

# **A CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE RESEARCH PAPER**

## **ACTION RESEARCH FOR OPERATIONS MANAGEMENT**

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## INTRODUCTION.

In this paper I write a report on the research paper titled "Action Research for Operations Management" written by Professors Paul Coughlan and David Coughlan

As my report i write a critical review of their research paper. I am doing this because in recent years everything about Action research has interested the CEO and manager as a means of understanding and changing organizations. Action Research is an approach of business research that aims at taking action and creating knowledge or theory about that action. In this research article titled "Action Research for Operations Management" written in 2002, the authors Paul Coughlan and David Coughlan write about action-oriented research approach in operations management. Paul Coughlan is Professor of Operations Management at the School of Business, Trinity College Dublin and Course Co-Director at the TCD-UCD Innovation Academy. He was President of the European Institute for Advanced Studies in Management (EIASM) from 2003-09. His research in product development and continuous improvement has encompassed an innovative action research dimension involving companies in action learning. This work has led to continuing methodology development and to specialized doctoral training in action research and learning through the EIASM doctoral network. David Coughlan is Professor in Organization Development also at the School of Business, Trinity College Dublin. He researches extensively and has been published widely in organization development and action research including the philosophy of action learning and clinical inquiry, methodologies for insider action research and methodologies for learning networks. Together Professors Paul Coughlan and David Coughlan have authored numerous articles and research papers in the field of action research. "Action Research for Operations Management", "Doing Action Research in your own Organization", "Action research: Exploring perspectives on a philosophy of practical knowing" and "Action Research in supply chain management to name a few. Many regard them as among the leading researchers in the field of Action Research. In this paper I write a critical review of their research article "Action Research for operations management" the authors say the purpose for writing their paper was guided by the fundamental methodological question: How can operations managers and researchers improve operations management by learning from the practice of Operations Management? According to the authors, seeking the answers to this question will explore the legitimacy of the action oriented research approach in operations management. It will also explore the value of applying action research to defining and understanding issues in operations management. The authors have several other note worthy contributions "*Collaborative Strategic Improvement through Network Action Learning*" written and published in 2011, "*Action Learning in inter-organizational sets*", "*Action Learning, Leadership and Organizational Development*" both written in 2006, and "*The application of action learning and action research in collaborative improvement within the extended manufacturing enterprise*" written in 2005. In my opinion its safe to say that the

authors are major contributors to the study and implementation of Action learning and Action Research. In this paper that I review, the authors assert action research as the tool or practice by which operations managers and researchers should study and improve the practice of operations management. They introduce Action Research with the purpose of showing how and why it should be used to tackle the themes and challenges facing operations managers. They criticize the fact that as the 2002 Action Research was not used as a research method in any of the published empirical research in operations management. They assert Action Research as important to the deeper understanding and improvement of operations management practice by tackling and answering seven fundamental issues and questions about Action Research. What is Action Research? What is needed before entering into action research? How do you design an AR project? Implementing action research. Action Research skills. How do you generate theory from AR? Assessing the quality of Action Research? My general opinion of this research paper is that it's a good contribution to the practice of operations management and the further understanding of Action research. My opinion is supported by the fact that this research paper is one of the first to stress that Action Research should feature prominently in the present and future of empirical research in operations management.

## **GENERAL ANALYSIS.**

### **The Research Problem, Question, and Purpose.**

In my opinion the authors stated reasonably well and clearly the problem they identified and the question they seek to address. They explain the problem in expressing that a running operation will neither become right nor continue to be right without knowledgeable decisions from operations managers. Managers seek Answers to the following questions about running operations that are not obvious. What makes it work as it does? Could it work better in its current form? What different forms could it take and still achieve the same result? What market, internal or environmental change would cause most trouble to the working of the operation, and with what effect? According to the authors the problem is that addressing such questions as a manager or as a researcher is not easy. The authors then logically state their research question to be, "How can operations managers and researchers learn from the applied activity that characterizes the practice of operations management?" My observation is that the flow of logic on how the research question will be answered is not stated clearly at the beginning of the paper. I had to read the paper over and over again to understand how it would be achieved. Eventually I understood the logic to be to introduce Action Research to the reader and from the perspective of Action Research, explore the issues and challenges facing operations managers and researchers as they attempt to learn from the applied activity that characterizes the practice of

operations management. The authors do not state clearly at the beginning that their intentions for doing this is to expose how effective or not Action Research is in addressing the research question.

## The Literature Review

The authors use the literature review to present the importance and relevance of their research paper. They cite other different research papers, which help expose that prior to this paper in 2002 Action Research, did not feature as a research method in any empirical research publication on operations management. All the papers the authors cited are research papers that reviewed published empirical OM research during relevant periods prior to their publication. I think this literature review was well done. It is short and to the point. The authors made good use of it to make their point that there was need for a rigorous application of AR to OM research because of its potential to contribute to knowledge and to practice.

