Reviews

edited by Philip Barker

Steve McDowell and Phil Race, *500 Computing Tips for Trainers*, London: Kogan Page, ISBN: 0-7494-2675-6. Paperback, 160 pages, £15.99.

Training in information technology (IT) is becoming a crucial activity for virtually all organizations – a well-worn cliché. Sadly, however, it is all too often the case that training budgets are manipulated and absorbed into other 'worthy' causes. The result is that IT training is hastily passed onto junior members of a team or to postgraduate students who have had little formal training and experience of IT training. It is for these novice trainers that the '500 computer tips' will be particularly useful but it is also a highly worthwhile, accessible reference for more experienced trainers in both academic and non-academic environments. This book (one of a series of '500 Tips' from Kogan Page) does not aim to give technical information about any particular software package but provides readable, understandable generic tips which have a sound pedagogical base (although this is carefully hidden).

The introduction, six chapters and conclusion are written in a clear, concise style with very limited use of jargon and could be read straight through but would probably be more useful as a guide to delve into as appropriate. The chapters are logically organized; each has an introduction, followed by several sections of carefully explained relevant, related tips (this helps scanning and navigation of the book for the 'time-poor' trainer). Each tip is typed in bold and followed by several illustrative sentences.

For example, the following tip is taken from the spreadsheet chapter: 'Show trainees where their lost data has gone. In the early stage of spreadsheet use, a common difficulty is disappearing data ... '

The first and longest chapter introduces a wide range of areas that are vital for successful training with IT. Initially, the tips address reasons for using computers in training, and motivating students to use computers for training and learning outcomes – these tips are very relevant for novice trainers and are frequently overlooked. They provide a superficial but useful introduction and explore themes, for example, the use of 'hands-on' training, which are referred to throughout the book. One obvious but often forgotten example: 'Remind your trainees that computers don't care about mistakes. They may give error messages ... but a computer does not get angry ... ' Some of the subsequent sections in this chapter address the selection of appropriate training materials. These sections provide an excellent checklist that would be found useful by both novices and experienced trainers. The last section explores methods for encouraging trainees to work together – this is often difficult to organize in most training environments but this book provides some workable ideas.

The second compact chapter has some excellent tips on using computers for presentations. These tips consider the appropriateness of presentation packages for training and discuss how they can be used as a valuable teaching tool (as opposed

to a technical gimmick) and provide some innovative suggestions on using the software. A useful tip from this section, and one that is all too frequently forgotten is: 'Don't leave a slide on when you've moved on to talk about something else.'

The third chapter provides tips for training in word-processing, spreadsheets, databases and programming. Although the first two sections offer some very pragmatic tips (especially the spreadsheet ones) it was perhaps a little optimistic for the authors to cover programming in this section. For experienced trainers, there are a few surprising ideas.

Rare in a training book, the fourth chapter addresses how to 'look after' the trainer. It provides a set of sensible tips about organization prior to the training session and extremely astute help on how to cope with stressful training scenarios including a powercut (I wonder if the authors had personal experience of such night-mare scenes). One tip in this section, which is invaluable, is: 'Don't blame the technology but concentrate on dealing with the situation.' In addition there are twenty tips for coping with technophobes and technophiles and some very succinct ones for the peripatetic trainer in strange climes from a technical perspective (gadgets, leads and grommets) to the personal ('look after your temperature')!

Rather ambitiously, Chapter 5 addresses such issues as: email; feedback using email and computer conferencing; and computer conferencing and the Internet. Each of these areas really warrants an entire chapter; hence the twenty-three tips alone on effective use of email (which would probably be useful for any email user). Nevertheless, there are some very stimulating suggestions and each section of tips provides an adequate taster for a novice trainer. The last three sections consider training and the Internet; again, there are some sensible tips that would provide a handy introduction to the subject. References (including Web addresses) for further reading and development would have been most appropriate for all these sections.

