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Editorial 19.2

The versatility of action learning

It is clear that action learning is extremely versatile, adaptable for use in many different contexts and many different forms. A brief review of the most recent issues of this journal demonstrates this. In the last four editions, we have seen research papers on:

Action learning supporting the development of women leaders in Canada (volume 18, issue 1)

Action learning being used in three EU-funded interorganisational and international projects (18.2)

Online codevelopment events using action learning with over 140 participants from nine French-speaking countries (19.1)

A project using action learning for neighbourhood improvement in the UK (18.2)

Action learning for undergraduates in Hungary, including online interactions (18.1)

A case study of action learning in China being used for teacher professional development (19.1)

A change laboratory using action learning to support an employee well-being agenda (18.2)

The use of Revans' problem-solving praxeology to analyse interorganisational learning between co-located companies in India (18.3)

Management development programmes using action learning to foster individual transformations (18.2)

As well as the online action learning in the examples above, recent research papers have focused on online action learning as part of a professional doctorate, using synchronous and asynchronous communication, and online action learning for a large cohort of undergraduate and postgraduate students engaged in undertaking research for dissertations (both in 18.1).

Action learning is practised by members of both academic and practitioner communities, and research papers on this in recent issues include a paper on building bridges between the two communities (19.1) a paper on academic-practitioner collaboration, and a paper on developing theories from accounts of practice (both in 18.3). Wilkinson and Mackenzie have offered an account of practice paper on difficulties encountered when trying to combine a traditional academic approach to teaching with action learning, and how one of these difficulties was overcome (18.2).

The research papers in this edition continue to demonstrate the range and versatility of action learning. There are three refereed papers and an invited essay.

The invited essay is written in partnership by editorial board members of this journal and staff at the universities of Salford and Manchester; it provides an overview of the unique materials on action learning that are held at the two universities. The essay provides a brief history of Revans and the early development of action learning, and his association with Manchester. This is followed by introductions to the Revans Archive at Salford University and the action learning materials held at Alliance Manchester Business School (AMBS), and the paper explains how the collections can be accessed.

In the first research paper, Rosetta Pillay shares her research on how the process of learning to facilitate action learning groups led to genuine personal development of human resources

professionals in a large public sector organisation in South Africa. The findings offer insight into the effects of the internalisation of action-learning principles.

In the second paper, Rebecca Qew-Jones gives an account of how action learning and action research were used to enhance management apprenticeships within the English higher education system. The study involved establishing action learning sets that included employer and university representatives and provided a safe place for reflection, enquiry and action to resolve complex problems.

In the third paper, Yayoi Hirose uses a case study of action learning with managers and professionals in Japan to explore the challenges to action learning practice posed by aspects of Japanese culture. The paper applies the stages of Kolb's experiential learning cycle to analyse how key challenges may be met and overcome.

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