

“learning to  
transform  
services -  
a guide to  
action  
learning”

april 2009

“breaking down the problem helps to make it less overwhelming. It enabled me to think outside of the box. I have changed my way of working. You need to be prepared to change yourself. The learning sets have planted a seed, which needs to be allowed to grow.””

## welcome to the skills for care london guide to action learning



Over the last six years, Skills for Care's 'New Types of Worker' programme has been working with and supporting social care employers, people who use services, carers and policy makers explore the new roles that have begun to emerge across the adult social care workforce. Via direct funding and pilot site activity, a series of skills audits and a range of diverse, regionally driven initiatives, the programme has developed a wealth of resources.

In London, we commissioned a series of action learning sets, which broadly aimed to support senior staff and managers to use action learning in tackling workforce issues linked to the new transformation agenda. The evaluation for each programme is available on request.

The success of action learning across the London region embraces the principles of co-development and co-production outlined in 'Putting People First' and sits alongside the work already in progress as detailed on the Interim statement of the Adult Social Care Workforce Strategy. These are both available to download on the Department of Health website. Visit [www.dh.gov.uk/en/SocialCare/Socialcarereform/index.htm](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/SocialCare/Socialcarereform/index.htm)

The New Types of Worker programme will evolve in 2009; our new, 'Workforce Action Learning Programme' will look at the way in which models

of social care commissioning and provision will change as the personalisation agenda advances.

To support this change process, Skills for Care have developed a range of publications that explore some of the implications of workforce reform including 'The Principles of Workforce Redesign' and 'The Common Core Principles of Self Care'. These are freely available to download on the national website; visit [www.skillsforcare.org.uk/home/home.aspx](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/home/home.aspx)

Visit <http://london.skillsforcare.org.uk> for further case studies and 'talking heads' material.

*Michael Armstrong  
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Skills for Care London*

### **With thanks to:**

All of the individuals and employers who contributed to the success of the action learning programme, case studies and this guide.

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## who will find this publication helpful?

This guide will be useful for a range of managers, project leaders and champions who are involved in transforming services and developing new ways of working in social care. It will also be useful for human resource and learning and development specialists.

# 1 introduction

## 1.1 Learning to transform services

Action learning has provided a powerful approach to help managers learn how to transform services. Transforming services according to the principles of 'Putting People First' means a fundamental shift in the way adult services are delivered<sup>1</sup>. This vision of services covers:

*Values* – a focus on prevention, early intervention, enablement and high quality personally tailored services with maximum choice, control and power over them, through the use of direct payments and individual budgets.

*Personalised social care system* – local authorities working in authentic partnerships with the NHS, users and carers, private and voluntary providers and the local community to achieve agreed and shared outcomes based on a common assessment process.

The role of statutory organisations will need to change to be more active and enabling and less controlling. The 'Common Core Principles' to support self care<sup>2</sup> have also been developed as a resource for reflection, challenge and practice change.

The pilot programmes have shown that action learning can provide a powerful process to support leadership and management learning to transform services in this way. The process works through:

- Empowering managers to work in partnership with users and carers
- Creating opportunities for sharing values and best practice

- Bringing professionals from different disciplines and types of organisations together
- Bringing commissioners and providers of services together
- Finding ways to overcome the barriers to integrated working
- Being inclusive about work with smaller private and voluntary sector organisations
- Creating opportunities for building networks and communities of learners
- Identifying barriers to progress and how to overcome them
- Finding new ways to safeguard vulnerable adults who are spending more time in the community
- Exploring new ways to engage with local communities

## 1.2 What is action learning?

Action learning is based on the ideas of Reg Revans. Revans' philosophy is that there is no learning without action and no action without learning. Action learning sets provide a powerful collaborative process for managers to increase their learning through testing out work-related problems and ideas with colleagues in an atmosphere of mutual support. This process helps to deepen learning, increase reflection and create opportunities to solve real management problems. Groups usually have six to eight members. Groups can either be led by an independent facilitator, or group members can take it in turns to facilitate the set. The decision whether or not to use an external facilitator will depend on the experience, commitment and readiness of the set members. Action learning involves taking action and learning from it. It can enhance the way individuals learn by drawing

<sup>1</sup> *Putting People First: A Shared Vision and Commitment to the Transformation of Adult Social Care* (HM Government, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> *Common core principles to support self care – a guide to support implementation* (2008) Skills for Care/ Skills for Health

## definitions of action learning

“The central idea of this approach to human development is... that of a set, or small group of comrades in adversity, striving to learn with and from each other ...” (Revans 1982)

“... the art of development – development of problems into opportunities and of people from what they are now to what they may become potentially.”

