



# SEMPRE Guidebook

for Empowerment Training

Second Edition



# Imprint

SECOND EDITION

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Duration: 2016-2019 (SEMPRE) and 2019-2021 (SEMPRE Accelerators)

SEMPRE and SEMPRE Accelerators were part-financed by the European Union (European Regional Development Fund) under the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme 2014-2020.

SEMPRE was also supported by the Federal Ministry of Transport and Digital Infrastructure of Germany under the Federal Programme Transnational Cooperation.

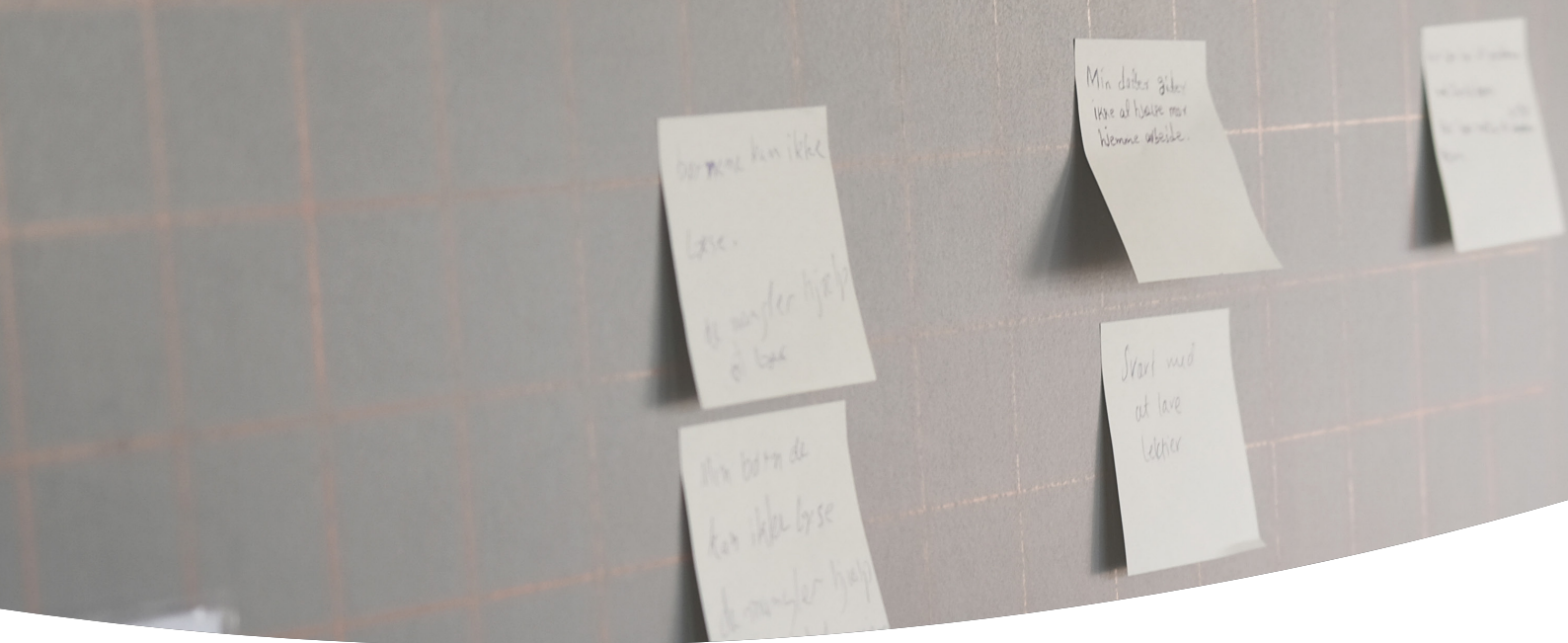


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AN INVITATION TO EXPLORE

## Dear Reader,

Welcome to the SEMPRES Guidebook for Empowerment Training, a manual that will describe how to design and deliver trainings which teach the concept of empowerment and user involvement with practically oriented applied methods.

The guidebook was prepared by the partners of the EU-funded project "Social Empowerment in Rural Areas" (SEMPRE). This second edition was revised by the follow-up project "SEMPRE Accelerators for Service Co-Creation". For both projects, empowerment is a philosophy – an inspiring framework for working with service users, social service providers, stakeholders and decision-makers. The empowerment concept is closely linked to participation, ownership, recognition, sharing and democratisation – values that are at the heart of the SEMPRES and SEMPRES Accelerators consortia, and which the partners promote via micro projects, networking and advocating.

Initiating, designing and delivering services with and not for service users, as practiced by SEMPRES and SEMPRES Accelerators, is an innovative approach to improving services and meeting service demands that are not being met. The experiential knowledge of service users is a highly valuable asset that is urgently needed if we want services to be available, accessible, affordable, sustainable and of good quality – the kind of services we would want if we were in need of help ourselves, whether we live in a rural or urban area.

What's more, working with and not for service users addresses everyone who works in social service provision, not only because it helps us in our endeavours to provide better, more targeted social services, but also because it brings us closer to a more inclusive society.

As the lead partner of SEMPRES and SEMPRES Accelerators, I am honoured and privileged to invite you to explore all the project outcomes – the Empowerment Handbook, the Organisational Roadmap, the brochure presenting our micro projects and the policy recommendations. These publications highlight the complexity and challenges we face when we work with empowerment but, more importantly, they illustrate the high level of commitment, creativity and inspiration that becomes available when we are open to empowerment as a working principle.

I hope that by working with this Guidebook you will be invigorated and motivated in your work in the same way that our own work has been invigorated and motivated by engaging with empowerment.

Sincerely yours,

Heiko Naß

*Landespastor (Head of the Diaconie of Schleswig-Holstein).*





## PREFACE

# All learning is, in itself, empowering

The Diaconia Valdese is part of the Chiesa Valdese or Waldensian Church, Italy's oldest protestant denomination.

The Diaconia Valdese provides services in many fields, including Long Term Care, access to employment, youth work, social housing, children and adults with disabilities, and the social integration of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. It is active throughout the Italian peninsula.

The Diaconia Valdese works according to the values of empowerment as their motto is "Servire con le Persone", that is, serve with people, not to people or for people.

Anyone who has seen a child's face light up with delight on mastering a new skill knows this is true. These moments came along from time to time even when old-fashioned didactic methods were used in the classroom and lectures were de rigueur in professional training for adults. In recent decades, interactive teaching and training styles have made classrooms more dynamic and training initiatives more stimulating and effective, in part by delivering more moments of satisfying accomplishment to learners. Today, even more can and should be done to enhance learning and subsequent performance for service provider staff.

Staff training is an essential investment that brings many benefits to private and public service providers as well as to diaconal organizations. The organizations themselves benefit through improved performance and there are important benefits for their staff and their service users as well. While in the profit sector, many companies restrict their training offerings to knowledge transfer and competence building, nonprofit organizations who employ service providers, training should do this and more. For example, training can serve to create or reinforce a positive and fairly homogenous organizational culture. When there is a recognizable and recognized organizational culture in place, staff share a sense of belonging to the organization and find that management figures are (usually!) acting in accordance with the key values of the organization. Such a climate is favorable for the diffusion and growth of a culture based upon empowerment. Empowered staff will be more creative and feel more motivated in providing positive outcomes for service users. Additionally, training provided to staff members at different levels can promote informal conversations among staff on the ideas and suggestions offered.

As all professionals know, preparing and delivering the training is a first step. Then, evaluating the effect of the training on the organization's culture and behavior is essential. Empowerment training will lend itself well both to informal diffusion among staff members and to assisting managers to evaluate the efficacy of the training. Staff members, who can quickly experience empowerment's benefits for themselves, will be likely to develop the habit of fostering and protecting the empowerment of service users. Managers in turn will be quick to notice this shift in behavior.

Thus, training modules will be part of the process, but interaction amongst staff members who are alive to the question of empowerment for service users will be of great importance. An awareness of the value of empowerment is contagious and can spread within an organization, giving priority to the involvement of service users in decision making and policy development and maintaining the motivation and dedication of staff.

This handbook has been prepared by training professionals with extensive input from partners and other service providers involved in SEMPRE and SEMPRE Accelerators. It is the fruit of experimentation and observation on the best ways to create a culture that fosters an awareness of empowerment as a process that not only leads to more positive results for end users but also provides a more positive working environment for staff.

Victoria Munsey  
*Vice President CSD Diaconia Valdese*





## Introduction

The training modules developed in the SEMPRES project are aimed at those who want to change the practice of social service delivery, either in their own organisation or in their capacity as trainers of social service providers. This second edition of the guidebook will provide you with necessary information to make the most of the training modules - and features an entirely new section that shows how the method of Action Learning can be applied in practice.

Your work is as a leader or staff member of social service delivery in a public or private organisation or NGO. Or perhaps you work at an institution for the training of social workers, whether a university, another kind of educational institution or a public or private institution for further education. Then this Training Guidebook is aimed at you and could perfectly suit you to take a fresh look at learning and redefine how social service design and delivery are conceived.

The purpose of this guidebook is to provide concrete recommendations and tools to develop training modules that will lead to a change in the practice of social service delivery, development or improvement. The recommendations and tools were developed within the SEMPRES project to serve these objectives.





## SEMPRE AND SEMPRE ACCELERATORS

SEMPRE and SEMPRE Accelerators are projects of the EU's Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme, in which partners from eight Baltic Sea countries cooperate to change the practice of social service delivery in rural areas.

SEMPRE Accelerators (2019-2021) empowers providers and users of social services to co-create social start-ups. The primary objective of the project is to "accelerate" the most promising social initiatives co-created in the predecessor project SEMPRE (2016-2019).

Empowerment and Action Learning are key concepts in both projects. In SEMPRE, Action Learning was identified as an effective and empowering way of joint problem-solving. We wanted to emphasise change and transformation regarding both individuals and groups, their living conditions and the organisations concerned. We developed our concept of Action Learning according to these demands and developed a structure for user-driven social initiatives that allowed them to implement the method of Action Learning.

The follow-up project SEMPRE Accelerators (2019-2021) aimed at showcasing how user-driven social initiatives can grow to become stable and mature organisations through empowerment and co-creation. SEMPRE Accelerators empowers providers and users of social services to co-create social start-ups. The primary objective of the project was to "accelerate" the most promising social initiatives co-created in the predecessor project.

These user-driven initiatives ("micro projects" as we call them) include a social coffee shop in Latvia, a refugee newspaper from Northern Germany and a social platform for single parents in Lithu-

ania, to name but a few. All these micro projects were successfully developed and launched in the previous project. Then, in SEMPRE Accelerators, the goal was to showcase how these micro projects can grow to become stable, mature and independent organisations that are viable without project funding.

SEMPRE has developed different products on different levels to support this change:

- **ORGANISATIONAL ROADMAP:** Guidance for management and leaders of social service providers in the organisational change process.
- **EMPOWERMENT HANDBOOK:** Compilation of empowerment tools for social service development and delivery.
- **GUIDEBOOK FOR EMPOWERMENT TRAINING:** Capacity building for trainers, leaders and staff to adapt working methods in social service delivery.
- **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:** Call to policymakers and politicians to support empowerment and social innovation.

In SEMPRE Accelerators, we revised most of these publications and enriched them with insights from our own experience with the co-creation of social services - like this Training Guidebook that you are just holding in your hands. This guidebook will tell you how you can benefit from the training modules developed in SEMPRE and how they can help with capacity building when working with the concept of empowerment. Moreover, in this revised edition we added a whole new chapter: Action Learning in Practice (chapter 4). In this chapter, we will show how Action Learning can be applied in practice in mixed learner groups. •

## THE TRAINING MODULES

### Learning approach

The training modules build on a common concept: Action Learning and the concept of empowerment.

This will be thoroughly described in Part one of the guidebook, where we will explain our approach to learning and designing training modules following these concepts. In Part two we will provide examples. The approach to learning will be described in further detail in Part three.

As mentioned previously, the SEMPRES project consists of a number of partners from different countries around the Baltic Sea. The countries differ both according to culture, traditions of learning, legislation and practice of social service delivery, and also in the way their institutions are structured.

This complexity adds up to a very broad understanding of learning which can be found in Illeris' definition of learning as "[...] any process, that in living organisms leads to permanent capacity change and which is not solely due to biological maturation or ageing." (Illeris red 2009 p.7). Illeris understands learning as a permanent change of capacity in the single individual. However, we want to create permanent change not only in the individual but also in organisations.

In Part two, Wenger (2008) defines how we can create learning in communities of practice. This means that one constantly learns and that one learns in different ways, situations, and contexts. Thus, we have to be aware that we design the appropriate settings, include the right contents and make sure, that the relevant participants are present so they learn and experience what is truly relevant for them.

---

### TYPES OF TRAINING

As has been mentioned before, context is very important when developing and designing a training session. Here, the different types of training for different target groups, directed at different organisations are described.

Type of training	Target group	Organisers
In-house training	• Staff, volunteers, service users	• Social service/welfare, private, NGO in cooperation with trainers
Further education	• Staff with professional training	• Training institutions at further education level – to be integrated into existing offers
Bachelor	• Students	• Universities or universities of applied science - to be integrated in existing curricula

Table 1: Types of training and its applications

## In-house training

We give you the tools so you and your staff can implement change in your organisation.

This means that you can use the training modules to develop and implement the principles of empowerment in your organisation.

## Further education

When you work with the training modules with participants from different workplaces and with different backgrounds, developing and implementing the concept of empowerment is more indirect since the participants are actors in their own organisation. We will return to this in Parts two and three.

## Bachelor

When working with students, you can cooperate with practice institutions, NGOs or service user's organisations, where students can work with empowerment perspectives and Action Learning in cooperation with service users and thus participate in the processes of change. We will return to this in Parts two and three.

## Literature and language

In developing the training modules, we have used English literature. As every participating country also has its own literature and will be doing the training in their own language, the amount of English literature is kept to a minimum and the theoretical descriptions of the different approaches have been simplified, making it easier to access and more inspiring. You can supply literature in your own language and vary it as you choose.

The training modules have been piloted in different ways by four different partners in three different languages. Experiences from the pilot projects are part of the guidebook.

## THE GUIDEBOOK AND ITS STRUCTURE

### Part one

Part one will explain the concepts of empowerment and Action Learning. It will lay out the theoretical foundations and prepare the reader to the practical application of these concepts.

