

# Introduction to and benefits of action learning sets

Resource part one of three  
Inclusive leadership programme

Leading change through action learning

# Welcome

Welcome to the action learning resources.

You are here because you have completed one or both of the following courses:

- Humanistic leadership in-person workshop
- Creating inclusive organisations webinar.

We have designed three resources that will help you to embed the learning and insights gained from the above programmes.

# Action learning sets

Leading change through action learning is powerful and effective. This work-based project is aimed at helping you to support change and have an impact on staff and students.

## About the resources

- This resource has been designed for education and professional services staff and leaders who wish to lead change in their organisations by using action learning sets (ALSs)
- This is part one of a three-part series designed to offer practical steps for participants undertaking ALSs in their organisations.

# Time allocation

- We anticipate that completing all three parts of this resource will take approximately two hours in total, possibly less or more depending on the following factors:
  - Your existing knowledge of this subject
  - The amount of additional reading and research you decide to undertake
  - The scale and size of the ALS interventions you intend to launch.

# Leading change through action learning

Once you have reviewed these resources, you will be ready to implement a work-based project that will help you and your organisation to stimulate learning cultures and support you in embedding change that makes a difference to your organisation and its stakeholders.

## In summary

The diagram below shows how participants from both the workshop and the webinar will complete the three-part ALS online resource then proceed to implement a project.



### Guidance for Projects One and Two:

The 20 hours noted here for each project are a guide only. You may decide to shorten your ALS or you may decide to hold fewer meetings. The 20 hours is based on:

- Six two-hour ALS sessions equals 12 hours
- One hour of admin time per ALS session equals six hours
- Two hours of project management time equals two hours.

Total time equals twenty hours, however, this is purely a suggested example.

## About project one

Participants who have completed the **‘Developing myself: humanistic leadership’** workshop are asked to focus their action learning initiative on embedding change that has an impact on staff and students.

## About project two

Those of you who have completed the 'Developing inclusive organisations' webinar are asked to focus your action learning initiative on identifying and addressing structural bias within the organisation.

# What to expect in each part of the resources

## Leading change through action learning

### Part one

Introduction and benefits of action learning:

- will provide an introduction to ALSs and help you to understand the benefits of using them in leading change.

### Part two

Structure, process and rules:

- will cover how an ALS should be structured, the process that should be applied and the rules that should be used to ensure that the ALS experience has the greatest impact possible.

### Part three

Effective questions and listening skills:

- will help you to get to grips with basic coaching techniques that will enable you to explore challenges effectively during an ALS session.

## Action learning sets – part two

This part provides an introduction to ALSs and will help you to understand the benefits of using them in leading change.

By the end of part one, you will be able to:

1. know how to structure an action learning set group
2. understand key roles needed to support the group
3. implement the process and adapt to varying conditions
4. set rules that will ensure high quality and psychological safety during the session.

# Action learning sets

## – The structure and group size

A typical ALS will consist of five to seven individuals who commit to working together over a period of time.

Can you still call yourself an ALS if there are only three people?

- It is certainly a start, so do not let numbers hold you back.

What happens if your group has more than seven people?

- A large group will need a longer time allocation, and it may also mean that some people do not get to speak during the session. That may make them feel excluded.

# Action learning sets

## – structure and time allocation

In an ideal world, a group of five to seven should allocate half a day as a minimum and a full day as a maximum. However, in today's busy workplace, time is one of the most precious commodities.

If you only have one to two hours to dedicate, consider keeping group sizes smaller and be aware that you are likely only to fully cover one or two people's problems. However, if the overarching theme is common to all, even working on one or two problems will likely help others in the group with their problems too. Read more in the process section of this resource.

# Action learning sets

## – the structure and frequency of meetings



Groups should meet regularly – anything from once per month to twice per term.