(Gaunt 1991, unpublished guide)

on practice. New ideas can be developed and shared.

Action learning can satisfy different learning styles, both for action and reflection.

An action learning set (ALS) may be made up of individuals who are from different organisations, and do not know each other initially and only meet during the life of the group. Alternatively, they may be people from the same organisation or work community, who do indeed interact with each other and may link with each other outside of the set on the challenges that they are addressing. Thus there are two main types of ALS:

- The inter-organisational ALS
- The community ALS

“Action learning works at all levels where individuals have some responsibility for the introduction of new ways of working or the achievement of complex tasks. It is especially useful where learners have to work across the functions of an organisation, or across organisations.”

CIPD Factsheet on Action Learning (May 2008) <sup>3</sup>

### 1.3 London action learning pilot programmes

Skills for Care London had a specific aim in commissioning two action learning pilot programmes. These were to explore, assess and evaluate the benefits of using action learning to support social care organisations in developing and implementing new ways of working to support greater personalisation of care services. This guide has been developed as a result of these programmes and makes reference to the evaluation of learning from them.

The first programme was an inter-organisational ALS. It ran for six months from November 2007 to April 2008, with a total of seven one day sessions. It had a novel structure, combining action learning with workshop-based learning input. The main group of 13 met in the morning session to explore key themes in new ways of working, many of which were identified by participants themselves through a learning contract process. In the afternoon, the group split into two ALS. Both inter-organisational ALS were mixed, including private, voluntary and local authority participants.

The second programme was a community ALS, run for a London borough learning disability service. It had a similar structure mixing action learning with workshop based learning inputs. The programme had a total of nine sessions, running from May to November 2008. It consisted of four whole day sessions and five half day ALS. In total there were seven ALS sessions. There was a main group of 17

<sup>3</sup> Available to download from CIPD at [www.cipd.co.uk](http://www.cipd.co.uk)

managers and supervisors split into two sets for the programme.

Both programmes were evaluated after each session and at the end. These evaluations are available upon request from Skills for Care London<sup>4</sup>. Both programmes had very similar outcomes for participants:

- Improved managers' confidence
- Helped develop leadership skills
- Encouraged effective delegation both upwards and downwards
- Addressed the isolation of managers in different settings
- Equipped participants to tackle common barriers and develop a more collaborative approach
- Reinforced the value of peer support in dealing with shared problems
- Increased managers' ability to deal with change and new ways of working
- Reinforced individuals' accountability and responsibility to deal with problems

Some of the specific skills that have been developed are:

- Practical techniques for problem solving
- Communicating, using questioning and listening with staff and service users
- A more strategic approach to looking at problems
- Using a framework for action planning and review
- Supporting people to manage change
- Taking responsibility for performance and good practice within their own team
- Delegation
- Time management and identifying priorities

## 1.4 Principles of workforce redesign

Skills for Care has established seven key principles of workforce redesign<sup>5</sup> for new ways of working through action research.

