

Report from IFAL- UK

It is my sad duty to report that Harley Frank, who was a long- time member of IFAL and recently served on the Executive Committee, died unexpectedly on the 13th February 2004. Our sincere condolences go to his family and friends and others who knew him.

On the same sad subject, I think most of you know by now that Ray Mahoney's daughter, Deborah, died suddenly whilst abroad a short while ago. Our thoughts and condolences go to Ray, his wife Barbara and Deborah's two brothers, boyfriend and others who were close. A stark reminder of the fragility of life.

You will understand, therefore, the reason for the postponement of the AGM and the reason I am writing this introductory page myself. The re-scheduled AGM will now take place 22-24 November in Dublin and contributions are invited for workshops and presentations. Please contact me as soon as possible. You will separately be receiving nomination forms for the Executive Committee, and as we have recently lost two members, volunteers will be welcomed!!

Don't forget without *your* news there is no Newsletter, contributions can be sent at any time, see below for deadline for next issue.

Pam Wright
Administrator

The next Newsletter will be published in January 2005



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

OR on a disc plus hard copy, to
Pam Wright, IFAL Administrator,
Dept of Management Learning,
Lancaster University,
Lancaster, LA1 4YT

DATE FOR COPY 17th December 2004

The learning cycle: Steps in the process of learning and change

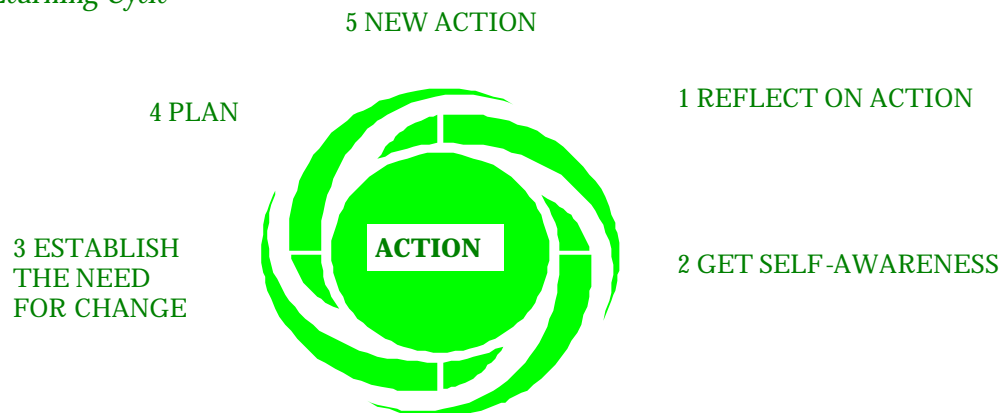
Learning is a complex process that is frequently understood as an intellectual activity of gaining knowledge or as a combination of intellectual and physical dimensions, required to develop a certain skill. However, by describing it that way, we leave out a number of key components of the process, which in turn impact the result.

From the many definitions of learning, I like the one by Argyris (1993): "Learning is not simply having a new insight or a new idea. Learning occurs when we take effective action, when we detect and correct error." Linking learning to a change is the key facet that I would like to highlight, given the fact that my experience with adults learning is aimed at people changing the way they interpret and judge events, and ultimately the way they respond and react to daily life challenges.

From this perspective, there are several steps in the learning process, some of which lead to change. In order to understand the steps of the learning cycle, it is helpful to locate where an individual is in the process. This is especially useful for those who support others through coaching, as the model allows to offer more appropriate supports and tools, according to what stage of the process the person is going through.

Figure 1.

The Learning Cycle



The Relevance Principle

This learning cycle begins with an **Action**. The reason to root the process in an action, is that it brings relevance to the learning. Various authors have used the relevance of the current action as an important launching platform for the learning process (Dewey, 1916; Vigotsky, 1988; Kolb, 1984, Revans, 1982, Bruner, 1986, Fosnot, 1996). The relevance of the current action seems to bring the ownership and interest required to engage in a learning process. So rather than starting with a concept chosen and brought in by the instructor or the expert, who then tries to instill the contents into the learners, taking a current action

that directly involves the learners is the preferred place to start. This points to the need to set up learning scenarios where the learning can flow naturally from an action that is both current and relevant to the learner.

