WORK-APPLIED LEARNING

for CHANGE LEADERS

CONCEPT | PROCESS | PRACTICE

SELVA ABRAHAM

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CONCEPT | PROCESS | PRACTICE

WAL PUBLICATIONS

SELVA ABRAHAM

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FOREWORD

PAUL DAVIDSON

Formerly Associate Professor of Management, QUT Business School, Brisbane

This is a valuable deepening and extension of Selva's original WBL model and methodology to produce a comprehensive WAL model that addresses individual team and organisational change through work-based tasks. It provides valuable advice at all levels of intervention – individual, team and organisation and tactical, operational and strategic. In this latter area it is particularly valuable for change managers and consultants. Selva has made a great contribution to the WBL field over many years, and now offers the reader the fruits of his experience and reflections.

My advice to the potential reader is: don't dismiss this book as just another management fad introduced by someone wishing to make a saleable name for himself. It is not that kind of book. It is a quiet, sincere and very thoughtful treatise. It is prescriptive in seeking results, yet reflective in encouraging insight and cognitive innovation and intelligent application. It is not a cookbook. More than that, it takes what MBA courses teach puts core topics into practical and pragmatic form. It encourages questioning and it respectfully points towards the answers that practitioners should be looking for.

Having taught graduate management courses for several decades, I've read a lot of uninspiring books and papers, and a few thousand assignments that lack freshness and utility. This book stands above all of these. For the curious and enquiring mind that wants authentic guidelines for how to apply change management in the workplace, especially at the strategic and organisational level, Selva's book is the outcome of much work and thought on his part. All of us who seek a better way to advise and practice in change management will learn valuable lessons from it. In short, I recommend it. It will repay your time and effort in reading it. I am honoured to be given the opportunity to endorse it publicly.

FOREWORD

DATUK SHAMSUDDIN BARDAN
Executive Director, Malaysian Employers Federation

> *"Change is the law of life and those who look only to the past*
> *or present are certain to miss the future." – John F. Kennedy*

Organisations face immense challenges in these turbulent and changing times. Organisations must embrace change as inevitable and keep re-inventing themselves in order to survive and sustain themselves.

However, their success is not just based on their ability to simply change. They need to change faster than their competition and sustain the change in the context of the ever- changing environment.

In this book, Professor Selva Abraham presents the WAL model for change which he developed, based on his extensive consulting experience and research. He explains how he developed the WAL concept and process. He then provides interesting and relevant case studies of the practice of the WAL model in diverse organisations. These include Australian organisations such as a business unit of Australia Post, a judo club, an Indigenous statutory corporation, and the Light Regional Council, as well as a Malaysian bank and a shipping company, the Internal Revenue Commission of Papua New Guinea, and a petroleum company in Trinidad & Tobago.

This book is to be commended for providing a systematic process for planning, implementing, evaluating and validating organisational change.

I believe that this book, especially the case studies, will be of much interest to many organisations who are seeking to plan and implement change but are unsure of how to proceed.

FOREWORD

COLIN BRADLEY

President, Action Learning, Action Research Association Inc.

I wrote in the foreword for the 2015 edition of this book that Work-Applied Learning (WAL) is an evolving concept. This edition demonstrates Selva Abraham's ongoing work on the development and evolution of WAL. The cyclical creative thinking and learning process brings together several concepts that reflect the underlying principles of WAL – the critical questioning in change, the stages of creative thinking and learning and the five stages of persuasion.

Of great importance, at least to me as a consultant working with people and organisations on real problems, is the practical nature of WAL, which is grounded in action research, action learning and reflective practice. This book demonstrates the diversity of application of WAL. In addition to Abraham's descriptions of mini-cases working with a local council and a bank, there are accounts from diverse entities: an Indigenous statutory authority reviewing and improving the effectiveness of its main programme (Our Land Our Future), and a not-for-profit judo club overhauling its business model. Other organisations have also used WAL, with accounts from Australia Post, a Malaysian shipping company, a Trinidad and Tobago petroleum company, and the Internal Revenue Commission of Papua New Guinea.

These accounts reinforce that the WAL method is a very effective example of action research and action learning in the change process. I believe that this book will be invaluable to managers who wish to introduce change in their divisions, departments or organisations as a whole.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

SELVA ABRAHAM MBA, PhD

Selva is the Founder Chairman of the Global Centre for Work-Applied Learning (GCWAL). He is also the Founder of and Emeritus Professor at the Australian Institute of Business (AIB), as well as a Visiting Professor at Leeds Trinity University.

He has a PhD in Management from Flinders University in South Australia and a Master of Business Administration from Henley Business School/ Brunel University in the UK.

Over the last 40 years, Selva's consulting and research focus has been on Work-Based Learning (WBL), which he has extended into the concept of Work-Applied Learning (WAL). Selva is a Thought Leader in Work-Applied Learning and Work-Based Learning and continues to undertake research and consulting in these areas.

Selva has worked with senior executives in work-based learning practice and change management programmes and has also supervised senior executives in their master's and doctoral theses in the areas using WBL and WAL, action research, action learning and reflective practice. Some of the senior executives with whom he undertook these projects came from private, public and community organisations including Motorola, Intel, Banque Nationale de Paris, Société Generale, Eastern Pretech, Australia Post, Light Regional Council, Aboriginal Sobriety Group, Epic Valley, Global Carrier Berhad, Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation Australia, Monash Health, Chief Minister's Department Sarawak Malaysia.

Selva has written five books related to action research and change and continues to undertake research and publish in the areas of WBL and WAL in the context of management learning and organisational change.

He is also the Founder and Editorial Advisory Board member of the Journal of Work-Applied Management (JWAM). This journal is Scopus-ranked.

Selva continues to work with the Board of Directors of the Global Centre for Work-Applied Learning in steering the organisation as the Chairman and he and his wife Param remain shareholders of the Australian Institute of Business where he provides advice in the areas of action research, reflective practice and practitioner research in his capacity as Emeritus Professor.

> " *Selva dedicates this book to his wife Param, sons Sanjay and Vinod, daughters-in-law Kate and Vanessa and grandchildren Ashvin, Maya, Sachin and Alisha. He hopes they will make a contribution in their own way to 'empower people to learn for change.'* "

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

GRAHAM ARNOLD MBA

Graham Arnold, now retired, was Dean, International, in the Business Studies Faculty at the University of South Australia. He was engaged in the development and delivery of graduate programmes based upon action learning and action research paradigms. He has a strong commitment to continuous learning and ways of turning that learning into immediate effect for improved quality performance at both individual and organisational levels. Graham's previous experience was at senior levels of the Australian Defence Forces, small business ownership, management consultancy, teaching in MBA programmes and international education.

ROD OXENBERRY PhD

Rod Oxenberry, now retired, was Head of the International Graduate School of Management at the University Of South Australia. He was responsible for the integration of an action learning and action research orientation into the School's graduate outreach programmes. Rod's previous experience was at senior levels in the State Government, lecturing in various policy and management courses, various board engagements, and consultancy projects.

TIM LARKIN B.AppSC

An experienced Executive in the Aboriginal Affairs sector, Tim has spent over 15 years in numerous leadership roles working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities across Australia to acquire and manage economic, social and cultural assets for the benefit of Indigenous people. Tim now consults to private companies seeking to engage and partner in commercial ventures with Indigenous communities.

