

Action Learning in Government A story from the Philippines

The biggest organizational system in any country, I would think, would be the Government. Thus, the founders of WIAL Philippines thought that aside from our corporate clients, it was imperative that we share Action Learning to the country's government agencies. Imagine, if all Philippine government agencies were using Action Learning..... solutions to our country's problems would come faster in a spirit of co-ownership, cooperation and collaboration!

As a microcosm, WIAL Philippines is a partnership among five friends coming from three separate consultancy firms who have been in the business of Change Consultancy for more than ten years. To be able to work harmoniously, the first rule of business was, of course, to participate in a visioning exercise. During this activity, we agreed that our compelling vision for WIAL Philippines would be *"a growing community of Action Learning coaches co-creating a better Philippines."*



The establishment of WIAL PH in March, 2015, couldn't have been more timely. A year ago, the Philippines was preparing for a presidential election, which comes every six years. Anticipating that a change in Leadership may derail the gains of the Aquino Administration, several government agencies led by the Civil Service Commission (CSC), The Department of Budget and Management (DBM), the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) focused on capacitating its manpower by teaching Management how to be Coaches of their people. It was hoped that no matter who the next President will be, or a new direction to be undertaken, the career officers of the country's government agencies would learn how to be more effective leaders creating better results for the Filipino people. With funds from Australian Aid, CSC came up with a Coaching manual using the GROW (Goals-Reality-Options-Will) one-on-one coaching model. These were distributed to Managers of government agencies who were encouraged to use it.

But the WIAL founders and other Action Learning coaches in the Philippines wanted to offer more. Because of the fast changing VUCA (Volatile-Uncertain-Complex-Ambiguous) world, the Filipino Action Learning coaches felt that the country's government agencies could no longer just be the traditional bureaucracy, passively waiting for the President and his

Cabinet to tell them what to do and Department heads coaching their people to obey. With a change in leadership forthcoming every six years, the increasing pressures of globalization, and the many opportunities opening up in Asia as the emerging economic region in the world, the country's civil servants had to learn 21st century leadership competencies that would help them to manage complexity, such as, systems thinking, reframing, strategic focus, dealing with paradox, asking questions, big picture thinking, collaboration, etc..... and they had to learn it fast!

After undergoing training with Mastercoach Choon Ng Seng in the first quarter of 2015 in Singapore and receiving my AL coaching certification in June, I immediately re-designed a Coaching program my company was asked to run for the DBM. From just cascading GROW, I also recommended Action Learning coaching for the 6-month organizational wide program that ran from November 2015 to April 2016. WIAL Philippines conducted the in-house Foundations course during the first two days of December attended by 40 Department Directors and their Assistants. Action Learning was warmly received by the DBM program participants. To further ensure that they practiced their new skills, participants submitted reports on three GROW coaching sessions with follow-ups, and three Action Learning sessions that they have conducted with their people to find solutions for recurring problems in their respective departments. With recommendations on work process improvements to better serve their customers (in this case the other government agencies), these reports are now part of the DBM archives for easy reference.

During the Commencement Exercise that put the program to a close, one of the Directors gave a speech in behalf of the graduating class. She specifically mentioned that one of the most valuable lessons they had learned was the skill of Action Learning coaching. She remarked how Action Learning was able to improve relationships in her department, as well as across departments and other government agencies, and how it has engaged her people to own the problems at work and collaborate in finding solutions.

Under the new administration of President Rodrigo R. Duterte, the DBM submitted the 2016-2017 budget on time despite the change in leadership. Could one reason be because of more empowered and collaborative Directors? As of this writing, we are happy to share that talks are underway with the Department of Education (DepEd) to institutionalize Action Learning coaching in the agency. The vision of WIAL Philippines is actualizing fast!

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