

# What AMED did for me and what about its future?

## Bruce Nixon



### When it all began

My interest in leadership and management development began in the Sixties, when I was working in Personnel at the head office of Alcan Jamaica. I was asked to give a series of lectures at the Civil Service College in Kingston on a new influential book [The Human Side of Enterprise](#) by Douglas McGregor, a management professor at the MIT Sloan School of Management. That sowed seeds in my mind.

When I returned the UK, I got a temporary job working in management training in Reed Paper. Then Alcan in London invited me back to do executive and graduate recruitment. I initiated training for managers in interviewing skills. But unfortunately Alcan could not offer me the work I really wanted. So after altogether eight years I got my ideal job with Sun Alliance Insurance.

My new boss, Jim Wickens, who had been brought in to update the personnel function, was exemplary in introducing management development programmes that focussed on improving performance. This represented a very practical version of Action Learning that involved most of the organisation. He practised what he preached. He gave me opportunities to develop myself and encouraged me to join [AMED](#) – then called ATM – the Association of Teachers of Management.

### My personal learning and development with AMED

That was the beginning of many opportunities to learn and develop my skills. In those days ATM was a mixture of people in organisations like me, academics and consultants. There were large conferences, workshops and a journal (Management Education and Development – MEAD) offering valuable accounts of members' work.



Reg Revans (Source: [IFAL](#))

I met author [Charles Handy](#), then a member, author/philosopher specialising in organisational behaviour and management. Among the ideas he has advanced are the "portfolio worker" and the "Shamrock Organization" (in which professional core workers, freelance workers and part-time/temporary routine workers form a leaf of the shamrock). An event given by [Reg Revans](#), the originator of Action Learning, was profoundly influential.



Charles Handy (Source: Twitter)

Over the years I discovered all kinds of valuable processes – ways of “*getting the whole system into the room*” such as Real Time Strategic Change, Future Search, Search Conferences and Open Space Technology, Co-counselling (which I adapted as co-mentoring for management support groups in senior management programmes), Non-violent Communication (NVC), Appreciative Inquiry (AI), and many other useful processes. Through what then became AMED, I came across Greenleaf Servant Leadership UK and [Margaret Wheatley](#). Her ways of facilitating large groups are particularly valuable.



Margaret Wheatley (Source: [margaretwheatley.com](http://margaretwheatley.com))

It was through Philip Sadler, former chair of AMED (1991-2) and of Ashridge Management College that I was introduced to [Tomorrow's Company](#) and the [Royal Society of Arts](#).



Philip Sadler (Source: [twitter.com/pjsadler](https://twitter.com/pjsadler))



### **AMED's influence on my practice**

In Sun Alliance I started our own innovative programmes for various levels of management with the help of consultants I met through AMED. Again, we focussed on improving business results and skill development – not the usual class room training which my customers felt offered little benefit. We ran development programmes for women's development. Finally we developed a Senior Management Development Programme for senior managers and directors. The focus was on colleagues working together to bring about strategic change. It was very popular and continued for ten years. Sun Alliance was a very tough place in which to work. I learned valuable lessons that work pretty much anywhere: build relationships with people, listen, and work with people who want change. But also respect and value the views of people who see things differently.

## Encouragement to write

In 1980 I began writing articles about this work. Some articles are still available from [Emerald Insight](#). They attracted people to my team. Thanks to the encouragement of Marguerite Greatorex, ATM's Co-ordinator of Development, with colleagues, I published my first book, *New Approaches to Management Development*. Thanks to Marguerite's initiative it was later published in Chinese! I started giving talks on my work and teaching at business schools. Professor Alan Mumford, colleague of Peter Honey (together they wrote about [four learning styles](#)) invited me, alongside many other members including [Bob Garratt](#) to contribute articles about my work to the Handbook of Management Development, which he edited in the 1986 and 1987 versions. AMED had given me a large network. In 1987, I felt confident enough to start my own independent management consultancy. We offered a programme for independent and internal consultants in organisation development. I worked with internal consultants, helping them establish strategic leadership development programmes, team development, men and women working together in their own organisations. It was basically about people creating better and more successful workplaces. I continued writing about this work. My aim was to reflect and share honestly with others what worked, what I learned and what I would do differently. These articles led to the publication of *Making a Difference - Strategies and Tools for Transforming your Organisation*.

## Global issues loom large

At this time I was getting very interested in global issues - the unprecedented challenges facing humanity: climate chaos, ecocide, economic and social injustice and ending violent conflict. After working with directors and senior managers for some years I asked myself "Why are these good people not doing the right thing"? With AMED's help, I ran with the World Development Movement (now known as Global Justice Now) a one day Global Forum at the LSE. I got involved in the AMED Sustainable Development Network and the Association of Sustainability Practitioners. It was time to give up working in organisations. Now writing and giving participative talks about these challenges is the focus of my work. My sixth book [The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Revolution – A Call to Greatness](#) would never have been written were it not for AMED's long term encouragement.

## AMED in 2020?

AMED in its glory days certainly played a major part in my becoming a writer, author and speaker – now an activist too! I have benefitted enormously from AMED. Times change. From being very large AMED, is now small. But I believe, potentially, there is a great future for AMED. The skills I learned through AMED are highly relevant in creating a better world, better politics, better democracy, a better Parliament and responding to the huge challenges humanity faces today. AMED should feel confident in the relevance of what we have to offer. I go to many campaign groups such as [Compass](#) and [The Electoral Reform Society](#), where the processes I learned through AMED are used. We are trying to get good processes used in political parties, Parliament and politics as a whole. I have published six books. Now I am writing blog posts. I only have a small following as yet. Maybe you can help me get a bigger one? Take a look here <https://brucenixonblog.wordpress.com/> and you will see how AMED influenced me.

I believe AMED could have a great future. But first its leaders need to educate themselves in what we all need to learn: how we face a radically different future in which artificial intelligence and robots transform the world, the way we live, our work and indeed our inner selves, as espoused amongst others by Valerie Hannon's [Innovation Unit](#). This is about education in schools but it is equally important for adults to read, as is the publication she co-wrote with David Price and others '[Education Forward](#).' We in AMED also need to become more ambitious and, as [Positive.News](#) says about Polly Higgins, "*Dare to be great*".

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## About the author

**Bruce** writes: 'I am passionate about our beautiful, extraordinary planet and how we can create a world fit for everyone on Earth and future generations. To succeed we have to transform our concept of leadership, how we do politics and, above all, our values and way of life. We need women and the full diversity of human beings to be equally involved in leadership. I am an enthusiastic member of our increasingly successful Transition Town Berkhamsted. I have five children, and six grandchildren. My blogs are [here](#), and you can contact me by e-mail at [bruce-nixon@waitrose.com](mailto:bruce-nixon@waitrose.com).'