LIM
Leadership in International Management

Dear Reader,

Over the years LIM has developed a number of best practices, tools, concepts and processes that help teams improve their relationships and performance using Action Reflection Learning® principles. As internal HR, OD and Training and Learning professionals wanted to learn more, LIM developed an ARL® Team Coach Certification Program for internal coaches[1].

This month we share with you the reflections of one such professional, who participated in a Certification Program in China. She is the OD Manager for a multinational corporation. English is her second language, and we have kept her comments as she wrote them. Her learning journey is amazing, and her candid report is full of lessons for all of us. Thank you, KM!

Enjoy the reading,

Isabel Rimanoczy
Editor

Quote of the Month
"One step at a time. There is no other way, anyway." Uncle Wilbur

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Becoming an ARL Team Coach,
My Journey

By KM, China

Some months ago, I received an internal email from our HR department to invite me to attend a half-day workshop named Action Reflection Learning.

"Action Reflection Learning? What does it mean? Does that mean learning by doing? How the workshop can help people from doing to learning?" With all these curious questions, finally I entered into my 1st training class for ARL. One 70 years old man came to my eyes. "Hi, I'm Ernie Turner." "Hi, KM". It's my 1st time to meet Ernie, president of LIM and founder and book writer of ARL. He looked very gentleman with a smile on his face. I noticed there were no tables in the training room, but only 10 chairs set in a round circle. I said to myself in the heart "maybe it would be a unique learning journey."

To my surprise, it's more unique journey than I had thought of. We started our journey by raising our personal questions and sharing our personal stories and then we tried to work together as peer coach to help each other to solve our personal challenges in our daily work and life! First time, I see different things from my peers who I had worked together for several months. First time, we started to connect with each other in personal side. First time, I saw and felt how the peer could be good coach with each other! How we could stimulate our thoughts each other by following a well structure peer coaching process! It was really good things to try out!

Right after the 1st workshop, we immediately made 2 decisions. Firstly, we decided to learn more about ARL and introduced the tool to the company and other peer colleagues. Secondly, we decided to use the peer coaching tool in our upcoming Regional General Mgr's workshop. With the team's efforts, both the team's decisions came true. In the end of August, we successfully facilitated a peer coaching session to solve our Regional General Mgr's selected personal challenges in Regional General Mgr's workshop. This session had been remarked by the participants as highly valuable part during the 2 days' workshop later. And in Oct of 2011, I also formally started my ARL Team Coach Certification Program with my peers together.

With more and more exposure to ARL concepts and tools, I became more and more interested to be an ARL team coach. Different from traditional learning experience, the expertise, knowledge, answers, instructions, decision not only came from the coaches, the trainers, the so-called experts, but also came from all the individual learning participants. The individual learners took full ownership on his or her learning. They learnt to access their own tacit knowledge and support each other to find solutions for their own challenges. And each learner is fully respected and supported for achieving his or her personal learning goals and gets the real growth that can help him or her make difference in their personal work and life thereafter. It's really fantastic!

In November of 2011, right after I have completed my 2nd learning model for ARL Team Coach Certification Program, I received a business request to facilitate a team learning workshop. With no hesitation, I decide to try out my expertise as ARL team coach.

I'm INTJ per MBTI test. With no doubt, I start to prepare for the workshop almost immediately right after receiving the assignment. I conducted a personal role contracting with the business leader and responsible HR business partner to understand their expectations on the key desired

outcomes for the workshop. And then I sent an email to all the workshop participants to collect their personal challenges at present and asked them to prepare to share some personal life up and down stories during the workshop. Moreover, I made several calls with some selected participants and their line mgrs and tried to understand my workshop participants more.

Quickly, I found myself the 1st challenge during my workshop design and preparations phase. I found that I just could never get ready for my workshop! Themore information I heard and collected from the key stakeholders and workshop participants and the more complex the situation seemed to be. As each participant holds very different personal challenges and expectations for the workshop. Their challenges ranged from how to improve personal communication skill, influencing skill, and how to explore new market, how to manage work pressure effectively and how to solve conflict effectively to how to manage personal growth and career. How to touch so many topics and address so many issues in a half-day workshop? Right after this question, immediately I asked myself "shall I go back to the original question that is what shall be real key outcome for the workshop? Shall I help address each individual participant's real challenges raised or shall I help them to connect with each other deeper and find their personal power and potential as a team to support each other to solve their challenges during their work? Quickly I decided to take the 2ndoption as my desired outcome and communicated my thoughts with my key stakeholders for the workshop and fortunately got alignment and support with her quickly. In just a half day, I completed a workshop design outline which including:

1. Desired workshop outcome

2. How to open the workshop

3. Key leaning activities and timeframe for each activities

4. Workflow and sequence of the events

Different from previous experience, there is no PowerPoint prepared for the workshop this time. It seems that I have completed all my paper work for the workshop preparation with 1 page of Word document. But just starting from that time, I suddenly realized my true challenges may come. As I just had a workflow at hand and I really don't know

1. What exactly the participants will come out with all the designed activities and how the team member will interact with each other?

2. When I shall jump in and provide the team just-in-time coaching, tool, concept as team coach? If I should, will I have right tools or concepts come up to my mind to provide to the team?

3. Shall I provide some one on one coaching for an individual participant if some individuals are requesting?

Suddenly I found it seems that I can never get ready for the workshop! I start to refresh my memories on a lot of concepts and tools and prepare my head with the systematic knowledge ranging from communication, influencing skill, conflict management, stress management, change management, engagement, career management, even some selling skills and negation skill and selling tools as my workshop participants are mainly coming from sales team.

