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***Using action research in the restructure of a public service department in
Papua New Guinea***

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Abstract

This paper reports an action research study undertaken within the Internal Revenue Commission (IRC) of Papua New Guinea (PNG). Action research was recognised as a method for introducing change in the organisation by encouraging its people to gather information and work together to develop a mutually acceptable solution. A group of senior managers within the IRC agreed to form an Action Research Group that was endorsed by the CEO with a charter to work with its stakeholders and address the problems in the organisation's strategy and structure. The activities of the ARG progressed through five mini cycles of planning, action, observation and reflection for the first Major Cycle that produced a strategic management plan for the organisation. The second Major Cycle of the action research involved a wider range of participants from the organisation in a series of five more mini cycles for the development and implementation of an organisational restructure. At a time when the economy of PNG was deteriorating due to the effects of regional crisis, a series of natural disasters, funding deficiencies, governance problems, perceived bad policies, and what was viewed as a lack of leadership from the politicians, the imperative for change had become a necessity. Within IRC, the action research project became the driver for this change.

Key Words: action research, change management, public sector restructuring, public sector reform

Introduction

The focus of this research was a change initiative undertaken to improve the performance of government departments of the Internal Revenue Commission (IRC) of Papua New Guinea (PNG) in accordance with the government's directive to reduce the cost of delivery of goods and services by the public service. The research was being undertaken to assist the PNG government to restructure public service departments to address issues of transparency, accountability and good governance for effective delivery of goods and services to the people of PNG. The PNG government was facing political instability, social unrest and economic crisis, and some of these problems can be attributed to the inability of government departments and institutions to cope with changes required to resolve these emerging trends. The PNG government was aware of these trends and their effects on the lives of Papua New Guineans, and had planned to transform government departments including state owned enterprises from 2001 onwards (Gaglioti 2000; Sause 2003).

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This research study sought an approach that would enable the government to explore, devise and implement the required processes of change, given that the government had not developed a clear focus on the methodology and procedures of reforms following the 1999 National Development Forum. This action research study was initiated to discuss reforms in government departments in the hope that exploratory research would develop a workable approach to the introduction of change that could be implemented in the IRC and then replicated in other government departments. The implementation of these changes occurred in a period of economic hardship and political upheavals, and the research focused on the strategic business plan and restructuring of the IRC.

There appears to be no evidence in the literature that any government organisation in the Pacific Region has undergone a restructuring process using the action research method, and this study shows how action research can be used for restructuring government organisations in PNG contributes to the policy and practice of restructuring government organisations.

This report of the case study starts with an examination of the need for change and the reforms that were being encouraged in government departments in PNG. The processes of action research and action learning are described as methods for applying reflective inquiry and introducing change within an organisation.

Background

A milestone in the recent history of Papua New Guinea occurred in 1975 with transition from colonial rule to political independence. Evidence of this reform was the introduction of its own currency, the PNG kina, and confirmation of PNG's independent sovereignty included a number of reforms that brought about mixed structural changes in the behavior of delivering economic and social goods to the people. A new approach to provincial and local government and the change from a fixed exchange rate to one that floated and devalued, further enhanced difficulties in economic and social systems (Barcham 2002). The deteriorating state of the economy caused by the effects of regional crisis, a series of natural disasters, a crisis due to deterioration in 'good governance' and bad practical policies, and the lack of political willingness by political leaders, set the need for structural reforms in PNG commencing in 1995 (Hess 2001; Barcham 2002; Standish 2002; Sause 2003).

The need for change was recognized and three broad areas needed to be addressed in a Structural Reform Program (Barcham 2002) to: improve economic management; restore the integrity and efficiency of institutions; and privatize and develop public sector assets. The first area for improved economic management required improved transparency and accountability and creation of an environment conducive to business activity. These policies were to be implemented through tightening fiscal policy, introduction of a value added tax, independence of the Bank of Papua New Guinea, passing of the Integrity Bill, completion of the 1999 review of tariff rates, enactment of the Central Banking Act, and completion of the 1999 taxation review (Report on Observance of Standards and Codes Fiscal Transparency 2000, Case Study – Papua New Guinea Public Sector Reform 2003; Sause 2003)

The second emphasis, on improved governance, integrity, effectiveness and efficiency in the civil service, related to the second reform program of Restoring Integrity and Efficiency. The aims of this program were to:

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- Maintain an ongoing review of the public sector
- Reinstated the Public Services Commission (PSC)
- Established the Central Agency Coordination Committee (CACCC)
- Recognized the Public Accounts Committee, Auditor General and the Ombudsman Commission
- Adoption of Anti-Corruption strategies
- Passing of the Integrity Bill in Parliament in 2002
- Introduction of the new Organic Law on Provincial and Local Level Government (Barcham 2002; Sause 2003).