The last chapter reviews the role of computer-delivered assessment and evaluation. Initially sceptical of the practical use of 'tips' in such complex subject areas, these sixty tips do provide useful insights and a launch point for novice trainers. McDowell and Race give excellent advice on how to devise computer-delivered tests and have some novel suggestions for computer-generated feedback. However, the section on computer-mediated coursework seemed slightly ambitious. Throughout the book there are tips on and about feedback – especially in Chapter 5; perhaps it would have been more appropriate if the authors had expanded the section on feedback rather than trying to cover so much in one chapter. The final two sections provide tips and a list of printed references on computing and training: manuals for specific software predominate. Ideally there should have been far more pointers to enable novice trainers to explore the pedagogical theory of training, needs analysis, etc., and to provide contacts with professional training bodies.

Overall, this book pleasantly surprised me. It aims to provide 500 practical tips for the novice trainer in a readily understandable format – which it does – especially in the first four chapters. Moreover, there are some innovative tips that experienced trainers might find useful and stimulating, particularly in the last two chapters. In addition, because of the generic nature of the tips the book should at least survive a few updates to *Microsoft Office*!

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P. Honeywill, *Visual Language for the World Wide Web*, Exeter: Intellect Books, 1999. ISBN: 1-871516-96-X. Paperback, 192 pages, £14.95.

The use of the Internet and the World Wide Web within education is growing at a tremendous pace within all levels and areas of the curriculum. To a large extent this rapid and widespread growth of the Web has been brought about by the availability of 'easy-to-use' Web development tools. This ease of use has invariably come about as a consequence of the powerful graphical user interfaces (GUIs) and the rich metaphors that are embedded within the main authoring tools that are now in common use. An important aspect of virtually all parts of GUIs is the nature of the icons that they use and the visual communication primitives that they embed. Basically, this is the area with which this book deals. It explores, to some extent, the history of visual communication and its impact on modern-day techniques of graphical communication with computers.

The book itself originates from some Ph.D. studies that the author undertook while he was a member of staff in the Faculty of Arts and Education at the University of Plymouth.

According to the author the purpose of the book 'is to speculate on the developmental route of visual computer languages and how computer users comprehend interfaces' (p. 8). The text is organized into six chapters and a bibliography. It starts off with a sort of historical perspective. The first chapter (which is entitled 'Learning from the Past to Inform the Present . . .') explores the Mayan visual writing system and how hieroglyphs work as a means of representation. A number of comparisons are made between hieroglyphs and computer icons. An important question posed by the author in this chapter, which in a way sets the scene for the remainder of the book, is: 'Can the development of computer iconography as visual language aid communication across trans-national language and cultural barriers and, if so, where should this begin?' (p.14).

The above question is partly answered in Chapter 2, the title of which is 'Simple Words and Visual Metaphors'. The main issue discussed in this chapter relates to how words and icons can be combined to form 'compound icons'. Examples are given from many different sources – such as Otto Neurath's Isotype system, standard ISO/IEC symbols and various software tools such as *Adobe Photoshop*. In Chapter 3 the author turns his attention to 'Designing Icons for the Graphical User Interface'. In particular, the chapter 'explores what design rules carry over from established graphic design principles' to the computer context. Some of the important topics discussed in this chapter include: visual reading order (when decoding a message); conflict, contrast and harmony (within computer icons); the use of 'white' space; and typography in icons.

In Chapter 4 the author discusses compound icons and their families. His treatment of this topic starts off with a discussion of corporate identity (on the Web) and the consistent use of symbols to project a company image – and 'the mood of their website' (p. 85). Two design case studies are then presented. These relate to consultancy projects that the author has recently been involved in. The case studies illustrate the detailed steps involved in creating corporate logos (primarily for use on printed stationery) using a computer-based design system (*Adobe Photoshop*). These in-depth examples serve to reflect the complex issues involved in designing graphical symbols for use both on paper and within electronic webs. The final part of this chapter discusses the possibility of creating a family of icons by grouping together appropriate combinations of graphical primitives chosen from a relevant base set – analogous to the way in which Aichers' 'body alphabet' was used to create a family of graphic symbols for use in the Olympic Games.

