

## Editorial Statement

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# Action Research in Management

Human systems management and human management of systems require human action and human reaction in order to achieve understanding and change in social systems.

This implies *interaction* between the practical manager/decision maker and the professional researcher. Eventually it requires co-operation between the practice role and the research role in a managerial environment.

The behavior of practicing managers has changed from the do-it-yourself attitude of yesterday, over today's desire for help of the professional consultant, to tomorrow's demand: research involvement in the managerial process.

The researcher has developed his attitude from yesterday's observation and neutral behavior, over today's desire to be able to recommend certain

actions to the practicing manager, to tomorrow's desire for a direct participation in the managerial process.

We are faced with a common desire for co-operation between the practitioners and researchers in the real management situations in order to solve problems and create new knowledge.

As far as problem-solving is concerned, the researcher helps the manager or managerial teams to solve what they experience as *their* problems. The reward is that the practitioner aids the researcher in solving his own problems, namely helping to create a better general theory of management. The benefit of the practitioner is a new knowledge created in his system in terms of local organizational learning, which could be synonymous with a desired development.



Erik Johnsen became Master of Economics (Aarhus University) in 1955. He started his own consultant firm for research and education in management in the same year. In 1955 and 1956 he studied at Princeton University, NJ. In 1956 he became Assistant Professor at the Copenhagen School of Economics and Business Administration and was in 1958 appointed as Associate Professor. He became Associate Professor of man-

agerial economics at Lund University, Sweden in 1966; Associate Professor in applied mathematics at the Technical University, Denmark in 1966. He was from 1967 till 1968 leader of the Institute of Business Administration at Umeå University, Sweden; became in 1968 oecon. dr. at Lund University, Sweden. He was founder of the Management Science Research Group at the Copenhagen School of Economics and Business Administration in 1969 and became leader of the Institute of Business Administration and Professor of Marketing and Managerial Economics at the Åbo School of Economics and Business Administration, Åbo Swedish University in 1969. He was appointed as Professor of Managerial Economics, Operations Research and Management Science at the Copenhagen School of Economics and Business Administration in 1969.

He is a co-founder of the Danish Society of Operations Research and was Secretary from 1962 till 1965 and President from 1969 till 1971. He was the Editorial Secretary for

the Danish Journal of Economics and Business Administration from 1956 till 1968 and Managing Editor from 1968 on. He has been Chairman of the EDP Education Committee of the Ministry of Education from 1970 till 1972 and member of other public committees from 1972 till 1976. He became a member of the Danish Academy for Technical Sciences in 1970 and The Society of Sciences in Lund, Sweden in 1973. He became Doctor of Honour at the Swedish University Åbo in 1977 and a Honorary Member of the Association of Danish Business Economists in 1979. He is member of scientific evaluation committees in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Finland.

E. Johnsen is the author of: Introduction to Operations Research (1962, 2nd ed. 1964, in Danish); The Painter Emil Jensen (1967); Studies in Multiobjective Decision Models (dissertation Lund, 1968, in English); Systems Problems (Editor, Lund, 1968, in Swedish); Absatpolitik (Hamburg, 1968, in German), Fair Play - A Business Game (Lund, 1969, in Swedish); Goal-Oriented Management (1973, in Danish and Swedish); Managerial Problems in The Hospital Sector (with Ove Hedegaard, 1974, in Danish); The Theory of Management (1975, in Danish); Problems of Aggregation (Editor, 1975, in Danish); Introduction to Operations Research (with Ove Hedegaard and Per Ellervik, 1976, in Danish); Elements of Management Science (1976, in Danish); The Consultant Role (Editor, 1978, in Danish); Management Processes - based upon Danish experiences (1978, in Danish); Interactive Change Processes (with Lasse Nilsson, 1979, in Danish); Managerial Economics. Development and Impact on Society (Editor, 1979, in Danish); Managerial Processes of the Municipality (with Ole Kjærgaard, Kaj Jørgensen and Stig Ree, 1979, in Danish); numerous articles on management, operations research, marketing, managerial economics and organization in professional journals. Numerous newspaper articles, primarily on professional matters.

Action research in management is a *mutual commitment* of manager and researcher to objectives, values, responsibility and action.

Action research in management produces mutual learning based upon the fact that:

- a man is a man and
- a system is a system.

and the fact that we question: what is a human system?

Action research in management amounts to a transdisciplinary exploration aiming at continuous development of human management of human systems.

There are several problems connected with action research. One of them is that a practicing manager must act as a consultant for his consultants (the researcher) in order to receive help. Another problem is that the researcher must act as a manager, take part of the power in order to help the manager. A third problem is that both must behave as managers as well as researchers, which requires a two-dimensional attitude for the project: a managerial and a research attitude. A fourth problem is the responsibility. The manager feels his responsibility morally and economically, the researcher 'only' morally. How do we cope with that problem? A fifth problem is how to test

the reliability of an action research study. For the manager the problem is solved if he attains his objectives. The researcher must, according to academical norms, 'test' his methodology and results according to partly traditional academic norms and partly to norms of his peer group or the specific societal values that he desires to uphold.

In practice, action research is primarily associated with a change in the total system based upon changes in the social system of a firm/organization. Action research requires a change in attitude and co-operation based upon a common objective to solve one's own problems better by giving a sparring-partner a possibility to solve his problems better. Action research is an ongoing mutual search-learning process, which – when it works – benefits both parties. Action research, therefore, does not neglect the traditional problem-solving methodology and traditional managerial skills. Every method which produces new knowledge for both parties is acceptable.

Human systems management has as one of its editorial objectives to become a leading source of information on action research in management.

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