

## Business Driven Action Learning

At Action Lab<sup>®</sup> a team of key employees solve an actual task of strategic importance to the business, while at the same time going through a process of intensive and focused development.

Business driven Action Learning is learning in motion that provides:

- Accelerated business understanding as well as professional and personal development
- Innovative business solutions based on actual strategic challenges
- Real life testing of strategic potential in selected individuals
- Improved cross-functional understanding and teamwork

Action Labs<sup>®</sup> are delivered by a **strong team of professionals**

## Benefits

Action Lab® provides a structured framework that enables innovative and creative thinking which can lead to unique organisational learning and business solutions.

Through the Action Lab® programme, we experience a great deal of dedication and enthusiasm from the participants as they gain new perspectives when facing important strategic challenges. This leads to individual development, an accelerated understanding of the business and the organisation, and new business suggestions that can be implemented. This concept is highly relevant in most business contexts. It brings about strong internal ownership, and consequently, increases the likelihood that suggestions are carried out.

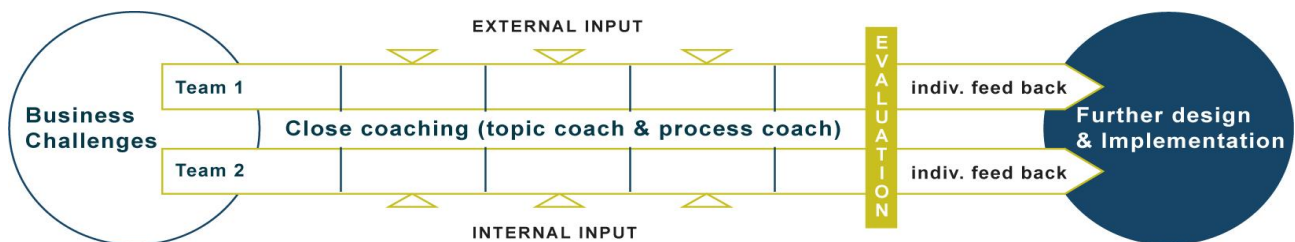
Action Lab® provides a solid link between individual, group and business development. It creates a foundation for improved cross-functional cooperation and comprehensive business understanding. During the programme the employees have opportunities to develop individual and team competencies and demonstrate their talents to top management.

# Action Labs

At present we are operating with three different models of Action Lab®:

- **Action Lab® Classic** (four to five months)
- **Action Lab® Condensed** (two months)
- **Action Lab® Intensive** (one week)

The duration and depth in which a business challenge can be explored varies according to the programme selected, but the frame of an Action Lab® is based on a common outline:



A team normally consists of six to eight participants. Each team is given a current, high priority business challenge defined by top management; the results are evaluated by top management at the end of the Action Lab®. Each participant has an individual follow up meeting with the coaches, where feedback and learning points are reviewed and linked with the individual's development plan.

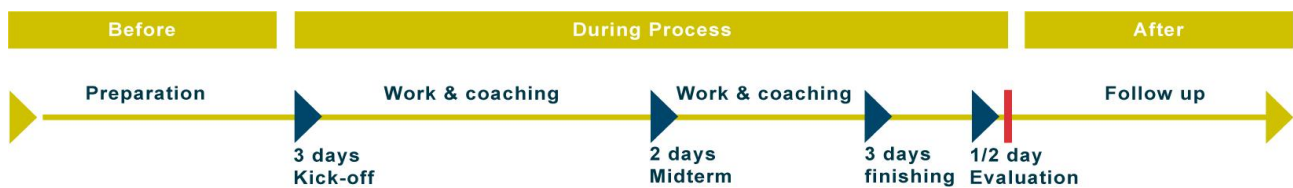
## Which programme is relevant?

Our experience shows that each programme has a value of its own depending upon the client's purpose. Which model is most suitable for your company depends on your specific needs, expectations, and current situation as well as company practicalities.

The Action Lab® concept has been well-tested over the past five years. Still, we realise that not every context will fit into pre-fabricated models. Therefore, we expect a detailed discussion with client companies regarding the purpose, prerequisites and practicalities before we make a contract. We have had positive experiences with making certain elements of the programme according to the specifications of the client.

