

PLURALISM: CRITICAL REFLECTIONS EMERGING FROM AN ORGANISATION-BASED ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

Alvaro Carrizosa and Ma. Carolina Ortégón

Carrera 18 No. 82-39

Lumni, Colombia

Bogotá, Colombia, South America

E-mail: nina.ortegon@lumnifinance.com

ABSTRACT

Critical Systems Thinking (CST) is calling for managers to use its ideas in the flux of ongoing problem situations to cope with increasing complexity, change and diversity. This paper presents a series of reflections from an organisation-based action research project, where the researcher entered into a real-world situation and aimed both at improving it and acquiring knowledge about the experience whilst contributing to the operationalisation of critical CST, that is, Critical Systems Practice (CSP). The research yielded defensible generalisations from a series of research themes explored relevant to CSP. This paper recapitulates on the contributions that this research endeavour had on the research theme of *pluralism*; the combined use of different paradigms, methodologies, methods and tools within the same intervention. In general, this research theme focuses on whether it is possible to carry out an intervention in an informed way preventing a relapse from *pluralism* to *pragmatism* or *imperialism*. This involves three issues which were explored further and to which this paper aims to contribute. These issues constitute three requirements for pluralism, namely, (a) flexibility in the use of the widest variety of methods, models, tools and techniques possible in any intervention; (b) employment of methodologies owing alliance to different paradigms in the same intervention; and (c) managing a degree of paradigm incommensurability.

Keywords: pluralism, pragmatism, imperialism, paradigm incommensurability

INTRODUCTION

This paper is the result of reflection and debate, which has been reciprocally enriched by theory and practice. It presents part of the findings of an organisation-based action research project, where the researcher entered into a real-world situation and aimed both at improving it and acquiring knowledge about the experience. He became, for a period of three years, involved in the flux of 'real-world problems' within an engineering company in the UK that invited him to do research by using systems ideas in practice.

This research project produced a series of findings contributing to the study of the process whereby different systems methodologies, methods, tools and techniques are used in combination. This process is known as Critical Systems Practice (CSP). The study yielded 'defensible generalisations' from a series of research themes explored, which constitute three issues relevant to CSP, namely, (a) pluralism, (b) improvement, and (c) the role of the agent. They led the researcher to formulate the 'transferable problem solving capacity' of the study: the enactment of 'platforms' as devices or 'research settings' or 'spaces' for operationalising CSP (See Carrizosa and Ortégón 2005). This paper focuses on the learning derived from the research theme of pluralism,

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the combined use of different paradigms, methodologies, methods, models and tools in an intervention. The reflections presented here lead to highlighting the role of the above mentioned 'platforms' towards 'coherent' pluralist practice or CSP.

The first section presents the general research approach to set the conceptual and methodological background of the research. The second section presents a brief summary of the research issues involved in this research theme. Each research issue is then discussed in light of the experience¹. The third section presents a concluding summary of this paper.

GENERAL RESEARCH APPROACH

According to Checkland and Holwell (1998), the constitutive elements of any research are: an area of concern, a methodology to go about the study and a framework of epistemological principles in terms of which what counts as learning. "Particular linked ideas F are used in a methodology M to investigate an area of concern A. Using the methodology may then teach us not only about A but also about the adequacy of F and M" (Checkland and Holwell, 1998, p13). Therefore, they suggest a cycle and a process, which are aimed at generating a series of findings about the area of concern A, the framework of ideas F and the methodology M used. The A in this study consisted in testing and developing systems thinking ideas and methodologies in practice, tackling real-world management problem situations. Critical Systems Practice (CSP) was the methodology to be used and this carried the implication that the framework of ideas F supporting the intervention became Critical Systems Thinking (CST). This is illustrated in Figure 1. (Adapted from Checkland and Holwell, 1998, p13).

