

Learning from differences

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The article sets out an experience-based account of “Learning from Differences”, underpinning engaged research as an alternative to conventional detached social science. There is a central focus on Action, and Action Research, with particular reference to policy development at regional level, and concerning older workers. The challenge is to enable others to learn. In so doing, we can mainstream Action Research as integral to management.

Key words: Action Research, empowerment, engagement, intervention, learning, older workers, policy development, quality circles

Introduction

The article seeks to bring together previously separate approaches to Action Research. Starting with individual reflection, and apprenticeship in organisational contexts, we explore implications for management and for policy making. Throughout, we seek to “learn from differences”, crossing borders to increase the range of cases. Much of what we learn must then be expressed through action.

As new researchers join the growing international field of Action Research (Greenwood & Levin, 1997; Reason & Bradbury, 2001; Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014), they encounter difficult epistemological issues, for which they may not be prepared. While conventional social science emphasises the importance of detachment, and the analysis of empirical data, Action Research requires engagement, and the recognition that interventions, includ-