Online Action Learning and Your Organisation

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Intended audience

- These slides are intended for staff and organisational developers who are interested in offering action learning within their organisations or networks.
- They make no assumptions about your level of knowledge of action- or online-learning.
Contents

- Action learning
  - what it is
  - benefits
  - issues
  - obstacles

- Online action learning (OAL)
  - how it works
  - our project
  - evaluation
  - how to get going with OAL
  - summary
  - screenshots
Action learning – what it is

“Action learning is a continuous process of learning and reflection, supported by colleagues, with an intention of getting things done.”


- Groups – or “sets” – of around 5, meeting every few weeks, usually 4 times
- Needs a commitment to engage with their issues and those of the others.
Action learning – what it is (2)

- In each session everyone has about 45 minutes of “air time”
- They share their professional (and sometimes personal) challenges
- Others don’t advise, but help the issue-holder to understand their situation, consider options, and plan actions
- Next time they report on what they did and what happened, and the cycle continues.
Action learning – obstacles

- Time commitment – 5 x 45 minutes plus extras plus travel means nearly a day
- Travel costs
- The reflective approach is not for everyone
- Skilled facilitation is needed until the group members get the hang of the approach.
Action learning – benefits

- “Unique forum focusing on my needs”
- “Insightful help with ways of addressing my needs”
- “Learning a surprising amount from seeing others dealing with theirs”
- “New techniques of questioning that I can use with members of my team.”
Action learning – issues

- Strategy – where am I taking my team?
- Motivation – how can I take them with me?
- Transition – how do I want my role to change?
OAL – how it works

- It works like face-to-face action learning but set members are at their computers using webcams and headsets.
- We use Blackboard Collaborate – until recently this was called Elluminate Live!
- This allows six simultaneous audio and video feeds, plus chat, emoticons, hand raising, application sharing, etc.
- It looks like this...
OAL – how it works (technical)

- A few technical bits, but not very
- Almost all the software for Collaborate is held on a computer in the USA
- So users only need to download a few small files
- The person with access to Collaborate sets up the meeting and sends a URL to the members
- They use this to access the virtual room.
Loughborough University ran a project on OAL for the Leadership Foundation for HE

Desktop Action Learning: Experience, Knowledge and Skills (DALEKS)

We ran 3 sets with 2 different facilitators

Set members were a mix of people with very different levels of confidence and experience in action learning and online learning.
OAL – evaluation

- Evaluation was, of course, required
- A detailed report is available as Section 6 of the *Guidance for Online Action Learning*
- Here are some key quotes offered to the independent evaluator...
more difficult to pick up the subtle physical cues
periods of silence appeared to be more natural and less strained within the online environment
people were more considerate when using the Desktop approach
found himself “paying more attention” as a result of the online environment
Quotes (2)

- the learning was more “chunked” with people being more able to summarise and be definite about their future actions
- “engaging” and provided a “rich learning environment”
- the process is different ... [but] ... the core elements of Action Learning Sets are still present
- added flexibility arising from DAL
Quotes (3)

- the de-personalised interface allowed him to be “more honest and revealing”
- the technology can make or break the experience
- [technical] competence and confidence... would take a little time to develop
- members appeared to rely less on the facilitator to provide structure and process
Quotes (4)

- commented favourably that the set facilitator had empathy with the technology
- helpful that the facilitator was “also learning about the technology and was not an expert in it”
- there appeared to be more reflection going on
How to get going with OAL (1)

- We recommend you join a trial set run by one of the initial facilitators.
- We can provide access to a Collaborate “room” and give you the chance to practise with the technology before being part of a set.
- Get in touch if you’re interested.
How to get going with OAL (2)

- When you do it yourselves you will need:
  - An experienced action learning facilitator
  - Access to Collaborate (or one of the many equivalents)
  - Someone who understands Collaborate (or whatever)
  - A group willing to give it a go
- Here’s our advice...
Advice – technical