Chapter 5 deals with representative and abstract icons. It starts off with a discussion of 'the ABCs of Graphic Symbols' and how they can be put together in various ways to build larger units of meaning. Examples are given from several sources such as the Bliss symbols and 'Elephants Memory'. The final part of the chapter discusses the 'ARC Interface' and its evaluation. ARC is an acronym for 'Arts Research into Communication'; this was a project that was intended 'to evaluate the convergence of technology between computers and communication and the natural development of computer compound icons' (p.126). The evaluation study involved the use of a user-tracking system that automatically logged mouse movement and the times spent at particular parts of the screen. The results from the logs could be analysed and interpreted in terms of the elements that made up a particular screen of information. In his conclusion to this chapter the author recommends that 'computer compound icons that navigate should represent what they mean, and give further explanation to confirm their meaning when selected through a dynamic behaviour' (p. 134).

The final chapter of the book is by far the largest and deals with the theme of 'Navigating Interfaces'. A wide range of topics is covered. It starts off with a discussion of 'user goals and sub-goals' and illustrates the use of icons for navigating through a software product's functionality (the example used is *Microsoft Word*). An example is then given of how icons can be used to facilitate navigation through a magazine. One of the most interesting parts of this chapter is the one that outlines the use of 'real-world metaphors' to aid navigation. Several examples are given to illustrate this technique, for example, eWorld, Lloyds TSB and Singapore's International Airport. A substantial part of this chapter is devoted to an examination of 'icons from around the world'. The author examines the icons used by 192 selected information service providers (taken from six different continents) in order to see how icons appear in their different Web sites.

Overall, I found this an interesting book which I enjoyed reading. However, in some ways I was disappointed when I had finished it because I thought that it left a number of questions unanswered. Primarily, these relate to: (i) icon design (how do you design a really good icon?); (ii) the use of visual language primitives (how can icons be combined in ways that create more meaningful messages?); and, (iii) what exactly happens when a user is exposed to an icon (set) within a graphical user interface – that is, what mental processes are stimulated? In my view these are important topics. Perhaps they may form the basis for a future book?

Philip Barker, University of Teesside

J. D. M. Underwood and J. R. Hartley (eds.), *Computer Assisted Learning – Selected Contributions from CAL97*, Exeter: Pergamon, 1998. ISBN: 0-08-043435-5. Paperback, 140 pages. $85 US.

This special edition of the respected international journal *Computers in Education* contains seventeen papers from the CAL97 symposium. This event was held at my own institution so I must confess to a certain expectation when I received the slim volume. The symposium theme 'Superhighways, SuperCAL, Super Learning?' was intended to suggest the tension between the expanding application of ICT for teaching and its questionable value for learners. Unfortunately the title did little for me at the time and, while the topic is certainly addressed explicitly in some of the papers and implicitly by the whole volume, the CAL97 theme only hints at the excellent range and content of the work presented.

Symposium volumes are hard to compile and can be really hard to edit into shape (speaking as an ex-journal editor) so it is rewarding to find a reasonably coherent collection of papers ranging from empirical research to (what amount to) project reports and critical reviews. The papers are of varying length and depth but none are outrageously long or frustratingly short.

The pure research papers are out-numbered by reports of projects and activities using ICT (principally CAL in these papers) in teaching and learning. This situation accurately reflects the severe lack of hard research data in the field. This is an issue that appears consistently throughout the papers and is highlighted in the Preface.

The Preface does its job by giving a good introduction to the changing themes in each paper whilst pointing out common strands which have sometimes resulted in natural groupings of papers. This goes some way to explaining the diversity of the contents and helped me make my own cross-references in contextually different papers. For example, the niche role of ICT is succinctly discussed in the first paper ('Niche based success in CAL') and neatly illustrated in two empirical studies later on ('Exploring children's responses to interpersonal conflict using bubble-dialogue in a mainstream and an EBD school' and 'Talking book design: what do practitioners want?'). Cross-referencing like this is something a reader might not expect to be doing with a set of conference papers but I found myself becoming quite immersed in the pedagogical and practical issues raised by this collection of work.