The research produced findings at these three different levels; however this paper concentrates on the findings generated at a methodological level. The study was not concerned with testing hypotheses, rather with generating research themes within which lessons could be sought. In this case the research theme relevant to M and A was: pluralism which is identified by Jackson (2000) as a relevant issue for CSP.

¹ The research experience involved the participation of the researcher in different areas and projects of the organization, which were the Proposals Department, Project Implementation Team (PIT) and Process 1. It also involved the creation, together with a group of members of the organization (participants in the research process or co-researchers), of 'research spaces', which were called: the Thinking Space (TS), the Book and the Walls Workshops (WW). The participation of the researcher in these areas, projects and 'research spaces' has been presented and extensively discussed elsewhere (See Carrizosa 2000 and 2002).

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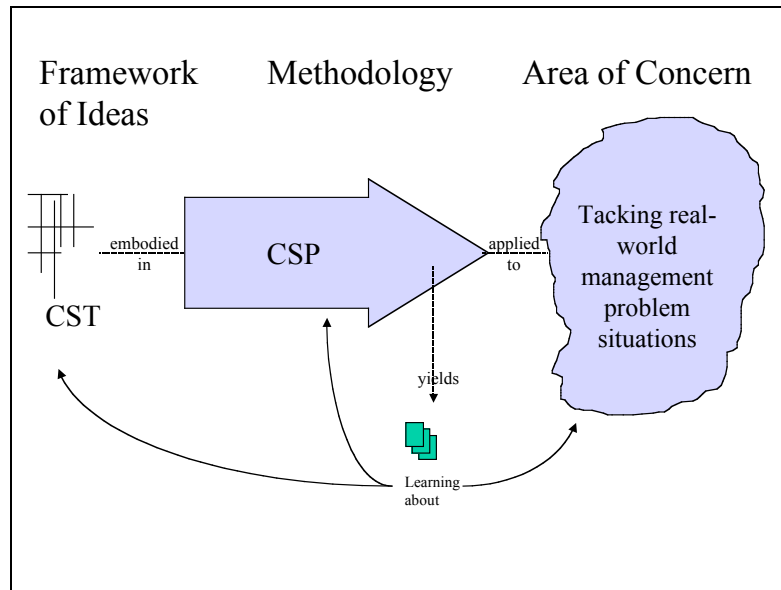


Figure 1. This Research Endeavour

The crucial elements in a research approach of this kind according to Checkland and Holwell (1998, p12) are: (a) a collaborative process between researcher and those involved in the situation, (b) a process of critical inquiry, (c) a focus on social practice, and (d) a deliberate process of reflective learning. In this order of ideas, the general aim was to inquire in the area of concern, A, by using different methodologies, methods, tools and techniques as required being consequent with the methodology M (CSP) and the framework of ideas F (CST). Naturally, since this research was concerned with real-world problem situations it continually evolved, becoming an ongoing cycle. This cycle, as an ideal type, is shown in Figure 2 (Checkland and Holwell, 1998, p15).

