**Management Education in Action – Observations, Reflections and Ways Forward**

**March 2018**

**David Higgins**

**Key Words:** Management Education, Critical Thinking, Learning Space, Reflexivity, Relational Learning

It is with great pleasure I introduce this exciting issue of the journal, having recently participated at a seminar on Professional Development and Post Experience education/learning I was struck by some fundamental questions in regards to the subject’s nature and purpose – to whom and for what means are educational agendas ultimately directed; these question have become of central importance to policy makers, practitioners and academics alike in the context of the dynamic nature of the business world. Concerns have been expressed about University Business schools engaging more critically with the lived experiences of practicing managers through alternative pedagogical approaches and methods, seeking to account for and highlighting the social, political and moral aspect of management practice. In the UK where funding in higher education has become increasingly dependent on student fees there are renewed pressures to educate students for management practice as opposed to educate them about management and what it does. Government and EU policies are calling on Business Schools to develop and enhance management skill sets, to meet these challenges management education programmes must be more proactive in providing innovative educational practices that helps and facilitates life experiences and experiential learning.

What pedagogical values should a business school stand for? Such a question is of huge importance to large numbers of management and related students currently in, and about to enter, university. Over the past and coming year’s large numbers of undergraduates and postgraduates, full and part-time, will pass through business schools and be influenced by them and their pedagogical approaches to the practice of management. *So how should HEI Business Schools educate and prepare students for the complex world of business……………………….?* Management development and education is a central feature of the University Business School agenda, this can be attributed to issues such as political agendas, perceived ideologies about business and what matters, institutional and educational divides and drivers. Unfortunately, some Management focused programmes in the UK continue to concentrate on teaching management through traditional formats such as lectures, exams and papers, adopting a “teach about” approach. There is a wide spread consensus that traditional pedagogical “instructional methods” alone are insufficient to adequately develop managers to deal with the complexities of running a business. Therefore, there is a growing need to cultivate innovating ways of thinking, and new modes of pedagogy to fully enhance and develop approaches to Management education and learning (Locke and Spender, 2011). The institutionalised nature in many Business Schools requires managers to be owned and taught in a certain manner, rendering the subject to become a marginalised and isolated area on the business school curriculum. The historical pre-occupation with an individualistic approach to managerial education has continued to marginalise and de-value the broader social context in which the manager functions (Khurana, 2007; Starkey and Tiratsoo, 2007). Such a rationalistic approach has resulted in a bias against a focus on the meaning managers make of themselves and their social worlds, or learning about the knowledge they possess from a careful study of their practice. The above has met with steady criticisms, the thrust of these criticisms is that what is being produced because of such educational programs are managers who are overly analytical, narrow and short –term focused, technically deconstruct and uninterested in methods of reflection as a means of understanding. Manager’s need to become aware of and develop their cognitive skills to aid them in making sense of their actions or own practice (Perriton and Reynolds, 2004). Thus, creating a real-time learning process by permitting, supporting and encouraging them to explore their judgements and critique their means of inquiry, calling into question the knowing, images, assumption of their actions, and the stories which they account for in their experiences of themselves and others. As a result, the conceptual diversity of management education and development has led to a lack of clarity in the integration with purposeful philosophical underpinnings, which has led to confused and mixed purposes. The current demand to develop proficient managers requires methods for enhancing and stimulating the learning experiences of the manager which enhance aspirations, critical thinking skills, capabilities and behaviour.

Such debate represents many challenges to the current traditional methods of management education adopted by University Business Schools, ranging from deeply rooted philosophical debates and beliefs about the nature of management within Higher Education, to the definitional and conceptual contradictions to the notions of what are management practice and learning (Keevers and Treleaven, 2011). The initial questions I posed at the outset of this editorial sought to establish a focus towards methods which enable one to gain a real insight into the natural practices of what it means to be a practicing manager, where experience and learning is gained through the natural process of action, the use of action learning and reflexive methods as a means of critiquing practice are key methods, (Reynolds, 2011). Such critique would draw focus to the action learning experience and the socially mediated nature of experiencing, a more rigours examination of theoretical perspectives in order that social and political tensions can be revealed, (Antonacopoulou, 2007; 2008; Trehan and Rigg 2015).

