Learning at the Speed of Change

Complexity and change

Key Point
If we are to match the speed of change, or, perhaps, to slow it down and to change its direction, we need a completely different approach to dealing with complexity. *Action learning* is such an approach — a way of thinking and acting that enables us to *solve real problems in real time*, and to create the resilience required to deal with complexity and change.

It is an understatement to say that organizations are experiencing more change than ever before. In fact, most of us are finally getting used to the idea that constant change is a part of living and working within organizations. What is less understood is how to work within the uncertainty, instability, confusion, and loss of control that accelerating change creates.

To deal with the conditions that change creates, we use all of the skills, knowledge, and experience that we have at our disposal. However, when we try to fix problems, we can make them worse than they were in the first place. Then, we ask ourselves questions to try to make sense of the resulting confusion: "What is going on? What are we doing wrong? Why can't we make things better? Why do our *fixes* not work?" Common answers to these questions are even less helpful: "It's their fault! We didn't have enough time or resources to do it right! We didn't get any help! We should have known what to do!"

The reason that we fail to solve these complex problems has little to do with being smart enough to deal with accelerating change. It has more to do with not being smart in a way that works when the degree of complexity is so high. Nothing that we have learned in the past has prepared us to deal with increasing complexity and the change that it creates. Unless we think and act differently, we will continue to struggle with problems we cannot seem to solve.

If we are to match the speed of change, or, perhaps, to slow it down and to change its direction, we need a completely different approach to dealing with complexity. *Action learning* is such an approach — a way of thinking and acting that enables us to *solve real problems in real time*, and to create the resilience required to deal with complexity and change.

Since publishing the first edition in 2003, MHA Institute has learned a tremendous amount from successes in applying action learning in many situations and organizations. This second edition includes this learning, as well as ways in which to apply this approach in life and work.

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Reg Revans

Reg Revans (1908-2003) was President Emeritus of the International Management Centres Association (IMCA), and is widely regarded as the founder of action learning. His vision was practical business people learning from each other, creating their own resources, identifying their own problems, and forming their own solutions.

Key Point
Revans recalled asking his father which lesson was the most important to be learned from the tragedy. His father said that we must learn to distinguish between *cleverness* and *wisdom*. Perhaps this reply prompted the young Revans to discern the importance of asking *why* questions that seek understanding, rather than *what* question that yield mere information.

Revans was born on May 14, 1907, in England. One of his earliest recollections was of the memorial service for Florence Nightingale in 1910. His mother's interest in Nightingale arose from her voluntary work at the family's local hospital in Portsmouth. His father worked as His Majesty's principal surveyor of mercantile shipping, and was heavily involved in the inquiry into the sinking of the Titanic. The family lived by the docks, and Revans recalled a steady stream of sailors coming to his home to report on their experience aboard the ill-fated liner. Revans recalled asking his father which lesson was the most important to be learned from the tragedy. His father replied that we must learn to distinguish between *cleverness* and *wisdom*. Perhaps this reply prompted the young Revans to discern the importance of asking *why* questions that seek understanding, rather than *what* question that yield mere information.

Reference
The source of this section is the article, *Who was Reg Revans?*, by Richard Teare and Gordon Prestoungrange, in ***Accrediting Managers at Work in the 21st Century***, Prestoungrange University Press, 2004.

After attending Battersea Grammar School, Revans studied physics at University College, London, where he took his finals after just two years, and won the prize for best student. At Cambridge, where he earned his doctorate, he won a double-blue in athletics — his Cambridge long-jump record stood for 30 years. In 1928, he went on to represent his country at the Olympics in Amsterdam. In 1929, he was awarded a research fellowship at Emmanuel College, Cambridge. After studying in the United States, he returned to Cambridge (1932-35) to work on his own research at the Cavendish Laboratories in a team led by the nuclear physicist Ernest Rutherford.

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Key Point
Revans championed a staff training college to be run by the colliery managers. Outside experts were not invited, because Revans believed that the real experts were those who worked the mines. The pits that tried out his methods reported a 30% increase in productivity.

