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Action Learning: Developing soft skills for MBA’s

Introduction
The Masters in Business Administration (MBA) programme has been the most recognised of qualifications for aspiring middle to senior managers and the most common of business School postgraduate provision. However it is increasingly becoming criticised as being remote from the needs of the business and becoming increasingly overly theoretical in its content (Schlegelmilch & Thomas, 2011).

The MBA
Hilgert (1995) states that MBA programs focus on the development of managers from specialist to a more integrated generalist perspective. This supports the common view that MBA programs provide a broader understanding of the business context which allows individuals with the qualification to perform better than those who do not hold an MBA degree (Mihail and Elefterie, 2006; Baruch and Peiperi, 2000).

European and American MBA programmes tend to have very similar structures and content, with an emphasis placed on the functional elements of business such as marketing, accounting, economics, finance and strategy (Matten and Moon 2004; Christensen, Peirce Hartman, Hoffman & Carrier, 2007).

The development of soft skills
Historically, universities in general have given little attention to the “learning by doing” philosophies and the attendant benefits gained, such as the
development of soft and interpersonal skills through those approaches (Datar et al., 2010; Rubin & Dierdorff, 2009, 2011) preferring to place emphasis on traditional lecturing and information giving approaches such as the formal lecture, seminars and the use case studies. Datar et al (2010): reported that MBAs in general require softer skills, such as self-awareness and the capacity for introspection and empathy. They also found MBAs lacking in critical and creative thinking, as well as communication skills. "These skills lie much more on the 'doing' side of the scale than the 'knowing' side," (Datar et al., 2011:2).

Mintzberg (2004:6) contended that "conventional MBA programs train the wrong people in the wrong ways with the wrong consequences’. Such teaching strategies locate the learner as a ‘passive participant’. However, there is increasing dissatisfaction with these traditional approaches with stakeholders increasingly expecting more than simply the acquisition of knowledge. In a global survey by a London-based firm, 5,000 MBA recruiters skills, were among the most highly valued by prospective employers (Loman, 2011 cited in Ingols and Shapiro, 2014:413). Hilgert (1995), Johnson et al,(1988) and McGurk (2009) offer both historical and contemporary views that encapsulates the dissatisfaction with MBA’s by stating that broadening the outcomes to include softer skills is an expectation over and above simply the acquisition of the usual learning outcomes. These outcomes have tended to focus on the demonstration of knowledge, such as the ability to analyse data, to be able to critically evaluate information, deal effectively with an increasingly changing environment make effective decisions, the overall focus being on the ‘harder’ aspects of professional and management learning, as opposed to be ‘softer skills’ which involve an understanding of self and others.
Soft skills are the personal attribute that an individual has that enhance that individual's interactions, job performance and ultimately their career prospects (Robbins and Hunsaker, 2011 and Whetten and Cameron, 2011). Unlike hard skills, which are invariably about a person's ability to perform a certain type of task or activity, soft skills are interpersonal and broadly applicable. Soft skills are usually described by using terms often associated with personality traits. In recognising this issue, some universities have responded by rethinking the way management education is delivered, choosing to adopt new and innovative ways that challenge the historically accepted didactic approaches. In their article Ingols and Shapiro (2014:413) discuss how in their School of Management at Simmons College in Boston, USA, they began assessing both the "hard skills" (such as accounting, finance, and strategy) and the "soft skills" (such as leadership, teamwork, and ethics) of their MBA Program. As a consequence, skills and competency development have emerged as major issues in management education, particularly in areas of management practice such as Human Resource Management (HRM) and more recently both entrepreneurship and innovation (Kuratko, 2009). One such way is the inclusion of learning approaches that place emphasis on 'experiential learning' or 'learning by doing'. This approach often includes the utilisation of action learning as the dominant learning paradigm (Frank, 1996; Johnson and Spicer, 2006). Schlegelmilch and Thomas (2011) conclude that the MBA would survive over the next ten years, but it would have to undergo several changes in the way it was delivered and in the syllabus. These changes would relate specifically to the style and mode of delivery, with emphasis placed
upon inclusion and flexibility of delivery to cope with the changing patterns and demands of recruiters.

Datar et al. (2011: 7) recommend business schools focus on three things to enable them to better develop effective leaders. First, re-evaluate what is being taught; secondly, adapt the curriculum to focus on the skills and personal attributes of effective leadership and finally, enable students develop the values and beliefs that form managers' professional identities and world view.

