

Action Learning and its Impact on Strategic Topics of Organization

Farzad Kamangar¹, Reza Rohani², Abdolnaser Shojaei³

¹M. A Student's of MBA, Sanandaj Branch, Islamic Azad University, Sanandaj, Iran

²M.A student's of Management, Sanandaj Branch, Islamic Azad University, Sanandaj, Iran

³Departments of Economics, Sanandaj Branch, Islamic Azad University, Sanandaj, Iran

ABSTRACT

Action learning is a vital element in strategic topics of all organizations. But it doesn't discuss more about its effect .to specify Action Learning, some models have been offered, but because lack of integration and span of this concept, (zuber-skerritt, 2002, Chem et al, 2010).It has not offered any coherent model. This paper specifies a conceptual frame to effect of Action Learning on strategic topics of organizations.This research that has been done by qualitative procedure considers ideas of different scientists in Action Learning contest and how Action Learning effects on: strategic thinking, strategic Innovation, strategic Planning, strategic Action.

Achievements in this research that is getting by ultra-analytical method, shows the effect of Action Learning elements on four mentioned strategic topics.

KEYWORDS:Action Learning, Strategic Thinking, Strategic Innovation, Strategic Planning, Strategic Action.

INTRODUCTION

How managers create new strategies and develop that? This simple question is one of the fundamental concepts in strategic managing zone. Although there is a fewresponses to strategic research-e.g. porter(1980-1981).today's competitive and changeable environment, offers new challenges to managers in many organization that: globalcompetition, disorganized technology, new volunteers and new competitions', requirement of external customers and high speed of producing the stuffs are one of these challenges. Facing with the new progresses and lack of budget order managers to Action Learning and multipliers request the participants to think in a different way to business stuff and look the market wide and imagine new sources of customers need to improve new markets and new incomes(Kuhn&marsick,2005).to success a firm in today turbulent market, don't let the employees mind to be freezed. It would be possible by continue the process of learning in all level of organization(smith&Abby Day, 2000).learning is a current process which in that process men capacity will be increased and its outcome is those things that everybody want that (Senge, 1990).learning is a current process, it is used strategically and it continually raises(Watkins&Marsick 1999).Action Learning in the view ofMarsick and Kuhn consist of 2 stage:

First, they have used Action Learning to create strategy and next they have used Action Learning to realization of strategy(Kuhn and Marsick,2005).Action Learning consider the strategic abilities in two level of individual and group(Kuhn and marsick,2005).this paper by ultra-analyzing process, introduces a model which offers effect of Action Learning on strategic topic of organization and believes that Action Learning impact particle of Strategic Thinking, Strategic Planning, Strategic Innovation and Action Strategy.

Action Learning

RegRevans(1997)learning architect believes that: because concept of Action Learning is easy, it's difficult to describe that (Revans, 1997).by the way there is a common perception of Action Learning. Action Learning briefly is learning actual experiences and reflects these experiences. That can be discovered through the group discussion, experiment and error. Action Learning is group processes that take place in a work place or complex position and situation by interlocution the practical topics. Advantages of Action Learning are large, because

*Corresponding Author: Farzad Kamangar, M. A Student's of MBA, Sanandaj Branch, Islamic Azad University, Sanandaj, Iran, E-mail address: Farzad_kamy2000@yahoo.com, Tel: 00989187714560

participants accept that they are owner of existing problems and the methods to solve those problems. In Action Learning, learners use their skills to solve their problems and they learn how to solve and guidance their problems and they are responsible for that (Zuber-Skerritt-2002). similarly Inglis(1994) defines Action Learning in this way: consulting men in order to find a solution for problems and practical action after that in order to develop skills of men and organization (Inglis,1994).

Revans(1998)in his book ABC of Action Learning offers supposition for learning that consist of: symbolic logic, managerspersonality, top managers impressionability,philo of Action Learning, that what is not Action Learning, some experiences at the start of learning plans and suppose the organization as a system (Revans, 1998).

(Revans, 1980-1982) imputes develop of learning to educational process that is result of practical action and reflection of conclusions. Action learning through a questioning process to show the nature of problems reflects and recognizes possible problems,

And by possible actions and strategies can solve problems (Marquardt, 2004).

Action Learning can be introduced as methods of Action Research. However there is a distinction between Action Learning and Action Research (Cardni, 2003,Coghlan and Brannick, 2001).Action learning have purposes that need to be full filled. In the view of Dick purposes of Action Learning are purposes like: create a view, create networks, define problemsand solution to solve problems, self-learning and group learning and a proper evaluation of learning process and result of learning (Dick, 1991).a model of effect of Action Learning on strategic topics of organization: from the introduced arguments we can get conclusion that Action Learning is a current process. It is used strategically and always raising and progressing (Watkins and Marsick, 1999).in this part we are trying to discuss about effect of Action Learning on strategic thinking, Strategic Innovation, Strategic Planning, Action Strategy. In addition there is a model in this research (figure1) that shows the connection between Action Learning and strategic topics:

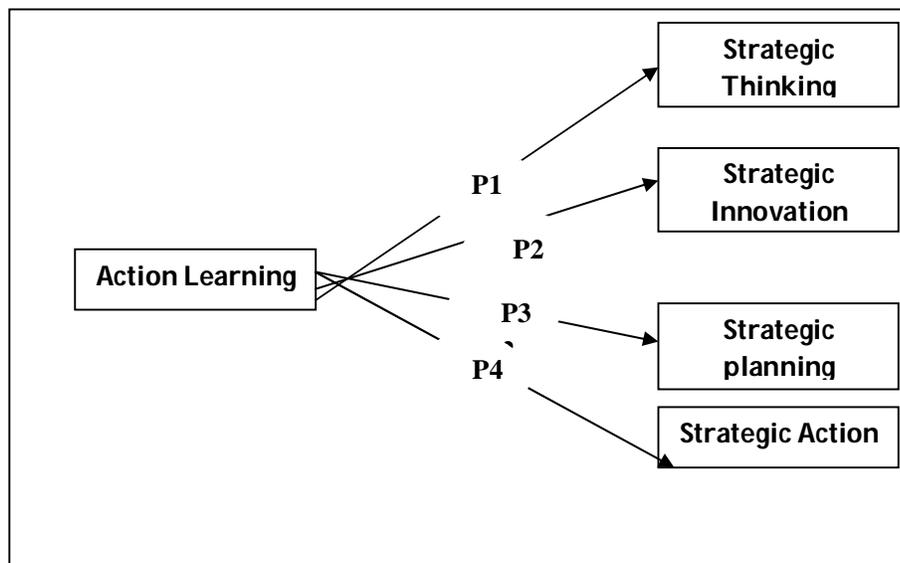


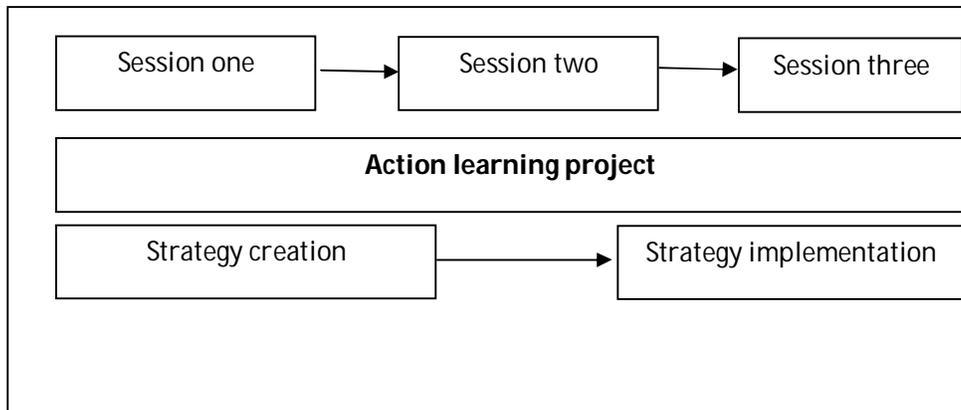
Figure 1: a model of effect of Action Learning on strategic topics of organization.

P1:Actionlearning effects on strategic thinking. Strategic thinking in many cases has been used wrongly to point at strategic planning or strategic management(Liedtka,1998).in the view of Mintzberg,strategic thinking is an intellectual process that through the intuition and creativity create a uniform diagram in the mind(Mintzberg,1994). Heracleousbelieves that strategic thinking is a creative and convergent process and strategic thinking is connected with views and horizons that have been designed via organization leaders and it needs to move managers'thought. An Action Learning plan, lead strategic thinking to so many ways. Result of Action Learning consist of: new strategy of raising, intensify strategic thinking, leading changes and realization of group working in the firm, process of realization of strategic Innovation, develop view of top managers and how to develop creativity of men (Kuhn and Marsick, 2005, MarthaandMarsick, 2007).Kuhn

and Marsick introduced a model of Action Learning to the new competitive world. Center of this model is based on developing reorganization of abilities that consist of: sense making, strategic thinking, critical thinking, divergent thinking, and malleable learning orientation. Action learning designs challenges opportunities and asserts organizations to come over their problems that could be harmful to Innovation(Kuhn and Marsick, 2005).Hamel(2003)points out that a few people are able to think creative about concept of marketing (Hamel, 2003).Action Learning planning guidance strategic thinking in all level of organization. Result of Action Learning consist of: new strategy of rise, increase strategic thinking, leading changes in the firms team, process of realization of strategic innovation, develop top managers view and how men creativity will improve(Kuhn and Marsick,2005,Martha and Marsick,2005).Action Learning through a questioning of existing problems, identify problems and consider strategies and solve problems by practical action(Kuhn and Marsick,2005,Marquardt,2004).AlsozuberSkerritt(2002)believes that major common conclusion of attending in Action Learning planning are: improve Strategic thinking abilities, conception of group process and reshuffle, improve conception between all part of organization, develop new skills, new ideas for new projects and constant rate of invest(Zuber-Skerritt,2002).Marsick and Martha (2007) have written that: organization must develop their abilities which consist of: search and use of knowledge in order to face with environmental changes and more and more register their strategies with environment. They state that how can organizations use their learning to match with strategic challenges (Martha and Marsick, 2007).Handford(1995) say that one of the strategic thinking features is "learning reaction against action" practicality (thought against action). (Handford, 1995).

