

SEMPRE

Action learning

Action learning workshop

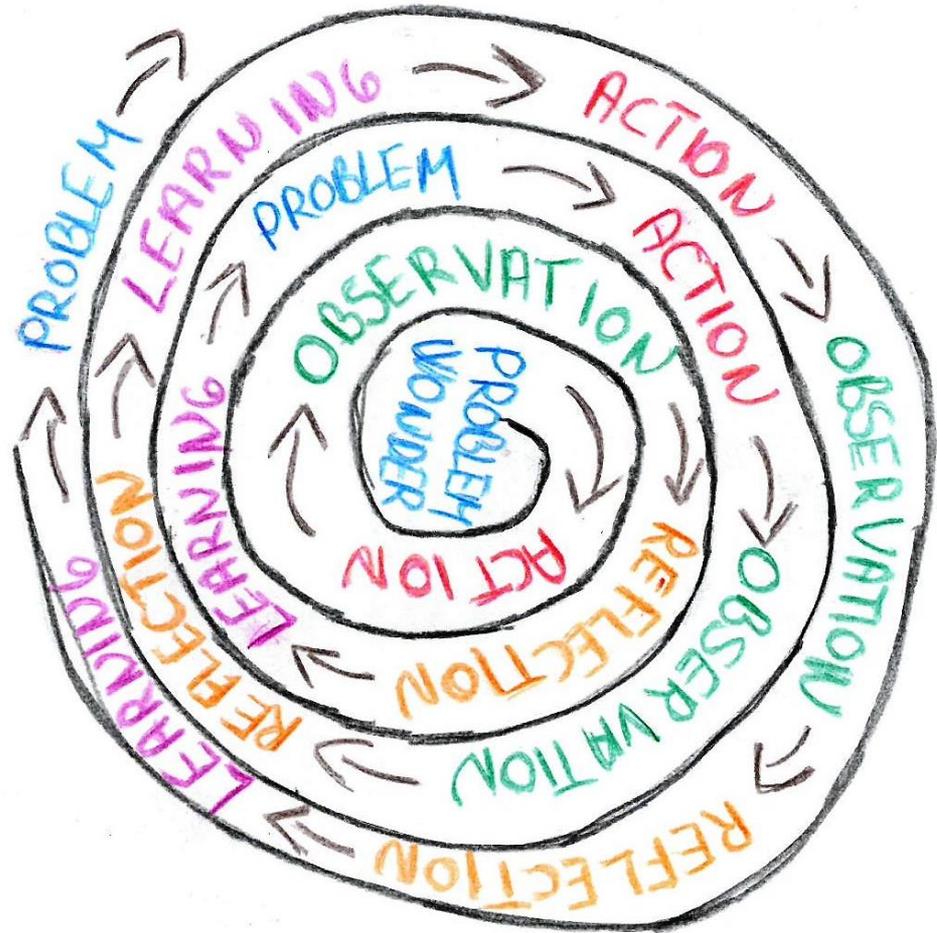
Action learning (AL)

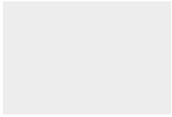
Action learning (AL) is joint learning through questioning, investigation and reflections in relation to participants actions

(projects, acts, practice, experiments)

And organised in special framed learning groups with voluntary participation

Benedicte Madsen (2008)





SEMPRE

Action learning –
Dogmas

To know where you are - to find the way to where you are going

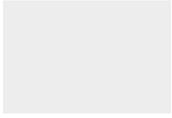
- If you don't know where you are, you cannot point out the direction for the change, you want
- To develop change it is important to take a starting point in existing practice or in your actual living conditions
- Then consider if this practice or living conditions are corresponding your core task/values and your wanted goals
- Then choose direction for change

Working with real problems

- You must wish for an improving change of your own practice and/or a change of your home organisation or of your specific living conditions
- At the beginning of the AL projects the participants do not need to be clear and well formulated.
- But relatively soon they must be narrow and focussed
- This makes it possible for project owners to risk their skin – projects should risk failure
- Project owner(s) should have mandate, or the ability to take responsibility and ownership of main parts of the project

How does action learning take place?

