Upcoming Special Issue on Action Research
Scheduled for publication in April 2019

Researching together across different borders, especially in innovation, is becoming more common. Through this, a multitude of perspectives and knowledge enhance the chances of success. As the TIM Review's upcoming special issue on Transdisciplinary Innovation (August 2018) will reveal, there is much to gain from bringing together existing disciplinary fields and fertilizing thinking by purposefully encouraging people with diverging ideas and mindsets to work together. But for this work to proceed and succeed, borders must be broken down or overcome – including the artificial border between *the researcher* and *the researched*. Such efforts to break down borders belong not just to one tradition but many, and they are undertaken with different names, designs, and preferred outcomes (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). This diversity intrigues us, but it also means that relevant insights are scattered and new borders are created.

Through this special issue, we aim to publish articles that will help us understand these mutual processes better. What we especially are looking for are new approaches to and contemporary accounts of action research. Both academics and practitioners are encouraged to contribute with their insights and ideas of what is *interesting* (Weick, 1989) in the current development of innovation processes where action unite researchers and those researched. We hope all those who have something to contribute will feel welcome to do so.

A well-established name for this research traditions is "action research" (AR), and when the mutuality of the approach is stressed "participative action research" (PAR). Action research can in turn be divided into a critical and a pragmatic tradition, according to Johansson and Lindhult (2008: 100) where they "… associate the pragmatic orientation with a focus on praxis and practical knowledge development, cooperation between all concerned parties, and the need for finding and constructing a common ground between them as a platform for action".

Tracing the origin of action research, one critical thread leads us to Latin America and the quest to bring about social change through reflection/learning/knowledge creation and the engagement by scholars in the everyday life of disempowered groups (Dewey, 1897, 1937; Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991; Freire, 1985). A similar critical thread, but closer to the pragmatic tradition, leads us to America, where Kurt Lewin (1946) argued for the need to change social practice by engaging those concerned in the research, where after he became known as the instigator of action research (Adelman, 1993).

This Lewinian tradition, aimed at creating dialogue for mutual benefit, has later been adopted to suit industrial needs. A complementary pragmatic action research tradition has evolved with the aim of solving more technical problems in society. Among these problems are those of innovation, where it also has become fashionable for companies to open up development processes to customers, external experts, and others. Creating knowledge together, in and through action across borders, is becoming a new norm for many companies and other organizations. Open innovation, a term coined by Henry Chesbrough (2006), can thus be said to rest on ideas connected to action research, where both open innovation and action research appear as modern in the sense of being more concerned with relevance and results than discriminating between certain established domains of practice.

More specifically, the introduction of action research in innovation processes is vague. The most cited work is by Robert Kaplan (1998) who stated he used "innovation action research" when constructing the Business Score Card framework together with David Norton. By this, he means an iterative development process between theory and practice, a method he also advocates strongly in order to increase research relevance.

As the references to both Chesbrough and Kaplan indicate, ideas related to participative and action research are present in today's more popular practices. As they concern problems that are directly relevant to society today, it comes as no surprise. They do not discriminate anyone from theory building, knowledge creation, or interpretation. In this sense, action research approaches are also a threat to existing power structures in academia. Current borders that uphold disciplines, careers, and publication practices are threatened, which also supply us with a possible reason why it is so hard to get action research published in well-established disciplinary academic outlets.

To our knowledge, well renowned and highly ranked journals are hesitant to accept articles based on action research methods, although there are some examples. The two top ranked journals in the ABS-index Innovation category, *Journal of Product Innovation Management* and *Research Policy* have since year 2000 published a total of 53 articles with "action research", but just two articles where "participatory action research" appears and none with just "participatory research". Action in research seems to be covered to some extent, whereas participatory aspects are less, at least by judging by the use of these three terms.

Interestingly though, is that *Research Policy's* two articles with "participatory action research" are recent, 2016 and 2018. The latter by Rau, Goggins, and Fahy (2018), is titled "From invisibility to impact: Recognising the scientific and societal relevance of interdisciplinary sustainability research". Through the abstract, we also learn that the article "supports arguments for alternative approaches to impact assessment that question conventional views of translating scientific knowledge into action, value the multi-directionality of science-society relations and recognise diverse forms of engagement between scientists and non-scientific actors through non-academic channels and outputs." Hence, the traditional division between researcher and researcher is thus addressed. As the citations also indicate, the article addresses sustainability issues, where one might speculate that this might be one angle that can pave the way for more action research-based articles in highly ranked journals in the future. At this time, it is too early to tell. What we can tell, however, is that these articles will be part of a broader literature review that will appear in the special issue.

To sum up: Action research means a commitment towards impact and change, where relevance is the key. But how do we create the desired impact, change and relevance? What perspectives and practices can contribute to a better understanding of action research as it plays out today? What research and what stories can convey the benefits of action research but also the benefits of breaking down borders, broadening participation and increase relevance? If you have answers to questions like these or other topics of interest for this special issue, please feel to send us your proposal.

This special issue aims to express this discussion in an accessible manner such that academics, industry, and the public sector can adopt the frameworks, models, and ideas presented in each article.

We invite submissions on participative and action research from academics, practitioners, and public or civil servants from around the world. Submissions from transdisciplinary teams of authors are particularly encouraged.

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Timeline: Scheduled for publication in April 2019

- October 1: Interested authors submit 1-paragraph outlines or abstracts

- December 1: Full articles due – see author guidelines: timreview.ca/authorguidelines

- January 15: Reviewer feedback sent to authors

- March 1: Revised articles due

- April 1: Articles edited and ready to publish

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