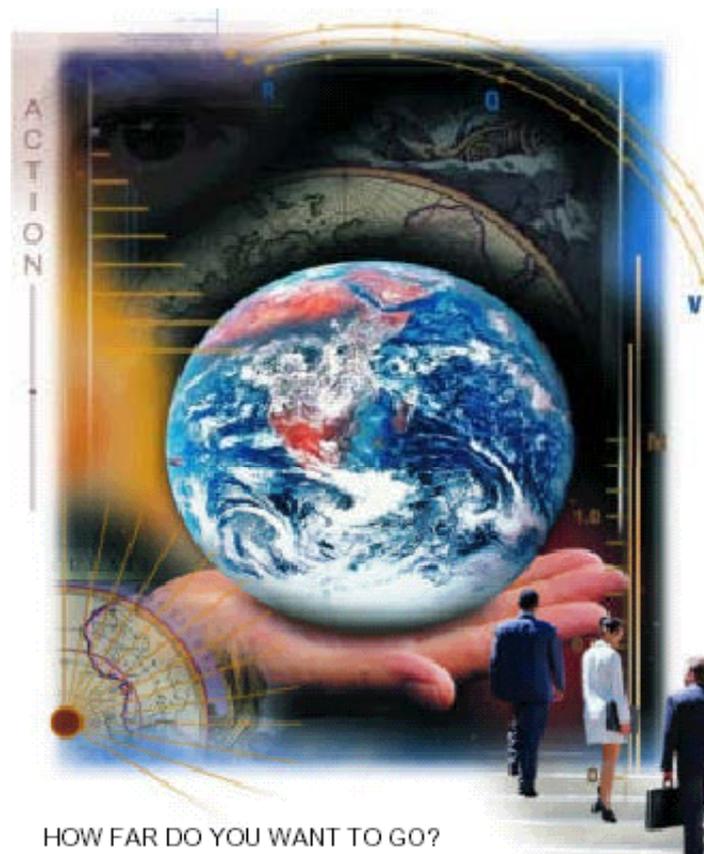




International Management Centres Association
with
Revans University – The University of Action Learning

Action Learning Around the World 1964-2004



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Reg Revans Official IMCA portrait with his Burnham Medal.



David Evans, Deputy High Commissioner for Australia, opens the Revans Action Learning Workshop at Buckingham in 1987, with Baroness Cox, a former nurse, who participated in the London Hospital's Project and became President of IMCA when Reg Revans became Emeritus President.



Reg Revans confers the DBA on James Espey, CEO of IDV (UK) whose company also sponsored our 1st MBA Set in 1982.



Reg Revans on Graduation Day at Windsor, July 1985, with Gordon Wills (left), Keith Howard (right) and Yan Poh Soon standing.



1 – Why Young DMS Graduates established IMCA in 1964

In 1964 the first cadres of the Diploma in Management Studies (DMS) established by the Department of Education and Science were reaching the end of their 3 year night school programmes at Technical Colleges around Britain. Three of these – from Portsmouth, Regent Street and Slough, and Slough were the leaders – resolved to ask the British Institute of Management (BIM) to establish a new Chapter of the BIM so that they could meet together as postgraduate educated managers as well as at the regular Branch Meetings. Dr John Marsh, the BIM's Director at the time, rejected the notion as separatist.

And thus the foundation of IMCA today was wished upon the UK as a parallel meeting place for postgraduate educated managers. A team from Slough Technical College (today part of Thames Valley University) encouraged by Head of Department Gordon Wheeler and Head of the DMS Programme, Geoffrey Pitt MBA Chicago and Ruskin College, established the Institute of Scientific Business (IScB) with Dr E.F.L. Brech, one of the very distinguished authors of that time, as inaugural President.

Amongst the earliest members were David Ashton, a DMS Graduate himself from Oxford Polytechnic (now Oxford Brookes University) on a Metal Box sponsored programme who became Dean of Lancaster University's School of Management; Barrie Pettman, a Graduate from Northampton College of Advanced Technology (now The City University) Chairman of MCB University Press/ EMERALD Insights; and Gordon Wills, a Graduate of Slough, who went on to become first Principal of IMCA in 1982 and President of the Canadian School of Management.