- the greatest learning takes place by solving actual tasks in defined projects.
- it takes place in joint communities with mutual support and challenge in form of AL group



SEMPRE

Action learning – the setting

What is a learning group?

- A learning group is a group who work together through the action learning process.
- The group have a common reference in either organisation, education or problem field/theme
- The learning group either work together and define common challenges and problems and do common actions or every single member of the group form their own challenges and actions

Who can be part of the learning group

- Depending on the context and goals for the training modules the action learning group can consist of:
 - Staff from the same work place
 - Staff from different workplaces
 - Staff and users
 - Users
 - Students
 - Students and users
 - Other combinations

The learning group have common responsibility for processes in the group

That is:

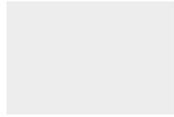
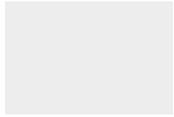
- Responsibility for the right balance between action- and learning oriented, questioning and reflection.
- Responsibility for everybody to make room for working in the different roles
- Responsibility for securing a comforting and supporting atmosphere in the group not letting this restrict the just as important challenging attitude

Organising the Action Learning group, individual actions

- The action learning group is organised with a facilitator, preferably a trained facilitator from outside the organisation
- The following tasks shifts between group members:
 - Enabler, who is doing the actual questioning
 - Actor, who is carrying out the action
 - Observer, who is observing the action
 - Reflecting team, who is reflecting during the set

Organising the learning group, group actions

- Facilitator is leading the group discussions/reflections or the group organises themselves with a facilitator/leader of the set
- The discussion can be organised in rounds and the template for group actions used as support
- Interruptions where the participants think for themselves for 5 – 10 min about core subjects that emerge during the set



SEMPRE

Example of organising a set

Establishing the group

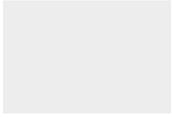
- The facilitator initiates that the group makes agreements/a contract on how the group should work together
- The contract should contain at least the following:
 - When, where and how often should we meet?
 - How is the sets organised, and how do we work together?
 - How do we handle disagreements and conflicts?
 - How do we use each others competences?

Action learning set example without external facilitator

- Sets of 6
- Everybody presents their action, short. 3 min each – together 20 min
- Choose an action to work with (Presenter)
- Choose a facilitator (you might start with that, but then the facilitator will not have the chance of having chosen her action)
- Choose an enabler
- The rest is reflective team/observers
- 5 min all together

Action learning set – example, continued

- Facilitator leads the set
- Enabler question the presenter in order to make her understanding of the problem and the plan concrete and prepared for action. Ask What? How? When? Who? Why? according to the action learning template.
- Integrate the different understandings of empowerment in the questions in order to chose the right setting for the action, 10 min
- The observers act as reflective team, 10 min
- Presenter and enabler reflects on the reflection 5 min



