

MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT WITH ACTION LEARNING

Background of project

Anh Duong JSC is a SME company in the field of environmental technology with 60 employees, established 2 years ago and currently growing rapidly. From discussion with the CEO, Mr. Memo Binh, we know that the company spent the first year to achieve very good results in business, and this year 2019 will focus on improving working capability for staff, most importantly management level. The company has a middle and senior management team of 12 people, they are quite young and dynamic and have not been trained in previous management.



The CEO realized that the management capability of the middle level is still weak, they only focus on completing the tasks and have not done well their management role in the team. The communication between senior leaders and the middle management team about the company's vision, strategic direction and implementation is not yet clear, leading to many problems in daily collaboration. Previously the CEO intended to send the management team to attend the 6-month management training program from other institutes, but he postponed because of the long duration of the program. And he is afraid that the theoretical approach to management will not help his team effectively.



We introduced him to the Action Learning method, and organized an introduction session to experience AL for a group of 6 people, and the CEO acted as a PP to share his real problem in the company. After 90 minutes of the session, the CEO was impressed and convinced about the power of AL for team problem solving. After that, we had a follow-up meeting with the CEO and he shared his company structure, their difficulties in developing the management team and the expectations so that we could embark on the design and application project by using AL for Anh Duong JSC.



MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT WITH ACTION LEARNING May to July 2019

Design of project

The project is designed for middle and senior management team of the company, with a total number of 12 participants, implemented within 3 months with 2 main phases as below

PHASE 1: TRAINING ABOUT THE ACTION LEARNING METHOD

In phase 1, we provide the training programs to participants in 2 topics: **Foundations of Action Learning (2 days)** and **Leading With Questions (1 day)**.

The purpose of this phase is to help participants get the essential knowledge about Action Learning, and through these experiential workshops, they will use the actual challenges of participants to develop Leadership competencies needed in the fast-changing work environment as well as the development of team coaching skills to become a competent and confident Action Learning coach. Each participant will have the opportunity to practice as an Action Learning coach and be a member of a dynamic Action Learning group. Participants deeply understand the power and importance of questions for the management level, and how they will use the question to lead better.

Before each training topic, we have a pre-survey to understand the knowledge and skills foundation of the participants. After each training topic, we conducted a survey to receive participants' feedback on each program.

At the end of phase 1, we conducted a comprehensive survey to acknowledge the feedback of all participants on the most valuable and applied knowledge they received from the program. At the same time we received feedback from participants about what is the most important problem that their organization needs to focus on and solve.

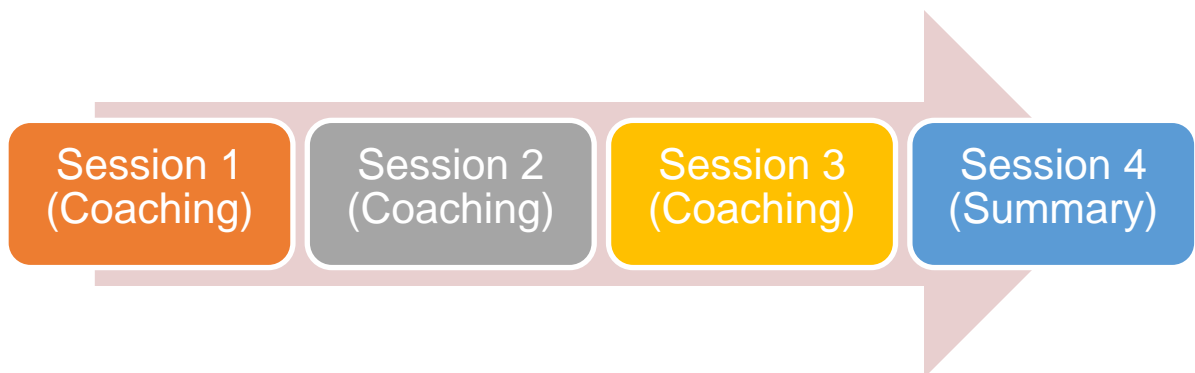


We also discussed with BOD to select 5 essential competencies for management that the company wants to focus on and development.



PHASE 2: APPLYING ACTION LEARNING TO SOLVING ORGANIZATIONAL PROBLEMS (SPAL)

From the list of problems that the managers responded to, the BOD met and decided on the two most important problems that the company needs to solve. Two company representatives (AL Sponsors) were also appointed to share their organizational complex problem. And we set up a core group of 3 people to implement the project including Myself (Project Lead, coach for group 1); Ms Quynh Nga (our Associate Coach, coach for group 2); Mr Loc (Project Coordinator). Each coach will be in charge of a group of 6 members (according to the selection by the BOD). We designed an overview model for 4 sessions with 2 months, proposed to the management board and present it to the participants before starting the phase with the below information:



In addition to the 5 essential leadership competencies required by the company's management, we propose 5 other competencies, forming a list of 10 leadership competencies for participants to practice in phase 2. With each of the five essential

competencies, we have clarified and listed three essential behaviors corresponding to each competency, a total of 15 behaviors for the group of 5 essential competencies.

