Module 6: Action Learning

Description	This module focuses on the understanding of basic concepts of action learning and providing experience for the participants to a short action learning process in the context of higher education.
Duration	4 hours (including 30 minutes break)
Training outcomes	▪ Participants are expected to understand the definition, element, and stages of Action Learning and Action Learning Set ▪ Participants are expected to experience an actual short process of an Action Learning process
Sequences	▪ Self-introduction (15 minutes) ▪ Presentation and Q&A (45 minutes) ▪ Group work (60 minutes) ▪ Break (30 minutes) ▪ Group presentation (60 minutes) ▪ Sharing learning experience (25 minutes) ▪ Recap (5 minutes)

Self-introduction (15 minutes)	▪ Method: Individual work
	▪ Output: Participants' metaphor of themselves as a leader
	▪ Material: A piece of paper, colourful markers/pens
	▪ Instruction
	   - Participants will be asked to think about themselves as a leader: strengths, weaknesses, habits, goals, etc.
	   - Participants have to find a metaphor that best describes themselves as a leader
	   - Participants will draw their metaphor on a piece of paper
	   - Participants share with their group about their metaphor

Groupwork
(60 minutes)
	▪ Method: Group discussion (a group consists of 4 participants)
	▪ Output
	  - A shared problems that happens in the participants' organization(s)
	  - Leadership issues potentially cause the problem
	  - Innovative ideas they could think to address the problem and tackling the leadership issues
	▪ Material
	  - Worksheet in Google Slide (see **Worksheet 1**)
	  - WiFi/internet connection
	  - Computer/laptop/tablet/smartphone
	▪ Instruction
	  - Participants will make groups of four to five people
	  - Each group discuss and choose one significant problem that happen in all of their organizations (an example is available in the Working sheet). They should write down some facts related to the chosen problem in column 1.
	  - Each group should reflect on their leadership practice and try to figure out the leadership issues potentially cause the problem and write them in column 2.
	  - Each group should find three innovative ideas to address the unit problem and tackling the leadership issue (self-improvement). The ideas should be concrete enough and highly possible for the leaders to implement. These ideas will be written in column 3.
	  - Each group present their worksheet to all participants

Dissemination
(60 minutes)
	▪ Method: Group presentation
	▪ Output
	  - Innovative ideas to address the unit problem
	▪ Material
	  - WiFi/internet connection
	  - Computer/laptop/tablet/smartphone
	  - Projector or other online meeting application
	▪ Instruction
	  - Each group select one representative to present the results of work-group discussion (10 minutes)

	- Other participants or facilitator may response or give any feedbacks or questions (5 minutes)

Sharing learning experiences (25 minutes)	▪ Method: individual presentations
	▪ Output
	  - Insight of learning from the group work
	▪ Material: none
	▪ Instruction
	  - Facilitator will ask some volunteers from the participants to share points they learned about themselves/ their team/ their organizations institution from the previous groupwork and presentations

Recap (5 minutes)	Facilitator will make a brief summary or highlighted insight from the training process.

Handout: Action Learning

Duration: 4 hours

Concept of Action Learning

Action learning originates with Reginald Revans (1907–2003).

It can be defined as: "Action learning is a process that involves a small group working on real problems, taking action, and learning as individuals, a team, and an organization while doing so (Michael Marquardt in Silberman, 2007).

Action learning builds on the relationship between reflection and action. Learning by experience involves reflection, i.e., reconsidering past events, making sense of our actions, and possibly finding new ways of behaving at future events. We believe that reflection is a necessary precursor to effective action and that learning from experience can be enhanced by deliberate attention to this relationship (Gill & Brockbank, 2006).

Action learning is unlike other kinds of group such as:

- formal meetings
- seminars
- teams
- support or self-development groups
- counselling or therapy groups

Formal meetings have a chairperson, an agenda, open discussion, minutes and sometimes a vote. An action learning set focuses on the presenter's issue and set minutes are simply action points, not a record of the meeting.

A seminar is a presentation of prepared material for discussion by the group. The material is based on factual knowledge in the public domain. The rules are rarely helpful to the presenter, being adversarial in style, and no consequent action is expected. Action learning sets are wholly focused on assisting the presenter to reflect on action and move towards action.

A team is a group with a well-defined group task. Members may support each other but the objective is primarily completion of the task. Action learning sets work for the benefit of individual set members, not an externally imposed task. If set members share a task or project, they become a team, and the action learning process would have to be created in addition to team/task-focused meetings.

Support or self-development groups are often focused more on support than challenge. The aim in action learning is to enable the individual to take responsibility, decide on action, and move on.

Action learning is not a counselling or therapy group. The presenter will be listened to and will be offered empathic support – aimed at helping. Counselling will not be offered in an action learning set. When personal problems arise, set members should seek counselling or therapy elsewhere.