2 – Providing Something Good to Read and the Chance to Meet

Not surprisingly, the founding team resolved to hold regular workshops and to publish a journal. Indeed the publication of the journal had preceded the foundation of the IScB. Workshops were held on a wide range of issues and as membership grew they were held around the country and once a year somewhere that seemed exotic. Mallorca and Sorrento were two such locations. The major advances occurred however with the journal, initially



known as *Scientific Business* but renamed *Management Decision* in 1967. Originally published by the *Reading Evening Post* that newspaper was fortunately taken over by Lord Thomson of Fleet in 1965 and responsibility for sponsoring the title passed to the Think Tank team assembled on Gray's Inn Road by Harry Henry, Lord Thomson's Marketing Director. Harry Henry's role at that time was to launch the *Sunday Times Colour Supplement* – precursor of what we know today of a Sunday newspaper with a dozen extras. Under Harry Henry's influence sales grew but not spectacularly enough to rival the *Harvard Business Review* on which it was modeled. So in 1967 the title was sold to Lord King's IPC where it was renamed and relaunched inter alia as the house magazine of the managers of IPC. Sales climbed to 2500 but the target had been 10 000 so IPC was content to pass ownership to the editorial team at that time for the nominal sum of £1 – three colleagues paid 6/8d each, namely David Ashton, Ronald Yearsley and Gordon Wills. And the rest is history.

The journal moved to Bradford University Management Centre where the three editors worked, and was published from small offices at 200 Keighley Road now a Balti Restaurant but previously a Ladies' Hairdressers. Observing its success initially as many as 51 colleagues at Bradford Management Centre raised the funding at Senior Common Room discussions to launch a stream of titles that led eventually to the achievement of the largest academic management publishing house in the world, MCB University Press with over 150 titles, which in 1996 became the first publisher in the world to be wholly accessible via the Internet – *Emerald Insights*.

3 – The Invitation to Reg Revans in 1982 to Show the Way Forward

16 years after its foundation, the IScB invited Reg Revans to become its President as it launched a pattern of postgraduate award programmes for Bachelor, Master and Doctor in Management solely by action learning and research. Until the Education Reform Act 1988 it was perfectly legitimate to commence a degree awarding institution and IScB did just that. It took accommodation in Buckingham on Castle Street where it has remained to this day. Its founding faculty were a combination of the originals from IScB and new colleagues from MCB University Press including Judith Atherton, Keith Howard, Sherril Kennedy and Charles Margerison. And it was the funding of the publishing business that



made the next stage possible at all. IScB changed its name to International Management Centre from Buckingham which as global activities grew became the Association, IMCA.

The decision by IMCA's founding faculty members to leave behind successful University Business School careers and commence action learning and research programmes arose from the same deep dissatisfaction with what was being offered to practising managers as had motivated Reg Revans to leave Manchester 15 years earlier. The teaching of normative curricula was not the best way forward; as seriously professional academics with a successful publishing house to fund their initiative they could step forward to offer the alternative approach on a grand scale. And the launch was indeed grand in April 1983 with IDV, Dow Corning Europe, Dupont and Bowaters providing upwards of £1million in the first three years. In 1987 five full professors joined the founding team, including Alan Mumford Roger Bennett and Joanna Kozubska, and IMCA was firmly established, or so it seemed. Reg Revans presided over graduation ceremonies at Windsor and IMCA received its Coat of Arms from HM The Queen.

4 – The Best Was Yet to Come

As Reg Revans had always found, such simple audacity has its detractors, and that included the great majority of Business School aficionados in Britain. They provided the necessary adversity for IMCA's own corporate action learning to come into its own in 1988 when our degree programmes were potentially about to be rendered illegal under that year's Education Reform Act. Only State sponsored universities were henceforth to be allowed to award degrees unless they were doing so under the authority of an institution outwith the UK that had the authority so to do. Fortuitously, IMCA already had that in place on the Appointed Day of May 28th 1988 from Australia, New Zealand and Vanuatu where its programmes had flourished. From that day to this, all IMCA's action learning and research for degrees in the UK has been conducted on behalf of those foreign institutions and their successors.

'Foreign' to IMCA in truth means global, multinational. As early as 1985 colleagues in Malaysia had asked for consent to offer the MBA programme there. The first was offered exactly a decade after Reg Revans gave the Tunku Abdul Rahman Lecture at



the Malaysian Institute of Management in Kuala Lumpur and by 2003 some 26 x 12 MBA Sets, a score of Doctors and over 1000 in-house Associates have completed IMCA award programmes on the Peninsular, in Brunei and Sarawak. Two global Congregations and two Annual Professional Congresses have been held there.

What happened in Malaysia was quickly mirrored in Singapore, Macau, Hong Kong, and more recently with China at large. Finland followed initiatives from Malaysia also at Bachelor, MBA and Doctoral levels and remains to this day an important base for IMCA with its Dean for Europe based in Helsinki where two Congregations have been held.

Australia has been a power house of ideas since 1987 when it was established in Toowong and Melbourne with many hundred graduates from IMCA programmes including in-house programmes with ICI, Australia Post and Shell. In New Zealand programmes have run with Anchor Butter and in Vanuatu following initial European Union funding some 5 MBA Sets and a similar number of Bachelor programmes have been run with scholarship funding. The Republic's first Prime Minister Dr Father Walter Lini sponsored the establishment there of the first and originating Revans University as the local IMCA partner institution.