This paper aims to address the concerns outlined above by considering the use of action learning on a part time MBA programme in a University Business School. The University is a public, post 1992 university located in the north of England. It has approximately 24,000 students, both national and international enrolled on a variety of differing courses.

The paper commences by outlining a brief introduction to the differing elements of the O'Hara model, which include: self-awareness; self-management of learning; learning with and through others and learning to learn. It then considers some of the salient points regarding action learning, moving onto discuss the context of this module and data collection. Finally the paper both discusses and analyses the findings.

**Action Learning**

Action learning is in its simplest form, is an experience based approach to learning that utilises Revan’s (1982) premise that managers learn most effectively with, and from, other managers whilst dealing with the real world
complexity of organisational life. It has long been recognised as amongst the
most effective means of gaining professional education and training (Zuber-
Skerritt (2002). Revans (1982) is credited with being the founder of action
learning suggested it was about “teaching a little and learning a lot” (Revans,
1982). Trehan and Pedlar (2011) suggest action learning promotes deeper
critical thinking, within a framework of collective as well as individual
reflection. Weinstein (1995:32) described the essence of action learning as a
method of learning by asking questions of each other after an experience has
taken place, reflection being the vehicle for learning. Action learning is carried
out in action learning sets comprising of between 6-8 people. Johnson and
Spicer (2006:41) noted that:

The philosophy of action learning is not solely about acquiring
knowledge or a skill by reading a book or listening to a lecture.
Learning is about doing something differently, or behaving
differently, about applying and making use of a skill or new
knowledge, about thinking differently, or having a new set of values
and beliefs

Smith (2001:36) spoke of experience in general terms, saying that
‘experience itself is a very slippery teacher’ acknowledging the inherent
difficulties in learning from experience, adding that action learning was an
approach that seeks to derive learning and knowledge from experience,
ensuring replicable behaviour in both similar and, indeed, differing contexts.
This view is supported by Johnson and Spicer (2006:40) who maintained that
action leaning has the ‘potential for creating individual and organisational benefits that extend well beyond those normally achieved through academic programs’. The voluntary participants in the group or ‘set’ learn with and from one another and take forward an important issue with support of the other members of the set. The collaborative process, which recognises each set member’s social context, promotes the premise that managers learn most effectively with, and from, other managers whilst dealing with the real world complexity of organisational life. The effectiveness of action learning, it has been suggested, lies in its resonances with the major theories of adult learning. As Marquardt and Waddill (2004:199) argue:

> The power and success of learning that occurs within the action learning process can be attributed to the fact that it incorporates so many different and disparate theories of learning

They examine the links with what they describe as five schools of adult learning – cognitivism, behaviourism, humanism, social learning theory and constructivism – and conclude that action learning “serves as a bridge between the different adult learning schools rather than a wall.” (2004:199). Trehan and Rigg (2012), Rigg and Richards (2006), O’Neill and Marsick (2007) indicate the variety of interpretations, applications and impact of action learning across the world, they reinforce the development of basic leadership skills within a safe environment, further supported by Trehan and Rigg, who suggest action learning is a ‘champion of change and impact’ (2012:207).

The benefits of Action Learning
In their paper entitled ‘Action learning in management education’, O'Hara et al (1996) discuss the purpose and role that action learning played within management education in a University Business school that was strongly committed to the use of action learning. They postulate that action learning is less straightforward and more demanding than traditional taught programs, but potentially could achieve a much wider range of outcomes, thus responding to the need for learning outcomes that exceed those typically found within a university setting. In their reflections they considered the benefits of this particular learning approach over and above traditional management education approaches such as case study analysis, role play and the traditional lecture scenario that yielded such outcomes as: developing a critical understanding, assimilate and synthesise information, developing a conceptual understanding, develop the ability to analyses data, apply knowledge and make complex decisions. They concluded that these extra benefits included: learning to learn; self-management of learning; self-awareness and learning with and through others. However, the article lacked examples of participant experiences that could illustrate the differing concepts adding richness to the work.