### Part two

Part two primarily targets leaders and staff at organisations wanting to change their practice by organizing training modules as well as trainers or consultants to help implement the process of change using the training modules. This section will present the methods for designing training modules that live up to the above-mentioned demands. Furthermore, templates for designing courses at different levels for different target groups will be presented, as well as experiences from the pilot projects.

### Part three

Part three targets the trainers who are going to conduct the training modules. This section will explain the training modules and their contents with concrete examples. We will also discuss the role of the trainer, or rather, the different roles of trainers. A more theoretical approach to the way the training modules are presented and their relation to the concept of empowerment and Action Learning will also be discussed.

### Part four

Part four looks more deeply into the method of action learning and its application in mixed learner groups - mirroring the experiences from SEMPRE Accelerators, where mixed teams were formed to co-create social services based on empowerment and Action Learning.



# 1. Part one: Empowerment by Action Learning

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION TO ACTION LEARNING

We have designed the training modules according to the concept of Action Learning (AL) as we work with empowerment by AL. To learn more about the concept of Empowerment, see the [SEMPRE Empowerment Handbook](#).

The concept of Action Learning corresponds very well with the empowerment process and Action Learning becomes a way of working with empowerment in practice.

## 1.2 THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF ACTION LEARNING

Action Learning has developed into four schools (O'Neil and Marsick in Pedler, 2011): Tacit Collaborative, Scientific, Experimental and Critical Reflection.

1. The Tacit Collaborative Self-Directed School is not really Action Learning, but working groups sharing the same goals, such as study groups, teacher development and social issues, where there is a certain amount of learning involved. (Ibid)
2. Ravens (ibid) is said to be the father of Action Learning. He was the founder of what is called the Scientific Action Learning School. The scientific school is based on scientific methods and is closely connected to organi-

sational development and less so to interpersonal skills and learning.

3. The Experimental School builds on Kolb's learning circle (Kolb, 1984) shown in Figure 1. You reflect on your action and learn from it and you bring this experience with you into the next action. The reflection, the generalization and the design of actions take place in learning groups in specially organized sets. This school is represented by McGill and Beaty (2013).
4. The Critical Reflection School (CAL) emphasizes reflection and focuses on the root of the problem. It is concerned with underlying assumptions, inherited from family, school and society, and an examination of organisational norms and contexts. The design of the Critical Reflection School is similar to the Experimental School, although the role of the facilitator/enabler is considered of even greater importance. CAL is transformative in its approach.

All schools of Action Learning have both individual and organisational implications to a certain degree, from the Tacit School with a very small effect on organisations but with the potential for a larger effect on individuals, to the Critical Reflection School where both individuals and organisations are challenged to a greater level with respect to change and transformation - Figure 2 illustrates this.

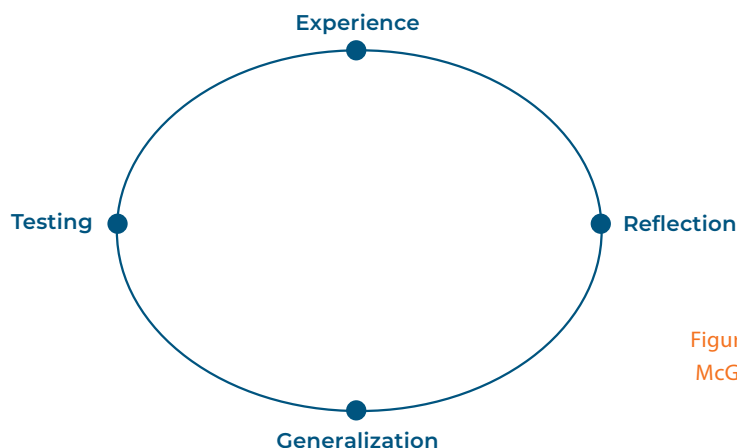


Figure 1: Kolb's learning circle McGill and Beaty (2013, p. 20)

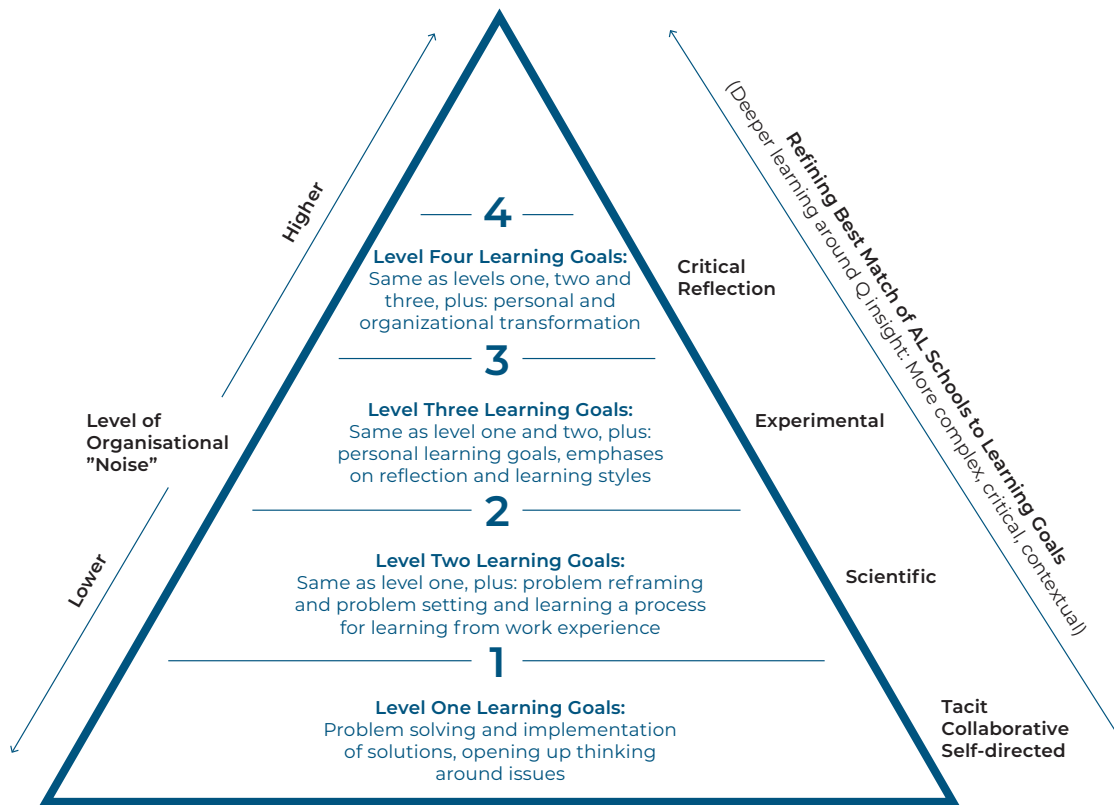


Figure 2: Action Learning Pyramid  
 Marsick & O'Neil (1999). *The Varieties of Action Learning in Practice: A Rose by another name?*  
 Cap 16 in Pedler (2011) Ed. *Action Learning in Practice*

In the SEMPRES project, level three and level four of Action Learning were applied, representing the Action Learning schools with the highest potential for change and transformation with regard to both individuals and groups, their living conditions and the organisations concerned.

We use the Experimental School (AL) and its way of designing Action Learning, as described in McGill and Beaty's (2013) book "Action Learning", but we expand the reflection and learning part with principles from the the Critical Thinking School (CAL).

For a detailed description how the Action Learning Methodology can be applied in practice, please refer to chapter 4.

## 2. Part two: Guide for designing training modules

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this section we will primarily address leaders of any kind of social service delivery either in public, private or voluntary organisations. Where there are large differences between different scenarios, the content will be supplied as training in educational institutions. Thus, there might be some elements which will not be particularly relevant for you if you come from a non-educational institution. You are therefore invited to pick and choose what makes sense for you and your organisation, as long as you remain loyal to the concept of empowerment and Action Learning.

An essential part of planning and applying a change process in your organisation and your practice is the training of staff. Staff should be trained to be able to change both their perspective and practice and apply the real involvement of service users. Models for designing training modules will be presented. The first model is for students and for the lifelong learning system while the the second model is a flexible model for all other purposes, but mainly in-house training in various forms.

### Action Learning

The training modules build on the concept of Action Learning, meaning that Action Learning frames and constitutes the training modules. Action Learning takes place in learning groups and is closely related to practice. Because you cannot foresee what is going to happen during an action learning process, designing the training modules is a challenge: they should have flexibility yet firmness to support the process. Link to Empowerment Handbook.

### 2.2 DESIGNING THE TRAINING MODULES

The training modules must fit all different countries, different organisations, different cultures and traditions and different target groups, while at the same time build upon Action Learning. This requires a broad and flexible, but at the same time firm and consistent model for designing courses.

To help us do this we will use Wenger's (1998) idea of learning in the context of communities of practice and his model for designing a framework for learning.

### Communities of practice

Wenger understands and defines communities of practice quite broadly. We all belong to communities of practice – in fact to several communities of practice. In his understanding, learning takes place in all kinds of communities of practice. This means that he understands and describes learning as being “situated”. Your organisation is a community of practice consisting of smaller communities of practice. You should define which parts of your organisation you want to change and which communities of practice these parts consist of. The [SEMPRE Organisational Roadmap](#) describes ways of organizing the process of change in different stages with different kinds of working groups.

### The Design Model

“Learning cannot be designed, it can only be designed for.” (Wenger 2008, p. 229). We can design a curriculum and frame for learning, but the learning itself is a matter of meaning, practice, identity, and community.

Wenger has developed a design model, not a recipe, for learning that takes core elements into consideration.

This means that during the design process, you must have the context for learning and the participants in mind, and also have participants involved in the process of developing the training modules.

**Meaning:** a way of talking about our (changing) ability – individually and collectively – to experience our life and the world as meaningful.

**Practice:** a way of talking about the shared historical and social resources, frameworks and perspectives that can sustain mutual engagement in action.

**Community:** a way of talking about the social configurations in which our enterprises are defined as worth pursuing and our participation is recognizable as competence.

## Dualities

In his Design Model, Wenger works with dualities that define each other by the tension between them, i.e. when you talk about participation you have reification as its opposite. Reification is the act of objectifying someone for a specific purpose. You will always have to work with and define participation in the light of reification in its different forms.

Reification is the act of turning you into an object for something. You will always have to work with and define participation in the light of reification in its different forms.

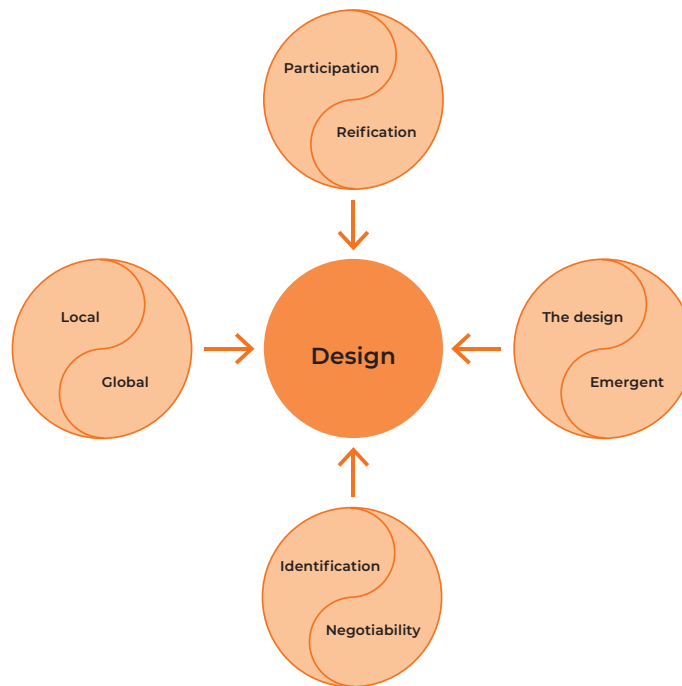


Figure 3: Design model.  
Wenger (2008, p. 232)

## Participation/reification

Design for practice is always divided between participation and reification, and achieving this depends on the degree of how these two dimensions fit together.

- You must make sure that the frames and tools for participation are present and that participation is possible – the learning will take place according to the availability of tools and the different participant's reactions to the interactions.
- Make sure "that the right people are at the right place in the right kind of relation to make something happen" (ibid, p. 231-231).

The advanced training is designed in the form of a four step sequence in order to:

- integrate practical experiences from the daily work of the participants for the next workshop step,
- gather information from the participants based on their daily work





## The design/emergent

There is a latent uncertainty between design and its actual realization in practice because the practice is not simply the result of design, but a reaction to it.

- This means that even if you design an ideal training program, it is not certain that the reaction to it will be in line with your expectations. Therefore, the design should include a variety of scenarios that can accommodate different types of reactions.
- It is important to discuss what might be at stake and what might emerge during the process in the relevant working groups, both in relation to the training modules and in relation to the organisation.

During one of the pilots it became obvious that the process of Action Learning required a presentation on communication and learning theory. This was included in the program during the process.

## Local/ global

"No community can fully design the learning of another.

No community can fully design its own learning" (ibid, p. 234).

- The training modules are developed to a certain extent and represent core values, approaches and methods, but should be adjusted and negotiated in your own organisation and adapted to your own particular needs.
- According to this, it is important that it is trainers from outside the organisation who conduct the training modules and participate in the development of them – or from somewhere else in the organisation so you do not have the same doxa<sup>1</sup>.

The pilot addressed issues from the day-to-day work of the participants, which sometimes led to AL being questioned and compared with other well-known methods. Flexibility is required and a temporary change in the method or a mix of methods is expressly permitted.

<sup>1</sup>what is taken for granted in any particular society or community of practice.

## Identification/negotiability

Design creates fields of identification and negotiation that form the practice and identities of the involved parties towards different types of participation and non-participation.

- Designing and carrying out training modules on the basis of a change of participants' practice will involve discussions of identity and you will have to negotiate the possibilities of identification.
- It is important that participants and stakeholders in the organisation take part in the design process in order to negotiate ownership of the process.

In at least two instances of the pilot seminar, it became clear that the limits of problem-solving were clearly set by the lack of equality of consciousness between the organisation's staff and management levels. Power is an issue here as well.

## A design framework

In the previous part, we looked at the dualities in the model. We will now go on and create a design framework for your work to apply change using training modules.

