Action Learning in Business Education: Lifelong Action Learning

Paula Caproni
Moderator
Panelists

- **Andrew Burgess**, Ross Tauber alum, now Senior Manager/Business Intelligence and Analytics, BCA Quality Integration, at Boeing

- **Michael Phillips**, Ross undergraduate alum, Kellogg MBA Alum, now Consultant at A. T. Kearney

- **Dean Eisner**, Ross MBA alum and former CEO of Manheim Cox Enterprises and board member of several organizations, including Ringling College of Art and Design in Sarasota, Florida, Manheim Cox Enterprises, American Tower Corporation, Agora-Gazeta, and the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce

- **Eric Hirst**, Associate Dean for Graduate Programs & John Arch White Professor of Accounting at the McCombs School of Business at the University of Texas at Austin
Definition of Action Learning

- People working as individuals or (more often) in small groups on real work-based projects in real time in ambiguous and challenging situations with real consequences for which there is no one correct answer.

- “Comrades in adversity” who take responsibility for their own learning with the support of others such as faculty advisors, colleagues, managers, etc. (Revans, 1982; Cho and Egan, 2010)
Assumptions about Action Learning

- People learn differently in action-based projects than in other forms of learning
- Action-based learning is worth the investment
Activity:

1. What would extraordinary outcomes be from action learning?

2. How do we structure action based learning for maximum impact in short and long-term?

3. What do we already know about the impact of action learning?

4. What is the research agenda? What are the most important questions we should be asking?
Action Learning in Business Education: Life Long Action Learning

Andrew Burgess
The Boeing Company
Topics

- World travels
- Wise words from an Action Based Learning expert
- Lightning
- Board Games
“Everybody has a plan until they get punched in the face”.

Action Learning in Business Education:
Lessons from the Future Panel Discussion – An Alum’s Experience and Perspectives

Michael Phillips
June 5, 2015
Action Learning Experiences

- **Michigan Ross** → Undergraduate Core Operations Project
- **Kellogg** → MBA Private Equity Buyout Lab, Consumer Insights Ethnography, Market Research
- **A.T. Kearney** → Chicago Booth Strategy Lab Coach, Michigan Ross Operations Lab Coach (x2)
Perspectives on Impact

- Marketability
- Professional network
- Informed career choices
- Engaged learning

- Diverse perspective
- Resilience and adaptability
- Collaborative aptitude
Reflection on Opportunity for Action Learning

- The more ‘real’ the better for increased impact

- Stakeholder alignment on objectives and roles is critical – Corp. Partners, Faculty and Students (Especially in teams)

- ‘Fit for purpose’ pairing for successful outcomes (and adjust if needed)
Action Learning in Business Education:
LIFELONG ACTION LEARNING

Eric Hirst
McCombs School of Business
University of Texas at Austin
Context—MBA+ Leadership Program

- Origins
- Optional co-curricular
  - Coaching—communication, presence, executive, …
  - Seminars—financial modeling, sales, using LinkedIn, …
  - Events—International night, pitch party, …
  - MBA+ Consulting Projects
- Offered to students across portfolio of MBA programs
Context—Fellows Programs

- Board Fellows
- Sigma Fellows
- Marketing Labs
- Marketing Fellows
- Clean Tech Fellows
- Venture Labs Fellows

- Corporate Finance Fellows
- MBA Investment Fund
- REIT Investment Fund
- Venture Fellows
Alumni survey—overview

- N ~ 300 → 2/3 Ross, 1/3 McCombs
- Largely classes of 2010-2014
- Broad range of industries and functional areas
- Differences across programs are minor, but ...
  - Not an exercise designed to isolate differences
Survey—preliminary findings

- They are happy MBA graduates!
  - 85% satisfied with career progress
  - 81% satisfied with job
  - 88% satisfied with life overall
  - 88% satisfied with leadership abilities, adaptability, ...
Survey—preliminary findings

- How was their ABL experience?
  - 88% got new practical, non-classroom, experience
  - 82% were interested in the project ex ante
  - 83% agree that sponsor was pleased
  - 78% got sufficient information to make effective recommendations
Survey—preliminary findings

- But ...
  - 72% on a high-performing team
  - Only 55% thought everybody put in their best work
  - 72% got school support they needed
  - 60% said experience contributed to first year job success
  - 63% said experience still contributes to job performance
  - Only 37% thought it contributed to getting first job
Survey—preliminary findings

- What impact did MAP/MBA+/Fellows have?
  - 84% enhanced ability to work in teams
  - 76% enhanced leadership skills
  - 73% enhanced functional skills
Open-ended—Wins

- Working with diverse (in all respects) teams
- Dealing with dysfunctional teams
- Helping with career transitions
- Project scoping skills
- Dealing with incomplete information and ambiguity
- International and cultural insights
Data Challenges

- Where’s the theory?
- No control group
  - No way to measure relative value (versus, say, taking other courses) of ABL
- Retrospective recollections
- Different model for different students?
  - Switchers, enhancers, explorers, entrepreneurs
Opportunities

- **Strategic**
  - Required or optional; general or individualized
  - What do *all* projects need to offer/accomplish?
  - Tied to learning? Functional? Integrated learning?
  - Tied to career management?
  - Optimal timing

- **Tactical**
  - Who chooses team? Who chooses project?
  - Enhanced operational outcomes
Going forward

- Where else can we learn from?
- Identifying key learning objectives
  - Tracking and assessing them
  - Pre-Post data collection and analysis
  - True experimentation—we saw that with reflection
- If this is so great, why do we still have lectures?