To explore how high potential Chinese managers who are acquainted with each other practise critical reflective working behaviours through an in-house action learning programme.

by
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To my beloved wife,
who always loves and supports me.

In memory of my father,
who had always strived hard to give me a better future.

Abstract

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TO EXPLORE HOW HIGH POTENTIAL CHINESE MANAGERS WHO ARE ACQUAINTED WITH EACH OTHER PRACTISE CRITICAL REFLECTIVE WORKING BEHAVIOURS THROUGH AN IN-HOUSE ACTION LEARNING PROGRAMME

There are varieties in the format an action learning. (AL) program is organized and their learning objectives were quite murky. However, according to Reg Revans, AL should be able to help the participants to learn critical self reflection which is also an important capability for a manager to lead change in their own organization.

The researcher had the opportunity of organizing two AL programs for high potential management staff of two manufacturing companies in China. In order to achieve AL's learning objective, these two programs were designed around the 5 key ingredients of AL discovered from the literature review.

These 5 key ingredients were – emerging programmed knowledge; real problem; participants implement their own proposed actions; questioning insight with each other; and take improved action. As the target participants of each AL program were high potential Chinese management staff of the same company and were acquainted with each other, it was alleged that these 4 contextual factors – (1) the program arranged in-house in a (2) Chinese cultural context for (3) high potential management staff who were (4) acquainted with each other, could have an impact on the 5 key ingredients of AL.

Literature mentioned little on ways these 4 contextual factors could impact on AL programs. In order to understand the way the 5 key ingredients could create impacts on the AL process, the methodology of action research (AR) was adopted.

The AL program in Cycle 1 was a failure as some of the contextual factors had hindered the effective functioning of several key AL ingredients. Armed

with the experience, another AL program was organized. It was found that one of the team had enabled the members to practice critical self reflections but another team still failed to do that.

This research seems to point out the possibility of achieving the learning objective of AL – critical self reflection when the 5 key ingredients were functioning effectively. However, the 4 contextual factors could enable the personality of the participants to become a roadblock for the effective functioning of the 5 key ingredients and rendered the AL program to become ineffective.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction to the research problem

When I enrolled for this PhD Program, I held a very practical objective on my research from the very beginning. My previous full time job employer told me in the selection interview: "You should know that the position you apply for (Staff Development Manager) do not require you to have a PhD qualification, not even a Master Degree". Therefore, I reject the objective of doing a research for the sake of doing a research or for the sake of getting a PhD from the outset. Unlike many researchers who are in the academic field, I aware it is unlikely for me to have another chance to do a really serious research for the rest of my life. I needed to use the fruit of my research to further advance my career as a management consultant focusing on providing learning solutions to my clients. The result of my research should be something that could make practical contribution for the practitioners in the field of human resource development (HRD) rather then served merely as a collection in the library.

1.1

Background of the study

My research problems started with an assignment from a company – the "I" Manufacturing Company – IMC (Not a real name) which I worked as a retainer consultant during the period of 2004 – 2007. The assignment was to develop a development program for a group of the Company's high potential mid-level staff so that they could lead changes in the organization. The program designed was called I Make Bigger Achievement (IMBA) Program.

My second consultancy project started in 2007 and concluded in 2009 with another company I called Hi Manufacturing Company (HMC) (Not a real name). The project was about the development of group of managers, most of whom were newly hired staff, who worked in the same division. The senior management of HMC had high expectation towards this group of managers and hoped that they could learn to be more competent in leading successful changes in the organization. The program designed was called the Change For Growth Program (CFG) Program.

There were some common elements in the expectation and beliefs of IMC and HMC towards the high potential staff they selected to join the Programs.

1. The organizations were operating in a Chinese cultural context and look for organizational change.
2. Some new changes needed to be initiated and leaded by the high potential management staff.
3. Their ability to lead successful change needed to be enhanced and proved.

1.2
Key issues

Literatures had documented many successful cases of using action learning (AL) as an intervention to help the managers to lead change. In what way then, an AL intervention could help the high potential staff of the two companies to acquire the necessary capability in meeting the above requirements?

Literature review indicated that the criteria for running a successful AL program were quite diversified and few mentioned what kinds of capability the participants could be able to acquire after attending the program. In view of the diversified criteria to justify success of the AL programs, I decided to "go back to basic" by referring to what the key proponents of AL had said in order to find out the answer.

1.2.1 Action Learning (AL)

As the core subject of study in this Thesis is action learning (hereinafter called AL), I would like to firstly provide a brief description on AL. A detail description of what AL is will be provided in Chapter 2. Smith & O'Neil (2003) provided the following brief description of AL after reviewing the literatures between 1994 to 2000 on this subject:

> A very wide variety of organizations now utilize action learning, and it gains ever widening application throughout the world. Action learning appears in numerous variants, much like the automobile is available in all manner of makes and styles whilst still being recognizable as an automobile. Generically action learning is a form of learning through experience, "by doing", where the task environment is the classroom, and the task the vehicle. (Smith & O'Neil, 2003, On-line resources)

1.2.2 Problem of AL

Despite the widely documented successful cases of application, there are three types of challenges to the action learning approach:

> (1) concerns about its misinterpretation, (2) concerns about the methodology itself, and (3) questions about its effectiveness.
> (Spence 1998, On-line resource)

1.2.3 Method to address the problems of AL

It was planned that these three challenges will be met by adopting the following methods in this research:

Regarding concerns on misinterpretation on AL	Look for advice from the original work of the architect of AL – Reg Revans.
Regarding concerns about AL's methodology.	Adopt an action research (AR) methodology to study the appropriate methodology for organizing AL by revealing "what's happening in AL"
Regarding questions about effectiveness	Focus on the individual learning and organizational results.

The diversified practice make it difficult to tell what exactly an AL program should look like, I would like to refer to the important principles of Reg Revans and other key writers of AL. These key principles I would focus particularly in this Research are based on Revan's famous equation:

$$L = P + Q$$

Where L means learning, P stands for Programmed knowledge and Q stands for questioning insight. The "operation version" of this formula was based on the following tenets:

- Participants tackle real problems (no "'right" answer) in real time
- Participants meet in small stable learning groups (called "Sets")
- Each Set holds intermittent meetings over a fixed program cycle
- Problems are relevant to a participant's own workplace realities
- A supportive collaborative learning process is followed in a Set
- Process is based on reflection, questioning, conjecture and refutation
- Participants take action between Set meetings to resolve their problem

(Smith, and O'Neil, 2003, On-line resources)

While the practice of AL had been expended greatly, I maintained that, after reviewing the literature on AL, that there are 5 key ingredients of AL,

1. The programmed knowledge (P) should be "emergent" rather then preset and should be generated among the set members rather then totally fed by outside experts. (Smiths, 2001; Peters & smith, 1996; Revans, 1980, 1998)
2. In order to enable the Q to happen, the project should be a real "problem" rather than a "puzzle" (Revans, 1980, 1983; Pedler, 1996; Mezirow et al., 1990).
3. In order that the "L" could happen, the participants (who were called set members in AL) need to implement the solution they proposed. (Revans,

1983; 1998; Smith, 2001; Barton & Haslett, 2003)

4. They need to "Q'ing each other" which is a process of reflecting in the "set" on their own experiences of implementing their solution and they need to help each other to learn by pointing out critical questions. (What Revans called "comrades in adversity") (Mumford, 1996; Keys, 1994; Revans, 1980; Zuber-Skerritt, 2002; McGill & Brockbank 2004; Raelin, 2006)
5. The "Q'ing" process should enable the members to take an improved action on the problem (Revans, 1998; 1982; McGill and Beaty, 1995)

Thorough the above process, the "L" should be "learn how to reflect on one's own action". (Revans, 1980; Editorial, Action Learning, 2007; Marsick, 1990; Rigano & Edwards, 1998; Beaty et al, 1997)

1.2.4 Contextual factors

Literature review provided large volume of "successful" application of AL in a wide variety context. Many of those claims on success were made under a generally lacking of rigorous process and agreed standard of evaluation. While it was not the intention of this research to propose an evaluation method, my previous experiences of organizing in-house leadership development programs seduced me to pose a speculation on the context free notion of AL.

The characteristics of the participants from the two Companies needed to be considered:

1. They were mainly Chinese (with the exception of one in the CFG program who was not Chinese but had been in China for a long time, had married with a Chinese lady and could speak Putonghua)
2. The programs were run in-house so all the set members were all from the same company and even from the same division (as in the case of CFG Program)
3. They know each other quite well.
4. They were all regarded by the top management as high potential staff.

In view of the characteristics of the participants, the following issues might have arisen.

Regarding the need to reflect on each other's action:

- Would the Chinese culture of seeking for harmonious relations and conformity affect it? If so, in what way?
- Would the set members who know each other quite well inhabit or facilitate them from giving critical comment to each other?

Regarding the need to reflect on one's own experiences from action:

- Would the personal expectation created by being identified as high potential staff affects their motivation to reflect on their own action openly?

Regarding the selection of a real "problem" for the project:

- The characteristic of being an in-house program pose little problem on the selection of a "real" problem for the project. However, the same characteristic make the identification of a "problem" rather then a "puzzle" difficult as the set members might be too familiar with the problems of an organization they work for.

Further literature review had justified that the above issues could really had an impact on the effectiveness of AL but had rarely been explored in an in-depth manner.

By answering these questions, the finding could hopefully provide insight on some important issues which had rarely been researched systematically in AL literature:

1. The selection and composition of set members.
2. The selection of problem for project.
3. The facilitation of critical reflection.
4. The enabling of individual to acquire change leadership capability.

This knowledge generated could possibly help to form a model of AL which targeted for:

- Medium size companies.
- Running the program in-house and for a group of high potential Chinese staff who are familiar with each other.
- How to identify real problems rather then puzzles which serves as AL project

These knowledge were important because:

1. Medium size companies are playing a more and more important role in the economy.
2. Unlike large companies, they need practical learning solutions.
3. China is growing fast and many organizations face big challenges and need to change.
4. The role of leading change frequently goes to the successful or high potential managers and the traditional management education could not effectively meet the need.
5. Leading successful change in one's own organization had become the most important ability for a manager and hence an issue of manager's development.

1.2.5 Main Research Question

The research aim is to:

> Explore how high potential Chinese managers who are acquainted with each other, practise critical reflective working behaviours through an in-house action learning programme.

Sub-questions

1. What critical reflective working behaviours do participants exhibit during the AL programme?
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of running an AL programme in-house?
3. What issues are raised by the use of a Revans' model of action learning in a Chinese context?
4. What are the implications for developing AL theory and practice in an in-house context?

1.2.6 Methodology

> Two of the weaknesses of the literature on action learning have been the failure to get contributions from Set members as distinct from facilitators, and the failure to

> provide some model of learning. (…) If, as clearly we hope, people arrive on action learning sets as managers and professionals and go away better equipped as learners then we need to provide guidance on the learning process. Even more specifically, we need to help them understand **what is occurring within the set**, not only in terms of the more familiar aspects of group dynamics and interpersonal behaviour referred to in much of the literature, but **in terms of the learning related behaviours which are occurring.**
> (Mumford, 1996, p.3) (Highlighted by me)

To fully reveal "what is occurring with the set" and the "learning related behaviours which are occurring" an Action Research method will be adopted as the research methodology.

The original intention was that a two cycle AR process would be conducted in one company (the IMC). Due to the termination of my service with the IMC, only cycle 1 of the IMBA program could be conducted. The two cycle process was able to be applied on the HMC in the CFG program. The termination of the IMBA enables me to completely review the practice and enable me to completely revamp the design in the subsequent CFG program.

1.2.7 Contributions

The findings will be significant to the AL practitioner. My discourse on the way I tried to install the 5 key ingredients in the two AL programs could illuminate the ways to better manage the roadblocks of running an in-house AL program. The requirement that the participants should solve some real organizational problems could make the participants to consider the ability of the organization to support his/her project. The participants would not be totally ignorant towards the organizational problem and he/she would probably learn something about the previous efforts done on the problem. The effectiveness of those efforts would inform the participant's route taken to solve it. The participant's experience with the company could affect their attitude towards the AL project. When the participants were high potential management staff, the confidence on their past experience, their concern to drive for quick action and avoiding those actions which could jeopardize their career could affect the course of action they choose in handling the AL project. If the AL program was regarded as a fast-track program for the “high-flyers”, it would be quite natural for the “chosen few” to ensure the top management would be pleased with their solution and no mistakes will be made so that their weakness won’t be exposed. Furthermore, the high potential managers, who are successful managers, would be smart enough to make sure that in case mistakes happens, it is not their mistake. The emphasis of harmony relationships and the importance of Guanxi in interpersonal relationships in Chinese culture, coupled with the fact that the participants were acquainted with each other, could affect the questioning process which is essential for learning to happen. When the participants were colleagues, their relations would be extended from the past and well beyond the completion of the AL program. It will be questionable that they will behave in a way that would hurt their existing or future relations. Critical questioning, which frequently been regarded as challenging one’s authority and status in an organization, could possibly met with highly defensive responses. To avoid being “too critical” and to prevent potential heated arguments, it would be natural for the participants to adopt a “mild” and less threatening ways in the problem solving process and hence failed to induce critical thinking among participants. My analysis on the roadblocks created by the 4 contextual factors, which had rarely been mentioned in literature, could help shed light on an effective way of arranging in-house AL programs which could be helpful for the HR practitioners when they plan for interventions to upgrade their manager’s change management capability in Chinese cultural context.

It was hoped that the analysis on the interrelationship among the 5 key ingredients of AL could contribute to the AL theory and point out ways to develop a new model of running in-house AL programs in a typical Chinese cultural context.

Looking through the lens of social constructivism, my perspective could add to the AL theory by focusing more on the individual aspect of the learning process which could compliment the usual emphasis of organizational result of the AL literature and contribute to knowledge on how AL could also help people to change.

By providing descriptions of critical events occurring on the two programs, it could offer insight into the planning needed to organize an effective in-house AL program.

Furthermore, my role as an AL facilitator in the two AL programs could contribute to the knowledge of AL facilitation skills by providing some “do’s and don’ts” condensed from actual practice rather then based on avocation.

AL had been quite vague on what the participants could be able to learn in AL. While one could learn many different things from AL, this research hoped to make contribution to AL theory by focusing on the exploration of possibilities of learning critical self reflection which was an important capability for change leadership. However, what one could learnt from one’s own action could be significantly affected by the contextual factors and by their reaction towards those factors which, in turn, could be shaped by one’s own personality. Although this is an interesting topic and had rarely been explored in the literature, it would not be the core subject in this research. My thinking was that, as a HR development practitioner, AL program should be open to people of different personality as long as the organization wishes certain staff to be developed and be prepared for leading future organizational change. With the rare mentioning of this issue in the AL literature, I regard this as a non key issue in the effective running of AL. Rather, it was hoped that the data collected related to the potential impact of the 4 contextual factors could generate some “by-products” which could help to shed light on this issue and hence indicate the potential need for future research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

In this Chapter, I will put the needs expressed by IMC and HMC into perspective by firstly discuss the organization's need for change and its growing importance for staying competitive in the present and future competitive environment. I will then proceed to discuss the role that management education should and could play to enhance the managerial and supervisory staff on this challenge. I will try to evaluate the effectiveness the formal management education in meeting this challenge and in what way action learning (AL) could meet this challenge better by delineating the three key characteristics of AL which are – real problem, implementing solution and reflection. I will then proceed further to discuss in what way in-house AL program could help organization and its management staff to meet the change better. I will also try to explore the possible deficiencies on the existing research and application cases in solving the possible problems that could paralyze the functioning of the three key characteristics of AL program created by high potential staff, Chinese culture, running the AL program in-house and when the participants know each other fairly well. Finally, the research questions and the possible contributions this research intends to make will be spelled out.

2.1

CHANGE MANAGEMENT

Change management has been defined as 'the process of continually renewing an organization's direction, structure, and capabilities to serve the ever-changing needs of external and internal customers' (Moran & Brightman 2001, p.111)

Although Pettigrew and Whipp (1993) argue there are no universal rules when it comes to leading and managing change, several advocates have suggested sequences of actions that organizations should comply with. However, many of the suggestions tend to be rather abstract in nature and difficult to apply (Burnes, 2004). There are some authors who offer more practical guidance to organizations and managers. Three of these authors are Kanter et al (1992), Kotter (1996) and Luecke (2003). The similarities and differences put forward by these three authors are summarized in the table below.

Kanter et al.'s Ten Commandments for Executing Change (1992)	**Kotter's Eight-Stage Process for Successful Organisational Transformation (1996)**	**Luecke's Seven Steps (2003)**
1) Analyse the organization and its need for change		1) Mobilise energy and commitment through joint identification of business problems and their solutions
2) Create a vision and a common direction	3) Developing a vision and strategy	2) Develop a shared vision of how to organize and manage for competitiveness
3) Separate from the past		
4) Create a sense of urgency	1) Establishing a sense of urgency	
5) Support a strong leader role		3) Identify the leadership
6) Line up political sponsorship	2) Creating a guiding coalition	
7) Craft an implementation plan		
8) Develop enabling structures	5) Empowering broad-based action	

Table 2A Comparing three models of change management (Continue in next page)

Kanter et al.'s Ten Commandments for Executing Change (1992)	Kotter's Eight-Stage Process for Successful Organisational Transformation (1996)	Luecke's Seven Steps (2003)
9) Communicate, involve people and be honest	4) Communicate the change vision	
10) Reinforce and institutionalize change	8) Anchoring new approaches in the culture	6) Institutionalise success through formal policies, systems and structures
	6) Generating short-term wins	
	7) Consolidating gains and producing more change	
		4) Focus on results, not on activities
		5) Start change at the periphery, then let it spread to other units without pushing it from the top
		7) Monitor and adjust strategies in response to problems in the change process.

Todnem, 2005 p.376

Table 2A Comparing three models of change management (Continued)

2.1.1 The need for change

Manufacturing organizations compete in an environment that is characterized by uncertainty, increased global competition, and the fragmentation of markets, an increasing dependence on non-price competitiveness and a high level of technological change (Bessant, 1991; Tomaney, 1994 as quoted in Holman et el 2000, p.121). To survive and compete in such an environment, there is a wide-spread agreement on the importance of an organization's ability to innovate and manage change (Burnes, 1993; Wolfe, 1994 as quoted in Holman et el 2000, p.121)

2.1.2 The importance of change leadership

Conger & Xin (2000) mentioned that according to executives from 25 global firms, executive education will be more directly geared to making leadership and change management work. As multiple interacting changes have led to a highly complex, confusing and unpredictable state, the focus in the change process has shifted from product innovation and technological change to behavioural aspects of change and attitudes about change (Bergquist, 1993). Organisational change has been seen as an individual-level phenomenon, because it occurs only when the majority of individuals change their behaviour or attitudes (Whelan-Berry et al., 2003)

2.1.3 What managers need to learn in order to lead change

Some have speculated that nearly 75 percent of all American corporations have gone through some type of systemic change program (Attaran, 2000). Armenakis et al. (1999) explore reducing resistance to change through incorporating the following components into the change message: the need for change, the ability to change, the valence for the change, the existing support for the change, and appropriateness of the change. So what types of training and education could enhance the manager's "ability to change"? Will there be some kinds of change programs that could effectively achieve the desirable result?

Beer et al (1990) claimed that "most change programs don't work because they are guided by a theory of change that is fundamentally flawed." (Beer et al, 1990 p.5)

> In fact, individual behaviour is powerfully shaped by the organizational roles that people play. The most effective way to change behaviour, therefore, is to put people into a

> new organizational context, which imposes new roles, responsibilities and relationships on them. This creates a situation that in a sense, "forces" new attitudes and behaviours on people.
> (Beer et al, 1990. p.5)

The concept of putting people in context as a most effective way to change the people echoed with the principle of action learning which emphasis putting the managers in real problem situation which required him/her to take real action and bear the real consequences. It is the opportunity to put people "into a new organizational context" within the old organizational context and "impose new roles, responsibilities and relationships" within the original rules, responsibility and relationships.

Kotter (1996), after delineated s series of steps for managing changes in organization, had provided a few lines of highly condensed advises in his book "Leading Change", for change leaders in organization:

> What kinds of personal growth that could support organizational change?
>
> - Risk taking: Willing to push one out of comfort zones.
> - Humble self-reflection: Honest assessment of successes and failures, especially the latter.
> - Solicitation of opinions: Aggressive collection of information and ideas from others.
> - Careful listening: Propensity to listen to others.
> - Openness to new ideas: Willing to view life with an open mind.
>
> Q: But these habits are so simple. Why don't more of us develop them?
> A: Because in the short term, it's more painful.
> (Kotter, 1996, p.183)

Actually, risk taking, solicitation of opinion, careful listening, openness to new ideas are attitudes and behaviours could all be categorized as behaviours conducive to "humble self-reflection". Senge et al (1999) looked at organizational growth from the factors that limit its growth. They had also proposed “a development of reflection and enquiry skills” that is needed in order to make a breakthrough on the factors that limit growth including the “tendency to focus on symptoms at the expense of the deeper systemic causes of problems”.

2.2
HOW MANAGERS COULD LEARN REFLECTION SKILLS IN ORDER TO LEAD CHANGE IN THEIR OWN ORGANIZATION?

2.2.1 The deficiencies of traditional management education

Other criticisms towards the traditional management education abound. Cheit (1985) for example identified 13 major complaints, which have been made against North American business schools, mostly revolving around emphasizing the wrong pedagogical mode, ignoring important work, fostering undesirable attitudes and failing to meet society’s needs. Porter and McKibben (1988) regarded the emphasis on quantitative, analytical and rational approaches, and the focus on functionalism by the dominant professional management model was at the expense of the integration of business functions across an organization. (Beck, 1994 quoted by Jamali 2004) criticized the emphasis placed on cognitive learning which a particular focus on theories, models and facts, and the overall positivist orientation of the dominant management paradigm.

All the findings had cast a great doubt on the assumption that improving the program design and delivery skills could significantly facilitates the “transfer of learning” for managers. A “banking” approach to manager development – which is fundamental to all those pedagogical approach to adult learning, need to be revisited.

2.2.2 The need to develop manager’s capability in actual management context through reflection

The importance of learning from actual job experience had been recognized by many others including Berlew and Hall (1966), Hall (1976), Mintzberg, (1973), Davies and Easterby-Smith (1984) and by research carried out by Lowy, Kelleher, & Finestone (1986), Zemke, (1985), Robinson and Wick (1992), Hoberman and Mailick (1992)

So what is needed is not just development opportunities conducted in actual context but the development intervention needed to provide opportunities for managers to be able to "reflect in" and "reflect on" experience.

> One approach to management development, which it may be argued encompasses the activities of action, reflection as well as maintaining a focus on the social, is action learning.
> (Clarke, Thorpe, Anderson, & Gold, 2006, p.441)

Bova, & Kroth (2001) conducted a study on "Generation X" employees with an aim to investigate their workplace learning preferences. A total of 197 Generation X employees were surveyed and follow-up interviews and focus groups were conducted. Participants indicated that they valued action learning and incidental learning in the workplace.

2.3

HOW TO LEAD CHANGE

As discussed in the previous sections, the capability to lead change in their own organization has becoming an increasingly important capability of a manager. In what way a manager could acquire the related skills to meet the challenges to lead successful and sustainable changes in their own organization?

2.3.1 The ability to engage in critical reflection is important for managers to lead change

Densten & Gray (2001, p.119) suggested that leaders need to practice critical reflective thinking and argued that critical reflection is at the core of leadership development. They proposed that only a reflective process can encourage future leaders to gain greater understanding of their environment. They concluded that, to meet emerging challenges, reflective learning can assist leaders to acquire the knowledge and skills to make better judgments in ambiguous situations.

Andrews et al, (2008) found that the skills and knowledge which managers found most useful were those that enabled them to "make sense" of the organizational change they subsequently experienced.

> What they had valued from what they learned in the classroom were materials and approaches which enabled them to be "reflective practitioners" (Carr, 2000; Moon, 2000; Schon, 1990) in implementing change.
> (Andrews, Cameron, & Harris. 2008, p.300)

2.3.2 AL as an effective way to acquire the skills of engaging in critical reflection

McLoughlin & Thorpe (as quoted by Holman et el 2000, p.133) proposed that technique such as action learning and cross-functional teams can provide an important means which to examine, reflect on, and manage the social, political, and technical practicalities of change.

2.3.2a AL as an effective learning methods for managers to learn in the context

Many had proposed that AL is the most effective and powerful tool to develop leaders in organization. (Keys, 1994; McNulty & Canty, 1995; Pedler, 1996; Dotlich & Noel, 1998; Yorks, O'Neil, & Marsick, 1999, Marquardt, 1997a, 2004).

> There has been a rapid growth of discussion (…) regarding best methods in executive development. While many methods and programs have been tested, few have succeeded. However, action learning may be an exception.

(Horan, 2007)

Margerison (1988) argued that the strength of AL lies in its process of confronting the reality rather than studying a hypothetical situation. It confronts the use of skills in real management situation, rather than learns in one place and transfer the learning to another place. (Margerison, 1988 p. 43 - 53)

2.3.2b AL as an effective way to acquire the skills of leading organizational change

When company executives were asked the questions in the survey of International Consortium for Executive Development Research: "Given the need to build competencies in management and leading organizational change, how should firms utilize education methods?" action learning involving company projects received a 76% response rate for "extensive use" in 1997-1998." (Quoted in Conger, & Xin, 2000)

Grieves (2000) (Quoted in Zuber-Skerritt,., 2002) had also named "action learning (through teamwork and executive development programs)" as one of the five key learning processes to enhance organisational capacity for change since it is almost always change that precipitates the need to learn:

In a case study, the role of action learning in promoting innovation and culture change is investigated within one medium-sized construction company. Feedback from middle managers believes that action learning has given them a vital sense of involvement in the corporate development of the firm and a sense of empowerment in relation to senior management. (Davey et al. 2002)

The originator of AL, Reg Revans actually intended AL be put to use when dealing with a changing context, where learning must be picked up

> …Minute by minute, as the changes and their risks come out of the blue.
> (Revans, 1983a) (Quoted in Smith, 1997, p. 368)

One of the main recommendations in the Karpin Report related to the reform of management education. It recommended more work-based education to be done in the following ways:

- Shorter programs (less time away from the organization);
- Development programs more focused on an individual company's need (customization);
- Development programs more closely linked to the workplace rather than the classroom (experiential);
- A project-based approach to learning.

(Quoted in Zuber-Skerritt, O., & Pwerry, C., 2002,)

These recommendations suggested ways that were reminiscent of Revans' action learning

Ford and Ogilive (1997) (quoted in Koo, 1999) pointed out that AL was particularly appropriate in ambiguous circumstances where interpretations of information were evolving and more qualitative. Mezirow (1990) thought that AL's ability to foster critical reflection on the situation was particularly fit for building up change leadership.

> Action learning is an appropriate strategy, however, when a program designer is looking for a way to help people reflect on, experiment with, and learn from their experience in conditions of ambiguity. Under these conditions, it is often valuable to foster reflection on the problems, critical reflection on organizational norms that govern conditions for identifying and solving the problems, and critical self-reflection vis-à-vis the situation.
>
> (Mezirow et al, 1990 p. 31)

2.3.3 Summary

Drawn from the previous sections, it is argued that AL could possibly be one of the effective methods to help managers to lead change through helping them to acquire the many skills that required for a change leadership, which, among them was critical reflection. So what is AL? Will there be something that an AL program must have so that the participants could effectively learnt critical reflection?

2.4

ACTION LEARNING (AL)

2.4.1 What is AL

> The term "action learning" has become a familiar part of pedagogical jargon, but not everyone who uses it means the same thing.
> (Robinson, 2001, p.64)

A lot of literature documented the AL program. There were actually no standard rules for organizing AL program. Morris (1987) highlighted one of the assumptions of AL was that "the process can vary in its implementation. Smith's (2001) comment could probably explain the highly diversified format that AL had taken:

> (AL) is development addressed as a business service provision: geared to provide in a precisely targeted way what is required, when it is required, in the form in which it is required.
> (Smith, 2001, p.37)

Despite the large amount of literature reporting the "successful" launching of AL, a good guideline on application was lacking.

> Many organizations have successfully transplanted action learning from one organization to the next, but today's designers and practitioners have very little ability to predict success due to the lack of guidance available in the literature. The literature offers many case examples and lists of elements but provides relatively little guidance

> or principles for application.
> (Hicks, S.A. 2001)

2.4.2 Types of AL

O'Neil (quoted by Hicks, 2001) had developed a typology to describe four action learning approaches or models or schools of practice and characterized them as the scientific, experimental, reflective, and the tacit schools of AL. She derived these categories from her literature review on the many variations in use around the world (Appendix 1A). The variables that play an important role in these variations include:

1. the role of the advisor;
2. the use of reflection;
3. the type of problem;
4. the type of group process;
5. the use of questioning;
6. the use of programmed instructions;
7. a sponsor;
8. a project or problems orientations;
9. a group orientation;
10. the programmed content;
11. the use of time;
12. the use of group

Boshry (2002) edited a series of action learning cases from across the world and introduced three different approaches: classic, critical reflection, and business driven. The classic and critical-reflection approach were very close to O'Neil's typologies of Scientific, Experimental and Critical Reflection. Business-driven AL (BDAL) describes a results-focused orientation to individual leadership development and organizational learning and change. Furthermore, Boshry's cases were not without problem:

> An important caveat on considering this material is that consultants and in-house managers provide most of the accounts. Consequently, objectivity of any assessments regarding the performance of BDAL could be questioned. (Barton & Haslett, 2003)

In this Thesis, I would adopt the “Critical Reflection” approach as it incorporates all the features of “Scientific” and “Experiential” approaches.

2.5

Key ingredients of AL

The diversified practices make it difficult to tell what exactly an AL program should look like. Mumford had rightly pointed out:

> Action Learning has become a generic title for a number of activities not all of which would be recognized or accepted by Reg Revans as being genuine examples of his major contribution.
> (Honey and Mumford, 1992) (Quoted in Smith, 1997, p. 365)

Smith (1997) suggested that “care must be taken that the power and simplicity of Revans’ original method are maintained” (Smith 1997a, p.721). (Smith, 2001, p. 38)

The complexity of practice which leads to the masking of the original purpose of AL had also been highlighted by Weinstein (2006) who was particularly against this ’anything goes stance’ and suggested to take Revans’ definition seriously.

An ’anything goes stance’ work well for me as anything I organized could almost guarantee success. Most commercial clients of mine won’t really care about the authentic definition of AL and query whether I am practicing the “true” AL as long as the solutions work for them. I agree with Weinstein’s stance that being a professional should take the definition seriously. However, a flexible approach towards AL is not totally without reason as Mark Easterby-Smith wrote:

> The labels we use are based on agreed meanings; they are always subject to challenge and redefinition. No-one has the

> right to impose meaning on others – this is a liberal and relativistic position that I hold with some passion! Attempts to restrict usage of terms such as…action learning are dangerous because they inhabit experimentation and learning: they privilege the ideas of the past and downgrade experience.
> (Quoted in Weinstein, 2006)

To strike a balance between the “fundamentalist” and “relativistic” position, I would try, in this thesis, to “extract” the key ingredients of AL as proposed by Revans with necessary interpretations from the key proponents of AL. Their advice, plus relevant research results will serve as the key information for me to design the AL program. By doing so, I hope, in one hand, I would not be bounded too tightly by the “fundamentalist’s” who could risk a lacking of flexibility and adaptability to the evolving social and organizational context. On the other hand, I hope this approach could help to retain the essence of AL which many of those who took a “relativistic” position had omitted in their implementation which will risk making AL become anything and ultimately become nothing.

To maintain the “power and simplicity of Revans’ original method”, I would like to refer to the important principles of Revans. These key principles I would focus particularly in this Research are based on Revan’s famous equation:

$$L = P + Q$$

(Revans, 1984, p.16)

Where L is learning; P is programmed knowledge; Q is questioning insight. This is the most commonly cited learning equation (Beaty et al., 1997, Chan, 1994; Chan and Anderson, 1994; Gregory, 1994; Keys, 1994; Mumford, 1995; O’Neil, 1996). Apart from this, some variations of this learning equation had also been proposed by other writers. For example, Mumford (1995) proposed:

$$L = Q^1 + P + Q^2$$

Where Q^1 is the need to resolve a managerial problem; P is the acquisition of relevant knowledge; Q^2 is the identification of further management opportunity. (Quoted in Koo,. 1999)

Smith (1997) proposed the following should be applied in a relatively invariant context:

$$L = f\{ Q_{P}, \ Q_{E}, Q_{L}\}$$

> Learning (verb) is some function, to be defined by the set, of questioning insightful action regarding: what is believed, what is eventuating, and the overall learning activity itself.
> (Smith 1997, p.371)

Other variations include:

> P + Q + A + R = L where the notions of action and the new (for many) skill of reflection are included;
> P + Q + S_k = L , which recognized the skill needed to ask helpful Q: what Marilee Goldberg (1998) has called 'learner questions' as opposed to 'judger questions'
> (Weinstein, 2006)

> L = P + Q + I …………...Marquardt (adds Implementation)
> L = P + Q + C + I ………Davies(adds Culture)
> L = P + Q + WoK + I ..…Inayatullah (adds Ways of Knowing)
> (Quoted in Barton & Haslett, 2003, p.5)

By and large, "P" and "Q" are still the key elements in the equation. Revans' original "L = P + Q" equation is still the most frequently quoted equation and I will refer to it in this Thesis. Revans (1984) had pointed out the interrelationship between the "P" & "Q":

> P is the concern of the traditional academy; Q is the field of action learning. … On the whole, however, programmed knowledge, P, already set out in books or known to expert

> authorities, is quite insufficient for keeping on top of a world like ours today, racked by change of every kind. Programmed knowledge must not only be expanded; it must be supplemented by questioning insight, the capacity to identify useful and fresh lines of enquiry. This we may denote by Q, so that learning means not only supplementing P but developing Q as well. It is arguable which is more important in 1984; the evidence is that a surfeit of P inhibits Q, and that experts, loaded with P, are the greatest menace to adaptation to change by questioning, Q.
> (Revans 1984, quoted in Zuber-Skerritt, 2002)

According to Revans, “it is idle to design programmes intended to concentrate on one of them. None can be accomplished unless its two counterparts are also encouraged”. Obviously, all the three objectives complement and support each other and ALL three of them need to be achieved in order for any one of them to exist. These three factors should be able to create a “synergy” by interplaying with each other and mutually enhancing each other. This mutual enhancement relationship could be summarized by Revans:

> 'Learning-by-doing' is an insufficient description of what I have been on about these twenty-five years; it is rather 'Learning to learn-by-doing with and from others who are also learning to learn-by-doing'.
> (Revans, 1980, p.288)

In this Research, I will try to adhere to Revans’ Formula and in the process of organizing the AL program.

2.6
The "L"

2.6.1 But what is the "L"?

The definition of "L" had never been very clear in AL from the outset.

> …by selling action learning on the basis of its problem-solving potential, what kind of learning are we promoting?...And there are other aspects of learning associated with action learning which are unclear and which might impact on the choice of variant. For example, does the individual learn or does the set learn or both?.
> (Smith, 1997, p. 368)

While literature on ways to organize AL program abound, few mentioned in a solid manner what exactly a manager could be learnt from participating in AL.

> The idea that individual set members learn something during an Action Learning program has been taken for granted in the literature. Virtually every article and book on the subject is written with the assumption that participants do learn. Few studies, however, have bothered to verify this seemingly obvious item.
> (Van Schuyver, 2004, p.110)

This lack of specification on the learning outcomes could work favourable or unfavourable to a staff development practitioner. On one hand, this could make a claim on the "success" of the program relatively easy. On the other hand, this could also make the sponsor a bit hesitant towards adopting the AL method as "consistency in outcome cannot be guaranteed with Action Learning since the outcome is never known in advance of a program". (Van Schuyver, 2004, p.108)

I would now turn to explore whether there are any intended learning result of AL had been mentioned by Revans and review to what extend the learning results documented in the various literature are relevant to it.

2.6.2 What COULD be learnt from participating in AL?

2.6.2a Individual result

> But my primary thesis - that true learning consists mainly in the reorganization, or reinterpretation, of what is already known - does call for the learners to understand what may be preventing them from using more fruitfully that to which they already might have access, if only they knew also how to secure that access. (Revans, 1980, p.289)

This is clear enough to conclude that the original intention of Revan is that "learning to learn" which could generate the result of the "reorganization, or reinterpretation, of what is already known" should be what AL could achieve

It is quite clear that a specific learning objective should be included in AL and "observable behaviour" in the problem field should be achieved.

Revans and many of his followers have predicted that much of the learning experienced by Action Learning participants would involve learning how to learn. (Dilworth & Willis, 2003, Marquardt, 1999, Merriam, 2001, Revans, 1997) Many researches had indicated that meta-learning is one of the learning the set members were able to learn through AL. Meta-learning (learning how to learn) and self-learning had considered by many to be a higher forms of learning (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001, Argyris & Schon, 1996, Mezirow, 2000)

The fact that most participants reported multiple instances of self and meta-learning makes for a significant endorsement for claims seen in the literature regarding the ability of Action Learning to spawn higher level learning and transformative experiences. (Van Schuyver, 2004, p.63).
Revans' assertion on AL had been frequently quoted:

> There is no learning without action and no action without learning.
> (Quoted in Pedler, 2008 p.5)

The Editorial in the first volume of the journal – Action Learning, had spelled out quite clearly that:

> Action learning requires that practitioners develop a reflective practice that combines thinking and doing; in this, the first requirement is action, without which there is no significant learning.
> (Editorial, Action Learning, 2007, p.115)

To summarize the discussion above, I argue that learning result of AL should be that the participants, particularly the management staff, should be able to reflect on their own practice and take an improved action to solve real problem of the organization they are working in.

2.6.2b Project results

Hicks (2000, p.25) mentioned that the majority of the literature gives significant anecdotal and case based evidence of successful action learning interventions and there are few stories of failure.

Examples of these kinds of "success stories" abound. Howell (1994) reports that one graduate from an AL program had saved A$6 million for his employer. Wills and Oliver (1996) claimed that in addition to non-financial benefits of action learning, 300+ managers triggered at least ten GBP of investment to reap a return on investment of fifty million GBP. However, what they had reported was only about the organizational results and a task force could achieve similar results. However, Revans had made clear that AL were not task forces.

Smith and Burgouyne (1991)(quoted by Hicks 2000, p.25) admitted that due to the many variables in the contexts in which it has been implemented, few have attempted to evaluate AL with rigor. Hicks (2000) also admitted that "In action learning, the project is much more easily measured than is learning and behaviour change.”

> Critical deficiencies in the literature are evident in a range of generalized, often prescriptive publications without any rigorously evaluated empirical base. These include papers by Beaty et al. (1993); Gourlay (1992); Gosling and Ashton (1994); Henderson (1993); Mc Gill and Beaty (1992); McMillen et al. (1994); Peattie (1996); and Pedler (1991)
> (Harrison, 1996, pp. 27-38.)

Marquardt had also commented on the lack of evidence on the effectiveness of AL:

> However, except for Hii & Marquardt (2000), most of the research on action learning and leadership development is anecdotal and focuses on advocacy rather than evidence. (Marquardt, 2003, pp133-157)

An even greater deficiency is that, there are very little in the literature that describes what learners really do in their group. (Caie, 1987)

Harrison (1996) suggested a plausible explanation for this situation:

> The very principles of AL so stress the need for confidentiality in set work that they themselves can act as a bar to meaningful assessment of that work.
> (Harrison, 1996, pp.27-38.)

As an HR development practitioner, I shared with Caine’s concern:

> While it is necessary to enable it to meet the elucidative situation, a more detail guideline on enabling the successful executives to transform themselves is needed for the reference of HR practitioners.
> (Caine 1987)

However, research on this area is rare. As Wallace observes (1990),

> The approach has rarely been examined for the coherence of its principles, rigorously evaluated, or compared with evidence from elsewhere about how professionals learn to improve their job performance.
> (Harrison, 1996, pp. 27 – 38.)

So to improve performance and change in behaviour should be the desired result of AL. Both of these should be measurable or at least, observable and visible.

2.7
The "L" on critical reflection

So what "actually" had been learnt from AL according to the practitioner's report? Different "learning" had been claimed by participants of in-house (or "in-company") AL Program.

> Some mentioned "communication and problem–framing skills, as well as learning about group dynamics and content knowledge"
> (Adams & Dixon, 1997, p.136)

Could critical reflection, which is one of a very important skill for managers to lead change in their own organization be learnt through AL? Answers from various writers seemed to be affirmative.

According to Marsick,(1990), one of the key components of AL is that

> Managers should have the opportunity to test pieces of theory out in a safe laboratory, to combine others' thinking with their own, and to develop the habit of continually testing out their assumptions publicly and getting feedback on which they can reflect. Revans's concept of Q learning fits in well here. In other words, managers cannot be prescriptive in their actions; they

> must constantly experiment, keep themselves fully open to results, discuss the undiscussable, open their eyes to the deniable, and experiment.
> (Marsick, 1990, p.35)

Rigano & Edwards (1998) concluded that:

> Critical self-reflection has much in common with the action learning approach of Revans (1978, 1982). Action learning was designed to help generate solutions to real-life problems with an emphasis on the concrete experience of the individuals taking part in the learning activity. Revans' work has similarities to action science as well as to Kolb's experiential learning cycle. However, action learning is a more flexible, less codified process left to the skill of the individual, compared with the highly defined rigorous method of action science, and it is less formulaic than Kolb's learning cycle (Marsick, 1990)
> (Rigano & Edwards, 1998, p.43)

2.7.1 Comrades in adversity

In AL, the critical self-reflection should be most effectively happen in the set , in the form of group process.

> Action learning is essentially a group process. It uses peers to generate action plans and generate learning from reflection on practice. The set meets regularly to support the learning of each member through active listening and questioning. This support and challenge is particularly appropriate when learning is about my experience and actions and not just my knowledge. Where learning is a holistic activity the set process can give impetus and insight, ideas and action plans. Action learning is about the person in context. The set helps me to explore my awareness of the features of the context and my place within it.
> (Beaty et al, 1997, p.184)

The group reflection takes the form of what Revans' called "comrades in adversity" (Revans, 1997). Ravens stated:

> 'Learning-by-doing' is an insufficient description of what I have been on about these twenty-five years; it is rather 'Learning to learn-by-doing with and from others who are also learning to learn-by-doing'.
> (Revans, 1980 p.288)

Those "others who are also learning to learn-by-doing" are what Revans called "comrades in adversity". Revans, R. (1997). Cunningham (1999) had "operationalized" this approach to learning

> The following bullet points represent the "comrades in adversity" (Revans) approach to learning
> - Learn from experience
> - Reflect
> - Share that experience with others
> - Have those colleagues criticize and advise
> - Take that advice, reflect and implement
> - Reflect and share the lessons learned
>
> Cunningham (1999, p.685)

These six points could be more easily observed in set meeting and will therefore be adopted in the chapter on data analysis as one of the tools to track group reflective behaviours in the set meetings. However, the "comrades in adversity" represented a group process only. If an individual had acquired more of this capability, would he or she, as an individual, demonstrate more of these behaviours? In the next section, I will try to explore individual critical self-reflective behaviours and try to identify the right tools for tracking them in the set meeting.

2.7.2 Selection criteria for tools of tracking reflective behaviour in this study.

There are not many theories about critical reflection in the context of the workplace (Marsick, 1988; Schippers et al, 2005; Van Woerkom, 2004). Also, since there is not one consistent theory on critical reflection (Currie and Knights, 2003), there is little consistency in the definitions of the concept of critical reflection (Brookfield, 2000; Brooks, 1999; Calderhead, 1989; Finlay and Gough, 2003)

There are numerous literature on reflective learning but as I went through them, I shared Williams' (2002, p.137) feeling who said that "I'd become tired of the various assertions made about the role and value of reflection, without any real grounding in practice".

In order that the reflective behaviour of the set members of IMBA and the CFG programs could be identified in the voice recording of the set meetings and the individual coaching sessions, the tool needs to be:

1. Grounded in analysis of data from business organizations
2. Based on a collection of most of the theories on reflective concepts.
3. The reflective behaviours are expressed in social interaction settings (e.g. meeting, interaction with others etc.)
4. Able to provide an "operationalized" interpretation of the reflective behaviour in work and learning situations.
5. Being tested on reliability.

2.7.3 Selection of tools for tracking reflective behaviour in this study

AL literature providing evidence on evaluating the reflective behaviours of the set members could not be located. To seek for a reliable guide for me to analyze the data, I compare the works of Thorpe (2004), Kember et al (2000),and Woerkom et al (2002) which were closer to my purpose and compare them against the 5 criteria mentioned above. (See Appendix 1B)

The research of Woerkom et al could meet all of the requirements stated above and hence will be adopted as analytical tool for this research.

> This study must therefore be seen as a first attempt to develop an instrument for measuring critically reflective work behaviour by translating theories about critical reflection into the accompanying work behaviour needed

> for individual and organisational learning.
> (Woerkom & Croon, 2008, p. 317)

Woerkom, & Croon, (2008) defined critically reflective work behaviour as

> …a set of connected activities carried out individually or in interaction with others, aimed at optimising individual or collective practices, or critically analysing and trying to change organisational or individual values.
> (Woerkom & Croon, 2008, p. 317)

2.7.4 The six dimensions of critical reflective working behaviour (CRWB)

> Critical reflective working behaviour seems to be a construct consisting of six dimensions, namely reflection on oneself in relation to the job, critical vision sharing, challenging group-think, asking for feedback, experimentation and awareness of employability. Both the sub dimensions and the construct as a whole seem to be reliable concepts.
> (Woerkom, et al;. 2002, p.380)

In this research, I will drawn on two works of Woerkom – Woerkom et al (2002) and Woerkom, & Croon, (2008) in the definition of the six dimensions of critical reflective working behaviour interchangeably. However, Woerkom, & Croon, (2008) added "Openness about mistakes" and left out "reflecting". In this research, the latest 6 dimensions of Woerkom, & Croon, (2008) will be adopted.

2.7.4a Openness about mistakes

In a social context like the workplace, openness about mistakes is important. As errors may help to correct false assumptions, to break down premature or inadequate "routinisation", and stimulate exploration and new discoveries. Drawn on a collection of definitions such as Chillarege et al. (2003) who defined openness about mistakes as not being afraid to make errors and Argyris and Schön's (1996) description on defensive behaviour, Woerkom, & Croon, (2008) defined "openness about mistake" as

> …not covering mistakes up or reacting defensively when confronted with an error thus limiting possibilities for oneself and others in the organisation to learn from them.
> (Woerkom, & Croon, 2008, p.317)

2.7.4b Critical vision sharing (critical opinion sharing)

The dimension of "critical vision sharing" (Woerkom et al 2002) was subsequently renamed as "critical opinion sharing" (Woerkom, & Croon, 2008).

Drawing on Mezirow and Associates' (1990) problem-posing (rather than problem solving) behaviour, this dimension of CRWB is about justification for the very premises on which problems are posed in the first place. It is the questions rose against espoused theories (Schön, 1983) and requires the courage to withstand the fear of appearing incompetent, being expelled from their professional group (Schön, 1983) or to avoid the problems and uncertainty of conflicts (Swieringa and Wierdsma, 1992). Critical opinion-sharing refers to an examination of social and political "taken-for-granteds" (Reynolds, 1998) in the organisation. People who dare to criticise espoused theories are perceived as saying "the emperor wears no clothes" or as "troublemakers" (Brooks, 1999)

Woerkom et al (2002) found the respondents in their case-studies who demonstrated critical vision sharing behaviours stressed the importance of contributing ideas and discussing this with others. "Good critical workers are not just being negative but do suggestions for a different way of working". (Woerkom et al 2002)

2.7.4c Challenging group-think

Drawing on Brooks' (1999) and Brookfield's (1987) notion of using a conflict model of approaching critical reflection, Woerkom, & Croon, (2008) maintained that challenging groupthink is another important aspect of critical reflection, as the latter cannot always be based on harmony with the social environment. They adopt Janis' (1972) notion that groupthink refers to a mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, when the members' striving for unanimity overrides their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action. They maintained that challenging groupthink is related to the concept of whistle-blowing as mentioned by Van Dyne and LePine, (1998). Woerkom, & Croon, (2008) defined challenging groupthink as

> …the competency to express disagreement, even when everyone else is in agreement.
> (Woerkom & Croon, 2008, p.317)

Woerkom et al (2002) found the respondents in their case-studies who demonstrated challenging group think behaviours mentioned such opinion as "The guy is a trouble-maker, but he sharpens us."

2.7.4d Asking for feedback

As reflection should be operationalised as an interactive, dialogical action (Reynolds, 1998; Vince, 2002), in which feedback from others is an important source for learning to occur (Annett, 1969; Ashford et al., 2003; Ashford and Tsui, 1991), asking for feedback is another important aspect of critically reflective work behaviour. According to Swift and West (1998), the feedback search rate of a team is a useful indicator of reflectiveness, since it suggests that a group is sufficiently open in its interpretation of its world and functioning to value external feedback. In their study, Woerkom, & Croon, (2008) included the areas of asking for feedback included:

> …one's opinions, underlying values or criteria about what is important at work, thereby stimulating a discussion on the theories-in-use (Schön, 1983) that may stimulate double-loop learning.
> (Woerkom & Croon, 2008, p.317)

2.7.4e Experimentation

Kolb, (1984); and Korthagen, (1985) mentioned “experimentation” as the last step in a reflection cycle. Dewey, the founder of the concept of reflection, maintained that mere doing is not enough to produce learning: doing and should be coupled with trying and experiment with the world to find out what it is like. Also the concept of reflection-in-action (Schön, 1983) is close to experimentation. Woerkom, & Croon, (2008) defined experimenting as

> …individual learning by trying out new ways of working.
> (Woerkom & Croon, 2008, p.317)

In the study of Woerkom et al (2002), the term experimentation was not mentioned directly by respondents (it has a connotation of experimenting without any obligations). What they did mention was the importance of putting ideas into practice. "Good teams don't need a suggestion box; they immediately turn ideas into improvements".

2.7.4f Awareness of employability (career awareness)

Career awareness refers to the intention to match self-development with career development, and, if necessary, to orient oneself towards opportunities outside one's current job or employer. (Woerkom, & Croon, 2008)

Due to my role as an external consultant, in the eyes of the participants, somehow represented the wish of top management, I don’t think the participants will express this kind of reflective behaviors in my presence. This dimension of CRWB will therefore be excluded in this study.

2.7.5 Summary

In this Section, I had tried to resolve the problem of locating a suitable tool for tracking the critical reflection behaviours that could happen in a group and work context so that I could made a more precise observation on the operation of the sets in the AL program I was going to organize. The dimensions of

CRWB of Woerkom seem to be a promising tool as it emphasis the more public facet of critical reflection. In the following section, I would explore the key ingredients of AL by referring to the literature on the key successful factors of AL and see whether the original model of AL proposed by Revans could have the potential to become a model for managers to learn reflective thinking and practice.

2.8
Key Ingredients of AL

Different ways of expressing the important elements of AL had been used. Some called them key success factors. I choose the word "ingredients" instead of KSF as adopting these KSFs does not guarantee success. They are really the "constructs" of the practitioners and carry a strong reductionist stance. I made a comparison of different writers on the KSF or elements perceived as important to AL in Appendix 1C. I had also summarized the KSF or elements perceived as important to AL by various writers under the heading of the 5 key ingredients and the "L" in Appendix 1D

Hicks (2001) made a list of 18 assumptions made by Revans on action learning:

1. Learning is embedded in a task,
2. Simple programmed instruction is helpful but not enough for learning,
3. Our dilemmas require exploration and insightful questions,
4. Learning requires action,
5. Learning is voluntary,
6. The urgent, meaningful problem reinforces the desire to learn,
7. Learning requires feedback,
8. The problems must carry risk to force the learner to examine their beliefs and values,
9. Learning requires a reinterpretation of the past,
10. Peers contribute to learning through group exchanges,
11. The group supports and challenges individuals,
12. Reliance on experts creates dependence,

13. The teacher’s role must shift toward facilitation of learning.
14. Learning is a social exchange,
15. Learning can be measured by action,
16. Learning requires fresh perspectives,
17. Learning requires an experimental process of observation, hypothesis generation, trial auditing, and review; and
18. Action learning creates learning across multiple people

I try to draw a relation on these 18 assumptions with the 5 key ingredients and the “L” in Appendix 1E

2.9
Key ingredients of AL : The “P”
Emergent rather then preset curriculum.

2.9.1 The role of “P” in AL

According to Revans, the role of “P” is quite marginal

> In true action learning, it is not what a man already knows and tells that sharpens the countenance of his friend, but what he does not know and what his friend does not know either. It is recognized ignorance not programmed knowledge, that is the key to action learning: men start to learn with and from each other only when they discover that no one knows the answer but all are obliged to find it
> (Revans, 1991 quoted in Smith 1997, p. 365)

In other word, the purpose of the “P” in AL is to serve as stuff for one to review and to discover how it should be understood in new lights. It served as a kind of “background information” for one to re-examine and to discover what they had understood incorrectly or inappropriately or inadequately. Therefore, pooling out and sharing with each other what one already know so that cross comparison and validation could be conducted is important in AL. To Revans, “P” should be emergent in nature and not to be pre-set by some external experts on the behalf of the managers. Peters & Smith (1996) further elaborate this emergent, “elicitive” nature of the “P”:

> An action learning programme of development starts with syllabus determination, rather than a given syllabus. The syllabus can only be the key issues facing an organization and an individual within it (Wills (1992) provides an insightful discussion of action learning as it applies to the concept of the learning organization). From there, individuals are encouraged to draw from the relevant areas of the body of knowledge - books, journals, other individuals, company literature, other organizations - appropriate, targeted and contextualized information. This approach is elicitive, in that it elicits relevant information, rather than disseminates what a teacher thinks is good for his or her students (Day and Peters (1990)) first coined the phrase "elicitive education" and discussed its application).
> (Peters & Smith, 1996, p.6)

2.9.2 An emergent "P"

Revans' notion that the programmed knowledge should be "emergent" rather then preset and should be generated among the set members rather then totally fed by outside experts not only fit in with the ideal of the personal growth tradition but represent Revans' proposal that the managers should be the best trainers of other managers in the set. It is the practice of over reliance on the outside "expert" that Revans' hold a negative position.

> The distinction between an <u>emergent, elicitive syllabus</u> and a trainer-directed syllabus is a profound one, going deeper than a change of tone. In designing action learning interventions we admit that we do not hold all the answers. In this sense we become one with the business climate of today.
> (Smith, 2001, pp37 – 38) (Underline by me)

2.9.3 "P" should be technique for tomorrow

According to Revans, those pre-set learning material belongs to knowledge of yesterday. AL highlighted the inadequacies of traditional training method which only equip managers with “yesterday’s technique”:

> The organization that continues to express only the ideas of the past is not learning, and training systems intended to develop our young may do little more than to make them proficient in **yesterday's technique**. Thus learning cannot be solely the acquisition of new programmed knowledge, howsoever important the possession of that knowledge may be.
> (Revans 1998 p.3) (Highlighted by me)

Revans did mention some ideal “P” for AL:

> …its (action learning) material is not the knowledge of the teacher but the experiences and the needs of the learners… (Revans 1980, p.288)

2.9.4 Learning from each other as an important part of the “P”

> Lasting behavioural change is more likely to follow the reinterpretation of past experiences than the acquisition of fresh knowledge. Among senior managers, in particular, it is in re-reading what is already scribbled on the cortical slate that leads to changed behaviour, **rather than in copying out new messages upon it.**
> (Revans, 1980)(Highlighted by me)

Revan relies very much on the group dynamics created by those who themselves are “anxious to learn by re-ordering their own perceptions” in order that this “Learning to learn-by-doing” could happen.

> Such re-interpretations of past experience, being necessarily subjective, complex and ill-structured, are more likely to be intelligible through exchanges with other managers

themselves anxious to learn by re-ordering their own perceptions
(Revans, 1998, p.9)

It seems that the method of AL to enable the "Learning to learn-by-doing" to happen is primarily through "with and from others who are also learning to learn-by-doing".

2.10
Key ingredients of AL : Solving real "problem" rather than "puzzle"

2.10.1 Problem as vehicle for learning in AL

Project is the vehicle for learning in AL. To ensure the project is a problem is important.

> The problem being the primary vehicle for action and learning, it should be demanding but not overwhelming. (Pedler, 1996, p.8)

The reason why it is important is that:

> …a good problem is a good **vehicle for learning** - it allows us to come up with ideas for action, to try them out and then to reflect on that action to see what we have leaned about the problem itself and about ourselves, the way we think, act, and relate to others.(Pedler, 1996, p.7)

The problem could even be regarded as the soul of AL.

> The choice of the problem seems to be a key determinant of the success of action learning. (Hicks 2000 p.48)

Its importance is due to the fact that the selection of a real "problem" is closely and critically related to the need to execute (i.e. the action) the set member's proposal. It is through addressing a real, living, problem that the "most effective managerial talent, namely, their power of observation" (Revans, 1980, p.309) could be deployed.

2.10.2 Solving "problem" rather than a "puzzle"

Revans (1983) had drawn a line between a "problem" and a "puzzle".

> Action learning is not a satisfactory approach to resolving puzzles or difficulties to which a solution clearly exists even if it is hard to find, such as the best way of reducing the time or cost of some specific operation… (Revans 1983, p.28)

So what kind of problem could facilitate learning in AL?

> David Pearce discusses guidelines for getting action-learning programs started. He notes that action learning is not the right strategy for problems that are highly technical in nature, where the answer is known by experts, where there is little ambiguity, where there is only one stakeholder, or where the decision maker has decided what he or she is going to do, disregarding other possible options.
> (Mezirow et el, 1990, p.31)

Apart from the non-technical requirement, a problem suitable for serving as project in AL should also be a task that the participants want to solve.

> I usually say something like 'a problem in Action Learning is an issue, a concern, an opportunity or a task which you want to do something about'.
> (Pedler, 1996, p.6)

Pedler's assertion echo Reven's criteria for a desirable AL project task:

> Thus, the conundrums of action learning are to be problems, **to excite the interest of the participants in what they**

> **cannot see rather than enhance their skill in elaborating what they can see already.**
> The project task must therefore be **open-ended** (admitting of a range of alternatives, each leading to still others), **inter-departmental** and of serious concern to those who offer it. Unless those who are beset with the problem offered in any action learning programme are **genuinely concerned to get something done about it,** the fellow who has the misfortune to draw it will, despite learning much, suffer endless frustration.
> (Revans, 1980, p.292) (Emphasis by me)

Hicks (2000) summarized all the viewpoints on choice of problem for AL under 6 headings:

> The choice of the problem seems to be a key determinant of the success of action learning. The criteria for problem selection includes the following: 1) a real problem; 2) a topic that is truly meaningful to the learner; 3) a problem that participants can apply their knowledge and experience towards a potential solution; 4) a problem that is not so large as to be overwhelming; 5) a problem that is complex, that no one expert could provide the answer to; and 6) a problem that needs multiple perspectives for a solution that is capable of being implemented.
> (Hicks 2000 p.48)

2.10.3 Problem of identifying a "problem" in an in-house AL program

However, making distinction between a puzzle and a problem is not easy in the real world. Pedler's assertion of "no right answers" helped to provide a more "operationalized" qualification.

> Puzzles are things which may seem like problems but in fact there is some knowledge, some solution which already

> exists, which will give you the answer. Unlike puzzles there are no right answers for problems, although you can take action on them to change the situation in some way.
> (Pedler, 1996, p.5)

Marquardt (2004) add the issue of "familiarity" to the choice of problem for AL program. He suggested "The fewer the members of the group who are familiar with the problem and its context, the greater the likelihood that there will be more innovative solutions." (Marquardt, 2004, p.30)

In view of the discussion stated above, the selection of problem for the project task is the key element in the AL, but relatively little study had been conducted to explore the potential issues related to it. In this research, particular attention will be placed on studying the issue of arranging project tasks and to see how it could affect learning in the process. It will be discussed in the later section of the Chapter

2.11
Key ingredients of AL : Implementation of proposed solution

Whether or not Action learning sets should participate in the implementation of their own recommended solution is one of the most hotly debated questions in the Action Learning literature (Mumford, 1996, Revans, 1997, Young 2002). "If there is a phrase related to Action Learning that tends to be somewhat murky and uncharted, it is the implementation phase" (Dilworth & Willis, 2003, p.120)

Quite a number of AL program require the participants to give just recommendations and some require the set members to execute the recommendation. Despite that many AL program offered by educational institutes and in-house by organizations did not required the participants to execute their proposed solution, it is clearly not the original proposal of Revans:

> If the clients are merely seeking a description of their trouble, however sophisticated, however charged with

> recommendations, they must not be lead to think that they are engaged in Action Learning. Managers are not employed to describe, nor even to recommend: they are employed to act. They learn to do this more effectively only after they know the outcome of their own deliberated plans, implemented by themselves rather than half-heartedly carried out by others.
> (Revans, 1983, p.22)

Obviously, the set members should take up the ultimate responsibility of implementing their recommendations according to Revans. By do so; the manager could know the **outcome produced by them.**

> By doing what they set out to do, and by setting out to do what they believe to be worth doing, managers are disciples of the Aristotelian ethic.
> (Revans, 1998, p.75)

Implementing the team members' own recommendation transcend the mere purpose of "walk the talk". It is the creation of learning material for oneself which is of high relevance to oneself.

> .in the end, learners themselves must adopt, own and ultimately live with the consequences of their program. **Irrelevance does not exist** within the well-designed action intervention, although learners can (in some circumstances) create irrelevant outcomes for themselves, of their own choosing.
> (Smith, 2001, pp37 – 38) (Highlighted by me)

Actually, several others had added the "implementation" –"I" into Revans' formula.

> L = P + Q + I …………...Marquardt (adds Implementation)
> L = P + Q + C + I ………Davies(adds Culture)
> L = P + Q + WoK + I ..…Inayatullah (adds Ways of Knowing)
> (Barton & Haslett, 2003, p.5)

Despite many of the claimed AL programs did not require the participants to really execute their proposals; I maintained that it is the true spirit of AL to ask the participants to do so and without it, learning from action could not happen.

However, the reason why so many AL program did not require the participants to execute their proposal by asking them to propose solution in outside organization could be related to Issue 2 – problem of outside organization were less familiar to the participants and could therefore be more easily be perceived as a "problem".

2.12

Key ingredients of AL : The "Q" – Reflection on experience

> The crucial contribution of action learning clearly is on the development of "Q" - questioning insight and definitions of problems.
> (Mumford, 1996, p.3)

According to Revans, the "Q'ing" process in AL is not just for solving the problem but also for the purpose of developing the peers.

> …if the full potential of action learning is to be realized, the selection of the fellow must notice not only his ability to improve himself but also to develop others. This may seem a strange demand to impose upon an educational system that he emerged from simple competitiveness, but is easily explicable when seen against the suggestions that the first quality of any leader is to ensure that his team learns the lessons of their own experience.
> (Revans, 1980, p.295)

2.12.1 Reflection in AL

> Action learning differs from normal training that its primary objective is to learn how to ask appropriate

> questions in conditions of risk, rather than to find the answers to questions that have already been precisely defined by others…
> (Keys 1994) (Quoted in Koo, 1999, p.89)

Critical self-reflection has much in common with the action learning approach of Revans (Rigano, & Edwards, 1998, p.433). Asking question is important and AL facilitator could play an important role in it.

> …facilitators of action learning do not come up with “the answers”. They question judiciously to help people in the workplace think carefully through the issues that are significant to their work situation. It is important, then, that facilitators “facilitate” this process of inquiry rather than impose their own vision. Their task is to open up and incorporate the visions of workplace participants as contribution to the shared task of problem solving or improvement.
> (Zuber-Skerritt, 2002 p.114-124),

On top of asking questions, action is needed so that reflection could be possible and subsequently lead to better or more effective action.

> Action learning builds on the relationship between reflection and action….We believe that reflection is a necessary precursor to effective action and that learning from experience can be enhanced by deliberate attention to this relationship.
> (McGill & Brockbank 2004, p.13)

In order that the Q could happen, they need to reflect on their own experiences of implementing their solution and they need to help each other to learn by pointing out critical questions. However, Revans had not mentioned in detail what kinds of reflection are needed in AL.

In part, the vagueness about reflection in AL exists because the term reflection describes both a cognitive process (Dewey 1933; King and Kitchener 1994; Kolb 1984; Mezirow 1991; Schon 1982; Sheckley, Allen, and Keeton 1993) and a structured learning activity (Goldsmith 1996; Henry 1994; Silcox 1993).

In a study, the relatively large numbers of meta-cognitive (learning how to learn) and self-learning reports are in alignment with frequent claims seen in the literature. (Van Schuyver, 2004, p.98) However, Van Schuyver could not explain this. "This study did not identify why the breakthrough experiences occurred, only that they often did". (Van Schuyver 2004) His study also included evidence that the majority of learning is done through questioning insight. (Van Schuyver, 2004, p.109)

2.12.2 Problem about the "Q"

Although reflection is agreed to be an essential element of effective practice in AL, practitioners in AL have not had much guidance in designing structured learning activities that promote intentional consideration. According to Raelin (2006), this key ingredient of AL "has often been overlooked".

> In the impetus to get the project accomplished, the questioning that Revans had in mind – what we might refer to as collective reflection – had often been overlooked.
> (Raelin, 2006, p.152)

2.13
Key ingredients of AL : Take improved action on the problem

Revans had stated one of the three objectives of AL was:

> Make useful progress upon the treatment of some problem or opportunity in the real world.
> (Revans, 1998, p.15-16)

Revans had also clearly stated that the outcome of the AL should be improved "observable behaviour henceforth in the problem field."

> Action learning is a means of development, intellectual, emotional or physical that requires its subjects, through responsible involvement in some real, complex and stressful problem, to achieve intended change to improve their observable behaviour henceforth in the problem field.
> (Revans, 1982 pp. 626 – 7 quoted in Marsick, pp 159-176)

The essence of AL is that the “Q”ing process – the reflection, will be followed by action. This action after reflection should be a better action.

> …in any of its guises, action learning is based on the premise that learning comes about through reflection followed by action to solve real problems
> (McGill and Beaty, 1995 quoted in Clarke et el, 2006, p441)

2.13.1 Problem of “take improved action”

However, this “cyclical” relationship between action and reflection had not been emphasized too much in the AL literature. Reason (1999) observed that:

> Research cycling is fundamental not only to co-operative inquiry, but more generally to the strategies of action research and action learning…Action science writing contains references to single and double-loop learning, but the emphasis on cycles of action and reflection sees less explicit…
> (Reason 1999)

2.14
Summary

In view of the previous discussion, it seems that AL arranged according to Revans’ model could have a high potential to help managers to learn reflective thinking and practice.

In the previous sections, the importance and nature of the five key ingredients of AL had been discussed, namely:

1. An emerging "P"
2. The insightful questioning "Q"
3. A real problem, not puzzle
4. The execution of proposal on solution of problem
5. Take improved action

As indicated by Revans' formula, these factors should be interwoven and hence need to be present in an AL program in order that the "L" could be delivered. However, few had mentioned how all these ingredients could be put together in one AL program that could make the L effective. The most important ingredient – the "real problem", had been taken too much for granted on its ability to become the vehicle of learning. Jarvis (1987) showed that people might respond to a potential learning situation as nonlearning, nonreflective learning or reflective learning. Nonlearning occurs if the person does not respond to a potential learning situation. Nonreflective learning occurs as a result of experiences that are not really thought about. Both of these situations would be possible if the participants adopt a passive, retreat manner which could be generated as a result of their feeling of being rejected in the set meeting or when their personality is too assertive or holding an extremely high confidence on their own experience and refute other's suggestions.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of the 5 key ingredients are not without problems in execution and is likely to be affected by contextual factors. In the following sections, I will proceed to discuss the effect of four contextual factors that presented to me when I arrange AL programs for the IMC.

On top of all these, a serious assumption of AL theory is that the participants would be competent in good questioning and highly motivated to challenge one self by trying out challenging solutions. While many successful managers do possess those attributes, they might still be very selective in applying those attributes. They might apply those attributes in front of their boss or in actual work context, they might prefer to "save the trouble" of adding to their heavy work load when taking part in a developmental program which should belonged to a lower priority in their long list of operation tasks. On the other hand, many successful managers do not possess those attributes but climb the corporate ladder through playing politics and by long years of service.

2.15

Is AL Context Free?

Some proposed that AL could be equally successful in different contexts and organizations.

> Action learning can be applied in various contexts and organizations looking for new solutions to an existing problem. (Fuchs, 2007, p.28)

The large amounts of literature that claimed great success across a wide spectrum of industries, countries (mainly Western countries) and organizations seemed to provide strong support to this claim.

2.15.1 What are the contextual factors

In this study, contextual factors in work which could affect the effectiveness of AL program come from two sources – Context of work and work environment.

I use the definitions of Cheetham & Chivers (1998) to define them:
Context of work is: "the particular situation in which a practitioner is required to operate".
Work environment refers to: "the physical, cultural and social conditions which surround an individual at work". (Cheetham & Chivers 1998, p.267)

That managerial learning occurs in and is thus affected by a particular organizational context has been verified empirically, so it is reasonable to assume that the organizational context within which developmental experiences occur should also significantly affect managers' reflection. (Seibert, 1999, p.12) Such kinds of developmental experiences can be understood only in context, since it is the organizational context that produces the experience. The notion of contextual conditions is also consistent with the view that as open systems, organizations create contexts in which a multitude of factors simultaneously shape rather than determine behaviour (Hackman, 1985).

However, the "success stories" on the application of AL in large number of organizations in different industries and countries seem that influence of contextual factors is not an issue for AL. Some provided a positive view on the capability of AL to be able to meet the need of the difference in application context:

> Action learning can be applied in various contexts and organizations looking for new solutions to an existing problem.
> (Fuchs, 2007, p.28)

Some even regard AL is organizational and cultural context free.

> What is more, in using the organization itself as a learning laboratory, it does not require any special set of conditions to be in place before it can be effective. Action learning works well in a bureaucracy, in a flat organization, in a firm culturally hostile to education and development, in a firm encouraging self-actualization. It does so because its whole ethos is learning about the surrounding context, and learning to be effective within it, thus leveraging whatever the prevailing culture is to its own advantage.
> (Peters, & Smith, 1996, p.6)

Hicks had summarized the literature on AL which described it as highly flexible and effective in a wide variety of contexts.

> It is clear from the literature that action learning can be an effective learning method and catalyst for change in a variety of contexts and it can be designed and applied in a variety of ways.
> (Hicks, 2001, p.25)

However, Zuber-Skerrit (2002) had highlighted three key success factors for AL

> The success of an action learning program depends largely on the extent to which the values in an action learning culture are adhered to, practised and actually lived by program participants. In brief, these values include:
>
> 1. collaboration, trust and openness;
> 2. team spirit and mutual respect for individual differences, talents and needs; and
> 3. tolerance of mistakes, from which we learn.
>
> If participants are not committed to these values in their espoused and enacted theories, an action learning program will not work,
>
> (Zuber-Skerritt, 2002, pp. 114-124)

Just take a look at these factors could tell us that they may not necessarily be found in every organization at the same time. For AL programs running in-house, all these factors could be influenced greatly by politics, group dynamics and business situations.

2.15.1a The participants context

Despite the numerous reports stating that AL would be effective in almost any organizational context Marsick & O'Neil offered a word of caution: which indicated the participant's context could be an issue when running an AL program.

> We conclude that people should not enter into Action Learning lightly. In comparison to other action technologies, Action Learning might be looked upon as relatively mild and unprovocative, yet our experience is that people can experience it as powerful and even frightening.
>
> (Marsick, & O'Neil, 1999p.174)

AL assumes that learners are self-motivated, self-directed, and voluntary participants. (McGill and Beatty, 1992) Morris (1987) referred to action learning “as a kind of do-it-yourself learning experience.” (Morris, 1987, p. 67)

In the program I arranged for HMC & IMC, there were two contextual factors related to the participant’s context – that the participants were acquainted with each other and they were regarded by top management as high potential management staff will be studied.

2.15.1b The value context

The focus on the professional and managerial elites in organization had invited some critiques from the critical school. For example, Fenwick (2003) commented that:

> …the invited participant are those who conform to a norm implicit in OL discourses; full-time knowledge-reliant workers committed to continuous learning. These are usually the professional/managerial elite whose learning power and stock of learnings are considered most valuable to the employing organization. (Fenwick, 2003)

Although Smith (2001) advocated that AL “does not require any special set of conditions to be in place before it can be effective”, he did mentioned that AL “maps over existing structures and development plans, and supports the aspirations of non-traditional managers.”(Underline added by me) (Smith 2001, p. 36)

In the program I arranged for HMC & IMC, there were two contextual factors related to the value & organizational context – that the program were ran in-house and they were operating in a typical Chinese cultural context.

2.15.2 Summary

There are four contextual factors were shared in all two of my consultancy assignment with the IMC & HMC.

1. They were Chinese (with the exception of one in the CFG program who was a South East Asian but had been in China for a long time and could speak Putonghua)
2. The program were ran in-house so the set members were all from the same company and even from the same division (as in the case of CFG Program)
3. They know each other quite well.
4. They were all regarded by the top management as high potential staff.

In other word, the contextual factors I need to consider were:

1. Chinese cultural environment
2. AL Program running in-house
3. High Potential Management Staff of the Same Organization
4. Set Members acquaint with each other and have a close work relationships

The importance of these 4 contextual factors not only interest me as a consultant for the two organizations I work for, but should worth exploring in a more detail manner as it will have great impact on the future application of AL worldwide. The significance of each of the 4 contextual factors and their potential impacts on the 5 key ingredients of AL will be discussed one by one in the following sections,

2.16
Analysis on the potential effect of the 4 contextual factors on the 5 key ingredients of AL

Organizations operate in a local environment which includes specific economic, social and cultural contexts (House et al., 2004; Moattar-Husseini and O'Brien, 2004)

2.16.1 Applying AL in Chinese culture

Literature from both the social sciences and business disciplines recognizes the existence of a strong relationship element in Chinese culture. Hofstede (1980), from a Western perspective, and Hong et al, (2001), from a Chinese perspective, identify the importance of the collective in the social interaction of the Chinese people. Gao et al. (1996) discuss the importance of harmony as a value in relationships. Hwang (1987) and Kirkbride et al. (1991) emphasis the importance of maintaining relationships

AL, with its Western heritage, could have issues in the process of implementation. Marquardt (1998, p.118) noted that the basic elements of AL (set, problem, insightful questioning etc.) "is based upon some basic assumptions and values of Western culture."

2.16.2 The Characteristic of Chinese Culture and Chinese management style

China's key cultural tenets can be traced to Confucianism, which, while coexisting with Taoism, Buddhism, and Legalism and later being challenged by Maoism, is widely presumed to have provided the foundation for Chinese cultural tradition (Metzger, 1977; Pye, 1981). Bond and Wang (1983, p. 59) write that "a Confucian analysis has continuing validity toward an understanding of Chinese interpersonal behaviour."

Among the key Confucian principles are harmony, hierarchy, collectivism, and personal relations. Harmony reflects an aspiration toward a conflict-free system of social relations, a principle which seems to have remained entrenched in the People's Republic (Bond & Wang, 1983). Hierarchy implies that individuals must be conscious of their position in the social system and abide by it (Eberhard, 1971). Maoist ideology fiercely attacked this principle, but apparently with limited success (e.g., Shenkar & Ronen, 1987a). Collectivism rejects personal aggrandizement as a threat to established group hierarchies (Pye, 1981), a principle which has been reinforced by Maoism (Eberhard, 1971; Metzger, 1977). Interpersonal relations are paramount; they are also the most resistant to change (Pye, 1981; Shenkar & Ronen, 1987b).

Human relations are of crucial importance in the Chinese business world (Wong, 1996; Xin and Peace, 1996; Yang, 1994). These human relations are often express in the term "Guanxi". Guanxi, which is an important concept for successful business in China, refers to "relationships between people" (Michailova and Worm, 2003). It implies a transferable, reciprocal, intangible and utilitarian obligation to dyadic relationships between individuals (Luo, 2000; Michailova and Worm, 2003).

2.16.3 Literature on applying AL in Chinese culture

> …while Asian managers and executives responded with high spirit and enthusiasm to active learning, they were more reluctant to adopt action learning. (…) In contrast to the common expectation regarding action learning outcomes in the West, which stresses Level 2 or Level 3 learning goals as a minimum requirement (as defined by Yorks, O'Neil and Marsick, 1999), the learning goals of the Chinese action learning design trends to focus on Level 1 and possibly Level 2 learning goals. Both foci emphasize a contextualized learning process which tends to be de-personalized and content driven.
> (Yiu, 2006)

Unwillingness to engage in open reflection, which is important for learning to happen in AL, could have a potential impact on the effectiveness of AL especially on the key ingredient – "Q".

2.16.4 The possible effect of Chinese culture on the 5 key ingredients of AL

2.16.4a Possible effects on identifying problem

Enhancing effects

The high power distance in Chinese culture might enable the AL participants, who are management staff, to place a higher demand on performance by pointing out the problem in a more straight forward manner.

Hindering effects

> In many other cultures, it would be more difficult for a leader or individual to turn over his or her most critical problems to subordinates. Even if he or she delegated such power, some members of some cultures would still not see real power present in the group without the leader being physically there. (Marquardt, 1998, p.121)

Revans' notion that "difficult managers, all honest, experienced, and wise, will advocate different courses of action in accordance with their different value systems, their different past experiences, and their different hopes for the future"(Revans 1983, p.28) was a big assumption when applying in Chinese culture. The drive for compliance to the idea of a seemingly more experience management staff in the set, or of a strong leader in the set, or the wish to avoid being seen as the "trouble maker" could easily turn a problem into a "puzzle" by simply following the problem definition of this/ these staff..

Further literature review had justified that the above issues could really had an impact on the effectiveness of AL but had rarely been explored in an in-depth manner.

2.16.4b Possible effect on the need to execute the proposed solution

Enhancing effects

> It seems that in Chinese organizations people tended to be more accepting of changes, but in a passive way. (…) Chinese people were educated and taught to accept what is and what will be without question. Actually, in deep down they thought they were unable to change anything even though they resisted the change because traditionally it was the rule that leaders and government made all the decisions.
>
> (Alas & Sun, 2007, p.232)

This "acceptance" culture works favourably (on surface) for the set members to push forward their proposed solutions. However, it poses another challenge to deepen the change as will be discussed in the next paragraph.

Hindering effects

> …if the organization would like the group members to learn about some content area such as customer relations, a problem related to that area would be presented to the group….Also, it is important for the individual, team, and/or organization to realize that the greater the challenge in solving the problem, the greater will be the learning opportunities.
>
> (Marquardt, 2004, p.30)

While people generally espoused that challenge generate learning opportunities, they may not always embrace challenge in practice. When AL program was organized in a typical Chinese context, the fear of failure to meet the challenge could deter the program participants to look forward to this sort of challenge. A tendency to "play safe" and "cover one's ass" is rule of the game in both Western and non-Western organizational life. There is a very common Chinese proverb telling the workers that「十功弈能補一過」(One mistake could not be sat off by ten credits) Not much literature on AL had explore in detail how this potential obstacle could be overcame. Much emphasis had been placed on the advantage of putting learners in the real work context. While real work context could provide genuine experiences, it could also be threatening and discouraging. Participants could react by adopting a nonlearning (Jarvis, 1987) approach or a nonreflective learning (Jarvis, 1987) approach by taking some “play safe” courses of action.

2.16.4c Possible effect on the “Q”

Enhancing effects

Almost every Chinese people had use the proverb:「苦口良藥」(good medicine taste bitter) in their daily conversation and the proverb:「忠言逆耳」(honest advises are antagonistic to hear) in advising others. They were actually originated from Confucius.

> 良藥苦於口而利於病，忠言逆於耳而利於行。
> Good medicine tastes bitter but effective for curing illness.
> Honest advises are antagonistic to hear but effective for acting.
> (孔子家語. 六本)
> Confucius

Be humble and open to accept other’s comment had been an espoused virtue in typical Chinese cultural context. When the participants were peers and had been acquainted with each other, the questions raised by others would therefore, be more readily accepted in a less defensive manner due to the emphasis of Guanxi.

Hindering effects

> Questioning one another, especially people of superior status, is very difficult. The questioning of Asians, for example, can result in ritualized behaviour, withdrawal, or even resentment
> (Rigby, 1986 quoted by Marquardt, 1998, p.123)

Marquardt further commented that:

> In most cultures, in addition, there is a fear of asking dumb questions since it may also cause one to lose face.

> One avoids exposing one's weakness and faults. Setting a supportive climate may not be sufficient in these cultural environments.
> (Marquardt, 1998, p.124) (Underline by me)

Another issue that might have arisen is the more conservative nature of the Chinese in expressing one's thinking and hence the effectiveness of critical self reflection. The experience of Yiu and Saner (1998) could provide support to my worry of that. Their experience was about a Sino-Swiss project running from 1994 – 1996 of organizing a large scale AL program for the core cadres of the Chinese Government to become the trainer for their fellow cadre on management skills

> It remained difficult to reflect on the interpersonal dimension of the learning process. Chinese trainees have demonstrated their sensitivity in this regard. To openly discuss their feelings and observations in this regard remained alien to their cultural norms. Feedback of this nature tended to happen privately and informally.
> (Yiu and Saner 1998, p. 145)

Yiu (2006) had suggested 6 "design constraints" when applying AL in China and two of them are:

> Design constraint 4: Lack of a psychological mindedness among participants and the general deficiency of Chinese language in expressing affective experiences.
> Design constraint 5: The importance of conflict avoidance and preservation of individual "face" in Chinese culture.
> (Yiu, 2006)

In the Chinese culture, where workers were more action oriented, will the practice to discuss and reflect be hindered also by the drive to take quick action?

> …in some cultures, such as Chinese, there is a high impatience in spending too much time in discussion and reflection; there is a great desire for quick results and speed. (Marquardt, 1998, p.123)

2.16.4d Possible effects on the need to "take improved action"

Hindering effects

> In many Asian cultures, people are much more circuitous in selecting a course of action. <u>Social and political sensitivity drive the solution</u> and the action taken cannot cause someone to lose face. Even if the group thought it a proper decision, they would desert/ disavow the decision later on.
> (Marquardt, 1998, p.124) (Underline by me)

Will such "social and political sensitivity" driven solution become cosmetic in nature and be perceived as satisfying the "rule of the game" and served merely as a show to satisfy the expectation of the senior management?

2.16.5 The AL program running in-house

Based on information gathered in their survey and their prior research in the field of executive education, Conger & Xin (2000) "believe that in the future, public open-enrolment programs are likely to play a smaller role in executive education" as the advantages of in house program are:

> 2. Customized, company-specific programs typically are more economical for sponsoring companies.
> 3. In-house programs ensure that a critical mass of the senior management of an organization share the same experience and in turn share a similar mindset.
> (Conger & Xin, 2000, p.73)

2.16.5a The importance of running AL in-house

Yorks, Dilworth, Marquardt, Marsick and O'Neil (2000) discuss five manifestations of resistance to an action learning/reflection approach and two of them were related to the disadvantages of non-in-house AL program:

- Resistance to allowing “outsiders” to be part of the set.
- Some organizations/individuals may be hesitant to share “inside” or “confidential” information with people within and/or outside the organization.

(Yorks, et al, 2000)

Revans (1998) regard in-house AL program as “second model” and “is one of the most powerful models of organizational learning at work”. (Revans, 1998, p.24) Lawlor also pointed out that in-plant AL program was “one of the fastest growing forms”. (Lawlor 1997, p.197-201)

Revan emphasis the importance of the set members’ execution of the proposal and bear the business consequence and hence to be able to learn from it. If this notion was taken seriously, it won’t be difficult for one to conclude that the in-house AL program with the participants coming from the same organization will be most qualified to do so.

2.16.5b Literature on in-house AL program

It is true that there are many AL programs which are not run as in-house program. Most of these programs are offered by consulting firms and educational institutes. Lawlor (1997) had compared various options of AL and said in-plant AL programmes have different advantages.

> They are a powerful medium for bringing about organizational change and though a higher cost per organization then external schemes, they are much lower per participant. … The in plant approach also achieves another and more difficult objective sought after by managers and trainers, to create a learning environment that maintains itself.
> (Lawlor 1997, p.197-201)

Companies like Prudential Assurance(Lewis & Marsh 1987, Keys 1990), GE(Meister 1998, Vicere & Fulmer 1996, Marquardt, 1999), Whirlpool (Meister 1998, Corona 1998), Xerox (Meister 1998), Cigna Property & Casualty, (Froiland 1994) had arrange in-house AL programs mainly for their high potential management staff and had reported huge success. However, the reports were mainly on the operation and the arrangement and focus on the organization benefits. However, those cases reported rarely touch on the individual change and what had happened in the AL sets.

2.16.6 The possible effect of running AL in-house on the 4 key ingredients of AL

2.16.6a Possible effects on identifying problem

Enhancing effects

The characteristic of being an in-house program pose little problem on the selection of a “real” problem for the project. However, the same characteristic make the identification of a “problem” rather then a “puzzle” difficult as the set members might be too familiar with the problems of an organization they work for.

Hindering effects

The desirable problem project for AL should be a problem without a right answer already existing. In the real world, it is hard to say whether some solution had already exists or not. In an in-house context, the desire and directives from the boss are frequently the most convenient solutions for the general workers. In an in-house context, it is rare that a problem put in front of the AL program participants had never been mentioned by the senior management before. When the “problem” become one of a puzzling over “what the boss actually want us to do”, it could be just a puzzle and could hardly conducive to reflective questioning.

Researches indicated that familiarity with the problem did pose a barrier on the perceived effectiveness of the AL experience.

