ALAR

Action learning and action research journal

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ALARPM is a strategic network of people interested or involved in using action learning or action research to generate collaborative learning, research and action to transform workplaces, schools, colleges, universities, communities, voluntary organisations, governments and businesses.

ALARPM's vision is that action learning and action research will be widely used and publicly shared by individuals and groups creating local and global change for the achievement of a more equitable, just, joyful, productive and sustainable society.

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Editorial

Welcome to issue number fifteen of the ALAR Journal – and what a little beauty it is! But before I tell you about what's to come, I would like to welcome Yoland Wadsworth (ALARPM President), Geof Hill (Brisbane Organising Committee member) and Gail Janse van Rensburg (ALARPM Management Committee and World Congress Organising Committee member) to the editorial team. Both Yoland and Geof have agreed to come on board as Consulting Editors. The depth and breadth of the ALAR Journal in recent issues, has been a consequence of their combined enthusiasm for ALARPM and their shared talent for encouraging the contribution of others. Gail has agreed to be Associate Editor and will be available to provide assistance for potential contributors to the ALAR Journal at the World Congress in Pretoria later this year. I gladly welcome them on board and thank them warmly for their efforts behind the scenes.

We begin this issue with an article by Graham Lyttle outlining *The Holistic Clinic Model,* developed in his own Osteopathic Health Clinics, using action learning and action research methodologies. This article is a 'must read' for people interested in their own health, health processes generally, and the patient/practitioner relationship in particular. Next we bring a series of four articles based on the highly successful Facilitators' Markets held in Brisbane during 2002. Pam Kruse explains the Facilitators' Markets concept and introduces the presenting facilitators and authors, Geof Hill, Bob Dick, Julia Zimmerman & Tim Dalmau (article not included); Di Seekers, and Jim Willcox & Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt.

In 'People' we bring sad news of Dr Reg Revans' death with a eulogy by Charles Magerison, reflecting on his extraordinary life. Reg Revans' significant and ongoing contributions to the ALAR community will be deeply missed.

In 'Bookshelf' we present a review, by Eileen Piggott-Irvine, of Sandra Speedy's new book, *Women using action learning and action research: The South African context.* And in 'Noticeboard' we bring you a last minute reminder to register for the ALARPM 6th/PAR 10th World Congresses to be held in September 2003, Pretoria, South Africa. Also, Paul Wildman offers a new CDRom using action learning principles to drive the development of your own small business.

The holistic clinic model: ALAR the key ingredients to change and development within the clinic model

Graham Lyttle –

Introduction – The clinic

I am the owner/manager and director of the Osteopathic Health Clinics and am trained in osteopathy, chiropractic, naturopathy, bio-resonance therapy, acupuncture, and in mental/emotional therapy. My role involves both health management and business management. Health management entails the development of treatment protocols, actual treatment and oversight by way of case management. It also involves the recruitment and training of quality staff.

As the manager/owner of a holistic health clinic, I recognise and rely on four major tools. These are the practice of osteopathy in the cranial field, naturopathy using herbs, nutritional substances and homeopathy, I use the principles of acupuncture and employ electro magnetic energy, primarily through a device known as a BICOM machine. The clinic's primary activity is the treatment of chronic, long term or degenerative states. We are not set up for the ER type case, nor do we hold a license for it.

I also work in the mental emotional realm. A primary tool is kinesiology and a system called Neuro Emotional Therapy (NET), which employs the principles of muscle testing and kinesiology for the treatment of mental emotional conditions.

I developed the clinic in response to patient need and their insistence that traditional medicine had failed them.

The methodology employed to implement changes in the clinic is based on the action learning, action research (ALAR) model. This is a particular paradigm of thinking and learning that:

> … emerged in the 1920's and has been developed since then constantly and in a dynamic way. They gained eminence in times of crisis and enormous change, such as during the World Wars I and II and in recent years in response to globalisation and rapid technological and socio-economic change. (Zuber-Skerritt 2001)

The patient's point of view is vital. Part of the holistic approach is the understanding that health requires more than a sterile process or a clinically uninvolved routine. More often than not, the patient knows intuitively where their problem lies, and that understanding is a vital element in the diagnostic process.

'Reflection' after 'Observation' is the key component of my practice philosophy, and that is what makes the ALAR model suitable as my research methodology. I observed how regular the cycle was, and I found myself doing the same thinking, but at another level (see Figure 1).

The research process

The ALAR process itself has been a major contributor to my holistic methodology. The way we see health and the way we see illness is an evolving process. Disease is not a static event so that one prepared solution can intercept and change completely for the good. Disease is a process, a reversal of positive energy, where vitality and life becomes diminished to a measurable extent. At what stage are we unwell or well? Does disease occur the moment pathology is detected? Not at all, we 'feel' unwell the moment our vitality is reduced enough for us to notice the 'feeling'. We are often aware we are not functioning on 'all four cylinders', long before we feel unwell. So the process of 'health turning to disease' and the reverse 'disease returning to health' is a continuum, not a static state. By the time a person is in their doctor's surgery, many systems are at varied states of illness. What we are defining here is the state of health equilibrium, or homeostasis. Homeostasis is in itself a conundrum, as we move in and out of balance constantly. I see it as a knife-edge, or a balance scale, our state of health is permanently challenged by every pressure pushing us off the knife edge of harmony, or every onslaught or force pulling us away from our centre of balance.

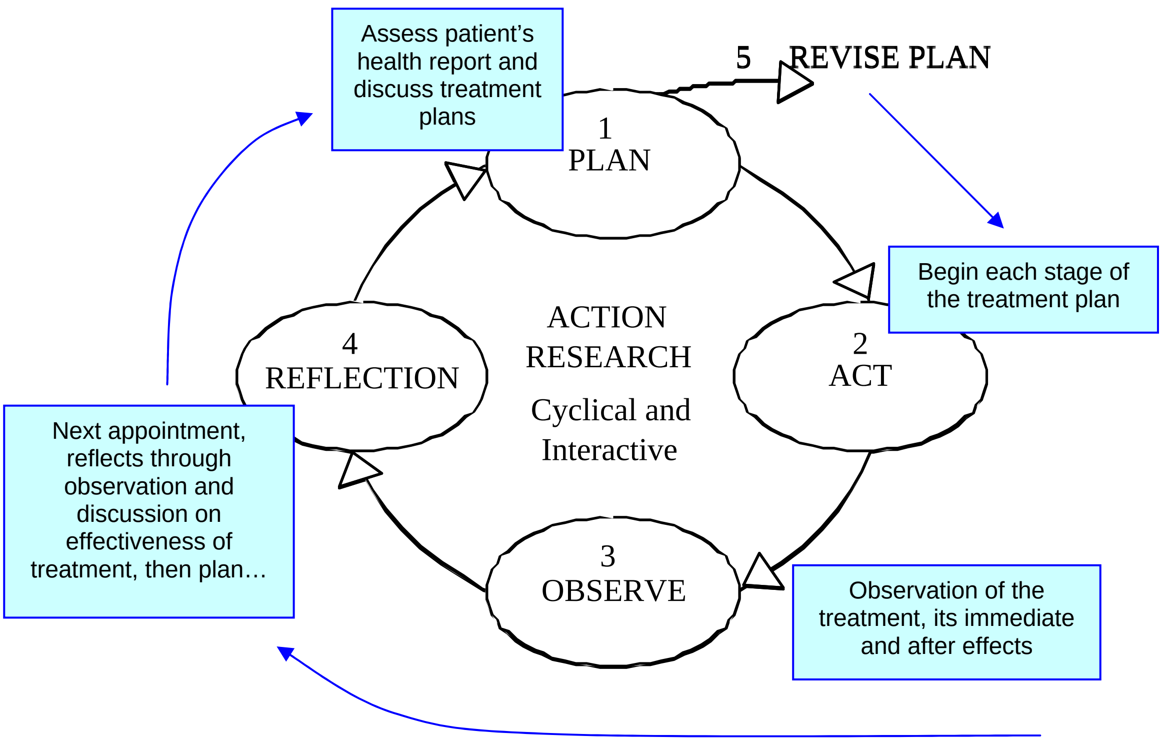

Figure 1: Our approach to action research

Considering the problem – A case called Ken

Ken is in his early 50's, overweight by 25%, an ex-builder who presented to my clinic some 15 months earlier in acute pain and with a history of chronic lower back problems. He had all the radiographic appropriate reports – CT Scans, MRI's, and plain films, all pointing to a disc protrusion with degeneration of all the lumber discs. The medical prognosis was 'surgery – the only cure'! (Ken became well after about 4-5 months of intensive work – without surgery. He has been back at work for about 6 months and is doing well).

Ken now reports about every 6-8 weeks for a check up, a good massage and structural balance. I remember the process that occurred, on a particular recent visit for treatment, when I asked him how he was doing.

> *I'm a lot better thanks, my back and shoulder has improved somewhat but my back still gives me some trouble sometimes. Like, it was fine for three weeks then last Monday morning I woke with pain down my left sciatic nerve again and my back really hurting, yet I cant remember doing anything to hurt it.*

During the time between appointments, Ken was subject to many forces and no one could have known what they were. At what stage did Ken enter ill health? Was it on the Monday morning or prior to that time? At what point was he unable to resolve the challenge of his pain without additional or outside support?

What is our response?

Mostly, resolving peoples' health issues become the doctors' rather than the patients' problem. I believe, however, that patients often intuitively know what they need, but that the doctor doesn't always listen, they may be elsewhere in their own thoughts looking inward for their own constructed answers, the result of years of pre-conditioning, or just absent from the scene for a moment. But what if the answer lies elsewhere? It may lie somewhere between the doctors' own insight and the patients' insight, or it may be outside either persons' experience or knowledge. Do we hold the courage to admit this to each other? What should be our response?

The critical moment is the decider for both the patient and doctor alike. It decides what we do between now and our next treatment? Our responses will be different depending on many factors such as, who we are, where we are up to in our own state of health, what we perceive is expected of us by the patient or their relatives, either commercially, or at a professional level. The moment is broken down into fractions of a second, fraction of a thought, and into the smallest increments of data.

I feel for the GP, the doctor, who is locked into a small time frame. How can he do justice to his patient and his conscience, making decisions and considering due process, over and over again, all within the time and financial constraints of a modern medical centre?

Often our market place and training controls us more than the patients' health needs. As a massage therapist we do our 'massage', why not, that is what we are trained to do and that is where we think the answer lies. As a physiotherapist we do our thing. As a medical doctor we do yet another, for example, administering anti-inflammatory drugs and/or referring on to the surgeon. As a naturopath we don't use NSAID's, we use alternative anti- inflammatory medicines and hope we have provided a better and natural solution, plus maybe a massage and our version of spinal adjustment or alignment. A psychologist would provide a cognitive or logical solution to the patients' mental state, and so on.

But what should be done? The answer is so dependent and controlled by whatever paradigm we are coming from. Changing disciplines is not the answer. We see patients who have already been there and done that. They have been every where, to every one, and tried the 'best' specialist, the best surgeon hoping that 'better trained is better treatment'. Patients come in more confused every day. They bring out diagnostic titles to obtuse symptomology asking 'I have been diagnosed with "Lord-only-knows-what syndrome", have you heard of it or, can you treat that one?' I usually answer something like, 'there are over 10,000 different entries of diseases, illnesses and syndromes and symptoms in my copy of the Oxford medical dictionary, and this is not all of them either, they keep inventing new ones. Our task is to help sick humans repair their systems, systems that have failed under missus, malnutrition, ignorance and abuse. Do you fit anywhere into these categories?'

There are really only two responses – the right and the wrong one. But a first response is usually prepared from an educational agenda, a treatment protocol or a set process that has been defined as the appropriate therapy for the presenting set of symptoms. After all, that is why we get training, so we do the same expected thing. We all do it every day in every city probably all around the world – wherever the western medical model is taught. Natural medicine practitioners may be guilty of the same thing – treating by symptom not by person. The public are trained to think this way also – sometimes asking bizarre questions comes like "… oh natural medicine eh! Well I have psychopathic tendencies, do you have anything for that?" So they expect a 'thing' for a symptom – or symptomatic medicine.

Ken's health challenges

Let's look at what had actually happened to Ken over these weeks. He was exposed to many challenges. <u>Biochemically</u> – 'sneezed on' in his office while he was very tired, so his antibodies would be waging war against the intruding bacterium stressing his immunity. <u>Structurally</u> – while laying bathroom tiles, tripped over and stressing his shoulder fascia and diaphragm taking him beyond his normal range of comfortable expansion and contraction – his shoulder would spasm and his breathing become hampered. Also, his doctor ordered x-rays so, now he had an <u>electro magnetic</u> challenge as well through the exposure to radiation from this diagnostic process – so his geopathic stress levels would be pushed beyond their ability to bounce back into balance. He also experienced a family related emotional challenge – leading to a digestive upset, his heart and pulse rate rising increasing his hypertension.

Ken's biochemical state was challenged whether he felt it or not. However at breakfast, his wife (who was totally unaware of his compromised state) gave him a freshly squeezed drink of citrus juices (just what the doctor ordered!). The energy in the bioflavanoids within the juices provided his immunity and T helper cells with just enough support that they were able to pick up so he commented nothing more than a mild sense of being a bit 'off colour'. Daily we all move in and out of homeostatic balance, our health being challenged away from harmony, our bodies fighting an unseen war even when we are not aware. This process occurs constantly every hour of every day. As time passes our need for help varies depending on what other challengers or supports may come our way.

As we shall see, healing has a longitudinal as well cyclical aspect to its process!

How do we use the Holistic Model?

The first stage – The diagnostic process

As was said at the start, we rely on the process of action learning, action research and every consultation is a process of research. We are on a joint project, in the process of discovering what the patient is looking for. Actively and jointly we are on the same team, searching out the solution to the patients' health challenges, so each case is a research assignment. Figure 2 shows how health improvement is a continuum from the patients' entry point until their complete recovery is achieved. Our treatment and diagnostic process has a very clear learning aspect to it. Observation and reflection are the keys to its success.