The third reform program aimed at privatization and the financial sector. The policies were directed at improving productivity and efficiency of costs, and improving the business environment to make it more conducive to private sector activity. These policies included sale of public assets, enactment of the Bank of Papua New Guinea Act and completion of the 1999 taxation review (Marshall 2001). The essence of these reforms was that transparency, accountability and good governance must be adhered to by all institutions of government.

A review of the public sector was underway at the same time in response to macroeconomic and fiscal reforms that were embedded in structural adjustment programmes sponsored by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). The aim of this public service reform was to make government affordable and lean through cost reduction and containment measures, especially by way of rationalizing the machinery of government, divesting non-core operations, retrenching redundant staff, removing ghost workers from the payroll, freezing employment and adopting measures to control the wage bill and other personnel-based expenditures.

All these reforms were intended to achieve 'good governance' practices leading to effective and efficient delivery of goods and services in the civil service. According to the prevailing wisdom, restructuring government departments was one way to bring about these changes (Littler, Bramble & Mc Donald 1994). Departments were being put on notice to participate in the reforms and the executive of the Internal Revenue Commission (IRC) regarded 'good governance' as the key to effective delivery of goods and services. The Commission commenced a review of operations to make changes that would assist in the reforms announced by the government. The action research project described in this paper was part of the organisational development strategy that set out to address the problems inherent in the organisation's strategy and structure.

Action research methodology

The action research approach to organisational change is known by many other names, including participatory research, collaborative inquiry, emancipatory research, action learning, and contextual action research, but all 'are variations on a theme' (O'Brien 1998, p. 2). Simply stated, action research is a group process for 'learning by doing' where the researchers identify a problem, take the necessary action to resolve it, determine how successful their efforts were, and, if not satisfied, try again. In a similar vein, Carson, Connors, Smits, and Ripley (1989) maintain that action research is a combination of both action and research where the researcher seeks to understand and apply the research practices in a more complete way to bring about both improvement and understanding. In brief, 'action research aims to contribute both to the practical

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concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and to further the goals of social science simultaneously' (O'Brien 1998, p. 2). Thus, action research is both systematic and reflective in nature (Kemmis & McTaggart 1988). There is a dual commitment in action research to study a system and concurrently to collaborate with members of the system in changing it in what is together regarded as a desirable direction. In other words, this collaborative nature of action research is (Cunningham 1993 p. 259):

A problem solving strategy that seeks to encourage people to work together to resolve a problem. The aim is to get all parties working together to jointly gather information and define a mutually acceptable solution. This requires the identification of the issue, each party's interest, brainstorming ideas or alternatives, and then working together to reach an outcome.

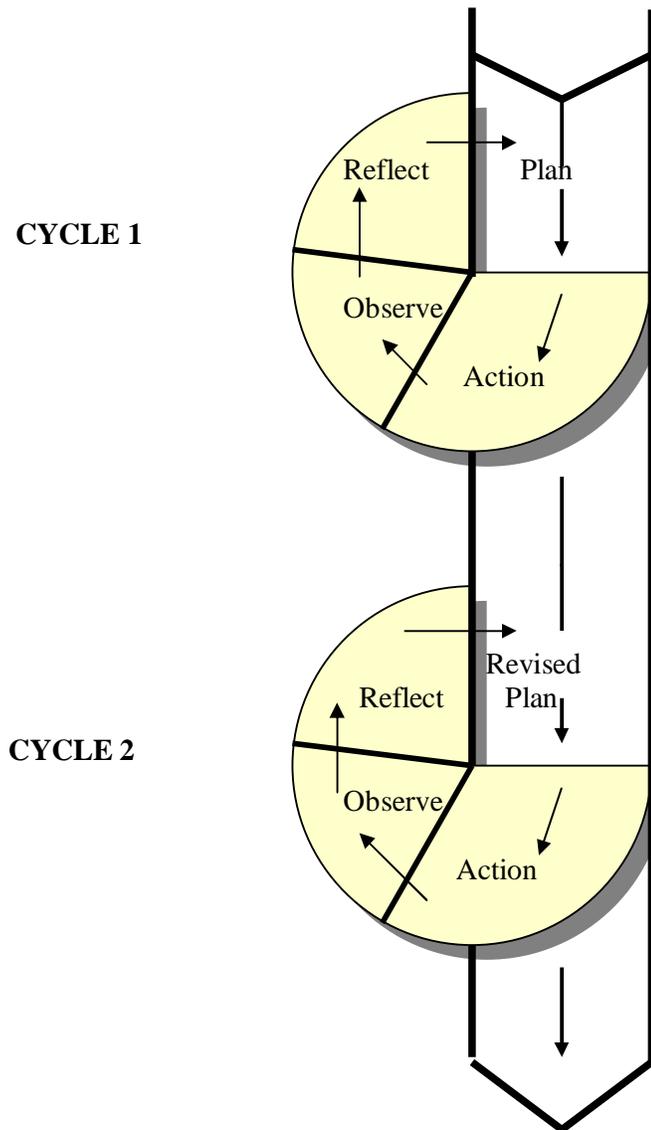
Also, action research consists of four phases that take place in a cycle. These four phases are: planning, acting, observing and reflecting:

- Planning – all the members of the research team question 'what are' the realities of their particular practices, and begin to search for 'what ought to be done?'
- Acting – the researchers implement the plan they have developed, addressing all or a particular set of problems.
- Observing – simultaneous with action is the collection of data. Observation is important for subsequent reflection and action.
- Reflecting – the researchers reflect upon what is happening with their project, developing revised action plans based upon what they are learning from the process of planning, acting and observing.

