How might we learn to ‘do’ change?
Using action research as a pedagogical approach in a business school

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My hopes for this session

• To bring my inquiry here!

• To connect my experiences with those of others working with action learning/action research methods in educational contexts

• To promote discussion of complex issues of paradigms in business education, and their connection to learning for change and innovation
It's 3:23 in the morning
and I'm awake
Because my great-great-grandchildren
work. Let me sleep;
my great-great-grandchildren
Ask me in dreams:
What did you do when your head
was filled with the need to
struggle?
Surely you did something!
When the seasons started failing?
As the normal cycles died,
were you all crying?
Did you fill the streets with petitions!
When democracy was stolen?
WHAT DID YOU DO ONCE YOU KNEW!
My Questions

• What is the impact of the pedagogy and action research orientation on the participants, including the ways in which this translated into actionable knowing in their work environments?

• How should we understand and work with the difficulty created for both participants and staff of sustaining a participative, action-oriented and critical stance in a business school context?
From alumni:

- “instead of advising other people on what they should do, I would have to make it happen”
- “a kind of invitation to explore, to really think about what you are doing in the world. I really appreciated the invitation…It gives you a sort of freedom and creativity”
- “I use it every day, to try and really pay attention to what I am experiencing, to ask myself: what comes next?”
- “It removes the fear of failure – everything is data!”
- “Forced to test assumptions – go and do”
- “Not just a new way of thinking, but a new way of being”
- I seek and find expertise everywhere, at all levels [in my organisation]
• “Sit with things, embrace uncertainty: I now know how to do that”
• “I am very clear: I would not be able to be who I am, or do what I do without this vibrant, resourceful, challenging community & the educational context it comes out of”
• “It turned me inside out, instead of the usual way of operating and fitting in to survive the financial traps, conditioning and appeasing the system: the life-journey remains a privilege, beyond "little me" to "we" and "us".
• “We need radical new ideas, some of which will be crazy and not work but the point is to keep pushing the bar, it's when we stop pushing that we fail. I think all of us who participated ... were given the confidence to keep pushing for change”
From the staff perspective:

• Relentlessly modelling the principles
• “you have to go on a journey with them about the place you’re in”
• Showing confidence in a way of working, over and over
• Difficult to handle the projection on to you as an expert – we do have expertise but show it in ‘non-expert’ ways
• Handling “strategies of dismissal”
• “[The BS] can’t distinguish between paying attention to the lifeworld and ‘therapy’”
• Not fitting in with conventional success measures – volume, student salary increase
• Immense challenge in naming a conflict of paradigm
Qs for you:

- Resonance for you? What is your experience?
- How might action-oriented critical pedagogies be better supported?
- *Should* they be?