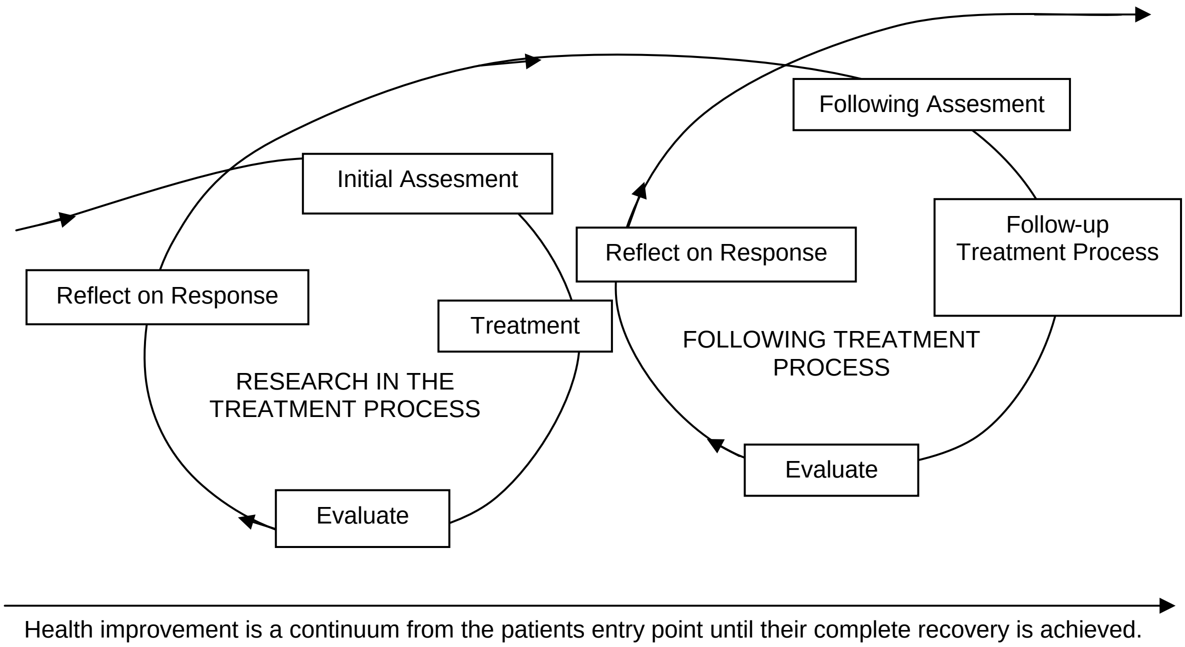

Figure 2: Action research in process

There is a similarity between action research and the treatment cycle for each visit. Each visit follows a similar format with the key ingredient being intuitive hearing and reflection. Treatment and diagnosis are cyclical, that is, we are learning about the patient as we proceed through their case week by week. Every treatment builds on the next. One system's response influences the next system and the next and so on. Our treatment is a process with a number of phases to it. Figure 3 shows the first phase of the treatment process in linear format.

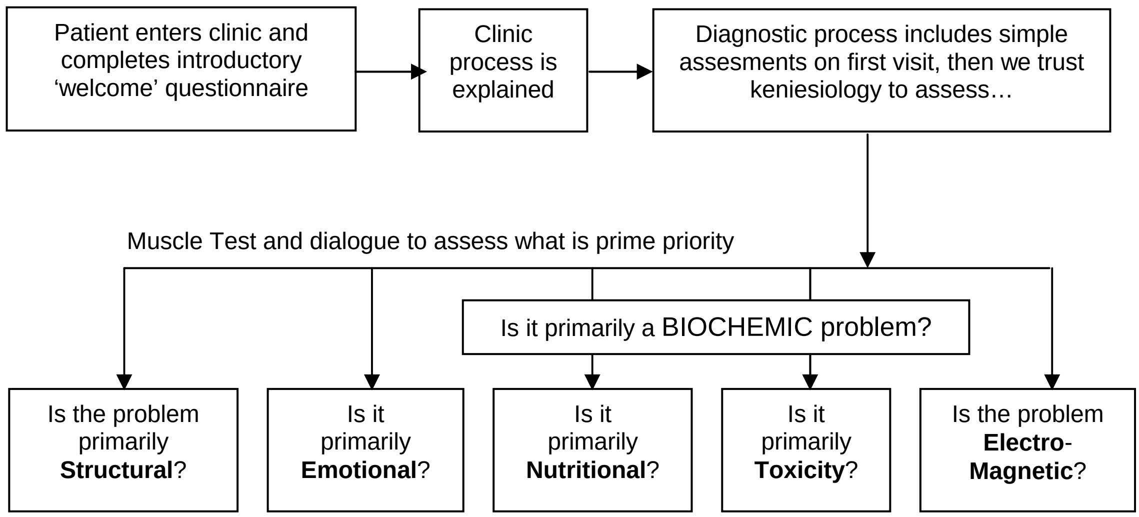

Figure 3: The first phase

Outline of the diagnostic phase

At the initial contact with the patient it is important to establish their understanding of our process. We estimate that over 90% of new patients contact our clinic as a result of referral from a trusted source. Even so, we still need to qualify <u>what</u> they know and fill in the gaps. Mostly, we have people with good concern for their health attending our clinic. About 70% would be keen for our holistic approach and 60% are open to emotional work.

Apart from structural balancing, the mental / emotional aspect of our work produces most remarkable results. People who <u>are not open</u> to muscle testing prove most difficult to move into options other than those they already believe are applicable. I can spend most of my time trying to explain what we are doing rather than doing it, so the first few visits are usually frustrating for both parties. It is a difficult conundrum for us, while we believe in co-researching with the patient, we also want them to be open to methods of health recovery they may not be aware of, and, out of ignorance, may block. To allow for their support and co-operation to grow, we often lose valuable time waiting until they are ready to accept methodologies that are initially beyond their range of comfort and knowledge.

I have had many discussions about our model and process of health recovery. During one such discussion, the following map (see Figure 4) was drawn, which shows some of the complexity involved in defining our process. I think this has been the hardest development.

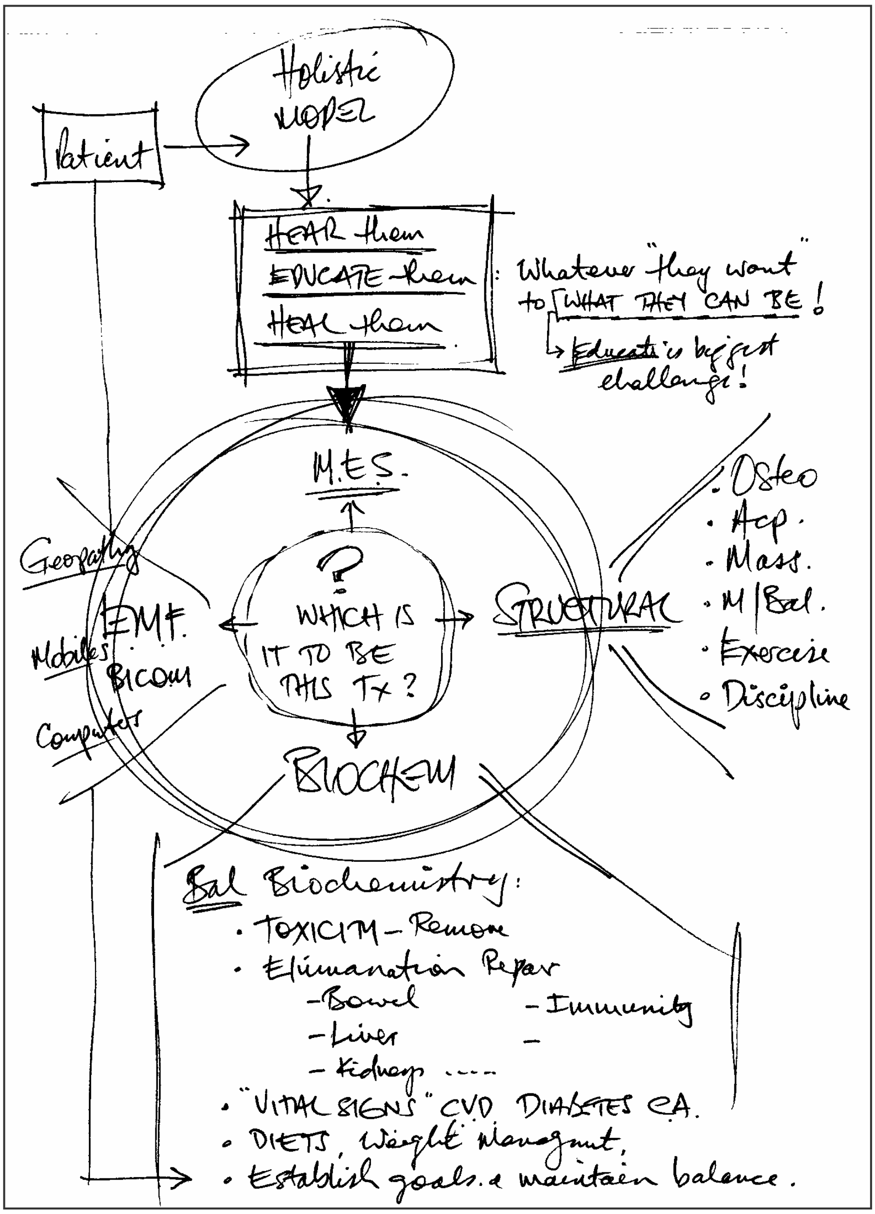

Figure 4: A coffee shop rendition of the model in action

To understand the above we need to understand the difference between the two philosophical streams of thought and their outworking on the health sciences. The two tables below show comparisons between these two models.

The Medical Model / Newtonian Physics. The following table describes the traditional research and scientific model, upon which medicine and conventional / conservative research is based.

Table 1: Traditional research and scientific model

Single Modality	One primary disciplinary focus in training
Reductionist	Focus on the part, not the whole
Dependency	Major stakeholders take a strong position in all decisions
Control	Doctor takes directive control of patient's case management process
Non-Participatory	Doctor often does not listen to the patient's point of view
Objectivity	Treatment plan from a pre-defined protocol
Disempowerment	Patient feels left out of their healing process
Disconnected	A result of the process is often disconnection and depression
Obstructive	Procedures are obstructive to the patient's ongoing health
Linear	Non participatory or cyclic process
Segmentalism	Focus on each segment to the detriment

	of the whole
Separatists	Separates every segment out of its synergistic environment

New Creative Physics. The table below forms the holistic paradigm that uses action research, action learning processes. It is an open collaborative approach to learning and research.

Table 2: The holistic paradigm of action research and action learning

Fractal	Learning about the patient's health is through spiral or cyclical processes
Spiral / Cyclic	Learn by observation and reflection toward improvement
Interactive	Patient collaboration and participation is vital
Interdependent	Not dependent on major stakeholders
Multiple modalities	No pre-conceived protocols
Expansionist	Wide open to any and all suggestions
Naturalistic	Use of the most natural resources available
Participate	Patient responses are invited and required
Emancipator	Freedom from stakeholder rules
Empowering	Patient feels part of and is motivated by the process
Idiosyncratic	View of the patient is valuable no matter what it is
Personal Coach	Practitioners coach patients towards wellness
Correctness	Practitioner and patient develop

	correct process collaboratively
Ecology	Sensitive to surrounding functionality of systems

The tables show the two paradigms as being directly opposed to each other. This is not intentional, but it is indicative of each model's function which reflects through to the practitioner's use of each model.

In Ken's case example, we saw that there could be no preconceived notion of a treatment protocol. He assumed his problem was structural. We could well have taken Ken's advice and pursued the structural solution. No doubt there would have been a satisfactory result as there was a structural element in his condition, however, the emotional element was the dominant concern and was covering the structural component. The underlying problem was masked by the emotional element and, should Ken have been treated structurally, he would have left the consultation with a measure of relief, but with a return visit imminent.

Figure 5 shows how the medical model draws on traditional research for insight and education. In contrast, the holistic model draws on action learning and action research for insight and educational growth.

The developing change process

The action learning process has been deeply involved in our clinic development program. The Frankfurt School of Critical Theory describes action research as,

> Emancipatory action research as collaborative, critical and self-critical inquiry by practitioners into major problem or issue of concern in their own practice. They own the problem and feel responsible and accountable for solving it. This is through following a critical process of (1) strategic planning, (2) implementing the plan (action), (3) observation, evaluation and self-evaluation, (4) critical and self-critical reflection on the results of (1)

> – (3), and making decisions for the next cycle of action research… (Zuber-Skerritt, 1992)

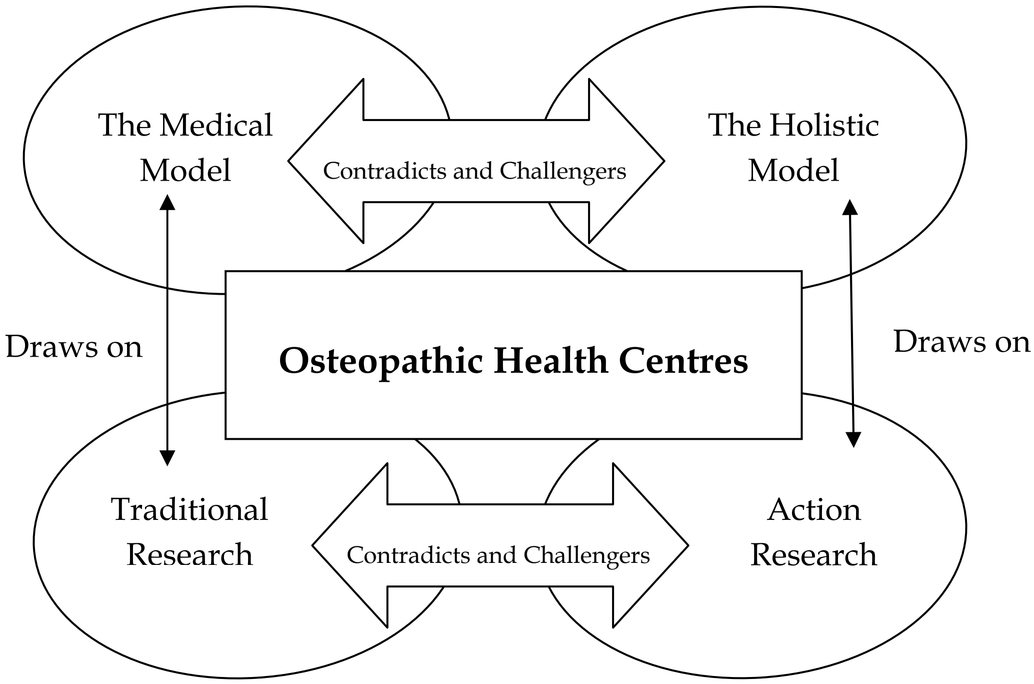

Figure 5: A model of osteopathic health

Zuber-Skerritt (1992) explains how action research is emancipatory in that it 'aims at changing the system itself or those conditions which impede desired improvement in the organisation.'

> For action research… emphasises process over a specific content. It recognises change as a continuous, cyclical, lifelong learning process, rather than a series of programs. It is based on team collaboration, coordination, commitment and competence and it needs to foster critical, double-loop learning in order to effect real change and emancipation, not only for the

> participants themselves, but also for the organisation as a whole. (Zuber-Skerritt, 1992)

The health industry finds itself with a similar exigency. The public needs to see change in its existing organisation, in the medical model itself, through self and external critical examination. The model presented here, the holistic health model, is providing both a platform for critical examination, and a viable alternative.

