

HOW WE CONDUCT VIRTUAL ACTION LEARNING SESSIONS

It all started in the South of France in September 2019. I began an Action Learning leadership program in a state organization responsible for the payment of pensions to retirees.

A multi-phases plan starting with upper management and strategic executives had been decided. Action Learning was to gently accompany the managerial transformation of the organization.

A two-year transformation plan through collaborative intelligence had been designed to change the managerial posture of the entire structure of an organization that employs 100 managers and 800 employees.

35 top managers rapidly discovered the power of Action Learning and identified solutions to their most complex and oldest problems. A 92% rate of satisfaction sanctioned this 6-month initial phase.



A seminar took place at the end of February 2020. The purpose was to announce to the operational managers the start of the second phase. The positive results and appreciations obtained, thanks to the use of the method during the first deployment, were also presented.

Throughout the day, several demonstration workshops were successfully conducted. Ultimately, all the executives were convinced of the efficiency and the positive originality of the Action Learning method.



Some days later, I was informed that the organization's CEO had been infected with the Corona Virus. Simultaneously, because of the pandemic situation, French government decided to shut down the entire country.

Overnight my mission was interrupted. Over 650 employees were sent home to work from home. The teams were separated with the mission to handle the urgent missions concerning only their department.

This is how the first confinement in stress and the intensive use of tools like Teams or Zoom began. Such tools demonstrate their limitations and offer little psychological safety. Yet, meetings have been multiplying and increasing the work and mental load.

One of the managers testified to me that a certain violence is emerging in the remote exchanges and that the constant use of video is perceived as an intrusion in the private life. Trust disappears as each department reverts to operating in silos, and the cross-functional collaboration gained through the Action Learning sessions evaporates.

After several conversations with executives, I realize they themselves were under a lot of stress about conducting online meetings. What would foster collaboration? The need to find a disruptive online collaboration tool that is compatible with Action Learning becomes clear. An online platform is needed that would allow to coach a session in gentle management without video while respecting as much as possible the WIAL Action Learning process.

During our CALC training, Daniel Belet, SALC, explained a set where one of the participants had to attend via speaker phone. The greatest questions came essentially from one team member that day. Kristy Alcouffe, a fellow Action Learning coach, shared her experience with SquareMeeting. It is an online co-development platform without video developed by Viti-Coaching, a French start-up specializing in online meetings.

She also forwarded an article from the Yales School of Management on organizational behavior research explaining it's easier for people to comprehend emotions from voice alone than when watching video. The study suggests that even in a digital age, audio-only conversations offer clear communication benefits.

The results underline the importance of listening, a skill that's going to be increasingly important as the workplace grows more global and more diverse. Their clients are among the top 50 companies in France and they have already trained over 600 Coaches.

A demonstration is more convincing than words! I discovered a platform that can be adapted to the conduct of Action Learning sessions. It is a user-friendly, ergonomic tool that facilitates authenticity.

After several exchanges and demonstrations, Viti-Coaching's management was convinced by the efficiency and professional complementarity of Action Learning. We decided to work together to design a platform that meets the needs of VAL for Virtual Action Learning. We conducted a dozen demonstrations with their development team to determine the features needed in a VAL session like the choice of leadership skills or soft skills to work on.

Co-development comes from Action Learning. They both share a common core that has allowed us to build on a solid foundation, a fluid and instinctive tool that meets the needs of our coaches and our clients.



All the team members who have practiced sessions on the VAL platform are unanimous about the power of the online method. They especially appreciate being able to focus on the challenge without worrying about their image. The fact that all the exchanges are structured, framed and staggered also reassures them.

Following the users' comments, the displayed elapsing time favors the dynamic. Above all, it is the quality of the exchanges and the presence of the coach's voice that comes up the most in the feedback. There again, the coach role is essential.

Action Learning has gained an increased visibility thru the partnership we have developed with Viti-Coaching. At this time, we offer a VAL platform exclusively for WIAL coaches.

Virtual Action Learning is now part of our service proposal to help remote teams collaborate and find innovative solutions that can transform the world.

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