# Action Lab® Classic

Duration: Four to five months plus individual follow up. Participants continue to perform their usual responsibilities with 80-85% of their time spent on their daily work, and 15-20% allocated to Action Lab® work.



## Outcomes from Action Lab® Classic

Management will receive an eight-page executive report followed by findings presented by participants in a slide show. The report is usually a comprehensive business case with recommendation(s) that are based on an in-depth analysis of the challenge and substantiated with extensive data from multiple sources.

The organisation is likely to experience a fresh perspective that cuts through organisational red tape and turf conflicts. Cross-functional understanding is greatly enhanced and barriers are broken down.

Individuals will gain profound strategic business understanding and experience accelerated personal and professional learning. Another benefit is a lifelong network that is established between group members.

# Action Lab® Condensed

Duration: two months plus individual follow up. Participants continue to undertake their usual responsibilities at close to the normal level between the launch and the evaluation.



## Outcomes from Action Lab® Condensed

The Management team will be given a presentation by participants of recommendation(s) based on a fairly extensive data collection. The recommendations build solidly on data and insights from numerous sources. This provides a good background before continuing with a more worked-through business case.

At an organisational level, the creation of new, informal communication lines and new angles applied when seeking solutions is intended to broaden the perspectives and general understanding of the complexity of the business.

Individual participants experience in-depth strategic business understanding as well as essential insights into own strengths and weaknesses.

## Action Lab® Intensive

Duration: five days plus individual follow up. The entire week is dedicated to the participation in Action Lab® work.



### Outcomes from Action Lab® Intensive

At the end of the week, Management is given a presentation by participants based on high level information. The presentation is based on data collection and insights from available sources during the week. The group will recommend one or two alternatives for further investigation.

The organisation will have an enhanced understanding of the complexity of the business and a genuine openness towards colleagues who have different functions. Participants will be able to look at business challenges from new perspectives.

Participants will gain real strategic business understanding combined with personal insights that are directly transferable to the advancement of their individual development.

## Our approach

Ideally, organisations need to learn to move even faster than the speed of change. In such a setting “learning how to think rather than teaching facts” becomes increasingly important.

We focus on real challenges that are of high priority and strategic importance to the business. Through Action Lab®, we deliver a comprehensive, tested and structured package in which we:

- engage with the management team to evaluate critical success factors before the Action Lab® and obtain a commitment to provide substantial follow up and feedback after the Action Lab®.
- clarify our code of conduct in order to safeguard confidentiality as well as our external perspective on the organisation and on the individual.
- ensure a solid link between individual, group and business development throughout the entire process.
- provide a framework for how to initiate teamwork in order to create a solid basis for effective cooperation during the Action Lab®.
- allow adequate time for participants to address the business challenges and take possession of what is learned through a series of facilitated team sessions and silent events.
- act as process coaches and involve topic coaches in order to catalyse innovative and creative processes for the duration of the programme.
- insist that participants take full responsibility for their own Action Lab® outcomes.
- maintain an integrated focus on the task and the process.

This Action Lab® action learning approach has proven successful at improving the business development dimension concurrently with the individual assessment and personal development dimensions.

## Preconditions

Realising the full potential of an Action Lab® requires a thorough evaluation of the critical success factors prior to the start of the Action Lab®.

The conditions listed below have been developed progressively over the past six years. We have observed when and how an Action Lab® enables ambitious professionals to work together in ways that go far beyond traditional learning and problem solving:

- It is critical that ownership and active participation from top management is visible and tangible throughout the process, including clear communication and feedback after the Action Lab® programme.
- The employees who are selected to participate must be competent, dedicated, and have high potential. They must be people who are considered to have strategic potential, who are prepared to engage themselves and others, and who are willing take leaps based on feedback from numerous sources.
- An Action Lab® is the beginning of a development journey supported by individual feedback. Emphasis is entirely on development assessment based on observations throughout the Action Lab® and not on selection or readiness assessment.
- The business challenge given to the team must be a real-life, high priority, unresolved issue of strategic importance.
- Participants must – to the greatest possible degree and within reasonable limits - have access to internal as well as external expertise throughout the process.
- Finally, the client must exercise realistic conditions and expectations for the outcome of an Action Lab®

## Reference list

Since 2003 we have conducted 30 Action Lab® with more than 50 teams and more than 300 participants.