The model of emancipatory action research is used in the clinic at various levels and, as reflection and research continues, the research process itself is being developed. Critical and self-critical reflection and evaluation has identified changes at each stage of our clinic's growth.

Levels of change

1. *Treatment methods* have altered as confidence in, and proof of, effectiveness and efficacy has emerged through observation and comparison of our methods with alternative methods. Our methods of treatment will no doubt continue to improve as knowledge grows and further research provides greater insight into health recovery solutions. The method options, and their variety, are not the issue for successful holistic therapy. Rather the issue should always be the integrity of the practitioner in considering every aspect of the patient's life experience, each time they present for treatment. This is a most difficult discipline, particularly when the practitioner grows weary with daily workload, and when difficult or objectionable patients are non-compliant.

2. *Diagnosis methods* have improved or changed as reliance on traditional, medical style, scientific tests and diagnosis have given way to less expensive, yet viable, empirical local techniques. Patients are more than happy to opt for these methods in preference to expensive time consuming lab tests. Expensive laboratory tests, however, are offered as a fall back option if we do not find improvement in

symptoms over an agreed period of time, usually 6 weeks or so.

3. *Holistic vs. Reductionism.* As presented earlier, the medical model primarily uses a reductionist approach to diagnosis and treatment protocols, for example, they divide the total human experience into individual experiences and reactions (called symptoms) and they treat these with either drugs or surgery. Holism has taken the stance to view the total body and all its systems in every session. We do not hold to the 'specialist' option when patient problems become 'too hard' for the local clinical setting. However we still hold the option of referral when referral is warranted.

4. *Modalities.* For 'alternative health' or non-medical options there are typically three modalities. These are structural, nutritional and biochemical. Our clinic has also embraced the challenge of the 20th century, electricity. Ever since an electric current has been sent around the globe in waves along or above the ground, magnetic currents that are opposite to the world's magnetic fields have emerged. These have a devastating effect on many ecosystems, not the least being our human experience. We have many patients who cannot live anywhere near overhead power cable systems, mobile phone antennas or go shopping in supermarkets with their high potency power banks of fluorescent lights. It is quite possible that further dangers will emerge as man, in his attempt to be commercial, develops other forms of toxic overload. So we use these four modalities, structural, biochemical, emotional and electromagnetic.

5. *Patient management.* As the model has progressed we have developed systems for managing patient files and administrative processes to assist us in working within these four modalities. As we are not aware of any other clinic operating like our own, we have developed our

own program. (Maybe one day we will encounter a 'sister' clinic and benefit from interaction).

6. *My personal involvement* with patients has also undergone change. Due to growth, and recognition that if the clinic is to reach its goals, others must be trained to accomplish similar results. The change process has included,

   (a) Initial hands on for each patient in their treatment;

   (b) Conceptualising the clinic as a viable model for the health industry;

   (c) Building the clinic model, including upgrading my personal research methods, my clinical skills and completing work on developing model procedures and standards above all others;

   (d) Finding other like minded healers and sharing our vision and model, which includes skills training and embracing the model's ethics and standards;

   (e) Demonstrating that the clinic is in fact a proven and viable alternative to the current health system by having others run the clinic successfully. This will involve overseeing clinic administration, practitioner development and treatment outcomes;

   (f) Replicating the clinic using the holistic model being developed.

This model of change includes organisational change for the clinic and its practices; conceptual change for the director of the clinic; developing a change mechanism to replicate the model in other locations; completion of at least one satellite clinic; and, finally, to assist the evolution of this process into the existing public health system. [Points (a), (b) and (c) above have been primarily completed. Points (d), (e) and (f) will be the subject of further studies and research work.] The process of completing this research work [points (d), (e) and (f)] may take the clinic's development into a temporary slow down phase.

Conclusion

As the head of the clinic, reflection has become my key function. The paper itself is the result of ongoing reflection or, 'thinking about my thinking'. I have no doubt that the more I reflect, the more I will plan new changes, and, when these changes are 'action in practice', I will again observe their effect on my clinic, and reflect on what actions I should plan. I find this paradigm most natural. I find that I use it every day in my thinking about domestic issues also. It is a valuable tool for all of life and cannot be eliminated or reduced down to only one aspect or function. It offers a holistic solution to any research problem, since all of life includes the function of planing, acting, observing and reflecting. I might add that the reflecting phase is probably the least used or the most neglected, and maybe, if we were to promote it as a part of thinking, we might see better resolutions to social issues and decisions.

I acknowledge the support and help of my supervisor, Dr. Ron Passfield and also Professor Outrun Zubber-Skerit. Their own journey in research has given mine great benefit.

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Facilitators' Markets – A bi-monthly ALARPM event held in Brisbane during 2002

Introduction

By Pamela Kruse

During 2002 a Brisbane based ALARPM working party hosted five Facilitators' Markets. The concept of the markets was to showcase the depth and breadth of facilitation skills among ALARPM members. The target audience was anyone interested in action learning. Attendees included ALARPM members and non-members, facilitators, human resource management leaders and practitioners from a diverse range organisations and sectors. We tried to create an environment where doctoral students, graduates and inexperienced practitioners would feel welcome and could contribute.

The key purpose of the markets was to provide a forum to improve the rigour of action learning *(plan, act, observe, reflect)* processes used by facilitators. The working party considered that hosting the facilitators' markets would contribute to ALARPM's objective of using action learning to generate collaborative learning in the participants' own environment.

The working party electronically distributed a one page flyer and organised venue bookings, registration and catering (nibbles and drinks). The events were held from 5.30-8.00pm. Participants, with the exception of working party members, paid a nominal amount of $16.50. All events generated a small net profit.

Dr Geof Hill, a member of the working party, liaised with facilitators to clarify the objectives and framework for their particular event. He was also Master of Ceremonies.

In the first half of the event, the facilitator/s facilitated a session for the participants, using an action learning technique they would use with their own clients. This section ran for approximately one hour. During the second half, the facilitator discussed with participants the process of the facilitation they had used. This stage gave all present an opportunity to reflect on the process and interact with the facilitator to explicitly explore the process options available at certain points, such as, the choices made by the facilitator, their reasons for making those choices, and the potential outcomes of their choices. The facilitators' markets gave facilitators an opportunity to discreetly market their capabilities to a potentially diverse clientele. Given that many facilitators often operate solo with clients, it also provided a unique opportunity for the facilitator to receive robust, constructive feedback from empathic and experienced colleagues.

Human sculpture

Facilitator: Dr Geof Hill

Dr Geof Hill has used human sculpture in his management consultancy practice since 1987, and he investigated the process in depth for his MSC (Hon) thesis.

Geof 's process encouraged participants to create a human sculpture. Members of the human sculpture were then invited to share their perspectives:

Why did they position themselves as they had?

What were their feelings prior to and after making their choices?

What were the outcomes of their respective choices?

How did that impact on the whole of the sculpture?

Geof emphasised that there were no “right” or “wrong” answers. What emerged was that the human sculpture gave us a mechanism to talk about universal issues in organisations, such as:

- To what extent am I “in” or “out” of alignment with my colleagues in the group / organisation / sculpture?
- How have my actions or choices impacted on the whole of the organisation / sculpture and on my relationship to other individuals in the organisation?
- What has been the impact for me personally arising from my choices? [As a participant in the sculpture, I had chosen to sit down, in a comfortable position. I reflected on occasions when I been positioned in an organisation where I was not comfortable and where my capability and creativity were not valued. This thought led me to consider what choices do I have, and what control do I take/have as to where I am positioned in an organisation?]

Geof outlined his experiences in a range of situations where he has invited people in an organisation to form a human sculpture and then discuss the sculpture in a non-defensive way. In his experience, during these discussions, the participants would actually be talking about both ‘discussable’ and ‘undiscussable’ organisational issues and developing insights into the systems and relationships within the organisation. With greater insight, people create the opportunity to make purposeful and constructive choices for the future. Geof’s session provided insight for the participants on the *observe* elements of the action learning cycle.

Structured focus groups

Facilitator: Bob Dick

Bob Dick has been an academic, consultant and facilitator using participative methods and action research in universities and organisations for over twenty five years.

Bob uses structured focus groups as a diagnostic tool to *plan* action research and organisational change management strategies. Bob suggests that focus groups are normally conducted with small groups (6-12) of like minded people, which are video-taped or recorded and then analysed. Bob's structured focus group approach values diversity and the opinion of participants and is not constricted by numbers. He outlined the preliminary approach he takes to provide a framework and context for the focus group which encourages an environment for sharing diverse views rather than debating individual views. Bob encourages participants to, if possible, be both truthful and tactful. Participants are invited to consider and share their responses to the focal question. In addition, Bob requests that participants analyse the responses and identify themes that emerge from the responses. This enables participants to critically reflect on their own and other participants' answers to the focal question. Bob might also ask the participants to identify options or recommendations to address the identified themes/problems.

The focal question chosen by Bob for the purpose of the facilitators' market was:

"*If the organisation that you know best were to introduce one change only, for the benefit of everyone in the organisation, what would that change be and why*?"

Participants provided a range of responses on this change management question and subsequently identified a range of themes at the organisational, individual, communication, leadership and values levels. Bob suggested that discussing values isn't particularly useful unless there is concurrent discussion about appropriate behaviours. Unfortunately, some people espouse values and do not reflect and question whether their own behaviours are congruent with their espoused values. Bob suggested that action learning is a practical and simple approach to implementing change effectively because, at some level, most people plan and implement their actions, and notice what happens, and this provides an opportunity for learning.

Using the process enneagram in organisational settings

Facilitators: Julia Zimmerman and Tim Dalmau

Julia Zimmerman and Tim Dalmau are members of a network of consultants who seek to improve people's ability to cope with and plan for the human effects of change and development in the present economic, social, political and industrial environments.

The process enneagram (a nine point circle) is a methodology to analyse and understand the dynamics of the processes of planning, diagnosing and reviewing changes in organisations.

Tim and Julia commenced the session by seating approximately ten participants in a circle and requesting them to converse with each other on a nominated topic. Other attendees were invited to observe the process and were asked to identify, using a nine point enneagram, the roles that participants were utilising as they contributed to the conversation. This assisted participants to enhance their *observation* skills. We then moved to explore the model and how, with the information thus gleaned, we could *plan* a change process.

Tim and Julia shared examples of using the process enneagram, which enabled both employer and employee representatives identify ways to understand the current situation and then identify, negotiate and commit to strategies to improve it.

Tim and Julia were unable to contribute to this ALAR edition, however, Tim's website is www.dalmau.com and it provides a number of useful resources.

Diverse reflective practices

Facilitator: Diana Seekers

Diana was a member of the Management Committee that organised the ALARPM World Congress held in Ballarat, Victoria, Australia in 2000.

Diana's session focused on the *reflection* stage of the action learning cycle. Diana commented that in the literature the traditional method of reflecting focused on options like journal writing. Her experience has been that writing is not conducive to her own learning style – hence she had explored a variety of alternate methods to reflect.

Initially Diana invited us to complete a questionnaire which was based on Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences. This was a reflection exercise, which gave us an opportunity to identify our own learning preferences.

Diana provided a vast array of creative tools and invited the participants to explore options for reflection, initially from their preferred learning style (as identified by the questionnaire), and then from their least preferred learning style. This was a challenging experience for me and I appreciated the strong bond of support given by other participants during the evening as I attempted to reflect using the intelligence mode in which I felt least confident.

Diana's session lead me to the conclusion that, when we are planning projects, we ought to identify the manner and timing suitable for our respective learning styles, to enable us to reflect and access our own body of learning. We can subsequently incorporate learnings into planning for future actions and achieve double loop learning.

Nominal Group Technique (NGT) using the Zing Team Learning System (TLS)

Facilitators: Dr Ortrun Zuker-Skerritt and Jim Willcox

Ortrun is Vice-President of ALARPM and an internationally recognised expert on action research. Jim is the principal of Scope and Focus, a consultancy which uses dynamic and collaborative digital tools to help organisations identify, explore, and resolve issues in ways that lead to better, creative solutions and rapid decision making.

Nominal Group Technique is a method for getting feedback from groups of people for needs analysis and evaluation purposes. Having gathered the information, a facilitator or change agent can *plan* a change strategy. The Zing Team Learning System comprises software and hardware that creates a learning and decision making environment for both structured and unstructured group collaboration. The Zing hardware comprised a dozen small keyboards which were networked to a laptop and screen.

Initially, Ortrun outlined the traditional Nominal Group Technique as she uses it with butcher's paper. As a contrast, Jim engaged the group in the Nominal Group Technique using the Zing Learning system hardware and software. Participants used their keyboards to enter their answers to nominated questions. Their answers were immediately shown on the screen in boxes numbered one to twelve. It was fun!! There were more than a dozen people and only twelve keywords, people had to complete their answers in pairs. "Where's our answer?" "Oh it's in box 9!" "Whose numbers are in the other boxes?" I could hear the guy sitting beside me tapping away, and simultaneously could see an answer appearing on the screen, so I concluded his answers were in Box 11. There didn't seem to be a system about the order of where answers appeared. Presumably, this was random depending on how the keyboards were networked. Ultimately, we had no idea whose answers were appearing in respective boxes on the screen. We then got involved and excited to see how the software analysed and reported immediately on the preferences and rankings of the participants' answers. We all had the "power of the pen" (keyboard). There was no opportunity for animosity or disputation about other peoples' preferences, as participants were focused on the answers that were facilitated by the software. The Zing Team Learning System clearly provided an efficient and enjoyable mechanism to gather and analyse data.

Next steps

The Brisbane working party was pleased with the outcome of the overall project. It encouraged a number of people into ALARPM activities who had not previously known about the organisation. It also made a small profit!

Other groups of action learning practitioners are invited to plagiarise (share) with pride (and improve) the process used by the Brisbane working party to host similar events in their learning communities.

The following papers, written by the presenting facilitators, provide a more in depth analysis of the processes they used.

Human sculpture: A tool for use in the context of the "dramatistic approach" to organisational communication

- Geof Hill

The "dramatistic approach" (Bordow and More, 1991, p. 60) is an organisational inquiry method that uses dramatic or theatrical metaphors to draw out aspects of interpersonal communication. The main proponents of the method, according to Bordow and More (1991) are Goffman (1959) and Mangham (1979; 1988; and with Overington, 1987).

The term 'dramatistic' has been taken from the writing of Kenneth Burke (1945) who refers to the "dramatistic model of human behaviour". This model addresses the proposition that meaning evolves from interpersonal processes as people relate to each other as 'actors'.

