

ACTION LEARNING IN GOVERNMENT SECTOR IN THE CARIBBEAN

The Government/Public Sector is often considered to be shrouded in tradition and what some may consider dated processes. This often extends even to the methods used for performance development of its employees. Forced to deal with the impact of global economic downturns and the increasing difficulty in sustaining growth and development in their respective countries, Caribbean nations have embarked on a master plan to create a more prosperous future. This overall strategy relies on the rapid transformation of the public sector so that government services can ably support, promote and facilitate initiatives in other sectors.

The Canadian-funded Caribbean Leadership Project (CLP) has been designed to support transformation of the public sector in twelve Caribbean countries. The Leadership Development Program (LDP) is the CLP pillar that aims to catalyze the transformation by engaging 250 of these countries' senior public sector leaders. CLP has selected Action Learning as the main vehicle for its Leadership Development Program. So far over 150 leaders from the twelve countries have participated in the program, each one using Action Learning in a group to find breakthrough solutions to urgent and significant problems while developing leadership skills. Now graduates of the program are introducing Action Learning to government services in their respective home countries.



The Project Manager for the Basic Needs Trust Fund in one of the countries presented his problem as the failure of beneficiaries to maintain the facilities after a project has been completed and handed over to them. Through his Action Learning group, the problem was reframed as his failure to adequately engage the various categories of stakeholders for each project. This reframing of the problem led to generation of several breakthrough strategies including a brief on the problem to the full cabinet of government ministers in order to gain support for the other strategies; enhanced stakeholder engagement built in to each project design; and closer networking with the parliamentary representative (political) for the community in which a project is

based. This was one of the many government sector problems thrashed out by LDP participants using Action Learning.

Several LDP graduates have sought to introduce Action Learning to their work teams in their home countries. Three LDP graduates from Suriname organized a group of 26 participants, who were drawn mainly from the government sector but included some private sector partners, to complete the Foundations in Action Learning. The team expects to have at least half of these participants become Certified Action Learning Coaches. One LDP graduate from Trinidad & Tobago, Mrs Jacinta Bailey-Sobers, as the Permanent Secretary (Head) of the Ministry of Public Utilities was so convinced of the power of Action Learning that she had several of her staff members participate in the *Foundations in Action Learning* Workshop led by Mike Marquardt. When she was transferred to head the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, she promptly identified a group of 29 staff members at different levels of leadership in the Ministry for immediate preparation to be Action Learning Coaches. By the end of April 2016, 24 of them had completed all three workshops required for WIAL Certification of Action Learning Coaches and are expected to complete the certification process by year end. Mrs Bailey-Sobers is of the view that Action Learning will help her build strong teams across the entire Ministry, will develop leadership skills and will foster collaborative problem solving among departments so that the organization may be transformed.



Action Learning Workshops in which both Government Sector and Private Sector employees participate prove to be very productive as each group gains a better appreciation for each other's roles in development."

At the end of July 2016, another LDP graduate, Mrs Barbara Cooke-Alleyne, Registrar at the Barbados Supreme Court and to whom the Court Process Office reports, chose to introduce Action Learning to that department. She engaged two Action Learning Coaches to work with the staff over two days. The participants worked in six separate groups, each group dealing with a different problem. At the end of the two days, the groups presented their solutions in a plenary session. Mrs Cooke-Alleyne intended to

strengthen the teams within the department; improve camaraderie and mutual respect among staff members; and engage the staff in joint problem-solving with respect to critical problems of the department.

Mrs Cooke-Alleyne said: *"I felt that this format was the most appropriate method as it would allow*

- *The group to rediscover the positives of the department and of their colleagues.*
- *Each person's voice to be heard*
- *The group to learn about each other's concerns*
- *To find solutions together*

There was some resistance to this format of training. However, this did not deter the majority of the staff from enthusiastically participating. The groups were mixed comprising juniors, middle and senior management. In plenary it was clear that the mixed groups and this method was successful in identifying the issues and finding solutions.

They left the training feeling hopeful of the future of the department. One manager said it was extremely productive and he had the opportunity to hear a junior he thought to be of a quiet personality reveal passion and clarity in his solutions for the department. One middle manager said that it brought to the fore that togetherness promotes production. One junior said she wanted to do this method of learning again as it was very beneficial.

*For me I saw one of the juniors in a different light - he came over as thought provoking and engaging. In speaking with the different groups, they all thought the exercise was beneficial. All who participated were converted to this method of learning: **Action Learning- trust the process!**"*

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