

This Issue

Issue #12, January 2007

Welcome to the 12th edition of the LDC Quarterly. To all our clients, colleagues, affiliates and friends, thank you for your support in 2006. We wish you a Happy New Year and look forward to working with you in 2007.

During 2006 LDC Group projects included a considerable amount of research, so to start the year we are focusing this edition of the newsletter on Action Learning, research we have undertaken to date on Direct Payments models in the disability services sector; and information about the Association for Qualitative Research.

As in previous editions of the LDC Quarterly, the following discussions are only overviews of the respective subjects. References are provided for readers interested in obtaining more comprehensive information about the subjects discussed.

Happy reading!

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Action Learning: a brief overview

Action learning is an action focused approach to management learning and organisational development. It shares similar assumptions to a number of research approaches including action research, participative action research, action science, developmental action enquiry, co-operative enquiry and experiential learning. Action learning can be seen as an ethos rather than just a method. The original principles of action learning are:

- The requirement for action as the basis for learning.
- Profound personal development resulting from reflection upon action.
- Working with problems that have no right answers.
- Problems are sponsored and aimed at organisational as well as personal development.
- Action learners work in sets of peers to support and challenge each other.

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- The search for fresh questions takes primacy over access to expert knowledge (Rigg 2006).

Action learning has such diverse origins that the meaning of action learning, and the experience of participants can vary considerably. All forms of action learning emphasise learning from experience in a deliberate, cyclic and integrated way (Howard 2003). The objectives of action learning are:

- to make progress on some problem,
- to give managers an opportunity to learn how to approach different problems,
- and to encourage managers to see their roles as learners from and with each other (Revans 1998).

Action learning is learning by doing. We learn from our actions, and from what happens to us and around us. It involves a group of people working together and requires regular meetings of the group to allow space and time for the questioning understanding and reflecting.

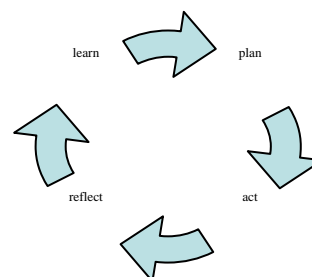
The six main elements of an action learning program are:

- the working group or learning set,
- the project or problems they are working on,
- the processes the group adopts when working,
- the group facilitator or coach,,
- the time limit on the program,
- the emphasis on learning (Weinstein 1999).

Working on a problem using an action learning process involves a continuous loop learning process. The cyclic process is often described using slightly different terms and generally has from 3 to 5 stages within the cycle.

An example of an action learning model is included in the Queensland Government guide developed for the Future Directions Program (QLD Department of Families 2002). The action learning model used by them involves a process of **plan, act, reflect, learn** which then leads into the next cycle. Its cyclical nature means that it generates deeper and deeper levels of learning.

Critical reflection, rethinking and a reinterpretation of the knowledge and experience gained from action is central to the action learning process. In turn, this leads to new learning and knowledge which are then used to inform the next cycle of plan, act, reflect learn (QLD Department of Families 2002). The cycle of learning is demonstrated in the following diagram.



Plan requires the planning of actions based on previous research, problem identification or a desire to change and study change.

Act involves making some interventions in the system such as: carrying out some research or enquiry or developing new structures.

Reflect engages the action learners in a study of their interventions.

Learning of a particular kind is central to the action research paradigm: learning which has the capacity to challenge and fundamentally transform the way those who engage in it understand, experience and do things (Cherry 1999). The cyclic process of action learning means that reflection leads back into action of one kind of another, and action is followed by reflection of one kind or another.

An action learning approach has been used in Queensland under the Future Direction Strategy in the Department of Families. They've found a number of challenges to implementing an action learning approach within government programs (Howard 2003). In particular:

- Action learning is about change and resistance is therefore inevitable; and
- Evaluation of action learning requires time.

Even so, programs that have used action learning have identified the following outcomes for participants:

- Increased personal knowledge
- Developed personal networks.
- Increased personal confidence and assertiveness and better able to challenge.

- A change to working practices (Fox, Rigg et al. 2006).

The most important outcome from action learning can be the improvement in communication and dialogue for the participants and within the organisation (Mead 2006).

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Direct Payments Models in Australia and Overseas

In the previous issues of the e-quarterly we reported that LDC has been contracted to evaluate the DHS Direct Payments Project which is trialling a Direct Payments model with a group of people with a disability and their family/carers. This project is due for completion in June 2007 and uses an action learning framework.

This is a very exciting project that has generated a great deal of discussion about options for people with a disability and their family/carers in managing their supports.