Goffman (1959, p.78) used the term 'script' to describe instances in "psychodrama" (Moreno, 1934), wherein clients in therapy act out part of a play about themselves without the use of a written script:

> *There own past is available to them in a form which allows them to stage a recapitulation…. For in learning to perform our parts in real life we guide our own productions by not too consciously maintaining an incipient familiarity with the routine of those to whom we will address ourselves. And when we become able properly to manage a real routine we are able to do this because of 'anticipatory socialisation', having already been schooled in the reality that is just becoming real for us.* (Goffman, 1959, pp.78-79)

Goffman (1959) suggested that a 'script' was a socialised routine. Mangham (1979), drawing from the writings of Schank and Abelson (1977) suggested that his choice of the word 'script' provides:

> *A general framework for understanding conduct in organisations which can grasp both individual and group conduct, which can locate the situational constraints on joint actions and can achieve this without resort to ad hoc additions from other metaphoric frameworks. Further, this approach allows us to inquire into the symbolic meaning with research skills which theatre goers bring to their appreciation of the drama. … This model fosters the kind of approach to organisations that promises to equip people working in organisations, and people studying them, with a way of acting which frees them from the absurd belief that our world is made*

by forces over which we humans exercise no control. (Mangham and Overington, 1987, pp. 25-6)

He (Mangham, 1979) defined his term 'scripts' as:

> *Relatively predetermined and stereotyped sequences of action which are called into play by particular and well recognised cues and circumstances, of which we acquire knowledge through the process of socialisation.* (Mangham, 1979, p.38)

And later (1988, p. 28) as "well established patterns of behaviour". His definition was based on Schank and Abelson (1977, p. 41) who suggested:

> *A script is a structure that describes appropriate sequences of events in a particular context. A script is made up of slots and requirements about what can fill these slots. The structure is an interconnected whole, and what is in one slot affects what can be in another. Scripts handle stylised everyday situations. They are not subject to much change, nor do they provide the apparatus for handling totally novel situations. Thus a script is a predetermined stereotyped sequence of actions that defines a well-known situation.* (Schank and Abelson, 1977, p. 41)

Both Mangham (1979, 1988) and Schank and Abelson (1977) have suggested definitions for a 'script' similar to Goffman's (1959) notion.

"Human sculpture" is a drama activity in which participants are invited to form a sculpture. It has been presented (Hill, 1995) as a tool for use within the dramatistic approach to organisational communication. The tool has been described as a "tool of articulation".

Hill (1991, 1993, 1995) conceptualises the notion of "script" in the following terms:

- A script is a routine for social interpersonal behaviour;
- A script is acquired through socialisation;
- A script is often unconscious.

His use of the descriptor 'tool of articulation' refers to his working from a position of script unconsciousness. The 'human sculpture' activity facilitates articulation of scripts and consciousness-raising about them in organisational situations.

A minimalist approach is used in facilitating the human sculpture. No theme is given. Few directions are given. The aim of the activity is to provide an open ended gestalt onto which the participants will project their interpretations.

The facilitator invites the formation of a sub group within the participant group, of about six people – beyond six people there is difficulty to remember each individual's actions – and invites the participants of this sub group to decide on their sequence of involvement in the activity.

Having decided their sequence, the first participant is invited to make (form) a statue. The facilitator might suggest that this is like the game of 'statues' played as a child.

A second participant is invited to walk around the first statue and to add an additional statue. There are no rules concerning the relationship between the two statues.

> They can touch or not touch.
>
> They can make eye contact or avoid eye contact.
>
> The can be on the same or different levels.

The facilitator does not state the absence of rules, but answers any questions by suggesting that that there are no rules.

The facilitator invites the subsequent addition of the third, fourth, fifth and sixth statues.

When all six people are in a sculpture formation the audience is invited to walk around the sculpture to view it from different perspectives.

Following the viewing, the first person is invited to remove themself from the sculpture while everyone else remains in their place. This move is explained on the basis that the first person had no-one to respond to, and this is an opportunity to make a change if they desire. If the first person chooses a different position, the sculpture can be viewed again.

Everyone in the sculpture then relaxes their position and listens while the audience discuss their perceptions of the sculpture and the way in which it developed. Then, one by one, the sculpture members talk about their perceptions and why they made choices as they did.

The essential element of the 'human sculpture' is the discussion that it creates about the sculpture. It is this discussion that addresses a number of elements about relationships and choices people make in relationships, and, when all the members of the sculpture are from the same organisation, can address issues that operate in that organisation.

I welcome discussion about this paper through my email address Geof@bigpond.com

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Structured focus groups

Bob Dick –

A brief description of a variant of focus groups, described here as a structured focus group, is given. As with conventional focus groups a structured focus group is a facilitated group discussion. The facilitator asks questions, usually open-ended, to trigger discussion amongst a panel of participants.

In the form of focus group to be described here the facilitator provides less guidance about what is discussed. Because of this the information is gained from the participants rather than being determined by the questions asked. At the same time, the process is more structured than is common. This is to increase the quality of information and the time-economy of the procedure.

The resulting focus group is also more tolerant of diversity within the group. Further, groups which are larger or smaller than usual can be used. These changes increase its suitability for some applications in action research and qualitative research.

My purpose here is to introduce a form of focus group which is well suited to some action research.

To provide some context, I first briefly describe a conventional focus group, and action research. These are followed by an overview and then a more detailed description of a particular form of focus group.

Conventional focus groups

Focus groups, or focused group interviews, are facilitated group discussions. An interviewer asks a series of questions of a group. The group members then provide a response to each question, and a discussion ensues. It is common for the group session to be videotaped (or less often audio taped) for later analysis. In other words, an elaborate analysis is done by the researcher.

The growing literature on focus groups (see later) recommends a number of features. For present purposes, two are important:

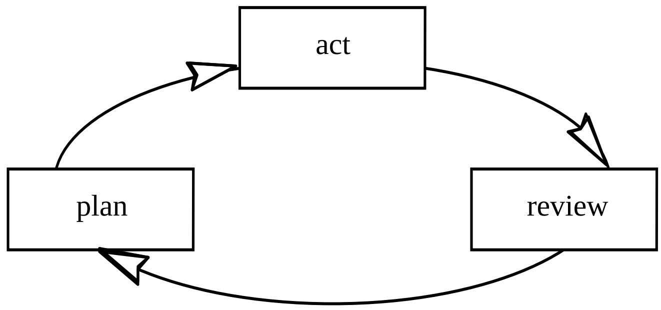
- group size between 6 and 12 people (some recommend between 8 and 10);
- homogeneous groups (groups of low diversity).

The common application in recent decades has been market research, and occasionally pilot research. More recently, focus groups have been rediscovered in what Morgan (1988) identifies as their original application — as a conventional tool for qualitative research.

My interest is in action research. For this purpose, some variation to the conventional form of focus group is useful.

Action research

Action research is characterised by its dual pursuit of action and research at the same time. In general, it does this by alternating action with critical reflection on that action. The critical reflection can be thought of as having two components. The first is a critical review of the actions just taken, and their consequences. The second is planning for the next step, or perhaps replanning the previous step.



The resulting action is usually directed towards some improvement in the situation being researched. As change occurs more easily with the cooperation of those who are being asked to change, action research is usually participative.

Much action research has been done in small group settings or by individuals researching their own practice. For these applications those deciding the actions are at the same time the people providing the information about the actions.

It might be thought that there is then little need for a separate process for information collection. Sometimes this is true.

However, consider applications such as community and organisational change. Here, there are often very many people with an interest: too many for all of them to have direct involvement. It may be that some or all of them can be involved as informants. Processes such as interviews and focus groups can then be valuable. (It may also be important to keep everyone informed about what is happening. I won't be discussing that aspect here.)

It is at this point that it would be an advantage to escape some of the constraints of conventional focus groups. In particular...

- I prefer to work with very diverse samples for maximum cross-fertilisation and so that disagreements can be resolved within each focus group.
- On occasion I find it useful to have the choice of working with numbers smaller or greater than those conventionally used. In some settings it isn't always convenient to engage people only in groups sized between 6 and 12.
- So that direct stakeholders can be involved as facilitators of the focus groups, I like a process robust enough for this to be possible.
- To reduce the influence of my own preconceptions on the information collected I like information to be interpreted by those providing it. This also provides greater involvement and transparency, important issues in change programs.

The following description is of a style of focus group designed to meet these requirements.

Structured focus groups in overview

In much of my information collection, I find I can reduce the influence of my own preconceptions by using structured processes and unstructured content. I start in an open-ended fashion, encourage the informants to contribute, and let their responses shape the further information collection.

Elsewhere (Dick, 1990) I have described a similar process for interviews. *Structured* focus groups apply the same approach to a group interview.

After certain preliminaries a structured focus group begins with the minimal questions that will keep the group members participating. I start with very general questions and provide little guidance about the topic. This reduces the likelihood that the questions I ask will limit the answers I get.

The process, on the other hand, is structured. My experience is that this gives a higher quality of information and more efficient use of time.

The resulting process is reasonably robust in inexperienced hands. A more skilled facilitator will get better information by asking better probe questions and by making more efficient use of time. Even in the hands of an inexperienced facilitator, however, the process will usually yield good quality information.

In the form described here, preparation is needed. However, as most of the important differences with structured focus groups are in the group session itself, that is the main emphasis of this description. Detailed descriptions of conventional focus groups are available in a number of works. In particular, Sage publishers have brought out a number of high-quality works on focus groups as a qualitative research tool. I've provided a bibliography.

The preparation for a focus group includes...

- design of the questions to be used in the different phases of the group; and
- identification of the population, and selection of a sample of people from it. In general a maximum diversity sample will usually give better information than a random sample for a particular group size.

The group session for a structured focus group can be regarded as having four phases…

- an introduction;
- optionally, a question to tap contextual information;

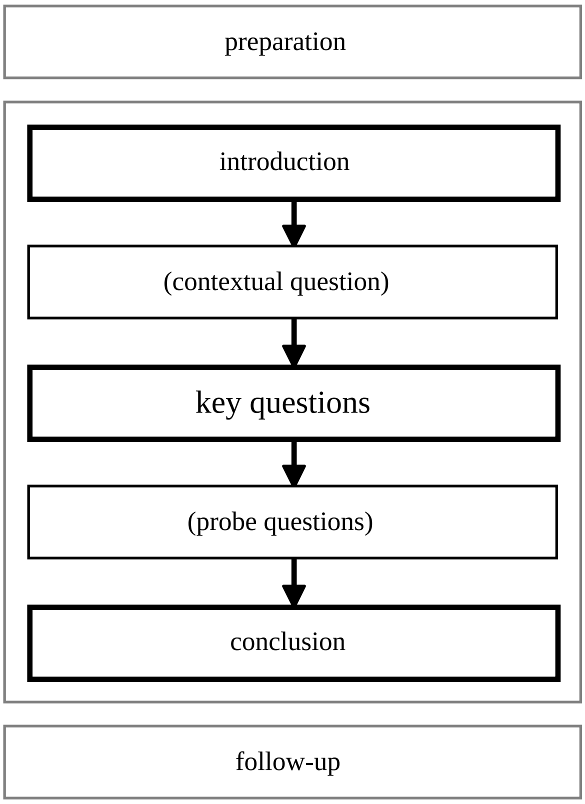
- questions to tap the key information required; and
- optionally, probe questions for follow-up or to elicit more specific information.

The probe questions may also be inserted during the discussion part of each phase. There will also be preparation and (usually) follow-up work.

The design allows for the introduction of other information for which a response is wanted. This is fed into the conversation part-way through the process. It may come, for example, from prior focus groups, or from a previous round of interviews. On other occasions it may consist of plans or the like for which you would like a reaction from focus group members.

Structured focus groups in detail

A step by step description follows. I encourage you to regard it as one example of what might be done. You will get better results from it if your tailor it to your own situation and style, and the purposes of the focus group.



A. Preparation

1. It is a great help if, prior to the focus group, you have a chance to meet participants face-to-face. They will then be more at ease when the focus group is held. You can also explain to them the purpose of the focus group, and what will be done with any information which emerges from it.

At this stage you may or may not want to tell them what questions will be asked. Giving them prior notice allows them to think about the issues ahead of time. It may also mean that they attend the focus group with their mind already made up; if so, you lose some of the benefits of cross-fertilisation between participants.

In organisational settings I usually don't reveal the questions beforehand. My experience has been that sometimes this leads to lobbying so that everyone toes the party line, so to speak.

2. I assume that you have chosen the venue to be comfortable, and to offer visual and aural privacy. If group members do not know each other, try to create an informal atmosphere where they are encouraged to talk to each other. It can help to have coffee or orange juice available, and perhaps non-greasy finger food. Greet the participants as they arrive. Introduce each of them to someone else to get them talking.

B. Introduction

3. When the actual session starts, begin by introducing yourself. Let them know briefly who you are, and what your role is in this. For example, are you collecting this information on behalf of someone else, or are you the person who needs the information.

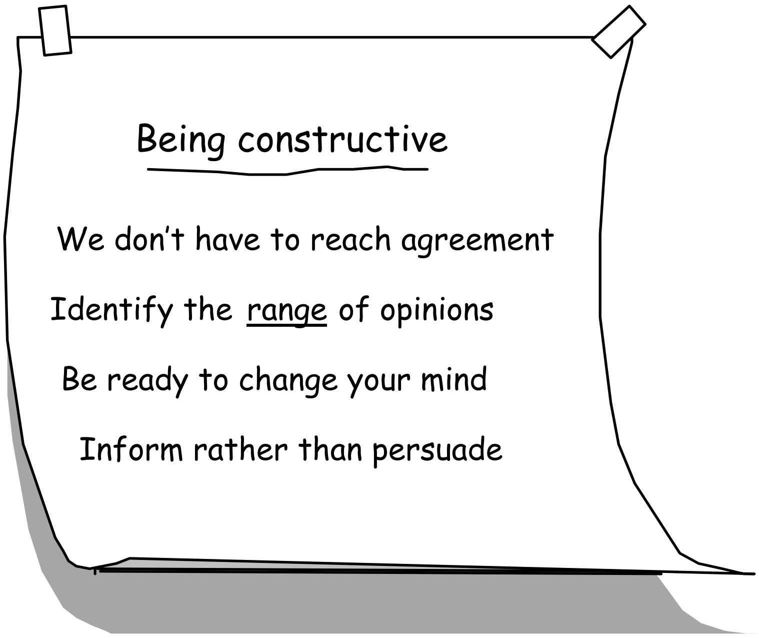
4. Then provide a brief overview of the session and its purpose...

- explain the purpose of the focus group, especially your intentions and those of the other people who will be given access to the information; if participants trust you and particularly trust your motives they will be more open;
- provide a brief overview of the process; a few sentences is enough, but allow some time for questions;
- briefly explain what will be done with the information: how it will be analysed, what it will be used for, and if the participants will have access to it (I recommend that anyone who provides information is also given access to any final report);
- be clear about whether or not the participants will be identified when the information is passed on to someone else. (Unless you have some particular reason to identify them, I recommend that you don't.)

  Do what you can to make this a constructive and cooperative discussion...

