

# Developing Reality Through Imagination: An Action Learning Approach

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## ABSTRACT

An individual's brain cannot distinguish between imagination and reality; therefore, it is imperative that one imagines a better changing tomorrow that can be enhanced by learning and transformation of one's attitude and mindset. The purpose of this study is to encourage participants to imagine a better future for the quality of their lives. Unless one knows what, one needs to achieve in life, one can likely achieve anything, therefore, imagining a better thing is the first step to achieve it. The literature about developing future of an individual appears to be abundant, but about the impact of imagination on an individual's future seems to be a few. hence the quality of life of an individual could be directly proportional to the quality of the individual's imagination. The researcher adopted action learning approach and identified a marginalised community for this study. The participants included youth who were still at school (3) from secondary) and (2) from higher institutions of learning and (3) adult people. The participants made a total of eight (8). The purpose of selecting youth was to confirm their perceptions about their future tomorrow. Another purpose of selecting adult was to find out their experiences towards the achievement of their objectives. The participants formed a focus group that had discussions in one of the schools. Their responses were recorded in a reflective diary and transcribed and then analysed by the researcher.

**Keywords:** Action learning approach, Imagination, Reality

## INTRODUCTION AND MOTIVATION OF THE STUDY

There are so many people who are where they never thought that one day they would be there, as a default of imagination, hence imagination builds self-confidence, self-esteem and self-transformation. However, imagination can occur from an individual or group imagination. Imagination is the way through that we can feel and live in future, this includes the better way to do things. This is the only way to see the positive and negative side of the things (Shukia,2021). The more vividly we imagine something, the more likely we believe it is real, a new study reports that researchers found that the brain encodes the vividness of perceived and real stimuli in a similar manner, resulting confusion between reality and imagination (Neuroscience, 2023). Although the brain is very competent at assessing the images in our minds, it appears that this kind of reality checking is a serious struggle according to the study conducted in the University of Glasgow (Magazine, 2023). For this study, imagination refers to the ways through which one can search the better way to do things and only see the positive side of things through learning and transforming one's attitude and mindset for a better reality that enhances quality of life.

Personal transformation involves the motivation and discipline required to grow, develop and improve in one's personal and professional life; transformation occurs internally and externally. Internal transformation occurs by investigating one's improvement or by defining one's-identity, hence external transformation leads to a tangible transformation of things outside oneself. This includes a career transformation with a new role or promotion. Some people rely on goal-based strategies for a holistic type of personal transformation. Goal-based strategies focus on big goals as the motivation force for change, hence this includes shifting goals and focusing on new goals that can help one to discover talents, skills, and responsibilities which prompt personal transformation; progressing goals occurs when one sets goals for oneself, and one continues to reach and

expand on them. The initial goal oneself sets yourself should remain consistent while continuing to be challenging. This allows one's capabilities and talents to expand further (Indeed, 2023).

Imagination can be a powerful tool for self-transformation and creating reality. This creates a vision board to help one to remember one's good and aspirations and engage in creative activities like writing, painting or music to challenge oneself to create something new. Therefore, everything one wants is at one's fingertips with the right mindset. Self-improvement is the key to happiness, and it is a vital part of one's personal development and future well-being. It helps one to become the best possible version of oneself while supporting one's endeavours and with a grateful and imaginative mindset, one can achieve one's potential without losing one's cool. Hence using one's imagination and creative to manifest the life one wants creates a symbiotic relationship between one and the universe (Ngako, 2022).

Action learning is a process that involves a small group on real problems, taking action, and learning as individuals, as a team and as an organization. It helps organizations to develop creative, flexible and successful strategies to pressing problems. Action learning coach assist group members in reflecting on the advancement of their group functioning, rather than on their problem solving. In this, action learning participants become effective leaders as they solve difficult problems (World Institute for Action Learning, 2023). Indeed (2024) Action learning is the process of finding creative solutions to workplace challenges while reflecting on results. Action learning also involves coaches who help to facilitate the learning process while encouraging team members to reflect on each solution. Action learning goals include enhancing problem-solving skills and providing insight into the decision-making process. Researchers in Sweden have found that one's imagination can change one's perceptions of reality. One's mind can literally play tricks on one by changing illusions of what one thinks, one hears and sees into what seems like reality. One's imagination of a sound or a shape change how one perceives the world around one in the same way actually hearing that sound or seeing that shape. Therefore, one found that one imagines hearing can change what one sees and what one imagines seeing can change what one actually hears (Bergland, 2013). For this study, many people appear to be hopeless due to some problems they encounter in every day's life. Therefore, this needs to be changed through action learning so that one could see the possibility of imagining a better future after learning from and with others. Action learning can occur by working with other people to accumulate experiences of what is related to your imagination for a good future. In this instance, the individual must be pertinacious to achieve the ambitious target set. The literature that evidences and ground the study is discussed below:

