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**RESEARCH IN INDUSTRY: A HUMANISTIC PERSPECTIVE**

*"If all research workers were laid end to end, no meaningful results would emerge".*

This comment was made to be shortly after I took up my present post as Research Officer with an Industrial Training Board. Moreover it was made by one who functions as gatekeeper for much of my research and with whom I must liaise closely, and in spite of the fact that previous research by the research function has variously been translated both into direct training courses which are in high demand, and into established selection and training criteria.

My first reaction was one of defensiveness. I had gained enormously from being a participant on the courses and had read up the prolonged and rigorous research which had led to their formulation. However, thinking and reading rather more around the role of the research psychologist within an industrial organisation, I realised that my defensiveness belonged to another context - one in which the dominant focus was that of being seen to contribute to a body of knowledge and only indirectly to influencing organisational change and development. The rewards for the organisational psychologist may be of a different order from those of the psychologist working within an academic context and may lie in seeing the results of her research translated into policies which make that organisation a better place in which to work. A different orientation is required by the field psychologist from the laboratory-based psychologist. This is not to suggest that the research be less rigorous but that different criteria of rigour apply. A survey of research projects and resultant policy implementation was carried out in the Netherlands by Van de Vall, Bolas and Kang (1976). They suggest that implementation was more likely to follow where the research is concerned with the process of day-to-day decision-making and intra-organisational problem-solving; where it embraced not only the diagnosis but also the design and development of solutions; where the balance lay in favour of qualitative, rather than quantitative methods and where primary rather than secondary data were sought; and where formal sociological and psychological

theories were not invoked but the results presented in such a way as to be accessible to the non-academic and statistically unsophisticated member of the organisation. The latter may take some learning!

The process of research constitutes an intervention into an organisation and is therefore a potential change agency. Change is more likely to follow upon research if its focus is jointly negotiated by the researcher and members of the organisation in response to a problem being identified **by the organisation**, and if those members likely to be affected by the process or by resultant changes, at whatever level of the organisation, are consulted throughout its course. This requires sharing of power by the researcher. Argyris (1970) proposes three primary rules for organisational intervention. These are:

- 1) To generate valid and useful information
- 2) To facilitate free and informed choice
- 3) To elicit internal commitment to the choices made

Such demands are unlikely to be onerous for the humanistically orientated researcher who will value the reciprocal and qualitative activity between herself and the organisational members. Nonetheless she has to operate within a political, economic and social reality, aspects of which she may deplore. She will be required to justify her tenets but should be prepared to promote, explicitly and implicitly, those values by which she structures her own social world, while recognising that others may not share her perceptions.

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### References

- Argyris, C. "Intervention Theory and Method: A Behavioural Science View". Reading, Mass. Addison-Wesley 1970.
- Van de Vall, M., Bolas, C., & Kang, T.S. **Applied Social Research in Industrial Organisations: An Evaluation of Functions, Theories and Methods**. J. Applied Behavioural Science (1976) 12:2.
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