



**SOCIAL
ENTERPRISE
ACADEMY**
One becomes many

ACTION LEARNING SETS

Resources and Reflections

Interreg



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Action learning set reflections log

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There are QR codes throughout your learning journal. They can be scanned with your smartphone camera to access more in-depth information and reading about concepts covered in your programme. The URL of the resource is also available.

KEY SKILLS AND COMMUNICATION



LISTENING SKILLS



If you want to be listened to, you should put in time listening.” Marge Piercy



Video: William Ury – The Power of Listening

https://bit.ly/Power_of_Listening

Ask yourself the following questions:

Listening to...

- Who am I really listening to?
- To the speaker? To myself and thoughts in my head? To background noise?
- Does the speaker have my undivided attention?

Listening for...

- What am I really listening for?
- For agreement with my own view? For a reason? For an answer?
- Am I truly listening with an open mind? Have I made assumptions and pre-judged the message?

Listening from...

- What viewpoint am I listening from?
- That of a friend? A parent? A manager? A colleague? How does this affect what I hear and how I interpret it?
- Am I really listening in a non-judgemental way?
- Have I understood? Clarify what you have heard. Have I listened with emotional intelligence? Seek out the ‘feeling’ of what is being said.

LEVELS OF LISTENING

LEVEL 3

- Understanding the person's words, intent and feeling
- What is behind what is being said?
- Body language, tone, facial expression
- Taking it all in
- Curiosity

LEVEL 2

- Focussed listening
- Hearing what's is being said
- Transactional
- Informative
- Gathering facts

LEVEL 1

- Paying attention to what the person says and comparing it to your own experience
- Thinking about something you want to talk about and what you are going to say next.
- You are listening only for the parts that interests you
- Trying to decide how you feel about the person or what's being said and might be disregarding/dismissing the other person's views

LEVEL 0

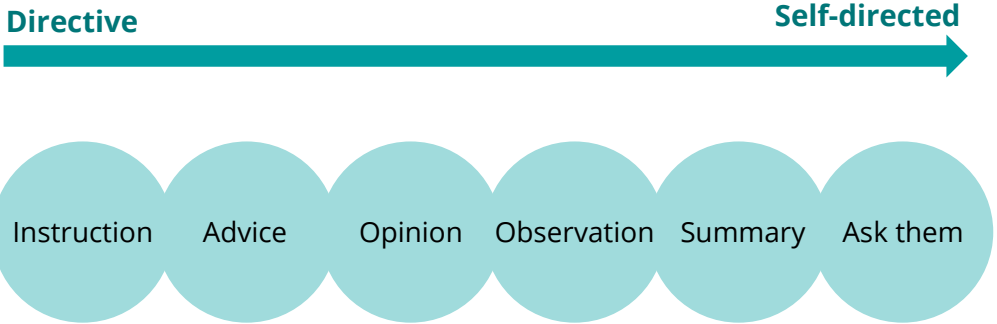
- Pretending, (occasional nod etc.)
- You might look like you are listening, but you are actually thinking about other things
- You are losing interest
- Making no effort to look like you listen

Source: Social Enterprise Academy 2020

NON-DIRECTIVE APPROACH

Flexible style of influence

Julie Starr's 'flexible styles of influence' offers us a scale of coaching styles, with directive coaching at one end of the spectrum and self-directed at the other.



Source: The Brilliant Coaching, 3rd Edition, Julie Starr (Pearson Education)

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WHAT GETS IN THE WAY?

Five voices that kill curiosity

When strengthening our listening skills, it is key to recognise any needs within ourselves that might get in the way of listening.



Helper

The need to help and solve things



Storyteller

The need to tell own stories related to the topic



Controller

The need to direct things or regulate/steer something



Judge

The need to decide if something is good or bad



Boaster

The needs to brag about achievements or possessions

Source: Entira AB, reproduced with permission 2022



Video: How to tame your advice monster

Giving advice might feel great – but what are the complications? Watch this video to explore how we really add value to a conversation?

<https://bit.ly/TheAdviceMonster>

QUESTIONING SKILLS

What makes a good question?

Good questioning technique involves using the right type of question for the right purpose.

Open	Open questions have no expected answer and give the subject an open space in which to respond. Where? What? How?
Probing	Probing questions are useful to fill in the details.
Reflective	Reflective questions are useful to obtain further information – repeat something the subject has said/implied.
Closed	Closed questions require a short answer – useful for establishing facts.
Comparative	Comparative questions are a form of probing question but with options to follow why? How? What?

What type of questions do you most often use?

