

Chantal Fleuret and Yury Boshyk from The Global Executive Learning Network visited Seoul, Korea from 15-18 March, 2012

The Korean journal Human Resources Development (HRD) interviewed Yury and the interview will appear in the next issue of the journal, in Korean. Below is a transcript of the discussion.

- **What is your purpose of visiting Korea this time?**

It's always a delight and great learning experience to come to Korea as there is so much innovation and energy in the field of leadership and development as well of course, in business and society as a whole. In my view Korea is a society in transition and it is inspiring to see that so much emphasis is now being placed on developing people for the next phase of Korea's development.

This time my colleague, Chantal Fleuret and I have come to learn more about the new Global Talent Management Institute being launched here as well as to invite leading practitioners to the annual Global Forum on Executive Development and Business Driven Action Learning. This is a community of practice that has been meeting since 1996, for 17 years, and is a not-for-profit and by-invitation only gathering. We had the pleasure of being in Seoul in 2008 for the 13th Global Forum and this year we shall be in Yokohama from 17-20 June.

- **You are the global leader of Action Learning. What was the occasion that you get first involved in Action Learning?**

My first corporate experience with Action Learning was with General Electric in 1990 when Stephen Mercer from GE Crotonville asked me to assist him and the company in exploring global business opportunities in what he referred to as an Action Learning executive program. We started our cooperation at that time by examining the very dynamic and dramatically changing landscape in Central and Eastern Europe. This was when I was with IMD in Lausanne, Switzerland as a professor of global strategy and the external environment of business. My relationship with GE continued for another 13 years, and more importantly, with Stephen Mercer still today. This experience was with what we now refer to as the Americanized or "modified" version of Action Learning.

- **What are the values of Action Learning?**

A few key points can be mentioned here:

1. Action Learning is concerned with tying learning to action or results, and ensuring that action is tied to learning--including reflection. In the business

context, this means tying work to learning and learning to work. But Action Learning is more than just “learning by doing”;

2. Because the world is changing so rapidly however, our organizational and personal Learning must be equal to or faster than the rate of Change ($L \geq C$), and in this context we must not rely on experts alone to provide us with answers because, as we know from experience, they themselves do not have all the answers;

3. Action Learning is seen as a social process in which “partners in adversity” or people facing dilemmas or opportunities work together to solve real problems or explore opportunities, at the same time **learning from each other and developing themselves in the process**--this is done in a spirit of humility. As can be seen by these criteria, traditional “quality circles” are not considered to be Action Learning;

4. Learning is a product of two things: “P” or Programmed information like books, lectures, and “Q” which is Questioning inquiry: hence $L = P + Q$ in which “Q” is seen to be far more significant and important. By asking open-ended questions and listening actively, it has been shown that colleagues can help clarify personal and business challenges and help in the process of coming up with innovative solutions to problems and opportunities;

5. People close to the work are proud of what they do and know best how to do it differently and better as long as they are “allowed” to do so by their seniors; a fundamental value of Action Learning is, therefore, the empowerment of people and trust in their desire to help each other and one another do their job or task better and differently;

6. And in a deeper way, one of the most important values of Action Learning is that everything starts from knowing one’s values and behaving in a way which is consistent with them, be this in business or in any walk of life.

Therefore, the value that BDAL brings to organizations is individual, team and organizational learning, group problem solving, and the exploration of strategic business opportunities-- as well as accelerated people development.

- **You have developed the Business Driven Action Learning (BDAL) concept. What is BDAL and how it is different from the other Action Learning approaches?**

I have often written and mentioned that “the house of Action Learning has many doors”. To summarize, there are four or five approaches in Action Learning, not counting outdoor exercises which are not, like simulations, considered to be Action Learning as they are not in the “real world”.

Besides traditional Action Learning, other approaches are Action Reflection Learning™ developed by MiL and LiM in Sweden and the USA, and the Learning Coach approach developed by Michael Marquardt and the World Institute of Action Learning—both are consultancies and not directly related to traditional Action Learning developed by Reg Revans in the U.K. because both stress the primary importance of a learning coach rather than the primary role of participants and the business challenges. Critical Action Learning is another approach that is primarily used in the academic community in the UK and is about the primacy of questioning inquiry. There is an “Americanized” or “modified” version of Action Learning that is practiced in the USA primarily and is mainly about project-based, business-focused work on real issues facing a company.

Business Driven Action Learning (BDAL) integrates the "Americanized" project-based version of Action Learning that appeared on the Leadership and Development scene in the late 1980s with the traditional Action Learning as developed in the United Kingdom and Europe by Reg Revans (1907-2003) a few decades earlier. BDAL has incorporated both of these Action Learning approaches and has introduced new features throughout the years, such as the "7 Dimensions of Learning". Since 1990 BDAL has played a role in accelerating business results, teamwork and leadership development for companies large or small, and for B2B company consortiums throughout the world.

