

ACTION LEARNING AND ITS TEACHING CONCEPTS

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ABSTRACT

Action learning process is an exceptional problem-solving tool that has the amazing capacity to simultaneously build successful leaders, teams and organisations. It involves a small group working on real problems, taking action, and deliberately learning as they go. It positions inquiry and questions at the heart of organisation culture. This article helps the reader to define and describe action learning process, enlist the different approaches to action learning and describe the action learning processes.

INTRODUCTION

Action learning describes an educational strategy, used in a group setting, that seeks to generate learning from human interaction arising from engagement in the solution of real-time (not simulated) work problems. Joe Raelin, *Work-based Learning* (Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle, NJ, 2000, p 66).

Action learning is an approach to come out with the solutions of the problems which involves taking the actions and reflections into considerations and get converted into desired results. The learning that results helps improve the problem solving process as well as the solutions the team develops.

The action learning process includes:

1. A real problem that is important, critical and usually complex.
2. A diverse problem-solving team or “set”
3. A process that promotes curiosity, inquiry and reflection
4. A requirement that talk be converted into action and, ultimately, a solution
5. A commitment to learning

Most of the action learning process involves a leader who takes the responsibility for promoting and facilitating learning as well as encouraging the team to be self-managing. In addition, learning is acquired by working on different, complex, critical and genuine problems that have no currently acceptable solutions which can be applied to an individual, teams, and organizations to other situations. The theories of action learning and their epistemological positions were developed originally by Reg Revans(1982) who applied

this method of action research to support organizational and business development, problem solving and improvement.

Action learning has many educational applications. Because action learning has been found to be very effective in developing a number of individual leadership and team problem solving skills (Leonard and Marquardt, 2010), it had been used extensively as a component in corporate and organizational leadership development programmes.

KEY FEATURES OF ACTION LEARNING:

Action learning is...

1. Change Oriented:

Action learning is encased in action. It finds to accomplish some meaningful and worthy tasks. It is brought into the light just to bring about the solutions to different situations or tragic realities and take some worthwhile initiatives. As the word itself makes out that it integrates the two processes of actions and learning or which results into meaningful solutions.

2. Mindful:

Action learning process is mindful i.e. requires the thoughtful and observation processes. This process is reflective in nature. The learners involved in this act, act with intention, pay attention to what happens and what the current situation or the problem is, and analyses and interprets the consequences and the result which was obviously expected at the start of the action learning process. Mindfulness and critical reflection are important features of this learning improving both action as well as learning.

3. Cyclic:

Multiple cycles of planning and re-planning, implementations of the plans and observing them periodically, reflecting and then if desired results are not obtained then re-planning. It starts with small cycles of planning, action, observing and reflecting which can help to define the issues, ideas and assumptions more clearly.

4. Qualitative:

The natural mode of communication in this method is the language. Therefore, action learning makes use of the appropriate language for the mode of conversation. Within this learning approach, the basic understanding between the participants develops through informed and evidence-based discussion. The form of language is supportive and at the same time questioning.

5. Participative:

The results which were intentional and real are the real-time change and are the major part of improvement. Hence, action learning process depends upon the real and genuine participation of the participants to find out the instant solutions to the problems.

Organisational learners are the participants but the extent to which they participate may vary from one participant to another. Genuine participation may bring about the fruitful and desired results.

ACTION LEARNING APPROACHES:

There is various action learning approaches such as:

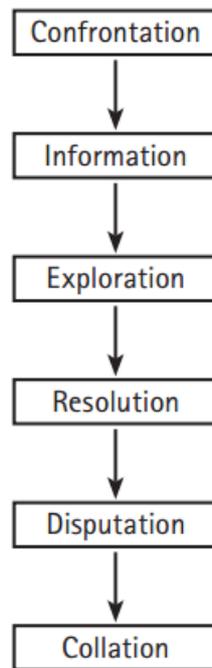
1. Project Based Learning:

This method of learning aims at developing self-confidence, self-organising and self-responsibility. A great advantage also involves the product- and practice-orientated work. It helps the pupil/student to occupy themselves with more than the vocational school and to make progress in transforming knowledge into practice. The project method is orientated towards problems concerning the teacher. By analysing the problem and stating it more precisely and by finding and simulating action alternatives the method tries to find a solution for the problem/the product. The project doesn't aim at arranging unreal scenarios but at being able to match the practice and to have a usable objective or subjective value. The project work can take place subject- and vocational field-overlapping. Furthermore, different working methods, forms, and instruments can be used in order to find solution patterns for the problem. Within the project method, the teacher plays a special role. He or she not only has to have professional competences, but also has to offer his or her help during the planning and decision processes within the project. Thus, another important aim is the communicating of work-methodical competences and the possibility of communication and action processes within the project groups.

