjective"). The Task Force independently disseminated their findings to the media and to local citizens' groups. Subsequently, a number of projects evolved to utilize 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 and mobilized participants around issues of taxation inequities. The mobilization impacts were most obvious in areas that were already concerned about land ownership and land-use decisions.

Participatory researchers, like action researchers, emphasize the value of <u>useful knowledge</u>, and dismiss the abstractions and irrelevancies of more traditional social science (e.g., Hall, Gillete and Tandon, 1982). Gaventa and Horton (1981) and their colleagues focused on the implications of knowledge about land ownership patterns for influencing policy-making, not with their theoretical implications. Participatory researchers also place high value on <u>developmental changes</u>. They particularly emphasize research implications that enable oppressed groups to improve their lives. Recurring value themes in participatory research include equitable distributions of resources, empowering oppressed groups,

increased self-reliance, and transforming social structures into more dramatic societies. (Freire, 1970; Hall, 1981; Tandon and Fernandes, 1981). Gaventa and Horton (1981) sought land-ownership data to counteract the corporate dominance of Appalachia.

The ideologies of participatory researchers, like those of action researchers, are drawn from both cultural backgrounds and professional training. Participatory researchers are often adult educators and community organizers, and they often analyze problems in terms of community and social structures. They draw on intellectual traditions, such as sociology, political science, and economics as well as individual and group theory. Gaventa and Horton (1981) focused on regional patterns of ownership and control, choosing political and economic forces rather than individuals and groups as critical variables. Participatory researchers have also been influenced by the cultural contexts of work with poor prople in the Third World and so conceive problems in terms of resource inequities, dependence, and oppression. In Appalachia, for example, absentee landowners held many resources and yet paid little taxes for local use. Participatory researchers conceive 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 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.

C. Comparing Action Research and Participatory Research

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 are appropriate to inquiries that seek to influence social systems (e.g., Susman and Evered, 1979), and participatory researchers emphasize the conservative social implications of an overemphasis on rigor in social science (e.g., Freire, 1970; Fals Borda, 1980). Both traditions seek knowledge that will have impacts 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, 19), and they give problem solutions to equal billing with 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., Gyblinyi, et. al., 1982; Hall, Gilette and 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 and Evered, 1978; Pasmore and Friedlander, 1982) do not cite the writings of influential paricipatory

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 projects in India.

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

Table 1

Action Research and Participatory Research Differences

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

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 corporate landowners; they assume that those parties will resist the project, and 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 top manager resistance to worker analysis of the "sore arm" problem, and they continued to focus on individual and interpersonal factors in spite of 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. These forces -- the political economy of inquiry -- shape the development of each tradition and the chances for mutual exchange between them.

The Political Economy of Inquiry

Political economy is used here to refer to 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 and Ilchman, 1972; Benson 1975). Political economists ask questions like:

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 interation that shape decisions. Some investigators argue that political and economic factors largely determine values and ideologies (e.g., Benson, 1975). Others suggest that ideologies and values shape recogniton and therefore political influence of economic factors (e.g., Starbuck, 1981; Weick, 1979). We will assume here that ideology and political economy interact and that either may influence decision-making in inquiry.

The political economy of inquiry applies these questions to decisions made in research. We will focus on three critical decision areas in the inquiry process: (a) the definition of problems, (b) the collection and analysis of data, and (c) the utilization of results.

A. The Definition of Problems

The definition of research problem fundamentally shapes and constrains the results of the inquiry. The definition of problems influences the data collected, the results apprehended, the solutions proposed, and the distribution of responsibility for the problem itself. Ryan (19) argues that social science often "blames the victim" by its initial problem definition, and Lukes (1974) has pointed out that agenda control by

dominant groups can make problems "non-issues" that never become part of the public choice process. Problems in traditional social science research are defined in large part by researchers on conceptual and methodological grounds, or by government and corporate interests with investments in the problem. Problem definition in the participatory and action research traditions is influenced by their 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 definition of research problems. But who are the clients of action researchers? Much action research has been carried out historically within organizations -- particularly in the private sector (e.g., Jaques, 1952; Whyte and 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 behaviors that undercut plant performance. Of course, workers did not like sore arms. 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 as yet untried solutions to the sore arm conundrum.

