

Our customers: Examples and quotations from 30 organizations

'Those unable to change themselves cannot change what goes on around them' Reg Revans

Allied Irish Bank (banking services)

Australia Post (postal services)

BAA (airport owners and operators)

Bekaert (manufacturing)

CarnaudMetalbox (manufacturing)

Conrad Jupiters, Gold Coast, Australia (hotel and casino operations)

Cummings Engineering (manufacturing)

Cypres, Netherlands (information technology)

Du Pont (chemicals)

Fina Petroleum (petrochemicals)

Granada Group (media, hotels and catering)

ICI Australia Ltd. (chemicals)

Interbrew UK business school (brewing)

International Distillers & Vintners (IDV) UK Ltd. (drinks)

Jones Lang Wootton (surveyors)

Lucent Technologies (information technology)

Malaysia Airlines (airline)

MCB University Press (publishing)

Mirror Group (publishing)

National Sorghum Breweries, South Africa (brewing)

Papua New Guinea Post and Telecommunications Corporation (telecommunications)

Pilkington (manufacturing)

Prudential (financial services)

Rocco Forte Hotels (hotels)

Seagram Europe (drinks)

Shell International Petroleum (petrochemicals)

St. Helier NHS Trust (health services)

Quotes from Barbados Hotel & Tourism Association associates (tourism)

Quotes from Jamaica Hotel and Tourist Association associates (tourism)

Quotes from Sodexo associates (food services and facilities management)

Quotation from Dr Peter Honey European learning specialist

Source: Accrediting Managers at Work in the 21st Century, Richard Teare & Gordon Prestoungrange, Prestoungrange University Press, 2004.

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Allied Irish Bank

Allied Irish Bank's general manager recognized the need to prepare his managers for the future. He knew that the bank needed a real customer focus and re-defined objectives. In so doing, he asked IMCA to develop custom-made action learning courses that would focus on the organization and its market place. The bank aimed to address a wide range of issues at different levels. Among others, the outcomes addressed the needs of small business customers, product development, customer service and the strategic challenge of maximizing the returns on central services.

Australia Post

Australia Post already had a range of traditional employee development courses and policies, but the human resources director felt that outcomes did not always match expectations. It felt like the company was taking one step forward and two steps back in management development. IMCA were asked to contribute:

'We were attracted by a management development process where everyone could be winners, the individual, the client organization and the individual sponsor, and by the emphasis on outputs rather than inputs.'

BAA

BAA (formerly British Airport Authority) is of the world's leading international airport groups. BAA wanted to enable any manager - at any level - to work towards action learning awards at several levels. Associates were drawn from a wide range of specialist areas - from the fire service to property development, terminal management, retail and operations research. Experts within the company also contributed to the learning process, and each associate was supported by his / her immediate line manager, together with a mentor, whose main role was to 'open doors' within the company. At the launch of the initiative (with more than 50 associates) the director of training and management development at BAA said:

'We wanted to become a learning organization in the true sense of the word, and we wanted to see all employees develop ways of continuous learning in the realities of their jobs'.

Bekaert

Bekaert International - a steel wire manufacturer based in Belgium, but operating in the US market were grappling with a number of export challenges. They worked with IMCA to address two of these:

- How to develop and implement appropriate plans to increase effectiveness in the marketplace.
- Mechanisms to enable managers to work on personal effectiveness, managerial skills and expertise.

Action learning projects took time to implement but were used to address the organization's strategic challenges. The associates who devised the plans were also given the responsibility for carrying them out. The marketing director commented: 'We looked for the best approach to suit our needs — action learning teaches not only the knowledge, but also the skills of how to do it'.

CarnaudMetalbox

'This course is very effective for young managers, as it takes them rapidly across all the company management functions.' Graduate recruitment and development manager, CarnaudMetalBox.

