

ACTION LEARNING EXPERIENCE OF DOMINICA RED CROSS SOCIETY (DRCS)



As part of the WIAL Gives Back initiative, the Dominica Red Cross Society (DRCS) received free WIAL coaching for four Action Learning sessions so that it could find breakthrough strategies for an urgent and important problem. For the Action Learning exercise, the organization's Director-General, Mrs Sandra Charter-Rolle, selected a diverse group comprising employees of the organization, a Red Cross volunteer from the community and two representatives from the private sector. Mrs Charter-Rolle participated as a member of the group and as problem presenter.

Members in the group were unanimous in their feedback that the sessions helped them to formulate breakthrough strategies, develop their leadership skills and build necessary rapport between the stakeholders represented in the group.



At the onset, the Director-General stated the problem by describing a dire situation faced by the organization but after working with the group during the first session the problem was reframed to be: The Dominica Red Cross has been unable to find a sustainable means of funding its operating costs and special projects over the long term. When the problem was stated in this way, the group members were fired up to ask questions, dig into the roots of the problem and then to generate breakthrough solutions.

In an interview with Director-General, Mrs Sandra Charter-Rolle, she provided the following feedback:

What were your initial thoughts about Action Learning before engaging in this exercise?

I had not heard of action learning prior to this session so I was intrigued to know how this was going to assist in resolving our problem.

What is the greatest benefit you believe you got from the Action Learning project?
The interaction with the participants in a coordinated and guided process, the ideas that were generated, the learning process and skills building which took place whilst generating solutions to the problem.

What was the impact on the external members – the Red Cross volunteer and the private sector representatives?

I believe their input allowed us to view things from a different angle and not just the Red Cross way. It gave them a greater understanding of how Red Cross operates and the challenges with which we are faced. They were very willing when first approached to join the small group and gave their commitment to be on board to the end. And now they have even agreed to continue to work with the Red Cross team with implementation and to provide further support and guidance.

What impact did inclusion of the external participants have on the DRCS staff members who were in the group?

The Red Cross team was impressed with the submissions of the external members and their commitment to the process.



How was this experience different to the usual problem-solving methods that you use?

This was a more guided process. Everyone participated through listening and providing feedback. It allowed one to assess their leadership skills and that of others throughout the process. There were concrete decisions taken and work commenced immediately. Participants were all at ease and looked forward to the next session. It was not a talk shop.

What was your greatest learning from this exercise?

The ideas that were put forward and that action learning is a simple and effective process.

Do you intend to use Action Learning again in the future? If so, how?

Yes, for other areas of planning and problem solving, utilizing the same process with WIAL assistance.

What other comments do you have at this time?

The process was indeed fruitful and met and exceeded my expectation. The Coach was excellent which helped as we were new to this system of learning.



Three other DRCS staff members and the two private sector representatives offered the following comments:

Finding solutions may sometimes be difficult but with Action Learning, it breaks down the problem into varied perspectives and helps you think strategically at tackling small goals. The team also learned discipline to listen actively to the opinions of others and provide positive feedback. This is not something that is easily achieved but the Action Learning process ensures that it is done before moving forward in any aspect. I would recommend the program to anyone or any team who has an interest in finding solutions and team building. [Ms Christine John, Accountant - Dominica Red Cross Society]

I have experienced firsthand how the Action Learning experience has enhanced my effectiveness and productivity in my field of studies. I have also become more aware of how assumptions, beliefs, attitudes, and organizational interests influence thinking, decision-making and strategic planning. Most importantly, this training has helped me to

develop my soft skills especially leadership, self-confidence, emotional intelligence and becoming more assertive when communicating. [Sylvester Jno Baptiste, DRCS staff member]

I came to appreciate the structure, often there is continuous chatter of the most outspoken people, but this setting fosters a more collaborative type of learning and sharing. It helps us to recognize and use various leaderships styles that many of us may not have thought of. At the end it brought us actionable strategies and effective problem solving. [Hihson Bougouneau, DRCS staff member]

It was focused on solutions coming out of the participants [and not the facilitator]. The basic ground rules appeared at first to be restrictive but in the end, they helped keep the thought process well streamlined. [Rawlins Bruney, private sector representative]

What was different- The structure allowed skilled training while still solving real problems. open ended questions helped good ideas to germinate and grow without arguments [Nicholas Rolle, private sector representative]

Two key factors contributed to the success of this Action Learning project: The head of the organization – the Director-General was actively involved as a fellow-learner in the group; the group was very diverse. There was diversity among the staff members selected for the group in terms of gender, roles, seniority. The community volunteer provided another perspective while the private sector representatives brought project writing skills as well as insights into how best to engage the private sector when seeking funding.

Several of the strategies developed by the group have been implemented successfully and the Dominica Red Cross Society intends to continue following up on implementation of the remaining strategies that continue to be relevant.

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