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The Neuroscience has discovered that imagination and perception rely on overlapping brain circuits. The researchers used a computer model to establish whether the pattern of results was consistent with the theory that people judge whether something is real or imagined, based on how vividly they experience it. They confirmed that the brain encodes the strength or vividness of real and imagined stimuli in a similar confusing reality and imagination (London's Global University, 2023). One line of research has shown that imagining one of two interpretations of an ambiguous stimulus prior to its presentation increases the probability of subsequently perceiving that same stimulus. Some studies found that simultaneous imagery increases the probability that an external stimulus was detected. The study shown that imagining a stimulus increased the tendency to report seeing that stimulus, and that imagery vividness also positively correlated with the tendency to report external presence and if external stimulus presence is less likely, perception might be more likely to be attributed to imagery (Dijkstra, Mazor, Kok and Fleming, 2021).

The brain evaluates the images it is processing against a reality threshold. If the signal passes the threshold, the brain thinks it is real, if it does not, the brain thinks it is imagined. Such a system works well most of the time because imagined signals are typically weak, hence, if an imagined signal is strong enough to cross the threshold, the brain takes it for reality. Although the brain is very competent at assessing the images in one's mind, it appears that this kind of reality checking is a serious struggle. The brain uses the same networks for reality and imagination, but that functional magnetic resonance imaginary brain scans do not have high enough resolution for neuroscientists to discern the differences between how the networks are used or not used in the brain's visual cortex, which processes images, imaginary, experiences are coded in a more superficial layer than real experiences (Quanta Magazine, 2023).

However, too often humanity is ruled by superstitions, stereotypes, and tribal prejudices resulting in all too real suffering, violence and war. The folly of these antagonisms became especially clear when human beings made the first journey into space and saw that the supposedly entrenched divisions between countries were just imaginary lines on a map. One's mind can run away with one another, leading one another to act through suspicion or fear, but one can also use one's imagination as a tool to change one's life, a process that one another can begin to understand through advances in neuroscience. One has envisioned two separate areas of the brain, one that processes the evidence gathered by one's senses, and one that spins off into gauzy daydreams. The functional magnetic resonance imagery has helped us understand that these two functions are not as distinct as they seem. The effect also occurs when one simply imagines oneself performing the activities. A number of contemplative practices directly recruit the power of imagination to retrain the mind. The transformative power of focused imagination is central to Buddhist practice but Buddha himself was not content to rest there (Cohen, 2013).

The researcher agreed with Cohen (2013) that imagination is a tool for changing one's life through learning by gathering evidence by one's senses that can make one's dream to come true. When one imagines performing a particular activity, one is likely to perform the very same activity. However, for an individual to be successful in life, this starts from the desire that ultimately develops aspirational objectives. Imagination builds self-esteem and confidence of an individual to open the possibility of achieving one's objectives.

Imagination is the same as fantasizing, daydreaming and visionary realities that one can better understand one's past, present and one's future aspirations. One's imagination helps one's envisioned the positive outcomes one would like to actualize and the negative experiences that one wants to stray away from. One's imagination can reflect both one's desires and fears. Scientific evidence suggests that one's brain's default network, made up of limbic systems and sensory experiences, is highly engaged when one's brain is at rest from cognitive tasks. The brain regions involved in this network show lower levels of activity when one is engaged in a particular task, but higher levels of activity when one is awake and not focused on any one exercise. Daydreaming helps ones to imagine the life ahead of ones. Ones imaginations have accompanied ones from childhood to adulthood carrying a metaphorical script of one's life. One's imagination is a reflective of childlike state (TED MileHigh, 2020). Action learning involves learning from the experience of acting. Action on pressing problems or issues that are of concern to an individual is a core purpose of action learning. A primary process that supports an individual to develop insight is the power of questions. Asking clear, direct and challenging questions at the right time and in the right way drives the process of action learning (Hauser, Rigg, Trehan and Vince, 2023).

