THE AMBIDEXTROUS ORGANIZATION AND ACTION LEARNING: MAKING THE CONNECTION

When the WIAL newsletter editor asked me if I would write about the connection between **Action Learning** and the **Ambidextrous Organization** (AO) I became excited. The reason was because the principles of Action Learning are ubiquitous in the AO, they're everywhere! I might even go as far as to speculate that if one were to model an organization and its objectives after the Action Learning model and principles they might end up with a specific kind of Ambidexterity, _contextual ambidexterity_. Let's take a look at some specific ways in which Action Learning supports the Ambidextrous Organization. This article takes the form of a checklist with links for more extended reading to a series of Linkedin articles.

- **Balances Attitudes:** Action Learning develops a positive ATDT or _attitude toward divergent thinking_ from organizational members, a key asset in AO's. In organizations where quick convergence to solutions is favored, divergent thinkers and their ideas can often be persecuted or marginalized.

- **Creates a Learning Culture:** Action Learning helps to develop a learning organization by bridging a gap between standard _organizational learning_ and a _learning organization_ in which everyone "learns how to learn together". This learning in action combines programmed knowledge with questioning, reflection and action to create strong performance.

- **Supports AO Leadership Models:** Action Learning supports ambidextrous leadership models like _Complexity Leadership_ and _Ambidextrous Leadership_ by: 1. encouraging entrepreneurs. 2. informing leaders, and 3. supporting managers.

- **Changes Mindsets:** some people have a _fixed mindset_ while others have a _growth mindset_, Action Learning promotes the latter. If your people who consistently favor exploitation do it because they feel it's right to execute it that's one thing; but if they do it because of a fixed mindset that's another thing all together!

- **Develops EQ:** Action Learning develops Emotional Intelligence skills to include self-awareness, management of emotions, self-motivation, empathy, handling relationships, and mindfulness.

- **Helps Learning Leaders:** Action Learning helps strengthen new burgeoning learning positions in organizations like the CLO (Chief Learning Officer) by giving them a new powerful tool for their toolbox.

- **Perturbs Learning:** routinely using Action Learning can <u>create a constructive culture of _perturbation_</u> in which the organization intentionally "shakes things up" or "perturbs" its processes to see what new learning comes out of it.

- **Keeps Exploitation at Bay:** using Action Learning to problem-solve promotes exploration to the level of exploitation by elevating its status, effectively keeping the <u>"tyranny of the urgent problem"</u> and its champions from sabotaging your meeting with a hasty 60% solution.

- **Promotes Strong Ambidexterity:** Action Learning has the power to <u>change cultures and the AO is no exception</u>. Of the <u>3 types of ambidexterity</u>, _temporal_, _structural_, and _contextual_, using Action Learning regularly can turn your organization culturally into a contextually ambidextrous organization, the strongest form.

- **Captures and Communicates every Type of Learning:** in one of my articles I talk about _intentional learning_ and _unintentional learning_, _structured learning_ and _unstructured learning_ and how <u>learning comes in many forms</u>. Action Learning, because it doesn't have a destructive storming process, is built on the highest norms, has a coach to capture learning, and promotes inclusiveness, psychological safety and respect, is the best tool available to encourage and capture learning in all its forms.

- **Speaks the Physics of the AO:** a major problem facing organizations today is they speak an outdated language written before the turn of the last century using metaphors borrowed from Newtonian physics. Concepts such as _cause and effect_, _predictability_, _certainty_, the reality of an observable world and _reductionist, mechanistic_ and _linear thinking_ are all ideas which are too simplistic for today's business world. Action Learning is grounded in modern day language and ideas taken from quantum physics, a science which has largely replaced Newtonian physics, and guides the Ambidextrous Organization. To execute the world through the lens of the AO is to consider things at the sub-atomic level. It is a world which takes into account _discreet events_, _emergence_, _complexity_ and the relationships between objects. A relationship rich environment, AO's consider concepts like _chaos theory, butterfly effect, order_ and _change,_ and _structure_ and _flexibility_ and Action Learning is the tool best suited to interpret such a world.

The magic of the Ambidextrous Organization is it takes both _exploitation_ and _exploration_ into account in its practices, a construct which more closely models real life. The challenge of ambidexterity is that 30+ years of research has proven that _"exploitation drives out exploration"_, as companies learn to do something well they begin to lather, rinse, and repeat on those practices and stop learning new things, exploring, and innovating. Action Learning, as illustrated through this checklist, brings _exploration_ back into the equation, giving it a legitimate voice at the table and restoring balance back into the organization.

Written by Dr. Eric Zabiegalski
CALC, USA
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Dr. Zabiegalski is available to talk to your organization or venue about this ground-breaking research. Contact Eric Today and read his other articles on LinkedIn.