

# Positive action learning



Use this when... you want to identify drivers of success and to draw out and share this tacit knowledge between colleagues.

## How to run this session

### Step 1: Introduction

The learning lead welcomes everyone to the group, making sure that everyone knows each other and understands the objective of the session and of the broader learning cycle.

### Step 2: Set your ground rules

The learning lead facilitates the group's creation of a list of ground rules. It is important that the group jointly comes up with and agrees on these. More detailed instruction can be found in the [guidance for learning leads](#).



### Step 3: Present success stories

**If this is the first session of an action learning cycle**, the learning lead asks everyone to briefly share their story of success. Each story should last a maximum of five minutes.

It is critical during this round of sharing that no one asks any questions or makes any interruptions. Only if the person sharing is going over time should the learning lead politely ask them to quickly conclude.

**If this is not the first session of a cycle**, the learning lead asks the person whose turn it is to share their success story to offer an initial description of their success and then the group moves to Step 5.

#### **Step 4: Choose which success story to start with**

\* If you have convened a learning group to talk about one particular success story, you can skip this step.

Once everyone has finished sharing and before doing anything else (discussing or asking questions) the group needs to decide whether there is enough time to discuss all the stories and how much time to allocate to each of these.

Now, you're probably thinking, how do I prioritise these stories? How do I know how long each story will need? How can I be fair? Here are some tips to help you.

##### Tips for managing story selection and time allocation

The group will need to jointly decide which story or stories should be selected. It is critical that everyone understands that stories are not to be selected based on a judgement of their quality or importance.

Instead, the issue is whether learnings from some of the stories are more time sensitive than others, or more complex and therefore require more time to address. Things to consider are:

- Which story has learnings that are more 'urgent'? What will the consequences of learning about this success later be? Could you rank the stories in order of urgency or time sensitivity?
- How complex were the factors of success in the stories and how much time do you have to talk about these?

#### **Step 5: Clarify the story**

This step involves a short round of questioning. Group members ask questions so that they understand the story in full. The topic holder responds as best they can to each question one by one.

This step is to make sure that everyone in the group is clear about what the story is as explained by the topic holder. Consider it a short, fact-checking exercise.

#### **Step 6: Explore success drivers**

During this step, other group participants are invited to individually write down what factors, in their view, made the success possible. Drawing on contributions from the group, the learning lead notes these factors and places them under two headings:

1. The actions of the topic holder
2. The context or environment in which the success happened

The learning lead writes these down on a flipchart, whiteboard or piece of paper, or using another presentation method such as in the chat screen or a projected on-screen document.

## Step 7: Explore deeper

Members of the group ask further questions about the first selected story. Preferably, these should be open questions that help to explore the success factors. The topic holder privately writes down each question one by one (not the answers at this point) as the questioning moves quickly around the group. See 'Box 1: Deeper exploration questions' and the separate guidance on how to ask questions for more examples.

### Box 1 Deeper exploration questions

#### Thinking questions

What did you try? What was the length of time that you had for the project? Have you experienced this problem on other projects – what happened? Are there any patterns in service delivery that you can see?

#### Feeling questions

How did you feel about this challenge when you were facing it? Who else cared about this problem? How did the affected population feel about this situation? How do you think other colleagues felt about this?

#### Willing questions

What could the results have been of not acting on this challenge? What, in your opinion, were the causes? What communication/culture barriers were there?

The topic holder glances through the questions and highlights which feel most significant as critical success factors. The topic holder shares their considerations with the wider group and explains why they have rated them in this way.

## Step 8: Distil discoveries

The learning lead facilitates a conversation among participants during which they crystalise and share their own learning from the topic holder's success story, including how they will draw on it to tackle their own situations and enhance their own practice.

## Step 9: Evaluation

The learning lead invites participants to look back at the cycle as a whole and to identify what went well and what would make the next round better.