But action by itself does not imply learning. While plain repetition and practice may develop skills and expertise in certain domains, it is called implicit or tacit knowledge (Hayes and Broadbent, 1988). What we learn without being aware of it, what we are unable to explain or express in words, is tacit knowledge and is the heart of many successful decisions based on “intuition”. However, we don’t have control over that knowledge, as we do not know what it is, therefore we are unable to share it, to transfer it to others, to build upon it or even to apply and repeat it consciously. It just “happens” – sometimes successfully and we are happy about it. But we are also unable to make any corrections when our “intuition” guides us in a direction that ends up being less successful.

Reflection on Action

So for the purpose of building a conscious learning, we need to start the learning process, and the next step is to reflect on what happened, to draw meaning from an action taken.

This step was first defined by John Dewey (1916)., for whom learning depended on action. Knowledge and ideas emerged only from a situation from which learners were able to extract experiences that had meaning and importance to them. Be it through individual reflection on the result itself or hearing what others have to say, if we don’t realize if and why an action was successful or not, we cannot develop any learning. *We just jump from one action to the next.*

This step to reflect on action involves a pause to ponder what happened, to look back and develop observation skills by describing a result:

- What happened?
- How did it go?
- Why so?

The US Army is one of the few organizations that has institutionalized this reflection step after an event. Their “After Action Review” procedure (Sullivan and Harper, 1996, Garvin, 2000) is implemented formally or informally after an exercise or an important activity, to identify successes and failures and how to perform better the next time. With a similar goal as our Reflection on Action step, the first part of After Action Review procedure involves the questions:

- What did we set out to do?
- What actually happened?
- Why did it happen?

This step is necessary to launch the learning process, as it creates a first moment of awareness. Learning should go beyond tacit and intuitive knowledge, and has to include

the possibility of articulating in words the connections within an event, the elements that played a role and the relationship with the result obtained. As in a scientific experiment, we invite individuals to observe carefully, to describe the variables, to formulate relationships between the variables, and to develop hypotheses that can be tested.

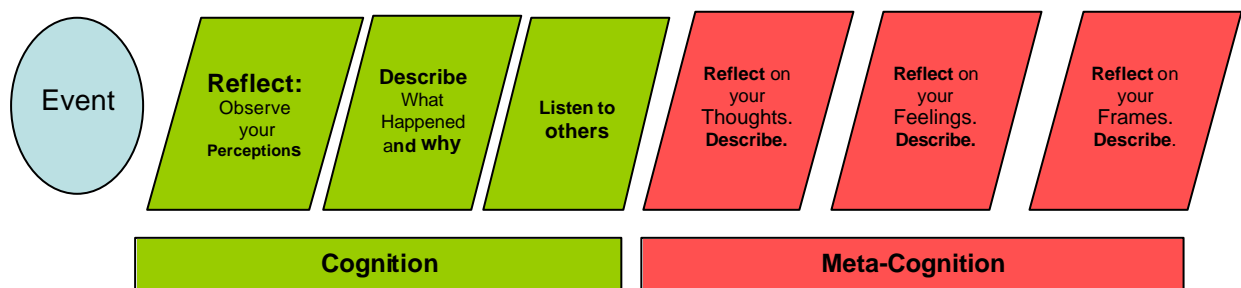
This principle of reflection on action and the impact on learning has been researched by Figueiredo and Barros (2004). The authors highlight that every student comes with his/her own knowledge, which will only be questioned when a new experience shows that the knowledge is not applicable, or cannot explain a result or event. But for this to happen, the students will have to reflect on the event, describing it and explaining it with their frameworks. The instructor (acting as a learning facilitator) can invite students to talk about such an event, with the purpose of having them:

- observe what they perceived
- describe it in their words
- reflect on the thoughts the event triggered in them
- reflect on the feelings the event generated in them
- reflect on the frames of observing and describing

This describes a process that can increase in depth going from mere cognition to meta-cognition (Ribeiro, 2003), from being aware of what happened to developing awareness of how their frames, their thinking patterns, and their assumptions and values condition their interpretation of what happened. (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Feedback Step at Cognition and Meta-Cognition Levels as defined by Figueiredo and Barros



It is clear that our own mental paradigms define (and limit) the spectrum of our perceptions: our values, cultural conditioners, habits, experiences, assumptions etc. will shape what we describe, and what we are not even able to perceive. For instance, if we are used

to participate freely in a meeting of peers, we may not perceive this as something to be described, while someone coming from a cultural context that honors seniority (like the Malay culture) may immediately notice that people were talking without waiting for their elders to go first, which can be perceived as disrespectful. This is the reason why it is a good idea to design this step in a group setting (Figueiredo and Barros, op.cit.), where differing perceptions open other participant's minds to new perspectives, helping them become aware of their own blind spots and broadening their horizon. This was recommended by Dewey in 1916 : "These [learning] situations had to occur in a social context, such as a classroom, where students joined in manipulating materials and, thus, created a community of learners who built their knowledge together." (op.cit.).It also can pave the way to deeper questions, addressing the meta-cognitive level, by uncovering mental models, assumptions and beliefs (i.e. "What makes me see things as I do, as opposed as how you see them?").

The more diverse the group, the richer the reflection experience, because group members will hear, and be confronted by, differing frames and experiences to challenge their own experiences and assumptions. The greater the variety of voiced perceptions, the deeper the learning among members. As participants become familiar with this step, they will increase their observation skills, knowing that they will be asked to reflect on what they observed and perceived. This is a secondary benefit from this step.

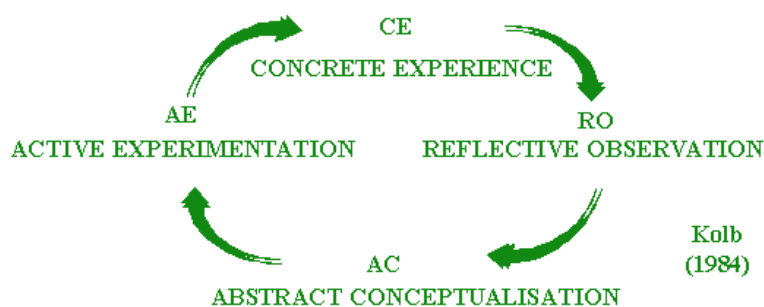
Both the Learning and Change model I propose and the "After Action Review" approach, as well as other learning cycles (Kolb, 1984) invite us to search for reasons and meaning, looking for the "why".

Self-Awareness

One important element that is not explicitly mentioned in the different learning cycles (Juch, 1983 cited by Greenaway, 1995) is the reflection on the individual's contribution to an event.

Figure 3.

Kolb's Learning Cycle



Source: Greenaway, 1995

(Continued on page 6)

While Kolb (Figure 3) goes from concrete experience, through reflective observation to the abstract conceptualization in order to make meaning, there is a factor missing that has a significant impact on the learning. I am referring to the question: *How did I contribute to this?*

This question transcends the mere description of an event or the variables that played a role in the results, and concentrates attention on the individual's contribution to the result. This is not to disqualify the other intervening factors, but it brings to the front what an individual has done that made an impact on the result. This step helps the person increase awareness of the power and impact of one's own actions, be it words, decisions, attitudes, etc.

We live in a fast paced world, where we spend our time doing and reacting to what others do. We invest time interpreting the behaviors of others, trying to make meaning, with a significantly low percentage of our time devoted to reflect on ourselves (Figueiredo and Barros, op.cit). This contributes to frequent feelings of being exposed and at the mercy of events, of other people's actions and decisions, with a restricted level of influence and no control of what happens. This feeling of powerlessness is at the root of much of the stress we suffer these days.