SEMPRE

Action learning – the process

Action learning

Learning groups

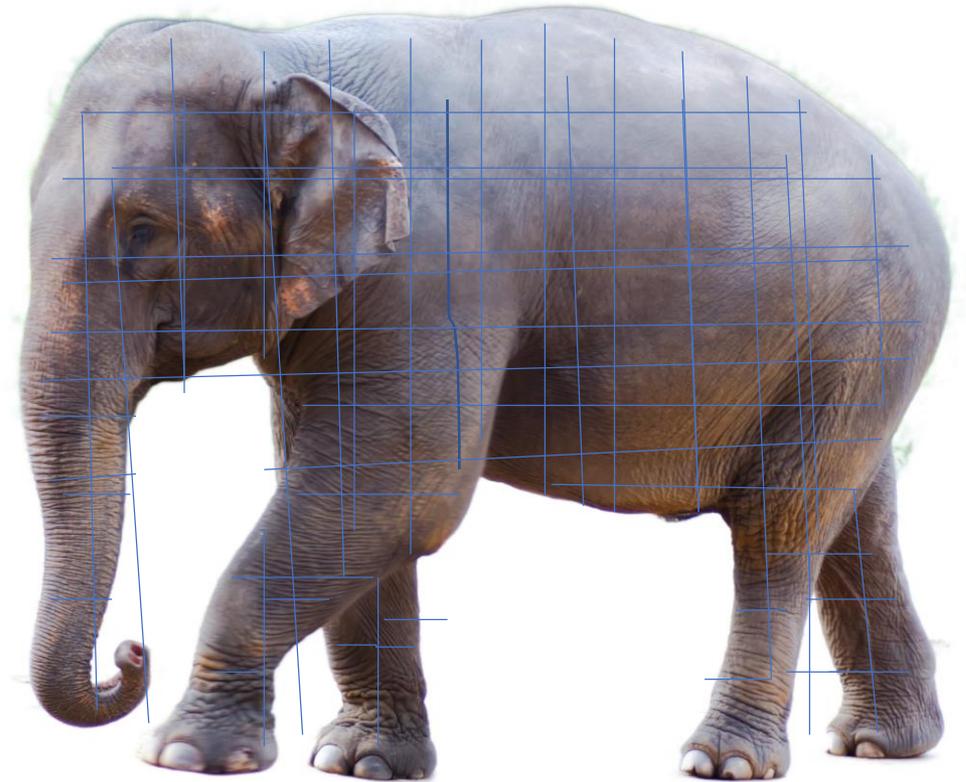
Stage 1	Problem/wondering	Choosing development theme
Stage 2	Action	Description and carrying out actions
Stage 3	Observation	Observing the action
Stage 4	Reflection	Reflective dialogue
Stage 5	Learning	Formulating common learning/ new action

Stage one: Problem/wondering

- A problem is a matter or a situation regarded as unwelcome or harmful and needing to be dealt with and overcome
- When you are to find a problem 4 points should be considered:
 - Are you able to act on the problem?
 - Does the problem have its starting point in practice?
 - Is the problem formulated as a question which can be examined ?
 - Does the problem seem meaningful and relevant?

To Eat the Elephant in Small Pieces

As it can be very difficult to eat the whole elephant in one bite, it can be impossible to solve big problems in one action. You have to take it bite for bite



Stage two: Actions

- An action is an experiment to be carried out in practice
- The action should relate to the problem
- The action should be limited and evident to actor and observer – described as a series of actions
- The action has a purpose – is must lead to something
- Make criteria's of success

Stage three: Observation

- The observer must know the action on beforehand: its problem, purpose (criteria of success) and consequences of action
- It is a very good idea to make notes, distinguishing between spontaneous (what you see) and reflective (what you think/consider) notes
- If you don't have an observer of the action:
 - The actor makes written notes with reflections on the action and its results (logbook)
 - The learning group gets the notes and it is used in a reflective dialogue
- In group actions all actors make logbook

