



get on the **smart** path

Action Learning Sets

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Action learning sets: a tool for unlocking solutions.

Action Learning Sets are used by Manchester Metropolitan University's Centre for Enterprise as a tool for enabling business owners and managers to identify solutions to the issues they face when running their business. It is essentially a tool for peer learning and the model is transferable to many situations. Smart Europe Partners have experienced Action Learning Sets in practice at the dissemination event and conference in Manchester in 2014 to help them identify solutions to their own issues faced in carrying out tasks in their own working environment.

Why use Action Learning Sets?

Action Learning Sets allow for a closed, confidential and informal environment where individuals can come together to identify solutions by approaching the issue from different angles. Through the use of open questioning from a number of peers in a 'set' the person with the identified issue to identify his or her own solutions and then work these up into an Action Plan to take with them to resolve the issue.

How do Action Learning Sets work?

Every Action Learning Set needs a Facilitator

A facilitator leads the group and starts off by working with the set to identify their own ground rules. These could include for example, confidentiality of things discussed, a commitment by members of the set to attend the sessions regularly, a commitment to follow through

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with the identified actions, that everyone remains non judgemental, and respect for each other and the actions taken. The facilitator ensures that the Action Learning Set's agreed ground rules and timings are kept. The facilitator may also prompt questioning but does not offer solutions.

The role of participants in the Action Learning Set

Each set is ideally made up of between 6-8 participants. Each participant takes it in turn to present an issue or goal over a pre agreed timescale, usually approximately 40 minutes per issue. Usually the set meets for several weeks presenting issues over time. At the outset, the rest of the group can ask very brief clarifying questions when the issue is presented to them. From then, the key is to ask open question only, not to give advice and each takes it in turns to ask a question.

Types of questions

A range of models are offered with specific types of questions to engage the presenter in finding solutions. Questions should be solution based questions, requiring the presenter with the opportunity to identify solutions to the questions, and should not be yes/no questions. Helpful learning questions might include the following:

- What result do you want?
- What can you do differently?
- Who else knows about the problem?
- How do you feel about the situation/issue you have?
- What do you know about the situation?
- What do you not know about the situation?
- What information do you need to help you make a decision?
- What would failure look like?
- What would a successful result look like?

- What actions will you now take?

Action Plans

As the group asks questions and the presenter responds, one member of the group writes down actions as they arise. At the end of the session, the issue holder/presenter will have a complete section of actions to take away to start to think about implementing.

Checking progress

At a later meeting each presenter updates the group on actions taken and how the situation has changed.