The Palgrave Handbook of Organizational Change Thinkers, edited by David B. Szabla, William Pasmore, Mary Barnes, and Asha N. Gipson, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, xxxiii, 1533 pp., $699.99 (print); $699.99 (eReference) ; $1,099.99, print and eBook. ISBN 978-3-319-52877-9 (Print); ISBN 978-3-319-52878-6 (eReference); ISBN 978-3-319-52879-3 (Print and ebook). UK price is 499.95 pounds (print).

This review is in two parts. First, a summary and comments on the book. Because it includes articles by numerous authors on eighty-five prominent organizational change thinkers covering a 100 year period, we shall focus our attention on those relevant to the history, evolution and practices of Action Learning. Second, we shall discuss the article in this book by Mike Pedler, "Reginald Revans: The Pioneer of Action Learning."

This handbook is an exceptionally valuable contribution to the history, evolution and practices of organizational change and Organizational Development. Because it is so large and expensive, it is intended primarily for research libraries and for "very dedicated" Organization Development (OD) professionals, professors and students.

The book under review is also rather original in another way besides its content. It is intended to be "electronic" with the editors assuming that readers will access it online and use it on a chapter-by-chapter basis, mostly for study purposes in graduate courses and elsewhere. But there is also another version of the book available, called a "Live Reference Work" that is intended to be updated continuously. In this second version you can already see some corrected articles, and you are given an indication as to the most consulted articles to date. Readers are encouraged to write to the editors to suggest and write further articles on thinkers and practitioners who have made major contributions to Organization Development and change but who were not included in the first version due to circumstances beyond the editors' control (Rensis Likert, Noel Tichy, and Amy Edmonson are examples mentioned).

The articles in the book are organized alphabetically and the editors asked every contributor to follow a four-part structure to their articles. The first part covers the "professional, intellectual, educational, social, and real-world influences that motivated the thinker to investigate change in organizations."

The second part "focuses on the thinker's …four or five advancements that were central to the work of the thinker" be they theoretical, methodological, and/or practical contributions that have endured over time.

The third part addresses new insights that the work of the thinker inspired in others. And finally, the fourth part deals with "legacies and unfinished business… the major intellectual legacies of this thinker, which later thinkers has he or she influenced"; and "what later thinkers have explored the issues of this thinker and carried them further?" At the end of each article is a section on suggested further readings.

Edgar H. Schein wrote the Forward to the book in which he congratulates the editors for providing "a whole new approach to understanding the many points of view toward organization development and the management of change. The reader will get a great view of the history of the field through reading about almost three generations of thinkers and practitioners in this field." He also celebrates the considerable diversity in OD theory and practice. This is inspiring to see and helps us understand

that all disciplines and philosophies like Action Learning have within them divergent influences and constituents.

For readers interested especially in Action Learning, they will appreciate the articles about present theorists and practitioners David Coghlan, Victoria Marsick and Karen Watkins; and those who have written about Action Learning--Warren Burke and Marvin Weisbord—albeit from an OD perspective. (Dilworth and Boshyk 2010, 144-153; 179-191). There are also contributions on people who were acquaintances, friends, colleagues and sometimes collaborators with Action Learning's founder, Reg Revans. Among these were Warren Bennis, Wilfred Bion, Robert R. Blake and Jane S. Mouton, Björn Gustavsen, Elliott Jacques, Edward Emmet Lawler III, Ronald Lippit, Edgar H. Schein, William Rockwell Torbert, and Eric Trist.

The Preface is a succinct review of the history and evolution of Organizational Development and change from a very Anglo-American point of view. The editors leave out an important historical point that the revival of OD in the 1970's and 1980's was partly due to the US Army and Navy having trained what they called Organizational Effectiveness Officers (as they did not like the words Organizational Development) and then several thousand such Officers entered the private sector when this program was terminated in 1984, a subject discussed elsewhere (Boshyk and Dilworth 2010,151).

Perhaps more importantly, the editors perpetuate a misunderstanding, albeit a common one, made by US professors and practitioners that "Lewin and Reginald Revans independently piloted what became known as 'action research'…" (Dilworth and Boshyk 2010, 144-153; 179-191). Verna Willis has written about this confusion and inaccuracy in her comprehensive chapter on "Action Learning and Action Research" (Dilworth and Boshyk 2010, 166-178). So does Revans really fit into this volume? Yes most certainly. As Mike Pedler points out in his chapter, Revans' ideas and practices had an "emerging" nature to them which they did until 1972, when we see the term Action Learning clarified by him in both content and form. Up until then Revans describes his studies and work, notably in hospitals and healthcare, as being about "organizational development." It is, therefore, not surprising that there is some confusion on this issue.

Pedler's article follows the four-part structure mentioned above. He summarizes the motivations, history and evolution of Revans' thinking and practice in separate sections on "Influences and Motivations: Understanding the Difference Between Cleverness and Wisdom", and in the section on "Key Contributions: Putting Learning at the Heart of Managing Change" there are sub-headings on "Action", "Learning", "The Principle of Insufficient Mandate", "Problems Not Puzzles", "The Risk Imperative", "Questioning", "Sets", and "The Ambiguity of Facilitation".

