

# Action Research Methods: Becoming a Professional Stranger

## Intermediary Level

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### Faculty

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### Dates

February 2011 to June 2011 (exact date to be announced)

Class time: Every Tuesday (1-4pm). These dates will be adjusted if public holidays are encountered (see a tentative timetable below).

Venue: to be advised (College of Commerce, NCCU)

### ✓ Course Objective

This module offers a practice-oriented course on qualitative research methods. It aims to help students develop their action-based research using different qualitative approaches, for different disciplines (Reason 1988; Reason 1994; Eden and Huxhm 1996). Case-based research helps us to understand human thought and action in real-life organizational contexts. But most learners face great difficulties in producing deep insights into organizational phenomena for their research. This course is designed to help students generating unique insights for their case-based research. Students are advised to complete the basic level course before embarking on this intermediate level. The course will be conducted mainly in English. Language proficiency is expected. Students are encouraged to take basic qualitative methods course before embarking on this course.

### Learning Objectives

Through a deep appreciation of reputable research works, this course seeks to help students become familiar with the principles for case-based, action oriented research evaluation in organizational studies, business policies, human resources management, information systems management, media/communication, technology/innovation management and other liberal art subjects. Students are encouraged to employ a variety of 'framing' approaches, learned from the cases, in their thesis projects.

This module is designed to achieve three learning objectives:

- Learning action research methods through exemplary papers, in broader sense.
- Acquiring skills on conducting professional fieldwork (i.e. how to conduct onsite investigation).
- Nurturing skills for professional academic reviews.
- Developing unique points for academic (and practical) research.

### Teaching Modes

This module provides an intensive learning program. A consultative approach is adopted to help students understand the theoretical issues emerging from the case-based research. It considers action research method as a craft, rather than a tool. Hence, this course has no lecture (Heracleous and Barrett 2001). Students will engage in extensive dialogues with the instructor and discuss their thesis framing approaches. By the end of this course, students should be able to develop a full fledge thesis. Please note that this course is demanding. Each week, heavy writing exercises in English and Chinese are required and scored. Three core elements are incorporated throughout the module.

1. Extemporary case studies: Students will learn how to appreciate qualitative articles that are published in premium academic journals.
2. Interpreting skills: Students will learn to interpret social artefacts from fieldwork and draw qualitative conclusions.
3. Becoming a professional reviewer: Throughout this module, students will learn to play the role of a reviewer and an associate editor. By the end of the module, students will develop a paper that is more likely to have unique insights.

### Synopsis

The module is designed to cover the three board topics:

1. Developing intermediary level academic skills
  - How to review an article: framing, executing, displaying and drawing (Locke and Golden-Biddle 1997)
  - How to draw conclusion (induction) and infer theories from qualitative data (Barley 2006)
  - How to interpret artefacts (Agar 1980)
  - How to develop a unique point through dialectical thinking (Barley 2006)

Understanding action research methods

- Disrupted routines (Edmondson, Bohmer et al. 2001)
- Technology brokering (Hargadon and Sutton 1997)
- Sensemaking and identity (Dutton and Dukerich 1991)
- Bounded emotionality (Martin, Knopoff et al. 1998)

- Non-spread of innovation (Ferlie, Fitzgerald et al. 2005)

## 2. Basic Academic Review Skills

- How to perform the role of a reviewer
- How to perform the role of an associate editor

## Learning Outcome and Evaluation

The course aims to develop three core skills in conducting qualitative research.

1. Participation and contribution: Class participation is necessary. Less than three absences from the class should be expected (starting Week 4). This consists 30% of class marks.
2. Appreciation of exemplary research: Each week, a student will exercise discussion leadership and appreciate the action research methods, framing strategies and unique points suggested by articles published in premium journals. Students also need to transfer each article's learning into their thesis. This will take up 40% of the class mark.
3. Review tasks: Students will be assigned with a review assignment. Students will learn how to prepare a reviewer commentary and AE (Associate Editor) report, which take up 30% of the class mark.