MEERA VERMA PhD, FTSE, FAICD

Meera is a professional director with expertise spanning the global healthcare, biotechnology and renewable energy industries. She is the Principal of Headland Vision, a strategic advisory and consultancy. She is

a strategic thinker who has been involved in corporate turn-around and leading change management. Her management expertise relates to both corporate and not-for-profit sectors and she has a deep understanding of the value of personal and professional development for individual executives. Meera is a Yondan (4th degree black-belt) in judo and a coach at the Adelaide University Judo Club.

COLIN BRIMSON MBA
Colin worked for Australia Post for more than 40 years, and served in several managerial roles for over 25 years. He was State Manager, Delivery South Australia/Northern Territory for more than 10 years before being promoted to the position of General Manager, Mail Services South Australia/Northern Territory.

ALOIS DATON MBA, DBA
Alois worked in the Internal Revenue Commission, Papua New Guinea (IRC) for over 30 years. In 2007, he became the Commissioner of Tax at IRC. Prior to this appointment, he held different managerial positions in the Customs division, as well as in the Corporate Services and Tax Technical areas of IRC.

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After serving in various managerial capacities at Shell Malaysia for 16 years, Mohamad started and grew a small domestic tanker business to an international shipping conglomerate, Global Carriers Berhad, which was listed on the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange in 1996. From 2003, he has pursued other business interests and is now Chairman of a major residential and commercial development company in Malaysia.

LISA MOHAMMED MSc, DBA
Lisa has been involved in the field of Occupational Health Safety and Environment (OHSE) as a consultant for over 15 years. She has conducted consultancy services for several companies in varying sectors and areas of operations but more so in the oil and gas sector in Trinidad and Tobago. Her doctoral research focused on change management in the field of OHSE using a Work Applied Learning approach.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Every author will know that the completion of a book is not possible without the contribution of others. This book is certainly no exception and I am grateful to a number of people who are clients, participants of our programmes, co-researchers and doctoral candidates.

As the following pages will show, I am grateful especially to Graham Arnold, Rod Oxenberry, Tim Larkin, Meera Verma, Colin Brimson, Alois Daton, Mohamad Bin Hashim and Lisa Mohammed for contributing chapters based on their own research and practice, and to Brian Carr for introducing the WBL programme in his organisation.

I would also like to thank Ana Mrkic who patiently managed this book publication project and Barbara Velasco for her design and coping with the endless formatting changes.

Most of all, my gratitude is directed to my wife, Param. The precision derived from her legal and doctoral research background on quality and learning has, time and again, kept me on the right track. Her questioning and encouragement have given me the strength to pursue this challenging project amongst others to completion. She has been tireless in working with me at every stage.

In spite of this expert help on a variety of fronts, if there are any remaining errors and omissions, the responsibility for these rests with me.

PREFACE

It is now more than twenty-five years since the publication of my earlier books on Action Research in the context of change and management development. Since then, there have been many developments to take into account.

Over time, I have been able to reflect on my original ideas and have found ways to take these forward. I have worked closely with subsequent cohorts of research candidates and with corporate clients; together, we have used the Work-Applied Learning approach to solve a variety of 'real world' problems. Inevitably, in this ensuing period I have also enjoyed the advantage of reading what other writers have published, and I gratefully acknowledge the stimulus that these have provided. And, of course, even in this relatively short period the world itself has changed in so many ways, calling for a fresh appraisal of issues faced by today's managers.

For these various reasons, it was timely for me to return to the drawing board and update this book based on my research and practice. I am convinced that a Work-Applied Learning approach, with Action Research and Action Learning (ARAL) including Reflective Practice, remains every bit as valuable for managers as it was when I first ventured into the field. I am also convinced that, having tested it more widely in practice, it is even more robust than it was previously.

True to the spirit of Work-Applied Learning and ARAL, the book is a blend of concepts, process and practice. As well as my own ideas on the conceptual basis of this approach, I have been able to call on the experience of fellow researchers and senior executives in organisations in Australia and other parts of the world. Thus, the book contains diverse examples to demonstrate the evolving nature of Work-Applied Learning and ARAL.

Accordingly, this book shifts the reader from unawareness to awareness of the WAL model. It starts with a description of the concept, process and

practice behind the WAL model. Chapter 2 sets out the conceptual and methodological basis of the WAL model. This was presented as a seminal paper at a conference organised by the Action Learning, Action Research and Process Management Association Inc and Singapore Institute of Management in 1996.

In the subsequent chapters, I present case studies of how the WAL model has been planned, implemented, evaluated and validated. The case studies become more detailed in progressive chapters.

Nothing stands still, of course, and in the conclusion I point to an undiminished need to further refine the model as we continue to learn more. There is no end to the process and practice, only further cycles of planning, acting, observing, reflecting, evaluating and validating this model to cope with the evolution and revolution of the world order that impacts on change in individuals, teams, organisations and communities.

I would like to end by sharing Albert Einstein's words which capture my message to you:

"Learn from yesterday, live for today and hope for tomorrow. The important thing is not to stop questioning".

To that, I would add *"And continue learning and re-creating yourself for the future"*.

SELVA ABRAHAM

WORK-APPLIED LEARNING (WAL) MODEL

This first chapter explains the concept and process of the WAL model. The subsequent chapters will show the practice of the WAL concept as it has been applied in private, public and community organisations.

THE WAL CONCEPT

The three vital components in the WAL concept are:
- the extension of Work-Based Learning (WBL) to Work-Applied Learning
- the fused Action Research method and the Action Learning and Reflective Practice processes, and
- the cyclical creative thinking and learning process.

The WAL concept which is grounded in Action Research and Action Learning recognises the workplace as the crucible of learning for change. This concept has been specifically researched in the context of managers as change leaders introducing change in their divisions, departments or organisations as a whole.

THE EXTENSION OF WBL TO WAL

WAL is an extension of WBL because WAL not only incorporates the features of WBL as set out in Table 1.1 but goes beyond WBL as explained in the following pages.

TABLE 1.1 – FEATURES OF WORK-BASED LEARNING
Work-Based Learning: • focuses on learning through and for work tasks • is often a collaborative activity • is often transdisciplinary rather than based upon the traditional subject disciplines developed and taught in business schools

TABLE 1.1 – FEATURES OF WORK-BASED LEARNING

- is a practical yet often high level cognitive process
- is primarily learnt by working, not through reading or observing work
- is essentially learner centered and where planned often takes the form of facilitated learning through work rather than being tutor led and classroom based
- is self-directed, creative, expressive, involves feelings, is continual and reflective
- includes action projects, learning teams and other interpersonal experiences, including mentorship
- provides opportunities for professional practice, critical analysis and reflective thinking
- involves knowledge creation and utilisation as collective activities when learning becomes everyone's job
- involves thinking and developing and evaluating theory and practice
- where there is formal assessment this will link with and may contribute to work practices
- can lead to the attainment of qualifications.
- involves thinking and developing and evaluating theory and practice
- where there is formal assessment this will link with and may contribute to work practices
- can lead to the attainment of qualifications.

Abraham (2012), Boud and Solomon (2001), Costley (2015), Garnett (2012), Helyer, Wall, Minton and Lund (2021), Raelin (2000, 2008) Roodhouse and Mumford (2010), Schon (1983), Wenger, (1999).

The similarities and differences between WBL and WAL are shown in Figure 1.1.

