

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
10th December 2004
Friends Meeting House, London**

1. Present: Ray Mahoney (Chair, IFAL-UK); Theresa Barnett (Executive member) Moira McLaughlin (Executive Member), Sean Cunningham (Corporate & Executive Member); Stephan Schütze (Executive member); Steve Moss (Executive Member); John Sweet and Stella Binns (Members)

In attendance: Pam Wright, IFAL Administrator

2. Apologies: Roger Reissner (Treasurer); Chris Yates, David Swinden, Jean Lawrence, David Barron, Jenny Jarvis, Klaas Wassens. June Whetherley, Christine Bell.

3. Minutes of last AGM (December 2003) and matters arising

The minutes were read and approved as a true record.

4. Treasurer's Report

This was presented to the meeting in the absence of the Treasurer. Receipts for the year to July 2004 were £8,908 and payments were £11,491 giving a deficit of £2,583 for the year mainly due to losses on the 2003 conference.

The current position as at November 11th was CAF Bank £1,006.65
NWB £4,528.54.

The Executive approved re-appointment of the Auditors should this be necessary.

5. Membership Report

Pam Wright presented the membership re-

port and advised that there had been a disappointing further drop in paid-up individual members to 84 (from 97), but that she had sent further reminders and already had cheques to bank improving the situation. Corporate members had dropped from 16 to 14 of whom 8 were paid up and two were honorary members. Outstanding subscriptions for Corporates were also being pursued.

It was suggested that Sussex University (where Tom Bourner was based) be invited as corporate members, and that all Corporates be asked how they are using action learning. PW to draft a letter.

ACTION PW

6. Executive Report

Ray presented the Executive report and advised that he was standing down as Chair for personal reasons, but would stay on the Executive and act as editor for the Newsletter. He explained the reasons behind the postponement of the 2004 conference as advised to members by letter and the hope that an International Conference be held in 2005. Executive meetings by Yahoo have not been entirely successful and the setting up of a private chat room is being investigated for this purpose.

Pam Wright was asked to check and up-date the IFAL Topica subscription list as some people are not getting the information on this.

ACTION PW

Ray thanked Pam Wright and Lancaster University for their support and Steve Moss and Roger Reissner who were standing down from the Executive.

Steve Moss proposed a vote of thanks for Ray for his work as Chair and his support of IFAL over the years, and particularly this last year in view of his personal difficulties. This was seconded and approved.

7. Administration Report

Pam Wright said she regretted to report yet more frustrations on the website due to software problems when trying to add the 'members services' section. She was in touch with the web designer, David Hanner in an effort to resolve this.

ACTION PW

8. Election of Executive Members

Standing down from the Executive but available for re-election were:

Alan Wenham-Prosser – nominated by SS seconded by TB

Ray Mahoney – nominated by TB seconded by MM

Sean Cunningham – nominated by RM seconded by TB

New executive members:

John Sweet – nominated by RM seconded by MM

Chris Yates – nominated by SC seconded by TB

Standing down: Steve Moss and Roger Reissner.

9. 2005 Conference

Originally Otmar Donnenberg and Jan Van Bommel were leading on this but had run into difficulties. Pam Wright and Alan Wenham-Prosser are contacting the Dutch group to progress this.

ACTION PW/AWP

10. Any Other Business

10.1 Chris Yate's and June Whetherley's responses to Ray's letter asking what members wanted were read out: small face to face meetings to compare action learning experience and occasional workshops/conferences to learn from, together with the opportunity to network with other members were the main points that emerged.

10.2 Moira Mclaughlin said she had spoken to Peter Smith who was unable to attend the AGM and there was a concern about falling membership. Was there a need to encourage younger members and if so how do we broaden the appeal of action learning? Do we need a sub-committee to look at the issues?

Ray Mahoney responded that this had been examined before and he felt a sub-committee was not necessary. Young people are involved in action learning but don't necessarily become members. SB asked how action learning compared to other personal plans eg are young people trained as facilitators.

10.3 Pam Wright appealed for articles etc for the January newsletter.

There being no further business the meeting was formally closed by the Chair at 17.15

**TREASURER'S REPORT
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST
JULY 2004**

For the year to July 2004, there has been a deficit of expenditure over income, due largely to the loss incurred for the 2003 AGM/Conference, but also in part due to reduced subscription income mainly from Corporates.

Summary of Expenditure and Income as follows:

Income	
Conference receipts	£2,904
Subscription income	£5,424
Interest	£116
Gift aid rebate	£464
<i>Total income</i>	<i>£8,908</i>
Expenditure	
Newsletters etc	£371
Website costs	£376
Meetings/conferences	£5,341
Secretarial	£4,950
Audit fees	£360
Sundries	£78
Depreciation	£15
<i>Total Expenditure</i>	<i>£11,491</i>
Deficit for year	(£2,583)

R Reissner
Treasurer



**MEMBERSHIP ADMINISTRATOR'S
REPORT FOR THE YEAR
2003/4**

At the end of the membership year in July 04 individual members remained steady at 130 with corporate members down to 14. Paid-up members continue to drop being 84 for the year compared to a previous 97. Details are as follows with the figures for the previous year also shown for comparison:

	02-03	03-04
Individual members	130	130
New	6	5
Corporate members	16	14
New	2	1

As last year there are a disappointing number of people who have still not paid their membership subscriptions and I have just sent a further reminder to those people.