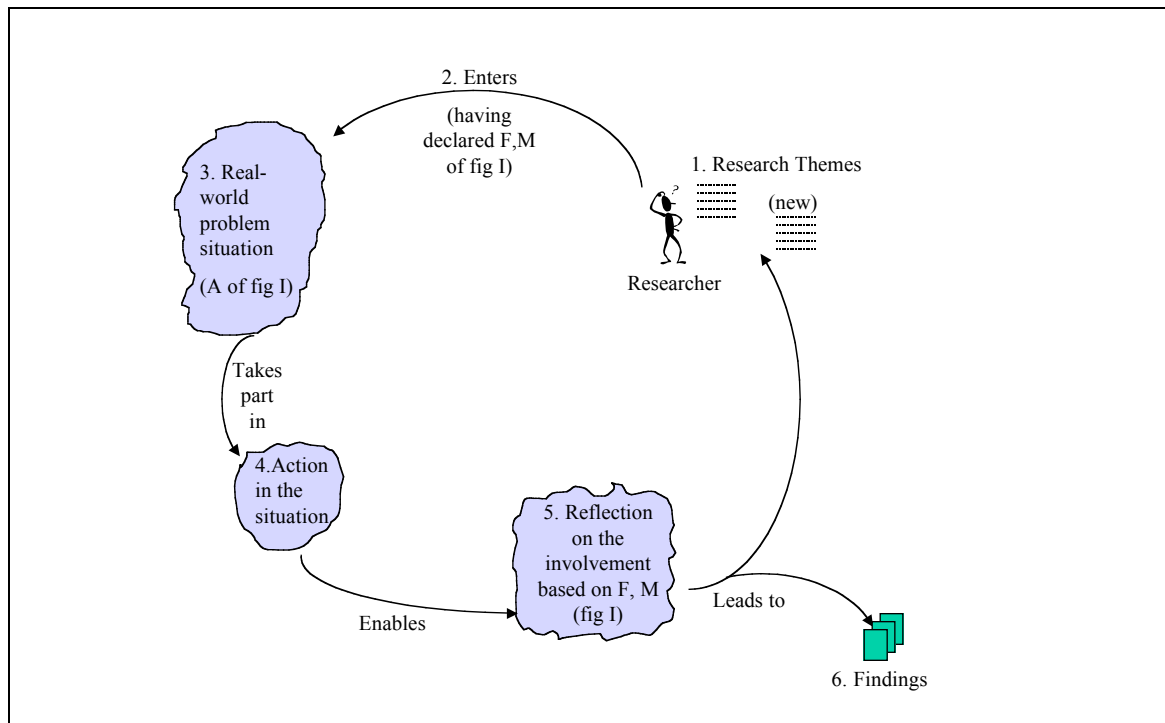


Figure 2. The Cycle of Organisation-based Action Research

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This cycle involves: first, stating the particular themes in which the researcher is interested; second, declaring in advance the framework of ideas *F* and the methodology *M*; third, entering into the real-world problem situation *A*; fourth, taking part in the change process in the situation; fifth, reflecting upon the experience; and finally, recognising what counts as learning derived from the findings and becoming new research themes. Naturally, this cycle is not a one-loop cycle; it is an ongoing process. The next section presents the research issues that are involved in the research theme of pluralism.

RESEARCH ISSUES

This study focused on pursuing theoretically informed pluralism (Jackson, 1999, 2000). This involved three issues requiring further investigation: (a) flexibility in the use of the widest variety of methods, models, tools and techniques in any intervention while, at the same time, learning about and improving them according to the particular rationale used to intervene; (b) employment of methodologies owing allegiance to different paradigms in the same intervention; and (c) managing a degree of paradigm incommensurability through pursuing protecting paradigm diversity and handling the relations between divergent paradigms. These issues are presented and discussed in the light of the research experience in the following sub-sections.

Pluralism at the level of Methods, Models and Tools

As mentioned above regarding this issue the research focused on whether it was possible to carry out an intervention in an informed way preventing a relapse from *pluralism* to *pragmatism* or *imperialism* (Jackson, 1991, 1999, 2000). Flexibility in the use of the widest variety of methods, models, tools and techniques in any intervention involves two aspects, namely:

- (i) Freedom within pluralism to tailor the use of methods and tools: “allowing the greatest freedom possible, within pluralism, to tailor the use of methods and tools to the complexities of the problem situation... as it changes during the intervention... recognis[ing] that methodologies can be decomposed and that the link between the traditional host methodology and the methods, tools and techniques usually associated with it need not necessarily be a closed one” (Jackson, 2000, p382); and
- (ii) Avoiding the theoretically uncontrolled employment of methods, models and tools: “the theoretically uncontrolled employment of diverse methods, tools, models, and techniques” (Jackson, 2000, p382) must be avoided. The idea is that when used under a particular rationale it is possible to learn about and improve the value and usefulness of different methods, models and tools. Essential to this is maintaining “clarity about what “generic methodology”, and therefore which theoretical rationale, method mixes are being used to serve, at any time” (Jackson, 2000, p383), to prevent relapse into pragmatism or imperialism.