These four phases are illustrated in a model developed by Stephen Kemmis that demonstrates the cyclic nature of the typical action research process. Each cycle has four steps: plan, act, observe and reflect. These steps are shown in Figure 1. To elaborate on this model, the initial cycle of these four activities leads to a second cycle in which the reflections of the previous cycle inform the plan.

Figure 1 **The Four Phases of Action Research**

Source: adapted from MacIsaac (1995).

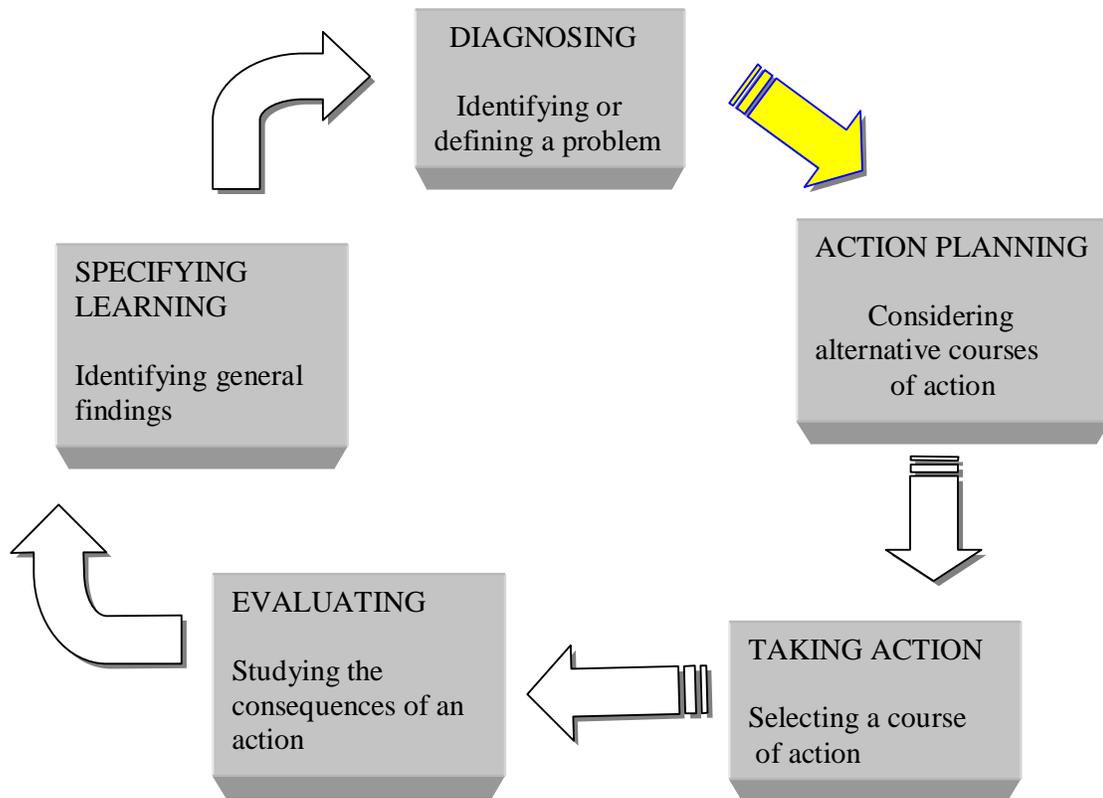


Elaborating on the steps above, five phases need to be conducted within each research cycle (Susman 1983). Initially, a problem is identified and data is collected for a more detailed diagnosis. This is followed by a collective postulation of several possible solutions, from which a single plan of action emerges and is implemented. Data on the results of the intervention are collected and analysed, and the findings are interpreted in light of how successful the action has been. At this point, the problem is re-assessed and the process begins with another cycle. This process continues until the problem is resolved, as demonstrated in Figure 2.

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Figure 2 **The five phases within each research cycle**

Source: adapted from Susman (1983).



In summary, the methodology of action research is a cyclic form of self-reflective inquiry. It is used in research situations by the researcher to improve and to share that knowledge with interested others (Carr & Kemmis 1986).