Participatory researchers are explicit about client contribution to problem definition: "the problem originates in the community or workplace

itself" (Hall, 11981:7). Their immediate clients are defined as "a wide range of exploited or oppressed groups" (Hall, 1981: 7). They also start from an assumption that oppression is a central problem. This perspective has at least three implications for problem definition: (1) their 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.

Problems are often evident to oppressed groups, even when system authorities do not recognize any difficulties. The Appalachian land ownership research project (Gaventa and Horton, 1981), for example, was a response to a problem perceived by the researchers and the alliance of citizen groups, but not by the Regional Commission. The Commission controlled resources and authority to support the study, but preferred to define and settlement rather than land ownership as the research problem. The Alliance and the researchers had to threaten public criticism to get Commission acceptance of their definition. Problem definition decisions in this project set a pattern of adversarial interaction among actors with potentially conflicting interests.

Problem definition decisions position researchers with respect to other groups with interests in research outcomes, and create political and economic contexts of inquiry. Action researchers are likely to be allies of organizational authorities, with access to authority and resources relevant to officially-sanctioned problem definitions. Participatory researchers are likely to be allies of oppressed groups and opponents of established authorities, and so find resources and authoritative support arrayed against them.

B. Data Collection and Analysis

Choices among alternative methods, types of data, and actors in data collection and subsequent analysis also influence research outcomes. The political economy perspective again focuses on interested actors and the distribution of authority and resources to understand those choices. The dominant social science research traditions have emphasized data collection and analysis methodologies, such as experiments and surveys, that require specially-trained researchers, and complex experimental or data processing installations (Diesing, 1974). These methodologies allow researcher control over data even when other actors finance the research. But researcher control may be counterproductive for research intended to influence non-researchers. One study of social policy research found conceptual and methodological rigor to be negatively related to impact on social policy-making (van de Vall and Bolas, 19), perhaps because policy-makers did not appreciate the relevance of the findings that resulted.

Action researchers seek "joint collaboration within a mutually acceptable ethical framework" (Rapaport, 1970: 499), and so encourage active client involvement in data collection and analysis. Common interests between researchers and system members enable mutual trust and the sharing of valid information. So action researchers emphasize good open relationships with clients (e.g., Argyris, 1970), sympathetic participant observation (Diesing, 1974), "empathic questionnaires" (e.g., Alderfer and Brown, 1972), or "interviews as catalysts" (Brown and Tandon, 1978).

Collaborative data collection and analysis can make important contributions to understanding. Pasmore and Friedlander (1982) joined

workers and managerrss 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 their attack on its findings 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 with 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: 7-8). But not all interested actors can be participants: solidarity with oppressed groups often places participatory researchers as adversaries to 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 -- "collective analysis" (Barndt, 1981). But in addition, they seek information from unwilling sources, whose control over vital information is used to oppress their clients. The participatory research tradition also uses "militant observers" (Darcy de Oliveira and Darcy de Oliveira, 1975), investigative and advocacy research (Laue, 19), and "conflict methodologies" of various kinds (Lehmann and Young, 1974).

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 questioned the "unscientific" methods used to construct the case studiess, resisted the initial proposal, delayed and eventually suppressed publication of some results, Gaventa and Horton saw it as a protector of established interests. 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, sanctions and resources provided by system 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 build close links to those clients. But they also seek information from and about groups with opposed interests, and so must develop adversarial data collection and analysis processes as well.