> During the interview, S10 said that she was very experienced in the area of her client's problem and claimed that as a result of her familiarity with the work at hand that she did not have a meaningful learning experience in the Action Learning process…(…).(should set members) be largely unfamiliar with their client's problem, in order to be successful. Additional study is needed to answer these important questions. (Van Schuyver, 2004, p.65 - 66)

2.16.6b Possible effect on the need to execute the proposed solution

In AL, it is by implementing their "own deliberated plans" that leadership capabilities could be developed.

> By promoting cognition and insightful inquiry with perceptive partners in situations where solutions are not always obvious, and by leaving responsibility for implementation of the solution in the participant's hand, it is particularly suited to enhancing leadership capabilities.
> (Smith, 2001, p.36)

Enhancing effects

From a practical point of view, set members recruited within the organization will undoubtedly be most qualified and effective in doing so. This also enables them to face the serious result of their implementation, and hence additional challenge, which is the key to the action learning process.

On the contrary, if the set members were composed of people from outside who collect data by interview the "clients", reviewing some document, make an analysis and then present a proposal and walk away. As they are external parties, the clients would not be willing to let a party of "part-time and unqualified consultants" to implement their proposals easily. Besides, implementation of the proposal requires more technical expertise and deeper understanding of the organization's operations.

Hindering effects

In an AL program of DuPont organized for her 400 senior managers which combined classroom work, personal/team coaching & activity-based learning through company projects, Barton & Haslett (2003) (based on Boshry's report) reported that:

> Participants prefer to work on topics within their own domains – these sometimes lack corporate significance, while corporate projects can appear too large/overwhelming.
> (Barton & Haslett, 2003, p.18)

For participants of in-house program, it would be natural enough for them to pick up those they had the highest confidence to succeed. No one wanted their project to become a "noble failure" which could put their career on peril.

2.16.6c Possible effects on the "Q"

Enhancing effects

Set members drawn from in-house could equip them with a basic understanding of the problem and hence could probably ask more insightful questions. They could also give comment to each other by pointing out directly the "facts and fictions".

Hindering effects

Harrison (1996) pointed out the advantages of disadvantages of running AL in-house.

> Where set members are drawn from the same organization, the grounding of AL in the current "reality" of that organization makes it likely that pressures to conform to the

> dominant logic coupled with the need simply to "get the job done" will result in little change in organizational learning except at the level that Spender (1994) describes as "technical'.
> (Harrison, 1996, pp.27-38)

As Harrison had rightly pointed out, the “baggage” of company culture or an understanding of a “taboo” could caused one to remain silent in order not to be regarded by others as “playing smart”.

2.16.6d Possible effects on the taking improved action

Enhancing effects

When the participants consisted of members coming from the same organization, representing different functions, an organization very akin to “matrix organization”, “task force” (Revans against mixing this with AL) could be formed which undoubtedly, was extremely effective for generating solid and feasible action plan on how to improve the problem.

Hindering effects

Beaty et al (1997b) had mentioned an incident that had happened in an in-house AL program.

> Another problem that can arise when all the set members are from the same organization is that they can bring "baggage" from their employment histories. One example that we encountered was where a participant explained that the main obstacle to her achieving her goal was a "bloody stupid system" that she was obliged to operate. The air froze over in the set meeting when another member of the set revealed icily that it was she who had set up that system!
> (Beaty et al, 1997b)

In an in-house AL program, in-house problems will be discussed and solution will be looked for. If that should be a real important problem and "inter-departmental" in nature, some members would likely to have more or less a stake in it. It could either become an "unwrapped" baggage as Beaty et al mentioned in their case or a "wrapped up" baggage when the members are Chinese who care more about giving "face" to colleagues and maintaining "Guanxi". In that case, the real and important questions might be avoided so that the related set members won't be embarrassed and improved action will be "cosmetic" and superficial in order that the set members at stake won't be "improved" or "repaired" at the same time and their antagonistic attitude won't be generated.

Although Beaty et al (1997b) had mentioned this possible problem related to in-house AL program, no specific advises on how to avoid it had been provided.

2.16.7 High Potential Management Staff of the Same Organization

2.16.7a The importance of organizing AL program for high potential management staff of the same organization

Gritzmacher (1989) highlighted the importance of training as a mean to retain fast-track staff.

> If training is not a major part of the culture, a fast-track employee may not stay with the organization. Fast-trackers will be attracted to a company that believes that training is a commitment to the human potential in the organization, and that uses training to develop employees and introduce the concept of change to remain competitive.
> (Gritzmacher, 1989, p.427)

As AL requires the sponsoring organization invest a lot of resources and the objectives of running AL had frequently been placed on promoting organizational change and solving practical business problems, the participants will naturally been targeted on the high potential and successful management staff of the organization. Actually, many AL program participants were high potential managers of organization.

2.16.7b The Characteristic of high potential management staff

Gritzmacher (1989) outlined nine key characteristics of fast-trackers, as follows:

- (1) A unique perception of their occupation: fast-trackers see their daily activities as fitting into a career pattern, rather than just doing a job, and see their role as making their organization into a global leader in its field (and playing an active leadership role in that).
- (2) A broad-thinking style: seeing wholes rather than job-bounded parts; seeing symbolic significances to actions.
- (3) Time-consciousness: a drive to achieve the most as soon as possible; a drive to achieve a goal and embrace the next one.
- (4) Independence: a creative urge to add value to guidelines; a fast-learned knowledge of what would be good to accomplish.
- (5) High commitment: not wanting to miss out on anything interesting for the organization; a belief that the organization would be diminished without them and a drive to enact that self-perceived importance constructively.
- (6) High energy: the ability to get supra-normal amounts of work done and cheerfully come back for more.
- (7) A need for creativity and variety: fast-trackers need new and testing challenges.
- (8) A varying interest in teamwork: the badging of fast-trackers as the favoured sons and daughters can make team interplay difficult; also the need to move ahead faster than the pack can make them impatient with others.
- (9) Continual improvement: a hunger to challenge and improve whatever they are involved in.

(Gritzmacher, 1989, Quoted by Peters & Smith, 1996)

2.16.8 Literature on organizing AL program for high potential management staff of the same organization

Companies like Prudential Assurance(Lewis & Marsh 1987, Keys 1990), GE(Meister 1998, Vicere & Fulmer 1996, Marquardt, 1999), Whirlpool (Meister 1998, Corona 1998), Xerox (Meister 1998), Cigna Property & Casualty, (Froiland 1994) had arrange in-house AL programs mainly for their high potential management staff and had reported huge success.

Brassard (2002) suggested that an effective AL program should be "Outreach: AL outcomes support individuals in becoming lifelong learners, teachers and agent of change in their organization and beyond." Park (2004) suggested that successful AL program should be able to "recognizing top performers as core personnel for the future of the company". (Park 2004 quoted by Kim 2007)

2.16.9 The possible effect of high potential management staff on the 5 key ingredients of AL

2.16.9a Possible effects on the "P"

Enhancing effects

The ideal of Revans is to have the set members to become the teacher of the others.

> …if the full potential of action learning is to be realized, the selection of the fellow must notice not only his ability to improve himself but also to develop others.
> (Revans, 1980, p.295)

With participants all are high potential managers; they should have a lot to share and to teach other. Furthermore, backed by their track record on performance and the senior management's support, the knowledge they shared would be of high credibility.

Hindering effects

> There should be some familiarity for one or more members of the group with the problem and the context of the problem. …it is advisable that not everyone be familiar with it. …The fewer the members of the group who are familiar with the problem and its context, the greater the likelihood that there will be more innovative solutions. (Marquardt, 2004, p.30)

Marquardt's allowance for difference among participants in their degree of familiarity with the problem could possibly lead to the inclination of those who are more familiar with the problem to play the role of teacher especially when they are high potential management staff. Their "need to move ahead faster than the pack can make them impatient with others" (Gritzmacher, 1989, Quoted by Peters & Smith, 1996) who know less then him or her and thus seduce them to play the role of expert and attempt to provide all the "answers" so that they could satisfy their "drive to achieve the most as soon as possible" (Gritzmacher, 1989, Quoted by Peters & Smith, 1996).

2.16.9b Possible effect on the need to execute the proposed solution

Enhancing effects

High potential manager fit in well with the nature of AL program.

> If there is one thing that most characterizes the effective manager, it is the fusion of decisiveness and ability to act, regardless of circumstance and uncertainty.
> (Levitt, 1991, p. ix)

An effective manager would not be handicapped by the lack of a pre-set "P" and the emergent nature of it. On the other hand, an effective manager should find the situation challenging and excited. Harris and Field (1992) described fast-trackers on a development programme at a US corporation as follows: "They itch to ... get involved, make real contributions ... they want visibility ... these people want a challenge. High risk/high reward is what they are looking for".

Hindering effects

For many management staff who had been consistently successful and they were perceived as high potential were the favoured son and daughters of the top management. To them, "failure is not an option". The experience of organizing AL program informed Bowerman & Peters (1999) that the "fear of failure" could make AL difficulties:

> The dilemmas we faced in implementing an action learning program in the context of a bureaucratic and hierarchical organization parallel the dilemmas faced by the learning organization. One of the fundamentals in the idea of a learning organization is the need to make mistakes, and to learn from those mistakes. Mistakes are only possible if one is free to take the action that permits them to happen. If the fear of failure is too great, then the actions necessary to achieve new and different outcomes simply will not happen.
> (Bowerman & Peters 1999, p.137)

2.16.9c Possible effects on the "Q"

> "Success is a lousy teacher. It seduces smart people into thinking they can't lose."
>
> \- Bill Gates
>
> http://www.quotes-museum.com/quote/33965

Hindering effects

Reflection is not easy in management. According to Robinson and Wick's (1992) action research, the bottom-line orientation of business organizations discourages reflection. Even though reflection is beginning to be incorporated into some corporate management development programs, and despite recently being connected to strategic planning (Hammer and Stanton, 1997 Quoted in Seibert, 1999), reflection continues to have minimal impact on management practice. This is probably because of the perception that managers are action-oriented and not reflective.

Research indicated that successful managers are even more action oriented and impatient with inaction.

> Managers typically…attempt to impose their vision and their learning on others. The result is that others do not share ownership in the vision and learnings. Because they have not been invited to share in the vision and learnings, they see them as faddish and abstract – not really connected to the realities they encounter and deal with in their work. (Fisher & Torbert, 1995, P.7)

The study of Luthans (1985, p.255-270) further informed us that high potential management staff had a high proneness to outward bounded action oriented activities such as "interaction with outsiders and socializing/politicking".

Rigano & Edwards, (1998) reported a case study on a Research & Development engineer – Vincent, who had volunteered to take part in a professional self development that resembled very much to the AL method. Actually participants received relevant reading material and worksheets for developing an 'action learning exploration' (ALE). (Rigano & Edwards, 1998 p.435) According to the report, Vincent shared most of the nine attributes of fast-trackers as described by Gritzmacher (1989):

Rigano & Edwards, (1998) reported that Vincent choose not to utilize the mentoring system and the ALE support group meetings. He perceived the mentors and the ALE support group members lack the expertise and did not consider that attending the ALE support group meeting was the best use of the time. This case study indicated the potential impact of high potential participants who may feel AL is inefficient and waste time.

Will successful past experiences of high potential staff as roadblock to "Q"

Sitkin (1996, as quoted by Ghaye, 2005, p.178) suggests that success can lead to actions that preserve the status quo, an avoidance of risk-taking, and an over-confidence form practitioners and possibly action where practitioners become blind to even more effective ways of doing things.

The participants being identified as high potential staff had been successful previously. Will their reflection of past experience which consists of many success stories, reinforced their view rather then generate a revised view on the problem?

> Reg Revens in The ABC of Action Learning describes four typical managerial blockages to the problem of deciding honest sources of information in conditions of uncertainty and risk – the four corrigible handicaps:
>
> 1. The idolization of perceived past experiences
> 2. The charismatic influences of (other) successful managers
> 3. The impulsion to instant activity
> 4. The belittlement of subordinates
>
> (Garratt, 1997, p.24)

Will participants of in-house AL program accentuate these “four corrigible handicaps? Oliver’s (2008) account of a case could help to illuminate the worry of Revans on the “four corrigible handicaps” did happen in in-house AL programs with successful managers as participants.

Oliver (2008) had made an account on a failing experience of running an in-house AL intervention with an UK television company. The objectives were to gain insight into the reasons on the decline of viewing figures and to develop a new strategy. Oliver discovered that the past success of the set members was a major road block for reflection. Oliver’s avocation on the need to engage in “assumption breaking” in the set meeting had met with opposition.

> The Head of Strategy argued that as an experienced strategist in the television arena, he had recently been employed by the organization on the basis of his previous work experience and how he could contribute to the future direction of the company in a fast-changing industry. <u>His existing assumptions had been shaped by his</u>

> experiences, and these experiences had landed him a good job with a leading media company.
> (Oliver, 2008) (Underline by me)

The experience of Oliver (2008) indicated the difficulty of asking successful management staff of in-house AL program to engage in the core learning activities of AL – reflection.

2.16.10 Set members acquainted with each other and have a close work relationships

When the participants are coming from the same organization, most of the participants will know each other. This kind of acquaintance could work for and against the set operation. In an organization, conflict and politics are common. This kind of relationship could create some impact on the set operation. In what way these kinds of impacts could facilitate or hinder the AL process had not been discussed extensively. Revans are not very concern with the group dynamics. However, as a practitioner of AL, some guidance is needed on how this issue should be handled so that the AL process could be enhanced.

2.16.11 The possible effect of set members who are acquaint with each other and have a close work relationships on the 4 key ingredients of AL

2.16.11a Possible effect on identifying problem

Hindering effects

The typical phenomenon of avoiding conflict among peers in an in-house AL program had been observed by Oliver (2008) when the participants were asked to engage in assumption surfacing technique.

> …it appeared that none of the members wanted to engage in open conflict, especially as the Head of Strategy ultimately had responsibility for this project.

Oliver, J., Reflections on a failed action learning intervention, Action Learning: Research and Practice, Volume 5, Issue 1 2008, pages 79 - 83

2.16.11b Possible effects on the "Q"

Enhancing effects

When participants of AL sets who are not acquaint with each other, the group dynamics could not be created. If the prime purpose of an AL set is to be working with and learning from each other, they need to be able to rely on and help one another, and will do so best if friendship and intimacy is fostered. Bowerman & Peters (1999) view this as critical to the success of AL program.

> Attention to group dynamics - through a familiarisation process intended to make the "set" personally comfortable with one another, in a more concentrated and determined way than a traditional "ice-breaker" half-hour. (Bowerman & Peters 1999, p.131)

In AL program where participants were acquaint with each other, this issue would pose little problem.

Furthermore, if the set members were acquainted with each other and have close working relationships, probing would be more efficient without the fear of offending others.

When those who raise questions are not totally ignorant to the issue, probing that requires the respondent to give genuine answers could be possible and this is important to foster critical reflection from the respondents.

Hindering effects

One reason that AL could foster critical self reflection capability lies in one of its key features:

> Action learning provides the safe environment or 'practice field' for reflection and learning to occur, while recognizing

> that real responsibility lies outside any classroom environment: it lies with the participants who must own the business outcomes.
> (Smith, 2001, p.36)

For AL programs that have participants coming from different organization and do not know each other, a “safe” environment of critical reflection could be easily created as the participants do not know each other and they will have little “consequence” of disclosing their own thinking of their own action. On the other hand, it will also be difficult for other set members to be certain of the genuineness of the other members’ own reflection so the set meeting could just become a “talk shop” and the participants could just vocalize anything they like and lacks in-depth reflection.

Collins had mentioned the difficulties for posing critical questions in an organization and the consequence of doing so.

> Many of the people learners deal with, both in the educational setting and at work, will not appreciate the challenging and critical approach which is developed when learners are in the habit of analyzing their situations. They may have to cope with being labelled as 'trouble-makers' and all the consequences of this. If learners are helped to become critical and active, they will almost certainly pose a threat to others who want to maintain the status quo.
> (Hammond & Collins, 1991, p.64)

Many AL proponents mentioned that AL could serve as a “safe environment” where critical comments towards the organization and towards each other could be conducted. However, in a context where participants of AL programs come from the same organization, such kind of “safe” environment for critical self reflection could not be easily established. When the participants know each other and have an on going work relationships or even conflicting relationship, critical self reflection in a set meeting is dangerous. Clarke et al (2006) were not unaware of this phenomenon:

> We found that there appeared to be an optimum level of similarity, where if the set members are too different they

> will be unable to form a "common ground", whilst if they are too similar they often feel in competition with each other, which inhibits the process. In this way the set members could understand and engage in discursive activities with each other yet enough distance was maintained so that they did not feel threatened by sharing critical events and reflections with other members.
> (Clarke et al, 2006 p.441) (Underline by me)

Marquardt's assertion that "A person unfamiliar with a problem and /or the context in which the problem takes place will be forced to ask fresh questions" may not happen all the time. People fear to ask "foolish" questions. In in-house AL programs where people know each other will refrain themselves from asking "foolish" questions in front of their colleagues. How this phenomenon could be prevented had rarely been mentioned in the AL literature.

2.17
Summary for Chapter 2

The above discussion indicated that the four contextual factors, namely, (1) Running the AL in-house; (2) Chinese cultural environment; (3) Participants who were high potential supervisory and management staff who know each other fairly well; (4) The problem for the AL project belongs to the participant's own organization, could have both facilitating and hindering effect on the 5 key ingredients of AL.

It seems promising that if those facilitating factors could be maximized and those hindering factors cold be minimized, in-house AL programs for high potential management staff could be able to effectively learn reflective thinking and practice.

Meanwhile, I will stop my literature review here and proceed to organize an in-house AL program along this principle and see what kinds of "L" will appear.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1
Introduction

In this Chapter, I will explain the methods adopted for this study with special emphasis given not only to the research question but to the supporting questions that arose from the research question in light of the review of literature. It must be highlighted here that the methodology was an evolving one that took shape as the study progressed.

The research aim is to:

> Explore how high potential Chinese managers who are acquainted with each other practise critical reflective working behaviours through an in-house action learning programme.

Sub-questions

5. What critical reflective working behaviours do participants exhibit during the action learning programme?
6. What are the advantages and disadvantages of running an AL programme in-house?
7. What issues are raised by the use of a Revans' model of action learning in a Chinese context?
8. What are the implications for developing AL theory and practice in an in-house context?

To meet my research purpose, Action Research is a particularly suitable methodology. AR focuses on real world problem-solving and decision-making as methods to drive change in organizations (Badger, 2000). AR fulfils an increasingly important role in the evolution of training and performance improvement evaluation and impact analysis in many organizations today. Considered a reality or situational methodology, AR approaches vary from traditional to participative or cooperative inquiry (Badger, 2000; Kemmis, 2001; Zeichner, 2001). This study explores the practical application of AR as a framework for developing, implementing, evaluating, and revising two formal AL programs focused on change leadership development in two different manufacturing organizations.

3.2
Epistemology

3.2.1 Similar to my professional requirement

The constructivist epistemology views knowledge as "adaptive and active" rather than "static and passive" (Heylighen, 1993, p.1). Thus the role of the teacher and trainer is to provide students with incentives and opportunities for building knowledge rather than to disburse knowledge (Glasersfeld, 1996).

Social constructivist perspectives focus on the interdependence of social and individual processes in the co-construction of knowledge. It recognizes learning as active development of personal meaning through the interaction of current conceptions and ongoing experiences, presents an approach appropriate for adult learners. It could also enhance empowered learning such as AL because of the consideration of prior knowledge and the ownership of learning by the students. Implicit in this is the development of metacognitive skills that are an important facet of active and action learning.

3.2.2 Similar to AL

This constructivist epistemology is fundamentally similar to that of the "comrades in adversity" form of group process.

> …in any of its guises, action learning is based on the

> premise that learning comes about through reflection followed by action to solve real problems (McGill and Beaty, 1995) where reflection and discussion take place in small groups facilitated by a set adviser. Therefore, **in line with a social constructionist view, this process recognizes the importance of talk, dialogue and interpersonal communication in management development.** Furthermore, through a questioning approach the focus of discussion is on "real world" issues contextually embedded in the owner-manager's environment and the interaction of the learning set provides many alternative views and arguments on the problems discussed.
> (Clarke et al, 2006, p.441)(Highlighted by me)

The type of AL I employed in both cycles belonged to the type of "critical reflection" which, in line with Revans and Kolb, emphasis the role of "questioning insight"

> Action learning participants need not take reality for granted; rather, they construct their own reality individually and collectively as they work on their problems (Berger & Luckman, 1996; Gergen, 1999). Although abstract knowledge can assist them, they tend to rely on the context – its culture, its expectations, its tools, and other institutional arrangements – to help them solve challenging workplace dilemmas (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The gateway into the world of contextualized practice is typically through inquiry with others.
> (Raelin, 2006, p.157)

3.3
Population/sample

The population in this research should be the high potential Chinese management staffs within the same company who were acquainted with each other. In both Cycle 1 and 2, the AL programs were organized in-house and exclusively for their management staff. In Cycle 1, the participants had been nominated (some being invited by top management) by their immediate supervisor, endorsed by top management and had passed assessment with ratings given by the top management. In Cycle 2, the whole team of the participants came from the Operations Division which composed largely of newly hired staff to fill in newly created position and had been regarded by the top management as a group of high flyers to lead organizational change. The top management regarded the AL program as a tool to boost this new team further to materialize the organizational change. All the participants in Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 had close working relationships and in Cycle 2, some of them knew each other long before joining the Company.

In Cycle 1, the samples of 10 managers were drawn from a manufacturing company – the "I Manufacturing Company (IMC), in Shenzhen, China which hired around 600 employees. Its headquarters was located in Hong Kong. In Cycle 2, the sample was a group of 10 managers drawn from another manufacturing Company (HMC) with several thousand employees. Same as the IMC, the plant of HMC was in Shenzhen and its head office was in Hong Kong.

The sampling method is one of purposive sampling. The sample selected were those who meet the requirements stated above and hence could generate information needed for this research.

Due to the dropping out of some participants in the IMBA program, the original sample of 8 had been reduced to.6. The dropping out of the 2 participants affect little on the research result as all of the participants engaged in their own project and affect other participants' project little. Their dropping out did created impact on the moral of other participants. However, this could provide me with data to analyse the impact of the factor – "participants were acquaintened with each other" on the AL program.

3.4
Research Strategy

The question I proposed for this study was best addressed through qualitative research methodology.

3.4.1 Qualitative research

As pointed out by Eiser (1998), qualitative research is field-focused and non-manipulative or naturalistic, allowing the researcher to study situations on site and intact. The use of naturalistic inquiry in this study allowed me to focus on the set members' varying reaction and interpretations of their learning experiences. Furthermore, due to the very particular nature of qualitative research, researchers "stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied" (Denzil & Lincoln, 2000, p.8). This was applicable to my role as a set adviser, a consultant as well as being a research in my study.

3.4.2 Action research (AR) method

Examination of the AR literature reveals that an important part of its goals were about change and improvement. (Corey, 1952, 1953; Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Whitehead, 1989; Elliott, 1991; Atkin, 1993). This aligned well with my epistemological position, job requirement, my professional development and the subject of research - AL.

3.4.2a Alignment with constructivist epistemology

My research strategy was action research, "a constructivist process set in a social situation," in which teacher's beliefs about learning, their students, and their conceptions of themselves as learners are explicitly examined, challenged, and supported" (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2001, p. 199) In this Research, I play the triple role as trainer, action learning set facilitator and a researcher. While I was involved as the researcher and observer, I was also actively involved with the participants either as the trainer or as the set facilitator. Due to this active involvement, I was able to connect my personal thoughts and experiences with

3.4.2b Alignment with the purpose of my professional development

"Action research is a cyclical process that involves identifying a general idea or problem, gathering related information, developing an action plan, implementing the plan, evaluating the results, and starting over with a revised idea or problem". (McKay, 1992, p.29) Elliott (1991) claims that action research integrates teaching and teacher development, curriculum development and evaluation, research and philosophical reflection, into a unified conception of a reflective educational practice.(p.54) These description had vividly described my wish for meeting my professional commitment, research requirement and my own professional development as a management consultant.

3.4.2c Alignment with the purpose of this research

Somekh (1995) characterizes action research through comparisons with traditional research methods. First, action researchers are directly involved in the situation undergoing study. The practitioner-researcher identifies a need for change. Secondly, action research findings directly incorporate into the practice from which they emerged.

What Somekh described fit in well with what I expect will do in the Research. I involve directly in the situation undergoing study by being the organizer, the set advisor, the trainer and the evaluator of the AL programs. Changes were expected to fit in with the characteristics of the organization and the particular context which the AL program conducted. Through adapting and improving the AL program arranged, I expect to validate the assumptions AL made and might come up with a new theory in practice for organizing in-house AL programs in Chinese context.

3.4.2d Alignment with the ideal of AL

Action Learning requires one to apply knowledge in a wider social context. It is therefore particularly suitable to use the Action Research method. (Elliott, 1995) The ideal of Action Learning is to enable participants to learn through the action they take. It is the ideal of putting learning into practice. However, there are several assumptions underpinning this widely accepted notion and AR is good for the purpose of validating these assumptions rather than taking them for granted.

> In identifying and explaining inconsistencies between aspiration and practice (…) it problematises the assumptions and beliefs (theories) which tacitly underpin practice in classrooms. It involves teachers in a process of generating and testing new forms of action for realising their aspirations, and thereby enables them to reconstruct the theories which guide their practice.
> (Elliott, 1995)

Besides, action learning needs to engage in an "action learning of the second order" as described by Revans:

> Exactly as managerial learning is a social exchange in which managers learn with and from each other during the diagnosis and treatment of real problems (and opportunities) l, so may teachers of management learn together, with either managers or other teachers.
> This can be done by tackling the design, introduction, conduct and review of Action Learning programmes and by regularly meeting in sets intended from the outset to monitor what is going on in the substantive activities of the managers at work on the real-life problems and opportunities. <u>This may be seen as Action Learning of the second order, or Action Learning to improve Action Learning, rather than, say, patient care or factory costs.</u>
> (Revans 1998, p.12) (Underline by me)

3.4.2e Alignment with the purpose of this Research

The intention of this Research is to explore the way to improve the effectiveness of in-house action learning program for high potential Chinese management staff. As there is no "best approach" of action learning and literature on arranging in-house AL program is rare, a research methodology which could help to point out not only what works and doesn't work, but also why it worked and why it didn't work is even more important.

This Research aims at exploring the impact of contextual factors in the action learning process of the set members. In order to reveal the impact of the contextual factors towards the learning process so that a more effective action learning programs could be arranged, I would expect several cycles of review and adjustment will be required and AR could be the most effective methodology to enable me to do it.

Another of my consideration was that the program was grounded the set member's learning in their action. Fully revealing the interplay between the organizational factors and the AL program is needed in order that the learning result could be analyzed in the full richness of the organizational context. To achieve this objective, a naturalistic approach is deemed to be more desirable.

My third consideration was that the AL program needed to be evaluated from the viewpoint of the participants, the effectiveness of a development program is one that "done for them" rather than "done on them". This require that the research methodology should fit in well with a developmental program which emphasises less on the delivery of programmed knowledge and more on the individual participant's evolving learning needs.

3.4.3 Action Research (AR)

There are a number of definitions available for action research. Kemmis and McTaggart defined it as "a form of collective self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as their understanding o these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out" (Kemmis & McTaggart 1988, p.5)

Action research is systematic. It "involves a self-reflective spiral of planning, acting, observing, reflecting and replanning" (McNIff 1988, p.7)

According to Cohen & Manion (1994, p.186) and Kemmis & McTaggart (1988, p.22-25), AR should possess the following characteristics:

1. Action research is situational and focuses on immediate problems. It involves researchers in making a critical analysis of the situations in context.

2. Action research is participatory and collaborative. The researchers are directly involved in the research process. They have to learn to work with teachers as peers. The researchers and teachers will work together in part or all stages of the project. They communicate frequently to avoid any misconceptions.
3. Action research is self-evaluative. It is a systematic learning process which develops through a spiral of planning, acting, observing and reflecting. The spiral allows researchers to build more refined plans for action.

3.4.4 Types of AR adopted for this Research

3.4.4a Forms of AR

Newman (2000) presented a discussion of several forms in which one might conduct action research in the education context. These forms include narrative inquiry, more traditional "teacher research", critical inquiry, case studies, reflective practice and critical incidents.

> No one specific model is recommended and, …they have many similarities. An action researcher should adopt the models which suit his or her purpose most or adapt them to fit his or her purpose.
> (Koshy, 2005, p.5)

Hart and Bond (1995) identify three primary foci for AR: education, problem-solving, and performance improvement. Furthermore, they described four broad categories of AR: "experimental, organizational, professionalizing and empowering" (p. 152) provided an adapted overview of their organizing framework for AR. It provides a concise framework with which to consider action research projects in the practice setting. (Please refer to Appendix 3A for the table of comparison)

The focus of my research is to improve my practice on helping the managers to learn by using AL approach and it requires me to engage in reflective practice. However, my role as a consultant of the clients also requires me not to lost sight on the client's requirement and the organizational change process.

Training programs will be included in the AL program. However, they are not the most important part of the AL program. The ideal of AL, according to Revans, is to enable the participants to learn from each other and to facilitate the “Q’ing” of those “P” (programmed knowledge).

The ultimate objective of my research is to improve the design of AL programs and to enable the participants to lead change in their organization.. The type of AR I adopted should therefore position as “educational” and be somewhat a fusion of both the “organizational” and the “experimental”.

3.4.5 Model of AR adopted for this Research

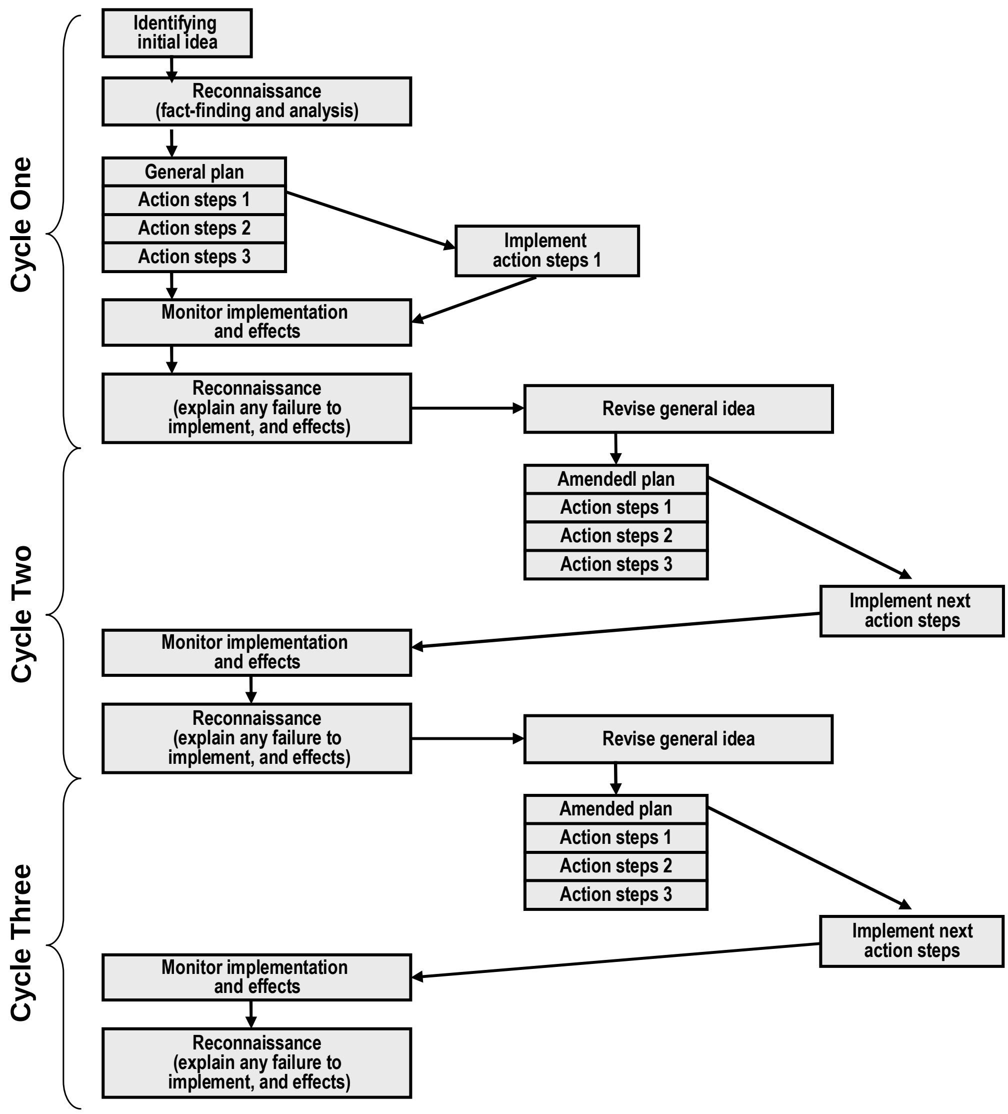
There are several model of AR such as Kemmis & McTaggart’s(2000, p.595), Elliot’s (1991, p.71) and O’Leary’s (2004, p.141). Each of the models has its appealing side.

Elliot’s model which includes reconnaissance – fact-finding and analysis – within each stage of the action research suits me particularly well. For Elliott (1991) ‘Action initiates reflection’ (p.23). He emphasizes the recurrent feature of ‘reconnaissance’ in the AR cycle which involves analysis and reflection of the situation rather than merely fact-finding. However, he regarded the purpose of reflection serves largely for task-oriented purposes. He cautioned that although ‘the process of analysis is an endless one, …in action research (it) must be interrupted for the sake of action (p.74) In this research, I am trying to apply AL in a context – in-house, Chinese high potential management staff, I expect there will be some areas which will be failed to implement. The duration of the Program which will be affected by the turmoil of business situations are also likely to make things difficult to implement. An ability to keep abreast of the change in the context and assess the effect on the whole Program will be important for amending the original plan.

> The general idea should be allowed to shift. Reconnaissance should involve analysis as well as fact finding and should constantly recur in the spiral of activities, rather than occur only at the beginning.
> (Elliott, 1981 quoted by Frost, 1999 p. 97)

Elliott's (1991) model aims at improving the quality of action within a situation through which "theory is generated and validated through the examination of practice by the practitioner rather than being independently applied." (Leitch & Day, 2000)

<u>Elliot's action research model</u>



Koshy, V. (2005) Action Research for Improving Practice – A Practical Guide, Paul Chapman Publishing, London, p.6

Informed by Elliot's Model, I will engage in reflection after the step of "implement action step" and "monitor implementation and effects". I will also engage in reflection of learning and the impact on my professional practice and subsequent action. These 4 steps formed a recursive cycle which I will iterate many times and will be exemplified further in Chapter 4 when I present the data.

3.4.6 AR Cycles

3.4.6a Cycle 1

The first part of the research is the Cycle One of an action research process on my own practice of organizing an AL program – the IMBA Program, for a group of high potential Chinese management staff. The Cycle One actually intends to be the "Phase one" of the IMBA Program which consisted of two Phases. Phase I required participants to solve individual problem while in Phase II, a team problem with high complexity will be arranged. Due to the high complexity of the problem in Phase II, it was expected that the AL's requirement of providing a complex problem as a learning project could be met. In Phase II of IMBA, it was hoped to induce a higher degree of involvement from the program participants in Phase II. The termination of the IMBA after Phase I enabled me to review the model I used for designing the IMBA and prepare a model of implementing AL program for high potential Chinese management staff.

3.4.6b Cycle 2

Cycle Two of my AR was concerned with implementing the revised model to another group of high potential Chinese management staff. The data gathered was subsequently analyzed to gather evidence to support or refute the propositions generated through the Cycle One.

3.4.7 Data collection procedure

3.4.7a Qualitative research approach

Qualitative data will be the predominant source of data collected although some quantitative data will also be collected.

> The qualitative research approach “intended to explore important social phenomena by immersing in the situation for extended periods. It intended to produce information on a given setting in its full richness and complexity” (Slavin 1992, p.65). Not only was the research descriptive, the data collected could be used to help building abstractions which could help a better understanding of the research theme.
> (Quoted by Oei 1999)

Nature of data & constrains

Since action research takes place in the real world, there are practical constraints on it. Occasions such as the outbreak of a safety hazard, a major quality issue raised by client’s key customer, flood in the plant and even the 08 world economic turmoil; all severely affect the progress of the Research. A more formal research project would require the operations to be fitted around it -- needing the managers to be available, or for a meeting to be engaged in a particular activity at a certain time, for instance. In contrast, this research project had to be fit round the normal life of a company with all the attendant interruptions. While this was frustrating, it meant that there was much less distortion of normal work and business. The constraint on the research could also be regarded as a strength. Any actions and conclusions that come out of it are rooted not in the `hard high ground' of scientific, laboratory research, but in the `swampy lowlands' of the complex real organizational life and business world (Schon, 1983).

Trustworthiness of qualitative methods

The issue of trustworthiness addresses whether research findings are worth paying attention to (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) and the standards of trustworthiness developed for the traditional scientific paradigm do not easily apply to qualitative research.

Constructivists argue for quality criteria of trustworthiness and authenticity (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998), while Lincoln and Guba, who have been identified as constructivists (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998), espouse the use of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability for evaluating qualitative research. Greenwood and Levin focus on the following three criteria: (1) workability, (2) making sense, and (3) transcontextual credibility. (Greenwood & Levin, 1998) In this research, the criteria of Greenwood and Levin will be chosen due to their mentioning of "workability" – whether there is improvement in the situation at hand, which is an important objective for AR.

A criterion of "workability" was proposed in Greenwood and Levin's Introduction to Action Research. They proposed the ultimate test of the validity of knowledge created through AR is whether the theories created actually work – whether there is improvement in the situation at hand. The workability of the knowledge created in this research will be presented in the form of comparing the results of the AL programs in Cycle 1 & Cycle 2.

Making sense is the primary tool for understanding in AR. As a measure of validity, making sense relates to the quality of the new knowledge created. The method to ensure good "quality control" in the process of creating new knowledge will be discussed in the upcoming section of "Instrument of data collection" and "Analysis of Data".

Transcontextual credibility seeks an answer to the issue of generalizability. AR has often been discounted because of its supposed inability to produce generalizable outcomes.

> AR does not generalize through abstraction and the loss of history and context. Meanings created in one context are examined for their credibility in another situation through a conscious reflection on similarities and differences between contextual features and historical factors. (…) Based on the historical and contextual analysis, AR judgments are made about the possibility of applying knowledge from one situation in another. (Greenwood & Levin 1998, p.87)

AR argues that findings from one study can be useful in making meaning in another situation as long as issues of context and history in the new situation are analyzed to see how they might affect the result. The issue of transcontextul credibility will therefore be address primarily through the detail description on the “contextual features and historical factors”.

3.4.7b Data collection methods

Data were generated at different stages of the research, and a multiple methods to collect data were employed including questionnaires, interviews, coaching, meetings and observations. At most of the time, two of those methods were used concurrently so that triangulation of data could be achieved. The choice of data collection were determined partly by the program plan and partly by the effectiveness to collect the type of data desired. As the learners are management staffs, the design of the research need to consider the work situation of managers. They are powerful and busy, which may mean that they do not want to fill in long questionnaires or spend time on long in-depth interviews; the concentrated interview may be the suitable data gathering technique. Most of the interviews were recorded by using my mobile phone. Some of the interviews were transcribed by an outsourced person.

To ensure the data collected could be as accurate and close to reality as possible, the multi-method approach known as triangulation in data collection and evaluation was employed. Triangulation, by definition, meant the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of the same phenomenon (Cohen & Manion 1994, p.233; Wisersma 1995, p. 264). The means employed for triangulation included:

1. Expressions of the same person on the same issue or topic in different times.
2. Expression of different person on the same issue or topic in different times.
3. The documents generated in the process such as the meeting record, e-mail communications etc.
4. Observation made by the researcher
5. Comments given by critical friends

3.4.8 Instruments of data collection

In both Cycle 1 & 2, I had been working with the sponsoring organization for more then 2 years. During my time at the two organizations, I had ample opportunities to get in touch with both the top management and the participants both formally and informally. Being immersed in the organizational culture allowed me to gather multiple data that support my theories (Jorgenson, 1989). It is not just the combination of different sources and types of data, but the attempt to relate them that can create the rick and detailed description that interpretive research attempts to convey. Richardson (1998), who described this as crystallization, proposed that could actually render a multi-faceted, complex view of the topic. I will describe the various instruments of data collections and explain in what way these multiple data could support my theories.

3.4.8a The Self as an instrument

A major characteristic of qualitative research which provide framework for this study is "the self as an instrument" (Eisner, 1998, p.33). In the role of researcher, I was the primary instrument for data collection. As an instrument, it was my task to "engage the situation and make sense of it" (Eisner, 1998, p.34)

During the research period, I documented data through multiple lenses: my own reflective journal; ethnographic observations, descriptions, and interpretation of field notes and audio and video recording of participants' engagement in various learning activities; analysis and interpretation of participants' "talent profiles", action plan, 180 degree feedback and reactions towards the feedbacks, comments to each other and the reaction towards others' feedback. This triangulation, or crystallization, of methods, "using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning', minimized the possibility of misinterpretations while it identified various ways in which a situation was perceived (Stake, 2000, p. 443)

I aware that my deep involvement with client organization in AR study may hinder good research by introduce possible personal biases in the conclusions. My due role as a researcher and as a management consultant sometimes did lead to conflict of interests. I felt this particularly when I had to face the dilemma of trying to push on to deliver something anyway to meet the expectation of the top management and hence maintained my own credibility vs. meeting the emergent needs of the participants which informed me that they had a lost feeling towards the Program.(as described in Section 5.2.2)

> All observational studies…have built-in bias; the challenge for investigators, editors, and readers is to ferret these out and judge how they might have affected results. (Grimes & Schulz 2002)

To maintain myself as a valid instrument of data collection, my prolonged relationship with the participants had definitely helped me greatly. My extensive exposure in the IMC and my spending of 2 years with the participants in the CFG Program enabled myself being perceived as an "insider". To build up my neutral image, I tried to remain neutral in discussion and avoid becoming the messenger of the top management. Whenever some messages of top management need to be conveyed, I generally ask the top management members to present directly to the participants rather then by me. Furthermore, I needed to demonstrate a high degree of integrity by informing the participants on what I will do next and deliver the promise I had made. My success in diluting my image of representing the top management could be evidenced from my repeatedly being invited to lunch with the participants in Cycle 2, and their bold, negative comment towards the top management at my presence in interviews (see Appendix 6I) and in meetings (though they will asked not to be voice recorded). I could recalled in one meeting when one participant made a negative comment towards the company, he made a signal to AH (the Director of Operations Division) to alert him on my presence. AH responded by telling him that "No problem, this guy (myself) is on our side (自己友)". My friendship built up with AH worked favourably for me in diluting my impression of representing the top management. As all the participants were the subordinates of AH, his opinion towards me could significantly affect how I was being perceived.

By and large, the fact that the IMC top management's interest in developing the OpD team rather then urgently driving for some instant "fix"; had provided me with ample time and freedom to explore deeply in the AL process. This is really something of a privilege to me and is quite different from a traditional role of an external management consultant I used to play. However, with the increasing emphasis of HR practitioners to take up the role of in-house consultant in HR development, I think my experience could serve as a useful guide to them.

3.4.8b Participant Observation

The value of a qualitative investigation generally resides in the discovery of human experiences as they are lived and perceived by subjects (Sandelowaski, 1986). Participant observation is both an overall approach to inquiry and a data gathering method (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). This method of data collection requires first-hand involvement in the social setting chosen for study. Immersion in the setting allows the researcher to hear, see and begin to experience reality as the participants do. Denzin (1978, p.183) notes that participant observation is a comprehensive field strategy in that it "simultaneously combines document analysis, interviewing of respondents and informants, direct participation and observation and introspection"

Janesick (1998) asserts that it concerns "description and explanation, and whether or not a given explanation fits a given description" (p.50). Rather then seeking an absolute truth, participant observation strives to uncover accurate and truthful findings based on the subjective reality of day-to-day life (Jorgenson, 1989). Participant observation, argues Stake (1998), represents "a uniquely humanistic, interpretive approach" (p. 87) Yin (1994) proposed that "another distinctive opportunity is the ability to perceive reality from the viewpoint of someone 'inside' the case rather than external to it." (p.88)

Because of the duel role of me serving both as the program organizer and the set meeting facilitator, I decided that I should voice record my delivery in the training session. When I was immersed in the interventions, I would try to experiencing the program as an insider by fully engaged in experiencing the setting under study while at the same time trying to understand that setting through personal experience, observations, and talking with other participants about what is happening. After that, I would listen to the voice recording and describing the program from an outsider's point of view.

3.4.8c In-depth Interviews

In-depth interviewing is a common and often relied upon method of data collection in qualitative research. Described as "a conversation with a purpose" (Kahn & Cannell, 1957, p.149), this Research utilize an interview format Patton (1990, p.280) refers to as the standardized open-ended interview. This interview format, as opposed to the informal conversational interview or the general interview guide approach, "consists of a set of questions carefully worded and arranged with the intention of taking each respondent through the same sequence and asking each respondent the same questions with essentially the same words". In-depth interviews were utilized in cycle 1, 2 and 3 of the action research methodology used in this Research.

The standardized open-ended interview was selected for three main reasons. Firstly, it was important to minimize variation in the questions posed to the interviewees. Secondly, the times allowed for interview were tight and it was necessary for me to use the time effectively. Thirdly, the numbers of interviewees were plenty (12 in IMBA Program and 10 in CFG Program) and this format could be easier for making comparisons between members. However, in order to stimulate spontaneity, I adopt a loosely controlled process and would allow discussion on any issue emerged during the interview while not forgetting to return to the set questions. This approach worked well for me as my time spent in the two organizations encouraged the development of trust with the project participants. We had achieved a certain degree of relatedness that became important particularly during my in-depth interviews.

Formats

Interviews were "embedded" in different forms in the process of the Program. It could be "embedded" in individual coaching, group coaching, obtaining feedback on individual performance and in presentation to senior management, Interview "embedded" in different form enhance the "naturalness" of the interview and hence yield more genuine responses. It could save the time of the busy respondents and their willingness to spent time on it.

Method of conducting in-depth interviews

All interviews were conducted face to face and most on one-on-one basis. As the researcher was also the designer and executer of the Program, role ambiguity might occur when asking the participants towards the program arrangement. To ensure the objectivity of information collected, the message of “obtaining comment for the improvement of next step of my action” were emphasized from time to time. As most of the interviews were conducted for the purpose of collecting feedback for the improvement of the participants themselves, the issue of power could be minimized here.

Furthermore, the comments from the program sponsor towards the program arrangement were solicited from time to time.

As all the interviews were conducted by the researcher, the issue of consistency within and across interviewees could be minimized.

To reduce anxiety and to ensure genuine feedback, interviewees were guaranteed the confidentiality of their identity. The interviews were conducted in a private room. The interviews were voice recorded only to facilitate transcription. The recording would only be kept by the researcher and a copy of the record will be forwarded to the interviewee. It was guaranteed that the senior management would not have access to those recordings. In the interview process, they could ask for turning off the digital voice recorder as they wish.

Before I turned on the recorder, I would spelled out a message informing the interviewee the purpose of recording was for my detail recording of the messages communicated by the interviewee and the content will be made confidential. For example, I had spelled out a message to the participant of the CFG Program prior to the interview I conducted for each participants in Apr and May 07, informing them the purpose of recording and their freedom to stop the recording at anytime they wish. The voice recording will be forwarded back to them and that the content will be treated strictly confidential. (My full message said to the interviewee was placed in Appendix

3B) Each time, the digital audio recorder would be placed on top of the table in front of the interviewees so that they could turn it off easily anytime they wished.

However, with the increase in acquaintance and trust being build up, I could shorten my paragraph. However, I will still inform the interviewee and get their permission of recording and they could turn off the recorder anytime they want. For example in an interview with KY on 7 Dec 07, I begin with this statement before the interview:

> December 7, I am with (KY). Same as the last time, just tell me whenever you want to turn off the recorder.
>
> Source: Meeting on 7 Dec 07 – select learning partners / Transcription_KY 7 Dec (1)

Handling of interview data

The audio-tapes were transcribed verbatim and verified by the interviewer before analysis. Transcripts were coded in their original language, and only relevant parts were translated to English for reporting in this Thesis. As the language used in the interviews was my native language, the issue of translation would only be related to the presentation of the quotes from the interview and would, therefore, created little impact on the result of analysis.

Two types of bias threaten this type of semi-structured interview and inductive analysis: description bias and interpretation bias. To minimize description bias, I asked a local professional transcriber to transcribed interviews verbatim. I verified the transcription by listening to the audio recording. As I spoke the same language (i.e. Cantonese and Mandarin) as the interviewee, description bias would be minimal. To minimize interpretation bias, I had presented the data I collected from initial interviews and the 180 degree feedbacks (in Cycle 2) for interviewees to verify data.

Limitations of in-depth interview

Due to the environment, some of the audio recording were conducted in restaurant, or in a large group or the tone of speaking make listening to the exact wordings hard to recognize. This situation will lead to possible lost of valuable information.

Language is another possible bias. As all the interviews were conducted either in Cantonese or Putonghua (i.e. Mandarin), translating them into English will likely lead to translation bias. The researcher tried to avoid this by doing the translation work himself so that his knowledge on the interviewee could make the translation more accurately reflect the intention of the interviewee. Certainly, this would add the risk of the researcher's personal bias by his subjective interpretation. To minimize translation bias, I had forwarded a piece of my translation extracted from an interview to a professional translator (a retired Chinese Language Officer of the Hong Kong Government) and asked her to give feedback to me. Her feedback indicated that my translation was up to standard and apart from some minor grammatical mistakes; the original meaning of the speaker had been essentially retained. The feedback from this professional translator had been placed in Appendix 3C,

3.4.8d Periodic interview with the participants on their project progress

Interview with the program participants usually take the form of individual coaching. There were around 12 interviews of this sort that had been voice recorded.

I aware that my triple roles might hinder me from collecting genuine opinions from participants if I directly ask them questions on the feeling towards the program or what kinds of suggestions they could give me. Besides, my experiences in Cycle 1 told me that these types of question could not be answered easily. Instead, I will collect data on this aspect during the periodic interviews with the participants on their project progress.

3.4.8e Critical incidents

Critical incidents are brief written reports compiled by the target learners about their experience of learning in the program. Through describing events that are recalled vividly and easily, events that are of particular significance to the students could be identified. The critical incidents questionnaire (CIQ) used in Cycle 1 was modelled after Brookfield (1994) but had been modified after consulting the critical friends' opinions. The CIQ was mainly used after some key interventions in the Program.

In Cycle 2, CIQ had not been used but had been replaced by questions built into the interview which aimed at capturing more personal feelings and opinions.

3.4.8f Document review

In this Research, I supplement participant observation and in-depth interviewing with content analysis of documents produced in the course of AL arrangement. The review of documents is an unobtrusive method, "one rich in portraying the values and beliefs of participants in the setting" (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 85)

In this Research, five major types of documents were reviewed:

- Participants' bio data
- Action plans
- Reports
- Correspondence such as E-mails
- Post training questionnaire

Participants' bio data

I will collect the background of the participants so as to justify they are not just Chinese but had been nurtured in a typical Chinese cultural context. As IMC is owned by a Chinese and an American, I will collect the organization chart to see whom the participants will report to and who are the workers of the participants' own department. That helps me to make sure that the people "surrounding" the participants in their natural work team are Chinese.

Action Plans

This category of documents includes the proposal for the AL projects, and the related action plans generated. A standard format was generally offered either by the researcher of by the program sponsor.

In Cycle 2, the action plans for individual were also included. Those action plans were generated together with the participants with reference to the findings in the Strength Finder" Test and the Talent Profiles generated in the individual coaching sessions.

Since identifying a specific area in the Program that lead to the participant's change would be difficult, I will rely on the alternations made by the participants' on their action plan after training, individual and group coaching sessions.

Reports

Various types of reports are generated in Cycle 1 and 2. In Cycle 1, the progress reports on their AL project were generated by the participants. Some of the reports were also in audio format such as the Group Coaching session in Cycle 1 and in the Forum of Cycle 2. PPT presentation slides could also be a supplementary report format.

Correspondence

Mostly in the form of e-mail, the correspondences provide timely feedback towards my work and responses of people in critical incidents.

Post training questionnaire

Asserting that the primary purpose of AL is to develop leadership, Bowerman & Peters (1999) admitted the meaningless of "smile sheet" evaluation:

> The typical "smile sheet" evaluation used for traditional training programs may provide a snapshot of "happiness quotient", but it flies in the face of the purpose of a program like Leadership in Action, where the primary purpose is to

> develop leadership. Leadership is an ongoing activity, related directly to business outcomes and results are difficult to measure.
> (Bowerman & Peters, 1999, p.131)

While post-training questionnaire will be used, it will be supplemented by open ended questions and whenever possible, interview of individual.

The interview sessions, particularly the final interview sessions, could help to identify what effect, if any, the whole IMBA program had on the participants. In the final interview, I included questions concerning participants'' attitudes towards the effect of the IMBA had on enhancing their capability.

3.4.8g My own research journal

I always keep a notebook with me when I attend activities in the Program. It was an extremely useful method for me to jot down main points I could recalled in some private discussions or after meeting senior management when taking detail notes was not possible. The notebook was also a companion to me when I need to take hours of travelling time to and from China. I frequently make use of the travelling time to jot notes and any thinking came to my mind. As the two AL programs span a total of 5 years and activities were not very frequent. Writing journals on a daily basis was not really needed.

3.4.8h Private discussions

Occasions such as chatting after the formal presentation, dining together in the factory canteen, chatting on the journey while taking the company coach beck to Hong Kong etc. all could be valuable source of information for this research. However, note taking and voice recording would not be possible. In those cases, the researcher could only jotted down what could be recalled in the notebook.

3.4.8i Meeting with senior management

Interview with the management generally take the form of meetings. There were numerous meetings of this sort. Many meeting with senior management touch on some sensitive issues and company secrets and voice recording were generally not welcomed. I tried best to jot down important points that had been discussed and resolved right after the meeting.

3.4.8j Feedbacks from critical friends

I frequently engage in informal meeting with the HR Manager. She know the participants quite well and was an important "informant" on "what's going on in the organization" and "what the set member had told you".
I will also solicit feedbacks from the Managing Director in formal meetings.

3.4.9 Methods of analysing data

An alternative to the scientific paradigm, which emphasizes objective knowledge, social constructionist espouses that "all knowledge is subjective knowledge and exists only through an individual perception and the interpretation of reality by the researcher" (Perry & Zuber-Skerritt, 1994, p.353). Looking at cause-effect relationships among team members provides insight into their logic.

3.4.9a Analytic procedures

Participant observation produce an understanding of temporal relationships and could also contributes to the formulation of interpretive theories (Jorgenson, 1989) and especially so when coupled with in-depth interviews. I will present a chronological report on key activities of the Cycle 1 AL program in Chapter 4 and the Cycle 2 AL program in Chapter 6. The underlying process and values of the participants and their teams would be illuminated in Chapter 5 & 7.

The chronologies follow the steps of AR which featured as planning, acting and reflecting. Chronologies could provide a detailed examination of the AL sets' movement through these stages of the AR process and further specify the actions that occurred within each stages of AR. Through a thick description of events in Chapter 4 & 6, it could provide the contexts of the experiences, indicates the effect of the 4 contextual factors, and reveal the actions that defined the experience.

3.4.9b Analytic procedures

The first step in the analysis was my listening to all the audio recordings. Because of the wealth of data and the research purpose, I decided that all the set meetings would be transcribed as well as all the in-depth interviews. Apart from that, I had also transcribed some of the more important meetings. I had hired a Chinese professional transcriber to carry out the transcription. I read each completed transcription a minimum of three times to become familiar with the materials, making margin notations about points of interest. I specifically noted dialogues about the "comrades in adversity", the 5 dimensions of the CRWB, the possible indication of the effects of the 4 contextual factors and the indication of the functioning or "malfunctioning" of the 5 key AL ingredients. After reading the transcriptions for many times, I noted the categories that arose repeatedly. The repeated mentioning of any category implied its level of significance and suggested the content to which it was essential to the understanding of "what's going on" in the set (Jorgenson, 1989).

To interpret the transcription, I chose specific quotations that clearly illustrate a characteristic of above mentioned points of interest. I looked for perspectives, opinions or dialogues within the AL framework that were repeated throughout one transcript or across transcripts and selected the quotations which captured a theme most outstandingly and meaningfully. According to Cunningham (1993), "direct quotations are the basic source or raw material for much of the qualitative measurements. They reveal respondents' levels of emotion, the way they have organized their thoughts, their ideas, experiences and perceptions" (p.174)

The subjectivity threat and ways to minimize it

The deep involvement of researchers with client organizations in AR might introduce personal biases in the research conclusions (Francis 1991). This is particularly true in situations involving a conflict of interests. Kock (2003) admitted that:

> While deep personal involvement from the part of the researcher has the potential to bias research results, it is inherent in AR because it is impossible for a researcher to both be in a detached position and at the same time exert positive intervention on the environment and subjects being studied.
> (Kock, 2003, p.5)

Although Kock described this subjectivity threat as "inherent in AR", I was in luck to be able to stay at a greater distance from the bias created by the conflict of interest. One of the interpretation biases relevant in the context of AR that rose out of the conflict of interest is the "externalization" bias. It is the kind of bias

> Whereby an individual has difficulty assigning blame for "negative" outcomes of his or her own action …to himself, instead of trying to find ways to explain those "negative" outcomes based on factors that are external to him or her.
> (Kock, 2003, p. 5)

In Cycle 1, the client organization – IMC, had given me a total freehand in conducting the Program. There was virtually no requirement on me to materialize some observable behavioural changes from the participants. Besides, I served as a retainer consultant in IMC and my duties did not restrict to organize the program. The pressure on me to "prove my value" by conducing a "successful" program was, therefore, minimal. In Cycle 2, I was hired on organizing the CFG Program by the HMC. However, the top management saw the Program as a kind of support to the newly hired Director of the Operations Division (OpD) and his management team, which composed mainly of newly hired managers. The ultimate deliverables I need to produce after running the program was just a report on the OpD team's functioning. Throughout the Program, I maintained a close communication with the top management and keep them informed on what's going on and the Forum enabled them to see the tangible result. The top management appreciated the approach very much and had suggested me to organize similar program for another division of the Company. The free from the burden of proving the value of the program and the free from the need to prove some specific problem had been fixed enable me to stay away from “externalization” bias.

3.4.9c Evaluating the AL program organized in the two cycles

After each cycle

The three objectives Revans mentioned for AL are:

1. Make useful progress upon the treatment of some problem or opportunity in the real world.
2. Give nominated managers (and many others within the operational fields of the problems or opportunities on which they will work) sufficient scope, variable but sustained, to learn for themselves, and in the company of colleagues, how best to approach ill-structured challenges to which nobody can, at the outset, suggest any satisfactory response.
3. Encourage teachers and others in management development to perceive their missions afresh. They should no longer try to teach managers anything about how to manage, but should see themselves as having to contrive, with senior managements, the conditions in which all managers, including those at the top, learn with and from each other in the pursuit of their common and everyday duties.

Revans, R.W., ABC of Action Learning, Lemos & Crane, 1998, London, p.15-16

I will evaluate the AL program I organized in each cycle against these three objectives.

After two cycles

The subject of this research is action learning (AL). There are great variations on the way AL were offered. The lack of a widely recognized practice on organizing AL and the lack of a rigorous method of evaluation on the effectiveness gives challenges for me to organize a "real" AL. According to Spence (1998), there are three types of challenges to the action learning methodology:

> (1) concerns about its misinterpretation, (2) concerns about the methodology itself, and (3) questions about its effectiveness.
> (Spence 1998, On-line source)

After two cycles, the three types of challenges mentioned by Spence will be served as part of the framework for evaluating my practice.

3.5
Ethics

In Cycle 1, the consent of the Managing Director of using the IMBA program as my PhD research material had been obtained and program participants had been informed on this. In order not to disclose the company's confidential information, the name of the company will not be disclosed. Name of the people will also be made anonymous and they could express their wish of withdrawal at anytime without affecting their participation in the Program. The people's name will be annotating with a combination of two or three alphabets assigned randomly and was NOT the true initial of the person.

In Cycle 2, the consent of the Vice President and the immediate supervisor of the participants, the Director of Operations had been obtained. Same as Cycle 1, the participants had been informed on my intention of using the data as my PhD research material and name of all persons involved will also be made anonymous.

In order to maintain the ethical standard of not to advance my personal interest through the research, all of my interaction with the participants and the activities arranged had been approved by the participants' immediate supervisor or arranged strictly according to an action plan formerly agreed by the senior management. In doing so, it was ensured that all the activities I arranged were of value to the companies.

Chapter 4

Cycle 1 : IMBA Program

I am going to tell my first story of arranging an AL program – the IMBA Program. I am going to give a narration on how it was started, proceed, "dragged on" and ultimately suspended by relating the events to a wider organizational context. In order to "interpret what is going on" from the point of view of those (including myself) acting and interacting in the problem situation, I will incorporate the related person's

> understandings of, and beliefs about, his situation;
> intentions and goals,
> choices and decisions;
> acknowledgement of certain norms, principles, and values in diagnosing, setting goals, and choosing courses of action.
> (Elliott, 1978)

My discourse will adopt Elliot's AR model. (Koshy, 2005)

4.1
Identifying initial idea

4.1.1 Background information

4.1.1.a The company – IMC

When I started my career as a management consultant in the year 2004, I had the opportunity to work for a company with a name starting with the letter "I". In order not to disclose its true name, I call this company "I Manufacturing Company" (IMC). The Company is not a big one. It is a medium to small size company with around 600 workers. The head office of IMC is at Hong

Kong and it has two factories in Shenzhen, China. It mainly produce plastic and fabric baby care products, kitchen ware, swimming goggles for clients in the US and Europe. Her sales up to Oct 04 is around US$15M.

4.1.1.b The Managing Director (MD)

The MD – Mr. RS was an American who had lived in HK for a long period of time. At his mid-forties, he was the sort of executive who was very keen with various management theories. His office had a good collection of management books and he subscribed several management magazines.

4.1.1.c My role in IMC

I played a multiple roles in the IMC. I reported directly to the MD and I needed to work closely with the HR Manager. I had also been assigned many ad hoc duties by the MD such as drafting a message to IMC's workers regarding the Company's donation to a country school in China and I had helped to prepare an IMC Ambassador Program which aimed at promoting the Company's image in front of the visiting customers. I therefore regarded myself as a part-time worker of IMC rather then as an external consultant who came to IMC to work only on a project. This could further be proved by the offering of a staff ID card and an electronic key to me for my access to different locations of the Company

4.2 Reconnaissance (fact finding and analysis)

The business of the Company had been expanding. Managers are quite overload with the operational duties. The IMBA programme has been designed as a coherent programme of management development which intended to upgrade the 2nd tier supervisors and managers (mostly local staff) so that the department heads could focus more on strategic management issues. The second objective being that the Company has a new opportunity to split out a fraction of the business to form a JV with a major customer. That requires an expansion of the existing executive forces.

4.3 General Plan and Action Steps

4.3.1 General plan

The general plan and action steps could best be summarized in a PowerPoint presentation I prepared for entering the 2005 Excellence in Training Award organized by the Hong Kong Management Association. The decision to use the IMBA for entering the Award was made by the MD and he had commissioned me and the GM to work out together on the presentation content. The presentation was made by me and the GM together on a morning in March 08.

Objectives

At the end of the Program, all the members should be able to:

Knowledge

- Pass the post-training assessment after each training.

Skills

- Completed both the individual project (6 mths) and group project (6 mths) that meets the 6 Sigma standard.
- Both Projects should be able to make financial contribution as specified in the Project Charter which had been endorsed by the Board.

Attitude

- On-going evaluation by the Board on the progress report made by the participants.
- Achieve satisfactory rating in the 360° appraisal on performance both on the performance in project leadership and on the execution of normal duties.

Diagram 4A Objectives of IMBA Program

Although not all the objectives could be rigidly measured, some robust means of measurement had been introduced. For example, the project result should meet the 6 Sigma Standard which required the improvement outcome to be measurable and whenever possible, in monetary terms. For other objectives, means of measurement such as the management panel's rating was used to achieve a more objective ways of measurement.

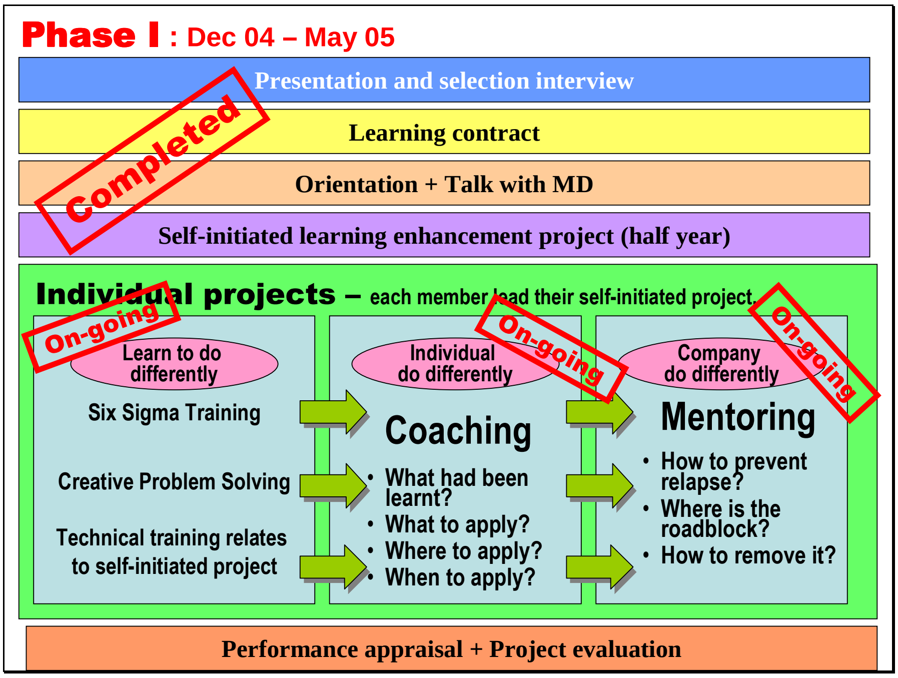


Diagram 4B Phase I of IMBA Program

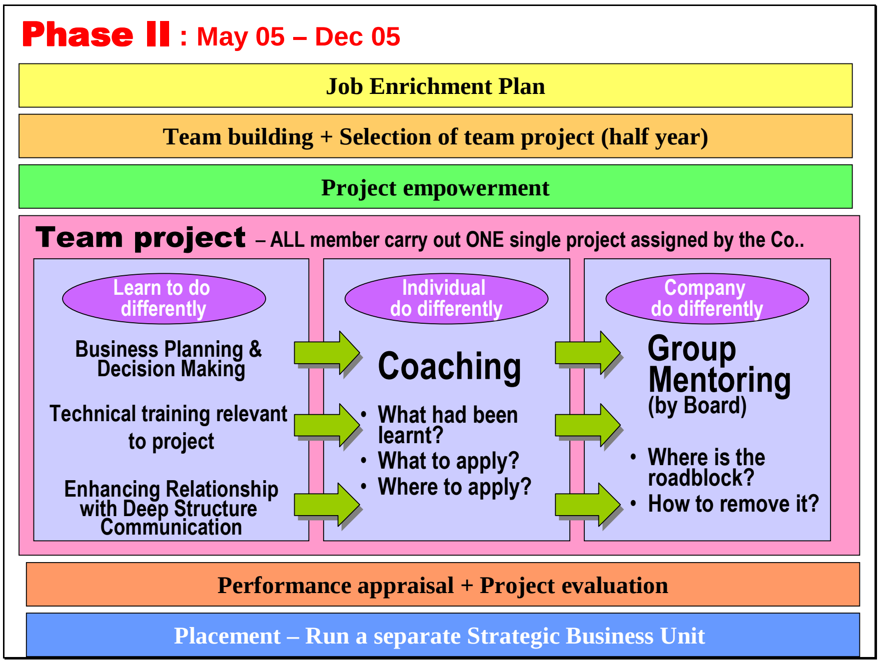


Diagram 4C Phase II of IMBA Program

I had not put a label of an action learning directly on the program in order that some more features could be added to it. I made a compare and contrast table which had also been included in my presentation which indicated the "dissolving" of some of the concepts of AL such as "learning the skills of future", "individual and organizational learning" into it.

Vision

Is not	Is
Just individual training	Also about organizational learning
Another training program	Part of key business strategy to earn competitive advantage.
A "basket" of training programs	A strategy for managing transfer of learning
Staff localization program	Business localization program
Skill acquiring program	Personal upgrading program
Executive team retention program	Executive team expansion program
Building up reserve troops	Training for a coming "battle"
Just for the trainees	Also for the trainee's manager.
Just on personal change	Also for organizational change.

<u>**Diagram 4D Vision of IMBA Program p.123**</u>

The content in the PPT were not just for the sake of presentation but genuinely reflect what we (me and the GM) intended to do. Although we had not won the Award of that year, (which usually won by brand name corporations and the winner of that years went to the Hong Kong Langham Hotel) the involvement of the GM in producing the presentation material enabled the building up of a key success factors for AL that many writers (Brassard 2002, Kim 2003, Park 2004, Bong, Park & Park 2002, Bowerman & Peters 1999, summarized in Appendix 1C) had mentioned – the management's support and attention.

4.3.2 List of activities planned

In the same presentation, I had made a list of all those planned activities carried out or prepared to carry out in the IMBA program.

Stage	Strategy to manage transfer of learning
Pre	Select trainee carefully
	Staff ownership
	Involve trainee in program planning
	Align with Co's strategic plan
	Provide practice opportunities
	Learn with objective
During	Performance standards clearly defined
	Relevant to adult learning style.
	Give individualized feedback
	Trainee to create individual action plan.
	Senior management support.
	Maximize attention
	Support team learning
	Support from immediate supervisor.
	Training content relevant to individual needs.
Follow-up	Coach
	Mentor
	Buddies
	Organizational change

(Detail on the elaboration of each of the point on "strategy to manage transfer of learning was displayed in Appendix 4A)

Table 4A List of IMBA activities

In the following description of the IMBA Program, I would present the process unfolded in form of key milestone activities/events by answering the McNiff's questions. Certainly, it will be very clumsy to answer all 13 questions each time. I will re-group the questions under a few headings and seek to answer them as best as I could.

- Questions 1 & 2 are questions I always need to bear in mind but not need to answer them from time to time.
- Description of background, my action and happenings – Question 3, 5, 6

- Reflection on action – Question 4, 9
- Learning & Impact on next step of on future professional practice– Question 7, 8, 11 and Question 10, 12, 13

McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead (2003) p. 175

4.3.3 The presence of the 4 contextual factors in HMC

4.3.3a In house

All the participants of the Program came from the various departments of IMC. All the participants were a natural work team who had an inter-departmental working relationship.

4.3.3b Chinese cultural context

IMC operates a plant in Shenzhen in China which currently employing over 600 staff. Except for the MD, who is an American, all the management and supervisory staff were either Hong Kong or local Chinese. Although the MD was an American, he had been living in Hong Kong for well over 20 years and had been very adaptive to the Chinese culture. I can therefore safely claim that IMC operates in a typical Chinese cultural context.

4.3.3c The participants were high potential management staff

The same definition of high potential management staff was defined as those who had been identified as high potential by the top management.

In a meeting with the GM and the HR Mgr, I request to get a list of the target participants from the GM. There’s no difficulties for the GM to write down a list of around 15 people whom he thought the Program should be targeted for and he made an address that those people belongs to those that “the Company cannot afford to lose.

The Program was open to both self nomination and nomination by department heads and was restricted to supervisory and management level. However, a "target participants" list had been worked out by the GM and the HR Mgr. and the consent of the MD on the list had been subsequently obtained. On top of those "public" nominations, target participants on the list will be approached privately by the HR Manager if their name had not been received from the public nomination channel. On top of this, there was a rigorous admittance process which will be described in the following section. With all these rigorous procedures, all the participants could be described as high potential staff of the IMC.

4.3.3d The participants were acquainted with each other

All the participants belonged to different departments in the IMC. Four of them (CP, LN, MY, PS) had been working in IMC for more then 2 years(some of them well over 5 years) and hence, knew each other quite well. Although some of them were new joiners, their close working relationship and their belonging to the same company enabled me to make a safe claim that they were acquainted with each other.

4.4
Action steps 1: Recruitment of high potential management staff participants

The development of the first draft on the Program had not taken me a lot of time. I made a one page Program outline and tabled it for discussion in a meeting with the MD, the director and the GM in a meeting called the World Class Steering Committee in which I served both as a member and as the secretary. After that, I prepared the second draft by making considerable amendments on the first version.

4.4.1 Implementing action step 1

It was decided that we should open the application to any worker at supervisory level and had worked in the Company for one year or above.

Nomination from the department head is desirable but not a must so that some capable workers who are not liked by the department heads could be identified.

The design of the Program had been announced in Oct to all department heads in a Monthly Management Meeting. They had been asked to communicate the message to their fellow workers in their departmental meeting.

In a memo to all department heads inviting for nomination on 13 Sep 04. The objectives of the IMBA had been stated as:

- To meet the future development need of IMC.
- To systematically upgrade the capability of the 1st tier supervisors.
- To offer opportunities of growth and development for the Company's loyal and good performing supervisors.

4.4.2 Monitor implementation and effects

The initial response to the IMBA was not very enthusiastic. Only a few nominations had been received. Actually, the GM had been worrying about inadequate nomination when we discuss about the Program. The HR Mgr talked privately to those "targeted" candidates to understand their worry. It turned out to be that most of the department heads had only mentioned the IMBA very briefly in their departmental meeting. Most of the candidates were not quite sure about the content and had misunderstood it as just a series of training programs. Although I had made myself clear in the Monthly Management Meeting that the training programs will be organized in office hour (the Company used to arrange training programs after office hour to minimize disruption to production), not too many department heads had mentioned this to their subordinates. After talking privately with those "targeted" candidates, the enrolment situation had improved a lot and a total of 12 candidates had been submitted their applications.

Dept:	Nominees
Business Development:	RC, MF, EW
Finance:	LZ
HR and Admin (PRC)	KY, CP, GY
Engineering dept:	WL, MY
Quality Assurance	LN
Production:	PS
Purchasing:	MZ
Injection:	None (no recommendation)
Production Material Control (PMC)	None (no recommendation)

(Initial of the members' true name were used to conceal their identity)

Table 4B List of IMBA participants

4.4.3 Reflection

The practice of inviting nomination through the department heads had not received good responses as expected. The department head's inadequate explanation and "internal marketing" could be one reason. Actually, the HR manager told me that the department heads were quite willing to nominate their staff to attend various short training programs. With hindsight, it is not hard to understand the department heads' lack of enthusiasm:

The program objective was suggested by the GM and intended to help relieving the department head's workload by strengthening their fellow supervisor's capability. However, this intention could easily be interpreted as the company's move to replace the department heads who are mostly Hong Kong people by local people who are much lower in salary.

AL program like IMBA which was characterized by its relatively long duration, project based learning methods, and high exposure to senior management could naturally be perceived as a program for the "future stars". It could be a roadblock if adequate and systematic development plans do not exist for the nominee's supervisor. On the other hand, it did indicate that in-house AL program could naturally be perceived as a fast-track program and hence likely to create some kinds of career expectation among the participants.

Lacking the department head's enthusiastic support could also pose problem for the learning of the members.

4.4.4 Learning & Impact on my professional practice and subsequent action

In case that systematic development practices for the department heads were not in place, in-house AL programs could easily be perceived as a threat to the department heads. This could trigger political considerations from the nominee's immediate supervisor. In the case of the IMC, the program could be perceived as prelude of the localization program which the department heads (mostly composed of Hong Kong staff) could feel threatened.

I will consider starting similar kinds of program at the department head level before cascade down to a lower level or to involve the target participants' immediate supervisor in the design and planning of the program. It was hoped that could trigger less political consideration from the immediate supervisors of the participants. The impact of the enrolment situation on the later development of the Program had not been felt by me at that time. As the nomination process had already been done, there was little I could do further on this issue. However, the learning had informed my practice in my Cycle 2 research when I organized the Change for Growth Program in which the involvement of the participants' immediate supervisor had been made at a very early stage and the effort to involve him was on a continuous basis.

4.5 Action steps : Screening of candidates

4.5.1 Implementing action step

To ensure that the candidates could reveal their capability of taking up a leadership role in the AL Project, a mix of assessment tools and formats were employed. Each of the candidates needed to prepare a presentation on the project they proposed in front of all other candidates and a panel composed of me and the senior management members. An in-tray assessment was arranged to explore their potential for taking up future managerial duties. The Group Interview was organized on 5 Nov 2004 according to the run-down detailed in Appendix 4B:

4.5.2 Monitor implementation and effects

The wish to secure a constant feedback from the participants actually came not just from me but also from the MD. Shortly after the screening of the participants, the MD sent me an e-mail asking me to check out the thinking of all the participants. In the e-mail he said "We need to keep the momentum going, so please let me know what else you need me to do.

Subsequently, a one page design consist of 8 questions had been issued to the participants. In order to free the opinion collection process from suspicion, the following statement had been place at the beginning of the questionnaire.

> The objective of getting your feedback is for our improvement of the IMBA Program and will NOT affect your application whatever your answers are.

4.5.3 Reflection

The feedbacks collected were not much. A consolidation on the feedbacks of some of the questions was:

1. Which part of the IMBA interest you most?
A. How do we make the bigger business?
B. Special coach
C. Share other colleague's thinking
2. Which part of the last Friday's activity (the screening interview) you feel more satisfying?
Share other colleague's thinking
3. Which part of the last Friday's activity you feel less satisfying?
I didn't receive any info for changing the venue before presentation

4.5.4 Learning & Impact on my professional practice and subsequent action

The feedback, though few in number, did confirmed the design such as individual coaching, sharing meeting were part of the attraction. Interestingly enough, no one mentioned about the opportunity of conducting a project which they had proposed and felt worthy of doing. It seemed to tell me that learning by doing had not been an attraction for the participants. The attractions mentioned were characterized mainly by the concern of “taking” rather then “giving”.

The feedbacks seemed to indicate many of the program design were attractive to the participants.

4.6

Action step: Confirmation of candidates

4.6.1 Implementing action step

A total of 3 candidates had withdrawn their application. They were – LN, MF, GY. The HR Mgr. talked with them individually but failed to persuade them to change their mind. As the outward development program will be started the next day, the MD insisted that all people needed to sign the contract prior to joining. I rushed to the factory and talk with them one by one. LN and MF were still hesitated to join after the HR Mgr met with them. MF’s hesitation was mainly originated from his dissatisfaction of not being raised in salary in the past two years. On the day before the formal embarkment of the IMBA Program, I had a chance to travel from IMC’s Shenzhen Plant back to Hong Kong together with the Business Development Manger. PL. He told me that he had nominated three of his staff to join the IMBA. When we were chatting on the progress of the IMBA, he was surprised to find that MF had not yet signed the contract. He thought that MF was a good staff and had work very hard. He really thought the Company had not paid MF fairly. He made a phone call to the MD immediately and expressed his opinion. After that, he told me the MD would talk to MF personally on the issue. Two hours later, the MD made a phone call to me telling me that MF would join the IMBA and he will participate in the next day's team building program

Another staff – LN, the Asst. Mgr. of the Quality Department, had not signed the Contract. On discussing with the HR Mgr, I was told that LN was hesitated on the value of the Program comparing with an external MBA program. Besides, he was a bit unsure whether he could spare the time on top of the heavy work load. I met LN personally and discussed on the issues he worried about. I suggest him to "take a look first" and join the upcoming Team Building Session. I told him that the cost of the Team Building Session was not high and not needed to worry too much on the cost to bear. He agreed on it and had finally signed the Contract.

4.6.2 Reflection

Frankly, the need to "persuade" some targeted staff to enrol for the Program was not something I had anticipated. I had no similar experience of doing so. My original thinking was that the key consideration of a staff when he decides to join a training program or not was mainly on the course content and the time available. The experience revealed to me that there were many other ramifications the participants will consider. In this case,

For MF – to express his dissatisfaction towards the compensation package offered by the company.

For LN – the concern of investing the time on some "formal" educational program instead which could grant some recognized academic qualification which could be helpful to his career.

4.6.3 Learning & Impact on my professional practice and subsequent action

Despite the "marketing" effort I put in the recruitment process, the political issue could not be avoided. From a point of view, this is an intervention on the agreed procedure of recruiting high potential management staff. On the other hand, this kind of intervention could be regarded as an indication on the top management's view of using the Program as a tool for staff retention and those who had been “persuaded” by the senior management to join the Program could be regarded as really “high potential” staff.

This incident had also told me that senior management concern more on the people than just on the program content. This is an aspect that literature on AL seldom mentioned.

With hindsight, I found myself had made a too optimistic assumption that the senior management had the same understanding on the AL program as what they had been briefed.

All the happenings surfaced during the recruitment stage had also provoked my thinking that progress of the individual participants is the key concern of the program sponsors (i.e. the senior management). This had not been mentioned too much in the literature on AL. Most of the AL literatures focus more on the result of the project.

The political intervention of senior management in the enrolment process had also shed light on the organizational factors that would be peculiar in an in-house AL program. These sorts of factors had not been discussed extensively in the literature relating to AL.

4.7
Action step : Team building

Adams & Dixon (1997) recommended that:

> In the future, at the onset of the Action Learning set component of the programme, each group will be taken through an outward bound/rope experience which will help break individual barriers to change and build the trust level in the team.
> (Adams & Dixon, 1997, p.137)

4.7.1 Monitor implementation and effects

The embarkment of the IMBA Program was an outdoor developmental team building program arranged in Jan 2005. The Program last for a whole day and was conducted by a Chinese company specialized in outdoor development program. Bothe I and the HR Mgr. had taken part in the Program. However, I had not taken part in the activities and the debriefing was also conducted by the training company's trainers.

The Team Building session was quite a success. Every one of them was quite excited. Post training interview with each of the members indicated that they had "learnt something". They also felt that the Program had got them started to "tuned in" and feel excited by the Program.

4.7.2 Reflection

The arrangement of an outward development program was well received by the participants. In the debriefing session on the same day, the feeling on the need of "thinking out of the box", "willing to try", "breaking assumptions", "tearing down the walls of communication barriers between departments" etc. had generally been shared. Actually, the feedback was so positive that the MD later told me to arrange all the supervisory staff to attend the same program.

4.7.3 Learning & Impact on my professional practice and subsequent action

It seems that the advice from Adams & Dixon (1997) was right. However, it was hard for me to say for sure to what extend it was useful for the subsequent action learning activities as many of the values the participants expressed in the outward development program just mentioned had not been materialized. The willingness to take up challenge had been put aside and the thinking out of the box had become more of a play safe behaviour.

The positive feedback of the participants was a good starting for the IMBA. Many of the learning the participants mentioned should be of great value to facilitate AL. I thought the participants would take those learning as guiding principles when they engage in the AL project.

4.8

Action step: Signing of undertaking

4.8.1 Implementing action step

Six staffs were finalized and they were asked to sign a standard contract which applied to staff sponsored by the Company to attend external training program. Due to the integrity issue in the labour market of China (a lot of workers attended expensive training program and just disappear right after that), it's a common practice in China to ask participants of a company sponsored training programs to sign an "undertaking". The participants were **NOT** really required to pay the cost of the training right away. The undertakings they signed only required them to commit to continue working in the company for a certain period (say, 1 year) after attending the program. In case they resigned before the ending of this period, they will be required to pay the sum in pro-rata manner.

4.8.2 Monitor implementation and effects

When I discussed the issue with the HR Manager, we came up with the conclusion that an undertaking should still be signed so that the participants won't have a feeling that they were the "favoured sons and daughters" which will cause an even greater suspicion from their immediate supervisor. As she had a much deeper understanding on the people and culture of IMC, I agree with her on this.

4.8.3 Reflection

Apart from the administrative consideration of the HR Manager, another of my consideration was that the contract could increase their ownership feeling which was desirable. However, my thinking might be wrong. In one of the interview with the Industrial Engineer, I got some important feedback

WW Do you have any concern on the contract?

MY The contract is no big deal for me. But I think if the project we work on can create value which are really measurable and is bigger than the 16,000(RMB), that sum should be waived. (explained in what way his project can create value bigger than that sum)

Interviewee: MY Conducted by me (WW) on 19 Jan 2005, 1200 – 1225 at IMC, Factory I, Block D, 2/F Mtg. Rm.

The comment of MY had pointed out the effect of signing undertaking. While I thought it was a common practice of the IMC and the participants should not have any strong opinion towards this, I had overlooked the issue related to the Project. For an in-house program, the project arranged will be those issues and problems of the participants' own organization. The response of MY indicated that participants regarded the project will "benefit" the organization.

4.8.4 Learning & Impact on my professional practice and subsequent action

The reaction of MY towards the undertaking signing had highlighted an unintended discovery – the participants' reaction towards the project. This is an issue that I found literature on AL had rarely discussed. It is hard to estimate the impact of this mentality to the learning and towards the Program. A feeling of being treated unfairly could hurt the moral of the participants.

Anyway, there is little I could do about that. Remedial action was not possible as the action had already been taken. Furthermore, the signing of undertaking was the company policy. I could hardly thought of any strong reason why the participants of the IMBA should be treated differently.

The comment of MY provoked me to think about the arrangement of project for in-house AL program. When I have the opportunity to arrange in-house AL program again in the future, I need to make sure that signing of undertaking will not be needed. If the signing of undertaking is still needed, every precaution needed to be made to ensure that unfair feeling could be minimized.

4.9

Action steps: Determining individual projects

There were different types of projects to serve different purposes. :

	Own job	Other job
Own organization	Own job projects	Internal exchange projects
Other organization	Technical expertise exchanges	External exchanges

(Garratt, 1997, p.27)

This matrix is clearly relates to Revans (1983) “four principal exchange options for designing action learning programmes”: a familiar problem in a familiar setting, an unfamiliar problem in a familiar setting, a familiar problem in an unfamiliar setting, an unfamiliar problem in an unfamiliar setting. (Revans, 1983)

4.9.1 Implementing action step

In the IMBA program, I had made it quite clear in the program design that the participants are required to execute their proposal. AL meeting should not be “talking shops”. This thinking was in line with the expectation of the IMC’s senior management. I also thought that this arrangement could raise the sense of ownership of the participants.

4.9.2 Monitor implementation and effects

Member	Project Title
CP	To provide the new staff a remarkable working environment
EW	Cost down the fabric price through sourcing more fabric supplier
LN	Product Safety Improvement
MZ	Packaging Material Cost Reduction
MF	Advanced Mould Management
PS	Improvement of Bin Identification
RC	Quote Process Improvement on Quote Time and Accuracy
MY	Minimization Plastic Part WIPs

Table 4C List of project titles of IMBA

(All the wordings were by the participants. I made no alternation on the grammatical mistakes.) Detail explanation on the project objectives, and team members are placed in Appendix 4C

In order that the project could be managed in a standardized format, the Six Sigma standard was used. This is good for standardizing the project management approach and to ensure the performance results are measurable. A briefing was provided by the IMC's Quality Manager on that.

4.9.3 Reflection

While some chose project that were relatively simple to execute (such as the one initiated by PS& CP), most of the project initiated by the members were not belongs to complex problems. In an interview with one of the participant – MF after he had convened the project meeting, he made the following comment:

> WW：OK, up to this moment, had you encountered with any kinds of difficulties?
> MF：It had not been really executed at this moment and couldn't tell whether there are problem or not. But

> actually I could anticipate that (…) in [IMC] I do not belong to that ranking (that has the authority to push forward my proposal). That means it will be impossible to ask all to follow my instruction in this project. If I am the General Manager, I could coerce everyone to follow (…) As long as I could ask those who are instrumental to this project to come over (to the meeting) (…), I think that's sufficient at this stage.

4.9.4 Learning & Impact on my professional practice and subsequent action (a)

4.9.4a Reflection & learning (1)

The problems selected for their "own job project" in Phase I were a perfect fit with the "6 points" requirements stated by Hicks (2000, p.48) mentioned in Chapter 2:

1. All the problems are real problems and had been endorsed by senior management.
2. The problems were raised by the participants themselves and hence should be meaningful to them.
3. The participants had provided a preliminary idea on how to solve the problem and made a presentation in the screening session indicated that they were confident in applying their knowledge in a potential solution.
4. All the problems were within the participant's own jurisdiction and their accountability and therefore would not be too large.
5. Most of the problems were complex (except for the one initiated by PS which was more straight forward), relating to cost reduction or efficiency promotion which were affected by many variables and environmental factors.
6. In order that the problems could be solved, almost all need to convene a group of staff from other functions to help exploring the problem and gaining their commitment on the solutions proposed.

The projects initiated by the members were something perceived as useful and were needed by the organization. In an interview with one of the participant – MF after he had convened the project meeting, he made the following comment:

> MF： They asked me a lot of detail questions but I felt that they are not the key questions. We had already stated the need to do this in the meeting. Secondly, this system had been with our Company for …whether people feel there is a need to add anything to the system. Any good idea to rise (they can just spell it out.). Basically, I think whatever their requirements are; they could be incorporated into this system.
> WW：So it seems that it is a re-confirmation of the value of this project. It also told me that you are highly confident toward the value of this project.
> MF： Exactly!

4.9.4b Reflection & learning (2)

The need to execute a project was not totally perceived as natural for some of the candidates. In an interview with one of the candidate – RC, he gave the following comment:

> When I first learn about the Program, I think that is very good. I felt that the Company is willing to invest in the staff. At first I thought that we will attend some training and then we will be free to apply. But now, we need to do a project. It seems that the Company wants you to contribute the value that the Company invested. It looked like a transaction. I could understand this. But it is a little bit calculative.
> (Talk with RC on 14th Jan 2005 0800 – 0850 on the way to attend the Outward Development Program for all the IMBA participants.)

In-house AL program, unlike the external program, generally assign projects related to internal organizational problems. These problems were not unknown to the participants. It is therefore not too surprising to invoke such kind of feeling among the participants. RC perceived doing a project as a kind of “transaction”. This could be something that needed to address to when organizing in-house AL program.

To what extend this feeling could hamper the motivation of the participants was unknown at that moment. Similar kinds of comment were also limited to one to two participants (RC & MY) only and I could think of nothing I could do to address this. However, I think I should pay attention to this mentality when organizing learning project for in-house AL program in the future.

4.10
Action steps 6: Self Initiated Training

4.10.1 Implementing action step

The need to balance the learning expectation of the participants and the ideology of the AL theory, a “cocktail” approach was adopted in the IMBA program. Three programmed training will be arranged – Problem solving, Six Sigma and Finance for Non-financial managers. Although these programmes were pre-determined and serve as a kinds of syllabus, they were more like a kind of tool box which intended to help the participants to “digest” and learn in the project context better. Furthermore, to fulfil the “elicitive” nature of the AL syllabus, members were free to initiate training they felt needed for conducting the project effectively.

The initial purpose of asking the participants to initiate a project by themselves is to let them discover their inadequacies and then initiate their training needs so as to prepare the greater challenge of the Group Project. However, it seems that all of the members are choosing an area which they were more then competent to handle. As a result, they may not feel any need for self improvement. That means it is only a “puzzle” rather than a “problem”.

4.10.2 Monitor implementation and effects

Despite this, some participants were able to tell their training needs. When I interviewed one of the participants – CP, who had initiated a better new staff integration program as her project, had mentioned some more specific training needs.

> CP When I am conducing questionnaire survey, firstly I need to have good communication skills so as to gain the full cooperation from others. You need to convince them and need to ask favour from others. If you are not doing a good work on communication, you might get a totally different result.
>
> (…)
>
> CP As the project I am responsible is quite different from other people's project, the target are people, others might deal with more on machinery or environment. On the contrary, I need to handle different individuals and different people have different thinking so I think this (training need) is more important tome.
>
> CP 31 May 2005, 1330 start, meeting room 2/F
>
> (Please refer to Appendix 4F for the whole section of the dialogue)

4.10.3 Reflection

Let the training needs to emerge rather then set a fixed curriculum is the characteristic of the AL theory.

However, in the interview with the participants, they either failed to state a clear training need or were not able to associate the need with the project they were engaging in.

The training need expressed by CP sounded more like her normal training need rather then elicited by the Project. In other word, the "emerging" character did not seem to happen. My assumption that the training need will "emerge" in face of the project did not seemed to happen.

Had the training need emerged already but failed to captured by me? Had I took a too pedagogical view towards the issue? Had I confused training need with learning needs?

4.10.4 Learning & Impact on my professional practice and subsequent action

The approach of asking the participants to "name" their learning need would be feasible if the participants had gone through a rigorous mental process of evaluating the knowledge the have and the knowledge needed to carry out the project. However, this would give headache even to an expert, not to mention the IMBA participants.

The "semi-emergent" approach – mixing "programmed knowledge" with emergent training needs, adopted in the IMBA had not achieved a great success and I think I will take an alternate approach to this issue.

If I had the opportunity to design an AL program for high potential management staff again, I think I would consider making an explicit "theme" (such as change management, change leadership etc.) for the participants to build up the knowledge gained from their action. Making the linkage between learning and the project might be instrumental for achieving this.

4.11 Action steps 7: Individual coaching

4.11.1 Implementing action step

In order to maintain a communication with the participants and to follow-up with their project progress, an individual coaching had been arranged with each participant individually every two months. The content generally covers the following headings:

a. The project progress.
b. Any problems encountered.
c. What had been learnt?
d. The next steps.
e. Comments towards the program arrangement.

4.11.2 Monitor implementation and effects

After several months of implementation, a major quality incident had occurred leading to massive rejection of a product by the customer. The Company hired a quality expert as a consultant and he had set up a tight accountability system. After that, everyone had become very self-protective. I had interviewed MY during this period of time and his comment toward the Program had become even more negative.

> MY As of the present situation, I am no longer qualified to continue with this Project. Not possible anymore. **You want to make a change; the Company won't allow you to make the change.** That means, the Company won't allow any kinds of change, you need to do things step by step, you need to do whatever you are being told, You need to adopt the criteria adopted by others. Don't try to change anything. Now, WI (Work Instruction) is needed for everything. The action of the workers are being placed under tight control…No one could ever attempt to change anything.
>
> Interview MY on 30 May 05 on progress of his Self-initiated Project
> Please refer to Appendix 4G on the whole section of the dialogue

What MY decided to do is "not to change anything". His decision is backed with good reason. However, will learning still happen? This "action of not taking action" had not been discussed in the AL literature.

4.11.3 Reflection

The embedding of learning in taking action is the ideal of AL. However, when AL becomes an in-house program, the learning attitude is likely to be affected by the happenings in the organization. This might work for and against the AL process. Will it lead to a truly critical reflection as what is happening around the set member is not in a client organization and not really relate to oneself? In this case, the set members are not learning in a "glass house" but a real milieu. Guidelines to handle the situation need to be explored further.

Had MY been he engaging in true reflection on his own action as he had truly rethink the action plan he made beforehand or was he only making up some excuses for not taking action so as to avoid failure? How could I tell which reaction is better?

4.11.4 Learning & Impact on my professional practice and subsequent action

The remarkable difference between EW and MY indicated the implementation of the project proposal was by no means straight forward. When the AL program was organized in-house, participants would have much more ramification in the process of implementation. Putting their career in peril will be something would be something they least want to do. They will have a sharp nose on the changing in organizational climate which might render their original proposal no longer worth doing or worth the risk. Finding an excuse of "wait and see" or to trim the scale would not be difficult for participants in in-house AL program.

If I had the opportunity to design an AL program for high potential management staff again, I think I would consider a clear division of accountability between me and the program sponsor. I should made clear to all that I should only be accountable for the learning result while the sponsor of the program should be accountable for the business result of the projects conducted by the participants. This would make finding an excuse to wait and see or deciding to "take the action of not taking any action" less easy.

4.12
Action steps: The "LEAP" Meeting

4.12.1 Implementing action step

As mentioned, the original plan was to have two Phases in the IMBA. Phase One would be individual projects and in Phase Two, one big project with all the members formed into one "set" will be arranged. As advised by Kim

(2003), Park (2004), Bong, Park & Park (2002) and Bowerman & Peters (1999) (Please see Appendix 1C) on the need to pay attention to the group dynamics, I had arranged two sessions of 2 hour meeting for the members to share knowledge and report progress on their Project. Those LEAP meetings, which I called them, intended to serve something like the “set meeting” in AL. All the members were gathered together to share among themselves the project progress and aimed at enabling the process of “Q’ing” each others to happen. Due to the difficulties of arranging time available for all, the first LEAP meeting had became the last session.

4.12.2 Monitor implementation and effects

In the first LEAP meeting, the MD had made a short address at the beginning and then departed. I started by sharing with all the participants a speech at the graduation ceremony for the class of 2005 of Princeton U made by Steve Jobs of Apple Computer. All of them felt greatly moved by Steve Job’s advice of living every day as if it was the last day of our life. After that, each one would take turn to explain to all on their project progress and comment from others had been invited. However, most of the questions were technical in nature and was mainly about the detail operation of the project. Critical questionings from other participants were rare. Even when critical questions did rise, they were mainly about the deficiencies of the company and dissatisfaction towards the administration. These critical comments were raised mainly by MF with some echo from MY. I wrote to the MD and alert him on the issue of moral. (See Appendix 4D)

4.12.3 Reflection

It seemed that the LEAP meeting failed to function like a set meeting where the participants could become “comrades in adversity” and practice critical reflective behaviours in the meeting. Although the negative attitude of MF had not been widely shared, it did created some undesirable feelings which I could not be sure of the long term impact. But I still thought it a good attempt to maintain a good communication with all the participants.

4.12.4 Learning & Impact on my professional practice and subsequent action

My intention of enabling an exchange of knowledge and opinions towards each other's project had not been materialized. The kind of "comrades in adversity" group process had failed to happen. The exchanges of ideas were superficial and mainly took the form of minor chit chats. Although I found the LEAP meeting unable to serve the purpose I intended, my informal communication with some of the participants did indicated that they were quite enjoying. However, my intention to arrange another session of LEAP meeting could not be materialized due to the difficulties to fix a schedule convenient to all and the dropping out the MF and MZ could further deteriorated the atmosphere when they meet.

4.13 Action steps : Group coaching

It was postulated that the problem for AL project should be "a problem that needs multiple perspectives for a solution that is capable of being implemented". (Hicks 2000 p.48) Horan (2007) reported a similar arrangement in an AL program and claimed a high impact being created.

> (…) business leaders were asked to question and challenge the team's feedback to create deeper thinking and possibly shift the business idea to another level. (…) The questions to this particular team were highly thought-provoking. (…) the team and everyone on the program - in hindsight - view this incident as one of the more powerful learning experiences in the ILD.
> (Horan, 2007)

4.13.1 Implementing action step

To broaden the perspective of the participants, a Group Coaching was arranged on 23 Sep 09 from 1000 – 1200. The coaching panel including the MD, the finance controller, the non-executive director, the HR Mgr., and me. The composition of the Panel aimed at helping the participants to get the feedback from a multiple perspective so as to enable them to acquire multiple approaches for viewing the problems related to their projects.

The coaching took the form of video conference. Participants made a presentation on their project progress in the factory in China and the Panel communicate with them through video conference facilities.

4.13.2 Monitor implementation and effects

The Panel members had been briefed by me on the purpose of the Group Coaching and each of them had been given an evaluation form (Appendix 4H) to fill in towards the comments towards each members. These comments, which will be expressed in the Group Coaching, will be consolidated by me and forward back to each participant.

4.13.3 Reflection

A post activity spot checking on the feeling of participants towards the Group Coaching had yield a less then satisfactory result. While some express the session as moderately useful, some put forward a more critical comment towards the session.

From	To		
8'54"	9'45"	WW	What's your opinion towards the group coaching?
		MY	"…ng….no specific opinion. In terms of the Project, I think it is not very helpful.… **They are just asking questions and demanding answers rather than giving you advice. They did not help you to solve the problems. They are not supplying you methods but just asking you to do more and to expand the activities."**

The "powerful learning experiences" described by Horan (2007) had not been mentioned. The reason could be found in MY's own word "They are just asking questions and demanding answers rather than giving you advice".

MY came to the Group Coaching session with an expectation that the top management could provide him with some “magic wand” to solve his problem.

4.13.4 Learning & Impact on my professional practice and subsequent action

The expression indicated that the critical questions expressed by the panel had not been very effective in stimulating critical self reflection from the participants. As the panel members were the boss of the participants, their questions would only be perceived as a kind of pressurizing

On the other hand, it indicated that this kind of “forceful critical reflection” by the boss installed in an AL program might make the participants found difficult to handle. Actually, Horan’s mentioning of the “powerful learning experience” could only be concluded “in hindsight”. What actually happen on the spot was that “within minutes of questioning the demeanour changed and the team fell apart. The silence in the room was palpable.” and “it took weeks (for the team) to recover”. (Horan, 2007) In a typical Chinese cultural context, this kind of critical questioning by the boss could be taken an equivalence to “death sentence” and hence need to be handle with extreme care.

It seems that the inclination of the top management to drive for business result may not be perceived as a motivator for the participants. The comments, while well intended and aim at creating a “deeper thinking and possibly shift the business idea to another level” (Horan, 2007), might not be able to take as learning experience for the participants. As activities of similar nature such as the final presentation were planned, critical questioning raised by senior management should be coupled with more supportive feedbacks and explanation on the intention of provoking members to think deeper need to be emphasized more explicitly.

4.14

Critical event: Drop out of members & drag on of the program

After around three months of program running, two members expressed their wishes to withdraw. I met with them individually to explore the reasons. LN was quite determined to quit due to heavy work load. MY's reasons were that he didn't think his project could be successful as there were too many uncontrollable factors in it. Secondly, he thought his project could not add too many values to the Company. Thirdly, he felt that the IMBA was inferior in value when compared to those technical training. Appendix 4D provides a detail extract from the mail I sent to RS after the meeting and had explained to him the reason for their wish to withdraw. However, the worst was yet to come.

The outbreak of a major quality problem of a product for the company's key customer had turned the whole company upside down. Everybody had become extremely busy. An external consultant had been hired and re-structuring of the organization had been launched. The support from the MD had been dropped to a minimum. I got no definite answer from him or from the GM on whether the key project for Phase Two, which was about the IMBA members delegated with the responsibility to make a turnaround for the Company's Factory Two.

4.14.1 Reflection

Actually, the participants had the perception that the team should work like a "mini-company" as it had incorporated members from the major departments. This is also the intention of the senior management at the very beginning as they wish that the team could become the management team for the spin out SBU in Phase 2. That's why when some members dropped out from the IMBA, some members expressed a feeling that the Program could no longer serve its original purpose.

> Comparing with the beginning, I feel a lower moral and lacks feelings. Some members had withdrawn and some were not that serious when attending training program. …With the shrink in the group size, it no longer looks like a group. There are not adequate representative from each department. Now there are three workers from BD including me which account for half of the group. It is not really a balanced team …The Company

> always emphasis the engineering competence but there are no representative from Engineering Dept.. I had also heard about that MY (Industrial Engineer) wish to drop out. If that really happen, there will be no representative from the engineering side at all. Needless to say, there are no people from Quality. What does it look like?
> (Interview IMBA member –RC, A Translation from Cantonese– some nonessential content had been skipped)

Although it had not been mentioned clearly in the AL literature that members recruited should have a fair representation across various functions in the company, the expression of RC did described the participants' expectation on the chance to learn something about other functions. Besides, if the project problem should be interdepartmental, such an arrangement could certainly promote an atmosphere of getting the managers to learn from each other.

4.15
Action steps : Final presentation of result

4.15.1 Implementing action step

A presentation of all the participants on their project achievement had been arranged on 18 Aug 2006. The MD, the non-managing Director and the HR manager had presented in the meeting. A "comment sheet" had been prepared by me for consolidating all the comments.

All the five "survivors" of IMBA – EW, MY, PS, CP, RC, had take turn to use 20 min. to present their Individual Project around the following three main titles:

(1) What you had done?
(2) What you had achieved?
(3) What you had learnt?

No guidance had been given by me on the way they present so that the way they organize their content will become part of the assessment on their potential to proceed to Phase II. A briefing had been organized one week before to tell them on the 3 questions they need to address in the presentation and to ensure they could have a correct understanding on all of the questions. A score sheet had been prepared for the senior managements to fill in.

4.15.2 Monitor implementation and effects

The achievement of EW, MY and PS had been recognized by the top management and their original business objective of cost saving had more or less been achieved. CP, with her original target being modified, had also provided some interesting findings from her survey. The work of RC was a bit below the top management's expectation but the overall comment of the top management towards the performance of the members and the results they achieved was satisfactory.

4.15.3 Reflection & Learning

Up to this stage, the focus of the management and the participants had been totally focused on the project result. Despite "what you had learnt" had been included as one of the three questions the participants needed to present, few had provide useful points about it in their presentation. The senior management was also not keen to discuss with the participants about it. The project and the learning had become two unrelated things.

4.15.4 Learning & Impact on my professional practice and subsequent action

The project and the learning being turned into two unrelated things signified a failure to achieve the core value of AL. It was a bit late for me to be able to do anything that could significantly change the situation. Actually, I could "smell" the decline in interest of the top management and the possible threat of the discontinuation of Phase II.

4.16

Termination of the Program

The resignation of the GM shortly after the Final Presentation had caused a suspension on the discussion for Phase Two. The "Big project" for Phase Two, which was the original idea of the GM, was withheld. The new GM who arrived three months later agreed to give some thinking to the arrangement of Phase Two and the MD sent me a e-mail telling me that the new GM would make the final decision on this matter. After almost 6 month's total silence from the management, my service contract with the IMC had been terminated without any reason given.

The impact on my research was that the abrupt termination of my contract rendered me unable to conduct a detail concluding interview with each of the members. Despite this, what had been planned to do in Phase I had been done – the training programs had been organized, the individual project had been more or less completed, the coaching had been conducted and the final presentation to the top management had also been organized. Although I could not organize a final interview with all of the participants, their opinions had been collected in the process which enabled me to conduct a good analysis on the impact of the 4 contextual factors on the 5 key ingredients of AL from the view of insiders.

The greatest disappointment about the dropping of Phase II was the inability to engage in the "dream project" – the participants teamed up to make a turnaround for Factory Two. However, given the business situation of IMC at that time, the capability of the participants revealed in Phase I and the team composition of the "survivors", it sounded less convincing that the team could handle the challenge of the "dream project" should Phase II ever be carried out.

I was in luck that I had been informed by the consultant company I work for soon after the termination of the IMBA about the opportunity to arrange program of similar nature. Armed with a better understanding on the challenge to run in-house AL program, applying the knowledge in another context represents a kind of multiple iteration which could help to bring in a greater degree of external validity on the invariable patterns observed.

4.17

Summary for Chapter 4

With the organizing of the Final Presentation, Phase I of IMBA was concluded. If I adopted the business result and the satisfaction of organizational need as the criteria for evaluating the successfulness of the IMBA, the Program could be claimed as fairly successful. However, readers who had gone through this Chapter could hardly agree with that. I will proceed to analyze the data and try to answer my research questions in the next chapter.

Chapter 5

Reflection on Cycle 1 :

In the previous Chapter, I tried my best to alert myself and the readers that my narrative is not the only possible truth by making an open acknowledgement of the social constructive nature of my own account as a researcher. I tried to include the context, the background history and the audience in the analysis of the narration. I hope that could help to address the part played by my own contribution to the narration when I am taking part in the interaction with the participants both as an interviewer, as a consultant, and as a part-time worker of the IMC.

It is my own professional practice that I would like to improve. As a management consultant, my core competence is on the ability to solve the problem of the clients, in most cases, through providing learning solutions. I, therefore, would like to reflect on the AL as a learning solution as informed by the discourse I made on the IMBA program and to see what kinds of problems will arise when organizing in-house for a group of Chinese high potential management staff by a consultant like me. With this knowledge, I could proceed to arrange a "better" AL program which, I hope, to discover what kinds of learning problems it could solve.

5.1

Was IMBA an AL program?

As stated in chapter 2:

> In this Research, I will try to adhere to Revans' Formula and in the process of facilitating the AL, pay special attention to make the three "objectives" achievable.

Adopting the lens of social constructivism, I aware that just by arranging the AL program according to the "book" (in this case, the work of Revans and other literatures) I could hardly make a safe claim that an AL program had really been in place I will firstly ask myself – was IMBA "really" an AL program.

Rather then reflecting in action which I had undertaken as mentioned in the previous Chapter, I will now try to reflect on those actions which I had taken, in a more coherent manner, on the IMBA program by evaluating what I had done against Revans' formula and the three objectives.

To reiterate Revans' equation:

$$L = P + Q$$

(Revans 1984 p.16)

Revans, R.W. (1984), The Sequence of Managerial Learning, MCB University Press, Bradford.,

The first question I would like to ask is "had all three objectives of AL mentioned by Revans (1988, p.15-16) stated in Chapter 2 been ultimately fulfilled in the case of IMBA Program?" It was a pity that Phase II of IMBA Program could not be continued. However, the Phase I of IMBA Program had already provided a fertile ground for reviewing the application of the AL Theory in a setting of a fast track program for a group of high potential Chinese management staff.

5.1.1 Make useful progress upon the treatment of some problem or opportunity in the real world

The accomplishment on this aspect was that most of the participants had made useful progress on the problems in their real work situation. The problems (which, actually, were "puzzles") came from the real world and had been recognized by top management as important and worthy to pursue a solution.

However, had I really make the "progress" "useful" to the participants? What kinds of progress were really "useful" to them? They were the one who were responsible for conducting the Project. They should fully aware of the "progress". I think I had not made the "progress" clearly be seen by the participants. However, what I failed to do was I could not shown to them what they had "done differently" and how these had "worked differently" and how these had helped them to improve and become a better manager.

Should the design of the AL program include some means which could enable the managers to know their "progress"? I think I as the facilitator could take up this role more proactively.

5.1.2 Give nominated managers sufficient scope, to learn for themselves, how best to approach ill-structured challenges to which nobody can, at the outset, suggest any satisfactory response.

The accomplishment on this aspect was that I had always been working closely with the senior management and got their support in building up the conditions in which the program participants could learn from each other in the pursuit of their common and everyday duties. They had participated in the selection of candidates. They had take part in the training on Problem Solving. The Quality Mgr had served as the trainer on Six Sigma. They had served as panel for giving feedback to participants on their project progress.

My reflection on it was that the senior management had not, in the eyes of the participants, learnt with them together. Participants were sceptical towards the willingness of the senior management to change. Feedback from the participants after the Panel feedback on project progress indicated that participants felt that the senior management was just interested in asking them to do more. I think I had not done enough in helping the senior management to "perceive their missions afresh". I had not make provision to enable the senior management to shift from a mentality of trying "to teach managers anything about how to manage" to a mentality of "learn with and from each other in the pursuit of their common and everyday duties".

A possible way to address this is to make explicit the role of the participants to advise the senior management on what they think the senior management should change based on their learning from taking action of executing the solution they proposed for the project.

5.1.3 Management development practitioners not to teach managers anything but to contrive, with senior managements, the conditions in which all managers learn with and from each other

In arranging the IMBA, I had refrained from the attempt to pack the Program with seminars and workshop but had only arrange training to provide them “tools” to ask questions and solve problems. This had caused the expectation gap of some participants and could be the cause of their withdrawn from the IMBA.

The nominated managers had been given sufficient scope to handle real business problems. The problems most of them chose were complex problems but not too complex as the original intention was to leave the real highly complex problem – the solving of business problem for Factory Two in Phase II of the IMBA Program.

The collaboration with the senior management had been frequent on the building up of favourable conditions “in which all managers learn with and from each other.”

A reflection I could have on this aspect was that the participants, when working on their own project, “the conditions in which all managers learn with and from each other” had not been fully functioning. The program arrangement had failed to make all the members learnt in the form of “comrades in adversity” and the effort of building up the team by the outward development program had been wasted.

I thought that by adopting a group project approach could be helpful to install a better condition for the participants to learn from each others.

5.2 Issues discovered in IMBA

Although I could not conclude with convincing evidence that the IMBA was effective or not, the process enabled me to discover many issues that might have contributed to the effectiveness of the program.

5.2.1 What is the "L" in IMBA?

In the interview with RC, CP & MY, all of them expressed that they didn't feel they had learnt much from the program. Although espoused feeling on what one had learnt could not be regarded as what one "really" or "actually" had learnt, and Phase II of the IMBA had been cancelled, the lack of other indicators of the learning handicapped me to support or refute their conclusion.

Although what the IMBA had accomplished had somewhat complied to the 3 principles, I could not safely concluded that Phase I of the IMBA had been a successful AL program. The reason being that the key learning result of AL program – the learning of AL – critical reflective working behaviours could not be clearly located.

5.2.2 Role conflict of me – drive for business result vs. learning result of the project

When I faced with the comment of MY on the situation of the company, I found myself placed in a difficult position to ask them to push forward with the original plan which, according to him, will have little chance of success or to take a safe path by "doing something anyway". As a consultant, helping the members to succeed is important. Besides, I don't want to put the career of MY at peril.

5.2.3 The "L" & action not closely related.

The embedding of learning in taking action is the ideal of AL. However, when AL becomes an in-house program, the learning attitude is likely to be affected by the happenings in the organization.

Some members were a little bit hesitant and less optimistic towards the accomplishment of their Project. It was not that they did not have confidence in themselves but towards the capability to support it. In an interview with one of the participants – MY, after the first embarkment program – and outward development program had been completed, he said

"What you do need to align with the Company's mode of operation. We had tried many new things such as One Piece Flow, TPEM. We had learnt all those theories. TPEM had completed but it doesn't seem to create a lot of change." He further commented that: "What I want to say is that, if the heads do not have the concept, it will be impossible to implement the project as it will touch on many other aspect of the company's operation" (Please see Appendix 5A for the whole section of interview dialogue)

Actually, what MY expressed was the "real problem" and this sort of understanding of the "reason behind" could be more easily surfaced in in-house AL programs. Getting the support from the top management by understanding why they did not do so could be the major learning point and the process of solving it could be the most valuable learning experience of MY. However, MY had failed to realize that and I had failed to help him to realize that.

5.2.4 What one had learnt not explicit

In the interview with participants, the question of "what you think you had learnt" had always been included. Few had mentioned clearly what they had learnt and some even expressed that they had learnt nothing at all. This might due to the limited time allocated to Program as expressed by CP.

WW: What do you think you had learnt up to this moment in the IMBA Program?

CP： Not much feeling. Due to the time factor, may be.

WW: What do you meant by the time factor?

CP： Five days (a week) and 8 hours a day. There's just no time to think about that. Just too busy.

WW: Spending too little time on the IMBA.

CP： For example, I spent three days out of office last week. There's just no time to think about that.

However, I felt a much bigger reason was that the participants felt they were "contributing" rather then "gaining" – the common notion of what learning meant. The response of MF towards my question of "what you had learnt" could be a hind of that mentality.

WW： Well, what do you think you had learnt up to this moment since the emarkment at mid Apr.?

MF： The company I previously worked for was bigger then IMC. Their operating system in their mould making workshop had been running for more then 10 years. Actually, their systems were evolving and look quite different from what it was. Similarly, IMC also had its own system. The key features look more or less the same at a glance in different companies. The key are the detail. The more precise your application detail, the more advanced will be your technology.

The ideal of AL – to help organizational change could be perceived as "doing favour for the company" when the AL program was running in-house. The learning opportunity would be perceived as something "in exchange" for it. The mentioning of CP and MY on some training irrelevant to the project could be an indication.

5.2.5 Want to learnt something new and practical

This could be evidenced firstly from the reason of withdraw of LN when he want to attend program which could gave him access to some formal qualification which would be helpful for this career. MY had express the wish to attend some theoretical things to back up what he was currently doing.

"I feel…that should be some kinds of programs like Operations Management for a company."

MY Should be a bit more on the "what". Actually I basically know how to do. The most important is the lacking of …the falling short of some theoretical things to do.

WW : What you feel is that you lack some theoretical things to support your practice.

MY …..

(Please see Appendix 5B for the whole section of interview dialogue)

My conception that AL project could "prompt" the participants to "rethink" what they had learnt and the "gap" they identified might make their knowledge needed become "elicitive" and emerging didn't seem to work. The project they engaged in was only a "puzzle" rather then a "problem" could be one reason. They see themselves a totally competent in doing what they planned to do. CP's expression on her learning need as communication and interpersonal psychology indicated a separation on the learning need from the project. MY see learning need as attending an MBA or EMBA where one could get some "theoretical" things to "wrap up" what one had already been doing.

5.2.6 No "recognized ignorance" raised related to solving the problem

The lack of "recognized ignorance" was evidenced in many of the participants' comment that they had not learnt much. The reason for this could be the thinking that they know too well about the problem and the method to handle it. For example, MF had expressed that "The key features (of the mould making workshop's operation system) look more or less the same at a glance in different companies" (Please refer to section 5.2.4 for the full version of MF's speech)

What MF expressed that the company he previously worked for was much bigger then IMC and the system had been running for more then 10 years and hence quite perfect. His believe was that the tooling system was pretty much alike. All that expressed by MF was his belief that he was competent enough to push forward his past experience in the IMC. Similar expression had been made by MZ.

> You know my project is on packaging material. I had been in the printing industries for 3 years and I am quite familiar with the operations of a printing factory. (…) For detail implementation and coordination work, I can handle myself. I hope that my project could bear fruit in a half-year's time. Actually, there are not too much "do-different" things in it
> **Interviewee: MZ Conducted by William on 19 Jan 2005, 1340 – 1400 at IMC, Factory I, Block D, 2/F Mtg. Rm**
> (Please see Appendix 5C for the full version of MZ's speech)

He saw his role in the project was about the "technical issue" of pushing forward his past successful experience and see the "support from management" as a "roadblock" that he should not be held accountable.

The training needs expressed by CP were about Psychoanalysis and interpersonal communication. The training need expressed by MY was about factory management. All these had little direct relationship with the project they engaged in. For other members such as EW, and PS, they expressed no training need at all. This could probably due to their awareness that they need to sign undertaking for taking up training programs and party due to the possibilities that the project they engaged were all within their own capability. However, another reason may relate to their thinking that what should be done in the project was something they knew too well.

5.2.7 Members as part of the problem

In an individual coaching with CP to discuss about the progress of their project, I found she made little progress on it. I tried to explore further when she mentioned about the time factor:

CP： My feeling is that I have no time to do this and I am not comfortable about that…that's just like a job leaving there.
WW: Just leaving there.
WW: So…what would you suggest to improve this situation?

CP： It’s real difficult to make a suggestion. Firstly you could not leave the jobs on hand, right? Can’t do that. (May be) to see weather I could some of my private time, on Saturday or on Sunday. (Furthermore) the mentor could give me some proposal, a better proposal to help me to solve this problem.

Individual coaching with CP on 31 May 2005, 1330

What CP had expressed was obviously a problem for every busy executive. A good management of time, setting the priority and be disciplinary is something that an executive need to do everyday. The suggestion of a solution by another person could help little. The behaviour of CP is clearly a personal problem that she allowed it to affect the project progress. Similarly, the emotional response of MF to mix his compensation package with the implementation of his project indicated an immature behaviour.

Despite the rigorous selection process, the members might have problem in themselves and RC’s reflection could have some fair indication about that:

> “Actually, everyone have a fairly good idea on the rule of the game. However, after some time, and no one take the lead, or no great pressure was felt, the moral will die down. Actually, we need to pull back all together, continue with the direction of each, and not to let each running towards different direction. Some will felt less committed and this could have great effect. I felt that this group of people are not those who would embrace challenges. Although some might say they love challenge, but I don’t think they belongs to these type.”

The members may not demonstrate the kind of “desirable” behaviour of managers who are willing to take up challenge, to try out new things or to take the comment from others. They may be arrogant and political and bad at time management. All these create great impact on the way they handle the project and how they learnt from the action they take.

5.2.8 Downgrade the original problem, to become a puzzle in face of organizational change

An issue relating to the selection of project is that it should be a problem rather then a “puzzle”. However, there lacks a clear definition of what could be regard as a “problem” and what should be defined as a “problem”. Actually all of the projects selected by the participants could either be treated as a “problem” or a “puzzle”.

An interview with one of the participants shortly after the Team Building session indicated that the Project they selected was “puzzles” rather then a problem.

> You know my project is on packaging material. I had been in the printing industries for 3 years and I am quite familiar with the operations of a printing factory. (…)When I made estimation on the savings the Project it could bring about, I use a very conservative approach which is 1%. However, it could be far bigger than that. Even 2% should not be a big problem (quoted some figures on the amount & % the Company currently spend on the material)
>
> **Interviewee: MZ Conducted by William on 19 Jan 2005, 1340 – 1400 at IMC, Factory I, Block D, 2/F Mtg. Rm**

MZ had also mentioned the strategies he had adopted – by making the target easier to achieve. As MZ was very experienced in the printing industry, “there are not too much “do-different” things in it”. Another participant – MF also regarded there’s not too many things new to him in the project. (Please refer to section 5.2.4 for the full version of MF’s speech):

MF’s comment indicated that he had rich experience in the company he previously served. The Project could well become a “puzzle” rather then a “problem”. On the other hand, MF’s comment had also made me think about the difference between “puzzle” and “problem”. While conceptually the two things were quite clear, it become much harder to draw a clear line between two of them in real world. What MF mentioned was clearly about the “application issue” of his previous experience in a new context. Was it a puzzle or a problem?

Just like what EW had said, she had high confidence that the target could be achieved as she had similar experience before. Her challenge was just on how to apply her past experience in the IMC's business context.

5.2.9 Act within comfort zone. Choose a "sure win" course of action.

The objective for arranging a project for AL is to enable the participants to face a challenging situation and hence to develop a high motivation to rethink by asking new questions. This should be achieved by choosing a "real problem" rather then a "puzzle". The "problem" chosen by MZ was about the cost saving on packaging materials especially about printed materials. However, he had chosen a "sure win" way which a staff would normally choose when facing a task delegated by the superiors – to state a "safe" target.

> When I made estimation on the savings the Project it could bring about, I use a very conservative approach which is 1%. However, it could be far bigger than that. Even 2% should not be a big problem (quoted some figures on the amount & % the Company currently spend on the material)
>
> **Interviewee: MZ Conducted by William on 19 Jan 2005, 1340 – 1400 at IMC, Factory I, Block D, 2/F Mtg. Rm**

The approach of MZ was not hard to understand and was a "smart" way of doing things in company. However, a "sure win" target would pose no problem for MZ and was only a puzzle – how to "transfer" his past experience to the new context. All the answer would be known by MZ and what need to be done were technical. Rethinking of past experience could be reduced to minimal as MZ had already weaved a good "safety net" for himself.

Unlike many AL programs in which the project topic had been pre-determined, either by the sponsors or the client organization, problems the IMBA participants intended to solve were initiated by the participants themselves. My thinking was that this arrangement could facilitate the execution effectiveness as the problem was something that the participants really want to improve.

However, I found out that this arrangement, when adopted in in-house AL program such as the IMBA, could also resulted in a Task oriented, “quick fix” approach. The focus would be placed on the task itself rather then on learning. This effect could be multiplied by the nature of those high-potential management staff who was more eager to show their capability and to minimize the potential failure which might create negative impact on their career in the organization. This intention had been discussed by Vince(1996):

> The need to feel competent, consistent, in control and comfortable for ourselves and with others sets a boundary around our capacity to learn and change. This boundary is built as a protection against anxiety and uncertainty, a protection against the unfamiliar. Claxton's analysis is useful in explaining the ease with which individuals create learning environments as places for the reinforcement of existing knowledge and experience (Learning I) rather than as opportunities for change (Learning II)
> (Vince, 1996, p. 113 - 114)

This indicated in an interview with one the participants – EW on her progress with her Project – cost cutting on fabric purchased when she repeatedly expressed that she had high confidence in achieving the target. (Please see Appendix 5E)

5.2.10 Feel oneself doing extra and benefit the Company only

In one of the interview with – MY, the Industrial Engineer, I got some important feedback

> WW Do you have any concern on the contract?
>
> MY The contract is no big deal for me. But I think if the project we work on can create value which is really measurable and is bigger than the 16000, that sum should be waived. (explained in what way his project can create value bigger than that sum)
>
> (Interviewee: MY Conducted by me on 19 Jan 2005, 1200 – 1225 at IMC, Factory I, Block D, 2/F Mtg. Rm.)

When a staff felt that he or she had already been working hard enough on his own job, an AL project would easily give them a feeling that the company is trying to ask them to do more. If the training were arranged "for free", they would think the efforts were "compensated" by the value of the training. This kinds of "bean counting" behaviour was evidenced in the expression of MY. RC had also shared these kinds of feeling.

> When I first learn about the Program, I think that is very good. I felt that the Company is willing to invest in the staff. At first I thought that we will attend some training and then we will be free to apply. But now, we need to do a project. It seems that the Company wants you to contribute the value that the Company invested. It looked like a transaction. I could understand this. But it is a little bit calculative.
>
> Talk with RC on 14th Jan 2005 0800 – 0850 on the way to attend the Outward Development Program for all the IMBA participants.

This kind of thinking had seldom been reported in the AL literature. This is the sort of reaction which might only happen when the AL program was running in-house. Although it is hard to estimate the impact of the thinking towards the effectiveness of the AL, it is certainly not the kind of attitude that a program organizer like me or the program sponsor – the senior management would like to see.

5.2.11 Difficult to induce critical reflective working behaviour

In all the interview with the participants, almost all had pointed out the problem they encountered were "not made here".

> WW Is it the project that cannot create results that worries you?
>
> MY You know, I am not on a senior position…I had learnt quite enough on theories…
>
> (Interviewee: MY Conducted by me on 19 Jan 2005, 1200 – 1225.)

Some members were a little bit hesitant and less optimistic towards the accomplishment of their Project. It was not that they did not have confidence in themselves but towards the capability to support it. For example, MY mentioned that "if the heads do not have the concept, it will be impossible to implement the project as it will touch on many other aspect of the company's operation." (Please refer to Appendix 5F) However, this was exactly what a good AL project should be. As Mezirow et al, (1990) had point out the AL project should NOT be "little ambiguity, where there is only one stakeholder"

5.2.12 Individual project failed to stimulate interest in "Q'ing" each other

Various writers (Dixon, 1998; Dilworth,1998; Brassard, 2002 ;Bong, Park & Park,2002; Bowerman & Peters, 1999) had mentioned that one of the key success factors for AL was about solving problem which is important to all the participants collaboratively and creatively without the reliance on expert. (Please refer to Appendix 1C for detail)

In the group coaching sessions, questions raised towards each other relating to their project were few. This could be due to the fact that each participants were responsible for a different project.

5.2.13 The action of "not to take any action"

> MY As of the present situation, I am no longer qualified to continue with this Project. Not possible anymore. **You want to make a change; the Company won't allow you to make the change.** That means, the Company won't allow any kinds of change, you need to do things step by step, you need to do whatever you are being told, You need to adopt the criteria adopted by others. Don't try to change anything. Now, WI (Work Instruction) is needed for everything. The action of the workers are being placed under tight control…No one could ever attempt to change anything.
>
> (Interview MY on 30 May 05 on progress of his Self-initiated Project)

The strong reasons given by MY had finally led to his decision to shrink the size of his project which was deviated from his original intention. The change in situation should provide a rich context and an increasingly complex environment which should be an excellent "problem". However, MY and other members had chosen to stay away from it and avoid the core of the problem. It is not difficult to understand as no one would want to put their career at peril in face of a perceived unfavourable organizational situation. It is something that would happen only when the programme was running in-house.

5.2.14 Drag on and more concerned about getting things done

Various writers (Inglis,1994; Dixon, 1998; Dilworth ,1998; Brassard, 2002 ; Bowerman & Peters, 1999) had mentioned that one of the key success factors for AL was about the awareness of the equal importance of learning and solving the problem in the AL project (Please refer to Appendix 1C for detail)

Many of the participants' thinking were preoccupied with the action steps they thought need to be taken which geminated in their past experience. This could be revealed in the interview with CP who believed that the inadequate orientation and caring given to the new staff was the reason leading to the new staff turnover.

CP： If we could provide a good environment to them, they won't feel that they wish to quit. Is that right? Through this survey, I could state the new staff turnover problem is not due to the low salary or lack of promotion opportunities as this do not affect new staff.

WW： Then you have a problem, a potential issue. The targets of your survey are those who had not quit. If they said that they are not satisfied and yet had not quit, it illustrated that their dissatisfaction with the existing arrangement had nothing to do with their leaving. (…)

Individual coaching with CP on 31 May 2005,
(Please refer to Appendix 5D for the full version of this section of interview dialogue)

CP had clearly not thought through the problem clearly and had not been well thought through with her problem solving objective. It was a bit strange that she had this problem after half a year's time since she had presented her project proposal. It seems that a preoccupation with taking action rather then thinking through the true nature of the problem. This could be due to the fact that they had already made a presentation to the top management and their project proposal had been "endorsed". If that is the will of the top management to do this, why bother going through all the trouble of rethinking which risk taking the trouble of giving additional explanation to the top management?

5.2.15 Too eager to drive for delivering business result

Many examples of AL literature such as Kim's, (2003); Park's, (2004); Bong, Park & Park's, (2002); Brassard's, (2002); Bowerman & Peters', (1999) advocated that the support from senior management is the key success factor (KSF) for AL program. (Please refer to Appendix 1C for detail) The support from the top management of the IMC had been continuous as discussed in the previous chapter. I recap on part of Table 2.III on the comparison of different writers on the KSF or elements perceived as important to AL

The MD had hand picked the participants. He had taken part in all the trainings. In the Group Coaching, the MD and other senior members of management had taken part to provide a multiple perspective feedbacks to the participants towards the progress of their project. This satisfied Brassard (2002) key success factor that "The organization's most senior management is equally committed to the AL program as are the participants and their learning partners." The organization of the presentation of the progress by the IMBA participants with the MD and other Directors presenting satisfied Park (2004)'s recommendation of "holding a presentation of the results of the program with participation by the Chief Executive". However, a post event interview with the members indicated that the kinds of "support" given by the top management had not been really appreciated.

7'04"	WW	How does it affect you?
	MY	Not much. But in the previous meeting, they (the group coaching panel) mentioned about extending it to the whole factory. But that is not possible.
	WW	I see. So you mean it is not possible to extend the practice to other places.
	MY	It is not impossible. It is simply no one are willing to do it. In IMC, there is no good planning. If they apply this practice, it will cause them a lot of trouble. They need to stop the production line.
8'54"	WW	What's your opinion towards the group coaching?
	MY	…Ng….no specific opinion. **In terms of the Project, I think it is not very helpful.… They are just asking questions and demanding answers rather than giving you advice. They did not help you to solve the problems. They are not supplying you methods but just asking you to do more and to expand the activities.**

5.2.16 Lacking “tools” & authority to facilitate critical self reflective behaviours

When MY had expressed his concern of the organizational roadblock, I was not unaware of his consistent pessimistic attitude toward the company. When CP & RC expressed their lack of time to get on with their project, I could point out their weakness of lacking perseverance and poor time management. However, all these seemed not to be part of the learning objective of the IMBA. Asking them to change themselves had NEVER been included in the program objective of IMBA as well as many other AL programs documented by many other practitioners in the AL literature. Like many other AL programs documented in the AL literature, the Program had been overtly focus on the project. Now I have a problem with the participant’s behaviour and I am not sure whether it is my problem due to poor facilitation or the problem of the AL theory.

5.2.17 Formal positioned as “fast track program” invited political behaviours of joiners

The original intention of the GM to ask me to organize a “focused” training for those whom “the company cannot afford to lose” had positioned the IMBA as a staff retention initiative. The decision of the head of the Business Development to nominate MF was based on his feeling that the performance of MF should be recognized. The subsequent persuasion made by the MD directly to MF further indicated the management’s wish to position the program as a staff retention program. This move would not be unrecognized by the participants and MF had taken it as a chance to express his dissatisfaction of not being raised in salary by choosing to refuse joining. The impact on the effectiveness of AL by these kinds of political behaviours could not be known for sure. However, AL being turned into a political tool for advancing one’s own interest should not be something healthy for the progress of the program.

5.2.18 Objective of learning not clear

Like many other documented AL programs in literature I came across, a formal learning objective for individuals was not a must and not even mentioned as one of the key successful factors for AL. I reiterate those KSF related to program objective mentioned in Table 2.III of Chapter 2. For example, Brassard (2002) mentioned the KSF of AL as to "meet specific organizational needs", Park (2004) mentioned "establishing clear objective for the program".

In IMBA, project result had never been unclear. "Reduce the yearly staff turnover by 5%"; "Cost down the fabric price 5-15%" (Appendix 1C) and a rigorous Six Sigma Standard had been applied. It was individual learning objectives had never been formally set up. I think this could lead to the "lost" feeling at a later stage of the Program and the difficulties for participants to name any learning from the program.

5.2.19 Nomination by department heads shrunk size of the selection pool

The preliminary request for nomination by department heads had not been very successful. The subsequent targeted invitation had actually limited to a pool who had been perceived by top management as high potential only. This had restricted the size of the pool and staff from some other departments such as the PMC, Quality Assurance, Logistics etc. could not be included.

5.2.20 Members not "embrace" challenge

How could we tell who is high potential management staff and who is not? Most of the literature on AL covering this issue usually mention about nomination by the management. The method I employed to identify the high potential management staff were a combination of both voluntary nomination, supervisor's recommendation, peer group evaluation and assessment tools. However, when the Program dragged on at a later stage, the performance of the members seemed not quite able to live up to their expectations. When I interviewed one of the members – RC, he gave his view on other members:

RC (…) Some will felt less committed and this could have great effect. I felt that this group of people are not those who would embrace challenges. Although **some might say they love challenge**, but I don't think they belong to these type.

Interview with RC

The comment by RC that he felt that the participants "say they love challenge" but he didn't felt the participants were those who" would embrace challenges" stimulated me to think about the selection process adopted. Will there be some specific kinds of people who are more suitable to learn by using the AL method? Willingness or even eagerness to accept a challenge could be an important attribute. On the other hands, our effort to select the high potential staff could be very successful but the AL learning method could be the wrong match for them.

The Project had been approved by senior management and they should aware that the result they produced will be put under the spot light. The fact that they had become the "prince and princess" had not pushed them too far beyond their limitation.

In had been mentioned in many of the literature related to in-house AL program, the candidates selection criteria were mainly based on the supervisor's nomination. It is the normal practice of inviting nomination for training programs designed for high flyers. However, due to the nature of the AL program, there were many ramifications to consider on the issues of selecting candidates. This had not been discussed in detail in the literatures related to organizing in-house AL program. It seems that further studies were needed to provide a guideline on selecting the "right" candidates for the in-house AL program.

5.2.21 Dropping out of members and lack of group meetings lowered moral

(Translation – some nonessential content had been skipped) Comparing with the beginning, I feel a lower moral and lacks feeling in it. Some members had

> withdrawn and some were not that serious when attending training program. …With the shrink in the group size, it no longer looks like a group. There are not adequate representative from each department. Now there are three workers from BD including me which account for half of the group. It is not really a balanced team …The Company always emphasis the engineering competence but there are no representative from Engineering Dept. I had also heard about that MY (Industrial Engineer) wished to drop out. It that really happen, there will be no representative from the engineering side at all. Needless to say, there are no people from Quality. What does it look like?
>
> (Interview IMBA member – RC)

With the dropping out of LN at the beginning and MF subsequently and the resignation of MZ, the number of participants had been reduced from 8 to 5. My original contention was that the reduced in number of participants should mattered little to the participants as they were all working on their own project and except for the occasional LEAP meeting, they rarely meet in the IMBA program. RC's comment informed me that the impact of the dropping out of members was not just a de facto issue but also a psychological one. It seems to point out the importance for the existence of the "comrades in adversity" and the management of group dynamics.

Literature did mention the importance of managing group dynamic properly (Appendix 1C). Suggestion of Bowerman & Peters (1999) of arranging a "familiarization process intended to make the "set" personally comfortable with one another" had been made available through the 1 day outward development program. However, the participants look at the group dynamic on a broader scope which could include the attendance, the group composition and the manner of the participants.

5.3

The existence of the 5 key ingredients of AL

In the previous section, I had pointed out that the IMBA did achieve the objectives of AL to a great extent. However, the discussions were mainly around the arrangement of the AL, on “what I had done” only. The discussion on the issues I discovered indicated the IMBA was far from perfect. Is it my problem or the problem of the AL? Had the 5 key ingredients truly existed in the mind and heart of the participants? I tried to group those issues together to see whether they were related to the 5 key ingredients, the “L” or some other critical successful factors mentioned by other writers.

The “L”		Role conflict of me – drive for business result vs. learning result of the project
		The “L” & action not closely related.
		What one had learnt not explicit
5 key ingred- ients	The P	Want to learnt something new and practical
		No “recognized ignorance” raised related to solving the problem
	Real problem	Members as part of the problem
		Downgrade the original problem, to become a puzzle in face of organizational change
	Implement solution	Act within comfort zone. Choose a “sure win” course of action.
		Feel oneself doing extra and benefit the Company only
	“Q’ing” each other	Difficult to induce critical reflective working behaviour
		Individual project failed to stimulate interest in “Q’ing” each other
	Take improved action	The action of not to take any action
		Drag on, more concerned about getting things done
*Other key success factors	Senior mgt’s support & commit- ment	Too eager to drive for delivering business result
	Facilitator	Lacking “tools” & authority to facilitate critical self reflective behaviours
	Voluntary participation	Formal positioned as “fast track program” invited political behaviours of joiners.
	Clear objective for the program	Objective of learning not clear.
	Careful selection of participants	Nomination by department heads shrank size of the selection pool.
		Members not “embrace” challenge
	Group dynamics properly managed	Dropping out of members and lack of group meetings lowered moral.

Table 5A Issues discovered in IMBA relating to the 5 key ingredients and some other key success factors of AL

Viewing from the lens of social constructivism, I would like to analyze the existence of the 5 key ingredients in the Program.

5.3.1 The P

The programmed knowledge – the problem solving workshop, the finance for non financial manger workshop had not created much value to induce a rethinking of something the participants already known. The "learning from each other" had rarely taken place among the members. In view of this, I could say that the purpose of the "P" had not been effectively functioned in the IMBA.

5.3.2 A real problem

The discussion in the previous section indicated that project most of the participants engaged in could only be regarded as "real puzzle" rather then as a "real problem" as most of the projects had a right or wrong answer and highly technical in nature. The project on "quote efficiency improvement" responsible by RC could really be regarded as a real problem as it involved many other departments and had no clearly defined answer on the approach. However, the fact that RC had made almost no progress on it and hence could not be regarded that any AL had happened. Therefore, I could conclude that what the members had engaged in the IMBA's individual projects could only be classified as "real puzzles" rather than as "real problems".

5.3.3 Need to implement own proposed solution

Some members were a little bit hesitant and less optimistic towards the effectiveness of their implementing their proposed solution. (E.g. MY mentioned past failure of the company in installing new system) It was not that they did not have confidence in themselves but towards the capability to support it.

5.3.4 "Q'ing" one another

As mentioned, the questioning on each other's project had not happen in the LEAP Meeting. This was partly due to the fact that each member was responsible for a different project and each one had become the "expert" in his own project.

5.3.5 Take improved action

Some had taken improved action on the original proposed action. For example, PS had changed the material used for labelling the bins. However, it was a mere technical decision. On the other hand, most of the participants had actually shrunk their original plan.

Member	Project Title	Final result
CP	**To provide the new staff a remarkable working environment**	Become a survey on the expectation of the new staff
EW	**Cost down the fabric price through sourcing more fabric supplier**	Done according to plan
LN	**Product Safety Improvement**	Member dropped out.
MZ	**Packaging Material Cost Reduction**	Member resigned
MF	**Advanced Mould Management**	Member dropped out
PS	**Improvement of Bin Identification**	Done with modification on the method originally proposed.
RC	**Quote Process Improvement on Quote Time and Accuracy**	No progress
MY	**Minimization Plastic Part WIPs**	Reduced to apply in a small production line currently under MY's control.

Table 5B Results of the various IMBA AL projects

It is hard to say whether the shrunk of the original plan is an improvement. It may be so if the true problem had been identified and a smaller scale project could tackle the problem better. However, all the decision to shrink the plan was not made in that way. Rather, the decision was made due to the identification of a more complicating situation and the shrinking decision represented a compromise to "do something anyway" in order to make a presentable presentation to the top management. In view of this, the action could hardly be considered as an improved action.

Possible impact of the project result on my study

The inability of most of the participants to deliver the project result could be hazardous to the Program should the Phase II of the Program be continued. According to the original plan, the participants would be evaluated against their suitability to proceed to Phase II by referring to their achievements in Phase I. (Please refer to Section 4.3.1). As Phase II was suspended, the effect on my study would be irrelevant.

Although the IMBA program was less then a success, this matter little in terms of the search as it provided a sound basis for the research in Cycle 2. The possible impact of the 4 contextual factors spelled out at the beginning of this research had been emerged with the IMBA implementation process. The preventive measures I adopted in Cycle 1 had not been working very well and in some cases (with hindsight), I had even fallen into the trap I had mentioned in Chapter 1 (e.g. position the AL program as a fast track program for the future stars). The IMBA program could provide a broad base for me to make an improved effort to manage the influence from those contextual factors in Cycle 2. Therefore, Cycle 1 was exploratory in nature and had enabled me to formulate a new design to implement in order to explore these possible issues. Although this cycle of "re-inventing the wheel" was not the norm in business world, it vividly manifested the spirit of AR, as McNiff had put it:

> Action research is open ended. It does not begin with a fixed hypothesis. It begins with an idea that you develop. The research process is the developmental process of following through the idea, seeing how it goes, and continually checking whether it is in line with what you wish to happen. Seen in this way, action research is a form of self evaluation.
> (McNiff, 2002, electronic resources)

Furthermore, the unit of analysis for this research are the "L" and the 5 key ingredients rather then those projects, the project result matters little to my study.

5.3.6 Reflection & recommendation

In view of the above discussion, the IMBA could be regarded as a total failure in terms of the effective functioning of the 5 key ingredients and in terms of delivering the learning and project result. While suggestions on ways to prevent this from happening will be spelled out in Section 5.5 of this Chapter, a reflection will be conduct here with a hope to provide useful reference to other practitioners.

5.3.6a The P

The past experience and knowledge of the participants were the most important P in AL. However, enabling the participants to share and learn from each other takes more then by just organizing a set meeting. While the LEAP meeting could help to build up team feeling and facilitate the sharing of information, it could also be turned into a "talk shop" and an occasion to share negative information. The set meeting should bear some clear and specific goals that require everyone to help achieving them.

5.3.6a A real problem

While the project objective proposed by the IMBA participants were all clear and real and very challenging, participants generally view it as a chance to "re-apply" their much proven past experiences. They were all about technical decisions and challenges. While one could still learnt from applying technical knowledge, which is clearly not the kinds of learning that AL intends to bring about as there are always right and wrong answers there. It is therefore not surprising to find the participants always commented the company had done something wrong and they felt they could not push a "right" answer under a "wrong" organizational context.

5.3.6a Need to implement own proposed solution

I could recalled the enthusiastic atmosphere in the first meeting when all participants present what kinds of changes they want to make in the organization and how the top management had been impressed. However, bearing a baby is one thing and rearing it is quite another. My belief that having the participants to rear their own baby should be the best route to install a sense of ownership among the participants and hence guarantee high motivation to make it a success might be flaw. To ensure the participants to rear their own "baby", a more disciplined way need to be adopted in the AL guidance process.

5.3.6a “Q’ing” one another

The lacking of a common project should be the key reason leading to the participants’ failure to demonstrate the “comrade in adversity” behaviours and the CRWB. Besides, all the participants come to the same team seemed lacked a competition feeling which could drive participants to ask more critical questions. It seems that splitting people into different teams working on the same problem could promote the “Q’ing” process better.

5.3.6a Take improved action

The shrink in scope of action, the action of not to take action, and the deferring of action could hardly be classified as improved actions. However, it is hard to justify by a third party whether their action was appropriate. The fear of failure had overridden the desire to take a daring action. This could perhaps be addressed by obtaining the top management’s explicit promise of openness towards bold suggestion and accept “noble failure” rather then timorous action.

5.4 Answering research questions

5.4.1 Purpose of the Study

The research aims to:

> Explore how high potential Chinese managers who are acquainted with each other practise critical reflective working behaviours through an in-house action learning programme.

This research aim had been met by my organizing an AL programs that adhered to the 5 key ingredients of AL as expounded mainly by Revans. The participants were from the same organizations and were all Chinese managers who had a close working relationship. They had been hand picked by the top management and regarded by top management as those "the company could not afford to loss". Although the IMBA was a failure, the process had generated a rich source of information to indicate the possible influence of the 4 contextual factors on the 5 key ingredients of AL. The adoption of the AR methodology enabled me to gain a comprehensive understanding from the participant's perspective on "what's really happening" in the AL process which I had a role to play. The prolonged duration of the programs (spanned a total of almost 5 years) enabled me to collect a wide range of information which greatly assisted my subsequent triangulation of data. The adoption of the CRWB provided me with a valid tool to measure the observation on the reflective behaviours of the participants. All these enabled me to make a safe claim that my research aim had been met.

5.4.2 Sub-questions 1 – What critical reflective working behaviours do participants exhibit during the AL programme?

In Cycle 1, the participants were handling their own project and the "set" was virtually non-existing. The "comrades in adversity" form of group reflection which intended for applying in "sets" would not be applicable. The dropping of the Phase Two of the IMBA program, which originally intended to form the outstanding performers of Phase One into one single set to tackle one business problem, made the collection of this data impossible. Based on the project progress meeting I conducted with the participants, I tried to locate any "trace" of the CRWB. Among the 5 "survivors", two of them (PS & EW) engaged in projects which were purely technical (Sourcing for new fabric suppliers locally for EW and labelling method for storage bins for PS) and hence not really qualified as AL project. The remaining 3 – CP, MY & RC, indicated very little CRWB during the Project Progress Meetings. On the contrary, many opposite behaviours of CRWB could be observed. Due to the absence of a "set", the CRWB – "challenging group think" will be dropped.

Types of CRWB	CP	MY	RC
Openness about mistakes	Admitting poor time management. Accept my comment to change the objective of the survey		Admitting lack of drive.
Critical vision sharing		Emphasis senior management support	
Asking for feedback			
Experimentation	Willing to try another way to conduct survey		

<u>Table 5C Behaviours relating to different types of CRWB observed</u>

Types of CRWB	CP	MY	RC
Behaviours opposite to "Openness about mistakes"	Attribute the drag on to heavy work load.		Attribute drag on as lack of intensive drive from organizer.
Behaviours opposite to "Critical vision sharing"		Affected by company politics and not willing to take an active step to tackle it.	Affected by group dynamics
Behaviours opposite to "Asking for feedback"	No asking for my feedback proactively.	No asking for my feedback proactively. Feedback from Group Coaching perceived as being pressurized by top management	No asking for my feedback proactively.
Behaviours opposite to "Experimentation"		Play safe. Adopt the action of not to take action. Shrink the project scope.	

<u>Table 5D Behaviours contrary to different types of CRWB observed</u>

5.4.3 Sub-questions 2 –What are the advantages and disadvantages of running an AL programme in-house?

In Chapter 2, I had explored the potential impact of 4 contextual factors. As "in-house" context embrace the other 3 contexts, I will explore the influence of all 4 contexts below.

5.4.3a In-house

Although some members such as MF, EW was obviously quite optimistic toward the possibility of pushing forward his proposal some other participant, notably MY, who had been with the Company for almost 10 years, were less optimistic. This could be revealed in one of the interview I conducted with him shortly after the embarkment of the IMBA.

> MY The most important thing is able to apply after learning.
> WW What do you think make it so difficult to apply in IMC?
> MY What you do need to align with the Company's mode of operation. We had tried many new things such as One Piece Flow, TPEM. We had learnt all those theories. TPEM had completed but it doesn't seem to create a lot of change. The machines are still poorly maintained. There is not much change. One piece flow is better.
> WW Is it the project that cannot create results that worries you?
> MY You know, I am not on a senior position…I had learnt quite enough on theories…
> Interviewee: MY Conducted by me on 19 Jan 2005, 1200 – 1225 at IMC, Factory I, Block D, 2/F Mtg. Rm.

This comment could be very specific to in-house AL program. In AL program where the project assigned belongs to some other companies, participants will perceive the assigned problem afresh. However in in-house AL program, their past experience toward the company could affect their attitude toward the Project.

5.4.3b High potential management staff as the participants

Some of the nine characteristics of high potential staff mentioned by Gritzmacher (1989) seemed to match with the behaviors of the IMBA... "…fast-trackers see their daily activities as fitting into a career pattern." (Gritzmacher, 1989). For example, LN, who dropped out of the program at the early stage repeatedly expressed that he want to invest the time on some formal education program which could help him gain some formal qualification and hence helpful to his career. Another member, MY expressed that he expected the IMBA should be something like an MBA program.

A collection of high potential management staff within an organization project an image of the program as a "fast track" program and the participants will be perceived as the "future star" of the organization. This seemed to motivate them to "play safe" and try out those action which were "success guaranteed". McCalland & Burnham (1976) concluded that the "institutional managers" who are interested in power and influence are most successful.

The participants use their own way of interpreting the "rule of the game" from day one (as RC had put it). This led me to re-think about the nature of participants for the IMBA Program – high potential management staff who had a track record and had made widely recognized accomplishment. They naturally have high confidence and good at (and also keen) influencing others.

The way the participants construct the experience of being granted the opportunity to join the Program could severely affect their perception on the nature of the learning arrangement. When the AL program was run in-house, the way they define the situation could be quite different from running outside. Powerful indication on the importance of learning result seemed to be needed

Given the fact that reflection as the key for learning to happen, are high potential management staff the right candidate for in-house AL program? The experience of running the IMBA informed me that the answers could be both yes and no.
High potential management staff being placed in in-house fast-track program will naturally accentuate their self-confidence, making the effort to ask them to engage in critical self-reflection difficult. On the other hand, they are the

group of people most in need of acquiring the capability of critical self-reflection.

I think a possible way to address this dilemma is not to position the AL program explicitly as a fast-track program for a group of elites.
Another way to address the problem could possibly be found on the area of engaging in reflection. While asking a successful to re-think his assumptions could be a highly unwelcomed exercise, the most successful executives would admit he or she have both strength and weakness. A helping relationship could be better build up by using the AL method to reinforce one's strength further and to improve or minimize the side effect of one's weaknesses.

5.4.3c Chinese cultural context

The compliance culture had some effect in the meeting with the senior management. In meeting with me, it doesn't seem to be a problem. As each participant had their own project, the requirement to communicate with each other was not a must. The original plan of having all participants to engage in one project which will enable the close communication to happen could not be carried out due to the termination of the Program.

5.4.3d Participants acquainted with each other

In Phase I of IMBA, the effect of familiarity with other and hence more in-depth communication and critical comment to each other had not been obvious. Each of the participants had their own project might weaken the need to have intense communication with each members.

5.4.4 Sub-questions 3 – What issues are raised by the use of a Revans' model of action learning in a Chinese context?

It is a puzzle for me to conclude whether those projects had really helped the participants to thought "afresh about their unconscious assumptions" (Revans, 1998, p.21). On the contrary, I found some participants had become even more entrenched in their original assumptions.

For example, MY decided that his project could not push further and that the company won't be success in launch new systems.
RC felt that there are too many uncontrollable variables in his quote time project and put a hold on his progress.

However, could I conclude that MY &RC had not think afresh about his own assumptions? They might have already done so seriously and concluded that their assumptions were very correct. As a facilitator, I could not make a judgment on it. One of the key ingredients of AL is "to take improved actions". By doing so, one could extend own capability and the knowledge gained in the process could enabled a better understanding of oneself and of the problem. The "action of not to take action" demonstrated by MY, CP and RC seemed to highlighted the dilemma of organizing AL program in-house.

Participants of in-house program had an advantage of being able to have a better understanding of the problem and a greater capability to execute their own proposed action. However, it is also these advantages that could sometimes become disadvantages. The "knowing too well" notion about the problem and the fear to face the possibility of failure and hence jeopardize one's career had deterred AL participants from taking bold actions. Taking safe and mean steps could reduce the problem to become a "puzzle" and the project becomes a lump of day-to-day operation steps. These could only diminish the benefits an in-house AL program could offer.

The case seems to indicate that there are some "internal dilemma" or "enemy from within" exist in the AL theories which needed to be resolved. I need to pay attention to it when I engage in the Cycle 2 of this research.

5.4.5 Sub-questions 4 – What are the implications for developing AL theory and practice in an in-house context?

I would like to answer this important by further breaking it down into several sub-titles with each one related to a key concept of AL.

5.4.5a Is there a thing call re-interpretation of past experience among the participants?

The “vehicle for individual change” is the project and the “ambassador” to deliver the change is the set members. Revans had painted a great portrait on the role of the set members:

> Lasting behavioural change is more likely to follow the reinterpretation of past experiences than the acquisition of fresh knowledge…Such re-interpretations of past experience, being necessarily subjective, complex and ill-structured, are more likely to be intelligible through exchanges with other managers themselves anxious to learn by re-ordering their own perceptions than through discussions with non-managers (including teachers of management) not exposed to real risk in responsible action.
> (Revans, 1998 p.9)

This proved to be a big assumption made by Revans that managers are “anxious to learn by re-ordering their own perceptions than through discussions with non-managers”. In the case of IMBA, it didn’t seem to be the case.

The participants are the experts of the problem and they should be. It is hard for the facilitator to motivate critical self-reflection. The senior management could actually play the role of stimulating reflection. However, participants felt the comment from senior management were not helpful. They felt that the management was just interested in pushing them to do the project rather then rendering help.

A project could easily be regard as “just another project” and be regard as “good for the company” rather then good for themselves. On the other hand, some participants felt the problem is organizational and originated from the top management and they felt they could do little about it.

But could the situation be improved by setting individual change objective also? By comparing against the change objectives others set for him, more factual data could be obtained and the degree of improvement could be suggested more easily. Furthermore it could facilitate an on-going monitoring of progress and feedback could be given and action plan could be made on an on-going basis.

5.4.5b What is the role of project in helping the participants to learn?

It doesn't seem that the project helped to stimulate a high motivation to learn among the participants. The arrangement of allowing the participants to choose their own problem had enabled the participants to execute their proposal but had also limited their motivation to do differently. The action they proposed was "do differently" for the organization. There was not enough data to indicate the new ways of doing things had changed the behaviour of the participants.

Choosing of problem for the Project had rarely been discussed in the AL literature. My experience of running the IMBA helps me to conclude that the issue of "Familiarity of the problem" could not be taken too lightly. Whether a problem is a familiar problem is critical for the participants learning but could be very difficult to determine. Familiarity of the problem is a matter of degree and depends a lot on the perception of the participants. Participants of in-house AL program will have high familiarity with the environment. Intentions of senior management will supersede the individual's thinking. He is not free to take his own action and hence could not reflect on his own action. Cases like MY, CP indicate their action are affected by their superiors.

In IMBA, the problem met the criteria of participants want to do something, and the problem were endorsed by the senior management. However it revealed that the participant will have a solution in mind when proposing the problem. It is therefore a puzzle rather then a problem.

The feedback of the participants towards the Problem Solving Training had also indicated that they felt the tools disseminated were too complicated. MF use the analogy of "using cannon to kill a mosquito" to describe the problem solving methods disseminated.

The IMBA experience also gave me a problem to find out a clear and obvious linkage between personal learning and the project. The difficulties for the IMBA participants to identify what they thought they need to learn could indicate this problem. If the participants interpret the situation as two different and un-related activities, the case of IMBA told me that the participants would perceive the project is "just another project" or an "assignment" to justify the Company's investment in the Program. They just want to get it done and get rid of it or to even to "forget about it". The project is more like a home work to entertain the senior management. There were virtually no connection between their individual development and the project. The lack of motivation could easily turn the facilitator's demand on project progress as a kind of pressure.

On the other hand, had I been too dogmatic towards the definition of reflective practice in literature? Had reflection actually happened and not noticed by me? Will the reflective practice of the Chinese high potential management staff in AL program had a form different from others?

5.4.5c The result of the learning experiences

The AL approach emphasis the process of group problem solving and the experience gained from the challenge. Even the proposed action failed to achieve the desired result, the participants could have a lot to learn.

When the AL program ran in-house, the expectation of the participants and the senior management affect the learning experience to a great extend. MY felt that the Company was "hopeless" when tight control was imposed on any alternation in the production process which ran contrary to his intention to make change. CP felt her project lost value when the Company put a halt to hiring new staff. RC inclined to give up when he found there were too many factors that could affect the quote accuracy were out of his control. All these environmental factors should be perceived as fertile ground for the participants and the dynamism of the situation differentiate action learning from classroom learning. However, the feeling of the participants could not be dismissed. A failure experience is not a good learning experience. When the project is about solving problem which is within one's own jurisdiction, failure to execute his proposal could mean a failure in his own job. To the participants, learning is about progress and a step by step process of proving to themselves that their capability had been raised and they had become a "better me". All those failure experience could only get them to construct a negative narrative towards their learning experience.

Most of the literature on AL depicts learning result as a kind of things that exist out there. My experience of running an AL program informed me that it could also be perceived as a social constructed experience. A free-hand and self-directed approach will be perceived by the participants as chaotic and lost of control. **Could individual change be placed in front of organizational change? For in-house AL programs, participants of the program were actually part of the organization and their change will naturally lead to organizational change.**

5.5
What need to be done differently?

Based on the experience gained in Cycle 1, I think I need to pay attention to the following issues when planning and conducting another in-house AL program for high potential Chinese staff. Certainly, whether all of these issues need to be addressed and in what way they need to be addressed should all depends on the situation and the organizational context in which the program is conducted.

5.5.1 Putting individual in front of organizational change

Focus on the strength of the participants. This is something which Raven had also mentioned:

> …the emphasis is put upon the progress of the fellow rather
> than upon his personal shortcomings or upon the processes
> of the dialectic in which he becomes caught up…
> (Revans, 1980, p. 293)

Participants need to have a clear and highly individualized learning objective and a set of learning material which could help them to learn from their action of achieving this learning objective

Revans was not object to programmed knowledge. What he emphasis is the "Q" which follows "P' (Programmed knowledge). The best learning material for a manager is his own action.

5.5.2 Need to provide provisions to enable critical reflection could happen

As an AL coach, I feel a strong need of a powerful tool to help me to help the participants to reframe the question.

> My reflections on four years (two + two) of working with the foremen at Williams Grand Prix are that the key elements in the Action Learning were most probably: courage, preparation and honesty.
> Courage is required because it is undoubtedly different. It is less scripted, more uncertain, which in the end means that the only way to know about it is to do it. There will never be …a 'right time'…a 'right group', or your feeling…'fully prepared'. It's like a parachute jump - which means of course that you prepare as carefully as you can! Preparation, I found, could be described in three phases:
>
> - starting -up and establishing the ground rules,
> - finding an acceptable framework by which to run the meetings,
> - creating a record in sufficient detail that it could be used by both the facilitator and the group as a reflective tool.
>
> (Giles, 1997, p.103)

The three points are exactly what I am not doing good enough in Case 1. The advice of Giles, plus the reflection on experience on the IMBA Program provided a good reference for me to work out my plan for the next action learning program – the Change for Growth Program

My conclusion is that adopting an Action Learning approach and the double loop learning as the reflection strategy could be more effective in the reflection process.

5.5.3 To emancipate the high potential managers from his own constrains

> According to critical educators, emancipation ranges from expansion of one's own perspectives and possibilities, to visible social transformation.
> (Fenwick, 2003 p.625)

I found that there were lots of constrains a manager had to face and most of them were created by the managers themselves. An AL program should not just focus on the "business issues" but should also help the participants to learn more about themselves. After all, a job is a job. The experience I gained from Cycle 1 was that running in-house AL Program could make the set members felt that the AL Project is just another job. Several IMBA members frequently utter that "It's my job anyway"; "I need to do it anyway". If the AL Project being treated as "just another project", it will severely affect the learning motivation of the set members. Worst of all, they might feel that they had been "tricked" by the company and thought that the company use the Program to get them do extra work.

5.6 Summary for Chapter 5

Although many of the features of the IMBA Program did matched the characteristics of AL and project results had been achieved and the top management was satisfied with it, I would still like to conclude it as a failure in terms of its inability to enable the participants to practice the CRWB. My experience of interacting with the participants informed me that they had not been changed a lot. Despite this, the experience of conducting the IMBA had provided me with extremely valuable information. It had informed me that the 5 key ingredients could not function effectively by just installing all those "key successful factors" such as the "set meeting", the voluntary participants, the top management support, etc.. (Please refer to Appendix 1C) I began to take a more reserved attitude towards those "success stories" of AL that adopted an 'anything goes stance' (Weinstein, 2006)

It highlighted the social constructive nature of the AL process – that knowledge about the IMBA arrangements I disseminated to the participants were "adaptive and active" rather than "static and passive" (Heylighen, 1993, p.1). It had also posed a challenge for the AL program organizer that they should not just focusing all their efforts on choosing a problem for the AL project but should also pay more attention to how the participants actually perceive it. Had they perceived it as a problem which is open-ended (Revans, 1980, p.292) and "no right answer" (Pedler, 1996, p.5) already existed. Cycle 1 had also informed me about the challenge of not just focus on making sure that adequate responsibility had been delegated to the participants to implement their proposed solution, but also able to make them believe that there is value to implement it in an organizational context they perceived as favourable and possibly, beneficial. Cycle 1 informed me on the difficulties for me to resolving the internal dilemma of encouraging experimentation on new course of action vs. the drive to run the program on schedule and "just get the job done". Without all of the above happening, it will not be hard to predict that critical reflective working behaviours would be hard to emerge.

Chapter 6

Cycle 2

Change for Growth (CFG) Program

Review of Cycle 1 equipped me with a better understanding the interplay of contextual factors in arranging in-house AL program for high potential management staff in Chinese cultural environment. Shortly after the discontinuation of the IMBA, I had the opportunity to start arranging an AL program for another company with a group of high potential management staff.

6.1 Identifying initial ideas and incorporating the revise general ideas in Cycle 1

The extension of Cycle 2 of my research provided me another iteration opportunity to test out my knowledge gained from organizing the IMBA. The research objective is to solve problems relating to the implementation of AL under the influence of the 4 contextual factors. The target participants of this new organization were founded to possess all of the attributes of the population of this research (described in Section 6.1.2). As the objective of AR are both solving problems and generating knowledge within it, extension of my study into another organization could even help to strengthen the external validity of the knowledge generated.

6.1.1 Background information

In Sep 2006, I got an assignment from the Consulting Company I work for , an assignment to help designing a development program for the management staff of a company which I call it Hong Kong Man Company (HMC).(Not a real name. Had checked in internet on 12 Jan 2010 and found no existing company had the same name)

After some management alignment workshops, which I took part in as co-facilitator, the senior management decided to focus the effort on its operation division, that is, the plant at Shenzhen.

They had hired a new Director of Operation – Mr. AH around half a year ago. There were a total of 9 managers reporting directly to him (had expanded to 10 later). Many of his subordinates were new hired and had good experience and high academic qualifications. The Company had high expectations of them and hoped that they could help to bring about changes in the organization. These 9 managers had been perceived as high potential staff of the Company.

6.1.2 The presence of the 4 contextual factors in HMC

6.1.2a In house

The fact that the participants of the Program were ALL the department heads of the Operations Division (OpD) and their reporting to the same immediate supervisor – the Director of OpD clearly qualified the CFG Program as an in-house or even as an in-division program. All the participants were a natural work team who had a close inter-departmental working relationship. OpD was the biggest Division of the Company and all the participants were peer level.

6.1.2b Chinese cultural context

HMC is a manufacturing company of Hong Kong specializing in the manufacturing of products relating to household and personal care. The Company had a history of over 30 years and is a privately owned company.

HMC operated a plant in Shenzhen in China which currently employing over 6000 staff. Except for the President, who was an American and some of the highly technical and senior management staff who were international (coming from India, Singapore, America etc.), the vast majority of the management and supervisory staff were Hong Kong or local Chinese. Although the President was an American, he had been living in Hong Kong for well over 20 years and had been very adaptive to the Chinese culture.

Obviously, HMC could be said as operating in a typical Chinese cultural context.

6.1.2c The participants were high potential management staff

The same definition of high potential management staff used in IMBA still apply here – those who had been identified as high potential by the top management and had passed some kinds of screening. Unlike the IMBA Program, recruitment and screening process were not required in the CFG Program. However, as 7 of them (out of 10) were newly hired (many of them less then 6 months), they had been screened in a rigorous manner. Many of the participants were occupying position newly created and they were expected to help the Director, who was also newly recruited, to lead some key changes in the organization.

Anyway, my experience of Cycle 1 informed me that after all those "sophisticated" screening process, it was still the intention of the top management to make the ultimate decision of who deserved to be included in the "high potential" staff list (as in the case of the joining of MF who had "bypassed" all the screening procedures).

HMC wish to focus the resources on this team

The importance of this team could be evidenced from the HMC's original plan to develop all of it's executives to focus just on the Operation Division's managers. The consultant project was originally targeted for all of the Company's strategic business units (SBU). After the initial stage of strategic alignment with all the SBUs, the top management wished to focus their resources on the most important SBU of the Company – the Operations Division (OpD). OpD was the Division that was responsible the ultimate delivery of the product and hired the most workers in the Company.

When interviewing the senior management of HMC, they had, for several times, mentioned that this group of executives were the key staff for the Company. Actually, one of the participants – PK had been promoted to a more senior position in mid 2009. Several other participants had also been mentioned by the Director of OpD that they had been placed in the list of to-be promoted soon.

Newly joined with high academic and rich experience background

Seven participants served in the Company for less than one year (Please refer to Appendix 6A). Like many new staff, the need to prove their value made them more eager to deliver high performance output and to make changes. This could be evidenced in the comments they made in the interview which will be discussed in the subsequent section.

Team members possess high potential staff attributes

They had also possessed one or several of what Gritzmacher (1989) (please refer to Chapter 2) described as the nine key characteristics of fast-trackers including (2) A broad-thinking style (3) Time-consciousness, (4) Independence, (5) High commitment: & (9) Continual improvement:

A broad-thinking style & High commitment

PK had indicated a visionary thinking and stated his mission in a sense that went well beyond his present job-bound parts.

> I think this Company will be more receptive to new things and more easy to engage in research and development. This is what I most want this Company to be able to achieve.
> (Interview PK, 30 Apr 07, Transcription row #33,)

Drive for continuous improvement & Independence

The most common attributes being the "continual improvement: a hunger to challenge and improve whatever they are involved in."

> What I looking forward to is a more complete change, (…), will there be anything that could be dispose of? Make it more simple and effective. As I had said, whenever customer made a demand or the big boss had said something, or want to get something, all the people will be working on it. Should we firstly think about the necessity of do so? That's what I looking forward to – simple and effective.
> (Interview PF on 30 Apr 07 This conversation start at around 5min. after the interview began.)

The interview with TC had also indicated his strong desire for self improvement

40	15:25	TC	From time to time, I want to listen to other's comment towards me. I really want to upgrade myself further. Cos' over the past years of working life, ah… especially for the recent 4 to 5 years, I felt myself make contribution more then to learn other things. (…) That's why I had a feeling that I came to a stage of stagnation. I hope that through this forum (program) I could fortify…

Interview TC on 2 May 07

Source: Data / Meet each 2 May / Transcription_TC 2 May 07

Time consciousness

Another common attribute was the "Time-consciousness: a drive to achieve the most as soon as possible; a drive to achieve a goal and embrace the next one."

> I am the kind of person, ah, I like those who behave like a tiger. TC look like very humble and PK also has an outlook like that. However, they are always already for a fight and whenever the time had come, they will sprang forward immediately. They are tigers.
>
> (Interview KY on 30 Apr 07 This conversation start at around 20min. after the interview began)

In view of the management's high expectation on the whole Operations team as evidenced by the senior management's commitment in their development, the positions they occupies and the aspiration they expressed, they could be described as high potential managers.

6.1.2d The participants were acquainted with each other

All the participants belonged to the Operations Division with the Director of Operation as their immediate supervisor. Five of them had been working in HMC for more then 2 years (some of them over 5 years) and hence, knew each other quite well. Although some of them were new joiners, some of them knew each other when they had served previously in the same company (e.g. KC, WC, PK) before joining HMC. In summary, their close working relationship and their belonging to the same Division enabled me to make a safe claim that they were acquainted with each other.

6.2
Literature review for Cycle 2

The literature review was actually an on-going process I engaged alongside with the conducing of the IMBA program. It had not been stopped ever since the embarkment of my PhD program. However, with hindsight, the cutting short of the IMBA program was indeed a blessing to me as I could engage in a complete re-examination on my understanding of the AL and a re-interpretation on the experience. The purposes for me to conduct a second round of literature review for Cycle 2 were discussed below under the headings of the following sections.

Most of the literature I went through gave me little advice on these areas. Accounts on practices abound but almost all claimed their program were highly successful. Few provided a critical reflective account on what they had done and almost none mentioned the kinds of problems I encountered in Cycle 1. I therefore decided to adopt the AL approach – review once more on the literature on what I had reviewed and try to look for new understanding and a reinterpretation of my experience in Cycle 1.

6.2.1 Re-read the literatures I studied in Cycle 1 to see if there are any misunderstanding and look for new insights

In the course of looking for more literature, I had the chance to re-read Mumford's (1996) essay and found the following lines particularly enlightening:

> I have undertaken action learning processes with professionals, with managers at a variety of levels, and with directors. (…)I was proud of the fact that they had agreed to work in pairs on their personal development plans and on the learning review. The mistake I made was not to ask them to discuss the benefits of formalizing these reviews in the sense of writing revisions of their personal development plans as they went through the programme, and writing learning logs and formal learning reviews prior to arrival at the next workshop. (…) (since they managed everything else by formal commitments on paper they could and should manage their learning processes similarly).
> (Mumford, 1996, p. 3)

Rereading Mumford's essay had enlightened me after equipped with the experience of Cycle 1. The following points Mumford mentioned had inspired me particularly. I'll put them under three headings and explain why I regard the points were useful and what I planned to do in Cycle 2 to materialize the advise.

6.2.1a To arrange the participants to "work in pairs on their personal development plans and on the learning review"

One of the difficulties I encountered in Cycle 1 was that the group coaching could not turned the IMBA participants into "comrades in adversity". As discussed in the previous chapter, reasons might be that the group was either too large or the participants all had different projects to work on and had shared little interest towards other people's problem. Let the participants work in pairs on top of the "set" could be more manageable for individual participants to give feedback to each other.

6.2.1b To "formalizing these reviews in the sense of writing revisions of their personal development plans as they went through the programme"

The experience of IMBA informed me that critical self reflection and the "re-interpretation of past experience" did not "just happen" as assumed by Reg Revans. High potential management staff normally have little time and patience. The role of the facilitator is important in this respect and the facilitator need to adopt a more systematic approach and the area to reflect on need to be more specific. A more systematic and organized approach to help participants to engage in critical reflection is needed.

6.2.1c His suggestion that "since they managed everything else by formal commitments on paper they could and should manage their learning processes similarly"

Mumford's notion inspired me on the need to adopt a documented approach which I think could work. The executives in the manufacturing industry were especially accustomed to document everything. In the production process, there were numerous documents for sign off, test reports to generate and quality reports to read on. They were use to those ISO, 6 Sigma, 5S systems which required a rigid adherence to procedures and a good housekeeping on documentations. I could see no reason why I should not adopt Mumford's suggestion by using a "commitment on paper" approach in Cycle 2.

