



Action Learning Glossary

The group-based, Action Learning process is used to address a current, important priority (a problem or opportunity) and to learn at the same time. Especially in learning and development, there are many terms related to Action Learning. This glossary includes terms specific to designing and operating an Action Learning program.

Action Learning

Even Reginald Revans, the developer of Action Learning, was reluctant to define it, but we'll review several "definitions" to give you a basic impression of the process.

Action learning is a method for individual and organisational development. Working in small groups, people tackle important organisational issues or problems and learn from their attempts to change things. (Mike Pedler, in *Action Learning for Managers*)

Action learning is an educational process whereby the participant studies his own actions and experience in order to improve performance. Learners acquire knowledge through actual actions and practice rather than through traditional instruction. (Wikipedia)

Action learning is a process for working on important business problems or opportunities, in diverse teams, to both develop the participants and improve the business. (FastCompany)

In their book *Facilitating Action Learning*, the authors Mike Pedler and Christine Abbott state "...the acid test is whether the people concerned are helping each other to take action on their problems and challenges, and whether they are learning from the work" (p. 20).

Actions

A hallmark of Action Learning that helps to distinguish it from other group-based processes is that members conduct actions between group meetings to address their current project. Meetings are used to guide and support members to select relevant and realistic actions. Action Learning places equal emphasis on actions and learning. (Also see Learning.)

Application (of Action Learning)

The overall type of purpose for the Action Learning program, for example, a program to solve a problem is a problem-solving application, a program to develop leaders is a leadership development application, and a program to strengthen a team is a team-building application. Some other applications of Action Learning include coaching development, networking and transfer of training. (Also see Outcomes.)

Champion

A person who ensures ongoing strong momentum in initiating and implementing an Action Learning program. (Also see Client and Sponsor.)

Client

The person who will most benefit from the success of the Action Learning program, for example, the person who owns the problem(s) or the opportunity(s) being addressed by the program. (Also see Champion and Sponsor.)

Coach (Learning Coach, Set Advisor)

Some models use this term or phrase to refer to a specific role of an external person (a person who is not a presenter in a meeting) who is primarily responsible to train members on the Action Learning process (Set Advisor) and especially for supporting members and the group to learn from their Action Learning meetings and activities (Learning Coach). Some models separate the role of Facilitator (as someone who attends to the meeting agenda and ground rules) from the role of Learning Coach. Other models might use the term “coach” to refer to a member of the group, for example in a multi-project program. (Also see Coaching and Facilitation.)

Coaching

Sometimes used to describe the nature of help that group members use to address project(s) in group meetings. The nature of coaching depends on the model of Action Learning being used, for example, some models prefer only question-driven exchange and others include use of targeted advice, brainstorming and other methods of guidance and support. (Also see Coach and Questioning.)

Evaluation

An intentional and ideally systematic activities to collect and analyze data in order to make a decision about something. For example, a process evaluation (a type of formative evaluation) is often done to decide whether to improve a process. A results evaluation (a type of summative evaluation) is often done to decide if desired results were achieved.

Facilitation

The nature of activities to ensure a high-quality Action Learning meeting, which includes focus on the meeting structure (agenda and ground rules) and on the group’s effectiveness and learning. Some Action Learning models separate this activity into the role of a Facilitator and a Coach. Groups can be externally facilitated (by someone who is not a presenter in a meeting) or self-facilitated by the members of the group. (Also see Coach.)

Facilitator

The person primarily responsible to ensure a high-quality Action Learning meeting. (Also see Coach and Facilitation.)

Group (Set)

A collection of individuals who come together to support each other’s progress and learning by using the Action Learning process. Reginald Revans, the developer of Action Learning, has written that 2 people can do Action Learning together, although conventional Action Learning includes 5-7 or 4-8 individuals, depending on the model being used. Single-Project Programs often refer to the group as a team. (Also see Multi-Project Program and Single-Project Program.)

In-Company Program

Action Learning program where all members are from the same company.

Learning

New knowledge, skills and abilities, including new perceptions and insights. Learning in Action Learning often is in the form of new perceptions and insights. Action Learning places equal emphasis on actions and learning. (Also see Actions.)