Reference
For more information on decades of action learning research, visit www.isd.salford.ac.uk/specollect/revans.php.

Revans noticed that, every week, Rutherford would gather his research team of more than a dozen Nobel Laureates. At these meetings, Rutherford encouraged these researchers to question their own, and each other's, knowledge, and to collaborate on developing fresh ideas. Rutherford used a method of inquiry that required scientists to work together as a community to solve each other's experimental problems. It is this experience of Rutherford's method that gave Revans the insight to develop his ideas on action learning.

Revans left the scientific world in 1935 to become director of education at Essex County Council. While there, a colleague asked him to examine the high level of staff turnover among nurses in hospitals, in an attempt to answer the question: Why did do many leave after training? Revans discovered that the newly qualified nurses were dissatisfied that the culture in which they worked did nothing to encourage them. The outcome of his research was a paper written in 1938 that contained his formative thoughts on action learning.

During the second world war, Revans became head of emergency services for the East End of London. The Blitz of 1940 was perhaps the ultimate lesson in crisis management. As the incendiary bombs dropped all around, there was no time for considered planning; there was time only for *learning by doing*. After the war, Revans was invited to work on the restructuring of the coal industry, which went into public ownership in 1946. He was responsible for planning recruitment, education, and training. He began his task by working for several weeks at the coalface in Durham. He championed a staff training college to be run by the colliery managers. Outside experts were not invited, because Revans believed that the real experts were those who worked the mines. The pits that tried out his methods reported a 30% increase in productivity.

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Key Point
Under Revans' leadership, and using action learning, five Belgium universities and 23 of the country's largest corporations worked together to find a solution to this national problem. Dramatic results occurred. Between 1971 and 1981, Belgium's average industrial productivity growth rate of 102% meant that the country had outperformed, in relative terms, the United States, Germany, and Japan.

In 1955, Revans became the first professor of industrial management at the University of Manchester, a post he held until 1965. Revans anticipated that his methods would be adopted by the new business school. But as UK management education sought academic recognition, the practical action learning approach — which is not reliant on expert knowledge — did not fit the emerging paradigm. It seems likely that this experience shaped Revan's low opinion of the emerging business school model of the academic MBA concept. Nor was he much kinder to consultants and management trainers, who he felt tended to skim the surface, rather than encourage managers to solve their own challenges.

In 1965, Revans left Manchester to head an inter-university project in Belgium. This project's goal was to develop recommendations for advancing the Belgium economy, which had been underperforming at the bottom of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development League. Traditional measures had not worked. Under Revans' leadership, and using action learning, five Belgium universities and 23 of the country's largest corporations worked together to find a solution to this national problem. Dramatic results occurred. Between 1971 and 1981, Belgium's average industrial productivity growth rate of 102% meant that the country had outperformed, in relative terms, the United States, Germany, and Japan.

During the period from 1965 to 1968, Revans also led the Hospital Internal Communications (HIC) project, in which 10 London hospitals used action learning to work together. Informal groups studied different ways of working, and decided which issues to tackle, and how to approach them. Here, Revans gained a reputation for persuading senior managers to listen to nurses. As a result, morale improved, reflected by lower levels of absenteeism, accidents, and staff turnover, as well as significant savings in costs per patient, and shortened waiting lists.

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Key Point
Revans argued that learning is about recognizing not *what we know*, but *what we do not know*. Action learning provides a near-perfect mode of inquiry, as learners meet in small groups to solve complex problems. Revans had found that, once small groups were working effectively together, they became *comrades in adversity* — held together by a shared desire to find implementable solutions to their questions.

Even more telling were the findings of an independent study by the University of Michigan that showed that patients recovered more quickly in wards in which an HIC-type project was implemented. Higher staff morale had translated into better care.

By now, Revans had become a passionate advocate of action learning; from the 1970s to the mid-1990s, he travelled widely, and spoke with evangelical passion about the power of action learning. Revans University from Vanatu is named after him in recognition of his unique contribution to the practice of management. In 1988, Sweden nominated Revans for a Nobel prize. In 1991, Revans worked with Nelson Mandella and the white government to use action learning to mitigate strife.

Revans argued that learning is about recognizing not *what we know*, but *what we do not know*. Action learning provides a near-perfect mode of inquiry, as learners meet in small groups to solve complex problems. Revans had found that, once small groups were working effectively together, they became *comrades in adversity* — held together by a shared desire to find implementable solutions to their questions.

In essence, action learning group members challenge each other about how each member sees the problems being considered. They then act as a mirror to each other to help each member, and the group as a whole, to recognize what they do not know. The learning is most effective when it is self-managed, and focused on finding internal solutions, rather than on seeking external help.

Original thinkers are rare, and Revans certainly battled against management fads that might so easily have crowded out his ideas. Reg Revans died on January 8, 2003, aged 95, but his legacy lives on!

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Action learning, leadership, and cultural change

Key Point
Action learning communities require all of their members to *account* for actions taken. Accountability occurs when members *commit* to taking action, then account to their members for what happened as a result. Unlike other processes that force accountability, action learning naturally creates accountability. This is because the focus is not on the action taken, but on the *learning* that occurs when action is either taken or not taken.

Revans believed that everyone in an organization has ideas to contribute. If you can gain access to these ideas, you can tap into the unused potential in an organization. One way to do this is to create communities of reflection and action — communities of learning, which Revans called *action learning sets*. These sets were comprised of a group of strangers or a working team. In these sets, people learned from reflecting on action, and inquiring into real problems, issues, and opportunities. They decided on actions to take, and committed to taking these actions.

Action learning communities require all of their members to *account* for actions taken. Accountability occurs when members *commit* to taking action, then account to their members for what happened as a result. Unlike other processes that force accountability, action learning naturally creates accountability. This is because the focus is not on the action taken, but on the *learning* that occurs when action is either taken or not taken.

For example, when a member of the community does not take action, he or she must still account for the failure to act. Instead of focusing on the fact that the person did not act, the community helps the person to learn from this experience. This process develops leadership skills in all of its members. Members become conscious of their behaviours, and take responsibility for their decisions and actions.

Action learning enhances individual, team, and organizational learning. It accomplishes this to such an extent that it can transform individuals, groups, and cultures, by creating ways of working that are based in valuing people and the relational systems they inhabit. And it even produces the tangible results that leaders so often desire: increased productivity, creativity, revenue generation, cost saving, and return on investment. What more can you ask?

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Key Point
If you focus on the learning that occurs while solving a problem, you get the best of both worlds: you learn from your actions while solving the problem. In other words, you *learn at the speed of change*.

Reg Revans developed action learning as a way to educate people in organizations to deal effectively with complexity, change, and uncertainty. To do this, Revans focused on learning, and used the task of solving problems as a way in which people could learn most effectively. There are two ways to learn from action; however, one way is more effective than the other:

- **If you focus on the task of solving a problem**, the learners and the learning experience take second place to solving the problem. This is often the case in most of the problem solving that occurs in our daily lives. People solve problems without either questioning their assumptions or learning deeply from the decisions and actions they take to solve the problem. Too often, the results are solutions that do not deal effectively with the problems in the long term. This is not what action learning is about.

- **If you focus on the learning that occurs while solving a problem**, you get the best of both worlds: you learn from your actions while solving the problem. In other words, you *learn at the speed of change*. There is a paradox in action learning: when you slow down to learn from your actions, you actually speed up your ability to take actions that are more effective in the long term. This, in turn, increases your productivity and saves you time. The catch is that you need to take time in the short term in order to save time in the long term. As hard as this is, those people who do it experience more success.

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Democracy and six characteristics of action learning

Embedded within action learning are the principles of a *direct democracy*. A direct democracy is a political system in which citizens participate in the decision making personally, as opposed to relying on intermediaries or representatives. In action learning, the people who are involved in the democratic process of action learning are the people who own the problem, and will therefore own the solutions.