6.2.2 To see whether by re-visiting those literatures, could help me to reinterpret my experience of Cycle 1

The experience of IMBA informed me how easily everyone could get lost in the myopia of action. The purpose of learning in AL was forgotten particularly easily in in-house AL programs. Perhaps, that was also the fallacy of AL where only the "A" – the action, was always on the top list of agenda. But the reason could also be due to that the "A" is most visible. In what way the "L" could be made equally visible? An analogy could be that both "A" and "L" are two runners on two parallel tracks. This enable the on-going feedback possible – that "L" on track 1 could stimulate "A" on track 2 to run even faster.

> Again we need to remember that most of the time learning is, while conceptually the purpose of action learning, practically constantly reduced to second place in terms of real attention. <u>So they will need to be rewarded from time to time with a review of developed skills which they see as being probably more practical managerially</u>.
> (Mumford, 1996)(Underlined by me)

Mumford's notion that the participants "need to be rewarded from time to time with a review of developed skills which they see as being probably more practical managerially" was something that I had failed to do in Cycle 1. It was due to the lack of specific skills that the participants had expressed which they wanted to improve from the outset and hence a viable action plan to achieve those improvements would not be possible.

> (…) One of the issues we need to face however about the kind of experience being reviewed and the process through which it is being reviewed is that participants can and do erect defensive barriers to discussion of some issues and circumstances
> (Mumford 1996)

The expression of MY that he felt it useless to improve in face of the turbulent organizational situation and the reason of deferring of his action expressed by RC due to the slacking of monitoring and the departure of some members could be viewed as "defensive behaviours". In Cycle 1, I found myself in a difficult position to get them critically reflect on those behaviours due to my role as a program organizer and I am not an insider and hence equipped with adequate knowledge to challenge their "expressed reasons".

6.2.3 To look for any updated literature on AL since 2006 – the conclusion of the Cycle 1

Many literature on AL had been produced since 2006 but not too many of them jumped out at me as compelling or revolutionary and add to my knowledge profoundly. The followings were some of the precious few.

6.2.3a The "P" – Literature related to programmed knowledge

In Cycle 1, my thought had been sticking to the conception that "P" should be something that related to formal knowledge or some kinds of training courses, books etc.. Weinstein's (2006) notion matched up well with the things that I seem to find – the "P" was those stuff that we "carries around without thinking".

> Others point out that P – programmed knowledge – is not just what is read about in books, articles (or chapters!) but is all the programmed beliefs, assumptions and hence behaviours that each of us carries around without thinking (our personal baggage!), and which needs to be addressed if we are to learn and change.
> (Weinstein, 2006)

Are there many P that the participants "carries around without thinking" in the IMBA? Many, I could say when I take up this perspective. One example was EW's thinking that her past way to source new supplier could be superior in cost and quality which might be true in her past company but may not be true when she came to a new company with a different order quantity, payment policy and quality standard. Another was MY's thinking that a good learning program should be one that resembled those offering in the university's MBA program. All these represent some conception and knowledge gained from past experiences that both MY and EW carried around all the time.

6.2.3b "Q'ing each other" – Literature related to "questioning insight"

Clarke et al (2006) described the set members who were all (small and medium enterprise) SME owners found critical reflection extremely useful:

> First, an interesting finding of the evaluation was that the discursive and critical reflection aspects of the set environment appeared to be of great utility and importance to the owner-managers involved in the study. (…) The challenges posed by the group members also helped managers realize the limitations of the views they currently held and led to changes in their management styles and approaches to their businesses.
> (Clarke et al, 2006, p. 441)

The "challenge posed by the group members" could indeed happen in a set meeting and it could lead to critical reflective behaviour. However, the AL program Clarke et al mentioned were not in-house and the set members were "owner-managers" of SMEs and hence not acquainted with each other.

6.2.3c Literature related to the "real problem"

Clark et al (2006) had made such observation:

> …the research shows that most set studies did have difficulties in separating business and personal issues. (…) Action learning, it seems has the potential to effectively encompass both business and personal issues as the process helps managers to address these underlying issues.
> (Clarke et al, 2006, p. 441)

As discovered in Cycle 1, the participants were part of the problem but regrettably, insufficient attention had been given to individual set members from the outset. Clark et al's observation helped me to re-frame my assumption that high potential managers, after being rigorously selected and the senior management's support was present, could handle themselves competently. **Those high potential managers might be totally competent to handle the project themselves but may not be able to handle the learning from doing the project with others by admitting ignorance – in other word, incompetent to learn from action.**

6.2.4 To review new literature related to revised or new actions I intends to take in Cycle 2

One of the problems I encountered in Cycle 1 originated from the insufficient attention given to the individual set members – their aspiration, their personalities and their learning objectives...

In order that the feedback could be meaningful to the individual, personal change objective should be set so that a comparison could be drawn subsequently. By receiving feedback related to those areas the participants want to change most, the feedback could be more meaningful. With this in mind, I started to look for some kinds of tools for assessing individual capabilities which related to work behaviours rather then just on personality.

6.2.4a Selecting tools that could enhance systematic reflections – The Strength Finder Test

Before I had prepared a formal proposal for the HMC, I got another assignment by the end of 2006 from the consulting company I worked for to conduct a staff development program for a major US IT company's operation in China. I had been sent to Singapore where I was being trained, together with other outsourced trainer all over Asia, on the skills of delivering the Program which had already been rolled out in US and many other places of the world. The Program adopted a book called "Now, Discover Your Strength" by Buckingham, M., & Clifton, D.O., (2001) as its theoretical framework. I was particularly interested in the core concept mentioned in the Book which could be summarized as:

1. Each person's greatest room for growth is in the areas of the person's greatest strength. (p.215.)
2. Each of us has weakness, if these weaknesses interfere with our strengths; we need to develop strategies to manage around them… (This) will only help us prevent failure. It will not help us reach excellence. (p.124)
3. Your talents,…are the most important raw material for strength building. Identify your most powerful talents, hone them with skills and knowledge, and you will be well on your way to living the strong life. (Buckingham & Clifton 2001, p.61.)

Each book also come along with a password which allow its reader to take an on-line test called "Strength Finder" so that a report could be generated indicating the 5 significant talents of the person. Apart from the desirable experience of using this book in the IT company's staff development program, I choose this book as one of the "P" for the HMC for three other reasons

It echo with AL's notion that managers should learn from each other

Buckingham, & Clifton, (2001) argues that we all have strengths and weaknesses. The big question is what useful things can come from this revelation.

> (…) among the excellent performers we interviewed, we found thousands who had become experts in the art of complementary partnering. They not only could describe their strengths and weaknesses in vivid detail but also identified someone close by whose strengths matched their weaknesses.
> (Buckingham & Clifton 2001, p.155)

The authors' avocation gives extra meaning for set meeting in AL where set members come together not just to solve the problem but also to learn from each other – on skills and knowledge.

It encourages self-reflection to discover one's talents

The Book lists a set of thirty-four strengths, identifying and describing one per page. The individual descriptions of each strength are detailed enough that, with some honest self-evaluation. One can pretty quickly figure out which strengths one has and which ones one does not have. When applying in an AL program, the real power of this strength finding process came with the self-evaluation and self reflection, not with the actual naming of the strengths.

> The majority of the world's population doesn't think that the secret to improvement lies in a deep understanding of their strengths.
> (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001, p.122)

Through taking part in the AL process of solving problems, one could have a chance to discover their gut reactionary solution to the problem situation and hence reflect on it.

It encourages taking action to polish skills that could reveal one's talent and manage roadblock to those talents

The authors postulated an idea which was very akin to the ideal of Revans.

> Your talents, your strongest synaptic connections, are the most important raw material for strength building, Identify your most powerful talents, hone them with skills and knowledge, and you will be well on your way to living the strong life.
> (Buckingham, & Clifton, 2001, p.61)

6.2.4b Literature on peer feedback

A number of organizations now use 360 degree feedback or multi-rater instruments as a tool for determining such disparities in leadership perception; however the current methodology is generally limited to the individual. The basic premise behind 360 degree feedback is to draw responses regarding leader effectiveness from upward (i.e. bosses, supervisors, etc.), peer level (i.e. co-workers, team-members, etc.) and downward (i.e. followers, employees, etc.) sources. These ratings are compared to the leader's self-ratings in order to determine disparities or blind spots. It is believed that such information will enhance the rates'' self-awareness, subsequently leading to improved leadership skills through a better understanding of their own abilities, and others' expectations (London and Beatty, 1993). For example, Thatch (2002) determined that in conjunction with coaching, multi-rater feedback accounted for increases in leadership effectiveness by as much as 60 per cent. Using a sample of 281 executives, the researcher found that dissemination of 360 degree feedback through coaching sessions improved the self-awareness of the executives and perceived leadership effectiveness over a six-month period.

As 360 degree feedback would involve many more people and more threatening for the managers. After discussing with the HMC's management, it was resolved that 180 degree feedback – feedback from the participant's immediate supervisors and from the peers of the same ranking would be more appropriate.

6.2.4c Literature on change management

Experience from cycle 1 informed me that participants, especially those new joint staff, were too eager to "carry forward" their past successful experiences, hence focusing exclusively on the technical details and lost sight of the need to overcoming all the roadblocks. In order to meet the expectation of HMC's expectation that the program participants could be more competent in leading changes in the organization, the topic on change management had been adopted as the major topic for learning.

As Kotter's model (discussed in Chapter 2) had incorporated more common items among the three models and his book "Leading Change" had been translated into Chinese, I decide to adopt it as the "P" – the programmed knowledge, for the CFG Program. (Please refer to Appendix 6B for detail of Kotter's 8 Steps Model)

The Kotter's Eight Steps process not only served as the "P" for the CFG Program but served well as the Program design framework. I grouped Steps 1 to 6 as Phase I of the program which will be concluded by a "short-term wins" – a project for improving the Operations Division's own performance which was only a "puzzle". In Phase II, which corresponds to Step 7 & 8, will be concluded by an inter-departmental project which could satisfy the definition of "problem" in AL.

6.3
Reconnaissance (fact finding and analysis)

6.3.1 Get the input from the HMC's top management

After discussing with the CEO of the consultant which I worked for and with the senior management of HMC, we had drawn the following conclusions:

1. Many direct reports (manager grade) of AH (the Operations Director) were newly recruited.
2. The senior management do wished that AH (the Operations Director) and his team could introduce some change.
3. AH is driving some changes in the organization which

were recognized as important for the long term success of the organization.

4. Some resistance to change had appeared and AH need support.
5. Due to some incident, (the handling of the flooding happened a few months ago and the complaint of some of AH's subordinates towards his leadership style) the senior management don't seem to have 100% confidence in AH. The vice-president and the HR Mgr. had expressed their wish to give AH some support to prove his ability.

6.3.2 Get the input from the Operations Director – the immediate supervisor of all the participants

After my visit to the factory and met HMC's Director of Operation – AH, I was assigned to work out with him directly to explore the need and to propose a development program for his direct reports who amount to 9 managers. I personally made an appointment with him on 22 Feb 2007, shortly after the Chinese New Year in a coffee shop in HK to get more of his input for my design of the Program. We talk casually on the need and I make some suggestions which AH seemed to be quite in agreement with.

After that, I had made a note (Please refer to Appendix 6C) on the key points discussed and forward them to AH and the CEO of the consultant company which I worked for. Receiving no objection on the approach, I started to prepare a proposal for the final approval of the top management.

6.4
General Plan

Armed with the understanding of the senior management's expectation and the background of the target participants, I endeavoured to work out a proposal that could assimilate the above and the experiences I had gained in Cycle 1. Appendix 6D presents in what way the "elements" I included In Cycle 2 could be helpful to address the issues I encountered in Cycle 1.

6.4.1 Proposal submitted and adopted by the HMC

In fact, the proposal I made to HMC in March 07 represent only a broad framework. It allowed me to made adjustment based on the further understanding on the problem and need of the Operation team. The following are two of the PowerPoint presentation slides I included in the Proposal to HMC.

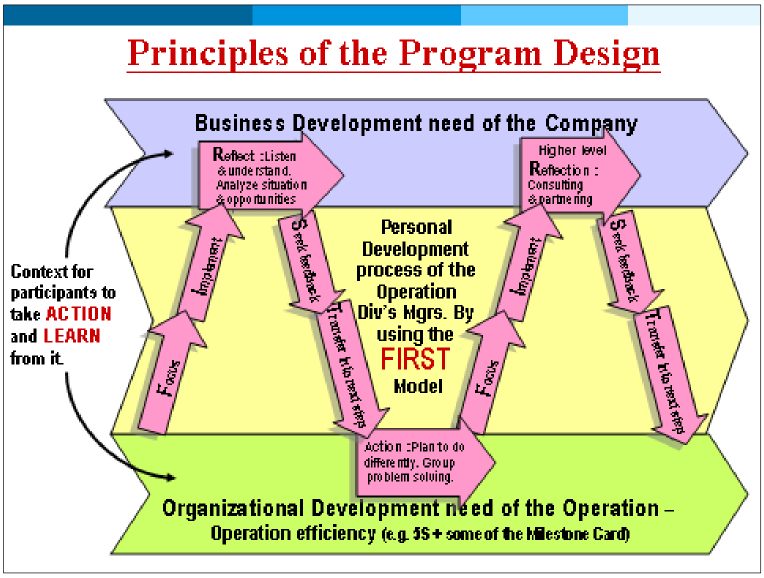


Diagram 6A Principles of program design for the CFG Program

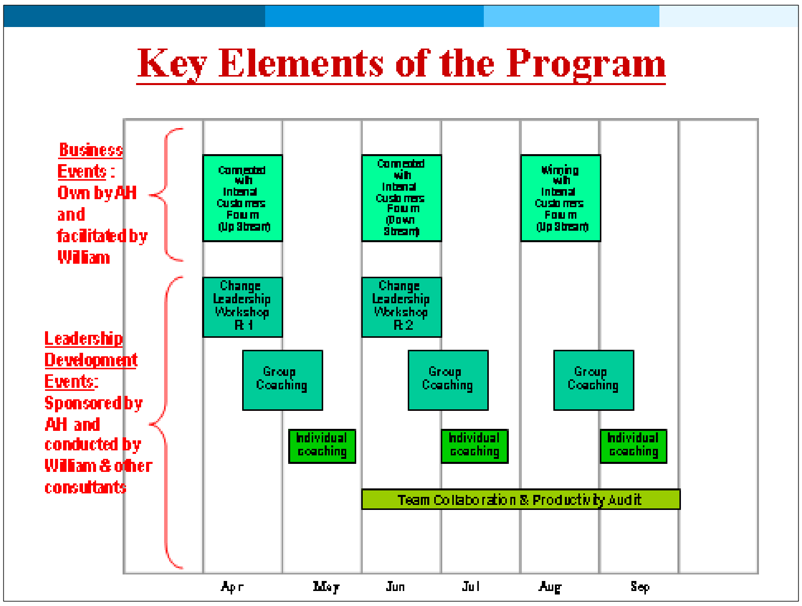


Diagram 6B Key elements in the CFG Program

Actually, the broad framework of the activities had been adhered to but a lot of "implementation details" had been fed in as the Program roll on. I therefore would like to narrate the Program design and content in a way resembling the IMBA. It would better able to tell why and how I made the design and in what way my previous action had created impact on my subsequent action.

After several amendments, I presented my final proposal to the Senior Management of HMC at their Head Office on 3 Apr 07. The Proposal was approved in the Meeting. The program was called "Change for Growth" which built-in the following characteristics:

1. Subject of learning is change management.
2. Learning method is action learning.
3. Source of reflection is the feedback from me, from senior management and from peers.

6.4.2 Master calendar of key activities and list of critical incidents

A calendar on the key events was placed in Appendix 6E. As there are many activities or events, I will refer the activities I described later to the "serial #" of the events or activities from time to time so as to avoid confusion. Furthermore, apart from those key activities, I will also include some critical incidents in the Calendar.

The activities specified in the Master Calendar did not represent ALL the activities I engaged. There were numerous small meetings, unofficial sharing which happened in between those activities. I will include those activities which, though not intended to be significant, did yield significant results. These activities will be presented alongside the key activities or critical incidents as specified in the Master Calendar. In the following Sections, I will present the key activities as specified in the Master Calendar in chronological order. In order to show the strategy I intended to take to cope with the issues arising from Cycle 1 as spelled out in Table 6I

6.5

Action Steps : Induction Meeting 23 Apr 07

6.5.1 Implementing action step

The Induction Meeting was arranged on 23 April 2007 with AH and all his 9 direct reporting managers attending. I had actually met all of them before in the company wide consultancy project conducted half year ago by the consultant company I had worked for.

While this Activity was more like a formality for every AL program, I hope, on top of the formality purpose, it could also address some of the issues that I had experienced in Cycle 1.

6.5.1a How this activity could meet the characteristic of AL

People in manufacturing industries who are mostly very practical people and they care more how you can help to solve their problem. Therefore, rather then telling everyone from the outset what is action learning, I choose a Motto for this Program which is reminiscence of Revan's "There's no learning without action and no action without learning."

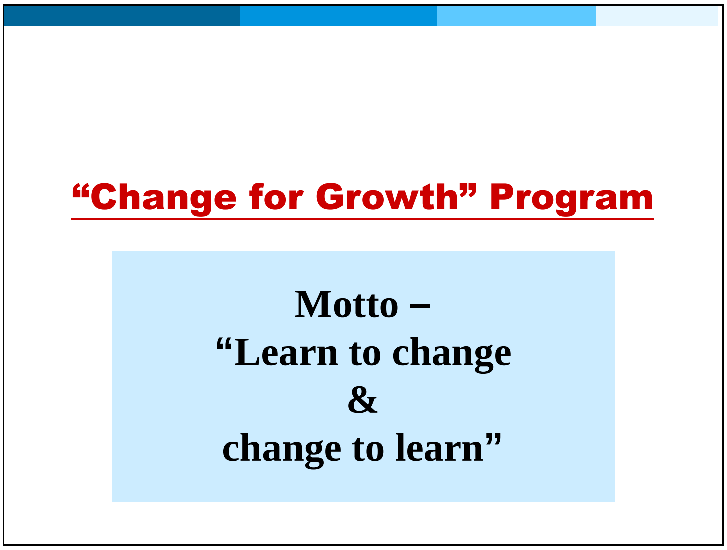


Diagram 6C Motto for CFG Program p.216

Source: Briefing Mtg / Briefing Mtg on 23 Apr, Slide #10

Instead of disseminating the concept of AL directly, I choose the Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle which was widely recognized in the field of quality management. I added "learning" between the "check" and "act" to highlight the importance of enabling one to take improved action – "Act wiser".

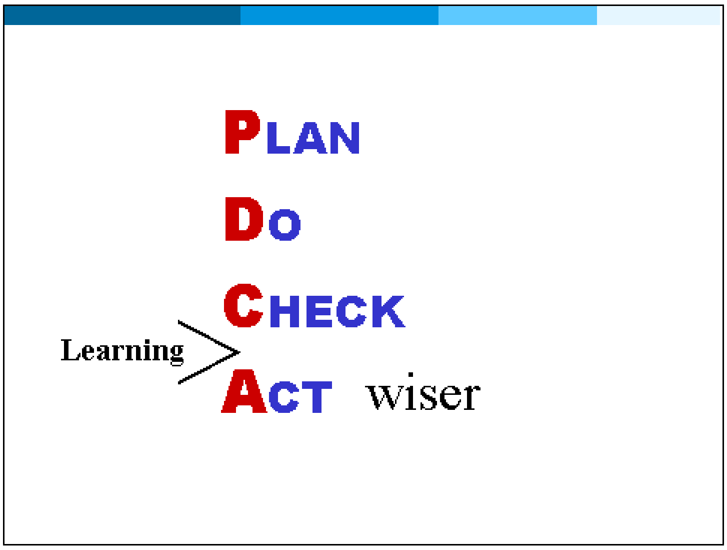


Diagram 6D The analogy of PDCA Cycle for CFG Program

Source: PPT in Change Leadership Workshop Part 1a

6.5.1b How this activity could address the issues arising in Cycle 1

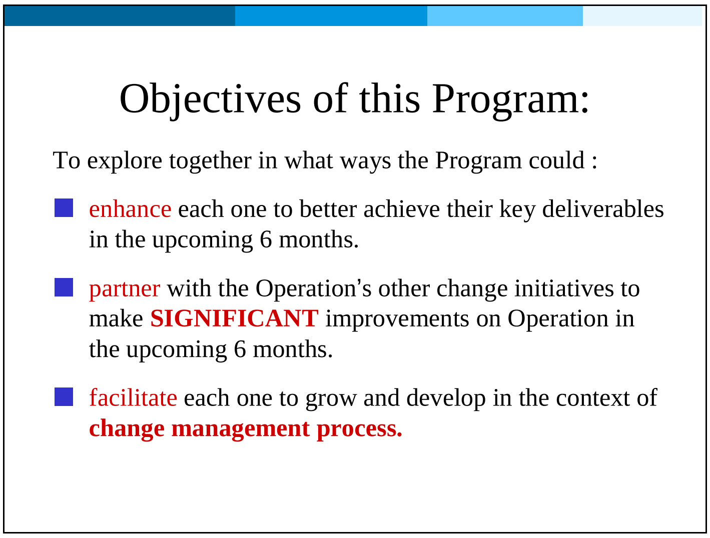
In order to present a clear idea on the way I design this activity so that the problems I encountered in Cycle 1 could be partly addressed, I will recall the relevant part of the Table 6.I for the reader's easy reference.

		Issues discovered in Cycle 1 that need to be addressed in Cycle 2	Briefing Mgt
The "L"		Role conflict of me – drive for business result vs. learning result of the project	✓
*Other key success factors	Clear objective for the program	Objective of learning not clear.	✓

Table 6A How the issues discovered in Cycle 1 had been addressed in Cycle 2 by arranging Briefing Meeting

How the issues discovered in Cycle 1 – "Role conflict of me – drive for business result vs. learning result of the project", could partly be addressed in this activity?

In the Meeting, I had also expelled the parallel tasks of organizational and individual changes as shown in the point 2 & 3 of the following slide. This represented my attempt to achieve a better balance between taking action to solve the problem and to learn from it.



<u>Diagram 6E Objectives of the CFG Program</u>

Source: Briefing Mtg / Briefing Mtg on 23 Apr, Slide #13

Of the three objectives stated above, the 1st one will be measured against the individual member's key performance indicator (KPI) which had been agreed with their own supervisor individually. For the 2nd objective, it will be measured against the KPI as specified in the H.O.W. projects which will be detailed in the upcoming section. (Section 6.8.1, Part 3) As the ultimate intention of the top management to arrange this Program was to support the new Director of OpD by strengthening his relatively new team, my production of an observation report on the team functioning at the end of the CFG Program will be suffice as a measurement on the achievement of the 3rd objective.

How the issues discovered in Cycle 1 –"Objective of learning not clear", could partly be addressed in this activity?

In slide number 14 of the presentation, with the heading "Guiding Principles for the Program Design", I had actually spelled out the objective of learning.

Guiding Principles for the Program Design

- Materialize [HMC]'s value and strategy
- Start from our strengths.
- Learn from our own actions
- Strengthen our change management skills
- Continuous improvement
- Make our learning benefit the whole organization.

Diagram 6F Guiding principles for the design of CFG Program

In the Meeting, I had also highlighted the principle of collaboration between me and the participants so that the desirable result could be achieved.

6.5.2 Reflection

In the round-the-table discussion session, when all of the participants were asked about their concern, most of their responses were about "time factors". They were extremely busy in their day to day work and they expressed that allocating time for the program so that everyone could be present could be a major challenge.

6.5.3 Learning & Impact on my professional practice and subsequent action

This Meeting informed me on the importance to pay attention to the time issues. I made the decision that rather then organizing one full day training, it will be better for me to split them into 2 or 3 two or three-hours sessions.

6.6

Action steps: Strength Finder Test

6.6.1 Implementing action step

A key deliverable in the Induction Meeting is the introduction of the Strength Finder Test. Every one get a Chinese version of the book “Now, discover your strength” (except for RR who could not read Chinese). After the session, each will be invited to complete an on-line test with the key provided inside each book. The Test could be completed in about 20 min. and a report will be generated automatically indicating the five “signature talents” of the participant. A sample of the report on 5 signature talents could be found in Appendix 6Q

After the reports were generated, I made a consolidation on them and produced a matrix on the team’s talent profile. It is not each one’s talent profile that concerned me most, it was their feeling toward the profile content that was my major concern. In fact, most of the participants found the 5 signature talents a fairly good match with their own perception of themselves.

The Test was intended only as a vehicle for eliciting communication on the individual member’s thinking about their learning and most important of all – to take action. I had caution them from time to time that we are not labelling people and the talents only serves as a reference material to add to our understanding of ourselves. They were always welcome to suggest thinking contrary to the finding.

6.6.1a How this activity could address the issues arising in Cycle 1

This activity rarely appears in the AL literature and was not a constituting part of the 5 key ingredients of AL. However, it was instrumental for enhancing the “P” and “facilitating” other key ingredients and key success factors to happen. (As discussed in the subsequent section).

		Issues discovered in Cycle 1 that need to be addressed in Cycle 2	Strength Finder Test & the book – Now Discover Your Strength	**How I design this activity in ways that could address the issues arising in Cycle 1**
5 key ingred-ients	The P	Want to learnt something new and practical	✓	Test result and the explanation on the 32 talents were new and practical as this knowledge related to individual.
	Real problem	Members as part of the problem	✓	Create awareness of ones talent and the need to manage around the roadblocks associated with the talents.
		Feel oneself doing extra and benefit the Company only	✓	The action taken not only could benefit organization but could serve as a "stage" for one to strengthen the talent and remove the roadblocks.
	"Q'ing" each other	Difficult to induce critical reflective working behaviour	✓	Inviting individual to rethink one's action and compare them to the objective of strengthening one's talent and minimizing the roadblocks could induce critical self reflection.
*Other key success factors	Facilitator	Lacking "tools" & authority to facilitate critical self reflective behaviours	✓	Same as above + agreed personal improvement objective.
	Careful selection of partici-pants	Nomination by department heads shrank size of the selection pool.	✓	Test result help to allocating people to Team A & B

Table 6B How the issues discovered in Cycle 1 had been addressed in Cycle 2 by adopting Strength Finder Test & Kotter's book

How the issues discovered in Cycle 1 – "Members as part of the problem", could partly be addressed in this activity?

Started with the identification of one's own talent, this approach was embedded in the "positive psychology" tradition claimed by the book's authors. I am not intended to go into a detail literature review on this psychology tradition as it will be out of the scope of my study. However, I did find it fit in well with the spirit of AL as the authors' emphasis of turning one's talents into strength by finding the right context of application. This echo with the spirit of AL which encourages people to take action and to improve by learning from the experience of taking action.

How the issues discovered in Cycle 1 – "Difficult to induce critical reflective working behaviour", could partly be addressed in this activity?

The objective of the CFG program was to help participants to change themselves in order to effectively change the organization. Rather then adopting a banking approach, which address one's deficiencies, the approach of the Book stated the approach of managing those roadblock which block the effective application of talents rather then improve all weakness fit in well with the adult learning philosophy.

How the issues discovered in Cycle 1 – "Lacking "tools" & authority to facilitate critical self reflective behaviours", could partly be addressed in this activity?

In the individual coaching sessions, I can make use of each of the member's talent profile and check with them on their personal improvement in the project.

6.6.2 Reflection

Interview KY on 30 Apr 07 This conversation start at around 26min.

after the interview began

378	26:05	KY	Ah, so, AH had talked with me briefly. He said some of the talents…did not quite represent you. He said, some described you appropriately but some did not. (Researcher: Yeah)
(…)			
390	27:07	KY	Ah, I think AH feel it is this part that didn't quite represent me. Cos' I am quite stiff
(…)			
394	27:18	KY	Those I admire not necessarily meant that I belongs to that kind
395		WW	Ha, ha, ha,ha
396	27:21	KY	Ah, ah, may be a bit too easy to get irate, a bit irate, ah… not very good at adjusting with others.

Immediate supervisor's involvement

Firstly, the supervisor of the participants did communicate with the members on the program.

KY mentioned that AH had talked with him on the test findings. Actually Ah had also communicated this with some other members. I had provided a matrix summary on the signature talents of all of the 9 members (the members had been informed on that) to AH but had NOT asked him to discuss with the members. What I felt surprised was that AH actually had conversation with his subordinates on the Test results. It is a good involvement of the sponsor much more valuable then making a mere presence in training workshops. The behaviour of AH will create a positive impact to motivate the program participants to engage in critical reflection on themselves which I found very difficult to start in the IMBA Program.

Natural start of critical self reflection

Secondly, the Test findings did provided a good point to start a very personal dialogue with the members which was quite important for me in the subsequent individual coaching session. As shown in the above example. KY was a man, as he described himself, of more stiff and quick temper. However, it was he who led me to the self disclosure. <u>A critical self reflective process had been started quite naturally. Actually, I had only asked KY a neutral question: what he felt about the test result.</u>

Another illustration on the natural start of this critical self reflection could be found in interviewing PF – the Operations manager on 30 Apr 07.

42	27:07	PF	(…)So this is just my wish…that is my own wish list of strength. For me, that means, ah, yeah, may be I hope that, I could do it in front of others…I may be a bad guy (WW: Yeah), but in fact, I am not. I am still pondering on this. Is that really me? I may think so but it fact it is not. I am, I am still experiencing…
(…)			
44	28:24	PF	(…) I do wish to have har(mony). But my actual behaviour probably could not exhibit this, ha…

Full version of this section of interview could be found in Appendix 6F

Appreciation of the approach

Interview TW - Supply Chain & Material Mgr. on 7 May 07

8	02:19 TW	Ever since I was a kid, parents frequently ask this sort or question: OK you got a mark of 95 so where the remaining 5 marks had went to? (WW: Ha ha ha ha) So, that is, that this is …a new approach to me. I used to, ah…my personal development, which is my career, for my own self, is always, quite focus on my own weakness and how to improve them. I always think about the need to remedies them and think the proper way is to focus the effort to improve them will do well for me. So…I never thought of maximizing my own strength. (…)

Full version of this section of interview could be found in Appendix 6G

6.6.3 Learning & Impact on my professional practice and subsequent action

The feedback from the members encouraged me that the following issues I encountered in cycle 1 had effectively been addressed through the incorporation of the Test in an AL program:

Related 5 Key Ingredients	Issues discovered in Cycle 1	Indications on those issues being effectively addressed.
The P	Want to learnt something new and practical	TW felt the approach of "building up one's strength" "new" and thought provoking.
Real problem	Members as part of the problem	Critical self reflection could be started naturally.
"Q'ing" each other	Difficult to induce critical reflective working behaviour	Same as above + the involvement of the participant's immediate supervisor.
Facilitator	Lacking "tools" & authority to facilitate critical self reflective behaviours	Same as above.

Table 6C How the issues discovered in Cycle 1 had been addressed in Cycle 2 p.227

6.7

Action Steps : Interview with each of the participants

6.7.1 Implementing action step

After the participants had completed the Strength Finder Test, I conducted an interview with them (Activities #3 in the Master Calendar) to obtain their overall expectation towards the program and to solicit their feeling towards the result of the Test. The interviews were also part of the Initial Interview after the embarkment of the Program.

Most of the interviews were conducted during the April and May of 07 after the initial kick off meeting but before the formal embarkment of the program. However, some interviews were conducted later due to the joining of new staffs. However, one staff – RK, who was involved at the Phase II of CFG Program (mid 2009), had not been interviewed on that.

6.7.1a How this activity could address the issues arising in Cycle 1

		Issues discovered in Cycle 1 that need to be addressed in Cycle 2	Initial Personal Inter-view	**How I design this activity in ways that could address the issues arising in Cycle 1**
5 key ingred-ients	Imple-ment solution	Feel oneself doing extra and benefit the Company only	✓	Show that the Program also intended to benefit the individual.
	"Q'ing" each other	Difficult to induce critical reflective working behaviour	✓	Understand whether participants would incline to improve oneself through critical self reflection.
Other key success factors	Facilitator	Lacking "tools" & authority to facilitate critical self reflective behaviours	✓	The preliminary understanding on individual objective could facilitate individual coaching by making reference to them.

Table 6D How the issues discovered in Cycle 1 had been addressed in Cycle 2 by arranging Initial Personal Interviews p.228

6.7.1b Interview PK(Operations Mgr), 30th Apr 07

This part of conversation begins at 19min57sec of the interview when I asked him on his expectation towards the program.

PK	Ah…Ah…should we think the other way round. It should not be how I perceive myself. Instead, should it be those surrounding me give me feedback and let them to tell me the result?
WW	OK, Sure. Anyway, it all about interpersonal relationship.
PK	Right, even I felt that I am perfect, but that's meaningless. It should be other who felt that I am good; my boss felt that I am very good and my subordinates felt that I am very helpful.

Learning from interviewing PK

PK mentioned his wish to get feedback from others as an indication of his improvement. The CFG program with the participants coming from the same organization, having a moderately close working relationship with each other and were acquaint with each other could be a rich resource for one to learn from each other. This is also the philosophy of AL to have the managers to learn from each others rather then from the teacher. The feedbacks from others were excellent "emergent" learning materials, compiled by the peers and were "elicited" through the observation of each other's action.

6.7.1c Interview KY (Factory Mgr.) on 30 Apr 07

This conversation begins at 32min 42 sec.

WW	OK, one last question, ah…what you would like to see and regard as indicator that you had been improved on those aspect you mentioned?

KY	Need to ask others. That means…to be appraised by others.
(…)	
KY	I felt that, … what I meant…This is, ah… many of my colleagues had been work with me for several years. …My personality …had been deep rooted in their …their minds …To make them believe that you…had changes or what so ever,…Need to take a considerable period of time.
WW	Do you think others will tell you directly on that or reflect through some issues?
KY	May be give them a from to fill in.

Learning from interviewing KY

It is the intention of AL to enable the “reinterpretation of past experience” to happen through the comments provided by set members towards the execution of the project. What’s so special about the comment of PK was that he indicated a wish to receive feedback from colleagues towards his own management practice. It draws a similar line with Revans’ assertion that the managers are more eager to learn from each other.

Secondly, it seems that the most wanted feedback from high potential managers were not on the practice in the project but on their ways of doing things. Anyway, managers received comments and feedbacks on work related duties constantly from their boss and from other colleagues. In in-house AL programs, where participants are surrounded by those who constantly give them feedbacks on work related duties won’t be able to give comments which are too surprising. However, it is the comment towards the person which will rarely be raise in day to day communication.

6.7.1d Interview PF (Operations Mgr.) on 30 Apr 07

This conversation begins at around 30min.

PF (…) What I meant is it could be a small improvement, but it should be visible, ah, able to get the recognition that there are improvement and able to tell me that what I adopt is a right approach to, to proceed further. I don't think it needs to be a total improvement and do everything perfectly. (…)

Reflections from interviewing PF

PF's expression on his wish to see improvement not just by himself but also get the recognition of others indicated that the AL method, with its emphasis to give feedback and support to help each other to learn, could be the right approach.

However, PF express his wish to see improvement in a more specific manner may not be achievable if an approach of arranging the IMBA remains unchanged. Learning results quoted in AL literature were frequently quite general. Furthermore, those learning result were frequently advocated by the participants themselves rather then by others.

6.7.2 Reflection

My decision to interview the participants one by one paid dividend. Through a casual conversation manner, not only I could build up good relations with them, I could also get a glimpse of their reflective behaviours (which I will describe in another sections). I could also get a good idea on what they want to achieve through the Program. Although I mentioned mostly about change management in the Embarkment Meeting, almost each of the participants mentioned something on personal improvement.

6.7.3 Learning & Impact on my professional practice and subsequent action

The suggestion of PK & KY informed me the importance to make provision for the collection of feedback to each other outside the set environment.

Provisions should be arranged to collect feedback towards the personal behaviours and practice. As suggested by KY, tools such as 180 degree feedback could be considered. This had not been included in the original proposal I submitted to the HMC but could be valuable to make the whole program more focus on the individual.

6.8
Action Steps : Workshops on change management

The training aimed at providing them framework on change management and two books had been distributed to the participants for their reference – "Leading Change" by John Kotter and "Now, discover your strength" by Marcus Buckingham & Donald O. Clifton.

All the participants and the Director of OpD – AH, were present in the Workshop. After each Workshop, I would spend half an hour with AH to review the result and plan for the content of the Group Coaching Session. (Detail provided in upcoming section.)

6.8.1 Implementing action step

Part 1

The key objective of Part 1 of the Workshop was to accomplish step 1 to 4 of Kotter's 8 Step Change Management Process.

Eight Steps to Transform Your Organization
1. Establish a Sense of Urgency
2. Form a Powerful Guiding Coalition
3. Create a Vision
4. Communicate the Vision

Kotter, (1998) pp31-33

Apart from disseminating the "P", some team building activities had also been arranged to further promote a "we" feelings among the participants.

Part 2

The positive feedback on the approach of program design encouraged me to make explicit the action learning approach. I informed the participants on that in Part 2 of Workshop. This part aimed at achieving the Step 5 of Kotter's (1996, pp.31-33) Eight Step Change Management Process. – Empower Others to Act on the Vision

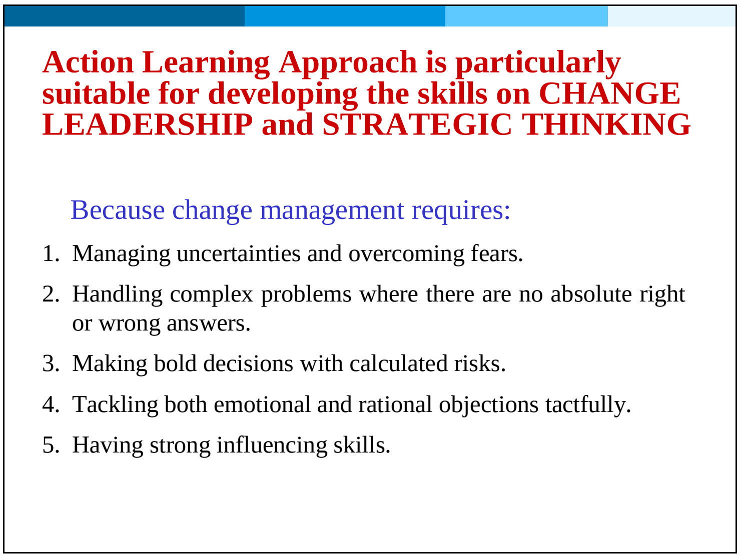


Diagram 6G PPT in Change Leadership Workshop Part 1b

Part 3

In response to practice the change management skills, The H.O.W. (the HMC Operation's Way) project was actually composed of several mini projects which aim at achieving the Step 6 of Kotter's (1996, pp.31-33) Eight Step Change Management Process. – Plan for and Create Short-Term Wins

Objective of the H.O.W. Project were:
a) At least 90% efficiency
b) 99% Acceptant (Internal + External)
c) Continuous 100% OTD (on time delivery)

In a meeting on 6 Sep 07, a series of change initiatives were brainstormed in order to achieve the three objectives.

6.8.1a How this activity could meet the characteristic of AL

The prime reason for splitting one workshop into three 2 hrs sessions was mainly due to the workload of the participants. Another reason I keep for myself was that I want to give myself sufficient time to observe the feedback of the participants so that I could made adjustments between sessions. To avoid the dissemination of knowledge that was important from my point of view, I spitted the training sessions into three parts. Except for the 1st workshop, the content of the remaining 2 workshops were customized according to the progress of the participants in their H.O.W. Project (detail provided in subsequent sections). Therefore, the Cycle 2 of my research could actually be regarded as several “mini cycles” of my action research with each trying to address the emergent issues and applying my new learning through working together with the participants.

Build-in “emergent” qualities in the program design and arrangement

I had been informed in the various literatures (detailed in Chapter 2) that the intervention on the transmission of knowledge the “P” in AL, should be “emergent” and “elective” and should not be fed to the set members by the personal will of the management teacher. To achieve that, a lot of discussions opportunities were made available in the training session and the process was more about the drawing up of the vision for change, analysing the situation and areas in need of change and identifying roadblocks to change in HMC. The immediate supervisor of all the members (the Director of Operations) had present in all the sessions. Rather then act as passive listener, he had been actively involved in leading discussion, clarifying points, making summaries of member’s opinion regarding the company issues and problems which I knew little. It was really a process “to contrive” and the training sessions were mainly a context “in which all managers learn with and from each other”.

In Workshop 1a, all the participants had drawn a group picture on what they felt about the current situation of HMC.

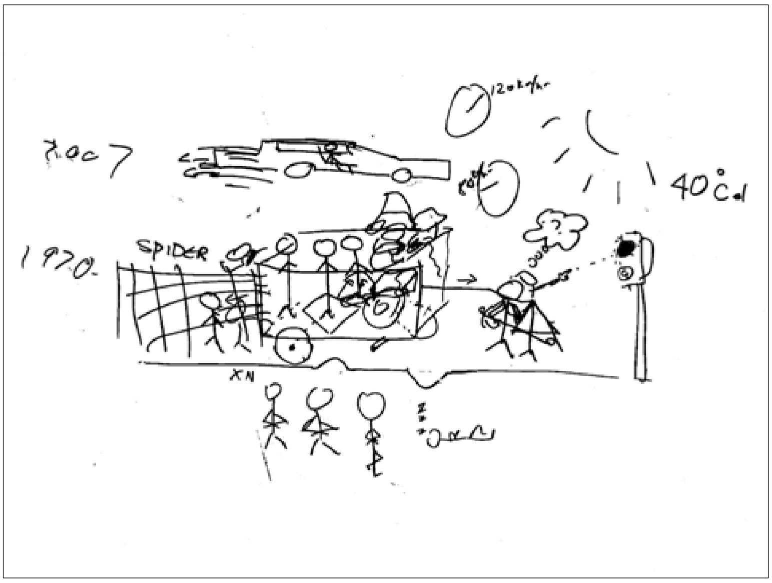


Diagram 6H Picture drawn by participants in Change Leadership Workshop

Based on this common understanding on the current situation, I asked them to brainstorm on what they thought need to achieve in order to change the current situation by writing up a “From, To” chart on the electronic whiteboard.

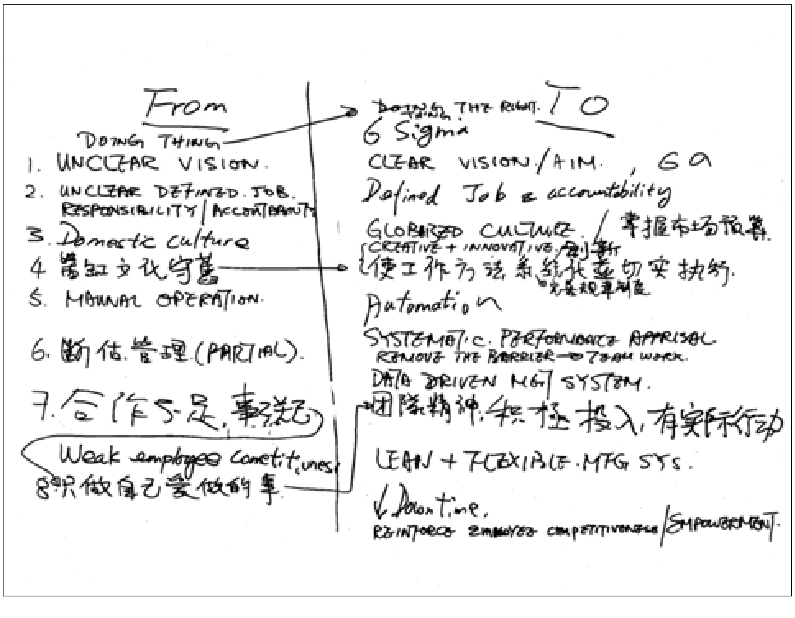


Diagram 6I the “From-To” Chart drawn by participants in Change Leadership Workshop

These two charts provided a good base to determine the Project as most of the items stated under “From” belonged to some complicating problems without an absolute right or wrong answers.

I had also adopted a "sandwich" approach by coupling a 2 hour Group Coaching session after (usually after a week's time) the workshop. The objective of Group Coaching was to handle the "practical" and "application" side of Workshop. Detail of the Group Coaching will be stated in upcoming session.

6.8.1b How this activity could address the issues arising in Cycle 1

			Change Mgt Work- shops		**How I design this activity in ways that could address the issues arising in Cycle 1**
		Issues discovered in Cycle 1 that need to be addressed in Cycle 2	3 two hours work-shops	Change mgt as theme & Kotter's 8 Steps Model	
The "L"		The "L" & action not closely related.	✓	✓	The 8 steps disseminated were coupled with exercise related to the making actual change in HMC
5 key ingred-ients	The P	Want to learnt something new and practical	✓	✓	Many of the participants were new and they wanted to introduce change to the organization. This could meet their practical need.
		No "recognized ignorance" raised related to solving the problem		✓	The "change management" theme could highlight the importance of "how" to apply what one knew rather then the "what". The importance of considering the contextual factors in change management process could emphasize the novelty of the situation which could make one's knowledge obsolete or inappropriate.

<u>Table 6E How the issues discovered in Cycle 1 could be addressed in Cycle 2 by arranging Workshops and adopting the 8 Steps Model</u>

(Continue in next page)

			Change Mgt Work- shops		**How I design this activity in ways that could address the issues arising in Cycle 1**
		Issues discovered in Cycle 1 that need to be addressed in Cycle 2	3 two hours work- shops	Change mgt as theme & Kotter's 8 Steps Model	
5 key ingred- ients (Cont-i nued)	Imple- ment solution	Act within comfort zone. Choose a "sure win" course of action.		✓	Creation of vision as spelled out in Step 3 help to build up a shared vision which encourage everyone to try out new course of action.
	Take improved action	The action of not to take any action		✓	Highlight the need to take action by disseminating Step 5 of Kotter' Model: Get rid of obstacles to change, Change systems or structures that seriously undermine the vision, Encourage risk taking and non-traditional ideas, activities, and actions.
*Other key success factors	Facilita-t or	Lacking "tools" & authority to facilitate critical self reflective behaviours	✓		The 8 Steps will be referred to by me in the subsequent meetings and briefing to senior management.
	Clear objective for the program	Objective of learning not clear.	✓	✓	Same as above Splitting up of 3 sessions could also facilitate the setting up of 3 different learning objectives to fit for the learning progress.
		Members not "embrace" challenge		✓	The Workshop + the HOW Project could install a group norm of making change and "embrace" challenge.
	Group dynamics properly managed	Dropping out of members and lack of group meetings lowered moral.	✓		The splitting up of 3 two-hours sessions with Group Coaching running in-between enable frequent meetings between the members that could keep the "stove hot".

<u>Table 6E How the issues discovered in Cycle 1 could be addressed in Cycle 2 by arranging Workshops and adopting the 8 Steps Model</u>

How the issues discovered in Cycle 1 – "Want to learnt something new and practical", could partly be addressed in this activity?

My choice was based on the following consideration:

1. A main point to disseminate in the CFG Program is "To change others, we must firstly change ourselves". So Kotter's change management model was aligned with personal change.
2. There is a Chinese translation of Kotter's book – Leading Change.
3. Kotter is a world famous scholar in the subject.

6.8.2 Reflection

In the Meeting of Team A, discussion on whether there was a need to apply the 8 Steps. This was raised by the members themselves and not a requirement of the Program.

22	10:02	PF	Hadn't we, at that time mentioned about producing a vision and making "small wins" right?
23	10:06	PF	Do we need to apply what had been delivered at that time?
24	10:10	TW	Those seven steps of change, The steps that make change.
25	10:12	PF	Yeah. I could recall it. That should be it at that time.
26	10:14	TW	Is it seven steps? Had my memory failed me?
27	10:19	TW	Doesn't seem to be correct.
28	10:19	PF	Can't remember. But what's the vision? WC might be right. We really should ask: what do we want?

Source: Data / Team A / Mtg Team A (b) 2 Jun 08

Despite the discussion ended up with nothing solid to explicitly put the 8 steps (not 7) of change management into their discussion agenda, Team A's overall approach to lead the change of Project T had more or less materialized many of those steps.

6.8.3 Learning & Impact on my professional practice and subsequent action

My "sandwich" approach served quite well for the purpose of adjusting content from time to time, making the content more customized to the need of the participants. This arrangement was also welcomed by the participants due to the short duration. However, it could also lead to the drawback of difficult to fix schedules for next session and make the whole duration longer then expected.

6.9
Action Steps : Group Coaching

6.9.1 Implementing action step

The Group Coaching sessions usually took 1 or 2 hours and were generally arranged within one or two weeks after each 2 hours Workshop. The activities undertaken in the Group Coaching session in the 3 sessions included:

- "Operationalizing" the 8 Steps of change management by relating them to the HMC's situation.
- Working out action plans to achieve the change.

6.9.2 Monitor implementation and effects

In each Group Coaching session, whenever the issue was about implementation of change, I would pass the buck to AH and he would take up the facilitation role such as writing down the points raised by the members on the whiteboard, clarifying queries on technical issues and company policies, consolidation of points and helping out with the compilation of a group decision on the action plans.

I follow the practice of spending half an hour with the Director of OpD – AH after each Workshop to get his input towards the content and plan for the approach in the next Group Coaching Session. This approach enabled AH to effectively play the role of critical friend in my research.

6.9.2a How this activity could address the issues arising in Cycle 1

			Group Coaching	
		Issues discovered in Cycle 1 that need to be addressed in Cycle 2	Arrange learning partners, prepare action plan	**How I design this activity in ways that could address the issues arising in Cycle 1**
The "L"		Role conflict of me – drive for business result vs. learning result of the project	✓	Co-leading of the session by the Pod Director.
		The "L" & action not closely related.	✓	The "sandwich" enables a close connection between the "P" and action.
5 key ingred-ients	The P	Want to learnt something new and practical	✓	New and practical information could be supplied by AH freely in any point of the Session.
	Take improved action	The action of not to take any action	✓	Group decision on action to take and the time line to follow banned the possibility of any "action of not to take action".
		Drag on and more concerned about getting things done	✓	Action plan ensure action be taken.
*Other key success factors	Senior mgt's support & commit-ment	Too eager to drive for delivering business result	✓	The "split responsibility" between me and AH could be embodied in the Group Coaching. It enabled everyone and AH to aware the need to strike a balance between learning result and business result.

Table 6F How the issues discovered in Cycle 1 could be addressed in Cycle 2 by arranging Group Coaching and assigning learning partners

(Continue in next page)

		Issues discovered in Cycle 1 that need to be addressed in Cycle 2	**Group Coaching** Arrange learning partners, prepare action plan	**How I design this activity in ways that could address the issues arising in Cycle 1**
*Other key success factors (Cont-inue)	Facilita-tor	Lacking “tools” & authority to facilitate critical self reflective behaviours	✓	Feedbacks could be given right the way during the session by everyone.
	Clear objective for the program	Objective of learning not clear.	✓	By “embedding” the 8 steps in the real work challenge, it was hoped that the objective could be a “living” objective and “everybody’s” objective rather then just the “stated” objective of me.
	Careful selection of particip-ants	Members not “embrace” challenge	✓	A high involvement and step-by-step approach to work out action to change hoped to induce a mission feeling.
	Group dynamics properly managed	Dropping out of members and lack of group meetings lowered moral.	✓	The “re-gathering” nature was hoped to strengthen a team feeling and conducive to the building up of “comrade in adversity” in the Project T.

Table 6F How the issues discovered in Cycle 1 could be addressed in Cycle 2 by arranging Group Coaching and assigning learning partners (continued)

6.10
Action Steps : H.O.W. Projects

6.10.1 Implementing action step

In the 3rd round of Group Coaching, the vision discussed in the previous Workshops and Group Coaching sessions had been consolidated into 5 key projects which had been further broken down into 12 sub-projects with each participant responsible for one to three of these sub-projects.

6.10.1a How this activity could meet the characteristic of AL

The H.O.W. Project was "house-keeping" in nature as all the change initiative would happen within the OpD and also within the jurisdiction of the participants. It aimed to serve as a "springboard" for expanding to become a more macro scale project which could "spilling over" to interdepartmental level. Actually this was a representation of a "bridging" process between Step 6 & 7 of Kotter's processes.

NOT action learning project

Although all the problems the projects aim at tacking were "real" and belongs to something that the participants genuinely want to do something about it, they could not be the action learning project and wasn't intended to be.

As could be seen from the project allocation, those who are responsible for the project were actually the manager of the respective function. They are not cross functional and the answers were known to the participants as they were the experts in the field. The way they adopt to handle the project was also almost totally up to them as they were the head of the function. Therefore, the projects were only "puzzle" and were highly technical in nature. All the projects were "house keeping", aim at improving the OpD's business objectives.

The basic purpose of the HOW project was a "spring board" from "private win" to "public win". Detail of the various HOW Projects were placed in Appendix 6H.

6.10.1b How this activity could address the issues arising in Cycle 1

		Issues discovered in Cycle 1 that need to be addressed in Cycle 2	H.O.W Projects	How I design this activity in ways that could address the issues arising in Cycle 1
The "L"		The "L" & action not closely related.	✓	This is the "practical" part of the Step 1 to 6 of Kotter's 8 steps model and was an "exercise" of translating vision into action.
5 key ingred-ients	Take improved action	The action of not to take any action	✓	Same as above.
	Senior mgt's support & commit-ment	Too eager to drive for delivering business result	✓	The Project result, which could served as fulfilling or help to fulfil the performance indicator could gain the support from AH and the senior management.

Table 6G How the issues discovered in Cycle 1 could be addressed in Cycle 2 by arranging H.O.W. Projects

6.10.2 Learning & Impact on my professional practice and subsequent action

According to my plan, the success of the H.O.W., which was predictable, should served as a prelude for the participants to march into a wider territory – an inter-departmental or organizational wide problem which could really served as the AL project. However, things did not happen easily in that way. It will be presented in the next section on the "selection of a real problem".

6.11

Critical events – selection of a real problem – the Project "T"

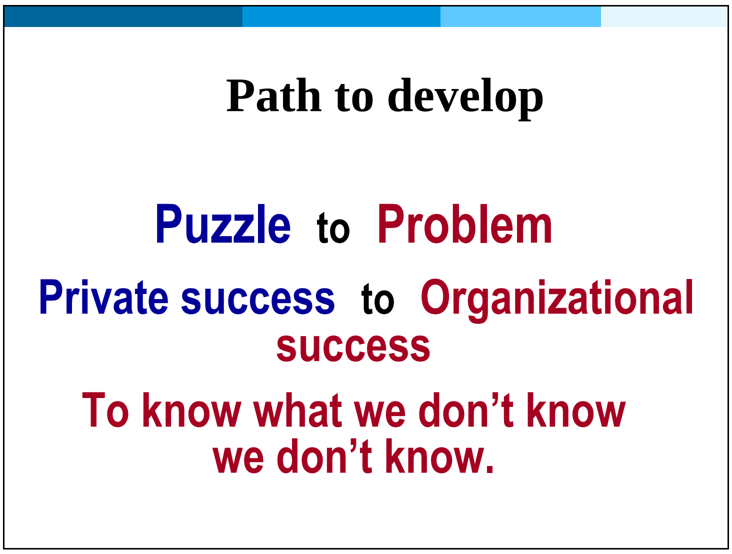
6.11.1 Implementing action step

6.11.1a How this activity could meet the characteristic of AL

The support from senior management had been regarded as of outmost important for the success of AL. (Brassard, 2002; Kim, 2003; Park, 2004; Bong, Park & Park, 2002; Bowerman & Peters, 1999)

Working together with the top management

I had a meeting with the Vice President (VP) of HMC on 24 Jan 08 to report to her on the progress of Part 1 of the CFG Program. In the Meeting, I had explained the difference between "puzzle" and a "problem" and told her that Part 1 is a "puzzle" and was a "private success" for the Operations Division. To achieve a greater degree of achievement, a "problem" is need for the CFG program participants to work on.



<u>Diagram 6J PPT for presenting to Vice President of HMC</u>

Presentation material for meeting with Vice President of HMC on 24 Jan 08

I had also asked the VP to make suggestion on an organizational problem that was both important for the organization and the Company so far had no clear idea on what exactly need to be done. To make my request more easy to comprehend, I had provided some suggestion for her to consider:

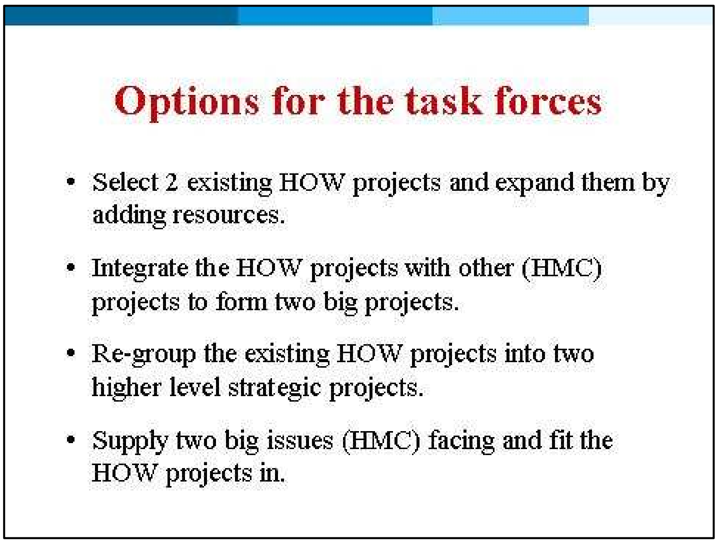


Diagram 6K PPT for presenting to Vice President of HMC

Presentation material for meeting with VP on 24 Jan 08

Although I aware that “sets” in AL are different from task force, the word “task force” was used to make the VP more easy to understand.

The result was that the VP suggested the “Top” Project (or Project T, which is not a real name) as the AL project.

Project T is a new product for HMC. Unlike other products of HMC, it involved many new technologies and the requirement of the customer was more freehand. In parallel, the management wished to ride on this new product to experiment a closer working relationship between the Engineering Department (the NBD, which responsible for designing it) and the Operations Division (OpD) – the division which bore the ultimate responsibility of manufacturing it. In the past days, the two divisions had been working quite independently. The NBD made the design, tested it and forward to the OpD for production. This system worked well in the past as the products of HMC were relatively simple and the product variety was fewer. With the growing demand (which also meant a higher level of trust) from the customers, new products like the “T” with higher complexity and more demanding on technology were expected to grow. Therefore, the design of NBD on new products would be less sure of flawless outcomes when put to production and better alignment and earlier involvement of the OpD was hence needed to minimize the to and fro wastage when put to production. Unlike the IMC in Cycle 1, HMC's business was good and was not fighting for survival. They were less desperate with change although the senior management were aware that change was pressing. However, they had also aware that many immanent factors needed to be tackled before a truly seamless alignment between NBD and the OpD could be materialized. That explained why they were more receptive towards a "middle-up" change initiative.

So the Project T is a "dream project" for AL as it fit in every respect of the requirements of Revans (1980, p.292) and many of the key proponents of AL.

It was open-ended as the top management clearly indicated that they were open to any suggestion.
It was a problem that all the managers of the NBD and especially the OpD had a lot of noise (as indicated in the subsequent team meetings) and "genuinely concerned to get something done about it.
It was inter-departmental as it involved all the departments in the OpD and those of the NBD (and to certain extend, some people in Marketing), the two biggest and most important functions of HMC. The inter-departmental nature of Project T had already triggered a lot of conflicts among the two functions. This conflict was rooted in historical, technical, political and even personal factors. The issue could be partially represented by the description of KY, the Quality Assurance Mgr. when I interviewed him on 30 Apr 07 which was the initial interview shortly after the Induction Meeting.

> Recently, a situation that gradually developed is that, ah…in case there is any problem pop up in the process of product development, it seems to become the problem of Operations (WW: Yeah). I am personally not quite agreed with this. (WW: Ng) Actually I am very disagreed with this.
>
> Initial Interview: Interview KY on 30 Apr 07
>
> Source: Data / Meet each on 30 Apr 07

Work out with the set members' supervisor – the Director of OpD

The communication of a “real problem” is by no means a straight forward business for in-house AL program when the participants’ immediate supervisor is the same person.

After being informed on the decision of the top management, I subsequently lined up a meeting between AH and the vice-president of HMC. In the meeting, the vice-president had made explicit her wish that it was vital for the company to achieve a better alignment between the Operation Division and the NBD. It could help to reduce the Company’s hidden costs.

Several days after the meeting (10 March 08), I meet with AH to seek his input for the Project. Assuming that AH, had already got a clear message from the VP and the support from top management was obvious, I expect AH could easily deliver a clear direction for the road ahead. However, his reaction had caught me by surprise.

Meeting with AH by WW on 10 March 08

1	00:00	WW	OK, for this time,…it’s quite important. Since we had met with (VP)… we got to confirm on this matter. Firstly, ah…we need to confirm… what you feel… about the problem, OK, what should the actual problem be? Because…the next step, in part two, we need to communicate this message to our mates, OK? (…)
2	01:45	AH	I don’t know. I don’t know what she want us to do.
3	01:47	WW	Right, no problem, I meant… let’s compare our understanding, OK? And also, what you want to do… (interrupted by AH)
4	01:51	AH	I want to do my own job. I don’t want to take care of other people’s business. Trust me, it can’t be done. Trespassing on other’s area is a different issue. It’s already not easy to do a good job in one’s own area, right?

Source: Data/ Meet Alex 10 March 08/ Transcription_Alex10 Mar (Full)

AH expressed that he wish I could give him some “direction” regarding the project target. After I had reinstated the vice-president’s wish that the Operations Division could have a better integration with the NBD in terms of work handover, AH made the following statement:

Meeting with AH by WW on 10 March 08

8	03:25	AH	But the prerequisite is that the other party are willing to work with you. I feel that, a good intention from one side is no use, William, right? If they don’t wanna work with you and just by working on your own will make you look like a fool and at the end of the day you will just end up going nowhere, right? And it also require the company…really think the same way, (WW:Yeah) if they are not think the same way and you’ll …just be wasting your effort.

Source: Data/ Meet Alex 10 March 08/ Transcription_Alex10 Mar (Full)

In response to his comment, I responded by spelling out the tangible and intangible benefits of a better alignment with the NBD which the vice-president had expressed in the previous meeting and I thought AH actually know. Answering my statement was an even more icy comment from AH:

Meeting with AH on 10 March 08 (Total duration: 57min. 22 sec.)

28	AH	What’s good for me?
29	WW	To… to all, we all benefited, the whole^^^ organization will be benefited.
30	AH	The organization will be benefited, so what’s the benefit for me?
(…)		
34	AH	My own salary won’t be raised; I won’t get an extra bonus for that, what’s the benefit? (WW: So…it might not be so…) ha, what other benefits you could tell me, (WW: it not necessary need to push to that extreme…right?) So what kinds of benefit you

can tell me, just about the process.

Source: Data/ Meet Alex 10 March 08/ Transcription_Alex10 Mar (Full)

Since my first meeting with AH, he had always impressed me by his vision of transforming the HMC into a world class manufacturing company and by his great enthusiasm in driving many much needed change in such a traditional organization. I really thought that those statements should not have been come from his mouth. Since I had taken up this consultancy project, I got on well with AH and he had always been very supportive towards my work. In face of his bitter comments, I tried to maintain a calm dialogue with him and invited him to tell me more what was his idea and it had indeed, paid dividend. There was an inside story:

Meeting with AH on 10 March 08 (Total duration: 57min. 22 sec.)

40		AH	Please tell me what kinds of horizon we could expect, for the whole organization, what kinds of mental benefit I could get? Cutting 200 headcount, at the end of the day only we got to cut 200 headcount. It is easy for this division that is most easy to cut headcount so I got a cutting of 200 headcount.
41	20:00	WW	That…that's a result no one would like to see, however…
42		AH	Ha···so what, what else we could do, please tell me? What financial result? What else···could drive? What else could drive the people mentally secured to do this sort of things? **What they will find out is that after doing all sorts of things, one need to bear the consequences.**

Source: Data/ Meet AH 10 March 08

OK, I finally realized that the gentleman sitting in front of me was not the visionary and enthusiastic AH but an Operations Director whose ego had been badly wounded by the hard side of corporate life. It was a mix of all the unfair feeling being turned into deep resentment towards the Company.

Anyway, our relationships had not turned sour. My meeting with AH ended up fruitfully by his final consent to meet the head of NBD with an objective to make sure that the other party would really cooperate. However, his advice was invaluable:

100	AH	You…after doing this, I think you should…that's, how you could switch to a second thing? This could…have an effect on the morale. Ha, that is…there must be a very good and prudent reason to back you up when you tell them, (WW: Right) It should not be just like walk in and tell them – Hi…ah…it has now been discovered that the management think this is most important, (WW: Yeah) isn't it?

Source: Data/ Meet Alex 10 March 08/ Transcription_Alex10 Mar (Full)

Solicit the support from top management of NBD

Addressing AH's comment that the NBD might not want to cooperate, I started a long but fruitful journey of soliciting the support from NBD.

Although the support from VP towards using Project T as an AL project was strong, I aware that it was far from enough to make the program a success if I failed to get the buy-in from the heads of the NBD. In order to ensure the NBD were willing to involve, the VP had informed the top management of the NBD on the intention to make use of the Project T as a "vehicle of learning" on a better alignment between NBD and OpD in new product launch. I had subsequently lined up a meeting with the top management of NBD and brief him on the purpose of the Project T. He agreed that NBD and the OpD should worked together to find a solution and promised that he would sent his department head – Mr.PM, to discuss this issue with the OpD. Again, I met PM in his office and brief him once again on the program background and intention. PM agreed to set up a "resource centre" (which was actually a team) composed of several experienced and cooperative engineers to work together with the OpD on this project. Armed with this achievement, I had successfully lined up a meeting between AH & PM and subsequently between PM and the whole OpD team (i.e. all the 10 participants). The willingness of the NBD to work together and the supportiveness of the top management conveyed a strong message that the people on the other side of the wall were waiting and ready to break down the wall.

6.11.1b How this activity could address the issues arising in Cycle 1

		Issues discovered in Cycle 1 that need to be addressed in Cycle 2	**Project T**	
The “L”		The “L” & action not closely related.	✓	It is the application of Step 7 & 8 in Kotter’s 8 Steps model
5 key ingred-ients	Real problem	Members as part of the problem	✓	
		Downgrade the original problem, to become a puzzle in face of organizational change	✓	The complex nature of the issue, my effort to align the top management, the immediate supervisor of the set members, the senior management of NBD all aimed at indicating to the set members the expectation of the top management was to look for a creative and feasible way to address a issue that was so important for the future development of the company.
	Imple-ment solution	Act within comfort zone. Choose a “sure win” course of action.	✓	There’s no definite answer and “sure win” approach should not be already exist as a large part of the solution need to be accepted by the NBD which was beyond the control of the OpD and the acceptance of the top management.
	“Q’ing” each other	Individual project failed to stimulate interest in “Q’ing” each other	✓	As all the participants were in “the same boat” and the solution will affect all in the future, it was expected to create intense interest and discussions.

Table 6H How the issues discovered in Cycle 1 could be addressed in Cycle 2 by arranging Project T

6.11.2 Reflection & Learning

The identification of a real problem for AL sets to work on is not an easy task. By working together with the top management, a real problem had been located which could fulfil the criteria of a “problem” for AL. However, my experience with AH on this incident had perhaps highlighted the difficulties which might happen in locating a problem for the project of an in-house AL program when the participants came from the same section or unit or department who need to execute the proposed action. I could summarize the points that AH were worried about.

1. He might trespass into other’s “territory”.
2. Others might not be willing to cooperate.
3. The morale of the staff might be hurt as a result of engaging in some fruitless venture.
4. Why me?
5. What’s the benefit for me?
6. I am already doing something about it. Does it mean that I should dispose what we are doing and work along this new direction?
7. I had not been fairly treated. Others are better off then me. Why should I sacrifice myself further to do all these for the benefit of others?
8. The engagement of the set members, who were the subordinates of AH, could hamper the day to day work of his subordinates and subsequently his performance.

6.12
Action Steps : Splitting into two teams

6.12.1 Implementing action step

My intention of splitting the 10 subordinates of AH into two teams could be explained in one of the slide I presented to the VP on the action plan of Part II of the CFG Program on 5 May 08.

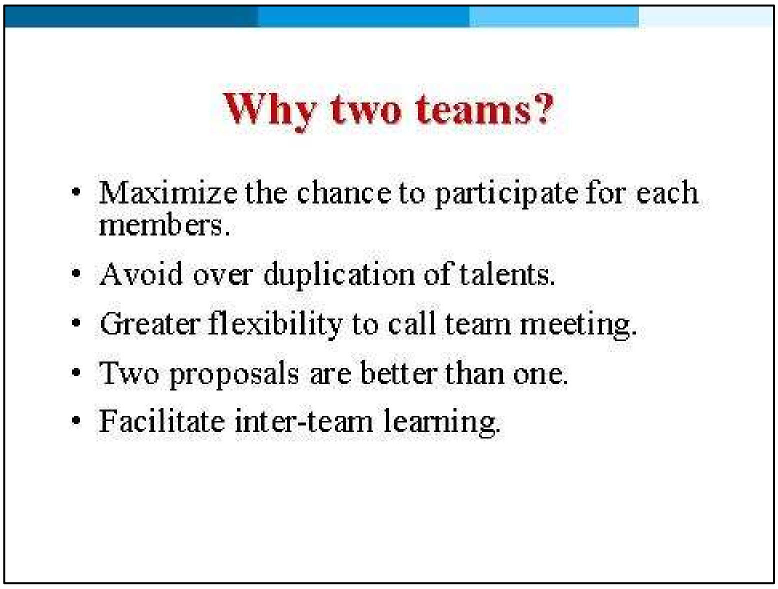


Diagram 6L PPT for presenting to Vice President of HMC

Team A

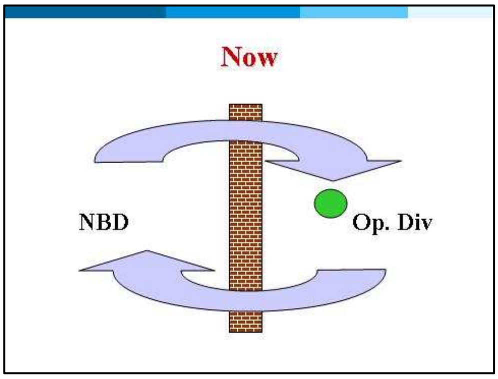
TW	Supply Chain & Material Mgr.
PF	Operations Mgr.
TC	Manufacturing Engineering Mgr
MYL	Operations Mgr.
WC	QA Mgr

Team B

RR	Quality Assurance Mgr.
PK	Operations Mgr.
KY	Factory Mgr.
FZ (Withdrawn due to resignation in mid 09. His successor had not been invited to join the Program)	HR Mgr.
KC	Operations Mgr.

Table 6I Compositions of Team A & Team B

A meeting to brief on the Project T for all participants had been arranged on 16 May 08. In the presentation by the researcher to all the participants in the Meeting, I had spelled out the nature of the problem and the role of the two teams in this Project.



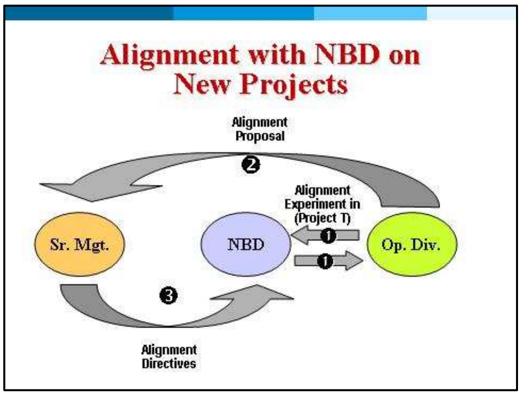


Diagram 6M PPT for presenting in the Briefing Meeting to all participants on Project T

Source: Phase II / Team Mtg May 08 (1st) Slide #7 & 39

A briefing for all participants for the arrangement of Phase II of the CFG Program had been arranged on 28 May 08

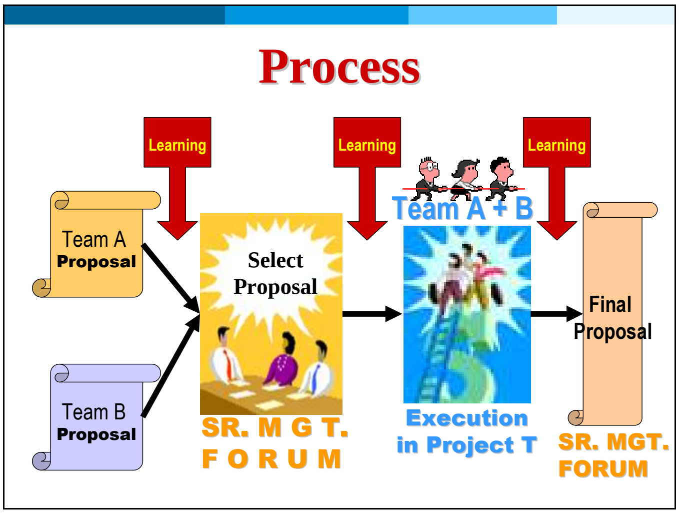


Diagram 6N PPT for presenting in the Briefing Meeting to all participants on Project T

Briefing for Phase II on 28 May 08

A month's period was scheduled for the two teams to work out the proposal. Two to three set meetings were expected to arrange. The senior management will not take part in the meeting and I will be the facilitator of in the meeting. I labelled the emark of the Project T as the Phase II of the CFG Program. I had also drawn reference to the Step 7 and 8 of Kotter's (1998, pp.31-33) 8 Steps – "Consolidate Improvements and Produce Still More Change" and

"Institutionalize New Approaches"

6.12.1a How this activity could meet the characteristic of AL

The importance of group dynamics and to form a team had been emphasized by many writers. (Kim, 2003; Park, 2004; Bong, Park & Park, 2002; Bowerman & Peters, 1999) I had "disseminated" the relevant messages when I communicate the objective of Phase II to all the participants in the same meeting. The objectives could be represented in the PPT presentation I made:

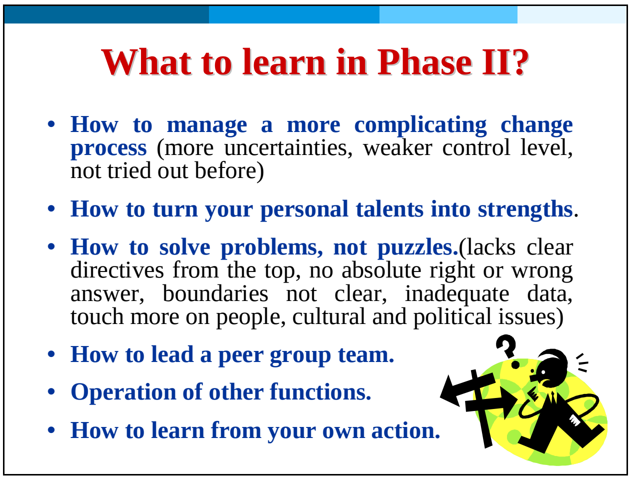


Diagram 6O PPT for presenting in the Briefing Meeting to all participants on Project T

6.12.1b How this activity could address the issues arising in Cycle 1

		Issues discovered in Cycle 1 that need to be addressed in Cycle 2	Team A & B Mtg	How I design this activity in ways that could address the issues arising in Cycle 1
5 key ingredients		Downgrade the original problem, to become a puzzle in face of organizational change	✓	The competition could probably invite the two teams to try their best to show their capability by "trying harder" and try out more challenging action
	Imple-ment solution	Act within comfort zone. Choose a "sure win" course of action.	✓	Same as above
	"Q'ing" each other	Difficult to induce critical reflective working behaviour	✓	The motivation to be the best might motivate them to challenge each other in order to be the best team in front of the top management.
		Individual project failed to stimulate interest in "Q'ing" each other	✓	The competitive atmosphere might be able to stimulate an intense exchange of ideas and challenges within team.
	Take improved action	The action of not to take any action	✓	Same as above
		Drag on and more concerned about getting things done	✓	The competition climate might stimulate them to work fast.
*Other key success factors	Facilita-tor	Lacking "tools" & authority to facilitate critical self reflective behaviours	✓	The individual team member's behaviour exhibited in team could be closely observed and reflected in the subsequent 180 degree feedback.
	Careful selection of partici-pants	Nomination by department heads shrank size of the selection pool.	✓	Although a selection process of joining the CFG program was non-exist, selection of the members for Team A & B was based on the result of the member's Strength Finder Test, their working experience in HMC and knowledge in the Project T.
	Group dynamics properly managed	Dropping out of members and lack of group meetings lowered moral.	✓	

Table 6J How the issues discovered in Cycle 1 could be addressed in Cycle 2 by splitting the participants into two teams

How the issues discovered in Cycle 1 relating to "Careful selection of participants", could partly be addressed in this activity?

Members list for the two teams was the product between me and AH. I use the term "team" rather then a "set" (a term in AL) to enable easy understanding.

Team A

Name	Position	Knowledge in Project T	Year of service
TW	Supply Chain & Material Mgr.	Medium	Long
PF	Operations Mgr.	Little	Long
TC	Manufacturing Engineering Mgr	High	Short
MYL	Operations Mgr.	Little	Short
WC	QA Mgr	High	Short

Team B

Name	Position	Knowledge in Project T	Year of service
RR	Quality Assurance Mgr.	Little	Short
PK	Operations Mgr.	Very high	Short
KY	Factory Mgr.	Little	Long
FZ (Withdrawn due to resignation in mid 09. His successor had not been invited to join the Program)	HR Mgr.	Little	Short
KC	Operations Mgr.	High	Short

Table 6K Compositions of Team A & Team B on knowledge in Project and years of services

Considerations in the team composition include the knowledge on the Project T. TC in Team A and PK of Team B were most knowledgeable on the Project.

6.13
Action Steps : Team meetings

6.13.1 Implementing action step

Both teams organized their own meeting on 16 May 08 with Team A run on A.M. and Team B on P.M.. Both teams had spent around 1.5 hours on the meeting. I had not prepared a rigid agenda for them but started with an updating of the Project T. After that, I'll leave the discussion on their own. A group leader had not been appointed. However, I would still remind them on the need to come up with more solid action plans and set out the rule of the game as described in the previous section. The meeting had be audio recorded with the whole team being informed on that. The digital audio recorder had been placed on top of the conference table and they had been told that they could turn it off themselves or ask me to turn it off anytime they don't want their speech to be recorded. As I take audio recording in almost every training sessions and meeting, all the participants were quite used to this practice and gave no objection to this arrangement. Sometimes, they even made jokes on it such as saying: "Had it been recorded?", or teasing each other by saying "Don't say that, the audio recorder is on" etc.

6.13.1a Team A – 1st Meeting

Despite the sentiment of being the "victim" had been shared at the earlier stage of the Meeting, they managed not to see the NBD as the "evil guys". They did mention that NBD was not unwilling to change.

1	(50min 29 sec. +) * 00:00:04	PF	I felt the objective mentioned by (WC) is right. A system could be developed in the course of conducting the project. (…) Furthermore, how we could break down the wall between us so that a common goal could be built up.
2	00:01:22	WC	There's no wall.

3	00:01:23	PF	But they felt there is a wall. (Mixed voice of discussion) So should we make them felt there is no wall between us through this project?
4	00:01:32	WC	But they may feel that we are the road block.
8	00:02:15	WC	Hay, let's be fair, let's be fair. We had already been feeding the engineering with a lot of task and they are handling them one by one. They had never mentioned that they are not going to change. They had not rejected your idea. They are not against…

* 50min 29 sec. should be added on top of this time as this is part 2 of the recording of the meeting.

Source: Mtg Team A (b) 16 May 08

(Please refer to Appendix 6J for full version of the dialogue)

In the set meeting, they had decided to invite the representatives of the NBD, to a lunch and listen more. Two weeks later, all of the team members and 4 representatives of the NBD, went to a decent restaurant close to the factory. They reserved a private room and sit around a round table and engaged in a sincere communication for 1.5 hours.

04:59 – 0625

TC We had been split into two teams, and another team might invite you to a lunch also. We would like to invite NBD together with us to explore in what way, using Project T as a media, in what way, well actually, we don't want to talk but would like to hear from your side, ah, actually we shouldn't talk, we want to listen and we won't criticize any of your opinion and we won't give big responses. (…)

Source: Voice file: Team A at Restaurant

(Please refer to Appendix 6K for full version of the dialogue)

It could be seen that Team A could adopt a more open attitude towards the Project.

6.13.1b Team B – 1st Meeting

A member of Team B – PK, is the Operations Manger of the workshop which was responsible for manufacturing the product of Project T. He was the one who had the most knowledge on the Project. The other members of the set who also had a better understanding of the product was KC who was responsible for providing the tools and RR who was responsible for handling the quality related issues of the new product. When I asked PK to brief all members on the progress of the Project, he gave a very pessimistic account:

1st Set Meeting: Team B 16 May 08

11	06:57	PK	Failure
12		WW	Finished? Go ahead, tell us more.
13	07:05	PK	One word; total failure.
14	07:05	KC	^^^What's the actual fact, what it failed at?

Set Meeting: Team B 16 May 08 Participants: PK, KC, KY, FZ, and RR. Set advisor: WW (Researcher) Location: 2/F Mtg Rm, HMC, ShenZhen. Total duration: 60 min. 45 sec.

Source: Data/ Team B/ Mtg Team B (a) 16 May 08

Although KY, the factory manager who actually responsible for the administration of the factory and had no direct responsibility for delivering the product, gave some comment according to his experience when he was the quality manager of HMC a few year ago.

59	16:19	KY	(in Putonghua) I could recall, in the past, QA (i.e. Quality Assurance Dept.), what I did in the past, was to motivate the NBD. (I would give them instruction on)What you had not done, what you had failed to do, (…) The DFMEA* was frequently conducted by QA. But that's odd; the problems pointed out in the meeting had frequently not being followed by actions. (…) I just feel that they lacked any self motivation.
60	17:18	WW	But that's something of the past.

*Design Failure Mode Effects Analysis

In the next five minutes, KY had almost dominated the discussion by repeatedly pointing out the incompetency of the NBD and kept describing his practices when he was the Quality Assurance Manager. Observing that they had almost jumped to the conclusion that all the causes of problem was the problem of the NBD, I tried to remind them on the need to set an objective first before reaching a conclusion at such an early stage . Their response (mainly PK & KY's) was simple

88	23:07	PK	It's just like what (KY) had mentioned, we, this system is obviously there, the problem is no one care to follow, the objective is (intruded by KY)
89		KY	Procedure。
90	23:22		Training had been conducted. Complaint had been raised against them in audit. What else you want me to do? As Operations, what else could we do?

Up to this point, the buy in of KC and FZ was not total. They had expressed some reservations on what KY had proposed and reminded KY that he had made a conclusion which had not been fully explored.

210	48:01	FZ	(…) KY might be right that there are such kinds of factors inside. However, will there be any other factors, any other factors that lead to this situation, right? Is that the people below are also like this…(interrupted by KY)
(…)			
222	48:59	KC	Not no need to understand further? For me, I had not concluded yet. But I feel they had made a conclusion already.
223	49:04	WW	No need to talk with them.
224	49:05	KC	Yeah, that mean no need to write down, for me, I could not made such a conclusion yet, is it really like that, possibly, (should we)study it a bit more.
225	49:18	KY	The experience of each person is different. I had in-depth contact with every layer of NBD. That's why I know some secret. Therefore, if you tell me that I made a conclusion and I could tell you that I really had made a conclusion.
226	49:32	KC	So you can write down all the secrets (mixed voices of discussion)
227	49:33	KY	Yeah, I could write them down.
228	49:36	KC	So you can open a blog.

(Please refer to Appendix 6L for full version of the dialogue)

Finally, it was PK who initiated the idea of inviting the NBD to talk together the next time and invite them for a lunch. The meeting was concluded by discussing about the invitation.

6.14
Action Steps : Setting up of "admonishing official" system

6.14.1 Implementing action step

To ensure critical comments could be given by every members, I used the title of an official in ancient China – 諫官 (Admonishing Officer) whose role was to give critical advise to the Emperor fearlessly as he had been granted by the Emperor a guarantee of not to be punished by his antagonistic wordings. The full message on the arrangement of the "admonishing officer" and the response of the team members are placed in Appendix 6M.

6.14.1a How this activity could address the issues arising in Cycle 1

		Issues discovered in Cycle 1 that need to be addressed in Cycle 2	Admon-ishing official	**How I design this activity in ways that could address the issues arising in Cycle 1**
5 key ingred-ients	"Q'ing" each other	Difficult to induce critical reflective working behaviour	✓	Make one to be the admonishing officer of another one could almost guarantee that the members need to raise questions or build on other's opinion.
	Take improv ed action	The action of not to take any action	✓	The cross fertilization could hopefully generate a better action resolution.
Other key success factors	Facilita-tor	Lacking "tools" & authority to facilitate critical self reflective behaviours	✓	Many management or personal issues interwoven with or "hidden behind" some alleged technical reasons, which will be unknown to me, could be effectively addressed by other team members.

Table 6L How the issues discovered in Cycle 1 could be addressed in Cycle 2 by adopting the "admonishing official" practice in set meetings

6.15

Action Steps : 180 Degree Feedback

6.15.1 Implementing action step

1st 180 Degree feedback

The 1st 180 degree feedback was arranged right after the 1st Workshop. All the participants and their immediate supervisor – the Director of OpD were involved. All need to complete a feedback form to all. A 30 minutes time was given and all need to fill out the Form inside the meeting room where the Workshop had just held. Those who give feedback to others will be anonymous. All gave the Feedback Form completed to me for consolidation. For the participants, there are two types of Feedback Form, one was for peers and one was for their immediate supervisor. For the Director of OpD, there was only one type of Feedback Form to him.