The second part of the article then focuses on "New Insights: Against Facilitation For Autonomous Learning" where he also mentions other subjects including what he maintains is Revans' resistance to defining Action Learning. Pedler also mentions that Action Learning itself is a "family of approaches" and criticizes a few of these approaches that do not follow "Revans Classical Principles" or the "Action Learning Gold Standard" outlined by Verna Willis.

In the next section of the article, Pedler reviews five of the legacies of Revans' work, entitled "Legacies and Unfinished Business: A Rich Heritage of Ideas and Provocations". Pedler selected the following legacies and spends the rest of the article elaborating on "Virtual Action Learning (VAL), Critical Action Learning (CAL), The Wicked Problems of Leadership, Unlearning and The Innovation Paradox." Of the five, Pedler believes "CAL is perhaps the most important development in post-Revans action learning" and much of his article is a philosophical explication about CAL and its "red thread" to other aspects of the five legacies. The article concludes with "References, Further Reading, For More on Revans and the Development of His Ideas, and For More on Revans' Legacies".

Pedler's article is a very fine and well written summary of his thinking, writing and experience with Action Learning including his personal interaction with Revans. While there is no time (and space) to comment comprehensively on all the issues raised by Pedler, perhaps a few comments would be in order in the spirit of stimulating further study and discussion.

In the "Motivations" section, that also covers personal influences on Revans' thinking, values and behaviour, it is worth looking more deeply at several key individuals who are not often discussed, among them the Scottish philosopher John Macmurray who Revans quotes as having written that "all meaningful knowledge for the sake of action, and all meaningful action for the sake of friendship." (Revans 1983). Macmurray had considerable influence on the interwar generation and on the British public in general. There is an excellent biography by Costello that is very illuminating and contributes to further research on this underestimated philosopher. (Costello 2002).

Another person who helped and influenced Revans was his Cambridge tutor, Alexander Wood, Fellow of Emmanuel College and also involved as a scientist with the Cavendish Laboratory. More details about their relationship can be found in the college's archival files on both Wood and Revans.

But one area that has not received the attention it deserves is the fact that Revans was also a qualified engineer as well as a scientist, very well acquainted with and a strong proponent of cybernetics and systems thinking. Revans' oft mentioned quote that "learning must be equal to or greater than the rate of change" comes directly from the work of one of the leading cyberneticist's in Britain, Ross Ashby (1956) from his "law of requisite variety".

Revans wrote about cybernetics himself (Revans 1969) and encouraged experts in cybernetics and systems thinking to see the connection between cybernetics and Action Learning. Among those he influenced in this area was V.H. Brix who wrote a major article on this interconnection (Brix 1983). In Revans' work there are often many references to both cybernetics and especially systems thinking (Revans 1982). Revans even described small groups and effective learning in cybernetic language and terms in a letter to Brix: "…The observable behaviour of the miners made me ask whether the mutual support and effective learning of the small group could not be more widely and generally exploited. In your terms how to put a forced draft under undesirable associative inducements (cybernetic exchanges) of the small group called into being to get something done?" (Revans 1984)

There is also a direct link to Critical Action Learning in that understanding fundamental control and power relations and interactions are very important to this way of thinking as can be seen in a Brix's analysis of control and power (Brix 1981).

It is my view that the oft made comment, also in the Pedler article, that there is no definition of Action Learning is misleading, as it does not take into account some basic premises of systems thinking and cybernetics. Revans once defined Action Learning as "Learning to learn by doing with and from others who are also learning-to-learn by doing." This is seen by some as being too general and not detailed enough. But Revans may not have desired to do more with this definition because as a systems thinker he realized that 'systems as a whole can change and evolve because they are 'open' and 'dynamic' rather than closed and entropic." And the cybernetic understanding "that 'feedback' also allows systems to adapt, while retaining their intrinsic properties as systems" could also help explain why Revans kept to his definition. He may not have wanted to constrict the possibilities of Action Learning and its system (Alpha, Beta, Gamma) evolving and changing with future experiences of action and learning (Caldwell 2012). Pedler states it differently and yet gets close to implying this when he writes about Revans' evolving but clear stand about the foundational priority and importance of principles and values.

In conclusion it may be of interest for us to ponder and get actively engaged with looking at how Action Learning is and can be relevant to the modern aspects of social, economic and political life. Pedler mentions Virtual Action Learning as one such technologically based innovation for Action Learning but there are other aspects to think about as we see common elements emerging.

The new ways of fast and lean innovation, the emphasis on learning, working and collaborating that we see in startups (Reis 2011), with eco-system platform collaboration (Johnson 2016), data-based decision making, machine-learning, and human and machine interfaces and communication, and concern about the necessity for values-based organizations (Roche and Jakun 2017) are yet another way of seeing how Revans' understanding of Action Learning theory and practice can be of relevance to a new generation working to make a difference-- another dimension of Revans' legacy waiting to be explored.

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