2. Case Study

The case study or as well case method is a complex instruction procedure in which the priority is the development of a problem solving concept. The problematic situations can mostly be found in practice. The pupils/students have to analyse the problem-solving context independently and to work out solutions in group work. In the case study different solutions are critically compared and selected after certain criteria.

Phase model of the case study according to Kaiser



3. Role Play

During this method, the participants assume themselves to be fictitious models of thinking and acting and experience, discuss and solve a certain problem within a specific period of time. This kind of method is generally conducted in a group and as soon as the problem is disclosed within the group, understood and planned, the group has to select a leader for this and accordingly the characters of the role play are distributed. In the forthcoming step, the group plans the procedure by which the role play has to be conducted and the corresponding positions of the participants are allotted.

After the planning phase the actual role play begins. During the action and communication, solution possibilities are to be found and a solution is to be presented. Afterwards, a group discussion and an evaluation of the role play is carried out in order to gain further knowledge. These role plays can vary depending on the scale, i.e. roles can be switched or alternative scenes can be introduced. Furthermore, various aspects can be specially discussed. A résumé and a potential generalisation of the possible solutions bring the role play to a conclusion. This conclusion is to give the pupils/students a general view of the experienced and to explain the actions.

The role play can also be described as a phase model:

a. Introduction phase

- Starting point
- Discerning of the problem

b. Work out phase

- Roles have to be filled with arguments corresponding the points of view

- Collection of material is provided

c. Discussion phase

- Press conference – statements of the parties having participated in the play are read aloud
- Discussion – a consensus is to be reached

d. Reflection phase

- Why has X acted like that?

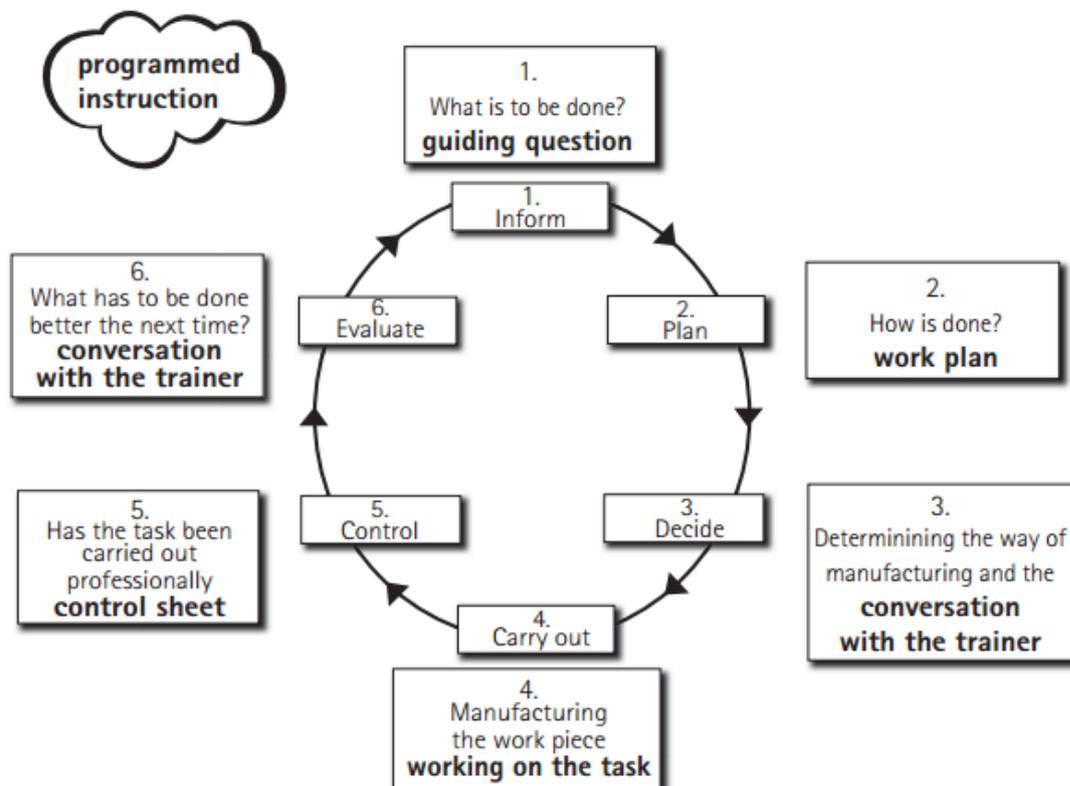
e. Evaluation phase

- How have opinions been influenced?