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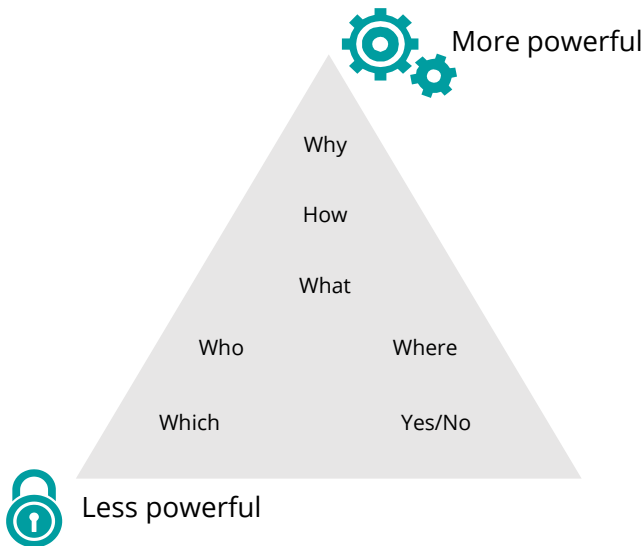
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QUESTIONING SKILLS

Powerful questions

A powerful question can help a person provoke constructive thought and challenge assumptions. In contrast a less powerful question can trap helps the other person into limited answers.

The structure of a question can make a great difference in whether it narrows our mind or opens it up for creative thinking.



WHY questions – a note of caution

Unless carefully crafted, a WHY-question can easily make people feel defensive and cause them to try and justify their actions rather than thinking creatively.

However, when a WHY-question stems from genuine curiosity, such as 'I wonder why that happened', then it has the potential to create useful insights.

Source: Eric E. Vogt, Juanita Brown and David Isaacs, *The Art of Powerful Questions*

The background is a solid red color with several overlapping, semi-transparent, curved shapes in a slightly darker shade of red, creating a layered effect. The text is centered in the middle of the page.

RUNNING AN ACTION LEARNING SET

WHAT ARE ACTION LEARNING SETS?

Action learning involves working on real problems, focusing on learning and actually implementing solutions. It is a form of *learning by doing*.

It provides a well-tried method of accelerating learning which enables people to handle complex issues more effectively.

Amongst a small group, individuals learn best with and from one another as they each tackle their own problem and go on to actually implement their own solution. The group provides each individual with needed challenge and support.

The process involves:

- Research (into what is obscure)
- Learning (about what is unknown)
- Action (to resolve a problem)

These functions are integrated into a single activity and develops an attitude of questioning and reflection to help individuals and organisations change themselves in a rapidly changing world.



Where did action learning sets come from?

Find out more about the background and use of action learning sets by following this link:

<https://bit.ly/action-learning-background>

10 KEY ASSUMPTIONS FOR ACTION LEARNING

Relevance	"Learning is optimal when the focus of the learning is owned by, relevant to, and important and timely for, the individual."
Tacit Knowledge	"Knowledge exists within individuals in implicit, often unaware forms; it is frequently under or not fully utilised and can be accessed through guided introspection
Reflection	"The process of being able to thoughtfully reflect upon experience is an essential part of the learning process, which can enable greater meaning and learning to be derived from a given situation"
Uncovering	Adapting and building new maps and mental models "The most significant learning occurs when individuals are able to shift the perspective by which they habitually view the world, leading to greater understanding (of the world and of the other), self-awareness and intelligent action.
Social Learning	"Social interaction generates learning".
Integration	"People are a combination of mind, body, feelings and emotions, and respond best when all aspects of their being are considered, engaged, and valued."
Self-Awareness	"Building self-awareness through helping people understand the relation between what they feel, think, and act, and their impact on others, is a crucial step to greater personal and professional competence."
Repetition and Reinforcement	"Practice brings mastery and positive reinforcement increases the assimilation."
Facilitated learning	"A specific role exists for an expert in teaching and learning methods and techniques which can help individuals and groups best learn."
Systemic understanding and practice	"We live in a complex, interconnected, co-created world, and, in order to better understand and tackle individual and organisational issues, we have to take into account the different systems and contexts which mutually influence one another and effect these issues."

Source: Action Learning in Practice, www.ifal.org.uk

RUNNING AN ACTION LEARNING SET

- 1** To start
Agree the different roles members of the set will take on
- 2** First few minutes
Set facilitator welcomes everyone to the set. The Issue holder presents their issue. This is likely to take around ten minutes. Members of the set actively listen in silence.
- 3** Summarising
The set facilitator invites the summariser to summarise the issue presented. The facilitator then checks with the issue holder whether the issue has been understood correctly and if they want to add any additional information. The facilitator then asks members of the set if they need any further information in order to be able understand the issue. (Questions of clarification.)
- 4** Formulations of written questions
Questioner members of the set are invited to write open questions for the issue holder from their agreed perspective. Each question gets presented individually for the set holder to consider. This process is usually undertaken in silence and will take some time.
- 5** The Giving of Questions
The facilitator invites members of the set to offer their questions to the issue holder by reading out their question and passing the question over to the issue holder.
- 6** Checking In
The reviewer closes the set by checking in with the issue holder. The reviewer asks them; Has your view of the issue changed? What were the significant learning points? What do you think of the process?
- 7** Review
Allow some time to review the set process after each set in order to improve the process. Set members could consider 'what worked well' 'what could they do more of' and 'what could they do less of?'

