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|  | **Action Theory** | **Action Research** | **Action Science** | **Comments** |
| **Definition** | Action theory is concerned with “discovering the reasons for action” and “also the norms, rules, and practices that make action intelligible, as well as the constitutive meanings that underlie them” from the point of view of the social actor.  (White, p. 107) | “The action research model focuses on planned change as a cyclical process in which initial research about the organization provides information to guide subsequent action. Then, the results of the action are assessed to provide further information to guide further action, and so on. This iterative cycle of research and action involves considerable collaboration between organization members and organizational development practitioners.” (Cummings & Worley, p. 27-28) | “…Action Science …is an approach to planned change [that] emphasizes the need for organization members in learning about their organization and how to change it.” (Cummings & Worley, p. 30)  Action Science is concerned with organizational learning. (White, p. 118) | “In brief, action theory differs from explanatory research in three fundamental ways: (1) it draws a distinction between action and behavior, focusing on the interpretation of intentional action rather than the explanation of caused behavior. (2) It focuses on the meaning of norms, values, intentions, rules, and practices for the actor, not for the explanatory researcher…(3) It seeks to help social actors define their own situation and what of changing it… (White, p. 107-108) |
| **Key Elements** | Action- “conscious and intentional doings”  “Actions have specific meaningful aim or intent”  Behaviors- “something that happens”  “behavior is thought to be caused”  (White, p. 106) | “Practical intent”  “Aims to solve a real problem.”  “Applied research”  “Intervene in a situation, learn about it, and change it through the participation of those whit something at stake in the outcome.” (Carnevale, p. 74) | Argyris and Schon (1974) two modes of organizational behavior:  Single-loop learning- instrumental reasoning and technical rationality  Double-loop learning-  Situational learning and critical reasoning  Schon (1983)- problem solving vs. problem setting.  (White, p. 120 – 121) | “Action theory is an intentionalist science; explanatory behavioralism is a causal science.” (White, p. 106) |

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| **Rationale** | “The evaluation of social situations is the point of any action theory, which strives to help actors understand their situations in a different light and to make value judgments about whether or not their situations should be changed.” (White, p. 142) | “The central objective of action research is to expedite the diagnosis of organizational problems and to encourage strategies that equip organizational members to learn how to cope with their own difficulties. ” (Carnevale, p. 1) | “Schon’s (1983) description of reflection-in-action… is clearly interpretative and critical and conversational. The practitioner strives to understand the situation”- presumably as a means to learn, teach, and influence others.  (White, p. 123) |  |
| **Process** | Action theory seeks to understand the meanings and intentions “social actors attach to action variables, their own actions, and those of others” from the actors’ own point of view. (White, p. 141)    Significance is determined by discerning the critical judgment of the actors. (White, p. 142) | 1. Problem identification 2. Consultation with behavioral science expert 3. Data gathering/ preliminary diagnosis 4. Feedback to client or group 5. Joint diagnosis of the problem 6. Joint action planning 7. Action 8. Data gathering after action | “Schon (1983) gives many examples of what he calls the practitioner’s ‘reflective conversation with the situation.’ In general terms, such conversations involve listening to what the situation has to say, making some move to alter the situation to see how it changes, reframing it in some fashion, and letting it ‘talk back’ to you. Schon describes one of those conversations as the ‘underlying process of reflection-in-action.’” (p. 102-103) (as quoted in White, p. 122) |  |
| **Foci** | Actor-centered/  Interpretive/  Critique | Technical expert/  Consultant/  Change facilitator/  Evaluator | “Reflective Practitioner”  (Schon, 1983) |  |
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| **Sources** | Carnevale, D. G. (2003). Organizational development in the public sector. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. | Cummings, T. G., & C. G. Worley, (1997). Organizational development and change (6th ed). Cincinnati, OH: South-Western College Publishing. | White, J. D. (2007). Taking language seriously: The narrative foundations of public administration research. Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press. (Winchell, fall 2010) |  |