Wenger operates with three fundamental infrastructures for learning:

Facilities of engagement - can be supported by the way the infrastructure is organised around the process of change.

Facilities of imagination - to change practice, it must be possible to imagine the change. Is critical thinking and exploration rewarded in your organisation? What else is rewarded?

Facilities of alignment - to change practice, a shared vision and plans for the change must be in place.

This is demonstrated in the following matrix:

Wenger's design model and fundamental infrastructures of learning

	Engagement	Imagination	Alignment
Participation/reification	• Combining these two elements meaningfully in actions, interactions and the creation of shared histories.	• Stories, playing with forms, recombinations, assumptions (ex. workshop study visit).	• Styles and discourses.
The design/emergent	• Situated improvisation within a regime of accountability.	• Scenarios, possible worlds, simulations, perceiving new broad patterns.	• Communication, feedback, coordination, renegotiation, realignment.
Local/global	• Multi-membership, brokering, peripherality, conversations.	• Models, maps, representations, visits, tours.	• Standards, shared infrastructures, centres of authority.
Identification/negotiability	• Mutuality through shared action, situated negotiation, marginalization.	• New trajectories, empathy, stereotypes, explanations.	• Inspiration, fields of influence, reciprocity of power relations.

Table 2: Design Model and Fundamental Infrastructures of Learning. Wenger (2008, p. 240)

This emphasizes the importance for staff members and other stakeholders to participate in the planning and development of the process of change so you can create common stories, different scenarios, local activities and dialogue across the organisation.

### 2.3 IMPLEMENTATION OF TRAINING COURSES IN THE ORGANISATION

Wenger’s model of a design framework for learning emphasizes that in the process of designing the training modules you work closely together with stakeholders in your organisation and with the participants. In the previous section, the argument for involving both stakeholders and participants was the designing of well-planned and well-organized training modules.

At the same time, this process functions as the implementation of the training modules in your organisation. In the design process, you prepared your organisation for change. The Organisational Roadmap will elaborate further on how you adjust your organisation to implement change towards empowerment by Action Learning and service user involvement.

When you design the training modules it is important to have the implementation of the training in mind.

Brinkerhoff (2006) estimates that 80% or more of the eventual impact of training is determined by performance system factors, while the remaining 20% or so is driven by variations in the quality of the training intervention itself and the characteristics of the learner, such as inherent ability and motivation values. He elaborates this further by saying that 40% of the conditions (system factors) are related to activities before training and 40% are related to conditions after training. This is illustrated in the Figure 4.

Conditions related to activities before the training	Conditions related to the training	Conditions related to activities after the training
Needs, preparation, goals, motivation	Planning, instruction, exercises, materials, instructors, location	Relevance, transfer, management feedback, organizational obstacles
40% of the effort	20% of the effort	40% of the effort

Figure 4: Impact of Training (Brinkerhoff 2006, p. 304)

The task of implementation is more difficult if you work as a planner/teacher at an institution for further education and are carrying out training modules for participants from different organisations. In this case, you can invite leaders from the organisations who have participants in the training module to the kick-off seminar or meeting together with the participants. They need information about the purpose of change and they should discuss among each other and with the participants from the organisation how they want to implement the different processes and changes in their organisation. An example of this will be provided in Part three.

If you work at a university or at another kind of training institution for social workers, you can cooperate with practitioners – both institutions and service users – in different kinds of projects and ideally with arrangements about implementation after the training module. This will also be elaborated on in Part three.

## 2.4 PRESENTATION OF THE TRAINING MODULES

We have developed different models for training courses and a template for the concrete planning of training courses. The models and the template are developed according to Wenger’s model of designing training courses and implementing training modules in organisations.

### Models of the training courses

The first model is for students and for the lifelong learning system, where the activities and lessons learned from the training modules do not have a concrete organisation where they will be implemented, and where participants come from different organisations or are students.

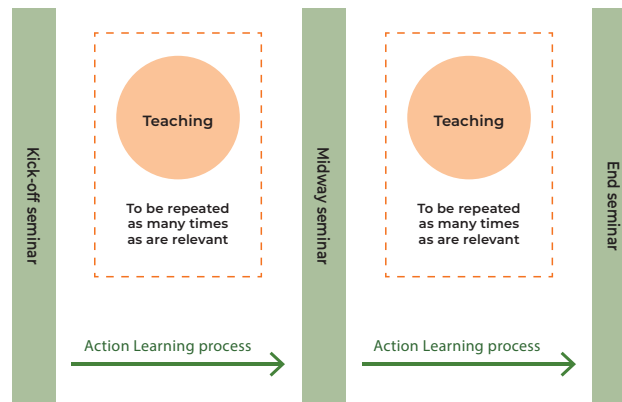


Figure 5: Students and the lifelong learning system

The second model is a flexible model for all other purposes, but mainly for in-house training in various forms.

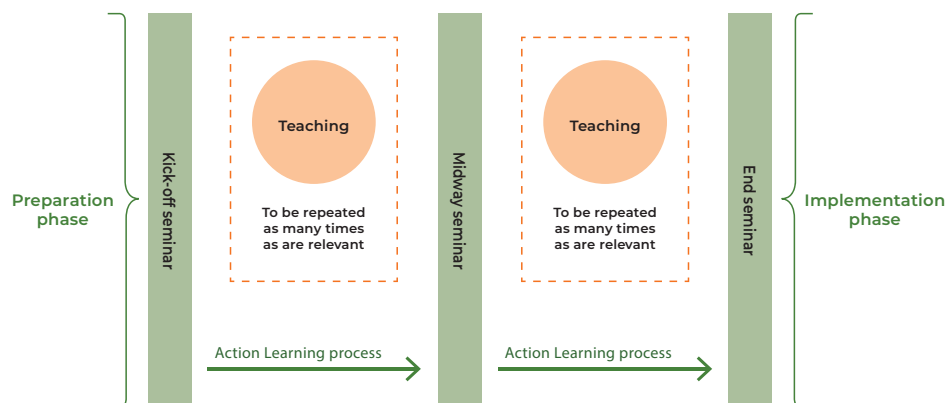


Figure 6: Flexible model for training modules

Neither of the modules have any time limits or indications. Action Learning processes take time, and depending on the way you plan the process (availability of capacities, structure and format of the instructions, etc.), you set your own suitable timetable for the training modules accordingly.

Both models are made from three pillars representing the Action Learning process and the changes in practice that are introduced during the training modules. All three have different purposes.

Because the pillars represent the Action Learning process in different ways and at different stages, it is highly advisable to invite leaders and other stakeholders from the participants organisations if you are working with further education in a training institution (life long learning programmes). This facilitates the implementation of changes in the represented organisations in the process.

You can also do this if participants are students and you are cooperating with practitioners in any way in order to enable students to work with Action Learning in practice.

The flexible model for training modules has both a preparation phase and an implementation phase. This is optional and only possible in some cases of lifelong learning modules and student modules, but it is necessary for all in-house training.

Participants from one of the pilots found that three rounds of Action Learning in four weeks was too short a time to develop actions that created change. They wanted much more time.

## Kick-off seminar

The purpose of the kick-off seminar is to prepare participants for the Action Learning process and what the changes working with empowerment by action learning mean both for the participant's practice and their organisations.

An essential common expectation of all participants was networking among themselves, promoting mutual exchange, growing together and strengthening each other through cooperation.

## Midway seminar

The purpose of the midway seminar is to coordinate and inspire the Action Learning process between the learning groups and to address common issues.

At the midway seminar all learning groups and management met. The learning groups evaluated their actions and learning and exchanged experiences. They planned new actions. Management adjusted the organisation according to the actions.

## End seminar

The purpose of the end seminar is to evaluate the Action Learning process and to discuss the implementation of the gained changes of practice, and to further discuss Action Learning processes and how they will be supported.

In general, the results of this process were positive. There is now a broad toolset available for the implementation of Action Learning workshops and the imparting of central ideas from empowerment and action learning in a German context. Suitable additional methods to vary the training are tested. All these points would enable institutions or firms to concentrate the training for e.g. into two days with additional follow-ups in online chats to collect the work experiences of participants and react accordingly to constraints by recommendations and additional inputs of the lecturer.

## Blended learning

Part of the training modules can be organized as blended learning, where you facilitate or teach via the internet, either via an e-learning platform or an interactive platform. The kick-off, midway and end seminars should all be face-to-face seminars.

The modules can be carried out as blended learning, but the group agreed that the first kick-off day should be planned with attendance. Also, the closing day should be attended.



### 2.5 THE DESIGN STAR PLANNING TOOL FOR TRAINING MODULES

After reflecting on how to implement training courses in your organisation and deciding which model to use for the training modules design, you are ready to start planning the modules.

While Wenger's learning model helps you to reflect upon core elements in the learning process in connection with fundamental infrastructures for learning, the Design Star will take you through

the first steps in planning your training modules. It was developed by Cecilie Van Loon, Henrik Horn Andersen and Line Larsen in their book on facilitating processes that create results through participation (2016). It is a tool which can be used to think through and plan vital elements and helps to define the frame of your training modules. When you have worked through the design star you will be able to prepare a script for your training modules.

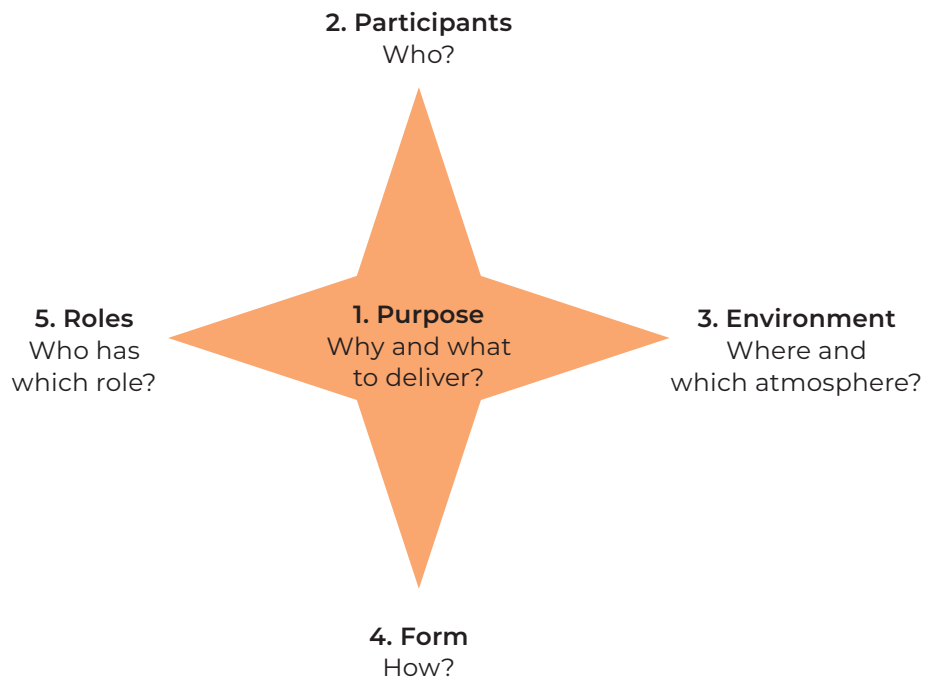
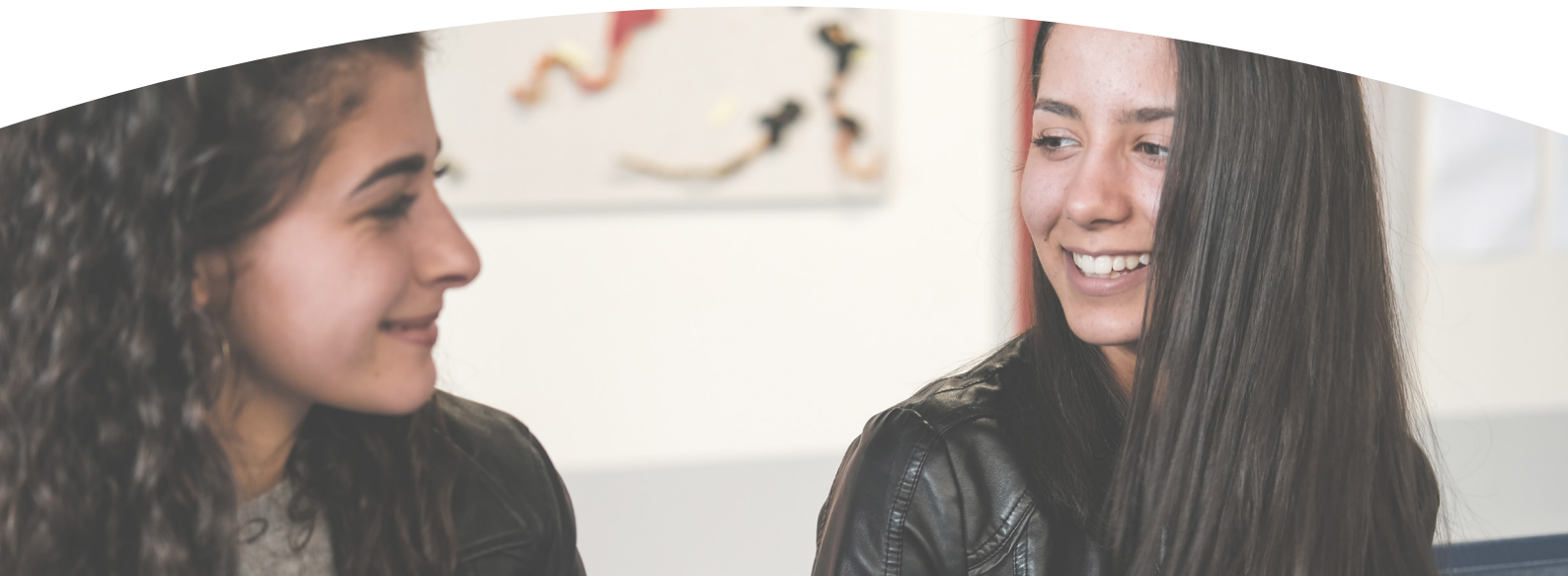


Figure 7: The Design Star  
(according to Van Loon et al 2017, p. 206)





**First,** you will need to consider the purpose of designing your training modules. This purpose could be broken down into several partial purposes for each module. A good way to consider this is to ask yourself which results this process will create. What will it contribute to? The purpose is your steering compass and shows you the way through the decisions you make about the process. At the same time, it should help the participants find meaning in the process.