WHAT ARE ACTION LEARNING SETS?

1



Set facilitator

Look after the issue holder and the process

4



Assumptions questions

Create three questions to help them explore any assumptions that may be evident

2



Issue holder

Tell your set about your dilemma in as much detail as possible (10-15 mins)

5



Different perspectives questions

Create three questions to help them explore the situation in a new way (*'if I were in your shoes, I'd be wondering*)

3



Summariser

Retell the issue in short. No analysis, no additions, no speculation (2-3 mins)

6



Feelings questions

Create three questions to help them explore the feelings involved

7



Reviewer – ask three questions:

Has your view of the issue changed? What were the key learning points?

How do you feel about the process?





Set facilitator

Look after the issue holder and the process

Your role is **to support the set through the action learning process**, serve the set and be guardian of the ground rules and the process. You will be required to keep a high level of self-awareness and to use judgement in your interventions.

Top tips for the set facilitator

- 1** Actively listen and observe the set at all times
- 2** Watch the process
- 3** Provide clarity on process, prompting set members on the next steps as required
- 4** Support group cohesion and at all times have concern for the well-being of set members, modelling by your own behaviour
- 5** This may require intervention at times to keep things on course as required. In this event, request the set to “stop the clock/press the pause button” so that you can make an observation, question, correct etc. as appropriate
- 6** Listen carefully to the issue holder and the questioners. Support, reassure and guide members who are finding it difficult
- 7** Use your observation and judgement to time the round-up of the issue
- 8** When all the questions have been asked check in with the issue holder. Without asking them to comment on the issue itself ask them how the process has been for them.
- 9** To close the set thank the issue holder for sharing their issue and members of the set for their questions.

When taking part in an action learning set, what did you notice about...

What did the **set facilitator** do that supported you or someone else to solve a problem or support your/their performance?

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What impact did the **set facilitator** have on the group dynamics in the set?

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Is there anything that you would like to remember for next time?

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Issue holder

Tell your set about your dilemma in as much detail as possible

(10-15 mins)

Share this issue with the set. This should take between 5-15 minutes. When you are finished, be prepared to listen to the others set members and where appropriate to note their questions without responding.



What makes a suitable issue to bring to the set?

- ✓ It is real – a live situation for which you do not, as yet, have a way forward
- ✓ It involves people rather than simply a technical challenge
- ✓ There is no easy or obvious solution
- ✓ Something that matters to you (you are part of the issue) and it will make a difference once resolved
- ✓ One that can be tackled and worked on now and over the next few months
- ✓ Best to avoid issues in which another set member is also a player, certainly in the early stages. This may inhibit open-ness and honesty depending on the issue, and the role of the set is to provide a fresh pair of ears and eyes

When taking part in an action learning set, what did you notice about...

What did the **issue holder** do that supported you or someone else to solve a problem or support your/their performance?

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What impact did the **issue holder** have on the group dynamics in the set?

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Is there anything that you would like to remember for next time?

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SUMMARISER



Summariser

Retell the issue in short. No analysis, no additions, no speculation (2-3 mins)

When the person appears to be finished sharing their issue, the summariser asks if they can summarise what they have heard in order to check understanding. As summariser, if you need to you can ask questions to clarify what is said, but not to challenge.

The process when summarising...

- 1** Feedback the key points of your understanding of the issue. This should take no more than 2 minutes.
- 2** Check with the Issue Holder if this is a fair representation or if there is anything they wish to add or correct.
- 3** Set members ask any clarification questions (simply a matter of clarifying the facts of the situation).

When taking part in an action learning set, what did you notice about...

What did the **summariser** do that supported you or someone else to solve a problem or support your/their performance?

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What impact did the **summariser** have on the group dynamics in the set?

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Is there anything that you would like to remember for next time?

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QUESTIONER ROLES



Questioner roles

Create three questions to help them explore...

Listen carefully as the issue holder shares with the set. If you need to you can ask questions to clarify what is said, but not to challenge. Write down questions that you feel will help them to gain a richer understanding of their issue. Pass each question separately to the issue holder.

