Action research in the HRM field: A critical perspective

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ABSTRACT:
This research examines the usage rate of the action research method in Human Resource Management. To see whether the HRM field is using action research, a literature study has been conducted. A clear finding from this literature research is that the Human Resource Management field hardly uses the action research methodology in comparison to other disciplines such as the information systems and education. To conduct action research in the HRM field, guidelines and principles are written to help the researcher to plan and implement the change project.

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Keywords

Human Resource Management, action research, quantitative research method, literature study

1. INTRODUCTION

Action research has a long history and it is usually divided in two stages, the first period covers the 1920s until the 1950s. This stage shows how action research originated in the United States where, from the 1920s onwards, there was a growing interest in the application of scientific methods to the study of social and educational problems (Carr, 2006). Action research was founded by Kurt Lewin in the 1940s. His first paper "action research and minority problems" was published in 1946 (Lewin, 1946). He believed that the motivation to change was strongly related to action, and that people are more likely to adopt new ways to do things if they actively take part in the decision making process. Lewin made the original formulation of action research which stated; "consisted analysis, fact-finding, conceptualisation, planning, execution, more fact-finding or evaluation; and then a repetition of this whole circle of activities; indeed a spiral of circles" (Dickens et al., 1999, p.128).

In the United Kingdom, the second stage of the historical evolution of action research started in the early 1970s (Carr, 2006). At this point, another version of the action research as known by Lewin appeared. Brydon-Miller et al. (2003) wrote that, "action research goes beyond the notion that theory can inform practice, to a recognition that theory can and should be generated through practice, and that theory is really only useful insofar as it is put in the service of a practice focused and achieving positive social change" (p. 15).

Forward today action research is a widely used method in different academic fields. For example, information systems researchers found it hard to make their research practical, and therefore turned their attention to the action research as a good solution when a researcher is involved in the change process and can learn from the changes that he/she is implementing (Baskerville et al., 1996).Action research is also a good method to adopt in organizations which are operating in the social networking space face, a particularly dynamic and uncertain environment. An action researcher can get access to the organization because he/she does not have a theory on forehand that must be applied to do the research. This is a benefit for the action research because the research question and the research approach can be tailored along the way (Zhuang et al., 2015). Another reason is connected to the observation that at the moment there are a lot of emerging markets all over the world, it is hard for organizations in such markets to conduct a traditional research approach because most of the time it is not contributing to the knowledge the organization needs to know to survive in a fast-growing emerging market. Organizations in an emerging market environment recognized the usefulness of partnering with external experts who might be able to help them solve the challenges Therefore action research is a good method to apply in this field (Zhuang et al., 2015).

Action research has a lot of advantages such as the willingness of action researchers to understand the complexity of local situations; for the knowledge people will get in the processes of everyday life, which it makes impossible for the researcher to ignore what people think and want.

"From this point of view, based on both democratic and empirical principles, action research moves on to the affirmation that action research is much more able to produce 'valid' results than ordinary or conventional social science. Action research projects test knowledge in action and those who do the testing are the interested parties for whom a base result is a personal problem" (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003, p.25).

Action research is a good method to use within a community when researchers want to understand the problem and are willing to take action with the people from the specific community. The researcher is taking part in the research that will be carried out, so there is not a threat towards the people who are taking part in the research. It is logical to expect that the HRM, that "involves management decisions related to policies and practices that together shape the employment relationship and are aimed at achieving individual, organizational and societal goals" (Boselie, 2010, p. 14). For involving an action researcher to make changes within the company it is important that the employees and management have faith in the action researcher to carry out the change. Action involves research, systematic critical reflection and action. To understand, evaluate and change something in real life practice, action is undertaken. For Human Resource Management it is useful to apply this form of research. It is a practical research method, whereby the employees on the bases of teaching and learning are gathering data that the researcher can use for interpreting a change. After interpreting a change, the change is critically reflected by reviewing the actions which has been undertaken by the employees of the organization and planning future actions to sustain the change (Costello, 2003). Therefore, we claim that action research can advance the HRM scholarly studies with the research question: *What is the state of action research within Human Resource Management and what are the guidelines to use it?*

The thesis is organized as following: different types of action research and their (dis)advantages; research method; guidelines for HRM action research; principles for action research and as last the discussion and conclusion are given.