Questions to answer in relation to the purpose might be:

- Why are we planning these training modules?
- Which results should come out of the process?
- How do we know we have achieved our purpose?

**Second,** you will need to decide who should participate in your training modules.

You want the right people to be trained. These are the people that need to be part of the transformation towards empowerment to ensure a change in your practice of social work. Make sure that you know the persons participating in the training modules, so you know their knowledge base, their practice, and their relations and can structure the training according to these factors. People have different preferences when they participate in training. Some are rational thinkers, others are more practical. Some like to experiment while others find that training works best when they get to work with others. Consider how these different preferences affect your planning.

Questions to answer in relation to choosing participants might be:

- Who needs to participate to achieve our purpose?
- What characterizes these people regarding knowledge, experience, and relations?
- What preferences might the participants have?

**Third,** you need to decide where to complete the training modules and which physical framework creates the best conditions for the training.

Make sure the venue meets your requirements for the process and consider how this affects the participants. Which materials, facilities and instruments need to be present in the room? Setting the atmosphere is also about the state of mind of your participants.

- Are they prepared to take part in the training? Do they know the purpose and which role they will play?

Questions to answer in relation to setting the environment might be:

- How do we create the best physical framework for the training modules?
- How do we prepare the participants so they are mentally prepared before the training modules start?
- Which instruments and facilities do we need to support the training modules?

**Fourth,** you need to decide the format of the training modules.

Which methods will you use to achieve the purpose of the training modules? How will you motivate the participants to engage in the training? How will you ensure that the participants experience the training as meaningful? It is a good idea to think about how you can open and close the training and how to keep energy levels high during the training. Consider which elements the participants need to learn and work with during the training and how they can work with them. Make sure the activities are varied and relate to the participant's professional practice. Provide time for discussion and reflection.

Questions to answer in relation to planning the format of the training might be:

- Which methods could help the participants achieve the purpose of the training?
- How do we create a safe and energetic training environment where the participants are motivated to take part in the training?
- How do we ensure a varied process within our timeframe?

**Fifth,** you need to decide who has which roles during the training modules.

Who will be hosting the training modules? Who will facilitate the training? Who will deliver presentations?

Having clear roles makes it easier for the host, facilitator or presenter to position themselves in their role and also in the room towards the participants. It helps the participants to direct their expectations and questions at the right person during the training module.

Questions to answer in relation to deciding roles might be:

- Who has the knowledge we need to bring into the training modules?
- How can we engage the people we need to realize our training?
- Who will be the best host and facilitator?

*After answering these questions, you are ready to prepare a script for your training modules.*

## 2.6 PREPARING A SCRIPT FOR TRAINING MODULES

A script is a detailed plan for your training modules. You could start by drawing up a rough draft of the schedule for one module to get an impression of the day based on your design thoughts. After this, you design each session in detail.

The script helps you think through the modules. What is the purpose of each session? Who has which roles during the day? How will you facilitate the day?

How many breaks should you have and how long should they be? Which material do you need for each session? etc.

When you develop a session you can follow a rhythm that helps to ensure variation within each session: motivation, assignment, work, and relate and result (Van Loon, Andersen and Larsen, 2016, pp. 104-107). This rhythm is illustrated in Figure 8.

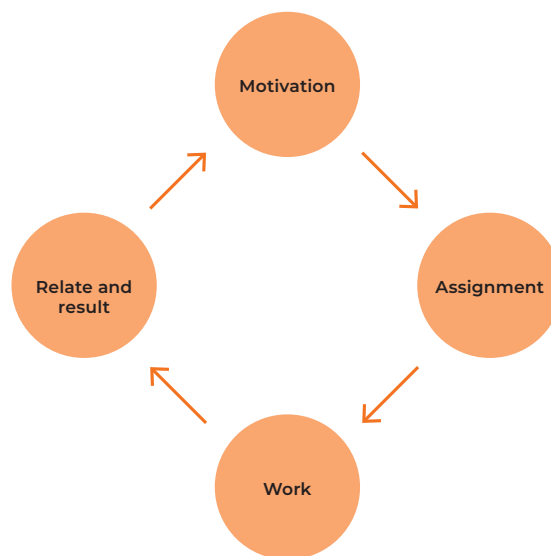


Figure 8: Rhythm for a session (Van Loon, Andersen and Larsen 2016, pp. 104-107)

**MOTIVATION** is about opening the participants' mindsets towards the theme of the session. It is important that they know the purpose of what they will be working with. It could be an illustrative story, a conversation with the neighbour, or it could be about the theme or an exercise.

**ASSIGNMENT** is about introducing the professional input that lays the foundation for the participant's work. Prepare a short and precise presentation of up to 20 minutes long. Use PowerPoint slides, a whiteboard and a flip chart to give the participants something to look at when they listen.

**WORK** is about stimulating the participants to work with the theme and perhaps produce some outcomes to illustrate their work.

**RELATE AND RESULT** is about presenting the result of the participant's work and relating it to their professional practice.

When working with Action Learning in a session you can use this rhythm to consider:

- How do I motivate the participants to the next phase in the Action Learning process?
- What professional input do they require to work with the next phase in the Action Learning process?
- What work do they need to do to complete the next phase in the Action Learning process?
- How can they illustrate their work and reflect upon it in relation to their practice together with other participants?.

Scripts can have different levels of detail. In the following section, you will find three different templates that have all been used in piloting the training modules in the SEMPRES project.

The first two templates are tools for the trainer, whereas the last template also could work as information provided to the participants before the meeting. The last one does not necessarily have to take the format of a table. When deciding on the level of detail for your script, you might want to consider the amount of support you need from it during the completion of the training module.

TEMPLATE 1: VERY DETAILED SCRIPT							
Title:							
Date:							
Place:							
Participants							
Aim:							
Preparation							
	Subject	Content	Learning goals	How to implement	Responsible	Material	Trainers guide
Day 1							
	Subject	Content	Learning goals	How to implement	Responsible	Material	Trainers guide
Session 1 Time							
Break							
Session 2 Time							
Follow-up							
	Subject	Content	Learning goals	How to implement	Responsible	Material	Trainers guide
Subject							
Subject							

**TEMPLATE 2: DETAILED SCRIPT**

Title:  
Date:  
Place:  
Participants

Aim:

## Preparation

Time	Session title (re- sponsible person)	Purpose	Activity	Material

## Follow-up

**TEMPLATE 3: ELABORATED SCHEDULE**

Title:  
Date:  
Place:  
Participants

Aim:

## Preparation

Time	Session title Short description of content

## Follow-up



## EXAMPLE OF TEMPLATE 1: DETAILED SCRIPT OF THE KICK-OFF SEMINAR IN KIEL, GERMANY

**Title:**

Empowerment through Action Learning - Kick-off seminar

**Date:**

2018-06-21

**Place:**

Wirtschaftsakademie Schleswig-Holstein, Branch Kiel

**Participants:**

Social service provider staff

**Aim:**

To empower social service provider staff in their daily work with end-user by learning and using new methods (especially AL), developed in the SEMPRE project.

**Preparation:**

Preparation: Train the Trainer workshop in Esbjerg / Invitation of participants with actual problems in their daily work / Work out a detailed concept for the group

	Subject	Content	Learning goals	How to implement	Responsible	Material	Trainers guide
Day 1	Empowerment and Action Learning.	Introduction to empowerment and Action Learning.	Knowledge of empowerment, understanding AL.	Presentations, round table discussions, exercises in AL, role plays.	G. Koegst.	Presentation, questionnaire, documentation.	Material from Train the Trainer workshop.
	Subject	Content	Learning goals	How to implement	Responsible	Material	Trainers guide
Session 1	Empowerment/AL.	Terms empowerment and AL.	What do empowerment & AL mean?	Short presentation.	G. Koegst.	Presentation, questionnaire.	Material from Train the Trainer workshop.
Time	09:00-11:00						
Break	Inclusive						
	Subject	Content	Learning goals	How to implement	Responsible	Material	Trainers guide
Session 2	Practical implementation I.	The roles in AL, the phases in AL.	To understand and use the method.	Active participation of the participants, role plays, round table discussions, critical reflections on role plays.	G. Koegst, M. Heckmann, participants.	Flip chart, pin board.	Material from Train the Trainer workshop.
Time	11:00-12:30						
Break	12:30-13:15						

	Subject	Content	Learning goals	How to implement	Responsible	Material	Trainers guide
Session 2	Practical implementation II.	The roles in AL, the phases in AL.	To understand and use the method.	Active participation of the participants, role plays round table discussion, critical reflection on role plays.	G. Koegst, M. Heckmann, participants.	Flip chart, pin board.	Material from Train the Trainer workshop.
Time	13:15-15:30						
Break	Inclusive						
	Subject	Content	Learning goals	How to implement	Responsible	Material	Trainers guide
Session 3	Extension of methods.	Problem tree solution tree, example by a participant, follow-up discussion.	To understand and use the method.	Presentation, round table discussion, exercises using previous AL cases.	G. Koegst.	Presentation. flip chart, pin board.	Material from Train the Trainer workshop.
Follow up	Further activities, scheduling the online conference (Skype).	Review and brief summary of the day, planning of further activities.	Homework assignment.	Discussion.	G. Koegst.	Script, documentation, development of a scheme for documentation of AL sets.	n/a
Time	15:30-17:00						

## 3. Part three: Guide for trainers

In this section, we address you as a trainer of the training modules. You are a teacher of social work, a consultant or another kind of trainer or teacher. You are experienced or not so experienced, and you are rooted in a certain way of thinking and understanding, learning and teaching. You come from different countries and speak different languages. This means that this guide has to be translated into languages where certain words and concepts mean something else. This also means that you have to find local literature to replace or supplement the English literature used here.

The guide for trainers will give you an idea of the thinking and the perspectives behind the training modules, and we will give you some ideas and recommendations for training trainers, organizing training and what challenges trainers might face in relation to their role with the support of examples from the pilots. You should take from it that which makes sense in relation to your role, background, and experience.

We will go into more detail about concrete themes for learning – related to the process of empowerment and Action learning.

“We realized the language barrier (English) was important for not being able to use a lot of useful information for their work. An optional language was Russian, but the concept of the social work paradigm differs – it is a more medical paradigm, while the West uses a more social paradigm in social work. Therefore, extra time was needed for preparing and translating materials for us (as trainers). We were more responsible for finding the materials for them on the themes they searched”.

Trainer, Vidzeme region (Latvia)





### 3.1 LEARNING THEORY

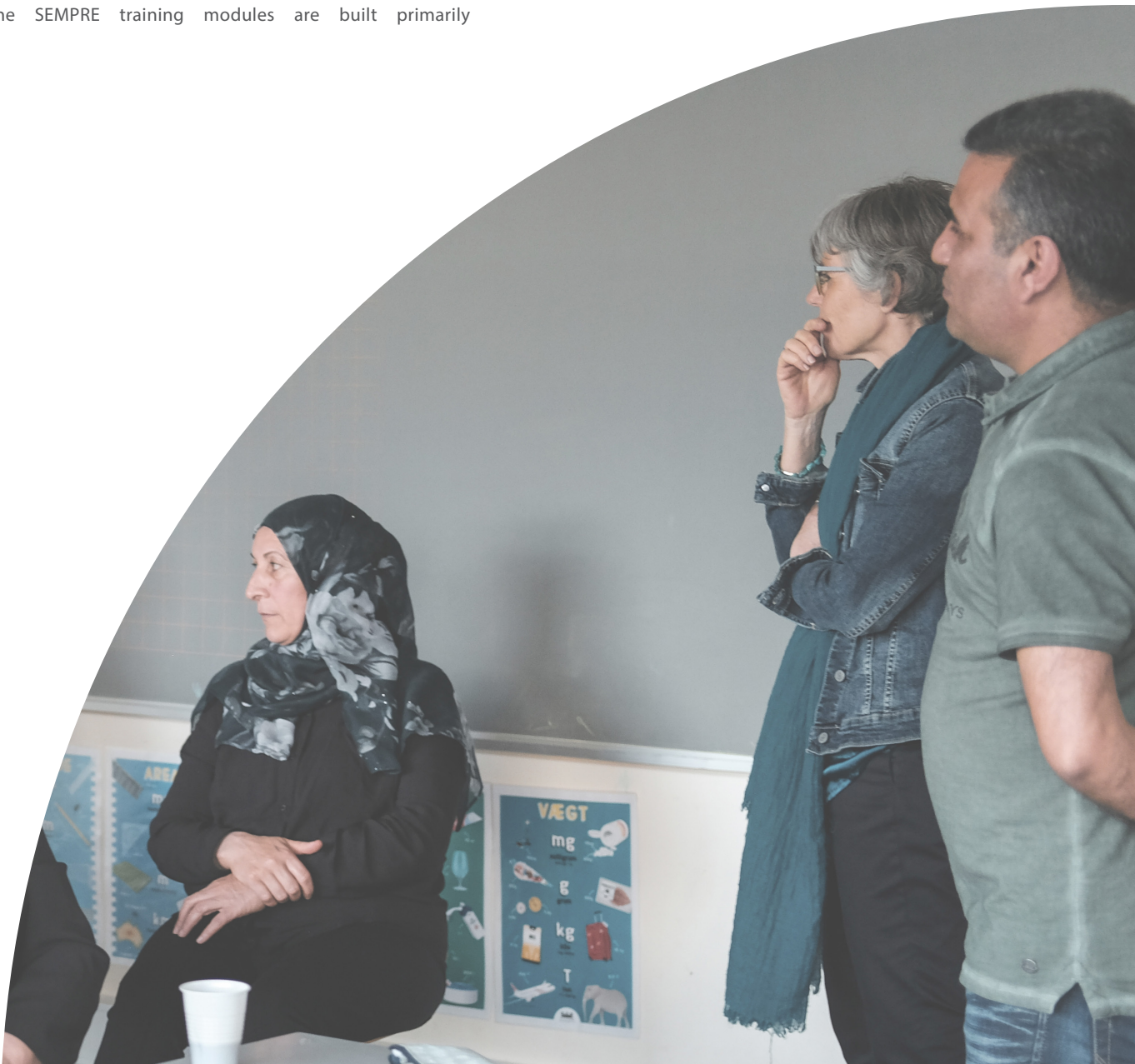
Our goal with the training modules is to challenge and hopefully change your understanding of teaching, learning and social work in practice. As described in Part one, the training modules are built upon the concept of Action Learning. We have chosen the Experimental School (AL) and the Critical Thinking School (CAL) as the platforms for Action Learning in the training modules.