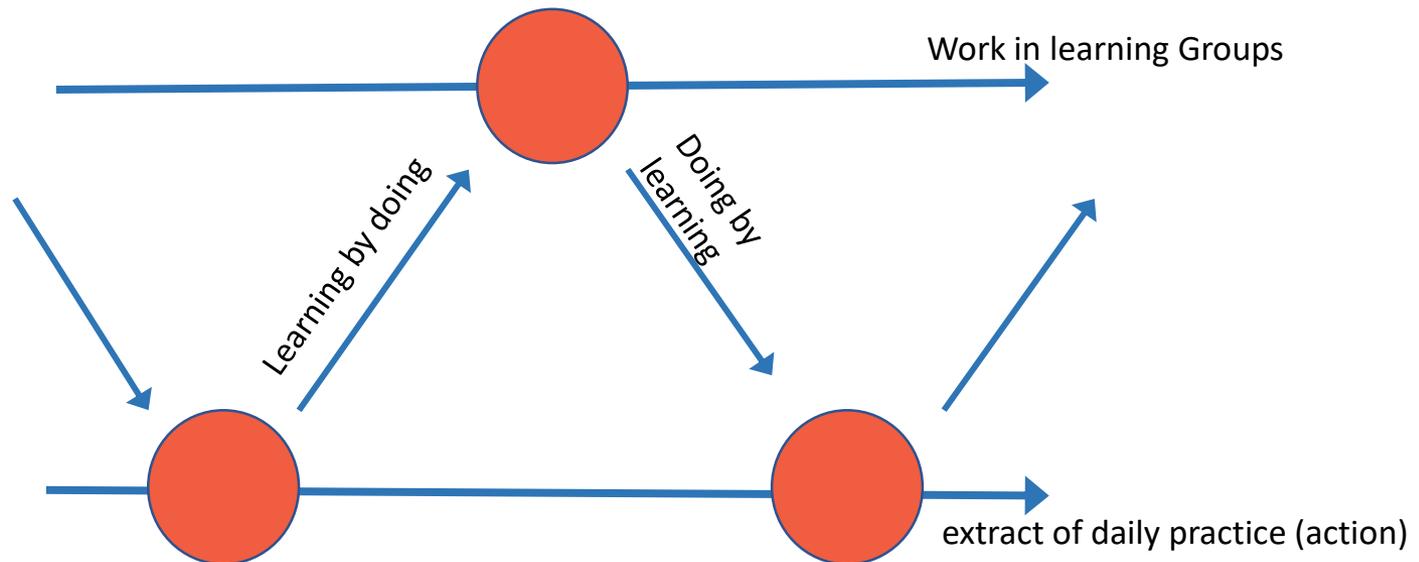
Stage 4: Reflection

- The reflection is expressed in a dialogue between actor and observer – either together or in the learning group, between actor and enabler or between facilitator and group
- It is important to:
 - Keep your mind on the problem
 - The concrete action and practice are object for the dialogue
 - Put practice into words in the common dialogue.
 - Frame the dialogue as an interview where the point is to ask questions rather than to suggest solutions.
 - Keep more interpretations and understandings open at the same time

Stage five: Learning – new action

- At the end of the reflective dialogue the enabler and/or the learning group help the actor clarifying:
 - What actions should be maintained in a new practice?
 - What new actions or initiatives are needed?
- Learning:
 - How did we work with action learning?
 - Which actions did we carry out?
 - Which reflections do we have in relation to the training modules?
 - Which conclusions can we make?
 - Which knowledge do we now have about practice?
 - What are we going to do in the future?

Working with action learning we pendula between actions and learning; learning by doing and doing by learning. The dialectic between the two processes can be illustrated as the following:

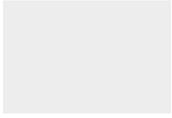


Support tools

- Organizing a meeting
- Leadership and follow ship
- Facilitation
- Cooperation
- Active listening/communication
- Peer to peer supervision
- Reflective teams
- For further information see: Beaty, Liz, and McGill, Ian (2016). Action Learning; a guide for professional management and educational development

Focus points

- The climate of the meeting/ in the learning group
- Relations
- Role of end users
- Development
- Management and organization
- Authenticity
- For elaboration of support tools see McGill and Beaty 2016.



SEMPRE

**Templates to support planning and
carrying out action the 5 phases in
learning in practice**

Template, Individual actions

To be filled in at the action Learning set

Phase 1: Formulating the problem, in the learning group with or without an external facilitator

Wonder, challenge or problem in relation to my work with empowerment/my life situation	
What has to be better, different or new?	
How do I understand the problem and the context (organisational, economical, social) where the problem takes place?	
Can the problem be investigated and acted on?	
What do I want knowledge about?	
Who is going to be involved? Service user involvement	

Phase 2: Action:

Describe the practical actions in sequences	1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6.
Describe time table, concrete – when do I do what	
Describe context (where is it going to take place, under which circumstances)	
Describe participants (i.e. service users)	
What do I want to gain?	
Carrying out the individual actions	

Phase 3: Observations (of the person carrying out actions):

Who is observing?	
When to observe?	
What to observe?	
How to observe?	
How to communicate observations to the person carrying out the action?	
To whom are observations communicated?	
When are observations communicated?	

