

USING ACTION LEARNING TO DEVELOP PURPOSE-DRIVEN LEADERS IN SAESFORCE



Why are we here? And why do we do what we do? These are big philosophical questions that have been preoccupying mankind for many years. They are also questions many corporations are now asking themselves in order to provide competitive and relevant workplaces in an age where generations of employees want more meaning from their work.

Salesforce, a fast-growing technology company with over 30,000 employees and voted the world's most innovative company by Forbes magazine for four of the last five years, is no exception. Last year, they launched a new leadership development programme focused on helping their most senior leaders understand their personal purpose. Action Learning featured strongly in the programme design.

The four-module programme is called Leading Ohana, a Hawaiian word meaning 'family' that captures the set of values at the core of the company. The programme incorporates 5 days working with purpose-driven not-for-profit organizations in Nairobi, Kenya and Detroit, USA using Action Learning.

The idea behind the module design was to have participants exposed to purpose-driven organizations in the social sector and, through serving them, gain insights into what being purpose-driven is about and the personal impact this can have on the world. To help design, develop and deliver the module, Salesforce worked with Emerging World, a specialist consultancy led by WIAL-certified SALC, Matthew Farmer.

Action Learning was chosen as a methodology because it offered the opportunity for the participants from the various parties involved (Salesforce and the Not-for-profit organizations) to come together as equals and collaborate effectively, enabling the diversity of the group to become an asset rather than a hindrance in the co-creation of action plans to address the problems presented. It also provided a rich opportunity for learning about group dynamics, questioning and leadership styles.



The program was structured so that after a day of contextual immersion for the participants, several small groups worked with a separate not-for-profit organization based in either Kenya or Detroit (depending upon which module they attended) for 3 days. The partner organizations included the Red Cross, The International Organization of Migration (IOM) and Teach for America as well as various grass roots NGOs dealing with issues such as women’s rights, marginalised youth and education. Each of these partner organizations brought an unresolved organizational challenge that they were facing. During the three days, the groups undertook a field visit and worked intensively on the problems with the support of WIAL-certified Action Learning coaches. After a share-out of the outcomes of the work, there was a celebration followed by some sensemaking and contextualising with the Salesforce participants supporting them to process the learning and consider what to apply and prepare ahead of the next module.



The results were excellent. The module was very highly rated by the Salesforce participants and many of the partner organizations were able to make great strides forward with their challenges and all got a lot of value from using the Action Learning process. Build On, an organization operating in schools in underprivileged areas of various US cities, explained that, “by talking through our problem using the Action Learning method we were able to clarify the problem and discover solutions

that we would have never come to otherwise. We walked away with a full action plan, that includes mid-project check-in with our Salesforce Team, that I confidently feel will deliver results.”

The Action Learning method itself was also a great source of value for some partners. The participants from Camara Education, a non-profit international educational organisation supported in the Kenya module said, “We will be taking away many valuable tools from this event. We have already begun using Action Learning methods in a session immediately following the workshop and plan on continuing exploring this as collaboration tool in the future. Additionally, it was motivating to receive such positive feedback from the Salesforce participants during our field visit.”

One of the key issues in using Action Learning in this cross-sector format is investing in relationship building and problem identification up front. This takes time but ensures that everyone involved engages in a positive spirit and can make progress on complex issues relatively quickly.

Salesforce and Emerging World partnered very effectively together, will undertake the program again this year and will be speaking about their collaboration at the Conference Board’s Leadership development conference in San Francisco on June 7th and 8th, 2018. A webinar is also planned for later in the year and you can register your interest in attending [here](#).

Written by Matthew Farmer, SALC, Emerging World

/published2018