

Action Learning Sets

Overview

This is a space for a group of peers to learn from each other through inquiry, asking questions and offering reflections. ALS allow participants to:

- generate new ways to look at a challenge or question
- develop new approaches for responding to the challenge or question

ALSes are based on the case clinic principle – participants take turns in bringing a case study to the group, while other ALS members act as consultants.

Purpose

To access the wisdom and experience of peers and to help a case giver to respond to an important and immediate challenge in a better and more innovative way.

Principles

- the case should be a challenge that is current and concrete
- the case giver needs to be a key player in the case
- the participants in ALSes are peers
- don't give advice, instead listen deeply

Uses and outcomes

- concrete and innovative ideas for how to respond to a pressing challenge
- trust building among the group of peers
- use with mindfulness and listening practices

Set Up

- groups of 4-5 peers
- online space for group to work without distractions
- minimum of 90 minutes

Roles and sequence

Case giver:

Share a challenge that is current, concrete and important and that you happen to be a key player in. You should be able to present the case in 15 minutes and the case should stand

to benefit from the feedback of your peers. Include your personal learning threshold (what do you need to let go of and learn).

Coaches:

Listen deeply. Do not try to “fix” the problem, but try to listen deeply to the case giver, while also attending to images, metaphors, feelings and gestures that the story evokes in you.

Timekeeper:

One of the coaches manages the time.

Step	Time	Activity
1	15min	<p>Set up</p> <p>Technical set up and selecting time keeper (you might choose to select roles over email in advance or on your previous meetings).</p> <p>Use this time to check-in with each other, informally chat or do whatever works best for you to arrive in the space together and find connection. You might also want to use some of the time for a little follow up after the last session – hearing any reflections or findings from the previous case giver or everyone in the group.</p> <p><i>Select the case giver in advance of the meeting, so that they have time to prepare their case.</i></p>
2	5min	<p>Grounding</p> <p>Take a moment to ground as a group. You might use one of the grounding/centering techniques and as you do so bring to mind your sense of purpose and bigger picture of why do you want to engage with this group and this work</p>
3	15min	<p>Case giver presents the case</p> <p>The case giver clarifies these questions to the group:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Current situation: What key challenge or question are you up against? 2. Stakeholders: How might others view this situation? 3. Intention: What future are you trying to create? 4. Learning threshold: What do you need to let go of and what do you need to learn? 5. Support: Where do you need input or help? <p>Coaches listen deeply, might ask clarifying questions (don't give advice!)</p>
4	5min	<p>Stillness</p>

		<p>Listen to your heart/guts/body: Connect to your body and what you are hearing, see how it resonates, what it brings up for you.</p> <p>Listen to what resonates: What images, gestures, metaphors come up for you that capture the essence of what you heard?</p>
5	15min	<p>Mirroring and Embodying: Images, Feelings, Gestures</p> <p>Each coach shares the images, metaphors, feelings and gestures that came up for them in silence or while listening to the case giver.</p> <p>The case giver observes and listens. Having listened to all the coaches, the case giver reflects back on what they heard.</p>
6	20min	<p>Generative dialogue</p> <p>The case giver reflects back on what the gestures, feelings, metaphors and the sculptures have evoked (<i>Seeing myself from outside, what touched me, what resonated with me, what questions and reflections come up for me now?</i>)</p> <p>Based on the questions the case giver now holds, the coaches ask open questions to help explore the issue (don't give advice!).</p> <p>Case giver with the help of coaches identifies possible solutions.</p> <p><i>When asking questions use the elicitive questions method (see additional tools at the end of this document)</i></p>
7	10min	<p>Closing remarks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - by coaches - by case giver: <i>How do I now see my situation and ways forward?</i> <p>Thanks and acknowledgements.</p>
8	5min	<p>Goodbyes and any necessary arrangements for the next meeting.</p> <p><i>You might want to spend 5 minutes after the meeting to do individual journaling to capture learning points for yourself.</i></p>

Based on: Presencing Institute, Social Presencing Theater, <https://www.presencing.org/>
Resources: C. Otto Scharmer, Theory U: Learning from the future as it emerges, San Francisco 2009, Chapter 21

Additional tools

Reversal Questions

This sequence is really helpful for someone who is “stuck” in their problem and doesn’t know what they want or is not yet ready to move forward towards a positive goal. The questions meet someone where they are and are designed to provoke a different way of thinking about the current situation.

1. Tell me about your current situation.
 - What symptoms are you aware of right now?
 - What is not the way you’d like it to be?
2. What exactly is the problem you have been experiencing?
 - When did the problem first start?
 - How often does it occur?
 - How long does it last?
 - Who is affected by the problem?
3. Where have you been noticing the problem?
4. What do you need to keep doing in order to maintain this problem?
5. What beliefs do you have to hold in order for this problem to persist?
6. What has to be there for this problem to occur?
7. What would you need to do to make this problem worse?
8. How do you know when you are about to have this problem?
9. How can you teach someone else to have this problem?
 - If I had to fill in for you for a day, how would I have the problem?
 - Teach me now... what must I do, think, believe and value?
 - What kind of person do I have to be to have this problem as well?
10. In order to create this problem in a different context what would you need to do?
11. What would you do differently in those contexts where you don’t have the problem?
12. There are some people who don’t have this problem. What are they doing that is different from what you do?
 - What do they never do that you sometimes (or often) do?
 - What advice could you give them from your own personal experience that would help them create this problem?
13. What is the quickest and best way that you can solve this problem and really enjoy the process and learn a lot at the same time as well?

(Tripod Training Collective material: <https://tripodtraining.org/>)

Elicitive Questions

Elicitive questions are about *eliciting* — *drawing out*, instead of organising by just telling people what to do. It's based on the idea that idea effective organising helps people get what they want, helps people want what is consistent with their values, and clarifies and aligns their values. *Elicitive questions* are an important tool for accomplishing all of this and can be used in training, organising, facilitation, and almost any group process.

Elicitive questions are not:

- yes or a no questions
- “why” questions that often stir up resistance or allow people to wax philosophical or invite rationalization
- long, complex questions that are hard to digest
- a way to trick someone into the “right” answer

Instead, elicitive questions:

- connect people more deeply with their own selves
- create motion and options by assuming people have wisdom
- are short and simple
- often ask the unaskable questions

Examples of elicitive questions:

- When you look at this plan, what excites you? What parts do you want to work on?
- Specifically, when has that happened?
- What parts of the proposal do you agree with?
- How could you imagine us working together?
- What would it take to convince you to...?
- How did you get involved in this work on climate change? What keeps you going?

Elicitive questions have multiple benefits. The person asking the questions gets information and gets to connect with someone's deeper motivations and considerations. Elicitive questions help you understand people who disagree with you. By asking rather than arguing you get their perspective, discover how they are framing the issue, find common ground with unexpected allies, and collect data. In that way elicitive questions can strengthen relationships.

Elicitive questions encourage the person being asked to express their assumptions and beliefs. They assist people to look beneath the surface, like peeling layers of an onion. Elicitive questions can help someone be more reflective about their own choices — and learn from themselves, which creates empowerment.

(350 and Training for Change material: <https://trainings.350.org/> , <https://www.trainingforchange.org/>)