Key Point
There are six characteristics of action learning, all based on valuing people and their ability to learn from their actions.

Dissent and majority rule are also principles of a democracy, and therefore of a direct democracy. However, in a direct democracy, dissent is critical to determining a majority position. If citizens hear the dissenting opinions, they will be much better informed before voting to determine the majority position. In action learning, the principle of dissent is resident in Revans' concept of *questioning insight* (Q).

In this Guide, the human dynamics that occur during the action learning process can be described using the following six characteristics. These characteristics value people and their ability to learn from their actions:

- People solve real-life problems that they experience in their day-to-day work and life.
- People learn to solve these real problems with the help and support of others.
- People reflect on their decisions and actions, in order to learn about how they think and act within the problem situation.
- People ask questions that bring to the surface deeply held assumptions, so that these assumptions can be openly discussed.
- People bring their experiences and expertise to the learning, in order to help others.
- People are accountable for their decisions and actions, and are committed to taking action on their decisions.

Reference
For more information on the ancient origins of *democracy* and the concept of a *direct democracy*, go to http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democracy#Ancient_origins.

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Action learning definitions

Key Point
Learning required the learner to challenge the assumptions underlying that knowledge, and that challenging Revans called *questioning insight*. In action learning, Revans stipulated that learning happens through the act of taking action in the real world, rather than in analysis, thinking about problems, making decisions, or making recommendations. Although all of these things feed into the learning process, learning occurs only when action is taken in the real world.

Reference
For more information on *learning* and Revans' formula L = P + Q, go to Section 2, page 30.

Reg Revans' perspective on action learning was based primarily on working with managers, in diverse groups of peers, in which the managers did not know each other. In this Guide, action learning and related terms are somewhat different from Revans' initial definitions. These terms and related ideas are defined below:

- **Learning (L):** As a scientist, Revans defined learning using a formula. The formula is shown below:

  $$L = P + Q$$

  or

  L (learning) = **P** (programmed knowledge) + **Q** (questioning insight)

  What Revans was saying in this formula was that knowing something (*programmed knowledge*) was not learning. Learning required the learner to challenge the assumptions underlying that knowledge, and that challenging Revans called *questioning insight*. In action learning, Revans stipulated that learning happens through the act of taking action in the real world, rather than in analysis, thinking about problems, making decisions, or making recommendations. Although all of these things feed into the learning process, learning occurs only when action is taken in the real world.

- **Programmed Knowledge (P):** Revans defined programmed knowledge as expert knowledge. Every person has this *internal expert knowledge*, knowledge that he or she has gained through experience. Revans had an abhorrence of what could be termed *external expert knowledge* — knowledge that is held by specialists. The whole idea of action learning was to have the people working on the project use their own internal expert knowledge, without needing to rely on external expert knowledge, such as that from a specialist.

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Key Point
To Revans, action learning is a group of diverse managers learning from and with each other, and taking action on what they learned.

Reference
Alan Mumford has been the Professor of Management Development at the International Management Centres, Buckingham, since its inception. In that role, he was responsible for developing the Centre's approach to improving management performance through effective learning processes, such as action learning. He has published numerous books and articles on management development, and has worked as a consultant with directors and senior managers in a variety of organizations.

- **Questioning Insight (Q)**: Revans defined questioning insight as a challenging form of inquiry into what is thought to be known (P). That is why Revans' formula for learning is written as:

$$L = P + Q$$

However, Alan Mumford, a highly respected researcher in action learning, has modified Revans' learning formula into the following:

$$Q_1 + P + Q_2 = L$$

Mumford also redefines Q as a problem or challenge that a learner faces. In Mumford's research, the most effective learning is driven by the need to resolve a problem (Q_1). This leads to acquiring the necessary knowledge (P), which then stimulates learners to identify further problems or opportunities (Q_2).