Writers have added depth to this picture of action research. Dick (1995) refers to the action research methodology as a cyclic progression from fuzzy questions through fuzzy methods to fuzzy answers to fuzzy questions, methods and answers. The key elements are the cyclic acting and reflecting before acting again in a continuing response to learning outcomes from reflection. Thus, action research provides confidence in outcomes through the checking and refining of data and interpretations. Lending support, Zuber-Skerritt (1991) notes that after an initial round of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting, a plan – based upon the information gained from the first round – is developed and implemented. The revised action plan can yield new questions and deeper insights into the area that the researcher is exploring. Through the continued process of planning, acting, observing and reflecting, and then developing a new action plan as a result of knowledge gained from the first cycle, action and research can work together to bring about democratic, systematic and reflective improvement in organisational change. Thus, in action research, improvement and understanding of changes are attempted simultaneously in order to improve the process of change in an organisation.

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Finally, drawing on Kemmis & McTaggart (1981), action research can be:

- a process which improves organisations with civil servants working together to improve their own practices.
- collaborative in nature and reflective of work culture.
- a systematic learning process that encourages civil servants becoming self-critical.
- an open-minded process that requires researchers to test their ideas about organisational change.
- a political process, applying a critical analysis of the place of work, and an emphasis on the particular.
- a cycle of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting in small groups.
- a justification of one's work practices.

To summarise, the action research method is valued because it is useful in 'real' situations. In situations where change and understanding is sought and it is difficult to control variables that are seemingly inflexible, complex and on-going, this is where the action provides change and research provides understanding. Another reason for using action research is that it is applied by practitioners, as opposed to researchers, to develop responses in complex situations that are uncontrollable in any conventional research sense (Dick 1995; Susman 1983). It is this participative approach to research that was used in IRC to investigate and implement the processes of structural reform within the organisation.

The action research experience in IRC

The executive of the IRC had noted problems it faced in its efforts to deliver services to the people. It felt that these problems involved a lack of skills in management, ineffective leadership, inadequate staff development and training programs, inadequate systems, insufficient standard operational procedures, duplication of functions and an organisational structure unable to fulfil the aim of government to effectively deliver goods and services to the people. Management, as well as staff, were aware of these problems and saw an immediate need to introduce a change strategy that would review current functions and restructure the organisation to bring about changes to the way business was being conducted.

The principal purpose of this study was to implement a restructuring process using the action research approach. The research design was adapted from Abraham (1997), and from Hashim (2001, 2008), Karvinen (2002) and Stevenson (2006). The design which includes a conceptual stage and an action research stage, is represented using a summary of the activities undertaken shown in Table 1.

The Action Research Group (ARG) which took responsibility to facilitate the restructuring process was made up of managers in IRC who had post-graduate qualifications and professional development in action research, action learning and management. The principal researcher at the time of the study was the Director of Corporate Affairs, a senior manager in the organisation. He played a key role in the action research group as a member of the team and also had to undertake the role of principal researcher in order to critically analyse the use of methods and techniques to satisfy all the necessary requirements of the study. Relationships between the ARG and its stakeholders are summarized in Figure 3.

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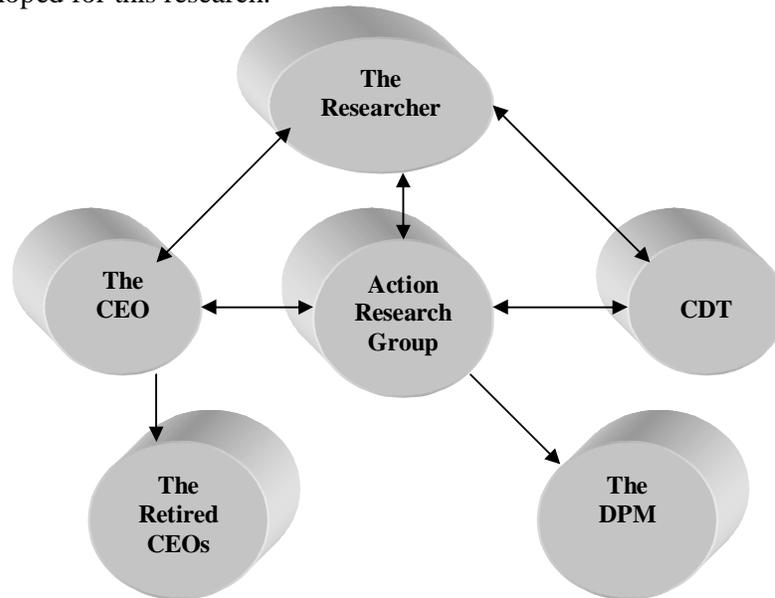
Table 1 Features of the research design

Source: based on a model developed by Abraham et al (1996).

Conceptual stage	Action research method stage
<p>1. Personal Dimensions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) professional contact with experts and colleagues ii) attendance at workshops and seminars <p>2. Literature Review</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) change management ii) strategic change iii) action research iv) governance principles v) structures and processes of restructuring vi) government and private sector reforms <p>3. Organisational Dimensions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) group development ii) organisational change through a restructuring process 	<p>1. Four Cycles of Action Research through</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) planning ii) acting iii) observation iv) reflection <p>2. Data Collection by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) participant observation ii) documentation departmental records action research group/ cross-functional team activities minutes of meetings iii) purposeful conversations <p>3. Data Analysis through</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) content analysis ii) clustering and chain of evidence iii) triangulation

Figure 3 **The Action Research Group and stakeholders**

Source: developed for this research.