To enable meaningful development work on the website and for the running of annual conferences that income remains steady or better still increases. If those members who have not paid or are not sure if have paid could contact me, or send their subscriptions this would help considerably towards the aim of ensuring the website delivers what members want.

As before Gift Aid forms continue to be sent out to those UK members who have not yet completed. This is a simple way taxpayers can help IFAL with no additional cost to themselves. Please complete a declaration if you have not already done so.

Pam Wright
Membership Administrator

REPORT OF THE CHAIR, IFAL-UK

We are at the end of another year in IFAL-UK and it seems only hours ago I was addressing the last AGM and then opening the conference in Whitechapel. Well, our membership is again steady and judging by the conference in very good heart.

Executive meetings

We have managed four Yahoo Internet executive meetings and two face to face meetings, although not all the exec. , Were able to get into the conference room on all occasions for the Yahoo meetings. The Yahoo option is certainly more cost effective and a great time saver, but the technology is sometimes frustrating.

Conferences

The December conference following last years AGM was very heart warming for me with so much enthusiasm around, especially from friends in Holland, Sweden, Germany and Ireland. Not to mention colleagues from the UK I had not seen for some time. The event was a huge success, Action Learning wise. However on the financial side we came out with a small loss. I had forgotten the VAT when negotiating the price for the event and our efforts to gain sponsorship came to nothing.

Conference 2004

We had planned to run a small event in Dublin prior to the AGM, but with three executive members having personal situations taking up their time it proved impossible to organise.

IFAL Topica

I am pleased to report the Internet exchanges on various topics around action learning have been very lively and helpful for some new members. If you are not aware of this forum, please speak to Pam for entry. The latest one on Internet sets has been very lively and informative.

Administration

Pam continues to be the jewel in the IFAL crown and I wish to thank her for another outstanding year. Also our friends at Lancaster University for continued support in housing Pam and our Library,

Executive members

I would like to thank them all for continuing to support IFAL UK, in what has been a difficult year for all of them and me. I would especially like to thank Roger Reissner for his contribution as treasurer. He has been the best one I have worked with in my time at IFAL. Without his efforts on gaining gift aid donations, our finances would not be anywhere near as healthy as they are.

Lastly, as you may recall from the letter I sent to all members recently I will be standing down as chair following this AGM. I have really enjoyed my time chairing the executive and it has been a privilege to be involved with and serve such a quality of membership that we have.

Ray Mahoney, Chair IFAL UK



IFAL ADMINISTRATION REPORT

It has, in many ways been a difficult year all round for IFAL, with the Chair, Ray's personal difficulties and the death of two former Executive members Tim Vidal-Hall and then Harley Frank. A reminder of the frailty of life and how important the support of friends and family are at times like these.

I continue to work out of Lancaster University, with the project based at the Department of Management Learning, who still kindly host the project at minimal cost.

Further frustrations with the web page have ensued with yet another change of ownership of the web hosts and some difficulties with the copyright of the original design of the web page making some of the changes we could like taking even longer than expected. However, I am still pursuing this with vigour as I believe it is the way forward and hope to entice new members if we are able to offer members offering professional services a space on the web page in exchange for a commission on any business obtained.

It was disappointing not to be able to hold a conference in 2004 I look forward enthusiastically to working with overseas colleagues to make the 2005 a success.

Pam Wright
Administrator



EXECUTIVE MEMBERS 2004/5

Raymond Mahoney

Stephan Schütze

Moira McLaughlin

Theresa Barnett

Sean Cunningham

Alan Wenham-Prosser

John Sweet

Chris Yates

(for details of Executive members' interests please see pages 7-8)

The action learning for managers project 2001-2004

The Action Learning for Managers Project (ALM) broke new ground by introducing significant numbers of senior managers in the voluntary and community sector to the benefits of action learning. Although parts of the sector had experimented with the tool before, this project saw the first large-scale promotion of action learning across the diverse range of organisations that make up the third sector thanks to funding from the Active Communities Directorate of the Home Office and Lloyds TSB Foundation for England and Wales.

The impetus for the project was a growing recognition amongst key infrastructure bodies that senior managers often experienced isolation in the workplace. With the increasing emphasis on partnership working, these bodies were also looking for tools that would enhance networking between different organisations.

A steering group of five national core partners sought academic input from the Revans Centre at Salford University and the Open University Business School. In 2003 as some of the benefits of participation became clear, 21 further national and regional networks joined the partnership.