FIGURE 1.1 – WBL AND WAL COMPARISON
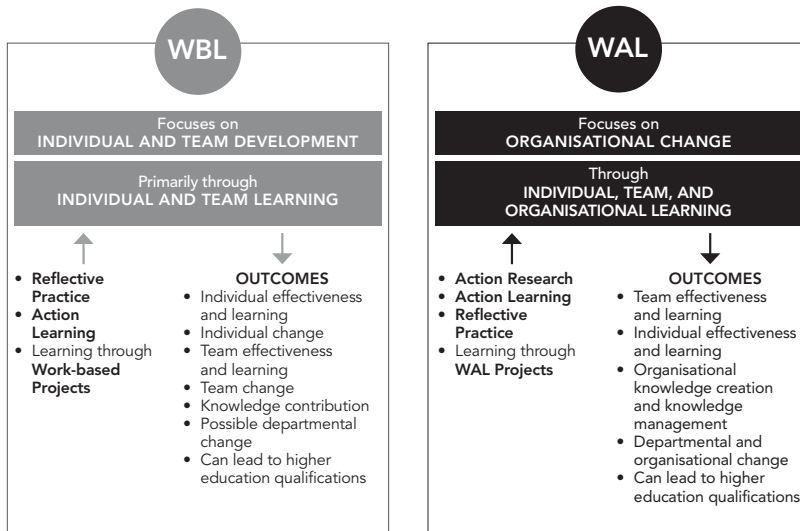
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It can be seen that:

- Both WBL and WAL focus on learning and change,

- WBL focuses on individual and team learning and change,

- In the case of individual learning, WBL uses Reflective Practice, whereas team learning involves Action Learning and Reflective Practice,

- WAL uses a fused Action Research Method and Action Learning process (ARAL). This leads to not only individual and team learning, but also to organisational learning, knowledge creation and change. These outcomes are achieved as the change leaders and their teams plan, act, observe, reflect, evaluate, and validate work-based projects through the action research (AR) cycles of WAL, and

- Reflective Practice is an essential part of both WBL and WAL.

The WAL Change Process has four distinct phases in creating change in organisations, as shown in Figure 1.2.

FIGURE 1.2 – PHASES OF THE WAL CHANGE PROCESS

FUSING THE ACTION RESEARCH METHOD AND ACTION LEARNING AND REFLECTIVE PRACTICE PROCESSES
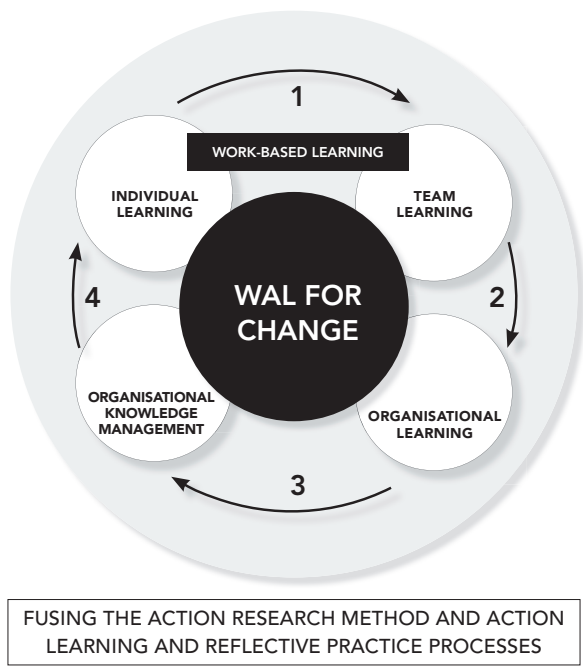
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Figure 1.2 shows how Individual Learning (Phase 1) leads to Team Learning (Phase 2), to Organisational Learning (Phase 3) and to Organisational Knowledge Management (Phase 4).

As can be seen in Figures 1.1 and 1.2, WAL is grounded in a fused action research (AR) method and the action learning (AL) and reflective practice (ARAL) processes. (Abraham S, Arnold G and Oxenberry R, 1996).

The cyclical nature of ARAL in relation to the four phases of WAL is illustrated in Figure 1.3.

FIGURE 1.3 – WAL THROUGH ARAL
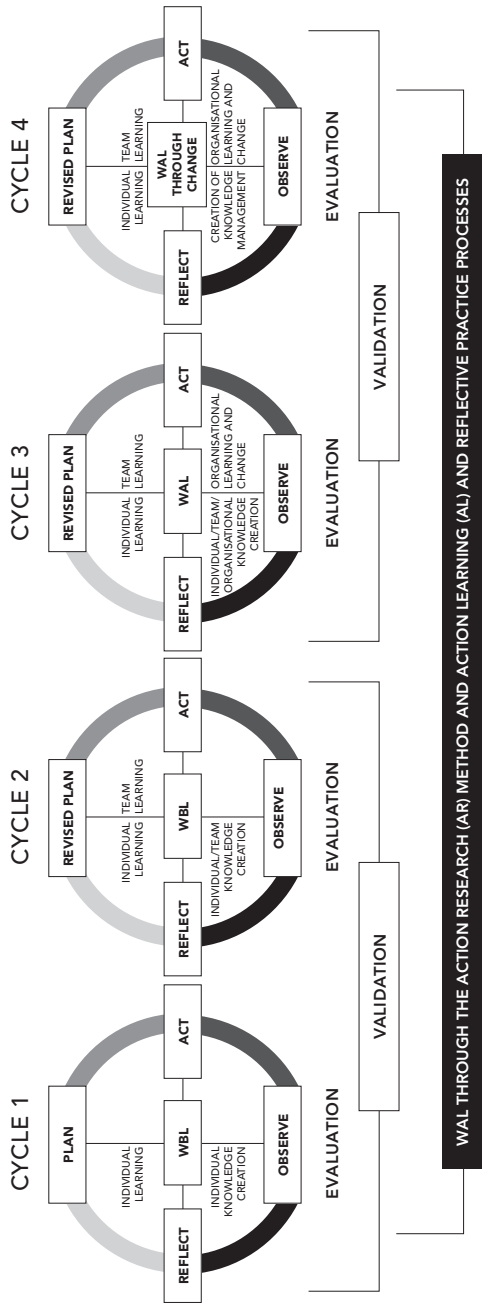
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While Cycles 1 and 2 in Figure 1.3 depict the emergence of individual and team learning and knowledge creation, the later cycles add organisational learning, organisational knowledge creation and knowledge management to complete the WAL change process.

Figure 1.4 illustrates a WAL programme for the Board members of Kuju CDEP, a Community Development and Employment Project. Kuju means 'fish traps' in the local Aboriginal language. Kuju CDEP was established to provide all eligible Aboriginal people in Port Lincoln with employment and on the-job training. It commenced its operations in May 1989, and was the first urban CDEP in Australia.

The most important issue which Kuju CDEP needed to resolve was the establishment of a strong Board of Management, with Aboriginal participation, which could provide leadership and direction to the organisation. Although Kuju CDEP had achieved many good outcomes, there was still too much reliance on the staff rather than the Board for decision making. There was an urgent need for a Board which could decide on long term planning and set up broad policy structures within which the staff could work on the day to day management of Kuju CDEP. Once the broad policies were set up, the Board then would have time to spend on longer term major issues.

There was, therefore, the need for the Board members to understand the function of the Board and have the management skills and knowledge to make decisions and provide leadership to the organisation. The two solutions to this problem were to strengthen the Board by bringing in experienced people from outside Kuju CDEP and to provide management training for the existing Board members.

