

ARL™ News

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The Action Reflection Learning™ Newsletter

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COACHING FOR CHANGE

The Action Reflection Learning Approach
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This is an extract of the paper presented at the ODN International Conference, Vancouver 2001. It offers a definition of Coaching for Change, using the Action Reflection Approach. It describes the key elements of ARL that are applicable to individual coaching, and the change cycle that underlies the model.

WHAT IS COACHING?

Coaching is the support given to an individual or a team by a coach. Within the ARL approach, the coach helps the individual or team to clarify his/her/their challenge/problem, validate its importance, develop a plan of action, take next steps and extract lessons .

WHAT ARE DIFFERENT TYPES OF COACHING HATS?

Coaches using ARL wear a number of “hats” that have to be chosen strategically according to the circumstances. To define what is the appropriate hat for the occasion is the main challenge. The different “hats” are:

- Reflector hat:: Asking questions to foster reflection.
- Expert hat:: Sharing information from his experience and knowledge.
- Instructor hat:: Teaching tools and techniques.
- Colleague hat:: Offering his personal opinion and perspective.

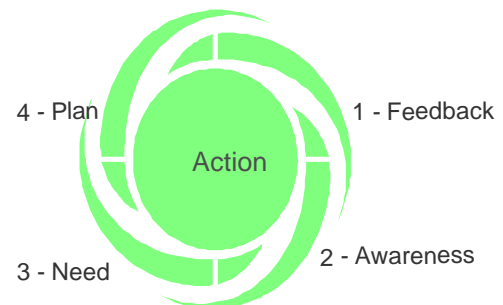
The Coach should prompt answers from the other as much as possible. When this does not happen, he may offer his own expertise, knowledge, experience, and ideas as a resource. The challenge is to avoid doing this too often, so that it never replaces the thinking process of the other person. The Instructor hat should only be worn “just in time”.

What is ARL?

Action Reflection Learning was defined as a modified version of Action Learning, in the late 80s. From the experience of the MiL Institute in Sweden and Ernie Turner in the US, learning does not automatically result from action. For the learning to occur, an intermediate step is essential: the awareness of what has happened in the “action phase”. Awareness is rarely a spontaneous event (Aha-Erlebnis); it requires an intellectual process - thinking “about” an action. For awareness to take

place, it is necessary to make a pause in the action and introduce a challenging question to promote reflection on what has happened. Thus, reflection was found to have a major role in this “Action Learning” process. As a consequence of this, a learning-cycle was defined:

5 - New Action



Each phase is supported by different interventions and tools to reach depth and efficiency of the cycle. A Coach who is trained to see the “just-in-time” learning opportunities guides the learner/s along the cycle and introduces tools and concepts to optimize the process of working on a task.

What are the ARL key elements that are used in Individual Coaching?

✍ Question-driven process

Question asking is the key element of the awareness process. The principle supporting this is that people have the knowledge to find their own answers, but need to be asked good questions to be able to find them. By asking the right questions a person will be able to discover why and how he/she did something, what should be repeated/avoided in the future, what the strengths are, what other options exist, what past lessons should guide future actions, and an infinite number of other discoveries related to the action.

In an individual coaching session, the learner begins stating the question that he/she wants to work on. Then, throughout the whole session, question asking will have a central role:

- a) for the Coach, to help the learner in finding his/her own answers;
- b) for the Coach, as a way to help uncover underlying assumptions and lessons from the past as well as possible scenarios for the future;
- c) for the learner, to discover new questions he/she should be facing.



Balance Task and Learning

For real learning to take place, the accent has to be as much on the learning as on addressing the challenge that the person is facing. The ARL coaching sessions therefore will always be focused on a real problem, conflict, dilemma that the learner needs to solve or to explore. It is not an intellectual exercise but a concrete situation that requires action as a result. The learning happens when the learner actually tries out new behaviors.

Learning Styles

According to Bernice McCarthy's findings, we each have our preferred learning style. People can be oriented towards the "Why?" (interested in knowing the purpose and rationale before they can move ahead), the "What?" (interested in data, information, research, and theory), oriented towards the "How?" (the mechanics of the process) and the "So what?" (pragmatic orientation and application: what can I do with this?). Discovering our own learning style is part of the learning process, as the coach will be better able to consider the "why/how/what or so what" preference of the learner in his/her interventions.

Learning Coach

The Learning Coach, which is the name of the Coach utilizing an ARL approach, has many different roles: he/she observes, questions, summarizes, paraphrases, builds a link between the situation and other possible scenarios, provides feedback, concepts, tools, highlights learning moments.

His/her role is key in the learning cycle because of three aspects:

- 1) he/she is focused on the process and therefore will act as mirror" asking questions that help the learner to see him/herself (reflection \neq awareness);
- 2) he/she provides the JITL;
- 3) helps the individual/teams apply lessons to their daily work life.

Just-in-Time Learning

ARL is based on another well known principle: that learning happens best when the person is in the problem-situation. This is how we learned to speak our first language. We needed it to communicate! All the concepts or tools the Learning Coach considers important to transfer will only be transferred when the learner is facing the obstacle or the need. As opposed to the "just in case" training that we received during our formal education, Just-In-Time-Learning means to wait for the learning opportunity.

Sequential Process

Learning is changing the ways we do things, the ways we think and act. Change is an ongoing process and behaviors usually don't change in one event. For assimilation of a learning - a new behavior needs to be tried out, modified or improved and tried out again.

To respect the progressive pace of change (the cycle of acting, reflecting for awareness, experiencing the need of a change, planning it and acting it out) it is important that there be periodical sessions.

Personal Journal

As important as the questions are to promote the pause and awareness, the personal journal is the way a person connects with him/herself. Writing in a journal is a powerful learning element, helping an individual clarify his/her thoughts. The Learning Coach will encourage the learner to keep his/her personal journal, as a core element for the learning process.

Systemic approach

ARL is based on systems theory. Tools and concepts are conceived to be used in a complex interactive system. Questions are asked taking into account the systemic environment of the learner. Solutions are selected after examining their impact on the whole system. The Learning Coach will help the learner identify the multiple perspectives which need to be considered to ensure that the solution is feasible in the system in which the learner acts.

Appreciative approach

David Cooperrider's model of appreciative inquiry indicates that the best results are obtained when you focus on the positive side of people and their actions, building upon their strengths. The appreciative attitude of the Learning Coach is key to building trust and a non judging, safe environment. This transfers confidence into the learner and helps him/her to go after new ideas, taking calculated risks.

Conclusion

ARL has been developed as a number of design elements, tools and concepts that constitute a learning methodology applicable to a number of different learning scenarios: individual coaching sessions, project teams, intact teams, students, etc. When these ARL elements are carefully included into a coaching scenario it is possible to enhance learning and achieve systemic change.

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