2. DIFFERENT TYPES OF ACTION RESEARCH

The literature shows five main types of action research that are still used, namely diagnostic action research, participant action research, empirical action research, experimental action research and canonical action research. Each type of action research is following the same steps, these steps were first classified by Lewin. His model consists of cycles of planning, acting, observing, reflecting or evaluating and then taking further action (Dickens, et al. 1999).
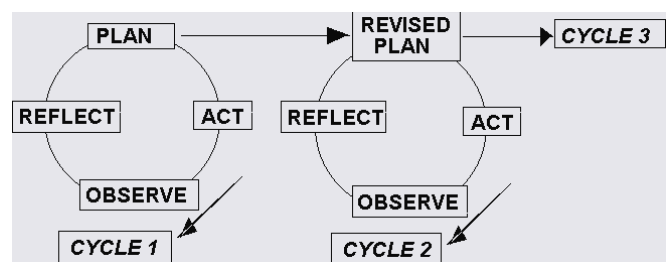

Figure 1 Action research Model Kurt Lewin (adopted from *http://www.informationr.net)*

Five types of AR exist, Glenn Adelman (1993) has written about four types of action research namely; diagnostic action research, participatory action research, empirical action research and experimental action research. Another type of action research is canonical action research presented by Davison et al., 2004. Below main characteristics of five types of action research are presented.

1. Diagnostic action research: the researcher is acting as a change agent. He/she would intervene in the

existing situation and determine what the problem is. After the researcher diagnosed the problem, he/she would recommend solutions to fix the problem. Diagnostic action research is not a widely used method, although it is a feasible, effective and acceptable method for people who are involved in the change process.

2. Participatory action research: people who are undergoing the action are participating actively in the change process. It is important that they are involved in the change process from the right beginning. The participants will realise earlier that the change that is being made is of great importance, not only for the company but also for their own 'ego investment'. This type of action research provides examples for other communities, that is why it is one of the most useful forms of action research in particular situations.

3. Empirical action research: was observed in day-to-day work, ideally the research would be conducted among a succession of similar groups. The weakness of empirical action research is that the conclusions were drawn from a single group or from several groups which were differing in numerous ways, without any test controls. Despite this infirmity, empirical action research could lead to the gradual development of generally valid principles.

4. Experimental action research: makes use of a controlled study that identifies the effectiveness of various techniques in nearly identical social situations. This variety of action research was the one with the most potential to claim scientific knowledge.

It is the most difficult form of action research to carry out, but if the research was carried out among favourable circumstances it could definitely test specific hypothesis.

5. Canonical action research: is a unique form of action research, repetitious, strict and collaborative. Canonical action research involves a focus on both the organizational development and the generation of knowledge. The three characteristics of CAR are: involvement of the cyclic process of interventions that are conducted within the change process can be seen as the characteristic repetitious; the researcher can repeat the cycles of activities so they make a good picture of the problem situation and at the same time the researcher can move closer to a solution of this problem; the activities that are being planned to come to a solution of the problem should be relevant to the problem at that specific moment; the researcher and the clients of the organization work together in roles that are culturally appropriate given the particular circumstances of the specific problem.

Five different types of action research with the key points are illustrated in Table 1.

Type of action research	Main characteristics	How it is used	Where it is used
Diagnostic AR	Designing a needed plan of action.	Intervene in existing situation → diagnose the problem → recommend solutions to the problem.	Concluding from the literature, this type of action research is not being used anymore (Adelman, 1993).
Participatory AR	Involving the residents of the affected community in the research process.	Involving residents in the change process from the beginning → ego investment → more easily accepting and implementing the change.	It can be used in specific situations, or in general to find a solution for a cultural problem.
Empirical AR	Observing a small group in day-to-day work.	Repetitive observations of a group → drawing conclusions and generalize them.	Gradual development of generally valid principles.
Experimental AR	Making use of a controlled study.	Making a hypothesis → doing a controlled study to identify the effectiveness of different techniques in nearly identical social situations → testing the hypothesis.	Not being used often, it is the most difficult form to carry out.
Canonical AR	Repetitious, strict and collaborative.	Making use of the cyclic processes of interventions, and keeping in mind the strictness of canonical action research and the collaborative motive of the clients and researcher.	Being used within companies.

Table 1 Different forms of action research

2.1 Benefits of action research

Action research has a few benefits in comparison to traditional empirical research. One of the most important benefits of action research is a benefit for the researcher. He or she has more access to the organization which will be the subject of the management research. For data collecting, an action researcher should dive into the organization, whereby the researcher will be provided with a more comprehensive and representative view of the organization and the management issue that he/she has to deal with. Because of this in-depth view of an organization, the overall quality of the results, depth of meaningful insights and contributions to scientific knowledge should be higher on average for action research over traditional research (Zhang et al., 2015). All the new insights of an organization and the different topics that are available to do action research on can lead to a better theory building and

testing when action research principles are applied (Zhang et al., 2015).

There is another benefit action research is credited for: it has the ability to make a more direct link between the study the researcher and the outcomes that matter from the organization's perspective. For the organization it is beneficial to participate in an action research project while action research is a multilevel research. It uses team-, unit-, and/or organization-level outcomes measures that reflect the actual business processes and objectives, and not solely survey-based measurements of some employees of the organization. For both the researcher and the organization, matching all the data from different disciplines is a value-add. It gives a brighter picture of the people in the organization, who they are, what their backgrounds are and the experiences they have with the organization they are working for (Zhang et al., 2015).