Research Issues in Light of the Experience

The research experience demonstrated that the pursuit of the “greatest freedom possible, *within pluralism*, to tailor [the] use of methods and tools to the complexities of the problem situation ... and the exigencies of the situation as it [changed] during the

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intervention” (Jackson, 2000, p382), progressively became consolidated as the study developed.

(i) Freedom within pluralism to tailor the use of methods and tools

In terms of this issue at the level of a multi-method approach, flexibility in the use of methods, models and techniques constituted an intrinsic practice in the organisation. In the case of this organisation the “complexity, heterogeneity and turbulence” (Jackson, 2000, p383) faced by managers seemed to justify the adoption of an eminently pragmatic approach.

Instead of encouraging abstract debates about the merits of different methodologies during the research process co-researchers were encouraged to engage in considering the significance and merits of different logics or rationales that were supporting their use of different methods. This was done by making constant reference to the constitutive rules of generic methodologies adopted, as proposed by Jackson (2000). For this reason helping the group understand the use of process mapping (QMAP) within both a functionalist and an interpretive rationale, for example, was highly valued. Then, based on an enhanced understanding about generic methodologies, the researcher encouraged co-researchers to see the intervention process as involving choices of different ways of engagement entailing different relationships between paradigms and methods, rather than simply choices about available methodologies alone (i.e. the constitutive rules of the TS and their operationalisation).

The tailored use of methods, models and tools based on the understanding that methodologies can be ‘partitioned’ was realised first by building upon the inventory of the organisation’s own methods, models and tools according to existent rationales. This was aided by making constant reference to the constitutive rules of generic systems methodologies. Progressively, systems methods, models and tools and their corresponding ‘root’ rationales were introduced as the situation demanded it. This was possible within the TS, the Book and the WW, where as co-researchers, participants found value in inquiring about their forms of engagement with problem situations.

(ii) Avoiding the theoretically uncontrolled employment of methods, models and tools

Demonstrating the value of adopting a theoretically informed approach became an essential point of departure for this study. The very fact that the PhD that supported this research was funded by the organisation was regarded as an acknowledgement of the value added by the theoretically informed study conducted in the organisation, according to Neil White, the then Commercial Director.

As the researcher brought in different methods, models and tools and these were employed in practice reflection on the intervention was propitiated from different frameworks. This process was favoured by shifts in ‘dominant’ and ‘dependent’ methodologies/rationales throughout the study. The study began with an interpretive rationale predominant in the Proposals Department. A functionalist approach then governed in PIT. An interpretive rationale became dominant in the TS, which was also permeated by an emancipatory approach, as well as the WW. And running throughout all these projects was postmodernism.

As co-researchers and the researcher tailored models, methods and tools to the complexity of the problem situation, they were supported by continuous reflection on the intervention. The intervention generated an interest in *learning about the value and*

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usefulness of the tools and techniques we employed. This process was triggered by the pursuit of increasing collective competence in the TS, which involved ‘learning about the use’ and not only ‘learning to use’ methods, models and tools. This process was consolidated in inquiries about the use of methods, models and tools (i.e. conducting research) present throughout the TS, the Book and the WW.

In effect, the interactions within the TS seemed to involve many potential worldviews, which resulted in multiple possibilities for actions. Co-researchers and the researcher then started searching for a new basis for ‘objectivity’. This search culminated in the Book as an integrative theory that would help make sense of the contradictory aspects experienced in the TS. Hence, in the Book efforts towards *conducting research to improve* the use of methods, models and tools were materialised. The WW then helped to facilitate reflection about practice *in practice*.