The WAL programme is described in my book on the Kuju CDEP Learning Experience (1994). The programme started with a WBL phase comprising an individual and team learning process for the Board members and eventually resulted in organisational change for the community organisation and the community as a whole.

FIGURE 1.4 – FROM INDIVIDUAL AND TEAM LEARNING TO ORGANISATIONAL AND COMMUNITY LEARNING AND CHANGE
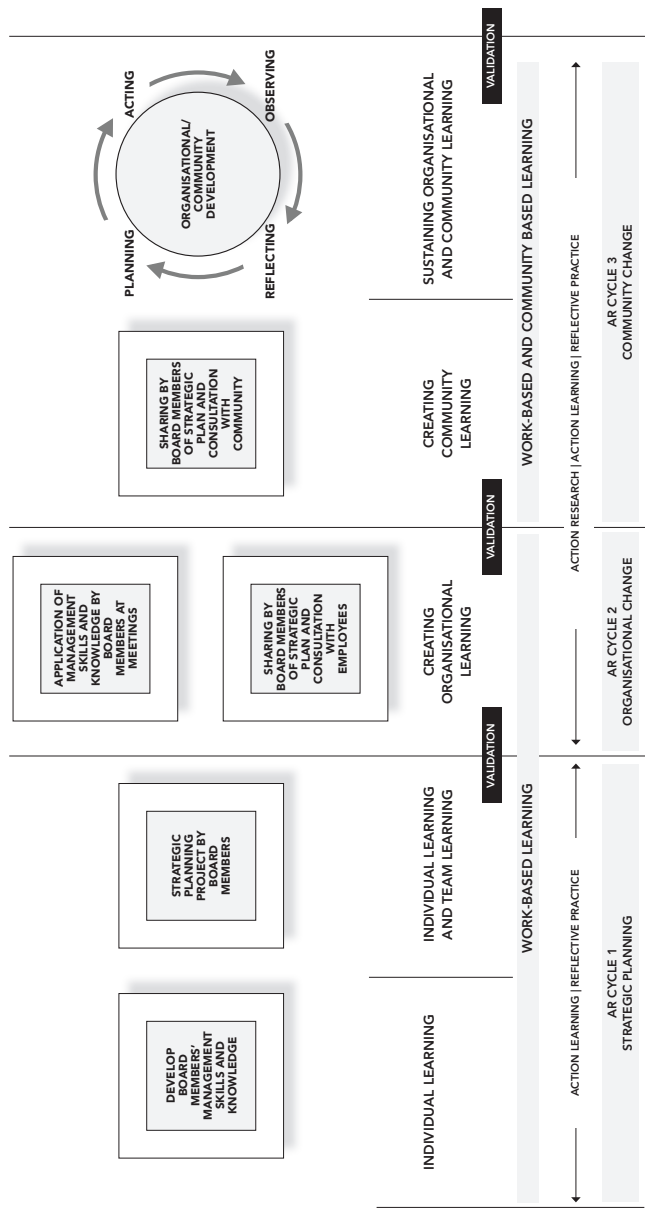
During AR Cycle 1, the Board members were provided with management skills in the context of their roles as Board members. Using the WBL approach, they worked as a team to develop a strategic plan for the organisation.

The Board members learned how to relate with each other and how to work as a team with the staff of the organisation, the funding agency and the community members. They also learned to reflect upon their strengths and weaknesses as Board members and to improve their practices.

In AR Cycle 2, the Board members applied such learning at Board meetings and shared their strategic plan with the staff of the organisation. In this way, organisational learning and knowledge sharing gradually developed in the organisation.

In the first part of AR Cycle 3, the Board members shared their strategic plan with the community as a whole. This involved a community consultation process where the strategic plan was presented and feedback was sought from the community.

Once there was acceptance of the strategic plan by the community members, the staff of the organisation with the assistance of the Board members implemented the strategic plan in the second half of AR Cycle 3 and beyond.

This programme is an example of how the use of the WAL model grounded by Action Research, Action Learning and Reflective Practice resulted in individual and team learning by the Board members in AR Cycle 1 and organisational and even community learning in AR Cycles 2 and 3.

THE FUSED ACTION RESEARCH METHOD AND ACTION LEARNING AND REFLECTIVE PRACTICE PROCESSES

As the Action Research method and the Action Learning and Reflective Practice processes (ARAL) ground the WAL model, it is important to understand how the fusion of the method and processes has evolved.

Action Research is a practical research method and should not be confused with the Action Learning process.

Lewin's (1946, 1947, 1951, 1952) concept of Action Research and Revans' (1982) concept of Action Learning are similar in some ways as both are problem-focused, action-oriented and utilise group dynamics; however, they differ in a number of major aspects. Revans (1983) is more interested in encouraging 'questioning insight" than in solving problems. In Revans' (1983, p.11) words:

> *Action Learning requires questions to be posed in conditions of ignorance, risk and confusion, when nobody knows what to do next; it is only marginally interested in finding the answers once those questions have been posed.*

Action Research, on the other hand, was designed as a means of introducing change in problematic situations to bring about a noticeable improvement.

Revans places more emphasis on the development of the skills and abilities of managers than Lewin, who was more concerned about making a contribution to science, and he accords outside experts a far lesser role.

Lastly, while Revans admits that Action Learning can become a cyclical process, it is not essentially cyclical in nature, unlike Lewin's concept of Action Research.

Since the time when the original concepts were first voiced by Revans and Lewin, there have been many varied opinions about what Action Learning and Action Research mean and how to implement them. Consequently, every group that wants to undertake an Action Learning project or an Action Research programme, must consider these various opinions and then decide what form of research or learning is appropriate for its needs.

Reflective Practice is common to both the Action Research method and the Action Learning process. This is because as change leaders plan and implement their Action Research and Action Learning projects, they reflect before action, reflect in action and then reflect on action either consciously or unconsciously.

In my PhD study on Board Management Development using Action Research (Abraham, 1993), I noted that Peters and Robinson (1984) had undertaken a survey of literature and had identified certain Action Research

characteristics. However, 12 Action Research characteristics clearly emerged in my findings. As a result of my practice and research since 1993, I have refined my thinking on the Action Research characteristics and provide in Table 1.2 a summary of the updated 12 Action Research characteristics.

TABLE 1.2 – GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF ACTION RESEARCH		
CHARACTERISTIC		SUMMARY DESCRIPTION
1	Problem Focus	The Action Research method is problem-focused in the context of real life situations. The solving of such problems in a research sense would contribute to professional practice and the development of social science knowledge.
2	Action Orientation	The diagnosis of a problem and the development of a plan to solve the problem can only be considered to be action-oriented if the action becomes part of a process to implement the plan. This brings an action element to the solving of an immediate problem of the organisation which has strategic change implications for the said organisation.
3	Cyclical Process	The Action Research method involves cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection (evaluation). Thus, the cycles of the Action Research method allow the group members to develop a plan, to act, to observe and to reflect on this plan, to implement the plan and then to modify the plan, based on the needs of the group members and the requirements of the organisation and situation. A record of the processes of each cycle enables its strengths and weaknesses to be reviewed so that modifications and strategies can be developed for future cycles.
4	Collaboration	Collaboration is a fundamental ingredient of the Action Research method, because without a team effort to solve problems in an environment of participation, Action Research cannot exist. Collaboration on group problems using the Action Research method can be viewed as a continuum from total dependence on the facilitator, who acts as a leader directing the group problem-solving process, through to the total management of the problem by the group members with the facilitator acting as a resource person. The position of the facilitator and the group on this continuum depends on the situation and the needs of the group.

