

What are, in your opinion, strengths and weaknesses of Argyris and Schön's critique of PAR (reading number 3) and of Whyte's response to Argyris and Schön (reading number 4).

### **Strengths of Argyris and Schön's critique**

First, A&S criticize the intervention's inferences: the authors do not consider alternate explanations. Secondly, A&S insist the interventionist should have taken seriously the question: why did the organisational learning system have the features attributed to it prior to the intervention.

(1) p. 90. A&S wonder whether all relevant observers saw the matter as Lazes did. Lazes was the interventionist and speaks only for himself, not for practitioners. (2) p. 90. A&S say authors do not try to construct and test alternatives to their "organisational learning" hypothesis and thus fall too easily to believe in "the ideology of organisational learning". (3) p. 90. A&S state Lazes's way of intervening remains a black box. We don't know how Lazes trained or how he helped to reduce resistances.

A&S don't have access to what Lazes actually said and did. Therefore the reader is limited to espoused theories.

A&S think Lazes had bypassed the organizational contextual factors (e.g. crisis situation) that helped to create the problem. A&S detected cover-up of cover-ups, defensive routines and hence it was not surprising that the undiscussables were surfaced in a crisis situation. "Lazes could apply genuine pressure", and A&S anticipated that the changes effected in crisis would not endure for very long.

## Weaknesses of Argyris and Schön's critique

A&S discusses if the new idea of productivity and the shift toward a more broad-gauged, sociotechnical approach to participation was suggested by Lazes's intervention and whether the intervention tested the theory. This chapter is fuzzy - what do A&S really want to say here? Do they say the theory was both built and tested during the intervention? Or do they insist that the theory should come first, the intervention comes next?

## Strengths of Whyte's response

Whyte compares action science (AS) and participatory action research (PAR):

Action science	Participatory action research
Focuses more on interpersonal relations and intrapsychic processes	Focuses on social structures and processes
Calls for a detached observer to document in detail the intervention process	The key PAR practitioners not likely to need or pay for a detached observer
First learn new thinking and feeling, then take new courses of action	New lines of action likely to emerge during the intervention, further reinforced and supported after the intervention. "Creative surprises" - new ideas that arise unexpectedly during the intervention process
Intervention team to take more control of both the intervention and the research process	Greater sharing of control between practitioners and researchers

## Weaknesses of Whyte's response

Whyte had asked - instead of the detached observer - the practitioners to interpret their own cases. Their account is said to suggest that they saw themselves as active participants in the PAR process. How do the participants themselves take a neutral position and distill their own defences out of observations?

Defining undiscussibilities into two categories - social and structural - makes sense, because the social process needed to eliminate the barriers may be quite different for the two types. However, it is hard for us to tell if the Xerox case was about structural or social type.