Collaborative Interactive Action Research (CIAR) is a mode of action research that evolved in an attempt to redesign work in order to achieve greater gender equity. It was developed in the early ‘90s by a group of researchers working with the Xerox Corporation, a project that was sponsored and funded by the Ford Foundation (see Rapoport, Bailyn, Fletcher, & Pruitt, 2002).

An early result of this project was that the very same practices that undermined gender equity also impeded workplace performance (Bailyn, Fletcher, & Kolb, 1997). From this unexpected and counterintuitive finding evolved the concept of the dual agenda (Bailyn & Fletcher, 2004; Fletcher & Bailyn, 2005). What this means is that it is possible to design work to meet a double goal: equity and effectiveness. No longer need these two goals be seen as adversarial, but as complementary, even synergistic. Just as low cost and quality were initially seen as either/or choices but were discovered to be synergistic, so too the goals of gender equity and work effectiveness are each enhanced when tackled together. That is what is meant by the dual agenda.

CIAR shares many of the characteristics of other forms of action research (for an overview, see Reason & Bradbury, 2001) such as collaboration, combining intervention with understanding, and the hope of improving work environments, but differs in its more specific goal of gender equity. The comprehensive meaning of gender equity that CIAR works toward is the ability of both men and women to participate fully in both work and personal life. In the workplace, CIAR works toward legitimating employees’ personal lives as part of an organization’s business equation (Bailyn, 2006, pp. 118-119).

CIAR casts a gender lens on the structures and cultural norms of work. A gender lens refers to the practice of treating gender as a systemic rather than an individual level characteristic (Rapoport et al., 2002). Using gender as a lens brings to the fore gendered assumptions behind accepted ways of accomplishing work and identifies characteristics of work design that are typically absent in other modes of action research.
of action research. The gender emphasis results in a different mode of questioning the ongoing practices in the organization and a different mode of analysis of these data.

The elements of CIAR are collaborative interaction and action research. As such, they are similar to other participative research models whose aim is to make organizations more responsive and satisfying. The emphasis on gender, however, makes the particulars somewhat different. Collaborative interaction in CIAR is based on mutuality and fluid expertise. It is a form of interaction that presumes expertise on both sides that fluidly moves from one to the other. The action researchers bring expertise on gender and its role in organizations; the organizational participants bring expertise on the functioning of their work unit. Then, in mutual interaction, new knowledge emerges about how these fit together in the particular situation. It is a fluid exchange that results in understanding the gendered nature of the organization’s practices, practices that prior to the interaction would have been seen as gender-neutral.

Action research in CIAR shares with other models the combination of intervention with an increase in understanding. Again, however, the particulars differ because they stem from a gender lens. The analysis of the accumulated data specifically identifies assumptions and practices that meet the dual agenda (i.e., that affect both equity issues and effectiveness concerns). And the interventions are geared to changing work practices that will lead to benefits for both. The process continues to be collaborative and interactive. Though the researchers do the initial analysis of assumptions and their consequences - intended and unintended - for both equity and effectiveness, it is in the feedback session and consequent action groups of employees that work design interventions emerge.

Since gender issues are typically silent in organizations, attempting to bring these assumptions into explicit awareness tends to produce resistance. CIAR does not treat such resistance as something to overcome, but as data that help identify the very issues it is trying to understand. Honoring resistance is another key aspect of CIAR.

The goal of CIAR is to unearth the gendered assumptions underlying the practices and procedures in the organizational unit in question - assumptions that lead to practices that undermine gender equity and also detract from work effectiveness. Building on the findings from the original Ford Foundation project at Xerox, this approach to research on gender in organizations has been differentiated from other approaches to gender equity by researchers at the Center for Gender in Organizations at Simmons (CGO) in what they call the fourth frame (Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Kolb, Fletcher, Merrill-Sands, & Ely, 1998). Taking a fourth frame approach means focusing on underlying systemic factors to achieve gender equity rather than more traditional, individual-level initiatives such as remedial training for women (frame one), policies and programs (frame two), or celebrating difference (frame three). Fourth frame initiatives conceive of gender as a systemic characteristic and advocate the use of appropriate methodologies, such as CIAR, to effect change.
Importance of Topic to Work-Family Studies

CIAR approaches work-family issues by getting to the deeper gendered assumptions underlying work practices that make it difficult for employees to be both productive at work and responsibly involved with their families. Its emphasis is on the design of work. It views flexibility not as an accommodative relationship between an employee and a supervisor, but as an integrative and collective assessment of the expectations around work and the way it is conducted and evaluated (Bailyn, 2006, p. 109).