C. Utilization of Results

The utilization of research results is also shaped by political and economic factors. (Social science studies may be buried in techical reports and have little impact, or they may have world-wide effects.) Utilization includes grants of access to or control over findings, decisions about dissemination, and choices of how to link to implementation. 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. However, action research and participatory research 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 reseachers work, but many groups inside and outside client systems may 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 utility of action research methods as contributors to knowledge, and they descried "bottom line" consequences as well as reduced injuries for the plant. The tradition emphasizes joint use of results by researchers and clients in an interative process that produces agreement on diagnosis and interventions (e.g., French and Bell, 1973). Action researchers seek result utilizations that can be supported by consensus among relevant actors: everyone favored a reduction in "sore arms" at Pasmore and Friedlander's (1982) plant, though how the reduction should be accomplished was more controversial. Ideally the utilization 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 workers and implicated management in the problem. But everyone realized that any utilization of the results depended on continued sanction and resources from management. The researchers were able to reassure aroused 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 and Friedlander, 1982: 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 been an important change. Increased communication about worker problems may have reduced worker stress, and so improved the situation. The project enhanced the interests of workers, by improving communications and by revealing technical problems without disturbing the existing political economy.

Participatory research explicitly calls for improving the lot of oppressed groups, and participatory researchers seek research outputs 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 ~~former~~ latter respond to both research audiences and client systems, while the ~~latter~~ 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 utilization 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 result 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 new data and new actors were expected to strengthen the representation of poor people in negotiations with established interests, such as big 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 fundamental conflict with existing authorities and resource holders.

D. Comparing Political Economies

The political economies of action research and participatory research are very different. Table 2 summarizes some political and economic characteristics of the two traditions and their impacts on research decisions.

Table 2

Political Economies of Inquiry:
Action Research and Participatory Research

	Action Research	Participatory Research
Actors:	Researchers Client Systems	Researchers Client Groups Established Authorities Third Party Funders
Resources and Authority:	Researchers - research expertise Client Systems	Researchers - research expertise - political awareness Client Groups

	- sanction - insights - information	- information - energy - insights Established Authorities - sanction power - funds and rewards Third Party Funders - funds - protection
Phases:		
1. Problem Definition	Shared by researchers and client system Benefits to whole system Resources and sanction from system leaders	Controlled by client group Benefits to client group Resources from clients or extracted from system
2. Data Collection and Analysis	Collaborative with whole system Iteration to system-wide shared diagnosis	Joint for mutual education, empowerment Collaborative with clients; adversarial with authorities Iteration to educate and mobilize client groups
3. Result Utilization	Systemic consensus on goals of intervention Problem-solving with systemic benefits	Client consensus on goals of intervention Negotiation to improve client situation

The political economies of action research and participatory research described in Table 2 are in fact quite different. Different actors and different distributions of political and economic resources influence decisions, and different patterns of problem defintion, data collection and analysis, and result utilization characterize the two traditions.

Action research ideologies and political economies are mutually supportive. Analytic predispositions to work at the individual, group and organizational level are consistent with defining organizations as clients; consensus assumptions about social systems are congruent with collaborative inquiries that include many different actors within a client system; belief

in the importance of productivity and efficiency are consistent with responding to the concerns of organizational authorities. Building broad consensus about problem diagnoses and incremental reform strategies are basic themes in action research (e.g., Clark, 1972; Alderfer and Brown, 1975). But action research strategies encounter problems when their ideological assumptions and political-economic expectations are not met. If client systems are riddled with distrust and conflicts of interest, for example, action research may not be appropriate (e.g., Lewicki and Alderfer, 1973). Collaborative inquiry that joined big landowners and poor citizens to investigate land ownership patterns in Appalachia would have been difficult to arrange. When action researchers are not aware of and careful about 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 ideology of participatory research is also mutually consistent. Concern with societal level analysis is consistent with attention to political and economic definitions of problems and awareness of a complex network of interested actors. Concern with extracting information from reluctant opponents as well as cooperative oppressed groups is consistent with conflict theories of society. Activities focused on educating and mobilizing oppressed groups to solve their own problems is consistent with beliefs in self-reliance and redistribution of resources. Like action researchers, participatory researchers run into trouble when their ideological assumptions and political/economic expectations are not met. Participatory researchers investigating the sore arm problem would probably focus on management exploitation of workers, even though the workers themselves did not

question the basic legitimacy of management's activities, and so the project would have been short-lived.