Marketing of the project was achieved via the partners' communications with their members, direct mail, regular newsletters and a dedicated website.

The ALM Project began by delivering 94 introductory days on action learning across England and Wales. Seven hundred and seventy managers participated in these days and hundreds more took part in workshops at conferences and events. The ALM Team were delighted to notice people making real progress on individual and organisational challenges even with the limited exposure to action learning possible at an introductory event.

The ALM Project also offered a package of seven facilitated set meetings. Two hundred and forty six managers joined one of 45 ALM sets. According to the internal and external evaluation reports, the overwhelming majority of set members found the experience positive and supportive.

Many participants experienced quite profound changes in their ways of thinking. The majority would recommend action learning for personal and professional development. Three-quarters of sets chose to continue meeting after the first seven meetings, most with a facilitator.

Set members were able to choose their own issue to bring to action learning. Two-thirds worked on issues of personnel management or organisational change. Many managers found it easier to identify movement on how they were reflecting on these issues rather than concrete action taken. However, some people were able to describe the first tentative steps towards organisational change and new partnerships.

In a sector that is often cash-strapped and short on human resources, there are major challenges to tackle before action learning can be accessed widely. It was apparent that the smaller community groups really struggled to join sets. In demanding front-line services such as advice agencies, the needs of the waiting room often were prioritised over set meetings.

The ALM Project have attempted to leave some resources for the sector that might make action learning more accessible. It ran a facilitator training programme for thirty-one staff from different voluntary organisations who could offer action learning in their job roles and in relevant networks free of charge. It published the *Action Learning Matters Pack*, a boxed set of cards that acts as a toolkit for people who wish to introduce action learning to their organisations. (see page 15)

In 2004, action learning was recommended by the Government in ChangeUp, a capacity building and Infrastructure Framework for the voluntary and community sector. It is hoped that action learning will be included in long-term developments for a changed structure for learning and development in the sector.

Kate Holmes, ALM development officer

For further information on the ALM Project, please see www.alm-vol.org.uk

Many participants experienced quite profound changes in their ways of thinking





IFAL-UK'S Executive

Sean Cunningham (Acting Chair) - works as a trainer in an Irish Government Department. His training unit have been corporate members of IFAL for some years. Sean has been involved in action learning as participant and facilitator for a number of years and has been on the IFAL Executive for a couple of years.

Moira McLaughlin is an independent learning and development consultant, based in London, and has been a member of the IFAL Executive for three years. Since participating in an action learning set as a middle manager in local government in the mid '80s, she trained as an action learning set facilitator with Roger Gaunt and has designed and run a wide variety of programmes and trained action learning facilitators in a range of contexts. She continues to be a member of a self-facilitating set for her own development. Current interests include inter-agency and intersectoral programmes.

Ray Mahoney is a learning and development professional who is a recent Chair of IFAL-UK and is currently the newsletter editor. An energetic and creative individual with extensive experience of managing the learning and development function in both the Public and Private sectors of business. He came across action learning via a three-day course. He then went on to facilitate groups in the Surrey County Council action learning programme. He founded an action learning community at the Corporation of London. Now working as an independent consultant. Having witnessed powerful change for individuals who embrace action learning. It is not a 'quick fix', nor is it a religion but as a developmental tool it has no rival.

Chris Yates has been a corporate organisational development practitioner, now an action learning consultant. An IFAL member since 1996, he has recently returned to England from Australia and is now pursuing local action learning opportunities, one of which is to contribute to IFAL as committee member and Treasurer. Chris, who lives in West Yorkshire, is writing a doctoral thesis on 'English Literature and Work'.

Alan Wenham-Prosser, formerly Principal Building Control Officer for the Corporation of London (now retired). Assisted in running the action Learning Community for five years at the Corporation and was active in management training in Technical Services Department of the Corporation for many years. Assisted in organising and running the previous IFAL conferences in Sweden in 2001 and in London 2003. Has sat on the IFAL executive committee for six years.

Continued on page 8

Notice Board

Advance notice of International Conference

We are planning an international action learning conference during 2005, probably to be held in Amsterdam.