Phase 3: Observation template or logbook:

Who is participating?	
What is happening? Concrete observations	
How do participants react?	
How is communication?	
The role of actor?	
What context related issues are on stake (organisational, economical, social)?	
What do you think about what is happening? Do you wonder about something? Is something underlying going on? What are the barriers? What makes success?	

Phase 4: Reflection.

In learning group with or without an external facilitator

Which actions did you carry through	
What happened?	
Which observations are made?	
What was changed?	
What was changed in relation to end user group?	
What did you learn? (see phase 5)	

Phase 5: Learning:

What did I learn about my own practice ? What did I learn about my life?	
What did I learn about practice in general ? What did I learn about my living conditions	
What did I learn about the organisation I am working in? What did I learn about the services I use?	
What did I learn about my colleagues in my own department, in other departments? What did I learn about social workers?	
What did I learn about (other) service users and their living conditions?	
What did I learn about society, local as wider range?	
Describe new action	

Template, group actions

To be filled in at the action Learning set

Phase 1: Formulating the problem, in the learning group with or without an external facilitator

Wonder, challenge or problem in relation to our work with empowerment/our life situation	
What has to be better, different or new?	
How do we understand the problem and the context (organisational, economical, social) where the problem takes place?	
Can the problem be investigated and acted on?	
What do we want knowledge about?	
Who is going to be involved? Service user involvement	

Phase 2: Action:

Describe the practical actions in sequences	1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6.
Describe time table, concrete – when do w do what	
Describe context (where is it going to take place, under which circumstances)	
Describe participants (i.e. service users)	
What do we want to gain?	
Carrying out the actions	

Phase 3: Observation template or logbook (logbook is individual also in group actions):

Who is participating?	
What is happening? Concrete observations	
How do participants react?	
How is communication?	
The role of actor?	
What context related issues are on stake (organizational, economical, social)?	
What do you think about what is happening? Do you wonder about something? Is something underlying going on? What are the barriers? What makes success?	

Phase 4: Reflection.

In learning group with or without an external facilitator

Which actions did we carry through	
What happened?	
Which observations are made?	
What was changed?	
In relation to end user group?	
What did we learn? (see phase 5)	

Phase 5: Learning:

What did we learn about our own practice ? What did we learn about our life?	
What did we learn about practice in general ? What did we learn about our living conditions	
What did we learn about the organization we are working in? What did we learn about the services we use?	
What did we learn about our colleagues in our own department, in other departments? What did we learn about social workers?	
What did we learn about (other) service users and their living conditions?	
What did we learn about society, local as wider range?	
Describe new action	

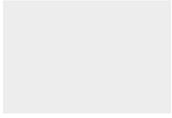
Action learning

A management challenge

Translation:

”It is now you should show confidence and say, that I am clever”





SEMPRE

Action learning – the problem

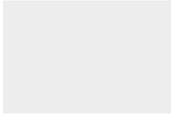
What is a problem?

A matter or a situation regarded as unwelcome or harmful and needing to be dealt with and overcome

In AL you have to find the problem important and engaging, and you have to have possibilities for doing something about it

Exercise

- Let the participants think for 5 min about 3 problems, they find important and where they have the possibilities of making a change in relation to or talk to their neighbour or both
- Write the problems on a post it and put it on the wall with wall paper or a flip over
- Let every person tell about their problems
- You can choose to let them tell about their problems and you write it on a flip over



SEMPRE

Action learning – communication (Exercise)
- perspectives

Asking concrete questions

Participants sit back to back each with a paper and a pen (or opposite each other, but they are not allowed to see each others paper)

2 sets of 7 min

A draws a painting. B is going to draw a painting as much alike as possible by asking A questions 5 min

They compare the drawings and discusses shortly what happened during the session. 2 min

They change roles

Afterwards they discuss what was the challenges and what kind of questions worked.