This means that the training modules are founded on Kolb's learning circle and transformative learning.

As learning happens differently, the training modules are based on different understandings of learning that match different learning styles. We will present the learning theories which we think are necessary to understand the concept, and present them as briefly and clearly as possible. Some references have been added at the end if you wish to study more about learning theories or go into more detail. The learning approaches of the SEMPRES training modules are built primarily

on the views of Illeris, the expert on lifelong learning. Further, the modules are based on Kolb's learning circle and his learning styles.

In the introduction we presented a definition of learning as "any process, that in living organisms leads to permanent capacity change and which is not solely due to biological maturation or ageing" (Illeris, 2009 p. 7). This is a very broad definition of learning which includes not only the learning that takes place in a classroom, but learning that takes place everywhere and in all kinds of relationships, including the environment of the learning. Learning takes place in a variety of settings and represents different processes and different types of learning. Everyone is learning continuously and always.



### KOLB'S LEARNING CIRCLE AND LEARNING STYLES

Kolb's learning circle draws its main inspiration from experiential learning and consists of four stages. The four stages also represent four learning styles (Kolb, 1984 pp. 68-69).

#### Concrete experience:

One performs a small action and observes what happens. Through such an action, a concrete experience is acquired. This stage emphasizes feeling as opposed to thinking, an intuitive, "artistic" approach as opposed to systematic.

#### Reflection and observation:

After acquiring a concrete experience, a process of reflection can begin. The reflection focuses on what happened and why it happened. One attempts to understand what happened, observe it and describe it as precisely as possible. Here, an emphasis on reflection as opposed to action takes place.

#### Abstract conceptualization:

This focuses on using logic, ideas, and concepts – a scientific approach as opposed to an intuitive, artistic approach. A theory is constructed through concrete experience and the reflection that follows.

#### Active experiment:

This aims at actively influencing people and changing situations – an emphasis on doing as opposed to observing. When the three previous phases have been completed, the person can create their own experiment where the learning cycle can begin anew.

Kolb argues that one has to pass through every single phase in order to proceed to the next one. But people learn differently and you will have a stronger orientation towards some stages than others, which helps us to create your learning style profile. This idea is illustrated in the Figure 9 (after Kolb 1984, p. 42).

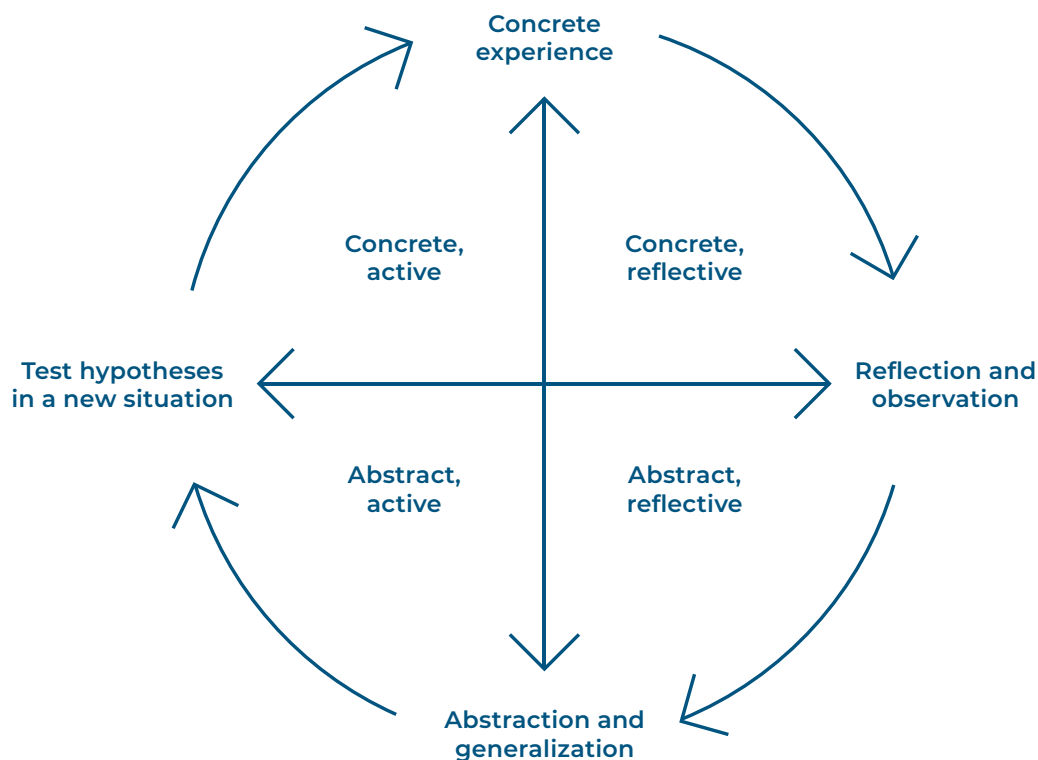


Figure 9: Learning circle

We will elaborate on the idea of learning styles as part of the team-building workshop.

**FOUR TYPES OF LEARNING ACCORDING TO ILLERIS**

Cumulative learning:

There are no influences from mental schedules or from the surroundings - they have to be created while learning.

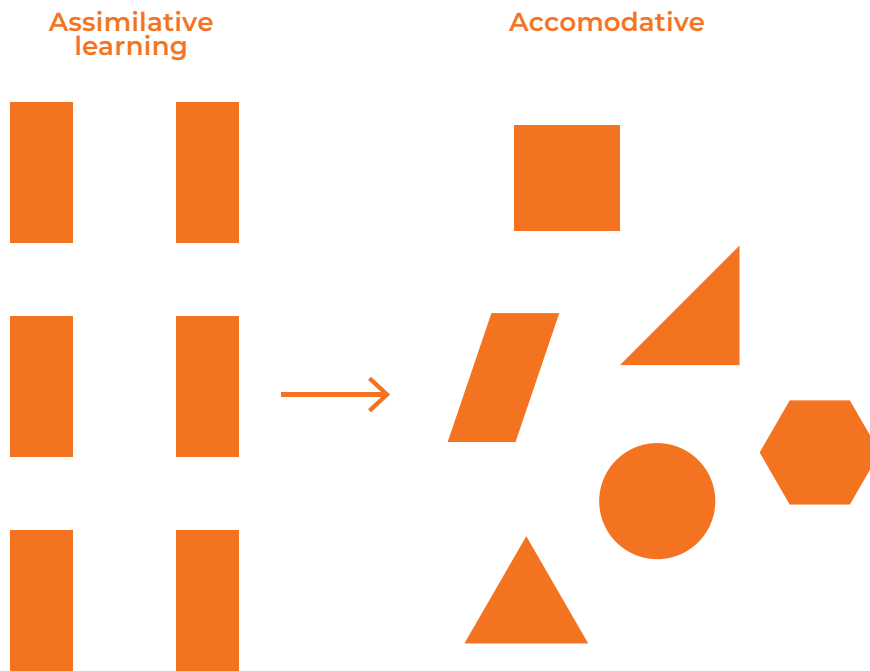


Figure 10: Illustration of learning

This is a kind of mechanical learning primarily connected to early childhood where many mental schedules are founded in their first form. This form of learning is characterized by rigidity.

Assimilative learning:

This is learning by adding to existing mental schedules. These are expanded with knowledge and skills. Cognition is formed, integrated and stabilized in a purely assimilative way. This is the most common form of learning

Accommodative learning:

This form of learning cannot be linked to prior mental schedules but is a transcendent kind of learning. Decomposition and reconstruction of already existing mental schedules take place in order to comprehend impacts from the surroundings which cannot be related to already-existing mental schedules. Reflection and critical thinking are aspects of accommodative learning.

**Transformative Learning**

Kolb (in Illeris 2009) talks about convergent and divergent learning:

**Convergent learning** focuses on one single question to a problem, i.e.  $2 + 2 = 4$

**Divergent learning** focuses on creativity where there are several different answers to a problem, i.e.  $2 + 2 = 4$  and  $1 + 3 = 4$ .

We can conceive of these types of learning as illustrated in Figure 11.

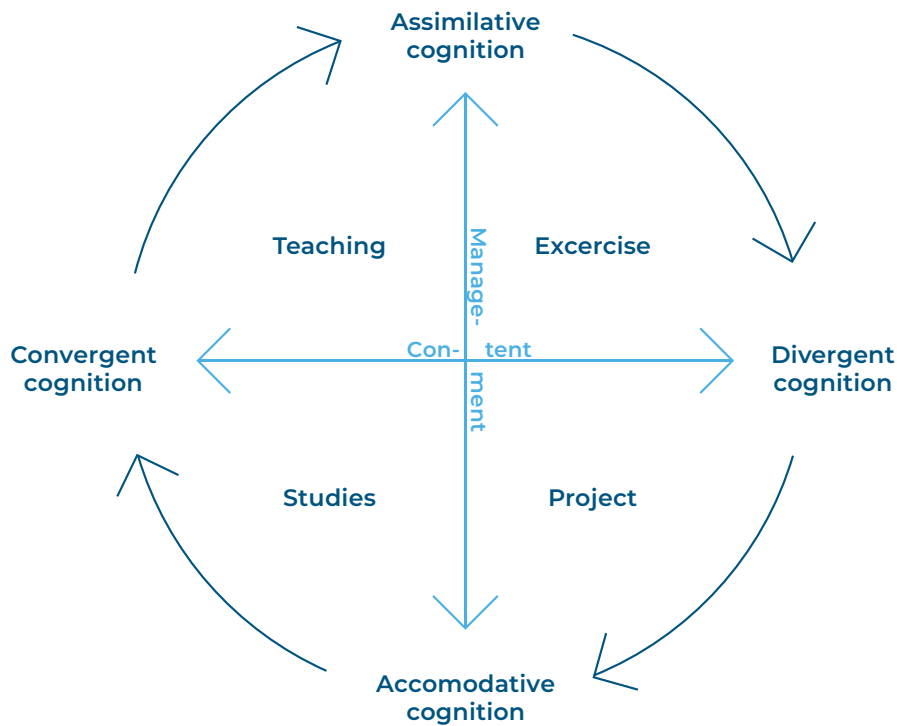


Figure 11: Types of learning (Illeris 2015, p. 285)

Transformative learning takes place with a change in the organisation of self perception and personal development. It is when numerous mental schedules change at the same time in relation to all four dimensions of learning.

The model shows different kinds of learning methods or teaching methods you, as a trainer, can use in the training modules. It will be relevant for teaching, preparing materials, doing presentations etc., both in the classroom and for exercises and studying, as well as when participants/students work either in the classroom or by themselves or in groups outside of class. The fourth field, "project work", represents the fields that best correspond to learning in action. Working with projects might not be new to you, but it is here you apply the principles of transformative learning.



Whereas Action Learning (AL) in the experimental version builds on Kolb's learning circle, CAL (Critical Action Learning) relates to transformative learning by its transformative approach.

Illeris defines transformative learning as follows: "The concept of transformative learning comprises all learning that implies a change in the identity of the learner". (Illeris 2014, p. 40)

He further states that "[t]he core elements are an individual experience, critical reflection, dialogue, holistic orientation, awareness of context and authentic relationships – these are, so to say, elements that should be involved in order to promote progressive transformative learning – and

the principles imply that the learning processes should be purposeful and heuristic, power should be confronted, differences should be taken up, imagination should be involved, learners should be led to the edge, and teachers and other persons supporting the processes should be aware that they function as models". (Illeris 2014, p. 93)

We have put transformative learning, as we have presented it here with its core elements and principles, into practice by the concept of Action Learning.

### 3.2 THE ACTION LEARNING PROCESS

In the previous parts we described the ideas behind Action Learning (AL) and Critical Action Learning (CAL). In this section, we will describe how to put these into practice.

As a trainer, you will have to facilitate the process and to make sure that all participants have enough training on the support tools for Action Learning. As training for support tools, we have described a number of workshops that you can use. For some of the support tools, you can assess the needs during the planning process of the training modules and build this into the script for the training modules. Some of the training needs will emerge during the process and you can add workshops or training based on the workshops and the training modules.

We have also described a workshop for AL which you can use as inspiration for your own workshop.

We recommend a book about AL: McGill and Beaty (2013) "Action Learning; a guide for professional, management and educational development", Routledge. The authors of this book describe both a workshop and support tools for AL. You can find different references on CAL in the bibliography in McGill and Beaty (2013), and you can, of course, use the references we provide in this guidebook.

During the pilot in Denmark, the trainers discovered that the participants needed additional communication tools for communication in the learning group sets, and they also needed knowledge about learning theory in relation to the planning and reflection of actions. A presentation on both themes was added.

#### Action Learning sets

McGill and Beaty (ibid) define an Action Learning set as a group of people, who come together in order to form actions and support each other's learning. They discuss four types of learning sets.

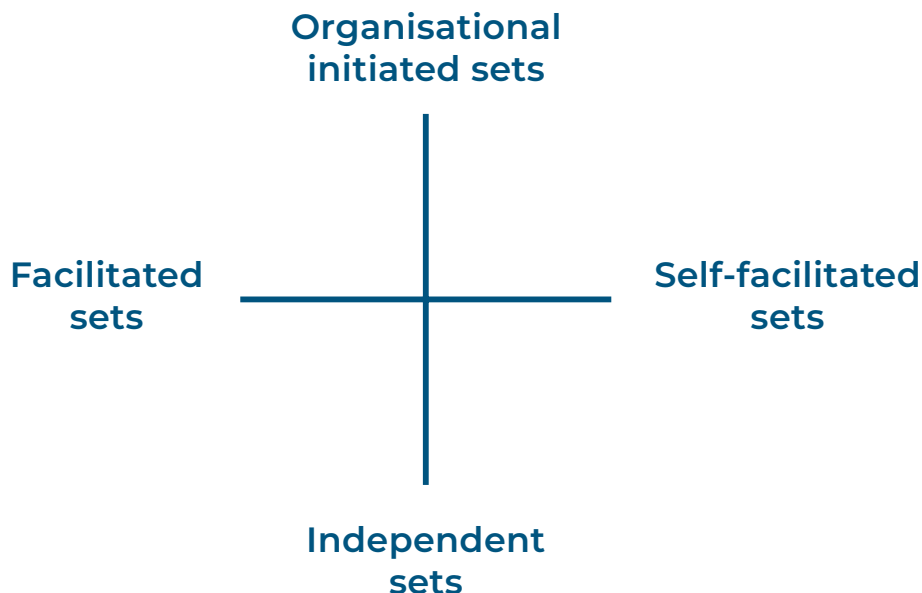


Figure 12: Types of sets. (McGill and Beaty 2013, p. 81)

We will start with facilitated sets, where you as a trainer are the facilitator, or the facilitator is somebody else who is a trained facilitator. The sets can be initiated by an organisation and take place as independent sets, maybe with service users. •

When you work with CAL, where the reflection and learning part is further stressed, you might work with facilitators through the whole process or you might work with a mixture according to the participants' ability and what is possible. As the SEMPRE project is addressing rural areas, it might be difficult to be physically present at all sets. Some sets might be facilitated via the internet or they could be self-facilitated. If you have to use self-facilitated sets, you will have to make sure that participants have the basic skills to do so. The target will be for all sets to be able to be self-facilitated, as this is a condition for participants to adapt AL or CAL as a method in their work/cooperation.