This last benefit, the multilevel view, is not often conducted in traditional research, but it is of great importance to understand all the layers within an organization and to get the best out of everyone working for that organization. It analyses the behaviour of employees at different levels in the organization, which will lead to a better understanding of their feelings against a change process.

2.2 Disadvantages of action research

Action research is not a method that only has advantages; it also has a few disadvantages. First of all, it is a time consuming research method. A researcher first needs to understand what the problem is within an organization. This means that the researcher spends some time in the organization before he/she finds out what should be changed. After the problem is recognized, a change problem must be implemented which will be followed by checks to see whether the problem is solved in the right way. If this is not the case, the process cycle needs to be changed wherefore the problem can be challenged in another way. This whole process can take up a few months, but it can also last for more than a year. After the researcher has spent some time in the organization, it is essential for the change agent that he/she will build a good relationship with the clients. All changes that are implemented during the whole process lean on the trustiness of the people towards the researcher and the other way around. Therefore the researcher should spend a lot of time with his clients to see what their opinion is about the change that will take place. Also, it is of great importance for the researcher that he/she can trust the clients, that they will do what he expects from them during the whole process.

Canonical action research is a collaborative and co-operative process whereby it is important not to dive into individualism as this will destroy the important group bonding. The values, beliefs and intentions of the employees are important subjects for the researcher where he/she has to deal with in the collaboration of the employees. They need to get the feeling that they are participating in the whole process and not that they are being used as just research objects (Davison, 2004).

Another disadvantage of action research is the problem that the researcher needs to get as close to action as he/she can. This means that he must identify himself with the employees of the organization. But this is at the same time the pitfall of the researcher, he must avoid 'going native'. There must be a good balance between the involvement of the researcher in the project and the distance he/she keeps to the employees (Davison, 2004).

To reduce on the disadvantages and build on advantages of action research for Human Resource Management it is important that HRM makes use of a form of action research that deals with the feelings of people and to make sure that the employees of an organization are part of the change process. This is the case in the following two types of action research: participatory action research and canonical action research.

2.3 The 'new' form of action research

Participatory action research, in short PAR, is a form of action research whereby people are involved in the participation and action of the change that will take place within an organization. The people who are involved in the change process can develop, strengthen and polish their resources to get the best out of the changes that are being made. One of the common ideas of participatory action research is that research and action must be done 'with' people and not 'on' or 'for' people, therefore the participants are co-researchers in the whole process. The expertise of the participants will be added to the expertise of the researcher. This will lead to a better know-how for the researcher and the participants of the problem and the change that will be implemented (Montero, 2000).

There are different approaches for the relationship between research and action within PAR. Some approaches state that first research must be done before taking action, whereas other approaches promote to take action immediately and then collecting data to evaluate the impact of the change (Mordock et al., 2001). Not only the approaches to take action before or after doing in-depth research are different in typical situation, also the participation aspect in participatory action research can be expressed in different steps, for example, the selection or choice of the object/problem of research; the participation in the decision-making strategies; how long a participant will participate in the intervention (Montero, 2000).

Canonical action research, also known as CAR, gives a clear view about real-life problems and tries to improve organizational performance by combining scholarly observations with practical interventions (Davison et al., 2012).

Canonical action research can be used in the context of an integrative process, as it complements a quality system. It can also be said that canonical action research is the backbone of rigorous and relevant action in an integrative model. For this backbone it is essential that integrative learning will be applied. Integrative learning focuses on different things like: the binding of theory; research and development in integrative action; the evaluation of action within an innovative system (Pirinen, 2009).

The form of action research that will be used in the rest of this article is a combination of participative action research and canonical action research. This form of action research includes the participative aspect of participative action research. Canonical action research has two aspects that are important to me to include: the clear view of the problems that occur within an organization and the practical interventions that will be implemented in a participative way (the aspect of PAR) what helps to solve the problem. It will be called action research in this thesis.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

To underpin my research, I have carried out a literature study in different Human Resource Management journals. I based my research on five international peer-refereed journals that are expected to represent main trends in HRM academic studies: Human Resource Management (HRM), Human Resource Management Journal (HRMJ), The International Journal of Human Resource Management (TIJoHRM), Human Resource Management Review (HRMR) and Action Research.

For this research it is essential to know to what extent the action research has been used in the Human Resource Management

field. I have searched through all articles in the above mentioned journals, published in the period between 2004 and 2015, mounting in 3030 articles in total.