Three action learning sets worked with IMCA. As the managers were younger than is usual with more limited managerial experience (a pre-requisite for Master's level work) these associates undertook a part-time foundation year. In all sets, associates came from the many different factory areas within the group. During this time, Metal Box, the old name for the British part of the company, merged with its French equivalent to become CarnaudMetalBox. Two different cultures emerged and with this, inefficiencies. An example being the different ways in which meetings were conducted and reported. Some members of the third set spent a week in the Paris head office, undertaking an operations management project which they wrote up individually, having reported back to their French clients. Before their oral examinations, this same group made a presentation to their British directors and clients about the benefits of their work.

Conrad Jupiters, Gold Coast, Australia

Hotel Conrad Jupiter's Casino on the Gold Coast, Australia employees some 2,500 people. IMCA faculty worked alongside the organization's executive team to ensure that associates' action learning would add value to the organization. It was estimated that Conrad Jupiter's return on investment from workplace learning amounted to approximately A\$70,000 saved from the marketing budget and A\$70,000 saved from project outcomes. One of the associates (later promoted to hotel operations analyst) commented: 'IMCA's approach allowed me to think more holistically about the business we are in, as opposed to managing 'in situ' as so many of us do.'

Cummings Engineering

IMCA started working with Cummings Engineering at a time when new organizational structures (built around the total work-flow process) had just been introduced. New thinking on organizational development, coupled with changing competition and technologies, prompted the four key objectives that associates worked on:

- How do we manage the totality of their newly defined business units effectively?
- How can we build more effective working relationships between different areas of specialist competence throughout Cummins?
- How can we achieve better levels of service to customers in all market segments?
- How can we improve business performance in a rapidly evolving environment?

Cypres, Netherlands

The challenge at Cypres was to design and implement a programme that would help the company to recruit and retain the 'right' people in a competitive, fast-paced information technology marketplace. This was accomplished by working with IMCA and IIP processes in conjunction with Business School Netherlands. Investors in people (IIP) offers a methodical approach for determining and communicating business goals and the development of people (on a voluntary basis) to reach those goals. IIP was fully implemented by Cypres - the first Dutch organization to obtain IIP certification.

Du Pont

Du Pont enlisted the help of IMCA to implement a range of courses designed to promote and sustain improvement in a variety of business areas. As the director of personnel comments: 'In-company management development is an excellent way of encouraging and enabling continuous improvement in a stressful and changing business scene.' The work also helped to address two areas of concern for Du Pont - marketing and corporate interfaces. A range of benefits were realized by the organization. The computer systems and telecommunications manager admits he was cynical beforehand, but felt differently later. He cites his reasons for conversion as: 'The focus on work-related assignments and the resulting benefits to the organization. The live and demanding nature of the projects undertaken and the scale and breadth of exposure to real-life strategies enabling the managers to overcome adversity. The results have hopefully led to more incisive, more rounded and better balanced group of managers.'

Fina Petroleum

IMCA worked with Fina when it was a UK subsidiary of the international petroleum and petrochemical group, PetroFina. Towards the end of the course, PetroFina merged with Total. Fina had sought IMCA's help in developing courses to facilitate action learning at all organizational levels. There were many insightful projects: For example a financial saving occurred when an associate on one of the courses used newly acquired marketing skills to promote payment by direct debit. This led to savings in the region of £12,000 from one assignment. A further project focused on human resource management and investigated the difficulties Fina plc might encounter when implementing 360° appraisal within the organization. This project added an estimated value of between £60,000 and £100,000 due to savings in consultancy fees.

Granada Group

Creating internal knowledge networks based on the outcomes of accredited learning at work

Divisional finance director

Led an internal task group review of management reporting and used his own work to help develop common reporting procedures and streamlined requirements. As an outcome, he was seconded to lead a finance and systems integration project, a strategic role, tasked to recommend the best finance and systems structure for the future. He became finance director of a major UK division.

Divisional operations director

Focused on the development of a new strategic direction for motorway restaurants, with a range of applications now in use. His experience has cascaded to his whole team via a 'managing people strategy' As an outcome he has become a more reflective practitioner, routinely drawing on research and other data to back-up own experience and intuition.