Although *Computers in Education* is an international journal the CAL97 edition is dominated by UK work, with pure research focused on primary/tertiary levels and virtually all other papers on tertiary education (either work for tertiary learners or work carried out at this level). There are some interesting reports of collaborative, international work (e.g. the T3 consortium and the European FETICHE project) and contributions from the USA and Finland. The latter serve to remind us that learners and educators encounter the same issues wherever they are based. A scan through the References section on each paper reveals some excellent sources, including many of the established journals in the field and, notably, a number of Web-based sources and sites.

There are five papers that examine and/or evaluate the use of specific software packages for learning. These range from 'Niche-based success in CAL' which takes a broad look at different applications of CAL packages, to the sharp focus of 'Microwave Workshop for Windows' which describes the practical application of one piece of software to support learning. There are also useful comparative studies, for example, 'Active, collaborative and case-based learning with computer-based case scenarios'. Further papers cover the development of systems for the integration and/or delivery of CBL/CAL. These include 'Beyond the media: knowledge level interaction and guided integration for CBL systems' which focuses on the use of a range of materials under the G-PIL system, and 'Building and testing a virtual

university' which is a highly readable account of the development of a large ICT-based learning delivery system.

The other papers represent a cross-section of accounts that examine how ICT has been used in schools and in other scenarios for the improvement and development of communication and interaction in a learning environment. Diverse titles include 'The Cyber-Olympics – schools, sports and the superhighway', 'A career service on the Internet' and 'An evaluation of the use of computer supported peer review for developing higher level skills'. The volume ends with some useful book reviews.

As a report of CAL97 this volume accurately represents the enormous diversity of presentations as well as the undoubted scholarship and obvious commitment and enthusiasm of the presenters. If a weakness needs to be identified it would be that the subjects covered are also being addressed at the same level in a number of other, excellent journals (ALT-J for one) but in a more timely fashion. By the time you read this review the CAL97 papers will be nearly three years old.

However, despite a continued explosion in the penetration of the Internet into our daily lives and big changes in consumer communications technology and usage, the work presented here is probably still pretty much state-of-play for the education world, at least in the UK and probably much of Europe.

To conclude, I found this collection of papers remarkably good reading, still very relevant, and thought-provoking. Not all the papers will be of interest to everyone working in this field but there is bound to be something of interest, something new and something you ought to know about. At least for the next three years!

Clive Betts, University of Exeter

Note: The papers contained in this book were simultaneously published as Volume 30 (1/2) in the journal *Computers and Education*.

John Holford, Peter Jarvis and Collin Griffin (eds.), *International Perspectives on Lifelong Learning*, London: Kogan Page, 1998. ISBN: 0-7494-2869-4. xvi+368 pages. £45.00.

The book can truly claim the word 'international' used in its title with contributions from all around the world of lifelong learning from Canada, USA, UK, Finland, Netherlands,

Belgium, Switzerland, Italy, Slovenia, China, Japan, Australia and Tasmania to New Zealand. Its multiple perspectives were originally presented as papers at the conference 'Lifelong Learning: Rhetoric, Reality and Public Policy' in July 1997 at the University of Surrey.

The book is presented in seven parts: International Policy (Part I); Lifelong Learning in the Learning Society (Part II); Lifelong Learning and Political Transitions (Part III); Learning, Markets and Change in Welfare States (Part IV); Learning and Change in Educational Structures (Part V); Learning and Change in Work (Part VI); Aims, Ethics and Social Purpose in Lifelong Learning (Part VII). It is a book that is more likely to be used as a resource to be dipped into as appropriate than it is to be read from cover to cover and the index facilitates this mode of use.