In table 2 you find an overview of the different journals, bibliographical data, and amount of articles per year (*) and the amount of articles written about action research in Human Resource Management (**). Out of 3030 articles published over the years 2004 until March 2015, only nine articles are written about action research in HRM. The Human Resource Management journals have published 2769 articles in total, only nine of them were about action research. The Action Research journal has published 261 articles, none of them were about Human Resource Management. In the next section the nine articles will be analyzed.

Year / Journal	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	
HRM	24 *	39	29	31	39	43	39	32	39	42	45	27	
	0 **	0	0	*1*	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	*1*	
HRMJ	20	19	20	22	24	23	25	25	25	25	32	16	
	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
TIJoHRM	81	126	108	117	131	133	146	210	230	212	155	90	
	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	*1*	*2*	*3*	0	0	
HRMR	24	18	36	33	23	26	30	31	26	31	25	22	
	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Action Research	22	28	30	23	22	23	22	21	21	22	22	5	
	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Total	171	230	223	226	239	248	262	319	341	332	279	160	**3030**
	1	0	0	*1*	0	0	0	*1*	*2*	*3*	0	*1*	**9**

Table 2 Overview of HRM journals and their publications on Action Research

* articles published in the specific year
** articles published on action research in HRM

3.1 HRM studies with the action research methodology

To get a better insight in the use of action research in human resource management journals, I analyzed the nine articles which are using action research as a method, along six criteria: research question, reasons for using action research as mentioned by the authors, empirical setting, main findings, advantages and limitations as observed and reported by the authors, and my own conclusion about the type of action research conducted in the subjected study (Appendix 1).

Title article	Research question/goal	Reasons for using action research	Empirical setting	Findings	Advantages/ limitations of action research in a particular study	Type of action research used
Briefing-debriefing: using a reflexive organizational learning model from the military to enhance the performance of surgical teams (*Vashdi et al., 2007*)	To examine the applicability and implications of the briefing-debriefing system (a team-learning model) from IAF to hospital surgical departments in Israel.	By applying an action research framework it will be more easy to identify obstacles and benefits of the briefing-debriefing (shortened as B-DB) system for a successful adoption in hospitals. And maybe get some propositions from the IAF or the surgeons themselves to apply the briefing-debriefing system.	Observations by the researchers of the people from the IAF and the people in a surgery room. Planning four meetings with the IAF and the people from the surgery room, so that the people from the hospital got to know what the plan was of the researchers. After these meetings the people from the hospital tried to apply the B-DB system in their own way, in a way which they can work with. In total this whole implementation process has taken up to three months.	The findings of the article are that the people who are working in a surgery room have come to three proposition which they (the people in a surgery room) can work with 1. problems that occurred in a surgery at T1 will be improved when the next surgery is done at T2. 2. Translating taken-for-granted procedures in more specific procedures that can be applied for subsequent surgeries. And searching for the common, system-level roots of recurring problems and translating these results in a re-specification of systems and frameworks for the surgical goals. 3. the quality of surgical teams will depend on the degree to which surgical team members share a common sense of the importance of inquiry, transparency and accountability in their day-to-day based interactions (Vashdi et al., 2007).	<u>Limitations:</u> There is no evidence that it will work in other hospitals too, because it is only tested in Israeli hospitals. Also there has not been a post-measurement so it is not sure if it the B-DB system really is implemented. <u>Advantages:</u> there is more transparency , self-responsibility and more self-reflection among the people whom are involved at a surgery (nurses, anaesthetics, surgeons etc.)	Participative action research
Move your research from the ivy tower to the board room: a primer on action research for academics, consultants and business executives (*Zhang et al., 2015*)	"To bolster the case for doing action research led by both external and internal researchers, and to provide some guidance on how to carry it out."(Zhang et al., 2015 p. 152).	In the case-study example at page 165 until 169, each aspect of the action research process will be described that has been explained earlier in the article.	"The genesis for the research was a request from the company to the Center for Effective Organizations at the University of Southern California for help evaluating the design and impact of a managerial competency system."(Zhuang et al. p. 165). After the action researcher and the company agreed on the subject, the researcher started extensive site interviews with both the participants in the competency system and with the local and corporate leadership. Not only to get access to the company and to conduct the study but also for collecting the interview data to get insights regarding the link between the competency system and business impact an action research approach was	The best way to use action research is in combination with a traditional research approach. A combination of both has the greatest potential to improve theory development and testing and to improve the decision making of organizations. Action research gives also new insights in the use of the already known management research and the usefulness of that research for organizations. Another finding for the use of action research in organizations is that because of the use of internal and external sources, the researcher can build a multivariate model that gives a more comprehensive and	<u>Limitations:</u> Because of the opportunity cost of employees' time, an action researcher has less access to the organization unless there is a business need that has to be addressed. <u>Advantages:</u> "The researcher has increased access to organizations that are the subject of management research." (Zhang et al., 2015 p. 153). Another benefit of applying action research is that the outcomes from the research study or more linked to the	A combination of participative action research and a traditional research approach, such as a case-study.