These are:

- 1 Take a whole systems view of organisational change
- 2 Recognise how people, organisations and partnerships respond differently to change
- 3 Nurture champions, innovators and leaders
- 4 Engage people in the process – acknowledge and value their experience
- 5 Be aware of the way adults learn
- 6 Change minds and change systems
- 7 Develop workforce strategies that support transformation and recognise the shape of resources available in the local community

## 2 planning action learning

### 2.1 Steps in preparing action learning

Inter-organisational ALS need to be supported by organisations or networks which can offer:

- To advertise and recruit individuals to the set
- Access to appropriate learning facilities
- ALS facilitation skills
- Administrative and evaluative support
- To work in partnership with organisations sponsoring set members

Community ALS may develop through the interest of key managers within an organisation or partnership, but will need:

- A senior champion
- Access to an appropriate venue

<sup>4</sup> *Action Learning for New Ways of Working Programme Evaluation*. G Bentley, F McDonnell and H Zutshi (May 2008)

<sup>5</sup> *The Principles of Workforce Redesign*, Skills for Care (October 2008).

- Skills development in how to run ALS or access to an external facilitator
- A clear process for identifying and engaging set members

ALS usually include individuals with similar levels of management responsibility. It may be unhelpful to include managers and their line managers in a set, as this may inhibit some of the openness essential to the problem-solving process. On the second programme this was a potential problem since participants were managers, deputies and supervisors from the same service. It was resolved by careful ALS selection to ensure that no group included supervisors or deputies and their line managers.

## 2.2 Engaging set members

It is important that ALS members can commit themselves both to the ALS group and the problem-solving processes involved. This means:

- Agreeing a learning contract
- Agreeing to work to the set ground rules
- Owning a problem, which can be presented in the ALS
- Making the time commitment, typically a half day per month
- Being prepared to support others in solving their problems
- Being ready to take a turn in facilitating the set (for self-facilitated groups)
- Being committed to translate learning into action

# 3 The action learning set

## 3.1 Guidelines

Experience has shown that the learning set process is most effective if the group members follow three critical guidelines.

### 1. Only one at a time

Only one manager at a time presents an issue. The space belongs to the problem holder, who should be encouraged to speak. Other group members should avoid giving direct advice; instead they should encourage the individual to identify new learning and solutions to problems. It is the problem holder's agenda not that of the other group members. Each member has time and space that is their own within the group and time is allocated equally as far as possible.

### 2. Using open questions and active listening

The process in an action learning set follows a non-directive counselling model. Even if a member of the set thinks they have the solution to an issue, they should hold back. Instead they should continue active listening and use open questions to encourage problem holders to find solutions that they will own for themselves. Silence can be important in the set in enabling the problem holder to reflect on the issues, develop new ideas and plan new ways of working.

### 3. Group safety

It is vital that the atmosphere in a group is a safe one. This will allow set members to admit needs and weaknesses and encourage risk taking and individual development. This means working in a positive way that respects equality and values the diversity and strengths of the individuals within the group.

## 3.2 The action learning process

An important first step in getting started is for the group to agree some ground rules about how they want to work together. Examples are given in the box below. The ground rules should be reviewed at intervals to ensure that they are being followed. Ground rules need to build on what may already have been agreed in learning contracts.

### Examples of ALS Ground Rules

- Share expertise and intelligence
- Hear about what has worked
- Supportive challenge
- Non-judgmental
- Respect each other's views
- Use of language – need to feel safe
- Allowed to be ourselves
- Say what I really feel and see
- Allow silence
- Honesty
- Encourage debate
- Carry on being passionate
- Sense of humour
- Constructive feedback
- OK to ask questions if I don't understand something
- Flexibility
- Able to check out assumptions
- Confidentiality – the 'personal' stays in the room

There was discussion in one London ALS about the learning process that is part of action learning. Comments about 'feeling blocked' or 'feeling confused' were initially taken as negative signs of being stuck. However, it is possible to reframe these thoughts. These could be really positive signs that new learning is taking place. Kurt Lewin<sup>6</sup>, writing about culture change in organisations, talks of 'unfreezing'. The same thing can happen with individual learning, which is not a linear process. There are plateaus and peaks and troughs in learning. Feeling confused is often a sign of individuals letting go of old learning, but not yet being confident in the new learning. Similarly, feeling blocked can be a sign of unfreezing old learning.

The ability to formulate open questions to support the problem holder's understanding is one of the keys to the success of action learning. It was realised that it was helpful to have some thinking time and to support silence while the problem holder is thinking through some of the answers to the questions. This sometimes means holding back and not giving advice, rather 'sitting on your hands'.