With all that experience, my firstly learning insight as ARL team coach is that as an ARL team coach, maybe we don't need to prepare a huge amount of paper work, but we do need to prepare a huge amount of knowledge, experience, expertise, concept, tools, linkage, applications, stories in

our heads.

With my fully preparation, finally I came to the day that I need to deliver the workshop. As originally planned I'm supposed to deliver workshop starting at 1 p.m. and ending at 5 p.m. in the afternoon. In the morning of that day, the participants need to listen to speech from top leaders and then several personal best practice sharing. 1 hour after the morning session started, I realized my 2nd challenge as ARL Team Coach came. That is how to keep flexible and redesign the designed workshop during a short period. The morning session has been dramatically delayed! Most luckily I can start my workshop at 2:30 p.m. and I had hard stop at 5 p.m. as quite a lot of participants need to catch up their flights that day. I quickly restructured my workshop outline and learning activities in my mind... What learning activities we can move away? What learning must be kept? How can I further structure each "must to do" learning activities with no need to compromise the desired workshop outcome? It's really tough in short period. Fortunately, I got my revised plan ready before lunch and have brief communication with the key stakeholders and got her buy in.

At 2:30 p.m. that day, I formally kicked of my first ARL workshop as team coach. The participants seems feel a little bit strange with the room setting as there are no tables as they familiar but only chairs set in the round circle. I kick off the workshop by asking the participants to share their critical moment in the past month. The participants seem to feel a little bit uncomfortable and surprised by such request in the very beginning. But they still start to think about themselves during the silence. Three minutes later, the first participant starts to share his story. The story is not quite exciting, but I can feel it's really critical moment for the story teller. With more stories shared, I can feel more and more emotion come on board from the participants. Story becomes longer and longer, and I became more and more struggling.

I know my challenges came again. I'm behind my planned schedule again. Shall I stop the story sharing to catch up with my planned schedule or shall I keep continuing the nice emotions and stories telling among the team? Quickly I made decision in my mind. I need to respect learning participants' learning needs instead of my planned workshop schedule. And I need to keep flexible to mostly address the learning participants' learning needs. So I quickly decided to redesign my revised plan again and respect the emotions among the team and pre-set principles for the session that is to provide equal sharing opportunity to everyone and to listen to each one carefully and try best to support each other as much as possible. I completed my redesign plan quickly in my mind.

Just at that time, my third challenge came. A lady participant began to cry in the mid of her story telling. And she was so emotional and could not continue with her story. However, her story seemed arouse great emotional echo among the team! I could see some other women participants start to get tear eyes as well. All the team members had emotional faces as well. They seemed quite understanding what had happened thereafter and why she became so emotional except me! I realized that it's time for me to jump in to provide something to the team. So I said to the team "I noticed that all the people are quite emotional at present, who could tell me why you all feel so emotional and what's your specific emotion at present." The question seems very helpful. The participant start to speak up their emotions and why? Then I could sense strong feeling of uncertainty, pressure, passion to achieve success but seemed lack of confidence at certain level commonly shared among the team. I've doubled checked my understanding with the team and got the team's confirmation on my understanding. So immediately I decide to provide some just-in-time intervention to the team. We talked about where the uncertainty and pressure come from, why seemed lack of confidence, how to find and explore personal talent. The team seemed quite satisfied with this jump in and had smiles on the faces.

After the session, I noticed I really run out of quite a lot of time. I decided to talk to my participants frankly about my personal challenges this time. "Now I have a personal challenge that I need your suggestions and support. I have met great time pressure now. "With this opening, I briefly introduce my revised workshop design plan to the participants and then I provided 2 optional solutions." Now we have 2 options. One is to revise the designed plan again then we can complete our workshop right at 5 p.m. but in this way, we may need to decide together which part in designed plan we want to move away. Or we can keep the original design, then we may need to complete the workshop at 5:20 p.m. Now I need team's decision on how we want to move on as it's your learning journey together." The team has a very quick discussion and then came to a conclusion quickly that they want to postpone the workshop until 5:20 p.m. so that they could experience all the parts of designed workshop.

In the following afternoon, I became more and more confidence to provide timely jump in during the session of peer coaching, debriefing and Reflection & Dialog of the designed workshop. The workshop ended at exactly 5:20 p.m. After the workshop, many participants did not want to leave. They said they have never experienced such a workshop where they feel they are so deeply connected and supported by peers, where they are so deeply understood and where they got inner energy for their personal learning and growing and achieve their personal learning goals.

I understood all these fantastic things came from ARL principles. I just tried my best to follow the ARL principles during the both design and delivery stage of the workshop. Meanwhile, I also collect feedback from workshop participants and took self reflection as well on what I did well and what I shall improve next time for the workshop and what's my key learning insight.

My conclusions are summarized as below:

What I did well?

1. Put workshop participants' learning needs as 1st priority and keep flexible on workshop agenda and even redesign the agenda during the workshop

2. Listen to the participants' stories and sharing carefully even some of the stories are quite boring

3. Provide equal participation to each workshop participant and show respect to every one

4. Timely address the key emotional echo of all the participants during the workshop

5. Share my personal challenges with workshop participant frankly and ask the participants to make critical decision together

What shall I further improve?

1. During the pre-design stage of workshop, need to be more prepared for all the possible emergencies during workshop delivery so as to be more prepared to the various re-designed workshop agenda instead of doing this in a rush.

2. Need more practice on when to jump in to the team and how

Key learning insight

1. Daily accumulation of expertise, knowledge, concept, tool are quite important to be a great team coach

2. Always keep ARL principles in mind

3. Keep flexible to really address key learning needs of learning participants

My journey as ARL team coach has just started. Definitely I will continue my journey on my trip!

K.M., China

[1] Click here to read more about LIM's **ARL Team Coach Certification Program**