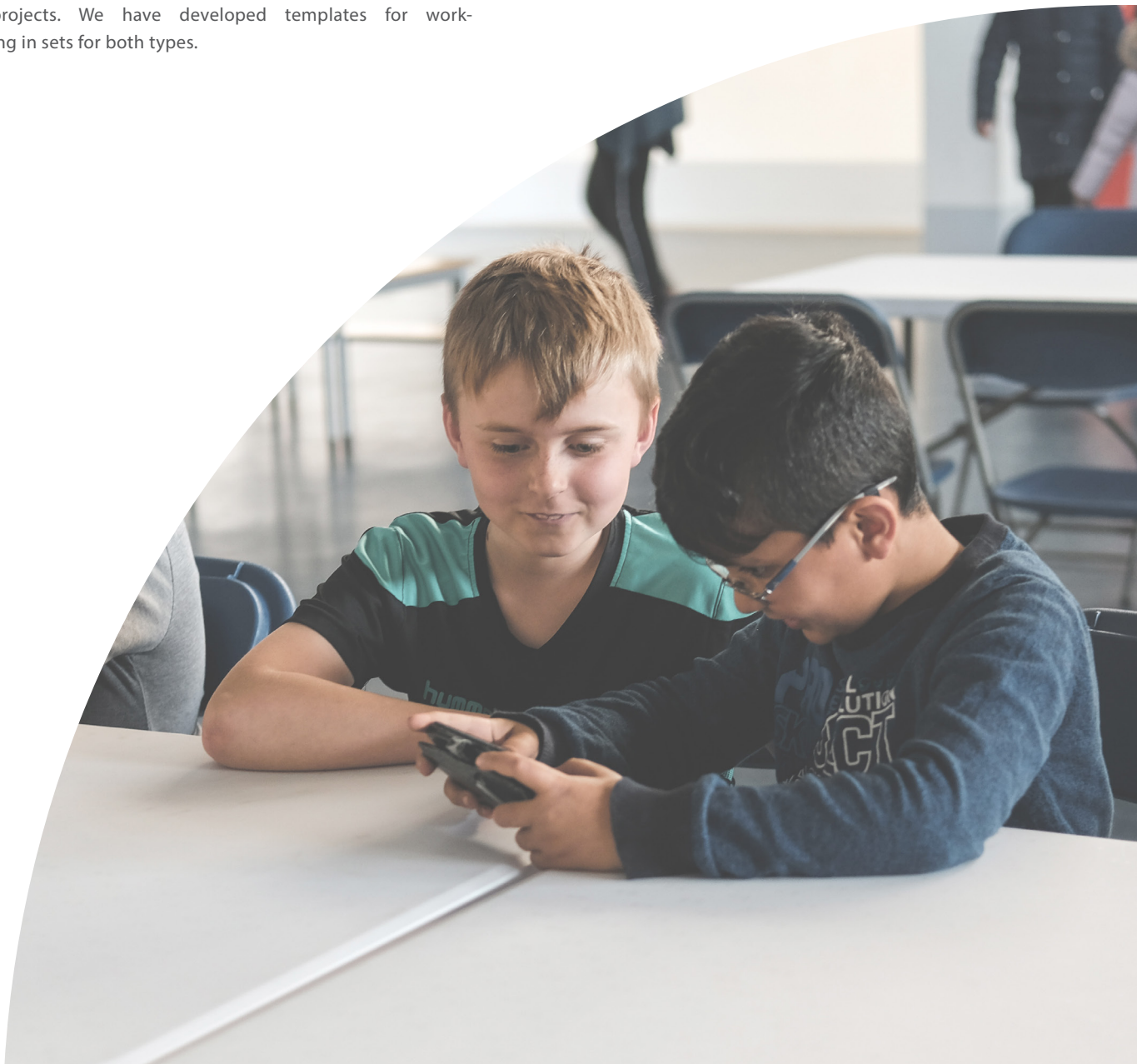
In AL and CAL, you can work with both individual projects, where the learning group supports the individual projects or where the projects are common to the group. You have to organize the group a bit differently for each of the two types of projects. We have developed templates for working in sets for both types.

The templates can be used as they are or you can adjust them to your needs. In the templates we have added "learning" as a separate part and have emphasized critical thinking. We have also made a [film about AL with individual projects](#).

Both individual projects and group projects can have service users as collaborators, or service users can be part of the AL learning group. Participation in AL/CAL must be voluntary and the problems you work with must be real problems, i.e. defined by the actors themselves.

Find all the resources, examples and templates available at:

<http://sempre-project.eu/results/empowerment-training/empowerment-training-resources>



### Critical Action Learning (CAL)

CAL, as mentioned before, means that reflection and learning is emphasized. This means reflection on the way context, power and emotion influence learning.

O'Neil and Marsick (2011) quote Rigg and Trehan (2003, p. 189) for these three guidelines for learning:

- First, to encourage participants to become aware of their theories in use. (Argyris and Schön 1974)
- Second, to think critically, as Carr and Kemmis (1986, p. 192) say of action research: "... a deliberate process for emancipating practitioners from often unseen constraints of assumption, habit, precedent, coercion, and ideology".
- Third, informed by Bateson's (1973) and Belenky et al.'s theories on levels of learning (1986), tutors also encourage participants to value their own experiences and insights and to make their own models – in other words, to create a theory from practice.

Trehan (in Pedler 2011, p. 163) emphasizes the way learning is influenced by power relations, unconscious processes from childhood, society, norms etc. and from human relations.

CAL allows you to recognize political and social dynamics that influence living conditions for service users and will challenge both your organisation, your courage and your skills as a facilitator.

The principles of CAL will be transformed into questions in the templates of AL/CAL.





### 3.3 ROLE OF TRAINERS

The learning approaches call upon trainers to support participants' learning processes in the best way possible. This means that you have different roles as a trainer and you have to adapt to the needs of the participants: you have to take leadership of the process. You are more a facilitator than a regular trainer. This means that you have to change your perspective from traditional teaching to facilitation. Your role is to facilitate the Action Learning process. This means that you are not supposed to deliver knowledge, theories or facts unless the process shows the need for you to do so. For this, we have described a number of workshops that can support the process. But you are supposed to create an environment and lead the set so that the participants will be able to develop their own ideas, actions and reflections/learnings. You have to make sure that the correct, but also critical questions are asked and reflected on, and you have to make sure that everybody is participating and feeling comfortable. Pedler (2011 quotes Pedler & Aspinwall (2009a)), in cooperation with Aspinwall, conducted and evaluated a project about facilitating leadership through Action Learning. On the basis of this work, he mentions six elements that involve facilitative leadership:

- Attending – focussing attention.
- Listening – listening to and understanding what others have to say rather than imposing your own views.
- Questioning – asking good critical questions which expose underlying issues and lead to creative outcomes.
- Reflecting – the ability to think through and make sense both before and after taking action.
- Learning – learning new skills, learning from group situations and also in general from reflecting on the experience.
- Giving fewer solutions – “unlearn the compulsion to offer solutions”.

It is very important to continuously evaluate and improve your skills as a facilitator. You might have sets where underlying tensions suddenly come to the surface and change the mood of the set. Or you yourself might start giving advice instead of supporting the process in a critical and creative direction. Hillman (2012:180) has worked with this and has identified three main actions to test out to try and help keep sets focused and positive:

1. Establish clearer ground rules and structures.
2. Have clear boundaries between organisational business and Action Learning time.
3. Redefine my own role.

Working in an empowerment-orientated way can be anxiety-provoking for the service providers, because it means new ways to carry out their professional work. Working with empowerment means something for the professional identity. Working so closely together with service users still demands some degree of professional distance. Inspired by the Danish philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard: “if you honestly want to lead a person in a certain direction, you have to meet him where he is, and start from there.” (from Train the Trainers workshop)

“I would say that, as a trainer, it is important to foster “sharing of knowledge” - between the individuals, learning groups and also learn to share your own knowledge in a reflective way (not “teaching”). It is about questioning, listening, reflecting on your own as well as on other’s experience.”

**Anna Broka**  
(Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences)



### 3.4 TRAIN THE TRAINERS

As a trainer of the SEMPRES training modules, you yourself have to be able to work with change, empowerment and Action Learning and to act as a facilitator. In the SEMPRES project, we trained the trainers from the different partners who participated in the pilot. To fulfill the role as a trainer and as a facilitator in the training modules and in the Action Learning process, it is important that you are either a skilled facilitator, or that you train for the role. Training as a facilitator is also emphasized in the articles mentioned in chapter 3.3, the Role of trainers.

We have developed a workshop about Action Learning with a proposal for a script. You can supply the methods and tools for the workshops. You can use it as a Train the Trainers module. The only difference from using the scripts in relation to the training modules is that you need to reflect more on your role as a facilitator, and you must be your own facilitator. You could also work together with colleagues and form an Action Learning group.

After the training, you could form a network of Action Learning facilitators so you can exchange experiences and further develop your role as trainer.

### 3.5 METHODS AND TOOLS: ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

On [www.sempre-project.eu](http://www.sempre-project.eu) you will find additional material for empowerment training:

Workshop examples:

- Action Learning
- Empowerment
- Team building
- Other workshop examples
- Evaluations from pilots
- Examples from pilots
- Action Learning film

### 3.6 DOCUMENTING THE CHANGE PROCESSES

Evaluation and reflection upon learning is an integrated part of the Action Learning process. During the Action Learning process, you evaluate and reflect upon your problem, your action plan, your changes in practice and your learning from these changes. You evaluate and reflect by yourself and with the help of your learning group. Ongoing evaluation and reflection are drivers in the Action Learning process: they help you follow up on changes you have made and define new actions to change your practice. You evaluate and reflect upon the effect of your actions on service users, your own practice and the organisation you are a part of.

When ending a training course, it is a good idea to evaluate the course. You can evaluate the course with different purposes in mind. You might be interested in evaluating the effect of the course in terms of the participant's learning. You might be interested in evaluating the flow and the form of the course and how the participants experienced the combination of teaching and Action Learning. You might be interested in evaluating the content of the course and whether the participants were able to relate to the teaching and to the application of Action Learning in their practice.

#### How to evaluate the participant's learning journey

Have the participants make a poster with illustrations of their learning journey during the course. Where did they start the journey and where did it end? Encourage them to think in ups and downs, sideways and surprises.





Let each participant present their poster to you and the other participants. This gives you an insight into every participant's learning journey: where they needed support, what helped them forward, and what challenged them. These insights can be used next time you plan a training course. It also gives inspiration to the participants. When listening to each other's learning journeys they might get new ideas to further develop their own practice.

After the presentation, you can continue to evaluate the flow, form and content of the course through asking questions like:

- How did the flow of the course help you with your learning journey?
- How did the teaching on different themes help you with your learning journey?
- How did the Action Learning process help you with your learning journey? •

### 3.7 HOW TO EVALUATE THE FLOW, FORM AND CONTENT OF THE COURSE LEARNING

Evaluation and reflection upon learning is an integr

It is important to collect feedback from the participants regarding the setting and content of the course, not least for the purpose of the trainer's own learning and progress. Factors such as form and flow both have immediate and indirect consequences for the learning environment of the participants. Besides ongoing evaluation and reflection during the course, a questionnaire at the end of the course might be used to collect essential information for developing and improving future courses.

You could do this with a questionnaire based on seven questions (see example 1 below) using a scale of 1 (for "negative") to 7 (for "very positive"). In this way, a quantitative assessment could be correlated with qualitative answers. The qualitative answers could be extended by a round of feedback via Metaplan. The respective questions could be aimed at "positive aspects", "critical aspects", and "proposals for improvement".

This evaluation can deliver significant answers for a new seminar concept of AL, concentrating the contents and the methods of the pilot seminar sequence (roughly 3,5 days) into two days. More focus should be given to the AL sets, less variations in methodology should be emphasized and a clearer utilization of the AL documentation in favour of the three dimensions "service user", "implementer" (counsellor of clients or social service provider) and "social service provider organization" should be discussed. •



## Example: Evaluation form

Answer the questions by putting a circle around the number on the scale of 1 to 7 that correlates best with your experience of the training programme. If you have any further comments, please use the space below each question. Thank you! Your feedback is valuable.

### 1. THE COMBINATION OF DIFFERENT WORK METHODS (THEORY, PRACTICE, ROLE PLAY, INDIVIDUAL WORK, GROUP WORK) WAS BALANCED IN A GOOD WAY.

