
Editorial

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Biographical notes: Roland K. Yeo is a Management Learning Researcher based at the Professional Learning Division of the Professional Development Department in Saudi Aramco and an Adjunct Senior Researcher with the International Graduate School of Business in the University of South Australia. He has recently co-authored a book with Michael Marquardt entitled *Breakthrough Problem Solving with Action Learning: Concepts and Cases*, published by the Stanford University Press in 2012. His current research focuses on the influence of emotional intelligence on learning styles with implications for management education and development.

Michael J. Marquardt is Professor of Human Resource Development and Program Director of Overseas Programs at The George Washington University's Graduate School of Education and Human Development. He also serves as President of the World Institute for Action Learning (www.wial.org). He is the author of 24 books and over 100 professional articles in the fields of leadership, learning, globalisation and organisational change, including *Building the Learning Organization* (selected as Book of the Year by the Academy of HRD), *The Global Advantage*, *Action Learning in Action*, *Global Leaders for the 21st Century*, *Global Human Resource Development*, *Technology-Based Learning*, and *Global Teams*.

Issue 2: contribution of AL to management education

This is the second issue of the special issue on 'Action learning for human resource development (HRD) and human resource management (HRM)'. In this issue, we focus on the impact of action learning on management education and development. We join the ongoing conversation of many scholars about the need to reconsider the design and

delivery of management education to meet the needs of volatile business environments. We distinguish action learning from other learning types as an emerging methodology in transforming the minds and experience of management learners as they pursue collaborative inquiry in understanding complex organisational issues.

Action learning was originated by Reg Revans in the 1940s when he observed an interesting learning pattern of coal miners in the UK. He found that managers could get together and share ideas with each other without the need of a teacher. His premise of action learning is that people, despite functioning under conditions of ignorance, have the capability of awakening their quest for new knowledge through the questioning of their assumptions and environments. Questioning allows them to create and modify their mental models when they draw on past experiences to make sense of their current situations.

Expectations in management education have changed rapidly overtime. Management education helps to develop leaders that can think creatively, be adaptive in ambiguous environments, and be courageous to take risks. In doing so, a holistic approach to learning is required to build the knowledge and competencies necessary for today's leaders and executives. A critical consideration is the design of learning systems that incorporate contemporary managerial thinking through an integrated programme of study. A desirable management education programme is one that promotes rigorous learning and optimal behavioural change with constant application of new knowledge and skills in the real world.

In this issue, action learning has been found to be a powerful methodology in management education, helping participants internalise their learning orientation and increasing their capacity to reflect on complex issues, provide feedback, and share information. In line with the main theme of the special issue, the five papers also draw on their theoretical discussion and/or empirical findings to provide closer relevance to HRD and HRM. This linkage reinforces the importance of the synergistic relationship between management education and organisational practice where the transfer of knowledge and skills in individuals is essential for leadership and management development.

The first paper by Yorks examines the relevance of action learning to management education from two theoretical perspectives: constructive developmental theory and developmental action inquiry. It discusses the importance of incorporating critical reflection and experiential learning as pedagogical components in professional graduate schools. A key finding is that these components, when incorporated into management education curricula, could help develop strategic mindsets critical for HRD practice.

The second paper argues that action learning is a viable option for application within executive management training and development programmes. Goh and Pavic suggest that the suitability of incorporating action learning into management education lies in the readiness of the learners who already possess knowledge of business principles, have extensive experience as managers, and are constantly challenged by organisational problems which lead them to take different actions. The authors further present a case to illustrate the application of an action learning model within the context of a specific management development course.

The third paper by Belet describes the innovative Finnish team academy entrepreneurship and business education experience incorporating the principles of action learning. It focuses on leadership competencies development through collaborative inquiry in team settings. It was found that a management education model based on the action learning approach could bring about cognitive and behavioural change in

entrepreneurship development. The model could also help identify future corporate executive needs and challenges.

The fourth paper explores the introduction of a European Union (EU)-accredited postgraduate management qualification using a blended action learning approach. According to Edmonstone and Robson, effective use of resources is crucial for ensuring a successful educational programme. They further found that not only did the participants of the programme gain an academic qualification but they also gained valuable experience through personal development. In turn, they demonstrated greater capability of independent learning, and experienced renewed social capital within their professional community.

The fifth paper by Soffe and Hale describes a new model that integrates foundational critical thinking concepts and principles into the process of action learning as a management learning and education tool. The authors suggest that a symbiotic relationship is necessary for understanding the mutuality of critical thinking and action learning in order to turn abstract ideas into concrete actions. The proposed model promotes creativity and innovation, and can make a positive impact on MBA programme improvement, organisational learning, and HRD.

A team of 13 dedicated international reviewers helped us in the double-blind reviewing process, increasing the overall quality of the papers to a large extent. Given the integrity of the blind reviewing process, their names cannot be acknowledged in this editorial. Still, we would like to commend them for their time and effort in crafting thoughtful and inspiring comments that helped the authors view the contribution of their studies in a different perspective. The final version of the papers published in this special issue is the result of a rigorous review process. We hope this issue will provide you with new perspectives of action learning in the context of management education and development.

Enjoy this special issue!