### 3.3 Problem-solving stages

Learning sets need to go through a number of stages to develop an effective way of working:

- Agree contract and ground rules
- Build trust
- Agree time allocations for each member, including a slot for reviewing progress
- Problem holder presents their issue
- Clarify the issue
- Next steps identified by problem holder
- Action plan
- Set aside time to review the work of each session
- Plan the next session
- Review the problem

There should be a schedule for all the sessions, identifying who will be presenting and reviewing their problem at each session. For self-facilitated sets, this will also identify the facilitators. Typically there is time for one presentation and one review at each session. However, during the pilot programmes, it was found important to have two problem holders during one set from time to time. This allowed more reviews later on in the programme. Without doing this, it may not be possible for each problem-holder to review their action plan.

There is a problem-solving process at the heart of action learning. This has two phases:

<sup>6</sup> In Group Decision and Social Change (1947).

*Divergent phase*

This is about asking open questions, helping problem holders to explore their issue in more depth, clarifying the context of the issue. In this phase it's useful to use the five questions: who, what, when, where, why and how?

This is important for a number of reasons:

- It makes the issue and its context clear, helping ALS members to ask appropriate questions
- It helps the problem holder to own the problem
- It helps to clarify the real issue, which may underlie the problem initially presented
- It is a powerful process that helps the problem-holder to focus intensely on the areas of concern
- It helps to explore the context of the issue, which may help with identifying appropriate actions

*Convergent phase*

This is about helping the problem holder to come up with solutions to the issue. It uses more focused questions. It leads to the problem holder being able to identify a range of options and from these a preferred action plan.

This is important for a number of reasons:

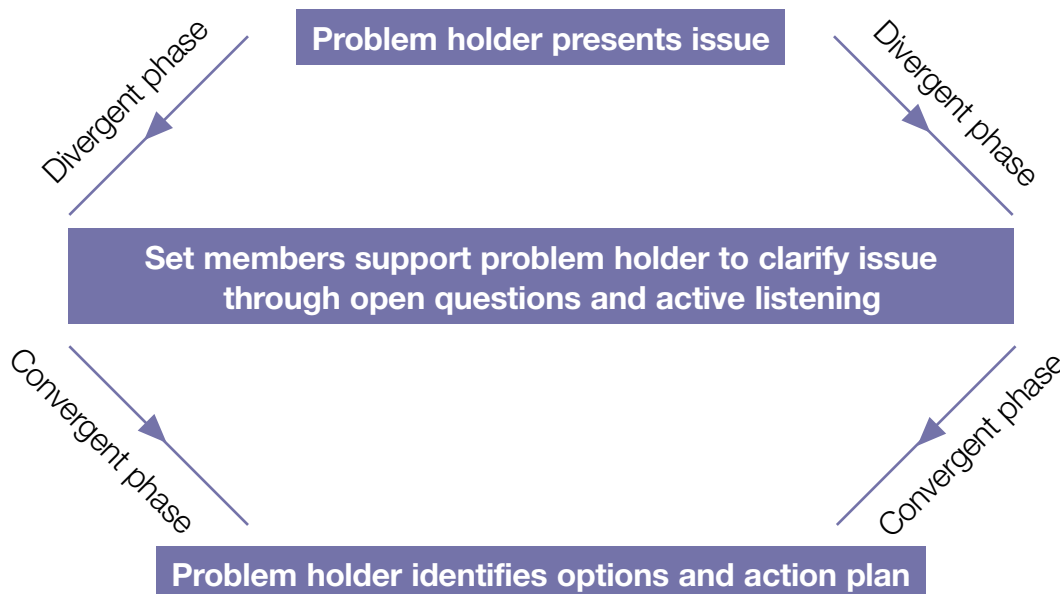
- It is at the heart of action learning – turning learning into actions
- It helps the problem holder to own solutions to the issue
- It clarifies a course of action
- It helps the problem holder to measure the progress they are making and this becomes part of the review phase of the process
- It means that action learning can make an organisational as well as an individual impact

**Comments from ALS participants:**

- “Humour and good facilitation has helped the group to work well”
- “It has been creative and has helped members to identify what has been blocking them”
- “Members have been able to recognise similarities in the issues they face, despite coming from different organisations – when there is common ground this provides a spark and an increased sense of support”

Action learning is not a neat and tidy process, it can move from divergent to convergent phases and back again. The challenges that managers face in social care are complex and discussions often reflect this complexity.