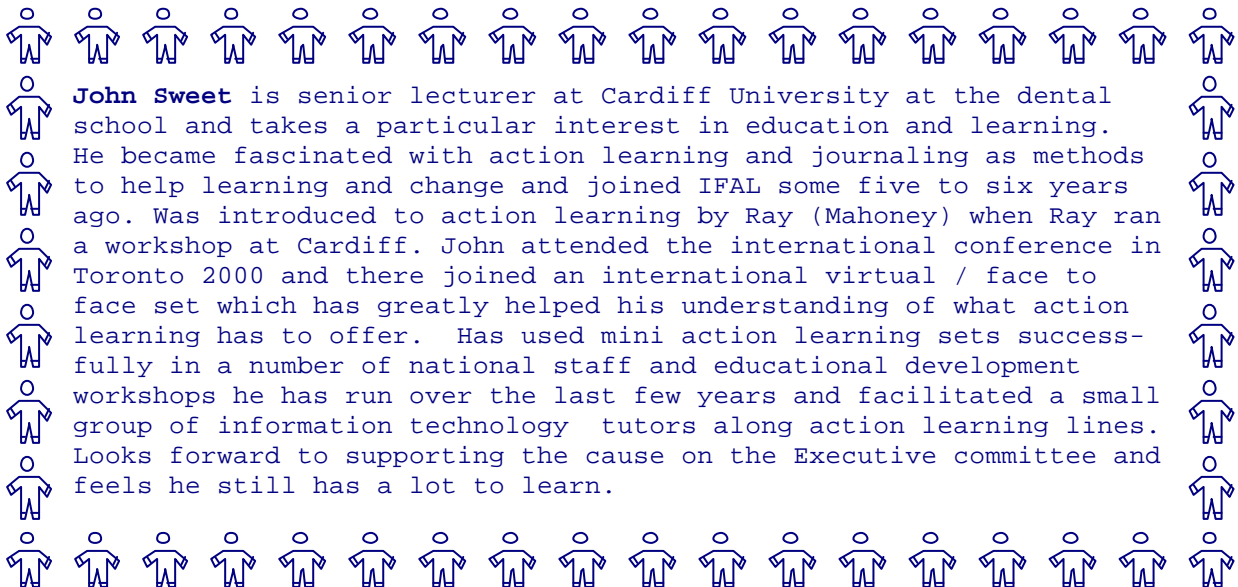
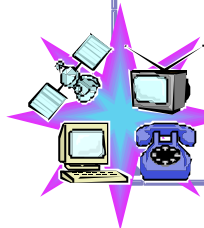
If you are interested in attending or presenting a workshop please contact Pam Wright so that we can establish if there is sufficient interest to go ahead.

p.wright@lancaster.ac.uk

Is anyone interested in forming an internet action learning set?

Mark Mortimer would like to join an internet set he is at:

mark.mortimer@kerobi.com



John Sweet is senior lecturer at Cardiff University at the dental school and takes a particular interest in education and learning. He became fascinated with action learning and journaling as methods to help learning and change and joined IFAL some five to six years ago. Was introduced to action learning by Ray (Mahoney) when Ray ran a workshop at Cardiff. John attended the international conference in Toronto 2000 and there joined an international virtual / face to face set which has greatly helped his understanding of what action learning has to offer. Has used mini action learning sets successfully in a number of national staff and educational development workshops he has run over the last few years and facilitated a small group of information technology tutors along action learning lines. Looks forward to supporting the cause on the Executive committee and feels he still has a lot to learn.



From armchair activist to action

Here I am procrastinating over an article for the newsletter. It is the end of January 2005 and I have kept Pam waiting again for my article. I know that I am a last minute person and use the excuse that it helps my creative juices flow when I am under pressure. That really is no excuse, just a 'cop out'. Now if I use action learning questioning as to why I am late again there are a few possibilities.

Firstly, I am hesitant to write because there is so much to write about. The government and its continued support for the war in Iraq. How does Tony Blair remain so popular, when I consider his ethics for the Invasion of Iraq so shoddy?

Secondly, I am still coping with grief for the loss of my daughter and now whole families are wiped out by the Tsunami. Nations are in shock. Families are being destroyed in Iraq. Yet President Bush throws the biggest re-election party ever, when sons, daughters, fathers, mothers are dying in the name of freedom in Iraq.

Thirdly, am I writing this article to prove how aware I am of current events? Am I writing this article to impress you the members? Am I writing as a form of therapy for my own grief situation?

How do I turn myself around from being an armchair activist, who worries about things but does nothing to change the situation?

Well, I believe I am writing it for the need that I see for action learning to be used in Schools, Communities, Family groups, political parties. In fact any

where that it will raise awareness of the fraudulent misuse of power that is corrupting our world at present, in the name of spreading democracy. I sometimes get discouraged that we are only around two hundred or so souls banded together in IFAL-UK and, hey, what can we do. Then I realise how many people we encourage to look for new answers, to ask the awkward questions, to think about feelings in the action learning groups we are involved with. This fills me with hope. I was overjoyed when I first heard from Sean Cunningham, our new Chair of IFAL-UK, about the work groups going about using action learning in the Irish Civil service. That is what we need in organisations and groups all over the place. People working together to solve their issues. Not being led by Western governments to free them, from oppressive regimes, but people learning for themselves what freedom means to them and how they can achieve it.

Now getting action learning going on a global scale was the life mission of Reg. W Revans and I ask myself and all of you what are we doing to bring this to the attention of others? What have I done to encourage others to think for themselves to question what Tony Blair and his government are doing in my name?

