

Critical Friend

see your strengths

want to help

move you forward

change your mind

make you smile

Critics

find your flaws

want to win

hold you back

change your mood

make you swear

The Role of the Critical Friend in Marketing Action Research

Introduction to Marketing Action Research

- **Qualitative methodology**

MAR utilizes qualitative methods like interviews and observations to understand customers.

- **Solves problems**

MAR helps marketers address marketing challenges and problems.

- **Tests ideas**

MAR allows marketers to test and iterate on marketing ideas.

- **Collaborative**

MAR requires collaboration between marketing, research, and other departments.

- **Experiments**

MAR uses experiments with customers to test solutions and ideas.



Action research reviewed: a market-oriented approach

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Action research
reviewed

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Keywords Action learning, Customer orientation, Knowledge management,
Market orientation, Relationship marketing, Australia

Abstract The purpose of this article is to provide an understanding of the methodology of action research, especially its use in a marketing context. A retrospective account of a market-oriented action research project in which the author was involved is provided in the form of a summative evaluation of the methodology used. The status of research claims for action research in scholarly publications is discussed and found to be problematic. A hermeneutic case research pathway is recommended as a solution. Links between action research as methodology and internal marketing as strategy are made. A conclusion is reached that the basis of market-oriented action research is "knowledge renewal". This is achieved through an iterative process of action and learning, facilitated by the relationships formed between those involved.

Introduction

This article is a retrospective account of a customer service improvement/ action research project undertaken at one of the four major retail banks in Australia. The project was conceived at the bank in its branch banking division and implemented Australia-wide.

An action research methodology was adopted in the light of uncertain knowledge of what service "improvements" were really critical to customers. There was also uncertainty about the processes by which possible improvements might be reviewed and implemented. However, there was a determination to avoid prescriptive approaches of the kind that had failed in the bank in the past. Within the evolving boundaries of this new project, volunteer groups of employees vigorously challenged and recommended changes to policies and procedures that impacted on the standards of customer service delivery. More than 100 action cycles took place, involving over 1,200 staff in all. Insights from one cycle were fed into the next cycle, forming iterative cycles of action and learning. This project continued for five years without interruption from 1986-1991.

I was a career banker, marketing practitioner and participant in this project from its beginning, first as a team member, then as the project leader for Australia, and later as an *ex officio* adviser (when I took up an academic appointment at a University in England). Thus I bring multiple perspectives to my review of this case.

More than ten years have passed since the project "action" wound down and some readers may intuitively feel that any learning that can be surfaced now must be past its use-by date. However, retrospective action research reports



What is a Marketing Action Research Project?

A Marketing Action Research Project is a cyclical, collaborative approach to marketing that focuses on meeting organizational and customer needs. It involves continuous planning, action, data collection, analysis, and follow-up.

“A critical friend will challenge the team to think critically and act with intention.”

EXCERPT FROM DOCUMENT

Finding the Right Critical Friend

- Determine needed skills

Identify the skills you need the critical friend to have to contribute meaningfully to the project

- Expected contributions

Decide what you expect the critical friend to contribute in terms of feedback, advice, support, etc.

- Type of person

Determine the personality type and attributes that would work well in the critical friend role for your project

- Find open candidates

Look for potential critical friends who are open to taking on the role and understand the commitment

- Assess project fit

Evaluate if the person's skills and abilities can benefit the specific project

Benefits of a Critical Friend

- **Sounding board for ideas**

A critical friend provides an open forum to discuss and evaluate marketing strategies and plans.

- **Reality check**

A critical friend challenges assumptions and helps find supporting data.

- **Fresh perspectives**

A critical friend offers new viewpoints on the marketing challenge.

- **Role model**

A critical friend demonstrates critical thinking and exploration.

- **Push outside comfort zone**

A critical friend voices opinions even if unpopular.

- **Help meet deadlines**

A critical friend assists with time management and work allocation.

Qualities of a Good Critical Friend

Chosen Based on Project Needs

A critical friend should be selected based on the needs and desires of the project participants.

Honest and Impartial

A critical friend provides honest, impartial feedback to help strengthen the project.

Focused on Project Success

A critical friend's primary agenda is to move the project towards success.

Participates by Invitation

A critical friend participates only at the continued invitation of the project participants.