It may well serve a purpose to attribute all the responsibility for events that occur, outside of our area of control: it is easier to blame others than to acknowledge our own contribution. To do so, however, is to short change our learning, and to inhibit our personal growth. Research done with students (Morais & Valente, 1991 cited by Ribeiro, 2003) showed that understanding their own cognitive processes helped the students to control and manage them, increasing their feelings of ownership of the task, of responsibility for the results, and of raising their self confidence with respect to their capabilities. This seems to indicate that the more we know about ourselves, the more resources we have to control our own decisions and actions, and to feel better about ourselves.

This is a principle very much used in psychological therapeutic contexts, as well as in conflict resolution settings (Stone, Patton and Heen, 1999). Goleman (1996) took the Socratic "Know Thyself" to a number of pragmatic levels in his work on Emotional Intelligence.

I call this step the self-awareness, which is the time to explore how *WE* contributed to what we obtained as a result of the action. It is not enough to realize how successful or not we were. If we don't discover what our contribution was, we lose our chances to learn.

The Need

However, if we are looking at learning as changed behavior, the real turning point is the next step: Establish the need for change. If we understand what happened, realize how we contributed to it, but don't see any need to change our behavior no change will occur. ***The need is the fuel for change..***

(Continued on page 7)

The energy required to effect behavioral change, to learn and try out something new, to “unlearn” a pattern of behavior, is directly proportional to the benefits that are anticipated to accrue to the individual making the effort.

This step has not been made explicit in the various versions of learning cycles. A possible reason may be that the learning cycles focus on intellectual learning and address how individuals develop new mental frameworks or a new conceptualization of reality. Within this scientific approach, an individual would analyze an event, reflect on its variables, establish hypotheses and try them out in a new experiment. This cycle, however, seems to have some shortcomings when it addresses change of human behaviors, which include emotions that increase the complexity.

The need for change can originate in avoidance of certain results or attraction of certain results.

When the avoidance of certain results is the main origin of the need, it is desirable to explore what scenario would be the attractive one. This principle of the power of the positive goal was developed extensively by Cooperrider (1990). Observing that the traditional approach to change had been based on an inventory of what is not working, what needs to be solved, David Cooperrider and his associates at Case Western Reserve University challenged this approach in the Seventies, suggesting that attention be put on what works. “The tangible result of the inquiry process is a series of statements that describe where the organization wants to be, based on the high moments of where they have been.”(Hammond, 1998). By building a positive goal-scenario, that is strong and appealing, it will be possible to sustain the energy level required to draw and implement a plan.

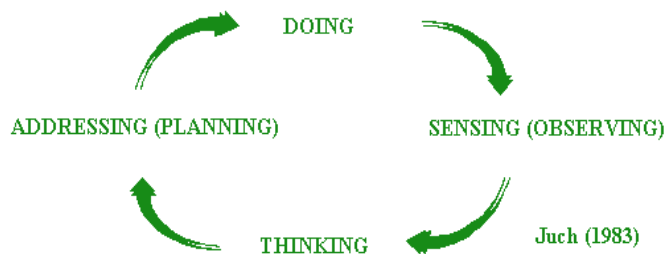
The Plan

While intellectual learning can remain at the awareness level, if we understand learning as changed behavior or, as in Argyris (1993) words, “Learning occurs when we take effective action”, the energy provided by the need has to be channeled into a feasible, concrete plan.

Bert Juch (1983), cited by Roger Greenaway (1995) has collected and listed 17 different learning process cycles linked to various learning theories, and came up with his own version (Figure 4).

Figure 4

Juch’s 4-stage Learning Cycle



The importance of a Plan cannot be overstated. We may have the wish to change a behavior, but in absence of a plan for making it happen, the chances of failure are high. The plan connects **what we want** with **what we can do** and control, with what we can influence. A plan gives us back the power we think we have lost when we feel victims of failure. (See Appendix)

The New Action

Finally, the learning is not really anchored until it is expressed in a changed behavior, in other words, until the plan becomes a **New Action**. All learning cycles have a spiraled shape, leading into a new action where the cycle can restart.