Thus, the theoretically informed employment of different methods and tools owing allegiance to different paradigms was progressively accomplished through the enactment and re-enactment of ‘organisational and intellectual space[s]’ (Whyte, 1991), where co-researchers found value in inquiring about their forms of engagement with problem situations. Through their participation in these spaces co-researchers progressively became aware of the possibility and value of using methods, models and tools according to generic systems methodologies representing different rationales. In this way relapsing into pragmatism or imperialism was avoided.

Pluralism at the Level of Methodologies

Regarding this issue of employment of methodologies owing allegiance to different paradigms in the same intervention the research focused on the following two issues:

- (i) Ensuring paradigm diversity: the employment of methodologies owing allegiance to different paradigms in the same intervention (and at all stages during the same intervention), unless good reasons can be given for a temporary relapse into imperialism. This requirement demands a precise understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of different methodologies.
- (ii) Consideration of political, cultural and cognitive constraints to pluralism: the employment of methodologies owing allegiance to different paradigms in the same intervention requires tackling political, cultural and cognitive constraints. Inadequate attention to these issues could result in limiting the range of possible methodologies to be employed in an intervention, followed by a reduction the potency of pluralism.

Research Issues in Light of the Experience

The research experience demonstrated that the development of ‘collective competence’ and the enactment of ‘research settings’ or ‘spaces’ where participants are challenged to look at things in new ways, are relevant to the pursuit of pluralism at a methodological level. This is evidenced below.

(i) Ensuring Paradigm Diversity

The study showed that the employment of methodologies owing allegiance to different paradigms in the same intervention (and at all stages during the same intervention) relied heavily on the development of methodological competence. Evidently, ensuring

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paradigm diversity demands a precise understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of different methodologies. Through the development of their methodological competence, co-researchers progressively became aware that in dealing with turbulent and complex problem situations, they could benefit from what each paradigm could offer. They saw more potential in pursuing informed pluralism for addressing complex, heterogeneous and turbulent problem situations than in using their usual pragmatic approach.

An important element to consider as part of developing multi-methodological competence was found: namely, the two-way process of enhancement of this competence, taking place between researchers and participants. It became evident that part of the development of the researcher's multi-methodological competence was in relation to the development of multi-methodological competence in co-researchers. Indeed, it was the "we think", which enabled the "I think" and not the contrary (Taket and White, 2000, p144). Hence the enactment of spaces like the TS, the Book and the WW favouring the "we think" became essential in ensuring paradigm diversity.

(ii) Consideration of political, cultural and cognitive constraints to pluralism

In pursuing pluralism throughout the research process the researcher encountered hostile power structures and already existing values that limited its impact. Naturally propitiating questioning things in a fundamental way can create strong reactions. In this sense the researcher shares Morgan's views when referring to the harsh realities he encountered in pursuing 'Imaginization': "it is important that they be recognized and that the idealism that we can achieve creative breakthroughs always be tempered by the realism that breakthroughs often have to be grounded in corporate cultures and politicised contexts that can make change a difficult and uphill task" (Morgan 1997, p267).

In the case of this research the political and cultural difficulties faced often served to emphasise conflicting views thus accentuating different rationales. This accentuation frequently contributed to the pursuit of pluralism since it motivated the enactment of spaces where these fundamental differences were valued and accounted for in successive processes of intervention. For instance, the WW was created in response to the MD's demands on deliverables, yet it also represented an *alternative* to continue pursuing pluralism.

This research experience showed that the enactment of research 'settings' (the TS, the Book and the WW) assisted in handling the political, cultural and cognitive difficulties of working across paradigms. Interactions among co-equal actors were definitive. Taking part in these 'spaces' meant for co-researchers and actors creating and re-creating political and cultural environments, where the often taken for granted beliefs and mental models developed over the years were questioned. Co-researchers challenged themselves to look at things in new ways and thus act in new ways (Morgan, 1997).

