

Action learning

What is action learning?

Action learning is a group approach to problem solving and learning to bring about change in individuals, teams, organisations and systems.

Working in small groups known as “sets”, usually with the help of a trained facilitator, people tackle important organisational or role specific problems and learn from their attempts to change things.

How does it work?

Typically five to eight people come together to form a set. There must be trust within the group. The set meets for a full or half day, every four to six weeks, over several months.

Participants take it in turn to share a problem, challenge or opportunity to the group. The group then asks open questions of the presenter. This helps the presenter to gain new insights – into why someone might be behaving in a certain way or into

an option they hadn’t considered – leading them to reframe the situation and identify actions they can test for themselves.

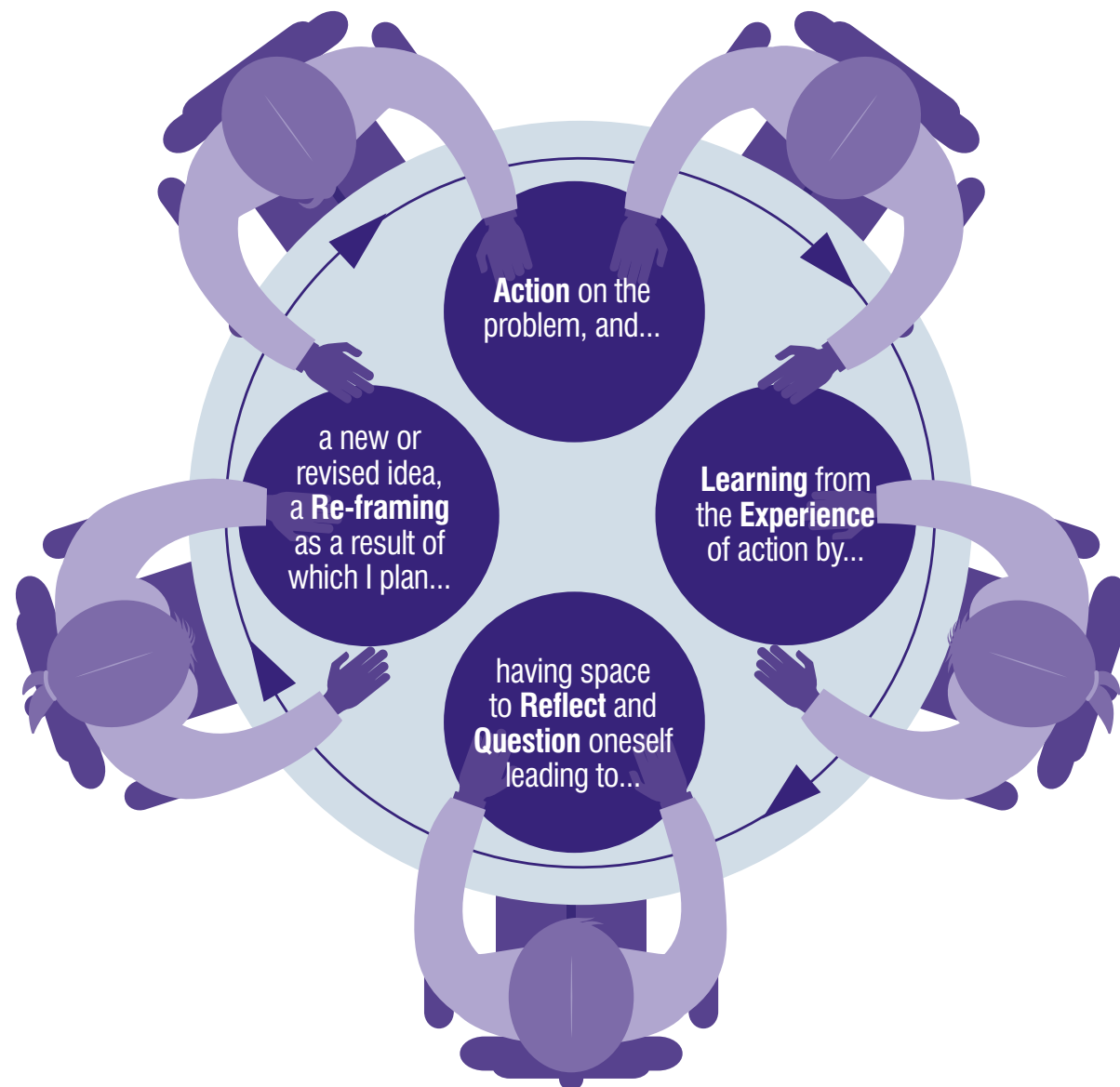
At the start of the next meeting, the presenter is invited to tell the group about what actions they applied, what they did and where that took them. This can be valuable learning for everyone. A person may continue to explore aspects of the same situation in later sessions, or they may bring something different at their next turn to share.

Why is it important to bring a “problem” or “challenge”?

An action learning problem is a vehicle for learning. With the help of others, we learn about the problem itself and about ourselves, the way we think, act and relate to others. This learning helps with how we navigate and work on the problem presented.

What is in it for me?

The skills we can learn during the course of the programme range from active listening, asking open questions, and navigating alternative solutions; ultimately the aim is to achieve positive outcomes whilst experiencing a new way of learning.



A continuous process of learning and reflection supported by colleagues, with the intention of getting things done

McGill & Beaty, 1994



Q: How does this tool help me achieve diverse thinking in my organisation?

A: Exploring the views of different people on the same or similar challenge leads to starting an open conversation about challenges in our role or in the workplace. By working through this process with a small group you not only learn a new way of working but develop an appreciation for seeking the views of other people to help when making decisions and finding solutions.