Disagree Agree completely  
 1      2      3      4      5      6      7

Comments (optional):

---

### 2. THE CONTENT WAS RELEVANT IN RELATION TO THE PURPOSE OF THE TRAINING PROGRAMME.

Disagree Agree completely  
 1      2      3      4      5      6      7

Comments (optional):

---

### 3. THE MATERIAL WAS RELEVANT AND HELPFUL.

Disagree Agree completely  
 1      2      3      4      5      6      7

Comments (optional):

---

### 4. THE DIFFERENT METHODS WERE PRESENTED AND PRACTICED IN A PARTICIPANT-ORIENTED WAY.

Disagree Agree completely  
 1      2      3      4      5      6      7

Comments (optional):

---

### 5. THE TRAINERS WERE PEDAGOGICAL AND WORKED IN A WELL-STRUCTURED WAY.

Disagree Agree completely  
 1      2      3      4      5      6      7

Comments (optional):

---

### 6. THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT WAS OPEN AND I FELT COMFORTABLE IN THE GROUP.

Disagree Agree completely  
 1      2      3      4      5      6      7

Comments (optional):

---

### 7. I HAVE LEARNT NEW THINGS THAT WILL BE USEFUL IN MY FUTURE WORK.

Disagree Agree completely  
 1      2      3      4      5      6      7

Comments (optional):

---

### 8. OTHER COMMENTS (OPTIONAL):

## 4. Part four: Action Learning in Practice

Congratulations! You finished the first three chapters of this Training Guidebook, and learned how to design and deliver training that teaches the concept of empowerment and user involvement with practically oriented applied methods. For us, the training methods described in the first three chapters were a helpful set of tools that we applied in our work with user-driven social services in the Interreg Baltic Sea Region project SEMPRE (2016-2019).

Now we invite you to join us for the next step: **Action Learning in Practice**. The following chapter has been newly added to this book. It reflects the experiences made in the follow-up project SEMPRE Accelerators (2019-2021) on Action Learning in mixed learner groups. We will firstly acquaint you with the way how SEMPRE Accelerators has translated Action Learning to its specific context (chapter 4.1), then outline the challenges that we approach through Action Learning (section 4.2), and finally guide you through concrete Action Learning scenarios (section 4.3). With these examples, we want to showcase the applicability of Action Learning to a variety of contexts - and hope to inspire you for your own projects.



#### 4.1. THE SEMPRES ACCELERATORS APPROACH TO ACTION LEARNING

SEMPRE Accelerators supported eight user-driven social services on the way to becoming self-sustaining projects with a mature organisational setup (see page 9). Action Learning was a crucial method in this development process. To understand how Action Learning has been applied in practice in SEMPRES Accelerators, it is important to first familiarise with the following key terms, which are described in detail below:

- **MICRO PROJECTS:** Initially, these user-driven initiatives were referred to as micro projects.
- **SOCIAL START-UPS:** Towards their later development stage, we use the term social start-up, which emphasises their progress towards sustainability.
- **ACCELERATOR TEAM:** Each of these initiatives forms around a so-called Accelerator Team: a small group that unites representatives of the micro projects and established service providers. The teams will pool the ideas and experiential knowledge of the service users and the professional know-how of the social workers.
- **FACILITATOR:** Every Accelerator Team has a Facilitator who coordinates their work with Action Learning and empowerment.

**Micro Project:** A micro project is defined in SEMPRES as a small-scale initiative at the local level that aims to improve the living situations of members of disadvantaged target groups. Micro projects must fulfil the following criteria:

- be initiated at least partly by service users (members of a disadvantaged group),
- react to specific needs of this disadvantaged group,
- deliver a service that was not previously available or follow a newly developed approach.

The service users thus become co-producers of social services, while the traditional social providers act as facilitators.

**Accelerator Team:** Every Micro Project needs an Accelerator Team (hereafter referred to as AT). Their task is to help the micro project grow and become sustainable by implementing solutions for their specific needs and challenges. As a result, micro projects will grow into social start-ups.

The AT consists of up to three members of the micro project group and up to four staff members of the social service providers. The AT should not have more than eight members (core group) which is a good size for intensive work sessions.

The AT is a learning environment working with Action Learning as a cooperative and empowering way of problem solving in order to refine the micro project goals. This is where strategies and support necessities are discussed.

The ATs meet regularly, at least once a month. During these meetings, the AT members report their practical actions in their micro projects, receive feedback, improve their actions and plan next steps. Between the meetings, the AT members stay in contact via e-mail and telephone and may hold additional work meetings in smaller groups if suitable.

**Facilitator:** Each AT needs a facilitator to lead the process and coordinate the Accelerator Team activities based on the principles of Action Learning and monitor the team's progress. The facilitator supports the learning processes of the micro project owners. Moreover, the facilitator ensures that Action Learning is continuously implemented as a method to learn and reflect in the AT.

The facilitator establishes a contract between all participants about the process. The role of the facilitator must be open to the process, showing ...

- sensitivity and patience,
- flexibility (be able to tighten up the process when needed and let go when needed),
- creativity (introduce the right method at the right time, including unconventional methods),
- thoroughness (time for reflection before and after the session),
- engagement (create a dynamic environment),
- time management (both for the meetings and the general development of the project).

The facilitator starts every AT meeting with a broad focus, narrows it through discussions (for example into a one-sentence-problem) and then widening it up again into different tasks or actions in order to solve or work with a challenge.

## Action Learning - Action and Reflection

The work in the Accelerator Team and in its sub-groups is based on Action Learning. The Action Learning method as a mindset is applicable in all parts of the work with the micro projects, but in more or less framed settings.

The AT frames planning of actions and reflection on actions. Actions can take place in sub-groups, micro projects, or even in other settings that contribute to improving the micro project and its way towards sustainability. The AT works with actions in different ways and in different settings, related to the micro project. They form actions in cooperation, carry out the actions, make a logbook, and reflect on their actions and their learning. They bring their reflection to the AT and together with the other members they reflect on each other's actions and learning, plan new actions, the settings in which they should be carried out, and who should do it (see the concrete scenarios in chapter 4.3).

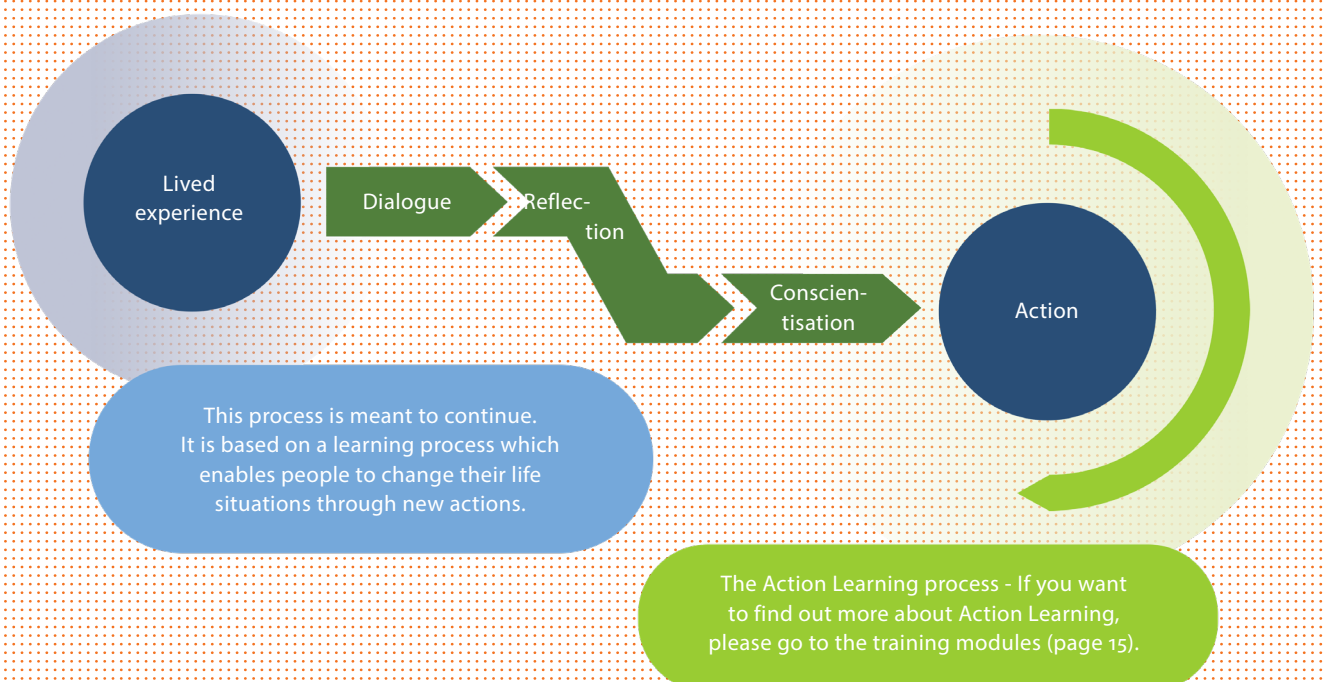
During the SEMPRES project, Action Learning was identified as an effective and empowering way of joint problem-solving. We developed the SEMPRES approach to empowerment and operationalized the process of working with Empowerment with Action Learning (AL).

**“Action Learning (AL) is joint learning through questioning, investigation and reflection in relation to participant's actions (projects, acts, practice, experiments) and organised in special framed learning groups with voluntary participation.”**

Benedicte Madsen (2008)

For details about the Action Learning methodology, please refer to page 13 of this guidebook.

Figure 13: Model of Empowerment  
© Gundi Schrötter Johannsen







Action Learning is based on the relationship between action and reflection and is thus a **continuous process of action, reflection and learning**. The actions are based on real problems experienced by the participants. In other words, it is based on “lived experiences” like the empowerment process. Participation is voluntary and it takes place in special organized learning groups.

The problems must be formulated in a way that allows to act in relation to them. Big problems must be cut into pieces, like “eating the elephant one bite at a time”.

Members of the learning group can be colleagues; it can be a mixture of service users and social workers or others if they have a common task or purpose.

An action is an experiment, project, act or practice to be carried out in practice.

- The action should relate to the problem.
- The action should be limited and evident to actor and observer - described as a series of actions.
- The action has a purpose - it must lead to something.
- It is recommended to define criteria of success.

An example: Your target group are people with a physical disability. The Accelerator Team formulates as problem that getting into public buildings is impossible for them due to physical barriers at the site. The Accelerator Team forms a series of actions as a demonstration of people with wheelchairs at the very barriers that they cannot pass. They get in contact with a local newspaper to document the event, they write letters to newspapers and/or politicians.

#### 4.2 CHALLENGES THAT WERE TACKLED WITH ACTION LEARNING

As different as the micro projects of SEMPRE Accelerators are, so were the challenges they faced. However, there are a few challenges that all had in common.

**Recruiting and involving further service users** was named as the number one challenge. One reason is that our participants come from disadvantaged groups and time for the project is a resource that they can only invest when there are no or just little other everyday challenges at the same moment. Therefore, it is sometimes difficult, despite all the methods used, to keep the participants in the project.

We have made the experience that some participants firstly need to reduce their fears before they dare to contribute their opinions and ideas in the group or even take part regularly. In micro projects with migrants and refugees for example, this is due to poor language skills. The language barrier, which was very high at the beginning of the project, leads to difficulties in understanding, especially when it comes to technical details in the project. It mostly hinders the linguistic participation of the participants.

The participants often experienced failures and it was important to build trust in the group. They are also very result oriented, while in empowerment processes results are sometimes less visible. Therefore, the 'imagination' of positive outcomes as well as reflection on small achievements was very important.

**Management and decisionmaking:** First and foremost, it takes a lot of time to familiarize participants who may have never been exposed to this topic with the basics of management and decisionmaking. It is important to measure the progress of the project in such a way that the participants can adequately follow. Constantly repeating and summarizing, as it is also provided for in the AL method, plays a central role at this point.

In some groups it was difficult to find people who want to lead the process and become decision-makers in the very beginning. However, during AL it is important to discuss the tasks and responsibilities of each person.

**Extending the range and outreach of the offered services:** SEMPRE Accelerators had a special focus on rural areas. In these regions, expectations should not be set too high: the degree of reach and awareness is limited, in most cases due to the lack of infrastructure. Even when digital possibilities grow, the personal meeting is important but often difficult to implement for our target group. The stakeholders as multipliers of the projects play an important role to extend the outreach.

**Improving the quality of services:** How to improve the quality of services is a challenge for which there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Our tip is to invite experts regularly with a wide variety of topics. The expertise may involve practical trainings as well as consultations or advice.

**Acquiring start-up financing, facilities and equipment:** This is a topic that every micro project has to deal with sooner or later. Especially projects that do not produce tangible products to generate income have to choose other ways to receive money. In our projects, it was mostly the founding of associations (here you can think about membership fees), seed funding (there are some possibilities at regional level), and fundraising campaigns.

When meeting rooms for the groups were sought, regional organizations were often able to help.

### 4.3 ACTION LEARNING SCENARIOS FROM THE MICRO PROJECTS

In the following section, we will guide you through different scenarios from the micro projects. This is to show how the partners used Action Learning to manage the different challenges at different levels during the project. The Action Learning method was helpful in one-on-one sessions with social service users as well as in smaller groups (sub-groups), in the Accelerator Team and even at staff/organizational level.

The thoughts from Action Learning can be visualised in a circle with five phases – (see fig. 14). It is derived from the learning circle introduced from p. 34 and also provides the frame for the presentation of the scenarios on the following pages.

Below you see the first example, that shows how the process of Action Learning is used to reflect on the facilitator's responsibility to introduce and work with Action Learning.