- Explain that agreement is not required. You are interested in the full range of opinions that are held.

  "If you can be both truthful and tactful, that's great. If you can manage only one of them, for present purposes truth is more important."



- Encourage people to remain open-minded so that they can learn from each other. Suggest that it is an exercise of mutual education. Different people are likely to have access to different information and different opinions. When all information is put together, better understanding can result. Therefore, suggest that they offer their opinions tentatively so that they can more easily change their mind.

  "There is an opportunity here to learn from the other people, as well as to help them learn. If you offer your opinions without dogmatism you will find it easier to change your mind later."

- Encourage people to offer information rather than to try to persuade others to their point of view.

"Your task here is to provide information which you have and others don't. They will find it easier to listen and understand if you inform *them, rather than trying to* persuade *them."*

Be ready to intervene in a good-natured way (and perhaps with gentle humor) if someone breaches these instructions.

(With a smile:) "That sounded like persuasion to me, George. Try again."

You will be asking people to take notes for themselves during the exercise. Check that each person has pencil and paper for doing so.

1. Have a quick round of introductions so that participants have a chance to form a beginning relationship with other participants. Time permitting, it is also helpful to ask them to spend a little time talking to one or two other people — some relationship with at least one other person will help them to feel less anxious.

2. Then follow three phases which have a close resemblance. In each, nominal group technique (in which information is collected from each person in turn) is used to ensure that all participants have a chance to think through the issues and voice their response. A discussion then follows. Finally, participants are asked to agree on the major opinions and themes which emerged. In this way, the information is refined during the different phases, and the participants help in interpreting the information.

C. Contextual information

This step may be omitted if time is short. However, it is usefully included. Alternatively, hear the information from each person but (in this phase only) omit the discussion.

The key question or questions are intended to elicit the information that you think you want or need. However, if you focus in too closely you may miss out on something by inadvertently excluding it with your question. Time permitting, the first round of discussion can be set a little broader. This ensures that you collect enough contextual information for the more specific information to be interpretable.

So, for example, if your interest is in training programs your contextual questions might address job performance generally. The aim is to trap information which will provide a context for the later phases.

This contextual phase also gives you a chance to develop a constructive form of interaction within the group before addressing the key information.

3. Announce that in this and subsequent phases, you are interested in knowing the range of opinion held by participants. You therefore hope that they will express their own views even when they are not in agreement with other speakers. Again remind participants that this is not intended to be an exercise where they try to persuade others to their own point of view. They will be most help to you if they note the range of opinion, and if they try to ensure that all views are expressed and recorded.

4. When they have factual information which is relevant to other people's opinions they will be given a chance to offer this. But, again, this is to be offered as information and not persuasion.

5. After announcing that people will be given a few minutes to think about the issue, ask your contextual question. Encourage people to take brief notes as an aid to memory. This increases the likelihood that they will speak their own mind and not be unduly influenced by the first speaker they hear.

6. Announce that everyone in turn will be given a chance to speak. Ask participants to take notes on the themes which emerge and the variety of opinions offered. Say that they will also be given a chance to ask questions for clarification before an open discussion proceeds.

7. Then invite each person in turn to offer two or three brief sentences at most.

8. After everyone who wishes to speak has said something, allow a few minutes for questions for clarification. No debate is allowed: this is merely to give people a better chance to understand each other before the discussion begins. Supportively and gently correct anyone who either speaks for too long, or tries to debate an issue.

9. As this is the first information collection, what happens here will do much to set the style of the later phases. You have a better chance of collecting good information enjoyably if you can encourage good habits at this point. Respond positively to any expression of disagreement, even if it isn't expressed as cooperatively as you might wish. In the end, disagreements are more valuable than agreements. They lead the discussion to deeper issues and explanations.

"Thanks, Zelma. It's really helpful that you are willing to express a different view."

10. Ask people during the discussion which follows to try to note down the opinions and information which are important. Remind them that you are interested in the range of views. You don't require them to reach agreement.

11. An open discussion is held. As facilitator, concentrate on keeping the discussion going while discouraging people who might otherwise talk too much or debate issues.

12. If this first discussion is slow starting, try asking people to talk briefly in pairs about their views, and then return to the large-group discussion.

13. If your confidence allows you can insert probe questions here instead of in a separate phase — see later.

14. The next step assumes that you will ask the participants to help you interpret the information. It is more usual in conventional focus groups to record the information on tape and analyse it later. I prefer to include the interpretation in

the session itself. It is much more time efficient. In the time it takes you to analyse the tape you can run another focus group or more. You also have access to more help from the participants in interpreting the information. It involves them as partners in the activity instead of just as informants.

15. Ask people to summarise for you the main ideas to emerge from the discussion. Alternatively (especially if you are less experienced) you may prefer to write up your own summary and ask people to suggest amendments or additions. Then invite them to help you interpret the information by discussing what it means. In any event, the summary and interpretation are captured on newsprint or electronic whiteboard.

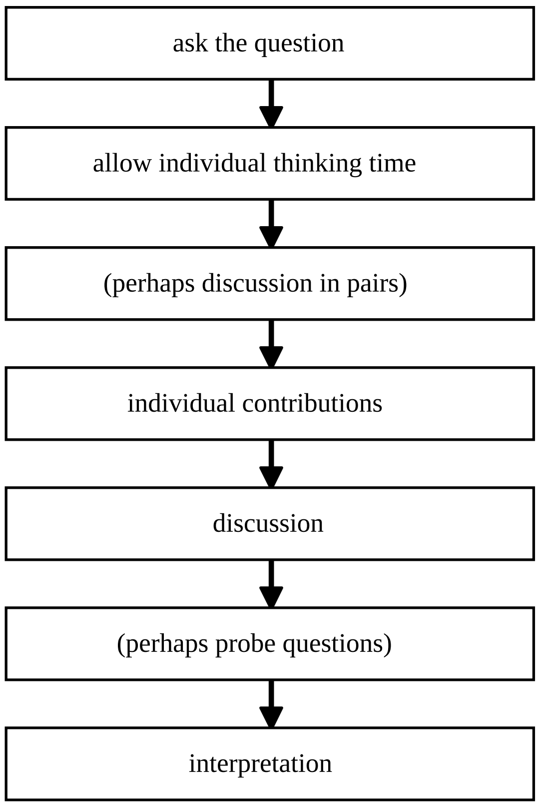
At this point it is useful to review how well this third phase has been, and encourage participants to continue to express disagreement constructively.

"Don't answer this out loud. How willing have you been to express disagreements constructively up until now? What can you do to improve this further in the remainder of this session? How successful were you in offering information without persuasion? What might you do to improve this?"

D. Key information

This is the heart of the structured focus group. It is here that you are most likely to collect the most valuable information. In your planning, allow the most time for this phase. A structured focus group can be run omitting the contextual phase and including the probe questions in this phase.

The process is almost identical to that for the previous phases. The opening question is different. If you have multiple questions, repeat the process for each of them. You will have planned the question(s) beforehand to ensure that you tap all of the relevant information. However, in the light of the contextual discussion which precedes, you may occasionally find it desirable to reword the question(s) in this phase.



There may also be an extra step during which you feed in results from prior focus groups or other information-collection processes.

10. Ask the question.

11. Allow individual thinking time, then encourage each participant to give a brief response. Encourage participants to take notes about any themes.

12. Open the discussion.

13. Capture the summary and interpretation on newsprint or electronic whiteboard.

Then repeat the sequence if you have multiple key questions.

The next step is used only if the structured focus group is part of a larger exercise, and you wish to integrate the information from the other parts. I describe here a brief version. If this is an important part of the process for you then it can be expanded into a complete phase. It is then similar in style to the other information collection phases.

14. If you have information from prior activities, this is an opportune moment to feed it into the discussion. First announce the information, preferably supported by a brief list of key points on overhead transparency or the like. (Alternatively you can provide everyone with a single sheet summary of the information.) In any event, I suggest you keep it brief.

Then ask people to provide their response. Discuss how this information affects their interpretation. Collect this on newsprint or electronic whiteboard.

E. Probe questions

This is optional, though again useful. The most valuable probe questions are often those which serve one or other of the following two purposes.

- If there are important issues on which everyone agrees, to search for exceptions.
- If there are disagreements, to search for an explanation of those disagreements.

Probe questions

For agreements, seek exceptions.

For disagreements, seek explanations.

Depending on your skill and experience you may be able to insert probe questions into the discussion. Otherwise you may prepare them during a short break and present them after the break.

An alternative (or additional) application can be used for multiple focus groups. You can address probes to later groups to expand and refine information from earlier focus groups.

Use the same sequence as before for each probe question. On some occasions you may decide that it is more useful to ask several related probe questions at once, and then move into the discussion.

15. Ask the question.

16. Allow individual thinking time, then encourage each participant to give a brief response.

17. Open the discussion.

18. Capture the summary and interpretation on newsprint or electronic whiteboard.

Finally, thank the participants for their information. If appropriate you may also want to offer them copies of any subsequent report.

First written 1993. This substantial revision of the paper was prepared for the ALARPM "facilitators' market", Brisbane, 27 June 2002. This version includes further minor revisions.

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A journey into reflective space ... with apologies to Star Trek

- Di Seekers

Captain's Log

Stardate 4004.5 in the Year of the Goddess

Quadrant 7802

We have journeyed into reflective space. A group expedition boldly going where we have all gone before, but this time in new and challenging ways. Our mission is to explore our diverse reflective practices as we seek to see ourselves more clearly.

On this particular journey we are exploring the planet MI, where the environment consists of a number of distinct and different cities which house creatures who interact with their world from quite different perspectives.

As our ship approached the planet we seemed to be enclosed in a tunnel that swung and wound in unpredictable ways, the inner surface of this path varied as we descended. It appeared that we were travelling through a curtain which set a boundary between the outside universe and inner space. The tunnel altered from transparent walls to mirror-like surfaces that flickered with shimmering images of our ship, ourselves, and remembered tranquil calm scenes from our past. At times the tunnel crackled and squeaked, played music or sounds, or seemed dark and quiet. Slowly we moved from the busy, noisy doing-universe to the surface of our destination planet.

We landed softly at the spaceport in our sturdy "Starship Pandora" nestling down onto a soft cushion. She has time to relax here. We were met by MI's *Identifiers* who request that we complete a short questionnaire they claim will help us discover our preferred destination. The Chief *Identifier* protocol indicates that our scores will determine our planetary access codes🌏. With absolute confidence I instruct the crew to complete the requirements, as I was sure we would completely agree on where we would all like to travel.

Captain's Log Stardate 4004.5

The Planet MI

Quadrant 7802

I have just received the Chief *Identifier's* Delegate, who presented the report of the crews' questionnaire results. I am shocked to learn that we do not have uniform preferences. The crew is split across five classifications which the *Identifiers* have labelled:

- Visual – Spatial
- Logical – Mathematical
- Verbal – Linguistic
- Body – Kinaesthetic
- Musical – Rhythmic

The Delegate informed me that a famous space-time traveller called Howard Gardner first identified these groupings, and collectively they make up part of his theory of Multiple Intelligences. [This sounds far fetched, but plausible given the number of different intelligent races we have encountered in our travels… why shouldn't there also be multiple types of intelligence itself?]

🌏 Web address for Gardner's MI Inventory = http://surfaquarium.com/Miinvent.htm

I have scanned the crew results report into data-storage for analysis and discussion at the upcoming leadership group meeting.

Table 1: Attachment to Captain's Log – MI *Identifier's* Report for the Starship Pandora crew

Title	**Name**	**Multiple Intelligence type (MI)**	**Accessible Destination**
Navigation Officer	Joan B Sulu	Visual-Spatial	Artsville
Science Officer	Bob D Spock	Logical - Mathematical	Calc City
Communications Officer	Pam K Uhura	Verbal - Linguistic	Talk Town
Chief Engineer	Geoff C Scotty	Body - Kinaesthetic	Lego Land
Environmental Officer	Pam S Attenborough	Naturalist	Wild Wood
Entertainments Officer	Geof H Neelix	Musical - Rhythmic	Tuneville

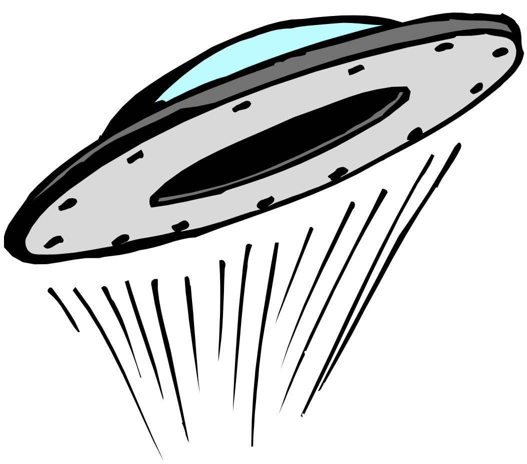

Table 2: Explanatory notes regarding MI categories – provided by *Identifiers* ✒

MI Category	Narrative description	Recommended methods for recording reflections
Verbal / Linguistic	Preference for use of language and reading, writing and speaking to process thought.	Journals, diaries, written stories or reports, poetry
Logical / Mathematical	Preference for the use of numbers, mathematics and logic to find and understand the patterns of everyday life. Often think in conceptual abstract relationships and linkages.	Measurement and chronological data recorded in mind-maps, flowcharts, pie-charts, tables, formulae
Visual / Spatial	Preference for the use of shapes, images, patterns, designs and textures along with drawing, painting, using paper or fabric to work through to understanding.	Paint a picture, build a sculpture or representational construction. Use imagery, collected artefacts, photos as mementos.
Bodily / Kinaesthetic	Preference for learning and understanding by doing. Feeling knowledge through the senses is important.	Take a walk, do some gardening, cook, jog, dance, almost any repetitive activity.
Musical / Rhythmic	Preference for the use of sound and vibration as a means to gaining understanding. Music and auditory processes are important aspects of the environment.	Find a melody or song to work with, select music which evokes the way you felt / thought / acted, use monotonous sound as an aide for reflection (eg. the shower or rain of the roof).
Naturalist	Preference for engaging with the out-door environment, plants, animals and eco-systems in order to gain understanding. The elements are important aspects of everyday existence.	Go on "retreat" to the wilderness, go bushwalking or camping. Talk to the animals (of which there will be plenty around you), lie in the sun or walk in the rain.

✒ Based on summaries of Gardner's MIs found at www.multi-intell.com/

Record of Starship Pandora leadership group meeting

Stardate 4004.7

Aboard the Starship Pandora

Discussion

Planetary exploration methods

The *Identifiers* require us to only visit those cities where we have a high preferred affinity. This will require the crew to divide into smaller away-teams, who will simultaneous explore each city and report back to the leadership group after three planetary cycles. Each team will be lead by a senior crew member according to the reported preferences referred to in my previous log entry.