Consideration of the O'Hara et al's model

Their model comprises the following categories which include:

*Self-Awareness*

Is achieved through group interaction, and reflection in action learning set meetings. Self-awareness is an important management skill. Revan’s premise was that managers learn better from interaction with other managers whilst
dealing with real life issues, seeking solutions as part of a group. An individual becomes conscious of him or herself through the development of self-awareness (Rochat, 2003). Self-awareness is difficult to define to some extent. But what is clear about it is the extent to which an individual knows themselves, which includes facets of their personality, such as an understanding of their individual strength and limitations.

Self-awareness is not something that suddenly develops in individuals. It is an iterative process of experiences that gradually develop over time that culminate in the individual having a better understanding of themselves. Revan’s premise was that managers learn better from interaction with other managers whilst dealing with real life issues. Part of that learning process is an insight into the self. Through group interaction and reflection in set meetings, individuals have the opportunity to gain insights into differing aspects of themselves in terms of thoughts, feelings, actions and reactions to the problem they are dealing with, with a view to seeking solutions to their individual problem. This in turn facilitates, assuming they are open to it, them to develop a greater understanding on self, and the impact of self on the problem they are dealing with.

**Self-Management of learning**

Has the aim of creating the autonomous learner. An action learning approach ensures that learning becomes the essence of the individual, ensuring that the ability to learn carries on after the programme has ended. To achieve this, the programme works with the idea of self-management, in which learners have control over what and how they learn, which includes focusing on managing
projects and problem solving skills. Self-management of learning aims of creating the autonomous learner who is able to develop the ability to learn through experience and interaction in a self-directed way.

Learning with and through others
This element reinforces the social aspects of the learning process, emphasising significant learning with and through others. Teamwork and differing facets of team work, such as the ability to work in a team and challenge one another positively.

Learning to learn
This element focuses on the participants’ capacity to be life-time learners who are able to adapt to new situations and circumstances within changing environment. Learning to learn emphasises the learning process as an outcome in its own right.

The module context
The MBA is the probably most highly regarded, top-ranking management programme in the UK. The MBA is designed to provide the next generation of business leaders and entrepreneurs with the highest level of management education and personal development. This particular University’s MBA programme is modular in design. The following offers a diagrammatically representation of the programme:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modules</th>
<th>Assessment Techniques</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yr 1 Modules:</td>
<td>All assessed through written</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Finance for Managers  
Managing People  
Personal Development  
Service Operations and Marketing  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment in each module</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Yr 2 Modules:  
Strategic Thinking  
Global Leadership and Change  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All assessed through written assignment in each module</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Yr 3 Modules:  
Research Proposal  
Research Dissertation  

| 3,000 word proposal  
17,000 word dissertation |
|--------------------------|

Table 1: Structure of the MBA

Students on the part time mode of attendance are prepared for the research proposal and dissertation by means of a four day research methods residential. After that they then have a minimum of four action learning sets to support their progress. Prior to attending the residential, students are given two important documents. The first is an outline of what action learning is and how it operates. The second document asked them to identify a research topic that forms the basis of their dissertation. In the introductory session attended by all staff and students, students were introduced to the basic rudiments of methodology, research methods and action learning. The nature of the tasks were described, then whole cohort of students divided into their self-facilitated action learning sets of approximately six to eight students. The composition of each set reflects either their mode or location of attendance at the University, so in some cases there was a degree of familiarity within the
sets; other sets comprise students who were relative strangers to one another.

The residential comprised two tasks. Firstly an individual task - the completion of a one page form that gives the outline of the student’s dissertation proposal. The task required set members to work collaboratively with the aim of critically evaluating each member’s dissertation topic. Simultaneously students were engaged in research activity as described below in the expectation that learning from those tasks would inform the students’ own understanding of the research process, whereby influencing each individual’s approach to his or her own work.

The second task required the selection of a research topic from a predetermined list. The sets were tasked with operationalising that particular topic i.e. generating aims and objectives, methodology and method; these were then carried out over the period of the residential. The results of this experience then fed into the remaining group task, which was a peer reviewed presentation that considers both the sets’ and individuals’ learning and the influence that has on each individual’s research proposal. It is the experiences that the students had in their action learning sets that form the basis for the analysis in this paper.