The overall process is like two funnels that have been fitted together, as in the diagram below.



## tip 1: applying problem-solving

You can apply the problem-solving process more widely in organisations. It is helpful for situations where people feel they are stuck and not able to make progress:

- In one-to-one or group supervision
- In team meetings
- In project meetings
- In partnership and network meetings
- Implementing new ways of working

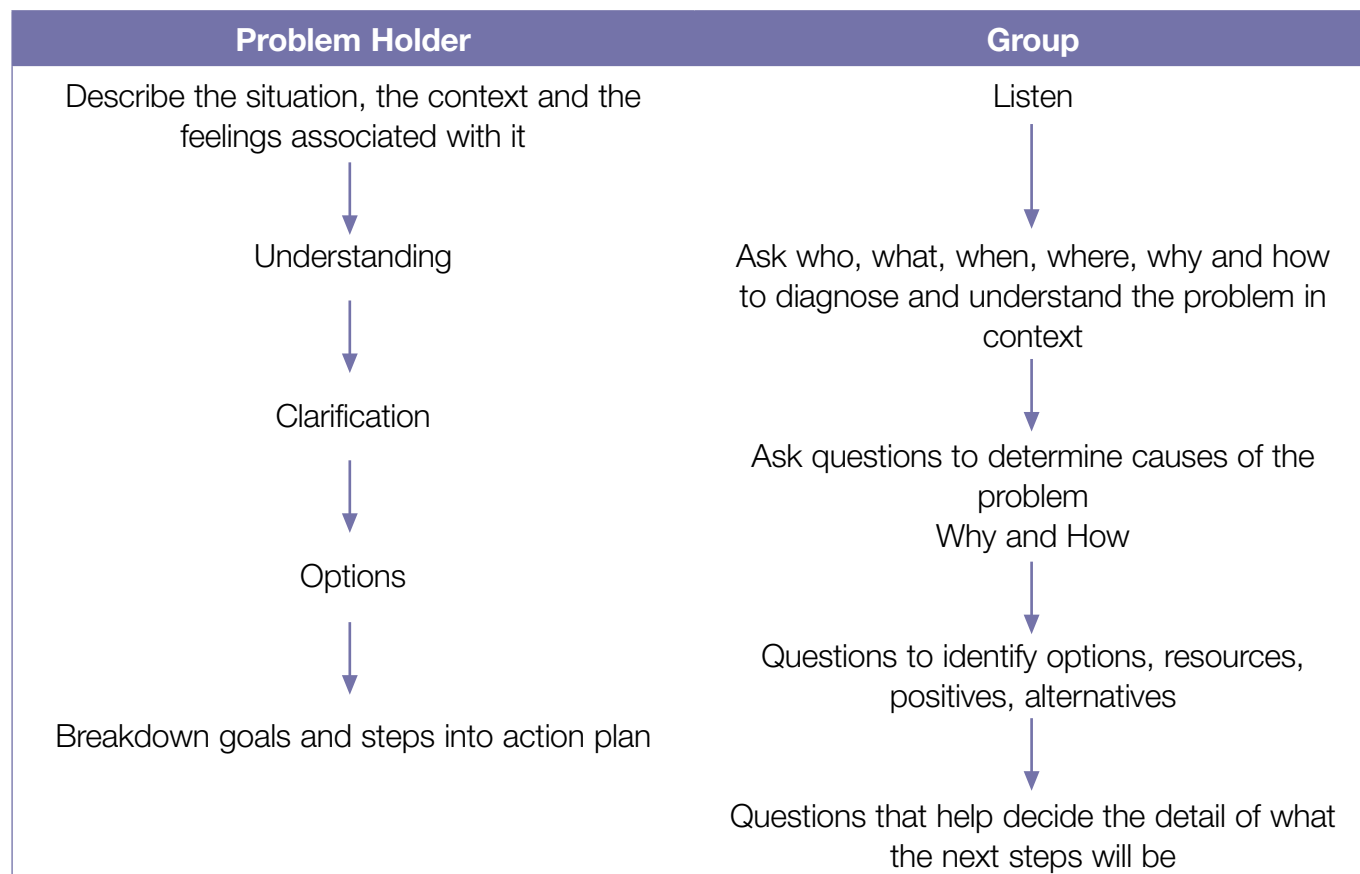
Some meetings may have plenty of discussion, but find it difficult to agree actions. Others, may be too task focused and not explore the range of issues, instead moving straight onto actions, that are not well grounded. This systematic approach to problem solving balances both aspects.

