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# Fostering Active Learning in Organizations

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## 1. Introduction: training vs learning

Many organizations at any level, tend to confuse training and learning. Training gets things done to you. Learning is something an individual does themselves.

*Learning* is more important than *training*.

- *Training* (and instruction and teaching) are organizational responsibilities and activities. The organization decides who is to have what kind of *training*, or instruction or teaching. The persons involved are often told, rarely asked or even consulted.
- By contrast, *learning* is each person's responsibility and opportunity, a key element of being in charge of one's own self-development.

The organization and all of its members, have the obligation to support and encourage each member's learning for their mutual benefit. Successful organizations are *learning organizations*, i.e. organizations where learning is an integrated process at any level.

1. Adult leaders should be engaged in their own discovery process and
2. They should be motivated to learn.

Therefore, organizations need *learning facilitators*.

*A facilitator is somebody able to motivate, equip, encourage and guide learners in their own discovery process.*

Don't worry, the idea is not to sack trainers - they have a very valuable experience - the idea is to encourage them to give more importance to *active learning*, as the key factor of success. The idea is to encourage them to move from *training people* to *motivating and supporting them in active learning*.

## 2. An approach based on a problem-solving

AL4AL will start not from ideological assumptions but from real problems met by leaders at grass root levels. In their daily work, members of organizations face difficulties and problems. At the basis of our approach there will be a problem solving process, for example, what are the difficulties youth leaders met in :

- Understanding young people's characteristics and expectations ;
- Developing successful activities meeting young people's needs and interests ;
- Ensuring security during the activities and preventing young people from harm ;
- Implementing youth participation ;
- Helping each young person develop a set of values and develop moral autonomy ;
- Helping each young person develop his/her personal objective and evaluate their achievement ;
- Etc.

On each of these topics and many others, the AL4AL approach can be applied to find out learning solutions.

### 3. The process of learning

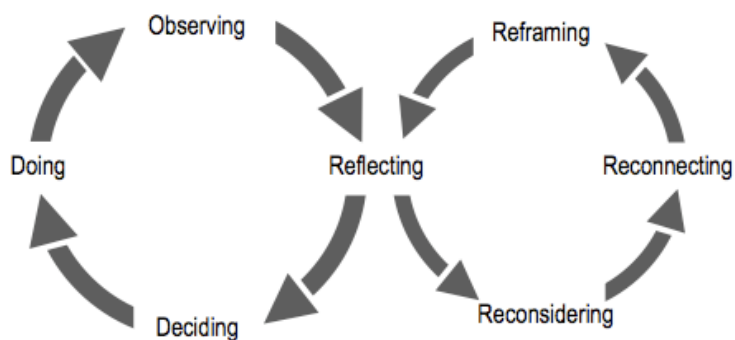
#### **Learning cycles**

The *Active Learning for Adult Leaders* approach is based on *learning cycles* where learners have the opportunity to:

- Be engaged in activities
- Observe and reflect
- Discover or develop concepts (models, frameworks, generalizations)
- Test them in new situations
- And gain experience

To achieve that, AL4AL puts the emphasis on two main kinds of experience and two main kinds of dialogue:

- *Experience*
  - ✓ **Observing:** the learners watch or listen to someone else doing something that is related to what their learning is about, for example observing children playing and interacting each others (direct observation), or watching a video film or reading a story about the experience of a group of children (vicarious observation).
  - ✓ **Doing:** any learning activity where the learners actually do something. For example organizing and leading an outdoors game with children (direct doing), or preparing a handout explaining how to plan an outdoors activity for children (vicarious doing).
- *Dialogue*
  - ✓ **Dialogue with Self:** a learner is invited to think reflectively about a topic, i.e., to ask him or herself what they think or should think, what they feel about the topic, etc. This is thinking about one's own way of thinking.
  - ✓ **Dialogue with Others:** learners are invited to take part in small group discussion on a given topic. This help participants reconsidering their basic assumptions and reconnect their experience to new possible approaches and perspectives in order to articulate new possible guiding ideas.



Learning cycles according to Peter Senge (Schools that Learn. 2000)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In a situation of team work, a second loop appears in "reflecting", because people are led to share their mental models and beliefs and to challenge each others their ways of thinking. This leads to a deeper learning.

## ***Strengthening the interaction between experience and dialogue***

To multiply the educational impact of active learning, AL4AL tries to use the four main learning models in an interactive way.