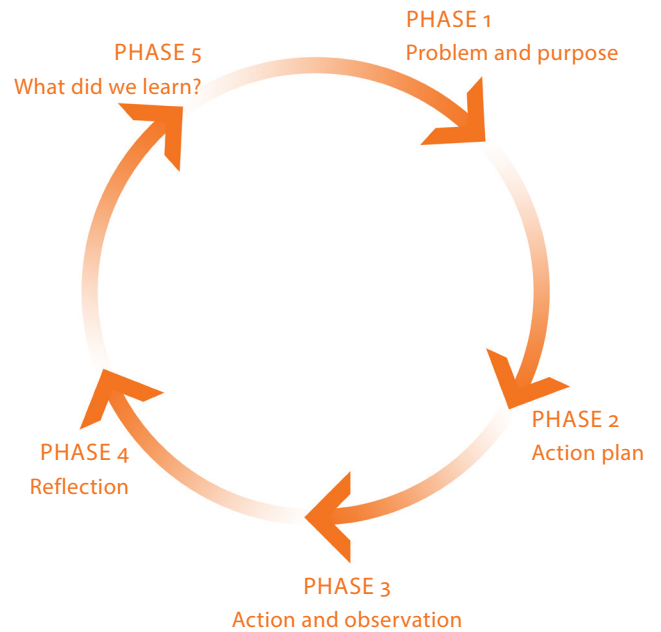


Figure 14: circle model for Action Learning in mixed learner groups

Phase 1: Problem and purpose	Phase 2: Action plan	Phase 3: Action and observation	Phase 4: Reflection	Phase 5: What did we learn?
<p>How do facilitators introduce and work with Action Learning?</p> <p>Action Learning will help the AT to identify a specific problem and focus on its solution by moving through the Action Learning cycle, which complements empowerment approach.</p>	<p>AT Facilitators need to familiarize with Action Learning, its phases and the functions or roles that different AT members need to take over.</p>	<p>We remind the AT Facilitators of Action Learning as a tested and agreed method to apply in AT meetings. We monitor the progress through regular reports provided by the facilitators.</p>	<p>In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, personal meetings have not been possible for some time. Implementing Action Learning has been disrupted and needs a revival.</p>	<p>Action Learning is a complex method. It needs training and more organized opportunities to reflect on Action Learning, its purpose, advantages and limitations. Action Learning needs grounding in practice and theory.</p>



## Scenario 1: Action Learning in one-on-one sessions

**Micro project/ social start-up:** How to Eat Healthy, Cheap and Tasty?

**SEMPRE Accelerators partner:** Diaconal Centre Liepaja

**Location of the project:** Rucava, Latvia

**Service user group:** People with disabilities and low income

**Main focus:** Empower the participants to prepare food that is healthy and affordable at the same time.

**Project details:** Already before SEMPRES Accelerators, social service providers in Rucava and people with disabilities co-created a recipe brochure for people with low income. The brochure is distributed through food boxes to people in need. During the creation of the brochure, the participants developed new skills (both in terms of cooking and compiling the brochure) and developed a sense of group identity and belonging. In SEMPRES Accelerators, the aim was to transfer this approach to other municipalities, provide training courses and form a stable organisational structure for the initiative.

“During the COVID-19 lockdown, we adjusted the Action Learning method and applied it in one-on-one conversations with the service users. This helped them to find solutions for their specific problems and the users started to think about alternative possibilities. Through Action Learning, new and interesting ideas were created.”

Karina Krievina, Facilitator

Phase 1: Problem and purpose	Phase 2: Action plan	Phase 3: Action and observation	Phase 4: Reflection	Phase 5: What did we learn?
<p>How to improve the meetings? How to improve the communication within and between different involved groups?</p> <p>What would be interesting for the whole group?</p> <p>The purpose is to find common activities for the entire group.</p>	<p>Members of the Accelerator Team started to think more intensely about their own experiences, skills and needs.</p> <p>Ideas were collected and filtered.</p>	<p>The facilitator applied Action Learning in a one-on-one approach. Through this process, the AT members started to analyse possibilities, needs and circumstances.</p> <p>The facilitator offered various training courses, e.g. to improve computer skills and or weaving skills to name but two examples.</p>	<p>The COVID-19 situation with all its constraints was identified as a challenge. All project activities that involved personal contact were halted. At the same time, using Action Learning under these special circumstances helped to think outside the box and find alternative ways.</p>	<p>Working with Action Learning methods in one-on-one sessions on the phone was not easy, but it helped to challenge existing patterns of thinking and to identify internal resources.</p>

### BROKĀSTIS

ČIČPĒMS AR ZĀLUMIEM  
SĪER MAIZE  
OLĪVĒLĒJĒIS  
TĒJA



### LAUNAGS

PAUKŪKAS AR  
ZĀLU TĒJU



### POSDIENAS

RĪSI AR GAĻOŠMĒRĒI  
SĀKŅU SAUTĒTĀNS  
Uzpriens ar pienu  
SVĀGI KĀPŅI AR BORKĀNIEM



### VAKARIŅAS

KĻĪPU TĒJA  
BĀNĀNI, ĀBOLS



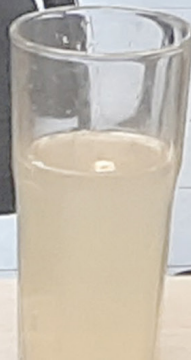
### ĪPAŠĀ

Uzskatīt  
SALT  
MAIZ  
SĪER  
OLĪV  
TĒJA  
LOKŅ  
GĀL  
KA  
BĀN  
DĀ  
RUM

ĀBOLA  
MAIŅĀ  
DĀRĪŅA  
RUM

GRĀNĪTĀBOLS  
VĀKARIŅAS

1 BIEZPIENA SĀCEPUMS AR ĶĪSELI





## Scenario 2: Action Learning in the Accelerator Team

**Micro project/ social start-up:** Newspaper & Web

**SEMPRE Accelerators partner:** Academy of Economics Schleswig-Holstein (WAK)

**Location of the project:** Husum, County of Nordfriesland, Germany

**Service user group:** Refugees and migrants

**Main focus:** Practical training to develop skills and foster employment of newly arrived migrants

**Project details:** Newspaper & Web operates at the nexus of journalism and social innovation and aims at supporting the integration of migrants and refugees with low to medium German language skills. The initiative cooperates with a local magazine in which the participants publish articles about their cultural backgrounds, their life circumstances in the past (e.g. reasons for escaping from home countries, escape routes), their current situation, their hopes and their future plans. The project not only supports the integration of migrants into society, but also comes with an individual development perspective for the participants.

Phase 1: Problem and purpose	Phase 2: Action plan	Phase 3: Action and observation	Phase 4: Reflection	Phase 5: What did we learn?
<p>Finding a suitable organisational form Finding money for the establishment and the first few months of the new organization</p> <p>The purpose is to make the project more sustainable and independent from SEMPRE Accelerators and its funding.</p>	<p>Select crowd funding method, research for crowd funding platforms, invite financial experts, prepare official application for the founding of the organisation, organise photo session for the application form, place the application in the crowdfunding platform</p>	<p>Participants and stakeholders of the AT discussed crowd-funding methods. A suitable platform was found through a stakeholder and his contacts. A meeting with experts from a regional bank was organised to learn how to prepare an application. The application was drawn up in several consecutive meetings in the AT. A photo shooting was organised to produce an eye-catcher photo for the donation platform.</p>	<p>Barriers: language skills of the participants in German language</p> <p>difficulties in formulating the application due to the level of German language</p> <p>Online meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic</p> <p>Due to language problems, many explanations about the process and constant repetitions were necessary, which significantly prolonged the process</p>	<p>Despite the difficult language level, the participants were always focused and interested.</p> <p>The activities were broken down into small, manageable steps so as not to overwhelm the participants This led to a better understanding and continuous progress.</p>

# ACTION LEARNING SCENARIOS



## Scenario 3: Action Learning and the facilitator role

**Micro project/ social start-up:** SIVANS Hundtjänst  
**SEMPRE Accelerators partner:** Sunderby Folk High School  
**Location of the project:** Sunderbyn, Luleå, Sweden  
**Service user group:** Long-term unemployed with disabilities  
**Main focus:** The group created their own work place – a café and a day care center for dogs, named SIVANS.

**Project details:** SIVANS tackles employment and income challenges by transforming an already existing, but still rather informal dog care service (SIVANS dog service) into an integrated social enterprise. This approach is particularly suitable for job training for men and women with mental disabilities. In addition to the creation of jobs and income, the social enterprise furthermore offers job training for people facing difficulties entering the labour market.

*“I fight with my demons every morning, but Sivans makes me have the strength to get up, I have a job to go to”. “By taking care of myself, I can take care of others.”*

SIVANS participant

*“SIVANS were perfect for working with Action Learning in an Accelerator Team. Their open, listening and reflective way as a group and the security they felt with each other made it work very well. The SIVANS group was open and took feedback and other people’s ideas in the right way and really implemented and took in what came out in the workshops.”*

Caroline Kjellgren, Facilitator

Phase 1: Problem and purpose	Phase 2: Action plan	Phase 3: Action and observation	Phase 4: Reflection	Phase 5: What did we learn?
The participants from SIVANS talk about their problem with getting a good internal organization for meetings.	The facilitator starts by reminding us of our roles, our climate, our mission to listen and reflect.  She shows the Action Learning model as a circle.  Then she used questions from Appreciative Inquiry* and NOPRA* to lead the group towards identifying the current situation, desired situation, resources, obstacles etc.	Open or closed questions depending on the problem The facilitator clarifies that we agree on the problem by summarizing and thus gains acceptance. The facilitator collects and concretizes clear actions that the group can take. She documents the agreed actions.	Questions from Appreciate Inquiry and NOPRA are good, such as “If it were this way, what would it look like? What obstacles are there for you to do this? What resources do you have?” Stakeholders provide more input from the outside world’s resources in addition to the group.	The group has chosen to make internal changes on their own initiative in their areas of responsibility that we worked with before. This shows a learning process and that the group has become more mature group. The group as a whole has taken over and runs its processes very independently. The Accelerator Team is more affirmative in its role.



## Scenario 4: Action Learning in sub-groups

**Micro project/ social start-up:** Hear Me Out

**SEMPRE Accelerators partner:** University College South Denmark

**Location of the project:** Esbjerg, Denmark

**Service user group:** People with disabilities

**Main focus:** The Project is called Hear Me Out, and is about giving a voice to people with mental disabilities, who often feel, that it can be difficult to find a place to tell their stories.

**Project details:** "Hear Me Out" is an initiative for young and grown up people with mental health difficulties. The purpose of the project is to develop methods and activities so people with mental health difficulties can get a voice in society and express themselves in order to fight prejudice and inform others about their difficulties and their challenges. The beginning of Hear Me Out can be traced back to the year 2017, originating from a research project involving lecturers and students of the University College South Denmark. However, after a while the project somehow petered out as the right structural foundation for a long-term project was missing. In SEMPRES Accelerators the aim was to reactivate the project and our grow the "wings to fly" that are needed in order to have a project that stands on its own feet once the support of SEMPRES Accelerators ends.

"This (the podcast) is our baby. It made me realise, that I can do things I never thought I could do. I listen to the final product and think: "Wow, We made this!" I'm an expert here. It gives me so much confidence."

Chloé Chandarelli, Podcaster

Phase 1: Problem and purpose	Phase 2: Action plan	Phase 3: Action and observation	Phase 4: Reflection	Phase 5: What did we learn?
How do people with mental disabilities get their voices heard? How do they want to do it?  How do we organize it?  The purpose is to share experiences and help others with diagnoses, so that they don't feel alone.	Two women of the group want to do a podcast about living with mental challenges.  Making podcasts	Make one podcast every week. The women created 29 topics for the podcast episodes.  Examples for podcasts: prejudice about mental illness, loneliness, living with a diagnosis.  They also created a logo and located a royalty free song for the intro.	Technical barriers (skype problems)  The two women explain, that the podcast feels like a free space to talk about themselves. They are very happy that the podcast has a large audience. This makes them more confident and brave for more work.	The women are vulnerable because of their diagnoses, and sometimes they cancel appointments or need more time between the podcast recordings.  For one of the women, the podcasting actually led to a job at a local radio station.







## Scenario 5: Action Learning in the Accelerator Team

**Micro project/ social start-up:** StopOver Coffee Shop

**SEMPRE Accelerators partner:** Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences

**Location of the project:** Liepa, Vidzeme Region, Latvia

**Service user group:** Youth, young parents

**Main focus:** Co-creation of inclusive workplaces in the StopOver Coffee Shop.

**Project details:** The StopOver Coffee Shop is a social enterprise that gathers young people and disadvantaged groups living in Liepa and the surrounding area. The idea behind the coffee shop is not only about coffee and cakes, but about new ideas and inspirations and creating a place to develop these imaginations at another level. We imagine the coffee shop as a center for services and local products, coffee and cakes, local tastes and our handmade souvenirs that are offered to tourists, locals and people passing by. The overarching idea of the coffee shop is to provide inclusive workplaces for people outside the labour market (such as single parents or people with disabilities) and to create a platform for education, training and practice (i.e. apprenticeships) to support the transition to the regular labour market.

“I was really out of the labour market for more than five years. But now I got the self-esteem and I really believe that I can do something. Here I see myself as potential employee and I hope that I will have an option to reconcile family and work life”

Marika, StopOver Coffee Shop participant

“It was interesting to learn different techniques and discover our skills and now we became more creative. I learned a lot and can use these skills for development of local souvenirs that are sold in the Coffe Shop.”

Alise, StopOver Coffee Shop participant



Phase 1: Problem and purpose	Phase 2: Action plan	Phase 3: Action and observation	Phase 4: Reflection	Phase 5: What did we learn?
<p>Development of products and services that are needed and attractive for the local market: (1) in the Accelerator Team (AT) meetings we discussed which products and services are needed and could be sold in the Coffee Shop; (2) then we invited different experts to the AT who helped to discuss and define these products in more concrete way.</p>	<p>Supported by external experts, the AT developed different products (cards, soap, candles, webpage, dried berries etc.).</p> <p>The support needs were very diverse. Some expertise evolved learning by doing, other – just learning and advice, consulting etc.</p>	<p>The participants continuously met to discuss the progress and searched for solutions for the identified problems.</p> <p>One co-creation action lead to the need for another.</p> <p>Sometimes participants were highly dependent on resources that are not in their control. In these cases it is important that the AT helps to define and approach new resources (personal, internal or external) and search for solutions together.</p>	<p>Once a product or service for the Coffee Shop has been readily developed, the person had to reflect on it. We (the facilitators) asked about the time and process, challenges and how it went to overcome these challenges. Eventually it was important to ask about future ideas, thoughts.</p>	<p>The participants learned to work in pairs and in groups (not standing alone with their ideas). It was important to learn to overcome barriers and identify (or distinguish) the obstacles or problems that are solvable and those that are hard to influence. They learned to empower and support each other.</p>

#### 4.4 CONCLUSIONS

SEMPRE Accelerators aims to strengthen and upgrade entrepreneurial skills and competences of the service users involved and to mentor the micro project groups on their way towards becoming mature and stable actors in the social service sector.

In SEMPRE Accelerators, Action Learning was identified as an effective and empowering way of joint problem-solving. As presented in this chapter the process has not been without challeng-

es, and even though the micro projects are very different, they met some of the same challenges along the way. Barriers were observed especially related to recruiting and involving further service users. The five scenarios presented on the previous pages show clearly how the Action Learning principles could guide mixed learner groups like the micro projects from identifying a problem or challenge to making a plan and observing the outcome and further to reflect on the process.



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