“I used the ALS questioning process to good effect in supervision to help a supervisee develop an action plan and outcomes”.

“I used the questioning skills unconsciously in supervision and was only aware of it afterwards.”

ALS pilot participants

The problem holder needs to have some structure to the process and the following stages have been found helpful.



## 4 skills of action learning

### 4.1 Set member skills

Set members need to develop a wide range of skills to support the effectiveness of action learning. While some initial learning input is helpful, the skills are best developed through the action learning process itself. Reviewing each action learning set at the end provides valuable learning to help develop such skills. Important skills are:

*Diagnosis* – help the problem holder identify the wider context and underlying causes of the issue

*Ownership* – help problem holder to own the issue

*Action orientation* – support the problem holder to identify actions to change the situation and review progress

*Holding back* - avoiding offering one's own agenda

*Not taking sides* – it may be tempting to be critical of the problem holder or others described in the situation, but this should be avoided

*Active listening* – this is key to the success of action learning

*Empathy* – it is important to empathise with the problem-holder's feelings

*Asking questions* – who, what, when, where, why, how and more probing questions. Avoid leading questions

*Group work* – knowing how a group works

*Silence* – being able to support periods of silence in the group

*Evaluation* – being able to evaluate one's own contribution and that of others

### 4.2 Problem holder skills

In addition to the set member skills (see section 4.1 above), problem holders will need:

- Presentation skills
- Analytical skills
- Open mindedness to try out new things
- A focus on action
- A commitment to new ways of working
- Group facilitation skills

## 5 examples from practice

### 5.1 Using action learning

London pilot programme participants found that action learning was very helpful to them, both in terms of personal development and the wider impact that it made on their organisations.

#### comments from ALS pilot participants

"It is like your own multi-disciplinary team sitting down together – different roles and dimensions of care: I've learnt from the diversity"

"The richness comes from approaching the issue from different angles"

"Action learning and evaluation – tie them into my everyday work"

"Getting feedback is the key – approaching things in a different way"

"We've seen the issues through – accountability is built in through the group"

"Helped my sense of confidence in my own problem solving skills"

One example from the pilot programme is quoted below:

"As we discussed ... there needs to be a change in roles within social care towards self-directed support and service users having choice and independence in organising their lives. I used our experience with direct payments, where we moved from being suspicious of handing out "public money" to recognising the real value of enabling service users to make their own decisions and how and when their support is provided, to encourage staff to agree that some changes are good. I now have a transitional process in place to move forward with this, after several hard negotiations, but have found the use of questions to alleviate tensions and arguments very useful."

Specific aspects of action learning appeal to different participants, but they were able to make use of it and apply their learning in a wide variety of ways. Some of the comments at the end of the programmes were:

“Gave me self-confidence and a positive approach to outcomes”

“The ALS has helped with planning and developing my leadership skills”

“It helped me to develop best practice and look outside the organisation for partnerships”

“The ALS problem-solving process is very useful - I used the tools to sort out a problem and come up with an action plan in the team”

“I feel I can let go and delegate – it’s more participative now”

“I have clarified roles and boundaries with my managers”

“I liked the reflective process – I found it very practical”

“Gave me a framework for being a manager,

more confidence in dealing with difficult people and situations”

“I took away some nuggets – I now listen more to the staff team, am more open about the issues and get them to help solve them”

“Ideas came out from working with other managers and this allows you to make a change happen - there was a definite outcome from doing the session”

*“I have found the process of the action learning group a very useful tool. The notion of using defined questions instead of asking random questions has been an effective way of tailoring your questions and developing your listening skills.”*

## 5.2 Examples

The box below shows actual examples of applying action learning to new ways of working, taken from evaluation feedback of ALS pilot programme participants. There are also 4 case studies available <sup>7</sup>.

