



Participative action research Developmental community involvement + 'project' accountability

'Research' is typically done by someone outside a group. The research is done on the group and then a report provided that tells others about the group.

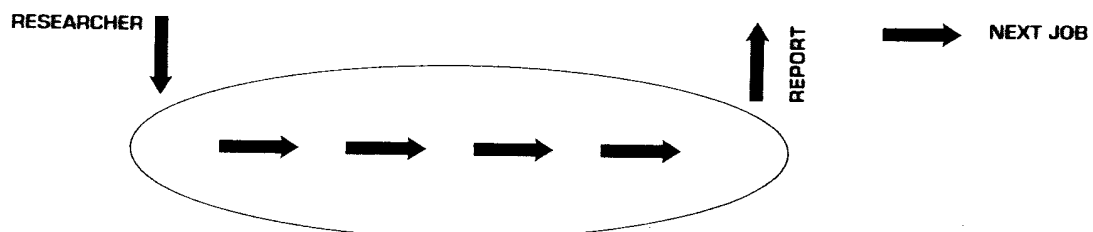


DIAGRAM 7.1

The group remain un-empowered and are left feeling 'studied' but not valued. Aboriginal people often complain that they are the most "researched" group in the world, with virtually no effective action to show for it.

7.1 Empowerment

Another option is to actually empower people within the group to learn new and effective ways of doing things themselves. They participate in a spiralling process of:

- Acting** Do what we reckon is the most effective thing.
- Observing** See what happens when we do this.
- Reflecting** On the implications of our observations.
- Planning** Work out how we will act differently as a result of what we've learned.
- Act differently** To assess the above and act accordingly.

Thus, the work we do as community and in community continues to evolve.

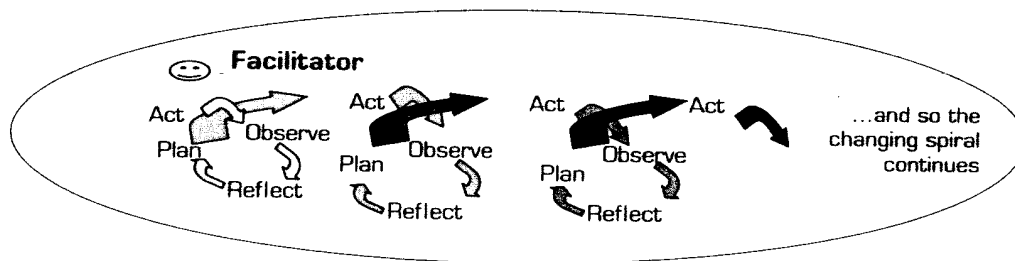


DIAGRAM 7.2

This diagram provides a framework for developing accountable projects that do not tie community groups to pre-determined outcomes. In fact, funding programs that use this model as a key form of accountability allow the space for truly developmental processes, whereas funding based only on Strategic Planning processes (Mission, Objectives, Strategies) tend to discourage developmental approaches. They also tend to tie people to a program approach, focussing their energy on the objectives for which they're funded rather than the needs, aspirations, assets and strengths of people around them.

An example of 'project development' using this framework is shown on the following pages.

7.2 Managing Projects

"Community" projects develop in a number of different and often un-predictable ways, and we can rarely predict the outcomes. However, a 'mud-map' of project development may be useful.

Steps 1 - 3 outlined below assume that we are working initially in a 'developmental' way, even if that is within our own organisation. All examples include our role as facilitator, not simply a servant or work-horse, and assume that we are working with a group with reasonably high capacity to begin with.

1. A network of relationships and dialogue

Ideas often emerge from people who feel part of a 'group' (eg: two or more people), and who are engaged in genuine (and preferably equitable) dialogue. Or put more simply, people are talking with each other. (This is why so much community work is driven by agencies - because they are, in the end, groups of people talking together).

So we need to create and/or be involved with groups of people who are talking together. (A good term for this, borrowed from Aboriginal community workers, is 'yarning'). Ideally, these will be in the community, but it's also important that you are part of the dialogue within Council.

When people are meeting and talking together we have a foundation for project development. The '**Action Research**' model provides simple steps for this.

Example:

We encourage, organise or join with 'discussion groups' amongst retired people in Subiaco.

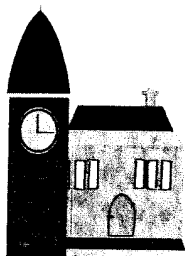
2. 'Observing' (together)

Sometimes, problems or opportunities 'bubble up' from these groups - issues that need to be addressed. Often, though, we need to get quite active in questioning - opening up space for ideas to emerge. This 'questioning' may take the form of 'yarning'. It's important though, to avoid 'yes/no' questions, as these just seek endorsement rather than generating ideas. A 'SWOT' framework (see page 30) provides a good personal 'check-list' for questioning even if we don't use it formally. (Examples of 'SWOT' questions are shown in the box).

