

DEVELOPING DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION PROFESSIONALS THROUGH ACTION LEARNING

On becoming certified as an action learning coach, I saw potential in using action learning to advance the diversity and inclusion (D&I) agenda in organisations through the development of inclusive behaviours and the fresh approach to addressing business challenges. As a committed advocate of providing a level playing field, the immediate benefits of action learning were clear to me.



Two years on, four cohorts of D&I professionals have experienced action learning. Inclusive Employers (a membership organisation promoting diverse and inclusive workplaces) launched the first D&I professional qualification in the UK. A forward thinking organisation, able to see the potential, they were keen to include action learning in the program.

We now run multi – problem action learning sets, involving two delegates (from each cohort of eight), bringing D&I related business challenges to the sessions.

Steven Copsey, Course Facilitator, Inclusive Employers comments “Introducing action learning has provided a powerful self-reflection and problem solving tool for our delegates, and the feedback has been incredibly positive. Participants have been from a range of roles and industries, including charities, education, finance, legal, and various government departments – and it’s that diversity of industry and experience that has really allowed them to re-assess their actual business challenges. However, without the sometimes rigorous process of action learning, I really don’t think the underlying issues would have been discovered. Organisations have shifted their entire nation wide strategy based on these sessions and I’m really looking forward to progress reports and seeing how these changes were not only implemented but continue to be maintained and re-assessed”.

Knowledge share

The knowledge share has been the most immediate and obvious part of the learning. D&I as a profession is very much evolving. D&I professionals are often working as the sole subject matter expert responsible for policy and practice. Sometimes, the impact of this can be limited opportunities for sharing experience and best practices. The greatest benefit of action learning has been the shared experience, rich discussion and valuable insights for both problem presenter and the rest of the group.



Action learning has surfaced an appreciation that others are facing similar sticking points in their work. Due to Steven’s efforts, by the action learning session the cohort

have bonded, and we believe this is deepened through the shared experiences of action learning.



Role modelling behaviours, and the power of questions

Within the D&I environment we often talk about the importance of visible role models. Action learning has played a part in helping D&I professionals recognise the importance of developing their own inclusive behaviours.

Delegates identified how the use of questioning can make a huge difference to personal impact and group performance. Some delegates mentioned that they will introduce the practice of encouraging questions into their work environments.

The value of spending time understanding the real problem

Participants learned that spending getting to the route of the problem is well worth it. We observed that in most cases the problem was redefined during the session.

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