Below is a list that represents clients who have used our expertise in the areas of talent and organisational development and who have kindly agreed to share their Action Lab® experiences upon request.

- Novo Nordisk - Corporate Relations (client since 2005, three Action Labs)  
Lise Kingo - Executive Vice President, Corporate Relations  
Ove Munch Ovesen - Senior Business Partner, Global Talent Development
- Novozymes (client since 2007, two Action Labs)  
Steen Riisgaard - Chief Executive Officer  
Michael Almer - Vice President, HR
- SimCorp (client since 2006, three Action Labs)  
Peter L. Ravn - Chief Executive Officer  
Niels Beck - Senior Vice President, Corporate HR
- Danish Association of Lawyers and Economists (DJØF) (client since 2007, one Action Lab)
- Novo Nordisk - Management of Finance, Legal and IT (client since 2003, five Action Labs)
- Lundbeck - Research and Development (client since 2003, four Action Labs)  
Anders Gersel Pedersen - Senior Vice President, Development  
Peter Hønggard Andersen - Vice President, Research
- NNE Pharmaplan (client since 2007, one Action Lab)  
Hans Ole Vogt - Chief Executive Officer  
Iben Schmidt Helbirk - HR Business Partner
- TeliaSonera AB (client since 2008, one Action Lab)  
Jesper Brøckner - Chief Executive Officer, Telia Danmark A/S  
Lene Vesterlund – Programme Director, TeliaSonera AB

## Testimonials

This is what participants and executive managers have said about the Action Labs.

**Eddie Taylor, Regional Manager, Project Management Department, NNE Pharmaplan, Clayton, NC, USA**

"My experience with the Greenhouse program (Greenhouse is NNE's internal designation for Action Lab) was truly amazing.

My team consisted of seven individuals representing six countries. In the span of one week we came together in a way I had never experienced before in my twenty year career. Upon leaving the program I was actually sorry to leave my team members behind. We were very appreciative that the executive management team took so much time out of their schedules to interact with us.

We gained a company perspective that most individuals within the organization do not have the opportunity to experience, and for that we were very humbled.

The feedback session at the end of the week was intense, but very rewarding. Often times in business we do not get project feedback in such an open and honest environment.

Overall, the program proved that when individuals agree and focus on a common purpose, anything is possible. I will never forget my experience at the Greenhouse program."

**Anders Gersel Pedersen, Senior Vice President, Development, Lundbeck, Denmark**

"Employees in our Development area are experts, who are motivated by specific tasks in which they feel they can make a contribution. Bringing some of these employees together in an Action Lab® programme forced them to think out of the box in relation to their own expert knowledge and tested their team-working skills across the organisation.

Working as a team is an important part of the programme.

By offering this talent development programme to our employees, we demonstrated to them that we care about their development. As a company we provide a set of tools, but they must take responsibility for their own development as individuals.

The external consultant applied his expertise to help the participants adjust their wishes and expectations to suit the needs of the business."

**MaoXia Wang, Administration & Quality Director, Novozymes Biotechnology Ltd, China**

"It was really an exciting and different experience to participate in the Action Lab. Our team consisted of 7 individuals representing different functions. We worked on a real-life challenging task and worked very intensively for a week.

This gave us a really great opportunity to accelerate business understanding, take the helicopter view and different point of views of colleagues for the topics given. We have learned taking total new task very different from our daily routines and talked to all stakeholders and analyze their point of views. These are very relevant for future development.

We have had the reflections during and after the lab. We have also learned giving and receiving the feedback and taken these as receiving and giving gifts to our team members. The working relationship and network we established during that week are continuing. We feel much closer even after the lab when we call or meet each other for different issues.

We were also very appreciative of the China management Team taking their time out of their schedules to interact with us during that week and after. We got their very valuable feedback and comments at the final presentation. As follow up section we also got very good individual feedback from the coaches. I took all feedback as very important inputs for my personal development. What I have gained can continue working for me for now and future.

By working on the real and challenging task and by working so intensively, we really believe we have learned how to handle more complicated and challenging task as a cross functional team. These experiences are different from normal training courses.”

