

Role of the set facilitator

Role of the Action Learning Set Facilitator

The role of the Action Learning Set facilitator is a varied one, with the main aim of managing the process of Action Learning. A skilled facilitator is an invaluable asset to the learning experience and outcomes gained by Action Learning. The facilitator supports the set in maintaining a non-directive approach to problem solving and the role permits feedback to set members on behaviour that supports or detracts from the process. The facilitator also helps maintain the ground rules which are agreed by the set.

Facilitators are responsible for:

- Helping action learning sets to establish a set of ground rules that they are willing to adapt.
- Role modelling the skills needed relating to effective listening, questioning and feedback.
- Managing the process including timing, bidding to present challenges, summarising and managing behaviour.
- Reporting back and communicating with programme lead.

Activities that are the responsibility of the facilitator include:

- Setting and agreeing ground rules and confidentiality with the set
- Managing the behaviour of the set to ensure that the stick to asking questions rather than giving advice
- Allocates and manages the time within the group to ensure that all set members get an opportunity to contribute
- Supports the set members and champions the member whose issue is being discussed
- Facilitates the questioning process
- Intervenes if the presenter is being bombarded, interrogated or if any other behaviour is displayed which they consider unhelpful in supporting the presenter to address their issue
- Attends to the administrative details of setting up

and organising space for the set meetings and facilitates contacts between the group

- Ensures that the focus is on reflection and action planning by adopting an open style of questioning
- Role models good questioning, listening and interpersonal skills
- Makes 'process interventions' this includes interrupting the discussion to suggest that the focus of the conversation is straying from the presenter's issue and getting the process back on track if the focus is moving away from the presenter or to suggest that set members are not allowing the presenter adequate time to digest or consider questions before moving on
- Balancing the supportive element of the group with being able to ask challenging questions to help the presenter address their issue.
- Reviewing progress at the start of each set meeting so that participants can provide an update of their actions on their issue since the last meeting and recognise their own development over time in relation to their progress on their issue
- An important element of the facilitator's role is to know when to withdraw from the process and allow the set to become self-facilitating. The aim should be to build the sets skills and awareness over time so that the role of the facilitator becomes redundant and the set manages itself.

Skills required for effective Action Learning Set Facilitation

Action learning set facilitation requires high level interpersonal skills and it is not something that everyone can do well. However many of the skills required can be developed and improved.

The key skills needed by a facilitator are:

- Active and empathic listening
- Interpersonal skills
- Effective questioning
- Building trust and rapport
- Being assertive to manage unhelpful behaviour in the set
- Emotional intelligence
- Knowing when to intervene