Before and after the implementation of phase 2, we conducted a survey for each participant to gauge their self-assessment of the level and ability to express each behavior in 15 behaviors of group of 5 essential competencies. These results, along with each participant's sharing of the results they have achieved after the Program, will be compiled and sent to management as a result of the whole project.



Results and Learning by Client

KEY RESULTS AFTER THE PHASE 1: TRAINING ON THE ACTION LEARNING METHOD

- Understanding about Action Learning key knowledge, conducting the AL sessions to the group with a length of about 1 hour to solve the actual problems
- 12 practical problems in the work have been included in the Program to work together to create actions and learning for all participants.
- Higher awareness of applying questions to managers' jobs such as meeting, problem solving, staff coaching and good feedback from their employees.
- Participants knew how to spend a lot of time for self reflection, asking effective questions to enhance the skills
- Participants were more open about sharing problems with others, problems were solved more effectively when there were many diverse views from all participants.
- Managers find themselves less imposing to their staff, using more open-ended questions for everyone
- The spirit and skills of teamwork are greatly increased, when the managers listen to the sincere sharing in the Action Learning sessions to help solve problems for others



KEY RESULTS AFTER THE PHASE 2: APPLYING ACTION LEARNING TO SOLVING ORGANIZATIONAL PROBLEMS (SPAL)

- The teams experienced the Action Learning coaching process to the organization's complex problem with the support of an Action Learning coach. They have a deeper understanding of the strength and importance of team and coaches in solving complex problems. They understand the comprehensive process of Action Learning from the shared problem, seek clarity, agree to the common statement about the problem, identify goals, develop detailed action plans and shared their learning after each meeting as well as for the whole project
- The coach helped each group create their own detailed action plan to solve the two complex problems of the organization. Each action plan is drawn, presented,

received feedback from the company management and will be implemented in the next 6 months.

- Participants were surveyed for the 5 core competencies with 15 behaviors, and **90% of members achieved progressive results** in better understanding and practicing leadership competencies according to the results from the survey.
- Participants also shared that they have made very specific progress in: asking more effectively, listening, taking notes, giving specific feedback, setting clear goals, committing to actions and giving more time for learning reflection for themselves after the Program.



Some useful tips from the completion of project:

1/ Engage the highest level (CEO, BOD) to experience the power the Action Learning

When AL is new, it's difficult to explain it to the decision makers from company. Invite them to join a coaching session with role of PP or Team member. Using the debrief after

the session helps them understand how Action Learning works, and its differences comparing to other learning development methods.



2/ Setting clear context of the program at the beginning to the participants. Remove the barriers in learning especially when the top level joining together with middle managers in one program.

Design the "check-in" activity and encourage the open sharing of each member attending the program. We encourage them to share the problem, explain the VUCA context and emphasize the importance, benefits of the problem and the learning opportunities from solving the problems. By establishing a clear and specific context, participants have positive attitudes and motivations to participate in the program.

3/ Helping participants realize their personal positive changes and impacts from the program.

We create the pre and post survey, as well as open feedback and sharing from all participants to prove their change in thinking and behaviors, creating the positive learning and positive atmosphere among the participants.

4/ Select the problem that is important to all, not only important to the CEO

Initially, the CEO want to decide the problems for SPAL coaching from his opinion. We suggest him to meet with all the managers, and build one activity to collect all ideas from them and select the top two most important problems for 2 groups. This approach will increase the better understanding, engagement from the managers before joining the SPAL session.

5/ Create a simple tool that help the CEO, coach team and all participants keep track of the project.

This tool should be simple, easy to use and updated as the recap after each session. It can be sent to the CEO so that he can see the big picture about what is happening and the results, actions, learning during the project.

6/ Setting clear framework and roles for coaches in the project.

We have two coaches and one project coordinator joining this project. For better collaboration, we have discussed and clarified clearly for below points:

- Roles of the coach and the coordinator (also some key tasks based on the role)

- The framework for the whole project
- The agenda (with detail timeline) for each coaching session
- The activities to be used to recap/team learning
- The tool to update and tracking the progress, as well as for assessment

After each session, coaches and the coordinator will meet around 20 minutes to review the session, identify areas to improve, and plan for next actions. These practices help us stay on the right track when implementing the project, achieving a good collaboration and learning as well.



Written by: Nguyen Duy Minh (SALC, Affiliate Head, WIAL Vietnam)
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