

## BUILDING COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

As Action Learning Coaches in an action learning session, one of our objectives has always been to guide and support the learning of the team members. Learning can be achieved through many ways and the action learning coach has a range of methods and skillsets to bring about that learning within the team. We use the power of questions, the keen eye of observation, the lenses of neutrality, the presence of sensory acuity and the action learning process to support the individual and team learning.

Being a member of the certification committee, I have reviewed many reflection and application papers submitted by candidates as part of their certification process. One of the common challenges of the coaches is not to facilitate the learning by guiding the group through the coach's own ideas and thoughts. There is a tendency for the coaches to lead the group based on their own knowledge, expertise and wisdom on the subject and the desire to help the group learn. So coaches end up being facilitators by asking questions like "Do think working on xyz is a good idea?" "Should we now prioritise the work?" or the coaches may end up sharing what the team is supposed to learn and start to share leadership models and theories.

An important mindset of the action learning coach is the adoption of collaborative or peer learning. Cornell University describes "Collaborative learning can occur peer-to-peer or in larger groups. Peer learning, or peer instruction, is a type of collaborative learning that involves students working in pairs or small groups to discuss concepts or find solutions to problems." And further "Collaborative learning is an educational approach to teaching and learning that involves groups of learners working together to solve a problem, complete a task or create a product. Collaborative learning is based on the idea that learning is a naturally social act in which the participants talk among themselves. It is through the talk that learning occurs."<sup>1</sup>



The action learning process is very much a peer learning process and the action learning coach is a guide to enable and encourage the peer learning to take place. In this process, the coach needs to be constantly reminding himself or herself that the coach's views, ideas and direct help in solving the problem and teaching the learning is not needed. What the coach needs to do is to support the creation of the environment in which learning can take place.

To have that peer learning, the coach must have trust in the team members that every team member has the knowledge and wisdom to solve the problem and also be able to enable other members to learn, and the coach's advice and help is not required.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: <http://www.gdrc.org/kmgt/c-learn/what-is-cl.html>

Sometimes this is against our nature of wanting to help the team learn. The team does not need our help because the team has the knowledge and wisdom to solve the problem and learn themselves.

What the coach has to do is to open the space and create a safe environment for the team members to take the risks to have their voices heard, not matter how small or insignificant they think their voices are.



One of the things the coach can do is to be cognitive of their own personal judgements and holding off these judgements so that they do not come out as leading questions or questions that suggest to the team what they should be or not be doing and learning. The coach has also to let go of the idea that the team has to learn certain things or they must learn at the level which the coach think they should be at. Sometimes the coach may unknowingly impose on the team what they should learn and not learn. The coach needs to observe the team with an open mind and open heart and using the Situation, Impact, Do differently (SID) model, ask questions to the team to let the team surface their own learning and actions.

The action learning coach is the conduit to the team's learning and not a generator of the team learning. So it is my hope that the coaches will continue to develop their own level of self-awareness and mindfulness and also learn to empower the team to create and own their learning and performance.

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