Captain's Message

Explore the city, discover its ways, and how it can help us see ourselves more clearly. Bring back the knowledge you gain. *May the Goddess be with you!*

Captain's Log Stardate 4005.0

Planet MI

I have received the exploration reports from all my away-teams and the consistent conclusion drawn by all parties is that the cities they visited aided crew members to see themselves more clearly. They felt familiarity with the resources available, and slipped easily into the mission tasks, generating complex and deep reflections. This is contrary to past research, as reported by Science Officer Bob D Spock📖,

📖 While McGill and Beaty, 1992, *Action Learning-a guide for professional, management and educational development* refers to other forms, the main recommended means of recording reflections is via a written journal.

which indicated that the most effective reflective practice is the written recording of observations and reflections in a journal, diary or Captain's Log!

A further observation needs to be highlighted from the away-team reports. Some crew were happy to work in pairs or small clusters however, some individuals found it necessary to act on their own. This was the case across all teams. Again, this goes against the previously quoted research which implied that solitary practice was the norm, and most effective.

I have decided to add another final cycle to this exploratory visit, and to test the assertion of the *Identifiers* that people need to be matched to their preferred city in order to maximise the effectiveness of their reflections. The away-teams will go out for a further 3 cycles, but this time we will send teams to cities they have not yet visited. I have the approval of the MI Scientific Council for this exceptional experiment. We will only have one chance to tackle this challenge – I hope it isn't too dangerous.

Captain's Log Stardate 4005.3

Planet MI

All away-teams have returned safely, if not happily. Many have reported that they found their planetary explorations exceedingly difficult this time. For some, they began their travels sure that they were heading to one particular city, and found that the road mysteriously took them to the city of their first visit. It was hard for these crew members to undertake the mission in any way other than by using their preferred methods. For those that found their allocated destinations – some found their mission efforts fruitless. They have reported expending large amounts of energy and concentration, for no real benefit or effectiveness. The illuminations, revelations and excitements of the first mission were absent.

However, a minority of the crew reported moving past this phase of their exploration and encountering a completely new wealth of reflections. These crew have also reported the costs as being high in reaching these pinnacles, but the benefits were significant.

The strong recommendation is that Star Command be petitioned to authorise a more comprehensive exploration of this unusual experience. *I have made it so…*

I have also noted that the crew members, who reported these exponentially greater gains in insight, are also my most experienced or most willing crew members. They are the ones willing to battle through to win the “gold”.

We leave Planet MI with many unanswered questions…

- Can we apply our learnings about reflective practices to aspects of our lives other than Star Missions?
- For each of us, what are our recurrent life patterns in relation to reflective practice?
- Do I reflect using verbal-linguistic methods for one context, and logical-mathematical ones for another?
- Can we each access all of these “pathways” or should we stick to our preferred methods?
- What did it mean that some crew members found it an essential part of reflection to engage in conversation or partnership with another crew member, whereas others could only gain fruitful reflections if they tackled their mission on their own?
- How important is it to record by whatever means, the results of reflection?

These will form the basis of our second mission to *Planet MI.*

Author's notes

This Star Mission began many years ago, when I was told by a lecturer that journaling was the only REAL reflective practice suitable for action learning, and action research. My own experience was that facing a blank lined page was a guarantee for the stifling of any energies or flow of thought. It took the inspiration of a partner in subversion for me [well us really] to experiment with other ways to do this "reflection thing". I finally got what everyone was on about when Toni and I had a mind-mapping session reflecting on our learnings from an action learning set meeting. We had grabbed a handful of coloured pens, and attacked the wyteboard. Three hours later we finally slowed down enough to ask ourselves what had happened. It was the shift to a basically visual-spatial, inter-personal mode of reflection that had spelled revolution. A grind was changed instantly to a lifelong passion.

The use of Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Theory as an explanation for this experience, came to me much later but it has proved fruitful in challenging me to design activities and "provision the environment" [8] to assist and facilitate people in their efforts to be reflective.

A final note has to be made about my choice of format for this article. When asked to write this piece I knew it would be a huge challenge but I agreed to try to stretch myself. The practice of writing was not the problem – I do it every day as part of my job. However, it took me months to realise that it was the "formal" structure required given that ALAR is a "proper" journal that was stifling my energy. I had the same response to this exercise as I had previously experienced to journaling.

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[8] Thanks to Geof Hill who generously provided a label for what I do.

So I decided to try the strategy of "just write something… anything, and see what happens". I gave myself permission to be as vivid and visual as I needed to be, and Starship Pandora launched herself into space. I wrote down in words what were basically a series of visual images. My starting point for the article was "How to give readers a sense of what we tried to create on the evening of the Facilitators' Market workshop".

An example of how the workshop processes have translated into metaphor is the "Planet MI Cities". These cities represent workstations utilised by participants of the facilitators' market. Each station was equipped with materials or "directions" to assist participants in their reflections on the critical question of "What are the various ways you reflect?" The visual-spatial area was full of paints, colour pens and pencils, large sheets of white and coloured paper, and instructions to draw a picture. The body-kinaesthetic people had a choice of either using lego or play-doh to build a representational structure, or to follow a candlelit reflective walk. Each of these activities could be done either solo, or with others.

For those of you who might like the metaphor translated into a more concrete description of what I did on the night – please feel free to ask via di.seekers@bigpond.com

In the end I'm pleased with Pandora's flight, and she has confirmed for me that preference should not be ignored. For me it makes available a diversity of perspectives which would otherwise be hidden, and give me a chance to partner with others in ways that expose me to stretch.

Using the Zing Team Learning System (TLS) as an electronic method for the Nominal Group Technique (NGT)

- Jim Willcox and Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt

This brief paper provides an outline of (1) the Nominal Group Technique (NGT) as a proven effective qualitative method for collecting feedback/data from a group of people, eliciting their views of some issues in response to a focal question; and (2) the Zing Team Learning System (TLS), a new electronic method of simultaneously recording group members' brainstorming, categorising and prioritising of ideas on a common viewing screen. We tried to combine the two methods with participants in an ALARPM (Action Learning, Action Research and Process Management) Workshop to obtain a useful focal question that could be addressed at the 2003 World Congress in South Africa. We have aimed to demonstrate how the combined NGT and TLS methods can operate as a means of process management, using qualitative and quantitative inquiry in action learning programs and action research projects. We argue that the use of TLS is of interest not only in relation to NGT, but also to other qualitative process management techniques, such as focus groups, that require a collaborative approach to enquiry, planning, analysis and decision making.

Introduction

In any democratic process management situation involving groups, such as consulting, mentoring and facilitating action learning sets or action research teams, the facilitator of research and/or personal, professional and organisational development has a number of challenging tasks. One such task is using methods and strategies that allow a high degree of participation and generation of ideas from the group, without generating competition within the group and with minimum direction, interference or control by the facilitator. However, it is important to point out that methods and techniques are only secondary matters. Of primary importance is the purpose (goals, aims, objectives) of what we want to achieve by means of these methods.

There is a growing literature on tools, techniques and qualitative methods of collaborative inquiry, including action learning and action research. The purpose of this paper is to present and discuss the use one such method, the Nominal Group Technique (NGT). This method has been described before, for example by Delbecq et al. (1975), Korhonen (1990), Anderson and Ford (1994), Dick (1991, Chapter 7) and Zuber-Skerritt (1998:8-9). As these studies indicate, NGT is appropriate for the purposes of 'think tanks', exploring new ideas, needs analysis and/or collecting feedback for evaluating activities.

The novel feature of this paper is that we have used NGT for the first time in combination with an electronic method, the Zing Team Learning System (TLS), to make the process of human/social interaction more time effective, active and enjoyable. Both NGT and TLS have been used effectively on their own as methods and we discuss the advantages and disadvantages of both. But as we explain here, in combination these methods have the potential to be a powerful tool for generating ideas collaboratively as a group, without producing competition within the group, and generally in less time than other methods (approximately one quarter of the time of NGT without TLS). In this paper we make explicit our learning from mistakes. We organise this paper in five main parts:

1. What is NGT?
2. What is Zing TLS?
3. A case study
4. Discussion of main learning points
5. Conclusions

What is NGT?

The Nominal Group Technique is an effective method for collecting feedback from a group of participants, especially for needs analysis (identifying issues, concerns and expectations) and for evaluation purposes, e.g. collecting positive and negative feedback on an activity, such as a workshop, course or a whole program. (Zuber-Skerritt, 1998).

The procedure of NGT normally comprises the following seven steps.

Step 1: Participants *individually brainstorm* and write their responses to a general, focal question (about five minutes).

Step 2: The individual participants' lists are then compiled into a public list (usually on a board or on flip-chart paper) by a *round robin collection of ideas* without any discussion at this stage (about 15–20 minutes). The rule is that criticism and judgment of any items are forbidden.

Step3: The facilitator leads the subsequent *discussion and clarification* of the public statements, collating any overlapping statements on the board/flip chart and numbering all statements (about 20–30 minutes).

Step 4: This discussion is followed by *ranking* (about 5 minutes). Here each participant is asked to select from a list of public statements three items that he/she considers most important, to write these on three separate small paper slips (provided by the facilitator), and then to rank these items (1: most important, 3: least important) (about 5 minutes).

Step 5: Finally, the *group results* emerge: The facilitator asking participants to display their ranking slips on a table or board in three rows, showing first, second and third priorities (about 10 minutes).

Step 6: These group results provide (a) *instant feedback of results* to the group and (b) later, the basis for a final prioritised list to be presented by the facilitator/researcher in table form. The table is to show the group's collective weighting/priority for each item/statement.

Step 7: The facilitator/researcher summarises the process and results (with the attached table) and distributes the report for *'participant confirmation'* prior to publication.

This procedure is only nominally a group technique (hence the name NGT), because the information is provided by the individual members in the brainstorming activity at the beginning, and is ranked in the voting at the end of the session. Face-to-face confrontation and competition are largely avoided, but the clarification and discussion of the provided information are essential for participants' understanding, learning and development.

The disadvantages of this group process include the following:

- The success of the session depends largely on the discussion leader's facilitation and process management skills. An untrained facilitator might get into discipline and time problems.
- If the group is too small (say less than five or six), the process does not work well, because there is not sufficient variety and richness of ideas/data.
- If the group size is too large (say more than 15), the process can be slow and boring, especially in the phase of collecting individual statements, one by one, to produce the collective list (step 2).
- In this phase (step 2), participants may also be frustrated by the rule that forbids any discussion or criticism.
- The facilitator often needs to interrupt the discussion for time reasons, when participants are still keen to continue the discussion.
- Other challenges that will be discussed in the case study.

However, an experienced facilitator can adapt the NGT, if and when necessary, to avoid most of these problems. For example, Zuber-Skerritt (1998) has used this process with a conference group of 60 participants by dividing them into five sub-groups of approximately 12 people each. Each group conducted the NGT led by a facilitator who had been introduced to and experienced the process beforehand. On other occasions she used the fishbowl technique with 12 people in the centre and 12–24 people in the outer circle who discussed and contributed to the brainstorming list of a partner in the fishbowl (in between steps 1 and 2 above). If the group size is too small, each participant may meet with colleagues outside the group before the session and bring a more comprehensive list to the NGT session itself (step 1). If a lively discussion (step 3) needs to be stopped, the group may decide to meet again at a later time.

We believe that the advantages far outweigh the disadvantages of using the NGT for identifying a group's needs, concerns, evaluation or innovative, creative ideas in response to a focal question.

The advantages of this group process include the following:

- The process ensures balanced participation from all participants: All get the same amount of time for thinking, generating and ranking ideas. No individual can dominate the discussion. All contributions and votes have equal weight regardless of the status of the participant.
- The process is task-oriented, hence makes effective use of resources and avoids personality clashes.
- It is depersonalised and all contributions become group property.
- Group cohesion and purpose are quickly achieved.
- The group stimulus encourages creative and innovative thinking.
- The influence of the leader/facilitator is restricted.
- The structure provides a format for closure and final decision.
- The group motivation and sense of purpose are high.

- Participant satisfaction is higher than in unstructured, open discussions.

There is no doubt that NGT is a valuable tool for needs analysis, problem definition and activity evaluation.

The focal question and its wording are crucial for the success of NGT inquiry. The question is normally fairly general and exploratory to allow participants to answer in a wide variety of ways. However, the question needs to be more specific if the results are to lead to specific constructive action.

Here we list a few examples of focal questions. Each question starts with “For you personally,” followed by the question, such as:

- What are the major issues and concerns in (postgraduate) training and supervision in your department?
- What areas/topics/issues of research (and thesis writing) would you like to see addressed in a series of workshops?
- What are your expectations of this course?
- What were the main positive aspects of this course, and what are your suggestions for improvement?

We have found that the NGT can be of further benefit to group process management if supported by computer technology, in this case, by the Zing Team Learning System (TLS).

What is Zing TLS?

The Zing Team Learning system (TLS) is an electronic process system comprising software and hardware that creates an environment for discovery, learning and decision making for both structured and unstructured groups of people. Technology underpins the process in a way that augments, rather than detracts from, the positive elements of human enquiry and social interaction.

In response to a question or issue, participants input their comments via mini keyboards into a team space. These comments and other process layouts are projected onto a common viewing screen (e.g. LCD projector) for processing.

In essence, TLS provides a common "thinking space" for multiple minds where, in parallel, each person is able to freely and quickly bring to the table his or her own perspective on an issue without fear of personal criticism or premature judgment. The richness of these perspectives is captured and retained in a database, which allows for reflection immediately and/or at a later stage.

TLS can allow a group to move quickly from the forming stage to the performing stage and rapidly create new knowledge. TLS has been used with groups as small as two people and as large as 240 people. Very large numbers may limit the range of process options that could normally be applied.

A case study

We presented the Nominal Group Technique (NGT) and the Zing Team Learning System (TLS) electronic method to a group of 16 participants in a workshop in the "ALARPM Facilitators' Market" series of workshops, convened by Geof Hill, in Brisbane in December 2002.

A few weeks earlier we presented both methods to a group of senior academic and administrative staff of a private higher education institution who worked through these processes successfully for their curriculum review and professional development. However, while we introduced the NGT first and then TLS separately, we used both simultaneously for the first time in the ALARPM workshop mentioned above.

Our aims were to introduce participants to this newly combined social and computer technology and to use it to get feedback from participants on what they considered to be the burning issue(s) for ALARPM that we might address with delegates at the next joint Sixth ALARPM and Tenth PAR World Congress in South Africa, 21–24 September 2003 (http://www.education.up.ac.za/alarpm/ and http://www.alarpm.org.au).

Therefore, we formulated and suggested the following focal question as the catalyst for the NGT process: "For you personally, what are the burning questions to be addressed in the Sixth ALARPM and Tenth PAR World Congress in South Africa?"