For this study, the researcher disagreed with TED MileHigh (2020) that when one is not engaged in any activity one can imagine better than when one is engaged in activity because some activities form part of action learning that can assist one solve some of the problems that can be encountered through the process of achieving an imagined reality. The researcher agreed with Hauser, Rigg, Trehan and Vince (2023) that action on pressing problem or issues is a core purpose of action learning in one's imagination towards achieving reality.

Action learning involves one in generating and collecting data to solve a p[problem. This develops an individual's design and implementation instructional units and assess the effects of learning outcomes. This is a valuable way to build hard and soft skills in individuals, including those essential for leadership, such as conflict resolution, strategic thinking, and open communication. Action learning helps an individual to develop core skills and competences by working on projects relevant to their future goals. Action learning normally consists of four to eight participants (Practera,2022). Action learning has to do with adopting an experimental, iterate mindset of daily activities. It requires a willingness to embrace failure and a recognition that there will always be opportunities to adapt and improve. This asks how one can better orient services, organisations and systems to continuously learning rather than optimising them for standardisation and control. Action learning challenges traditional notions of accountability and hierarchy (Centre for public Impact, 2022).

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The researcher adopted Action learning approach in order to improve imagination of individuals to a better understanding of good opportunities. Action learning is a process that involves a small group on real problems, acting, and learning as individuals, as a team and as an organization. It helps organizations to develop creative, flexible, and successful strategies to pressing problems. Action learning solves problems and develops leaders simultaneously because its simple rules force participants to think critically and work collaboratively (World Institute for Action Learning, 2023). The researcher identified a rural community and purposively selected eight participants for the study. The participants comprised of different age and gender groups. The purpose of selecting different age groups was to find out their experiences and to ascertain if imagination contributes to an individual's reality. The participants comprised of youth who were still at school (3) from secondary) and (2) from higher institutions of learning and (3) adult people. The participants made a total of eight (8). The purpose of selecting youth was to confirm their experiences related to their future tomorrow. Another purpose of selecting adult was to find out their experiences towards the achievement of their objectives. The participants formed a focus group that was interviewed in the discussions in one of the schools. Their responses were recorded in a reflective diary and then transcribed and then analysed by the researcher.

## RESULTS

The focus group's discussions clearly shown the ontology and epistemology of the study. In the first phase of the study, the focus group reflected the nature of the reality, while the second phase articulated the suggestions that can assist an individual to imagine a better understanding of the significance of imagination for better future that can ultimately impact individual and community positively.

### The nature of reality

In the first phase of discussions, individuals clearly reflected their experiences that contributed much to their lives and indicated that one could hardly achieve anything if one never had something in mind. One participant of the focus group reported that he/she was a grade five school dropout because he/she imagined that being in a transportation business was what he/she wanted to achieve in life rather than sitting in a class. The participant approached someone who was responsible for transportation of goods from city to rural areas. The participant volunteered to assist the man by uploading and offloading goods from his car. Thereafter, the participant managed to get a driving license and suddenly started to drive someone's minibus and at the time the study was conducted, the participant was taxi owner who was managing five minibuses that transport people from rural areas to towns every day. The business was prospering leaps and bounds. The participant confirmed that learning every day from that man contributed significantly towards the achievement of the imagined reality. In a classroom situation I was never cooperative hence working with the man I was very cooperative although human activities are precarious. Self-transformation sophisticate the whole action learning process. Another participant pointed out that he/she was good in creative arts and then he/she wanted to work by designing cars or fixing them. Despite dropping out from grade 10, participant insisted that working with cars would be far better than sitting in class. The participant volunteered to work with other people who fix cars. The participant dedicated him/herself to learning from others. At the time of study, the participant had a workshop for fixing cars that was his/ her imagination in his/her youth. The other participants regretted that they never imagined themselves doing something for themselves and that was the reason that they were not working, and they admired those who had dreams at their youth, hence others were proud of what they managed to achieve.

Another participant showed that all he/she wanted was to be a person who can work with children either in childcare centres or schools. The participant was motivated by child abuse that occurs almost every day. The participant managed to pass grade 12 and thereafter, registered at one of the universities to get profession so that the dream could be achieved. The participant indicated that his/her study's focus was on Early Child Development Programme. Although some of the participant's friends wanted to engage him/her in all juvenile delinquencies, the participant opted to focus on the dream and learn from other students. The desire had been had increased by working with other students who wanted to take care of children.