The divisional heads and their managers were the Cross Divisional Team (CDT) members. The CEO of IRC was the initiator and sponsor of the restructure process and both the CEO and the retired CEOs were the validators of the outcomes. The other validator of the new structure was the Department of Personnel Management (DPM). The researcher was the participant observer of the ARG and the facilitator for the CEO when he was called up for pressing demands. More detailed descriptions of the roles of each of these stakeholders and participants in the restructuring process are summarized in Table 2.

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Table 2 **Roles of stakeholders**

Source: developed for this research.

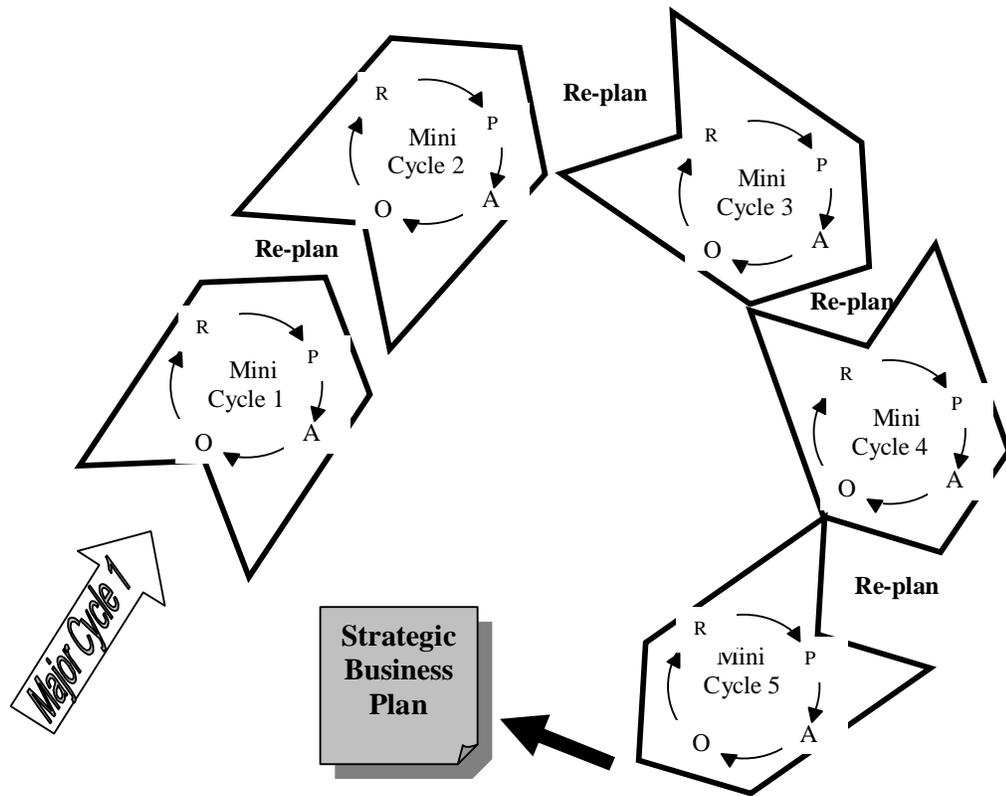
Stakeholder	Role
Chief Executive Officer (CEO)	The CEO as head of the IRC was the initiator of the restructuring process and worked with the researcher and members of the ARG and CDTs to restructure the IRC using the action research process. He was involved in triangulation of data gathered and analysed by the ARG and CDTs, and was also the validator of data, the strategic business plan and the new structure.
The Researcher	The researcher was a participant observer and a member of the ARG. He worked with the CEO and members of the ARG and CDTs throughout the study in developing the strategic business plan and implementing the restructuring process using the action research method.
The Action Research Group (ARG)	The ARG was responsible for the planning, implementing of plans, observing and reflecting on the progress of the restructuring process. The ARG evaluated outcomes of each cycle of the development of the strategic business plan and the restructuring process during meetings with the CEO and the CDTs and used the cyclical steps throughout the two Major Cycles.
Cross Divisional Teams (CDT)	The CDT was made up of divisional heads and senior managers of the fourteen divisions in Tax, Customs and Corporate Services based in Port Moresby. The role of the members of the CDTs was to participate in the review of the strategic business plan and the structure of their respective divisions and present these details at the CDT meetings which were attended by the CEO, ARG and CDTs. CDT meetings were the key forums in the discussion and development of the strategic business plan and the implementation of the restructuring process using the action research method.
Department of Personnel Management (DPM)	DPM was involved in the development of the strategic business plan and the implementation of the restructuring process using action research as the external validator of data presented to it from the ARG.
External Validators	The external validators were three former Commissioner Generals who participated in the strategic business plan workshop and were involved as validators for the strategic business plan, the restructuring process and succession planning

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This action research study consisted of two major cycles and a number of mini cycles within the two major cycles. **Major cycle 1** of the study commenced in January 2000 when the management of IRC was asked to consider and undertake a review of the organisation's structure. The management team, of which the researcher was a member, agreed to undertake the review and the first step was to develop a strategic business plan to provide direction for the organisational changes and greater clarity with its core functions. This major cycle took over six months to complete. Figure 4 illustrates major cycle 1 and the five mini cycles that emerged in the development of the strategic business plan using the action research process.