These spaces facilitated a process of sharing views and listening to the views of others so as to share mental models and question rationales underpinning proposals for improvement and change. The TS, the Book and the WW also assisted the researcher and the group of co-researchers in temporarily reflecting about and trying what other tools, methods and methodologies, sometimes pertaining to different paradigms (other than the engineering rationale) could offer when dealing with a particular problem

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situation. Thus these spaces accounted for drawing specific attention to enhance 'collective competence' through the pursuit of critical awareness.

Pluralism at the Level of Paradigms

Regarding the theme of pluralism at the level of paradigms this research focused on managing paradigm incommensurability through the employment of a meta-methodology that protected paradigm diversity and handled the relationship between paradigms.

Research Issues in Light of the Experience

Managing a degree of paradigm incommensurability by protecting paradigm diversity and handling the relations between divergent paradigms became possible in the extent to which co-researchers engaged with others in exploratory dialogue and play. This process was evidenced in different ways. One of this ways was a process of celebrating contingencies in which paradigm incommensurability was experienced. These situations were welcomed as a means to increase co-researchers' collective competence. Contingencies often arose from the 'breakdowns' (Brocklesby, 1997) co-researchers experienced when things went wrong, or when unexpected outcomes emerged.

For instance, in implementing Process 1 the Package-Engineering management team recognised that Process 1 initially aimed at capturing the nature of standard jobs from a functionalist rationale. However, soon after the implementation process began, co-researchers found that there was no agreement on the features that represented a Process 1 job. Two opposing views arose; on the one hand, to conduct the intervention on the basis of expert knowledge following a functionalist approach; on the other hand, to conduct the intervention on the basis of stakeholder participation following an interpretive approach. This fundamental disagreement was canalised towards doing research along with increasing the collective competence making possible the emergence of the TS.

Another example, of managing a degree of paradigm incommensurability by emphasising differences between paradigms was experienced in the WW. The Managing Director's demand was clear: the co-researchers' group was expected to find a solution that would be both efficient and efficacious –a functionalist approach. However, co-researchers engaged in handling the relations between mainly functionalist and interpretive rationales, among others. The WW then constituted a way to respond to the demands of the Managing Director while at the same time alleviating feelings of uneasiness, facilitating participation, encouraging diversity, challenging power structures, opening spaces for those without a voice and contributing to the learning of actors. In this way divergence in suggestions for change propitiated by different rationales assisted in maintaining reflective conversations in the pursuit of discordant pluralism.

The study demonstrated that progressively, in the extent to which co-researchers became 'in tune' with the evolving nature of the situation, the researcher engaged with them and others in a process of identifying aspects, concerns and issues denoting different rationales. This 'delineation of constellations', evidenced a local, contingent and situational process (Gregory, 1996), which enhanced co-researchers' understanding about what they were doing. This was one way in which paradigm diversity and confrontation of different paradigms was pursued.

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Identifying constellations meant identifying dominant and recessive rationales. Paradigm incommensurability in the TS, the Book and the WW, was then managed by promoting communication between these different and alien perspectives. The type of communication emphasised was one that could help co-researchers “come to a deeper understanding of themselves precisely in and through the study of others” (Bernstein, as quoted in Gregory, 1996, p620). Within these settings this deeper understanding was assumed as part of the co-researchers’ agenda. Co-researchers valued the insights thus generated since it made them aware of difficult but highly relevant questions such as: when to sacrifice efficiency for participation. This was favoured in the settings provided by the TS, the Book and the WW because they propitiated juxtaposing oppositional viewpoints (Gregory, 1996). The WW, for instance, integrated various perspectives through a multidisciplinary approach where co-actors reflected about their own practice through the understanding of others’ views *in practice*.

The above involved a critique between paradigms orchestrated virtually as a playful, learning activity. This evidenced the post-modern input to pluralism emanating from the TS, the Book and the WW. Managing incompatibility between paradigms involved a creative and reflective conversation process, in which co-researchers became engaged with each other in order learn and contribute to the learning of others, to provoke and provoke others and to change their own minds as well as the minds of others. It involved the use of a variety of forms of representation: symbols, analogies, images, ‘espoused’ and ‘in use’ theories, models, the construction and use of metaphors.