**Data collection**

The sample used in this study was drawn from three year part-time MBA programme in an English post-92 university. Participants were mostly middle managers from both the public and private sectors; slightly skewed towards
the public sector. Females dominated the sample and the mean average age of the participants was thirty two. The survey was entirely qualitative, and data collection took the form of an anonymous semi structured questionnaire, distributed at the end of this module to all the cohort of students, sixty five students in total. Forty two students returned a completed questionnaire. Questions were generally concerned with how the students had experienced action learning throughout the course of this module; how they felt that it had worked for them, what they had learned from using this process. The results from the questionnaires were analysed within O’Hara’s et als framework of the learning. The data was coded using an open coding approach and thematic analysis was used to categorise the findings. The coding process involved reading and re-reading the data, which in turn generated a series of themes that were subsequently organised into the four categories in accordance with the themes of O’Hara’s et als model.

Findings

Self-awareness

Analysis of the data revealed illustrations of this concept. These illustrations include the individual who stated that action learning ‘...requires emotional intelligence and maturity, especially at the start of the journey’, which was required when another stated that ‘I found that I had to control my impatience and intolerance to allow others to express their issues and concerns’, illustrating the need for an understanding of self when working with others who have a different approach to learning. This was expanded upon when another declared that ‘I was having (sic) to compromise and listen’. This
challenged some students; one in particular saying that he found difficulty in: “taking constructive criticism i.e. not being too defensive”. Action learning highlights an individual’s insight into their ability; it encourages the individual to consider previous behavior, thereby developing understanding of an individual’s own learning processes. This point is illustrated by the individual who said that ‘it showed me that my opinion was narrow and I was blinkered’, further illustrated by a student who said ‘the questions/suggestions from members of the set about every proposal made me think about my proposal in more depth and question some of the assumptions I had made’. This brings in the concept of an individual’s world view or ‘frame’ with which an individual views their particular issue under discussion in the action learning set (Schon and Rein, 1994). This is illustrated by the student who wanted to: ‘reduce the risk of personal biases by understanding that people do inevitably have personal biases and see the world through their unique view. Through challenges within in the set (Mumford and Gold, 2004) individuals are encouraged to consider re-framing and understanding that this often generates new meanings.

Self-management of learning

In relation to self-management of learning one individual said of an action learning approach that ‘The course helps build on individuals skill set/qualities to be an autonomous learner’, encouraging a departure from the typical didactic to learning and teaching associated with post graduate learning. Action learning encourages participants to transfer the responsibility for learning from the facilitator to the participant, encouraging the participant to
become an autonomous learner with the capacity and opportunity for decision making in differing contexts. One student stated that the ‘individual must take responsibility for their own learning - and they must want to learn! Admittedly, this is espoused theory; the theory in action may be different (Argyris and schon, 1974). Another added that ‘the individual must have the desire to learn and take a proactive role in their own learning process and beyond’. One student began to explore the range of skills that the independent learner must have in order to successfully learn, saying ‘these skills include: independence, motivation and discipline’ acknowledging the role action learning played in this by adding ‘which are further enhanced in experiences of working in action learning sets. The hope here is that becomes the case.

Learning with and through others

This reinforces the social aspects of the learning process, emphasising learning with and through others. In relation to teamwork and the ability to work in a team, one student cited that: ‘the power of five minds bouncing ideas and challenging views and opinions was great’ another added: ‘the set was very useful in helping to define parameters at the start of a research project’. The synergy that seems to exist in some sets gave rise to creativity and the opportunity to experiment with thinking outside the box, with one individual commenting favorably that it was: ‘good to discuss my idea for the dissertation and get approval from the group and new ideas on how to focus my dissertation proposal’.

Communication appeared to be positive in the respect of both honesty with one student saying: ‘I appreciated the honesty of the set in challenging my
proposal robustly which helped to focus my mind’ whilst, demonstrating the ability to communicate effectively illustrated by the student who said: ‘it was interesting to listen and embrace other opinions on an issue and the clarity they provided was great’ and another who brought in the dimension of diversity in the set, citing individual set members organizations and the inevitable differences that would bring to the set, the student stated that: ‘you are able to identify the problems by sharing your thoughts and comments with people who are not in the same organisation’ and adding the unique nature of the individual as illustrated by the student who observed:

People have different perceptions and understanding of what you are delivering as a problem. Reason for this is of the vast areas of public and private sector and individual thoughts. They may not understand the context of your question. It is challenging in how you deliver the question but you have to work hard and look deep into presenting your case forward.

Both emotional intelligence and resilience were aspects that emerged as being important to understand. One student commented that,

…..the group worked really well together and demonstrated advanced emotional intelligence evidenced by mutual respect, negotiation and a real willingness to
manage differences of opinion in a way that ensured that there was no animosity in the group.