Divisional commercial director

Focused on e-procurement and its likely implications for the Group supply base. Outputs included the development of an electronic marketplace - a new income stream activity - as well as additional purchasing volume growth in the UK. This work led to an invitation (among others) to join a DTI consultative committee on e-procurement.

Divisional managing director

Two key projects have had substantial impact - the first concerned the introduction of a roadside division intranet where his own research on this topic helped ensure continuity of involvement. The second focused on the development of a new concept and the subsequent brand ownership issues. These outcomes led to a divisional MD appointment.

Divisional commercial director

Implemented work included a review of the 'business category' management process and key elements of the supply chain and a detailed review of a roadside franchise opportunity with external retailers. Tangible outcomes have included improved sales and profits (franchised retailing) and improved brand management, with new retail offers and delivery support.

ICI Australia Ltd.

The personnel director of ICI Australia at the time, felt that a number of well educated technical employees would benefit from an intensive management course. He knew that it would be too costly and impractical to send 15 of their brightest people away for a year or more to a business school. So, IMCA brought an action learning business school approach to the company. The practical nature of the work, enabling participants to relate study to their job and other projects, really appealed to the directors. They liked the way participants could study marketing and apply the principles at the same time. The ICI action learning set established a strong camaraderie and was effective in assisting and helping one another. Further, the scepticism expressed by some disappeared when they realized they were working on key projects supported by the board, and that they had control over the ways and means of working and learning. The projects dealt with major issues such as the launch of new products, introducing new ways of working, extending support services for clients, improving safety, marketing and selling into new territories and other key activities of the business. The participants, aged between 28 and 40 years of age, brought a high level of energy and new ideas as they assisted one another in the spirit of action learning. Challenging questions were asked and 'connecting rods' of information and enquiry that did not exist before, began to criss-cross the organization.

Interbrew UK business school

Extracts for the Interbrew UK (IUK) business school annual operational report, 2003

The IUK business school was formally launched on 18 March 2002, having been built up over the previous 15 months - principally through the development & introduction of the business programme 'Competing for the future through action learning' run in partnership with Ashridge business school and IMCA Socrates™. Since this time we have developed a range of other programmes based on accredited action learning to maximize the value for participants & through them, the business as a whole. IMCA Socrates™ coupled with the Ashridge programme offered us a perfect vehicle to introduce action learning into Interbrew UK Ltd. The experiences and growth of those individuals who embarked upon that first programme is clearly visible to all who know them. They have led others into the process.

The application of IMCA Socrates™ has evolved in an organic manner. We do not seek to force, but allow action learning to emerge as a natural learning methodology when appropriate. As more and more of our population undertake accredited action learning, the more it will shift and absorb into our culture. Another great success in this year has been the involvement, participation and active support of many of the board members and senior managers and the very direct sponsorship of the chief executive, UK & Ireland, himself. They see the very real results of this process. Looking forward we are now taking steps to enlarge our resource architecture for the Interbrew UK business school. There is work to be done on marketing what has been achieved. I look forward to bringing action learning into teams focused on one business problem from various different aspects, and being able to achieve a number of credits on the basis of their work. A quote from Stewart Gilliland, our chief executive UK & Ireland - speaks volumes about the value of these programmes to the business in that those supporting the participants also learn in the process:

This programme epitomises what we are attempting to deliver in terms of personal development and personal responsibility, linked to key business projects. I have been particularly impressed with the quality of the project work and the support the individuals are receiving from the organisation, both in terms of the development and subsequent actions. I have enjoyed my involvement with the programme and the coaching sessions have also helped my own skill development and appreciation of some of the business challenges. I am now keen to see my more senior managers actively involved in the programme.

International Distillers & Vintners (IDV) UK Ltd.

International Distillers and Vintners (IDV) UK Ltd were key players in the liquor industry. To help with strategy and direction the company used IMCA to develop and implement its first ever attempt at in-company management development. As it touched strategic nerves, IDV executives were keen to participate. IDV's chief executive 'championed' the work and played an important role in its design and development. The CEO was so impressed with the results that he later undertook and successfully completed one of IMCA's action research doctorates, thus reinforcing strategic focus and encouraging learning throughout the organization. The CEO commented:

'The process works wonderfully, the savings realized by one project alone in the first IDV action learning set paid for the entire course in less than a year, and went on paying back. That was just one of the fourteen projects, almost all of which gave a bottom line pay-back. And that's not to mention the personal development for the people involved. As a way to deliver strategic intent, it can't be beaten'.