My daughter was so good at busting my ego bubble when I was pontificating to the family group about how immoral our government or how right I was to resign my membership of the Labour party. She would then question me about what I was going to do about all this ranting and raving. Now she is departed from this world I must keep her spirit of challenge going for myself. This

for a world class dreamer will be challenging, but I am becoming determined to get on with it. The start is this article and two films I was given over Christmas. "Bowling for Columbine" and "Farenheight nine eleven", both, I am sure you are aware, were produced and directed by Michael Moore.

I have read Michael's books previously and become enthused by the questions he raises in them. However I found the films very powerful and encourage you to give them some airspace. They should be viewed by all thinking open minded people. I suspect they would have a greater effect on closed-minded bigoted people though.

What makes me say this? Well I have relatives in Texas USA and some of them think Michael Moore is in league with the devil himself. They do not question anything George W. does in their name. I find this very worrying.

.....then I realise how many people we encourage to look for new answers, to ask the awkward questions, to think about feelings in the action learning groups we are involved with....

I do not believe him to be a great savour, but he is challenging what is going on in Washington. He is raising questions about the ethics of George Bush.

What am I doing about a Blair government that is proposing house arrest of anyone suspected of being a terrorist, whether there is any evidence or not. This arrest to be unconditional.

Colleagues we have much work to-do let us not rest on our laurels and pretend there is nothing I can do to challenge what is happening. Let us get active and just maybe there will be fewer deaths in families to grieve, from illegal unhelpful wars in the future. That people making fortunes from the sale of rotten drugs can be stopped.

That an ant can move a rubber tree plant.

**Ray Mahoney,
Editor IFAL-UK Newsletter.**



The next Newsletter will be published in May

**Please send contributions directly to Lancaster (preferably by e-mail) to:
*p.wright@lancaster.ac.uk***

**Pam Wright, IFAL Administrator
Dept of Management Learning
Management School
Lancaster University
Lancaster LA1 4YT**

DATE FOR COPY 15th April

Action learning in Sydney schools— action learning in educational improvement. The experiences of Sydney educators.

What is action learning?

Action learning is a process of learning from our actions and experiences by taking time to question and reflect. Our work tends to be so hectic that we often neglect structured reflection. The power of action learning is that in tackling the set project we acquire the tools to help us face future problems and challenges more confidently and effectively. Action learning is about questioning. Learning to ask the right question is fundamental. A good question can change the way we see situations and ourselves and can be a permanent eye-opener. Action learning creates an opportunity for us to become conscious of what we do, how we think and what we believe. Thus action learning encourages a climate of learning within individuals and the organisation. It is useful in every day work, in development programs, as a follow up to training courses, to help people manage change, to develop emotional intelligence and to provide networking opportunities.

The context: Why we got involved in action learning

We began action learning in 2000. We were all looking for ways of making a difference for students and thus making teaching more rewarding for teachers. The issues we face in educational transformation are incredibly complex. No simple management plan or training program was going to be able to provide the learning we required to deal with this complexity. Work based learning was attractive to all of us. Action Learning was a preferred option of our Superintendent and the District T & D Committee was exploring ways of incorporating it into our program in 2000. The District Conference featured a workshop which served as a catalyst. Development of a pilot was chosen as a way to begin. This area of action learning was new to us and we couldn't find much in the way of literature in an educational setting to help us.

What are we trying to achieve?

The best learning outcomes for all our students. This requires a focus on instruction at all levels. Each of us had a specific program or project that we worked on.

What have we done?

- researched action learning thoroughly
- identified people with experience and knowledge and spoken to them
- found a professional set adviser to lead the group
- formed a team to document and evaluate the process so that we could share the learning with others. As well as being part of the set one member looked at the school based outcomes, one member kept a record of process and a third member examined and documented the role of the set adviser. There is now a group of people trained to act as advisers in the District
- devoted time and money to project
- established a set consisting of eight principals and a professional adviser from outside education. We came from a mixture of primary and secondary backgrounds and included both highly experienced and recently appointed principals. We shared the same motivation in joining...the commitment to kids and to transforming our schools so that all our students get the best possible learning-developed a code of ethics or rules eg confidentiality, no dropping out, no missing sessions-planned, implemented and evaluated a six-month pilot. This consisted of two initial planning meetings; one full day per month for six months; a formal report on progress to be produced by each member each month; contact with individual members of the group between meetings to support the work we were undertaking; formal evaluations after each monthly meeting; ongoing communication with the set adviser and examination of the process with our Superintendent who acted as sponsor of the pilot. This structure has been refined and our new structure is included later.
- planned an extension of action learning to be implemented in 2001 and to be continued into 2002/3. The initial group will continue to work on the project but with some modification to be trialled. We shared information with all St George Principals at our District Principals Conference. The program has now been offered to all princi-

pals in the district and there are now three other principal groups and a deputy principal group running.

What have we achieved?