CIAR identifies the separation of the private domain of domestic and family care from the public domain of occupational employment and achievement - which emerged in the industrial age - and the alignment of the former with femininity and the latter with masculinity, as the underlying cause for work-family difficulties for both women and men. This gendered division of labor, accompanied also by the Western (particularly the US) evaluation of the public economic sphere as competence based and more valued than the "natural" private domestic sphere, defines roles of ideal workers - dedicating all their time and energy to their employment - and ideal caretakers - dedicating all their time and energy to family care -- that create constraints on the achievement of gender equity in either the workplace or the family (Fletcher, 2005). Because of this premise, CIAR eschews the use of "balance" to describe the preferred relation between work and family and uses instead "integration" or even "harmony" (Gambles, Lewis, & Rapoport, 2006). And integration applies to this basic cultural level of the public and private sphere, and not to the individual's mode of dealing with the work-family interface (cf. Nippert-Eng, 1996).

Though CIAR projects have primarily dealt with the workplace, it is clear that this notion of integration implies also change in the family. It really means a closer alignment of nurturing skills with production skills and an equal valuing of both. Only by breaking the distinction between the presumed feminine skills needed for the domestic sphere - relational skills that are seen as natural and hence not often defined as competence - and the individually competitive masculine skills associated with the more valued and achievement oriented economic sphere will true gender equity be accomplished (Fletcher, 1999). What CIAR has contributed to this vision of integration is that changing work practices in the direction of this goal does not necessarily hurt business performance and may indeed enhance it.

State of the Body of Knowledge

CIAR projects have shown that it is possible to change work practices to achieve both gender equity and work effectiveness. They have also shown that it is the process of identifying gendered assumptions and devising interventions to undo their unintended negative consequences that creates change, not the particulars of what was changed. But these projects are time intensive and their results run the risk of being re co-opted by the existing culture.
Perlow (1997) for example, worked with a group of software engineers who were being asked to develop a new product in record time using off the shelf technology as well as their own. Their work was crisis driven and their days continuously interrupted, with the result that in order to get their independent codes accomplished they had to work nights and weekends. A collaboratively designed intervention consisted of dividing the day into "quiet time" - periods of independent work where no interruptions were allowed - and interactive work, (i.e., meetings that could coordinate the separate outputs). The results were dramatic. The project was finished in time, despite expectations it would lag, and received a quality award. The lives of the engineers as well as of their supervisor were enhanced, and much less evening and weekend time was needed. But when other units, seeing this success, decided to adopt quiet time, they did not see the improvements on either side of the dual agenda achieved by the original group. It was not quiet time per se, but the process of learning that preceded the intervention that made the difference. Unfortunately, in this case, the intervention did not last and the old culture reasserted itself.

Other examples were sustained. For example, an underwriting group in a bank had just undergone a re-engineering project which resulted in the reduction of administrative staff in the unit to one person (Rayman, Bailyn, Dickert, & Carre, 1999). The underwriters were under great stress with increasing loan goals and less support for their more menial tasks such as writing acceptance or rejection letters to loan applicants, so much so that their sleep was disturbed - which did not help their judgment or their personal lives. The intervention the group and the researchers came to collaboratively was to undo some of the reengineering results and hire a temporary administrative assistant and also to develop the existing staff person by teaching her how to write the letters to applicants. The results were favorable all around. The underwriters could now spend more of their energy on loan applications and their sleep greatly improved, enhancing not only their judgment but their general quality of life. The developed administrator was more satisfied with her job and was eventually promoted. Given these results, the company decided to make the temporary job permanent against the advice of the previous reengineering effort.

There are many more examples detailed in various publications (Bailyn, 2005; Fletcher & Bailyn, 1996; Fletcher & Rapoport, 1996). What is interesting about these examples is that after the fact the work practice changes seem obvious. But before the CIAR process - with its honing in on gendered assumptions - they were not at all obvious to the organizational work units involved.

