

The place of action in the management case study: reflections on research in an organizational setting

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It has been suggested (Gergen, 2003) that organizational scientists should concentrate their research efforts on developing 'broadly actionable discourses'. The present paper explores this proposition from the perspective of management education and social science research. One of the methods of teaching used at business schools is the case study which aims to convey a 'theoretical paradigm to new members of the theoretical community by telling a story that shows the paradigm in action' (Stewart, 1991:122). The paper looks at a collaborative action research-case study where the group of people involved were not shown a paradigm in action but, instead, became a paradigm in action. I analyse the process of participation in the research through the different languages-in-use. I argue that the collaborative action research created an 'extended language' (de Zeeuw, 1992) referred to as the 'language of the live case study'. The paper suggests that in order to achieve 'broadly actionable discourses' the emphasis needs to shift from the 'case' to the 'study', in research and practice.

Key words: management education; case study; action research; language; paradigm; complexity