TABLE 1.2 – GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF ACTION RESEARCH		
CHARACTERISTIC		**SUMMARY DESCRIPTION**
5	Ethical Practice	Community interests, improvements in the lives of the group members, justice, rationality, democracy and equality are some of the themes of 'ethical' behaviour. The ethical basis of Action Research is an important characteristic to consider, because the Action Research method involves, to a large extent, groups of people with limited power who are open to exploitation. It requires the researcher to concede their personal needs so that the needs of the group are given the highest priority.
6	Group Facilitation	The success of the Action Research method will depend on how well the group can operate as an effective team. An understanding of group dynamics therefore seems essential in facilitating this process and dealing with problems that arise during the Action Research cycles.
7	Creative Thinking	The Action Research Group members will experience creative thinking as they go through stages of saturation, deliberation, incubation, and illumination where the group members look for different options and seek the opinions of different relevant parties to validate those options.
8	Learning and Re-education	Action Research can be viewed as re-educative, since it contributes to a change in the knowledge base of the organisation, a change in the skills, attitudes and knowledge of the individual group members, and a change in the skills and knowledge of the researcher. It also makes a contribution to several of the social sciences.
9	Naturalistic	If one accepts that Action Research should be scientific but that there are problems in adopting a positivistic model of science and applying it to social science settings, then it follows that a naturalistic approach is appropriate for the Action Research method. The approach involves qualitative descriptions recorded as case studies rather than laws of cause and effect tested experimentally with statistical analysis of data.

TABLE 1.2 – GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF ACTION RESEARCH		
CHARACTERISTIC		**SUMMARY DESCRIPTION**
10	Emancipatory	The changes experienced by the group members during the Action Research process can contribute to some improvements in their lives and may also have wider social action and reform.
11	Normative	The normative characteristic of Action Research implies that the social 'norms' of the group are not only considered during the research, but, in order to bring about change in the group, they are modified during the Action Research process.
12	Scientific	Since the Action Research method does have a scientific basis and can provide an alternative to the positivistic view of science, it is essential that the research be conducted in such a way that it can be defended against criticisms of lack of scientific rigour.

In 1996 Graham Arnold, Rod Oxenberry and I wrote on the fusing of AR and AL in the context of organisational learning and change. We (Abraham et al, 1996) first identified the features specified by some authors as being necessary components to produce Action Research and Action Learning and expressed them in a word formula to capture the integrated nature of the Action Research method and the Action Learning process (ARAL).

The individual word formulae for Action Learning and Action Research are shown below, with the symbols used in the formulae being explained in Table 1.3:

Action Learning (AL):

$$S + P + A (+F) + RP = AL$$

Action Research (AR):

$$G + P + A + F + C + R + RP = AR$$

TABLE 1.3 – SYMBOLS USED IN THE AL AND AR WORD FORMULAE (Abraham et al, 1996, p.17)	
SYMBOL	**DESCRIPTION**
S	The Action Learning set comprising individuals who come together to investigate solutions to shared problems and to learn from each other. There is no requirement that the set members are from the same organisation.
P	The problem to be addressed. Both Action Learning and Action Research share this problem-focused characteristic.
A	Both Action Research and Action Learning are action-oriented. The group or set takes positive action in response to the ideas and suggestions generated through questioning and discussion.
G	The nature of the Action Research Group may be rather different to the set described in Action Learning. The group comprises members of an organisation or community and could also include "Researchers" who may be seen as an integral part of the group since they work in a collaborative manner with the group for change and knowledge development.
F	The term "Facilitator" has been placed in brackets in the Action Learning word formula to indicate the disparate views amongst the authors on whether or not a facilitator should be part of the set.
C	The cyclical nature of Action Research. Lewin (1946 and 1947) indicated that the spiral nature of steps was fundamental to Action Research. His steps started with diagnosis, followed by cycles of planning, action and reflection.
R	The Researcher in Lewin's original view assisted the group. While some writers question the need for a Researcher, the role of a Researcher as a consultant to the group is widely supported by other authors.
RP	Reflective Practice
AL	Action Learning
AR	Action Research

On scrutinising of the above formulae, I noticed an overlap between some of the components of AL and AR and that in fact, AL could be considered as a subset of AR. As a result, using the definitions from above, I developed the following formula to depict the fused ARAL model:

AL + C + R = AR

Since the article was written in 1996, I have come to appreciate the importance of reflective practice in both AL and AR. As a result, I have since included Reflective Practice in the definition of ARAL.

THE CYCLICAL CREATIVE THINKING AND LEARNING PROCESS

Through my practice and research over the last 30 years with managers who have used the WAL model as change leaders, I observed that they go through a cyclical creative thinking and learning process as they work on their change projects. This process is shown diagrammatically as Figure 1.5 below.

FIGURE 1.5 – THE CYCLICAL CREATIVE THINKING AND LEARNING PROCESS

It can be seen that there are four concentric circles with a core that contains the "Work-Applied Learning (WAL) Formula" which I developed in the course of my practice and research. This formula is repeated in Figure 1.6 and is explained in the subsequent paragraphs.

FIGURE 1.6 – THE WORK-APPLIED LEARNING (WAL) FORMULA

$$K \ + \ P_1 \ + \ Q \ = \ P_2$$

(KNOWLEDGE)   (PROJECT)   (QUESTIONING)   (PERFORMANCE)

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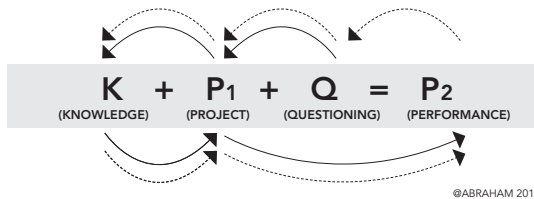
The WAL formula shows how change leaders will learn by:

- Critically reflecting on a problem in their workplace
- Questioning (Q) how to solve the problem
- Defining the project (P1)
- Reflecting and applying the relevant knowledge (K) to provide solutions
- Achieving performance (P2) outcomes including learning, project and process outcomes.

The formula shows that the natural starting point is the **Q**. The change practitioners will start by asking questions about a problem, identify a project **P1** to address the problem, then move on to read about the relevant knowledge **K** on this subject. Armed with that material, they will go back to **P1** to see if the explanations make sense, and then they can move towards achieving performance outcomes **P2**, namely project, process and learning outcomes.

But that cycle is not the end of it because, on the basis of what they have learnt, they will now want to return to the questioning stage and repeat the whole process. They can repeat the cycle again and again as each time their understanding will be refined by more practical experience. Knowledge and practice, as they will discover, go hand in hand and this formula helps to show how this is achieved.

Moving outwards from the core, the first circle shows how the WAL formula is used by managers and their teams as they plan, act, observe, reflect, evaluate and validate their work-based projects through the AR cycles.

The second circle in Figure 1.5 shows how the change practitioners critically reflect on the questions **Q** in the context of their change projects, and integrate the knowledge to their projects.

The third circle depicts the stages of the Creative Thinking and Learning process, namely saturation, deliberation, incubation, illumination and accommodation. These stages were initially formulated by Graham Wallace (1926). Since then, they have been commented upon and adapted by different writers, including Tripathi and Reddy (2007). One such adaptation by Quick, J.T (1963, pp 29-30) is provided below:

> **Saturation:** Becoming thoroughly familiar with a problem, with its setting, and more broadly, with activities and ideas akin to the problem.