In this issue of the journal we are introduced to several interesting papers which rise debate surrounding key fundamental issues in Management development in action. Our first contribution from Caroline Ramsey is that of a “provocation to thought” the emerging discussion presents a challenge to us surrounding how we might think more critically about our practice as we enact. A position is presented to us based upon a social constructionist premises, “Social Poetics” is offered as a mindfulness that foregrounds moment-by-moment relations in which new realities are improvised as we enact. Our second contribution from Elena Antonacopoulou presents a fresh conceptualisation of Action Learning by revitalising what criticality means in action and in learning, embedding this as integral to Continuous Professional Development (CPD). The criticality that action learning promotes could be most impactful, in fostering a mode of learning – *Learning in Crisis* - that cultivates reflexive critique and Phronesis to guide professional conduct, particularly when dealing with professional dilemmas. Our third contribution from Kiran Trehan explores Action learning in an African context and examines how action learning as a cultural product is biased towards western values and practices. The paper draws attention the political, cultural and social encounters of internationalising action learning which are often glossed over in current debates. Our final contribution from Andrew Eaton presents on how reciprocity between academic and peer researchers led to stronger collaborations.

An integral part of this journal is our Accounts of Practice and Book reviews which demonstrates not only an articulated understanding of learning in action and inquiry but also the means to which practices are oriented and crafted as we engaged and act in the moment.

[**Top of page**](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.libaccess.hud.ac.uk/doi/10.1111/j.1467-8551.2009.00679.x/full#leftBorder)

[**Abstract**](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.libaccess.hud.ac.uk/doi/10.1111/j.1467-8551.2009.00679.x/full#abstract)

[**Introduction**](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.libaccess.hud.ac.uk/doi/10.1111/j.1467-8551.2009.00679.x/full#ss1)

[**Reflexive critique: multiple perspectives on what it is to be critical**](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.libaccess.hud.ac.uk/doi/10.1111/j.1467-8551.2009.00679.x/full#ss2)

[**Introducing ‘critical thinking’ into the MBA curriculum**](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.libaccess.hud.ac.uk/doi/10.1111/j.1467-8551.2009.00679.x/full#ss3)

[**The challenges of reflexive critique in the business curriculum: lessons learned**](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.libaccess.hud.ac.uk/doi/10.1111/j.1467-8551.2009.00679.x/full#ss10)

[**Why impact matters to making business schools critical**](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.libaccess.hud.ac.uk/doi/10.1111/j.1467-8551.2009.00679.x/full#ss11)

[**Conclusions**](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.libaccess.hud.ac.uk/doi/10.1111/j.1467-8551.2009.00679.x/full#ss12)

[**References**](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.libaccess.hud.ac.uk/doi/10.1111/j.1467-8551.2009.00679.x/full#ss13)

**References**

Alvesson, M. (Ed.). (2011). Classics in Critical Management Studies. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar.

Antonacopoulou, E. P. (2007) ‘Actionable Knowledge’, in S. Clegg and J. Bailey (eds) *International Encyclopaedia of Organization Studies*, pp. 14–17. London: SAGE.

Antonacopoulou, E. P. (2008) ‘On the Practise of Practice: In-tensions and Ex-tensions in the Ongoing Reconfi guration of Practice’, in D. Barry and H. Hansen (eds) *The SAGE Handbook of New Approaches to Management and Organization*, pp. 112–31. London: SAGE.

Khurana, R. (2007). From Higher Aims to Hired Hands. The Social Transformation of American Business Schools and the Unfulfilled Promise of Management as a Profession. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Locke, R., & Spender, J.-C. (2011). Confronting Managerialism. How the Business Elite and Their Schools Threw Our Lives Out of Balance. London: Zed Books

Perriton, L., & Reynolds, M. (2004). Critical management education. From pedagogy of possibility to pedagogy of refusal? Management Learning, 35 (1), 61-77.

Keevers, L, Treleaven, L (2011) Organizing practices of reflection: A practice-based study. Management Learning 42(5): 505–520.

Reynolds, M (2011) Reflective practice: Origins and interpretations. In: Pedler, M (ed.) Action Learning in Practice. 4th edn. London: Gower, 403–414.

Trehan, K, Rigg, C (2015) Enacting critical learning: Power, politics and emotions at work. Studies in Higher Education 40(5): 791–805