- **Action Learning:** To Revans, action learning is a group of diverse managers learning from and with each other, and taking action on what they learned. In the famous Belgium project, the action learning sets were comprised of managers from different sectors of the economy (e.g., finance, manufacturing, government). These sets met on a regular basis and took action after each meeting. At the next meeting, set members reported on what had occurred as a result of taking action, then continued to solve problems and take action.

- **Action Learning Process:** The action learning process follows the learning cycle, giving appropriate attention to both reflection and action. This process is explained in more detail in Section 2. The actual process that this Guide promotes is self-managed by the action learning group or team, and is featured in Sections 4 and 5.

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Key Point

In this Guide, *action learning sets* are called *action learning groups*. The authors believe that action learning can take place in any diverse group, as well as in an intact work team. Even though action learning works best when diversity is high, and when teams are as diverse and cross-functional as possible, less diverse teams can still benefit greatly from action learning.

Reference

Mike Pedler, a published author, is a leading academic and consultant on management and leadership issues. He works with people in organizations on learning and development processes and practices and is particularly known for his work with action learning, the learning organization and leadership development.

- **Action Learning Group:** Revans called the groups *action learning sets* — a *set* being a group of people. Revans' term *set* probably comes from his physics and mathematics background, in which a *set* usually refers to a set of numbers, such as a *set of natural numbers* that can be represented as {0, 1, 2, …}. In this Guide, *action learning sets* are called *action learning groups*. The authors believe that action learning can take place in any diverse group, as well as in an intact team in which all members share the same problem. Even though action learning works best when diversity is high, and when teams are as diverse and cross-functional as possible, less diverse teams can still benefit greatly from action learning.

  Action learning is a process of inquiry. According to Mike Pedler, author of **Action Learning for Managers**, each member of the group, joins voluntarily, has his or her own problem to understand and to solve, and wants to help others in the action learning set to understand their problems and to take action. Members are also willing to take action in solving their own problems, and are willing to learn from the consequences of that action. The members of the group do not need to have any expertise in the problem area. One of the reasons that members can ask fresh questions is precisely because they do not know much about the problem area, and therefore can often see the problem in a new light. The group focuses on three aspects: real problems, how effective the group and its members are in the learning process of inquiry on the problem, and the actions that are taken to solve the problem. The members are mature individuals who are open to diverse and disparate perspectives, are willing to deal openly with conflict and challenge, and are flexible in their ability to work with others and with diverse ideas.

- **Set Advisor/Facilitator:** In most action learning literature, action learning groups are facilitated by an external *set advisor*, who act as coaches and mentors to help the action learning groups to facilitate the action learning process. However, in this Guide, the action learning process is self-managed by the action learning group itself. Members of the action learning group select a facilitator from within the group itself. Detailed instructions for facilitating the action learning process are designed to assist the facilitator and the group to facilitate the process without any external intervention.

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Assumptions about people

Reference
David Perkins is a Senior Research Associate at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and author of several books.

The action learning process in this Guide is based on the following assumptions about people:

- People are smart and capable, but do not always know how to gain access to their gifts.
- People wish to be respectful and to work together collaboratively.
- People know much more than they think they do about what is going on.
- People want to help others in solving problems.
- People want to contribute to something that is purposeful and meaningful.
- People know how to communicate.
- People wish to be authentic and honest.
- People seek meaning and understanding.

Even more unique to the action learning process is that, with little effort, the action learning process creates the conditions for the emergence of *expert learners*. According to David Perkins, author of **Outsmarting IQ**, expert learners are able to:

- Generate the knowledge required to anticipate and to create the future
- Take the initiative to identify problems, and to solve those problems
- Create a culture in their organizations that favours two-way communication
- Sustain a high level of internal motivation
- Learn continuously, in order to develop themselves and their organizations
- Release their talent and energy for innovation, creativity, and risk
- Increase their confidence, their capacity to understand others, their ability to achieve results in spite of uncertainty, and their capacity to work with diverse people and groups
- Embrace complexity, uncertainty, and diversity, so that they can respond effectively to change

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The Five Disciplines of a Learning Organization

Reference

Peter Senge is Director of the Systems Thinking and Organizational Learning Program at MIT's Sloan School of Management.