2nd 180 Degree feedback

The 2nd 180 degree feedback was arranged after the Forum, which was the conclusion of Phase II of the CFG Program. The major differences of the 2nd Feedback were:

1. The feedback from NBD to each of the participants had been solicited.
2. The Feedback Form was a bit different in content.
3. The Feedback Form was forwarded to the participants as they wish "to have more private time to write down their thought".
4. The feedbacks for each participant from the new Director of OpD – RL, were given to me in a face to face meeting. I had jotted notes and the consolidated points had been forwarded to RL for confirmation.

6.15.1a How this activity could address the issues arising in Cycle 1

		Issues discovered in Cycle 1 that need to be addressed in Cycle 2	180 degree feedback (2 times)	How I design this activity in ways that could address the issues arising in Cycle 1
The "L"		What one had learnt not explicit	✓	The feedback could become a base of making comparison on change in behaviours.
5 key ingred-ients	The "P"	No "recognized ignorance" raised related to solving the problem	✓	The feedback could provide knowledge on one's "blind spot" and hence could probably raise
	Real proble m	Members as part of the problem	✓	Could promote better understanding of themselves
	Imple-ment solutio n	Feel oneself doing extra and benefit the Company only	✓	The feedback could probably make participants felt the benefit of the Program to one's career.
	"Q'ing" each other	Difficult to induce critical reflective working behaviour	✓	It was hoped that the feedback, some of which might run in contrary to one's own conception of himself, could induce critical self-reflective behaviour.
Other key success factors	Facilita tor	Lacking "tools" & authority to facilitate critical self reflective behaviours	✓	Feedback from peers and supervisor could probably give me extra "ammunition" to facilitate critical self reflective behaviours.

Table 6M How the issues discovered in Cycle 1 could be addressed in Cycle 2 by adopting the "180 degree feedback"

6.16
Action Steps : Individual Coaching

6.16.1 Implementing action step

Three rounds of individual coaching were arranged.

1st Round

Present 180 degree feedback

2nd Round

Work out individual improvement plan

3rd Round

Present 2nd 180 Degree feedback

6.16.1a How this activity could address the issues arising in Cycle 1

		Issues discovered in Cycle 1 that need to be addressed in Cycle 2	Individual coaching	How I design this activity in ways that could address the issues arising in Cycle 1
The "L"		The "L" & action not closely related.	✓	Integrating the "L" and action taken in the projects as "means" to improve those behaviours that they themselves wanted to improve.
5 key ingredients	The P	Want to learnt something new and practical	✓	The presenting of the 180 degree feedback could be "new" and highly relevant knowledge to the individual.
	Real problem	Members as part of the problem	✓	Hope to address individual problems one recognized as "roadblocks" to the effective execution of the project.
	Take improved action	The action of not to take any action	✓	It was hoped that drawing reference to one's change objective and compare them with the feedback from peers could induce critical reflection on one self.
Other key success factors	Facilitator	Lacking "tools" & authority to facilitate critical self reflective behaviours	✓	Same as above.
	Clear objective for the program	Objective of learning not clear.	✓	Help to make learning objective a "living" objective which could be modified from time to time after receiving 180 degree feedback.

Table 6N How the issues discovered in Cycle 1 could be addressed in Cycle 2 by providing individual coaching to participants

6.17

Critical incidents

6.17.1 Resignation of AH

By the summer of 08, AH was resigned. Who will be the successor had been unknown to me for several months. The resignation of AH was quite a surprise for the participants. When I chat with them informally on that, their concern was more on who would be the new boss as it affected them greatly.

6.17.2 Flooding

After both Teams had organized their 3rd meeting, a heavy rain storm had caused a serious flood in the factory. Their post mortem report told me that the flood reach almost 1 meter high and virtually all the furniture, equipments, machinery and stocks on the first floor had been damaged. All the participants were fully engaged with the crisis management and the project had been put to a halt. The seriousness of the flooding could be seen from the e-mail a participants – PF, sent to me on 16 Jun 08:

> William,
>
> FLOODING!!!
>
> We are all in the water for pass few days due to the serious flooding problem in Shenzhen area. All the activities are almost stopped due to no power and water.
>
> We have no idea when we can resume our project.
>
> Rgds,
> PF

However, it was only the AL Project – a better alignment with the NBD in the new product development process and in this case, the Project T. The Project T – the production of the new product T had not been stopped as the production schedule had been fixed.

6.18

Action Steps : Briefing for Senior Management

6.18.1 Implementing action step

The detail had been described in the section on “Soliciting support from the top management of NBD”

In order that the senior management members could have a right understanding on the background of the CFG program, the AL philosophy, and the role of the Project T and the Forum in the learning process of the participants, I conducted a 30 min. briefing for most of the senior management staff who had been invited to attend the Forum. I had placed the main point of the presentation in Appendix 6N.

6.18.2 Monitor implementation and effects

I had highlighted two extra points to the attention of the panel members so that would not thought of the presentation material as the “homework” of my teaching. I hope that could enable them to give more critical comment in the Forum even with my presence.

- I own the learning results and [RL] owns the business results.
- I had **NOT** provided any comment towards the solution and the presentation material of the two teams. The purpose is to ensure that the team member’s thinking could be 100% revealed.

(Slide # 14)

6.19

Action Steps : The Forum

6.19.1 Implementing action step

Team A

Recommendation made by Team A was based on their questionnaire sent to the NBD. They had virtually assimilated most of the suggestions the team members made in the team meetings and produced lots of recommendations. Detail of their recommendations was included in Appendix 6P

The presentation of Team A had invited many questions from the panels and many of them had expressed considerable interest in some of the recommendations.

Team B

Team B had mainly presented the system and procedure that had been applied in A&B Company. The presentation was made by RR only. RR had several detail description of the procedures related to quality without the prior consent of other team members.

The panel had asked few questions and the concluding comment from the President was that Team B should consider not to overload the meeting with detail.

The synthesis of recommendation of Team A & B

The proposals of the two teams had been synthesized after receiving the comments of the top management and had been integrated into the following 7 major tasks for improvement:

1. Sign off system – Proper project monitoring (milestone sign-off / documentation)
2. System audit; Management review
3. Establish new procedure together with NBD & Operation team.
4. Training / Refreshment Training
5. Leadership empowerment / Common Goal / Re-inforce discipline
6. Electronic Data System (Project Management)

7. Award & recognition (whole team / task force)

6.19.1a How this activity could address the issues arising in Cycle 1

		Issues discovered in Cycle 1 that need to be addressed in Cycle 2	Forum	How I design this activity in ways that could address the issues arising in Cycle 1
The “L”		Role conflict of me – drive for business result vs. learning result of the project	✓	The Forum was a “formal” way to pass the buck of making business decisions to the management
5 key ingred-ients	The P	Want to learnt something new and practical	✓	The panel members of the Forum could provide knowledge on the senior management’s view points, way of thinking, the company strategy, and up dated situation of the market etc.. All these would be new and highly practical knowledge.
	“Q’ing” each other	Difficult to induce critical reflective working behaviour	✓	The need to make a good presentation would probably stimulate a greater interest in “Q’ing” one another within the Team.
		Individual project failed to stimulate interest in “Q’ing” each other	✓	Same as above.
	Take improved action	The action of not to take any action	✓	With a clear deadline and a specific requirement being provided, taking the “action of not to take action” would not be possible.
Other key success factors	Facilitator	Lacking “tools” & authority to facilitate critical self reflective behaviours	✓	The feedback and questioning from the panel would be the “tool” for me to induce critical self-reflective working behaviours.
	Group dynamics properly managed	Dropping out of members and lack of group meetings lowered moral.	✓	In face of the need to “look good” in front of the top management, members would engage in good group dynamics in teamwork

Table 6O How the issues discovered in Cycle 1 could be addressed in Cycle 2 by arranging the Senior Management Forum

6.20
Content reflection: Is CFG an AL program – reflection against the 3 objectives of AL?

Same as the approach I adopted in Cycle 1 – the IMBA program, I would respond to this question by asking myself the following questions:

1. Had the 3 objectives of AL mentioned by Revans (1998 p.15-16) been met?
2. Had various provisions been made to enable the 5 key ingredients of AL to exist?

6.20.1 Had the 3 objectives of AL been met?

1. Make useful progress upon the treatment of some problem or opportunity in the real world

The problems, as described in the previous section, came from the real world and had been recognized by top management and the set members as important and worthy to pursue a solution.

Useful progress had been made as both teams had reached out to the Engineering Department (the NBD) to resolve the problem.

The progress had also been consolidated in the Forum composed of the top management of the Company and resolution had been reached concerning the follow-up action by merging the recommendation of both teams.

The set members had engaged in follow-up meeting to re-group into 5 teams to implement the consolidated recommendations.

2. Give nominated managers sufficient scope, to learn for themselves, how best to approach ill-structured challenges to which nobody can, at the outset, suggest any satisfactory response.

I had work closely with the senior management and got their support in giving the set members a free hand in working out the solution. The immediate supervisor of the set members had participated in almost all of the training and general meetings. I met with him to report on the progress and got input from him regarding the selection of problem and teaming up of the members. He had also refrained himself from giving directives in the meeting and play the role of information provider for all.

In the Forum, all the members of top management were good listeners and were very liberal towards the proposal of the two teams. They gave great appreciation towards the contributions of all the members and encourage them to work further on the problems.

3. Management development practitioners not to teach managers anything but to contrive, with senior managements, the conditions in which all managers learn with and from each other.

In arranging the IMBA, I had refrained from the attempt to pack the Program with seminars and workshop but had only arranged three half-day sessions on the topic of change management.

The training aimed at providing them framework on change management and two books had been distributed to the participants for their reference – “Leading Change” by John Kotter and “Now, discover your strength” by Marcus Buckingham & Donald O. Clifton. Extensive lecture on change management and the content of these two books had not been given. On the contrary, short lectures were frequently followed by discussions sessions. Opportunities were made available for the drawing up of the vision for change, analysing the situation and areas in need of change and identifying roadblocks to change in HMC and the making of action plan. All of them were realistic exercises addressing a “living problem”. The immediate supervisor of all the members (the Director of Operations) had present in all the sessions. Rather then act as passive listener, he had been actively involved in leading discussion, clarifying points, making summaries of member’s opinion regarding the company issues and problems which I knew little. The information he shared about the organization and his opinion towards concepts such as “boundaryless organization” had added to the knowledge disseminated in the training

sessions. The training sessions were mainly a context "in which all managers learn with and from each other".
The following is a summary on the strength and roadblock analysis conducted during one of the training session (which I called them Group Coaching).

(As concluded in the 8 Jan Group Coaching)

Strengths of (HMC)	**POTENTIAL ROADBLOCKS that constrain (HMC)'s strengths & business mission.**
• Experience & technology in the field	a. Lacks of motivation b. Reluctance to change
• Cash cow, deep pocket	Not spent wisely
• Multi-national staff	a. Inadequate participation b. Inadequate operation staff.
• Honest and customer oriented image & reputation • Customer skill of CEO • Adaptable	Inadequate succession planning a. Not catch up with new technology b. Lack personal involvement c. Inadequate teamwork

<u>Diagram 6P Presentation material for meeting with VP on 24 Jan 08</u>

I had told him and all the members explicitly from time to time that I was responsible for the learning result and the Director was responsible for the business results. This worked fairly well and could effectively address the issue of balancing the action and learning.

6.20.2 Had various possible provisions been made to enable the 5 key ingredients of AL to exist?

In this section, I would describe the provisions made to possibly enable all the 5 key ingredients of AL to exist in the CFG program. However, the provisions were something or some actions taken by me or by the HMC which could be interpreted differently or neglected by the members. Exploration of these possibilities will be made in another section.

6.20.2a What provisions had been made to enable an emergent "P" to

exist?

According to Revans (quoted in Smith 1997, p.365), the role of “P” is akin to an awareness that “no one knows the answer” and “all are obliged to find it”.

In order to build up an awareness that “no one knows the answer” and “all are obliged to find it”, a meeting between the Operations Director – AH, and the Vice-president (the VP) of HMC had been set up. During the meeting, the VP had stated the need to achieve a better alignment between the NBD and the Operations Division. This “murky” requirement could be indicated by his expression in a follow up meeting between AH and me on 10 Mar. 08:

Meeting with AH by WW on 10 March 08 (Total duration: 57min. 22 sec.)

1	00:00	WW	Right, for this time, we need to discuss several things. Since you and met with the [VP] last time, we really need to confirm the problem. OK, we need to confirm what the problem is really about. Because we need to communicate this message to the band of brothers. (…) I just hope that we could come up with a clear message.
2		AH	I don’t know. I don’t know what she wanted me to do.

Source: Data/ Meet Alex 10 March 08/ Transcription_Alex10 Mar (Full)

Although the expression of AH was more an emotional expression of his feeling of unfairness in the issue of cutting headcount (as discussed in the previous section), his expression did indicated the requirement on what need to be done was not a clear and solid. Actually in the meeting between AH and the Vice President, the VP had talked mainly about the need and importance of a better alignment between the NBD and the OpD. She had not mentioned about how and what to do.

Anyway, I had mentioned to both team, in their first meeting, on the consent of the NBD to cooperate and their arrangement of assigning two teams of their engineers as a “resource” for them to work together. Detail of other messages AH shared with me in the Meeting could be found in Appendix 6I

6.20.2b What provisions had been made to enable a real problem, not a puzzle, to exist?

Technical complexity

The nature of the Project could be revealed by the description of TC in the 1st set meeting of Team A:

> 22:20 TC (…) there are now three parties involved, the NBD, the customer, so Marketing could stand for them, and also us, the Operation. Three parts of a question. (…) So the problem now becomes (a situation of) everyone just keep on doing, continue to produce samples without knowing whether the final product will be exactly the same when put on mass production. No one could really tell you about that. Now we are talking about the production schedule was targeted at August. It had been written down in the schedule. Suppose to be August. Time is highly pressing.

TC mentioned three problems: the technical problem related to the design of the product T which was a new one and involved some new technology. Secondly, the final design had not been finalized but there was only around 3 months left and finally, there were three parties involved.

Political complexity

TC explained that the Project signified a new way of working with the Engineering Department (NBD) and NBD had little experience in dealing with this new relationship.

28:13 WC I believe that the past practice of handling a project is quite different with that of Project T. In the past when there is a project, Operations had not been involved. Project T is the first project that involves Operations at the very early stage. (…) In that case, many feedbacks were fed to them by us. Now NBD seemed not quite able to handle all these feedbacks. Furthermore, they could not be able to accept these criticism and don' t know how to respond. So they had become quite negative, quite depressive, and feel that we are finding faults with the person and not really focus on the job itself. So they feel a bit let go with the Project ^^^

This new relationship involved many ramifications on the political aspect such as who made the decision when controversies arise, sharing of responsibility and accountability, work load and exposure of "secrets within department" etc..

Certainly, this new relationship also involved some practical constrains such as resources constraint, limitation of knowledge, time constraints etc.

No answers from senior management

With the growing in number of new products, the past practice of a clear cut on responsibility of NBD and the Operations Division would no longer be the most efficient method. To cope with the future challenge, an earlier involvement of the Operations Division was needed. However, how early and how deeply the Operations Division needed to be involved and in what way they should be involved was a problem with no known answer. It could be varied from cases to cases and varied according to the requirements of different customers. In other word, it is both a technical and management problem that HMC need to resolve and the solution could have an important impact on the company's future business.

Participants had no previous experience of solving similar problem

While participants had the experience of working in context (either in the companies they previously served or in project while serving in HMC), they lacked the experience of DESIGNING or INSTALLING a system of alignment between the engineering and operations arms in a company the product launching process.

In summary, Project T was a perfect problem for AL as it:

- Was a real problem where no one could confidently provide a right answer
- All wanted to do something about it.
- It had an important and long term implication to the organization

It fit the requirement of a good problem for AL project from almost every aspect.

6.20.2c What provisions had been made to enable set members need to implement and could implement their proposed solution?

> By doing what they set out to do, and by setting out to do what they believe to be worth doing, managers are disciples of the Aristotelian ethic.
>
> Revans, R.W., ABC of Action Learning, Lemos & Crane, 1998 London, p.75

Reminding the team members on the need to implement from time to time in the team meetings

When attending the team meeting, I had, from time to time; remind the participants that what they proposed, on the acceptance of the top management in the Forum, will be implemented by them. I could quote an example for that:

173	00:27:56 WW	That's not just a game of words. This should truly reflect the ideal everybody agreed. You must state how you could achieve this ideal and not just talk about it. It's easy to write down a hundred ideals. The issue is what you will do to achieve these ideals. Ha…that can be a big issue. So don't take it too lightly. It's a tough job.

Source: Data / Mtg Team A (b) 16 May 08

The support from top management

The top management had granted their consent that they would make decision in the Forum on which proposal they would adopt and inform the members right the way. To facilitate the management to make the decision, a half-hour break in the Forum will be arranged. During that period, the team members will leave the room and come back half hour later.

The resource centre of NBD

A group of NBD engineers being designated by the Director of NBD to work together with the team members on request was a clear indication that the need to "walk their talk" was for real.

The Forum

At this stage, both teams were only required to find out the problem and made a proposal to the top management in the 1st Forum. In the Forum, the top management will make the decision which proposal to adopt or to merge the two proposals. After that, both team will merge together to implement the refined solution.

The need to really implement the proposal adopted by top management

All the participants had been informed and fully aware of the need to execute what they proposed and what had finally been accepted by the top management in the Forum. In the briefing meeting, the following PPT had been presented.

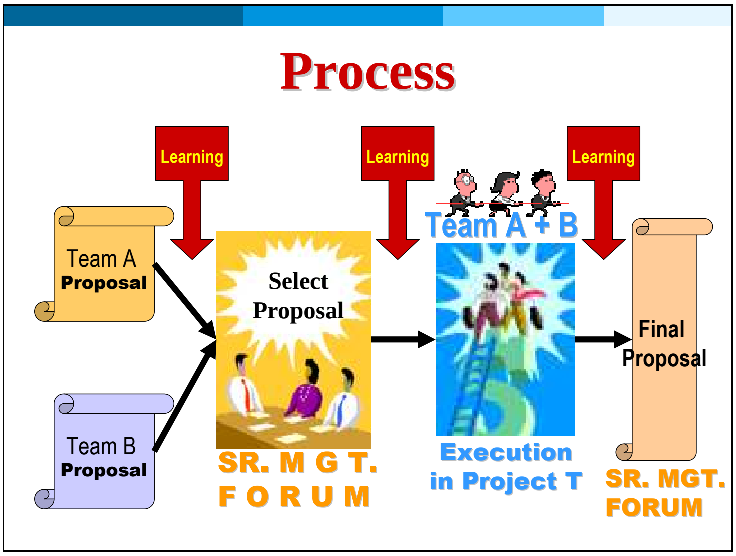


Diagram 6Q PPT displayed in Briefing for Phase II on 28 May 08

After the Forum, the proposals adopted by the top management which included a mix of two team's proposal (predominately belonged to Team A's) had been assimilated and repackaged to form 5 separate projects. The 10 members had been assigned by the new Director of OpD to those 5 projects. They had then made a presentation on their own project result in the second Forum held on 28 Jan 2010 which marked the official conclusion of the CFG Program.

6.20.2d What provisions had been made to enable set members could "Q'ing" each other?

Neutral role

When some member of Team B look at me for an agreeing face when they commented about the NBD senior management, I said:

203 47:25	WW	There’s no need to seek my opinion. I just come here to take voice recording (laughing), OK. Right, is everybody are agree with the location of the gap, and the reason leading to that seemed being discussed already, isn’t it? Everybody… every body feel that，that's the reason， lacking of ah… senior management commitment， and ah… 。

Source: Data /Team B / Mtg Team B (a) 16 May 08

My role as a facilitator

> …facilitators of action learning do not come up with “the answers”. They question judiciously to help people in the workplace think carefully through the issues that are significant to their work situation.
> (Zuber-Skerritt, 2002),

On top of refraining from providing answers, I had tried to remind I will not give any directives on what decisions the teams had to make. Whenever they looked at me for advise when they had come across of conflicting opinions and look at me for indication of direction, I would tell them they should make their own decision.

Admonishing official

Detail had been described in the section “admonishing official”

6.20.2e What provisions had been made to enable set members COULD take improved actions?

Personal Change Agenda

Taking improved action is vital for set members to learn from it and start a new cycle of AL process. However, it is a result of the set’s decisions and could neither be enforced by me nor by individual set member. However, the "change agenda" each set members developed could serve as a motivator to personally "do differently" in the AL process.

6.20.2f Summary

By and large, I must admit that the lack of report on the actual implementation of the team's proposal by the team members made me unable to make a completely safe claim that the two key ingredients – "implement proposed solution" and "take improved action" were completely in place in the CFG Program. I could only claim that the step taken by Team A & B to invite the NBD to tackle the Project T issue represented a first step toward implementing their proposed solution and the subsequent set meeting of Team A did helped the members to reflect on their meeting with the NBD and hence, enabled them to take improved and better informed actions in the Forum. The fact that all the team members were fully aware of the need to implement what they had proposed could help me to make a safe claim that their behaviours I observed represented their full anticipation on the future need to implement what they proposed. That is a marked difference with some other AL programs which ONLY required the participants to make a proposal (Dilworth & Willis, 2003, p.120). However, it would definitely have been much better to have had the opportunity to research the implementation phase.

6.21
Summary for Chapter 6

In this Chapter, I had tried to make a narration on too many activities that had been carried out in the two year's time. Due to the constraint of space and the consideration of the reader's interest, many details could not be included. By and large, this Chapter was a narration on my effort to build up an AL program together with the HMC's management. This is the part I felt I had made a real achievement much bigger then that in the IMBA Program. In the next Chapter, I will conduct an analysis on the data and made a report on my findings.

Chapter 7

DATA ANALYSIS

In the previous chapter, I had made a discourse on the way I conducted the CFG program so as to enable the 3 objectives of AL could be communicated to the members I had also made a discourse on the various provisions I made to set up a context to enable the 5 key ingredients could be available for all the participants, While the two Teams had been operating under more or less similar influences of the 4 contextual factors and had been provided with similar resources, it was found that the two teams had behaved quite differently in the project T (i.e. the project of seeking a better alignment between the OpD and the NBD in new product launch process). In this section, I would firstly explore the effectiveness of the two teams in the AL process in terms of both the process and the result. After that, I would proceed to compare and contrast between the two team's behaviour and explore the potential effect of the 4 contextual factors which might facilitate or inhibit these differences in practice to happen.

As an inductive study, data analysis was conducted throughout the study, and at the conclusion of the data collection. (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992) Data analysis included the use of the following analytical strategies:

1. Categorizing and recategorizing data,
2. Creating charts and matrices to assist in the organization and examination of data
3. Re-reading transcribed interviews for specific topics or concerns of interest using highlighting pens
4. Tabulating the frequency of behaviours related to "comrades in adversity" and the CRWB by using the sorting function of MS Excel.
5. Review data using the technique of pattern matching. In this strategy, patterns derived from the research are compared to emerging patterns in an effort to identify matches and mismatches. The greater the degree to which the patterns coincide, the stronger the study's internal validity would be.

7.1
The data for analysis

Rather then collecting the participants' self avocations on what they had learnt, the data I used for analysis mainly came from the transcription of the 4 team meetings of Team A & B. Every word in the audio recording of the four meetings, which added to a total of around 5 hours, had been transcribed. Due to the large volume of words and that the major part of them had not been translated, it will not be included in this Thesis but will be made available whenever needed.

Team	Meeting date	**Duration of audio recording***		**Location of meeting**
A	16-May-08 A.M.	111min.	29 sec.	Meeting room in factory
	2-Jun-08 Evening	65 min.	7 sec.	A Chinese restaurant close to the factory.
B	16-May-08 P.M.	70 min.	35 sec.	Meeting room in factory
	30-May-08 P.M.	51 min.	26 sec.	Conference room in factory

*The audio recording of Team A's 1st & 2nd meeting and Team B's 1st meeting had been split into two parts – part a & b, due to some interruption happened during the meeting.

Table 7A Meeting dates, times and locations of Team A & B meetings

I will present the extract of transcription in the following way which is slightly different from the format I presented in Cycle 1 due to the use of Excel format.

(A)	(B)	(C)	(D)
42	27:07	PF	(…)So this is just my wish…that is my own wish list of strength. I am, I am still experiencing…

(A) – Serial number of the speech starting from 1 at the beginning of the digital voice recording file. Please note that 1 may not signify the begging of the meeting. In some occasion, two or three voice file had been recorded in

one meeting due to the intermissions. In that case, notes will be given on that.
(B) – The reading on the timer in Media Player during play back.
(C) – The participant
(D) – Text of the speech
In order to save spaces, the heading for each column will not be shown in the extract of the transcript.

My decision not to adopt the data of asking the participants to name directly what they had learnt was due to the difficulties of doing so I experienced in Cycle 1. Marsick & O'Neil had put forwarded a plausible explanation on the difficulties to state clearly on the learning results for AL.

> People can find it difficult to learn from their experience through a messy struggle with real challenges. Participants in some programs are surprised when they are expected to take charge of their own learning, and often find it disturbing that they cannot easily 'name' or describe what that learning looks like.
> (Marsick & O'Neil, 1999, p.174)

I use the data generated in the set meeting (I call it "team meeting" in CFG Program for the participant's easy understanding) was due to that the set meeting was where some of the variables of the three schools of AL mentioned by O'Neil (quoted by Hicks 2001) could happen. Namely, reflection; group process; questioning; and the use of group.

The importance of the group process in AL had been further illustrated by Beaty et al (1997)

> Action learning is essentially a group process. It uses peers to generate action plans and generate learning from reflection on practice. The set meets regularly to support the learning of each member through active listening and questioning. This support and challenge is particularly appropriate when learning is about my experience and actions and not just my knowledge. Where learning is a holistic activity the set process can give impetus and

> insight, ideas and action plans. Action learning is about the person in context. The set helps me to explore my awareness of the features of the context and my place within it.
> (Beaty et al, 1997, p.184)

Mumford further stated that:

> The group process encourages people to tackle personal competences "what I am", as well as managerial competences "what I am able to do".
> (Mumford, 1996)

Therefore, the data generated in the group process – the team meeting of Team A & B are most relevant for exploring the learning result. On top of this, data from other sources such as transcription of interview I conducted with each participants and with the Director of Operations, the audio recording of the meeting between Team A and the NBD representatives, the presentation material of the two teams in the Forum etc. will also be used.

7.2 Which team had learnt and solved the project problem better?

In AL, learning and solving problem were equally important. In the following sections, evaluation on both parts will be discussed.

7.2.1 Evaluate by process

It was argued in Chapter 2 that one element of learning that should ideally happen in the AL process should be critical self reflection and the context for plasticising it could take place in the “set” in the form of group reflection process which Revans’ called “comrades in adversity” (Revans 1997). Cunningham (1999) had “operationalized” Revans’ "comrades in adversity" approach to group reflection and I will find out .to what extend the two teams had practiced them.

I will firstly evaluate to what extend the two teams had practiced the comrades in adversity's way of reflection and then I will proceed to examine whether the participants of the two teams had demonstrated more of Woerkom et al (2002)'s 5 dimensions of critical reflective working behaviours in the 2nd set meeting?

7.2.2 Had the set members became "comrades in adversity"?

The functioning of the "set" is of outmost importance for the type of learning in AL to happen. Revans had explicitly stated that:

> 'Learning-by-doing' is an insufficient description of what I have been on about these twenty-five years; it is rather 'Learning to learn-by-doing with and from others who are also learning to learn-by-doing'. (Revans, 1980, p.288)

Those who "are also learning to learn-by-doing" were named as "comrades in adversity" by Revans.

> Action learning as originated by Professor Reg Revans in the 1940s (Revans, 1945) embodied an approach based on "Comrades in adversity learning from and with each other through discriminating questioning, fresh experience and reflective insight" (Smith, 1997, p.721)

According to Cunningham, (1999), the following bullet points represent Revans' "comrades in adversity" approach to learning

- Learn from experience
- Reflect
- Share that experience with others
- Have those colleagues criticize and advise
- Take that advice, reflect and implement
- Reflect and share the lessons learned

It is difficult to measure the "comrades in adversity" precisely and I had come across no empirically tested measuring tools. I will use Cunningham's (1999) 5 points and try to elaborate them by referring to some actual examples I found in both teams so that the reader could be better informed on how I categorize the data.

Thorough out the team meetings which I acted as facilitator, the need for a straight adherence on the "comrades in adversity" style of discussion had not been stated. I had only installed an "admonishing officials" system which could probably address the 4th point of Cunningham – "Have those colleagues criticize and advise" so as to ensure that everyone had a chance to speak out. As I had argued in Chapter 2, the "L" for AL should be about critical reflection, I should not "dictate" the result but rather, should allow it to emerge naturally so that it could truly reflect whether the 4 key ingredients of AL could lead to the "L". Furthermore, I hoped that this naturalistic approach could also enable the reveal of the full impacts of the 4 contextual factors.

7.2.2a Team A

In the following example, the issue on setting up a reward system were championed both by PF & TC. WC was not quite agreed on the need for that as he felt a review system would be suffice for the purpose. However, PF's pointing out the possible scenario that "the people just don't even bother to follow the system" had made WC change his mind.

(A)	(B)	(C)	(D)	(E)
107	21:47	PF	Reward and penalty.	Share that experience with others
108	21:48	WC	I think that’s not needed. I feel that’s not needed.	Have those colleagues criticize and advise
109	21:49	PF	Why?	Have those colleagues criticize and advise by non-defensive response.
110	21:51	WC	So do you think with the existence of penalty they will do better? Or you think reward will get them to work harder?...I think that’s not needed.	Have those colleagues criticize and advise
111	22:00	TC	But if you have a, let’s say, not really a penalty, no reward is already a penalty, right?	Take that advice, reflect and implement (accept not to use the use the wording “penalty”)

(…)

	24:16	PF	I agree with TC’s comment that there are a lot of factors that could affect the project. (…) But according to what, WC, you propose system review, will there be cases that the people just don’t even bother to follow the system, what will you do then? What action you need to take after the system review?	Have those colleagues criticize and advise
	24:35	WC	In that case, I feel that we need reward and penalty.	Take the advise

Source: Mtg Team A (b) 2 Jun 08

(A) – Serial number of the speech starting from 1 at the beginning of the digital voice recording file. (B) – The reading on the timer in Media Player during play back. (C) – The participant (D) – Text of the speech (E) Relevant behaviours of “Comrades in Adversity” as proposed by Cunningham, (1999).

30	10:47	WC	This is very important. The opposite party (the NBD) should be able to hear our voices. What I felt about the current situation is that they could not really hear our voices and also, would not give an explanation on why they had not accepted our opinions. (…)	Learn from experience Reflect Share that experience with others
31	11:10	TC	The point I really agree with you is that, they should listen to our opinion. But I will choose another word, which is that they should give responses to our opinions, but not necessarily accept them. (…)They could just give a response and not necessarily need to agree with it. Ha.	Take the advice but modify it. Have those colleagues criticise and advise
	11:43	PF	That should be a kind of channel to give feedback on the situation.	Take that advice.

Source: Data / Team A / Mtg Team A (b) 2 Jun 08

(A full version on the dialogue could be found in Appendix 7.1)

Other examples of "comrade in adversity" way of group reflection for Team A could be found in Appendix 7A

7.2.2b Team B

Evidences showing incomplete "comrades in adversity" group reflection process could be found easily in Team B's 1st and 2nd meeting. The incompleteness was attributed to the general lacked of taking advises, reflect and implement. For example, when RR had completed his half-hour presentation on the procedure of A&B Co., which was "sharing on the learning" by nature, the NBD staff raised question concerning the time factor which was a "reflection on that knowledge". The NBD's questions, which was actually a kind of "criticize and advise by colleagues" had not been accepted, but rather, met with defensive behavior.

36	28:48	NBD staff	If you follow this process, how long do you think this flow would take before the project completed? Could you make an estimation on it?	Reflection request
37	29:00	KY	I cannot make an estimation.	Unable to reflect or not want to reflect.
38	29:01	NBD Staff	I think it would take quite long.	Reflection by NBD
39	29:02	KY	^^^I cannot make an estimation on it.	Unable to reflect or not want to reflect.
40	29:04	NBD Staff	I estimate it could take two to three years if all the steps were followed.	Advise by NBD staff
41	29:08	KY	Ah…but we had succeeded before.	Not taking advise

What happened in Team B was that many learning from experience was shared. There were also many criticism and advise towards each other's opinion. However, what had been lacking was the "take the advice, reflect and implement". Without this the comrade in adversity way of group reflection could not be said as complete and effectively in-place.

222	48:59	KC	Not "no need to understand further". For me, I had not concluded yet. But I feel they had made a conclusion already.	Reflection request
223	49:04	WW	No need to talk with them (the NBD)?	
224	49:05	KC	Yeah, that mean no need to write down, for me, I could not made such a conclusion yet, is it really like that, possibly, study it a bit more.	Advise by colleagues.
225	49:18	KY	The experience of each person is different. I had in-depth contact with every layer of NBD. That's why I know some secret. Therefore, if you tell me that I made a conclusion and I could tell you that I do had made a conclusion.	Felt no need to reflect further. Refuse to take advice.
226	49:32	KC	So you can write down all the secrets (mixed voices of discussion)	Almost giving up to advice.
227	49:33	KY	Yeah, I could write them down.	Being firm on no need to reflect further.
228	49:36	KC	So you can open a blog.	Giving up to advice.

Source: Data / Team B / Mtg Team B (a) 16 May 08

The giving up to advise by KC did not indicated that he had totally adopted the "advise" of KY. At the rear part of the meeting, KC had still uttered the need to check out what was happening and query the suitability of the procedure recommended by KY.

Other examples of "comrade in adversity" way of group reflection for Team B could be found in Appendix 7B

Other examples of INCOMPLETED form of “comrade in adversity” way of group reflection for Team B could be found in Appendix 7.1.

7.2.3 Comparing Team A & B

The effectiveness of discussion within team had not only made me aware but had also been noticed by the team members themselves. In the 2nd meeting, both TC and MYL of Team A agreed that a consensus had been reached.

19	08:16 + 13min24 sec of part 1	TC	Actually, we are using the opinion that each one had contributed which is good. At least, each team member within the team could feel that he is able to achieve what other had said. And we had been able to reach a consensus. (…)
20	08:55	MY	Besides, the opinions that each of us had contributed had not been too diversified and that represent different thinking of each of us and if there are some other points which one felt important and had not yet raised could take the opportunity to raise (…)

Source: Data / Team A / Mtg. Team A (b) 2 Jun 08

Full text of this part of conversation detailed in Appendix 7.2

What TC had mentioned was that everyone had a fair chance to “share experience with others” and mutual criticism and advises had been given and members had taken the advise so that a “consensus” could be reached.

On the other hand, KY of Team B was aware that KC and FZ had not been totally convinced at the concluding part of the meeting. However, attempt to reach a consensus had not been followed. It seems that he intended to leave the difference in opinion as it was. One reason for that was that a major part of the work of preparing the proposal for presentation will be volunteered by RR.

239 51:25 KY Ah…can I speak first? Ah...**I could understand you may or may not have a buy in on what I had said, you may have your viewpoint.** Actually, I agree with what (FZ) and KC had said. Surely we should not jump to conclusion. We surely should not put into writing that we propose to fire the people, and mentioned the problems were caused by top management etc. That is, we should go back to study what is the problem, where is the gap though we fully aware what had happened.

Source: Data / Team A / Mtg. Team A (b) 2 Jun 08

7.2.4 Summary

The overall behaviors of the two Teams could be summarized by the 5 points of comrades in adversity's way of reflecting.

Comrades in Adversity's way of reflection	**Team A**	**Team B**
Learn from experience	Stated past experiences	Stated past experiences
Reflect	Reflection on those experience with more reference to the existing condition	Reflection on those experiences with less reference to the existing condition.
Share that experience with others.	Experiences from varied set members Share experience in a factual way.	Experiences mainly from a few members. Emphasis superiority of experience
Have those colleagues criticize and advise.	More mutual criticize & advise behaviors. More build on each other's ideas.	More Q & A like behaviors. More in the format of telling. More behaviors of playing down, neglecting or stopping the advise of others

<u>Table 7B Compare Comrades in Adversity way of communication demonstrated in Team A & B meetings (Continue in next page)</u>

Comrades in Adversity's way of reflection	Team A	Team B
Take that advice, reflect and implement.	More accepting behavior. Many advise expressed by members had been modified, consolidated into solid team action. Modify action plan and proposal after meeting the NBD representatives.	More defending behaviors. Many alternative advise expressed by some members had been ignored or rejected. The original idea of some members had remained almost unchanged. Little modification on the original action plan and proposal after meeting the NBD representatives.

Table 7B (Continued) Compare Comrades in Adversity way of communication demonstrated in Team A & B meetings

To avoid duplicating the content, further examples of team A & B's behavior which could further illustrate points stated above could be found in the upcoming sections.

In summary, Team A, when comparing with Team B, had exhibited much more behaviors which could indicate a "comrades in adversity's" way of reflecting had been happening in the set. It could therefore be concluded that members in Team A could have more chances of practicing reflective behaviors then members in Team B.

7.2.5 Had the participants of the two teams demonstrated more of Woerkom et al (2002)'s critical reflective working behaviours

While the "comrades of adversity" emphasis a serial steps of group reflection, I tried to look for some "stand alone" reflective behavior which could be found individually in the team meetings. Woerkom"s six dimensions of critical reflective working behaviors were adopted for this purpose.

7.2.5a Openness about mistakes

Woerkom, & Croon, (2008) defined “openness about mistake” as

> …not covering mistakes up or reacting defensively when confronted with an error thus limiting possibilities for oneself and others in the organisation to learn from them. (Woerkom, & Croon, 2008, p.317)

Openly admitted one had made a mistake could not be found in both teams. However, expressions indicating an intention of not “covering mistakes up” and exhibiting non-defensive behaviours when confronted with other’s comment could be found much more in Team A then in Team B.

Team A

For example, MYL regard the thinking that the NBD “intentionally” avoiding problem could be just an assumption and might not be the case when communicating with the NBD face to face.

128	42:42	MYL	(…) If there is a feeling that we, internally are not aligned, (…) and there is a feeling of that they (the NBD) are trying to avoid something, I believe that by the time we discuss the issue face to face, they might tell us the other side of the story. (…) I don’t think there are a two totally opposing views and I don’t think they would intentionally not to handle some obvious flaws on the product (…)

Although this was not a direct admitting of one had made a mistake, but this was something quite similar to the expression of “We might be wrong” and “We might have made a mistake here”. Another example was WC, the QA Manager, who mentioned the NBD’s suggestion that some of the flaws on the product design was actually due to the inaccuracy of the machinery of his own department.

136	47:49	WC	(…) and now they (the NBD) said that the machinery of QA was not accurate or that the handling procedures of the QA equipment were not accurate. Their saying might not be untrue or in conflict (with the fact). O.K. Because the machine we are currently using is really a bit dumb. (…)

A third example could be found in Team A's 2nd meeting when WC and TC pointed out the possibility of some of their current practice might caused the NBD to "felt uncomfortable". This was an indication of an attitude of empathetic understanding while not ruling out the possibility that one might have done something inappropriate.

59	15:42	WC	(…) What had been changed compare with the previous projects? What had been changed (in terms of) the goals compare with other projects? I believe there is one thing that had been changed and that is our involvement in the project at an early stage. In that case, will it be our involvements at early stage cause their discomfort? So what caused them (the NBD) to feel uncomfortable? Right? We need to reflect on that.
60	16:27	TC	(···) We really need to interview them (NBD) in order to know what cause their uncomfortable feeling. From this Project T, what I feel is that they might feel that we re a bit not very proactive. Apart from that, there might be an opportunity that they felt they are just a middle person and had been curbed by others at their front and at the back. (…) But we must ask them in order to know for sure what really had caused their discomfort (…)

Team A had also been able to show the ability to use the comments of NBD to point out some management issues of their own function. This vividly shows a willingness to admit own department's mistakes and not to find excuses to cover up them.

130	08:07	PF	However, [a staff of NBD] had also mentioned when he take up the role as a project manager, he felt that he had experienced some difficulties when locating people on our side. He raised example of contacting a lot of people but they didn't seemed to understand. That's his feedback.
131	08:20	TC	Will this tell us something about the issue on communication channel in our organization which is actually not very clear or quite confusing? Or they may be relatively not very official or not formal.

Team B

Team B had repeatedly stated that they had already done their duty and all problems were caused by the NBD. However, some members did raise some concerns, queries or comments towards the appropriateness of the solution or the validity of the assumption that some members held.

124	34:37	KC	(…)But why the people did not execute (the procedure), shouldn't we find out this and then proceed to improve them?
125	34:47	KY	That's pretty simple – lazy.
126	34:50	KC	OK, if it's individual staff who is lazy, remove him.
127	34:55	KY	Remove them all.
128	34:56	KC	Is it really that all staff are lazy. All of them are lazy so…

Source: Data/ Team B/ Mtg. Team B (a) 16 May 08

The comments and queries of those members (mainly FZ & KC) had generally been met with reassurance, ignoring or side tracking (Evidence on this had been placed in Section). All of these indicated that there Team B, as a group, had generally lacked a kind of openness towards potential mistakes.

7.2.5b Critical vision sharing (critical opinion sharing)

Critical opinion-sharing refers to an examination of social and political "taken-for-granteds" (Reynolds, 1998) in the organization. People who dare to criticize espoused theories are perceived as saying "the emperor wears no clothes" or as "troublemakers" (Brooks, 1999)

Team A

Some critical vision shared was really on some social "taken-for-granted" assumptions.

69	18:25	MYL	Do you believe that system could change the personality?
70	18:32	WC	May be we can share our ideas on whether a system could make alternation on the style, personality, behaviour of a person.
71	18:37	TW	Environment should change a person.
72	18:40	?	Yeah.
73	18:40	WC	But that person should accept the system.

TC had also raised a point that challenged the assumption that "understand before seed to be understood" when many team members expressed that a better alignment could be achieved by understanding more about the NBD's problem.

224 38:10 TC (…) To understand others, that is to put your (foot) into other (people's shoe) is good in itself. (…) However, there could be situations when you want to understand but others don't want them to be understood. In that case you need to adopt a more straight forward or an approach that tense up in order to make things work. (…)

Mtg. Team A (b) 16 May 08

The opinions stated above were more about being critical towards others. That's not all for "critical vision sharing". Woerkom et al (2002) had also stated that they found the respondents in their case-studies who demonstrated critical vision sharing behaviours also commented that "Good critical workers are not just being negative but do suggestions for a different way of working". (Woerkom et al 2002, p.380)

One example illustrating this was that in the 1st meeting of Team A when many others had expressed that the "ideal" situation should be achieved through "interaction throughout the process" (by TW), by "sharing informations" (by WC), by "alignment on attitudes" (by MYL), by "clarifying accountability" (by PF), TC raised an idea that challenge those "espoused theories" and point out that they won't be effective and suggested a "different way of working" the need of building up a competing situation. (See Appendix 7C)

Team B

In Team B, some members did raise some critical vision which, actually, were much more critical then those rose by Team A.

188 44:10	KY	(…) <u>When I dine with them (some “good” NBD staff) and they told me something. Which is about “it’s who and who told me not to do this”,</u> “It is who and who asked me not to do that”. So what? What is this? <u>That’s top down. It shows that they didn’t care to walk their talk.</u> They told you they embrace challenge and what had followed? They don’t really think in this way. You’ll be fooled by them if you believe in what they said.
201b 46:52	PK	As what KY had said that is basically the management (problem). If I ask my subordinate to walk to the East and he ever dare to walk to the West side, I will just give him a slap on the face. It’s just that simple. So it’s a waste of time to discuss further.

The points raised by PK & KY were simple, forceful and sounded convincing. I don’t want to evaluate whether their points were correct or whether they were purely prejudices. Anyway, their comments challenged many people’s “espoused theory” of not to criticise the senior management openly and publicly. Their comments were much like crying out loud "the emperor wears no clothes". However, as Woerkom et al (Woerkom et al 2002) had quoted in his research, "Good critical workers are not just being negative but do suggestions for a different way of working". That was the part which was lacking in Team B. It could be evidenced that at the concluding part of the meeting, their resolution was not even trying to mention about it.

239	51:25	KY	Ah...can I speak first? Ah...I could understand you may or may not have a buy in on what I had said, you may have your viewpoint. Actually, I agree with what (FZ) and KC had said. Surely we should not jump to conclusion. **We surely should not put into writing that we propose to fire the people, and mentioned the problem were caused by top management etc.** That is, we should go back to study what is the problem, where is the gap though we fully aware what had happened.
240	51:59	KC	(…)So what are you going to write down? Straight from you had mentioned or what…
241		WW	OK。
242	52:17	KY	Surely it could not be written down.

Source: Data/ Team B/ Mtg. Team B (a) 16 May 08

The expression that "I agree with what (FZ) and KC had said. Surely we should not jump to conclusion." was itself an espoused theory and it had NOT been matched with an action of trying to reach consensus with KC & FZ.

One might argue that the procedure (the A&B Co. Procedure) proposed by KY when he dealt with the customer – A&B Company, might be able to address this issue. It will be out of the scope of the Thesis to go into a detail analysis on the A&B Co Procedure and could not say for sure whether the procedure could really address this issue. However, I would postulate that's not very likely due to three reasons:

1. KY, PK & RR had never mentioned in the meeting how the senior management commitment issue they mentioned could be addressed by this Procedure.
2. This Procedure was developed by KY few years ago to meet the requirement of the customer – the A&B Company, and was not originally intended to address the senior management's commitment issue.
3. PK admitted that NOTHING could be done without the authority of "firing" people. Which meant that he did not perceive the A&B Co procedure could really address the issue.

246	53:54	FZ	Solution?
247	53:55	WW	What's your suggestion to solve these issues (laziness of staff and lack of top management commitment)?
248	53:57	PK	Actually, my feeling is that if the people could not be fired then nothing could be done. So just let it be

Source: Data/ Team B/ Mtg. Team B (a) 16 May 08

7.2.5c Challenging group-think

Woerkom, & Croon, (2008) defined challenging groupthink as

> …the competency to express disagreement, even when everyone else is in agreement. (Woerkom, & Croon, 2008, p.317)

Team A

Some evidence of challenge group think could be found in case such as challenging an idea agreed by most of the Team A members on using IT systems to help solving the work flows monitoring.

16	06:41	TW	We had mentioned using the IT system to strengthen communication and specially emphasis the "work flow's capability to boost efficiency. I think "Work Flow" should be able to help us on these. (…)
17	07:20	TC	However, we need to consider that the principle of "garbage in garbage out" should also apply to the system. That means, if the input is not good in quality, the output would also not be good in quality (…)

Some pose situational question towards other's proposal which could just be a "best wish".

132	24:16	PF	I agree with what (TC) had said. There are many factors that affect the project. They may^^^ so and so. That could be difficult to control. However, for example what (WC) had mentioned to use a system review. Right, but in case that the person just don't follow the system, so what could you do about it? What I meant is what would you do after the system review?

Source: Data/Team A/Mtg. Team A (b) 2 Jun 08

Team B

The behaviour of challenging group think could be found also in Team B. After KY made a strong endorsement of the A&B Company's Procedure and described how successful it had been, KC pointed out the success might due to the strong driving force from the customer.

111	28:33	KC	There is a point I would like to clarify. You had mentioned that the product of [A&B] had strictly adhered to it (the procedure). Could it be due to the close monitoring of the customer so that they (the NBD) was forced to comply with the rule.
112	28:47	KY	That's true
113	28:47	KC	So there is a close monitoring (by the customer) on the project development process.

When the whole team had almost agreed that the cause of the problem was the incompetence of the NBD staff and the lack of commitment by the top management and the procedure proposed by KY had been agreed as the right solution, KC challenge the group think at the concluding part of the meeting.

54	04:15 (+ 58' 39" of part 1)	KC	Actually, I felt that although this procedure (the A&B Co's procedure recommended by KY) is 99%, 100% work, but in the process of implementation, would the design of the form be really fit for managing the existing situation. Referring to what I mentioned about the CAF, why there is no operation or QA team (involving).

7.2.5d Asking for feedback

In their study, Woerkom, & Croon, (2008) included the areas of asking for feedback included:

> …one's opinions, underlying values or criteria about what is important at work, thereby stimulating a discussion on the theories-in-use (Schön, 1983) that may stimulate double-loop learning. (Woerkom, & Croon, 2008 p.317)

Proactively asking feedback towards one's own opinion had not been found in both Team A & B's meeting. This could partly due to the Admonishing Officer system I set up so everyone would aware that his idea would be commented by others. However, examples of asking questions to unearth the underlying values could be found. In the second meeting of Team A, WC's recommendation of setting up a powerful program manager had invited a lot of critical feedback from all other team members. WC tried to persuade others by providing a lot of explanation and had nearly convinced others when PF asked a question that helped to point out the underlying value of WC – the belief that a good leadership was needed.

204	33:37	PF	Actually, what WC you mentioned aim at tacking the leadership issue, that sort of thing.
205	33:42	WC	That's what I felt is currently lacking.
206	33:45	PF	Yeah, that is what I actually agree.
207	33:47	WC	That is what is lacking.
208	33:48	PF	The area is really about the leadership for team.
209	33:52	WC	Right, I feel that was lacking now and need to be strengthened.

Source: Data / Team A / Mtg. Team A 6 Jun 08

7.2.5e Experimentation

Woerkom, & Croon, (2008) defined experimenting as:

> …individual learning by trying out new ways of working. (Woerkom, & Croon, 2008 p.317)

Team A

53	12:33	TW	I feel that we had conducted so many experiments, QA and indicated many failures (on product design) but they currently could not hear our voice. We should make a projection on the cost and inform them on the cost implication if they still go ahead and maintain a rate of 180 thousand (…)
(…)			
57	13:27	PF	Actually this is right. No matter how much you tell the boss, it will always be the money issue that triggered his biggest reaction.
58	13:33	TW	That's why I raised this issue and will it be good for us to include this element on cost in our project objective.

A comparison between Team A & B indicated that Team A, in their two meetings, had been much better in willing to try out new ways of working. This could be reflected in the summary on the ideas contributed by various team members occasionally made by the "secretary" – PF. When I asked him to make a recap on the different ideas contributed by various team members, he made a summary of 4 other team members different opinions. (See Appendix 7D)

It must be note that merely stating different viewpoints is only part of "experimentation" as they represent new ways of thinking. The set meeting will just be turned into a kind of "talk shop". The most important is "trying out new ways of working" which means the ideas being assimilated and adopted. This could be evidenced from the remarks made by TC & MY in Team A's second meeting.

19	08:16 + 13min24 sec of part 1	TC	Actually, we are using the opinion that each one had contributed which is good. At least, each team member within the team could feel that he is able to achieve what other had said. And we had been able to reach a consensus. (⋯)
20	08:55	MY	Besides, the opinions that each of us had contributed had not been too diversified and that represent different thinking of each of us and if there are some other points which one felt important and had not yet raised could take the opportunity to raise (⋯)

Source: Data / Team A / Mtg. Team A (b) 2 Jun 08

Full text of this part of conversation detailed in Appendix 7.2

It vividly shown that the team members felt that everyone did make contributions and the difference in opinions had been assimilated and were mutually supportive to each others. The subsequent proposal of Team A which had incorporated and assimilated most of the ideas of the team members provided another strong evidence to prove that they had "walked their talk".

Team B

Experimentation in Team B was few. One of them was expressed by PK when he suggest inviting the NBD for lunch which was a breakthrough as the overall tone of the meeting was just to present the A&B Company's procedure which could be done without consulting with the NBD.

Some expression in Team B's meeting look like "experimentation" but they were really a kind of emotional expression. For example:

250	54:08	PK	OK, that's simple. If the documents had not been completed, do it the tough way KY had done before. That's a right approach. In cases document are not in full set, let's not to start working. No FMEA, not to start working. Not to mention producing the prototype.
251	54:19	KC	There is some thing which were currently under production but the CAF was still no where to be seen.
252	54:24	PK	Yeah, slowed down without giving reason.
253	54:25	KC	Let's decline start to work. Not to produce. Stop there. Forward ^^^back to them.

The suggestion made by PK & KC were an experimentation, a new way of working but served merely as an emotional expression as it had not been included in their proposal.

On the other hand, there were many expressions that DISCOURAGE experimentation. When KC and FZ had suggested the desirability to look into the issue of training effectiveness, to dig deeper to see if any guideline had been in used, KY made a straight disagreement on it.

119	33:29	KY	What KC and FZ mentioned were a bit too in-depth. A bit in-depth and should not be the objective. Ah,…those research, had the training been so and so, locating the guide set etc. were a bit too in-depth. Our objective should be simpler.

When FZ continued to express his doubt on KY's conclusion that NBD's failure to adhere to the procedure was due to their "laziness" and suggested to locate the real problem to see in what way they could help them, KY again, made a straight disagreement.

130	35:13	KY	I think it's not the right time to make an analysis on these things.

The A&B Company's procedure was not something new but had been devised by KY years ago. The suitability of applying this to every customer is questionable. What Team B attempted to do was not completely a "new ways of working" though it could be said as a new ways of applying "old things". In that case, exploration on the issue of application in the new situation should be needed. Regrettably, discussion on this issue had never been touched on.

7.2.6 Difficulties of counting the CRWB

7.2.6a Multiple CRWBs in one expression

There were some cases when more then one types of CRWB were contained in an expression. One example could be found when most of the team members of Team A agreed on the seemingly promising solution of setting up a formal system, WC raised an issue that challenge the (1) group think and (2) the "take for granted" assumption (i.e. critical vision sharing) of a good system could guide the behaviour of people.

> 74 18:42 WC The system requires the top management to drive it, right? It needs the top management to drive this system. They might not implement this step in case the top management do not drive this system.
>
> Team A (b) 2 Jun 08

7.2.6b The same CRWB topic being cut up into several expressions

For example, KC postulated the possibility of the customer's pressure to enforce a detail new product launch procedure represented a "critical vision sharing". He subtly raised the query on the possibility of enforcing a very detailed approach for the new product launch process by an in-house department alone. His suggestion actually challenged KY's former description on his success of implementing the A&B Company's procedure.

This theme had been broken up into three parts due to the interruption of KY. In that case, I choose to count them as three critical vision sharing behaviours. (See Appendix 7D)

In view of the difficulties of making a count on the CRWB, I would suggest taking the count as a reference. The reader should refer to the original transcription for making their own judgement.

Woerkom, & Croon's, (2008) 5 dimensions of critical reflective working behaviours	Team A	Team B
Openness to mistakes	8	1
Critical opinion sharing	26	14
Ask feed- back	14	
Challenge group-think	8	13
Experimentation	12	2
Total:	**68**	**30**

Table 7C Behaviours related to the five dimensions of CRWB observed in Team A &B

It was quite clear that members of Team A had much more chances of practicing CRWB then Team B.

7.2.7 Evaluate by result

To evaluate the result, I would like to see from four lenses.

a. Problem solving – Had the team produced quality solution to the "real problem"?
b. Group learn from it action – Had the team take an improved action?
c. Individual learning from AL – Had the set members became more reflective in the 2nd set meeting
d. Learn from "P" – Had Kotter's * Steps Process been effectively employed?

7.2.7a Had the team produced quality solution to the "real problem"?

Although learning is more important than the solving of the actual problem according to Revans, able to see a positive result on their own action will certainly be a desirable outcome and an indicator of program effectiveness for both the participants and the sponsoring organization.

Many proposals of Team A had been adopted by the top management (Please refer to Appendix 7E), and the 7 resolutions had subsequently been executed by 7 tasks forces formed by all of the participants. For the proposal of Team B, the top management had not refuted it completely but would like the NBD to work out the appropriate procedure with the OpD. This was exactly what Team A had proposed. In view of this, I could conclude that the proposal of Team A was higher in quality then Team B.

7.2.7b Had the team take an improved action?

Team A

When Team A decided to collect the opinion and input of NBD, they started with hosting a lunch gathering with the NBD staff. In the lunch gathering, they had successfully obtained a great deal of input from NBD and Team A decided to collect a greater amount of ideas by sending out questionnaire to all of the NBD staff. Their seriousness towards using the questionnaire findings to improve their action could be indicated from the following as shown in Appendix 7F

Team B

Team B chose to arrange a lunch with the NBD staff before involving them in the next meeting. Unlike the intention of Team A, which aims at listening and exploring, their intention was more of building a good atmosphere for them to present their proposal in the meeting right after the lunch. That could be evidenced from their casual chatting, though joking and mean nothing serious, could reveal some of their intention:

88	08:54	PK	Let's have lunch together with them first. How about make it 12:30. Then we can have meeting after lunch, is it OK?
89	09:05	KC	In order to achieve our goal…
90	09:05	?	Invite them all.
91	09:07	KC	…be unscrupulous.
92	09:08	KY	Have a good dinner outside, discuss with them while singing Karaoke
93	09:09	PK	Singing while talking.
94	09:10	KY	Have a drink together (Mixed voice of discussion)

The lunch with NBD, to Team B was just a prelude to present their off-the-shelve solution. Actually, they communicate little on the alignment issue with the NBD staff during the lunch and little opinion had been collected. Most of the talks were around some day-to-day works and mindless chit-chats.

7.2.8 Had the set members became more reflective in their 2nd meeting?

Team A engaged in a meeting that featured with plenty of reflective behaviours. It resulted in a lot of improved action resolution. Q'ing each other was common in the meeting.

Woerkom, & Croon's, (2008) 5 dimensions of critical reflective working behaviours	1st Mtg.										2nd Mtg.									
	Team A					Team B					Team A					Team B				
	TC	WC	TW	PF	MYL	PK	KY	KC	RR	FZ	TC	WC	TW	PF	MYL	PK	KY	KC	RR	FZ
Openness to mistakes	2		1					1			2	3								
Critical opinion sharing	**6**	**1**			**1**	**2**	**3**	**7**		**2**	**3**	**4**		**9**	**2**					
Ask feed-back										**1**	**3**	**2**	**5**	**4**						
Challenge group-think			**1**					**7**		**6**	**1**	**2**	**2**	**2**						
Experimenta-tion		**2**									**5**	**2**	**3**				**2**			
Sub total:	**8**	**3**	**2**		**1**	**2**	**3**	**15**	**0**	**9**	**14**	**13**	**10**	**15**	**2**		**2**			
Total:	**14**					**29**					**51**					**2**				

Table 7D Frequencies distribution of the "comrades in adversity" communication behaviours in the 1st & 2nd meetings of Team A & B

It was quite clear to conclude from the table that the types of CRWB practiced had been more evenly distributed and Team A had practiced much more CRWB then Team B in their 2nd team meeting.

7.2.8 Had the eight change management steps been employed?

Ever since the 8 Steps Process of Kotter had been mentioned in the 3 half-day workshops at the early stage of the Program, it had NOT been stated as a requirement for the participants to follow the steps when they engaged in the Project T. Nor had it been mentioned as a requirement to be complied when making their presentation in the Forum.

Intention of applying the Kotter's 8 steps change process

In the second meeting of Team A, PF did raise the desirability of referring to the 8 Steps Process.

22	10:02	PF	Hadn't we, at that time mentioned about producing a vision and making "small wins" right?
23	10:06	PF	Do we need to apply what had been delivered at that time?
24	10:10	TW	Those seven steps of change, The steps that make change.
25	10:12	PF	Yeah. I could recall it. That should be it at that time.
26	10:14	TW	Is it seven steps? Had my memory failed me?
27	10:19	TW	Doesn't seem to be correct.
28	10:19	PF	Can't remember. But what's the vision? WC might be right. We really should ask: what do we want?

Source: Data / Team A / Mtg. Team A (b) 2 Jun 08

Despite the discussion ended up with nothing solid to explicitly put the 8 steps (not 7) of change management into their discussion agenda, Team A's overall approach to lead this change had more or less materialized many of those steps. Although both teams had attended the "programmed knowledge" of Change Management, but they came up with two different interpretations of the change management steps.

The extend of applying the 8 steps change process

As Step 7 & 8 were beyond the scope of Project T, only Step 1 to 6 will be included in the following analysis.

	Team A	Team B
1. Establish a Sense of Urgency		
• Examine market and competitive realities	Yes	No
• Identify and discuss crises, potential crises, or major opportunities	Discussed crises, potential crises and opportunities.	Mainly discuss crisis that had happened already
2. Form a Powerful Guiding Coalition		
• Assemble a group with enough power to lead the change effort	Attempt to INVOLVE the NBD as a **partnership** relationship.	Attempt to INCLUDE the NBD as **followers** with Operations takes the lead
• Encourage the group to work as a team	More effort put on team work within own team and to team up with NBD	Some behaviours hindering team work within own team. Less effort on teaming up with NBD.
3. Create a Vision		
• Create a vision to help direct the change effort	More effort put on creating a vision together with NBD	Focus on pushing forward own solution
• Develop strategies for achieving that vision	Develop together with NBD	Persuade NBD
4. Communicate the Vision		
• Use every vehicle possible to communicate the new vision and strategies Teach new behaviours by the example of the guiding coalition	Lunch as a media for frank discussion. Innovative method in presenting their findings to top management.	Lunch more as a gesture. Only RR made the presentation in a straight forward manner.
5. Empower Others to Act on the Vision		
• Get rid of obstacles to change	Explore with NBD on obstacles. Using questionnaire to get more information.	Obstacles pre-determined: laziness and NBD top management. These they did not intended to get rid of.
• Change systems or structures that seriously undermine the vision	Made bold suggestion such as a high authority program manager and adding competitive elements. Suggest change OpD's .	Change the work practice of others but not on themselves.

Table 7E Application of the 8 Steps Model by Team A & B (Continue in next page)

(Continue from previous page)

	Team A	Team B
• Encourage risk taking and non-traditional ideas, activities, and actions	Encourage more ideas within Team and with NBD. Many new ideas actively build upon each other and assimilated in the final proposal.	More "pre-empting" others behaviours in set meeting and undermining suggestions other then adopting the A&B Company's procedure.
6. Plan for and Create Short-Term Wins		
• Plan for visible performance improvements	Plan were multi dimensional and less concrete	Plan was off-the-shelve, uni-dimensional and straight forward
• Creating those improvements	Met and discuss with the NBD and really listen to them.	Met and discuss with the NBD but mainly aim at "selling" to them the A&B Company's procedure
• Recognize and reward employees involved in the improvements	Mentioned installing reward system in meeting	Not mentioned anything about reward in meeting

Table 7E Application of the 8 Steps Model by Team A & B

7.2.9 Summary

In terms of both evaluation criteria 1&2, the performance of Team A is better then Team B

Evaluation criteria	Team A	Team B
1. Had the set members became "comrades in adversity"?	Yes	Not quite
2. Had the set members became more reflective by demonstrating more critical reflective working behavior (CRWB) in the 2nd set meeting?	More CRWB in 2nd Meeting	Less CRWB in 2nd Meeting
3. Had the team take an improved action?	Yes	A little
4. Had the team produced quality solution to organizational problems	A lot being accepted by top management	Little had been accepted by top management
5. Had the eight change management steps been employed?	Yes. To a large extend.	A little

Table 7F Summary on the evaluation criteria

7.3

Difference in practice between Team A & Team B

As criteria 2 is the focus of the research question and could have a big influence to the result of criteria 1, I ask: Why did members in Team A can demonstrate more critical reflective working behaviours? Why Team A as a group could demonstrate more critical reflective working behaviours? I intend to answer this question by firstly drawing a comparison between the practices of Team A & Team B in their set meetings.

Sixteen group and individual behaviours which could compare and contrast with each other as observed by the researcher on Team A & Team B during the period from the 1st team meeting to the Forum. They had been summarized in Appendix 7G and will be discussed one by one in the following sections.

7.3.1 Difference in the dimensions the facts presented

Team A	Team B
Present two sides of the fact	**Present one side of the fact**

As mentioned, the OpD and NBD had a long history of conflicting situation. I had been informed informally, for several times by the Vice-president herself that the inharmonious relations was partly due to the attitude of AH, the Director of OpD. Originally, it was the intention of the management to hire AH, who had a strong background of Engineering, could communicate with the NBD better. But quite in the contrary, AH, who was a veteran of engineering and a new guy to the Company, had became quite critical towards some of the practices of the NBD. Being the immediate supervisor of the 10 CFG Program participants, the attitude of AH, according to what the Vice-president had told me, had casted a significant impact on the participants' view towards the NBD. It was therefore not too easy for the participants to state their case from the viewpoint of the NBD.

7.3.1a Supporting evidence – Team A – Present two sides of the facts

State the case from the opposite side of view

WC, who is one of the most knowledgeable on the Project T, had presented both side of the fact by stating the relationship with the NBD from the opposite side.

61 28:13 WC (···) In the past when there is a project, Operations had not been involved. Project T is the first project that involves Operations at the very early stage. (···) Now NBD seemed not quite able to handle all these feedbacks. (···) So they had become quite negative, quite depressive, and feel that we are finding faults with the person and not really focus on the job itself. So they feel a bit let go with the Project ^^^

Source: Data / Team A / Mtg. Team A (a) 16 May 08 (1)

The two sides of the fact were mentioned in

- The mode of operation of the past and present which might lead to conflict.
- Constant press for data lead to pressure feeling by the NBD

Triangulation: the claims of WC were supported by other team members in the remaining part of the Meeting. WC's knowledge in the Project T had also been recognized by the Op Director – RL.

TC had also been able to state the "fact" from the NBD's point of view.

60 16:27 TC (…) in order to be more sure on what make them feel uncomfortable, we need to ask them first because what we are now talking about is our best guess only, we really could not be sure on that.

Source: Mtg. Team A (b) 2 Jun 08

Make use of the information supplied by the opposite side

When WC mentioned a new issue – lack of leadership, PF could state, from the view point of NBD, that their Division's division of labour might not be very clear for the NBD. This indicated that some knowledge which was not totally favourable to the OpD had been shared by the OpD members themselves.

130	08:07	PF	However, [a staff of NBD] had also mentioned when he take up the role as a project manager, he felt that he had experienced some difficulties when locating people on our side. He raised example of contacting a lot of people but they didn't seemed to understand. That's his feedback.
131	08:20	TC	Will this tell us something about the issue on communication channel in our whole organization which is actually not very clear or quite confusing? Or they may be relatively not very official or not formal.

Source: Mtg. Team A (b) 2 Jun 08

Put the issue on a bigger perspective

The discussion on the responsiveness of the NBD had also been put into a broader perspective on the unclear roles and responsibilities of the whole company.

132	08:39	WC	I felt what they (the NBD) mentioned was that they need to repeat the same message for 10 time before things could be worked out. People might just say that's not my job, or say please ask who and who as they just don't know.
(…)			
138	09:41	TC	What you want to say is that the person does not have the right authority.
139	09:46	WC	That is what I felt they (the NBD staff) really meant.
140	09:48	TC	That is the attendees of the meeting had not been delegated with the appropriate authority.

Source: Mtg. Team A (b) 2 Jun 08

7.3.1b Supporting evidence – Team B – Present one side of the facts

The fact about the status of the Project T

When I asked PK who was most familiar with the Project T, he gave the following comment towards the Project.

11	06:57	PK	Failure
12		WW	Nothing more? Please explain further.
13	07:05	PK	Only one word, complete failure.
14	07:05	KC	^^^ what actually it had been failed at.

Source: Data/ Team B/ Mtg. Team B (a) 16 May 08

PK's notion that Project was a total failure had been prevailing thorough out the discussion. For example, when mentioning about the progress of the project, PK said:

41	10:25	PK	The Design FMEA had only been conducted during part two. That's why this project is a bloody failure.

Source: Data/ Team B/ Mtg. Team B (a) 16 May 08

PK had keep on maintaining this "failure" notion even toward the end of the meeting.

77	07:23 + 58:39 of Part 1	PK	When deciding to use the Project T, I know that it was a wrong move. This project is a dead dog already.

Source: Data/ Team B/ Mtg. Team B (a) 16 May 08

Actually, PK had drawn a conclusion about the Project – its total failure and he didn't seem to be interested in engaging a "port mortem" analysis of such a "bloody failure" project.

Triangulation: The fact was that the Project T was only "stagnated" and could not make significant alternation on design. This was triangulated according to Team B's discussion in their set meeting, and PK's subsequent mentioning it (though lightly) at the later stage of the meeting.

29	09:02	PK	Let me finish it quickly. This project is currently at a stagnated situation. All that was because the customer won't allow the product to have a white line on the finishing (…)

Source: Data/ Team B/ Mtg. Team B (a) 16 May 08

The fact about the existence of a widely acknowledged procedure on new product launch

In their 1st team meeting, KY put forwarded several copies of procedures document that PK had printed for him before the Meeting. These procedures were actually prepared by KY when he served as the Quality Assurance Manager a few years ago.

71	20:32	FZ	Is it currently already existing or…
72	20:34	KY	Already there. The process manual. And this is what PK printed out which is what I had produced – a chart for project management. It had spelled out in great detail on what to do. But this had not been followed. It had been written down already.
73	20:50	FZ	Is it the procedure that we really need to follow? Is it required during execution…?
74	20:56	KY	They had not (follow), they just don't follow.
75	20:58	FZ	Really?

Source: Data/ Team B/ Mtg. Team B (a) 16 May 08

What KY had said was the NBD "don't follow" the procedure rather then answering FZ's query on whether the NBD "need to follow" or not. KY proceeded to tell the Meeting that NBD was fully aware of the existence of these.

81	22:07	FZ	Actually, I think there is one point we need to consider, had this procedure been made know to all the people below, they may not…
82	22:14	KY	Surely they know about this.
83	22:16	FZ	Had they been clear on what procedure to follow and full aware of who need to handle what (…?)
84	22:22	KY	Training had been provided
85	22:23	FZ	Training had been provided?
86	22:24	KY	Training had been provided. We had offered serious training.

Source: Data/ Team B/ Mtg. Team B (a) 16 May 08

What he had not mentioned was that this procedure, while applicable to a key customer – the A&B Co. at that time, might not be equally applicable to all other cases. This could be triangulated by the information supplied by (1) Team A, (2) from NBD and (3) from the behaviour of "selling" this procedure to the NBD representatives in Team B's 2nd Meeting.

(1) Triangulated information supplied by Team A in their 1st Team Meeting on 16 May 08

According to WC, a good system guiding the alignment between the NBD and the OpD in new product launching process was nonexistent.

137	13:24	WC	(…) I feel that a perfect system currently not exists. This system should include the engineers, or the men from Operations, (…) What could be observed about the system is that (…) it might not be updated and not viable to enable all parties work on this together.

Source: Data / Team A / Mtg. Team A (a) 16 May 08

This was quite contrary to what KY had informed the Team that a good procedure was "already there" and the staff "surely know about this" and "rigorous training had already been provided". Actually KY was not lying. He just hadn't mentioned clearly that the said procedure was there only for applying to one customer (the A&B Co.) on some of the products a few years ago and training were provided to those staff who were involved in those projects. This could be triangulated by KY's response to NBD staff query in their 2nd Team meeting.

26	23:59	NBD staff	Had it been currently in practice when [A&B] place orders.
27	24:01	KY	It had been practiced in my time. It was [Plant A], I need to make clear, it was [Plant A] not [Plant B] that got 100 marks.
28	24:11	NBD staff	I know that.

29	24:12	KY	[Plant A] had practiced it for a long time and it was not too difficult for me to comply with it and delivered it. However, there had been no new project from [A&B] so there is no need to practice it. In case there are new projects, it will need to practice again.
30	24:27	NBD Staff	No need to discuss new one? That means it had been put down.

(2) Triangulated information supplied by the Head of NBD in his meeting with Director of OpD. On 11 Apr 08

WC's understanding was right, according to what the department head of NBD – PC had said, he had started to review the previously completed process and sign off documents etc. He had also mentioned that he had taken the initiative to set up the mile stone and procedures for NBD's product development and system improvement. Some agreement had previously been made regarding the final documents needed. PC made this statements in a meeting between me, himself and AH, the Director of OpD and was therefore reliable. This meant that a mutually accepted and formally established procedure of new product development had not really been in place. (Please see Appendix 7H)

(3) Triangulated from the behaviour of "selling" this procedure to the NBD representatives in Team B's 2nd Meeting

Firstly, KY had spent 30 minutes in introducing the A&B Co's procedure. This obviously would not be needed if this Procedure was "already there" and the staff "surely know about this" and "rigorous training had already been provided".

Secondly, the response from NBD representatives indicated that they were quite ignorant towards this system. (Please refer to Appendix 7I or the detail conversation)

While the procedure mentioned by KY might be good, he failed to make adequate effort to alert the meeting the need to update the content and the need to validate them against the situation of the Project T. Nor had he proposed to take a closer look at the reason behind the non-compliance of the procedure. Rather, he attempted to force fitting it to the current situation. However, this situation might not totally be applicable. This assertion could be triangulated by other Team B member – KC, who had highlighted the success of the system proposed by KY was due to the forceful monitoring from that particular customer. This notion had also been acknowledged by KY..

111	28:33	KC	There is a point I would like to clarify. You had mentioned that the product of [A&B] had strictly adhered to it (the procedure). Could it be due to the close monitoring of the customer so that they (the NBD) was forced to comply with the rule.
112	28:47	KY	That's true
113	28:47	KC	So there is a close monitoring (by the customer) on the project development process.

KC's notion was acknowledged by KY. However, when KC further elaborated on this point, his talk had been neglected by KY as he picked up an incoming phone call and KY'c comment die down as he felt lacking a back up by other team members.

7.3.1c Potential impact of the 4 contextual factors conducive to the difference in practice between the two teams on the dimensions the facts were presented

High potential staff

PK, who had been promoted to the position of senior manager in mid 09, indicated he was the highest potential management staff among the participants. He was also the one who supposed to have the most knowledge in the Project T.

PK had seldom expressed his idea. He spent most of his time either checking e-mail, answering incoming mobile phone calls and seldom gave opinion. He had asked **NO** questions (not including those statements which expressed in a questioning tone but actually was not a question that need someone to answer) at all thorough the Meeting. When he did asked, it was about when the meeting could be finished (although there was half more hour to go according to the announced meeting schedule)

> 232 50:52 PK Could we move faster as I had a meeting at 5 O' clock? There is some…

This is not strange as he felt that the answer was already there and there's no point to spent time discussing them further. The concern of high potential managers was always about getting things done quickly and not to drag on with things according to Gritzmacher's description:

> Time-consciousness: a drive to achieve the most as soon as possible; a drive to achieve a goal and embrace the next one. (Gritzmacher, 1989, Quoted by Peters & Smith, 1996)

Refraining from giving too much "useless" information so that the meeting could be more "focused" and could be concluded quickly would be the natural option for a high potential manager.

7.3.2 Difference in the authorativness in presenting the knowledge

Team A	**Team B**
Less authoritative in presenting knowledge	**Authoritative in presenting knowledge**

As mentioned previously, the knowledge on Project T was quite evenly distributed among the two teams. However, there was a marked difference in the degree of authorativness they presented those knowledge.

7.3.2a Supporting evidence – Team A – Less authoritative in presenting knowledge

The "less authoritative" approach of communication could be found in the following behaviours of Team A's members.

Evidence 1: More open to criticize other's concept

Criticism towards each other could be found in both Teams but Team A members were generally less defensive towards other's criticism.

256	48:46	WC	I want to make one comment. ISO 90010, the ISO doesn't mean that acquiring an ISO standard could produce a good product, (…)
257	49:09	TC	No, no, what you are talking about is good product, not about high reliability not whether this product is a quality product.
258	49:16	WC	I am talking about the ISO on the system
259	49:17	TC	That's about the system which meant that the system could serve as a guard to you.

(Team A meeting 30 May 08)

Please refer to Appendix 7J for other examples.

Evidence 2: Being more willing to admit incompetence of own self

When the group was discussing the solution to solve the alignment issues that happen during the new product launch, WC stated his view on the role of the OpD:

236 39:28 WC (…) We just want to advise you (the NBD) that there might be a problem. If you (the NBD) thought that, OK, we (the OpD) are not having the adequate expertise to solve this (problem), fine, we can provide some more (support for that), (inc case) we cannot provide these we can find a third party to do this (…)

Source: Data / Team A / Mtg. Team A (b) 16 May 08

Evidence 3: Being careful on the generalizability of past knowledge

When MYL quoted the practice of his past company, he was quite careful on the generalizabiity of the information provided by emphasising that was purely the practice of one company only.

129 45:06 MYL Apart from the system in which there is a review meeting, the participants are operation director, the director of NBD, if there is a QA director then he will also join. **But this is purely the practice of the company I previously worked for.** (…)

Source: Data / Team A / Mtg. Team A (a) 16 May 08

Similarly, when TC was asked about the practice of the company he previously worked for on the issue of Program Manager, he highlighted the importance of considering the context.

168	29:27	TC	Not to that extreme (…). It's true that the person occupying this position needed to have a good leadership and authority. However, this person may not be able to go so far as adopting an autocratic method in doing this
169	29:39	TW	To drive (the compliance of) others.
170	29:40	TC	That's all because our company was not just composed of a hundred or a handful number of people.

7.3.2b Supporting evidence – Team B – More authoritative in presenting knowledge

A key avocation of Team B was that all the troubles they had been experiencing regarding the Project T was that the NBD had not complied with a "good" procedure and the cause were the "laziness" and the "lack of commitment by their senior management". The key proponent of this avocation was PK, RR and KY. The main "spokesman" on this view was KY and had been backed up by PK & RR. I could summarize some of the approaches adopted by KY to get the authority to state his case.

Evidence 1 – By providing exclusive information

Expression like "insider story", "you don't know this, let me tell you" were found for several times in 1st meeting of Team B. Through the supply of these kinds of "exclusive" information, a kind of authorativness could be more easily build up among a group of peers.

225	49:18	KY	Everyone had his own experience. I had close encounter with the NBD and with each layer. That's why I could get hold of some secret. (…)

Source: Data/ Team B/ Mtg. Team B (a) 16 May 08

186	43:34	KY	Actually (FZ), what I said, was through many^^^. That's because I had some good friends in NBD. In certain sense, I hate their ways of doing things, however, I am very good friend with them, that is some of them. (…)
(…)			
188	44:10	KY	(…) When I dine with them and they told me something. Which is about "it's who and who told me not to do this", "It is who and who asked me not to do that". So what? What is this? That's top down. It shows that they didn't care to walk their talk. (…)

Source: Data/ Team B/ Mtg. Team B (a) 16 May 08

Evidence 2 – By reassurance the team members

When FZ and KC had expressed some opinion towards the need to look further into the problem behind, KY used a reassuring method to gain extra authority on the solution he and PK & RR proposed.

121	34:04	KY	(Interrupting the speech of KC), OK, look here, let me say it once again, this system had been hammered for a thousand times and we got a rating (by the previous client) of 92, 95, 98,100 by adhering to it. It had been well testified, the system is perfectly problem free. (…)

Source: Data/ Team B/ Mtg. Team B (a) 16 May 08

Evidence 3 – By emphasizing past successful achievement

Telling about own successful stories is a common enough method to make others believe that one had a better knowledge then others. It could be found many times in Team B’s meeting.

59	16:19	KY	I could recall, in the old days, the role of QA, and my role was responsible for driving the NBD. (…) We frequently drove them around by tell them: you haven’t done this, you haven’t done that. What stage are you at? You should conduct the DFMEA (…)

Source: Data/ Team B/ Mtg. Team B (a) 16 May 08

The successful stories were about how KY, when served as the QA Manager, had “drove” the NBD around and monitoring them.

Evidence 4 – By emphasizing oneself having more experience

When KC & FZ had raised counter opinion on the desirability to check out the reality, KY stated:

108	27:04	KY	Actually you and FZ are new guys. I know that in the past, all the project from A&B Co had strictly follow the procedure (…)

Evidence 5 – By Gaining support from the member who was most knowledgeable in the Project

Until a late stage of the meeting (50 min had passed), FZ was still expressing the desirability of looking further into the problem. KY responded by stating his “alignment” with PK.

213	48:33	FZ	I think that will be better, may be we could really dig out something, right?
214		WW	Understand more about the reason behind, what do other people think about that?
215	48:42	KY	I am in full alignment with PK, so let’s see what two of them (i.e. KC & FZ) think about.

The strategies of KY had worked as evidenced by KC's admittance of his inferior in knowledge.

39	03:03 + 58' 39" of part 1	KC	Actually, I feel that, to be frank, I had not been heavily involved in the existing process and say, you are very familiar with this, (…)

7.3.2c Potential impact of the 4 contextual factors conducive to the difference in practice between the two teams on the dimensions the facts were presented

In-house

The in-house context had fed KY with a lots of ammunition such as the inside story, his past track record, his network with the NBD etc. which would not be available for non in-house context. In house program participants could also reveal who were new guys and who were old guys. In the case of Team B, although all the participants were peers of the same ranking, the level of seniority came into play when knowledge of the company's problem was exchanged.

High potential staff

One of the characteristic of high potential management staff was their capability to communicate and influence others. Although all the participants were high potential management staff, KY had gained a high hand in the influencing process by adopting an array of tactics to gain his credibility as mentioned above.

Chinese cultural context and members were acquainted with each other

Until the concluding stage of the Team A's 1st meeting, some of its participants, KC for example was not totally convinced on the way the conclusion was drawn. However, he seemed not wanted to argue further and instead, chose to talk about some practical things – what to stated in the proposal.

240	51:59	KC	You guys had a conclusion in your mind which you had collected information from many sources which helps you to drawn a conclusion. While this conclusion might be right but you still need to write it down (i.e. in the proposal), so what you intends to put into it. Just straight from what you said or what…?

The reason of KC's giving up to strive to state his counter idea further could not be known from the data I collected. It could be due to his less aggressive personality. Another possible explanation could be the Chinese culture of "giving face" and not to drive too hard. KC's acquaintance with KY and PK could also lead to his withdrawal as long term relationship need to be maintained.

7.3.3 Difference in the perceived adequacy of knowledge within team to solve the problem

Team A	Team B
Felt need to obtain more knowledge	**Felt owned adequate knowledge already.**

7.3.3a Supporting evidence – Team A – Felt need to obtain more knowledge

In Team A, there were lots of avocations on the need to obtain more knowledge in order to solve the problem. These conversations were scattered in different times in Team A's three meetings.

128 42:42 MYL If there is a feeling that we, internally are not aligned, (…) and there is a feeling of that they (the NBD) are trying to avoid something, I believe that by the time we discuss the issue face to face, they might tell us the other side of the story. (…) I don't think there are a two totally opposing views and I don't think they would intentionally not to handle some obvious flaws on the product (…)

Source: Team A / Data / Team A (a) 16 May 08 (1) Analysis

A feeling of inadequacies were shared in the 2nd meeting of Team A after they had "dug deeper" on the issues which had surfaced after their meeting with the NBD.

37 12:48 TC So we go ahead together, get involved together, but will it be adequate? In case that we come across with some problem when the whole team don't have the knowledge, should we still charge head on? Or should we hire some helping hands from outside? (…)

Source: Data / Team A / Mtg. Team A (b) 2 Jun 08

TC had also expressed that what they were discussing were based on assumptions only and had not obtained adequate facts yet.

60 16:27 TC We really need to interview them (NBD) in order to know what cause their uncomfortable feeling. From this Project T, what I feel is that they might feel that we re a bit not very proactive (…) But we must ask them to know the fact. (…)

Source: Data / Team A / Mtg. Team A (b) 2 Jun 08

Another evidence indicating a feeling of the need to know more was shared in the 2nd meeting of Team A in which there were some disagreements toward whether they should start preparing the proposed solution before all the questionnaire they sent to NBD had been received (Please see Appendix 7K for the dialogue)

7.3.3b Supporting evidence – Team B – Felt owned adequate knowledge already

Some of the Team B members had occasionally raised the comments or questions on the desirability to know more or to dig deeper on the issue.

81	22:07	FZ	Actually, I think there is one point we need to consider, had this procedure been made know to all the people below, they may not…

Source: Data/ Team B/ Mtg. Team B (a) 16 May 08

83	22:16	FZ	Had they been clear on what procedure to follow and fully aware of who need to handle what (…)

Source: Data/ Team B/ Mtg. Team B (a) 16 May 08

73	20:50	FZ	Is it the procedure that we really need to follow? Is it required during execution…?
74	20:56	KY	They had not (follow), they just don't follow.
75	20:58	FZ	Really?

Actually, in most of the time, KY had only answered part of the questions raised by KC & FZ. The example above shown that KY had just said that the NBD "had not followed" the procedure but he had not answered whether the NBD "really need to follow" the procedure. Until the concluding stage of the 1st meeting, KC had still raised the need to understand more about the fact.

39	03:03 + 58' 39" of part 1	KC	Actually, I feel that, to be frank, I had not been heavily involved in the existing process and say, you are very familiar with this, ^^^ shouldn't we take a look at the documents to be sure whether the project had been followed, as you had said…

In fact, PK, who was supposed to be the one who was most familiar with the problem, should be an important source of information. However, he had spoken so little that most of the information (actually his personal opinion) was from KY. But KY was NOT the person who knew most about the problem on Project T and he was NOT responsible for the production of product T. He therefore, had little contact with the NBD on this Project. Actually, what he mentioned was his PAST EXPERIENCE with the NBD.

7.3.3c Potential impact of the 4 contextual factors conducive to the difference in practice between the two teams on the dimensions the facts were presented

In-house

Past experience and insider knowledge could all kill a team's thirst for information. The supply of these kinds of knowledge could be more easily available when the program was running in-house.

Acquainted with each other

The participants who were acquainted with one another could make the mutually supporting more explicit and they will query less on the reliability of the source of the information. This acquaintance relationship could enable a kind of alliance or mutual supporting of each other's opinion which could exert a strong impact on the "Q'ing" process of the set meeting as evidenced from Team B's first meeting.

As discussed, KY was NOT the person who knew most about the problem on

Project T. The knowledge he supplied, which mainly consisted of his COMMENT towards the practice of the NBD based on his PAST EXPERIENCE, had met with little challenges. This might partly due to the support from PK and RR and partly due to the other contextual factors which will be discussed in the next section.