Jones Lang Wootton

Jones Lang Wootton, a leading chartered surveying partnership, relies for its success on the knowledge and skills within the firm. IMCA were asked to design an action learning programme that would assist in the development of professional and specialist skills, as well as an understanding of other key areas of business and financial management. The projects focused on issues of strategic importance to the firm, together with cross-functional analysis and operating unit contributions to overall business strategy and how it could be improved.

Lucent Technologies

Lucent Technologies is a world player in the telecommunications industry. The company was originally part of AT&T and a large number of staff had risen through the ranks of AT&T. Lucent Technologies had a number of design requirements for the work it asked IMCA to undertake. Flexibility in the courses design and delivery was sought and Lucent wanted the courses to have specific outcomes. Further, senior management at Lucent expected the projects undertaken to demonstrate measurable improvement in managerial skills and knowledge, the development of a culture of continuous learning, enhancement of teamwork and a return on the investment in training.

Malaysia Airlines

Malaysia Airline Systems (MAS) operate in the busy hub of South East Asia. Air travel is said to be one of the most competitive industries in the world and MAS experience intense rivalry in their region. Because of this, attention to detail, customer service and teamwork are crucial to the airlines' success. IMCA's action learning approach was part of the airline's response to its competitive situation. The director of customer service noticed the improvement in teamworking among course participants and in their own work teams: 'It has resulted in an integrated approach to solving key issues at MAS and with it, a closer working relationship and understanding. The crossing of functional boundaries has led to a cross-fertilization of ideas and generated new thinking within the organization. This has provided an important catalyst for improving the interface between functions and the overall effectiveness of the organization.' Associates had also produced a number of plans which were implemented by the airline. These include: PR strategies for business travel, service excellence in baggage handling, a financial strategy and a materials management strategy - all of which 'provided real returns on investment'.

MCB University Press

MCB University Press (now known as the Emerald Publishing Group) is a leading professional and academic journal publishing company based in Bradford, UK. The company, in partnership with IMCA, formed its own enterprise school of management to offer its employees a range of action learning courses. Action learning and the continuing professional development of staff were important to the company as the organization sought to make a number of organizational changes. Such changes included the transition from traditional print to the electronic capture and dissemination of knowledge and information. These trends in publishing brought a number of opportunities and challenges to the organization.

The enterprise school of management (ESM) - a model on which IMCA Socrates™ was later based, provided an affordable means of enabling many employees to develop at work. The work centred on issues critical to MCB's future success. As a direct result, a number of organizational changes were pioneered and implemented. Projects included: Internet connectivity, strategic alliances and the transformed supply and demand side marketing relationships. Further, a policy of promotion from within was established and several staff rose through the ranks to director level. One example was an associate who began at MCB and via the ESM gained the skills needed for promotion. His comment was: 'MCB gains a more effective, efficient and motivated manager as a result of workplace learning, and the manager is able to extract the best from his/her team. Meanwhile team members themselves feel encouraged to take up workplace learning opportunities, promoting a generalized learning culture and a corporate goal'.

Mirror Group

A member of the circulation department at Mirror Group Newspapers PLC registered for an IMCA course in quality management so as to assist with the implementation of the organization's quality system. By taking a helicopter view of the organization, and applying theory to real life situations, the associate helped the Mirror Group with some radical changes to the company and its customer services. The associate claims that the outcomes of the Diploma in Quality Management '...saved our company over £1 million, and our customers are happier'.