Another added:

‘Interesting to consider other people’s perspectives. I find it difficult to engage with people who are reticent to speak forthrightly and am focusing on ensuring involvement of all members of any set I work in. I accept that there are times when democracy has to rule, I struggle to accept that a vote should be taken before all persuasive arguments are exhausted’

Another added that they had had to learn to: ‘to embrace other people’s opinions and not disregard them’. Learning to question posed a problem for some, one student reported that he had found listening difficult and had to resist: ‘not giving my opinion and trying to pose questions as it’s important to try not to influence others’ This reflects the difficulty that some set members inevitably encounter when learning the skill of credulous listening and the difficulty of suspending personal opinion, often falling into the trap of taking ownership of the problem and offering the presenter with direct advice, illustrated by the student who also found this challenging by saying: ‘making sure you didn’t give answers/opinions rather than asking questions that would get individuals to think for themselves’. Another learning outcome was that of dealing with dynamics within the immediate group and how individuals
present themselves, one individual added that they had learned to
'overcome nervousness in both informal discussions about work issues as well as formal presentation at lectern of proposed approach'.

One participant concluded that this process had: 'helped to refine ideas and process and reassure me about the feasibility of intended project which was valuable'. A recurring theme was about learning to listen to other points of view and to learn from the differing perspectives, illustrated by the student who said they had learned: 'to embrace other people’s opinions and not disregard them’ achieving this by using credulous listening which often happens with managers who are ‘action-orientated’ and as such, will often only listen to their own opinions’. Reflecting on the usefulness of looking at self-awareness, one respondent remarked that: ‘the different perspectives it brings out makes you question your own approach and revalidates your original thinking’. Learning in this context largely revolved around how to both navigate and negotiate their way in the set. It also calls upon individuals to exercise the skill of empathy in being able to support other members, if their situation is one that resonates with other members of the set. One student added: ‘I believe in any situation where people have issues in workplaces, and the solution is not apparent, to share and learn from others is useful and appropriate’. Part of that learning process is to unpack what actually happens in the set and what skills are developed. Students understand that this form of learning is useful, most likely the utility comes from the types of questions that are been asked of one another. Revans (1982) described action learning as a combination of P + Q = L; P being programmed knowledge, Q being
questioning insight and together they helped the individual to learn. Revan’s emphasis was always placed upon Q and the power of questioning insight and the ability to be able to find the right question to ask that uncovers what the individual is actually dealing with. One individual refers to thought provoking questions and the utility of such, saying:

*We implemented an action learning set approach to developing our individual dissertation proposals and this was an extremely useful process with thought provoking questions from my student colleagues that helped me get clarity of thought on my proposal.*

Clearly this approach to learning isn’t an easy exercise for everyone, demonstrated by one student who said: ‘it was to some extent draining and put pressure on me to listen properly and ensure that for each member of the group I was able to give positive and constructive feedback’. A view added to with the comment ‘It can be intimidating at first and being aware of the feelings brings forth is necessary. Above all, it means there is no place for egos, unless you want it to be bruised’. Weinstein (2006:110) discusses the importance of individuals hearing their own stories and recognising the inconsistencies and illogicality’s within their own discourse, understanding that the skill is to be able to do it for oneself outside the action learning set developing the skill of learning to learn.

*Learning to learn*

Analysis of the data highlighted the importance of collaboration, collegiality and a psychologically safe environment. One student said that they had
‘learned to work cooperatively and think/reflect not simply on one’s own research, but to ‘hone’ (sic) the skills to critically contribute in a non-threatening environment’. The student went on to qualify the statement by adding that they felt that learning to learn ‘challenged old school learning with the personalised learning agenda…giving a freedom away from the traditional board room defensive/attack behaviour’, another stating that “discovered different ways of working”. The examples cited serve to illustrate the extent to which learning to learn focusses on the changing educational environment in which pedagogical and psychological needs of the learner are considered. The student’s comments allude to the need for emotional safety (Dindira, 2002) within the learning environment, illustrated here who felt that the set ‘allowed me the freedom to be brave and try ideas out with the safety of a trusting and supportive’. There is also a sense that traditional didactic teaching and macho board room tactics can act as a barrier to ‘learning to learn’. The student, by acknowledging the importance of understanding the interpersonal dynamics that exist within the learning set, which in previous learning environments had not been significant, has learned to adapt to a new learning environment, essentially an environment that has a positive psychological climate (Koys and Decotis, 1991).

