How does action learning work?

Action learning uses listening, sharing and questions to explore real-time work issues in a supportive, confidential group setting.

The real value comes from the questioning of the other set members: this helps to generate insights, actions and wisdom, and can be very motivational for the person working on their issue.

While each participant benefits from discussions around their own challenge, they also learn from the problems others face and dialogue about those issues. Action Learning helps participants learn to learn and create new thinking and new behaviours.

How action learning sets work

- A small group of 5-7 peers meets regularly, usually over 6 months to a year, for half- or full-day sessions
- Participants may be part of the same business or organisation, or they may be part of an 'open' set where the other members are initially unknown to them
- Each member of the set takes turns to be the 'presenter', offering up a work-related or personal challenge which needs resolution
- Other set members ask insightful questions to help the presenter gain insights, explore options, reflect, review and rethink approaches
- The exchanges between the presenter and the other members should be challenging, supportive and stretching, and result in concrete actions for the presenter
- At the next session, there is a chance to follow up and reflect on the action taken and its results
- A trained and skilled facilitator keeps the whole process on track and focused.

A typical Action Learning Set cycle

2. Progress updates
& review of actions
taken

1. Arrive and
check in

3. Agree running
order

Action Learning Cycle
The Set meets for 6 sessions
approximately every
5-6 weeks

Action taken
between sessions

4. Individual
time

Share issue

Questions that
support exploration

5. Set review (how
well the Set is
working together)

Review &
reflect

Agree actions

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