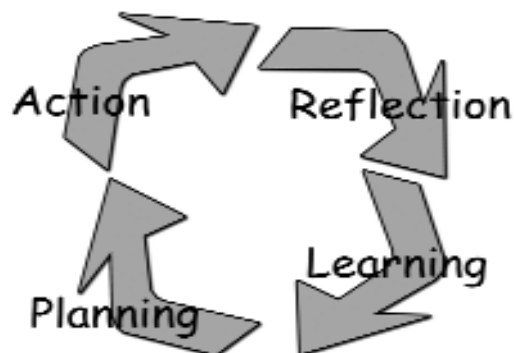


Learning and Development Focus Groups - Action Learning Sets

What are Learning and Development Focus Groups?

Learning and Development Focus groups are also known as Action Learning Sets. Their purpose is to create a learning environment within the workplace where a group of individuals work with, and alongside each other to facilitate their own learning and implement this into the workplace.

In Learning and Development Focus Groups the emphasis is on learning from experience and then acting on that learning. This is shown in the learning cycle (illustrated). The Learning and Development Focus Group approach provides a way of working in small groups which can provide the structure we often need to help us learn from what we do, and improve our practice as a result.



Who can benefit from a Learning and Development Group?

Individuals who:-

- have the same role;
- are dealing with similar issues in the workplace;
- have other factors or interests in common.

How does it work?

The group is facilitated by an experienced learning and development facilitator who will challenge the group's thinking, perceptions, and assumptions. Questions are likely to follow a flow – from clarification of the experience and issue being expressed, through reflection and then deeper analysis of that issue - looking at it from different angles and possibly re-framing the original problem. The final questions of the set focus on future action the individual/s can take.

The group becomes a place of learning, support and growth as group members reflect on, make plans, and implement action back in the workplace, reporting back to the group on their progress at each session. This method of learning works best where there may be many solutions to a problem or issue and where the group can become creative in their problem solving.

Why are Learning and Development Groups beneficial?

Benefits for the participant

Learning and Development Groups provide an individual with a group of peers who are experiencing similar issues and challenges. The group provides a structured, safe and enjoyable environment where problems can be discussed and learning take place which will impact on the action an individual takes back to their work role.

Participants learn:

- How to relate to, and communicate with, others more effectively
- To be aware of others
- To network with others
- Responsibility for finding their own answers to issues
- Self-awareness and confidence
- To initiate and create solutions for themselves and each other
- To become part of a team (often an unplanned benefit)
- Questioning, listening and facilitation skills
- To recognise what they can and can't control, and what they can influence
- Pragmatic ways of working – an ability to 'get on' with things
- How to be reflective practitioners and consider - what did we learn from this?
- Attitudes that are proactive towards change

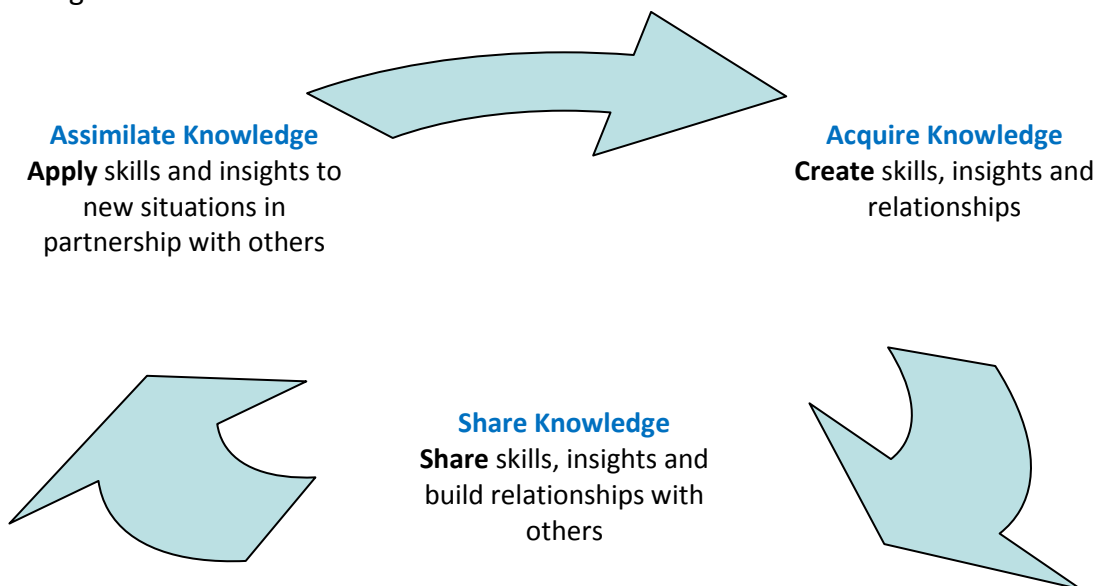
Benefits for the organisation

Through the effects on individuals as identified above, Learning and Development Groups enable an organisation to improve performance and increase efficiency. It does this by creating a learning environment within the organisation which is based on a three stage model (illustrated) of acquiring, sharing and using knowledge to improve the skillset of individuals and groups, support them to make behavioural changes and then integrate these into the workplace, applying them to current and new situations.

Organisations benefit from:

- Creating a learning environment and a learning culture within the organisation

- Integrating individual learning needs within the workplace using a peer approach to learning
- Individuals who are able to change their thinking, perceptions, and behaviours
- Employees who have an increased ability to deal with real life issues in the workplace
- Employees who have a positive 'can do' attitude
- A reduction in the isolation that individuals can sometimes feel
- An increase in personal motivation to change and learn new skills
- Increased interpersonal and communication skills
- Continuous professional development and learning which grows the individual and organisation



How do Learning and Development Groups meet and work together?

Typically groups of 6 – 8 individuals will commit to working together over a period of at least six months. The group meets regularly, ideally every four – six weeks for a day, or half a day. At each meeting members have an opportunity to introduce a challenge they are facing in their own practice. The group helps to work on the problem through supportive but challenging questioning - encouraging a deeper understanding of the issues involved, challenging underlying assumptions, and exploring ways forward. As well as reflecting on the issue and developing a plan of action, the member is encouraged to report back to the group on progress next time they meet.

Meetings are held either at an external venue or they can be held in-house. The most important thing is to be away from everyday work distractions.