Initially we developed:

- ❖ the model for leading the learning and developing in our schools. This new learning has been applied in the real setting of our work in numerous ways, not just in the area of the group project
- ❖ a group of set advisers who can work with other groups across the district, thus adding significantly to the T & D resources available to schools
- ❖ Twenty six principals trained and actively using the competencies that we have developed

Longer term we have developed a work based learning culture.

What have we learned?

- action learning is costly, long term, and requires a major commitment
- Action learning is not a series of fuzzy get togethers, a mutual support group or a social get together
- Action learning is a focussed project and an intense learning experience that really does change how we think and act now and in the future
- the set adviser is critical to the success of the group
- the initial phase needs to be pure action learning and thus rule driven if we are to learn and to make significant changes to how we work. It isn't easy for principals to stop giving advice etc
- the beginning can be slow and frustrating. You will experience Edwards' *J curve* and Aitkins' *ouch phase* if real learning is happening. You need to have strategies in place to stay committed through that period
- quality learning relates to real work
- a repertoire of new frameworks for considering leadership/change
- vastly improved listening and questioning techniques
- learning can be accelerated in a group of like-minded people, where trust and mutual respect are present. We have established collegiality and truly professional relationships

- a range of practical resources to share with each other. These cover a range of T & D and development activities
- clearer understanding of the role of principal especially the complexity of the role.

Some Practical Issues

What makes a good set

When we come together to learn about ourselves we need to find a set of people with the skills to support thinking and acting differently. A good set needs to have between five and eight people with:

- common areas of work
- common level of authority
- capacity to build trust (confidentiality)
- willingness to commit time
- willingness to follow procedures
- capacity to be reflective and insightful about self and others
- capacity to be generous (questioning)
- desire to learn about yourself as a leader

What does action learning look like?

Initially you should be prepared to commit to a six month program during which time you need to meet for one day per month.

The day might be structured as follows:

8.00 – 8.30 A Development issue that is presented by the set adviser

8.30 – 5.30 Presentations from each set member

5.30 – 6.00 Planning and debriefing

A presentation could take the following form:

Ten to fifteen minute presentation using set headings below

Forty-five minutes of questioning from the set

Five minutes of feedback

Headings / Questions used to present to the group:

What am I trying to achieve?

What is happening? What have I done since last month?

What have I achieved / learnt?

What do I need help with?

What can we share?

- our experiences of action learning in an educational setting
- support in setting up a group

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • readings, suggestions for funding, names of professional advisers and associations <p>When to start a project This wouldn't be my first priority as a new principal. Two of us got involved towards the end of our first year and found that timing to be excellent. We'd settled in, had some understanding of the most challenging issues in our schools and had developed relationships with a group of like minded principals. You could begin looking out for readings, funding, suitable colleagues, a possible project and so on from now.</p> <p>The project The project is the vehicle for learning. The best projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ are ones that you lead ➤ are about real work ➤ have a measurable outcome ➤ allow for a flexible solution ➤ involve a problem or challenge relating to people, improving processes or innovation ➤ deal with our core business <p>Getting started You could phone our group for some preliminary contacts, information and support. We have materials that you could show to others if you were trying to get a group together.</p> <p>Reading The best introduction that we found was Krystyna Weinstein, <i>Action Learning: A Journey in Discovery and Development</i>, Harper Collins, 1995. This text covers all the issues really well although it does not have a schools focus. There is a new, updated edition available now. We found that some of the literature was very poor, in fact it would do more harm than good if you didn't have a set adviser and were relying on it for guidance.</p> <p>Definitions in action learning The Set: The Group of people, usually five to seven in number, who form the action learning project team. The set must be prepared to commit to the project and to the rules that the set negotiates. Confidentiality and trust are vital. The set adviser: Skilful, knowledgeable and resourceful person who steers the action learning team through the learning process. They should be trained, have personal experience of</p>	<p>action learning, and be confident in working in action learning.</p> <p>The work or project: This must be real life work that you have to do. Action learning helps you do your existing work more effectively, it doesn't create more work or new work. The set can have a group project or each individual can have their own. This project should be substantial and challenging. It needs to last for a least 6 months.</p> <p>A possible activity: Building professional dialogue This activity requires groups of three to six. We planned it for a group of teachers but will do a simplified version as part of the workshop. When working with peers you could allow about thirty minutes per person. Rotate the roles so that each person has a turn as speaker. Hand out the questions to the group well in advance. Suggest that each person thinks about one question in depth, they may even make notes to bring along.</p> <p>Possible questions: What is the most valuable learning experience that you've had? How do you ensure that you have balance in your life? What drives you as a leader? What metaphor would you choose to describe the last ten years of your career?</p> <p>Roles Person One: Answer the question. Take about five to ten minutes. No one is allowed to interrupt you or comment. We must all practice respectful listening. Person two, three and four: You are to wait until the person has finished. You can then begin asking questions. The questions should aim to help you understand what the first person was saying and help them to be reflective about their experience. They must not be judgemental or suggestive. Continue for about ten minutes. If you have time this could be extended to about twenty-five minutes. Person five: You can make notes throughout. You may note values, beliefs and attitudes or you could copy down the questions that they were asked. When the questions are finished you can sum up what was said in about three to five minutes. The notes should then be given to the speaker.</p>
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Reflection

Was it hard keeping to the rules eg no interrupting? How did it feel to be the speaker or person one? Was the activity useful? How does this vary from the discussions we normally have in executive meetings, T & D sessions etc. Where could you use an activity like this?

