

# Designing Action Learning Programs

## A Practitioner's Checklist

At SageWays, we have designed many variations of action learning programs ranging from 90 minute sessions to multiple weeks, including early in career talent to senior executives working on urgent and important business challenges or pressing social issues in emerging markets. Regardless of the scenario, this checklist has been an invaluable resource when crafting each development experience. We hope to share lessons and support you, as you prepare your team to design and deliver high impact action learning.

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### Purpose & Background

- What strategic organizational goals will this program address?
- What is the historical background for this program?
- Is this initiative being considered solely to solve an urgent problem? Is it part of a leadership development or organization development and change effort?

### Identifying the problem(s)

- How will problems be identified and selected? By whom?
- How critical are these problems/challenges to the success or fate of the organization?
- How clear and specific are the problem goals? (Can the problem goals be measured and quantified? How would you justify this program to the CFO, the executive management team, or the board of directors?)
- Have other efforts been made recently to address these problems/challenges? What results were achieved? What obstacles were encountered?
- Are acceptable solutions for these problems/challenges already known or available?
- What will happen if these problems/challenges are not resolved?

### Problem Ownership

- Is any other involved party currently working on these problems?
- Who are the important stakeholders for these problems/challenges? Who will be affected by the process of determining a recommended solution? The process of implementing an approved solution? The results of an implemented solution?
- How much involvement by these stakeholders is expected, desirable, and feasible?
- Which of the leaders of these stakeholder groups are willing to serve as sponsors? Providers of necessary resources to support this effort?

### Senior Leadership Responsibilities

- Are senior leaders clear on their responsibilities and involvement in this program?
- Will key senior leaders be available to provide visible and tangible support throughout the life of this program?

## Program Management Team

- Has a program manager been designated?
- Is a program steering committee desirable?

## How will teams be formed?

- How will program participants be identified?
- How has diversity of team membership been assured?
- Will team members be given release time from their routine responsibilities to participate in this initiative? How will their managers arrange to cover team members' responsibilities?
- Will participation in the team be added to team members' formal performance appraisal process?

## Program Format

- Will the team have *massed* meetings for a block of time (e.g., 5 full sequential days) or *spaced* over time (e.g., bi-monthly meetings for 3 months)
- If meetings are spaced, what is the expected intervals and length of time for meetings?
- Will meetings be held during regular work hours?
- Will all team members be available for team meetings (face-to-face and/or virtually)?

## Team Resources

- What resources (time, budget, technology, meeting space, staff assistance) will the organization provide to teams?
- How will team members and the organization manage the extra workload required for this program?

## Solution Presentations

- Will the teams be given the opportunity to present their solutions to senior leadership?
- Will the team be given assurances that worthy solutions will be seriously considered for implementation?
- Will the organization have a systematic method for evaluating solution presentations?
- Will the team be given feedback on senior leadership's decision?
- Will team members be asked to participate in the implementation of approved solutions?

## Solution Evaluation

- Is it desirable and will it be possible to measure the value of solutions (e.g. ROI)?
- Does the organization have resources to provide evaluation of solutions?

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