On the basis of these experiences, there has evolved a way of doing CIAR projects that is more efficient than the earliest efforts. The process starts with the establishment of a liaison committee of organizational members who are involved in every step of the way and in particular help decide what unit should be worked on and whom to interview. These interviews with a cross-section of employees deal not only with their work but also with their family and personal situations. They are a first point of intervention by explicitly highlighting the intrinsic connection between work and family - something employees are of course aware of individually but not in a systemic way. Indeed, this form of questioning often comes as a
surprise, assuming that outside researchers are either interested in work issues or in family policies but not both. In essence, these interviews are geared to answering the question of what it is about work that interferes with people’s family and personal lives.

These data are analyzed by the researchers in the form of assumptions - about time, competence, commitment, etc. - that underlie the existing practices and seemingly have unintended negative consequences for both gender equity and work-family integration on the one hand and work effectiveness on the other. These assumptions are presented in the language of the organization, along with their function in the system and their unintended negative effects on work as well as on the lives of employees, often underlining their differential effect on female employees. This feedback session to the whole group (i.e., more than just those interviewed) is another key point of intervention. Ideally, the session is followed by employees working in groups to devise specific interventions in the way they work that would alleviate some of these unintended consequences. Jointly, one of these is embellished and worked out and guidelines are set for evaluation of the change. Usually it is necessary to treat these intervention projects as pilots or experiments, since often they need to be experienced before organization members are convinced that they will not impede the goals of the business unit. The experiment can be jointly monitored and iterations and revisions in procedures can be applied.

In one such feedback session to 300 people in a customer-service division, the division head, on his own, mandated a 3-month trial that changed procedures quite dramatically. Though initially startling to his supervisors, the results were impressive: better control of working conditions for the employees leading to a 30% decline in absenteeism - a good dual agenda outcome. (These results and others, as well as a detailed description of the process, are available in Rapoport et al., 2002)

CIAR projects are now being done in many parts of the world. In the spring of 2006, an international conference on CIAR was held which brought together researchers from the US, Korea, Greece, Australia, the Netherlands, Chile, and others to share experiences (Bookman & Bailyn, 2007; Bookman & Lewis, 2007).

**Implications for Research and Practice**

CIAR by definition intertwines research with practice. Up to now, projects have combined academic researchers with organizational partners, but just as action research can be done by insiders (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005), it seems possible that insiders can also apply a gender lens to their work practices - though it might be more difficult. The question whether and how organizational members can be CIAR researchers within their own organizations is one that needs investigation.

CIAR projects also take time, more than is often deemed reasonable. Thus, an important question - which CGO has been dealing with - is whether the process can be shortened and still be effective. The
The diagnosis element of CIAR, i.e., the identification of gendered assumptions and their consequences, turns out to be quicker and easier with practice, since a few general categories of issues - e.g., the use of time or the enacted definitions of competence and commitment - come up over and over again, though the particular language used to describe them varies by the situation. Thus fewer interviews are necessary to identify the key issues. But whether the implementation process can be shortened remains an open question.

The outcomes of CIAR projects have typically been characterized as small wins (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000). As such these outcomes are more akin to what in the innovation literature has been called incremental innovation rather than radical innovation (Dewar & Dutton, 1986; Ettlie, Bridges, & O'Keefe, 1984). So the question whether this kind of change, which after all delves into deeply-seated gendered assumptions about competence and success, should really be more radical is an important one. There has recently been a call for such more radical change (Harwood, 2006). Harwood’s work on gender issues in a police force succeeded with bold initiatives directed at the whole training and career development program.

Finally, what is the relation between individual change and organization change? Clearly CIAR calls for both. Jessica DeGroot (see http://www.thirdpath.org/) has been working with couples who are dedicated to equal sharing of the care of their children. She works with each to help them negotiate the necessary changes in their individual work situations that will make shared care possible. CIAR has worked less on individual accommodations, and emphasizes more collective systemic solutions. But clearly, considering the issues involved, both individuals and organizations and indeed society must change if gender equity in all domains is to prevail (Gambles et al., 2006). How to relate these levels of change is an important question to raise.