			key to gather these information. The surveys could only be held if the action researcher included some specific questions the organization wanted to know. These question were not relevant for the researcher, but if he/she did not include them, he/she was not allowed to held the surveys. The archival data that the researcher searched through, "revealed critical details about the competency system that highlighted its unique design and the value of the ratings for testing a causal link between competencies and performance" (Zhuang et al., 2015 p. 166). The findings of the interviews, surveys and the archival data give the right information for the multivariate models that were the core part of the analysis for the research. After all the information has been collected the researcher makes a feedback report for the organization and shows the conclusion of his/her research via a PowerPoint presentation.	actionable set of findings that can be used to support and improve organizational performance (Zhuang et al., 2015). Last but not least, there is a win-win situation whereby scientific knowledge is expanded and at the same time this knowledge is put into action. So the researcher knows directly if his/her findings are correct.	perspective of the organization while organizational stakeholders are included in the process.	
Organizational cases on behaviour-based safety (BBS) in India (*Kaila, 2011*)	Through BBS training interventions among multinational organizations in India, the observers try to create a safe work environment. Action research is a part of this research.	In this research, action research has been used by the observing the participants whom are undergoing the BBS process. The observers were asked to identify the number of safe/unsafe behaviours and unsafe conditions of the workers. Most of the time the observers were people from the plant who were trained to do the observations of their co-workers.	The study has been carried out over a time period of 12 years, the research has been done among 64 organizations in different working fields such as: petroleum, engineering, automobile, cement, power, chemical and pharmaceutical. To get enough observers to identify the safe/unsafe behaviours and the unsafe conditions an employee faces, some employees were trained to be an observer. In other words, the observer observes their co-workers.	There is a correlation between the amount of observations and the percentage of risk reduction in an organization. More observations will lead to a higher percentage of risk reduction. Feedback on the behaviour of the observed people will lead to a more safe behaviour, the feedback should be anonymous while the people who are being observed will then be more open for their failures. It is also important to give the same feedback to their supervisors, so that they can change some unsafe working conditions.	BBS interventions help to give a rise in the number of safe behaviours and a decline in the number of unsafe behaviours. Besides that, a BBS training also reduces the number of unsafe conditions in the organization (Kaila, 2011).	Participative action research in a longitudinal field observation study.
Becoming empowered: organization change in a telecom company (*Styhre, 2007*)	"Is it adequate to say that the Good Workplace programme at Alpha is aiming at empowering its employees?" (Styhre, 2007, p. 1457).	The action researchers, in the text called the academic researchers, are participating in the top management team meetings and to share their reflections on the progress and the potential threats and concerns for the Good Workplace	The research that has been carried out is a longitudinal study which lasted for two and half years within one company. This type of research gave a more in-depth understanding of the organization. For the change in the organization Alpha, four components of the Good Workplace were important to implement the change. The components	Empowerment is not a quick fix method, it is a long term commitment to get new organizational cultures and attitudes as well as shop floor practices. "The study of the Good Workplace programme suggests that all empowerment programmes include the enactment of new organizational ideals and practices that will affect the long-term	Advantages: The good workplace at Alpha helps to establish new shop floor relationships and to get another view of the conventional wisdom and justified beliefs in management practices. A second advantage of the good workplace programme at	For this study they have chosen for a combination of action research and ethnography.