7.3.4 Difference in the way the knowledge were presented

Team A	Team B
Knowledge shared based more on facts	**Knowledge shared based more on comments**

Bothe teams had mentioned the product design of the product T by the NBD would create potential problems during the production process. Both teams had shown a big concern on this. However, a relatively significant difference was that the description of Team A had included more facts and the description shared in Team B was based more on comments.

7.3.4a Supporting evidence – Team A – Knowledge shared based more on facts

Members of Team A choose to present more plain facts – what had happened, what had been done, what's the feedback etc..(See Appendix 7L for example) The wish to understand the NBD's problem could also help to understand the other side of the fact. It had also been proposed by TC.

114	00:18:08	TC	Right, one of the possible things we need to do is to start a campaign through which we could know the opposite side better and to understand the difficulties the opposite side is facing.

Source: Data / Mtg. Team A (b) 16 May 08 analysis

7.3.4b Supporting evidence – Team B – Knowledge shared more based on comment

Most of the information shared in Team B was coupled with personal comments. It is not easy to separate neutral information from comment but the highlighted phrases could help to illustrate them:

20 07:19	PK	OK, this project, right from the beginning, the Design FMEA (Failure Mode Effects Analysis) had not been conducted. This is our very first product that **made such a foolish design** of spraying coating both on the front and on the back, and a supersonic treatment is needed after that. **You know it's our [HMC]'s background to make the material to squeeze out (…). That's our tradition.**

In contrast, when Team A described the same issue, they chose to present in another way which was more fact based:

34 23:38	TC	(…) the key issue we are facing is that no one had a clear picture yet. Regarding the product, I am pretty experienced on its overall function and structure. However, we do not have experience on the sonic treatment and on top of that; we are not very experience on the cosmetic treatment. This product need to spray coating and the paint should create a shiny and metallic look. We don't have much experience on that also.

Source: Data / Team A / Mtg. Team A (a0 16 May 08

Many of the information presented in Team A were neutral description on facts and explanatory in nature. In contrast, many of Team B's description and explanation were attached or even wrapped up in a strong personal comment. I highlighted those belong to these kind of comment based contents.

26 08:41	KY	I've told you the day before that **they (the NBD) never had learnt from their lessons.** One lesson is bad enough. **And now, what they had originally doing well had now become worse.**

33 09:43	PK	(showing the prototype of the product) From one degree to 3 degree, or from 7 degree to 10 degree. It now became no one is making a control of it; **they are all just for lip service.** Regrettably, that should be discovered when put on trial run but we (the NBD) had done nothing about it and now it is now at the tooling production stage.
34 10:04	FZ	Had it happened during trial run?
35 10:07	PK	It was not unnoticed during trial run. **They just pretend they were deaf and blind.**
36 10:13	FZ	Ah
37 10:13	PK	**That's how the whole thing had been messed up**.

Notions such as "they are all just for lip services" and "they just pretend deaf and blind" to some very obvious design problem sound absurd and were probably belonged to some kind of emotional expressions.

7.3.4c Potential impact of the 4 contextual factors conducive to the difference in practice between the two teams on the dimensions the facts were presented

In-house

Running program in-house enabled one to know just about the problem but had also their emotions attached to it. This emotion could be mixed with their perception towards the company's practice. They could have formulated a strong personal opinion towards the issue that they perceived as laying behind the problem. Beaty et al (1997) had mentioned about this "emotional content" and "some participants find difficult to deal with."

> What is learned in the action learning process is individual for each person and is a whole person experience. Learning will not just have an impact on how the participant interacts with the external world; it will also have an impact on the individual's internal world. Because of this, there is an emotional content in action learning that some participants find difficult to deal with. In the words of one set member: "I don't think there is any room for emotion in the set meeting. I don't think that is what we're about here." (Beaty et al, 1997, on-line resources)

When the AL program was running in-house, there will be much more of these kinds of "emotional content" flow out in the process. However, while Beaty et al (1997) took a positive look at these kinds of emotional content, my experience with Team B informed me that these "emotional content" could actually hurt the reflection process particularly when the member who flow out a lot of these emotional content and when the member was too influential in the set as in the case of KY & PK in Team B.

7.3.5 Difference in the application of past experience

Team A	Team B
Re-interpretations of past experience.	**Reinforcement of past experiences**

Both the teams' members had a lot of experience in dealing with the NBD staff and their experience should be more or less the same. However, during the team meeting, the two teams differed quite remarkably in the way they interpreted their past experience with the NBD.

7.3.5a Supporting evidence – Team A – Reinterpretation of past experiences

In one occasion, TC's experience of opinions not being adopted, which was probably many other's experience, had been modified from the wish for opinions being adopted to getting response from the NBD.

31	11:10	TC	A point I agree with you is that, they should listen to our opinion. But I will choose another word; they should response on our opinion, and not necessarily accept. (⋯) They could just give a respond and not necessary need to agree.

Source: Mtg. Team A (b) 2 Jun 08

7.3.5b Supporting evidence – Team B – Reinforcement of past experiences

When KY was the QA Manager (the position now occupied by RR & WC), he had a lot of experience in dealing with the NBD. In Team B, he is the "oldest guy" with the Company. In the 1st meeting of Team A, KY mentioned a lot on the bad experience with the NBD which not really related to the Project T but only served to strengthen KY's argument that the NBD staff were incompetent.

97	24:37	KY	Yeah, I had talk with PK yesterday on this issue which is about the tooling they produced. (…) The vacuum cleaner which was taken up by XX, could you recall this. Hay, (the product) will be placed on the line (for production) two weeks later. I ask when you could provide me with the IQC for the checking of my lab. It will take me

two weeks to do the checking. What? You tell me you need to take two weeks to do the checking? So could you tell me when the prototype could be produced? Well, he told me, my plan is to put on line two weeks later so the prototype could be produced two weeks later. Jesus! What a fellow he is!

Source: Data / Mtg. Team B (a) 16 May 08

Obviously, the story put forwarded by KY had no direct relationship with the issue under discussion and was merely an additional description on the incompetence of the NBD staff

KY had for many times, reinforce his bad experience with NBD but all of them had nothing to do with the Project T. Despite this, he had met with little challenges.

59 16:19 KY I could recall that in the past time the QA was responsible for pushing the NBD, (…) It was the QA's responsibility to hold the DFMEA. It sounds absurd, after the meeting, those problems pointed out had no follow up. (…) It made no difference of organizing the meeting or not. I feel that's an indication of a total lack of self-motivation.

Source: Data/ Team B/ Mtg. Team B (a) 16 May 08

In another occasion when KC pointed out the compliance of the NBD to the A&B Company's procedure was mainly due to the forceful monitoring of the customer, rather then the QA Dept.:

111 28:33 KC Well, there is a point I would like to raise. You had mentioned previously that for the product of the A&B Company, this procedure had been strictly followed. Would it be all due to the close follow up and monitoring of the customer that forced them (the NBD) to

			follow the rules set by the customer?
112	28:47	KY	That's true.
113	28:47	KC	(…) That is there was an all embracing monitoring enforced by the customer.
		KY	That's true.

KC's comment, though acknowledged by KY as true, had not lead to KY's reinterpreted this part of his past experience or to lead other team members to examine the problem further by re-examining the environmental factors which was not really similar to that of the A&B Company. What actually had happened was that when KC further elaborated his points, there was an incoming telephone call on KY's mobile and KY continued with his telephone conversation until KC had finished his expression. After that, KY stated again the need to "pull them back" and totally "forgot" to response to KC's comment.

The need to re-examine the suitability of applying the A&B Company's procedure could be triangulated in KY's presentation to the NBD staff in Team B's second meeting when he finally admitted the suitability issue of applying this procedure to every new product launch cases.

61	37:45	KY	There are quite a lot of procedures and quite a nuisance, XX [a NBD staff] expressed his concern on the time factor. This is surely not a coercive requirement to follow. It was a big concern in the [A&B] projects. For [A&B] and [C&D] this was a procedure that must be followed. It will be a violation of their requirement if this procedure were not followed. (…) For other project like XXX, it will surely be unreasonable to stick to this procedure. (…)

7.3.5c Potential impact of the 4 contextual factors conducive to the difference in practice between the two teams on the dimensions the facts were presented

In house

AL programs running in-house could frequently "re-mind" the participants on their past experiences, making re-interpretation of past experience more difficult. Rather then re-interpreting past experiences, sharing of similar experience could even reinforce those experiences, making critical reflections even more difficult. This could be illustrated by the following dialogue which happened at the concluding part of Team B's 1st meeting.

250	54:08	PK	OK, that's simple. If the documents had not been completed, do it the tough way KY had done before. For cases without full document, let's not to start working. No FMEA, not to start working. Not to mention producing the prototype.
251	54:19	KC	There is some thing which were currently under production but the CAF was still no where to be seen.
252	54:24	PK	Yeah, just slowed down without giving reason.
253	54:25	KC	Let's decline start to work. Not to produce. Stop there. Forward it ^^^back to them.

Even KC, who had been quite neutral and had adopted a more factual approach towards the problem, had given out such kinds of emotional expression. One could easily imagine the challenge of running an in-house AL program when the participants had a negative attitude towards those who had "created it".

Participants acquainted with each other

When participants were acquainted with each other and when they share similar experiences, their sharing of experience could reinforce each other even greater and hence making re-interpretation of past experiences extremely difficult. This situation could happen in the occasions of every in-house training program. However, the emphasis of AL in providing “real problems” could trigger much more conversation of this kind and the set meeting would be a most convenient occasion for members to engage in this “talking shop”.

7.3.6 Difference in the objectives of sharing

Team A	Team B
More for understanding and clarifying	**More for fixing blames and complaining.**

7.3.6a Supporting evidence – Team A – More for understanding and clarifying

132 24:16 PF I agree with what (TC) had said. There are many factors that affect the project. They may^^^ so and so. That could be difficult to control. However, for example what (WC) had mentioned to use a system review. Right, but in case that the person just don’t follow the system, so what could you do about it? What I meant is what would you do after the system review?

Source: Data/Team A/Mtg. Team A (b) 2 Jun 08

For example, MYL regard the unaligned situation with the NBD as something that should not happen and he did not believe that the NBD was “intentionally” not to face the problem or to avoid following the procedure or even to disregard the quality issues. He felt that could all be a guess and one could heard "a different story” when meeting with the NBD face to face.

128 42:42 MYL (⋯) If there is a feeling that we, internally are not aligned, (…) and there is a feeling of that they (the NBD) are trying to avoid something, I believe that by the time we discuss the issue face to face, they might tell us a different story. (…) I don't think there are a two totally opposing views and I don't think they would intentionally not to handle some obvious flaws on the product (…)

Source: Data/Team A/Mtg. Team A (a) 2 Jun 08

7.3.6b	Supporting evidence – Team B – More for fixing blames and complaining

Apart from sharing negative stories towards the NBD, some "unfair" stories had also been shared.

254 54:33 PK How could we complaint others. Obvious flaws were disregarded for the sake of meeting the shipment schedule. CAF being hastily put together, ^^^ we need to made a compensation of $200K. Right, OK, all need to be thrown away, totally scraped. Very smart. See. They enjoy it. Why worry, there will be no consequences anyway. Mess up all the things; (company) suffering a 100K lost and what's next, ship by air, Wahoo.

Source: Data/ Team B/ Mtg. Team B (a) 16 May 08

Their intention of just sharing complaints could be indicated by their determination of not to put those complaint down in their proposal.

240	51:59	KC	You know what had happened. That means you had collected a lot of information from various sources and you had already drawn a conclusion. While your conclusion might be right, but you still need to write it down. So what are you going to write down? Straight from you had mentioned or what…
241		WW	OK。
242	52:17	KY	Surely it could not be written down.

Source: Data/ Team B/ Mtg. Team B (a) 16 May 08

It was a good illustration on the intention of the presented information. They were intended more as a mean to convince and to express feelings then as a problem solving process. In other word, a lot of time spent on complaining the NBD’s top management had became a “talk shop”.

7.3.6c Potential impact of the 4 contextual factors conducive to the difference in practice between the two teams on the dimensions the facts were presented

In-house program with participants acquainted with each other

When participants were from the same company and were acquainted with each other, sharing of emotions and making complaints on the third parties could be easily triggered.

Chinese cultural context

Making complaints could “free” oneself from the uncertainty of making an untested suggestion. The low to medium “uncertainty avoidance” tendencies of Chinese culture could fuelled this sort of sharing.

7.3.7 Difference in the perceived openness of the problem

Team A	Team B
More on possibilities	**More on impossibilities**

7.3.7a Supporting evidence – Team A – More on possibilities

Team A described the problem as difficult such as the design had been "frozen". However, they had also mentioned the specification could still be changed. (See Appendix 7M)

7.3.7b Supporting evidence – Team B – More on impossibilities

A feeling that the Project T was a "dead dog" had been disseminated by PK & KY through out the meeting. Henceforth, a pessimistic sentiment had been spreading through out the meeting.

> 42 10:39 KY Just like what he had said, this should not be an operation of "saving the Titanic". What I feel is that in this project we should tick out all those (faulty behaviours) as it could not be saved.

Source: Data/ Team B/ Mtg. Team B (a) 16 May 08

However, KY did mention the possibilities of future change but he was pessimistic toward the possibility of making change in the Project T.

> 49 11:26 KY (…) List all the problem, pick them out in the hope that they could remedied it in the future. Just as what you had said this is not an operation of "saving the Titanic" as it could not be saved.

Source: Data/ Team B/ Mtg. Team B (a) 16 May 08

Another impossibility was the mentioning of some “unfair” policies of the company. The PK mentioned on NBD could get away clean after making the company to suffer a $100K lost.

After almost an hour’s discussion, the perspective towards the possible solution had not become more positive. Rather, PK maintained that the opportunity of solving the problem was quite dim.

> 258 55:02 PK Our solution is that we should look at it with a more pessimistic view.
>
> Source: Data/ Team B/ Mtg. Team B (a) 16 May 08

7.3.7c Potential impact of the 4 contextual factors conducive to the difference in practice between the two teams on the dimensions the facts were presented

In-house

For program running in-house, participants will know more about the “taboos”, “traps” and “politics” inside the organization. When someone raised a possibilities, the voice of those who hold a pessimistic views could easily cover them by uttering such comments as “its naïve”, “it’s just don’t work in this company”. They may not be mentioned too much as in the case of Team A but could also have a chance to happen as in the case of Team B.

7.3.8 Difference in the perceived context which the problem was embedded

Team A	Team B
Context in which the problem embedded perceived as changeable	**Context in which the problem embedded perceived as almost unchangeable**

7.3.8a Supporting evidence – Team A – Context changeable

In the eye of Team A, the NBD was not unwilling to change.

00:02:15	WC	Hay, to be fair, to be fair. We had alerted the Engineering Department on many issues and they are working on them one by one. They had not said they are not going to change. They had not rejected our ideas, They are not to…
00:02:30	PF	But when … ah…
00:02:31	WC	But they had made clear to us that something could not be done. For those which could be done they will do.

7.3.8b Supporting evidence – Team B – Context unchangeable

49	11:26	KY	Let's talk about our purpose and see if you guys are OK with this. (…) <u>list out all the problems, unearth them, hoping that they could change in the future.</u> So that is not what you said a "save the sinking Titanic" exercise as it could not be saved anyway.

Source: Data/ Team B/ Mtg. Team B (a) 16 May 08

As PK & KY perceived an important part of the problem lies in the top management of the NBD, it was almost hopeless to make any change on the situation. They want to do something about it but as the "root" causes they perceived were almost un-resolvable,

246	53:54 FZ	Solution?
247	53:55 WW	What's your suggestion to solve these issues (laziness of staff and lack of top management commitment)?
248	53:57 PK	Actually, my feeling is that if the people could not be fired then nothing could be done. So just let it be

Source: Data/ Team B/ Mtg. Team B (a) 16 May 08

Although KY emphasis that what he meant by "top management" was "the top management of the NBD", PK did mentioned some "unfair" practice which related to the system of the whole company. With this perception, it will be even more difficult to do some really useful improvement.

7.3.8c Potential impact of the 4 contextual factors conducive to the difference in practice between the two teams on the dimensions the facts were presented

High potential staff

Among the 5 team members of Team B, PK was regarded by the senior management as having the highest potential and his subsequent promotion to next higher level (in mid 2009) had proved that.

One of the characteristic of high potential staff is the high confidence level and ability to influence others. The way he presented the knowledge was just like a teacher and the knowledge he present is unquestionable. His presentation wore an air of authority and his comment were short, forceful and full of strong tones which could easily convince the other members, who were less knowledgeable on the Project, that the Project was a "dead dog" and studying further on it was a waste of time.

7.3.9 Difference on the view that "what else could be done"

Team A	Team B
We need to do differently together	**We had done our part**

7.3.9a Supporting evidence – Team A – We need to do differently together

Team A suggest they are willing to do more – in other people's way. They suggested that they were willing to invest in extra effort to comply with the agreed system and invest extra effort to improve the situation.

405	48:46	WC	This improvement should not be one side but should be two ways. It should be something that we and they (the NBD) think of ways to discuss and bridge the gap together.
406	48:53	TW	Furthermore, the system not just binds us too and we also need to follow the procedure.
(…)			
414	49:18	MYL	We should emphasis our role to match with others. Training is one of them and we are part of it. Even the system review, the task force team, we are part to hem.

7.3.9b Supporting evidence – Team A – We had done our part

89	23:21	KY	Training had been provided. Criticism had been given in audit. So what could you expect us to do? As the Operations, what else you could expect us to could do?

Source: Data/ Team B/ Mtg. Team B (a) 16 May 08

Team B regarded that a major part of the trouble was caused firstly by some of the NBD staff and secondly, by the NBD's senior management. Furthermore, as training and advice as mentioned and in Project T, they had already done something extra proactively.

77 07:23 PK (…) Actually, our objective is quite clear, why not just invite …(the NBD) Actually we had already marched one step forward, (…) *It does know actually the report is not by them is not us ，don't follow is by them is not us* 。(…)

(Words in Italics were the exact wordings of PK)

Data / Team B / Mtg. Team B (b) 16 May 08

Team B did suggest they were willing to do more, but – "in my way". KY did suggested that he and RR could help to train up the NBD on using the A&B Co's system.

74 43:32 Kent We together with RR are very willing to train up everybody as an expert, he is (referring to RR) is an expert.

7.3.9c Potential impact of the 4 contextual factors conducive to the difference in practice between the two teams on the dimensions the facts were presented

In-house

The feeling that "we had already done our part" is a most commonly used excuses by workers when something went wrong. When the program participants were coming from the same department, this "we" feeling could easily lead the members to become self protective. The stronger and more overt expression of this sentiment in Team B then in Team A could possibly explained by the fact that PK was the one actually responsible for producing the product T. He needs to bear all the bad consequences such as high scrap rate, increased production cost etc. when the product were produced in his production line. Making sure that "if any problem happens, it is not my problem" will be the most convenient route to choose.

7.3.10 Difference in the preconceptions on cause of the problem (1)

Thorough the discussion of both teams, some preconceptions on the problem had a big influence on the content of the discussion. A view on what the problem "is" seemed to be even more important then what the problem really is.

Team A	Team B
Cause of problem – adaptation to change of requirements	**Cause of problem – Laziness and lack of commitment of the senior management**

7.3.10a Supporting evidence – Team A – Cause of problem as need to adapt to change

In many of Team A's meetings, a lot of discussions had been raised regarding the changed environmental factors.

59	15:42 WC	I have a comment and that is let us step back and takes a look. Why there is a Project T? Why there are confrontations? Or there is…Let's think about why we need to engage in this Project first? Let's think about what had been changed. I believe there is one thing that had been changed and that is our involvement is at the early stage. So, will our involvement at the early stage make them feel uncomfortable? What make them feel uncomfortable about? Right? We need to reflect on this

Source: Mtg. Team A (b) 2 Jun 08

From the examples quoted above, it could be seen that the changed in customer requirement, the strengthening of the engineering competence of the OpD had been described as conducive to the alignment problem in new product launch. Other examples could be found in Appendix 7N

7.3.10b Supporting evidence – Team B – Cause of problem as laziness and management

KC and FZ had repeatedly mentioned the desirability of finding out reason behind the failure of the NBD to follow the procedure. However, their query had been met with one simple answer – laziness of the NBD staff.

124	34:37	KC	(…)But why the people did not execute (the procedure), shouldn't we find out this and then proceed to improve them?
125	34:47	KY	That's pretty simple – lazy.
126	34:50	KC	OK, if it's individual staff who is lazy, remove him.
127	34:55	KY	Remove them all.
128	34:56	KC	Is it really all staff are lazy. All of them are lazy so…

Source: Data/ Team B/ Mtg. Team B (a) 16 May 08

123	34:32	KY	When they (the NBD) see the system they will just run away. There's so many works they need to do. They need to this and need to do that. Thad's the cause of the problem.

FZ had also raised the need to explore the reasons leading to the problem at the earlier stage of the discussion.

109 27:51 KC So, so will it be that they know, would there (interruption attempted by KY) be some other questions or that there are some other reasons that prevent them (interruption attempted by KY) from doing that.

Source: Data/ Team B/ Mtg. Team B (a) 16 May 08

However, his suggestion had been met with an "answer" – no commitment of the NBD's top management.

110 27:53 KY (…) It's the one at the top. I can tell you, the one behind, who is at the top who care nothing but speed. Speed is of outmost importance. So it explains why it is like this. (…)

Source: Data/ Team B/ Mtg. Team B (a) 16 May 08

The discussion had not resulted in a generation of a widened scoped of understanding. Quite the contrary, an attitude of "I know the problem well enough" still prevail at a later stage of discussion. (See Appendix 7O)

Actually, some of the members in Team B did share the view with Team A and regard the problem was due to the changed situation. For example, KC mentioned the increased in the engineering knowledge of the OpD had made them less receptive to the directives of the NBD and their proactiveness could become more possible.

115 30:10 KC (…)My view is that we should take a look at the whole Program and in the process of development. (…) But now, the operation team had been strengthened, the QA team had been strengthened and many feedbacks could be generated by the operation team and the QA and the production (…)

Source: Data/ Team B/ Mtg. Team B (a) 16 May 08

(Please refer to Appendix 7P for the full speech of KC)

KC's viewpoint and Team A's view point could therefore triangulate each other. However, KC's viewpoint had not been echoed by other team members. 15 minutes after KC had stated his point, PK still maintained that the real roadblock was the OpD's top management.

201b 46:52 PK	As what (KY) had said, that's basically the management^^^, For example if I ask my subordinate go to the east and he dare to go to the west instead, I'll give him a slap on the face, that's simple. So it's a waste of time to discuss further.

Source: Data/ Team B/ Mtg. Team B (a) 16 May 08

7.3.10c Potential impact of the 4 contextual factors conducive to the difference in practice between the two teams on the dimensions the facts were presented

In-house

When AL program was organized for in-house participants, it should enable the participants to look into the problem in a "longitudinal" manner. Their experience of "living" with the problem enabled them not just understand the problem on its "face value" but also about its historical root. Team A had been managed to make a compare and contrast between the present and the past and hence, able to take a broader view on the cause of the problem.

However, the experience of "living" and "suffered" from the problem for a long time could also build up a "die casted" impression and feeling. When this feeling was owned by someone who are more stiff in personality (as in the case of PK & KY, which will be analyzed in the subsequent section) could lead to an entrenched view and difficult to be convinced.

Chinese cultural context

It is worth noting that the KY and PK's behaviour of pointing out straight on the incompetence of others is quite incongruent with the Chinese culture which emphasis harmony and "giving face" to others. However, this was consistent with the personality of both of them. PK described that he frequently bring along "shocks" to the company he had served. (This will be analyzed in the subsequent section) On the other hand, the drive for harmony and avoidance of confrontation had worked on FZ and KC who given up the striving for their opinion of checking out the real problem behind after several unsuccessful attempts.

7.3.11 Difference in the perceived cause of problem (2)

Team A	Team B
Cause of problem – "Ours"(effective system and procedure not agreed upon)	**Cause of problem – "Theirs" (NBD not comply to "good" procedure)**

7.3.11a Supporting evidence – Team A – Cause of problem as lacked agreed procedure

The need of a common goal had been shared among various team members in Team A. For example, TW postulate the need to build up better team work with the NBD.

> 238 00:42:02 TW When I want to make comment on him, he managed to provide additional inputs which were good. He mentioned about the system but many people just don't bother to follow it. He had added the need to have a common goal at the ending part. I feel that just to have a system in place won't be sufficient. We need to have a common goal and make it known by all. (…) That's why I feel that a team building is need on top of a system.

MYL highlighted the different emphasis between the NBD and the OpD.

178 29:49 MYL (…) It's pretty simple. Production and quality are frequently in conflict. (…) When you are talking about the NBD or the designer, whether the design could be worked out and meet the specification, whether it could be produced before the deadline, or whether it could really be delivered, from the viewpoint of the NBD, they should be more concerned about the successful passing of the design.(…)

Source: Data / Mtg. Team A (b) 16 May 08

WC raised the practical issue of making the benefit of OpD's early involvement MORE visible to NBD.

236 39:28 WC (…) there was no early involvement in the project previously. That could be sort of ^^^ and result in some mistrust between us or to created some roadblock or frustration. I feel that NBD might felt a bit in experienced in handling the design approach in this manner. Therefore I think we should look at the benefits for both sides. What kind of benefit our early involvement could lead to and compare it with the disadvantage of our not so early involvements. (…)

Source: Data / Mtg. Team A (b) 16 May 08 analysis

7.3.11b Supporting evidence – Team B – Cause of problem as not complied to "good" procedure

According to RR, all the problem was that the NBD had been consistently failed to adhere to the quality system.

58	15:20	RR	(…) I feel that the most important issue is about the design review. That is a must for the part of NBD. (…) After the design review should be the drawing review (…) and then is there a tooling qualification review? Proceed to ^^^without the tooling …qualification inspection and verification will ^^^. So I think the problem is more on the front side.

Source: Data / Team B / Mtg. Team B (a) 16 May 08

The thinking of PK, KY& RR was that – follow the rules and procedure.

88	23:07	PK	As what KY had said, the system is there. The problem is that no one cares to adhere to it. The objective is "follow the procedure".

However, what are those rules and procedure had not been even agreed among three of them. RR was thinking about a very idealistic quality management procedure and that's why he had added many "extra stuff" into the presentation of the Forum without the consent of other team members. For KY, the procedure was the A&B Company's procedure.

At the conclusion of the meeting, PK still maintained that it was the NBD who had not done their job and it was them who had failed to fulfil their proper role. With this thinking, the true purpose of meeting the NBD would undoubtedly one of telling rather then listening.

77	07:23 + 58min 39sec of Part a	PK	(···) What I suggest， may be we actually when we discuss actual is no meaning，may be we just direct inviting in our next meeting。Or we invite NBD，sit together to listen their voice with ^^^ the follow way，the rule what will they basic。 **It does know actually the report is not by them is not us，don't follow is by them is not us**。Ah

PK spoke in English in this part and the text was his exact wordings
Source: Data / Team B / Mtg. Team B (b) 16 May 08

Actually, in the last slide of Team B's PPT in the Forum, they had made the following conclusion which was consistent with the main theme of their 1st and 2nd team meetings:

> **Team B "Final Clause"**
>
> We had a good system in place. The only thing we need to do is to properly implement the procedure accordingly.
>
> Source: Slide #15, Team B Proposal

7.3.11c Potential impact of the 4 contextual factors conducive to the difference in practice between the two teams on the dimensions the facts were presented

In-house

When participants all came from the same department, in this case, the OpD, this kind of "ours" and "theirs" feeling could be much easier to generate.

7.3.12 Difference in the perceived meaning of solving the problem

Team A	Team B
Solving the problem was meaningful	**Solving the problem was meaningful but meaningless to ask us to solve it.**

7.3.12a Supporting evidence – Team A – Solving the problem was meaningful

In Team A, there was a general agreement that something need to be done and worthwhile to be done on the issue of alignment between NBD and the OpD in product launch process.

> 220 00:37:04 MYL (…) this itself is a preventive measure and better then thinking of a method later but at cost of several times higher. That's why it's something that must be done.
>
> Source: Data / Team A / Mtg. Team A (b) 16 May 08

This comment was actually in line with the need expressed by the Vice-President to me.

7.3.12b Supporting evidence – Team B - Solving the problem was meaningful but meaningless to ask us to solve it.

As it had been mentioned, PK held a strong belief that the problem was not caused by the OpD and was actually the problem of the NBD's staff and their top management. He thought that was a "waste of time" for them to discuss in that meeting as they could do nothing about it.

Believing that the Project T (the new product) was a total failure, PK felt meaningless to discuss it further. Whether he did not understand or did not want to take it as a learning chance to explore future preventive measure could not be known. However, he was more interested in finding out another project which could serve as a "successful" case as a "demo" (for presenting to the senior management in the Forum).

> 77 07:23 PK They had a team now, so I feel it more practical, rather then discussing among ourselves, actually our target is quite clear, why not we get, actually we had take one step forward, **talk with them which project could be taken as a demo**. Because I knew it was a mistake to take Project T, this project is a dead dog already. (…)
>
> Team B Mtg. (b) 16 May 08.

7.3.12c Potential impact of the 4 contextual factors conducive to the difference in practice between the two teams on the dimensions the facts were presented

High potential staff

One of the characteristic of high potential staff is the impatience with the waste of time.

> Time-consciousness: a drive to achieve the most as soon as possible; a drive to achieve a goal and embrace the next one.
> (Gritzmacher, 1989, Quoted by Peters & Smith, 1996)

PK, who was the one with the highest potential (as indicated by his promotion to senior mgr. position in mid 09), was not interested in using a "failure" case – the Project T as a "demo". Spending time on a "failed project" was not a good use of time for him.

7.3.13 Difference in the perceived solution

Team A	Team B
Relative – Need to work out the best solution with NBD	**Absolute – The solution is already there**

7.3.13a Supporting evidence – Team A - Need to work out the best solution with NBD

Actually, both team agreed that a good system and procedure need to be in place. At the concluding stage of Team A's first meeting, the need for a system to guide all parties in the new product launch process was agreed by everyone. (Please see Appendix 7Q)

While agreeing that a system must be in place, TC proceeded to comment that this system should be the one which could bind both parties together.

250	47:06	TC	Yeah, that's a must have. It must be in place, you are right. (…) On top of it we need to develop (…) lost together, win together and there should be no personal success. Even there are (personal success), it will also lead to company success too. (…)

Source: Data / Team A / Mtg. Team A (b) 16 May 08

7.3.13b Supporting evidence – Team B - The solution is already there

What Team B mentioned about the solution was actually a procedure adopted for the customer of the HMC – The A&B Co. when KY was serving as the Quality Assurance Mgr.. Although this procedure had been adopted successfully by the A&B Co., this was by no means a standard practice for all cases. However, KY had made a strong avocation of this and his position was backed up by PK and by RR, who was the successor of KY.

What followed was KY's notion that a "good system" had already existed and why the NBD not comply with the requirement of this "good system" is due to their "laziness" and the lack of commitment of their senior management.

88	23:07	PK	As exactly what KY had said, our, this system is already there. The problem is no one cares to follow. **The objective for this is: follow the procedure.**
89	23:21	KY	Training had been provided; criticism had been raised in audit, what else you want us to do? What else we, as Operations could do?

Source: Data/ Team B/ Mtg. Team B (a) 16 May 08

That's why the problem was not to build up a good alignment system but how to “pull” those NBD people back to that system. This “pulling back” notion could be found everywhere in Team B’s 1st meeting.

132 35:17 KY (…) Let’s try to find out all the problem on the way they work and think of methods to pull them back towards the system.

182 42:06 KY Why? You don’t know why. Ah…don’t know what kind of method could pull them (the NBD) back.

7.3.14 Difference in the approach to handle questioning by others

Team A	Team B
More open and receptive attitude towards others questioning	More close and defensive attitude towards others questioning

7.3.14a Supporting evidence – Team A - More open and receptive attitude towards others questioning

The behaviour of “Q’ing” each other could be found in different timings of the set meeting of Team A. For example, when someone raised the question whether a reward and penalty system should be established alongside with the procedure almost all members were involved in the Q’ing and probing. (Please see Appendix 7R)

Team A had also demonstrated a “stop and think” behaviour in the process of group discussion.

28 10:19 PF A little bit get lost. What actually is our vision? That’s what (WC) mentioned. He is right. What exactly do we want? That’s what we should ask.

29 10:30 WC What we should success at? OK, I think all of us should think about this first. I suggest

we spent five minutes to think about this and start recording again.

Source: Data / Team A / Mtg. Team A (b) 2 Jun 08

When everyone was immersed in the discussion of the solution, PF reminded the team not to overlook the importance of having a clear understanding on the problem.

67	18:00	PF	Apart from the solution you mentioned, I am talking about the problem first. Would any please to say something about the problem?
68	18:04	WC	Do you guys had a ^^^ of problem that had been agreed on? Your solution should build in with ^^^which aspect.

Source: Data / Team A / Mtg. Team A (b) 2 Jun 08

In the Team A meeting (the set meeting) held on 16 May 08, at the meeting room of HMC, most of the set members were quite agreed with the need to refer to the top management show there be situation when the view between the Operations and the Engineering were too diverted. MY managed to state a view point which challenges the group think in a mild manner. (Which was also the style of MY)

39	00:10:36	MY	However, we are talking about getting the top management to make the final decision in case there are differences in view point. (…) Actually, there should be a consensus in most circumstances if there is a healthy relationship.

7.3.14b Supporting evidence – Team B - More close and defensive attitude towards others questioning

Questioning behaviours were mainly exhibited by FZ and KC towards KY's "pre-determined" position. Even after almost 50 minutes of discussion, KC did not seemed to be convinced by KY's position of making a conclusion even before conducting a study on the fact. However, his query had met with a straight response from KY.

219	48:53	KC	What you said mean that you had already drawn a conclusion on the cause (of the problem of NBD's non compliance to procedure)

(…)

225	49:18	KY	The experience of each person is different. I had a close contact with the NBD on every level, therefore I know some secret. **If you said I had already drawn a conclusion I can tell you I had drawn a conclusion.**

Mtg. Team B(a) 16 May 08
(Full section of this piece of dialogue placed in Appendix 7S)

Such kinds of question were not infrequent and were mainly raised by FZ and KC and the responding party was mainly KY. The response usually took the form of defence and end up with FZ or KC giving up pursuing further.

When KY conclude that it was "laziness" of the NBD staff which cause all the problems, KC and FZ had case a reserved vote and subtly suggested to look further into other possibilities, KY set a limit on the boundary of exploration.

128	34:56	KC	Could all of these (problems) be attributed to laziness? If all could be explained by laziness then…
129	34:59	FZ	Sorry, I feel that, that's their internal problem, right? ^^^and we had no jurisdiction over them right? Surely we don't have the authority. We could just make proposal. I feel we should rely on our team to help them.
130	35:13	KY	I think that is not the right time to explore on this issue.

According to KY, the problem could be easily solved by adopting the procedure he had employed when dealing with a client – the A&B Company (not a real name) when he served as the Quality Assurance Manger a few years ago. When his position had been challenged by KC, he made an ultimate defence by assuring that the System he proposed was a "success guaranteed" method. They had been rated by the customer "as 92 marks, 95 marks 98 marks and 100 marks were all because of this. This is something being hammered by A&B for a thousand times." (#121 at 34:04, Team B 1st Meeting)

7.3.14c Potential impact of the 4 contextual factors conducive to the difference in practice between the two teams on the dimensions the facts were presented

Participants acquainted with each other

189	45:00	FZ	What I feel is that, in case^^^, regardless of what their senior management had said, suppose^^^
190	45:09	KY	Sorry, (FZ). Each system must have a system behind, ^^^ Operations Division, the ISO9000, QAKE, that is the top management or you calls it leadership commitment. Without this leadership, management, the top management commitment, absolutely no system ever exist could deal with this. (…)

KY had interrupted other's (mainly KC's and FZ's) speech for many times. I doubt this could happen in situation when the participants were not acquainted with each other. This had hampered the Q'ing process obviously by KY's domination.

7.3.15 Difference in the step taken to improve original action plan

Team A	Team B
Take active improvement action	**Take cosmetic improvement action.**

7.3.15a Supporting evidence – Team A – Take active improvement action

The drive for continuous improvement could be revealed in the attempt to improve on the data collection method in their next step..

1	00:22	TW	We had mentioned that the sample size is not big enough. We had targeted for three persons only at the very beginning. (…) I think we need to expand the sample size in the next step. It should include all the people in the NBD. (…)

7.3.15b Supporting evidence – Team B – Take cosmetic improvement action

Team B chose to arrange a lunch with the NBD staff before involving them in the next meeting. Unlike the intention of Team A, which aims at listening and exploring, their intention was more of building a good atmosphere for them to present their proposal in the meeting right after the lunch. That could be evidenced from their casual chatting, though joking and mean nothing serious, could reveal some of their intention:

88	08:54	PK	Let's have lunch together with them first. How about make it 12:30. Then we can have meeting after lunch, is it OK?
89	09:05	KC	In order to achieve our goal…
90	09:05	?	Invite them all.
91	09:07	KC	…be unscrupulous.
92	09:08	KY	Have a good dinner outside, discuss with them while singing Karaoke
93	09:09	PK	Singing while talking.
94	09:10	KY	Have a drink together (Mixed voice of discussion)

The lunch with NBD, to Team B was just a prelude to present their off-the-shelve solution. Actually, they communicate little on the alignment issue with the NBD staff during the lunch and little opinion had been collected. Most of the talks were around some day-to-day works and mindless chit-chats.

7.3.15c Potential impact of the 4 contextual factors conducive to the difference in practice between the two teams on the dimensions the facts were presented

Chinese cultural context

It is a typical Chinese culture to place the activities of building up Guanxi at the up front before proceed to tackle the core business. Bothe teams recognized the importance of this. However, the difference between the two teams was that Team A take the chance to know more in a relaxed and unofficial situation whereas Team B merely take it as a friendly gesture which actually is a “prelude” to the subsequent meeting.

7.3.16 Difference in the perceived locus of power to solve the problem

Team A	Team B
Emphasising any one person or department with adequate support could solve the problem	Emphasizing the role of QA in solving the problem.

7.3.16a Supporting evidence – Team B — Emphasizing the role of QA in solving the problem

In Team B, they recommended the A&B Co’s procedure as the solution in which the Quality Assurance (QA) Department (which KY was the head previously and now headed by RR) would take the lead. This could be evidenced by KY’s repeated emphasis on the key role the QA Dept had been playing in the past and how successful it had been.

In the second meeting of Team B, the intention of KY and RR's wish to take a lead in the alignment process of new product launch.

74	43:32	KY	We together with RR are very willing to train up everybody as an expert, he is (referring to RR) is an expert.
75	43:47	NBD staff	**One expert leading the whole world!**
76	43:49	KY	He had been successfully got the approval of (name of a customer). He is really very good in it, building up all the data and all the things.

Full version of this section of dialogue placed on Appendix 7T

More examples on this could be found in Appendix 7U

7.3.16b Supporting evidence – Team A –Emphasizing any one person or department with adequate support could solve the problem

In Team A, their conception was to have a single person or function who/which is powerful enough to lead the whole project from start to finish, be this person/function was placed under the OpD or the NBD. Whoever in that position, they will feed them with all the information needed to enable them to do a good job.

403	48:21	WC	Ours are pretty straight forward, if they take up the role of a project leader, we will support them. There is no need for me to mention they have the total authority. We will just give them a total support by providing all of our knowhow's and our expertise to facilitate this project.
404	48:38	PF	I think when we put into detail we should emphasize how the Operation team should follow and how to conduct the system review what we are going to do and that's all.

Source: Data / Team A (b) 2 Jun 08

Quite contrary to Team B, Team A had suggested to strengthen the role of the position of the Program Manager which was under the authority of the NBD. WC suggested giving the incumbent of this position great power so that he could command the compliance of all other departments. As this was running against the interest of the OpD, WC suggested that the OpD needed to "change the mindset".

159	28:44	PF	That is because this certain Program Manager is currently under the NBD. That means the team members of the Operations need to totally comply with him. And this, I believe^^^
160	28:54	TC	That means the whole infrastructure, which meant that the whole organizational infrastructure also needs to be changed. Our whole Operations Division originally work under this Program Manager (…)

Source: Data/Team A/Mtg. Team A (b) 2 Jun 08

7.3.16c Potential impact of the 4 contextual factors conducive to the difference in practice between the two teams on the dimensions the facts were presented

In-house

When the AL program was running in-house, there will be a possibility, as illustrated in this case, that a certain department or person or section would like to take the opportunity to expand their influence or to prove their value. A way of doing this, probably, is by volunteering to do something "extra". In order to demonstrate their value, they would prefer to work alone and take the lead so that all the credit would goes to them. I am not trying to say that was KY or RR's intention. What I want to postulate is that, when an AL program was running in-house, the very requirement of AL to solve a real important problem could give those who had that intention an excellent opportunity to materialize it.

High potential staff

For many high potential managers, willing to take up extra challenge and an eagerness to show his performance is common. In the case of Team B, it will be natural for RR, who was relatively new, to want to build up his credibility through taking up a higher responsibility in the new product launch process.

Chinese cultural context

The NBD staffs were not totally convinced that the whole process should be lead by QA. However, in face of the strong "endorsement" of KY, they choose not to confront openly but take a strategy of "let's see what will happen". This is a typical approach of Chinese culture to "give face" to others and not to hurt the long term "Guanxi". The guanxi between KY and the delegates of the NBD could be triangulated by KY's mentioning that he was indeed quite friendly with some of the NBD staff (the name he mentioned were actually some of those NBD delegates) and they frequently have lunch together and it was them who had told KY those "inside stories" (according to KY).

7.3.17 Summary

In this Section, the variation in practice between the two teams had been depicted. The two teams had been provided with the similar level of resources, the same problem and the same operation guidance. The minimum intervention by me and the management of HMC enabled the participants of the CFG program to manage their own learning. The difference in practice signified a difference in the way the two teams construct their learning experience in the AL process.

7.4

Implication of difference in practice between Team A & Team B

In the previous Section, I adopted the lens of social constructivist and try to make sense of the difference in practice between the two teams by examining the possible effect of the 4 contextual factors on the way the participants construct their learning experience.

Could the difference in practice between Team A & Team B explain the difference in learning results as described in Section 7.1

In this Section, I will make an attempt to analyse the effect of the difference in practice on the effective functioning of the 5 key ingredients.

7.4.1 The emerging "P"

Revans did mention some ideal "P" for AL:

> …its (action learning) material is not the knowledge of the teacher but the experiences and the needs of the learners…
> (Revans 1980, p.288)

In Team A, there was no apparent "major knowledge" presented in the team meeting. All the knowledge was emerge and elicited during meeting as needed and this did enabled the team members to learn from each other. One way that the team members make this "P" emerge was by asking directly the practice of the company the members previously work for. One example could be found when WC raised the suggestion of installing a powerful Program Manager.

> 165 29:19 TW Let's check for some opinion. Is it a practice that had been used in the company you previously work?

It was found that the knowledge elicited not just limited to practical "know how" but could also be some "theoretical knowledge". One example was that when the team was discussing the issue on the extend of control method of the new product launch process, the concept of three management control style had been provided by WC. (See Appendix 7V)

In the subsequent discussion, this concept had become a “frame of reference” and being frequently quoted by other members for many times. One example was that the concept was quoted by another member TW, in response to WC’s suggestion of installing a position called program manager in Team A’s second meeting which was held 2 weeks later.

146	27:40	TC	That is autocratic, right? The existence of a program manager meant autocratic.

Source: Data / Team A / Mtg. Team A (b) 2 Jun 08

The programmed knowledge of the CFG program – Kotter’s 8 Step Process had also been recalled in an elicitive manner.

22	10:02	PF	Hadn’t we, at that time mentioned about producing a vision and making “small wins” right?
23	10:06	PF	Do we need to apply what had been delivered at that time?
24	10:10	TW	Those seven steps of change, The steps that make change.
25	10:12	PF	Yeah. I could recall it. That should be it at that time.
26	10:14	TW	Is it seven steps? Had my memory failed me?

Source: Data / Team A / Mtg. Team A (b) 2 Jun 08

On the other hand, the “major knowledge” shared was the procedure that KY had developed and used when he was the QA Manager when dealing with the A&B Company (I call it the A&B Company procedure). He had shared this with PK and probably RR and had got the detail procedure printed out, disseminated and tried to persuade the other team members that this procedure was the most effective solution.

71	20:32	FZ	Is it currently already exists or…
72	20:34	KY	Already there. The process manual. **And this is what PK printed out which is what I had produced – a chart for project management.** It had spelled out in great

detail on what to do. But this had not been followed. It had been written down already.

What KY had prepared was akin to the "programmed knowledge", "a given syllabus" that he intended to disseminate during the meeting. Subsequent dialogue in Team B's 1st and 2nd meeting indicated that KY was quite determined that the A&B Company procedure was the "right stuff" for curing the problem. His behaviour was just like a teacher telling his students a "proven method" to solve the problem defined by him.

Revans (Quoted in Smith 1997, p.365) spelled out that the "P" should NOT just be "what a man already knows". "What a man already knows" is the "P" and in AL, it should not blind oneself from the "recognized ignorance" and the pre set curriculum should not prevent the participants from "learn with and from each other". It is the "re-reading what is already scribbled on the cortical slate that leads to changed behaviour" (Revans 1980). That's why the P in AL should not have a "given syllabus" and should not "disseminates what a teacher thinks is good for his or her students" and the knowledge should be "elicitive" (Peter & Smith 1996 p.6)

Peters & Smith (1996) further mentioned what a "P" should not become a syllabus that "disseminates what a teacher thinks is good for his or her students". Apart from that, the "P" could be any "relevant areas of the body of knowledge - books, journals, other individuals, company literature, other organizations - appropriate, targeted and contextualized information" All these knowledge represented some past experience. The sharing of this knowledge in AL is to enable a "re-reading" of those one already know.

Should be	Should not
Any relevant knowledge flow freely and elicited as needed. Enable participants learn with and from each other Enable “re-reading” of past experience	Be something what a teacher thinks is good for students.(Not a trainer directed syllabus) Prevent participants from recognized ignorance.

Base on the distinction between what makes an effective “P” and what does not, I will proceed to analyse which of the 14 behaviours demonstrated by the two teams make the “P” effective or not effective.

7.4.1a Any relevant knowledge flow freely and elicited as needed

Team A	Team B
Felt need to obtain more knowledge	Felt owned adequate knowledge already.

The general feeling that more knowledge need to be obtained had enabled different team members of Team A contribute to knowledge.

The feeling that adequate knowledge had been owned by Team B as indicated in their insider story, past successful stories etc had made the contribution of knowledge mainly from a few members. Although some members did raise the need to explore further information on the cause of the problem, the notion that the core of the problem is crystal clear inhibited other members from contributing knowledge further.

Team A	Team B
We need to do differently together	We had done our part

The shared notion that a different approach needs to be adopted by both parties in order to meet the changed situation enabled Team A to express among themselves on their own deficiencies and the contribution of the NBD. Knowledge of possible solutions had also been elicited and shared as needed.

On the other hand, the emphasis of Team B that they had already done their part lead the Team B's knowledge supply concentrated around what they had done and what the NBD had not done. They never mentioned what the NBD had done.

Team A	Team B
More open and receptive attitude towards others questioning	More close and defensive attitude towards others questioning

Team A's open and receptive attitude towards other's questioning had made knowledge and information flow easily in their meetings.

On the other hand, the closed and defensive attitude towards others' questioning banned others from supplying further information and knowledge.

7.4.1b Enable participants learn with and from each other

Team A	Team B
Felt need to obtain more knowledge	Felt owned adequate knowledge already.

Team A's felt need to obtain more knowledge enabled its members to learn with and from each other as evidenced in TW ask WC to operationalize the concept of the 3 management style, and in asking TC on the practice of the company he previously worked in.

On the contrary, asking other's input on knowledge (not comment) could not be founded in Team B's meeting.

7.4.1c Enable "re-reading" of past experience, Should not be something what a teacher thinks is good for students and should not Prevent participants from recognized ignorance

Team A	Team B
Less authoritative in presenting knowledge	Authoritative in presenting knowledge

Team A members' less authoritative approach in presenting their knowledge enabled the re-reading of past experience more possible. It also facilitates the natural recognition of one's ignorance in face of the changed situation.

On the other hand, Team B's authoritativness in presenting their knowledge such as KY's constant mention of his success stories of implementing the A&B Co's procedure prevented him and other team members to raised queries on the suitability of the procedure.

7.4.1d Summary

As seen from the previous discussion, the true nature of "P" for AL had not been incarnated in Team B. It helps to inform me on the reason leading to the ineffectiveness of AL in Team B.

7.4.2 The "real problem"

Should be	Should not be
Open-ended Participants are "genuinely concerned to get something done about it" (Revans, 1980, p.292)	Puzzle (i.e. answer is known by experts, where there is little ambiguity, where there is only one stakeholder, or where the decision maker has decided what he or she is going to do, disregarding other possible options.) (Mezirow, J., et el, 1990 p.31) Highly technical in nature

7.4.2a Open ended

Team A	Team B
Felt need to obtain more knowledge	Felt owned adequate knowledge already.

The practice of Team A enabled the team members to discover more options to tackle the alignment issue. Their decision to get more input from the NBD had broadened their understanding on the issue and hence makes the problem more open.

On the other hand, Team B regarded them as holding adequate knowledge – the knowledge in the practice of the NBD as informed by their past experience and the "friends" inside, the knowledge of the A&B Company's procedure. The problem was a closed one to them.

Team A	Team B
We need to do differently together	We had done our part

The approach of Team A to find out and solve the problem together with the NBD had opened up more uncertainties for the solution. The reaction of the NBD could not be known for sure and their counter proposal would make the ultimate proposal hard to control. All these could add to the "openness" of the problem.

On the other hand, Team B frequently pointed out the problem was "not created here" and maintained that they had already done their part and expressed "what else you want us to do?" This delimited the scope of exploration on the solution and instead, turned their focus totally on the pushing forward of the A&B Company's procedure.

7.4.2b Participants genuinely concerned to do something about it

Team A	Team B
More on possibilities	More on impossibilities

Team A's more concern on the various methods to tackle the issue enabled them to proposed some solutions which the OpD could have a part to play. This could give them a bigger drive and a higher devotion to do something about the problem.

Team B mentioned a lot on the unfairness of the system, the lack of commitment of the NBD's top management and the incompetence of the NBD staff and their lack of authority to "fire people" lead to a passive notion of "if the documents were not ready, we should not start working at all". Their decision of not to mention the issue on the "commitment of top management" indicated a mentality of "**the problem is meaningful but asking us to do something about it is NOT meaningful**" as they feel that many of the problem could not be tackled by them. PK's constant express of the discussion was a "waste of time" illustrated this mentality vividly.

7.4.2c Not a "puzzle"

Team A	Team B
Felt need to obtain more knowledge	Felt owned adequate knowledge already.

Team B's notion that it was the "laziness", the top management's lack of commitment and the unfairness of the system seduced them to focus their solution on pushing forward the A&B Company's procedure. The preparation of the procedure's print out and the forceful "selling" of it to FZ & KC indicated that the solution was akin to the undesirable quality of problem for AL – "the decision maker has decided what he or she is going to do, disregarding other possible options"(Mesirow, 1990, p.31). The continuous mentioning of his and RR's experience in the A&B Company's procedure make the problems become "highly technical in nature, where the answer is known by experts, where there is little ambiguity". (Mesirow, 1990, p.31). In the eye of Team B, it was the NBD that need to take all the corrective actions that turned the problem into one "where there is only one stakeholder" (Mesirow, 1990, p.31).

On the other hand, Team A's shared feeling to gain a deeper understanding on the problem made them to treat the problem as complex and involved multiple stake holders. Their reorganization on the need to seek "external expert's" advice and their willingness to adopt the NBD's suggestion indicated that they had not regarded themselves as expert.

7.4.2d Not highly technical in nature

Team A	Team B
Felt need to obtain more knowledge	Felt owned adequate knowledge already.

The ultimate proposal team A presented in the Forum covered many areas in management such as reward system, training, team work etc.. That indicated that they treated the problem as not purely technical which could only had right or wrong answers.

On the other hand, Team B turned the problem into highly technical in nature ever since they had resolved that the A&B System was the only solution to the problem. The notion of PK that the objective was to get the NBD to "follow the system" and the overt expression of KY of "list out what they (the NBD) had done incorrectly" and then "pull them back" turned the nature of the problem into a technical one. The 30 minutes they spent on explaining the technical detail of the A&B Company's procedure in the 2nd meeting and the technical proposal they made to the top management in the Forum had clearly indicated that the issue of alignment with the NBD in new product launch process had been perceived by Team B as "technical".

7.4.2e Summary

The discussion above indicated that the "real problem" had been constructed in different ways by the two teams. The way Team A constructed the problem made it function effectively as a "vehicle of learning" as it should be in AL. On the other hand, Team B constructed the problem in a way that something could be done immediately and solid action could be taken instantly. I am not in a position to comment whether the A&B Company's procedure was an effective solution or not. In terms of making the problem to become a "vehicle of learning", the way Team B constructed it was clearly not an effective way. It pointed out the fallacy of treating the "real problem" provided to AL sets as just "out there". Whether they could really become a "vehicle of learning" depended very much on the way the set members had "re-constructed" it. Further discussion of it would be stated in next chapter.

7.4.3 Implementation of proposed solution

Reiterating Revans' conception on the role of the "real problem" in AL:

> If the clients are **merely seeking a description of their trouble**, however sophisticated, however charged with recommendations, they must not be lead to think that they are engaged in Action Learning. (Revans, 1983, p.22) (Highlighted by me)

On top of taking up the ultimate responsibility of implementing their recommendations, the action taken up by set members should also be "what they believe to be worth doing" according to Revans.

> By doing what they set out to do, and by setting out to **do what they believe to be worth doing,** managers are disciples of the Aristotelian ethic. (Revans 1998 p. 75) (Highlighted by me)

Should be	Should not be
Believed by set members as worth doing. The deliberate plan to solve the real problem implemented by the set members	Merely describing own trouble.

7.4.3a Believed by set members as worth doing

Team A	Team B
Less authoritative in presenting knowledge	Authoritative in presenting knowledge

The less authoritative in presenting knowledge by each members of Team A enabled a proposal that included almost everyone's input. The enthusiasm of all members of Team A in preparing the questionnaire, the innovative approach in presenting their proposal (by wearing a specially designed T-shirt) and the team approach in making presentation in Forum (each members presented a part of it) indicated that all members of Team A shared the belief that the solution was worth doing.

On the other hand, until the rear part of the 1st meeting of Team B, KC and FZ had showed signs of their not being convinced, the lack of participation of PK, and the presentation in Forum was made only by RR all indicated that the belief on the worthiness of implementing the solution was highly diverted among the members of Team B. All these could be due to the highly authoritativeness of KY and PK in "telling" the team what to do. As a result, the proposal was not the "baby" of everyone.

7.4.3b Implemented by the set members who proposed it.

Team A	Team B
Relative – Need to work out the best solution with NBD	Absolute – The solution is already there

The approach adopted by Team A to work out the solution "comfortable" to all parties enabled them to produce an all rounded action plan. In their plan, ALL team members had a role to play to implement the plan and all were very willing to take up their part.

In Team B, the action plan was the pushing forward of the A&B Company's procedure which had been prepared by KY a few years ago when he served as the Quality Assurance Manager. It was KY's baby and known best by KY. The enthusiasm in pushing forward the procedure belonged to KY and RR. FZ and KC had no roles to play in it. Almost all the preparation work was done by RR.

In other word, although all the participants fully aware that they need to implement their proposed solution subsequently, some members of Team B had been excluded from it from the outset.

7.4.3c Not merely describing own trouble.

Team A	Team B
Cause of problem – adaptation to change of requirements	Cause of problem – Laziness and lack of commitment of the senior management

Team B spent a lot of time in illustrating the laziness of the staff and the lack of commitment of the senior management. However, at the end of the day, those "core issues" was decided not to put into the proposal. This indicated that their discussion was more for describing rather then for problem solving.

The attributing of the alignment issue to the change in the added engineering competence of the OpD and the changed in the complexity of the product enabled Team A to dig deeper into the issue and made bold suggestions on ways to improve the situation.

7.4.3d Summary

The discussion above highlighted the issue that not only the opportunity to implement by set members was important, the way they construct the solution significantly affect the "how" and the "who" to implement which ultimately affect whether "each member" had a fair chance to implement their "own" deliberated plan or, as in the case of Team B, leave "the trouble" to other by positioning themselves as just proposing.

7.4.4 The "Q"

> It is **recognized ignorance** not programmed knowledge, that is the key to action learning: men start to learn with and from each other only when they discover that no one knows the answer but all are obliged to find it (Revans, 1991 Quoted in Smith, P.A.C., 1997 p. 365,) (Highlighted by me)

The method to enable learning from each other is the "comrades in adversity" as called by Revans.

Should be	Should not be
Recognized ignorance Comrades in adversity	

7.4.4a Recognized ignorance

Team A	Team B
Less authoritative in presenting knowledge	Authoritative in presenting knowledge

In Team A, their recognized ignorance could be evidenced from their emphasis to ask the NBD and their ignorance of what make the NBD "uncomfortable about".

On the contrary, the constant emphasis of KY on his successful experience of using the A&B Company's procedure, the "insider" information he obtained, the supporting gesture of PK and RR had successfully override the recognized ignorance" expressed by KC and FZ.

7.4.4b Become comrades in adversity

Team A	Team B
More open and receptive attitude towards others questioning	More close and defensive attitude towards others questioning

The defensive response of KY towards the questioning of KC & FZ made the process of "having those (experience) criticize and advise" became ineffective. The behaviour of "take that advice, reflect and implement" was rare in Team B.

Quite the opposite, the more open and receptive attitude of Team A's members towards others questioning enabled the happening of many mutual criticizing, advising and advise taking and opinion modification behaviours.

7.4.4c Summary

The discussion stated above indicated that questioning and responding equally important in an AL set. The "ignoring", "pre-empting" responses towards others questioning could affect whether the "Q'ing" process seriously.

7.4.5 Take improved action

Revans had stated one of the three objectives was:

> **Make useful progress** upon the treatment of some problem
> or opportunity in the real world.
> (Revans 1998, p. 15 – 16) (Highlighted be me)

Revans had also clearly stated that the outcome of the AL should be improved "observable behaviour henceforth in the problem field." (Revans, 1982 pp. 626 – 7)

Should be	Should not be
Able to make useful progress on the treatment of the real problem Able to achieve intended change to improve their observable behaviour	

7.4.5a Make useful progress on the treatment of the real problem

Team A	Team B
Take active improvement actions	Take cosmetic improvement actions

Team A's objective of inviting the NBD staff for lunch was for listening and understanding so that they could plan their next action. The lunch meeting with the NBD helped them to broaden their understanding of the NBD's problem and enabled them to design questionnaire to collect more information. All these indicated that Team A had taken active improvement action towards the quality of their proposal.

On the other hand, the objective of Team's invitation of NBD to lunch was more a gesture and a way to gain higher acceptance level towards the A&B Company's procedure in the subsequent meeting with them. Throughout the two meetings, the stuff Team B proposed had not been changed and in the Forum, it had been changed by adding more technical detail on the A&B's procedure only.

7.4.5b Achieve intended change to improve own observable behaviour

Team A	Team B
More open and receptive attitude towards others questioning	More close and defensive attitude towards others questioning

As discussed in the earlier section, the critical reflective working behaviour of Team A in their 2nd team meeting was more then that in their 1st meeting.

More open and receptive behaviour could be observed in their 2nd meeting. For Team B, their close and defensive behaviours could equally be observed in their 2nd meeting.

7.4.5c Summary

In a nutshell, the ingredients of taking improved action could be fostered effectively in an AL set where the practice of “comrades in adversity” could be found.

7.5
What led to the difference in practices?

The 16 differences in approaching the Project T are quite remarkable. Why this could happen? The two teams had been presented with the same task, had a mix of team members with comparable backgrounds, provided with same resources and being exposed to the same 5 key ingredients of AL. Furthermore, both of the teams were exposed to the more or less similar effect of the same 4 contextual factors. When I ran down the list of the 16 differences from time to time, I found many of them actually originated from one common notion that had not been explicitly stated – A pre-conception of the answer to the question “Who made this mistake?” vs. “What caused the problem?”

7.5.1 Team B

The following line of thinking had been running through the discussion in Team B’s meeting.

The NBD had made the mistake → We OpD do not have a role in creating the mistake → We need to correct their mistake.

This logic of thinking could be evidenced in their conclusion on action steps as shown in Appendix 7W

7.5.1a The NBD had made the mistakes

In Team B, a lot of discussions were conducted around the following "mistakes"

Product design mistakes – PK repeatedly told the Team that the design was "stupid" and it was inherited from some stupid tradition.

Procedure mistakes – RR repeatedly told the Team that many checking that need to be done had not been done by the NBD. PK repeatedly mentioned that it was the NBD who had not follow the procedure.

Management mistakes – KY & PK repeatedly inform the Team that it was the laziness of staff (which is about HR Management) and top management which concern only about "speed" was really the "black hand" behind. Besides, it was the company that had not asked the NBD to bear any consequences for the problematic products they designed.

7.5.1b We had not contributed to the mistakes

Furthermore, Team B had spelled out that those mistakes were not caused by them by:

Saying that we are ignorant

76	20:59	KY	I can tell you all about this. All these were, right, the Marketing Department get the order, and then the Engineering Department and then passed to us. We are just, if they didn't tell us, we are totally ignorant on what they are doing. When they make it (a mess), ah, by the time we found out problems and we need to yell out, hay man, there is a problem, it needed to be changed. (And the NBD will say) Oh, no way, we need to proceed to the tooling stage.

Team B (a) 16 May 08

Regarding "we had done our job".

As training and advice as mentioned by KY and PK had already been provided, "What else you want us to do" was KY's conclusion.

77	07:23	PK	(…) Actually, our objective is quite clear, why not just invite …(the NBD) Actually we had already marched one step forward, (…) *It does know actually the report is not by them is not us ，don't follow is by them is not us 。*(…)

(Words in Italics were the exact wordings of PK)

Data / Team B / Mtg. Team B (b) 16 May 08

Telling that "We had already provided a solution."

As KY had mentioned which had been backed up by PK and RR, a good solution was already there which had been developed by the member of OpD (i.e. KY).

7.5.1c We need to correct their mistakes

KY repeatedly mentioned that the objective of the meeting was to "dig out what they had done wrong", and how to "pull them (the NBD) back" to follow the good "system" (the A&B Co's procedure).　(Evidence in Appendix 7X)

Naturally the lunch with the NBD and the subsequent "meeting" with them mainly served as a friendly gesture and a benevolent prelude to lure them to accept the need of listening to the advises of the OpD.

7.5.2 Team A

On the contrary, the following line of thinking had been running through the discussion in Team B's meeting.

There is a problem in the alignment process → Each parties had a role in creating the problem → We need to solve this problem together.

7.5.2a There is a problem in the alignment process

In Team A, many of the “mistakes” were regarded as a problem:
Product design problem – new product and new technology which both NBD and the OpD were not experienced. NBD were trying to resolve but since the problem were new to them, they were not able to provide a feasible solution at that moment.
Procedure problem – new way of cooperation with NBD made them not quite prepared in handling the OpD’s early involvement. A feasible procedure agreed by all parties was not in place.
Management problem – the lack of a powerful leader, difference of goal and interest, inadequate expertise, no motivational tools, absence of progress review system, ineffectiveness of equipment, and the lack of an agreed procedure all contributed to the problem.

7.5.2b Everyone had contributed to the problem

According to Team A, OpD had also contributed to the problem by making the NBD felt uncomfortable, by unclear division of labour among departments, and the lack of expertise in handling the technical problems. The in-born difference on the emphasis of the two departments (NBD on time and OpD on cost) had also contributed to the problem.

7.5.2c We need to solve this problem together

The unanimous resolution of Team A was to sit down together with the NBD and to understand each others concern and problem, and try to work out a way of doing things that were comfortable to each other.

7.5.3 Why did Team B adopt the "mistake correction" approach?

The key person who shaped this "mistake correction" approach was KY with the strong support from PK and RR. In the individual interview I conducted with each participant during Apr to May 07, KY had already expressed a very strong dislike and disapproval towards the practice of NBD which tried to draw a clear line of responsibility when the product had been handed over to the OpD.

118	09:57	KY	In all the previous companies I had worked for, the engineering department was responsible for all the follow-up to ensure the smooth production of the product.
123		WW	A follow through.
124		KY	Yeah, and now there is an argument over who should be responsible for the realization of the product. Ah, (the NBD) make the process smooth and then…
129		WW	Once passed to you (the OpD) and that's your job to do the rest.
130	10:21	KY	Recently …there are…more and more …cases…ah…that whatever had happened in the production process, the responsibility had been laid on the Operations. I personally not very agreeable towards this, and actually, I am very much disagree with this.

Although PK had not mentioned any opinion towards the NBD, he considered himself a "driver" and many of his opinion were to "drive" the NBD and to "fire" the incompetent staff. When I asked him on his vision when I interviewed him in 30 Apr 07, he made the following comment:

32	PK	To bring in more new things, to try to prove that they really work is really feasible. To push those who do not want to walk until they could walk by themselves. Or even, to push them from walking to running and in worst case, force them to leave.

56 PK Because I had been an engineer. I am a technical man and was a doer. May be I am quite straight forward to people (…) Whenever I join a new company, they usually commented that I created a very big impact. It really depends on the degree of acceptance of the company.

It is therefore not surprising to found PK very supportive to fixing “stupid” errors, outmoded “traditions” and “lazy” people in a bold and forceful manner. It aligned with his iron hand approach.

For RR, he had always been an idealistic man and never forgets to implement good systems. He could almost be described as dogmatic towards system and a strong believer of quality systems.

10 RR My… my expectation is that (…) we should be able to implement this kind of system… in… in the whole plant, (ng), not only in the operation. But also… from up… to down, (ng…) because ah… upper management places an important tool here, (…)

(RR was a South-East Asian person and the wordings were straight from his speech)

RR had also expressed his ideal of incorporating the NBD and other functions towards the setting up of a good quality management system. The Forum had become the best stage for him to educate and gain the support of the top management. That might be able to explain why he had added so many detail about quality management system into his presentation in the Forum without the consent of his own team.

22 RR Including… including I can say… ah up side operation, is the, ah… supporting from NBD, (yes), if we need team and we should include also the marketing team. (…) we should not only limit … to the operation side, we should… include the whole management team. (…)

The "iron triangle" of KY, PK and RR had become a "dream team" to push forward their common goal.

7.5.4 Summary for Section 7.5

Treating the problem for the AL project as a "mistake" made by others or treating it as a "problem" that all parties have a stake seemed to create a big difference to the way the 5 key AL ingredients were constructed. The former perception tempted one to resist critical self reflection and construct the project as a chance to teach others a lesson and fixing the "bad guys". On the contrary, the latter perception enabled the team members to engage in critical reflective working behaviours and construct the project as a change management process. I postulated that perceiving the problem to be solved by the AL project as a "mistake made by someone else" is more likely to happen in AL program running in-house.

7.6 What are the invariables found in the two cycles

Invariables: Practices that were common in both cycles that make the program ineffective

Unit of analysis	Cycle 1	Cycle 2
P	MY, CP – look forward to some programmed knowledge.	KY – act as the expert and tutor.
Problem	Turned into a puzzle	Turned into a puzzle
Q	No chance (build in) to Q'ing each other.	Little chances (social) to Q'ing each other for Team B.
Implement	MY, CP, RC – No action, delaying action.	PK– perceived the organization as hopeless, play safe, not my problem; I had worked all right at the beginning. Behaviour – not involve, no comment,
Take improved action –	MY – perceive the organization as hopeless, play safe, take the action of not taking any action Behaviour – restrict his project scope,	KY – Leave the "real" problem alone and take off-the-shelve (w/o any improvement) and cosmetic action.
L	CP, MY, RC expressed no learning.	KY, PK being commented as no change in behaviour in 180 degree feedback. Group – No learning on 8 Steps

Table 7G Summaries of invariables found in Cycle 1 & 2

7.6

Summary for Chapter 7

To compare and contrast between Team A and Team B on their approach to handle the AL project – the Project T, had informed me that the 5 key ingredients had been effectively "constructed" by Team A but not by Team B.

Factors leading to these differences could be many but the 4 contextual factors had served as conducive factors. However, the "trigger point" for the difference of the two teams seemed to lie in their seeing of the problem to be solved in the project as some kinds of mistake made by others or a problem that various parties had a stake in it. It seemed to support the postulation of the importance of "problem" in an AL program. However, it is not what and how the problem was chosen by the senior management or by the program organizer. It is how the problem was constructed by the participants.

As Team A, with the 5 key AL ingredients "functioning" properly, had functioned more effectively in the AL process and in the delivery of the problem solving and learning result, it seemed that some kinds of connections between the effective construction of the 5 key ingredients and the effective AL process could be established in some way. It seemed to support the postulation that the 5 key ingredients were important for an effective AL program. However, the exact relationships between them need to be studied further in future researches.

In this Chapter, the data were presented and analysed by some emerging themes. The characteristic of AR – allowing improvement in practice and tracking the data generated from the process, had been materialized. In the next chapter, I will summarize the research findings and try to answer the research questions I had set out at the very beginning. A conclusion will be drawn and the limitation and future research direction will be discussed.

Chapter 8

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this Chapter, I will presents a brief summary of the study, results, conclusions, implications for practice and for theory and future research recommendations relevant to the arrangement of in-house AL programs for high potential management staff who are acquainted with each other in a typical Chinese cultural context.

8.1 Summary

Change management had been a key topic for corporate strategy and developing the managers so that they could be more competent in leading change had became a key issue for manager's development. AL, with its emphasis on the managers to learn through their process of taking action of tackling some real problems in the organization could be an ideal tool for achieving both individual and organizational change. Literature on AL indicated that participants could learn a lot of things through AL. Among them, behaviours related to critical self reflection was the one that had frequently been quoted.

8.1.1 Purpose of the Study

Both theories and researches postulated that the capability to reflect is important for a manager to lead change in a versatile environment. Literature on AL had also pointed out the learning that could happen through AL method is critical reflection. The main research aims to:

> Explore how high potential Chinese managers who are acquainted with each other practise critical reflective working behaviours through an in-house action learning programme.

Sub-questions

1. What critical reflective working behaviours do participants exhibit during the AL programme?
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of running an AL programme in-house?
3. What issues are raised by the use of a Revans' model of action learning in a Chinese context?
4. What are the implications for developing AL theory and practice in an in-house context?

8.1.2 Had the 3 challenges of AL been met?

These three challenges of AL mentioned by Spence (1998) had been met by the following methods in this research:

The three types of challenges	How to meet the challenge in this research	Had these challenges been addressed?
Regarding concerns on misinterpretation on AL	Look for advises from the original work of the architect of AL – Reg Revans.	Done. Revans' formula and the 5 key ingredients of AL had been used as a guideline to run the CFG Program.

Table 8A How this research could meet the 3 challenges of AL? **(Continue on next page.)**

(Continued from previous page)

The three types of challenges	**How to meet the challenge in this research**	**Had these challenges been addressed?**
Regarding concerns about AL's methodology.	Adopt an action research (AR) methodology to study the appropriate methodology for organizing AL by revealing "what's happening in AL" and use the knowledge generated together with the participants to improve my practice of organizing AL program.	Done. The AR methodology enabled the detail reporting on what had been done and what had been found in the various activities through two cycles of research.. The reflections and learning from the findings had been actively incorporated into my next steps of action.
Regarding questions about effectiveness	Adopting the "Critical Reflection" (O'Neil 1999 quoted by Hicks 2000 p.174) type of AL which incorporated Revans' and Kolb's Scientific and Experiential types. Focus on the individual learning and organizational results. More solid change objective had been formulated – to improve organizational effectiveness by OpD taking proactive change to improve the alignment with the NBD in new product launch. Individual change objective based on the 180 degree feedback had been set up and evaluation on them was made more possible.	The questions about the effectiveness in conducting the NBD alignment project had been answered with observable results. The effectiveness of the CFG program in terms of providing opportunities for practicing CRWB had been evaluated. However, as part II of the CFG program which focus on the issue of individual change had not been concluded by the time this thesis was submitted, evaluation on the program effectiveness from the viewpoint of the participants could not be supplied.

<u>Table 8A How this research could meet the 3 challenges of AL?</u>

8.2

Results

This research supported the ideal that an effective AL program should be able to provide a good context for practicing the group process of "comrades in adversity" and critical reflective working behaviours (CRWB). With the effective construction of the 3 key ingredients (Learning from each other, real problem, questioning insight) and the practical construction of the remaining 2 key ingredients (Implement proposed action & take improved action) of AL by **Team A** in the CFG Program, (please see explanation in section 6.20.2f) the "comrade in adversity" form of learning had taken place and a lot of CRWB could be observed. On the contrary, the ineffective construction of the 5 key ingredients of AL by Team B indicated the "comrade in adversity" form of learning did not exist and CRWB had rarely been observed.

This research had also supported my speculation that AL was not context free. The 4 contextual factors, notably, the in-house factor, could become an important context where behaviours facilitating or inhibiting the effective construction of the 5 key ingredients had been generated. In what way those contextual factors could be "turned into" a facilitating or inhibiting factors to the construction of the 5 key ingredients would be discussed further when I answer the research sub-question 4.

Through out this Thesis, I had conducted my investigation on how in-house AL, when built around the 5 key ingredients, could provide chances for practicing critical reflective working behaviours (CRWB) for high potential management staff.

In the previous Chapter, it had been shown that the demonstration of CRWB in the 2nd team meeting were more then in their 1st team meeting. Furthermore, the total number of CRWB of Team A in their 1st and 2nd team meeting were much more then that of Team B.

A compare and contrast of the behaviours demonstrated by the two teams in the team meetings indicated that the 5 ingredients of AL had been functioning in Team A but not in Team B.

I can, therefore, draw a conclusion that the effective functioning of the 5 key ingredients of AL are helpful for the demonstration of CRWB in their two team meetings.

On establishing that Team A had "really" been engaged in AL (defined as the presence and effective functioning of all 5 key ingredients), I could proceed to answer the research questions.

In the attempt to answer the research questions, I will triangulate my analysis on the result by adopting a multiple perspective on the performance of the two teams which had been outlined in Section 7.2.7.

8.2.1 Meeting the research aims

The research aim is to:

> explore how high potential Chinese managers who are acquainted with each other practise critical reflective working behaviours through an in-house action learning programme.

This research aim had been met by my organization of two AL programs that adhered to the 5 key ingredients of AL as expounded mainly by Revans. The participants were from the same organizations and were mainly Chinese managers who had close working relationships. They had either been hand picked by the top management or regarded by top management as high potential staff. The adoption of the AR methodology enabled me to gain a comprehensive understanding from the participant's perspective on "what's really happening" in the AL process which I had a role to play. The prolonged duration of the two programs (spanned a total of almost 5 years) enabled me to collect a wide range of information which greatly assisted my subsequent triangulation of data. The CRWB provided me with a valid tool to measure the observation on the reflective behaviours of the participants. All these enabled me to make a safe claim that my research aim had totally been met.

Despite the emerging nature of the knowledge generated in the AR process, this research had simply adopted a basic principle of management – be very clear with the objective one would like to achieve. In this research, the main argument is that AL should enable the participants to become a more reflective manager. With a clear objective, a more ideal way to achieve this objective could be strived for and the relevant roadblocks could be identified. It might be one of the many contributions this research had made in view of the loose and murky learning objectives many AL literatures had documented.

In the process of implementing the two programs, I had the opportunities to deal with the impacts possibly originated from the 4 contextual factors. These factors emerged at different phases of my implementation and some of their impacts could only be recognized with hindsight (e.g. the assertive personality of some high potential staff, the tactics to "play safe", etc.). I had made some mistakes (e.g. position the IMBA program as a fast track program, adopt a free-hand approach in supervising the IMBA participants which resulted in the dragging on of the Program and the ultimate termination of it) and had learnt from them. All these proved to be valuable to me for making adjustments in the Cycle 2 which could be part of the reason for the effective functioning of Team A. However, it was the ineffective functioning of Team B that provides the biggest room for further exploration, particularly on the way the personality change could be better linked with the AL process. All these turned out to become an odyssey for me with little guidelines from existing research. I think my odyssey had eventually helped to sketch a more detailed nautical map which had included some newly identified reefs. In other words, the importance of personality was not in the existent literature and thus is a significant contribution to the field.

8.2.1a The construction of learning experience by the set members

The characteristic of AL allows a high degree of autonomy on the learning activities of the set members. This could resulted in a greater variation on the way the participants manage their learning activities and hence, their learning experiences. With the limited intervention of the program designer and the facilitator, more attention need to be placed on the ways the learning context was experienced and constructed by the participants to ensure the 5 key ingredients of AL could function in the way that learning from actions could happen.

Cycle 1 informed me that “installing” the 5 key ingredients was by no means a simple task for an AL program running in-house. These ingredients will not be just “out there” by the administrative arrangement of a program designer like me. The 5 ingredients are really something being socially constructed by the participants themselves.

8.2.1b Behaviours helpful for the construction of the 5 key ingredients

In Cycle 2, the performance of Team A further informed me that the “true” existence of all the 5 key ingredients could be helpful to provide much more chances for the practice of critical reflective working behaviours. The behaviours demonstrated by Team A in set meetings seemed to be able to indicate that the 5 key ingredients of AL had been functioning properly and could facilitate the “comrades in adversity” and CRWB to happen. I summarized the 16 behaviours demonstrated by Team A with the adding of some less effective behaviour demonstrated by Team B. It indicated those individual or group behaviours which could be helpful for the construction of the 5 key ingredients of AL.

1. Present two sides of the facts in set meetings
2. Less authoritative in presenting knowledge
3. A shared feeling of the need to obtain more knowledge
4. Knowledge shared based on facts rather then comment
5. Willing to re-interpreter past experience rather then justifying or reinforcing past experience.
6. More emphasis on the need to understand and clarify
7. More attention on possibilities to make change through the project
8. Context in which the problem embedded perceived as changeable by themselves
9. The notion of “We need to do differently together” was shared
10. Cause of problem perceived more as an adaptation to change of

environment.

11. Cause of problem regarded as "Ours" and all parties at stake had contributed to it.
12. The notion of "Solving the problem BY US was meaningful" was shared.
13. Regard definition of a good solution as relative and need to work out together with other parties at stake
14. More open and receptive attitude towards others questioning in set meetings
15. Willing to take active improvement actions on the group's original action plan.
16. NOT over emphasizing the superiority of any one specific department or person in solving the problem

8.2.2 Sub-questions 1 – What critical reflective working behaviours do participants exhibit during the AL programme?

Based on Woerkom et al's (2002) 5 dimensions of Critical reflective working behaviour exhibited in the 4 set meetings, it was observed that Team A had much more chances of practicing CRWB then Team B.

Woerkom, & Croon's, (2008) 5 dimensions of critical reflective working behaviours	**Team A**	**Team B**
Openness to mistakes	8	1
Critical opinion sharing	26	14
Ask feed- back	14	
Challenge group-think	8	13
Experimentation	12	2
Total:	**68**	**30**

Table 8B Frequencies of CRWB observed in Team A & B

As mentioned in section 7.2.6, the numbers were just for reference as it is difficult to make a clear cut categorization on the dimensions a certain expression belongs in a natural dialogue. The full version of the original dialogue should be referred to in order to avoid bias of interpretation.

Another phenomenon worth mentioning was that KC & FZ of Team B had exhibited a great number of "challenging group think" behaviours (7 for KC & 6 for FZ). This was the result of their repeated need to state their opposite view that the problem need to look in a more in-depth manner. A set splitting into two camps and engaged in constant argument could hardly be regarded as "comrades in adversity". The uttering of unconvinced sentiments towards the end of the meeting by KC & FZ could hardly make us concluded that they had learnt from each other in the process.

Apart from the "quantity" of critical reflective behaviours exhibited, the "quality" of them could be more important. This could be addressed in the 2nd criteria of effectiveness evaluation – the group process of "comrades in adversity".

8.2.3 Sub-questions 2 –What are the advantages and disadvantages of running an AL programme in-house?

There are both advantages and disadvantages of running an AL programme in-house. Both teams had been presented with the same "real problem" and had been allocated with the same resources. The mixes of team members were similar in terms of the knowledge in Project T. A complementary in personality had also been considered by making the participants immediate supervisor – AH, to made the final decisions. Despite all these, the performance of the two teams and their group behaviours differed remarkably as shown in the 14 items. I try to explore the phenomenon through the lens of the 4 contextual factors to see in what possible ways that those factors could become a favourable context for those behaviours to happen.

8.2.3a Facilitating force discovered in in-house context that facilitates the 5 key ingredients

The performance of Team B enabled me to highlight a list of observable individual and group behaviours that could be conducive to the practicing of critical reflective working behaviours.

Behaviours of Team A	4 contextual factors				Probable facilitating forces generated by the 4 contextual factors
	IH	HP	Ch	A	
1. Present two sides of the facts in set meetings	✓				In-house – More in-depth understanding on the background of the problem
2. Less authoritative in presenting knowledge			✓		Chinese Culture – More emphasis individualism and humble.
3. Felt need to obtain more knowledge	✓				In-house – Further information could be obtained easily.
4. More emphasis on the need to understand and clarify	✓				In-house – Further information could be obtained easily.
5. More attention on possibilities		✓			High potential staff – Willing to take up new challenge and have "can do" attitude.

Table 8C Facilitating force discovered in in-house context that facilitates the 5 key ingredients (Continue in next page)

(Continued from previous page)

Behaviours of Team A	**4 contextual factors**				**Probable facilitating forces generated by the 4 contextual factors**
	IH	**HP**	**Ch**	**A**	
6. Context in which the problem embedded perceived as changeable	✓				In-house – More in-depth understanding on the background of the problem
7. The notion of “We need to do differently together” was shared	✓	✓			In-house – More in-depth understanding on the background of the problem High potential staff – Willing to take up new challenge and have “can do” attitude.
8. Cause of problem perceived more as an adaptation to change of environment.	✓				In-house – More in-depth understanding on the background of the problem
9. Cause of problem regarded as “Ours”	✓			✓	In-house – More in-depth understanding on the background of the problem Acquainted with each other – More willing to disclose own problems which could be part of the problem the group tried to resolve.
10. The notion of “Solving the problem by us was meaningful” was shared.	✓				In-house – Able to implement the solution promote the intention to involve other parties at stake.

<u>Table 8C Facilitating force discovered in in-house context that facilitates the 5 key ingredients (Continue in next page)</u>

(Continue from previous page)

Behaviours of Team A	4 contextual factors				Probable facilitating forces generated by the 4 contextual factors
	IH	HP	Ch	A	
11. Regard definition of a good solution as relative and need to work out together with other parties at stake	✓				In-house – Able to implement the solution promote the intention to involve other parties at stake.
12. More open and receptive attitude towards others questioning in set meetings				✓	Acquainted with each other – More willing to listen and adopt other's ideas.
13. Willing to take active improvement actions on the group's plan.				✓	Acquainted with each other – More easily to reach consensus on the change.
14. Not emphasizing the superiority of any one specific department in solving the problem					

IH – Program arranged **in-house**, HP – Participants were **high potential** management staff, Ch – The program run in a typical **Chinese** cultural context, A – the participants were **acquainted** with each other

Table 8C Facilitating force discovered in in-house context that facilitates the 5 key ingredients

8.2.3b Inhibiting force discovered in in-house context that deter the 5 key ingredients from functioning effectively

Behaviours of Team B	4 contextual factors				Probable inhibiting forces generated by the 4 contextual factors.
	IH	HP	Ch	A	
1. Present one side of the fact	✓				
2. Authoritative in presenting knowledge	✓	✓	✓	✓	In-house – Quote past experience and insider stories possible. High potential staff – Good influencing skills Chinese culture – More receptive to authority and avoid confronting actions not agreed with. Acquainted – Save face, not to hurt relations, let go on unsatisfied conclusions.
3. Felt owned adequate knowledge already.	✓				In-house – Make quoting past experience and insider stories convincing and possible.
4. More attention on fixing blames and complaining.	✓			✓	In-house – Possible to quote many past bad experiences. Acquainted – Sharing emotions of bad experiences further spread atmosphere of fixing blames.
5. More on impossibilities	✓		✓		In-house – Knowledge on company culture, taboos and politics. Chinese culture – Play safe. Adhere to the principle of "Ten credits could not be compensated by one mistake".

Table 8D Inhibiting force discovered in in-house context that deter the 5 key ingredients from functioning effectively **(Continue in next page)**

(Continue from previous page)

Behaviours of Team B	4 contextual factors				Probable inhibiting forces generated by the 4 contextual factors.
	IH	HP	Ch	A	
6. Context in which the problem embedded perceived as almost unchangeable	✓		✓		In-house – Knowledge on company culture, taboos and politics. Chinese culture – High power distance lured members to avoid raising issues related to senior management's problem which they believed to be so.
7. The notion of "We had done our part" shared.	✓			✓	In-house – Possible to quote convincing past experience. Acquainted – Members coming from the same department more easily to build up this "we" feeling.
8. Cause of problem perceived as unchangeable (e.g. Laziness and lack of commitment of the senior management)	✓	✓			In-house – Possible to quote convincing past experience and insider stories possible. High potential staff – High expectation on work quality make them pose a negative rating on others work.
9. Cause of problem regarded as "Theirs"	✓			✓	In-house – Possible to quote convincing examples from past experiences. Acquainted – More easily build up "we" and "their" feeling.
10. Solving the problem was meaningful but meaningless to ask us to solve it.	✓				In-house – Unfair feeling could be built up by quoting convincing evidences.