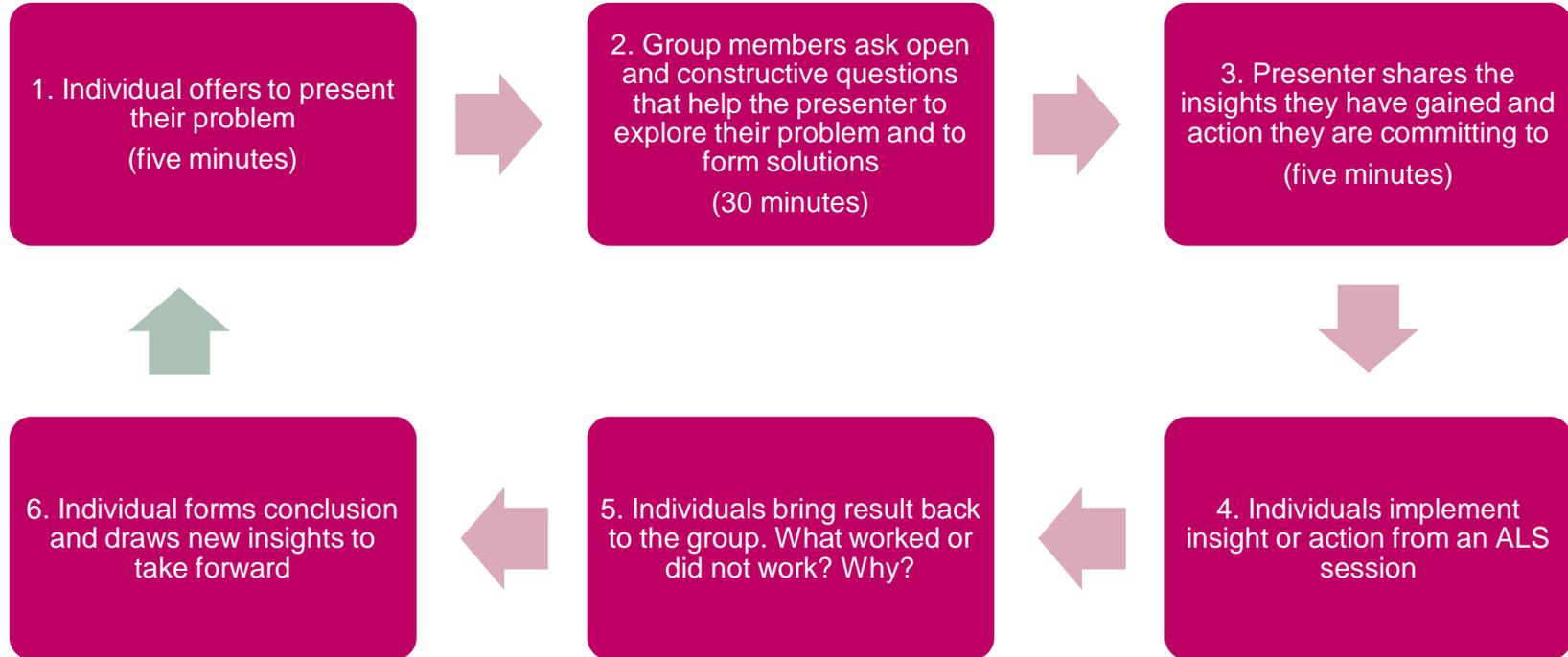


A gap between meetings is helpful in allowing people time to implement or further develop their solutions, try them out and bring that learning back to the group in the next session.