Changes in the workplace as well as in the workforce have created issues for everyone. As Kathleen Christensen (2005) has said, the current mismatch between these two is a serious social problem. CIAR is an attempt to deal with this problem in a particular workplace. It points to the fact that without raising the gendered assumptions that underlie current workplace practices, this mismatch is not likely to be bridged.

References


Other Dual Agenda Research Reports


**Additional Bibliography**


**Locations in the Matrix of Information Domains of the Work-Family Area of Studies**

The Editorial Board of the Teaching Resources section of the Sloan Work and Family Research Network has prepared a Matrix as a way to locate important work-family topics in the broad area of work-family studies. (More about the Matrix ...).

Note: The domain areas most closely related to the entry's topic are presented in full color. Other domains, represented in gray, are provided for context.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain A: Antecedent Descriptives</th>
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**Domain F: Theoretical Underpinnings to All Domains**
About the Matrix

Sloan Work and Family Research Network
Resources for Teaching: Mapping the Work-Family Area of Studies

Introduction

It was appropriate that the members of the Founding Editorial Board of the Resources for Teaching began their work in 2000, for their project represented one of the turning points in the area of work and family studies. This group accepted the challenge of developing resources that could support the efforts of teaching faculty from different disciplines and professional schools to better integrate the work-family body of knowledge into their curricula. The Virtual Think Tank began its work with a vision, a spirit of determination, and sense of civic responsibility to the community of work-family scholars.

A fundamental challenge emerged early in the process. It became clear that before we could design resources that would support the teaching of those topics, we would first need to inventory topics and issues relevant to the work-family area of studies (and begin to distinguish the work-family aspect of these topics from "non work-family" aspects).

The members of the Virtual Think Tank were well aware that surveying the area of work and family studies would be a daunting undertaking. However, we really had no other choice. And so, we began to grapple with the mapping process.

Purpose

1. To develop a preliminary map of the body of knowledge relevant to the work-family area of study that reflects current, "across-the-disciplines" understanding of work-family phenomena.

2. To create a flexible framework (or map) that clarifies the conceptual relationships among the different information domains that comprise the work-family knowledge base.

It is important to understand that this mapping exercise was undertaken as a way to identify and organize the wide range of work-family topics. This project was not intended as a meta-analysis for determining the empirical relationships between specific variables. Therefore, our map of the workfamily area of study does not include any symbols that might suggest the relationships between specific factors or clusters of factors.
Process

The Virtual Think Tank used a 3-step process to create the map of the work-family area of studies.

1. **Key Informants:** The members of the Virtual Think Tank included academics from several different disciplines and professions who have taught and written about work-family studies for years. During the first stage of the mapping process, the Virtual Think Tank functioned as a panel of key informants.

   Initially, the Panel engaged in a few brainstorming sessions to identify work-family topics that could be addressed in academic courses. The inductive brainstorming sessions initially resulted in the identification of nearly 50 topics.

   Once the preliminary list of topics had been generated, members of the Virtual Think Tank pursued a deductive approach to the identification of work-family issues. Over the course of several conversations, the Virtual Think Tank created a conceptual map that focused on information domains (see Table 1 below).

   The last stage of the mapping process undertaken by the Virtual Think Tank consisted of comparing and adjusting the results of the inductive and deductive processes. The preliminary, reconciled list was used as the first index for the Online Work and Family Encyclopedia.

2. **Literature review:** Members of the project team conducted literature searches to identify writings in which authors attempted to map the work-family area of study or specific domains of this area. The highlights of the literature review will be posted on February 1, 2002 when the First Edition of the Work-Family Encyclopedia will be published.