Figure 4 **Mini cycles for developing the strategic business plan using action research**

Source: developed for this research.



The action research process can be observed in the mini cycles as the ARG planned each stage, took action as agreed, observed the outcomes and reflected on what was needed for replanning in the next cycle. These activities are shown in the summaries of the mini cycles that produced the strategic business plan in major cycle 1.

In *mini cycle 1* the CEO, the researcher and the ARG planned for the review of the structure and obtained executive management to approve the review. On observation and reflection, the CEO agreed to establish the strategic business plan first and then deal with the structure.

Mini cycle 2 saw the members of the ARG and CDTs meet and discuss issues relating to the strategic business plan. The meeting decided on the vision and mission of the IRC.

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In *mini cycle 3*, some divisions managed to present their objectives and strategies while others had difficulty with their reviews. The problems of lack of understanding and knowledge of the review process, consultation, attendance and leadership were noted in this cycle and plans were made by the ARG to deal with them.

Mini cycle 4 saw all divisions establish their objectives and strategies and the ARG prepared to hold a workshop to discuss and finalise the strategic business plan.

Mini cycle 5 involved the discussion and endorsement of the IRC strategic business plan. The plan was also validated by three external validators.

Having established and validated the strategic business plan, the IRC Management then embarked on the next phase of this change process with **major cycle 2**. There were five mini cycles involving planning meetings of the ARG, CDTs and the CEO, implementation of plans and observation and reflection at all meetings. These actions are summarized in Figure 5 which shows the combination of major cycle 1 and major cycle 2.

The same action research process was used by the ARG in major cycle 2 with the five mini cycles involving a larger number of people within the organisation as they worked together in developing the restructure proposals. The interactions between the stakeholders are shown in the summaries of the mini cycles that produced the final restructure proposal in major cycle 2.

In *mini cycle 1*, the planning meetings in this cycle reviewed the existing structure and discussions involved the CEO and the ARG.

In *mini cycle 2*, this cycle, meetings were held by the executive management, ARG and then the CDTs where executive management endorsed work to commence on the restructuring process. The ARG and CDT meetings also discussed issues relating to the structure, problems and positive outcomes.

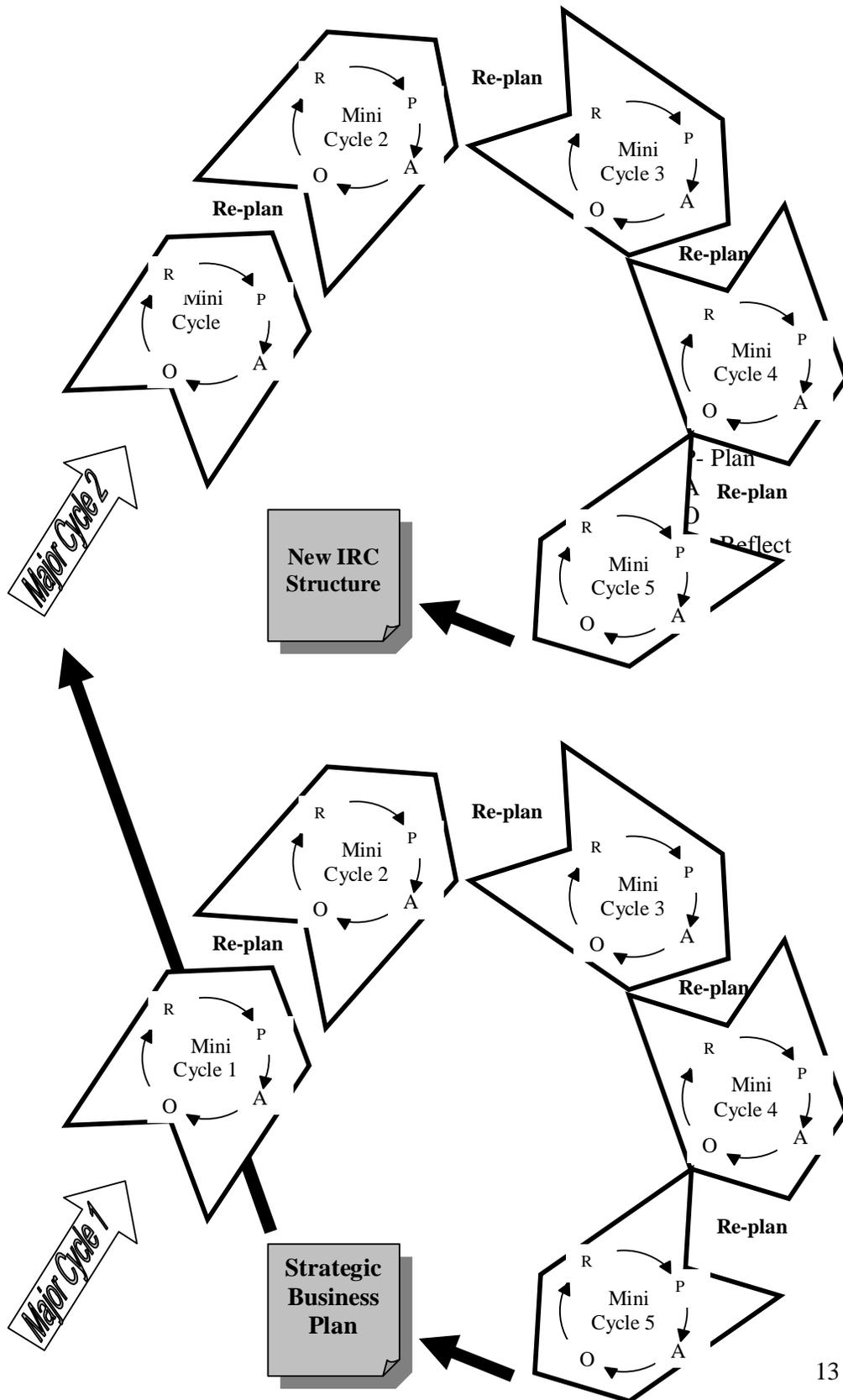
In *mini cycle 3*, there were planning, action, observation, and reflective meetings with the ARG and the CEO, and meetings where the CEO worked with members from the ARG and CDTs. The CDT meeting discussed a number of divisional proposals for the restructuring process.