## The Research Approach, Method and Techniques

The qualitative nature of this paper is determined by the research purpose and question. Qualitative researchers seek to gather deep understanding of human behavior and the reasons that define and determine such behavior. The qualitative method investigates not just what happened and where and when, but also how and why. Therefore here we have a typical situation where qualitative research methods would be and are used to answer, the question, "How can operations managers and researchers learn from the applied activity that characterizes the practice of operations management?" The qualitative nature of this paper also comes from the fact that in the times prior to the writing this paper, Action Research was not used as a method in empirical research for operations management. Therefore there would be little or no statistical and numerical data etc... to use in this paper in a quantitative way to show how effective or not Action Research can be in learning from operations management practice. However in my opinion the research approach used by the authors is relevant and appropriate for achieving the objectives of this research. The reader of this paper gets an introduction to Action Research, what it is, how to use and when to use it as applied to management practice in general. Perhaps there are very little specifics to distinguish between management and operations management. However the authors should have highlighted a more in depth or glaring difference between Action Research for management practice and Action Research for operations management practice.

## The Research Results and Conclusions

The authors achieve the results they sought to achieve in writing this research paper, which among others is to establish Action Research, a valid methodology for research in OM. This paper gives the reader an in-depth review of AR as a valid methodology for research in management practice, and by extension operations management. The conclusions they present about Action Research are clear and can be understood and reached by the reader of the text. Owing to the management logic of this paper, the reader knows that what he is reading in this paper is valid and accurate. In my opinion the reader also knows that what he is reading is valid and accurate for both management practice and operations management. In the end the reader appreciates the role of Action Research as a powerful conceptual tool for uncovering truth on which action can be taken in an organization. Therefore the results and discussions in the paper are not only relevant but are revealing towards the research statement of problem. The references are extensive, complete and current for this paper writing in 2002.

## **BRIEF ANALYSIS OF THE METHODOLOGY**

This paper is actually about a research method called Action Research. The authors present this research method to operations managers as the means by which they can and should learn from the applied activity that characterizes the practice of operations management. Accordingly they introduce Action Research, and in a qualitative manner they explain all about it as they use it to explore issues and challenges faced by operations managers and researchers as they learning from activities that define operations management practice. In the end they have produced a handbook of guide for action research for operations managers. Which, judging from the title of this paper is what they sought out to do.

## **EVALUATION**

### Value

This research paper is very important and valuable. In 2002 it was almost the only paper that urged empirical researchers to turn to Action Research as a leading method for research in operations management. Today eleven years later we know that AR is growing in popularity as a research approach among managers, researchers and management of organizations. Most will agree with me that this paper is considered valuable to management practice.

## Affecting Management Theory and Practice

This paper answers its research question by exploring the themes and challenges facing operations managers and researchers as they try to learn from the activity in operations management. It does this by introducing and explaining Action Research in depth. Issues and questions such as, what is Action Research? How do you design an AR project? And how do you generate theory from AR? Are addressed. For a controlling manager/CEO of an organization, such as myself this paper serves as a handbook and guide on how to apply AR in my organization. This paper exposes the fact that Each AR cycle leads to another cycle, and therefore continuous planning, implementation and evaluation take place over time. This turns my organization into a learning organization with an environment where innovation is faster and is encouraged. Which should give my organization a competitive edge over our competition. Further more the text reveal that Our competitive edge is further increased because owing to Action Research, my organization is always anticipating and predicting change internally and externally, and is therefore better suited to deal with change.

## The Strong Points, My Criticisms and Conclusions

The authors criticize the fact that as at 2002 Action Research was not used as a research method in any of the published empirical research in operations management. Being confident of the benefits of AR in 2002, to the learning process of management and operations management practice in my view is one of the strong points of this research paper. This paper gives the reader an in-depth review of AR as a valid methodology for research in management practice, and by extension operations management. The conclusions they present about Action Research are clear and can be understood and reached by the reader of the text. Another strong point of this paper is that, For a controlling manager/CEO of an organization, such as myself this paper serves as a handbook and guide on how to apply AR in my organization. The authors should have highlighted a more in depth or glaring difference between Action Research for management practice and Action Research for operations management practice. The flow of logic on how the research question will be answered is not stated clearly at the beginning of the paper. One had to read the paper over again to understand how it would be achieved. Eventually one understands the logic to be to an introduction of Action Research to the reader and from the perspective of Action Research, explore the issues and challenges facing operations managers and researchers as they attempt to learn from the applied activity that characterizes the practice of operations management. The authors do not state clearly at the beginning that the intentions for doing this is expose how effective or not Action Research is in addressing the research question.

## Suggestions and Recommendations

Perhaps there are very little specifics to distinguish between management and operations management. However I feel the authors should have highlighted a more in depth or glaring difference between Action Research for management practice and Action Research for operations management practice.