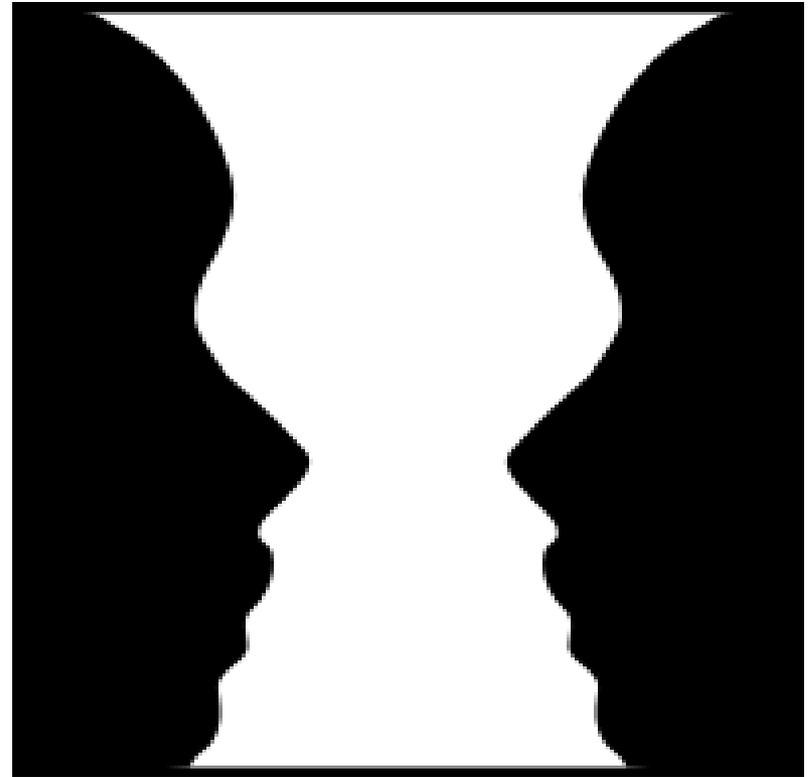
What did they learn about asking concrete questions?

What did they learn about different imaginations of what you see?

In plenum write core points on a flip over or black/whiteboard

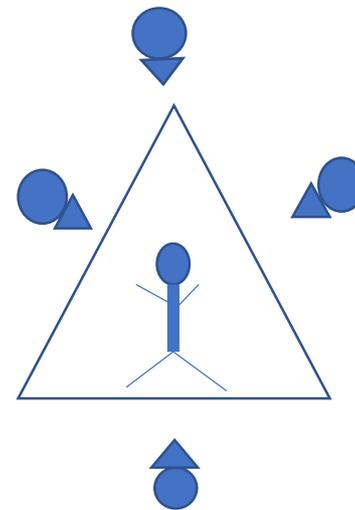
The vase of Rubin

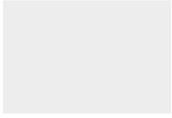
- You see 2 different pictures, but not at the same time
- You can just see one perspective at a time
- (Rubin 1995)



Investigate from more perspectives to see the whole picture

- The observers are all seeing different pictures of the person in the triangle. They have to communicate and exchange pictures or the enabler have to ask the presenter questions from different positions to get the whole picture and to help the presenter to see the whole picture.
- To help making the picture more complete we use reflective teams





SEMPRE

Action learning – reflective teams

What is a reflective team

- In this setting the reflective team is a part of the learning group forming a small group. The group observes the dialogue between enabler (facilitator if they are the same person) and presenter.
- The group reflects what they have heard or seen during the dialogue according to the accord you have made on how the session should take place
- At the beginning of the session you agree on how the session should take place. The enabler can ask the reflective team to reflect, when she wants or the reflective team could reflect after 5 – 10 min of dialogue as you find best
- The team can reflect on special subjects either agreed on or as the enabler wants

Instructions for reflective team

- Note, what makes you wonder in the process, what reflections you get, and your ideas
- When you are going to reflect you sit in a circle looking at each other. Presenter and enabler are outside the circle and listening. You are not allowed to look at them.
- The reflective team talks about their wonders, reflections, ideas, but they are not allowed to give advise. They are not allowed to talk directly to the presenter and enabler during the session either
- Presenter and enabler listens and notes what makes sense for them during the session. They are not allowed to ask the team questions
- The facilitator leads the session and makes sure, that the rules and the time is held