

iPeer project

# Info sheet for Action Learning Groups

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## Document control

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# Info sheet of Action Learning Groups

## *Basic info*

**Methodology name:** Action Learning Groups

**Also known as:** Action Learning

**Derived from:** Peer Coaching Workgroups

**Author of the methodology:** Reg Revans

## *Explanation*

These are small groups, usually of the same people, working on current and essential real-world priorities by sharing questions, taking actions, and learning especially from reflecting on the questions and actions. There are various formats of Action Learning, but there usually is an equal and strong focus on intentionally generating new actions and learning from the sharing in the group. Thus, Action Learning can be very effective for solving complex problems and/or achieving significant goals.

## *How to demonstrate it*

A typical set meeting might last 2-3 hours and might have a structure something like this:

1. At the start of the meeting each member 'checks in'- feeding back on progress or changes since the group's last meeting.
2. One or more members then seek permission from the others to share/present- an issue they're dealing with at work they'd like to explore. This should be a concrete project and not one with a simple solvable answer.
3. The set agrees on an initial person to focus on and the issue to be addressed- this is sometimes called 'claiming airspace.' The presenter outlines the issue or challenge they'd like to consider.
4. Set members to ask questions designed to help the presenter analyse the concern they have, and clarify what the challenge is and why they're struggling to deal with it.
5. These questions can take a number of forms: e'. g. clarification – 'Are you saying that...?', understanding – 'Could you explain this issue a bit more...?', checking implications – 'You said before that.. so If that's so then what would happen if...?'

6. It's important that set members don't offer advice or opinions. They also need to avoid using airspace for telling their own stories or discussing their issues.
7. At the end of a period – 15 minutes or so – the presenter reviews their thinking and selects one or more courses of action which they then commit to. In doing so they are committing to take action and to be held accountable for action at the next meeting. Then another group member presents.
8. The group might then typically reflect on the quality of the group process, and reflecting on what was successful and less successful and how they might improve for next time.
9. Once back at work the presenter applies the insights they gained to their work issue. They will consciously choose to note what worked and not in order to report back to the group on effectiveness. And they bring that learning back to the next meeting.

### **The process:**

- Step 1: Confirm the Topic to Address
- Step 2: Appoint Set Members
  - Try to choose participants with a variety of backgrounds.
- Step 3: Appoint a Leader
  - Some people find that it's helpful to appoint a set leader or [facilitator](#).
- Step 4: Choose a Setting
  - Action Learning Sets are often most effective when they take place in an unfamiliar setting.
- Step 5: Run the Session

Use Revans' Action Learning Cycle as a basis for your set. As we show above, the four steps are:

- Reflect - first, present the problem. Set members should then [ask questions](#) about the issue, check assumptions, and discuss potential solutions.
- Learn - after the initial discussion, talk about what each person has learned from it.
- Plan - your goal in this phase is to identify activities that could help resolve the problem, and develop an effective plan to undertake them.
- Act - listen to members' reports, and examine what worked, what didn't, and what action members need to take now. Then, schedule another meeting to reflect and discuss your newly agreed action.



Picture 1: Action learning set process

## Conclusion

In summary, action learning is a collaborative problem-solving strategy that involves a number of people working on an identified problem together. While action learning is a problem-solving process, the most important stage of it does not involve finding solutions but rather a line of insightful questioning and reflection on the actions undertaken. The emphasis is on learning by doing.

Action learning requires an empathetic, open-minded and reflective process. Skills developed during action learning include critical thinking, questioning and reflective listening.

## More info and sources

- <https://www.managementcentre.co.uk/blog/action-learning-sets-group-problem-solving/>
- <https://www.mindtools.com/anbk5zv/action-learning-sets>
- [https://utas.shorthandstories.com/PP\\_Action\\_Learning/index.html](https://utas.shorthandstories.com/PP_Action_Learning/index.html)
- Picture 1 source:  
[https://utas.shorthandstories.com/PP\\_Action\\_Learning/index.html](https://utas.shorthandstories.com/PP_Action_Learning/index.html)