THE ACTION LEARNING CYCLE AS A TOOL

Action Learning is a continuous cycle: the end of each learning cycle becomes the beginning of the next cycle.

**ACTION**
To do or experience and then recalling the experience: nobody knows your experience of your actions better than you do. To become more conscious of our “experience” while acting, can impact on the next step quite dramatically.

**REFLECTION**
Re-examining and thinking about the event or action means to make it more conscious, to analyse it, to evaluate it, to understand it better or on a deeper level. The problem is that we do not do this automatically. Often it is only as a result of a crisis that we reflect, that we stop to take a deeper look. A more pro-active approach is vital to become a good action learner.

**LEARNING**
Reflection is no guarantee that learning has taken place! Very often people “reflect” on practice and repeat the same mistake over and over again. Therefore the distinction between reflection and learning in the AL Cycle is important; learning here is the process of distilling or drawing out the core generalised lessons; moving from “what actually happened” to “what tends to happen as a result of such circumstances”, surfacing deeper implications and guidance for the future. Be careful of jumping to learning before adequate reflecting has taken place, or the learnings will often be shallow.

**PLANNING**
This is the key link between past learning and future action (and learning). The core “insights” from the previous step must now be translated into decisions that will ensure improved practice. These decisions then need to become part of the plan. Planning that is unrelated to learning from the past is nearly always a waste of time!
The Action Learning Cycle

Guiding Questions

What significant things happened? Describe the events. Who was involved, what did they do? What picture emerges? How did I/we feel?

Why did it happen, what caused it? What helped, what hindered? What assumptions did we make? What did we expect? What really struck us? Do we know of any other experiences or thinking that might help us look at this experience differently?

So what does this mean for practice? What do we want? What do we want to do, to happen? How? What are we going to do differently? What do we have to let go of or stop doing? How will we not repeat the same mistake? What steps will we use to build these new insights into our practice?

What would we have done differently? What did we learn, what new insights? What was confirmed? What new questions have emerged? What other theories help us to deepen these learnings? What guidance do we get for the future?