

# Editorial

## Martin Reynolds

Martin Reynolds is Dean of Ashcroft International Business School.



**W**ELCOME to this edition of *Interconnections*. We hope our theme of international management practice provides interesting and stimulating reading and is successful in provoking thought and debate. As with the two earlier editions of *Interconnections*, our contributors are connecting the insights provided by academic theory into the challenges and issues facing international management practitioners, just as the experience of practitioners feeds back into academic theory.

One of the innovative aspects of this journal is its ability to respond swiftly, but still at depth, to the changing nature of our global landscape. This is a feature of the emergent new business climate, and should equally be part of the business education that we offer our students and our business partners. *Interconnections* is developing into a community of practitioners and educators interested in dialoguing and at the same time participating in the emergent world view. As we said in Issue 1, this is a challenging but also potentially exciting time, as we all adjust to the changing landscapes. Whilst there is still a place for methodological and rigorous research that can inform the debate, there is an urgent need, as we recognised, for bridging the theory practice divide, and one of these characteristics needs to be dialogue that is not weighed down by the time constraints of standard academic research. Equally, this is not a time for a panic response – but for measured and timely dialogue.

Inevitably, we have had to be selective in exploring a diverse and complex set of issues but there are some core cross-cutting themes. In times of financial and environmental crisis, organisations and businesses across the world need to strive to innovate their management practice. We require new ways of leading and managing organisations that reflect the context of the challenges of our times. These innovations in management practice will help

drive improvements in efficiency and performance and will hopefully provide some pointers for organisations wishing to find the balance between competitive advantage and sustainability.

Innovation in management practice has implications for business educators. There has been a regular flow of criticism of the activities and work of business schools in recent years in terms of the relevance of courses and research to organisations and the practice of management. Innovation in management practice needs to be supported by innovation in management education.

Our various contributors in this edition will explore the current business environment from a number of different angles, providing a valuable insight into a series of different perspectives that reflect various issues across industries, economies and cultures.

One of the emergent issues from our first two editions has been that of systems thinking, and the importance of looking holistically at organisations within the relevant technological, social, political and historical context of their operations. This theme remains strong in this edition.

Times of rapid and difficult change require managers with new and imaginative skills to enable their organisations to survive and prosper. An important area of management capability is the ability to work collaboratively and reflect on their own practice. The value and contribution of systems thinking in recognising things are interconnected is an important aspect of management capability for driving effective management action in the context of where management decisions are likely to have wide ranging systems impact. This perspective and understanding has been powerfully underlined by the current credit and financial crisis that has had a global impact on economic, social and political systems across many different countries. The commitment to co-ordinated and collaborative action by governments and businesses in trying to address this crisis has emphasised the value of understanding differences and similarities across international boundaries.

The educational imperative associated with these changes should be clear and evident. University business schools have a key role in timing and aligning their own strategies to the changing needs of businesses and organisations. Innovative management education has a key role to play in supporting innovative management practice. It is important to understand the differences and

similarities in management practice across international market places – how businesses respond to the innovation of management practice is likely to be different given the market, economic, social and political context. A good illustration of this challenge is the assumption of market dynamics based on growth and the assumed business strategies necessary to exploit growth opportunities. By contrast the need for sustainable business models that challenge

conventional business assumptions is going to require new management education initiatives to support innovations in management practice.

The scene is set with an article by Marcus Incledon-Webber who outlines the characteristics of a civilisation based on systemic thinking. In it, he outlines the dynamics of adaptable organisms, and what the implications of this are for economic and financial leadership. He concisely sets out the key ingredients of an East/West fusion of ideas and practice. Systems thinking shows the interconnections between human beings as organisms, the organisation in which they work, and the outer environment. This means that the

skills and competencies required are different from that of the more fixed 'knowledge-based' economy – our knowledge is actually changing all the time. This has considerable implications for the training of our managers. These will come from the environment and the internal and external conditions and will include the states of mind, and actions of employees, the customers, and the other systems within which the organisation works, such as the social and political system.

Professor Raymond Saner and Lichia Yu show how important it is for leaders to have training not just in business skills but also in diplomacy through an exploration of the practices of Shell. Professor Paul Turner discusses the nature of corporate reputation, and how this may be managed.

In our 'From the Field' section, Professor Sebastian Green presents a radical new consulting approach drawn from the leading edge work of Bert Hellinger in family systems. Here, organisational diagnosis takes place through examining, and working with the dynamics of teams that are energetically constellated in the organisational system.

*“The commitment to co-ordinated and collaborative action by governments and businesses in trying to address this crisis has emphasised the value of understanding differences and similarities across international boundaries.”*

Greg O'Shea then offers up some practical examples of his work with chaordic organisation – finding ways in which organisations can be enabled to 'self-emerge' whilst taking care that power dynamics do not lead to uncreative hierarchical situations. He provides us with some good practical working tools for any organisation wishing to survive in this rapidly changing state.

Finally, to provide a broader picture of the different contexts in which managers and leaders operate, Jasper Garland describes the changing face of business in Eastern Europe from his perspective as major brand developer. He suggests that this may be the place where dynamic ideas may emerge, as this area is itself emerging from the shackles of its past.

The research and practice forum covers the in-depth discussion that took place in Budapest, on the changing face of economics, and its implications for business education. Joel Magnuson ends the issue with some further timely reflections on the credit crisis, setting the scene for our next issue.

Although the articles in this edition come from different parts of the world and offer a mix of differing and similar perspectives on a range of issues – they share an understanding that management practice needs to evolve in response to range of international and global issues. This edition of *Interconnections* offers thoughts and ideas on key areas for these innovations and associated innovations in the area of management education. We hope this generates further debate and dialogue.

In 2009 we are running a series of breakfast seminars on these and related issues and will be inviting you to contribute and collaborate with our writers. This is part of the on-going approach to develop dialogue and debate between academic colleagues and management practitioners as we seek to extend the activities of our *Interconnections* community.

Colleagues within Ashcroft International Business School are using the debates and discussions within our *Interconnections* community to help feed into our new courses to ensure that Ashcroft International Business School becomes one of the UK's leading practice-based schools.

## Section 1

# Views from the ivory tower

A top-down perspective from Marcus Incledon-Webber shows us how to connect broader systemic issues into a **programme of economic and financial leadership**. Raymond Saner and Lichia Liu highlight the need for **diplomatic and political education** for our corporate leaders, and Paul Turner discusses the changing foundations of **corporate reputation**.