> **Deliberation:** Mulling over these ideas, analysing them, challenging them, rearranging them, and thinking of them from several viewpoints.

> **Incubation:** Relaxing, turning off the conscious and purposeful search, forgetting the frustrations of unproductive labour, letting the subconscious mind work.

> **Illumination:** A bright idea strikes, a bit crazy perhaps, but new and fresh and full of promise; you sense that it might be the answer.

> **Accommodation:** Clarifying the idea, seeing whether it fits the requirements of the problem as it did on first thought, re-framing and adapting it, putting it on paper, getting other people's reaction to it.

The fourth circle depicts the Five Stages of Persuasion which were identified by Wimmer (2011). During the continuous steps of creative thinking, individuals learn as they move from a stage of Unawareness to Awareness, Comprehension, Conviction and finally, to Action. Wimmer (2011) explained that these Five Stages of Persuasion can apply to any decision a person makes from the purchase of goods and services to decisions such as marriage, careers and learning any concept. He further stated (2011, p.4):

> 1. *All people pass through these stages for every decision they make or anything they learn.*

*2. All people pass through the stages at different speeds –
there is no universal timing.*

3. Not all people make it to the Action stage.

*The only way to move people through the Five stages is
through repetition of message. In most cases, people do not
make decisions [or learn something] after only one exposure
to a message. The process nearly always requires several
exposures.*

Whilst these Five stages of communication and learning were originally
used in the context of marketing communications and external customers,
I believe that they are equally relevant to internal customers, namely change
leaders and staff of organisations.

I created this diagram because I realised there were some linkages
between the various concepts depicted in the concentric circles. I noted
that there was a certain degree of overlap between the third circle
of the Cyclical Creative Thinking and Learning Process and the fourth
circle of the Five Stages of Persuasion, especially when applied in the
context of learning and change management.

The Unawareness and Awareness stages, for example, have similarities
to the Saturation and Deliberation stages as they cover the process of a
person becoming aware of a problem or idea and analysing it from different
viewpoints with a view to finding a solution.

Also, the Incubation, Illumination and Accommodation stages of the
Creative Thinking and Learning Process align with the Comprehension
and Conviction stages where the person identifies a solution, obtains
opinions from others and perhaps re-frames and adapts the solution.

Similarly, I saw that the second circle comprising Critical Review, Enquiry,
Questioning and Reflection is closely related to the first circle which is the
AR process of Plan, Act, Observe, Reflect and Evaluate. At the core of this
thinking and learning process is the WAL formula K+P1+Q=P2, which has
been explained earlier.

WAL CHANGE PROCESS AND PRACTICE

Over the last 30 years, I have worked with change leaders in various organisations who have successfully used the WAL model in change programmes as it provides a systematic approach for undertaking change in their organisations.

The WAL change programme is designed to address an organisational problem and is led by one or more change leaders within the organisation, depending on its size. The change leader may either be the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or a person nominated for the role. The change leader will work with a team of change facilitators to plan and implement a change programme which addresses a specific aspect of the organisational problem. Each change facilitator, in turn, will work with their teams to plan and implement a change project which contributes to solving the organisational problem.

While undertaking the change programme, the change leader needs to acquire knowledge in the areas of Organisational Change using Action Research and Action Learning and Reflective Practice (ALRP). The change facilitators need to understand the concepts and practice of Work-Based Learning (WBL) and ALRP as well as the knowledge relevant to their change projects.

The change leader and change facilitators will acquire the above-mentioned knowledge through intensive face-to-face sessions or webinars supplemented by online learning materials, depending on their needs and the specific requests of their organisations. In addition, an external Programme Advisor will work closely with the change leader and change facilitators as they plan and implement their change projects.

Each WAL Change Programme comprises a number of AR cycles of planning, acting, observing, reflection, evaluation and validation. Figure 1.7 shows the AR cycles in the WAL planning and implementation process.

FIGURE 1.7 – AR CYCLES WITHIN THE WAL PROGRAMME
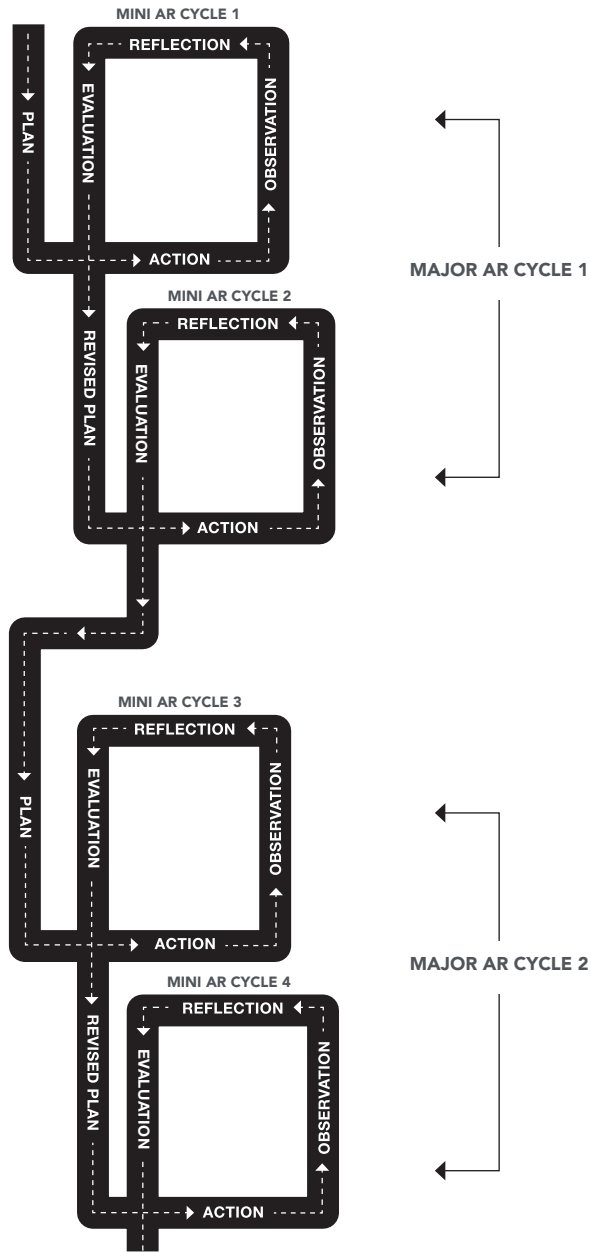
The normal duration of an AR cycle is four months. However, if an AR cycle is anticipated to take six or more months to complete, it is possible to have several AR mini-cycles within the major AR cycle. Each mini-cycle would have the same phases as the major AR cycle but compressed in a shorter timeframe.

The main players in a WAL Change Programme are:
- the AR Group made up of the change leader, the change facilitators, and the Programme Advisor,

- the change facilitators and their respective teams, and

- a Validation Committee comprising the CEO as well as external and internal stakeholders recommended by the CEO.

The following phases are embedded within each AR cycle and are elaborated upon below:
- Planning by the AR Group

- Acting during Work-Based Learning Phases

- Joint Observations and Reflections

- Monitoring and Evaluation by the AR Group, and

- Validation by an independent Validation Committee usually after every two AR Major Cycles.

PLANNING BY THE AR GROUP

The planning phase of the AR cycle is undertaken at AR Group meetings, which is to be undertaken by the change leader working with the change facilitators and their teams.