5 – Siren Calls Yet Still the ‘Power to Do Something About It’

The events that made IMCA a foreign led institution unsettled some, indeed many, of IMCA's Faculty and some of its client managers and organisations. So the suggestion was made that IMCA should repatriate itself, should come back to the UK for its degrees and awards in partnership with a university. We had in 1988 already promoted an unsuccessful Bill in the House of Lords. So the first stop was to be the late Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA). Put simply, the CNAA and all to whom IMCA subsequently spoke quite properly had their own educational paradigms. If IMCA wished to work with them it had to conform to them. As such the only option available was to search for a university that was closest to the action learning and research paradigm and to go along with the inevitable loss of discretion to design programmes specifically for the managers following them. And so for an entire decade IMCA met with and proposed to as many as six universities across the UK and to three in Australia. But as luck would have it, even two truly amicable and constructive collaborations that



were negotiated eventually fell foul of escalating costs for their central service functions. The notion that the action learning Set wherever it might be around the globe, speaking whatever language managers might use, drove its own learning forward to its own agreed issues and curriculum was indigestible.

Meeting in Cape Town in 1999 IMCA pondered just why the Sirens had been so unsatisfying for most if not all its members. And there were instances to observe within IMCA where such a strategy had been superseded. IMCA's Dutch colleagues from Kastel Heukelum, who had created The Netherlands largest Business School using action learning, and had taken the programmes to the Antilles and taken over the major initiatives already afoot in Southern Africa, gained their own MBA degree awarding rights in Holland. The Canadian School of Management formally joined with IMCA in 1997 which had its own professional awards.

After much debate the Cape Town conclusion sealed at a vineyard luncheon was that IMCA should formally sponsor its own university in the USA where action learning had lately become especially visible. With the support of IMCA's longstanding US Accrediting Agency in Washington DC, Revans University – The University of Action Learning was established in Delaware and Colorado. Those who knew and cared had exercised their power to do something about it, just as they had in 1964 and 1982.

6 – The Internet as The Servant of Action Learning

The team of individuals in their twenties led by Mathew Wills, Eric Sandelands and Michael Cross, who put MCB University Press/ *Emerald Insights* into pole position of the Internet was also available to IMCA. IMCA logged up its place in the annals of the Internet becoming the first provider in the world of its degrees and awards on the Internet in 1995 with full online courseware and meeting places and a virtual Library. It was Dreamtime for IMCA. It reduced logistics expenses dramatically, facilitated library services beyond our wildest expectations and enabled coursewares to be permanently updated without stock holdings. It enabled 'virtual' Annual Professional Congresses to precede the face to face events for two months, and improved communications at minimal expense around the globe. Yet if all this seems obvious now it certainly took audacity and belief and confidence in the mid-1990s, and an investment of over £2 million.



Yet even more was to materialise. The pattern of in-house support that had been IMCA's hallmark from 1982 on with scores of MBA and Bachelor Sets run, received a gigantic fillip with the arrival of IMCA's Mk III Internet server. A unique approach known as IMCA Socrates is now provided to a dozen enterprises with their own Corporate Universities in Europe, North America, Asia and the Caribbean. Thousands of managers and supervisors now use their own action learning campus provided by IMCA and gain credits to degrees of membership and awards of IMCA as they go. It has been created and led since 1997 by IMCA's Principal, Richard Teare, and a team of colleagues formerly at Bournemouth and Surrey Universities.

Nobody at IMCA believes for one moment that the Internet and all it munificently affords replaces face to face sharing and comparing of adversity and the asking of questions as the discussion goes forward in Sets. And that is asserted after the deepest possible immersion since it all began; but its role as a facilitator equals that of a Set Adviser on a good day, and we seldom wish to be without such support. But it is not always possible logistically or cost-wise for managers especially in multinational concerns to be face to face. IMCA sees it as imperative in such circumstances to do all that is possible to facilitate action learning. Nowhere is this more apparent or successfully accomplished than at the IMCA partners in the Canadian School of Management which has been a distance learning institution for three decades, or at Cambridge Online Learning which has recently launched most powerful online action learning programmes with over £3 million of support from the European Union.

7 – Forty Years On - Some Statistics

IMCA is surely the longest serving wholly action learning institution established anywhere in the world, with complete continuity of two of its original founding Set and many more with 20 years before the mast. In excess of 50 000 managers have joined IMCA's programmes, more than 6000 of which have graduated with degrees and professional awards. More than 100 have achieved their doctorates. And every one accomplished by action learning and action research. No other approach is practiced whatever. There are over 350 inducted Faculty Members around the globe and programmes have been followed on the ground in 44 countries. IMCA's corporate sponsors are a galaxy of the great enterprises of the world and its Court of Honorary Members includes dozens of the most highly respected names in action learning.

IMCA's members worldwide, ever committed disciples of Reg Revans, look forward to their coming years of action learning with gratitude for the inspiration his life gave us all.