These processes will expose a number of problems and opportunities and people may notice points of commonality that bring them together.

Example:

We encourage discussion (formal or informal) about the rhythms of life in my street.



SOME SWOT QUESTIONS

What are some of the things you most love about living in your street? (Strengths)
 What are some of the things you really don't like about living in your street? (Weaknesses)
 Imagine this: you have to move to London for 10 years. Then you come back and are living in the same house. To your delight you find life in this street now meets all of your ideals about living in a community. What would it look like? What are those ideals? (Opportunities)
 Imagine the same scenario, only this time you come back to find life in this street has come to realise all your worst fears about living in a community. What would that look like? What are those fears? (Threats)

We can help guide things toward actions by reflecting on the problems and/or opportunities that have emerged from the group, and asking the question: 'What could be done to minimise the negatives (weaknesses or threats) and maximise the positives (strengths and opportunities)?' Answers that emerge from this might include things that 'they' should do (Council, government, etc) and these responses should be honoured and responded to (even if the response is "it can't be done because..."). But we should also seek ideas for what 'we' can do, because this puts the power into the group's hands.

What moves us from 'reflecting' to 'planning' is that we have a clear and agreed idea of what we want to achieve. It might be a small thing, or it might be a grand vision, but we all are clear on what it is.

Examples:

A number of people express a desire for more interaction and would like to work towards:

- 1. A community intranet**
- 2. 'Streets alive'**
- 3. Street based 'information meetings' about key issues.**

4. Planning (together)

The process described so far has been largely 'developmental'. If you are taking a 'program' approach to working in community, you'll be starting here. If you have been taking a 'developmental' approach, the group that you are planning with may decide to move into 'program' mode to 'get the job done'.

Having determined what we want to achieve, we now need to work out how to achieve it.

The group may now need assistance in planning what actions to begin with. It's important that you don't need to be 'the expert' in this - you are a resource to the group. When you don't know answers or information, or when you don't have the time or skills to do tasks, be honest and work with the group on how to get that information or complete those tasks. Some of the questions the group will need to consider are:

- Who wants to be on a working group (with fairly high commitments)?
- Who else needs to be involved?
- How do we make it easy for them to be involved, and how will we invite them to be involved?
- What information do we need (if any), and how will we get it?
- What money do we need (if any), and how will we get it?
- What information do we need to collect (if any) to 'measure' how useful or effective the project was, and how will we collect it?
- By what date will we have planned what action to take?

There are likely to be other important questions. A simple 'checklist' for any project that everyone can remember is: who, what, when, where, how, why?

It's important that the planning be punctuated, or at least completed, with a **reality check** - is the 'action' we are planning for achievable?

Examples:

1. A working group sets up a meeting with the Librarian. They do detailed planning together on a strategy for establishing a community intranet with Council advice and support.
2. They are informed that 'Streets Alive' initiatives are already occurring. Some join their local networks, but apart from that, no further action is taken.

5. Act

Implement your plan! If possible, celebrate when it's finished or successfully underway. If it fails, come together to talk about it.

Examples:

1. The community intranet is uploaded.
2. The 'streets alive' meetings are held. Numbers range between 3 in one street and 27 in another. At the meeting with 3, 2 of them want to work with the host to do it again.

6. Observe & Reflect

We come together as a working group to look at how it all went. Again, the 'SWOT' framework is useful. What went well? What didn't? What could we do better or differently in the future? What pitfalls should we avoid? We also collate information that we collected while we were doing it.

We use this information to reflect on how we can improve on what we've done, or do something new.

Examples:

1. The intranet is getting used by 8% of residents and steadily growing and all feedback (gathered through an on-line anonymous survey) is overwhelmingly positive. Some people though, are concerned about security issues.
2. The meetings were very positive. It was important that hosts used both face to face invitations to people they know and letter box drops. A number of people felt we should work to find more 'street hosts'.

7. Plan

And so we move into the 'next round' of planning. We may celebrate and 'close' the working group if everything has been achieved. We may simply keep doing what we're doing. We may decide on new directions.

Examples:

1. The intranet working group aims to provide information to all users on intranet security measures.
2. The 'street information nights' will be repeated (different topic and speaker). In addition, all participants at the info nights will be encouraged to work with a friend in a different street to hold an information night there.

8. Act

And so the process continues, with the working groups in control.