National Sorghum Breweries, South Africa

National Sorghum Breweries (NSB) was regarded by some as a sleepy, loss making, state owned brewer of traditional African beers. With IMCA, the company aimed to re-think its vision and re-vitalize it. IMCA helped to establish one of the largest single corporate educational and development initiatives ever undertaken in South Africa. In a period of twelve months, 200 of the managers joined a series of in-company courses and in so doing, transformed the company. The transformation was triggered by the associates themselves, working on real-issue projects that addressed the social, political and economic problems facing the black workforce in the wake of apartheid. In response, a plan to buy-out and turn around the brewery was formulated. National Sorghum Breweries became a successful company, largely owned and managed by those who had previously felt disenfranchised. How did this happen? First, the organization was turned inside out by the energy of the action learning projects. And, second, many of their graduates went from NSB into other South African organizations so as to replicate the educational and development process. NSB made itself an enterprise school of management with IMCA - and found, interestingly enough, that it was wholly complementary to its commercial ambitions.

Papua New Guinea Post and Telecommunications Corporation

Papua New Guinea Post and Telecommunications Corporation, located in Port Moresby, sought the help of IMCA action learning at a time when the company was due to be split into two separate entities. Action learning was used to prepare managers for the coming separation and to enable them to devise operational strategies for the successful separation of the two functions. Five years later, the post and telecommunications functions become autonomous companies and two of the action learning associates were promoted to run these operations.

Pilkington

Pilkington and Crown Berger managers worked together on an IMCA action learning management development course. The fact that the two organizations were so different enabled the associates to freely share and compare ideas and practices. This consortium approach came about as a direct result of IMCA's involvement with both companies.

Prudential

IMCA ran action learning sets with Prudential over a period of eight years, engaging with hundreds of managers at all levels. The writings on how to 'be' a learning organization were at that time both stimulating and frustrating. Most suggest some grand design, indicating that the start of the process comes with the recognition of the benefits by the senior executives in an organization. There then follows the analysis of the gap between the qualities of resources required to fulfil the company's strategic aims and the current resource capabilities. This gap is then filled by a sequence of learning activities focused on individual and business development. To get to a clear statement of individual and business development needs is by no means obvious. The evidence showed that individual lives were changed by the process. Managers were more prepared to take imaginative steps, and were more prepared to question constructively what needed to be done to increase sales. They were more confident that they had the ability to succeed in their enterprise. Perhaps most important of all, the managers who managed their part of the business on action learning lines allowing staff to develop and grow in the routine of managing the daily business.

Rocco Forte Hotels

The managing director of Rocco Forte Hotels (UK & Russia) used IMCA Socrates™ to create the Rocco Forte Academy. Here, a pilot group of senior managers worked on four key projects:

- The creation of a central reservations office
- The creation of a convention centre
- The creation of a corporate purchasing system
- The creation of a corporate business school

The participants all qualified with either a Master's degree or a postgraduate Diploma in Management Studies and the projects they undertook have been a resounding success. The managing director attributed much of this to the detailed planning and shared learning that characterize the action learning approach - leading with 'questions' rather than 'content'.

Seagram Europe

Seagram Europe used IMCA action learning to develop both senior and junior managers. The work-based projects had in common direct, quantifiable results in key areas of the company's operations. The projects provided the company with new strategies and enabled senior managers to draw in new insights and experiences. Projects covered the areas of franchising, the organization's resources, employment patterns and channel marketing. The director of human resources, summed up the successes: 'We have seen the tangible benefits - personal management development contributing to company performance'.

Shell International Petroleum

To improve the skills and thinking of management at Shell an IMCA action learning procurement leadership course was undertaken by a number of the organization's management. The course was to last seven months and in that time the company wished to achieve a number of outcomes:

- Change in management thinking, i.e. business orientated thinking, change management and how to implement change.
- Skills i.e. team skills and how to create and manage effective teams.
- Financial returns on investment.