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PEMIMPIN
Perkumpulan
Pendidikan
Kepemimpinan
Perguruan Tinggi

DIREKTORAT JENDRAL
PENDIDIKAN TINGGI
Kementrian Pendidikan & Kebudayaan

Four elements in Action Learning

First, each person joins and takes part voluntarily. (You can't be sent or send anyone else – although you might work at persuading and encouraging them.)

Secondly, each person must own an organizational task, problem, challenge or opportunity on which they are committed to act.

Thirdly, because we are very much more likely to succeed with the help of friends, action learning sets or small groups are formed to help each other think through the issues and create options.

Fourthly, take action and learn from the experience of taking that action (Abbott & Peddler, 2013).
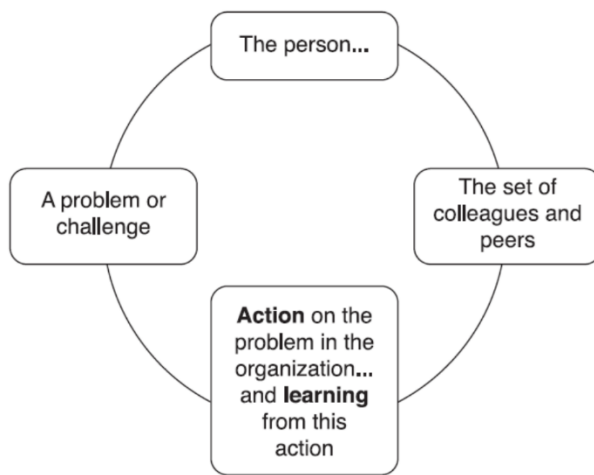
What is Action Learning For?

Learning equation holds that:

L = P + Q

so that **L** (learning) is a combination of **P** (programmed knowledge), or what we already know; and **Q** (questioning insight), which is inspired by fresh questions about the challenges where we do not know and do not have solutions.

The element of Q is the key to the distinction Revans makes between:

PUZZLES and PROBLEMS

Puzzles have 'best' solutions and can be solved by applying P with the help of experts. Revans uses the word 'problems' to describe situations where there are no right answers and which are best approached through questioning which provokes new lines of thinking, action and learning.

Stages of Action Learning (Silberman, 2007)

1. **Formation of group:** The group may be volunteers or appointed and may be working on single organizational problem or each other's individual problems. The group will have a predetermined amount of time and sessions or may determine these aspects at the first meeting.
2. **Selection and presentation of problem or task to group**: The problem (or problems, if a multi-problem group) is briefly presented to the group. Members ask questions to gather more information about the problem or task.
3. **Reframing the problem**: After a series of questions, the group, with the guidance of the action learning coach, will reach clarity and a consensus as to the most critical and important problem that the group should work on and establish the crux of the problem, which may differ from the original presenting problem
4. **Determining goals**: Once the key problem or issue has been identified, the group searches for the goal, the achievement of which would solve the reframed problem for the long term with positive rather than negative consequences for the individual, team, or organization.
5. **Developing action strategies**: Much of the time and energy of the group will be spent on identifying and pilot-testing possible action strategies. Like the preceding stages of action learning, strategies are developed via the reflective inquiry and dialogue mode.
6. **Taking action**: Between action learning sessions, the group as a whole as well as individual members collect information, identity status of support, and implement the strategies developed and agreed to by the group.
7. **Capturing learnings**: Throughout and at any point during the session, the action learning coach may intervene to ask the group members questions that will enable them to reflect on their performance and to find ways to improve their performance as a group.

Some questions in form of checklists for each stage can be seen in the Appendix.

Source:

Brockbank, A., & McGill, I. (2003). The action learning handbook: powerful techniques for education, professional development and training. Routledge.

Pedler, M., & Abbott, C. (2013). EBOOK: Facilitating Action Learning: A Practitioner's Guide: McGraw-Hill Education.

Silberman, M. (2007). The Handbook of Experiential Learning. Wiley.

WORKSHEET
PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION AND INNOVATIVE INITIATIVE

(Column 1) Significant problem(s) in my unit/institution	(Column 2) Leadership issue(s) potentially cause the unit/institution problem	(Column 3) Innovative initiative(s) to solve the unit problem(s)
Example: Our university is expected to open a new faculty of medicine but we do not have enough resources (human, infrastructure, financial) that will hinder the establishment of such faculty.	*Example:* Lots of pressure from key stakeholders (conglomerate). Inability of top university leadership to say NO to demands from key stakeholders. Power from university leadership is taken away because of the overwhelming business "necessity" to support the conglomerate	*Example:* ● Continuing communication with patience and resilience ● Collaboration with another university with medical faculty ● Look for additional income and funding from industry e.g., pharmaceutical and medical equipment ● Active collaboration with other hospitals HMO for education, training, practice
Example: The MOEC demand each university to achieve 8 key performance indicators, one of them is the international recognition for research outputs **[ideal condition]**. To date, however, we lack of reputable international publication **[fact 1]**. Moreover, most of our research have a low technology readiness level. Therefore, it is still unready to be used in the society **[fact 2]**.	*Example:* To be honest, I am **clueless** in providing mentors to my staff who could guide them to do research well and then publish well. Moreover, I think **they are less motivated** to do the international publication due to the high cost it may charge.	*Example:* - Developing network in research publication with HEI partners. - Building and applying reward and punishment system in research publication. - Providing training and assistance for the researchers to make a good article and publish sebagiathem.
<mark>*Your Group answer*</mark>	<mark>*Your Group answer*</mark>	<mark>*Your Group answer*</mark>

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Silberman, M. L. (Ed.). (2007). The handbook of experiential learning. John Wiley & Sons.

