



Action Research in the University Library: the "Front Office Project"

Introduction by Ilaria Moroni

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Summary

- Action Research: History and Practice, Characteristics, Process

- Front Office Project:
 - Objective, Team, and Method
 - Diagnosis
 - Planning
 - Action
 - Assessment
 - Sharing

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Action Research: History and Practice

Origins: Kurt Lewin (social psychologist), 1946

Developments: since 1970s-80s many studies and experiences of psychologists and educationalists; since 1990s scientific literature grows, mainly in the North America and in Europe

Applications: organizational contexts and communities; educational, training, and school contexts

Applications in the library: since 2000 information sciences literature increases; many studies and experiences in university libraries and on Information Literacy

See Moroni I., *Action Research in the Library*, JLIS.it, 2 (2)

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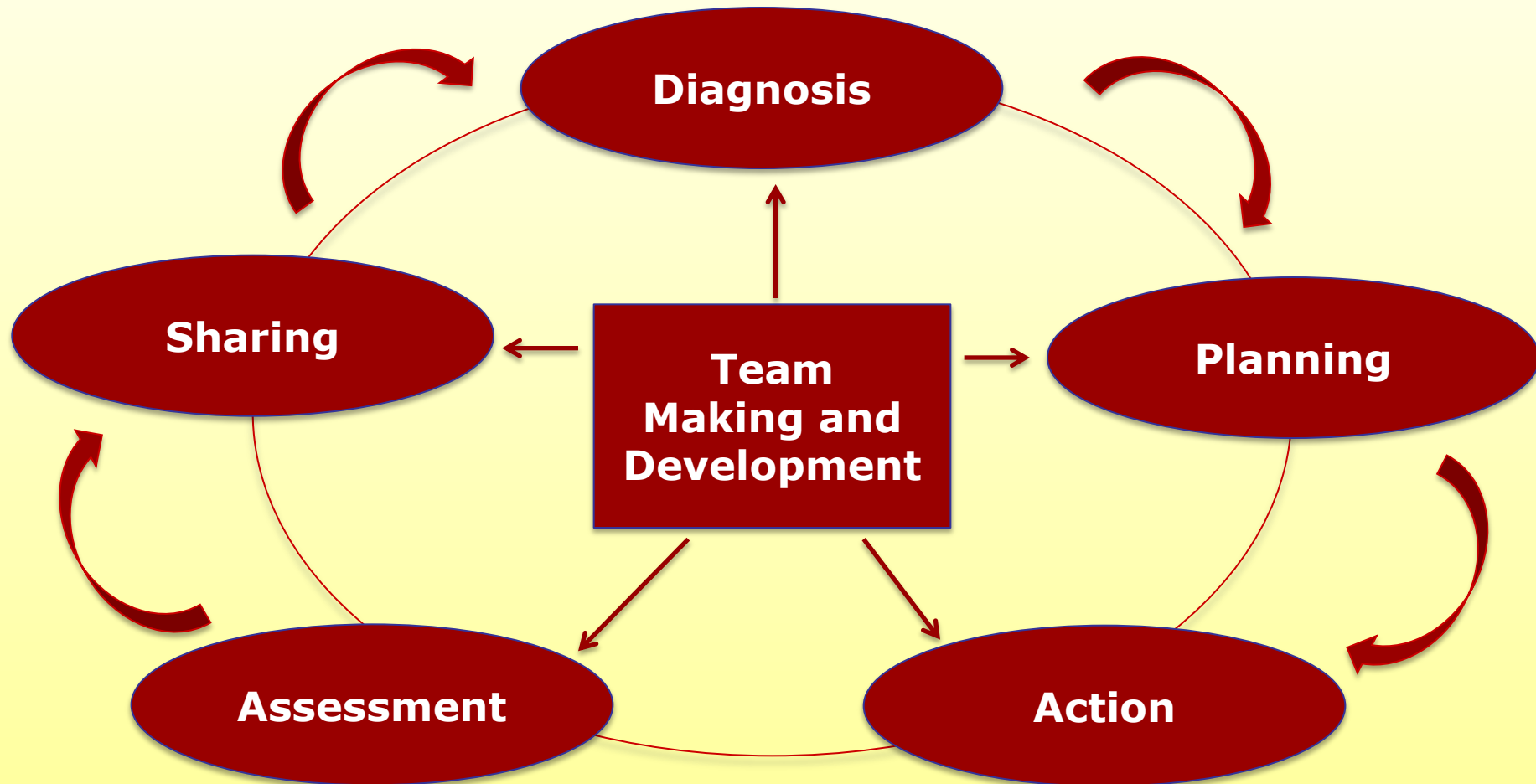
Action Research: Features