Thus this research confirmed that managing paradigm incommensurability is favoured by the enactment of enabling settings such as the TS, the Book and the WW, where participants engage in exploratory dialogue and play. Within these settings paradigms are allowed to confront one another on the basis of ‘reflective conversations’, involving playful, learning activities, where paradigm diversity is celebrated.

CONCLUDING SUMMARY

The following tables summarise the research findings presented in this paper.

Table 1: Synthesis of Research Findings at the Level of Methods, Models and Tools

Research Issue	Research Findings
(i) Freedom within Pluralism to Tailor the Use of Methods, Models and Tools	<p>The tailored use of methods, models and tools based on the understanding that methodologies can be ‘partitioned’ was realised first by building upon the inventory of the organisation’s own methods, models and tools and according to existent rationales. This meant the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Participants as co-researchers engaged in considering the significance and merits of different logics or rationales that were supporting <i>their own use</i> of different methods, models and tools (i.e. understanding the use of process mapping (QMAP) within both a functionalist and an interpretive rationale).

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Research Issue	Research Findings
	<p>- Participants as co-researchers were encouraged to see the intervention process as involving choice for different ways of engagement entailing different relationships between paradigms and methods, rather than simply a choice about methodologies alone (i.e. the constitutive rules of the TS and their operationalisation).</p> <p>This was aided by making constant reference to the constitutive rules of generic systems methodologies. Progressively, systems methods, models and tools and their corresponding 'root' rationales were introduced as the situation demanded it. All this was possible within the TS, the Book and the WW, where as co-researchers, participants found value in inquiring about their forms of engagement with problem situations.</p>
(ii) Avoiding the Theoretically Uncontrolled Employment of Methods, Models and Tools	<p>The theoretically informed employment of methods, models and tools was pursued throughout the study by enhancing reflection on the intervention from different frameworks. This research process generated an interest among participants in increasing their collective competence in the following areas:</p> <p><i>-Learning about the value and usefulness of the tools and techniques employed (i.e. 'learning about the use' and not only 'learning to use' methods, models and tools).</i></p> <p><i>-Realising efforts towards conducting research to improve the use of methods, models and tools (i.e. the WW constituted settings where "progress was available for scrutiny, validation, revision and feedback" (Carrizosa, 2000, p8)).</i></p> <p>The above was accomplished through the enactment and re-enactment of 'organisational and intellectual space[s]' (Whyte et, al., 1991), where co-researchers found value in inquiring about their use of methods models and tools in order to increase their collective competence. Through their participation in these spaces, co-researchers and actors progressively learned about and improved their employment of methods, models and tools according to generic systems methodologies representing different rationales. In this way relapsing into pragmatism or imperialism was progressively avoided.</p>

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Table 2: Synthesis of Research Findings at the Level of Methodologies

Research Issue	Research Findings
(i) Ensuring Paradigm Diversity	<p>The study showed that ensuring paradigm diversity, that is, the employment of methodologies owing allegiance to different paradigms in the same intervention (and at all stages during the same intervention), relied on the development of methodological competence.</p> <p>The study also highlighted the two-way process of enhancing this competence, which took place between researcher and co-researchers. Indeed, it was the “we think”, which enabled the “I think”, and not the contrary (Taket and White, 2000, p144). Hence, the enactment of ‘spaces’ like the TS, the Book and the WW favouring the “we think” became essential in ensuring paradigm diversity.</p>
(ii) Consideration of Political, Cultural and Cognitive Constraints to Pluralism	<p>In pursuing pluralism throughout the research process, hostile power structures and old values that limited its impact were encountered. These were realities that were faced continuously. They were handled as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Participants took part in constituting ‘spaces’ where conflicting views, often representing threats to pluralism, were valued and accounted for in successive processes of intervention (i.e. the WW was created in response to the Managing Director’s demands on deliverables yet also represented an alternative to continue pursuing pluralism). - Participants took part in creating and re-creating political and cultural environments, where they challenged themselves to look at things in new ways and thus act in new ways (i.e. the norm was interacting among ‘co-equal actors’ in the TS). -Participants as co-researchers took part in a process of sharing views and listening to the views of others so as to share mental models and question rationales behind proposals for improvement and change. In this way the predominantly engineering rationale was challenged. <p>The above efforts culminated in the enactment of the TS, the Book and the WW.</p>