Questions in action learning

Good questions provoke thinking, promote insight, stimulate reflection, help problem solving and challenge assumptions. The sort of questions that you might ask include:

How will you measure success?

How will you know when you are successful?

What will get in the way of this working?

What could ensure that this project is successful?

Can you articulate where you think that you will go next in this project?

In order for this to happen who has to change most? You or them? Why and How?

You said that you were process orientated. Would you elaborate?

Which areas would you like to explore first, next?

What is the first thing that you would like to see happen? Why?

What were the strengths that you brought to the school?

Can you describe Mr X using only their strengths and not mentioning any negatives?

Worthwhile? Who defined this?

Would your team be surprised to learn that you felt this way?

How is this situation different from others?

What were the alternatives that you considered? Why did you choose this one? Why did you discard the others?

What should you do differently next time?

What would it take for Mr X to be successful?

How far would you go to achieve this?

Have we helped you?

Is there anything you would have liked us to have asked you?

Role of the principal in change for improvement

One suggestion that I've found useful relates to leading the learning. It is suggested that at any time in your school you should be leading one major change and should be a participant in one other project.

A final word

While we've stressed the serious side of this we had tremendous fun and are all committed to continuing. We have learned an enormous amount about being a principal. We also know that in a crisis there is a group of people we could turn to for support and who we know we can trust to be honest and professional.

We've also grown and evolved over the last three years. The original set still meets, but in a slightly altered format, we now take turns as set adviser. Five of us also are acting as set advisers for other groups of principals. Twenty-six of us are now actively involved in the program. We have helped peers in two other districts get started.

This work has been a St George team effort and the resources and ideas come from a variety of sources. Mr Chris Yates (Chris Yates and Associates) was our facilitator and set adviser and Dr John Edwards gave invaluable advice. We are happy to share our knowledge with others and can be contacted through Christine. Simmons@det.nsw.edu.au or Sue.Cran@det.nsw.edu.au

Christine Simmons and Sue Cran

September 2003

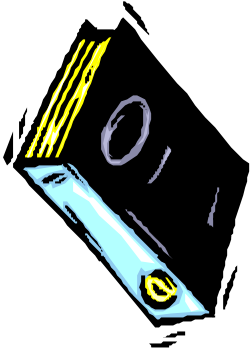
Action learning in Australian Government schools

The above is an article written for the New South Wales Department of Education and Training by two government school principals. I had the pleasure of designing and developing their sets.

Their report says all I can about the results. Questions about process or anything else can be addressed to me, Chris Yates, at yatescig@btinternet.com or on 01484 865 536.

Postscript dated 25th January 2005

All work based learning is growing in popularity in NSW. The Action Learning Sets have continued to exist and thrive. They have now spread to three districts and doubled the number of people involved since the article was written. C Yates.



Books...Books...Books

Action Learning Matters - how to use it in the voluntary and community sector

Action Learning brings small groups of peers together to make progress on key work issues. It has been used extensively in the private and public sectors since its invention by Reg Revans in the middle of the last century. Using a questioning and challenging approach to problem-solving, participants are encouraged to balance action and reflection..

The ALM Project (2001-2004) demonstrated that Action Learning is an effective capacity-building tool benefiting individuals and organisations in the voluntary and community sector. The project has published Action Learning Matters as a resource for organisations who wish to introduce the method either internally or with relevant networks.

Action Learning Matters is presented in a blue A5 sized box. This contains 26 coloured cards and a 32 page notebook. The cards are laminated and have curved corners to help them stay in good condition. Accessibility has been considered with the pack using font size 14 and approved colours. Each card also has a shape in the top right hand-corner for further ease of identification.

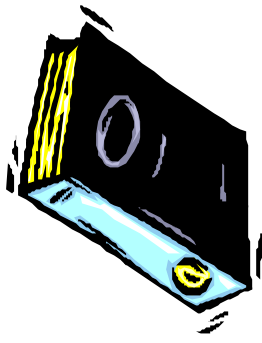
The ALM Project consulted widely with people who had experience of Action Learning Programmes as set participants or facilitators before writing Action Learning Matters. There was a consensus that the pack should be presented in a way that allowed people to use it flexibly according to their specific needs at the time. Hence, the cards are separate and can be used in whatever order makes sense to the particular user. A contents list appears both in card format and in the notebook allowing people to return the cards to the original order should they wish to do so.