Checklist for Group Formation

- ☐ Will membership be by choice or by appointment?
- ☐ What will be the size of the action learning group?
- ☐ Will members from outside the organization be included?
- ☐ Will the groups operate full-time or part-time?
- ☐ How often will the groups meet?
- ☐ Are the most appropriate people in the group?
- ☐ Are the members clearly oriented to the principles of action learning?
- ☐ Are they aware of how action learning is different from task forces and other problem-solving groups?
- ☐ Is the role of the action learning coach clear and accepted?
- ☐ Are there any specific organizational or individual learning goals?
- ☐ Will we be using single- and/or multiple-problem groups?
- ☐ Have set members agreed to processes and norms relative to air space, asking questions, and reflection?
- ☐ Is there agreement on ground rules relative to confidentiality, starting and stopping on time, being supportive, and taking action between meetings?
- ☐ Have they agreed on future dates for set meetings and committed to attending them regularly?
- ☐ Do we have access to the necessary outside resources and knowledge?
- ☐ Is there a sense of ownership and responsibility for the problem?
- ☐ Have they identified a place convenient for participants?
- ☐ Is the group clear as to its sponsor and champion?

Checklist for Selection of Problem/Project for Action Learning Groups

- ☐ Who will choose the problems/projects—the organization or individual managers or the group members?
- ☐ Who will be presenting the problem?
- ☐ Do the problems meet criteria for action learning problems?
- ☐ Are the problems feasible and manageable?
- ☐ Are they urgent and important?
- ☐ Do they provide opportunities for learning and development?
- ☐ Is there a timeframe for completing the project?
- ☐ Do the problems or program need to be discussed with top leadership?
- ☐ Do managers and participants understand the time involved in working on these problems?
- ☐ Are they true problems, or does management already have a solution?
- ☐ Does the organization have restrictions on possible strategies?
- ☐ Will groups work on single or multiple problems?

Checklist for Reframing Problems

☐ What is the quality of problems (framing)?

☐ What type of problem is it—technical or adaptive?

☐ Have we identified the real problem versus the presenting problem?

☐ Are our goals specific, measurable, feasible, and beneficial to the organization?

☐ Are we asking fresh questions and taking risks?

☐ Have the obstacles been identified?

☐ What is our level of commitment to solving the problem?

Checklist for Determining Goals

☐ Are we committed to innovative, high-quality goals rather than quick solutions?

☐ Have we examined and tapped where the power, passion, and knowledge reside?

☐ Are the best-leveraged solutions chosen?

Checklist for Developing Strategies of Action

☐ Have outside resources and links that may be needed been identified?

☐ Are action plans specific and part of each meeting?

☐ Have the actions to be taken been clearly identified at each meeting, including the responsible person(s) and the specific dates?

☐ Are strategic actions recorded and then reviewed at the next meeting?

☐ Have learnings from our actions been achieved?

☐ Have we considered the impact of our strategies?

☐ How can we pilot-test the strategies?

☐ What have we learned from the pilot-testing?

☐ What communications between the top management, sponsors, and group have occurred during the life of the action learning group?

☐ Will we be sharing our learnings as well as our recommendations?

☐ Are the strategies for the actions clear, systems-oriented, and time-based?

Checklist for Taking Action

☐ Will the group have the authority to implement their recommendations?

☐ Will proposed solutions first need to be presented to higher management for implementation? If so, to whom will the group present its recommendations?

☐ How will the group's recommendations be handled and implemented?

☐ Who will be implementing the strategies?

☐ Are there likely to be difficulties in implementation?

☐ Were problems resolved and actions taken?

☐ How effective were the actions taken?

☐ Is there sufficient support from top management?

☐ Is there follow-up to the action learning actions?

Checklist for the Learnings of the Action Learning Group

☐ Have the learnings been applied throughout the organization?

☐ What is the quality of individual development and learning? Of team development and learning?

☐ Are the greater, long-term benefits and leveraging of learning valued?

☐ Is there commitment to team and individual learnings?

☐ Has there been a review of the learning?

☐ Has a systematic analysis of the learning been applied to other parts of the organization?

☐ What were the major benefits to the members of the action learning program?

☐ Have verbal or written reports been prepared for clients, managers, and others interested?

☐ How can future action learning programs in the company be improved?

☐ What is planned for follow-up?