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Table 3: Synthesis of Research Findings at the Level of Paradigms

Research Issue	Research Findings
Managing a degree of paradigm incommensurability through the employment of a meta-methodology (CSP) that pursues protecting paradigm diversity and handles the relations between divergent paradigms.	<p>The study demonstrated that the meta-methodology used to conduct this study crafted and was crafted by enacting enabling settings such as the TS, the Book and the WW, where participants engaged in the following activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Celebrating contingencies in which paradigm incommensurability could be experienced. These problem situations were welcomed as means to increase co-researchers' collective competence. They often arose from the 'breakdowns' (Brocklesby, 1997) experienced by co-researchers when things went wrong or when unexpected outcomes emerged. (i.e. the inadequacy of defining Process 1 using an engineering rationale). - Engaging with others in a process of identifying aspects, concerns and issues denoting different rationales. This became a local, contingent and situational process of 'delineating constellations', which in turn enhanced our understanding about what we were doing (i.e. the Book, identifying organisational 'constellations' in a continuous effort to build the 'organisation's theory'). - Promoting communication between different and alien perspectives. The type of communication emphasised was one that could help us "come to a deeper understanding of ourselves precisely in and through the study of others" (Bernstein, as quoted in Gregory, 1996, p620). In the WW, for example, integrating various perspectives through a multidisciplinary approach where co-actors reflected about their own practice through the understanding of others' views <i>in practice</i> was promoted. - Overall, orchestrating critique between paradigms as a virtually playful, learning activity. This evidenced the postmodern input to pluralism emanating from the TS, the Book and the WW.

Creating the 'organisational and intellectual spaces' within which new ideas could be effectively acted out (Whyte et al., 1991) became part of pursuing CSP, that is the combined and informed use of methodologies, methods and tools. The TS, the Book and the WW provided opportunities to enter into processes of reflection about different methods, tools and techniques and corresponding rationales for the actions that had already been taken and would be taken in the future. Thus, the organisational social system became the focus for reflection turning it back on itself. Pursuing research through the TS, the Book and the WW facilitated the process of overcoming political,

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cultural and cognitive constraints. This pursuit also allowed for conducting reflective conversations in the spirit of CSP via discordant pluralism (Gregory, 1996).

In effect, CSP, the meta-methodology used to conduct this study, involved ‘crafting’ enabling settings like the TS, the Book and the WW where critique between paradigms was orchestrated as a virtually playful, learning activity. CSP was also ‘crafted’ through the enactment of these settings in the course of the intervention because as part of this process participants reflected on what was happening and opened up new possibilities for improving their practice.

As a whole this research demonstrated the possibility and necessity of assuming pluralism in contrast to other management strategies, namely isolationism, imperialism and pragmatism. Pluralism was operationalised through the TS, the Book and the WW, where it was possible to enhance and encourage the use of different methodologies, methods, models and tools in combination. This involved a knowledge generation attempt, as stressed by Jackson (2000) when emphasising the need to *inform* practice, in order to prevent relapse into pragmatism or unreflective imperialism. Thus, from this research it is possible to conclude that one approach for successfully operationalising pluralism was achieved in the creation of enabling settings such as the TS, the Book and the WW, where this organisational need of informing practice is recognised and addressed.

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