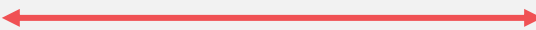


What makes a suitable question?

The challenge for set members is not to jump to solutions or suggestions based on your own experience. Work on being open to the issue and responding to what you have heard. Avoid questions which are really a mask for your own interpretation or solution. Hold the intention to support the issue-holder in deepening their understanding.

How exploratory is your question?

Not at all



Very

A?

P?

F?

To allow a deeper insight into the issues holder's situation, it is beneficial to **assign specific questioning roles**. You want to assign set members to focus on questions specifically exploring feelings, help challenging assumptions and explore different perspectives.

Different perspectives

Write down questions that you feel will help them to gain a richer understanding of their issue by focussing on the expected questions which if **you were in their shoes would help to gain a richer understanding** of the issue.

P? Use this space to gather your own examples

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Exploring feelings

Write down questions that you feel will help them to gain a richer understanding of their issue by focussing on the **expected feelings of the people involved on the receiving end of the issue.**

F? Use this space to gather your own examples

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Reviewer – ask three questions:

Has your view of the issue changed?
Were there any key learning points?
How do you feel about the process?

When the set is finished the reviewer (sometimes the set facilitator takes on this role) asks the three key questions to help review the set.

The process when reviewing...

- 1** Ask the first question and regardless of the answer then ask the second question
- 2** Keep repeating the second question until the answer is 'no'
- 3** Ask the final question. Following this, the set facilitator will formally close the set.

When taking part in an action learning set, what did you notice about...

What did the **reviewer** do that supported you or someone else to solve a problem or support your/their performance?

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What impact did the **reviewer** have on the group dynamics in the set?

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Is there anything that you would like to remember for next time?

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REFLECTIONS LOG

ACTION LEARNING SET 1

When taking part in an action learning set, what did you notice?

What did the **different roles** do that supported you or someone else to solve a problem or support your/their performance?



Set facilitator



Summariser



Questioning roles



Reviewer

What did I notice about the group dynamics in the set?

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What might have impacted on groups dynamics of the set?

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Did the set follow up on the outcome? How was action learning used to solve problems and/or improve performance?

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Date	My role
Set members	

ACTION LEARNING SET 2

When taking part in an action learning set, what did you notice?

What did the **different roles** do that supported you or someone else to solve a problem or support your/their performance?



Set facilitator



Summariser



Questioning roles



Reviewer

What did I notice about the group dynamics in the set?

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What might have impacted on groups dynamics of the set?

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Did the set follow up on the outcome? How was action learning used to solve problems and/or improve performance?

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Date	My role
Set members	

ACTION LEARNING SET 3

When taking part in an action learning set, what did you notice?

What did the **different roles** do that supported you or someone else to solve a problem or support your/their performance?



Set facilitator



Summariser



Questioning roles



Reviewer

What did I notice about the group dynamics in the set?

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What might have impacted on groups dynamics of the set?

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Did the set follow up on the outcome? How was action learning used to solve problems and/or improve performance?

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Date	My role
Set members	

ACTION LEARNING SET 4

When taking part in an action learning set, what did you notice?

What did the **different roles** do that supported you or someone else to solve a problem or support your/their performance?



Set facilitator



Summariser



Questioning roles



Reviewer

What did I notice about the group dynamics in the set?

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What might have impacted on groups dynamics of the set?

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Did the set follow up on the outcome? How was action learning used to solve problems and/or improve performance?

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Date	My role
Set members	

ACTION LEARNING SET 5

When taking part in an action learning set, what did you notice?

What did the **different roles** do that supported you or someone else to solve a problem or support your/their performance?



Set facilitator



Summariser



Questioning roles



Reviewer

What did I notice about the group dynamics in the set?

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What might have impacted on groups dynamics of the set?

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Did the set follow up on the outcome? How was action learning used to solve problems and/or improve performance?

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Date	My role
Set members	

ACTION LEARNING SET 6

When taking part in an action learning set, what did you notice?

What did the **different roles** do that supported you or someone else to solve a problem or support your/their performance?



Set facilitator



Summariser



Questioning roles



Reviewer

What did I notice about the group dynamics in the set?

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What might have impacted on groups dynamics of the set?

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Did the set follow up on the outcome? How was action learning used to solve problems and/or improve performance?

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Date	My role
Set members	



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At the Social Enterprise Academy, we believe social entrepreneurs play an essential role in changing the world.

We strengthen their role in local communities through transformational learning programmes that will increase their community impact.

Our programmes are accredited, responsive to learner needs, and are delivered by experienced facilitators who are social change leaders themselves.

Since 2004, we have facilitated over 28,000 adult learners and 55,000 young people to help create fairer communities in over 30 countries around the world.



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