Applying the Change Model

During the course of a session designed with the Action Reflection Learning methodology (Rimanoczy, **2002**) the Learning Coach will intervene at different appropriate moments to help the group and/or the individuals to move along this change cycle, with questions, tools and concepts. That does not mean that there is only one change cycle going on, and that all the participants go step by step through the process together. Most frequently, there are several simultaneous cycles going on, some individual, some for the team, and even several for each individual as they address different behavior challenges.

In addition, as learning does not occur in an instant, it requires repetition and practice. It is critical that the individuals put into practice what they have learned. For this reason, ARL interventions take place over time so that participants try out new behaviors, practice some new skills and get feedback from their colleagues on their results. Program members then report on their experiences when they next meet and reflect with their teammates on their experience and what they have learned. With the help of the Learning Coach the team members analyze the obstacles and seek alternate ways to overcome them.

The purpose of the Change model is to establish a framework that helps both the learner and the coach to understand at what stage of the process they might be stuck, in order to find the appropriate tools/support to help moving the process forward.

Learning is a complex process that is frequently understood as an intellectual activity of gaining knowledge or as a combination of intellectual and physical dimensions, required to develop a certain skill.

Isabel Rimanoczy

APPENDIX

Characteristics of a successful Plan

For a plan to be successful, it has to be feasible and realistic. Planning does not necessarily refer to extensive long term strategic plans. A plan can be as simple as “I will remind myself to smile on the phone by sticking a smiley face on my screen”. The simpler, the better the chances to succeed. Behavior change plans are mostly about little things.

Nevertheless, there are some elements to pay attention to when drawing a plan.

Table 1.

Elements of a Plan

Identify and act on behaviour chains	What behaviours or context conditions are linked to the one you want to change? Example: I cannot listen carefully when I have urgent pending issues
Make them feasible	Concrete small steps, clearly defined: ‘I will check what my urgent issues are, before agreeing to a meeting where I need to listen carefully’
Ensure available resources	Time and timing (how long and when): ‘The late afternoon is the critical time’ Knowledge (know what) ‘I will stick a reminder on my screen’ Skills (know how) No special skills required
Establish measurements	How will I know that I completed a step? ‘I will look at the reminder and just know’
Involve others around you	Who can help/support? ‘I will ask my PA to remind me not to book meetings in the late afternoon’ Be clear in your requests, get clarify about the terms of their acceptance ‘I will explain that her support is needed, but has to be sensitive to critical meetings’

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Notice Board



IFAL AGM 2004

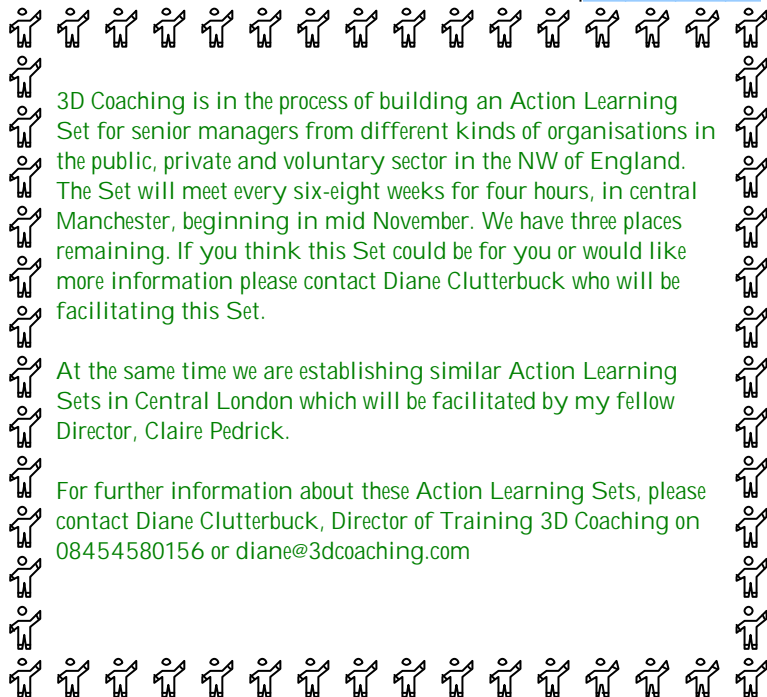
**This has now been re-arranged for
10 December 2004 in London**

