

Solution 1 – Action Learning

What is Action Learning?

We believe that developing the skills of managers is the key to unlocking most other skills in an organisation.

In particular, Action Learning is an extensively used development process¹ that helps managers and leaders solve both short and long term business issues using the collective wisdom of a supportive group.

This is a real solution that can help a real manager with a real problem today.

Who should read this?

Individuals working for:

- SSCs²,
- Brokers and Independent Advisors serving SMEs who are interested in Management and Leadership (M&L) development.
- Staff from the English Regional Development Agencies and the Devolved Administrations with a similar focus.

Who's the customer?

Action Learning may be used within organisations of all sizes but the focus of this programme is on small companies where owner managers have a specific set of problems.

What's the evidence?

We engaged Henley Management College to research the leadership issues facing SME owner managers. They recommended that an Action Learning approach would be the best solution to meet the needs of this target group.

SME owner managers are likely only to be attracted to programmes that bring them immediate, tangible business benefits and that can be organised locally to them, at a time and place, to fit in with their busy schedules.

What business issues can Action Learning deal with?

Almost any business issue may be worked on but our focus is on *medium-term* to *strategic* challenges.

Examples include:

- Succession management for family owned firms
- Hiring and keeping high quality staff
- Growing the business
- Setting a longer term strategy.

What's the offer?

The all-sector Skills for Business M&L team have produced a well researched and tested Good Practice Guide³ that describes how to set up, run and assess Action Learning programmes or 'sets' and provides 20 points of good practice.

How's it delivered?

We are working with Regional and Country staff to allocate funding to this area. We are advocating the organisation of locally based programmes using experienced Action Learning facilitators who are able to set up, run and evaluate sessions.

What's the payback?

Results from our own experience and from other independent sources show this type of programme is highly valued by SME owner managers. Significant leadership skills development was also seen in many cases. Examples include business leaders who have improved their communication skills, have increased their capability to direct and manage change, adapted their leadership style to different business situations, been able to come up with more creative solutions for survival or growth. For more details see the success stories on our website⁴.

What do I do next?

Visit our website to find subsidised programmes already identified. But you can also look for your own local sources of this type of training and development. For example, there are programmes on offer from Regional Leadership Academies and Business Schools, Business Links and private providers. Contact details for the English Regions are available from our Regional Contact database⁵.

¹ <http://www.sfbn-mandl.org.uk/leadermodel.htm>

² The 25 SSCs form the Skills for Business network as the evidence-based, authentic voice of employers representing 87% of the working population. This programme is rooted in the employer needs that emerged from the major research exercise underpinning Sector Skills Agreements.

³ http://www.sfbn-mandl.org.uk/files/ALfL/ALFL_20points.pdf

⁴ http://www.sfbn-mandl.org.uk/alfi_projects.htm

⁵ http://www.sfbn-mandl.org.uk/files/regions/Regional_dbase_latest.pdf