Learning Coach (See Coach)**Meeting (Action Learning)**

When group members meet face-to-face or virtually to use the Action Learning process to further their progress toward addressing the program's project(s). The agenda and format of the meeting depend on the type of program and the model of Action Learning being used. (Also see Model, Multi-Project Program, Preparatory Workshop and Single-Project Program.)

Model (Action Learning)

The particular values, approaches and design used to conduct Action Learning. There is a wide diversity of models, many of which are proprietary to the developer, for example, the model used by the World Institute of Action Learning or the Action Reflection Learning model.

Multi-Company Program

Action Learning program in which members are from different companies. (Also see Single-Company Program.)

Multi-Project (or Cross-Sector or Open Group) Program

Action Learning program in which each member of the group is using Action Learning to address his/her current project. (See Single-Project Program and Project.)

Outcomes

Results achieved by participants in an Action Learning program, for example, new knowledge, skills, abilities, or solved problems or achieved goals. (Also see Applications.)

Participant

Member of an Action Learning group.

Peer Coaching Group

A generic phrase sometimes used to refer to a multi-project Action Learning program, although it technically could apply to a single-project program, as well.

Preparatory Workshop

A training intended primarily to train group members about the Action Learning process. The goals and content of the Workshop depend on the purpose of the program and the particular model of Action Learning being used. It often includes introductions to stakeholders, sponsors, clients, facilitators and group members; a brief experience of Action Learning, such as a demonstration or fish bowl exercise; and might also include training about various tools. It is usually one of the first meetings in an Action Learning program.

Presenter

The group member who is currently presenting his/her priority to the group in a meeting.

Program (Action Learning)

Activities designed to address project(s) for an organization or for individuals. Activities could include an initial training of group members, and a certain number of subsequent meetings, actions by members between meetings, collections of learnings, and program evaluations during and after the program. The design of the program depends on the purpose(s) or project(s) to be addressed by the program and the model being used. (Also see Meeting, Model, Multi-Project Program, Project and Single-Project Program.)

Project (or Problem or Priority)

The current, very important problem, challenge, issue, goal or opportunity being addressed by the group (in a Single-Project Program) or by individual members (in a Multi-Project Program) in an Action Learning program. Some authors refer to the project as the overall priority being addressed over numerous Action Learning meetings, and that the problem is the priority being addressed by a member in the current meeting – that problem is in regard to the overall project.

Questioning

Another hallmark of the Action Learning process, that distinguishes it from other types of group-based processes, is the very frequent use of questioning among members and facilitators (and Coaches, if the model of Action Learning uses Coaches) to cultivate deep reflection and learnings among members. (Also see Coaching.)

Reflection

An intentional process to think about one's, or sometimes others', experience to try learn more. One of the primary purposes of the frequent use of questions in Action Learning is to cultivate more learning from members' reflections.

Reframing

Changing the way that a person views or thinks about something, such as a past experience or current problem. Sometimes when a person is stuck on a particular issue, it's because of the way the person perceives the issue. One of the primary purposes of the frequent use of questions in Action Learning is to help members to reframe situations in order to more effectively address them and learn from them.

Reginald Revans

The person who is widely credited for first developing the Action Learning process and using that phrase to refer to the process.

Session (Coaching)

Sometimes used to refer to the activities to help one presenter in a meeting. If the entire meeting is devoted to helping one presenter (as what might be used in a Single-Project Program), then most of that meeting is one session. If each member is helped in a meeting (used in Multi-Project Programs), then each session helps one presenter.

Set (see Group)

Set Advisor (see Coach)

Single-Company (or In-Company) Program

Action Learning program in which all members are from the same organization. (Also see Multi-Company Program.)

Single-Project Program

Action Learning program in which all group members are using Action Learning to address the same, common project. (Also see Multi-Project Program and Project.)

Sponsor

The person who is formally responsible for the success of the Action Learning program. (Also see Champion and Client.)

Team Leader

Some programs appoint one member per group who is responsible for scheduling meetings and acting as a liaison to the program's staff and other stakeholders.