## Litterature list

Here is a non-exhaustive list of publications on the topic action learning:

- Argyris Chris, Robert Putnam, Diana McLain Smith (1990): "Action Science", Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco
- Arnkjær, Anne-Mette; Svalgaard, Lotte (2009) "En Mølle – tre vinger". Ledelse i Udvikling, marts 2009, PID-Personalechefer i Danmark.
- Boshyk, Yury, (Editor) (2000): "Business Driven Action Learning Global Best Practices ". Palgrave, Macmillan
- Dilworth, R. L.(1998): "Action Learning in a Nutshell", Performance Improvement Quarterly 11, no. 1, 1998.
- Dilworth, R.L. (2003): "Action Learning – Images and Pathways", Krieger Publ. Co.
- Egger, Geert (2009): [Making Space for Reflection in Action Learning](#)
- Egger, Geert; Svalgaard, Lotte; Arnkjær, AnneMette (2007): "[Mens du står her, kører verden videre - Action Learning i ActionLabs](#)", ERHVERVSPSYKOLOGI · volume 5 · nummer 2 · juni 2007
- Egger, Geert; Svalgaard, Lotte; Arnkjær, AnneMette (2007): "[While you are waiting, the world keeps turning – Action learning in Action Labs®](#)", ERHVERVSPSYKOLOGI · volume 5 · number 2 · june 2007
- Inglis, S. (1994): "Making the Most of Action Learning", Aldershot, England
- Pasmore William (2001): "Action-research in the Workplace: The Socio-technical Perspective" in Peter Reason & Hilary Bradbury Handbook of Action Research. Participativ Inquiry and Practice. Sage Publications, London – Thousand Oaks, New Delhi.
- Revans, Reg (1980): "Action Learning. New techniques for action learning", Blond & Briggs, London.
- Revans, Reg (1993): "The ABC of Action Learning", Chartwell-Bratt, Bromley.
- Weinstein Krystyna (2008): "Action Learning", Erhvervspsykologisk Forlag.

## Senior partners

### **Our background**

We have solid business understanding from a wide range of international industries combined with in-depth knowledge in the fields of organisational psychology, anthropology, sociology and communication.

Each of us has over fifteen years of professional experience in such areas as line management, strategic and organisational development, leadership development and coaching. We founded Action Lab® Ltd. because we are committed to offering business driven action learning.

We firmly believe that superior development is best situated in a relevant, actual business context. Since 2003, Action Lab® has been shown to accelerate individual and group learning while at the same time advancing innovative and useful business solutions.

## Anne-Mette Arnkjær



Business degree from Copenhagen Business School, majoring in Business Strategy and Change Management.

Has many years of experience in all areas of Human Resource Management from working at various international companies. She spent fourteen years at Novo Nordisk in HR, including supporting their affiliates worldwide. Anne-Mette has been HR Manager at DHL Worldwide Express, Denmark and HR Vice President at Dyrup.

## Kirsten Bragh



Masters degree in the Psychology of Organisations and a Masters of Science from the Royal Veterinary & Agricultural University in Copenhagen. Has many years of experience with line management, training, change processes, team development and coaching.

Kirsten spent twelve years at Nestlé in such positions as Nordic QA manager, Factory Manager, Nordic HR Director and as Nordic HR Development Manager with overall responsibility for leadership- and team development. For a number years she has worked as an external consultant.

## Geert Egger



Masters of Science in Social Anthropology and PhD in Education and Psychology. Has many years of experience with action learning and organisational development.

Geert has held managerial and corporate positions at the Copenhagen Institute for Futures Studies, Novo Nordisk and Telia Denmark. He is the author of several books and articles, and serves as a teacher and an external examiner at Copenhagen Business School.

## Dorte Sandager



Masters degree in Organisational Communication and Masters degree in the Psychology of Organisations.

Has many years of experience with leadership development as well as facilitation of large scale organisational processes. Dorte was a senior manager at Accenture for over eleven years heading projects that focused on human performance within a wide range of organisations. She has been an external lecturer and external examiner at Roskilde University for many years within the fields of Organisational Psychology and Communication.

## Lotte Svalgaard



Business Psychologist. Has many years of experience with leadership assessment and training, coaching and the consultancy of organisational processes.

Lotte has a background as internal consultant in the financial sector with strategic leadership and leadership training as her primary fields of activity, and has worked as an external consultant in different contexts. She has been an external lecturer at Roskilde University at a Masters programme in Organisational Psychology for a number of years.

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