### Working with stakeholders

“I have found that by using an action learning approach within our organisation we have been able to address the issues of change management focussing on priorities and consulting others in our day to day work. All the team are involved in the changes and the approach of using open questions, active listening and user involvement have ensured that all ideas are shared with stakeholders allowing for more informed decisions on the future direction of the service”.

### Developing practice learning

*“I have recently used action learning with a group of 10 social work students by offering a few sessions to test out this model, in preparation for developing this further with the new intake in September. The feedback following the session was excellent and we will be offering this service across Adult and Children’s services”.*

### Improving team meetings

*“More recently we have held a team meeting run on action learning lines where I have presented our problem and asked them questions as to how we could solve it - this worked well, not least because the team found it to be a positive and inclusive experience. They moved from passively expecting a magic solution to the problem to come from outside to actively identifying possible actions they could take themselves to improve things. We then drew up a plan which we have presented to the Service Manager for his consideration and have asked him to meet with us to discuss it”.*

### Developing oneself

“Breaking down the problem helps to make it less overwhelming. It enabled me to think outside of the box. I have changed my way of working. You need to be prepared to change yourself. The learning sets have planted a seed, which needs to be allowed to grow”.

<sup>7</sup> Action Learning Case Studies – set of 4 (2009) Skills for Care London

### 5.3 New ways of working issues

Examples of problems related to new ways of working raised by ALS members include:

#### *The inter-organisational pilot*

- How to gain understanding, support and resources for a change agent role (an example action plan from this is given in the box below)
- Development and implementation of an organisation wide dementia care strategy
- How to expand a home care business to meet the personalisation agenda and direct payments, whilst still being commissioned in a traditional way
- Development of a recruitment and retention strategy and guide for a local authority within the context of transformation projects
- Developing and implementing an induction programme for foster carers across several offices in different UK countries
- How to support staff and black and minority ethnic residents of a voluntary sector home for people with mental health problems through a time of change

#### Example ALS action plan

- Go back to director and project manager to gain clarity on expectations and to get them to take ownership of problem
- Get management commitment to providing resources
- Identify resources to make my position viable
- Clarify what I am expected to do as change champion and my position during and after the project
- Clarify the purpose of the project and the project plan
- Work on making sure the team are on board
- Enlist support for me and the project and clarify how people are going to support me
- Plan how I communicate what the project is and what support I need
- Identify how I empower myself and others

#### *The learning disability service pilot*

- How to involve parents and carers more effectively in the transformation of the service
- Developing an employment strategy for people who use services
- Engaging and motivating a group of staff who are reluctant to implement person centred planning
- Motivating a staff group to adopt new ways of working
- Encouraging and motivating people who use services to develop independent living skills
- Tackling poor work practices which are acting as a barrier to new ways of working

## 6 review and evaluation

### 6.1 Reviewing and feedback

Time should be allocated at the end of each ALS to allow a review of the set. This will give set members individually in turn a chance to comment on the process. Ideas for improvements can also be discussed. This is important for all set members, but particularly so for the problem holder. Feedback is vital so that concerns and feelings can be appropriately aired.

### 6.2 Problem holder review

Problem holders will need an allocation of ALS time to review progress with their action plans. It can be helpful to plan the review sessions to take account of when a particular stage of the individual's action plan will be completed. A typical pattern is two to three months between problem presentation and review. However, this may mean that a number of review sessions need to take place towards the end of the programme and this may lead to time constraints. Several pilot participants commented on the importance of these reviews. They give a focus and urgency

to the action plan that might otherwise be lacking. One London ALS used the reviews as an opportunity for set members to develop their facilitation skills, taking over from the external facilitator for these slots.

