

Is action research for you?¹

	Opportunities to reflect on action and act on reflection are enhanced by.....	Barriers to reflect on action and act on reflection are presented by.....	Opportunities for exchange and sharing are enhanced by.....
Practitioners and action researchers	<p>Openness to challenge and having professional assumptions questioned</p> <p>Getting out more – seeing what goes on elsewhere</p> <p>Sufficient staff autonomy and freedom to take initiative</p> <p>Individual commitment to professional development and new skills</p> <p>Explicit, conscious practice of those values espoused by the organisation</p> <p>Awareness of personal and professional frames of reference that inhibit the capacity to act in ways which are more congruent with expressed purpose and actions</p> <p>Ability to validate the significance of individual cases/stories</p> <p>Openness to intended and unintended consequences of actions</p> <p>Ability to decide on key methods and targets that suit local context and priorities</p>	<p>Restrains of roles, divisions of labour, job descriptions</p> <p>Lack of ability and skills to reflect/act critically</p> <p>Focus on delivery as the imperative</p> <p>Continued adherence to quantitative methodologies in all areas of clinical and organisational practice</p> <p>Preference and history of seeking patterns rather than puzzling</p> <p>Cynicism and lack of buy-in to wider goals</p> <p>Undermining of commitment to change by failure of organisation to practice the values it espouses</p>	<p>Ability to self-select rather than by management directive</p> <p>Personal passion, commitment and energy to process of exchange and dialogue</p> <p>Access to other people doing similar things in the same organisation and elsewhere</p> <p>Openness of boundaries of network – not a closed group</p> <p>Seeing diversity as a rich source of information for improvement</p> <p>Skills and techniques to help recognition of tacit knowledge and to identify who else might be able to use it</p> <p>Credit/reward for sharing knowledge and experience with others</p> <p>Ability to pay dual attention to personal, local concerns and the bigger picture</p> <p>Sufficient time for initiatives to run as long as energy and commitment is there – not constrained by other imperatives</p>

¹ This table is adapted from *How to Select a Suitable Occasion to Use Action Research*, Bob Williams and Robyn Bailey available at: <http://users.actrix.co.nz/bobwill/> and Table 1 Communities of Practice in Bate, S. P. and Robert, G (2002) op cit.

	Opportunities to reflect on action and act on reflection are enhanced by.....	Barriers to reflect on action and act on reflection are presented by.....	Opportunities for exchange and sharing are enhanced by.....
Service Users	<p>Organisational and professional respect for experience of service users</p> <p>Recognition of validity of qualitative evidence by all parties</p> <p>Confidence that views are important, will be heard and acted on</p> <p>Feedback on what happens to evidence provided by service users</p>	<p>Tokenism and undervaluing or rejection of perspectives</p> <p>Entrenched professional agendas and power dynamics</p> <p>Continued adherence to quantitative methodologies in all areas of clinical and organisational practice</p> <p>Patient care and professional interests seen as in conflict</p>	<p>Openness and ability to listen by the organisation</p> <p>Preparedness of professionals to give up some of their power in order to learn</p>
Task/situation/problem that is the focus	<p>High importance of the situation or task to those most centrally involved</p> <p>Clear purpose for inquiry</p> <p>Strong imperative for the issue to be resolved creatively</p> <p>Solutions not necessarily clear cut – challenging, but not high risk</p> <p>Access to formal evidence of effectiveness where desired</p>	<p>A focus on urgent tasks, rather than important ones</p> <p>No imperative to act any differently</p> <p>Lack of adequate skills, resources, time and tools</p> <p>Inability to access or understand formal evidence</p>	<p>Ability to work collaboratively</p> <p>Attention to process as well as outcomes</p> <p>Ability to ask questions, rather than fix problem or give advice</p> <p>Knowing what to do with the 'best' practice you hear about</p>
Organisational and wider environment	<p>Strong organisational expression of values which support learning</p> <p>Strategic overview of the range of interventions to support learning from practice</p> <p>Awareness of organisational frames of reference that inhibit capacities to act in ways more congruent with expressed</p>	<p>The 'blame' culture; lack of focus on learning from mistakes</p> <p>Failure to credit successes</p> <p>Pressure for short term solutions</p> <p>Limited to reactive response to crises, audit and managerial-led service improvement initiatives</p>	<p>Skills of facilitation and mentoring available</p> <p>More strategic and proactive attitude to networking - brokering meetings, presentations or by hosting visits</p> <p>Opportunities for extended social contact and face to face working</p>

	<p>purpose and actions</p> <p>Permissive management culture - encouragement of reasonable risk taking</p> <p>Modelling of reflective practice by managers</p> <p>Legitimising feedback of all kinds – compliments, comments and complaints</p> <p>Building on corporate existing knowledge</p> <p>Working with the energy and commitment of staff</p> <p>Encouragement of professional development</p> <p>Nurturing of leadership skills at all levels of the organisation</p> <p>Positive culture of evaluation</p>	<p>Organisational history and values that undermine quality improvements</p> <p>Preference for forgetting – ‘organisational dementia’</p> <p>Lack of trust and poor relationships</p>	<p>Informal creative opportunities for exchange</p> <p>Development of systems thinking - encouragement to work across boundaries and outwith traditional silos</p> <p>Multiple ways of communicating across boundaries and networks – greater ‘interactivity’ or ‘two-wayness’ between participants</p> <p>Interest in locally contextualised <u>and</u> wider systemic learning</p>
--	--	---	--

For more information: *The improvement of public sector delivery: supporting evidence based practice through action research*, Scottish Executive, Social Research Knowledge Transfer, 2005. Report available at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/>