

## Some ground rules to discuss in your first group meeting...

- **Confidentiality** – matters discussed in the set are not to be taken outside. But what does that mean? Can you talk about your action, thoughts, feelings to other people? Can you discuss conversations with your core team members who aren't able to attend?
- **Commitment** to attending and having a really good reason if you can't.
- Everyone has a right to their **time** – but they don't have to take it.
- Everyone should be **listened** to.
- We agree to offer each other **support** and **challenge** but avoid judgements.
- It is **safe** here to admit needs, weaknesses and mistakes.
- **Punctuality** – we should start and finish on time.

Some other ground rules could include:

- Meetings rotate around each person's workplace.
- Each meeting starts with a bid for time.
- At each session, part of the time is given to members sharing their special knowledge.
- Twos and threes meeting separately outside the set is OK.
- Sub-group meetings separately outside the set is not OK.
- The facilitator should have some time in the set for his/ her issues.
- Achievements will be celebrated in an appropriate way.

## How does an action learning set work?

- **Catching up** – a round which allows each person to share immediate news.
- **Agenda setting** – based on what they have heard in the catch up round, members set the agenda, decide on a batting order and allocate the available time. In principle, everyone has equal time but this may be varied depending on need, urgency and so on.
- **Progress reports** – each person takes it in turn to report progress since the last meeting and where they are now. The other set members help the person learn from what has happened and explore options for new directions and actions. They do this by keeping the focus on the person and their problem, questioning, supporting, challenging and offering help of various sorts.
- **Review** – at the end of each sessions, the set takes a few minutes for feedback and discussion of the process. What worked well? What was difficult in this meeting? How could we be more effective?

## What is Action Learning?

Action learning was developed by Reg Revans. More background at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Action\\_learning](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Action_learning)

Action learning sets bring people together in order to:

- Work on and through *hitherto intractable problems* of managing and organising. This must be a voluntary commitment.
- Work on problems or opportunities which personally engage the set members – situations in which “I am part of the problem and the problem is part of me.”
- Check individual perceptions of the problem to clarify and render it more manageable, and to create and explore alternatives for action.
- Take action in the light of new insight. This insight begins to change the situation. An account of the effects of the action are brought back to the set for further shared reflection and exploration.
- Provide the balance of support and challenge (warmth and light) which will enable each member to act and learn effectively.
- Be aware of group processes and develop effective teamwork. Usually sets have an adviser or facilitator whose role it is to help members identify and acquire the skills of action and learning.
- Focus on learning at three levels:
  - About the problem or opportunity which is being tackled.
  - About what is being learned about oneself.
  - About the process of learning itself, i.e. “learning to learn”.

The second and third levels are essential for the transfer of learning to other situations.

*Adapted from the original by Kath Aspionwall.*

*“There can be no learning without action and no (sober and deliberate) action without learning.”*

Describe your problem situation in one sentence:

- Why is this important?
- To you?
- To your practice?

How will you recognise progress on this problem?

Who else would like to see progress on this problem?

What difficulties do you anticipate?

What are the benefits if this problem is reduced or resolved?

- To me?
- To other people?
- To the practice?

### Set meeting review

At the end of each meeting take a few minutes to reflect on these questions and share with the group:

- **My problem.** The three key things I have learned about my problem today are:
- **Myself.** The one thing I've learned about myself today is:
- **Action.** My action steps before the next meeting are:
- **Other set members.** The most interesting thing I have learned today about the problems facing each of the other set members is:
- **The set,** The thing that stands out for me today in terms of the working of this set is:

Notes...

### Good questions for action learning



- What am I trying to do?
- What is stopping me from doing it?
- What can I do about it?
- Who knows what I am trying to do?
- Who cares about what I'm trying to do?
- Who else can do anything to help?

Some other questions which may facilitate work in the set are:

- What do you want to get out of this session?
- Can you tell us the story as it happened?
- What have you learned from that?
- What do you most need from us now?
- How do other people in the situation – colleagues, friends, partners, etc. feel about this situation?
- How do you feel about what is going on?
- What questions do that raise?
- How can we help you move forwards on this issue?
- How would someone you most admire deal with this situation?
- Can you think of three options for action?
- What are the process and cons of each of these options?
- What first steps are you going to take before our next meeting?
- On a scale of 1 to 10, how likely are you to do this action?

And...

How can we make this set more effective?