Christine Oliver is an organizational consultant and psychotherapist in the public, private, and not-for-profit sectors in the U.K. She is a leading international author and teacher in the field of systemic organizational learning.

In 1990, Peter Senge, author of **The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of a Learning Organization**, articulated five disciplines that a learning organization practices:

1. **Personal Mastery**
   Individuals consistently realize the results that matter most deeply to them, and are committed to being accountable for their decisions and actions, and to learning from their experiences.
2. **Mental Models**
   Individuals and teams question the ingrained assumptions and beliefs that lead to their actions. Christine Oliver calls these mental models *stories we tell ourselves* that create the *patterns we live*.
3. **Shared Vision**
   Individuals see how their personal vision fits into the team and organizational visions. They recognize how they have created their current reality; therefore, they see how they can create the future they desire.
4. **Team Learning**
   Team members suspend their assumptions, and enter into collaborative and cooperative thinking, dialogue, decision making, acting, and learning. Individuals value differences and diversity within the team.
5. **Systems Thinking**
   Individuals and teams understand the interconnectedness of all things, and the impact of decisions and actions in both the short and long term.

Senge does not see the five disciplines as separate entities. Instead, he sees them as an integrated system for developing the capabilities of an organization to learn at the speed of change. The action learning process creates the conditions in which these five disciplines are realized. Of the five disciplines, the ones that the action learning process develops the most are personal mastery, mental models (Q), and team learning. At its core, the action learning process is the ultimate team learning process.

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Generative learning and action learning

Key Point
The action learning process is a *learning infrastructure* that builds more effective thinking patterns that actually *generate* alternatives, especially in times of stress and crisis, when we are most likely to become defensive. More effective thinking patterns allow us to use *any failure* or crisis as a learning opportunity for generating alternatives, instead of habitually getting caught in our defensive routines.

Most organizations are very good at *adaptive* learning; that is, learning to adapt to the changing environment. However, since adaptive learning uses established ways of thinking, it does not create *new* ways of thinking about difficult and complex situations. Adaptive learning is based on problem solving, but that is only one part of learning. The second part of learning requires people to be conscious of their contribution to the organization's problems, and how they can change the ways in which they think and act in order to solve those problems. This is called *generative learning*. Without *generative* learning, organizations, and the people within organizations, fall prey to the same reactive thinking and behaviours that are used each time a crisis arises, even when these behaviours no longer work. Action learning is such a generative learning process.

The action learning process is a *learning infrastructure* that builds more effective thinking patterns that actually *generate* alternatives, especially in times of stress and crisis, when we are most likely to become defensive. More effective thinking patterns allow us to use *any failure* or crisis as a learning opportunity for generating alternatives, instead of habitually getting caught in our defensive routines. Action learning is a learning system that can be embedded easily into any work process.

One way to understand the action learning process in this Guide is to examine fields that practice action learning (e.g., sports, theatre). These fields set up a discipline of running a play, a scene, or a piece of music, over and over again. The rules are strict, and timing is essential. The scenes are played over and over again with small variations, until they are the best that they can be. Each person plays an integral part, and is responsible for, and accountable to, both himself or herself, and the group as a whole. When rehearsals are over, the group goes into performance. The paradox is that the rules or controls allow the freedom and flexibility to learn new thinking patterns and behaviours that are required to achieve exceptional performance.

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Using this Guide

When to use this Guide

Key Point
You can use action learning to develop leadership skills, high-performing teams and individuals, and a learning organization.

Reference
There are a number of support materials for action learning. For more information, see Section 8, pages 182-183.