There are six colours and shapes used in the pack representing different topics. These are:

- Information on the pack, guidance on using it and a resource list
- Description of Action Learning theory and practice, different ways to use it, its benefits for individuals and organisations, its values
- Aids for reflection for the different roles and processes in Action Learning
- Checklists for Introductory Workshops and Set Meetings
- Storycards describing the experiences of a Training and Development Officer who attempts to introduce Action Learning to their organisation from establishing interest to evaluation.
- Example questions that lead to insight

A key element of Action Learning is taking time out to reflect on your learning. Many people experience profound changes in their ways of thinking during an Action Learning Programme. It is valuable to record this journey in a learning log and the notebook can be used for this purpose by both set members and facilitators. As with the cards, it is hoped that people will use the notebook in a way which makes sense to them.

(Continued on page 16)



Books...Books...Books

Action Learning places a huge emphasis on the power of questioning in helping people move forward on key issues. This is reflected in the pack with about one third of the cards consisting of questions and the notebook exploring the impact of questions.

The action learning approach can appear quite alien to people in the voluntary and community sector who are used to helping others by offering information and advice. It can take a couple of sessions before the real benefits of working in a questioning and challenging way are perceived. With these facts in mind, Action Learning Matters includes inspiring quotes from people working in a diverse range of organisations and geographical levels on what action learning means to them.

An example is:

"I have always been open to and excited by new learning experiences but I didn't realise how much I needed action learning until I tried it. My set has been supportive when I was down, challenging when I needed new ideas and accepting when I lacked self-confidence. They have made me realise that I can develop my job and given me the strength of purpose to do it"

Action Learning Matters costs £20.00 and can be ordered by copying the slip below and sending it to NACVS, Arundel Court, 177 Arundel Street, Sheffield S1 2NU

I would like to order _____ copies of Action Learning Matters at £20.00 each

Name:

Job Title/Role:

Organisation and Address:

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Telephone Number:

Email Address:



IFAL LIBRARY



The IFAL library is a unique collection of over 1000 articles and books on Action Learning. For minimal charge, the Lancaster office will supply hard copies of the complete list of items and a short list of particularly important practice-related publications (£5) and copies of articles (£1.25). We believe that this is a valuable resource for practitioners, researchers and others interested in Action Learning.

Please send copies of any articles or reports on action learning you have written for inclusion in the library.

IFAL Librarian

Copies and details of publications or requests for a listing of publications and/or copies of articles should be addressed to:

***Pam Wright IFAL Administrator,
Dept of Management Learning, Lancaster University,
Lancaster, LA1 4YX,
email p.wright@lancaster.ac.uk***





THE INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR ACTION LEARNING

THE WORK OF THE CHARITY AND THE BENEFITS OF MEMBERSHIP

The International Foundation for Action Learning is a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity, set up to promote action learning. This is a process for improving management in which people learn together by direct involvement in the identification, analysis and treatment of their own real problems and opportunities. It is a form of learning by doing.

Action learning is used in many industries, businesses and services in this and other countries. Examples are:

1. managing director groups;
2. helping the unemployed to start their own business;
3. developing skilled managers as they take on new responsibilities;
4. improving productivity in retailing and manufacturing companies;
5. bringing about operational change in large organisations;
6. improving services in health and education.

Action learning has demonstrated that it can help individuals and organisations to adapt in a fast changing world

Since 1977 when it was set up ALT/IFAL has become well-known and respected as a source of information and support for those who practice or are interested in action learning. IFAL encourages the use of action learning by:

1. Information - On request, responding to requests and promoting discussion by phone or letter.

2. Library - IFAL has a substantial library (over 1000 items) of writings about action learning, many of which are not available elsewhere. Copies of items may usually be purchased for the cost of photocopying and distribution. Some of the most useful are unpublished discussion papers.

3. Newsletter - A regular newsletter provides the opportunity for members to share their ideas and experience, it is used to spread news and views about the process of action learning and its development. It includes book reviews and reports of conferences, and promotes discussion through correspondence and articles.

4. Meetings/Conferences/Workshops - IFAL arranges meetings around the country for the purposes of exchanging information and to highlight problems in the application and use of action learning. Conferences are held regularly and occasional regional meetings provide a local forum for debate and learning.

The design of these meetings is always participative following the principle of action learning that people learn best from people who are also learning.

5. Network of individuals and organisations - Through its international membership, IFAL constructs a network of people who can support one another in their diverse experiences of action learning throughout the world in private, public and voluntary sectors.

In summary: IFAL exists to identify and encourage a network of enthusiasts who will support and develop the work of action learning worldwide. It is an educational charity and in order to do its work properly it appeals for financial and practical support from those who believe in the value of action learning

IFAL'S REGISTERED CHARITY NUMBER IS: 273242