

VIRTUAL ACTION LEARNING

“The end of learning is action, not knowledge”

Dr Peter Honey

What can virtual action learning offer me?

- Space for individual reflective learning
- An opportunity to share the application of what you have learned with colleagues
- The opportunity to gain support and challenge from a group of peers on a specific situation you face
- The chance to work smarter and find creative ways to bring about change
- A chance to test your beliefs and assumptions and learn what works for others
- A safe environment to explore new ways of thinking and doing
- Personal, as well as professional, learning and development
- Insight into how others achieve different solutions
- A chance to progress new opportunities and develop new ideas
- Structured time away from the work environment to consider what you are doing, without the travel time and expense
- An opportunity to develop and improve your leadership and facilitative skills in the virtual world
- Time to explore how your learning translates in to action in the workplace

What can virtual action learning offer my organisation or business?

- An innovative yet proven form of individual and organisational development with colleagues around the globe
- Fresh approaches for organisations seeking new directions or facing change
- A chance to put established practice and development under the spotlight
- Testing more efficient ways of working
- Learning which underpins improved delivery for customers, clients and beneficiaries
- A sustainable method of development for geographically dispersed leaders

What is a virtual action learning set?

A virtual action learning set is a group of up to five to eight people who contract to meet regularly with an action learning facilitator using a web-based platform such as Zoom or Skype. They usually meet five or six times over an agreed period. Each session generally lasts three hours (with a short break) and runs at a time agreed by all. Learning sets are usually made up of peers who work at similar levels of responsibility. The benefit of virtual action learning is that it can bring together people based throughout the UK or the world, either within an organisation or across sectors.

What happens when I join a virtual set?

Set members come together virtually for an initial short briefing and contracting session with the facilitator who explains the process and makes sure everyone is comfortable with the logistics of working in the virtual world.

What happens during each session?

- Each session starts with an arriving round when every set member reports briefly on what's been happening for them and on any action they have taken from the last session
- The set members then choose who will speak about a particular situation they are currently facing. This is known as 'presenting'. Despite the terminology this does not need preparing in advance.
- The presenter describes the situation, problem, decision, or challenge
- Set members listen without interruption, then may ask questions for clarification
- They then ask open questions which help the presenter come to a deeper or different understanding and so be open to new solutions, attitudes and behaviour changes
- The set members do not give advice, tell anecdotes, pass judgement or talk about their own situation - they stay focused on the presenter
- Guided by the facilitator and through questions, the set helps the presenter review their options and decide on action
- Set members each offer reflections; they respond to the presenter on what they have heard and talk about their own individual learning
- The presenter takes what they have learned back to the workplace - initiating changes and trying new ideas or approaches
- During the next session the presenter reports back on the action they have taken
- There may be a process review in which the set reflect on how well they used the process and how they could improve

What does the facilitator do?

- The facilitator establishes the ground rules and keeps the set on course
- Focuses the set on the presenter
- Creates safety for individuals to explore sensitive issues
- Takes the set beyond superficial analysis
- Helps the set draw out learning
- Introduces the set to other tools for exploration, analysis, and solution generation
- Enables the set to reflect on the group process