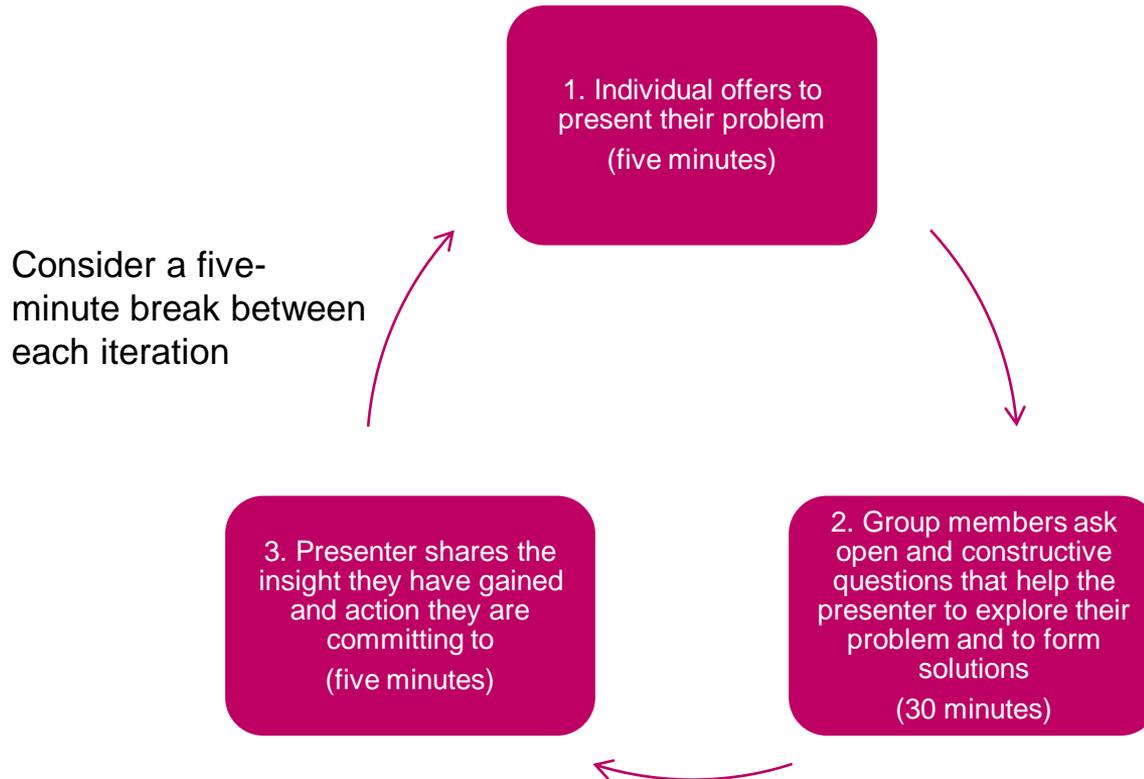
Agree on meeting dates, times and locations in advance so that these are firming up in diaries.

# Action learning sets – the process in full



# Action learning sets

## – the process, half or full day



# Action learning sets

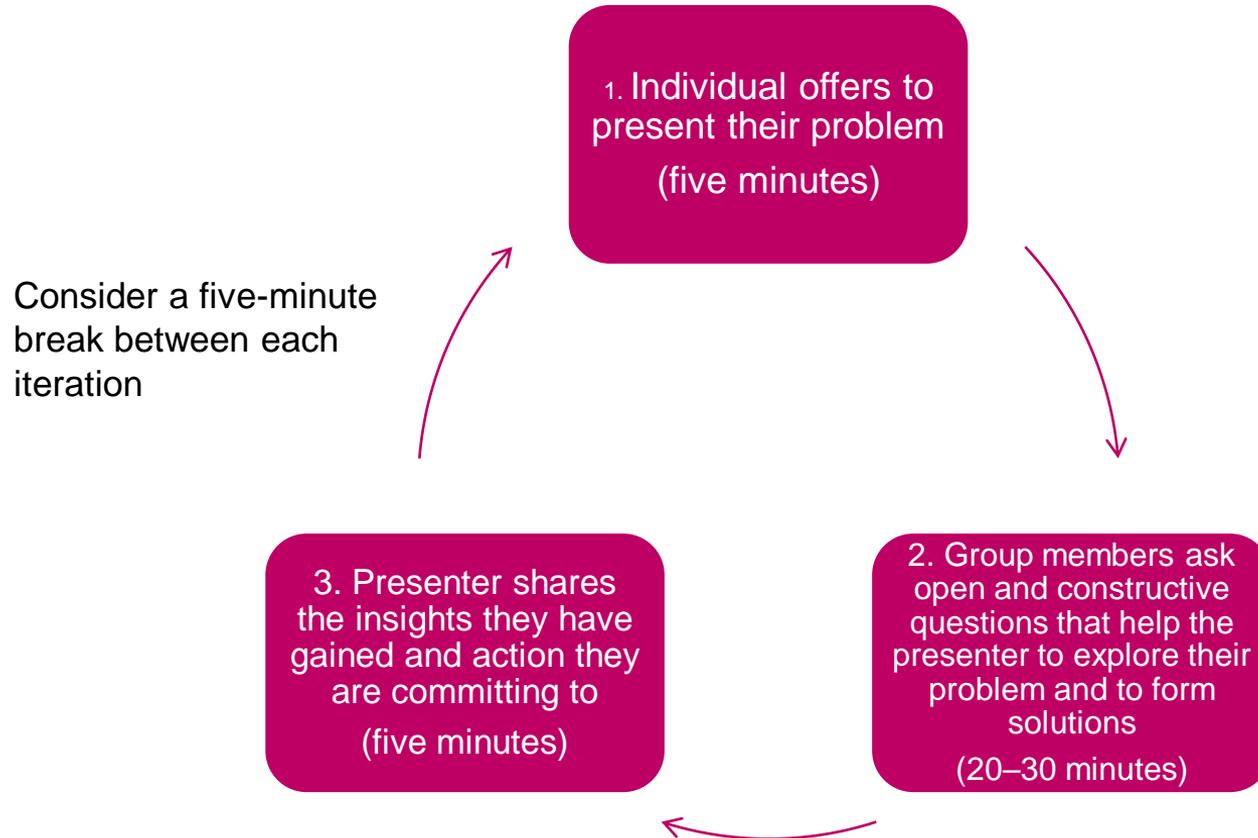
## – the process, one- or two-hour sessions