Table 8D Inhibiting force discovered in in-house context that deter the 5 key ingredients from functioning effectively (Continue in next page)

Behaviours of Team B	4 contextual factors				Probable inhibiting forces generated by the 4 contextual factors.
	IH	HP	Ch	A	
11. Definition of good solution as absolute – The solution is already there	✓				In-house – Possible to quote past successful achievements. Possible to pick out off-the-shelve "proven" solution that had been "hammered for a thousand times".
12. More close and defensive attitude towards others questioning		✓	✓		High potential staff – High self confidence and influencing skills. Chinese culture – Not confront directly with other set members dominating opinions.
13. Take cosmetic improvement action.		✓	✓		High potential – More interested in using successful case as "demo". Chinese culture – Build up relationship in order to promote acceptance level which might only be superficial. High power distance lured members to avoid raising issues related to senior management's problem which they believed to be so. Presentation as a "show" to satisfy the top management.

<u>Table 8D Inhibiting force discovered in in-house context that deter the 5 key ingredients from functioning effectively (Continue in next page)</u>

(Continue from previous page)

Behaviours of Team B	**4 contextual factors**				**Probable inhibiting forces generated by the 4 contextual factors.**
	IH	**HP**	**Ch**	**A**	
14. Emphasizing the role of QA Dept. in solving the problem.	✓	✓			In-house – Interest of advancing own influence and jurisdiction High potential – Drive for creating positive impact on career.

IH – Program arranged **in-house**, HP – Participants were **high potential** management staff, Ch – The program run in a typical **Chinese** cultural context, A – the participants were **acquainted** with each other

Table 8D Inhibiting force discovered in in-house context that deter the 5 key ingredients from functioning effectively

It could be seen that the 4 contextual factors could either produce favourable or unfavourable behaviour that lead to the effective construction of the 5 key ingredients by the set members. In what way those contextual factors could be "turned into" a facilitating or inhibiting factors to the construction of the 5 key ingredients would be discussed further when I answer the research sub-question 4.

8.2.4 Sub-questions 3 – What issues are raised by the use of a Revans' model of action learning in a Chinese context?

Some of the possible influence by the Chinese cultural context had been discussed in answering sub-question 2. In this section, I will try to answer this sub-question by referring to the literature I quoted in Chapter 2 that supports my speculation on the potential effect of the Chinese cultural context as a potential factor that could affect the effectiveness of the AL.

Typical attributes of Chinese cultural context	**Relevance to the 5 key ingredients**	**Evidences**
⋯ in some cultures, such as Chinese, there is a high impatience in spending too much time in discussion and reflection; there is a great desire for quick results and speed. (Marquardt, 1998, p.123)	Questioning insight, implementation	Team B's pushing forward of the A&B System. Team B member – PK express "waste of time".
In many Asian cultures, …Social and political sensitivity drive the solution, and the action taken cannot cause someone to lose face. Even if the group thought it a proper decision, they would desert/ disavow the decision later on. (Marquardt, 1998, p.124)	Implementing proposed action	Team B decide not to mention about NBD senior management's lack of commitment in their proposal.
In many other cultures, it would be more difficult for a leader or individual to turn over his or her most critical problems to subordinates. (Marquardt, 1998, p.121)	Real problem	KY only mentioned his successful experience when adopting the A&B Company's system. PK's wish to use a successful case to demonstrate to top management instead of using Project T which he regarded as a "total failure".

<u>Table 8E, Issues discovered by the use of Revans' model of action learning in a Chinese context (Continue in next page)</u>

(Continue from previous page)

Typical attributes of Chinese cultural context	Relevance to the 5 key ingredients	Evidences
Guanxi, implies a transferable, reciprocal, intangible and utilitarian obligation to dyadic relationships between individuals (Luo, 2000; Michailova and Worm, 2003).	Implementing proposed action, Questioning insight	In Team A, the typical Chinese cultural context of driving for harmony and the wish to build up "Guanxi" (relationship) had manifested in cooperative behaviours which helped greatly in bridging the gap with the NBD. In Team B, the drive for harmony had also made the members who were not very agreeing towards the dominating members proposal gave up confronting and escalating the level of criticalness in their questions.

Michailova, & Worm, (2003) and Luo (2000) Quoted in Davison, &, Ou, (2008)

<u>Table 8E, Issues discovered by the use of Revans' model of action learning in a Chinese context</u>

8.2.5 Sub-questions 4 – What are the implications for developing AL theory and practice in an in-house context?

8.2.5a Making AL work – by making all the 5 key ingredients available.

The success of Team A had indicated that the effective functioning of all the 5 key ingredients of an in-house AL program for high potential Chinese management staffs who were acquainted with each other would also be the team that could demonstrate more "comrade in adversity" group process and critical reflective working behaviours.

On the other hand, the ineffective functioning of the 5 key ingredients in Team B was a team that demonstrated less “comrade in adversity” group process and critical reflective working behaviours.

It seemed to inform us that if we want high potential Chinese management staffs of the same organization who were acquainted with each other to practice more of critical reflective working behaviour, arranging AL program in which all the 5 key ingredients could function effectively is an effective way.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, there was a great variety in the way the AL programs were organized. The compare and contrast on the performance of Team A and Team B did pointed out the value of those practices that could enable the 5 key ingredients to function effectively. A summary on the practices I conducted in Cycle 1 & Cycle 2 which seemed to be instrumental for the effective constructions of the 5 key AL ingredients by the participants were summarized in Table 8A

8.2.5b More then group dynamics and good meeting practices – the prove and disprove of AL theories

The 16 differences in practice I deducted from the data I collected in the team meetings seemed, at a glance, like a list of “good meeting practices”. By referring back to the AL theories, they illuminated the “way” of the AL as a truly distinguishing mode of learning for managers to learn from their action.

AL Theories saying what AL should be	**#**	**Evidenced found in Team A's behaviours**	**Evidence found in Team B's behaviours**	**AL Theories saying what AL should NOT be**
It is recognized ignorance not programmed knowledge, that is the key to action learning: (Revans, 1991 quoted in Smith 1997, p. 365)	1	Present two sides of the fact	Present one side of the fact	…its (AL) material is not the knowledge of the teacher but the experiences and the needs of the learners… (Revans 1980, p.288)
	2	Less authoritative in presenting knowledge	Authoritative in presenting knowledge	
Such re-interpretations of past experience, (…) are more likely to be intelligible through exchanges with other managers themselves anxious to learn by re-ordering their own perceptions (Revans, 1998, p.9)	3	Felt need to obtain more knowledge	Felt owned adequate knowledge already.	In true action learning, it is not what a man already knows and tells that sharpens the countenance of his friend, but what he does not know and what his friend does not know either. (Revans, 1991 quoted in Smith 1997, p. 365)
	4	Knowledge shared based more on facts	Knowledge shared based more on comments	(…)merely seeking a description of their trouble, (Revans, 1983, p.22)

Table 8F, How the 16 differences in practice between Team A & B had illuminated the AL theories **(Continue in next page)**

(Continue from previous page)

AL Theories saying what AL should be	**#**	**Evidenced found in Team A's behaviours**	**Evidence found in Team B's behaviours**	**AL Theories saying what AL should NOT be**
(…) it is in **re-reading what is already scribbled on the cortical slate** that leads to changed behaviour, rather than in copying out new messages upon it. (Revans, 1980)(Highlighted by me)	5	Re-interpretations of past experience.	Reinforcement of past experiences	(…) it is in re-reading what is already scribbled on the cortical slate that leads to changed behaviour, **rather than in copying out new messages upon it.** (Revans, 1980)(Highlighted by me)
(…) true learning consists mainly in the reorganization, or reinterpretation, of what is already known (Revans, 1980, p.289)	6	More for understanding and clarifying	More for fixing blames and complaining.	
…a good problem is a good vehicle for learning – it allows us to come up with ideas for action, to try them out and then to reflect on that action(…)(Pedler, 1996, p.7)	7	More on possibilities	More on impossibilities	
(…)'a problem in Action Learning is (…) **an opportunity** or a task which you want to do something about'. (Pedler, 1996, p.6) (Highlighted by me)	8	Context in which the problem embedded perceived as changeable	Context in which the problem embedded perceived as almost unchangeable	
Learning to learn-by-doing with and from others who are also learning to learn-by-doing'. (Revans, 1980 p.288)	9	We need to do differently together	We had done our part	
	10	Cause of problem – adaptation to change of requirements	Cause of problem – Laziness and lack of commitment of the senior management	Thus, the conundrums of action learning are to be problems,(…) in what they cannot see rather than enhance their skill in elaborating what they can see already.(Revans, 1980, p.292)

Table 8F, How the 16 differences in practice between Team A & B had illuminated the AL theories (Continue in next page)

(Continue from previous page)

AL Theories saying what AL should be	**#**	**Evidenced found in Team A's behaviours**	**Evidence found in Team B's behaviours**	**AL Theories saying what AL should NOT be**
By doing what they set out to do, and by setting out to do what they believe to be worth doing, (…)" (Revans, 1998, p.75)	11	Cause of problem – "Ours"(effective system and procedure not agreed upon)	Cause of problem – "Theirs" (NBD not comply to "good" procedure)	…facilitators of action learning do not come up with "the answers". (Zuber-Skerritt, 2002 p.114-124)
	12	Solving the problem was meaningful	Solving the problem was meaningful but meaningless to ask us to solve it.	
	13	Relative – Need to work out the best solution with NBD	Absolute – The solution is already there	Action learning is not a satisfactory approach to resolving puzzles or difficulties to which a solution clearly exists (…)(Revans 1983, p.28)
	14	More open and receptive attitude towards others questioning	More close and defensive attitude towards others questioning	"(…)to learn how to ask appropriate questions in conditions of risk, rather than to find the answers to questions that have already been precisely defined by others…(Keys 1994 Quoted in Koo, 1999, p.89)
	15	Take active improvement action	Take cosmetic improvement action.	
	16	Emphasising any one person or department with adequate support could solve the problem	Emphasizing the role of QA in solving the problem.	

Table 8F, How the 16 differences in practice between Team A & B had illuminated the AL theories

In view of the analysis stated above, many of the AL theories seemed to be proved to be good “Do’s and Don’ts” guidelines for making AL effective.

8.2.5c Inhibiting force discovered in in-house context that deter the 5 key ingredients from functioning effectively

It was discovered that there were some forces that could deter them from functioning effectively when the program was running in-house for high potential Chinese management staff who were acquainted with each other. As the effective functioning of all the 5 key ingredients were important for the AL, describing those inhibiting force by referring to what had been mentioned in the AL theory proposed by Revans could be helpful for its practice in an in-house context

The 5 key ingredients of AL	**Enemy from within - Forces generated by the requirement of the 5 key ingredients themselves in an in-house context that in turn, deter the 5 key ingredients from functioning effectively in an in-house context**
The “P”	When the set member had been treated as the “expert” in solving the project problem or when the set members were informed by some biased information.
Real problem	When set member wanted to make sure the problem is not or will not become my problem
Implementing own proposed action	When set member just wanted to “Do what I am allowed to do”
Q’ing each other in set	When the “Q’ing” was killed by the drive for quick action or some “powerful” members
Take improved action	When set member just wanted to take cosmetic improvement

Table 8G The “enemies from within” created by the requirements of the 5 key ingredients

Forces deterring the “P” – When the set member wanted to become the expert

Revans did mention some ideal "P" for AL:

> …its (action learning) material is not the knowledge of the teacher but the experiences and the needs of the learners…(Revans 1980, p.288)

In the case of Team B, the "experience" of the learner had been supplied almost predominately by KY. However, what KY provided were really his past experience and the solution he forcefully preached had been successful but only had applied to one customer (though it was a key customer). Furthermore, he was not the one who knew the most about the Project T. PK was the one who knew most but he had chose to support the stand of KY and take the role of a silent supporter in most of the time,

What Revans had forcefully against was the programmed knowledge supplied by some outside management educators and expert who supplied knowledge he know best but which belongs to "yesterday's technique" (Revans 1998 p.3). What Revans might not want to see could probably cause by what he preached – the learners became the teacher. In the case of Team B, although KY was a member of the set, what he supplied was not too different from a programmed knowledge. KY, in a certain sense, act more like a teacher and trying to feed the team with the stuff which he thought was the right answer. In some of the cases, the way KY presented his "solution" were even more forceful then an outside teacher.

> 121 34:04 KY (Interrupting the speech of KC), OK, look here, let me say it once again, this system had been hammered for a thousand times and we got a rating (by the previous client) of 92, 95, 98,100 by adhering to it. It had been well testified, the system is perfectly problem free. **We only need to consider how to pull those people towards this system.** Now they are…

Source: Data/ Team B/ Mtg Team B (a) 16 May 08

As a management consultant for 10 years and being hired as an expert, I dare not to talk to the clients in such a manner. The way KY interrupting and keep telling KC and FZ that there was something they did not know would not even be done by a teacher or outside expert. So it might not be whether the knowledge was come from a teacher or the set member, the key was the way they were presented.

What I want to say is that, when a set member takes up the role as a teacher in an in-house AL program, it could be worse then a teacher from outside. Due to his relation with other set members and the credibility of the experience he quoted, the knowledge he passed might be more readily accepted without deep thinking or challenging by other set members then those disseminated by an outside expert.

The reason that this "enemy from within" had not happen in Team A could probably due to the fact that none of the members had a thorough knowledge on the A&B Company's procedure.

Forces deterring the "real problem" – When set member wanted to make sure the problem is not my problem

The prerequisites for a problem to serve as an AL project are that it should be a real problem. Just like a soldier, he learnt most from participating in the battlefield rather then in a war game or war simulation.

> Action learning is a means of development, intellectual, emotional or physical that requires its subjects, **through responsible involvement in some real, complex and stressful problem,** to achieve intended change to improve their observable behaviour henceforth in the problem field. (Revans, 1982 pp. 626 – 7) (Highlighted by me)

When it is a real problem, a common belief is that someone must have caused it and someone will be the victim. If the set members are not the "victim" of the real problem, the real problem will not be **really a real problem** for them and it could hardly be "complex and stressful".

The feeling of being a victim had been shared at the beginning of Team A's meeting indicating the Project T was a real and stressful problem.

11	02:35 +50 min 29 sec of part A	PF	But in this case we had become the victim. Shouldn't we state our case at an early stage, which meant that we let other know about that (the expected problem during production) through some channel…

Source: Data / Team A / Mtg Team A (b) 16 May 08

In Team B, the victim was PK whose nightmare will come once the "flawed" design of the product T had been passed to his factory for mass production. For PK, Project was also a very stressful problem.

The point I would like to drawn on the case of Team A & B is that, the result of a real problem for an AL program running in-house would ultimately be borne by one or several of the set members. As the fact that the set members will bear the fruit of this "really real problem", the best way to stay away from being blamed is to "make sure it is not my problem". Team B did it by "ticking out what the NBD had done incorrectly"(insisted by KY), announcing it is a "dead dog" before passing to me (mentioned by PK) and the Forum will become a good chance to "inform" the top management that the problem was "not made here".

What I want to say is that the AL requirement that the problem should be a "real problem" could in turn, when placed in an in-house AL program, could produce forces that deter it to serve as a vehicle of learning for the set members as all the effort of the set members would be drifted towards the task of making sure that "it is not my problem".

The reason that this "enemy from within" had not happen in Team A was probably due to the fact that **none** of the members in Team A was responsible for the direct production of the Product T. TC, WC and TC were only responsible for the preparation stage of the production process. It was PK of Team B who was responsible for the ultimate production of the product and to meet the delivery deadline. He could anticipate that he would need to conduct many fire-fighting works during production process. He will also need to bear the responsibility of the high scrap rate. For PK, Project T was "really a real problem" and also a painful problem. That could explain why he had such a bitter feeling towards the NBD and towards the Project.

Forces deterring the "implementing own proposed action" – When set member JUST wanted to "Do what I want to do"

There is no argument regarding the importance of the need for better alignment between the OpD and the NBD on new product launch process. The CFG Program, as an in-house program, had produced a "real", "pressing" and important problem which public AL program could not possibly provide.

> By doing what they set out to do, and by setting out to do what they believe to be worth doing, managers are disciples of the Aristotelian ethic.
> (Revans, 1998 p.75)

As mentioned in Chapter 7, KY expressed a very strong disapproval towards the practice of NBD which tried to draw a clear line of responsibility when the product had been handed over to the OpD.

KY's strong disapproval on the practice of the NBD made him anxious to "do something about it". This is the kind of motivation that is desirable for AL as a high commitment and enthusiasm could be generated. However, it could also create a potential problem as the participants will place the importance of solving the problem over the importance of learning. The case of Team B informed me that this "goal displacement" could be germinated if the person had a strong idea of what should be done; an "off-the-shelve" solution is available, supported by some other "strong" members and had high influential competence.

Forces deterring the "implementing own proposed action" – When set member just wanted to "Do what I am ALLOWED to do"

The case of Team B informed me that agreeing that something "worth doing" is one thing and agreeing it "worth my doing" or "our team's doing" or "my doing more/extra" is quite another in an in-house context. PK expressed clearly that the discussion was a "waste of time" as it was all about the problem of the NBD's top management.

201b 46:52 PK As what (KY) had said, that's basically the management^^^, For example if I ask my subordinate go to the east and he dare to go to the west instead, I'll give him a slap on the face, that's simple. So it's a waste of time to discuss further.

Source: Data/ Team B/ Mtg Team B (a) 16 May 08

With the requirement to implement one's deliberate action plan in an in-house context, the notion of "what's the benefit for me" and "what if they (the NBD) don't want to do" had already been aired by the former Director of OpD. In the case of Team B, what they (mainly KY, PK & RR) believed the core problem were really about the incompetence of the NBD staff and the no commitment of the NBD's top management. Eradication of these two factors was beyond their control.

In this way, the "hazard free" approach was to take an autocratic approach by feeding the NBD with an off-the-shelve solution and have RR volunteered to take the lead. Furthermore, by adopting the A&B Company's procedure in which the quality assurance department will take the lead could help to advance the influence of the QA Department which could be one of the benefits of implementing the Project T.

My observation is that the ideal of having the set members "setting out to do what they believe to be worth doing" could have much more further ramification to consider when the AL program was running in-house. The feeling of fairness, the perceived possibility of ABLE to do what "I believe worth doing" exerted an influence could set a limit as evidenced from KY's turning down of FZ and KC's suggestion to explore the problem further.

Furthermore, the desire of advancing departmental influence could turned the "believe to be worth doing" for us to become "worth doing" for ME or for my department.

Ideally, the team could propose any courses of action and they could still learnt from the process of implementing them. Revans emphasized the importance of a fully dedicated attitude towards implementing the solution so that effective learning could happen.

> Managers are not employed to describe, nor even to recommend: they are employed to act. They learn to do this more effectively only after they know the outcome of their own deliberated plans implemented by themselves rather than half-heartedly carried out by others. (Revans, 1983, p.22)

However, will the set members implement a 2nd best solution whole-heartedly or rather, "half-heartedly" as described by Revans (Revans 1983, p.22)? If the solution was only the "baby" of some other team members, will it make any difference that they be "carried out by others"?

If the 2nd best solution was successful, they could have told themselves that their most preferred solution could be even more successful had it had the chances to be implemented. If the 2nd best solution was failed, they could reaffirm to themselves that their most preferred solution should be the best. Managers did learn from the process but they could not learn what they most wanted to learn – whether the course of action they strongly believe to be right is really right or not? Revans might be right. If a staff like PK who could not do what he believe to be most worth doing – firing the incompetent staff and fixing the top management, he would not be able to know the outcome of his own deliberated plan. **<u>But the problem is, if the problem is a real problem, people may not be able to implement what they believe to be worth doing as there are too many constraints.</u>**

It also related to the issue of a "realistic" problem where there is an assumption that each one were eager to improve on it. However, in an in-house context, a realistic problem could also be a painful problem and a pressing problem and it could easily seduce one to take the shortest cut to kill it.

The objective of learning from solving the problem is important. But it is hard to prevent the "operative" objective of Team B from happening. The pressing need to come up with a solution could easily seduce the set members to pick the "fast lane" and a "quick fix" approach. Existing and "proven" solution, as KY had endorsed the A&B Procedure, would be very attractive to the set. Anyway, "Why re-inventing the wheel" is a common notion in the business context.

Forces deterring the "Q" – When the "Q'ing" was killed by the drive for quick action

> There should be some familiarity for one or more members of the group with the problem and the context of the problem. …it is advisable that not everyone be familiar with it. …The fewer the members of the group who are familiar with the problem and its context, the greater the likelihood that there will be more innovative solutions. A person unfamiliar with a problem and /or the context in which the problem takes place will be forced to **ask fresh questions**, which, in turn, will stretch the thinking of the group and ultimately lead to breakthrough solutions.
> (Marquardt, 2004 p.30)

As evidenced from Team A & Team B, those who were less familiar with the problem such as PF in Team A and KC & FZ in Team B did asked substantial "fresh questions". However, in Team A, PF's "fresh questions" were met with more receptive response while those raised by KC & FZ had been met with defensive or ignoring response and hence the ideal of "ultimately lead to breakthrough solutions" could not be effectively achieved.

Therefore, the most important thing, apart from asking fresh questions, is to respond with receptive attitude and followed by explorative discussions.

The process of having set members "Q'ing one another" had been quite effective in Team A but relatively less effective in Team B. The practice of Admonishing Officer had been installed in both teams and set members who were unfamiliar with the Project T were equal in number in both teams. From the observation, it was found that many "fresh questions" had been voiced out by set members who were unfamiliar with the problem. However, there was one thing that was found to be hard to control but affect the "Q'ing each other" process seriously and that is the questions raised were ignored.

Person unfamiliar with a problem WOULD ask fresh questions, but these questions could be IGNORED.

While new questions could be but they could just be ignored.

129	34:59	FZ	Sorry, what I felt is that, this (the laziness of NBD staff and lack of commitment of their top management) belongs to their internal problem. As we don't have the authority right? (…)We as a team could see in what way we could help them.(intruded by KY)
130	35:13	KY	I think this is not the right time to explore on these things.

Source: Data/ Team B/ Mtg Team B (a) 16 May 08

It had been stated in the AL literature that it is more desirable for the set members less familiar with the problem so that they could have a higher potential to ask new questions.

Actually, among the 5 members in Team B, two of them (FZ & KC) had no responsibility in the production. Whereas in Team A, all five members had a responsibility in the production (though not all had direct responsibility in the production process of the Product T). Team B fit in very well with Marquardt's ideal. Actually, Marquardt was right in that FZ and KY did asked some fresh questions but had either been ignored or banned by the other members. At the end, FZ and KC had almost given up asking any fresh questions and their questions didn't seemed to be able to stretch the group's thinking as they pursue with the proposal which had been put forwarded by KY at the early stage of the meeting.

In most of the time, the "fresh questions" raised by FZ and KC were dismissed due to their "too in-depth" or "out of scope" and cannot lead to quick action.

The much better "Q'ing each other" process in Team A could be explained firstly by their lack of knowledge on the existence of an off-the-shelve solution. Secondly, the personal style of KY and PK was also a key influencing factor.

Effect of personal styles

Revans was not unaware of the influence of personal style:

> Reg Revens in The ABC of Action Learning describes four typical managerial blockages to the problem of deciding honest sources of information in conditions of uncertainty and risk – the four corrigible handicaps:
>
> 5. The idolization of perceived past experiences
> 6. The charismatic influences of (other) successful managers
> 7. The impulsion to instant activity
> 8. The belittlement of subordinates
>
> (Garratt, 1997, p.24)

One would not be difficult to recall that many of the behaviours of PK and KY had rightly demonstrated those "four typical managerial blockages". However, point I would like to add to it is that those 4 blockages were actually rooted in the personal style of PK and KY. This could be evidenced from the interview dialogue and the 180 degree feedbacks from peers and supervisors.

KY had dominated the discussion and PK's information had dominated the thought. Their personal style could be revealed in the feedback given by others (the other team members and the NBD delegates) in the 180 degree feedback after the Forum.

> Need improvement: Sometime prejudice. Need different point of view
>
> Need to improve: Put a label on others and very strong with his judgment. Tend to evaluate others negatively. Something not good is bad. (…)
>
> **Feedback from colleagues and Director of OpD in 180 Degree feedback**

These comments were not unnoticed by KY. He expressed his self-knowledge on this aspect in the individual interview I conducted with each participant in April – May 07. When I review the Strength Finder Test result and asked his opinion about this, he made the following comments.

390	27:07	KY	Ah, I think AH feel it is this part (individualization) that didn't quite represent me. 'Cos I am quite stiff …And sometimes, quite easily get irate.
(…)			
396	27:21	KY	Ah, ah, may be a bit easy to get irate, a bit irate, ah… not very good at adjusting with others.

Similarly, PK had been commented as not a good listener in the 180 degree feedback conducted after the Forum.

> Need to improve: Not a good listener. Seem only interested in pushing forward his own ideas. E.g. always using his Blackberry in meeting. In some meeting, when others had not even finished with his words, he will jump up and state opposite viewpoints or switch to other topic. (…).
>
> **Feedback in 180 Degree feedback**

Just like KY, PK had an awareness on this aspect of his personality as indicated in the individual interview I conducted with each participant in April – May 07

> (…) the way I handle people,…May be I am quite straight forward in dealing with others. I need to polish on this slowly. (…)(#55 - 59, 30 Apr 07)
>
> (…) I felt that dealing with others is my weakness (#99 - 103, 30 Apr 07)

The personality of KY & PK was known to AH and an attempt to "balance" the personality style had been made. Actually, two other members of Team A – TC, WC, and PF had similar personality style. In the two team meetings, TC & WC had also been very active in expressing their ideas. In the 180 degree feedback after the Forum, the following comments were given towards them:

It can be seen that the performance of PK & KY were aligned with the comment by others. In this respect, the comment of Revans on the selection of set members was correct:

> …if the full potential of action learning is to be realized, the selection of the fellow must notice not only his ability to improve himself but also to develop others.

Individual behaviours create a significant impact on the effective interplay of the AL ingredients. AL literatures seldom tackle this issue. Actually Revans had made a great assumption on the intention of the participants:

> (…) difficult managers, all honest, experienced, and wise, will advocate different courses of action in accordance with their different value systems, their different past experiences, and their different hopes for the future.
> (Revans 1983, p.28)

The high motivation, eagerness to share, had an open mind etc. all those essential personal qualities of a successful set had been taken for granted. However, the cases of Team A & B informed me that while participants could be “honest, experienced, and wise”, they could also be narrow minded, want to play safe, prejudice, etc. The set environment and a real problem could not help much to eradicate these behaviours and it could, in turn, affect significantly on the AL learning process.

Implication for implementation of AL program

The issue of personal style is hard to tackle in AL. If the target participants are high potential managers, quite a number of them would be highly experienced, self-assertive, impatient, and political. Their past success largely came from their effective driving of results and other’s performance. The very nature of AL which allows a greater degree of freedom in the learning process provides opportunities for these personal attributes to surface. These kinds of attributes and personal beliefs could create serious impact on AL as evidenced in the case of Team B As the format of learning in AL happened largely in group, these attributes could create serious impact on the learning of others (e.g. jeopardized the learning of FZ, KC of Team B). Unlike the more traditional form of learning in which the teacher could exert a tighter control on the behaviour of the students, too much intervention might as well jeopardize the group reflection process and the opportunities of learning from each other. Moreover, the behaviour and personal style of the participants could also be the "P" of AL which the participants could learn from his/her own action and from each others'. Furthermore, the relying on the set's "internal resources" (i.e. the knowledge of the set members within the team) could be seriously hampered by incidents such as the departure of some team members as I had experienced in both Cycle 1 and 2. It is a dilemma which AL seemed less ready to tackle. However, the inability to tackle this dilemma could put the ideal of AL – to achieve individual change and organizational change, at peril.

Although the way out of this dilemma should be left to future research, the performance of Team A did help to point out some hints on the direction. The attributes of TeamA's behaviour condensed from the 16 differences in practice had been listed out in Appendix 8B. As those behaviours are highly observable and would be known to the supervisor of the participants, it could be helpful for mixing the participants in different groups so that a "check & balance" effect could be achieved. Furthermore, the list could be used as ground rules for the team meetings and the consent from all participants be soughed before the meeting. On top of that, a small session of self evaluation on team performance could be conducted by evaluating against those ground rules at the end of the meeting.

Forces deterring the "take improved action" – When set member just wanted to take cosmetic improvement

Revans had stated one of the three objectives was:

> Make useful progress upon the treatment of some problem
> or opportunity in the real world.
> (Revans, 1998, p.15-16)

To achieve some "useful progress upon the treatment of some problem" will not be difficult for AL program running in-house. Team B regarded the presentation in the Forum was more or less a formality. Responding to the feedback of KC, KY had stated that "we all know in our heart what the problem is" but these should not be stated explicitly in the proposal. It indicated he had positioned the Team meeting as more or less of a "talk shop" and the Forum was just a presentation. Their subsequent invitation of the NBD for lunch was more a gesture then a step to find out the real problem.

> Action learning is a means of development, intellectual, emotional or physical that requires its subjects, through responsible involvement in some real, complex and stressful problem, to achieve intended change to improve their observable behaviour henceforth in the problem field.
> (Revans, 1982 pp. 626 – 7)

Will this kind of cosmetic improvement ACTION lead to LEARNING which resulted in "development, intellectual, emotional or physical"? Could we classify those cosmetic improvement actions as "responsible involvement" in the problem of alignment with NBD in new product launch?

8.2.5e Summary

In the earlier section, I had presented the possible effect of the 4 contextual factors on the effective functioning of the 5 key ingredients of AL. In the above discussion, I wish to present another discovery in this research which is that the 5 key ingredients were interwoven with each other. In one way, these interwoven relationships could facilitate the functioning of each other positively. In another way, they could also hinder each other, deterring each other from functioning in ways that they should function effectively.

In Section 1.2.7, the potential impact of personality on the effectiveness of learning from action had been raised. However, I regard this as a non key issue in the effective running of AL due to its rare mentioning in literature and my belief that AL program should be open to people of different personality as long as the organization wish certain staff to be prepared for leading future change. However, all the "deterring forces" mentioned above could be traced back to personality factors. As both Team A & B faced with more or less the same situation, the only major difference was the personality of the individual members. I think this is the "by-products" of this research which helped to shed light on the need for future research on this issue.

8.3
Conclusions & recommendations

As there were many different practices adopted in Cycle 1 & 2 and as a result, a great amount of data had been generated. In order to highlight my action research process, I will try to draw a conclusion by referring to the issues discovered in Cycle 1, my practice to address those issues in Cycle 2, the results I observed and, based on these observation, the conclusions and recommendation I could drawn on them. In order to show the complex relations clearly, I had also drawn up a comparison table in Appendix 8a for the readers' easy comprehension.

8.3.1 The "P"

In Cycle 1, it was found that the participants had repeatedly expressed a wish to learn something new and practical. To address this issue and at the same time, the Strength Finder Test & the book – Now Discover Your Strength had been used It was hoped that the issue could be addressed partially as the test result and the affiliated explanation on the 32 talents were new to the participants and were also practical as these knowledge related to individual. It was found that TW expressed the approach was new and able to give him good insight.

The Strength Finder Test result provided me with a good framework to "fit-in" the 180 degree feedback. It enabled the knowledge generated from the 180 degree feedback became more practical in a sense that it related closely with individual participants. It seemed to match well with the AL's notion of learning from reflection on one's own action.

Furthermore, in order to enable the most important P – the experience of the participants could be "elicited" in the AL process, the workshops and Kotter's

8 Steps Model was introduced to serve as the P in Cycle 2. It was arranged with a view that many of the participants were newly recruited and they wanted to introduce changes to the organization and hence could meet their practical need

The approach of Team A indicated their practice of leading the change for the NBD alignment in new product launch was akin to the 8 Steps Model and PF did mentioned his intention to fit the team's approach with the Model. It seems that Change Management, whether it be the 8 Steps Model or some other models, could be a desirable "P" in AL as it could "pull" all the AL activities together and gave them a clear purpose. The kind of "lost" feeling expressed by members of IMBA could not be found anymore in CFG program.

In the set meetings, a lot of knowledge had indeed been elicited. However, the quantity of knowledge supplied by Team A was more then that of Team B in the sense that almost all members had contributed their knowledge and it had came from wide sources. The knowledge elicited in Team B came mainly from KY and the knowledge were those which could support his claims. The quality of knowledge supplied by Team A was also of higher quality in terms of the presentation on two sides of the fact, less emotional expression and more objective in the collection of data. It helps me to pointed out that the quality and quantity of knowledge "elicited" is an important issue and it seems that the many practices in the literature adopted a laissez-faire approach towards this. This research shown that it could seriously influence the AL process and the members could become a teacher to deliver some "programmed knowledge" which suppressed the supply of information from other sources. Although a briefing by top management on the current situation had been arranged before the set meeting, it still could not prevented some members from telling the "insider stories" which sounded much more convincing to the team members.

To address the issue, it was recommended that some kinds of checklist to ensure the objectivity of the knowledge supplied was needed. A thorough presentation on multiple side of the fact related to the project problem by authorities people could help to prevent the over reliance on the supply of information from a single source.

8.3.2 The "real problem"

In Cycle 1, it was found that the participants could be part of the problem. To address this issue, the Strength Finder Test & the book – Now Discover Your Strength was introduced in Cycle 2 with a hope to create awareness of ones own talent and the need to manage around the roadblocks associated with the talents. It was found that it had successfully stimulated the support of participants' supervisor and was extremely helpful for setting up personal learning objectives for each of the participants and provided a good rationale on the selection of team members. However, it had also been found that personal styles continued to be part of the problem (e.g. dominating, prejudice, etc.), and personal agenda (e.g. interest in advancing the influence of one function etc.) could create great impact on the AL process. I had tried to "dilute" the situation in Team B by pointing out the need to get everyone's consent on the suitability of the action. However, in retrospect, my presence could also convey a message to some member which could be that "if WW do not say something against it then it is OK" despite my repeated emphasis of my neutral position.

It was recommended that a greater attention should be place on the selection of participants. Although this recommendation had been documented in other literatures, it is not easy to do as some behaviour of the participants won't surface not until the set meeting. Facilitator's intervention won't be appropriate at that time. Perhaps it could be stated explicitly as a "rule of the game" at the very beginning and get the consent of everybody. But it requires careful handling so as not to delimiting the scope of problem solving. With hindsight, the individual interview had actually revealed many of the attributes the team members revealed in the set meeting (e.g. strong opinion towards the NBD, dominating personality etc.) It could be served as a valuable input for setting up the "rule of the game".

In Cycle 1, it was also found that some participants had a feeling that he was doing extra just for the benefit of the Company. In Cycle 2, it was hoped that his feeling could be addressed by the introduction of the Strength Finder Test & the book – Now Discover Your Strength. It was hoped that the arrangement could build up a bridge between individual change and organizational change by conveying the message that action taken by the participants not only could benefit organization but could serve as a "stage" for one to strengthen the talent and remove the roadblocks. In cycle 2, no expression by participants on feeling of doing extra and benefit the Company. It seems that some kinds of personal assessment could really enhance a feeling that attention had been paid to individual needs. Departing from one's strength seemed to be an effective approach to adopt a positive attitude towards the program. It was recommended that helping the participants to explore their own problem could be run in parallel with the exploration of the project problem through the participation of the AL activities. The group dynamics could serve well for the function of exploring one's own management style.

8.3.3 The need to execute the action proposed

In cycle 1, it was found that some members had a feeling that they are doing something extra which only could benefited the Company. Furthermore, they felt the top management might not have the right "mindset" and was a roadblock to make the implementation a success. In Cycle 2, this issue was addressed by arranging the Workshops on change management and the H.O.W. projects. Top management had also been invited to explain to all on the important role of OpD and show their support on the change initiatives.

The personal interview enabled the participants to have the chances to share the view and intention to make a "bigger win" publicly and aware their action was essential for solving their existing and future problems. This was helpful to gain the commitment of the participants by indicating the change initiatives were something they really want to do.

The personal interviews on 180 degree feedback and objective setting also aimed at showing that the Program also intended to benefit the individual. The seriousness of Team A and the determination of Team B in pushing forward their A&B Company procedure indicated that the participants were quite serious toward the implementation issue. However, AH's question "what's the benefit for me?" and PK' notion "we had already take one step forward" (1st Mtg Pt B, #77) indicated that some members still had a feeling of doing something extra and out o their scope. Although it was hard to say for sure which of the three arrangements had contributed to this result, the introduction of these arrangements were new to Cycle 2 and had created a much better result then in Cycle 1.

In Cycle 1, it was found that some members had act within comfort zone and inclined to choose a “sure win” course of action. In Cycle 2, it was hoped that these issues could be addressed by adopting the change management as and Kotter’s 8 Steps Model as the theme for learning. Furthermore, the top management had been invited to explain to all on the openness of the top management towards the solution proposed by the teams. Actually, in Kotter’s 8 Steps Model, Step 3 was about the “Creation of vision” which could help to encourage the team members to try out new course of action. In view of all the arrangements, it is hard to determine the connection as only Team A had made a slight mentioning on the 8 Steps Model. However, Team A had made many moves that aligned with the 8 Steps and had indicated lots of thinking “out of the box” behaviours. Some members of Team B had also asked some ‘fresh questions”. However, due to the dominance of some members, a “sure win” course of action (as described by other members) had been chosen. This research showed that whether one choose to act within comfort zone or a group choose a “sure-win” course of action depended very much on the group dynamic.

8.3.4 The “Q”

In Cycle 1, I had encountered with the difficulty of inducing critical reflective working behaviour (CRWB) among the participants both in a one-on-one and in a group context. To address the issue, it was hoped that the Strength Finder Test & the book – Now Discover Your Strength could inviting individual to rethink one’s action and compare them to the objective of strengthening one’s talent and minimizing the roadblocks could hence, induce critical self reflection. Furthermore, the competitive atmosphere created by splitting into two teams could better promote reflective behaviours among team members. It was found that CRWB had been observed in both teams in much greater intensity then in Cycle 1. However, with Team A demonstrated much higher in number it is hard to say for sure whether the Test and the team splitting arrangement could really served as a useful tool to promote the “Q’ing” of each other.

To promote critical self reflection, personal interview with 180 degree feedback had been provided to the participants. It was hoped that it could better understand whether participants would inclined to improve oneself through critical self reflection. It was found that this arrangement had successfully stimulated critical self reflection on one's management style in interview. It was recommended that this arrangement could be very useful to promote critical self reflection and bridge the relation between the individual change and organizational change the project intends. However, whether this arrangement could help to promote the process of "Q'ing" each other could not be concluded.

8.3.5 The need to take improved action

In Cycle 1, some members, in view of the change in organizational climate, decided to take the "action of not to take any action". In AL, learning depends very much on action. The approach of taking action of non-action put facilitation in a difficult position. In order to address this issue, the approach of Change Management as the "P" was adopted with a hope to address this issue. In Kotter's 8 Steps Model, Step 5 which advocates the need to get rid of obstacles to change, change systems or structures that seriously undermine the vision and encourage risk taking and non-traditional ideas, activities, and actions. All these provides a knowledge context which encourages taking bold action. Furthermore, the H.O.W. project was arranged aimed at serving as a "dress rehearsal" for the participants to take bolder actions in the organization.

Obviously, Team A had chosen to take a lot of bold actions by incorporating the NBD in the problem solving process. For Team B, although they choose to put forward the A&B Company's procedure as a solution, the "true problem" they felt was the problem of the NBD staff and management and they decided not to propose anything to address it. The reason they held was almost the same as what MY in IMBA program had mentioned – the "action of not to take action" towards the core problem. It seemed that Cycle 2 had still failed in totally prevent the "action of not to take action" from happening. The interim action taken by MY (shrink the scope of the project) and the cosmetic action taken by Team B (lunch with NBD for fun) could be regarded as an improved action but not the action the participants really thought as effective. Whether these experience could still be turned into meaningful learning experience need to be explored further by other researches. Without a feeling that they were doing something they genuinely felt need to be done, the learning result would be discounted. It seems to be a roadblock hard to overcome in in-house program as the participants could always think of something "untouchable" which could not be sure of their true existence.

Another issue I encountered in Cycle 1 was that the members were not eagerly to "embrace" challenge. Although that was mainly the opinion of one member – RC, this comment could be triangulated by the some of the behaviours I observed. (E.g. MY's shrinking of project scope and CP's non-action) In Cycle 2, the adoption of Change Management and the H.O.W. Project were installed with the hope of building up a group norm of making change and "embrace" challenge. Despite the success of the H.O.W. Projects, the effectiveness of this arrangement was hard to determine as Team A exhibited the consideration of a bigger and deeper scope of organizational change then that of Team B. However, the Director of OpD did mention to me the "fatigue" factor created by the H.O.W. project when I seek his opinion on the Project T. May be, in next time, a direct venturing into a "problem" project seemed to be more desirable and make the whole cycle much shorter. That means, the step of creating "small wins" mentioned in Kotter's 8 step process could be skipped or replaced by some much simpler projects when the AL program was organized...

Conclusions and recommendations on other issues such as the selection of team members, the group dynamics and learning objectives are not the core unit of analysis in the research and had been placed in Appendix 8a for the reader's reference.

8.4
Implications for practice

Cycle 1 informed me that "installing" the 5 key ingredients was by no means a simple task. These ingredients are not just "out there" by the administrative arrangement of a program designer like me. The 5 ingredients are really something being socially constructed by the participants themselves. In Cycle 2, the performance of Team B further informed me that the "true" existence of all the 5 key ingredients could have a chance to be affected by the 4 contextual factors.

It raised new questions since many AL literatures which focus mainly on the "how" of arranging the AL program from the management educator's perspective. The research findings implied that more attention needs to be placed on what is happening inside the set meeting. A "checklist" had been devised based on the effective and in effective behaviours found in the two teams' set meeting. It had been placed in Appendix 8b in detail.

The effective functioning of a set in its role to enhance members to learn from their own action should not be taken for granted. The ability to run a liberal meeting by demonstrating listening and collaborative working behaviour might not just exist even the participants were high potential managers. The list spelled out above, I believe, should have a good value in helping the facilitation process of the set advisor, the facilitator and organizer. The value lies in the preventive works that these groups of professionals could engage in when designing the program content and in the facilitation of set meetings.

8.5
Implications for theory

It seems that the 3 key ingredients (Learning from each other, real problem, questioning insight) had functioned effectively in Team A but had not functioned effectively in Team B. Although the remaining 2 key ingredients (Implement proposed action & take improved action) of AL had not been totally put in place in this study, Team A had embodied the spirit of these two ingredients by engaging in involving the NBD and improving their original action plan. This study enabled me to add some other "qualifiers" for each of the key ingredients if they could function effectively in AL process.

8.5.1 The "P"

According to the Revans and other key AL writers, the P should be the "elicits relevant information, rather than disseminates what a teacher thinks is good for his or her students" (Peters & Smith, 1996, p.6). It should not be some "yesterday's technique." (Revans 1998 p.3) and should not be "the knowledge of the teacher but the experiences and the needs of the learners" (Revans 1980, p.288) It should be those knowledge gained by "exchanges with other managers themselves anxious to learn by re-ordering their own perceptions" (Revans, 1998, p.9) Whatever the contents of the P are, it should be able to elicit among the participants a "recognized ignorance"(Revans, 1991 quoted in Smith 1997, p. 365) and should be able to enhance a "re-reading what is already scribbled on the cortical slate" (Revans, 1980) which according to Revans, constitute the true definition of learning.

The practice of Team A had demonstrated many of the attributes of the desirable properties of the P in AL. On the other hand, many of the practice of Team B had fallen into the traps of those undesirable attributes of P in AL.

The higher in effectiveness of Team A seemed to support the postulation that a properly functioning P could be one of the contributing factors and hence seemed to support Revans and other key writers' ideas on desirable nature of P as spelled out above.

However, this research had also highlighted the need to take a broader view on the definition of P. It might not necessarily being supplied by "teachers" or outside experts but could be a role taken up or even conferred by the set members themselves.

8.5.2 The real problem

The ideas of Revans and other key AL writers on "real problem" were very similar to each other. It should not be "puzzles or difficulties to which a solution clearly exists" (Revans 1983, p.28) or "problems that are highly technical in nature, where the answer is known by experts, where there is little ambiguity, where there is only one stakeholder, or where the decision maker has decided what he or she is going to do" (Mezirow et el, 1990, p.31) The problem for AL project should be "an issue, a concern, an opportunity or a task which you want to do something about"(Pedler, 1996, p.6) The project task must therefore be "open-ended … inter-departmental and of serious concern to those who offer it.(Revans, 1980, p.292)

Although Project T could fit in with the very requirements of the ideal properties of AL, Team B had turned it into a "puzzle" as described above. On the other hand, the practice of Team A had adhered to the properties of "problem".

The higher in effectiveness of Team A seemed to support the postulation that a properly functioning "real problem" could be one of the contributing factors and hence seemed to support Revans and other key writers' ideas on desirable nature of P as spelled out above

One contribution of this research on this AL theory is that on top of those description of the desirable and undesirable properties of "real problems" for AL, one other property could be added – the perceived locus of control on the problem and the extend of attributing the AL project's problem to it. In this research, Team B had pointed out some deep layer problem such as the senior management and staff qualities. In fact, the layers they touched on were deeper then Team A. However, they felt that they could do nothing about it and had attributed almost all the alignment issue with NBD to these deep layer problems.

8.5.3 The need to execute own proposed action

Revans believed that the participants of AL should be able to do "what they set out to do" and, "do what they believe to be worth doing" (Revans, 1998, p.75). By doing so, the participants should "own and ultimately live with the consequences" (Smith, 2001, pp37 – 38).

It had been made clear to all the participants that what they had proposed in the Forum, upon the acceptance of the top management, will be executed by them subsequently.

With a shared feeling on the need to hammer out a solution together with the NBD, the proposal of Team A had gained a greater acceptance by the top management. Most important of all, this shared feeling of "worthiness" to do something about the problem had stimulated a much more effective "Q'ing" process in the set meetings. The need to bear the consequences of taking their proposed action had successfully invited heated debate among members of within their own teams. This seemed to support the AL theory on the need for the participants to execute their own proposed action.

However, the perceived value to doing what the team members “set out to do” may not totally rely on the degree of “worth doing” as perceived by the team members. It could also be interpreted as “worth the effort to do”. Some Team B members, who might not be totally agreed with the proposal of KY & PK, agreed to support as they were required to do little in the process. PK, who said little in the two meetings, was also required to do little to do. KY, who was the strong proponent of the solution, also had little things to do as the A&B Co. procedure was something developed by him years ago. Actually, most of the work was carried out by RR who was more than willing to invest the effort as he was a true believer of the importance of a company wide quality system.

In Team B, the person who invested most effort to do what he genuinely “believes to be worth doing” was RR (as indicated by his insertion of many more PPT on his own without the team’s consent in the Forum). In that case, could the other 4 members still be able to learn from the process if they set out to do things which are not what they truly believe to be worth doing (PK & RR believe the true solution was to fix the senior management and fire the incompetent staff) but due to “convenience” reason? Should AL facilitator or sponsor be satisfied as long as some action had been taken and then safely assumed that learning had happened?

8.5.4 The “Q’ing” process

The Q in AL should be “questioning insight and definitions of problems.” (Mumford, 1996, p.3) The questions raised should be helpful to “develop others” (Revans, 1980, p.295) and “help people…think carefully through the issues that are significant to their work situation”. (Zuber-Skerritt, 2002 p.114-124)

It had been shown that Team A, which was more effective in producing solutions which had been more readily accepted by top management was also the team that exhibited the most “comrades in adversity” way of communication and the most observed CRWB. Team A was also the team that had effectively applied the 8 Steps Process. It seems that the effectiveness of the “Q’ing” process could contribute to the effective functioning of the AL process.

In this research, many examples on those kinds of questions that could “help people to think carefully through the issues” could be found in Team A. However, a few members (e.g. KC, FZ) had also asked questions of similar nature and in some occasion, even more critical. It should be the “Q&A” process rather then just about the “Q’ing”. When a good question was met by defensive or dismissing behaviours, the developmental nature will be discounted.

8.5.5 Take improved action

The intention of AL is that the participants could “make useful progress upon the treatment of some problem” (Revans, 1998, p.15-16) and “to achieve intended change to improve their observable behaviour henceforth in the problem field. (Revans, 1982 pp. 626 – 7 quoted in Marsick, pp 159-176) As “reflection followed by action to solve real problems (McGill and Beaty, 1995 quoted in Clarke et el, 2006, p441), the subsequent action should be better informed then the previous one.

Obviously, Team A had adopted several cycles of improving their action. Their action plan had been modified each time after their meeting and data collection process. On the contrary, the kinds of improvement Team B had taken on their own action were more about the presentation format.

It seems that the kinds of improved action that could lead to a more effective AL process belongs to those that improve on basic premise on problem definition and problem understanding method.

8.6
Discussion

In this research, I tried to address the issue of the “L” in Revans’ formula which, as had been discussed, was murky and taken too much for granted in many literatures. I tried to explore whether AL could enable the participants to learn critical self reflection which was regarded as one of the core competence for a manager to lead organizational change. Unlike many studies on AL, which focus on the project results, I focused particularly on the learning result of the participants. My literature review informed me that the learning gained from taking better informed action through critical reflection should be the "L" that AL intends for. As Robinson (2001, p.71) rightly pointed out:

> The question that remains is perhaps the most significant. It is possible to imagine various learning contexts which would fit the action learning model in many ways but which do not **provide genuine opportunities for each member to be trying to change or achieve something through reflection in action.** This is why Revans is so emphatic that case study, simulation and role play are not action learning situations; no genuine problem exists and no real-world action can result.
> (Robinson, 2001, p.71)(Highlighted by me)

My endeavour to "provide genuine opportunities for each member to be trying to change or achieve something through reflection in action" was exemplified by my attempts to offer AL program with designs guided by the 5 key ingredients of AL. Unlike many literatures which proposed that AL is context free, my past experience and literature review enabled me to cast a doubt on this. Research data support the conclusion that AL program is not context free. All the five key ingredients of AL could be significantly affected by the 4 contextual factors, notably the in-house factors. The 4 contextual factors could both inhabit or facilitate the effective functioning of the 5 key ingredients of AL. Although team A & B in cycle 2 had been offered a more or less similar context, it was found that they had not really been exposed to same AL learning environment. It was found that all the 5 key ingredients were functioning effectively in the Team A context but not quite in the Team B context. When comparing with the IMBA program, there were many similarities on the way the 5 key ingredients were constructed by members of Team B and of the IMBA.

Another of the accomplishment I had achieved in this research is that the AR methodology had successfully enhanced my professional practice of arranging an AL program which could bring about the result of Team A. The Team A context had successfully enabled its members to practice the “comrades in adversity” ways of “Q’ing” and the number of CRWB exhibited in their second set meeting was markedly much more then the Team B. It is important to note that Team A had adhered more to the 8 Steps of change management which was the “P” in Revans’ formula. It seems that a successful AL program could also enhance the learning of change management. The potential for the AL members to learn something solid and related to the requirement of solving real problem should not be overlooked and could be further explored.

However, the greatest achievement in this research is that an “ideal type” of AL set functioning had been observed and embodied in Team A. It was not their success in getting the management to accept most of their proposal that impressed me. It is their achieving the ideal of “L” in AL that impressed me. They had really achieved the reinterpretation of their past experience towards the NBD and the new product launch alignment process (the “P”).

The much greater number of recommendations made by Team A the top management had adopted fulfilled the ideal of AL which aim at achieving both organizational change and individual learning result. Actually, the recommendations made by the two teams had been consolidated right after the Forum and the 10 members had been re-grouped into 5 teams to execute what they had proposed and accepted by the top management. That was the Phase II of the CFG program which was concluded by the 5 team members’ presentation of their project result in the 2nd Forum organized on 28 Jan 2010. Due to the time constraint, this part, which could be regarded as the Cycle 3 of this research, could not be reported in this thesis.

When I take a look at Revans’ AL formula, I felt this research had actually addressed the “+”. Rather then something solid, the “+” signified a process which could be described as a co-construction process of learning experience between the participants and the 5 key ingredients. This process was much affected by the 4 contextual factors, the personality of the participants and by the pre-conception of the answer to the question: “Who made this mistake?” vs. “What caused the problem?” (Section 7.5) This, I think, should be an agenda of the preventive action the program organizer need to take and could probably be addressed in the “P”.

Preparing managers to lead organizational change is an important topic in management education. This task would naturally be taken up by the high potential management staff within the organization. This study revealed that the high potential managers could adopt a non-reflective approach towards the learning opportunities offered by AL program. Their assertiveness, drive for quick action could hamper the learning opportunities of other set members. To enable to AL organizer and facilitator to live with this corporate reality and to
get better prepared for the challenges of incorporating the high potential management staff, this research had point out a list of “operationalized do’s don’ts of AL” (Section 8.2.5b) to serve as a behavioural guidelines for the facilitation of learning effectively from AL process.

The AL is not without its own problem. This research had pointed out the need to be cautious of the “5 enemies from within” (Section 8.2.5c) when the program was running in-house. Measures that could effectively tackle these “5 enemies” should be explored further in other researches.

The experience of Cycle 1 informed me on the importance of setting a clear learning objective for AL. In Cycle 2, individual change agenda had been set up by each participant. I found it extremely helpful, when coupled with 180 degree feedback, for enabling each participant to make sense of the action experience gained through conducting the projects.

Making AL able to achieve observable learning result should therefore be vital for it to achieve further success. Revans had stated explicitly that AL meant to help managers to achieve “intended change” which meant that a learning objective should be set beforehand. Furthermore, he stated that AL should be resulted in an improvement in the participants’ “observable behaviour”.

> Action learning is a means of development, intellectual, emotional or physical that requires its subjects, through responsible involvement in some real, complex and stressful problem, to achieve intended change to improve their observable behaviour henceforth in the problem field. (Revans, 1982 pp. 626 – 7)

However, I felt that the potential of individual learning objective had not been fully expressed in Cycle 2 and future research on this direction was recommended.

8.7
Future research recommendations

8.7.1 Achievement of this study

> There is no learning without action and no action without learning.
> (Revans quoted in Pedler, 2008 p.5)

It is the AL's ideal to make learning and solving real problems happened in parallel to each other. This research marked a practical step towards the achievement of this ideal. Learning of change management in terms of being able to practice Kotter's 8 step process had been achieved by Team A.

> Action learning is a means of development, intellectual, emotional or physical that requires its subjects, through responsible involvement in some real, complex and stressful problem, to achieve intended change to improve their observable behaviour henceforth in the problem field.
> (Revans, 1982 pp. 626 – 7 quoted in Marsick, pp 159-176)

The ideal of AL to facilitate organization change (i.e. to achieve a better alignment between the NBD & the OpD in the new product launch process) had been achieved by the two teams' (especially Team A) proposals and the subsequent adoption of the proposals by the top management. All the team members had subsequently been engaged in different task forces to materialize their proposals.

The ideal of AL to enable individual change on their "observable behaviour" – the CRWB, through their "responsible involvement in some real, complex and stressful problem" had been achieved in Team A. The CRWB observed in Team A's 2nd meeting were much greater in number and more fairly distributed then in their 1st meeting. On the other hand, the practices of CRWBs observed in Team B were less evenly distributed among the members and the chances of practicing the CRWB in 2nd team meeting were much fewer in their 2nd team meeting.

AL had frequently been quite vague on what the participants could be able to learn in AL. While one could learn many different things from AL, this research had make contribution on this aspect by pointing out its great potential in learning change management and critical self reflection. Both of them were essential for leading changes in organization.

My findings could be served as a useful reference for the AL practitioner in three ways. Firstly, my failure experience of Cycle 1 and the compare and contrast of Team A & Team B's behaviours in Cycle 2 had vividly indicated the importance of the effective functioning of the 5 key ingredients. In view of the highly diversified practices in arranging AL, this research provided strong evidence on the importance of ensuring the presence of those ingredients in every AL program. They are really the "soul" of every AL program.

Secondly, my adoption of a social constructivist perspective could add to the AL theory by balancing it with a stronger focus on the individual aspect of the learning process and hence complemented the usual over emphasis of organizational result. It was hoped that this emphasis could further unlash the emancipatory potential of AL.

This research had successfully shown that the 5 key ingredients were not something existed just "out there" by some deliberate arrangement made by the program organizer or by the sponsoring organization. Rather, they are something being constructed actively by the participants themselves. Team A's way of constructing the 5 key ingredients had been summarized in Table 8C. It could be a useful guide for facilitating the type of group process specified in "comrade in adversity" to happen.

Thirdly, this research had also casted a strong query toward the context free notion of AL and had indicated the potential influence of the 4 contextual factors, notably the in-house factor. My narration on the AR process of installing the 5 key ingredients in the two AL programs could illuminate the ways to better manage the roadblocks created by the 4 contextual factors of running in-house AL programs.

My role as an AL facilitator in the two AL programs had contribute to the knowledge of AL facilitation skills by providing some “do’s and don’ts” condensed from actual practice rather then based on avocation.

The compare and contrast on the performance of Team A & Team B had successfully illustrated that the effective functioning of the 3 key ingredients (Learning from each other, real problem, questioning insight) and the partial functioning of the other 2 key ingredients (Implement proposed action & take improved action) could probably enabled the “comrades in adversity” type group process to happen and the greater chances for the practicing of CRWB. It was hoped that the analysis on the interrelationship among the 5 key ingredients of AL in this research could contribute to the future development of AL theory and point out ways to develop a new model of running in-house AL programs in a typical Chinese cultural context.

8.7.2 Limitations of this study

There are a number of limitations in this research that I am aware of. In this research, the learning was measured by the CRWB. Learning is a vast subject in and of itself that it is difficult to define precisely. It was therefore necessary for the purpose of study, to define the observable learning behaviours in a way that could meet the nature of AL. The selection of adopting CRWB was the result of a careful selection process according to several prescribed criteria as spelled out in Chapter 2, (Appendix 1b). Nevertheless, the way the learning was defined should be counted as a limitation.

The members of the two teams in the CFG Program could not represent the general population of AL program participants. The fact that two companies belongs to manufacturing industries could set a limit on its generalization into other industries. The CFG Program, though arranged in a way that strived to adhere to the core idea of AL do not represent it was the only valid way to arrange AL program. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to all forms of AL. However, this study does provide a picture of the process experienced by the set members and can inform decisions related to using in-house AL program as an intervention to help high potential management staffs who are acquainted with each other to learn about critical reflection so as to better equip them with change leadership capability.

Time is also a critical limitation on this study. The prolonged duration of the IMBA and the CFG Program due to the unexpected change in business situation, natural hazard (the flooding) and the change in people had made definite impact on the attitude of the participants.

Methodologically, the paper did not apply any quantitative approach to triangulate the findings for greater reliability nor did it propose predictors of any type for conducting AL program. Also, analysis was done at the individual and group level and therefore, could be greatly affected by the characteristic of individual and the composition of the group. The research findings aim at adding to the AL literature, and provide insights on arranging AL program in-house for high potential Chinese managers who were acquainted with each other so that a greater chance of critical reflective working behaviours could be practiced. This, in turn, will help to understand better on the AL processes.

As Cycle 2 of this study was launched in a new context, the issues reported about the company – the HMC, might also affect the quality of the finding. Luckily, the Director of OpD, had played the role of critical friend in a great way by telling me a lot of thinking straight from his heart. Some of those ideas were antagonistic to the ear and imposed challenges on my original plan. However, they had subsequently proved to be extremely useful to me and had helped me to make the program more able to address the concern of the participants and meet the specific situation of the Company. I had also worked closely with the participants and their inputs (e.g. expectation expressed during interview, vision on organizational change etc) had become important guidance for the design of the program. All these enabled me to achieve what Kemmis and Wilkinson (1998) identified as the purpose of the collaborative process: working together to examine their understanding and skills to improve the process of teaching and learning.

Another limitation was the inability to report on the Phase II of the CFG Program. After the Forum, the proposals adopted by the top management which included a mix of two team's proposal (predominately belonged to Team A's) had been assimilated and repackaged to form 5 separate projects. The 10 members had been assigned by the new Director of OpD to those 5 projects. They had then made a presentation on their own project result in the second Forum held on 28 Jan 2010 which marked the official conclusion of the CFG Program. Despite the lacking of the report on Phase II of the CFG Program, this research had already gone through a multiple iteration process. The splitting up of two teams in the CFG program had resulted in two different AL contexts in terms of the different ways of constructing the 5 key ingredients. As the unit of analysis are the 5 key ingredients of AL, they had been exposed to two different contexts. In view of this, three iterations of AL had already been arranged.

8.7.3 Epilogue

In a nutshell, I found AL actually shared some of the teaching of Confucius:

> 夫仁者，己欲立而立人，己欲達而達人。能近取譬，
> 可謂仁之方也已。 《論語•雍也》
> A humane person, in wishing to establish self, establishes others; in wishing to enlighten self, enlightens others. To be capable of appraising self in order to comprehend others can be regarded as the key to humaneness
> Confucius Analects 6:30
> (Lam, 2002, p.32)

Similarly, Revans had also pointed out the importance for set members to have the capability of developing others.

> …if the full potential of action learning is to be realized, the selection of the fellow must notice not only his ability to improve himself but also to develop others. (Revans, 1980, p.295)

My experience of organizing the two cycles of AL programs had strengthened my belief that the Confucius' teaching – to develop ourselves by helping others to develop themselves, could actually be more effective by embedding in an AL context where the 5 key ingredients had been seriously treated and solidly constructed together with the participants. It could be the direction for future research if the potential of AL in developing and emancipating the manager's potential could be further unleashed. In Cycle 2, Team A consisted of greater number of members (e.g. WC, TC) who possessed this ability which might be able to explain their better achievements. However, will it be too demanding to ask a line manager to be able to possess the ability to "develop others"? If so, they might not be those regarded as most needed to be changed in an organization. If AL is targeted for these group of managers, it will become a "nice to have" rather then essential development for them. Furthermore, we should not take the desire of the high potential manager to learn for granted. While they will response positively to the question of the desire to develop further, the very characteristic of AL that it requires solving real problem and executing the solution they proposed could invite many consideration that deviated from the learning objectives which are quite out of the control of the facilitator and hampered the learning of others.

By and large, I am optimistic towards adopting AL for the learning of change management. Many staff, especially the Chinese staff, views participation in development program as "gaining" something new. It would sound absurd to them if we just tell them what they are going to learn from the AL program will ONLY be what they already knew! I am also optimistic that, coupled with change management, a real organizational change could be resulted as in the case of HMC.

On the other hand, I am still reserved on the ability of AL to induce personal change and it is my belief that real and lasting organizational change won't be materialized without the people in it changed. As I had worked with the participants for quite a lengthy period of time, I felt that they were still who they were after the program. However, two members of CFG Program – MYL & TC once told me in an informal chat that they felt the program had instilled some change in them. TC, who used to be an impatient person and drove for quick action (like PK in certain senses), had become a bit more moderate and patient toward others. MYL, who used to be too mild and deference in manner had become straighter forward and clear with his requirements. One thing in common was that these two gentlemen belongs to those who incline to be more reflective as indicated as TC's frequent use of the term "I will ask myself...","That seems to tell me…" etc. This point out the great potential to run the AL program in parallel with the personal transformation endeavour for those who shown an inclination to be more reflective.

One thing we should not overlook is that, the set member's performance in the set meeting would be a wealthy pool for learning. It should be better utilized for helping each to reflect on this experience which is more micro and easier to discuss.

Appendix

Glossary of terms

AL	Action learning
AR	Action research
DFMEA	Design Failure Mode Effect Analysis – A process of documenting the key functions of a design, the primary potential failure modes relative to each function and the potential causes of each failure mode.
PMC	Production Material Control. A function in the manufacturing process
HR	Human resources
QA	Quality Assurance
Six Sigma	Six Sigma seeks to improve the quality of process outputs by identifying and removing the causes of defects and minimizing variability in manufacturing and business processes. Each Six Sigma project carried follows a defined sequence of steps and has quantified targets.
L	Stands for "learning" in Revans' (1984, p.16) formula: $L = P + Q$
P	Stands for "programmed knowledge" in Revans' (1984, p.16) formula: $L = P + Q$
Q	Stands for "questioning insight" in Revans' (1984, p.16) formula: $L = P + Q$
CRWB	Critical reflective working behaviour – Proposed by Woerkom, et al. (2002) as a construct consisting of six dimensions, namely reflection on oneself in relation to the job, critical vision sharing, challenging group-think, asking for feedback, experimentation and awareness of employability.

Chapter 2

Appendix 1A Variations in the typology summarized by O'Neil

	Scientific	Experiential	Critical Reflection	Tacit
Theory	Alpha, Beta, Gamma; L=P&Q	Learning from experience (Kolb)	Learning through Critical Reflection (Mezirow & Schon)	Incidental Learning (Marsick & Watkins)
Practitioners	Revans	McGill & Beaty; Mumford	Marsick; Pedler; Weinstein	Noel; Tichy
Role of learning advisor;	**(1)**	**X**	**X**	
Reflection;	**X**	**X**	**X**	
Groups/ teams;	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**
Project/problem based on real work	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**
Focus on group/team process	**(2)**	**X**	**X**	**X**
Questioning insight	**X**	**X**	**X**	
"P" knowledge or teaching	**(3)**	**X**	**X**	**X**
Just in time learning	**X**	**X**	**X**	
Individual problem	**X**	**X**	**(4)**	
Group/team problem/project		**X**	**X**	**X**

(1.) "…there is a role for a supernumerary (set advisor) in the early days of the set, to help the five or so fellows find their feet in this somewhat artificial venture, by encouraging them to exchange their experiences at the periodic meetings in accordance with an intelligible programme" (Revans, 1978)

(2.) Revans (1978) explicitly says that action learning "is not group dynamics", but also refers to a need for participants to be involved in the "collective social process of the set".

(3.) "…this does not imply that action learning rejects all formal instruction; it merely recognizes that, however necessary such instruction may be, it is by no means sufficient…" (Revans, 1978)

(4.) Participants may have individual projects, but group or team projects is the norm (O'Neil & Marsick, 1994, Pedler, 1996)

O'Neil (1999) quoted by Hicks 2000 p.174

Appendix 1B Selection of tools for tracking evidence of reflective behaviour

Selection criteria	Thorpe (2004)	Kember et al (2000)	Woerkom et al (2002)
Grounded in analysis of data from business organizations	52 nursing undergraduates enrolled in a Nursing Management course.	First trial version of the questionnaire from 350 students from the health science faculty of a university in Hong Kong. Final version from 303 students from 8 classes of the health science faculty of a university in Hong Kong	Case studies on 7 organisations: two banks, three factories, a call centre and the Post Office. Participants obtained from a data bank with school leavers of secondary and tertiary agriculture education and selected on the following criteria: having a paid job, are working in an organisation of at least 20 employees and in a job which requires working together with colleagues.
Based on a collection of most of the theories on reflective concepts.	Draw on Atkins & Murphy (1993), Scanlon & Chernomas's (1997) three stages of reflection, and merge with Wong et al. (1997) & Kember et al.'s (1999) three levels of reflection.	Mainly from Jack Mezirow (1991), Chapter 4 and other works by Mezirow (1977,1985,1992) reflective and non-reflective thinking, Habitual action, thoughtful action and introspection.	Reflection on oneself in relation to the job as proposed by Van Bolhuis-Poortvliet and Snoek, (1996) Learning from mistakes of Senge (1990) Vision sharing of Argyris and Schon's (1996) model II behaviour Challenging group-think by Brookfield. Asking for feedback in Argyris and Schon's model II behaviour Experimentation as appear in Schon's (1987) distinguishes between reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action. Brookfield's (1987) perception of "exploring and imagining alternatives" Sharing knowledge in (Argyris and Schon, 1996) non-defensive behaviour.

The reflective behaviour are expressed in a social interaction settings	Assessing the level of reflection in journal writing	Assessing the level of reflection in journal writing	Responses were drawn from work context.
Able to provide an "operationalized" interpretation of the reflective behaviour in work and group settings.	Categorizing non-reflectors, reflectors and critical reflectors by the journals submitted.	Questionnaire contains four scales. (1) Habitual action ; (2) Understanding ; (3) Reflection (R),; (4) Critical reflection	Combination of literature review and the analysis of the case-studies (these were carried out in a parallel process, returning from one to the other) leads to the operationalization of critical reflective working behaviour in nine dimensions
Being tested on reliability.	Qualitative Solutions and Research: Non-Numerical, Unstructured, Data: Indexing, Searching, and Theorizing (NU*DIST, 1997).	The properties of the questionnaire examined by Cronbach alpha values for each scale to determine its reliability. Use factor analysis to see whether items contributed to intended scales. 3 cycles of trial and revision with the scales examined by reliability tests and confirmatory factor analysis at each stage. Items that did not contribute to a scale were either removed or modified.	Use factor analysis to determine whether the nine dimensions of critical reflective working behaviours really exist. A factor-analysis (with principal components method and no rotation) is carried out on the nine variables without indicating a number of factors to be extracted in order to find out if the sub-scales indeed load on one underlying construct, namely critical reflective working behaviours.

Appendix 1C A comparison of different writers on the KSF or elements perceived as important to AL

	Inglis (1994)	Dixon (1998)	Dilworth (1998)	Brassard (2002)	Kim (2003)	Park (2004)	Bong, Park & Park (2002)	Bowerman & Peters (1999)
Real and challenging problem	Learning is centred around the need to find a solution to a real problem	Learning results from addressing real problems	The problem must be real	Relevance: Learning is grounded in real work challenges and in the priorities of the organization			Characteristics of problems Process of selecting problems	
Voluntary participation	Learning is voluntary and learner driven		Learning is the primary goal, even though the problem solving is real and important.				Emphasis on learning	
Learning and solving the problem are equally important.	Individual development is as important as finding the solution to the problem	Work and learning are coupled	Reflection is as important as action	Balance: Learning and development goals and performance/action goals are pursued in a balanced and complementary fashion.				Real work - learners undertook improvement projects from which learning was derived, rather than improvement benefits were felt.
Conducive to organizational change	Action learning is a highly visible, social process, which may lead to organizational change		The problem to be solved can be tactical or strategic, but the learning is strategic.	Leverage: AL outcomes support the development of individuals who also contribute to improving the organization				
Need to takes a moderate period of time	Action learning takes time, about four to nine months excluding implementation	Learning occurs over time						
Solving problem important to all the participants collaboratively and creatively without the reliance on expert		Ordinary people, working together, are capable of solving their own problems	Learning is facilitated, to include breaking out of well-established mind sets by having the setting, the problem, and colleagues to some degree unfamiliar	Partnership: Participants, learning partners and other stakeholders re actively involved in setting AL goals and working collaboratively to achieve them			Commitment to implement	Encouragement of self-managed learning - through transparency in discussion of the process where possible.
Feedback on experience		Learning requires feedback from the experience				Facilitating review activity.	Feedback and reflection	

Able to see the problem anew and challenge established thinking.		Learning requires 'fresh eyes'	Questioning insight is always the start point Begin with (a) What should be happening? (b) What is stopping us from doing it? (c) What can we do?					Questioning and critical thinking - through a deliberate strategy by the program leaders do "de-expertise" themselves and indeed challenge the veracity of the body of management theory.
Continuous development of participants supported by organizational culture				Outreach: AL outcomes support individuals in becoming lifelong learners, teachers and agent of change in their organization and beyond	Organizational environment (cultural issues)	Recognizing top performers as core personnel for the future of the company		
Continuous cycle of taking improved action as a result of learning from previous action experiences.				Momentum: A sustained cycle of action, reflection and learning is integrated into all learning components of the program.		Fostering continuous learning atmospheres, Support adoption of action learning output to real work		
Senior management's support and commitment				Commitment: The organization's most senior management is equally committed to the AL program as are the participants and their learning partners.	Support from management	Acquiring willingness of support from the Chief Executive. Maintaining top managers' interest in the program, Confirming strong support from the departments to which trainees belong Holding a presentation of the results of the program with participation by the Chief Executive	Sponsor	Embedding what was learned in the organization - through a marketing strategy culminating in a politically-motivated celebratory event involving senior managers, and write article.
Alignment the program objective with organization's system				Systematic: Relevant program elements and initiatives are connected to the organization's management systems (decision-making, human resources, and so on)		Structuring systematic relation between the objectives of training and the program. Connecting training performances with personnel management		
Program manager					Program manager			

Careful selection of participants					Program participants	Carefully selecting the trainees Designing systematic procedures for selecting subjects for the program *****	Participant selection	
Have a clear objective for the program				Flexibility: the principles and practices of AL provide a benchmark from which to innovate in order to meet specific organizational needs	Goal setting (selecting problems and clarifying issues)	Establishing clear objectives for the program, Forming the common ground of the necessity for leadership programs		
Support from skilful facilitator						Seeking and equipping a facilitator	Setting the role of learning coach	
Results made public						Publishing a manual of action learning		
Group dynamics properly managed					Project team and members	Team activity management	Forming learning teams	Attention to group dynamics - through a familiarisation process intended to make the "set" personally comfortable with one another, rather than a traditional half-hour "ice-breaker"
Continuous improvement of program						Building an effective evaluation system and feedback process to identify the deficiencies of the next program. Analyzing the effects of training		

***** Placed in this box by me. It was originally place the 1st box of this column by Kim which I think not aligned with the content of other boxes in the same row

1. Bowerman, J., & Peters, J.,(1999) Design and evaluation of an action learning program - a bilateral view, Journal of Workplace Learning. Bradford: 1999. Vol. 11, Iss. 4; pg. 131
2. Bong, H., Park, H., & Park, K., (2002), Exploration of the key success factors of action learning programs in Korean corporate action learning programs employing the strategic fit concept, 2002 Fall proceedings of the Korean Association of Personnel Administration, pp.261-293
3. Dilworth, R., (1998), Action learning in a nutshell, Performance Improvement Quarterly, Vol.11, No. 1, pp.28-43
4. Dixon, R., (1998), Action learning: More than just a task force, Performance Improvement Quarterly, Vol.11, No. 1, pp.44-58
5. Kim, Y., (2003), Effectiveness and key successive factors of practical learning methods in business: Focusing on the case of company T, Unpublished master's thesis, Yonsei University, Republic of Korea
6. Park, S.H. (2004), A study on drawing critical success factors (CSF) for planning and management of leadership development programs by applying action learning method: Delphi method approach, Unpublished master's thesis, Chon-Buk National University, Republic of Korea

2 – 6 Quoted in Kim, J., (2007), Action learning factors perceived by action learning participants in companies in South Korea, a PhD Thesis, U of Minnesota, UMI # 3249501

Appendix 1D Summarizing the KSF or elements* perceived as important to AL by various writers under the heading of the 5 key ingredients and the "L".

* Only items agreed by at least two writers stated in Appendix 1Cwere included below.
# The item "Continuous development of participants supported by organizational culture" had not been taken as it mentioned what need to be done beyond the AL program itself.

	The 5 key ingredients of AL					**Learning ("L") – Learn to be critical reflective**
	Emergent programmed knowledge (P),	Real "problem"	Execution of solution proposed	Questioning insight(Q)	Take improved action.	
Real and challenging problem		✓				
Voluntary participation						
Learning and solving the problem are equally important.						✓
Conducive to organizational change			✓			
Need to takes a moderate period of time			✓			✓ (so that learning could happen)
Solving problem important to all the participants collaboratively and creatively without the reliance on expert	✓ (Learning among the set members)		✓			
Feedback on experience	✓ (It then become part of the source of "emergent knowledge")		✓ (feedback would be possible)		✓	
Able to see the problem anew and challenge established thinking.	✓ (Re-interpretat-ion of what one think he already known)			✓		✓ (learn to become reflective)
Continuous cycle of taking improved action as a result of learning from previous action experiences.	✓ (It then become part of the source of "emergent knowledge")				✓	✓ (learn to become reflective)
Senior management's support and commitment						
Align the program objective with organization's system		✓				
Careful selection of participants						
Have a clear objective for the program						
Support from skilful facilitator						
Group dynamics properly managed						

Appendix 1E Summarizing the key assumptions of AL on learning under the heading of the 5 key ingredients and the "L".

	The 5 key ingredients of AL					"L"
Hicks' (2001) list of 18 assumptions made by Revans on AL	Emergent programmed knowledge (P),	Real "problem"	Execution of solution proposed	Question-ing insight(Q)	Take improved action.	Learn to be critical reflective
Learning is embedded in a task,		✓	✓		✓	
Simple programmed instruction is helpful but not enough for learning,	✓					
Our dilemmas require exploration and insightful questions,				✓		
Learning requires action,			✓		✓	
Learning is voluntary,			✓			
The urgent, meaningful problem reinforces the desire to learn,	✓	✓				
Learning requires feedback,			✓	✓	✓	
The problems must carry risk to force the learner to examine their beliefs and values,		✓				
Learning requires a reinterpretation of the past,	✓			✓		
Peers contribute to learning through group exchanges,				✓		✓
The group supports and challenges individuals,				✓		
Reliance on experts creates dependence,	✓			✓		
The teacher's role must shift toward facilitation of learning.	✓					
Learning is a social exchange,	✓			✓		
Learning can be measured by action,			✓		✓	
Learning requires fresh perspectives,	✓			✓		✓
Learning requires an experimental process of observation, hypothesis generation, trial auditing, and review; and			✓	✓	✓	
Action learning creates learning across multiple people				✓		

Chapter 3

Appendix 3A Three primary foci for AR (Hart and Bond, 1996, p.152)

Action Research Types	Experimental	Organizational	Professionalizing	Empowering
Educational	Education design, Leadership design, Researcher focused.	Organizational change process; Managerial bias and Client focused	Reflective practice; Empowerment, Practitioner focused.	Empowering repressed groups, User/practitioner focused.
Problem-solving	Social science problems identified and social science theory applied. Problem in experimental group.	Problem identified by power holder; Success evaluated by sponsors. Problem in work group.	Problem identified by professional group. Problem lies in professional group	Emerging issues and negotiated problem identification with power holders. Problem in experience of the identified group
Performance Improvement	Move toward specific outcome or definition of improvement	Move toward a tangible outcome using consensual definition of progress.	Move toward practice enhancements as identified by professionals for others.	Move toward negotiated outcomes, considering stakes.

Appendix 3B Message said to the interviewee before audio recording in interview

繼續吓，我哋嘅，今日係，五月七號，〔係〕，咁呀同亞 (TW) 嘅，咁呀一樣啦，純粹係我自己我，〔嚇嚇〕，費事記低咁多嘢，〔嚇嚇〕，專注同你傾偈，〔係係〕，咁所以呢，如果你陣間你有任何地方，你唔想錄嘅，話俾我聽，〔好好〕，其實好簡單嫁啫，OK。 咁呢，同埋呢個錄音呢，就，你果部份，錄完之後，我會掉翻俾你嘅，係個 wave ，wave file 嚟嫁啫，〔OK， OK ，OK〕，OK，你 media player 開到嫁啦，〔OK， OK ，OK〕，咁好，咁同埋我會做翻一啲筆記，〔係〕，即係，重點嘅，咁呢就，亦都會俾翻你，〔係〕，咁你睇下

有無演繹錯誤，〔係〕，或者係即係你唔想 disclose 嘅，〔係〕，whatever 你話俾我聽，〔係係〕，咁呀，唔會，俾你公司第二啲人聽嘅，呢個你放心，〔好呀好呀好呀〕，淨係我自己嘅記錄，好嘛？(OK〕，(…)

We can continue. Today is 7 May (TW: Yes), and I am now with TW. Same as before, this is purely for me (TW: Ha, Ha – utterance of acknowledging), to save the trouble of notes jotting, (TW: Ha, Ha), so that I could concentrate on conversing with you (TW: Yeah, Yeah). Therefore, if there is any part in your subsequent speech you don't want to be recorded, please tell me (TW: Good , good), it's pretty simple, OK?. Right, in regard of this recording, the part on you, after recording, will be forwarded to you. This is in WAV format, a WAV file (TW: OK, OK, OK), OK, you can open the file with Media Player. (TW: OK, OK, OK). Furthermore, I will also prepare some notes, (TW: Yes), that will be in main point format and will be forwarded back to you (TW: Yes). You can take a look at it to see if there is any misinterpretation (TW: Yes), or you can see if there is any part you don't want to be disclosed (TW: Yes). Whatever the case, just tell me. (TW: Yeah, Yeah). And this won't be disclosed to any other person in your company and you can put your mind at ease.(TW: Very good, very good, very good) This is my private record, you feel OK with that? (TW: OK).

Interview TW on 7 May 2007

Source: Data / TW 7 May 2007

Appendix 3C Feedback on my translation

呢個好重要，對方要聽我哋把聲囉，我覺得而家暫時係對方聽唔到我哋個聲音，同埋都唔會解釋點解佢哋唔接納我哋嘅意見囉，我覺得呢個係一個好重要嘅問題嚟，因爲我哋可能俾咗好多 proposal 呀，或者 hints 佢哋話可能呢個差唔多會有 potentially 有 issue，咁我哋見唔到呢啲 issue 係 address 咗。 This is very important. The opposite party (the NBD) should be able to hear our voices. What I felt about the current situation is that they could not really hear our voices and also, would not give an explanation on why they had not accepted our opinions. I think that's a major problem. We might have provided a lot of proposals or given them hints on some potential issues. However, we couldn't see in what way those issues mentioned had been addressed.	刪除: giving
即係同樣地呢我又會贊成你果一點就係，佢哋應該要聽我哋意見，但係我用另外一個字講我就，佢哋應該要 response on 我哋嘅意見，未必一定係接受嘅，可能係唔接受，但係要 response 囉，因爲你 response 咗我哋嘅意見之後，係得定唔得呢，佢應該要去，應該要解釋囉，呢個情況就係大家會覺得我哋講咗出去係即刻，化爲烏有咁樣，唔知去咗邊嘅，嚇，所以我都贊成呢一點，佢嘻 response 囉，但係未必係贊成嘅，嚇。 The point I really agree with you is that, they should listen to our opinion. But I will choose another word, which is that they should give responses to our opinions, but not necessarily accept them. They could choose to accept or not to accept. Whichever is the case, they should provide response. That's because when you have made a response, that should be followed by a need to explain their cases and tell us whether they feel OK with our ideas or not. The present condition is that ever since we had voiced out an opinion, it seemed just disappeared right away. Ha. That's why I agree on this point. They could just give a response and not necessarily need to agree with it. Ha.	刪除: re is a 刪除: the way
一個 channel 可以去 feedback 翻個情況囉。 That should be a kind of channel to give feedback on the situation.	

全螢幕
關閉全螢幕(C)

Chapter 4

Appendix 4 A Presentation on the action plan of IMBA program for the Excellence in Training Award.

Stage	Strategy to manage transfer of learning	Program design
Pre	Select trainee carefully	• Open to all interested eligible staff. • Supervisor level and above with good past performance. • Candidate writes up proposal on self initiated project. • Present Project Proposal in front of all other participants. All participants give rating. • Attend mini-in tray assessment
	Staff ownership	• Need to sign a learning contract. • Analyze individual aspiration for development and their personal strength & weakness. • Communicated to all candidates on the cost and benefits of joining the Program.
	Involve trainee in program planning	• Trainee actively explores training options and to select those which could meet their need.
	Align with Co's strategic plan	• Endorsement of the self initiated project by the MD. The Project should be financially justified. • Meet the 6 Sigma standards.
	Provide practice opportunities	• Self initiated project • Place under the 6 Sigma standard. • Should be completed within 6 months time. • Should make financial contribution to the Company
	Learn with objective	• Develop application oriented objective
During	Performance standards clearly defined	• 6 sigma standard for project • Kapner & Tregoe Problem Solving Model
	Relevant to adult learning style.	• Problem centred approach. Emphasis discovering the problem and develop the best balanced resolutions. • Action learning approach. Emphasis learning with application objective and through resolving problems pop up during application. • Provide realistic work task that creates impact.
	Give individualized feedback	• Post training interview by the OL Mgr. • 360 degree feedback by peers, mentor and immediate supervisor.