- Have technical advice on hand at first
- Get a webcam and a headset and mic
- Avoid weak wifi
- Test your system well ahead of time, you may need to update your version of Java
- Play with the system first
- Test your audio setup before each meeting...
- ...Collaborate offers testing facilities.
Advice – social

- Find a private location
- Be aware that it’s a new social situation
- Recognise that people will respond differently
- Be prepared for slight lags in the audio
- Develop turn-taking conventions
- Follow general good-meeting advice on clarity of purpose, roles, recording actions
- Review the social side.
Advice – facilitation

- Much as with f2f
- Set a confident tone
- Reassure people (more variables)
- Model the processes – technical and social
- Pay particular attention to clarity and checking understanding
- Develop your technical familiarity
- Discuss the use of the chat facility.
Advice – OAL process

1. Meeting arranged
2. URL distributed
3. People arrive a few minutes early to check their settings
4. Technical advice on hand
5. People join the meeting
6. Gossip
7. Meeting starts
8. Runs like a face-to-face set
9. Mic or hand up for turn-taking
10. Some use of chat
11. Not much use so far of application sharing
12. Facilitator can take notes.
To try it for free use vRoom

- Full Elluminate functionality except for:
  - 3 people
  - No recording
- Only one user needs to have vRoom
- www.learncentral.org/user/vroomreg
# OAL Pros and Cons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Saves travel time and cost</td>
<td>Some setup costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More and shorter meetings are now worthwhile</td>
<td>Subtle visual signals are harder to spot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meetings can easily be slotted into your diary</td>
<td>Technical difficulties can destroy the meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared working generates a record of what happened</td>
<td>Suitable location may be hard to find</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parallel communication possible</td>
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Key points

- Different from face-to-face but still action learning and still powerful
- Can also be used for meetings, coaching, mentoring, etc.
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Screenshots

- From Elluminate session
- DALEKS project steering group
- People from: Bath, Cumbria, Norwich and Loughborough
- For general Elluminate guidance see...
  - www.jisc.ac.uk/elluminateguidance
Moderator (Joe Bruce): yes - it would be good to talk to you after the session

Moderator (Joe Bruce): totally agree - it's always a risk

Andy Wilson: Maybe Jo needs to talk to the BG technicians?

Clare and Becky: Yes - liaison with our tech back up would be good. Thanks!

Stuart Hunt: for 'oo jokes!

Stuart Hunt: Andy W - can we have you back in the colour, p'l?

Stuart Hunt: I must say I'm enjoying this session
Elluminate screen

These are the main elements...

- Participants window
- Chat and Audio
- Mic, hand-up and emoticons
- Whiteboard
- Video window
- Notes.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andy Wilson (Moderator, Me)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Participant
Chat

Show All

Joined on 22 April 2010 at 09:11

Send to This Room

Audio

Ctrl+F2

Teleconference available
Mic, hand-up and emoticons
Welcome to your Elluminate vClass!

GET STARTED NOW

01 Check your audio - click on Tools > Audio > Audio Setup Wizard...

02 Load a presentation and change screens

03 Share an application

04 Communicate using voice or text

Interested in adding Teleconferencing to your vClass? Learn more:
http://www.elluminate.com/Products/Teleconferencing/?id=75/

Get more rooms or integrate with your institution’s LMS or portal:
http://www.elluminate.com/Products/Elluminate_Learning_Suite/?id=72/
Sharing Applications

- You can show people what’s on your computer’s desktop
- See the meeting agenda on the next slide
- You can even give them control of your application.
DALEKS Steering Group Meeting
Friday 9 July 2010 at 9am

Agenda

Meeting conventions
Confirmation on recording the meeting

Report on progress to date
- number and status of sets
- development of guidance

Feedback from members

Evaluation

Finance

Awareness raising
- briefing to DALEK groups
- SDF and OD conferences
- Vitae project group
- use in JISC project

Technology update