We intended to follow the NGT process as described above, but here using TLS to replace the manual writing on flip chart paper and to evaluate the combined NGT and electronic system.

However, two main issues arose in relation to the process:

First, we had assumed that participants in this ALARPM workshop were members or at least familiar with the core values and activities of the ALARPM Association and its world congresses. However, it transpired that the majority of participants were totally new to ALARPM and unfamiliar with its philosophy and operations. Therefore, the NGT question we had designed was not appropriate.

Second, this was the first time that the facilitators had used a focal question (for this workshop) to elicit ***questions*** (for the World Congress) rather than formulating a focal question to elicit and clarify issues in the form of ***statements*** or ***keywords*** as answers to the focal question, as we always had done before. We realised this challenge and confusion during the workshop and concluded that a question-producing focal question is not an appropriate use of NGT.

It is not surprising then, that the NGT question as suggested, "For you personally, what are the burning questions to be addressed in the Sixth ALARPM and Tenth PAR World Congress in South Africa?" was challenged by the group. The main reason for this was that the majority of the participants did not consider themselves competent in responding to the question since they were new to ALARPM, its concepts and philosophy.

This was reinforced by one of the participants' comments provided in the post evaluation: "I found this session a little confusing. The focus question was not a question that the whole group understood. It would have been better to generate *(first-up)* a question with the group as you *(then)* did."

Indeed, we then asked the participants to put forward alternative focal questions that might be appropriate for them to respond to and appropriate in the context of the World Congress. This led to the group putting forward four additional questions. Through a show of hands, the group then agreed to use the following question: "What are the burning questions I would like to have discussed at the World Congress". This resulted in 23 responses (see appendix A part 1).

Virtually no discussion took place on the responses. When participants were asked to select their top three choices, the results brought out 22 of the 23 original responses, with the consequence that no distillation of the responses took place. Participants were then asked to each select only their first choice, with this vote resulting in only eight of the 23 responses being chosen (see appendix A part 2).

Discussion of main learning points

We arrived at a number of tentative learning points from this experience in relation to NGT and TLS. We turn first to our learning in relation to ***NGT***.

1. NGT requires participants to be familiar with the context of the question so that they can make meaningful responses.
2. The initial vote response of 22 out of 23 narrowed the selection by only one. This suggests participants chose

questions similar to and/or the same as they originally put forward. This may suggest participants were not open to the responses of the other participants, as they did not understand them.

3. It is important that the facilitator not only provides the opportunity for individual participants to seek clarification on the responses put forward, but also ensures that participants discuss and understand the various responses before moving to the vote step.

The top three questions voted on in order of ranking were:

1. What are the best examples of particularly valuable action research outcomes?
2. How can action research be used better in conflict resolution/resolving conflict?
3. How is action research used in practice?

During informal discussion after the process, the experienced ALARPM members considered the question ranked number 4 “What can action researchers do about world terrorism?” as the most appropriate question to be presented to the World Congress.

A typical observation at the evaluation stage was that “The process is logical and relatively easy to facilitate”.

We have also learnt from our experience in relation to ***TLS***:

The actual time taken for the NGT using the TLS, including the time to agree on an appropriate question, was 30 minutes. The conventional, manual method of NGT would have taken approximately two hours. The group size (16 participants) can be considered larger than normal for NGT and therefore taking more time than a normal-sized group.

Not only does the TLS facilitate hastening the NGT process significantly (about four times faster) and with larger groups, but the system captures all responses, discussion and voting, hence providing greater richness and validity than can be achieved by the conventional method without TLS.

Evaluation responses from participants on the use of TLS with the NGT included: very interesting; fun, informative and a great tool; technology makes the process smoother; very useful at a number of levels - can see the potential of the technology; absorbing, hands on was good; I think the process is innovative and it is interesting to see your words appear on the screen for everyone to see; much information can be put together in a short time; I see the main value of using this technology in the opportunity for introverts and/or people who do not [looks like evaluation author didn't mean to include: 'do not'] want to be anonymous to have an input in a group process.

Concerns about the TLS were: I wonder how it would work with a group that is not so familiar with keyboards; I see a main limitation in the way it seems to focus on the technology people. The facilitators' experience with many groups suggests that the concerns raised, while valid, are not issues in practice.

Conclusions

In this paper we have set out to introduce a new process method that combines the Nominal Group Technique (NGT) with the use of computer technology called Zing Team Learning System (TLS). The process seeks to facilitate output of qualitative and explorative information from people in response to a focal question, in this case: "For you personally, what are the burning questions to be addressed in the Sixth ALARPM and Tenth PAR World Congress in South Africa?"

We have reflected on our experiences in this case study, learnt from them and concluded as follows. First, NGT is a logical, structured process that is relatively easy to facilitate. It is valuable for generating ideas and for eliciting issues in the form of statements and propositions. However, a question-providing focal question is not an appropriate use of NGT. Further, the use of NGT is not appropriate if participants are not familiar with the issues to be discussed.

Facilitators should not only invite participants to seek clarification of responses gathered, but should also ensure, before proceeding to the voting stage, that all participants understand the importance and meaning of each of the responses gathered. This must be balanced with the risk of discussion extending beyond clarification and understanding.

Second, TLS is a much faster (about four times) and a more efficient method for NGT than the conventional manual method, and it makes the process easier, more interesting and active. TLS captures and retains all brainstorming input, discussion and voting in an electronic database that can then easily be used for analysis and report writing.

Third, our evaluation showed that participants viewed TLS as fun, interesting and informative. Several participants indicated at the end of the workshop that they would introduce this technology in their organisations. We, the authors, also achieved our original objectives. In a roundabout way participants finally selected a challenging question that we intend to take to the 2003 World Congress: "What can action researchers do about world terrorism?". The decision on this question was made easier through having had all the responses captured electronically.

It is now up to other facilitators to test our claims and conclusions by trying out NGT combined with TLS technology in their organisations or consultancies and by experimenting further with other facilitation methods.

Jim Willcox is willing to respond to your queries and requests, if you contact him by email jimwillcox@scopeandfocus.com.au

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Appendix A

Part 1

What are the burning questions I would like to have discussed at the World Congress?

What is a world congress on action research?

What can action researchers do about world terrorism?

How to develop reflective practice on-line?

What type of people use action research?

Who's facilitating what?

How can technology be used to facilitate ALARPM?

Using action research in practice.

Do the people who go to the world congress actually use action research or do they only talk about it?

How can ICTs be used to improve the facilitation of action research?

What's the state of action learning/research around the world?

Why not have an electronic congress to save the cost of airfares. Why do people have to meet together?

How can we achieve world peace and address AIDS pandemic? Can AR & AL contribute?

Action research – when to use it.

How to work with undiscussables in a culturally sensitive way in a cross cultural context?

How can action research be used better in conflict resolution/resolving conflict?

How can the world congress influence an action learning approach to be adopted across nations?

Anyone else interested in Multiple Intelligences and Giftedness?

Provide examples of Action research outcomes that have been very valuable.

Is Action Research different across different countries?

Differentiating between action research and community development - does it really matter?

What comes after AL?

Can we make action research more accessible to the general workforce?

Do other countries have problems with action research being used in higher education?

(NB: These are unedited comments of participants)

Part 2

Selected question/issues for ranking

1. What is a world congress on action research?

2. What can action researchers do about world terrorism?
3. How to develop reflective practice on-line?
4. How can the world congress influence an action learning approach to be adopted across nations?
5. Using action research in practice.
6. How can action research be used better in conflict resolution/resolving conflict?
7. Provide examples of Action research outcomes that have been very valuable.
8. How can we achieve world peace and address AIDS pandemic. Can AR & AL contribute?

Selected responses and ranking

Provide examples of Action research outcomes that have been very valuable – Rank Order 1

How can action research be used better in conflict resolution/resolving conflict? – Rank Order 2

Using action research in practice – Rank Order 3

What can action researchers do about world terrorism? – Rank Order 4

How can we achieve world peace and address AIDS pandemic. Can AR & AL contribute? – Rank Order 5

How to develop reflective practice on-line? – Rank Order 6

How can the world congress influence an action learning approach to be adopted across nations? – Rank Order 7

What is a world congress on action research? – Rank Order 8

The next issue of the ALAR Journal will include:

- Papers from the recent ALARPM/SCIAR Conference *Surfing the waves of change;* and

- All our regular features such as ‘People’, Books’ and much, much more …

People

Reflecting on the life of Dr Reg Revans
- Charles Margerison

Dr Reg Revans, who died recently, was an extraordinary man by any standard. Born in 1907, he trained as a scientist and worked as a young man with the great names of his day including Einstein, and those at the Cambridge Cavendish Laboratory. During this time he represented England at the 1928 Olympics. He then established a career in education both at the University level and within industry where he was Director of Education for the National Coal Board after the end of the 2nd World War.

He said that there were so few people who could manage the mines, due to the losses during the war years that it was not appropriate to take them off the job to attend courses. Therefore, he adopted a system he had seen in the research laboratories, where colleagues shared and compared their problem, ideas and findings. He invited the managers of coal mines to do likewise. He invited them to visit each other's coal mines often in groups of three, which he called "a set of managers". One of them could be managing safety very well. He was asked to share his methods. Another might be doing well on productivity, and another might be controlling costs well. By their visits and discussions, they not only learned best practice, but also had mutual support to introduce the new methods to their own mines.

Revans called this "Action Learning". It sounded simple enough, but to his dismay he found the training profession going in the opposite direction. The professional trainers wanted to control the agenda, and set up courses and have people sit in classrooms. They introduced a passive, rather than active approach to work based learning. Revans said that could be appropriate when the issue was a puzzle, and the solution already known. But for real work problems, where there could be various options, it was best to research the action, and help people share what they do.

I first met Reg Revans in 1973. I was in Belgium at the European Foundation for Management Education. A colleague said there was an Englishman nearby who was advising the Belgium Government. It was Reg. He welcomed me and outlined how his ideas had not found favour in UK universities, so he had accepted the challenge of establishing action learning with a consortium of Belgian companies.

His ideas had however been accepted by the National Health Service. He introduced a range of challenging processes that brought doctors, nurses and administrators to work in the same project groups. Independent research later showed that in those hospitals there were a number of clear improvements, such as reducing the number of days in hospital per patient, in comparison to others that had not used action learning.

Later, he was to accept the challenge from Arnold Weinstock, Head of the GEC Company, to introduce action learning. He again rose to the challenge with great success. He brought managers from different parts of the business together to ask questions, find the facts, assess options, make choices and implement them and share the learning. It sounds straightforward and obvious. But, I can tell you from personal experience that it is not. The reason is that the learning is rarely shared. People focus on getting the task done then rush to the next assignment. The learning is rarely shared and often lost. As Revans kept saying, it is not just the action, but also the learning that is important.

I met Reg again in 1979. I was by then a Professor of Management at Cranfield University School of Management. We invited him to speak, and he did so with gusto, for he was a brilliant orator with people waiting upon his word.

Afterwards, we had a discussion, and I asked him a question about the progress of action learning. He replied, "it will not be a success until places like Cranfield, and other universities, offer doctorates in action learning". At the time, we thought we knew what a doctorate was based on traditional scientific method, but Reg was talking about work based doctoral work and the acceptance of that. I am pleased to say that I am now involved in that work as a member of the International Management Centres Association - www.imcassociation.org Dr Revans was the first President of the organisation. For those interested in the doctoral level work please see www.i-m-c.pacific-garc.org

I began to realise that what Reg Revans was saying added up with what managers were saying, albeit they did not have a process or structure. I therefore invited him to Australia, where I emigrated in 1982. He was now in his late 70s but accepted the invitation, and gave a brilliant series of talks. I can see him now talking with a group in the sunshine on a beautiful Australian afternoon. The listeners sat under the shade of a tree while Reg gave forth, in Old Testament fashion, for he was without doubt a prophet. During the meeting, he said something that has always stayed with me. "Remember", he said, "the measure of the person is not in the statements he or she makes, but in the questions they ask"

So, it was with Reg. He would expect you to ask questions about your work, your team, your life, your relationships, your career, and so on. Yet, he had strong opinions and felt that too much money was wasted on non-work based training.

He was a modest man in terms of his approach to business and style of life. He never tried to establish a business out of action learning and was suspicious of those that did. He was reluctant to institutionalise his ideas, as he wanted them to be challenge the status quo. In that sense he was a revolutionary, out to build and develop people and organisations. He did not want followers, but rather for each person to be their own leader contributing to improvement at all levels. Management education was not just for managers. It was for all; including the unemployed, who he encouraged to get together to assist each other find work.

He was a fund of knowledge, and called upon the scriptures in the widest sense for he understood many faiths, plus his deep knowledge of philosophy and science and history. At another level, his memory was incredible. I remember being with him at a conference he was asked for names of people who were applying action learning. He not only gave the names, but also reeled off their phone numbers and addresses without reference to any notes.

Reg Revans believed in the ordinary person, and their factory floor understanding and streetwise knowledge. He was suspicious of business schools, and their restricted entry, and divorce from the real place of work and learning. He was a populist without a big organisation or army of people supporting him.

Open the doors and the windows, bring people together who share problems and care about getting solutions. That was the start point. Then encourage them to understand qualitative and quantative research and focus on the real positive politics of how to get action. That was the message of Reg Revans. It was so obvious, that many people ignored it, and still do. To my knowledge, he never received an OBE or MBE, or other similar award. Yet, his contribution to the nation, and the world, was many times greater than so many who have been recognised. It was a pleasure, and honour, to know him and to learn from him what action learning can mean and can do, for I have benefited considerably.

Charles Margerison

11 January 2003

Bookshelf

Women using action learning and action research: The South African context
- Book review by Eileen Piggot-Irvine

Speedy, S (2003) *Women Using Action Learning and Action Research: The South African Context.* Lismore: Southern Cross University Press, ISBN 1 875855 59 9, pp. 342

This is a paperback compilation of action research (AR) and action learning (AL) reports that Sandra Speedy has edited. Each report is written from the perspective of women action researchers or action learners who have been involved in a two-year-long professional development project. The project was funded by AusAID and managed by IDP Education Australia. The project involved 12 senior female academics from Australia working with 22 academic women employed in technikons (technical universities) in Northern Gauteng in Pretoria. Its publication in the year of the World Congress, located in Pretoria, is timely. I would recommend it as interesting reading for anyone going to the Congress who might want to gain some understanding of the complex socio-cultural, political and educational issues that exist in South Africa. Almost all of the reports provide a little insight to these issues.

The range of reports in this book is varied. Almost all involve AR or AL projects that have focused on addressing requirements in three new Acts in South Africa. In essence, these Acts require that higher education institutions:

- Adopt an outcomes-based education and training approach, which includes the use of innovative teaching and learning methodologies;

- Make provision for skills training of all employees; and
- Provide equity of access and employment in leadership positions, specifically for blacks and females.

