# THE NEW NORMAL FOR ACTION LEARNING

I have never been a fan of presenting a webinar. I always feel like I'm talking to myself. The loss of interaction with the audience I find horrifically deflating. However, give me an audience I can interact with and I am in my element. Especially, if it's a small audience like the CALC classes. My favorite has become the four-day intensive.

In the face to face program, we typically require no prework, other than to contemplate potential problems to work on. The plan is to cover all the material including a thorough demonstration when we are all together. The planning for the actual training includes getting all the practice sessions done in addition to the material and demonstration.
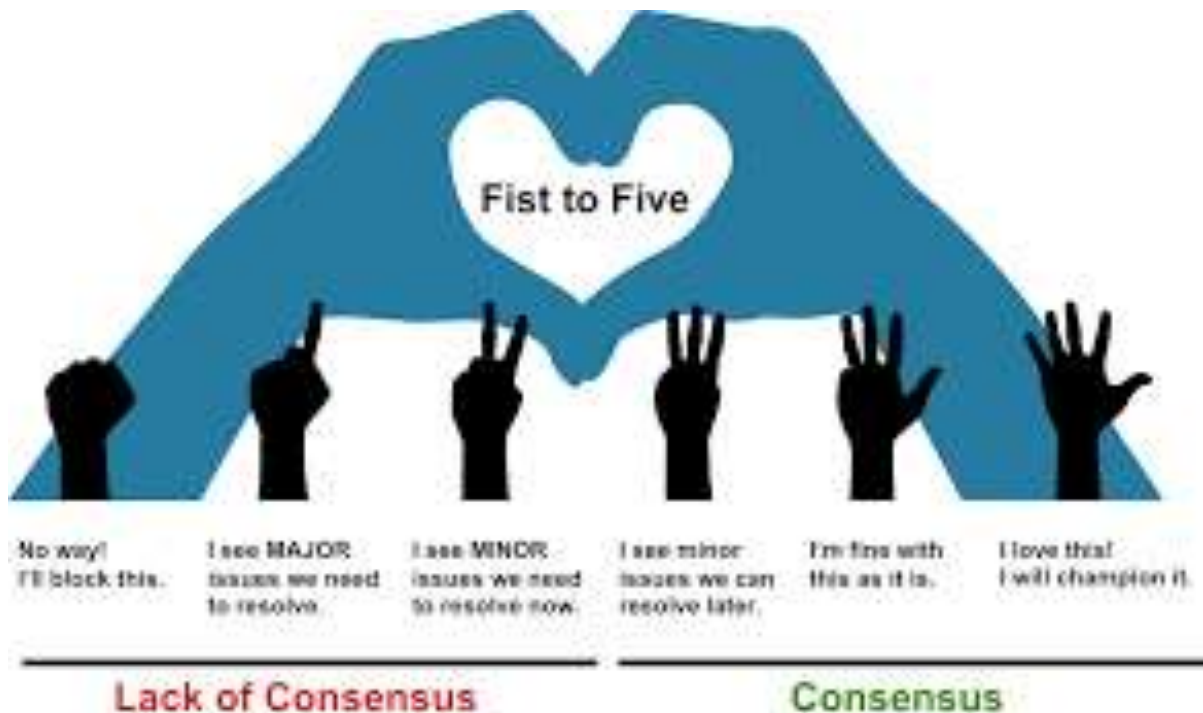
Four days with five or six participants is great for getting through the required elements. The first two days are very content heavy, leaving participants exhausted. The second two days are primarily activities so ultimately the group leaves feeling extremely energized.

At the start of the pandemic, it quickly became apparent face to face sessions were going to need to be canceled. When it became apparent the pandemic was going to be a long-term situation, we were going to need to offer a new normal.

We had already started doing Zoom Action Learning. One of the greatest learnings past on to me for virtual action learning has been to have participants use the rename function to include their leadership skill. This ensures the leadership skills stay visible. Another technique that works both virtually and face to face is when doing on a scale

of 1 to 10 instead use a technique called fist to five. This allows for participants to vote simultaneously.

The next part to focus on was how to deliver the material effectively in the zoom environment. The material can get very heavy when delivered face to face, how to get through it in a zoom room was going to be the key to the success of VCALC. The decision was made to flip the classroom. The participant's guide was sent to everyone before the program with instructions to read it and come prepared with questions. Instead of going through the material slide by slide, we had conversations around each of the modules based on the questions the participants brought. Additionally, all participants were asked to watch the YouTube video of Mike demonstrating Action Learning. Having the demonstration reviewed before coming together helps free up time.

Zoom has breakout rooms that make it possible to do seven questions. I haven't tried it as I prefer question hunt for practicing questions. To do this virtually a facilitator is needed to deal cards, roll the dice and keep score. The first time I tried typing the words in the chat box to get them to participants – deathly slow. The second time I held the cards up to the camera – significantly better. The third time I created a virtual version that let folks choose a number to select a card. This way seems to work well enough. Not as energizing as face to face but allows the skills to be practiced.

One simple learning was, any observers – either participants or instructors – should turn their video off during the practice sessions, A recently discovered zoom pro tip – have everyone mute for the duration of the session and simple hold the space bar when they want to speak. The space bar down temporarily unmutes until the bar is released. A key learning discovered, with the first running of the program, was frequent short breaks are more effective for keeping the team engaged. A key learning from a later session is to emphasize how important it is to come prepared. This preparedness includes printing the scripts that will be used, as well as coming with problems the teams can use.
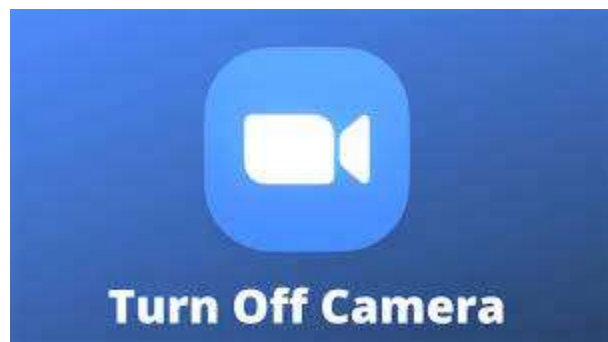
Here's what participants are saying:

"The VCALC workshop which took place in July 2020 was very good and well organized. I personally found the program very helpful especially the enormous benefits Action Learning coaching methods and tools bring to bear when it comes to problem solving among others."

"The program was well delivered by the Instructor Dr Bea Carson and participant engagement was very good. I also learnt so much from the participants who freely shared their experiences during the sessions."

"I will always recommend Action Learning to people and organizations whenever I have the opportunity to do so." - Fred Aryeetey, Chief Executive Officer, Institute of Directors – Ghana

"I find the action learning program a strategic key to solving complex problems while promoting high degree of learning. One unique aspect about the methodology is not focusing on the negatives but using the positives as a strategic lever to get the best out of a bad situation. The delivery by Bea was great and the participation by all presents an extra ordinary experience." - Rockson Dogbegah, Executive Chairman of Berock Ventures

"This training was very inspirational, energizing, bringing lots of ideas, with both substantial and in-depth knowledge together with case studies, learning from experience and being fully practice-oriented. Well-balanced composition of participants, which contributed to interesting and focused discussions and exchanges. Great learning experience." - Dr. Afia Nyarko Boakye(PhD)

"The virtual CALC program led by Bea Carson was a truly remarkable experience that far surpassed my expectations. Bea provided incredible insight and guidance, and we had an amazing group of people that supported one another in some very profound ways." - Tom Palmer, Skills by Design

Written by Dr. Bea Carson, MALC
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