INVENTIVE INVOLVEMENT | WITH PATIENTS & THE PUBLIC

Participatory Action Research

What this involves

Participatory action research (PAR) integrates three basic aspects: participation (life in society and democracy), action (engagement with experience and history), and research (soundness in thought and the growth of knowledge). It is an approach to research in communities that emphasises participation and action. It seeks to understand the world by trying to change it, collaboratively and following reflection.

What are the benefits of working in a participatory action research way?

- It may be a way to bring together service users, researchers, commissioners, service providers and industry to a common goal.
- It is also a way to work on proposals as you progress, making changes during the course of the research.

When this might be a useful/appropriate approach:

- When you want the outputs from the research to be used in real life.
- When you want to conduct an evaluation that will elicit the results close from the people most involved.

How can you work in a participatory action research way?

- You will need to gain ethical approval to work in this way as it is not strictly defined as PPI.
- You can create stakeholder workshops and use tools such as storyboards to facilitate conversations in which there is common ground and equality of input.

What are the drawbacks of this approach?

It involves a substantial time commitment for the researchers and some of the key stakeholders potentially. PAR is not necessarily PPI so it may not be appropriate for what you are planning.

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How can you work in an participatory action research style?

The facilitator will greet the people and briefly re-state the theme of their gathering, without giving a lengthy speech. Then the facilitator will invite all participants to spend the next ten minutes, say, in thinking through and identifying any issue or opportunity related to the theme. When the facilitator announces time is up, any participants willing to raise a topic will come to the centre of the circle, write a short description (typically up to 7 words) on a sheet of paper and announce it to the group. The person who has called out this issue or opportunity then posts the paper in an area of the space designated for the agenda. If the meeting takes place in a room, that space is often a wall on which are mapped out pre-determined time slots and meeting locations. That wall becomes the agenda for the meeting. The only limit on the number of issues that get posted is the number of people who take responsibility for the topic getting discussed.

When all issues have been identified and posted, participants sign up and attend those individual sessions. Sessions typically last for 1.5 hours; the whole gathering usually lasts from a half day up to about two days. The opening and agenda creation lasts about an hour, even with a very large group. The facilitator can explain the rules before sessions begin. Open Space has Four Rules and One Law (the Law of Two Feet):

1) Whoever come are the right people.
2) Whatever happens is the only thing that could have.
3) Whenever it starts is the right time.
4) When it's over, it's over.

The Law of Two Feet states that: "If, during the course of the gathering, any person finds themselves in a situation where they are neither learning nor contributing, they must use their feet and go to some more productive place."

After the opening and agenda creation, the individual groups go to work. The attendees organize each session as they go—in other words, are free to decide which session they want to attend, and may switch to another one at any time. This supports different styles of participation as many people like to sample before landing, others may be looking for the most productive sessions, while yet others are hoping to pinpoint discussion on an issue. Networking can occur before, during, after, so discussions can continue seamlessly. All discussion reports are compiled in a document on site and sent to participants, unedited, shortly after.

The topic announcers should be given something that reminds them of these key principles:

1) Let participants' contributions count. They should write down all major points made, not just a favoured subset.
2) Foster creativity by recommending unconventional note taking, such as mindmaps, mood boards, post it cards, which result in a more organic and metaphorical dynamic.
3) Grow connections. At the end of a session, nurture the opportunity for ongoing collaboration by making time for and encouraging synergistic participants to connect with each other.

If only the topic announcer shows up for a session, that person has several options: use the session as free time to think the issue through and record their thoughts as a contribution to the

Resources:

- 'Co-production in practice: how people with assisted living needs can help design and evolve technologies and services' — Joseph Wherton *et al* Implementation Science 2015
- 'Communication between people with schizophrenia and their medical professionals: A participatory research project.' — Schneider, B., *et al* in Qualitative Health Research, 2004.

  In this report people with schizophrenia conducted qualitative interviews with fellow schizophrenic patients. They developed and performed a reader's theatre presentation of the results and their recommendation for how they would like to be treated. Script for the theatre performance of results was written by the academic researcher based on consumer group suggestions for content and includes quotes from the interviews.
- 'Improving health care services through Experience-based Co-design' — Annette Boaz and Glenn Robert blog (i2insights.org/2016/10/20/experience-based-co-design)
- 'The Cambridge Project' — Greenfields M Buckinghamshire New University REF submission 2014.
  The `Cambridge Project' (2006) was the first research to include Gypsies/ Travellers (G/T) as interviewers, identifying their own community's service delivery needs empowering gypsy/traveller communities through collaborative participation action research
- Social Science & Medicine 75 (2012): The politics of action research: "If you don't like the way things are going, get off the bus" — Peter Nugus *et al*