The first AR Group meeting is very important as it is the start of the WAL Change Programme. It is essential for the CEO to officially launch the WAL Change Programme and reinforce management support for it.

During the first meeting, the AR Group will:

- Clarify the organisational problem to be addressed,

- Establish the purpose of the WAL Change Programme and the goals of the change projects to address the organisational problem,

- Discuss and reflect on the potential change projects which the change facilitators could undertake in the context of the organisational problem,

- Agree on the design of the WAL Change Programme, including the number and duration of AR Group meetings, Work-Based Learning Phases, feedback and reflective sessions with the Programme Advisor, and scheduling of dates, taking into account job demands and organisational requirements, and

- Determine the obligations and commitments of the AR Group members, namely, the change leader, the change facilitators and the Programme Advisor.

As part of the planning process, the AR Group will agree on the timeline for the change facilitators to present their draft change project plans for the approval of the change leader and/or CEO. This process will help consolidate all individual change project plans into the organisational change plan for implementation.

During subsequent AR Group meetings, the change facilitators will share their experiences and lessons learned during their Work-Based Learning Phases. They will also discuss the project, process and learning outcomes that they have achieved so far and issues and challenges that have arisen and how they have addressed these. They will reflect on these issues and challenges with the other members of the AR Group who may make suggestions to overcome the problems.

Furthermore, the change facilitators are encouraged by the change leader and/or CEO and the Programme Advisor to provide assistance to their peers when they face issues and challenges with their change projects.

ACTING DURING WORK-BASED LEARNING (WBL) PHASES

Each AR Group meeting is followed by a WBL Phase where each change facilitator works with their respective team members on their change project.

During the first WBL Phase, each change facilitator will have to explain to their team members the purpose of the WAL Change Programme and of their change project. Each change facilitator, and where appropriate, their team members will:

• help refine their change project

• break down the change project into individual projects for each team member

• agree and establish
  - project outcomes for the change project and each individual project,
  - learning outcomes for the change facilitator and each team member, and
  - process outcomes

• obtain management support and, if necessary, further refine the change project as agreed with the AR Group

• implement the change project as a team using the AL process

• undertake directed reading on the relevant knowledge area

• create opportunities for effective reflection and review with the team members

• keep detailed notes of the process, project and learning outcomes

• establish and continually encourage a working relationship between the team members, and

- consult and reflect with AR Group members and other relevant stakeholders and resource experts, when required.

A template for a Change Project Plan is provided in Table 1.4. The change facilitators are encouraged to add additional dimensions as they see fit. The templates can also be adapted by the team members for the plan of their individual projects.

TABLE 1.4 – TEMPLATE FOR A CHANGE PROJECT PLAN

The need for the Change Project:
- Describe the background of the issue or problem that led to this type of project being chosen.
- Provide evidence that there is a need to resolve this problem or issue.

The purpose and outcomes of the Change Project:
- Establish the purpose of the project in a precise and concise manner.
- What are the expected project outcomes?
- What are the expected process outcomes?

The team:
- Who are the members of the team?
- Justify why they qualify as members of the team.
- What are the expected learning outcomes for each of these members?
- What activities are to be put in place to achieve the expected project outcomes?
- What type of budget is needed to achieve the project objective?
- What is the timeframe to achieve the project and learning outcomes?
- Consider other aspects of project planning and implementation.

The justification:
- Justify why the Change Project Plan is work-based learning and action learning oriented.

JOINT OBSERVATION AND REFLECTION

Typically, at the end of each WBL phase, the change facilitators will seek and collate feedback from their team members on their observations of how the change project is progressing and whether any further amendment is needed in the next WBL phase to make their change project more effective.

EVALUATION

After the Joint Observation and Reflection session, the   AR Group members will come together for an Evaluation meeting. The change facilitators will report on their change projects and the feedback and observations of their team members. The AR Group members will analyse and evaluate the project and process outcomes as well as the learning outcomes of the change facilitators and their team members.

Observations by the CEO and other AR Group members will be reflected upon and discussed, triangulated, evaluated and re-planning for the next AR cycle would take place.

VALIDATION

Usually, the WAL Change Programme is validated at the end of every two Major AR Cycles by the Validation Committee. However, the frequency of the Validation meetings can vary depending upon the dictates of the situation and challenges arising during the AR cycles.

During each Validation Committee meeting, the change leader will present the project, process and learning outcomes of the WAL Change Programme to date, including the issues and challenges faced during the implementation. The change facilitators will present the findings of their own change reports and seek feedback from those present. They will then make the necessary adjustments to the WAL Change Programme and their change projects, as advised by the Validation Committee. The Evaluation and Validation phases of the various AR cycles are depicted in Figure 1.8.

FIGURE 1.8 – EVALUATION AND VALIDATION PROCESS IN WAL CHANGE PROGRAMMES

AR CYCLE	EVALUATION	VALIDATION

AR CYCLE 1

P
R
A
O

Change Facilitators

Triangulation

CEO   Other AR Group Members

KEY
P - Planning
A - Acting
O - Observing
R - Reflecting
CEO - CEO and/or change leader
Re-P - Re-planning

AR CYCLE 2

RE-P
R
A
O

Change Facilitators

Triangulation

CEO   Other AR Group Members

AR Group Members and Chief Executive

VALIDATION

Select Board members and Stakeholders

AR CYCLE 3

RE-P
R
A
O

Change Facilitators

Triangulation

CEO   Other AR Group Members

AR CYCLE 4

RE-P
R
A
O

Change Facilitators

Triangulation

CEO   Other AR Group Members

AR Group Members and Chief Executive

VALIDATION

Select Board members and Stakeholders

FLOW CHART OF A TYPICAL WAL CHANGE PROGRAMME

Now that I have explained the WAL Change process including the various phases of the Major AR Cycles that make up a WAL Change Programme, it is useful to review the process in a diagrammatic form. Accordingly, Figures 1.9a and 1.9b are flow charts which illustrate the planning and implementation process of a typical WAL Change Programme over four Major AR Cycles.

Figure 1.9a shows two Major AR Cycles of the WAL Change Programme. Major AR Cycle 1 captures the planning process. It starts with the first AR Group Meeting attended by the CEO and/or change leader and four change facilitators and then shows the development of the WAL Change Plan and WBL Project plans. Next comes the first WBL Phase where the change facilitators select their teams, develop detailed plans for their WBL projects and obtain CEO approval and support.

Major AR Cycle 2 starts with the second AR Group Meeting where the WAL Change Plan and the WBL Project Plans are approved. It then shows the initial implementation of the WAL Change Plan over two AR Mini-Cycles where the change facilitators work with their respective teams on their WBL projects. The third AR Group meeting is held after AR Mini-Cycle 1 and an evaluation meeting by the AR Group as well as a Validation meeting are held after AR Mini-Cycle 2.

During Major AR Cycles 1 and 2, the change leaders will acquire knowledge in the areas of Organisational Change using Action Research as well as Action Learning and Reflective Practice. The change facilitators will be introduced to the concepts and practice of Work Based Learning and Action Learning and Reflective Practice and specific knowledge relevant to their change projects..

Figure 1.9b shows that Major AR Cycle 3 and 4 functions on the same basis as Major AR Cycles 1 and 2 with AR Group meetings, Mini-Cycles, Evaluation and Validation. The relevant knowledge required for these change projects include Work-based Learning, Organisational Learning and Knowledge Management and additional project-based knowledge.