An overview of Direct Payments models researched at this stage of the project is provided. As we continue with the evaluation we are building knowledge and comparing national and international experiences of Direct Payments with the present trial.

Australia

Direct payments or funding to people with a disability has been implemented in two Australian states, Western

Australia and Queensland. Both states include a Local Area Coordination program with different structures for the management of direct payments.

In WA direct funding operates within the structure of the Local Area Coordination Program. This program offers a combination of case management, family support, personal advocacy, community development and direct funding. It was initially developed in rural WA to meet the needs of people with a disability and their families within their own local community and was later extended to cover all of WA (WA Disability Services Commission March 2003).

Queensland is considering a similar system to WA where people with a disability and their families can manage their own funds. Queensland has approximately 10 people who manage their own support and funding by incorporating as companies.

UK

Direct Payments has been operating in the UK since 1996 with local authorities given the discretionary power to pay cash directly to people with a disability aged between 18 and 65 years. This was extended in 2001 to include people over 65, young adults aged between 16 and 18 and to carers of young children. People with a disability can use the cash to purchase services directly including employing personnel to provide direct care. Currently they can't employ staff from the local authority but must use independent sources for their personal

care needs (UK Department of Health 2005).

Northern Ireland

The direct payments system works slightly differently to the United Kingdom with local health boards being responsible for the assessment of people with a disability and the provision of services. The number of people using direct payments in 2003 was very low. One option operating in Ireland involves the establishment of Micro-boards. A micro-board engages a number of key people involved in the disabled person's life, usually family and friends, who oversee the management of the direct payments scheme on his/her behalf. The micro-board is the 'employer' of the workers on the individual's behalf. (Bray Partnership Disability Research Steering Committee 2003).

Europe

A study by Halloran (1998) of direct payment schemes in Europe found they all have a system of directly funding in cash or kind (e.g. vouchers) physically disabled adults who directly manage (or indirectly with assistance from agencies, local authorities or third persons as may be necessary) their own personal assistance. This means that people with a disability have defined choices about who they employ and when they provide assistance. People with a disability are involved in the assessment of their own needs and enter into agreement with their assessors about their care plan. They also have access to some form of complaints procedure.

Canada

The Ontario Direct Funding Program is for adults with physical disabilities who can direct their own support. The Direct Funding Project has some infrastructure support, in the form of Independent Living Resource Centres (ILRC) across Ontario, that are available to support people who are applying to the program (Lord, Zupko et al. 2000).

British Columbia

British Columbia has a system of microboards similar to Ireland. A microboard is a small group of committed family and/or friends who join with a person to create a non-profit society that addresses the person's needs in an empowering and customized fashion and administers funds allocated to the person for supports and services (Vela Microboard Association).

USA

In the United States of America there has been considerable policy and program development in the area of direct payments since changes to funding practices in the 1980's. A review of the practice in 2003 found that of the 84% who responded to the survey 75% provided individual budgeting options. The extent of these varied considerably and were limited by geographical area, funding mechanism or program type. Eligibility to receive an individual budget depended on the type of funding received and what kind of program the person was enrolled in (Gaylord, Moseley et al. 2004).

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About the Association for Qualitative Research (AQR)

The Association for Qualitative Research is an international organisation that brings together qualitative researchers so they can discuss and exchange ideas about qualitative research.

AQR is interdisciplinary, and is open to researchers working in a variety of fields including sociology, health, education, history, occupational therapy, psychology, social work, business, anthropology, counselling, management, hospitality and tourism, criminology and speech communication (among others).

The objectives of the Association are:

- To improve the theory, practice and use of qualitative research across the disciplines of the human sciences
- To provide a forum for the discussion of ideas via regional meetings, publications and annual international conferences
- To link people who have similar interests in qualitative research
- To provide education and training in the methodologies of qualitative research
- To establish and maintain ethics and standards in the practice of qualitative research
- To recognise in appropriate ways outstanding contributions to the theory and/or practice of qualitative research.

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AQR holds a conference every 2 years, and this year (2007) the conference will be held at **Monash University on Tuesday 13th and Wednesday 14th of November**. The title of 2007 AQR conference is “Qualitative Research and the Professions”. The focus is on the relationship between qualitative research and professional practice. A call for papers will be posted shortly on the AQR website.

AQR also publishes the “Qualitative Research Journal” twice yearly; and conducts a series of seminars and workshops during the year.

For general inquiries about this organisation please contact the secretary: Pam Green
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For information about AQR including seminars and workshops visit the website:
<http://www.latrobe.edu.au/aqr/>

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<http://www.latrobe.edu.au/aqr/>

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