A number of meetings were held in *mini cycle 4* with the ARG, the CEO and the CDT members to discuss and review all the restructure proposals that had been presented. The ARG met and reflected on these meetings and prepared a number of restructure models for presentation to the CEO and the CDT at the next meeting.

In *mini cycle 5*, the final CDT meeting discussed the two remaining restructure proposals and endorsed one for approval by the IRC.

Figure 5 Mini cycles for implementation of the restructuring process using action research

Source: developed for this research.



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This case study shows how the action research method was applied within the IRC in a purposeful manner to firstly develop a strategic planning document and then use this as a guide during the engagement of stakeholders in development of a restructuring plan. The ARG applied action learning processes in their meetings and some of the key learning outcomes from the planning, action, observation and reflection activities are presented in the next section.

Key learnings and their implications for the literature

While learning occurred at all levels of the organisation during the project, three of the key learning outcomes involved: the development of the strategic plan with its identification of core values of the IRC; the successful use of action research for involving stakeholders in determining a restructuring of the organisation; and the application of action research characteristics for introducing organisational change.

Firstly, completion of the strategic business plan was a major achievement for the organisation and all participants were pleased with the outcome. For the first time in a long while, the IRC had put in place strategies aligned with the organisation’s primary objective of revenue generation and collection. In the development of the business plan, the mission and achievable goals were defined, along with the organisation’s core values. Executive managers were able to use the core values to inspire staff to new standards of performance. These core values are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 **The IRC core values**

Source: IRC Strategic Plan (2000).

	Core values
1	We must uphold the integrity, impartiality and fairness of the tax system.
2	We must correctly apply the tax law so that all our customers are provided fair and equal treatment.
3	We must take pride in our work and carry out our duties professionally.
4	We must learn to work in teams, empower our staff and be diligent in our efforts so that quality service is provided to our clients.
5	We must build trust and respect for each other and value individual differences of our staff and clients.
6	We must be honest and transparent in our dealings with each other and our clients and be held accountable for our actions.
7	We must recognize efforts of staff, give credit where it is due and reward them accordingly.
8	We must build an environment that will provide equal opportunity for all staff including minority groups.
9	We must work through each other, with each other, and for each other with commitment and strive for excellence in all we do.
10	We must be prepared to adapt to environmental changes and implement change where appropriate.

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The action research process of major cycle 1 took just over six months to complete and saw the establishment of the IRC strategic business plan. The strategic business plan was validated by the three former CEOs and this helped pave the way for the IRC to introduce other change initiatives such as the review of the structure and succession planning.

In the second learning, the development and implementation of the restructuring process took three years from completion of the strategic business plan and the restructuring would not have occurred without a process that dictated on consistency and discipline as was required by the action research process. The implementation of the restructuring process at the IRC is the only one of its kind in the PNG public service as no government organisation has used this process to date. The review and subsequent restructuring of a government department in PNG using the action research process has never before been undertaken and documented. A search of the literature focusing on restructuring provided very little or no insight into the way government organisations in the Pacific Region, and the Melanesian countries, especially in PNG, dealt with restructuring of its institutions using the action research process.