Amongst participants, another one confirmed that he/she imagined owning a company that could serve the whole country. Fortunately, the participant started to work in a company that dealt with the installation of electricity in houses and companies. The participant was so dedicated to that to such an extent that some people started to be jealous of him/her but he/she was never discouraged by all remarks from other employees because he/she had a clear imagination of owning a company one day. The participant did not mind to work overtime without compensation because he/she wanted to learn from other employees whose expertise was admirable and desirable. The participant confirmed that the dream came true because he/she was running a company that installs electricity in houses and big complexes such as shopping centre and government buildings and eight people were employed by that company. The participant reported that he/she was contributing in the economy of the country as others.

Some of the focus group members showed that at their youth time, what most of the people imagined was to have husbands or wives, perhaps would also imagine such a big number of children who could look after livestock. They indicated that their dreams had never been on any type of learning although a few had such a dream and they managed to get employment. They confirmed that their dreams were limited to their environment only, by then a few imagined beyond their environment, unlike today where most of the children imagined beyond their environment. The youth confirmed that they wanted to be professionals who would assist their community in future. Another youth reported that he never got special training hence he/she had imagined installing DStv dish in houses. The participant voluntarily worked with another company that was installing dishes in schools. The participant indicated to have learnt a lot from other employees of that company. After the company left the area, the participant started to recruit people if they wanted to install DStv hence he/she managed to get and assisted them. The participant approached DStv company for subcontracting and he/she was lucky to be awarded a subcontract. The focus group confirmed that the participant was working beyond the municipality district because of dedication and learning with such imagination in mind.

The responses to the discussions confirmed that imagination could develop reality irrespective of what one could experience on the way towards one's future. Therefore, it is imperative that one should imagine a good thing to have a better future. It is not a simplistic issue to think either positively or negatively to oneself unless one transforms oneself. Self-transformation needs self-knowledge with a critical understanding of oneself. The participants' responses showed much experience in creativity and skill development. Hence, the suggestions are discussed below:

### **Suggestions relating to learning and imagination for better reality**

The focus group suggested that one should forget one's positional power and age in order to learn to achieve one's imagination. It was also suggested that people must advise one another on one's imagination about the future. It is never too late to learn and transform if one wants to achieve one's imagination, however, transformation of an individual is significant to achieve one's goal. People must volunteer to work with someone or group that has knowledge about solving a particular problem. Through action learning, people can achieve their goals, therefore, it is worthwhile to develop such propensity. One should never underestimate oneself in life, hence nothing can be achieved without zeal and enthusiasm. It is also parents' obligation to ask their children what they would like to be tomorrow so that they can contribute towards cultivating their imaginations. Educators should shape the child's imagination that had been cultivated at home. Therefore, setting an ambitious target in life helps to build one's self-confidence and self-knowledge.

## **DISCUSSIONS**

However, one should visualise what one wants to do before one does it. Visualisation is so powerful that when one knows what one wants, one can get it. Therefore, imagination is the beginning of the creation, it is the tool that one can use to programme one's subconscious mind to help one to achieve one's goals and dreams. Imagination is powerful because it helps one to explore possibilities, where fear is one side of the motivation coin, hope is in the other side. Imagination is more powerful than knowledge (Wilson, 2020). One must also account for the ambivalent role of the imagination in one self-narrative. An imaginative projection can be an important source of self-knowledge, helping one to envisage future possibilities and to make sense of the alternatives one faces. One understands one's emotional import of one's decisions and evaluate their practical

and normative significance. The story that one tells oneself provide opportunities for self-deception, self-indulgence, wishful thinking and other failures of agency, leading to make decisions that one later regret. The role of imaginative projection is self-transformative decision making (Mackenzie, 2008). For this study, the participants concurred with Wilson (2020) and Mackenzie (20080) that unless one would have imagined what one wanted to achieve one could hardly achieve anything. The participants imagined having their own businesses and struggled by all means to achieve what they wanted to achieve. Therefore, it crystal clear that imagination is a powerful tool to achieve what one wants to achieve in life. However, this needs dedication by an individual because there should be learning and transformation of an individual.