As mentioned, if you only have one to two hours to dedicate to your ALS, consider the following adaptations:

- Keep group sizes at a lower number.
- The group agrees on a common theme such as 'effective feedback'.
- Individuals bring challenges to the session that are directly aligned with the common theme and all members of the group should present their problems at the start.
- Mutually agree on which one or two individuals' problems you want to work on in the session. Hopefully, as you have a common theme, working on these will also support others.
- Follow the process as laid out on the previous page.

# Action learning sets

## – the process, one- or two-hour sessions



# Action learning sets – the roles needed

In some organisations, ALSs are facilitated by either an external or internal facilitator. It is possible that the facilitator is experienced in action learning.



Where this is not possible, the group should select a moderator and timekeeper.



When it is the turn of the moderator and timekeeper to present their challenge, these roles should be passed on to other members of the group.

# Action learning sets

## – the moderator and timekeeper roles

### Moderator:

- Ensures that the group is following the rules, staying focused and being inclusive throughout.

### Timekeeper:

- Provides time checks to ensure that time is distributed fairly throughout the session.

# Action learning sets

## – developing safe spaces

It is imperative that all members of the group feel safe in discussing their problems (issues, questions and challenges).

It is possible that members may become emotional during the process and, as such, it is critical that group members show a high degree of support, empathy and kindness throughout the process. All these elements are key in humanistic leadership.

# Action learning sets – the rules

<b>Confidentiality</b>	Identifying details can be omitted. There is no pressure to share details that you do not want to.
<b>Respect</b>	Stay fully present during the session (keep distractions such as phones and emails at bay, unless urgent).
<b>Empathetic</b>	Guard against jumping to assumptions or judgements and consider others' contexts and circumstances.
<b>Honesty</b>	Be truthful about the circumstances, intentions and feelings.
<b>Patience</b>	Recognise that it may be difficult to clearly or succinctly express things in the session.
<b>Open</b>	Embrace the supportive and constructive challenge.

# Action learning sets – the rules

<b>Do not tell:</b>	Try not to give advice or solutions; instead, dig deep to find the right open question that helps the presenter to explore thoughts.
<b>Rights</b>	The presenter's right not to respond to questions.
<b>Time</b>	Allow time to think, for both people asking the questions and the presenter hearing them; resist the urge to fill the silence.
<b>Equal</b>	Ensure equal airtime for each member, opportunity to participate and time to engage in questions and discussions.
<b>Trust</b>	Feeling safety is paramount, so work together to make this a safe space.
<b>Gifts</b>	Members may gift one piece of advice at the very end of the session.

## Next steps

- Review this resource in areas where you feel you want to increase your confidence.
- Alternatively, carry out some research of your own and/or find someone within your network who has experience in action learning. Speak to them about their experience.
- Move on to part **three** of this resource.

**End of part two**

**Leading change through  
action learning**