- Tight interconnection between **theory and practice**, knowledge and change, analysis and action
- «**Cyclic**» or «spiral» research process
- **Work group** managed by a practitioner who fosters individual development
- Use of **qualitative techniques** to analyse the problems in depth and to stimulate reflections
- Pursuing of individual and collective **changes** (inner growth, relational and operative improvements)
- Importance of **experience sharing**

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Action Research: Process



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FOP: Objective, Team, and Method

- The **Front Office Project [FOP]** aims at improving the perceived quality of library services; it's one among the University Library **objectives 2009/10**
- The **team** is composed by **six librarians** from three library seats, and is managed by Ilaria Moroni, the person in charge of Training, Development and Communication Office
- The **method** that the Front Office Team uses, to achieve its objective, is **Action Research**

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FOP: Diagnosis [1]

Diagnosis activities (november, 2009 – april, 2010):

- **Benchmarking** among Italian university library services
- **Literature analysis** about library services and surveys
- **Quantitative survey** (776 questionnaires) to students and scholars on library services use and satisfaction
- **Qualitative survey** (47 interviews) to students and scholars on library services use, satisfaction and marketing

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FOP: Diagnosis [2]

Findings from double (quantitative and qualitative) survey:

- **high satisfaction** for library services, mostly for electronic resources from scholars, and for staff from students
- **low use** of some services, mainly of website, electronic resources, reference, interlibrary loan and document delivery, due to little knowledge or awareness about services
- main user suggestions: **increase marketing** services and **information literacy** activities

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FOP: Planning

Planning of actions to improve library services

is divided in six fields:

- Marketing
- Information Literacy
- Reference
- Loan
- Interlibrary Loan and Document Delivery
- Reading rooms

Action plan was approved by management and shared with staff of University Library in May 2010.

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FOP: Action [1]

Actions to improve library services in **Marketing**:

- monthly newsletter, to scholars and administrative staff
- library news in [BNews](#), to scholars and students
- Digital Library [Poster](#)
- promotional [bookmarks](#) on library services
- faculties and departments website analysis to add library information or library website link (see [Psychology](#) and [Education Sciences](#))
- [introduction](#) to library services for first-year students

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FOP: Action [2]

Actions to improve library services in Information

Literacy:

- monthly courses, interdisciplinary and by subject, organized by librarians
- courses on request from professors and scholars
- Information Literacy webpages:
 - ✓ guides and tutorial
 - ✓ courses schedule
 - ✓ courses support materials
 - ✓ courses registration

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FOP: Action [3]

Actions to improve library services in reference,

ILL and DD:

- six faculty maps for Central Seat
- guides (leaflets) and website updating
- frequent user questions analysis and email replies standardizing
- comparing among three seats, flowcharts, and email standardizing about ILL (Interlibrary Loan) and DD (Document Delivery)

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FOP: Action [4]

Actions to improve library services in circulation and readings rooms:

- doubling of loan renewal
- suggestions on circulation services for new Code of service (in 2011)
- signs to respect silence in reading rooms in Central Library and in Science Library
- more careful shelving in Central Library open shelves
- temperature monitoring in Central Library

The actions ended in December 2010.

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FOP: Assessment [1]

Qualitative and quantitative assessment, especially on strategic services for perceived quality:

- [library services data analysis](#)
- [library courses data analysis](#)
- [survey on user perceptions of library courses](#)
- [survey on user perceptions of reference service](#)
- [survey on user perceptions of library service](#)

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FOP: Assessment [2]

Main assessment findings:

- slight increase of users for all library services
- larger increase of courses than previous years (+ 400% trained users)
- high satisfaction for library courses (8,5/10 points)
- high satisfaction for reference service (5/6 points)
- **perception** of library services **more positive** than previous years (see self-interviews, Good Practice 2011)

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FOP: Sharing [1]

Internal sharing and **reflection** on activities :

- monthly group meetings, to assess the work in progress
- 360-degree feedback, to evaluate even the project leader
- sharing of thoughts, ideas and personal experiences on project and working group, to improve management
- emails to all the staff, to update about the FOP
- all-staff meetings, to share survey findings and ensuing actions

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FOP: Sharing [2]

The FOP team learns through the working group, and the project fosters the cognitive and emotive **evolution** of every person. Here are some metaphors from the staff:

- the **project** is like “a mirror reflecting our work”, or “a cake that is made up by many ingredients, and rises”
- the **working group** is like “a ring-a-ring-a-roses of people stepping synchronously to the center”, or “an orchestra in which each instrument has to tune up with the others, producing something harmonious, led by the director”

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FOP: Sharing [3]

External sharing and **dissemination of experience** in the relevant scientific community:

- [news](#) and [reports in university library website](#)
- [reports in BOA \(Bicocca Open Archive\)](#)
- [report in ELIS](#) (E-prints in Library & Information Science)
- Article (full text english version) in [JLIS.it](#) (peer review):
Moroni I., [Action Research in the Library: Method, Experiences, and a Significant Case](#), 2011

Contacts

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