

# Action Learning

*A sustainable way to build capacity,  
strengthen relationships and drive impact*



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Helping leaders make a difference

Is there something that you want your organisation to be better at?

Maybe it's a specific practice, like stakeholder engagement, or something broader like managing change

I partner with organisations committed to improvement who realise that 'doing some training' just isn't going to make the difference they need

They know from experience that development programmes need to be rooted in the context of the work. And they don't want to waste time and money on learning that doesn't respond to the actual challenges faced by their teams

So they invest in **Action Learning**



# What is Action Learning?

- Action learning takes place through small groups having **regular, facilitated conversations** about real-life problems and how to solve them
- It involves **asking questions** rather than giving advice, so that solutions come from the people who really know the complexities of the situation
- Action Learning creates spaces of **trust and openness** that generate a cycle of action, reflection and impact
- And it allows you to **build learning and coaching muscles** in yourself and across the organisation so that you can keep on applying it as new challenges arise – a **truly sustainable** approach



# Case Study

An NGO operating across multiple countries in Africa wanted to improve the facilitation skills of teams working with different governments

They envisaged masterclasses and toolkits to support people with designing and running effective workshops

Building on this, we co-designed an action learning programme that brought people together to establish a community of practice that went far beyond developing facilitation skills

- Action learning groups of 6 people met for two hours every 4-6 weeks over the year
- Learning journals helped each person map out the issues they wanted to solve together
- The discussions shaped masterclasses and toolkits so that these responded real-life challenges
- A final presentation to senior leaders ensured sharp focus on impact



# What participants said

*The action learning set has improved our efficiency and made us better able to confront new challenges. It breaks down barriers between people operating in different parts of the organisation, reduces the likelihood that we repeat mistakes and stops us thinking in silos*

*I found the sessions strengthened my relationship with others in my region and created a sense of shared camaraderie... having the opportunity to bring difficult issues to a nonjudgmental group, I found it actually built my confidence in my own approach and problem solving. I left feeling that I was not alone in grappling with these issues...*

# When to use Action Learning

Action learning can work at any level, from Team Leaders to C-suite Executives

You can use it to bring existing peer groups together in new ways e.g. managers across an organisation who may have similar roles in different groups or regions

Or you can form sets that go beyond organisational or national boundaries e.g. groups of Executive Directors from multiple industries or Civil Servants working on delivery challenges in different countries

Action learning has many uses, from improving certain skills to addressing systemic challenges or supporting the delivery of a major project or change programme

*This approach can be applied to anything that requires learning, not just this topic. We want to explore how we sustain it and ingrain it as a way of working - how do we institutionalise this? We want to maintain this support system and platform to share possibilities and issues without them being polished ideas*

*Action Learning Sponsor*



# Conditions for success

What will make Action Learning work for me?

Here are some key ingredients to consider:

- **Sponsorship:** how will participants know that taking time for action learning is valued and important to achieving the mission?
- **Attendance:** will members able to join all sessions?
- **Facilitation:** how is a safe and constructive space created and held for the participants? How is the process run and adapted?
- **Approach:** have members developed the ability to ask questions instead of giving advice? How well does the set reflect on its own patterns and effectiveness?
- **Organisation:** are the logistics well-managed so that sets run as planned?
- **Size and format:** 5-6 people is an ideal size for a set. My sessions are between 1.5 and 3 hours long and are usually held online.



*It's hard to block 90 minutes for an activity like this - but I looked forward to these sessions. Claudine knows the work we do; she gets the challenges we face and approached the sessions from a place of empathy and support... she really helped the group learn from each other and provided unique insights from her experience.*

Learning Set Member, Global Consulting Firm

**Book a call** if you're interested in joining a set or want to explore how action learning could help your organisation learn and develop



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