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="6"></td><td>Trainee to create individual action plan.</td><td>Post-training interview by the OL Mgr. on learning progress.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Senior management support.</td><td>Regular review and report-back sessions to Board.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Maximize attention</td><td>Training arranged during work hours</td></tr>
<tr><td>Support team learning</td><td>Team building sessions in form of outward development program</td></tr>
<tr><td>Support from immediate supervisor.</td><td>Immediate supervisor attend some of the trainings and discuss with member on how to apply in work.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Training content relevant to individual needs.</td><td>Individual strength & weakness analysis to help customizing training topics.
Provide real company cases to external consultants for fitting into training content.
Training arranged based on the nature of the self-initiated project.</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="4">Follow-up</td><td>Coach</td><td>OL Mgr meet with each member after each training to help them recap and reflect on what they had been learnt.
Review the member’s “learning log” to understand learning progress.
Help members to develop action plan to practice what they had learnt or to actively take steps to solve their current problems.
Communicate with the members’ immediate supervisor on areas to help the member to work more effectively.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Mentor</td><td>Should be a manager of discipline other than the member’s own.
Match the member’s strength & weakness by consulting the GM, the member’s immediate supervisor and the members themselves.
Trained on mentoring skills.
Need to meet with the member once every two weeks.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Buddies</td><td>Pair up the members as “learning partner”.
They should keep telling each other what they intends to improve on themselves and report back to each other what they had actually achieved.
Meet after each training.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Organizational change</td><td>MD promised to all members’ full support. All members could communicate to the MD direct.
Feedback from member on organizational problems during the execution of the Project will be directed to the Board.
Change in system and policy will be seriously considered.</td></tr>
</table>

Appendix 4B Run down for the Group Interview organized on 5 Nov 2004

Duration	Activities	Mechanism & responsible parties
15 min.	Thanks everyone for applying. Appreciate their effort in their work. Tell everyone that staff development program like the IMBA is not commonly found in a medium size company like IMC. However, we cannot take all the applicants. Whether the application is successful or not, the management highly appreciate their contribution to the Company.	The MD
2.5 hr (10 min presentation 5 min Q&A)	Each applicant give a presentation on their project proposed.	Each applicant take turn to raise one question to the applicant. All the applicants give rating to each applicant. WCSC members rating carry double weighting.
0.5 hr	In-tray exercise (carries 30% weighting)	Each applicant writes up their own handling methods and responses to the in-tray documents.
15 min	Roughly explain the Program content and next step	WW

Appendix 4C An overview on the title, objective and team members of the individual projects initiated by the IMBA members

Member	**Project Title**	**Project Objective**	**Project Team Member**	**Project Champion**
CP (HR Officer)	**To provide the new staff a remarkable working environmen**	Reduce the yearly staff turnover by 5%; Improve the new staff satisfaction level by 5%; Achieve a good reputation from the new staff about	JT (Training Officer) , + (Staff representative)	RS (General Mgr)

	t	the company culture and the whole working environment we provide to them.		
EW	**Cost down the fabric price through sourcing more fabric supplier**	1. Source more supplier is 10%. 2. Cost down the fabric price 5-15%.	Elisa Purchase buyer(Sewing) EN Project manager(Sewing) and QC Supervisor(Sewing)	QM (Purchasing Mgr)
LN	**Product Safety Improveme nt**	100% Full implementation on the safety related tests in material, process and product by the end of 2005.	CH / AT / GZ (Quality Dept) JY (Engineering) YY (Purchasing)	LN (Quality)
MZ	**Packaging Material Cost Reduction**	Customer “P” colour box cost reduction by 5% in 2nd half of Y05 -Customer “P” carton box cost reduction by 5% in 2nd half of Y05	AL (Purchase Coordinator) FK (QA) LL, JLH PL (Business Development)	MZ
MF	**Advanced Mould Manageme nt**	Reduce the risk of new meld approval. Get original & detail data for new meld/new project development. Achieve to world class meld management level. To serve for injection moulding process	Project engineers Injection Dept. Quality Engineering	RS (General Mgr)
PS	**Improveme nt of Bin**	Change the label attachment method;	KY, PZ, LZ, RZ	CWL (Factory Manager)

	Identification	Reduce the cost of each bin labelling by 70%.		
RC	**Quote Process Improvement on Quote Time and Accuracy**	core business : 2-3 days non-core business : 5 days	Peter (Engineering) Danny, Eric, Garric, Matthew (Project Mgr.) QM (Purchasing Mgr) FK (QA Mgr)	
MY	**Minimization Plastic Part WIPs**	Minimize the plastic warehouse area from 2624 m² to 624 m². Reduce plastic transportation from 140m to 16m.	RZ (Injection Supervisor) ZL (Store Supervisor) MW (PMC Supervisor) KT (QC Supervisor) JQH (Production Supervisor)	AW (PMC Mgr)

(All the wordings were by the participants. I made no alternation on the grammatical mistakes.)

Appendix 4D

-----Original Message-----
From: William Wong
Sent: Friday, July 08, 2005 10:27 AM
To: [MD]
Subject: IMBA
Dear RS,

Thanks for your support by addressing the IMBA members on Monday. I had a nice meeting 2 hr meeting with them and had come up with an agreed action plan to push them to move faster with their project. The speech of Steve Jobs I shared with them had successfully motivated them and they appreciate this kind of sharing very much. However, I found their attitude towards the company had become less positive which I think should bring to your attention. I think their feelings, to certain extend, reflected the current thinking of the middle level staff in IMC. The IMBA members mainly felt that the company had become quite chaotic in the past few months and the working atmosphere was turning bad. Some of them even doubt (either implicitly or explicitly) on the usefulness of carrying on with their project. They thought that their Projects could not create much value for the Company under the present situation. As I don't want these negative expressions to spread in the meeting, I had not explored too much on the reason behind but just listen. After some discussion, all, except for MF, expressed their understanding that the ultimate objective of their self-initiated project is to enhance the transfer of learning and all of their projects carry cost-down implication for the Company. However, MF openly expressed his unwillingness to continue with his project. He had not explained much on his intention and I told him that I will talk with him on that in private. Luckily, MF's attitude had not been echoed by other IMBA members (MY shared some of MF's feeling but had not expressed in a strong manner). but I think we need to do something about the moral issue of the staff quickly. They may not have a full picture on what is happening or the management had not communicated well with them in the past few months. I think rumours could spread quickly and negative attitudes are highly infectious.

Regarding MF's case, I need to talk to him further but I suspect the salary raise issue might be the cause as he was very positive the last time I met with him(3 wks ago). Anyway, MF is quite emotional and I doubt on his development potential but my consideration is that losing him might create negative impact on other IMBA members (MY is on the margin) and PS might not be willing to see this also.

I welcome your advice on whatever I could do but I told myself that I definitely need to put more time in the IMBA from now on.

Cheers,
William

Appendix 4E Extract of the e-mail I sent to the MD after interviewing LN & MY when they expressed their wish to withdraw from the IMBA.

> LN was determined to quit the Program. Heavy work load is one reason and he doesn' t want to be bond by the training contract. I therefore could smell that he might quit sooner or later as he expressed he could not stand the high work pressure forever.
> MY keep telling me he didn't think his project could be successful as there were too many uncontrollable factors in it. Secondly, he thought his project could not add too many value to the Co.. Thirdly, he felt that the IMBA was of less value to those technical training such as the HKPC. Finally, he keep repeating asked whether there will be any "consequence" if he drop out.

I told him not to think of "consequence" as it will be totally meaningless if he stay behind for that reason. Secondly, he should restrict his project scope. Thirdly, He should transit from a purely technical man to take up more management duties which is exactly the IMBA aimed at. I repeatedly emphasis the IMBA aims at developing them and their success in learning is already the Program's success. We had talked for an hour and he finally agreed to "think over" again. However, I think he is likely to change his mind for the time being. However, we still need to pay close attention to him as he is typical man who think too much and need help to transit from a technical person to be a management person.

Appendix 4F Interview CP 31 May 05

WW The next issue I would like to discuss with you is on your personal training needs. The outward development program and the problem solving training are for all. In the university, they belong to the core program. Now I am asking for your suggestion of elective programs. This training should be related to your specific project with the objective of helping you to execute your project better. So what kinds of skill you think you are deficient in carrying out your project? What is your idea? We need to start early as we need to do some souring work.

CP I have two ideas. One is the advanced communication skills and the other is psychological analysis.

WW Psychological analysis? Why do you feel you need to learn about this?

CP So there's no need for me to explain on communication skills, right?

WW What I meant is how do they relate to your own project?

CP When I am conducing questionnaire survey, firstly I need to have good communication skills so as to gain the full cooperation from others. You need to convince them and need to ask favour from others. If you are not doing a good work on communication, you might get a totally different result.

WW That exactly explain why I think you need to state your case more clearly. Just like what you say communication. It does not belong to general communication. It is about how to convince others and to make presentation. As it is a personalized training, could you tell me a bit more on what aspect you want to improve on yourself through this training.

CP Well, it means how to handle different types of personalities.

WW What do you meant by “how to handle”?

CP It means how could I communicate and relate with different people.

WW By the “different people”, do you mean different personality or different position.

CP Should mainly on different personality.

WW Is it about in general situation or in conflict situation?

CP Should be on general situation.

WW OK, please tell me what other kinds of training need you might have.

CP As the project I am responsible is quite different from other people’s project, the target are people, others might deal with more on machinery or environment. On the contrary, I need to handle different individuals and different people have different thinking so I think this (training need) is more important tome.

CP 31 May 2005, 1330 start, meeting room 2/F

Appendix 4G Interview MY 30 May 05

MY As of the present situation, I am no longer qualified to continue with this Project.. Not possible anymore. **You want to make a change, the Company won’t allow you to make the change.** That means, the Company won’t allow any kinds of change., you need to do things step by step, you need to do whatever you are being told, You need to adopt the criteria adopted by others. Don’t try to change anything. Now, WI (Work Instruction) is needed for everything. The action of the workers are being placed under tight control…No one could ever attempt to change anything.

WW I see, I see. Ever since the product X issue, the control had become tighter.

MY	What else could we do now…Nothing could be changed now. Same practice as before, there are many systems and restriction for you to follow. You dare not to change anything under this situation.
WW	So you felt there is little chance to succeed?
MY	Basically…no one dare to change the statue quo under the present condition. Fearing that in case problem might arise after change. Seems better not to change anything.

Interview MY on 30 May 05 on progress of his Self-initiated Project

Appendix 4H Checklist for Group Coaching and a sample of feedback given to one member – RC

Multiple perspectives on problems

Name of IMBA member : RC	Rate by :	Date :

Explanation of the problem

Rating criteria	Explanation not clear and without appropriate supports	Explanation needs further elaboration and supports are quite weak	Explanation basically clear but supports are not adequate or totally valid	Explanation clear and with appropriate supports
Check (Can check in more than one item)		From HR Mgt, customer & strategic mgt perspective	From financial perspective	
Remarks				

Insight

Rating criteria	Some of the points presented are incorrect	No new insights at all	Some new insights	Breakthrough insights included
Check (Can check in more than one item)		From customer value perspective. From strategic mgt perspective	From HR Mgt perspective. From financial perspective	
Remarks	(HR) Useful for cutting lead time and improve accuracy. (Strategic Mgt.) No good suggestions presented despite prompting.			

Analyze of the problem

Rating criteria	Incorrect analysis of the problems	Some of the analysis is not correct	The analysis is basically correct	Able to present a correct and in-depth analysis of the problem
Check (Can check in more than one item)		From strategic mgt perspective	From HR Mgt, customer & financial perspective	
Remarks	(Strategic Mgt.) Some basic concepts missing from explanation. (Fin) Understand quote problem was the result of insufficient info or some info being passed to other dept.			

Chapter 5

Appendix 5A Interview MY on 19 Jan 05.

MY The most important thing is able to apply after learning.

WW What do you think make it so difficult to apply in IMC?

MY What you do need to align with the Company's mode of operation. We had tried many new things such as One Piece Flow, TPEM. We had learnt all those theories. TPEM had completed but it doesn't seem to create a lot of change. The machines are still poorly maintained. There is not much change. One piece flow is better.

WW Is it the project that cannot create results that worries you?

MY You know, I am not on a senior position…I had learnt quite enough on theories…

(…)

MY I think I might need to attend some training on JIT. But the point is that will the senior have the concept?

WW What do you meant by that?

MY What I want to say is that, if the heads do not have the concept, it will be impossible to implement the project as it will touch on many other aspect of the company's operation. For example, the PIE might come up with the suggestion of reducing the people and reducing the production time. However, it requires the alignment of many other factors such as the production, the material. When the goods are urgently in need of delivery, many other requirements needs to give way.

Interviewee: MY Conducted by Wong Po Wah on 19 Jan 2005, 1200 – 1225 at IMC Factory I, Block D, 2/F Mtg. Rm.

Appendix 5B Interview MY on 19 Jan 05.

WW : What kind of training you think you needed for the implementation of your project?

MY I feel…that should be some kinds of programs like Operations Management for a company.

(…)

WW : Could you be more specific, for example, the subject and title, what you want to learnt from it(…)

MY Something more practical, different subject areas in engineering such as logistic analysis, layout design of the whole factory, some layout design…everything.

WW : That's pretty general and not likely to be completed in one or two courses.

MY Yeah, that's right. Those programs that we are currently engaging in…they are just one or two days. You can't really learn much from it.

WW : OK, regardless of the dates. What you think should be the right focus.

MY It should be about factory layout, where to place the office, the layout design of the workshop, the design of the warehouse, the logistic system. There should be course like this being offered.

(…)

WW : What you just mentioned belonged to knowledge and not belonged to the issue of "what" rather then "how". So you want to know more about the "what" or the "how".

MY Should be a bit more on the "what". Actually I basically know how to do. The most important is the lacking of …the falling short of some theoretical things to do.

WW : What you feel is that you lack some theoretical things to support your practice.

MY …..

Appendix 5C Interview MZ on19 Jan 05

You know my project is on packaging material. I had been in the printing industries for 3 years and I am quite familiar with the operations of a printing factory. After I had joint IMC, I had received no formal training. Packaging material was originally handled by (my boss) I think I really need training by (my boss) on an on-the-job basis. I think I also need some training from Engineering, Quality and Purchasing as well. There are quite a lot of areas in need of alignment such as the specification of materials.

The critical issue is support from management. The support from (my boss) is especially important. For detail implementation and coordination work, I can handle myself. I hope that my project could bear fruit in a half-year's time. Actually, there are not too much "do-different" things in it

Interviewee: MZ Conducted by William on 19 Jan 2005, 1340 – 1400 at IMC, Factory I, Block D, 2/F Mtg. Room

Appendix 5D Individual coaching with CP on 31 May 2005,

CP： Regarding this part, the major thing is to, firstly, my first step is to locate the current problem. I need to collect information from different channel. After discovering the problem, I need to improve on the existing problem.

WW： But you had made an assumption which is that the new staff orientation had some sort of relations with their job satisfaction. This assumption had not been verified yet.

CP： Ng.

WW： He (the new staff) might be perfectly OK with the existing arrangement. (…) What you planned to do is certainly beneficial but could have nothing to do with the staff satisfaction.

CP： Ng. That's why my ultimate is not to raise the (new staff) satisfaction level.

WW： What would be your objective then?

CP： My objective is to provide them (new staff) with an even better working environment.

(…)

CP：
If we could provide a good environment to them, they won't feel that they wish to quit.

WW：
Ng.

CP：
Is that right? Through this survey, I could state the new staff turnover problem is not due to the low salary or lack of promotion opportunities as this does not affect new staff.

WW：
Then you have a problem, a potential issue. The target of your survey is those who had not quit. If they said that they are not satisfied and yet had not quit, it illustrated that their dissatisfaction with the existing arrangement had nothing to do with their leaving.(…)

CP：
Ng

WW：
If they said that they are not satisfied and yet had not quit, it illustrated that their dissatisfaction with the existing arrangement had nothing to do with their turnover.

CP：
Ng

Individual coaching with CP on 31 May 2005, 1330

Appendix 5E Interview with EW on May 2005

WW Are you confident that you could achieve the objective of this Project?

EW Sure, Just for this case $3 per yard had been saved. In one month, we consume 10 thousand yards and that means we could save $30 thousand. Just for this order we had saved 30 thousand. For a year, we could possibly save 300 – 400 thousand.

WW So you had already found some suppliers?

EW I had already done it. The order had already been placed.

WW Ng

EW I don't worry about this

WW Not worry about this?

EW The former suppliers were mainly from Hong Kong. They need to earn money in the process. Now, the requirement is mainly on quality. If the new supplier could meet our quality requirement and provide good service, they will save our time. I am pretty confident on that.

Interview with EW on May 2005 row 21 -28

Appendix 5F Extract of an interview with MY after the outward development program.

MY The most important thing is able to apply after learning.

WW What do you think make it so difficult to apply in IMC?

MY What you do need to align with the Company's mode of operation. We had tried many new things such as One Piece Flow, TPEM. We had learnt all those theories. TPEM had completed but it doesn't seem to create a lot of change. The machines are still poorly maintained. There is not much change. One piece flow is better.

(…)

MY I think I might need to attend some training on JIT. But the point is that will the senior have the concept?

WW What do you meant by that?

MY What I want to say is that, if the heads do not have the concept, it will be impossible to implement the project as it will touch on many other aspect of the company's operation. For example, the PIE might come up with the suggestion of reducing the people and reducing the production time. However, it requires the alignment of many other factors such as the production, the material. When the goods are urgently in need of delivery, many other requirements needs to give way.

Interviewee: MY Conducted by Wong Po Wah on 19 Jan 2005, 1200 – 1225 at IMC, Factory I, Block D, 2/F Mtg. Rm.

Chapter 6

Appendix 6A Bio data of CFG Program participants

	Name	Position	Diploma	1st Degree	Master Degree	Serve 2 yr & above	Serve 1 – 2 yr.	Below 1 yr.
1	AH (Resigned in Jun 08)	Director – Operations			✓		✓	
2	RL (Take up the role as head of Operations after the resignation of AH)					✓		
3	TW	Supply Chain & Material Mgr.			✓	✓		
4	PF	Operations Mgr.			✓✓	✓		
5	KY	Factory Mgr.			✓	✓		
6	TC	Manufacturing Engineering Mgr			✓			✓
7	RR	Quality Assurance (QA) Mgr.		✓				✓
8	PK	Operations Mgr.			✓			✓
9	FZ (Withdrawn due to resignation in mid 09. His successor had not been invited to join the Program)	HR Mgr.		✓	**Studying**			✓
10	TD (Withdrawn and replaced by MYL in Jul 07)	Operations Mgr.		✓		✓		
11	MYL	Operations Mgr.	✓					✓
12	KC	Operations Mgr.		✓				13 Aug 07
13	WC	Quality Assurance (QA) Mgr		✓	✓			5 Nov 07

AH (and later, RL) were not participants of the program. They are the sponsor of the Program as staff 3 -15 reported directly to them.

Participants 2-11 all report to AH directly. Each of the participants had several managers or assistant managers or engineers reporting to them. It is therefore quite obvious that all the participants were well qualified managers.

Appendix 6B Kotter's 8 Step Model

Eight Steps to Transform Your Organization

1. Establish a Sense of Urgency

- Examine market and competitive realities
- Identify and discuss crises, potential crises, or major opportunities

2. Form a Powerful Guiding Coalition

- Assemble a group with enough power to lead the change effort
- Encourage the group to work as a team

3. Create a Vision

- Create a vision to help direct the change effort
- Develop strategies for achieving that vision

4. Communicate the Vision

- Use every vehicle possible to communicate the new vision and strategies Teach new behaviours by the example of the guiding coalition

5. Empower Others to Act on the Vision

- Get rid of obstacles to change
- Change systems or structures that seriously undermine the vision
- Encourage risk taking and nontraditional ideas, activities, and actions

6. Plan for and Create Short-Term Wins

- Plan for visible performance improvements
- Creating those improvements
- Recognize and reward employees involved in the improvements

7. Consolidate Improvements and Produce Still More Change

- Use increased credibility to change systems, structures, and policies that don't fit the vision
- Hire, promote, and develop employees who can implement the vision
- Reinvigorate the process with new projects, themes, and change agents

8. Institutionalize New Approaches

- Articulate the connections between the new behaviours and organizational success
- Develop the means to ensure leadership development and succession

Kotter, John P. (1998) Leader to Leader, A publication of the Leader to Leader Institute and Jossey-Bass, pp31-33

Appendix 6C Note on the key points discussed and forwarded them to AH after meeting with him.

1. The approach of building up people's strength rather than focus totally on eliminating weakness will be more effective in reducing resistance to change. It could convey a strong message that everyone is important and valuable to make the change successful.
2. The action learning approach could effectively convey the message of "changing others by changing ourselves first". This is a good case of leading by example, which is important for change management.
3. The 8 managers are all different in terms of the degree of receptiveness to change. As they could influence their subordinates profoundly, they need to be changed first. Action learning is an appropriate method to bring about those kinds of personal change.
4. Rather than using action learning as a separate program, this should be actively integrate with the change process. The change process is a rich context for learning for everyone. Sustainable development of the company relies on the development of its staff.
5. The ABC Change Management program(name had been changed to CFG Program afterward) is an organizational development process. Without the organizational development, the change will not be sustainable. In order to support the change, both personal and team development are needed.
6. The Action Learning Program will partially integrate with the ABC Change Management Program and become part of the change process.
7. The 5S implementation is a common experience for almost all of the management staff. The major challenge facing the management is to make it become sustainable. We should ride on it to reduce the feeling of creating extra work burden to the staff.
8. The three Workshops serve as "data collection" source which the direct reports could use them to formulate strategies to do differently.
9. The 5S serves as the "laboratory" for trying out the change as it provide a lot of stuff for experimenting new ways of doing things and new behaviour
10. The Group Project serves as the ultimate testing ground on the level of development of the 8 immediate reports.
11. AH will explore a Group Project for his management team which could be completed after 8 month.
12. The whole process will span a period of 8 months. The peak time will be avoided in order to minimize the distraction.

Source: Points discussed with AH 22 Feb

Appendix 6D Strategy I intended to take to cope with the issues arising from Cycle 1

			Split owner-ship of results	Brief - ing Mgt	Change Mgt Work-shops		Group Coaching	Intra depart-mental Project	Inter-departmental project		Self improvement plan					Forum	Briefing mtg. for top mgt
		Issues discovered in Cycle 1 that need to be addressed in Cycle 2			3 two hours work-shops	Change mgt as theme & Kotter's 8 Steps Model		H.O.W Projects	Project T	Team A & B Mtg	Strength Finder Test & the book – Now Discover Your Strength	Personal Inter-view	180 degree feedback (2 times)	Individ ual coach-ing	Admon -ishing official		
The "L"		Role conflict of me – drive for business result vs. learning result of the project	✓	✓			✓										✓
		The "L" & action not closely related.			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓			
		What one had learnt not explicit											✓				
5 key ingred-ients	The P	Want to learnt something new and practical			✓	✓	✓				✓			✓		✓	
		No "recognized ignorance" raised related to solving the problem			✓			✓					✓				
	Real problem	Members as part of the problem							✓		✓		✓	✓			
		Downgrade the original problem, to become a puzzle in face of organizational change							✓	✓							
	Imple-ment solution	Act within comfort zone. Choose a "sure win" course of action.				✓			✓	✓							
		Feel oneself doing extra and benefit the Company only									✓	✓	✓				
	"Q'ing" each other	Difficult to induce critical reflective working behaviour								✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
		Individual project failed to stimulate interest in "Q'ing"							✓	✓						✓	

		each other															
		Issues discovered in Cycle 1 that need to be addressed in Cycle 2	**Split owner-ship of results**	**Brief - ing Mgt**	3 two hours Work-shops	Change mgt as theme & Kotter's 8 Steps Model	Arrange learning partners, prepare action plan	H.O.W Projects	Project T	Team A & B Mtg	strength Finder Test & the book – Now Discover Your Strength	Personal Inter-view	180 degree feedback (2 times)	Individ ual coach-ing		**Forum**	**Briefing Mtg. for top mgt**
	Take improved action	The action of not to take any action				✓	✓	✓		✓				✓	✓	✓	
		Drag on and more concerned about getting things done					✓			✓							✓
*Other key success factors	Senior mgt's support & commit-ment	Too eager to drive for delivering business result					✓	✓									✓
	Facilitator	Lacking "tools" & authority to facilitate critical self reflective behaviours			✓		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	Voluntary participa-tio n	Formal positioned as "fast track program" invited political behaviours of joiners.					✓										
	Clear objective for the program	Objective of learning not clear.		✓		✓	✓							✓			✓
	Careful selection of partici-pants	Nomination by department heads shrank size of the selection pool.								✓	✓						
		Members not "embrace" challenge				✓	✓										
	Group dynamics properly managed	Dropping out of members and lack of group meetings lowered moral.			✓		✓			✓						✓	

*Other key success factors – Items that had been listed out in Table 2. IV that could not be categorized as adding description to the "5 key ingredients" or the "L"

Appendix 6E Master colander of key activities and list of critical incidents

Serial #	Dates	Events/ activities	Participants	Objectives/Key Deliverables
1	On 23 April 2007,	Induction Meeting	AH and all participants	Introduce the CFG Program & the change management theme. Introduce the action learning approach. Introduce the book – Now Discover Your Strength and the Strength Finder Test.
2		Strength Finder Test	AH and all participants	Each takes the on-line test of Strength Finders. A profile for each of the participants will be generated automatically after taking the test.
3	28th, 30th April , 2nd, 7th May, 2007	Personal interview with each of the participants	All participants	To obtain the participant's view towards the findings of the Test. To get the participant's opinion toward the change(both organizational and individual) they would like to achieve.
4	16 May 07	Change Leadership Workshop Part 1a	AH and all participants	Communicate the program content and the approach to all Complete a group picture on the participant's perception on the HMC's existing conditions.
5	9 Oct 07	180 degree feedback	AH and all participants	Write down opinion towards others. Give feedback to each other.
6	31 May 07	Change Leadership Workshop Part 1b	AH and all participants	
	29 Jun 07	Change Leadership Workshop Part 1c	AH and all participants	
7	18 Jul 2007			
8		Meet each	All participants	Communicate the feedback from other and

		participants		select the most unwanted "roadblocks"
9		The HOW Project		
10		The Project T	AH and all participants	
		180 degree feedback	AH and all participants	Feedback from user and from supervisor Compare and contrast what the participants had said they would improve and how others perceive them.
	Dec 07	Set individual objective		Base on the 180 degree feedback, each participant set his own change objective.
	24 Jan 08	Review meeting with Vice President	Vice President (VP) & WW	Report back on the progress and achievement. Selection of a problem for team project. Get consent to quote CFG Program data in my PhD thesis
	11 Apr 08	Meeting on Project T and alignment issues	Head of OpD & NBD & WW	To share the intention of improving the alignment process between OpD and NBD on new product launch
	May	Team A & B work on Project T	All participants	Two teams invite New Business Development Division to explore solution
	3 Jun 08	Meet with Vice president of HMC	Me and vice-president	Report back on the progress. Discuss on the Forum arrangement
	16 Jun 08	Flooding & suspension of Project		
	Aug 08	Resume of Project		
	Aug 08	Brief new Op Dir – RL	WW	Brief the new Op Dir on the achievement of Phase I and arrangement of Phase II
	12 Sep 08	Forum	RL and all participants	Each team present their proposal
		2^{nd} 180 degree feedback		

41 26:27 WW OK, regarding the Strength Finder, there mentioned some personal strength about you. What's your view on that? Could you recall it? (I read out the 5 "signature talents" from the Test report KY forwarded to me) You had mentioned to me that they are 80% accurate in describing you (PF: Yeah, yeah), right, it's 80% accurate description of you (PF: Yeah) OK, let's not to challenge the methodology or the accuracy of the Test but rather, we take it just as a reference, had it gave you any insight or any view.

42 27:07 PF Ah…what I feel is that…after completing (the Test), there's a high resemblance of me. Especially on one or two points. But for some, there is some, say for example, "responsibility", it's me. Very much represents me. And for some it doesn't quite describe me. (WW: Which are they?) But…for example "harmony", may be I felt it described me quite well but others may not think the same way. Ha ha…Yeah, that's the way it is. I feel by just doing these, would it be accurate? We all know that it is not so. (WW: Yeah) **So this is just my wish…that is my own wish list of strength. For me, that means, ah, yeah, may be I hope that, I could do it in front of others…I may be a bad guy (WW: Yeah), but in fact, I am not. I am still pondering on this. Is that really me? I may think so but it fact it is not. I am, I am still experiencing…**

43 27:57 WW You focus on the "harmony". Are you telling me that what you had filled in was actually what you want to become (PF: Yeah, Yeah) your wish (PF: exactly, I am thinking about this) (…) OK, actually you are striving for these two things (PF: harmony…), harmony and individualization, (PF: Right) hoping that you could do better on these (PF : Yes).

44 28:24 PF Yeah, just like what I had said, "harmony", less resentment, and less feeling being pressured on by others or being asked to do too many extra things. Felling less happy. That means, **I do wish to have harmony. But**

my actual behaviour probably could not exhibit this, ha…

45 28:41 WW OK, that's not strange, sometimes we will fill in a "wish" image of me (…)

46 28:58 PF That's why I had experienced some kind of struggle when I filled out the questionnaire. I'll ask myself: ^^^is it really (a representation of) me? Sometimes, I will ponder around whether I was referring to "working me" or the "family me". I think there could be a difference^^^ somehow…

47 29:12 WW Sure, sure, sure. One will definitely response differently to different role requirement and in different context. OK, will it induce an expectation at your part for a chance to change? That is, apart from what you just said…?

48 29:30 PF Sure…Filling up this Test is just a beginning. What I feel is that after knowing these, what should be followed is how to …maximize the strength. Because just by looking at it (the Test result) couldn't tell me what is it good for. I hope that after finish reading the book, (…) I could have a better idea of it.

Appendix 6G Initial interview with TW - Supply Chain & Material Mgr. on 7 May 07

3 1:07 WW So, overall, that is, up to this moment, what's your thinking or your understanding? That is, up till now, any questions or anything you want to express is OK. Just tell me. Our conversation this time doesn't mean to be a formal interview. ^^^ be more casual and that's not about any kinds checking of your understanding, right? That's just for deepening our understanding. OK? There will be no right or wrong answers, OK?

4 TW Ah, for me…on this program, I, so far, feel that, ah…it's my impression up to this moment right.

5 WW Exactly. Impression. Right. The feeling here and

			now.
6	1:57	TW	Up to this moment, ah…quite a good approach. Ah…this is…after attending so many …training, this is the first tie that tells us the need to discover one's own strength, the strength. (WW:Yeah), this…this approach, I had flip across the book, well, start looking into the content, and …ah…its elaboration is quite good. Well many people will just pay attention to one's own weakness and not mention one's own strength.
7		WW	So it seems that you had already gone through a great part of it.
8	02:19	TW	Ever since I was a kid, parents frequently ask this sort or question: OK you got a mark of 95 so where the remaining 5 marks had went to? (WW: Ha ha ha ha) So, that is, that this is …a new approach to me. I used to, ah…my personal development that is my career, for my own self, is always, quite focus on my own weakness and how to improve them. I always think about the need to remedies them and think the proper way is to focus the effort to improve them will do good for me. So…I never thought of maximizing my own strength. I can say, that is quite interesting. Because, one's weakness might not be able to eradicated and…ha… created a big pressure on one self, and resulted in not able to excel in everything. It is good to change but failing to do so could create an increasing pressure on one self.
9		WW	An ongoing failure, possibly.
10	3:28	TW	Yeah, yeah, yeah. So…so…I'll reflect after failure and discover, hey, my strength is lying there, so that's really my strength so that make me feel a bit more balanced. That's my feeling. Ha.

Appendix 6H The various HOW Projects

No.	**Task**	**Responsible Dept.**				**Actionable items**	**Leader**	**Date complete**
		ME	**QC**	**MC**	**OM**			

1	WI	*	*	—	*	Turn all (HMC)'s WI to A3 size with visual aids & content review target DDI	TC	Jan
2	Training / Shop Floor Management	*	*	—	*	Focus on Mgt staff training	MYL	Early Nov
		*	*	—	*	Training of shop floor mgt for OM	MYL	7-Dec
		*	*	—	*	Periodical cross audit for lesson learn/benchmarking	PF	Mid Nov
		*	*	—	*	Set up guidelines of incentives	PK	7-Nov
		*	*	—	*	Real time data mgt for (Factory 1)	KC	
3	Automation	*	*	—	*	Automated machine for (product line X)	TC/ PF	
		*	*	—	*	Automated swaging & punching machine in (Factory A)	TC	Jan
		*	*	—	*	Auto labelling machine at (Factory A)	TC / MYL	7-Nov
4	Line Layout	*	—	—	—	Conduct simple line balancing for all existing manual assembly line	TC	Jan
		*	—	—	—	Install DFT for (production line X)	TC	Jan
5	Supplier Development	—	*	*	*		TW	

* the wording in ( ) were not the original wording in order to conceal the identity and business information of the company.

Appendix 6I Meeting with AH on 10 Mar 08

39 WW Yeah…, so, as I had said, two of us, own two different results. You own the business result…(AH: I had my business result) yes, (AH: And, that's cut cost, cutting of 200 headcount for this year) to expend our horizon…(AH: cutting 200 headcount, what kinds of result you could ask for, result, there's nothing wrong with my financial result but I am the only one to need to cut two hundred headcount), so, so you feel…

40		AH	Please tell me what kinds of horizon we could expect, for the whole organization, what kinds of mental benefit I could get? Cutting 200 headcount, at the end of the day only we got to cut 200 headcount. It is easy for this division that is most easy to cut headcount so I got a cutting of 200 headcount.
41	20:00	WW	That…that's a result no one would like to see, however…
42		AH	Ha…so what, what else we could do, please tell me? What financial result? What else…could drive? What else could drive the people mentally secured to do this sort of things? What they will find out is that after doing all sorts of things, one need to bear the consequence.
43		WW	That's , that's, that might not be a …what I meant is …fair, not fair, I dare not to say…
44		AH	I made no mention of fair or not fair (WW: Yeah, I…) I just act as per instruction.
45		WW	That's …OK
46		AH	The question is I don't understand why I am the only one who needs to cut (the headcount)?
47		WW	Ah…I could understand your point
48		AH	Ha, I need to cut 100, done. Then a requested to cut 195, I make it 200… right?
49		WW	Ah…look, ah…two, that's two issues…OK. Surely that's not totally unrelated…OK.
50		AH	So what you could think of, mentally, what else the people could do? What will be in their mind, what could be continued? What could be next…squeezing, right? Telling you …integration, how to integrate, my dear fellow. It's so simple to cut 200, so what integration to do.

Appendix 6J, Team A 1st Meeting

1	(50min 29 sec. +) * 00:00:04	PF	I felt the objective mentioned by (WC) is right. A system could be developed in the course of conducting the project. However, I have some other thinking. For example, you mentioned training up a particular person; I am not busy in with this. For this time, it is a project. In other cases, it would not be feasible to do this from time to time. That is giving a problem to the boss. I heard what you said and I had similar experience when I work with IV telling him, hay, please inform the client so and so,^^^ but he might felt, that's not my duty but someone tell him that it was his job. Then you have a problem, That's

			bad. I am not acquaint with the people^^^he felt that it's the usual practice, ^^^ but I think otherwise. Just like what you had mentioned in the case, in the system, the responsibility is very clear, I just hope that this could be included in our objective. Furthermore, how we could break down the wall between us so that a common goal could be built up.
2	00:01:22	WC	There's no wall.
3	00:01:23	PF	But they felt there is a wall. (Mixed voice of discussion) So should we make them felt there is no wall between us through this project?
4	00:01:32	WC	But they may feel that we are the road block.
5	00:01:34	PF	Ha, so we break down, that is, we could do that, ^^^we are not similar in^^^, I felt that we, as group A could produce the output…
6	00:01:44	WC	That's why we mentioned that all of us need to reach a consensus with the NBD. The consensus is about all of us agreed on…
7	00:01:54	PF	Also, as what you had mentioned, for example, we might not be able to predict where the leaking would happen, we might expect 5%. Would there be a protocol of conducting a validation, the company set a rule that the consent of the senior management need to be obtained if the percentage was beyond a certain level, OK, so^^^
8	00:02:15	WC	Hay, let's be fair, let's be fair. We had already been feeding the engineering with a lot of task and they are handling them one by one. They had never mentioned that they are not going to change. They had not rejected your idea. They are not against…
9	00:02:30	PF	But when reaching the stage of, ah…
10	00:02:31	WC	However, they had made clear that there is something that could not be done and there is something they would do if they could.
11	00:02:35	PF	But in this case, we had become victim, should we make it , if possible, be known by others…

* 50min 29 sec. should be added on top of this time as this is part 2 of the recording of the meeting.

Source: Mtg Team A (b) 16 May 08

Appendix 6K Meeting between Team A & NBD staff

04:59 – 0625

TC : We had been split into two teams, and another team might invite you to a lunch also. We would like to invite NBD together with us to explore in what way, using Project T as a media, in what way, well actually, we don't wanna talk but would like to hear from your side, ah, actually we shouldn't talk, we wanna to listen and we won't criticize any of your opinion and we won't give big responses. We engage in this project alignment and we want to listen to your opinions. Tell us what's your problem, where's the area you thing things go wrong, and where you think should be improved. We want to listen to your opinion and that's why those responsible for the Project T are here. We already had some sharing among us and we wish to listen to your opinion in a more casual environment. So each of you could take turn to express your opinions. Actually Project T is just a media.

NBD staff: What kinds of opinions you want to get as we had, before, had some…

TC : There's no need to concern about the before, we focus on the product alignment..

NBD staff: What you meant is how to have a better product launch.

Source: Voice file: Team A at Restaurant

Appendix 6L Team B Meeting (a)

210	48:01	FZ	Let me speak something. Regarding the reason, I do not understand the inside story and not understand as clear as KY, I feel that, how to say, should we better to more … to see if there are still some other reasons. (KY) may be right, there are such kinds of factors inside. However, will there be any other factors, any other factors that lead to this situation, right? Is that the people below are also like this…(interrupted by KY)
211	48:30	KY	Or as RR said…
212		WW	Please let him finish first
213	48:33	FZ	I feel that might be better, we might be able to pick out some real stuff, right?
214		WW	Understand the reason behind, so what's everybody's view?
215	48:42	KY	Me and PK shared the same opinion, so may be we can take a look at two of them.
216	48:46	KC	So this viewpoint meant…
217	48:48	WW	You had not talked much on your opinions.
218	48:49	KC	Yeah, they had been very clear (mixed voice of discussion)
219	48:53	WW	So that meant you had come to a conclusion.
220	48:56	KC	Come to a conclusion.

221		WW	No need to understand further.
222	48:59	KC	Not no need to understand further? For me, I had not concluded yet. But I feel they had made a conclusion already.
223	49:04	WW	No need to talk with them.
224	49:05	KC	Yeah, that mean no need to write down, for me, I could not made such a conclusion yet, is it really like that, possibly, study it a bit more.
225	49:18	KY	The experience of each person is different. I had in-depth contact with every layer of NBD. That's why I know some secret. Therefore, if you tell me that I made a conclusion and I could tell you that I do had made a conclusion.
226	49:32	KC	So you can write down all the secrets (mixed voices of discussion)
227	49:33	KY	Yeah, I could write them down.
228	49:36	KC	So you can open a blog.

Appendix 6M Message on Admonishing Officer

2	03:04	WW	So this is an overarching goal. Right, in this Program, I need to emphasis that there is not much we can do by ourselves. However, the motto is "help others to help ourselves". That is, to help them so that they could be able to help us in a better way. Right. We should let them aware that we had voiced out loudly already but they still couldn't hear. So get them to tell us how much louder we should call out so that they could hear, what kind of information and at what time we should feed to them etc.. Certainly, our ultimate goal is to strengthen the strength of (HMC) and minimize her weakness. OK, that's almost all in my agenda and I had provided some update on the situation. For the latest situation of the product, you can brief each other subsequently. Prior to the meeting, we had met individually and had allocated a job for everyone. Everyone is the master black best of your signature talent. For your team, ah…KY is activator, RR is "competition", PK is "strategic", FZ as "fairness", KC is "analytical" OK. (…) We actually could adopt a zoom in and zoom out technique. That is, the roles, as each one had taken up, are to minimize… to maximize the opportunity for success. Furthermore, apart from having a master black belt for each talent, we need to allocate one more role which in the ancient time that the emperor will grant the incumbent of that position a

			guarantee of not be punished. OK a quiz for all, what is the name for this position? An official who always by the side of the emperor and act like a devil's advocate, asking the emperor to rethink and rethink before making final decisions.
3	05:08	KY	Admonishing officer.
4		WW	That's it. We need an admonishing officer too.
5	05:11	KY	Should we admonish by threatening suicide.
6		WW	Right. OK. So I had chosen the admonishing officer for each one so that each could take turn to admonish the other who had presented his opinion. The admonishment could take the form of comment, whether you agree or not agree with the one who had just spoken. Certainly, don't try to be a shoeshine boy. It should be a comment based on…
7	05:39	KC	Always state the opposite opinion.
8		WW	Ah, certainly we should not criticize for the sake of criticize. You can give another opinion or to give some highlight.
9	05:49	FZ	What you meant is agree or in line with^^^
10		WW	"Agree –but" is also OK. Or you can agree the most part of it but you had another view on a minor part. That's totally up to you. In that case, please memorize the identity and don't get wrong. KC takes care of PK, PK takes care of FZ, OK, and you should give feedback to what he said. And FZ should take care of RR and RR should in turn take care of KY and KY on KC so on and so forth. Is all right? Good. So in a moment, we will start a round the table discussion and for now, due to time constraint, I had set an agenda for all of you. There are quite a lot of agenda items for today. So what we had just engaged in and had spent considerable amount of time is part one only. However, there is one thing that I would like every one of you to pay special attention. We are here not to serve as the crisis committee of Project T. In the Project T, there may be a lot of issues way up there. There's no need that we cover and resolve all those issues. OK, who had the most updated info on the Project T please proceeded to brief us. I think this job should go to PK, right?

Source: Data /Team B / Mtg Team B (a) 16 May 08

Appendix 6N Presentation to senior management on purpose of Forum

- The Forum is the most important part of the Change For Growth (CFG) Program.
- The key objective is NOT to solve the detail operation problems but to learn about change management.
- The T project is only a "backdrop". The "show" is really about the way of thinking of the Dept heads they reveal in their presentation.
- The key objective of this Forum is to groom the dept heads on strategic thinking – acquiring different ways to view a problem, understanding the interest of different parties at stake, taking a long term vision, customer centred, creative thinking and making the best balanced decisions.
- Please put forward question which could challenge the presenter's biased assumptions, the area which is not customer focused, the area that important aspects had not been fully considered.
- The Panel's comment will be used as learning points in the subsequent coaching sessions after the Forum.

(Slide # 12)

Appendix 6O Message to both Teams on the NBD's consent to work together on Project T

Please, please, let's focus a bit first. I would like to say something. Please. OK. That's Team B, team meeting. I would like to brief you first on the update situation. (…) On this Monday, I had met Mr. R (Director of NBD) & Mr. P(Engineering manager), OK. We met in Hong Kong. They were more than happy to align with your work and they had decided to provide two resource centres for you. This arrangement aim at enabling Project T to become a success. I suppose those who formed the two resources centres were colleagues whom you are already working with. They also hope that not just the Project T could be a success but also in the future, they hoped that NBD could have an even better alignment with all of you. That's why they had also selected several of their staff, whom you should be acquainting with, yes? It was hoped that in the future, they could align with and could also work out things by themselves in the NBD. Hoping that they could be a catalyse to facilitate the two parties to achieve better alignment in the future. OK? So these two teams served as a resource open to all of you. So regarding how you would like to mobilize them or to buy them a lunch etc and get info from them is all up to you. OK. They already know about that. OK. You get it? These two teams, based on the previous meeting their feeling was that the present situation is like that (showing a PPT). The NBD and the Operations are playing tennis over a high wall. We serve a ball to each other without knowing what the other party is doing and wondering what the hell others are working on. So whenever one found the ball does not belong to me, I will throw the ball back to the other side of the wall. (…) OK, they hoped that this Change For Growth program could at least meet one purpose and that is the NBD, could "sloooooowly" pick up the bucks. So it is really about how the Operations could tune in. Certainly, it is a best part of their wish.

Team B Meeting at 0025

Appendix 6P Conclusions and recommendations of Team A (extracted from their PPT presented in Forum)

Conclusion:

[HMC] has comprehensive standard of operational procedure but most people are not following.

- Ineffective training and internal audit
- No monitoring

Roadblocks (Engineering and Operation)

- Lack of team spirit & different goal
- Lack of transparency

(Source: slide #7 of Team A's presentation)

Recommendation:

System

Training of New Product Launch (NPL) procedure

Revised training plan for fitting to various position for both Operation & Engineering team.

NPL System Review regularly

Monitor the effectiveness

Invite manager for forum and share the strength from other repudiated industrial companies.

On Project

Offer rating to each new Project for regular management review.

Monitoring the project management through scrap rate, time and other relevant parameters.

Regular review the CPS and keep momentum of team and project.

Setup a task force for each project.

Team members are accountable for matter from kick off till SOP

On management

A predetermined goal of project should be approved by top management at the beginning stage

Top management step in at some important stage of project. Sign off system is a must.

A company award will be granted to the best launch project.

Total Authority over cross-functional project team.

On documentation

A comprehensive file of project with aid of computer.

Documentation management for easy record retrieve and storage

Project file (should include) : Gantt Chart, Drawing, Design review, Reliability test, Meld progress, CAF

Apply “WORKFLOW” to reduce the approval lead time of document

Appendix 6Q Sample of the Strength Finder Test Report

(This report was on me)

If…(part 3) – for peer level

CONFIDENTIAL

If _____________ will become my direct supervisor after 6 months time, (assuming that he is totally qualified in terms of both experience and technical for the position) I think he could be a more successful leader to lead us and the whole Division if he could improve the following ways of doing/handling/seeing things (can fill in 1-3 items):

From	To	Gap (5 being the widest)				
		1	2	3	4	5
		1	2	3	4	5
		1	2	3	4	5

Chapter 7

Appendix 7.1 Examples of "comrade in adversity" way of group reflection for Team A & B

Team A

128	07:55	TW	Shouldn't the project leader be the gate keeper to ensure whether those procedures had been followed or not.	Share reflection on experience with others
129	08:00	WC	That's the job he should do. Ah, such as, hay, you should do this TC and you should do that WC. That's what I am ^^^currently doing. In that case, ^^^all people.	Share reflection on experience with others
130	08:07	PF	However, [BB] (of NBD) had also mentioned when he take up the role as a project manager, he felt that he had experienced some difficulties when locating people on our side. He raised example of contacting a lot of people but they didn't seemed to understand. That's his feedback.	Have those colleagues (NBD staff) criticise and advise
131	08:20	TC	Will this tell us something about the issue on communication channel in our whole organization which is actually not very clear or quite confusing. Or they may be relatively not very official or not formal.	Take that advice, and reflect

Source: Mtg Team A (b) 2 Jun 08

144	26:39	WC	I want to mention one thing about cross function team. (that had just been discussed) In it, there is certain position called program manager who has an overall authority to obtain the compliance of all of the team members. OK? Whether it be TC, whether it be PF or whether it be WC. All should comply with the directives of this Program Manager. OK. I believe, we can still have our own opinion or we might feel, hey, we shouldn't	Share reflection on experience with others

			do it this way and they might feel uncomfortable with this. **<u>However, we might possibly, need to, and the Operation might also need to change the mindset.</u>**	
146	27:40	TC	That is autocratic, right? The existence of a program manager meant autocratic.	
147	27:44	PF	I felt a bit reserved on this, what you meant is…	Have those colleagues criticise and advise
148	27:46	PF	In case that that he (the program manager) need to purchase a machinery worth 1M, you need to comply to him, because…	Have those colleagues criticise and advise
153	28:09	TC	The question is none of us; actually I could see no one at present in our company could be able to do this…	Share reflection on experience with others
154	28:18	WC	With the competence.	
155	28:18	TC	Right, with such a straight authority. It is such a big powers that I could think of no one except for the big boss who could do this.	Have those colleagues criticise and advise
159	28:44	PF	Because the program manager is currently under the NBD and that meant all team members of the Operations need to obey him. I am a bit hesitating about it.	Have those colleagues criticise and advise
160	28:54	TC	即係成個 infrastructure ，即個我哋嘅 organization infrastructure 都，即係要變啦，我哋可能成個 operation 原本就係 under 呢一個 program manager 下面嘅人囉，嚇。	Have those colleagues criticise and advise
161	29:02	WC	End of the day， program manager 話哂事嘅，end of the day， 因爲佢要咩呢個責任，同埋呢個 project 嘅。	
162	29:10	TC	但係現時嘅 resources 容唔容許做呢樣嘢先？	Have those colleagues criticise and advise

173	29:51	PF	譬如話你正話講緊嘅問題呢，即係話，係一個框架入面佢可以有個權力，譬如話，budget 咗，funding 咗咁多錢做呢個 project，佢可有權去用呢啲錢點去用，但係就唔可以話無限囉我覺得會係。	Take the advice, partially and stating ways to set limit on authority
181	31:20	TC	Concept wise 嚟講係啱嘅。	Take that advice, and reflect
204	33:37	PF	Actually, what WC you mentioned aim at tacking the leadership issue, that sort of thing.	Take that advice, and reflect
205	33:42	WC	That's what I felt is currently lacking.	Take that advice, and reflect
206	33:45	PF	Yeah, that is what I actually agree.	Take that advice, and reflect
214	34:35	WC	Over cross functional team 囉。	Take that advice, and reflect

30	10:47	WC	This is very important. The opposite party (the NBD) should be able to hear our voices. What I felt about the current situation is that they could not really hear our voices and also, would not give an explanation on why they had not accepted our opinions. I think that's a major problem. We might have provided a lot of proposals or given them hints on some potential issues. However, we couldn't see in what way those issues mentioned had been addressed.	Learn from experience Reflect Share that experience with others
31	11:10	TC	The point I really agree with you is that, they should listen to our opinion. But I will choose another word, which is that they should give responses to our opinions, but not necessarily accept them. They could choose to accept or not to accept. Whichever is the case, they should provide response. That's because when you have made a response, that should be followed by a need to explain their cases and tell us whether they feel OK with our ideas or not. The present condition is that ever since we had voiced out an opinion, it seemed just disappeared right away. Ha. That's	Take the advice but modify it. Have those colleagues criticise and advise

			why I agree on this point. They could just give a response and not necessarily need to agree with it. Ha.	
	11:43	PF	That should be a kind of channel to give feedback on the situation.	Take that advice.

Source: Data / Team A / Mtg Team A (b) 2 Jun 08

76	19:16	WC	(Based on the data collected) I could come up with a result and a finding. That is the existing system is not effective. Furthermore, no one is auditing the system (and ask) weather the system need to be adjusted? This had not been done. That shows a system break down. That's what I could share with you	Learn from experience Reflect Share that experience with others
77	19:31	TC	Well that is a finding.	
78	19:32	PF	I am quite agreeing with your mentioning of a point which is about the production of a periodic project progress report for the management's reference. (I feel that) this report should not be compiled by one person but rather, by many people, whoever had encountered with difficulties.	Have those colleagues criticise and advise

Source: Data / Team A / Mtg Team A (b) 2 Jun 08

Team B

115	30:10	KC	(…)My view is that we should take a look at the whole Program and in the process of development. **Will they have a mindset that if the Operation do not get involve earlier so that we could provide feedback, they could feel that they …that all issues about engineering had been identified already, they might felt that they know everything already and there is no need to consult us further. They think they know everything and I had produced it already and that's the job of the Operation to follow the instruction. That's what I heard about the past practice.** As of the allocation of resources, Engineering is purely engineering and everything about them will be handled by them. Because of the lacking of the PE and engineering people, Operation will work according to the instruction of the engineering and that could make us felt that they had become the ruling party. That makes them accustomed not to consult us as they had all the knowhow and knowledge. What they need to do is to tell us. But now, the operation team had been strengthened, the QA team had been strengthened and many feedbacks could be generated by the operation team and the QA and the production (…)	Learn from experience Reflect Share that experience with others
116		WW	That could happen. (…) We should think clearly what sort of result we want to achieve through this activities and this proposal. (…)	
117	32:28	KY	Let me say something about that to see if you agree. Firstly, let's list out all the problems we discovered (…) in the development of the project, up to this moment. (…) All those problems related to their ways of doing things.	Not commenting on KC' s idea but stated another idea.
118		WW	Right, what do all of you think about that? What's your opinion, PK? (mixed voice of discussion)	
119	33:29	KY	Actually, what KC & FZ mentioning is a bit too in-depth. A bit too in-depth and not really the objective. Training, guide line etc. They are a bit in-depth. Our objective should be simpler.	Not taking any advice from others.

39	03:03 + 58' 39" of part 1	KC	Actually, I feel that, to be frank, I had not been heavily involved in the existing process and say, you are very familiar with this, ^^^ shouldn't we take a look at the documents to be sure whether the project had been following, as you had said…(Interrupted by incoming mobile phone call for KC)	KC raises the issue again on the need to check out "what really is happening" while acknowledging KY's "expertise".

KC's speech was interrupted by an incoming call from his mobile.

54	04:15	KC	Actually, I felt that although this procedure (the A&B Co's procedure recommended by KY) is 99%, 100% work, but in the process of implementation, would the design of the form be really fit for managing the existing situation. Referring to what I mentioned about the CAF, why there is no operation or QA team (involving).	KC raise the issue on the "suitability" of the procedures recommended by KY
59	04:44	KY	You listen to what I say first. There is only one form for approval. However, there should be QA photo data sheet attach to it in order to make it a valid document. What I had said the first hand information they provided to you had not been passed to QA and therefore is not legitimate.	Not reflecting on KC's query by talking about the existing procedure instead.
60	05:07	KC	Right, despite the availability of those document, they are just testing report and it doesn't meant that they could approve this, With the testing report and the sign off by QA doesn't meant that …	
61	05:20	KY	They are not responsible for checking that. It should be the QA.	
62	05:23	KC	Right, the QA do the checking.	
63	05:24	KY	That's right.	
64	05:24	KC	The report provided by QA doesn't mean it could be approved.	

65	05:26	KY	So it is passed. Why not approve if (QA) passed? It is not just that, not just…	
66	05:31	KC	So you just take the view of quality. You should also view it from the perspective of manufacturing as you said there are many others who had not seen it.	**KC criticize KY's over focus on the perspective from Quality**
67	05:37	KY	You listen to what I want to say. It shows that you are ignorant on this process. When the component arrived, and the checking was completed and passed, the trial run on line will started. (skip on the procedure mentioned)	**Refuse to reflect.**
68	06:19	KC	But I just don't have that, sir.	
69	06:21	KY	So don't go ahead with production without that. It's not legitimated.	

Appendix 7B Examples of “comrade in adversity” way of group reflection for Team B

39	03:03 + 58’ 39” of part 1	KC	Actually, I feel that, to be frank, I had not been heavily involved in the existing process and say, you are very familiar with this, ^^^ shouldn’t we take a look at the documents to be sure whether the project had been followed, as you had said…	KC raises the issue again on the need to check out “what really is happening” while acknowledging KY’s “expertise”.

KC’s speech was interrupted by an incoming call from his mobile.

54	04:15	KC	Actually, I felt that although this procedure (the A&B Co’s procedure recommended by KY) is 99%, 100% work, but in the process of implementation, would the design of the form be really fit for managing the existing situation. Referring to what I mentioned about the CAF, why there is neither operation nor QA team (being involved).	KC raise the issue on the “suitability” of the procedures recommended by KY

(…)

59	04:44	KY	You listen to what I say first. (…)What I had said the first hand information they provided to you had not been passed to QA and therefore is not legitimate.	Not reflecting on KC’s query by switch to talking about the existing procedure instead.

(…)

66	05:31	KC	So you just view from the standpoint of quality. You should also view it from the perspective of manufacturing as you said there are many others who had not take a look at it.	KC criticize KY’s over focus on the perspective from Quality

67	05:37	KY	You listen to what I want to say. It rightfully showed that you are ignorant on this process. (narration on the procedure)	Refuse to reflect.

Source: Data / Team B / Mtg Team B (b) 16 May 08

Appendix 7C Critical vision by TC of Team A

150 24:08 TC Ah, sorry, I am a bit more practical. I always feel that everyone should be quite clear with their own accountability (…) The main point is about how to ensure a certain person to stick to his own boundary. If all that we need to do is by expressing our wish, that would be impossible as no two persons would be the same, O.K. and no one would know what you are thinking about. (…) I feel that it should be just like a team, with a competing situation just like a relay. If someone lost in his own relay section and make others suffer, that one should be penalized. (…) We can just imagine there are 4 or 5 relay teams in an athletic game. That 4 or 5 teams launch at the same time and we can take a look at which team had a best launch (of new product), which team is most competitive. (…) so as to build up a competing atmosphere.

Appendix 7D Examples of The same CRWB topic being cut up into several expressions

109 27:51 KC So, will there be some more reason behind that lead to the failure to do this? (interrupted by KY)

110 27:53 KY Yeah, the reason behind (…) is the guy at the top (…)

111 28:33 KC But I would like to raise a point which you had mentioned is that the customer, the A&B Company had a close monitoring on the procedure that forced them to follow (…)

112 28:47 KY That's right.

113 28:47 KC The project development process had been guarded by the customer and was closely monitored by them (…) which

explain why the product of A&B Company could follow. However, when switched to another customer, (…), they might not have the same requirement (…) so the requirement was lax. (…)

Appendix 7D Summary of different opinions by Team A

188 32:22 PF TW had talked about different perspectives and hence difficult to align. WC had made similar comment. We (the OpD & the NBD) had different objectives. We had cost objective and time line is their (the NBD) objective and this could lead to some conflict between us. MYL mentioned the focus should be on adjusting the mentality and if we couldn't do this, it will be difficult for us to fully understand the situation or problem of them. TC mentioned how to be more effective in deploying resources, expertise in a faster and better manner as the gap that currently exist lies in the linkage.

Source: Data / Team A / Mtg. Team A (b) 2 Jun 08

Appendix 7E Which proposals had been adopted by the top management in the Forum?

Resolutions adopted by Top Management in Forum	Similar proposal by Team A	Similar proposal by Team B
Sign off system - Proper project monitoring (milestone sign-off / documentation)	Top management step in at some important stage of project sign off system is a must. Monitor the effectiveness	
System audit; Management review	NPL System Review regularly Regular review the CPS and keep momentum of team and project.	
Establish new procedure together with NBD & Operation team.	(This was the overall approach of Team A' proposal)	(This was part of Team B's proposal but their approach was not to establish "new" procedure "with the NBD" but just adopting the old one

		that had been applied in the A&B Co..
Training / Refreshment Training	Training of New Product Launch (NPL) procedure Revised training plan for fitting to various position for both Operation & Engineering team. Invite manager for forum and share the strength from other repute industrial companies.	
Leadership empowerment / Common Goal / Reinforce discipline	A predetermined goal of project should be approved by top management at the beginning stage	
Electronic Data System (Project Management)	Apply "WORKFLOW" to reduce the approval lead time of document A comprehensive file of project with aid of computer. Documentation management for easy record retrieve and storage	
Award & recognition (whole team / task force)	A company award will be granted to the best launch project.	

Appendix 7F Seriousness of Team A towards using questionnaire to improve their action.

47	14:09	WC	I feel that, without a result up to this moment, you do not have a finding; the finding is not ready yet. Don't you understand? You only got two questionnaires back up till now. Is it one or two? Only after we get them back we could make a conclusion and tell ourselves that hay, I see, that's the reason. Until then we could made a prescription. Right?
48	14:29	PF	I think the result won't be too far from our estimation. We should be able to make a close estimation on the key points…
49	14:37	TW	Not necessarily. I can recall (FF's) opinion, there are pretty much surprising stuff in it.
50	14:41	PF	But, but…

51	14:42	TW	That means our research direction would be affected.
52	14:46	PF	I feel we are…
53	14:47	WC	^^^I could put a trust on them. Actually I am quite agreeable with what they said. What they mentioned did make sense, right?

Source: Data / Team A / Mtg Team A (b) 2 Jun 08

Appendix 7G Summary of difference in practice in team meeting between Team A & Team B

		Team A	**Team B**
1	Difference in the dimensions the facts presented	Present two sides of the fact	Present one side of the fact
2	Difference in the authoritativeness in presenting the knowledge	Less authoritative in presenting knowledge	Authoritative in presenting knowledge
3	Difference in the perceived adequacy of knowledge within team to solve the problem	Felt need to obtain more knowledge	Felt owned adequate knowledge already.
4	Difference in the way the knowledge were presented	Knowledge shared based more on facts	Knowledge shared based more on comments
5	Difference in the application of past experience	Re-interpretations of past experience.	Reinforcement of past experiences
6	Difference in the objectives of sharing	More for understanding and clarifying	More for fixing blames and complaining.
7	Difference in the perceived openness of the problem	More on possibilities	More on impossibilities
8	Difference in the perceived context which the problem was embedded.	Context in which the problem embedded perceived as changeable	Context in which the problem embedded perceived as almost unchangeable
9	Difference on the view that "what else could be done"	We need to do differently together	We had done our part
10	Difference in the preconceptions on cause of the problem (1)	Cause of problem – adaptation to change of requirements	Cause of problem – Laziness and lack of commitment of the senior management
11	Difference in the perceived cause of problem (2)	Cause of problem – "Ours"(effective system and procedure not agreed upon)	Cause of problem – "Theirs" (NBD not comply to "good" procedure)
12	Difference in the perceived meaning of solving the problem	Solving the problem was meaningful	Solving the problem was meaningful but meaningless to ask us to solve it.

13	Difference in the perceived solution	Relative – Need to work out the best solution with NBD	Absolute – The solution is already there
14	Difference in the approach to handle questioning by others	More open and receptive attitude towards others questioning	More close and defensive attitude towards others questioning
15	Difference in the step taken to improve original action	Take active improvement action	Take cosmetic improvement action.
16	Difference in the perceived locus of power to solve the problem	Emphasising any one person or department with adequate support could solve the problem	Emphasizing the role of QA in solving the problem.

Appendix 7H Dialogue in meeting between Heads of OpD & NBD

18	04:36	PC	Ok, since the previous meeting, I had asked them (his subordinates) to collect those relevant project information and create those sign off (documents), ah ah to create those documents on customer review, and those report on pilot run whether it be from QA or from customer…
19	05:16	WW	To reassemble all the relevant documents first.
20	05:17	PC	Yeah, up to this moment, we had compile those file as that is what I planned to do since last year and had prepared a proposal on the product development and system improvement of NBD. After several meeting on that, some agreement had been reached regarding what kinds of document and mile stone need to be followed. Besides, there were minutes on meetings and those final documents that had been agreed to re-generate. There is actually a list on that. All those information related to Project T had also been…

Meeting between AH & PC, 11 Apr 08

Appendix 7I Dialogue in 2nd meeting of Team B with NBD staff present.

34	28:45	NBD staff	May I ask a question?
35	28:48	KY	Sure
36	28:48	NBD staff	If your process was followed, could you give estimation on the total time needed? Just an estimation.
37	29:00	KY	I cannot make estimation on that.
38	29:01	NBD Staff	I think it could take quite a long duration.

39	29:02	KY	It’s hard to estimation from the viewpoint of ^^^
40	29:04	NBD Staff	I could imagine that it will take a very long duration, may be two or three years according to the flow.
41	29:08	KY	Ah…but we had succeeded on it before.
42	29:10	NBD staff	Half year?
43	29:!1	KY	Ah…I don’t know how much time the customer will provide to us. We had done this before in [Factory A]
44	29:20	NBD staff	For how long when it was applied in [Factory A]? I meant doing all of these, from project launch or NPF to mass (production).
45	29:28	NBD staff	It should take around a year’s time for such an important task. I think it should take more (time) than that, should be much more (time) than that.

Source: Data / Team B / Team B 30 May 08 at Mtg Room

Appendix 7J Examples of Team A’s openness to criticize other’s concept

106	06:23	TW	Team spirit. Lack of team spirit.
107	06:26	PF	No trust. That’s what you had just mentioned.
108	06:28	WC	No trust?
109	06:38	MYL	No team···not sure about what is it. Hold on^^^ OK, that is lack of trust. Or rather, lack of team spirit? Right? Hold on, spirit or trust. If there is no trust there will certainly be a lack of spirit.
110	06:55	?	Both are nonexistent.
111	06:56	MYL	No (team) spirit will certainly be a lack of trust. You agree with it (…)

(Team A meeting 30 May 08)

Appendix 7K Team A dialogue on to need to understand more in 2nd meeting.

47	14:09	WC	I feel that, without a result up to this moment, you do not have a finding; the finding is not ready yet. Don’t you understand? You had only got two questionnaires back up till now. Is it one or two? Only after we get them back we could make a conclusion and tell

			ourselves that hay, I see, that's the reason. Until then we could made a prescription. Right?
48	14:29	PF	I think the result won't be too far from our estimation. We should be able to make a close estimation on the key points…
49	14:37	TW	Not necessarily. I can recall (FF' s) opinion, there are pretty much surprising stuff in it.
50	14:41	PF	But, but…
51	14:42	TW	That means our research direction would be affected.
52	14:46	PF	I feel we are…
53	14:47	WC	^^^I could put a trust on them. Actually I am quite agreeable with what they said. What they mentioned did make sense, right?

Source: Data / Team A / Mtg Team A (b) 2 Jun 08

Appendix 7L Example of Team A's more description on facts

22	18:54	WC	Something about the design and the specification. Regarding the CPK, it requires 1.3321 and they change the draft in order to make its performance reach 1.33. OK. We made a query on them about the measurement for the tooling they are going to use for mass production. They told me that they will use the measurement of the original design. But those original measurement had never been conducted a study on them before and not sure whether they would be OK or not. (…) When the product put on mass production, a problem will arise. That's why we have a conflict and why we have a big concern on it.

Source: Data / Team A / Team A (a) 16 May 08

Appendix 7M team A's discussion on possibilities in 1st team meeting

25	21:17	TW	They had frozen the design which meant that I could not be changed further. No matter whether you had provided very solid facts, just like the effect you mentioned, so many lost, that we can probably able to make an estimation, and which

also meant that…

26	21:33	WC	Which also meant that scrap rate will be continued…
27	21:36	TW	That lost, despite presenting the value to the management could not be changed, is that right?
(…)			
35	25:01	WC	The biggest concern is about the angle. As this angle had been patented. What had been produced could meet the spec. Now the design and the client and the customer agreed to loosen the angle and change it to plus or minus 0.5 angle degree to 61 degree.
36		TC	That meant it could be changed.
37	25:34	WC	Had enlarged already.
38	25:35	TW	What I meant is the design could be adjusted.
39	25:37	PF	Only the spec. Not on the design.
40	25:39	WC	The spec had been adjusted as a result of our complaining. We really had put in a lot of effort but still couldn't make it. And the customers see that it really could not be done. So we had been benefited from that.

Appendix 7N Examples of Team A which perceived the cause of problem as need to adapt to change

138	49:32	WC	As I had just mentioned, everyone are using a new method to handle this project. In the past, Engineering Department did all the jobs; put the finalized product on table for launching. They had never tried working together with us in the design stage. OK, so the procedure possibly had not been formally documented. The role of each party might not be very clear and who needed to do what might not be clear. So conflict and argument will happen.

Source: Data / Team A / Mtg Team A (b) 16 May 08 (1)

Appendix 7O Examples of Team B which perceive the cause of problem as laziness and senior management

186 43:34 KY Actually (FZ), what I said, was through many^^^. That's because I had some good friends in NBD. (…).

(…)

188 44:10 KY (…)When I dine with them and they told me something. Which is about "it's who and who told me not to do this", "It is who and who asked me not to do that". So what? What is this? That's top down. It shows that they didn't care to walk their talk. (…)

Source: Data/ Team B/ Mtg Team B (a) 16 May 08

225 49:18 KY Everyone had his own experience. I had close encounter with the NBD and with each layer. That's why I could get hold of some secret. (…)

Source: Data/ Team B/ Mtg Team B (a) 16 May 08

Appendix 7P Full content of KC on his opinion towards the nature of problem

115 30:10 KC (…)My view is that we should take a look at the whole Program and in the process of development. Will they have a mindset that if the Operation do not get involve earlier so that we could provide feedback, they could feel that they …that they all issues about engineering had been identified already, they might felt that they know everything already and there is no need to consult us further. They think they know everything and I had produced it already and that's the job of the Operation to follow the instruction. That's what I heard about the past practice. As of the allocation of resources, Engineering is purely engineering and everything about them will be handled by them. Because of the lacking of the PE and engineering people, Operation will work according to the instruction of the engineering and that could make us felt that they had become the ruling party. That makes them accustomed not to consult us as they had all the knowhow and knowledge. What they need to do is to tell us. But now, the operation team had been strengthened, the QA team had been strengthened and many feedbacks could be

<u>generated by the operation team and the QA and the production</u> (…)

Source: Data/ Team B/ Mtg Team B (a) 16 May 08

Appendix 7Q Team A's agreement on the need for a system in place.

242	42:48 + 50min 29 sec of part A	MYL	(…) What I feel is that the system or the process of the product, what steps need to be followed, may be we have this sort of things already. In that case how could it be adhered to it? Or it might be that the existing one is not good enough. In that case the question is how to make it perfect, how could we make it even better and then stick to this subsequently, Yeah, so, that's pretty what we should do.
243		WW	Your comment please, WC.
244	45:04	WC	I agree with this (…)
245		WW	PF what's your suggestion on the solution PF?
246	46:03	PF	I felt there must be a very clear procedure, that is a must. (…)
247		WW	Your comment on PF please TC ◦
248	46:51	TC	My comment is that it is right. A system must exist. (…)
249	47:05	?	Its existence is a must.

Source: Data / Team A / Mtg Team A (b) 16 May 08

Appendix 7R Example showing Team A's more open and receptive attitude towards others questioning

120	23:03	MY	When we talked about the project appraisal, we mentioned that after doing this, we should not emphasis that a penalty must be imposed in order to avoid some reaction or some hard feelings…
121	23:18	TW	Could we just follow the terms you applied?
122	23:19	?	Sure.
123	23:19	TW	Or should we call it a kind of regulations so on and so forth?
124	23:23	WC	Sort of this kind.

125 23:25 TC	At least we could identify whether the performance is a successful project as no body could tell you about this under the current practice. People just feel that I had successfully made a launch, and is now under production and that already represent …
126 23:35 TW	Only until doing project review we could know about this.
127 23:36 PF	But is it actually a project review?
128 23:38 TW	Yep, I think this is a project review already.

Appendix 7S Examples of Team B's more close and defensive attitude towards others questioning

219	48:53	KC	What you said mean that you had already drawn a conclusion on the cause (of the problem of NBD's non compliance to procedure)
220	48:56	KC	That means, actually a conclusion had been drawn.
221		WW	No need to further understand?
222	48:59	KC	Not no need to understand. I had not drawn a conclusion yet. But I feel that they had drawn a conclusion already.
223	49:04	WW	No need to ^^^ talk
224	49:05	KC	Yeah, in that case there's no need to write anything. For myself, I had not made a conclusion yet. Will it be the case as had been mentioned, probably? But should study further.
225	49:18	KY	The experience of each person is different. I had a close contact with the NBD on every level, therefore I know some secret. **If you said I had already drawn a conclusion I can tell you I had drawn a conclusion.**
226	49:32	KC	So you can write up all the secrets (Mixed voices of discussion)
227	49:33	KY	Yeah, I can write them up.
228	49:36	KC	Open a blog then.

Mtg Team B (a) 16 May 08

Appendix 7T Example of Team B's emphasizing the role of QA in solving the problem

74	43:32	KY	We together with RR are very willing to train up everybody as an expert, he is (referring to RR) is an expert.
75	43:47	NBD staff	**One expert leading the whole world!**
76	43:49	KY	He had been successfully getting the approval of (name of a customer). He is really very good in it, building up all the data and all the things.
77	43:59	NBD staff	Absolutely.
78	44:02	KY	No, no. We sit here to think of ways to sort out things. In the past days (…) Regarding the time factors, you really had some worries. However, the pressure on QA, in the past days when I was there, was extremely great. The pressure on QA was very big indeed.
79	44:30	NBD Staff	I realize that.
80	44:31	KY	And most amazing was that everything was chased after by QA. (They will asked) Hay, hay, you seemed to forget doing this and you had forgotten to do that. Give me a deadline. So and so. All these sorts of things, and the documentations which need a lot of manpower were all completed by the QA. You NBD could really put your mind at ease if RR volunteered doing all this.

Appendix 7U Example showing Team B's emphasizing the role of QA in solving the problem

140	36:14	KY	Furthermore, it is the A&B who monitored us. Not monitor by ourselves. They come over everyday (…) (They will ask the NBD) Did the QA know what your are doing, (…) The customer was powerful. (…) (They will asked the NBD)Had you done this already? How could the QA know what you are doing if you just keep your door shut?

Source: Data / Mtg Team B (a) 16 May 08

80	21:45	KY	Ever since the time when I was in the position (as QA Mgr.), when RR is in position, it was always the QA to …hay, had you completed your own duty? ^^^ If you did not chase after them (the NBD), they would do just like what they are doing now, no DFMEA, no project launch meeting, and by the time they (the new project) were made public, everything had been finalized, is that right?

Source: Data / Mtg Team B (a) 16 May 08

Appendix 7V Example showing "P" emerged in Team A

112	38:31	WC	For the objective, there should have a compromise and let's be realistic, that could do little about it at our level. That must be led by senior management with the authority and could exert control on the Operation, on the NBD. Once the decision was made, everyone could follow and that's an autocratic method. (…)
113	39:17	TW	**But the senior management might not wish to be like this. They would like you people at our level could handle it among yourselves.**
114	39:23	WC	I don't feel that way. That is not feasible. I had once engaged in an exercise which was that three guys were selected, say A, B & C and each being assigned the task of applying an autocratic approach , democratic approach and laissez-faire approach to lead the respective to complete a task such as use the straw to construct a building or to play a game which made everyone confused(…)
115	41:11	TW	The last group which …
116	41:13	WC	Yeah, in the group which the laissez-fair approach adopted, someone will stand up and will take the lead and tell others what to do.
117	41:18	WC	That's what one could see how people behave.
118	41:21	TW	So what you feel is that we had adopt an autocratic approach …(mixed voices of discussion)

Source: Data / Team A / Mtg Team A (a) 16 May 08

Appendix 7W Example on Team B's conclusion on action steps which could shown their logic of thinking.

16	01:12 + 58min 39 sec of Part I	KY	What I suggest is that, which I had mentioned once, that PK pick out all their existing problems, or defect list (…) and then we can examine the nature of those problems. Hay, plastic bleeding? Plastic bleeding was due to the bad super sonic treatment. Why problem with the super sonic, ah, that's a problem relating to the tooling. So why there is a problem with the tooling? (Because) There is a problem in the design. So why there is a problem? Because the DFMEA was not in-place. So the first step is that PK provides some thing that could represent,…represent what?
17	01:55	PK	Don't worry, had talk about it already. Just follow this.
18	01:57		But there is only one (solution)
19	01:59	PK	Not enough?
(…)			
29	02:24	PK	OK, OK, fine for me. I will provide the problem and the cost on^^^.
(…)			
35	02:43	KY	There are a few options, for example, you can ask the opposite party to have a commitment by exerting pressure on them. Secondly, DFMEA must be in place.

Source: Data / Team B / Mtg Team B (b) 16 May 08

Appendix 7X Examples showing Team B's intention of "pull back" the NBD

49	11:26	KY	(…) Let's pick out all the problems, that is , what they should do in the future when conducting a project, all the lesson learnt(…) List all the problem, pick them out in the hope that they could remedied it in the future(…)
54	13:45	KY	(…) Let's pick out all of their problems, list them out. Think in advance what they won't be able to learnt in the future (…)
132	35:17	KY	(…) Let's try to find out the entire problem on the way they work and think of methods to pull them back towards the system.

182	42:06	KY	Why? You don’t know why. Ah…don’t know what kind of method could pull them (the NBD) back.

Appendix Cases on critical vision found

Team A

138	00:20:16	TW	I felt that should be to produce a perfect product through continuous interaction with the Operations from the design stage so as to fine tune the design continuously.
142	00:20:49	WC	My view is that, they (the NBD) are not the ultimate owner on how to design and develop the product. OK. So our roles are to assist (…) to provide information. They can decide to take it or not but they should address those fundamental problems. (…) At the end of the day, the top management should make a decision to approve and to finalize the ultimate decision.
146	00:22:29	MYL	**(…)If when things had not yet been proved and an argument had already been developed, that will generate a roadblock to the whole project. That’s why the most important thing is to have an alignment on the attitude between all parties.**
148	00:23:41	PF	(…) each party should be clear about their own accountability and what they need to help others to accomplish (…)
149		WW	唔，OK， TC。
150	00:24:08	TC	Ah, sorry, I am a bit more practical. I always feel that everyone should be quite clear with their own accountability (…) The main point is about how to ensure a certain person to stick to his own boundary. If all that we need to do is by expressing our wish, that would be impossible as no two person would be the same, O.K. and no one would know what you are thinking about. (…) I feel that it should be just like a team, with a competing situation just like a relay. If someone lost in his own relay section and make others suffer, that one should be

penalized. (…) We can just imagine there are 4 or 5 relay teams in an athletic game. That 4 or 5 teams launch at the same time and we can take a look at which team had a best launch (of new product), which team is most competitive. (…) so as to build up a competing atmosphere.

Appendix 8A

Related issues on AL	Issues discovered in Cycle 1 that need to be addressed	How I design this activity in Cycle 2 in ways that could address the issues arose in Cycle 1		Result discovered in Cycle 2	Conclusions & recommendations
		Programmed knowledge supplied by me			
L	The "L" & action not closely related.	3 two hours work- shops + Change mgt as theme & Kotter's 8 Steps Model	The 8 steps disseminated were coupled with exercise related to the making actual change in HMC	The approach of Team A indicated their practice of leading the change for the NBD alignment in new product launch was akin to the 8 Steps Model	A carefully selected "L" could helps to cater the participants' expectation on learning something "new" and make evaluation on it at the end of the program more solid. In this case, Change Management could be a "win-win-win"(the participants, the program organizer and the sponsoring organization) topic for learning through AL.
The P	Want to learnt something new and practical	Strength Finder Test & the book – Now Discover Your Strength	Test result and the explanation on the 32 talents were new and practical as these knowledge related to individual.	TW expressed the approach was new and able to give him insight. For me, the Test result provided me a good framework to "fit-in" the 180 degree feedback and hence make the knowledge generated from the 180 degree feedback more practical as it was related to individual participants.	Knowledge about oneself and the perceptions of others seemed to be a "practical" knowledge. It seemed to match well with the AL's notion of learning from reflection on one's own action.
	Want to learnt something new and practical	3 two hours work- shops+ Change mgt as theme & Kotter's 8 Steps	Many of the participants were new and they wanted to introduce change to the organization. This could meet their practical need.	The approach of Team A indicated their practice of leading the change for the NBD alignment in new product launch was akin to the 8 Steps Model	"L" – Helps to cater the participants' expectation on learning something "new" and make evaluation on it at the end of the program. Change Management could be a

		Model			good topic for learning through AL.
	No "recognized ignorance" raised related to solving the problem	3 two hours work- shops+ Change mgt as theme & Kotter's 8 Steps Model		Several Team B members indicated little "recognized ignorance" towards the Project T. The Workshop and 8 Steps Model had little influence on their problem solving approach.	
Real problem	Members as part of the problem	Strength Finder Test & the book – Now Discover Your Strength	Create awareness of ones talent and the need to manage around the roadblocks associated with the talents.	Stimulated the support of participants' supervisor and helpful for setting up learning objective for each of the participants Personal styles continue to be part of the problem (e.g. dominating, prejudice, etc.), and personal agenda (e.g. interest in advancing the influence of one function etc.) created great impact on the AL process.	Need to pay greater attention in the selection of participants. However, that will be difficult as some behaviour won't be surfaced not until the set meeting. Facilitator's intervention won't be appropriate at that time. Perhaps it could be stated explicitly as a "rule of the game" at the very beginning and get the consent of everybody. But it requires careful handling so as not to delimiting the scope of problem solving. With hindsight, the individual interview had actually revealed many of the attributes the team members revealed in the set meeting (e.g. strong opinion towards the NBD, dominating personality etc.) It could be served as a valuable input for setting up the "rule of the game".

	Feel oneself doing extra and benefit the Company only	Strength Finder Test & the book – Now Discover Your Strength	The action taken not only could benefit organization but could serve as a "stage" for one to strengthen the talent and remove the roadblocks.	No expression by participants on feeling of doing extra and benefit the Company. (Except for AH who is not the participant)	Some kinds of personal assessment could enhance a feeling that attention had been paid to individual needs. Departing from one's strength seemed to be an effective approach to adopt a positive attitude towards the program.
"Q'ing" each other	Difficult to induce critical reflective working behaviour (CRWB)	Strength Finder Test & the book – Now Discover Your Strength	Inviting individual to rethink one's action and compare them to the objective of strengthening one's talent and minimizing the roadblocks could induce critical self reflection.	CRWB had been observed in both teams with Team A demonstrated much higher in number.	It is hard to say for sure whether the Test could serve as a tool to promote the "Q'ing" each other.
	Difficult to induce critical reflective working behaviour	Personal Inter-view with 180 degree feedback provided	Understand whether participants would incline to improve oneself through critical self reflection.	Stimulated critical self reflection in interview.	Same as above. However, it served as a good "checklist" for the participants to compare them with the feedbacks they received from the 180 Degree Feedback.
Facilitator	Lacking "tools" & authority to facilitate critical self reflective behaviours	Strength Finder Test & the book – Now Discover Your Strength	Same as above + agreed personal improvement objective.	Successfully stimulated dialogue on critical self reflection.	Same as above.
	Lacking "tools" & authority to facilitate critical self reflective	Personal Inter-view	The preliminary understanding on individual objective could facilitate individual coaching by making reference to them.	Successfully stimulated dialogue on critical self reflection.	By coupling with the personal learning objective and the 180 degree feedback, more solid objective – to produce action plan could be carried out. All these had enabled my lead in of some critical

	behaviours				questioning.
	Lacking “tools” & authority to facilitate critical self reflective behaviours	3 two hours work- shops + Change mgt as theme & Kotter’s 8 Steps Model	The 8 Steps will be referred to by me in the subsequent meetings and briefing to senior management.	Team A had reflected on the 8 steps and had employed it in their Project T	A “theme” of facilitation and a “logic” of asking the participants to engage in a bigger challenge which were beyond their jurisdiction could be raised. This was not without difficulties as indicated by AH’s resistance at the beginning. However, the 8 step model gave me a good back-up on the reason.
Careful selection of participants	Nomination by department heads shrank size of the selection pool.	Strength Finder Test & the book – Now Discover Your Strength	Test result help to allocating people to Team A & B	Hard to say effective or not as it was the participants’ supervisor who made the final decision on the allocation. But it provide an additional reference to him and had increased his involvement in the Program	As there was no selection process at the beginning of the program, the allocation of participants to the two teams could not make big changes. Consideration on personality had been made by the immediate supervisor which should be the most reliable criteria.
Implement solution	Feel one doing extra and benefit the Company only and the top management might not have the right “mindset” to make the implementation a success.	The Workshops & the H.O.W. projects Top management explain to all on the important role of OpD. Personal Inter-view	The participants had the chances to share the view and intention to make a “bigger win” and aware their action was essential for solving their existing and future problems. Show that the Program also intended to benefit the individual.	AH's question “what’s the benefit for me?” and PK’ notion “we had already take one step forward” (1st Mtg Pt B, #77) indicated that some still had a feeling of doing something extra and out o their scope.	The seriousness of Team A and the determination of Team B in pushing forward their A&B Company procedure indicated that the participants were quite serious toward the implementation issue. Although it was hard to say for sure which of the three arrangements had contributed to this result, the introduction of these arrangements were new to Cycle 2 and had created a much better result.
	Act within	Change mgt as	Creation of vision as	Hard to determine the connection	This research showed that whether

	comfort zone. Choose a "sure win" course of action.	theme & Kotter's 8 Steps Model Top management explain to all on the openness of the top management towards the solution proposed.	spelled out in Step 3 help to build up a shared vision which encourage everyone to try out new course of action.	as only Team A had made a slight mentioning on the 8 Steps Model. However, Team A had made many moves that aligned with the 8 Steps and had indicated lots of thinking "out of the box" behaviours. Some members of Team B had also asked some 'fresh questions". However, due to the dominance of some members, a "sure win" course of action (as described by other members) had been chosen.	one choose to act within comfort zone or a group choose a "sure-win" course of action depended very much on the group dynamic.
Take improved action	The action of not to take any action	+ Change mgt as theme & Kotter's 8 Steps Model	Step 5 of Kotter' Model specified: Get rid of obstacles to change, Change systems or structures that seriously undermine the vision, Encourage risk taking and non-traditional ideas, activities, and actions	Obviously, Team A had chosen to take bold action. For Team B, although they choose to put forward the A&B Company's procedure as a solution, the "true problem" they felt was the problem of the NBD staff and management and they had proposed nothing to address it. The reason they held was almost the same as what MY in IMBA program had mentioned. It is the action of not to take action.	It seemed that Cycle 2 had still filed to prevent the "action of not to take action" from happening. The interim action taken by MY (shrink the scope of the project) and the cosmetic action taken by Team B (lunch with NBD for fun) could be regarded as an improved action but not the action the participants really thought as effective. Whether these experience could still be turned into meaningful learning experience need to be explored by other researches.
Clear objective for the program	Objective of learning not clear.	Change mgt as theme & Kotter's 8 Steps Model	Same as above	Hard to determine the connection as only Team A had made a slight mentioning on the 8 Steps Model.	

	Members not “embrace” challenge	Change mgt as theme & Kotter’s 8 Steps Model	The Workshop + the HOW Project could install a group norm of making change and “embrace” challenge.	Hard to determine as Team A exhibited the consideration of a bigger and deeper scope of organizational change then that of Team B.	The expression of the Director of OpD – AH did indicate the “fatigue” factor created by the H.O.W. project. A direct venture into a “problem” project seemed to be more desirable and make the whole cycle much shorter. That means, the “small wins” mentioned in Kotter’s 8 step process could be skipped or replaced by some much simpler project.
Group dynamics properly managed	Dropping out of members and lack of group meetings lowered moral.	Change mgt as theme & Kotter’s 8 Steps Model	The splitting up of 3 two-hours sessions with Group Coaching running in-between enable frequent meetings between the members that could keep the “stove hot”.		

Appendix 8B

More favourable for AL process	Less favourable for AL process
Present two sides of the fact	Present one side of the fact
Less authoritative in presenting knowledge	Authoritative in presenting knowledge
Felt need to obtain more knowledge	Felt owned adequate knowledge already.
More for understanding and clarifying	More for fixing blames and complaining.
More on possibilities	More on impossibilities
Context in which the problem embedded perceived as changeable	Context in which the problem embedded perceived as almost unchangeable
We need to do differently together	We had done our part
Cause of problem – adaptation to change of requirements	Cause of problem – Laziness and lack of commitment of the senior management
Cause of problem – "Ours"	Cause of problem – "Theirs"
Solving the problem was meaningful	Solving the problem was meaningful but meaningless to ask us to solve it.
Relative – Need to work out the best solution with other parties at stake	Absolute – The solution is already there
More open and receptive attitude towards others questioning	More close and defensive attitude towards others questioning
Take active improvement action	Take cosmetic improvement action.
Not emphasizing the superiority of any one specific department in solving the problem	Emphasizing the superior role of a specific department which one or several set members belongs in solving the problem.

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