4. Programmed Instruction

In this method, as the terms indicated that the instructions are given to the pupil teachers in the form of texts, documents or files.

Course

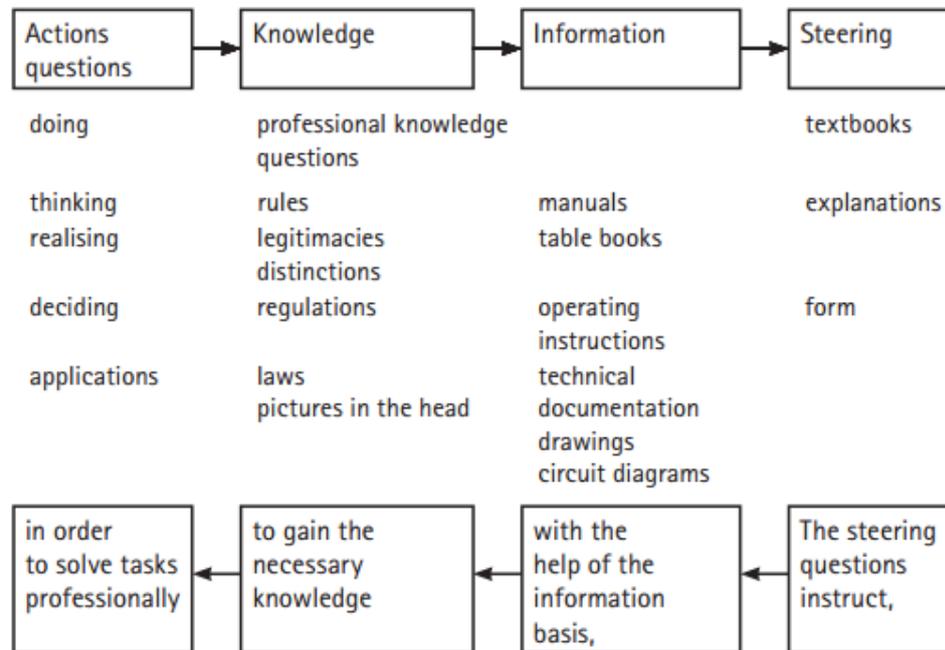


Source: Arnold/Lipsmeier/Ott 1998, p. 40

The introduction to the practical tasks is to be strengthened by instructions including so called steering questions. The pupils/students work on complex tasks independently and are instructed by steering questions.

The programmed instruction is to help to carry out the self assessment and the objective assessment of the completed work and to help the pupil/students to get the ability to assess and to develop his or her work correctly. The teacher is to give the pupils/students a hand in form of steering questions.

The steering questions can be developed after the following pattern:



5. Experiment

Research and teaching experiment In principle, experiments can be divided into research experiments and teaching and learning experiments. They differ in their objective.

- Research experiment: Examining unknown connections by quantitative or qualitative processes.
- Teaching and learning experiment: Experimentally comprehending familiar legitimacies and connections for the purpose of communicating. The legitimacies and connections are unknown to the pupil/students, he or she acts in the sense of the research experiment.

6. Answer Garden

A form of vicarious learning originating in the 1990 paper by Akerman and Malone. In this approach, “snapshots” of learning can be reused. For example, concepts or problems discussed can be added to an answer garden to allow these ideas and concepts to further develop.

7. Snowball Approach:

Group activity that involves concentrating groups of ideas pertaining to the same problem assigning them a theme, Patterns and relationships in the groups can also be observed.

Involves concentrating groups of ideas pertaining to the same problem and assigning them a theme, i.e.

- One slip of paper is used per idea generated or possible solution offered
- A meeting is set up to 5 people. The slips of paper are viewed and then grouped “like with like”
- Duplicates can be created if the idea/solution is relevant to more than one group
- Patterns and relationships in the groups are observed

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