			project (Styhre, 2007).	are: Work environment; Distributed decision-making; Open-minded culture; The egalitarian outline of Alpha. To put the model in work, Alpha undergoes three phases. The first phase of the Good Workplace was characterized by making/conceptualizing a coherent model, with all the values and objectives of the top management are included. During the second phase, the model from the first phase was implemented at Alpha and becomes part of the daily life at the plant. The last phase is the evaluation phase, here it became clear that all the participants in the Good Workplace gave their full support to this new method, but because of the financial and economic conditions that occurred during the second phase, when implementing the Good Workplace, their support was sometimes lacking.	perspective of the organization." (Styhre, 2007, p. 1459).	Alpha shows that in the long-term, trust, entrepreneurship and meaningful work assignments leads to a better competitive position for the organization.	
Can leadership branding work in theory and practice to resolve the integration-responsiveness problems facing multinational enterprises? (*Hodges et al., 2012*)	"Can, how and what conditions does leadership branding work in theory and practice to address the integration-responsiveness issue in MNEs?" (Hodges et al., 2012, p. 3795).	Action research is used in this study because it agrees with the social constructionist perspective of data collection and analysis, focusing on how actors interpret and enact their definitions of reality.	The process of action research in this study: In this project four stages will be followed during the process, the first stage is the data collection stage, there are two manners of data collections interviews and online questionnaires. The second and third stages involved a series of workshops, to get the same view on leadership among the leaders across the company. The fourth stage involved an evaluation of the leadership branding program.	"Our reflections on the case data cause us to conclude that the decision to undertake action research through survey feedback establish the need for and nature of the leadership brand was critical in signalling and establishing a more dialogical relationship between the Executive Board and the operating company leaders."	Limitations: There was not an overall acceptance of the change which might have been occurred because of the initial top-down process. This has led to confusion among the participants.	A case study using an action research approach.
Measuring the return on investment in international assignment: an action research approach (*Doherty et al., 2012*)	"Given the apparent complexity of measuring ROI in IAs, this article examines the factors impacting the measurement of ROI and explores how organizations attempt to assess ROI." (Doherty et al., 2012, p. 3436).	This article takes an action research approach because it will overcome the issues of buy-in, the challenge of the dynamic nature of ROI and the important impact of contextual factors on measurement (Doherty et al., 2012).	In this research there is active engagement with practitioners. This will extend the knowledge of the researcher of the processes and practices that will be conducted during the research. The first step in the data collection of the research was a discussion with the steering committee, who contributed to the formulation of the aims of the research. There was a high degree of involvement between the research team and the companies. The companies which were chosen to be in the sample, were only the companies that agreed to the methodological approach. After the companies agreed to take part in the research, the research team applied a	"This study indicates that is possible for corporate executives to construct an evidence-based business case for expatriation by attributing a value of performance improvement, higher retention of staff, and promotions, and contrasting these with investment data."(Doherty et al., 2012 p. 3448).	Limitations: The sample size of the participating organizations was very small, only nine organizations. It is not sure form this research if the findings will reflect a general pattern. Advantages: This research has given a higher quality of the data that has been used because of the in-depth research the researchers did.	Participative action research

			series of metrics, necessary for defining meaningful measures. Also the researchers had discussion and consultation with organizational experts to get data regarding both expatriates and non-expatriated peers (Doherty et al., 2012).			
Turnaround user acceptance in the context of HR self-service technology adoption: an action research approach (*Huang et al., 2012*)	"The objective of this research is to develop an interpretive framework of user acceptance in the context of HR self-service adaptation by addressing the research question of 'How HR can drive and influence users' acceptance within the context of HR self-service technology adaptation in an organisation?'" (Huang et al., 2012, p. 623).	The reason for action research in this case is that there are theoretical shortfalls for answering the research question. It is therefore essential to know the user's perception towards the new technology and how their perceptions can be influenced and reshaped.	To know what the perceptions of the users are towards the use of self-service technology the researchers made the action research spiral. This spiral shows the driving for acceptance and adaptation of HR self-service technology. It consist of three cycles, the first cycle is about the acceptation of the HR self-service technology, an HR self-service 'prototype' is developed to encourage end user debate and feedback (Huang et al, 2012). The second cycle is about testing the prototype by the target audiences and shows the functionality and management information that is available in the new portal. The last and third cycle is about the 'go live' stage. The prototype that was developed in the first stage and showed to the target audience in the second stage is now going viral. This cycle evaluates the effectiveness of the programme and tests this through the use of questionnaires.	This study has contributed to new theoretical and empirical contributions. To answer the research question, it is important that the transactional aspect of practice is shifted from the HR function to the users.	<u>Advantages</u>: Through the use of action research, the participants felt that their voices were being heard better. They were involved in the decision making process which led to a greater willingness of the participants. Instead of the use of top-bottom communication where no room is for discussion. <u>Limitation</u>: there need to be done more research on this subject while the this study only has focused on one typical case organizations.	"A participatory, problem-solving and intervention-driven research approach." (Huang et al., 2012, p. 623).
Enabling organizational cultural change using systemic strategic human resource management – a longitudinal case study (*Molineux, 2012*)	"Can the implementation of a systemically designed strategic human resource management intervention have a positive and sustained impact on an organization's culture?" (Molineux, 2012, p. 1591).	This type of study can offer insights into underlying organizational processes, policies and culture. That is why a longitudinal single case study with a major action research project is adopted.	The research team will design and implement projects, the projects were chosen for their potential to initiate change to systemic structure. The projects are held over 18 months, each project will last for 3 months, so 6 times the research will follow the action research cycle. After these 18 months, the change model has been designed by the team. "This model represents a process for integrating SHRM with cultural change utilizing a systemic approach." (Molineux, 2012, p. 1599). To collect more date, the researchers held surveys among staff, this gave good insights in the pre-existing culture, the post-change culture and the recent culture. Another way the researchers collect data was the use of structured interviews and subsequent interviews.	"The contention that the implementation of a systemically designed SHRM intervention can have a positive and sustained impact on an organization's culture is confirmed in relations to this particular case study." (Molineux, 2012, p. 1607).	<u>Limitations</u>: This research is a single case study design, there is not enough evidence that this research can be applied in another setting too. <u>Advantages</u>: Because of the use of action research it can be said that there is a sustainable improvement. This is only because of the long-term commitment between the researcher and the company.	This is a longitudinal single case study based on a major action research project.