FIGURE 1.9A – PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTING AR MAJOR CYCLES 1 AND 2
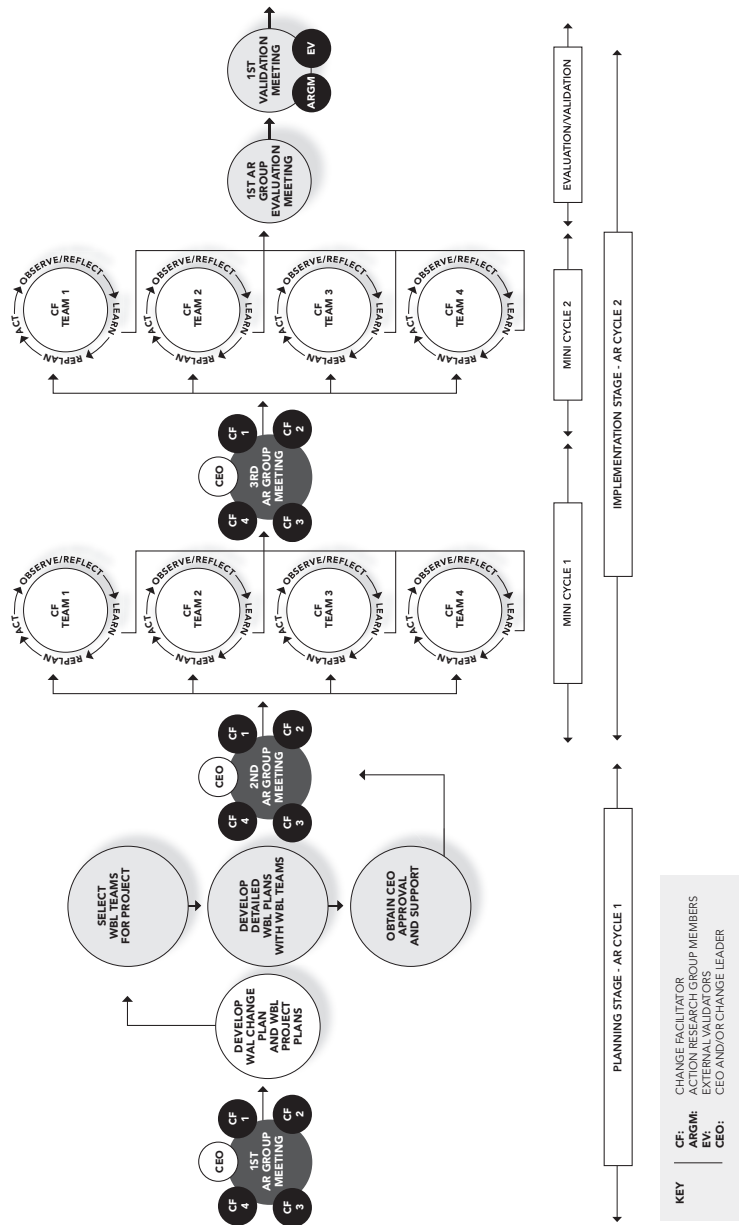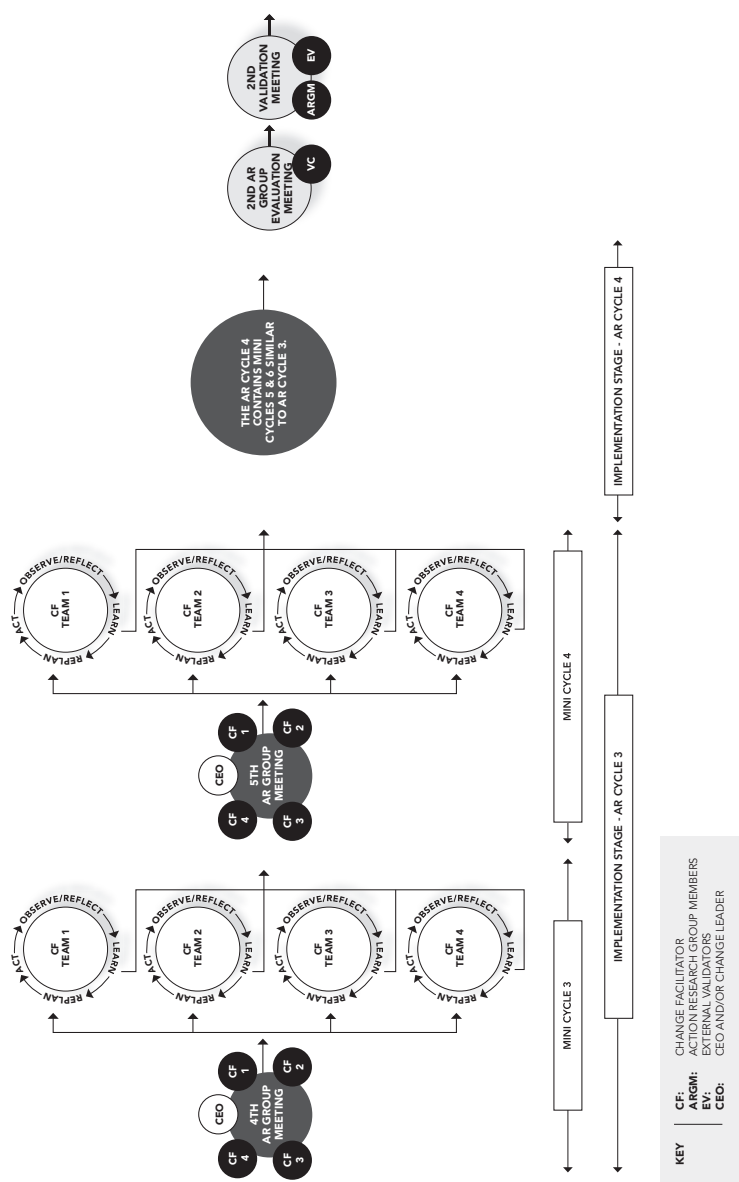
FIGURE 1.9B – RE-PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTING AR MAJOR CYCLE 3

KEY

CF:	CHANGE FACILITATOR
ARGM:	ACTION RESEARCH GROUP MEMBERS
EV:	EXTERNAL VALIDATORS
CEO:	CEO AND/OR CHANGE LEADER

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has described how I developed the WAL model in the context of the concept, including the practice, and the process for the planning and implementation of WAL Change Programmes.

Chapter 2 presents the original conference paper by Oxenberry, Arnold and I on the fusing of AR and AL in the context of organisational change, which is now known as the WAL model.

The subsequent chapters will demonstrate the practice and process of the WAL Model through its adaptation in change programmes in a variety of organisations, both in Australia and overseas.

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For the curious and enquiring mind that wants authentic guidelines for how to apply change management in the workplace, especially at the strategic and organisational level, Selva's book is the outcome of much work and thought on his part. All of us who seek a better way to advise and practice in change management will learn valuable lessons from it.

Paul Davidson

Formerly Associate Professor of Management, QUT Business School, Brisbane

This book is to be commended for providing a systematic process for planning, implementing, evaluating and validating organisational change.

Datuk Shamsuddin Bardan

Executive Director, Malaysian Employers Federation

Of great importance, at least to me as a consultant working with people and organisations on real problems, is the practical nature of WAL. This book demonstrates the diversity of application of WAL… The WAL method is a very effective example of action research and action learning in the change process. I believe that this book will be invaluable to managers who wish to introduce change in their divisions, departments or organisations as a whole.

Colin Bradley

President, Action Learning, Action Research Association Ltd