Part I opens with Roger Boshier's (Canada) contribution on the twenty-five years following the publication of the Faure Report, 'Learning to Be: The World of Today and Tomorrow', in 1972. The Faure report was born on the wave of protest in the 1960s and constructed as a blueprint for educational reform defining four dimensions of lifelong learning: vertical integration (cradle to grave); horizontal integration (education in non-formal as well as formal settings); democratization (improving access and involving learners in the design of the educational process); the learning society (the requirement for a restructuring of education systems). Implementation of lifelong learning has shifted the vision from 'a neo-Marxist or anarchistic-utopian template for reform to a neo-liberal, functionalist rendition orchestrated as a corollary of globalisation and hyper-capitalism'. Colin Griffin's (UK) paper analyses the non-linear journey from public rhetoric in the Faure Report to its implementation in the public policy documents that emerged from the European Year of Lifelong Learning in 1996. Barry Hake (Netherlands) offers a critique of EU policies on lifelong learning in terms of sociological theories of globalization, reflexive modernization and risk society. Michael Collins (Canada) reframes the discourse on lifelong learning and reminds educators that 'these are the times . . . to adopt political strategies for adding substance' to Faure.

Part II opens with a chapter by Peter Jarvis (UK) on the paradoxes of the learning society exploring three interpretations of the learning

society: a futuristic ideal; as a reaction to social change and a marketing phenomenon of the information society, i.e. a consumer society; and the inherent paradoxes of these formulations and the place for education. Elaine Butler (Australia) debates the implications of lifelong learning and the interrelationship with globalism and new managerialism for the production of working subjects in the post-industrial era. Theo Jansen, Matthias Finger and Danny Wildemeersch (Switzerland, Belgium and the Netherlands) explore the significance of aesthetic reflexivity for adult education. Brian Connelly (UK) looks at lifelong learning through the Habermasian lens ('an interdisciplinary macrotheory of communicative action based on a long-term critical engagement with, and modification of, theories of philosophy, sociology, politics, psychology and linguistics') to provide a theoretical grounding to adult education practice.

Part III focuses on lifelong learning in political transitions and presents four country case studies reflecting the multiple utilities of lifelong learning. Bobby Soobrayan (South Africa) describes the conceptual malleability of lifelong learning in mirroring 'the dominant political agenda of reconciliation'. In Germany, as described by Marion Spöring (UK), lifelong learning is seen as a cure for unemployment. In China, Xiao Fang (China) describes the exploitation of lifelong learning in the development of the private sector. John Holford's (UK) chapter describes the lack of a co-ordinated policy framework in Hong Kong where lifelong learning is still largely conceived as 'adult learning' or as 'continuing education'.

In Part IV Jukka Tuomisto (Finland) provides a Finnish perspective on policy and reality. Michael Law (New Zealand) analyses critically the radical changes to schooling and post-compulsory education in New Zealand that have resulted from economic and social restructuring from a labour studies perspective emphasizing the concerns of working people. Hiromi Sasai (Japan) analyses lifelong learning policies in Japan where lifelong learning is termed social education and the policies encourage subsidies for capital infrastructure, funding to provide lectures and courses in public halls and for the training of social education experts. Fran Ferrier (Australia) explores the implications of the Australian User Choice initiative to lifelong learning. Peter Jarvis, John Holford and Colin Griffin (UK) conclude Part IV with an account of the voucher experience in the City of London.

David Boud (Australia) opens Part V with the question of how university work-based courses can contribute to lifelong learning. Paul Hager and David Beckett (Australia) ask what lifelong learning would look like in a learning setting exploring the differences between workplace learning and more formal education systems and suggesting that the way ahead for workplace learning should be a focus on the contingent, the practical, the process, the particular and the affective and social domains. Aureliana Alberici (Italy) relates Italian perspectives on the learning society. Cliff Falk (Canada) sentences learners to life as he retrofits the academy for the information age. Matthew Williamson and Margaret Wallis (UK) explore the role of the public library in lifelong learning as an integral part of the National Grid for Learning in the UK through its public accessibility.

