



16 March 2026

TARN Conversation: Reflections on Theology, Practice, and Change

Takeaways from our gathering on March 12, 2026

Thank you to everyone who joined our recent TARN conversation exploring the intersection of theology, action research, and practice theory. Following the presentations by Joseph and Maria, our chat filled with rich reflections on why change does—or doesn't—happen.

Instead of a verbatim transcript, we have mapped the comments, questions, and concerns that surfaced into three core themes, each paired with questions to serve as "food for further thought" as we carry this work forward.

1. The Nature and Definition of Change

A prominent thread in the conversation revolved around how we fundamentally understand and conceptualize change within our research.

- **Theological Definitions:** What does a specifically theological definition of change look like? Some suggested that we must remember the Holy Spirit is ultimately the greatest agent of change.
For further reflection: How does recognizing the Holy Spirit as the agent of change shift our expectations, timelines, and measures of "success" in TAR projects?
- **Theories and Models:** Where do our underlying theories of change come from, and how do those assumptions shape how we conduct Theology and Action Research?
For further reflection: What underlying, unspoken assumptions about change might we be bringing into our research without realizing it?
- **Linear vs. Emergent:** Several participants highlighted that change often cannot be created directly; rather, it emerges as a natural property of the new possibilities disclosed through deep conversation.
For further reflection: If change is emergent rather than a linear output, how do we best design our research to capture and articulate it?



- **Permanence:** Questions were also raised about the lifespan of change.
For further reflection: How permanent is change once it occurs, and what practices help sustain it within a community?

2. Agency, Power, and Ethics

If change is to happen, who is driving it, and who gets to decide its direction? The chat surfaced vital questions about the power dynamics inherent in action research.

- **Who Decides?** There is a tension regarding how much direction should come from academic researchers versus local practitioners.
For further reflection: How do we balance a researcher's drive for clarity or outcomes with the organic, localized will of the practitioners?
- **Inclusion and Exclusion:** When looking through the lens of practice theory, we must ask who is included in these practices and who is excluded from them.
For further reflection: Whose voices or bodies might be inadvertently sidelined by the very practices we are studying or seeking to change?
- **The Ethics of Intervention:** What are the ethical implications of actively seeking to bring about change versus maintaining the status quo?
For further reflection: Under what circumstances might the most ethical choice in a TAR project be to step back and allow the status quo to remain?

3. The Role of TAR, Facilitation, and "Wrestling"

Finally, participants reflected on the practical role of the researcher and the methodology itself.

- **TAR as a Space, Not a Tool:** We were cautioned against viewing TAR as a direct, mechanical tool for producing change. Instead, TAR is a way to facilitate spaces and conversations that contribute to change.
For further reflection: How do we envision and conceptualize the mechanisms through which TAR contributes to change?
- **The Necessity of Trust:** Facilitating these spaces requires a foundation of deep trust so participants feel safe enough to speak, question, and reflect.
For further reflection: What specific postures or practices from researchers best foster the psychological safety required for this work?
- **Internal Wrestling:** True change rarely happens without an internal wrestling of the mind and spirit as new alignments are forged.
For further reflection: How can we better hold space for, and validate, the uncomfortable "wrestling" that inevitably precedes meaningful change?