Imagination is the mental ability to visualize what may lie beyond the immediate situation and to see things that are not present. Many educational theories simply neglect the concept of imagination, or limit its meaning to common fantasizing and playfulness, whereas others give imagination a central role in the process of understanding and learning. Some philosophers argue that education should not be satisfied with developing students' abilities to think imaginatively, create a narrative and develop social imagination, rather than the need to intentionally raise young people to live imaginatively, that is to live a rich life with an open mind, being ready to think in new ways and change their habits when former ways of thinking prove untenable for moral and ethical reasons (von Wright, 2021). One's ability to imagine alternative future is at the heart of the creative process. A creative tension arises when the present as one experiences it, is different to the future one imagines, and this generates the energy that is necessary for transformation. Imagining a vivid, realistic, and desirable yet alternative future is important because one acts into the future one imagines. This creative tension opens up a desire to learn and motivates one unconsciously to strive for one's desired future. Many change efforts fail to engage one because one is based on rational-logical plans that do not capture one's imagination or help one to connect to one's emotional experiences in the present. When one visualizes possibilities, both excitement and anxiety are present, as acts that matter to one that is necessarily grounded in anxiety. Change means old patterns need to dissolve for new ones to emerge. If one does this, one needs some levels of hope that something good will come of it. This encourages one to draw on one's capabilities and creativity to find ways of overcoming adversity, obstacles or difficulties to realize one's goal (Day, 2021). For this study, imagination is the ability to achieve a better changing tomorrow that would satisfy an individual's needs. The researcher agreed with Day (2021) that imagining a vivid, realistic and desirable alternative future is important because one acts into the future one imagines, and the creative tension opens up a desire to learn and motivates oneself. It is possible to learn from others than to learn alone, hence action learning is imperative. One learns easy if one give up one's positional power.

Imagination, coupled with arts education, creates possibilities for self-expression and the development of higher order thinking. In early child development, this is a fundamental skill, which helps children to make meaning of the world. Imagination opens the windows and shows one landscape, horizons that one would not otherwise perceives. Children bring to imaginative play to their individual dispositions and realities in order to bring concepts to life. Collaborative participation in a sociocultural context creates mutual zones of proximal developments where intellect and emotions come together to form a unified whole that extends learning capabilities (Carrick, 2020). Imagination enables one to go beyond actual experience and construct alternatives possibilities in which a fragmented situation becomes a meaningful whole. Therefore, imagination can be perceived as the basis for cultivating creative thinking, and then the driving force of innovation. In addition, imagination has several noticeable characteristics, some of which are related to psychology aspect, such as exploration, intuition, sensibility and crystallisation, while some are more practice- oriented such as effectiveness, novelty, transformation, elaboration and productivity. Imagination assists one in transferring a function from one object to another that did not previously have such a function. This ability helps people in dealing with unpredictable problems by using existing experiences (Liang, 2012). For this study, the researcher confirmed that that imagination couples with creative arts education to achieve reality and higher thinking order (Carrick,2020), hence the participants reported their creative arts education in order to achieve reality that they appeared to be proud of in their lives. The researcher further ascertained that imagination has several noticeable characteristics including psychological aspect, practical orientation and transformation of an individual (Liang,2012).

Over and above, for this study, one can hardly achieve what one wants to achieve in one's imagination if one does not transform and ready to learn with others. It is critical for an individual to have clear self-knowledge so that one can change one's behaviour and attitude to achieve what one images. Developing reality through imagination is not just an obvious achievement unless one transforms and be ready to learn.

## CONCLUSION

Since the brain cannot distinguish between imagination and reality, it is crucial to imagine a better understanding of oneself to enable to achieve a better reality. Self-criticism and evaluation can determine an individual's better understanding to enable one to transform to a better person with vision that can be driven by an imagination. Critical thinking about oneself is fundamental towards self-judgment that can improve an individual's imagination for a better future. Action learning enables one to collect qualities of mind that include clear-headedness and critical thinking. When one has an ambitious target to achieve, one steps up to the mark through self-regulation strategies. Imagination can be enhanced easily by creative arts and helps to activate an individual's mind. However, imagination enables one to go beyond actual experience and construct alternatives possibilities in which a fragmented situation becomes a meaningful whole and ultimately develops a magnificent propensity to achieve reality. Action learning can hone an individual's imagination to become a reality. Therefore, for this study, imagination is an actionable strategy for achieving a better future. The responses to the interview questions in the discussions confirmed that imagination builds one's confidence and better future.

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