Human resource development for inclusive procurement by intermediation: a situated learning theory application (Theodorakopoulus et al., 2013)	For this research there are three research questions posited: "1: How can we build a strong community of practice of CPOs, whit a healthy identity, within which CPOs can develop competences related to inclusive procurement? 2: How should we go about interfacing communities of practice of CPOs and EMBOs so that the latter expand their identities and develop the supply competences needed to access large procurement systems? 3: How should power relations in this kind of intermediation be handled, in order to optimise HRD for inclusive procurement?" (Theodorakopouluos et al., 2013, pp. 2327).	The reason for this research to use action research was to bringing about change and advancing knowledge.	Four investigators did the data analysis and the interpretation of the data, they also sought for the feedback the original informants gave. The programme consist of two components, the first component of the programme are the so called steering group meetings. These are workshops with CPOs and EMBOs participants. Hereby examines the research team all kind of documents that are submitted by the participants, such as self-assessment forms, documents that referred to goals, reports on their progress (Theodorakopoulos et al., 2013). A more valuable source for data came from the diaries, field notes and minutes that were written by participants about their development of competences which relates to inclusive procurement. After these workshops the participants had to fill in observation and feedback questionnaires, these were completed immediately after the events. The question were a basis of the usefulness of the workshops for their development and in what ways.	The findings from this research can be displayed by answering the research questions: "1: The extent to which CPOs develop competences relating to inclusive procurement is predicated on intra-organisational factors that influence the effectiveness of their identity. Mainly, it depends on the degree to which senior management, organisational culture and other functions systematically support inclusive procurement policies and practices. 2: It is submitted that developing EMBOs' supply competences involves creating boundary spaces, where CPOs' messages can be understood by EMBOs, enabling coordination and transparency in SLT terms. 3:Power relations within organisations of CPOs, and especially the degree to which senior management supports inclusive procurement efforts, determine the extent to which CPOs develop competences relating to inclusive procurement " (Theodorakopouluos et al., 2013, pp. 2335).	<u>Advantages</u>: The research that has been carried out and the lessons drawn from this research can be used in other intermediation contexts.	A longitudinal action research

Table 3 Overview of research findings in the HRM action research, 2004 - 2015

As follows from the table, action research goes beyond the theoretical shortfalls for answering the research question. It gives a more in-depth view of what is going on in the organization. Because the action researchers are participating in the (top) management meetings, they can easily share their reflections on the progress of the change and potential threats that the organization faces. Further, the findings of the nine articles are very dispersed. The reason is that the research has been carried out in specific disciplines and all the findings are different from each other. Limitations: For most action researches performed in the articles, it is not sure if the findings will reflect a general pattern. As the articles show, the self-responsibility of employees and self-reflection grows because they have to evaluate themselves in the change process. The data that is conducted is of a higher quality because of the in-depth research the researchers did. From the analysis of the articles, action research is used in combination with a (longitudinal) case study.

4. GUIDELINES FOR HRM ACTION RESEARCH

In conducting an action research it is necessary to follow a few steps in the decision making. The first step in doing action research is finding an overlapping interest between the organization and the action researcher. This is of great importance while the research that will be done by the action researcher must be within his/her interest and the research must be beneficial for the company. The beneficial component for the company includes the strategic issues the organization faces both real and imagined. The intersection must be defined by the researcher and approved by the organization. After the research goal has been defined, the researcher will hold interviews and find focus groups, which are key part of an action research process. The use of interviews and focus groups are especially used to sharpen the research topic and often are used for coding and content analysis (Zhuang et al., 2015). In addition, it is also useful for an action researcher to see how the results from the study are being received by the organization. The following step in the action research process can be performing surveys. This is not always the case, because it is time consuming and it will nog always give the researcher more information. An action researcher will only outset a survey if it is valuable for the organization. Another way for an action researcher to gather data is using archival data. This is the last step of an action research approach before jumping to the results and a report. Archival data is data that first was not collected by the researcher; it is data that the organization made available for the researcher to use. Because an action researcher has greater access to internal stakeholders than a traditional researcher. This access to internal stakeholders is a lead to traditional researchers while the internal stakeholder have deeper knowledge of the data's meaning and can give the action researcher an advantage. After the action researcher has gathered all the data he/she needs to answer the research goal that was made in the first step, the researcher will make a report with the results. The researcher will make feedback reports for the organization; this is a unique way of presenting the results to an organization. In traditional research it is not common to make reports while the results are written for a scientific research audience. (Zhuang et al., 2015) For an action researcher the way he/she presents the feedback reports is essential to the adaptation of the feedback by the organization and their employees. It is necessary that the outcomes of the research are written and visualized in an easy way, just like a consulting company will present their findings to an organization.

