

Book Review

Action Research, 4th edition by Ernest T. Stringer. Sage Publications Ltd. Thousand Oaks, California, USA. 2014. ISBN: 978-1452205083. 305 pp. Paperback \$49.

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Action research is a practical approach to professional inquiry in a social or business setting. It is a form of investigation designed for use by researchers to solve problems and improve professional practice. It is based on five phases: (1) selecting or identifying a problem in a social or business setting, (2) investigating the issue and planning the process, (3) collecting, organizing, and analyzing the data, (4) studying and synthesizing the professional literature, (5) drawing conclusion and implementing the solutions of the problem, (6) reporting and presenting the research.

Action Research by Dr. Ernest T. Stringer is a book for both novice and practitioners. It elaborates the areas like professional and public life of a social researcher, theory behind practice; planning a research process and breaking it down into different stages; gathering relevant and vital data for decision making; reflection and analysis of the available data through in-depth analysis and adding insights from experience and literature. It also elaborates implementing a sustainable solution, reviewing the process, and modifying strategies for overall process. The book comprehensively covers all the important aspects of action research and provides practical anecdotes from experiences and live examples of experts involved in action research in different social settings.

Dr. Stringer takes action research with "applied scientific expertise" aimed at "eradicating the problem by applying some intervention at an individual or programmatic level." He argues that there are evidences to suggest that "decentralized policies and programs generated by experts have limited success" in overcoming problems. His emphasis in action research is on taking into account the local context where the problem lies. He asserts that "research operated at distant from the everyday lives of practitioners, and largely fails to penetrate the reality they experience in their day-to-day work. The objective and generalizing knowledge embodied in social and behavioural research often is irrelevant to the 'real-world encounter'".

Action research, therefore, is based on the proposition that generalized solutions, plans, or programs may not fit all contexts or groups to whom they are applied and that the purpose of inquiry is to find an appropriate solution for the dynamics, particularly at work in a local situation. Dr. Egon G. Guba, a prominent writer in qualitative research, profoundly submits that Dr. Stringer opts for the resurgence of action research, which is fundamentally different from the classic approach of defining variables and generating hypotheses and tests, explanation for why people behave in a particular manner. That action research may not conform to the fact that it takes a more democratic, empowering, and humanizing approach; assists teams in extending their own understanding of their situations; and help them resolve the problems they see as important.

The book mainly focuses on planning, identifying the problem. During planning phase, the researcher involves stakeholders in confidence, development of agenda, stance, and position of the researcher. The process is broken into different stages and highlighting the key features of each stage. Like other authors, emphasis is given to reflection. A special focus is given to reflection on the process and product. Various examples are used to illustrate the details by the novice researchers.

The success of action research is gauged by the author has very rightly highlighted success through political, financial and operational aspects. The theoretical solutions of problems in the book are refined and refined in results. There is a lot of value added in the literature or theoretical aspects. The book provides an array of available alternate solutions.

The language of the book is specifically designed for use with typical research parlance. This is clear and concise, it is within the grasp of any reasonably intelligent person, even the unwary. Every procedure described in the book is clear. The professional researchers may find the book helpful. They will surely appreciate being helped at each step. They will find the details useful because they are not normally found in research methods texts.

The book is written for a wide variety of readers, including social workers, community workers, counsellors, and many other lay workers and professional workers. It provides tools that will enable people to deal effectively with problems as they perform their work.

The book is worth reading for the researchers in their respective fields of interest. New insights are provided on aspects on the subject. For instance, while reading *The Action Research Dissertation: A Guide to Writing and Defending Research Proposals*. Similarly, in comparison with *Stage Process for Educators and School Leaders*, the book is sufficiently that how to turn findings into action. It is enough to provide a good start for understanding the subject.

The book mainly focuses on planning, process, and implementing the sustainable solution of the problem. During planning phase the important aspects highlighted are taking key stakeholders in confidence, development of rapport and establishing a role, developing the agenda, stance, and position of the researcher. The process phase is strengthened by dividing it into different stages and highlighting the activities taken in each process along with outcome of each stage. Like other authors, emphasis is laid on planning, action, monitoring, and reflection. A special focus is given to reporting the action research output both as process and product. Various examples are used to highlight the pitfalls of the planning and process details by the novice researchers.

The success of action research is gauged by the solution implemented to the problem, and the author has very rightly highlighted strategic planning and managing sustainable change through political, financial and operational considerations. Action research is not just providing the theoretical solutions of problems in hand; rather supports the implementation of identified solution and refinement in results. Therefore, the importance of action research is more than adding value in the literature or theoretical knowledge, and focusing to the workable solution from an array of available alternate solutions.

The language of the book is specifically comprehensible to practitioners who may be unfamiliar with typical research parlance. This is clearly not a book solely for professional researchers; it is within the grasp of any reasonably literate reader. There is no arcane language to confuse the unwary. Every procedure described in the book is accompanied by step-by-step instructions. The professional researchers may find these instructions unnecessarily detailed, but the novice will surely appreciate being helped at each juncture. However, if professionals read it closely, they will find the details useful because the approach differ so dramatically from what is normally found in research methods text.

The book is written for a wide variety of audiences, including researchers, health workers, social workers, community workers, counsellors, business planners, teachers, educators, and many other lay workers and professionals. The purpose of the book is to provide a set of tools that will enable people to deal effectively with many of the problems that facing them as they perform their work.

The book is worth reading for the researchers who are interested in opting for action research in their respective fields of interest. Nevertheless, one may find it lacking certain important aspects on the subject. For instance, while comparing it with other action research books like *The Action Research Dissertation: A Guide for Students and Faculty* by Herr and Anderson, this book does not provide sufficient light on quality criteria for action research and action research proposals. Similarly, in comparison with *The Action Research Guide Book – A Four Stage Process for Educators and School Teams* by Richard Sagor, this book does not elaborate sufficiently that how to turn findings into an action plan. However, the books is detailed enough to provide a good start for understanding in the field of action research.