For example, in a learning activity where the objective is to discover what is youth participation and how to implement it, the learners may have to:

1. Think about what they know about youth participation and write their own thoughts on a sheet of paper (*Dialogue with self*);
2. Observe a video film showing how young people are involved in selecting and planning their activities (*Observation*);
3. Take part in a group discussion to share their ideas and their remarks, agree on a common definition of youth participation and the conditions to implement it (*Dialogue with others*);
4. Organize a sociogram within a group of young people to analyze the relationships between individuals and then propose a way to set up various teams and organize the group (*Doing*).
5. Finally each learner evaluates what they have discovered during the module and decide how to implement that in their own unit (*Dialogue with Self*).

By having to write their own thoughts (*Dialogue with Self*) before they engage in *Dialogue with Others*, learners can have a richer and more engaging group discussion. At its turn, the observation is again richer and more engaging when it is preceded by a collective dialogue. Then, after this dialogue, learners will have a better sense of what they need to do and what they need to learn during the following *Doing*. Finally if, after *Doing*, the learners process this experience by writing about it (*Dialogue with Self*) and/or discussing it with others (*Dialogue with Others*), this will add further insight. Such a sequence of learning activities will give the facilitator and learners the advantage of the power of interaction.

It would also have been possible to start with *Doing* and *Observing* (with half of the group observing the other half doing) and then pass to personal reflection (*Dialogue with self*) followed by a group discussion (*Dialogue with others*).

The important aspect is to create a dialectic between the two principle components of Active Learning: Experience and Dialogue.

- New experiences (whether of *Doing* or *Observing*) have the potential to give learners a new perspective on what is true (beliefs) and/or what is good (values) in the world.
- Dialogue (whether with *Self* or with *Others*) has the potential to help learners construct the many possible meanings of experience and the insights that come from them.

## **4. The Learning Modules**

### ***How to build a module?***

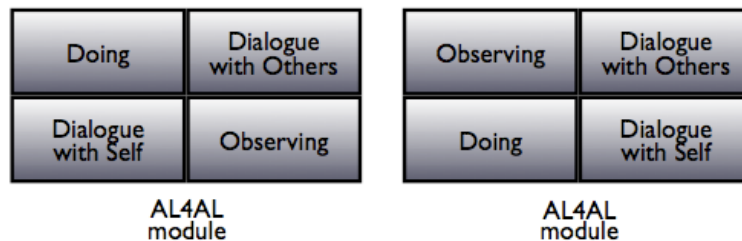
To start with, we can follow the well-known systematic approach:

1. **Content:** Choose a topic which is important for the success the members of your organization, for example: Understanding the needs and expectations of stakeholders, How to plan projects, Risk management in activities,, Personal progressive scheme, etc.
2. **Needs assessment:** Analyze the problems that adult usually face in implementing these element as well as the more common assumptions or mental models that prevent them to succeed. We can use for that a Problem Solving method such as *Cause and Effect Diagram*, *Flow Charts*, *Systems Diagrams* or *SWOT Analysis*. This last method is interesting because it allows to identify not only the negative aspects in leaders' capabilities or situations (weaknesses and threats) but also the positive ones (strengths, opportunities).
3. **Objectives setting:** Identify the objectives that the learning process should achieve in order to respond to adult leaders' needs, i.e the knowledge, attitudes, skills, tools they should have in order to be able to implement this topic successively.

4. **Selection of methods:** Select the experience and dialogue situations (Observing, Doing, Dialogue with self, Dialogue with others) that would be the best to build up the expected learning process.
5. **Programming:** Arrange the experience and dialogue situations in order to get the most dynamic, interactive and efficient set.
6. **Evaluation:** Test the module, evaluate the achieved results and make the necessary changes if needed.

However, the difference with the classic *training approach* is that the participation of learners is much more significant due to the systematic use of reflection and dialogue. During a module, the learners themselves will contribute to the topic and develop new ideas which can be used to improve the module or develop new ones. AL4AL is a kind of *wiki*, which by itself represents a creative and on-going process.

### **A flexible modular system**



Each AL4AL module is a specific set of several experiences and dialogue. We can have *Initial training modules* for beginners and *Advanced training modules* for more experimented leaders.

Each module is a kind of brick, which can be associated with others - like in a *Lego* game - in order to organize a specific learning event.

AL4AL modules, because they are based on experiences and dialogue, can be used as well in personal learning, coaching, face to face learning sessions as in distant or e-learning training sessions.

The idea could be to create - through the Internet - a *AL4AL network*, in order to develop new modules, test and exchange them.