Organisational Learning: Keeping pace with change through action learning

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In the current climate of economic ‘austerity’, organisational learning has increasingly gained importance, with a need for new ways of transferring learning now required.
This presentation...

• ...addresses the issue of organisational learning and how organisations have difficulties in learning from their employees
• ...draws upon data gathered from three groups of managers on three different academic programmes
• ...discusses the challenges and solutions to organisational diffusion following thematic analysis of the data examples
Traditionally organisational learning occurs in the following ways:

- On the job
- Training courses
- Harvard method... didactic and case based
Barriers to Organisational Learning

- Perpetuation of the same approach and thinking...
  Fixed mental models
- Encourages one right way... Based on hierarchy and possession of power
- Questioning signals descent
Action Learning is based upon **small groups** of colleagues meeting regularly over time to **address**, via specific **questioning techniques**, **real problems and issues** in order to get things done; **reflecting and learning** with and from their experiences, and from each other, as they attempt to **change** things.
Questioning Techniques (Revans, 1982)

- What am I trying to do?
- What is stopping me from doing it?
- What can I do about it?
- Who knows what I am trying to do?
- Who cares about what I am trying to do?
- Who else can do anything to help?
Insightful Questions
(McGill & Brockbank, 2006)

- Questions to help find or make meaning
- Questions that cause others to reflect and learn from the past
- Caring and supporting questions
- Questions seeking examples or practical illustrations what sort of things are you talking about?
- Questions that cause people to think about the future and the consequences of action
- Questions about initiating Action
- Balancing, integrating, summarising and moving on questions
Data gathered over the last two years from various managers on academic programmes, which included:

- DBA
- MBA
- MSc Healthcare Management
Data Collection

- DBA
  - Focus groups
  - Impact statements
- MBA
  - Questionnaires
- MSc
  - Organisational reports

Thematic Analysis & Content Analysis
Findings – Challenges for Diffusion

• Hierarchy: ceiling on decision making and involvement

• Culture: discouraging questions

• Fear of sharing knowledge: knowledge is power and control

• Avoidance of knowledge dissemination
Findings - Solutions

• Building a culture that values reflection
• Building an enquiry based culture that looks for right questions as well as right answers
• Seeing both failure and success as learning opportunities... No fear of repercussion
• Modelling positive behaviour... To support the above interventions
The process of Action Learning assists in challenging the status quo... whereby promoting change through knowledge transfer.