3. **Peer review:** On October 1, 2001, the Preliminary Mapping of the work-family area of study was posted on the website of the Sloan Work and Family Research Network. The members of the Virtual Think Tank invite work-family leaders to submit suggestions and comments about the Mapping and the List of Work-Family Topics. The Virtual Think Tank will consider the suggestions and, as indicated, will make adjustments in both of these products. Please send your comments to Marcie Pitt-Catsouphes at pittcats@bc.edu

Assumptions

Prior to identifying the different information domains relevant to the work-family area of study, members of the Virtual Think Tank adopted two premises:
1. Our use of the word “family” refers to both traditional and nontraditional families. Therefore, we consider the term “work-family” to be relevant to individuals who might reside by themselves. Many work-family leaders have noted the problematic dimensions of the term “work-family” (see Barnett, 1999). In particular, concern has been expressed that the word “family” continues to connote the married couple family with dependent children, despite the widespread recognition that family structures and relationships continue to be very diverse and often change over time. As a group, we understand the word “family” to refer to relationships characterized by deep caring and commitment that exist over time. We do not limit family relationships to those established by marriage, birth, blood, or shared residency.

2. It is important to examine and measure work-family issues and experiences at many different levels, including: individual, dyadic (e.g., couple relationships, parent-child relationships, caregiver-caretaker relationships), family and other small groups, organizational, community, and societal. Much of the work-family discourse glosses over the fact that the work-family experiences of one person or stakeholder group may, in fact, be different from (and potentially in conflict with) those of another.

**Outcomes**

We will publish a Working Paper, “Mapping the Work-Family Area of Study,” on the Sloan Work and Family Research Network in 2002. In this publication, we will acknowledge the comments and suggestions for improvement sent to us.

**Limitations**

It is important to understand that the members of the Virtual Think Tank viewed their efforts to map the work-family area of study as a “work in progress.” We anticipate that we will periodically review and revise the map as this area of study evolves.

The members of the panel are also cognizant that other scholars may have different conceptualizations of the work-family area of study. We welcome your comments and look forward to public dialogue about this important topic.

**Listing of the Information Domains Included in the Map**

The members of the Virtual Think Tank wanted to focus their map of work-family issues around the experiences of five principal stakeholder groups:
1. individuals,
2. families,
3. workplaces,
4. communities, and
5. society-at-large.

Each of these stakeholder groups is represented by a row in the Table 1, Information Domain Matrix (below).

**Work-Family Experiences:** The discussions of the members of the Virtual Think Tank began with an identification of some of the salient needs & priorities/problems & concerns of the five principal stakeholder groups. These domains are represented by the cells in Column B of the Information Domain Matrix.

- Individuals' work-family needs & priorities
- Individuals' work-family problems & concerns
- Families' work-family need & priorities
- Families' work-family problems & concerns
- Needs & priorities of workplaces related to work-family issues
- Workplace problems & concerns related to work-family issues
- Needs & priorities of communities related to work-family issues
- Communities' problems & concerns related to work-family issues
- Needs and priorities of society related to work-family issues
- Societal problems & concerns related to work-family issues

**Antecedents:** Next, the Virtual Think Tank identified the primary roots causes and factors that might have either precipitated or affected the work-family experiences of the principal stakeholder groups. These domains are highlighted in Column A of the Information Domain Matrix.

- Individual Antecedents
- Family Antecedents
- Workplace Antecedents
- Community Antecedents
- Societal Antecedents

**Covariates:** The third set of information domains include factors that moderate the relationships between the antecedents and the work-family experiences of different stakeholder groups (see
Column C in Table 1).

- Individual Covariates
- Family Covariates
- Workplace Covariates
- Community Covariates
- Societal Covariates

**Decisions and Responses:** The responses of the stakeholder groups to different work-family experiences are highlighted in Column D.

- Individual Decision and Responses
- Family Decisions and Responses
- Workplace Decisions and Responses
- Community Decisions and Responses
- Public Sector Decisions and Responses

**Outcomes & Impacts:** The fifth set of information domains refer to the outcomes and impacts of different work-family issues and experiences on the principal stakeholder groups (see Column E).

- Outcomes & Impacts on Individuals
- Outcomes & Impacts on Families
- Outcomes & Impacts on Workplaces
- Outcomes & Impacts on Communities
- Outcomes & Impacts on Society

**Theoretical Foundations:** The Virtual Think Tank established a sixth information domain to designate the multi-disciplinary theoretical underpinnings to the work-family area of study (noted as Information Domain F).
### Table 1: Matrix of Information Domains (9/30/01)

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**Domain F: Theoretical Underpinnings to All Domains**