At the close to the course, most of the outcomes had been achieved, with additional unplanned benefits too. An important component was the preparation of procurement improvement plans (PIP). These were action learning projects based on real organizational problems which sought to find answers, changes and savings for the organization. A target was set of seven percent financial savings on each PIP - this target was met and in some cases exceeded. A number of associates made savings in the region of \$12 million, by identifying corrective action(s). The impact on management thinking was significant and associates commented that action learning had helped them to focus, feel energized, and bring fresh ideas and thinking to business processes. One associate said that the 'the stimulus to achieve what should already have been done had accelerated the implementation of their projects'. Another associate said that he had felt helped to: 'realize the power of leadership and to become more aware of how to push and lead processes which contribute to savings. The action learning process provided powerful tools to enable us to influence change and this is one of its greatest strengths'.

St. Helier NHS Trust

The achievements of the St. Helier national health service hospital trust in the UK clearly illustrate the many potential benefits of the IMCA enterprise school of management (ESM) organizational learning approach.

Using the medium of workplace projects, action learning enabled consultants, doctors, nursing professionals and clinical and development management personnel from various hospitals within the Trust to work together, build relationships and develop new managerial skills. The outcomes helped associates to be more effective managers and developed measurable return on investment in both qualitative and financial terms. At the outset, some confessed that they had not written a report for over thirty years, though the first action learning set alone yielded annual efficiency savings in excess of £2 million. Perhaps even more importantly, given the nature of a health service trust and the need to win and retain clients, the organization also reported significant quality improvements in service to customers both in terms of efficiency and effectiveness. Commenting on the success of the partnership, the St. Helier trust CEO said: 'IMCA action learning is about far more than achieving a degree. It is an extensive personal development process that helps those involved to become far more effective in every aspect of their own working life – and to be better members of teams. It has the power to transform individuals and the organizations they work for.'

Quotes from Barbados Hotel & Tourism Association associates

- 'I have become a better team player...'
- 'Realizing that if you lead with questions, you can find answers'
- 'It gave me a real platform and confidence to go forward in my career'
- 'I have learnt the beauty of teamwork'
- 'I now produce better, more factually-based reports, backed by data'
- 'I am committed to action learning for future problem-solving'
- 'I learnt how to stand back and let go'
- 'I now use reflection on a daily basis to enhance my own performance'

Quotes from Jamaica Hotel and Tourist Association associates

'The tourism industry needs action learning. It is very 'hands on' and ideally suited to the industry's practitioners.'

'I now evaluate every discussion, every meeting and every article to determine if a project can be implemented.'

'The learning review is immensely useful. It allowed me to reflect on the journey and to tie it back to the career review. In so doing, it helps you to see how one has grown and developed.'

Quotes from Sodexho associates

Action learning opens the mind to the skills that are required in the 21st century, such as daily business downsizing and reorganization of large companies. For example, our own re-organization, or output three, was a \$1.1 million budget reduction. Through the team approach, and with our minds together, we came up with many ideas. We saved the client \$1.1 million and did not lose any productive work hours or lay anyone off. I've been in this business for twenty-eight years. I was a sceptic of action learning before I entered the program, but now I am a strong believer in this process. Bachelor's graduate, July 2003.

Determination to learn is the key to a brilliant future. Ideas are exposed rather than being imposed. The action learning degree program is the most effective strategy to combine learning with real business applications. The concept has been a superb solution to increasing our employees' knowledge with reference to their jobs, as well as motivating them to have a brighter future, both professionally and personally. Master's graduate, July 2003.

Quotation from Dr Peter Honey, European learning specialist

The IMCA Socrates™ programme combines three elements; the idea of a truly customized corporate business school, an action learning approach (i.e. the action learning projects become the 'curriculum') and accreditation whereby the participants gain credits that eventually result in a degree. This is a stunningly simple formula with something for everyone. The organization 'wins' by getting practical solutions to operational problems and a highly motivated workforce committed to successful implementation. Each participating individual 'wins' by getting a worthwhile qualification. Essentially, the organization is helped to create the best sort of corporate business school where 'students' apply their knowledge to raise performance and where the 'faculty' are successful managers within the company. The effect is nothing short of a quantum leap towards becoming a learning organization. The IMCA Socrates™ approach invites organizations to behave as if learning through work is king.

'The clamour for content is crazy', published in his column for the *Training Journal*, UK.