Part VI has four chapters looking at learning and change at work. Paul Tosey and John Nugent (UK) reflect on their consulting experience within one learning organization. Fred Scheid, Sharon Howell, Vicki Carter and Judith Preston (USA) critically study the learning organization concept addressing issues of agency, decoding some of the language and suggesting that learning organizations have used lifelong learning as a means to maximize effectiveness and drastically to reduce labour costs. Annikki Jarvinen (Finland) analyses two approaches (Nonaka's dialogue between tacit and explicit knowledge and Boland and Tensaki's production of knowledge to create innovative products and processes which require the ability to make strong perspectives within a community as well as being able to take account of other people's perspectives) for organizing learning during organizational innovations and the implications for education presenting the preliminary findings of a case study. Sue Kilpatrick (Tasmania) looks at the exploitation of learning networks to facilitate change in small Australian farm businesses.

Part VII consists of four chapters exploring the aims, ethics and social purpose in lifelong learning. Evan Alderson and Mark Selman's (Canada) chapter attempts to think through alternative approaches to liberal education analysing the traditional ideology of liberal learning. Del Loewenthal and Robert Snell (UK) discuss the appropriateness of the mix between face-to-face delivery methods versus educational technology in the development of professionals and in the way that they sub-

sequently practice. Venitha Pillay (South Africa) addresses two main questions: firstly, whether the new educational model sufficiently recognizes and acts upon the gender inequities of the apartheid education system; and secondly, whether the concept of lifelong learning promotes gender equity or serves to create and/or maintain inequity suggesting that all educational policy development should be premised on the recognition of gender as a variable that can have significant outcomes in the education equation. Janko Berlogar (Slovenia) argues that the reality in which employees strive for their education is that of political utilitarianism and that the education of employees is an important, internal but usually neglected part of business social responsibility.

Overall, this book contains a mixed bag of offerings from policy development to the implications of pragmatic implementation of lifelong learning in varying international and political contexts. The book is a well-edited collection of papers that will be of interest to serious students of lifelong learning around the world.

Eleri Jones, University of Wales Institute Cardiff

Beverly L. Cameron, *Active Learning – Green Guide No. 2*, Halifax, Canada: Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, 1999. ISBN: 0-7703-8466-8. Paperback, 35 pages, $10 Cdn.

The aim of the Green Guide Series is to present research and theory about specific aspects of teaching and learning in higher education in the context of current practice. In the second Green Guide in the series, Beverly J. Cameron focuses on the challenging issue of promoting active learning and critical thinking in higher education. The Guide is aimed at educators who are new to the topic of active learning and are interested in finding practical strategies for introducing it into their courses.

The Guide begins with a section entitled 'Definitions and a Brief Literature Review'. This introduces the reader to the topics of active learning, creative thinking and problem-solving and concludes with a working definition of effective thinking. The second section, 'Linking Effective Thinking and Active Learning' introduces Kolb's experiential learning cycle. A brief case is presented for the use of Kolb's model as a framework for accomplishing effective thinking.

These first two sections cover an immense area of research and theory in only six pages. Thus, although they set the scene and are written in a clear and accessible way, they may leave the reader looking for a more in-depth coverage of the theory underpinning the topic.

The third section, 'Introducing Active Learning to the Classroom' begins by emphasizing the point that a change is required in the mindset of both teacher and student when undertaking active learning and the author recommends a carefully planned introduction of active learning techniques. This section includes a number of suggestions about strategies and techniques that teachers can use in the classroom. In total seventeen different techniques and activities are discussed, beginning with those seen as fairly low risk to those perceived as being more risky. In this context, risk is seen in terms of the degree of departure from familiar instructional settings such as the lecture. Specific emphasis is placed on the importance of building multiple opportunities for active learning into a course design, in order to enable students to 'have opportunities to develop the skills of effective thinking'. Each of the techniques is presented first in terms of process, that is the intention of the activity and the way the activity relates to Kolb's learning model. This is then followed up by 'suggestions', additional strategies to assist the teacher to facilitate the activity. This section will prove helpful to educators who are just beginning to adopt active learning approaches as it introduces a range of helpful strategies and activities. However, by presenting activities that focus on specific stages in the experiential learning cycle there is a slight loss of focus on the overall cycle and the holistic view of experiential learning is reduced to a rather procedural set of activities.