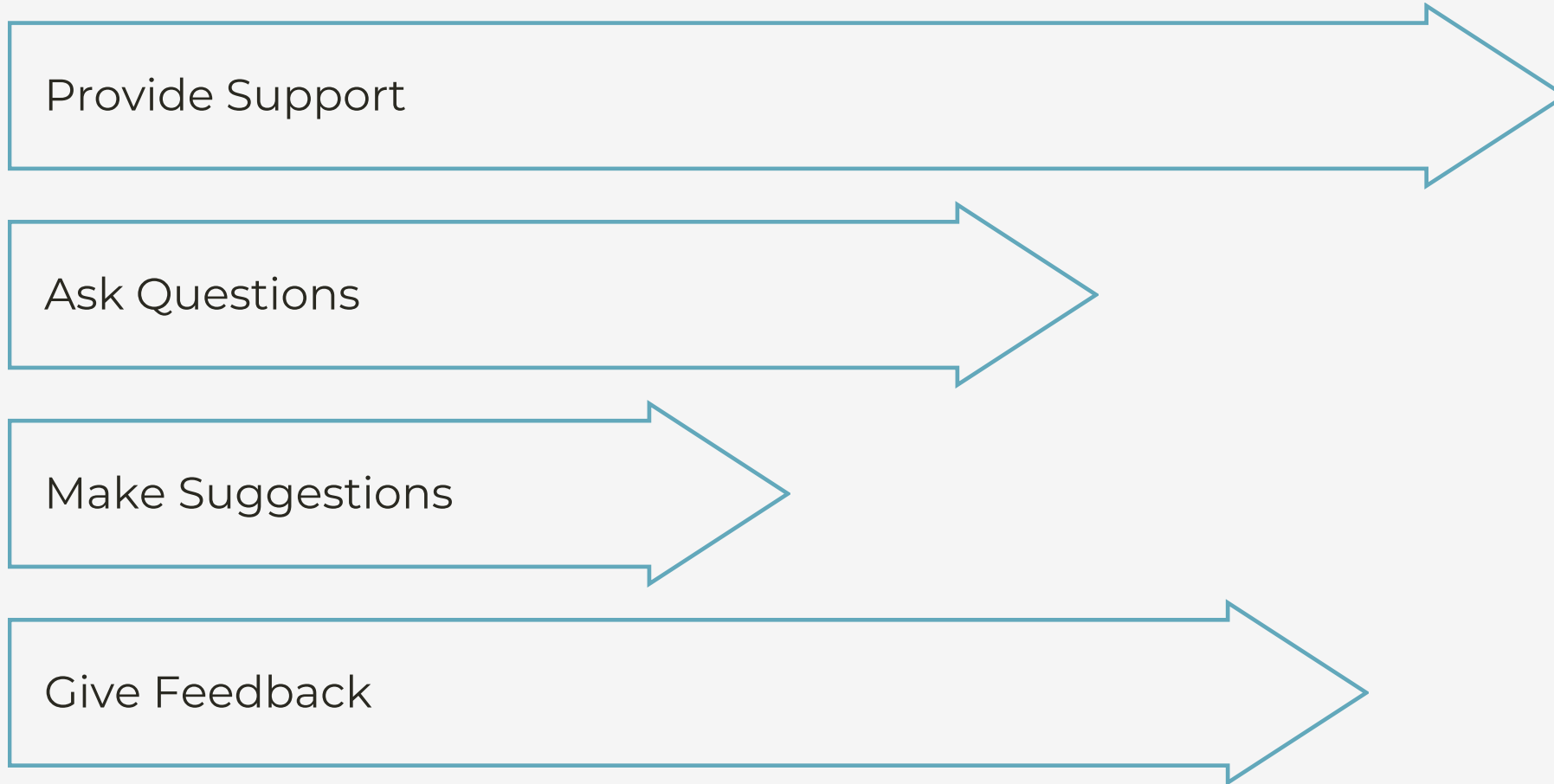
Declares Conflicts of Interest

A critical friend declares any conflicts of interest or values with the project.

Maintains Confidentiality

A critical friend maintains confidentiality of the project's interactions and findings.

The Role in Action Research



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**THE ROLE OF CRITICAL FRIENDS IN
ACTION RESEARCH:
A FRAMEWORK FOR DESIGN AND
IMPLEMENTATION**

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ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of action research carried out by teachers is to improve their own educational and pedagogical practices in a specific context. However, teachers need to develop a more critical stance on their practice to interrogate and validate their action research systematically. Literature suggests that action research can be strengthened through the involvement of critical friends who can ask provocative questions, provide data to be examined through



Conclusion

A critical friend provides an objective perspective and constructive feedback to strengthen a marketing action research project. They challenge assumptions, offer fresh viewpoints, and push the team in positive ways.