

A HEAD START WITH VIRTUAL ACTION LEARNING

Virtual Action Learning sessions are just as powerful as the original in person meetings. While virtual AL can take some time and effort to get used to, similar results can be achieved in both leadership development and problem solving.



Image: Mies de Koning coaching the WIAL-USA board in a Zoom Gallery

A quick Internet search will provide you with great tips and tricks for leading online team meetings. My biggest takeaway from these articles is the importance of time management and working from a clear agenda or meeting structure. This makes Action Learning a great fit for the virtual space, because our script fundamentally integrates such structure and timekeeping guidelines.

Effective virtual AL does require slightly advanced coaching skills in my opinion. Here are three quick tips to give you a head start.

1. Limit distraction

Regular participants in webinars and remote conferencing know that distractions are always just around the corner. Ask participants to prepare their space so they can focus on the virtual meeting and use headphones to filter out distracting noise. When engaged in virtual AL it should not be an option to mute your audio in order to have a quick side conversation with the colleague sitting right next to you.

Ask the group: How are we doing with focusing on our meeting and limiting distractions?

2. Pause to move forward

I believe that slowing down the pace of conversation is important in all Action Learning sessions, because it creates space for reflection, sensing and questions. In virtual meetings this is of extra importance due to an estimated two seconds delay for most systems to communicate.

Ask the group: How are we doing with taking our time to communicate effectively?

3. Make interactions very visible

Unless participants are calling in on a telephone line, turning off your camera should not be an option. Visibility of non-verbal behavior is essential for the group to be most effective. As a coach, be extra bold with hand gestures, leaning in, and other body language to remind the group of your authority.
Pro-tip: Zoom video conferencing includes a useful gallery feature that allows you to see all faces at the same time.

Written by Mies de Koning, SALC, USA
tel: +1 917 794 1006
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