### **6.3 Evaluating learning and its impact**

To understand the value and impact of action learning, it is important to be clear about sponsor expectations. The outcomes such as projects achieved, new ways of tackling problems and the development of leadership skills can be assessed. Individual participants can self-assess their own progress with their actions plans. Wider evaluation can review the impact of action learning on key stakeholders (partner organisations, people who use services, volunteers). Individuals can track their learning through a learning log as part of their continuing professional development (CPD). Formative feedback session by session can be complemented by summative evaluation of the overall programme outcomes.

## **7 the set facilitator's role**

### **7.1 The action learning set facilitator**

Action learning will normally benefit from the availability of a set facilitator. The person may be an external facilitator or a member of the ALS with appropriate skills. Some additional learning input for the facilitators prior to running an ALS will be helpful. Ultimately, the way to learn this role is to do it, creating opportunities to reflect on learning from this practice. Previous experience of group work facilitation is also very useful. The role can be considered in three phases: setting up the set, helping the group and achieving action.

### **7.2 Setting up the set**

This involves understanding the principles of action learning and gaining the commitment of a client or sponsor. The expectations of the organisation will need to match the contribution and values associated with action learning. The set facilitator will have to help the group to establish itself and explain the process to the set members. Contracts can be used to identify learning needs (see section 7.5 below). The role and composition of the group will need to be agreed and the nature and type of problems to be tackled will have to be negotiated with the sponsor and the set members. The development and agreement of ground rules will need to be facilitated.

### **7.3 Helping the group**

This will require skills in forming the group. The basic learning environment will need to be created with individuals taking responsibility both for their own and others learning. A private space for meetings is essential. The focus needs to be on enabling. The facilitator needs to be able to help people to think for themselves. Experience of using reflection and appropriate models and concepts can also be vital in achieving what for many will be a fundamental shift in learning method. Listening and interactive skills will be required. Process skills such as timing interventions and challenging to elicit honest contributions also have their part to play. In addition, the facilitator also needs the same skills as all the group members (see section 4.1 above). Helping the group learn the art of using open questions is key to the success of action learning.

### **7.4 Achieving action**

The skills here will be about understanding problems and helping the group to use an effective approach to problem-solving. It may be

necessary to help members with presentation skills and dealing with internal politics. A certain amount of managing the organisational environment in a low key manner is sometimes necessary. A key requirement is a desire to see other people learn coupled with openness and honesty on the part of the set facilitator. Some problem-holders benefit from the facilitator recording their action plan as it is being discussed in the group, for example on flipchart. This in turn provides a handy record when the problem-holder comes to review their progress in the group.

## 7.5 Contracts

Learning contracts can be agreed with set members, before the set begins, with the help of the ALS facilitator. They can be helpful for a number of reasons:

- To enable potential set members to be clear about what is expected of them
- To ensure set members are making a positive choice to join
- To specify individual learning needs – it may not be possible to meet all these within the ALS, but it may be necessary to provide additional learning inputs, for example through workshops to meet these needs
- To agree timescales and dates for attendance
- To gain commitment for review and evaluation of action learning

## 7.6 Timekeeping

Keeping to time is very important in set facilitation. ALS should be clearly structured with time set aside for the problem holder, a problem reviewer and an ALS review. It is essential not to overrun the overall time for the ALS. Within the ALS, problem holders should be allocated equal time as far as possible as this is one of the core principles of action learning. Time management is a vital skill for ALS facilitators and it can be

challenging when attention and interest is focused on a particularly difficult issue.

## tip 2: virtual action learning

- Supplement ALS with an electronic forum for members to network, sharing knowledge and expertise.
- This is particularly useful where several ALS are running, or sets are inter-organisational. Either make use of an existing forum or develop a new one specifically for action learning.

## 8 Further reading

- Edmonstone J. (2003) *The Action Learner's Toolkit*. Aldershot: Gower
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