The project reports fall under three main categories – institutional and programme development, enhancing learning skills, and academic development in higher education. The book is compartmentalised according to these categories. The 13 reports associated with the first two categories are all written by the South African women academics leading the projects. The two reports in the final category are written by Sandra Speedy and Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt, two Australian academics.

Just as the range of reports in the book is varied, the quality is also variable. Some are rich cultural journeys showing transition and transformation. There are stories of self, team, and organisational empowerment. All are centred on small, achievable and believable projects aimed at making a difference to fundamental areas of practice. Brandt's report on improving the quality of instructional offerings, Erasmus' focus on developing a skills audit questionnaire, Harmse's description of outcomes based curriculum development, and Herbst's discussion about stimulating a research culture and critical reflective practice, are all examples of exciting projects that have been recorded in a thorough way.

Some papers describe well the contextual and methodological issues and challenges associated with the projects. Others have done this in a minimal way only. The reports from Erasmus, Herbst, Selepe, Tjabane, Banoobhai, Louw, Seerane, Van Rensburg are all examples of good reports. Louw's report, in particular, has a superb literature review on student underachievement in mathematics and van Rensburg's report is one that I will share with others as an example of a finely written account of AL. I was impressed with the theoretical papers by Speedy and Zuber-Skerritt. Both provide a strong background to the practical reports. I question the positioning of these two latter papers, however. I wondered why they were not located early in the book rather than at the end.

A couple of reports contain good examples of material or instruments that could be utilised by readers. Erasmus' use of categorisation of competence is an example. This led me to reflect on the raft of competencies staff require when teaching in developing communities in any country.

It is difficult for me to make a blanket statement about the response I had to this book or what I gained out of it. Some reports inspired me: some left me with a sense that either the project itself or the report had been approached superficially. There is no question however that many of the participants involved in the AR and AL projects gained a great deal out of their experiences. New knowledge – of AR, AL, or the topic under investigation, has been a gain for all participants. Insight and development in the skills of data gathering, planning, and report writing are other gains. Coping with the challenge of collaboration within and across teams has been another learning for some participants. At a team and organisational level there have also been gains in terms of the development of infrastructures for improving quality and developing the capacity of staff (and sometimes students). In terms of AR and AL, the reports certainly indicate that some participants have a raised awareness of enablers and constraints.

Would I recommend the book? Yes, I think some reports are fine enough examples of AR and AL for me to consider this book a good buy overall. Don't think that the reports are consistently so however – they are not. Most importantly I think I would recommend this book as a rich tapestry of stories about development: development in a country that is striving to make amends for past injustice.

Eileen Piggott-Irvine
Lecturer/Management Consultant, New Zealand
epi@igrin.co.nz

Noticeboard

In "Noticeboard" we bring you information about impending activities or resources, such as conferences, courses and journals. We welcome member contributions to "Noticeboard".

ALARPM 6th & PAR 10th World Congresses

Learning partners in action

- University of Pretoria, South Africa

21-24 September 2003

The ALARPM/PAR World Congress is shaping up to be a major world event, bringing together all the current key thinking and practice in the action research, action learning and participatory AR communities. To give you a taste of who and what to expect, below is a list of the Keynote Speakers, Honorary Guest Presenters and PAR Community contributions. Be assured, however, there will be much, much more!

Have you registered yet? It is not too late. The deadline for early bird registrations has been extended to 31 May 2003 and the organising committee will accept proposals for presentations up until the end of June 2003. Come to South Africa and combine the Congress with an unforgettable wildlife safari!

For information and advice see the Congress Website: http://www.education.up.ac.za/alarpm

or contact the Organising Committee Xandra de Fortier:

Fax: +27 012 420 3003 Phone: +27 012 420 2769 or
E-mail: xdefortier@gk.up.ac.za

Keynote speakers

Prof Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt, Director of OZI (Ortrun Zuber International P/L, specialising in Action Learning & Action Research, Leadership Programs, Postgraduate Research Training & Supervision, incl. Qualitative Research Methods) and Adjunct Professor at Griffith University (Australia) and Professor of Professional and Organisational Development in the UK-based International Management Centres Association (IMCA). Co-presenter: **Dr Thomas Kalliath**, Department of Psychology, The University of Waikato, New Zealand.

Prof K P Dzvimbo, Senior Education Specialist, The World Bank, Washington DC, USA.

Prof Cheryl de la Ray, Deputy Vice-Chancellor –University of Cape Town (current),ZA and responsible for research, innovation and postgraduate studies, institutional transformation and government and community relations. Her research over the years has focused on gender, race and social justice.

Prof Susan Weil, Professor of Social and Organizational Learning and Founder Director of SOLAR (Centre for Social and Organisational Learning as Action Research), University College, Northampton (UK).

Dr Ineke Buskens, a Cultural Anthropologist with a passion for research methodology, women's empowerment and Africa. Title of her keynote address: When can we let go of the need-to-control and embrace the power-to-lead? Reflections on issues of leadership and control in action research and participatory facilitation processes.

Prof Richard Bawden, Visiting Distinguished University Professor at Michigan State University (USA) since December 1999, following his retirement from the University of Western Sydney, Hawkesbury (Australia) where he had been Professor of Systemic Development, and, for many years, Dean of Agriculture and Rural Development. His research interests lie in the application of systems principles to the process of development in its broadest context, with a particular interest in the engagement of universities with civil society in pursuit of systemic development.

Tim Dalmau, Dalmau Network Group, Australia**,** Well-known expert in Process Management, Professional and Organizational Development. His skills and experience base covers CEO and senior exeuctive coacjing, performance reviews, alignment and engagemnet of executive teams. Reviews and consulting to establish the best fit of strategy, structure and culture, creation of new forms and processes.

Prof Peter Reason, Professor of Action Research/Practice and Director of the Centre for Action Research in Professional Practice in the School of Management at the University of Bath which has pioneered graduate education based on collaborative, experiential and action oriented forms of inquiry. His major academic work has been to contribute to the theory and practice of participative inquiry.

Honorary Guest Presenters

Dr Ben Boog, Dutch Network of Action Research, Lecturer community organisation/education; secretary Dutch Network (participatory) Action Research. Did AR-projects on urban renewal, migrant workers, organisations within environmental movement. Currently AR (exemplary AR) on Female Radical Therapy organisation and "vocational quality improvement of social casework concerning (growing) problems of the poor". Working on AR as a (synthetical) third paradigm (based on Habermas, Touraine and Freire).

Emeritus Prof Orlando Fals Borda, Emeritus Professor of Sociology at the University of Colombia and Honoris Causa of the University of Venezuela; former Dean and Vice-Minister of Agriculture of Colombia; Research Director of United Nations Institute for Social Development at Geneva; president of Latin American Council for Adult Education;

Deputy of the National Constituent Assembly of Colombia; visiting Professor in European, Japanese and North American universities; Guggenheim Award, Hoffman United Nations Prize, Kreisky Award for Human Rights (Austria); author of books on participatory action research, social research theory and methods, regional history and territorial administration. Native of Colombia 1925.

Dr Judith McMorland, Senior Lecturer in Change Management in the Department of Management and Employment Relations, University of Auckland Business School (New Zealand) and Director of her own consulting practice, working mainly with not-for-profit and public sector organizations.

Dr Yoland Wadsworth, Adjunct Professor, Institute for Social Research, Swinburne University of Technology (Australia) and President of the Action Learning, Action Research and Process Management (ALARPM) Association

A/Prof Brendan Bartlett, Griffith University, Australia

Margaret Fletcher, Griffith University, Australia

Chris Kapp, University of Stellenbosch

Eileen Piggott-Irvine, New Zealand

Maybe by video link

Prof Davydd Greenwood, Goldwin Smith Professor of Anthropology, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, USA. Co-author of Industrial Democracy as Process: Participatory Action Research in the Fagor Cooperative Group of Mondragón. Has in press two book- length edited works on action research in the U.S. and Europe. Currently co-authoring a textbook on action research with Morten Levin (Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim) and participating in the Trondheim module of Norway's "Enterprise 2000" industrial democracy and development program.

Themes proposed by the Participatory Action Research community

The PAR Community have proposed several themes which will be explored in a variety of ways throughout the Congress. These include: "Roots of Participation Thinking" which explores the thoughts on participation and self-reliance propounded by early social philosophers like Rabindranath Tagore in the east and John Dewey in the west. This discussion will be placed in the context of individual, community and national development as well as reflecting on issues of self-reliance and creativity. "Addressing the contradictions of participatory inquiry regarding co-option and/or achieved culture shift". For example, a recent statement raised concerns about the dangers of the ways that words like 'participation' and 'advocacy' are now used as technical phrases, devoid of any real meaning. This may be a problem that the Congress wishes to address.

You may also wish to contact a member of the International Support Group

Prof Richard Bawden, Visiting Distinguished University Professor at Michigan State University (USA). Email: bawden@mail.rd.msu.edu

Dr Ben Boog, Senior Lecturer at Groningen University (Netherlands), Department of Adult Education and Social Intervention. Email: boboogie@hotmail.com or b.w.m.boog@ppsw.rug.nl

Bob Dick, Managing Director of Interchange, his consulting practice for about 30 years, and Adjunct Professor at Southern Cross University (Australia), supervising action research theses and maintaining an extensive action research Email: bd@bigpond.net.au Web site: http://www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm/ar/arhome.html

Emeritus Prof Orlando Fals Borda, Emeritus Professor of Sociology at the University of Colombia and Honoris Causa

of the University of Venezuela. Email via: dorissantos463@hotmail.com

Prof Davydd Greenwood, Goldwin Smith Professor of Anthropology and Director of the Institute for European Studies at Cornell University (USA). Email: djg6@cornell.edu

Dr Judith McMorland, Senior Lecturer in Change Management in the Department of Management and Employment Relations, University of Auckland Business School (New Zealand) and Director of her own consulting practice, working mainly with NFP and public sector organizations. Email: j.mcmorland@auckland.ac.nz

Prof Tim Pyrch, Professor of Continuing Education at the University of Calgary (Canada) and Director of the Certificate in Adult Learning Program, specialising in community development and work-based learning. Extensive international work experience in Ethiopia, Thailand, the Philippines, Mexico, Ukraine and the UK. Email pyrch@ucalgary.ca

Prof Peter Reason, Professor and Director of the Centre for Action Research in Professional Practice, School of Management, University of Bath (UK), which has pioneered graduate education based on collaborative inquiry. Best known for editing the Handbook of Action Research (2001 with Hilary Bradbury) and the new Action Research journal (starting in 2003). Email: p.w.reason@bath.ac.uk

Dr Yoland Wadsworth, Adjunct Professor, Institute for Social Research, Swinburne University of Technology (Australia) and President of the Action Learning, Action Research and Process Management (ALARPM) Association. Email: ywadsworth@swin.edu.au

Prof Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt, Email: ortrun@bigpond.net.au

Prosperity thinking: Blending personal and business achievement through action learning for your small business success
- Multi Media CDRom from Prosperity Press

Wildman, P., (2003). *Prosperity thinking: Blending personal and business achievement for your small business success.* Prosperity Press: Brisbane. (p. 200 equivalent CD Rom)

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Contributions to this journal

Through the ALAR Journal, we aim to promote the study and practice of action learning and action research and to develop personal networking on a global basis.

We welcome contributions in the form of:

- articles (up to 10 A4 pages, double spaced)
- letters to the editor
- profiles of people (including yourself) engaged in action research or action learning
- project descriptions, including work in progress (maximum 1000 words)
- information about a local action research/action learning network
- items of interest (including conferences, seminars and new publications)
- book reviews
- report on a study or research trip
- comments on previous contributions

You are invited to base your writing style and approach on the material in this copy of the journal, and to keep all contributions brief. The journal is not a refereed publication, though submissions are subject to editorial review.

Contributed case study monographs

Contributions are welcomed to the Action Research Case Study (ARCS) monograph series. The case studies in this refereed series contribute to a theoretical and practical understanding of action research and action learning in applied settings. Typical length is in the range 8,000 to 12,000 words: about 40 typed A4 pages, double spaced.

Types of case studies include (but are not limited to):

- completed cases, successful and unsuccessful;
- partial successes and failures;
- work in progress;
- within a single monograph, multiple case studies which illustrate important issues;
- problematic issues in current cases.

We are keen to develop a review and refereeing process which maintains quality. At the same time we wish to avoid the adversarial relationship that often occurs between intending contributors and referees. Our plan is for a series where contributors, editors, and referees enter into a collaborative process of mutual education.

We strongly encourage dual or multiple authorship. This may involve a combination of experienced and inexperienced practitioners, theoreticians, clients, and authors from different sectors or disciplines. Joint authors who disagree about some theoretical or practical point are urged to disclose their differences in their report. We would be pleased to see informed debate within a report.

You may have interesting case material but may be uncertain of its theoretical underpinning. If so, approach us. We may offer joint authorship with an experienced collaborator to assist with the reflective phase of the report.

Another option is to submit a project report initially for the ALAR Journal (1000 words) with a view to developing the report into a full case study.

Detailed guidelines for case studies are available from the editor, ALAR Journal. The first case study in the series, by Vikki Uhlmann, is about the use of action research to develop a community consultation protocol.

The cost of *Consulting on a consultation protocol* is listed in the following Publication order form.

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Position / Job Title		*Organisation*	
Address			
Postcode			
Town / City		*State*	*Nation*
Work contact numbers	*Phone*		*Fax*
Email			*Mobile*

❖ *My interests/projects relating to action learning, action research and process management are:*

____

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❑ Action Learning	❑ Action Research
❑ Community Action	❑ Education
❑ Evaluation	❑ Gender Issues
❑ Higher Education	❑ Human S Practice/Change
❑ Learning Organisations	❑ Manager & Leadership Dev
❑ Method	❑ Org Change & Dev
❑ Process Management	❑ Quality Management
❑ Rural Community Dev	❑ Social Justice
❑ Systems Methodologies	❑ Teacher Development
❑ Team Learning & Dev	❑ Vocational Education
❑ Other	

____

❖ ***Do you wish to be linked with a world network of people with similar interests and have your information included in our database and appear in our annual networking directory?***

❑ ***Yes*** ❑ ***No***

❖ ***Please complete payment details overleaf*** ▸ ▸ ▸ ▸ ▸ ▸

To apply for ALARPM membership, which includes ALAR Journal subscription, please complete the information requested overleaf and the payment details below. You do not need to complete the ALAR Journal subscription form.

Payment Details

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Cheques, bank drafts or money orders can be made payable to ALARPM Association Inc. in Australian dollars. Please return application with payment details to:

ALARPM ASSOCIATION INC.
PO Box 1748, Toowong Qld 4066, Australia

Phone: ***(61-7) 3345 7499***
Fax: ***(61-7) 3899 2519***
Email: ***alarpm@uq.net.au***

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