Action research and participatory research subscribe to similar values, but the surrounding political economies and their guiding ideologies encourage very different patterns of inquiry. What do these differences imply for the diffusion of the two traditions across international borders and for their interaction with each other?

The International Diffusion of Research Traditions

What are the implications of this analysis for action research and participatory research? 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 be insulated from each other? This section proposes hypotheses about the diffusion of the two research traditions, with anecdotal evidence about present trends.

A. The Diffusion of Action Research

When is action research an appropriate approach? The action research tradition emerged during World War II, when the legitimacy of national authorities were unquestioned and social scientists were greatly concerned with solving practical problems. Action research was later adopted by the private sector, where resources and authoritative sanctions for solving recognized probems are available (Whyte and Hamilton, 1964; French and Bell, 1973). Action research assumes that problem solutions acceptable to many different parties are possible. This assumption is appropppriate when the distribution of resources and authority is generally accepted as legitimate. Consensus solutions are much more difficult when the legitimacy of current distributions of power and resources is not generally accepted, and solutions that benefit one party are rejected by others. Even the subtle challenge to management authority posed by the "sore arm" problem threatened the continuation of that project--even though workers generally accepted the legitimacy of management authority (Pasmore and Friedlander, 1981). So legitimate distributions of authority and resources

are critical to the action research tradition.

Action research also depends on acceptance by different parties within the client system. Projects may fail for lack of sanction by and resources from system authorities (e.g., Clark, 1972) or because of suspicion or resistance from middle levels (e.g., Alderfer and Brown, 1975), or because of challenges from lower levels (e.g., Lewicki and Alderfer, 1973). Maintaining acceptance by multiple interests may call for high 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 also important for promoting action research. Some European researchers, for example, do not believe in consensus assumptions implicit in action research (Faucheux, et al., 1982). Others do not have institutional bases that reward action research. Pasmore and Friedlander (1982) worked from the security of University positions, and so were not seriously threatened even if the project collapsed.

These 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, researchers are accepted as credible by the relevant parties, and researchers are rewarded for problem-solving as well as research.

What are the prospects for international diffusion of action research? Does this Hypothesis imply that action research will be restricted to developed countries? Certainly not. There are organizations and institutions in most countries that meet these criteria, just as in most countries there are organizations and institutions that do not. In many

Third World countries, researcher skills and incentives for combining research and problem-solving is an important limiting factor. But in some countries action research strategies are beginning to be employed. In India, for example, action research projects have been undertaken in a number of settings (e.g., De, 1977; Pareek, 1978; Sethi and Dubey, 1978). But India, more than most Third World countries, has the personnel and the institutions to support action research. Actior research emerged in the developed countries, but has much to contribute to the Third World in appropriate political, economic and ideological contexts.

B. The Diffusion of Participatory Research

Participatory research has come 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 and alternative possibilities, questions are raised about 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 about the costs of failure (e.g., Huizer, 1975). Client group commitment is crucial in participatory research, for resources for research and action must come largely from them. Gaventa and Horton (1981) managed to get funds from the Commission, but the actual data collection relied heavily on volunteer willingness to record and analyze data. Participatory research projects

need more than client tolerance; active commitment of time and energy is required.

Participatory researchers themselves often run substantial risks, for they challenge authorities who may influence their institutional security, their professional rewards, or even their physical safety. Participatory researchers are motivated more by ideological commitments to social change and socal justice than by hope of professional and institutional rewards, for the resources and authority of established institutions are often arrayed against the interests of their clients. Gaventa and Horton (1981), for example, were based in a small research and education center and the citizens group Alliance respectively, and so they were much less secure in political and economic terms than the large landowners they challenged in the land ownership study.