To do action learning, you need:

- A challenging problem to solve, or an opportunity to investigate
- A group of diverse people, or a working team of people, who are willing to commit time and effort to do action learning
- The action learning process to guide the group

Use action learning when you want to:

- ❑ Solve challenging problems that seem unsolvable, or to investigate possible opportunities
- ❑ Develop leadership skills
- ❑ Deal effectively with complexity, change, and uncertainty
- ❑ Develop a learning organization
- ❑ Develop high-performing individuals and/or teams
- ❑ Increase creativity and innovation

Use action learning in the following situations:

- ❑ **Leadership development:** You want to develop leadership ability in yourself and/or others.
- ❑ **Organizational learning:** You want people within your organization to cross boundaries, such as departments, in order to learn from each other and to share best practices.
- ❑ **Individual learning:** You want to solve problems by working with a group of people who are not in the same organization or the same department within an organization.
- ❑ **Cross-organizational learning:** You want people from different organizations to learn from each other and to share best practices.

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Learning in community

There are two approaches to using action learning in a learning community that are found in this Guide.

- Action learning for diverse groups (e.g., a group of strangers)
- Action learning for teams (e.g., a work group or team)

Key Point
In this Guide, there are two approaches for using action learning:

- Action learning for diverse groups
- Action learning for teams

Action Learning for Diverse Groups

Originally, Revans developed action learning groups that were comprised of a number of people from a variety of backgrounds and occupations. An action learning group has about 5-8 people. In this Guide, the group size that is suggested for diverse groups is 5-6 people. These people:

- Do not work together on a daily basis
- Are not of the same occupational group
- Do not report to each other

Members of an action learning group can be from within one organization, or from a number of different organizations. In this Guide, when doing action learning for diverse groups, there is no formal facilitator, since the group facilitates itself, using the process described in this Guide in Section 4. When the members of this group are from within an organization, this enhances the capability for *individual* and *organizational learning*.

Reference
If you want to facilitate action learning for teams, see the accompanying *Action Learning for Teams Facilitation Guide*. For information on this accompanying Guide, see Section 8, page 182.

Action Learning for Teams

Action learning for teams occurs in situation in which members:

- Work together on a daily basis
- May or may not be of the same occupational group
- May or may not report to each other

When the members of this action learning group are from a working team, you enhance the capability for *team learning*. When working with teams, you need to use a modified action learning process that is described in Section 5.

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How to use this Guide

Reference

For more information on:

- Orienting people to action learning, see Section 3, page 81
- Coordinating an action learning group, see Section 3, page 69

This Guide is designed for people to:

- Conduct action learning groups
- Participate in action learning groups

If you want to conduct action learning groups, you will find information to help you to:

- Understand action learning as a concept
- Orient people to the action learning experience
- Form action learning groups
- Conduct an action learning process
- Find more information on action learning
- Increase your ability to enhance the action learning experience

If you want to participate in action learning groups, you will find all of the instructions you need in this Guide. The action learning process is highly self-directed, which means that members of the action learning group are in charge of the entire process.

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How this Guide works

This Guide has the following eight sections:

1. **Action Learning**
   This section includes information on action learning, and how to use this Guide.
2. **Action Learning System**
   This section includes information on the *Learning Cycle*, the *Critical Thinking Model*, the *Action Learning System*, and how the *Action Learning System* works.
3. **Start Here! Road Maps**
   This section includes information on road maps that tell you where to start in the action learning process. This section also includes information on how to coordinate an action learning experience, select members for an action learning group, and conduct action learning meetings.
4. **Action Learning Process for Diverse Groups**
   This section includes information on how to prepare the action learning group for an action learning experience, and how to do the action learning process with diverse groups.
5. **Action Learning Process for Teams**
   This section includes information on how to prepare the action learning group for an action learning experience, and how to do the action learning process with teams.
6. **Advanced Tools**
   This section includes information on advanced action learning tools that support the action learning process.
7. **Using Action Learning**
   This section includes different approaches that follow action learning principles, as well as ways to apply the action learning process in life and work.
8. **More Information**
   This section includes information on research references, useful contacts, Guide references, other reading, and an index.

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