**Analysis of the findings**

Findings from the research carried out for this paper indicate that some of the students did achieve the unexpected outcomes as outlined by O’Hara et al (1996). Outcomes, as described earlier, that are over and above the usual learning outcomes which have tended to focus on the ‘harder’ aspects of
management learning that are traditionally associated with the MBA programmes, as opposed to be ‘softer skills’ that are equally important to the management process.

In relation to self-awareness, the examples cited serve to illustrate the individuals developing sense of self and a greater awareness of self and illustrate differing facets of the individuals emerging new behaviour and attitudes. These changes can be arguably attributed in some part to their experience in the learning set. Development of these examples of the required softer skills that were an immediate concern for Datar et (2011) in which an individual has the ability to be introspective and the ability to manage in a more empathetic way.

Self-Management of Learning illustrated that there was a growing sense that action learning played a role in an individual’s learning. However, it was acknowledged in the main that learning is the responsibility of the individual, arguably appropriate to this academic level.

With respect to the construct of learning with and through others, one of the most interesting findings was the feedback on the opportunity to learn with and through others, reinforcing the notion that learning can also be a social process in which students learn such skills as appreciating the views of others, learning to give honest feedback to other people which may not always be welcomed, learning to appreciate that within a group of learners there will be differing perceptions of the task, this may impact on both how the task is viewed and how it is executed, the importance of being emotionally
intelligent, particularly when differing opinions are surfaced, learning to create a climate that is inclusive and promotes collegiality.

Finally, learning to learn gave a sense that that some of the individuals felt emancipated by the experience in the learning set, the term freedom being used. This arguably takes the notion of learning from being painful to pleasurable occurrence, and as such, is likely to encourage the individual to seek out learning opportunities, with learning becoming more instinctual. In many respects, there was for some an emergence of the ‘learning manager’ who has the capacity to be a lifelong learner and favours a ‘learning by doing’ (Datar, 2011) ethos, as opposed to the ‘learned manager’, one who simply ‘knows’.

**Conclusions**

This paper has added another dimension to the use of action learning in management education. O’Hara et al (1996) postulate that the benefits over and above the usual learning outcomes derived from an MBA programme included: learning to learn; self-management of learning; self-awareness and learning with and through others. The paper has enriched O’Hara et al’s views by giving voice to students from an MBA programme that used action learning on a research methodology module. The paper illustrates the differing facets of their particular model by the experiences of a group of students that help to illustrate the points. In many respects the findings illustrate that this intervention was successful, and support claims that an action learning strategy can respond to the concerns echoed by individuals outlined in the introduction to this paper. As Schlegelmilch and Thomas (2011) suggest,
change to traditional delivery modes are crucial to this important management education programme and need to reflect the changing attitudes to both leadership and management.

In terms of the limitations of the paper, it is important to recognise that the clearly action learning was successful at that moment in time, with individual citing examples of the development or enhancement of soft skills. However, as said mid-way in the paper, the principles of espoused theory/theory in action do prevail in both research and life…simply saying something is so is not evidence that the same something is so, thus recognising the need for this type of research, and subsequent follow up research in order to develop a better understanding of the longevity of the process and the potential problems of using the learning outcomes in an uncontrolled environment. However, as it stands, this paper has added knowledge in operational terms to various groups which include business managers, academics and practitioners who are currently engaged in the facilitation of action learning or who may be considering its use or have employees on programmes where it is used. As well as offering confidence in the learning/teaching strategy applied, it is also beneficial to these stakeholders in the following ways which include:

Addressing business stakeholders’ concerns who expect more from an MBA or similar management development programme than simply the acquisition of knowledge, this is achieved by giving real examples from participants of the outcomes that go beyond the usual educational outcomes. It also provides an explanation to individuals who have not experienced its use before that there is the potential for the acquisition of additional knowledge and skills. This
should reassure any individual who may approach action learning with a
degree of scepticism as it presents a challenge to both traditional and
accepted ways of learning and teaching. Lastly, it illustrates the benefits of
‘active learning’ as opposed to ‘passive learning’ to the academic fraternity
who arguably remain largely sceptical of its use.
References


