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NETWORK REPORT

Launch of Revans Academy for Action Learning and Research

Manchester Business School November 26, 2008

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Launch of Revans Academy for Action Learning and Research: action learning comes 'home'

On 26 November 2008, the Revans Academy for Action Learning and Research was launched at Manchester Business School. The goal of the Academy is to foster the development of action learning as a unifying framework within Manchester Business School. Its goal is to provide a hub for dialogue, collaboration, exploitation and innovation in the field of action learning, and to work with colleagues from across the realms of education and business to secure innovative teaching, pioneering research and organisational improvement learning. There is, of course, a certain irony in this event, since in 1965 Revans resigned his chair at the University of Manchester amidst negotiations over the new 'Manchester Business School'.

This recent inauguration sought to reconcile some of the tensions that had preceded Revans resignation by seeking to embrace, and connect, a wide array of renowned speakers from across both sides of the theory/practice divide and an audience inclusive of members from various nations, occupations and interests. The day built on this diversity and inclusivity by exploring action learning and its relationship to both change on multiple levels and to allied developmental approaches, including appreciative inquiry, strategic management and leadership.

The day began with an introduction by Professor David Botham, who in describing the 'meaningfulness' of action learning, reminded us of Reg Revans' legacy and the reciprocal impact of action learning across personal, organisational and societal dimensions. Professor Botham shared anecdotes of his friendship with Revans and explored with the audience the centrality of friendship in action learning. These two themes of meaningfulness and reciprocity come together in action and Professor Botham provided a nexus for these attributes with his concluding quote from John MacMurray (1953):

All meaningful knowledge is for the sake of action; all meaningful action is for the sake of friendship!

The impact of action learning was further developed through a panel discussion between Stefan Bergstrand, from the Revans Centre for Action Learning in Sweden, and Dr Mandy Chivers, assistant chief executive for Mersey Care NHS Trust. Both panel members described the use of action learning within their own sector (education and health) and provided inspiring examples of the emancipatory power of action learning in practice and the relationship between personal and organisational change.

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