**Friends House
173 Euston Road
London NW1 2BJ**

At 16.00 hrs

Please note there will be no workshop this year.



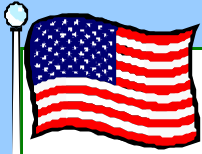


3D Coaching is in the process of building an Action Learning Set for senior managers from different kinds of organisations in the public, private and voluntary sector in the NW of England. The Set will meet every six-eight weeks for four hours, in central Manchester, beginning in mid November. We have three places remaining. If you think this Set could be for you or would like more information please contact Diane Clutterbuck who will be facilitating this Set.

At the same time we are establishing similar Action Learning Sets in Central London which will be facilitated by my fellow Director, Claire Pedrick.

For further information about these Action Learning Sets, please contact Diane Clutterbuck, Director of Training 3D Coaching on 08454580156 or diane@3dcoaching.com

Notice Board



Upcoming Changes at IFAL-USA

IFAL-USA has been on a hiatus for the past year and a half. In order to spark new interest and membership, we have decided to make some changes in venue and leadership. Effective this coming Fall, the new base for IFAL-USA will be at Columbia University, Teachers College. Leadership will be recruited from the doctoral student body of the Department of Organization and Leadership. Look for more information about these exciting new changes in upcoming newsletters and at the IFAL-USA website, www.ifal-usa.org.

Judy O'Neil
IFAL-USA
Leadership Group

Peter Renwick is interested in joining an action learning set in the Winchester/Portsmouth/Southampton/Chichester area. He would also be happy to help establish a new set with others who are interested.

Please contact Peter on 01489 877 877 or email: peter@managing-matters.com



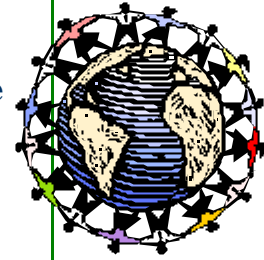
Ghislaine Caulat is currently doing some research work and experimentation with the facilitation of audio action learning sessions. She would be very interested to find out whether anyone has any experience of audio action learning. Ghislaine would like to share her experience and learn from other people's.

Contact Ghislaine on 01442 841436 or email her at: Ghislaine.Caulat@ashridge.org.uk

Food for thought.....

If we could shrink the Earth's population to a village of precisely 100 people, with all existing human ratios remaining the same, it would look like this: There would be 57 Asians, 21 Europeans, 14 from the Western Hemisphere (North and South) and 8 Africans. 51 would be female; 49 would be male. 70 would be non-white; 30 white. 70 would be non-Christian; 30 Christian. 50% of the entire world's wealth would be in the hands of only 6 people and all 6 would be citizens of the United States. 80 would live in substandard housing. 70 would be unable to read. 50 would suffer from malnutrition. One would be near death, one would be near birth. Only one would have a college education. No one would own a computer

When one considers our world from such an incredibly compressed perspective, the need for both tolerance and understanding becomes apparent.



What's important?