BDAL helps organizations explore new strategic opportunities and solve internal business issues. This is done through programs that have substantial pre- and post-program learning, as well as through "just-in-time" stand alone or follow on interventions with boards and intact teams.

This aspect of BDAL is in keeping with "Organizational Development" initiatives with new and added component parts such as rigorously organized and disciplined "outside-in" dialogs and meetings with external stakeholders, best practice companies and thought leaders. These have a bearing on the business challenges or "Action Learning projects" assigned by the most senior executives of a company or group of companies. Knowledge capture and sharing, as well as an equal emphasis on individual, team, and organizational learning are, therefore, fundamental to the BDAL approach, and BDAL has developed tools and processes to do so.

Personal leadership and business challenges are addressed in "Action Learning Sets" using a systematic and inclusive process developed by Revans and by others over the years. Through a structured yet largely self-facilitated process using open-ended questions, Sets help clarify issues for the individual leaders and through mutual cooperation assist them throughout the change process associated with individual behavioral change.

Several books and articles have also been written about BDAL.

For more details about about BDAL please visit:

www.globalforumactionlearning.com and www.gel-net.com

- **What are the key success factors in designing and running BDAL?**

These can be listed as:

- senior executive involvement and deep engagement;
- their selection of strategic and important Business Challenges (BCs) and opportunities facing the company or organization;
- equal weight given to personal development through discussions about Personal Challenges (PCs);
- the mobilization of those inside and outside the organization who know, care or can do something about the BCs and PCs;
- information and knowledge capture and sharing throughout the entire intervention;
- personal and teamwork development through various instruments and feedback mechanisms and approaches;
- outside-in learning discovery meetings and dialogues with best practice companies, thought leaders, customers and suppliers who can help with the Business Challenges and with the Personal Challenges;
- and finally, follow up on the Business Challenges and Personal Challenges by the senior team, by participants themselves and through other means to ensure continuous learning and business development for the company and those involved.

- **You have worked with many global companies for developing leaders. From your experiences which companies do you think have the best practices in applying BDAL globally?**

As with most things in life there is always an ebb and flow, an evolution, so it is difficult to say which companies today are “best in class” but the good news about BDAL is that companies that initiate it can quickly become “beyond best in class” by learning from others who are doing it and have done it. I would say that in the list of global companies that are doing it today on a global level we could mention: some parts of General Electric, SABMiller, The Global Learning Alliance (a BDAL company consortium program that includes Lilly, L’Oreal, Rio Tinto, Schneider Electric, and Wipro) among others.

- **Who do you think have the best practices of BDAL in Korea**

I am learning more about this every day but from my visit to Korea this time, I would put Samsung, LG Electronics, Hyundai and SK in this category, with each one showing a great interest and passion for improvement, to go “beyond best in class”.

- **You are leading the Global Forum on Executive Development and Business Driven Action Learning. What is GF and how it is operating?**

The Global Forum is an international not-for-profit community of practice made up of business leaders, and Leadership & Development practitioners from leading companies and organizations that has been in existence since 1996. It meets in a different location every year and attendance is by-invitation-only and restricted to no more than one hundred participants. There is an International Advisory Board that plays an active part in content development and venue selection. I am very pleased to say that one of its most active and long-standing members is K.R. Yoon from DuPont Korea. He played a vital role in the creation of the Korean Action Learning Association and was the main organizer from Korea of the 13th Global Forum when it took place in Seoul in 2008.

For details about the Global Forum please visit:

www.globalforumactionlearning.com

- **Many Koreans attend the ASTD conference every year. What are the different values of GF vs. ASTD (or how would you differentiate GF)?**

I have attended several ASTD conferences over the years. They are increasingly becoming very commercially oriented with presenters being overwhelmingly consultants and with an extensive showcase of consulting and commercial booths almost all aimed at selling to participants. The format is also slide presentations with little room for interactive discussions. It also caters to more middle-level practitioners and trainers.

The Global Forum in contrast is a community of practice that has been in existence for 17 years and involves practitioners from companies and leading organizations that want to share their experiences and issues. No selling is allowed and neither is the media present, in order to ensure confidentiality. Consultants are asked to bring along a client to ensure a good balance. It is not-for-profit and is by-invitation-only, to a limit of 100 participants to allow greater interaction. The Global Forum also is much more international and exclusive in participant composition. It meets annually and in a different part of the world each time.

- **Who were the key participants of GF from Korea? Who would you like to invite or encourage to participate in the future?**

I would like to encourage all senior practitioners who have a passion for learning and development and global talent management to consider attending and participating in the Global Forum. They should be willing to learn and share with other practitioners from around the world, in a spirit of collegiality and humility. For those wishing to learn more about attending the Global Forum I would strongly suggest that they get in touch with KR Yoon at: