



"Leading and Sustaining Change at all Levels of the Organization through Action Learning: Individuals, Teams and Organizations"

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****This is the first of a three part article that will be distributed over the next two months.***

Part I – Developing Leaders and Leadership through Action Learning.

Let me begin by asking you to think about your answers to these two questions before you read the rest of the article.

- **“Leadership is**
- **“What are the challenges you or your clients are currently facing in your organizations?”**

My experience in both private, public institutions and as a coach with leaders, teams and organizations is similar to yours, which is the challenge leaders in both private and public institutions are faced with at the individual, team and organizational level are multifaceted across a complex and interdependent operating environment to include:

- Working across stake-holder boundaries;
- Developing an enterprise wide perspective;
- Operating in an ambiguous environment;
- Shifting strategies as the external and internal changes change;
- Creating the conditions for adaptive change to develop themselves and their team, and
- Creating commitment and leadership at all levels of the organizations for its outcomes.

This is no small task for any leader! In fact, it can be such a big task that to get our hands around it we need to reframe it. I've needed to think of this task as an ecosystem of interrelated strategies, tactics and activities that can be encapsulate into two ideas that apply to individuals, teams and organizations:

1. First, being able to reduce the time between learning and development and
2. Second being able to align learning strategies with business strategies

Action Learning is a proven and effective methodology to share individually held information in a group. It is also an effective process for change at an enterprise level. To change is to encompass learning at different levels, for the leader, the team, and for the organization. How so?

Let's address this from the various points of view in an organization and start with the **leader's point of view**.

From where the leader sits the faster pace of work, increasing diversity, competition and the need to have flatter organizations make it harder to maintain direction, alignment and commitment – a hallmark of leadership output. Consequently, leaders have to change from the all-knowing, unique individual to one that embodies leadership as a social process that involves a wide network that they can mobilize to create and innovate.

They are doing this in environment where employees are no longer wed to one organization, desire training and development, mobility and yet personal development funds are limited.

This requires leaders to facilitate organizational purpose at all levels to embody the experiences of others to create emergent knowledge within the context of the organization, and in doing so also create commitment.

Hence, part of the challenge of the leader is to create other leaders that see one of their roles as increasing the social capital in an organization in order to foster emergent knowledge that can be self-sustaining. Secondly, it's creating the



conditions for knowledge to be co-produced in the existing context of the values, assumptions and existing strategy to make tacit knowledge available to all.

We would all agree this is a different approach or skill sets needed to solve linear problems of the past where rooted in the cultural paradigms of the organizations that were not typically open for negotiation.

This is no easy task for many leaders who are in the throes of keeping up the tyranny of the urgent or they simply may not know how. What is known, is that central to change is a cycle that includes: discomfort, need, envisioning a future, moving through transition, and taking action.

If you want to shift somebody's world view, you have to get them to spend a lot of time thinking about alternative world views. For coaches, organizational development professionals and for organizational leaders at any level, it's important to challenge existing paradigms of thinking - knowing that how one thinks about themselves and their job influences how one does their job and the ensuing relationships.

In action learning, leaders hear other people's questions from their perspective, enabling them to safely broaden their own point of view. Importantly, by hearing the questions, leaders learn how their thinking, behavior and actions effect and affect on others. For many, it is a transformative experience that necessitates a re-ordering of their assumptions and habitual ways of being leaders to create differentiated perspectives, deep reflection, self-awareness and a heightened sense of their operating context. In doing so, they build direction, alignment and commitment across the teams, which will be addressed in Part II – Action Learning and Teams.