This study showed that action research can be used to undertake restructuring of public sector organisations in PNG and has filled a gap in the literature of organisational change generally and specifically the literature on restructuring using the action research process. It has also made a contribution to policy and practice of restructuring public sector organisations using action research, specifically in PNG and generally in the Melanesian countries.

Finally, the characteristics of action research described by Abraham (1997) provide a framework for review of the action research method that was used in this research and are shown in Table 4. The characteristics are described as they were observed within the change projects and only the experimental nature of action research did not emerge in this study because it was aimed at generating rather than testing a hypothesis.

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Table 4 Characteristics of action research observed in this case study

Source: based on characteristics identified by Abraham (1997).

	Action research characteristic	Features of this study
1	Problem focus	The action research method used in this study was problem focused in the context of real life situations as it was to explore and solve a real life problem in developing a strategic business plan and subsequently dealing with impediments in the structure of the IRC.
2	Action orientation	The study involved executive management and members of the CDTs to plan and take actions to resolve the problems.
3	Cyclical process: spiral of Steps	The action research method involved two Major Cycles and ten mini cycles of planning, acting, observing, reflecting and evaluating within the two Major Cycles.
4	Collaborative	Collaboration occurred among CEO, ARG and CDT members with the researcher being the facilitator and providing leadership initially and then allowing CDT members to work independently in their divisional teams and report back at the CDT meetings.
5	Ethical basis	All ethical issues were conformed to in this study. The CEO, executive management, members of the ARG and CDTs were informed of the purpose of the study through management meetings and internal memos. Members of the management team and senior managers were consulted by the researcher and subsequently invited to become members of the ARG.
6	Scientific	The study had a scientific basis with similarities to 'action science' as described by Argyris, Putnam and McLain Smith (1985). The implementation of shared knowledge produced was the primary purpose, and capacity was an important aspect; therefore the method used in the study was scientific although it did not follow the positivist approach.
7	Re-educative	Education occurred where CDT members learnt to work in groups, learning to resolve problems in teams and developing planning, problem solving and decision making techniques.
8	Emancipatory	An emancipatory objective was evident in the aim to improve the professionalism displayed by staff in their newly acquired knowledge to assist them in their responsibilities for decision making in leadership roles.
9	Naturalistic	This was a naturalistic study in which qualitative and descriptive data were collected in a real world situation.
10	Normative	The normative aspect was evident in that it is the Melanesian sign of respect to listen to elders make decisions, but the norms were modified and allowed senior managers in CDTs to participate in the decision making process.
11	Group dynamics	Group dynamics were evident in the study as it allowed CDTs to discuss the issues of the structure among themselves and with their divisional staff, and together each group interacted and responded accordingly.

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Conclusion

This research study has proved that change can be introduced with the full participation of staff in all levels of the organisation. The action research and action learning approach is recommended for government departments in PNG to use in problem solving and knowledge development because within IRC it:

- Dealt with questions and problems in relation to the business plan and the structure of the organisation. The ARG were responsible for developing the business plan which also identified the core values of the organisation. They were also instrumental in the implementation of the restructure of the IRC.
- Has proven itself as one way in which executive managers, divisional heads, senior managers and their staff came to develop a better understanding of their roles and improved work practices. The action research process enabled greater interaction between the different parts of the organisation and demonstrated what could be achieved by working together more closely in articulating a vision of the future for the organisation.
- Led to better learning. Action research involves action learning principles for engaging everyone in learning by doing, and more importantly introduces a reflective component to the learning whereby work issues are tackled and resolved and the members of the ARG learn how to learn.
- Helped to build stronger collegial relationships with those in the organisation. Action research is a collaborative process with people coming together to work and to learn. The ARG became a team that was able to deliver the required results and in the process they developed strong working relationships. The need to work closely with others in IRC also served to strengthen relationships in the organisation.
- Helped to develop a greater understanding and appreciation of the ethics involved in civil service work practices. One of the characteristics of action research is its ethical nature and the ARG recognised the importance of applying ethical procedures and protocols with the research and helped the members of the group gain a greater awareness of ethical issues and concerns.
- Broke down some of the hierarchical barriers that separate executive management and other staff. This was achieved through the spirit of cooperation that emerged as people from different levels of the organisation worked together with the research activities.
- Provided alternative ways of viewing and approaching work problems with new ways of seeing work practices. The processes of planning, action, observation and reflection that are critical to the action research method encouraged new ways of thinking and acting, where new knowledge was sought and questioning was encouraged.
- Helped to examine the 'habits' that have developed – what staff are 'really' doing in the work situation or in management practices. An inevitable consequence of the research was to take a closer look at the way things have been done in the organisation, to confirm those things that are being done well and to identify areas where improvements could be made.

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The case study has provided an example of how the action research method can be used for implementing change in a public sector organisation. It shows how the collaborative and consultative group dynamic mode of action research can be used to introduce change in the way business is conducted, with the result of providing a more effective approach for improving the delivery of services.

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