## Syllabus

DATES		CORE TOPICS	READING
1	02/22	Making a Unique Point	Barley, S. R. 2006. When I write my masterpieces: Thoughts on what makes a paper interesting. <i>Academy of Management Journal</i> , 49(1): 16-20
2	03/01	Generative Power in Action Research	Weick, K. E. 2007. 'The generative properties of richness.' <i>Academy of Management Journal</i> . 50(1) 14-19. Eisenhardt, K.M. 2007. Theory building from cases: Opportunities and challenges. <i>Academy of Management Journal</i> 50(1) 25-32.
3	03/08	Disrupted Routines (Part 1)	Edmondson, A. C., R. M. Bohmer, and G. P. Pisano. 2001. 'Disrupted routines: Team learning and new technology implementation in hospitals'. <i>Administrative Science Quarterly</i> 46: 685-716.
4	03/15	Disrupted Routines	Edmondson, A. C., R. M. Bohmer, and G. P. Pisano. 2001. 'Disrupted routines: Team

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		(Part 2)	learning and new technology implementation in hospitals'. <i>Administrative Science Quarterly</i> 46: 685-716.
5	03/22	Technology Brokering (Part 1)	Hargadon, A., and I. R. Sutton. 1997. 'Technology brokering and innovation in a product development firm'. <i>Administrative Science Quarterly</i> 42(4) 716-49
6	03/29	Technology Brokering (Part 2)	Hargadon, A., and I. R. Sutton. 1997. 'Technology brokering and innovation in a product development firm'. <i>Administrative Science Quarterly</i> 42(4) 716-49
7	04/05	Keeping an Eye on the Mirror (Part 1)	Dutton, J.E., Dukerich, Janet M. 1991. Keeping an eye on the mirror: Image and identity in organizational adaptation. <i>Academy of Management Journal</i> . 34(3) 517-554.
8	04/12	Keeping an Eye on the Mirror (Part 2)	Dutton, J.E., Dukerich, Janet M. 1991. Keeping an eye on the mirror: Image and identity in organizational adaptation. <i>Academy of Management Journal</i> . 34(3) 517-554.
9	04/19	Recess Week	No class this week; please prepare your data from action research.
10	04/26	Emotional Labours (Part 1)	Martin, J., K. Knopoff, C. Beckman. 1998. An alternative to bureaucratic impersonality and emotional labour: Bounded emotionality at The Body Shop. <i>Administrative Science Quarterly</i> 43(2) 429-480.
11	05/03	Emotional Labours (Part 2)	Martin, J., K. Knopoff, C. Beckman. 1998. An alternative to bureaucratic impersonality and emotional labour: Bounded emotionality at The Body Shop. <i>Administrative Science Quarterly</i> 43(2) 429-480.
12	05/10	Nonspread of Innovation (Part 1)	Ferlie, E., L. Fitzgerald, M. Wood, C. Hawkins. 2005. The nonspread of innovations: The mediating role of professionals. <i>Academy of Management Journal</i> 48(s1) 117-134.
13	05/17	Nonspread of Innovation (Part 2)	Ferlie, E., L. Fitzgerald, M. Wood, C. Hawkins. 2005. The nonspread of innovations: The mediating role of

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			professionals. <i>Academy of Management Journal</i> 48(1) 117-134.
14	05/24	Presenting: Thesis Projects	Role Play: Associate Editor and Two Reviewers
15	05/31	Presenting: Thesis Projects	Role Play: Associate Editor and Two Reviewers
16	06/07	Presenting: Thesis Projects	Role Play: Associate Editor and Two Reviewers
17	06/14	Course Wrap-up: Action Research and Becoming a Professional Stranger	
18	06/21	Thesis Submission	

Note: The course arrangement is subject to change due to local conditions. Students should download the pre-class reading articles by themselves. Handouts will be given during class time.

## References

Agar, M. (1980). The Professional Stranger: An Informal Introduction to Ethnography. New York, Academic Press.

Barley, S. R. (1996). "Technicians in the workplace: Ethnographic evidence for bringing work into organization studies." Administrative Science Quarterly 41: 404-441.

Barley, S. R. (2006). "When I write my masterpieces: Thoughts on what makes a paper interesting." Academy of Management Journal 49(1): 16-20.

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Eden, C. and C. Huxhm (1996). Action Research for the Study of Organizations. Handbook of Organization Studies. S. Clegg, C. Hardy and W. Nord. Beverly Hill, Sage.

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Heracleous, L. and M. Barrett (2001). "Organizational change as discourse: Communicative actions and deep structures in the context of information technology implementation." The Academy of Management Journal 44(4): 755-778.

Locke, K. and K. Golden-Biddle (1997). "Constructing opportunities for contribution: Structuring intertextual coherence." Academy of Management Journal 40(5): 1023-1062.

Martin, J., K. Knopoff, et al. (1998). "An alternative to bureaucratic impersonality and emotional labor: Bounded emotionality at The Body Shop." Administrative Science Quarterly 43(2): 429-480.

Reason, P. (1988). Human inquiry in action: Developments in new paradigm research. London, Sage Publications.

Reason, P. (1994). Co-operative inquiry, participatory action research & action inquiry: Three approaches to participative inquiry. Newbury Park, Sage Publications.