To schematically illustrate the guidelines for HRM action research I put them in six steps:

1. Finding an overlapping interest between the researcher and the organization and define the research goal.

2. The researcher holds interviews and find the focus group.

3. Performing surveys, this step is not always the case. The researcher will only carry surveys if it is valuable for the organization.

4. Using archival data that the company made available to the researcher.

5. Combining all the gathered data.

6. Writing a report with the conclusion of the research.

An action research process starts with a conversation between the researcher and the organization in which the researcher will do the research. They have to identify the intersection between the researcher's interest and the challenges the organization faces. If they can come to a sufficient agreement, the researcher will start his/her research. By doing an action research process, it will not be the case that in all phases of the project one or more persons will participate. Sometimes it is necessary that the researcher does some research on his/her own, instead of working together with the employees of the organization.

Because of the involvement of all stakeholder of the organization, the researcher will get access to more data and gives a better overview of the problems and or the benefits of the organization. That is why the first step is the most critical; it has to be made sure to the organization and all his stakeholders that engagement in the process is of great importance.

The researcher needs to identify what the strategic issues are of the organization. It is essential that the researcher keeps these issues in mind, so that the outcomes of the research will correspond with the viewpoint of the organization.

As said before, trust is an essential element in doing action research. Interviews are a key part of the action research process, if a researcher has built trust, employees will be more open during the interview. This will lead to a greater understanding of the organization for the researcher and thus for a better solution to the problem. The interviewees and the focus group of the research are at the same time the subjects under study and the key stakeholders that give insight into the organization.

To conduct an action research project, there are five principles to be followed. Each of these principles (Huang et al, 2013, p.630; Davison et al., 2004, p 70-77) has a few criteria which help researchers to plan and implement the project.

1. The principle of the researcher – client agreement (RCA)

    a. Did both the researcher and the client agree that action research was the appropriate approach to the organizational situation?

    b. Did the client make an explicit commitment to the project?

2. The principle of the cyclical process model (CPM)

    a. Did the project follow the CPM or justify any deviation from it?
    b. Were both the exit of the researcher and the conclusion of the project due to either the project

objectives being met or some other clearly articulated justification?

3. The principle of theory

    a. Were the project activities guided by a theory or set of theories?

    b. Was the domain of investigation, and the specific problem setting, relevant and significant to the

    c. Interests of the researcher's community of peers as well as the client?

4. The principle of change through action

    a. Were both the researcher and client motivated to improve the situation?

    b. Did the client approve the planned actions before they were implemented?

5. The principle of learning through reflection

    a. Did the researcher provide progress reports to the client and organizational members?

    b. Did both the researcher and the client reflect upon the outcomes of the project?

5. DISCUSSION

Action research is not a new methodology, it is already being used in other fields for example in information management; organizations which are operating in the social networking space face; hospitals. In my research I have done a literature study in order to figure out whether action research is being used in the HRM field. For this purpose I have used five journals: Human Resource Management, Human Resource Management Journal, The International Journal of Human Resource Management, Human Resource Management Review and Action Research. I came to the conclusion that in the 3030 articles I have searched through, only nine studies conducted action research as a method in the HRM field. This is only 0,3% of all the researches that have been carried out in these five journals. It could be an option for HRM to use the action research method more in the future, given the benefits action research has been proved in other disciplines. For this reason I have made five principles for using action research in the HRM field. Guidelines for HRM action research, a researcher has to follow the guidelines in combination with the five principles to perform an action research study. My recommendation for future research is to put these guidelines and principles into practice to see if HRM can work with this method.

6. CONCLUSION

Action research is a good methodology to use in the Human Resource Management field; it helps to get better view of the processes that are going on in the organization. Action research will also help to get better involvement of the participants in the changing process, because their voice will count too. It is not a top-bottom change that will be implemented but all people from the organization will participate in the research process. To conduct an action research approach it is necessary to know what the important steps are in the change process. Therefore guidelines include Finding an overlapping interest between the researcher and the organization and define the research goal; holding interviews and finding focus groups, performing surveys if it is valuable for the organization, using archival data that the company makes available to the researcher, combining

all the gathered data, and writing a report with the conclusion of the research.

By using these guidelines an action researcher should also take into account five principles. These principles are important to plan and implement the change project. The five principles are:

1. The principle of the researcher – client agreement (RCA)

2. The principle of the cyclical process model (CPM)

3. The principle of theory

4. The principle of change through action

5. The principle of learning through reflection

Based on the advantages action research offers in other disciplines, I convey that Human Resource Management will greatly benefit from an application of action research as a new method.

7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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9. APPENDIX 1

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