It's nice to be important but it is more important to be nice

Attitudes are more important than abilities

Motives are more important than methods

Character is more important than cleverness

One small deed is more important than a thousand big ideas

Poems for lost loved ones

"Death is nothing at all. I have only slipped away into the next room. I am I, and you are you. Whatever we were to each other, that we still are. Call me by my old familiar name, speak to me in the easy way which you always used. Put no difference in your tone, wear no forced air of solemnity or sorrow. Laugh as we always laughed at the little jokes we enjoyed together. Let my name be ever the household word that it always was, let it be spoken without effort, without the trace of a shadow on it. Life means all that it ever meant. It is the same as it ever was; there is unbroken continuity. Why should I be out of mind because I am out of sight? I am waiting for you, for an interval, somewhere very near, just around the corner.

All is well."


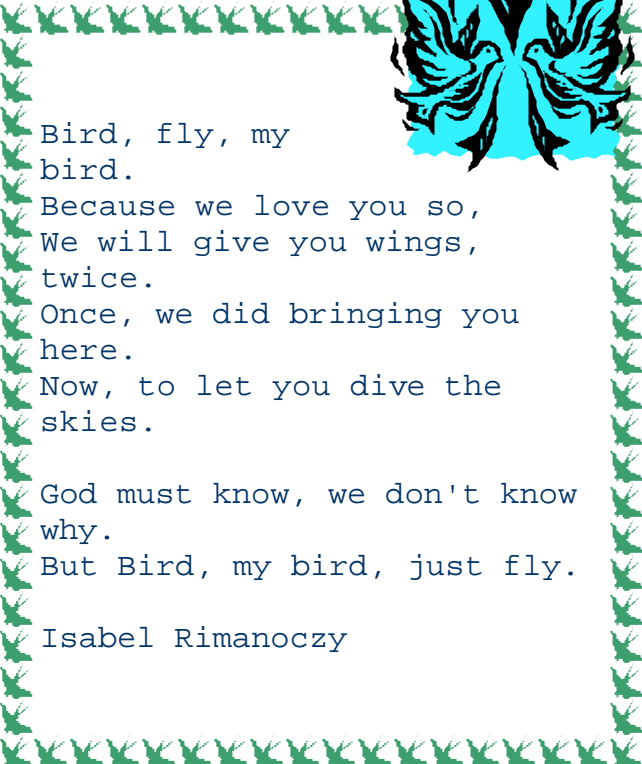


"God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life" John 10:10

THE SHARING OF GRIEF

*I cannot carry this burden alone, the road is
too steep and the pain too great.
I shall only get to the top of the hill if I am
able to lean on a firm shoulder
whose strength lies in the reality of the feet
which bear its weight.
The sharing of grief is the only solution to
the crisis that surrounds
bereavement in our age.
To share a person's sorrow is to accept their
reality and to acknowledge
the fact that none of us is immune from
death.*

**Rev Dr Simon Stephens,
Founder of
The Compassionate Friends**



Bird, fly, my
bird.
Because we love you so,
We will give you wings,
twice.
Once, we did bringing you
here.
Now, to let you dive the
skies.
God must know, we don't know
why.
But Bird, my bird, just fly.

Isabel Rimanoczy

Some defining descriptions of Action Learning

- A powerful form of problem solving combined with intentional learning in order to bring about change in individuals and the organisation.
- Essential elements of action learning
 - tackling real tasks in the real world and the real role
 - learning with and through each other
 - taking individual responsibility and actually implementing solutions and plans.
- At the heart of the process is the 'action learning set'. This is a group of 4-6 individuals who meet at regular intervals for each member to explore a challenging open-ended problem or opportunity. Every member in turn works on his or her 'task' and the others as 'friends' provide support and challenge. The aim is to help each member both to tackle the task and to learn from this.
- A basis premise of action learning is: 'there is no learning without action and no (sober and deliberate) action without learning' (Reg Revans)
- Another premise is that **learning** has two elements: **programmed knowledge** (traditional instruction or knowledge in current use) and **questioning insight**. This is expressed in Reg Revans equation $L=P+Q$
- By using the knowledge and experience of a small group of people combined with skilled questioning individuals are enabled to re-interpret old and familiar concepts and produce fresh ideas - often without needing new knowledge.

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 read recently (or written yourself) for inclusion in the library.

*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