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

Do such research strategies have application outside the Third World? This question has already been answered in microcosm by the Appalachian land ownership research (Gaventa and Horton, 1981). 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 increasing popular cynicism about U.S. institutions ability 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 dissemination of participatory research may be the availability of

researchers with appropriate skills and ideological commitments, for social science in the developed countries offers well developed socialization and rewards for supporting the status quo.

C. Interaction between the Traditions

Action research and participatory research share some values and employ similar methodologies, so there is potential for mutually productive exchanges between them. But those exchanges will also be shaped by differences in their ideologies and political economies.

Action researchers operate most effectively in client systems that enjoy consensus on goals and share common values, and they emphasize collaborative problem definition, data collection and analysis and research utilization. So action researchers might be expected to appreciate aspects of participatory research that emphasize cooperative relations with client groups. The U.S. Academy of Management, long interested in action research, offered a symposium on international participatory research activities in 1982. Symposium speakers emphasized the information and insights available through the cooperation of workers. The Journal of Occupational Behavior, a European academic journal, will soon offer a special issue on participatory research to English-speaking social scientists. So action researchers are attending to aspects of participatory research that fit action research assumptions such as cooperative relations with clients.

But action researchers can be expected to pay less attention to aspects 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 may be expected to avoid or minimize revolutionary

aspects of participatory research. The Academy of Management symposium included speakers from several developed countriees, but none from the Third World; most speakers emphasized cooperative rather than conflictful aspects of participatory research. The Journal of Occupational Behavior special issue reports on projects in developed countries, largely within organizations, rather than Third World or community projects. Action researchers are quite willing to talk to participatory researchers, but action researchers 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 for which the perspectives and methods of participatory research might be helpful (e.g., Brown and Kaplan, 1981; Lewiciki and Alderfer, 1973).

Participatory researchers are often more aware and committed to explicit ideological perspectives than action researchers, for such commitments in large part fuel work in the tradition. They are sensitive to conflicts of interests among actors and attentive to political and economic forces that separate them from other social scientists. Participatory researchers are critical of traditional social science research (e.g., Hall, Gillette and Tandon, 1982), and they often reject action researchers as "tools" of dominant groups -- naive at best, and sometimes active supporters of oppressive forces (e.g., Mbilinyi, et. al., 1979).

But automatic rejections may be costly. Participatory researchers may profit from the experience of action researchers. The consensus assumptions of action researchers are relevant to relations between participatory researchers and their clients. So action research methods and perspectives may be useful in that limited context. Wholesale rejection of methods and insights from other social science traditions also surrenders important

tools for gaining and managing information. Information control and management is increasingly critical for social influence and such tools are too important to give up without careful choice (e.g., Tandon, 1981). A forest tribe in India recently blocked government actions that would have devastated their lands by recruiting researchers to critique the sophisticated ecological models used in government decision-making, and then to produce an equally sophisticated alternative. They turned the tools of sophisticated reseach to purposes of an oppressed group, and produced an alternative within the parameters used by the first model.

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 be blind to the importance of power differences and conflicts of interest among actors.
- Participatory researchers will reject action research, and be blind to 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 and Brown, 1981). A similar conclusion may be appropriate for different approaches to inquiry. Action research is appropriate when parties have common interests and accept the legitimacy of power and resource distributions. Participatory research assumptions and methods are appropriate when parties have fundamentally different interests and disagree about the legitimacy of power and resource distributions. In concept, researchers might be able to 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 is oriented to 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 social transformations that affect both its clients and their opponents. The ideologies and the political economies *that underlie participatory research* and action research are very different. More exchange, challenge and cross-fertilization between the two may be desirable from an intellectual point of view -- but the political economy of inquiry can be expected to reinforce the present differences and communication difficulties.

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