The fourth section 'Making Changes to Active Learning Techniques' deals with issues of managing students' expectations and to help them actively engage with the learning process. Cameron also discusses the need for teachers to address changes to assessment and marking schemes to reflect the objectives of active learning. This discussion is then followed by a short overview of the various facets of group work as they apply to active learning. The final section 'Implementing Active Learning' very briefly discusses outcomes of active learning for both student and teacher.

In summary, *Active Learning – Green Guide No 2* provides a very brief glimpse of the research and theory about active learning and begins to address some of the practical issues of implementing active learning strategies in the classroom. The practical guidance will be useful to those new to active learning. However, the lack of depth in presenting the theoretical underpinning may leave others a little short on detail about active learning and the impression of a rather procedural approach.

Sue Fowell, University of New South Wales

Krystyna Weinstein, *Action Learning – A Practical Guide – 2nd edition*, Aldershot: Gower, 1999. ISBN: 0-566-08097-4. Paperback, xiv+230 pages. £18.99.

Interest in the subject of action learning has increased over the past few years and programmes of action learning are now well established in many universities and workplaces. This book (an updated and expanded version of an earlier edition) introduces the topic of action learning and is primarily aimed at practitioners and participants who are new to the area. It provides a useful source of advice and guidance by presenting insights into the experiences of learning set members and the process of developing and facilitating action learning programmes. There are two parts to the book, the first part includes two chapters that deal with the definitions of action learning and their theoretical and philosophical origins; the second part focuses on action learning in practice and the process of programme development.

Most of the chapters in this book include one or more case studies that ground the content of the chapter in the experiences of action learners. The examples illustrate a range of settings and types of activity where action learning has been applied.

Chapter 1 begins by discussing the meaning of action learning and goes on to explore the reasons why organizations choose to take an action learning approach, the various kinds of programmes they initiate, and the benefits of being a participant in an action learning programme. Chapter 2 covers the theory and philosophy behind action learning and provides definitions that help to convey the spirit of action learning as well as providing a more detailed look at the underlying values and models. This is not an in-depth exploration but a clearly written overview of the area, providing an introduction to the basic premises of action learning as well as explaining how the approach followed in this book differs from similar approaches.

Part II Action Learning in Practice includes nine chapters that, as the title suggests, focus on the practicalities of implementing programmes of action learning. Chapter 3 explores the nature of the action learning set and makes comparisons with other kinds of group work. Chapter 4 explores the action part of action learning and addresses the nature of projects and tasks and how they are selected and tackled.

Chapter 5 focuses on the processes that take place in the learning set and what it takes to be an effective set member, and Chapter 6 explores the role of the learning set adviser. Chapter 7 considers why action learning programmes often require more time to complete than other forms of learning. Emphasis here is on the value of taking time to establish the learning set, for participants to get to know each other and to develop the skills required for effective action learning.

Chapter 8 covers the learning that takes place alongside the action, outlining methods for documenting learning such as keeping a diary and learning notes. This chapter also considers the ways the achievements of action learners can be evaluated. Chapter 9 is a very short chapter summarizing the reservations people have about action learning and discussion focuses on ways of overcoming these reservations.

Chapter 10 on the future of action learning makes links to the area of organizational learning and looks at other opportunities for organizations to apply action learning. For instance, action learning càn be used as an approach for exploring problems and stresses arising from information overload and situations of job change and uncertainty.

The final chapter contains guidelines and suggestions about how to go about designing an action learning programme. This chapter includes helpful notes and recommendations for the structure of meetings and learning sets as well as a discussion about potential pitfalls and how to avoid or recover from them.

Although there are now many books on action learning, I would expect that most people would find this book a useful addition to their collection. Weinstein provides a balanced account of the benefits and limitations of action

learning. Although she is clearly a skilled and experienced practitioner with a strong commitment to action learning, she does not simply present an over-optimistic view but addresses the concerns that many people have about action learning and presents a very practical guide to effective programme develop- ment. The book is well written and the case studies and personal experiences provide valuable insights into the practical application of action learning.

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