P2: Action learning effects on Strategic Innovation:

Strategic Innovation is a complicate reorganization process that needs to be known advanced methods and the ability to learn in a high level. Albeit there is a wide aplitudereorganization of strategic innovation profound. Kuhn and Marsick(2005)introduced a model of Action Learning to accelerate strategic innovation in mature organizations that face with new competing ambits. Action Learning project for strategic innovation consist of two levels: the first one is that we use Action Learning to create strategy and second we use Action Learning to realization of strategy (Kuhn and Marsick, 2005).Action Learning consider organization abilities in a group and individual level(Kuhn and Marsick,2005).



Ron Pass field(2002)introduce principles and plans for Action Learning through discuss around parallel structure of action learning (Pals).Pass field introduce PALS model as a result of action research which is a developed plan for academic center and administrations employee based on Action Learning principles and action research. Explained PALS model by pass field(2002)made a connection between designed element of program and individual result and organization and also shows that how this program trepan to strategic innovation and develop organization energy. Structures of parallel Action Learning that pass field (2002) offered by interfering strategies for organization learning and starts and consist of: normative strategy, power and spread revenue and result of communion existing in this structure. This strategy through impressibility and interaction of dialog creates,efficiency, reduce consumption, innovation,

personal security, quality. These results cause to increase organization abilities (Passfield, 2002). Learning can strengthen strategic innovation and must have these qualifications:

1. Integrated into strategy development process.
2. Transformative in nature.
3. Moreover individual learning, in order to develop some leaders who engage in group and organizational learning.

Pietersen (2002) shows that it is essential to updating your insight and learning to achieve strategic success. Actually achieving strategic innovation is more important than learning. Key learning is in strategic question and conversation. Leaders develop skills and ideas in this way that: a base to build strategic innovation as a strong organizational ability (Pietersen, 2002). In the second step alternatives learning, specially changing views according to thought motor to achieve success is not assured to achieve strategic innovation. This learning theory (MEZIRROW, 1991, 2000) includes examine and transfer profound supposition, intellectual model, patterns and blind spots that doesn't let critical reflection, question and conversation, creating intellectual models and views toward learning could be useful as they can be proffer and reframe. This kind of changing view is in heart of strategic innovation. Changing a pattern let the participants to overcome intellectual models and see the market by reforming shape of lenses. Yorks, O'Neil, Marsick (1999) also, have developed curriculums that shows how organizational noise increases critical reflection. Profound question around duty purposes and out puts by critical reflection can lead to changing organizational culture. But organization tends to assert of profound changes. Designed learning for strategic innovation for a success to create new raise curve and challenge marketing needs critical reflection. Leaders use their learning to develop organizational capacity in order to strategic innovation.

P3: Action learning impact strategic planning.

Affording changes in any organization is complex subject. Organizational changes broadly and educational changes especially never follow a constant rate (Fullan, 1993). Experienced managers know that controlling large number of elements during a process is impossible. Choosing proper strategy of change is an indispensable step in achieving favorite success. A strategy as Action Learning can help organization to become a learner organization (Silins, 2001). Learning is a process which is used strategically. It is combined and uses parallel. Organizational learning is a system which is used to achieve and share learning (Watkins and Marsick, 1993, p.8-9). Strategic planning has defined as a learning process. Willauer and Schafer (2003) have published a paper named: strategic planning as a learning process. They suggested that better learning in the strategic planning process must has an more effective out come in planning that effectively effects on market performance and its units. In addition they offered theories to show the evaluation of learning in strategic planning and by using structural equation model and by using (Liserl) software, the theories have been tested (Willauer and Schafer, 2003).

Schaffer and Willauer (2003) consider relation between learning and strategic planning that cause market planning process in German firms be more effective. Result of this study showed that learning in strategic learning process lead to increase prediction of efficiencies and implementations. Both learning and strategic planning have an effective and positive and significant on marketing groups and back stairs effect on market performance sale returns. Based on experimental achievements those suggested to design strategic planning as increase learning and also showed that learning cause endogenous dynamism. Endogenous complication, culture based on trust and reconcentration. Thus this point is very valuable that we designed strategic planning as a learning process (Schaffer & Willauer, 2003). Smith and Abby Day (2000) introduced method named planning as learning. That was strategic planning based on Action Learning and long term experiences in the Canadian commercial firms. They described methods that made question like: how can we contrive a planning method based on learning organization marketing process?

Smith and Abby Day (2000) describe main element of "planning as learning" as:

- 1): Action Learning: Smith and Abby Day clarify that: executional committee prove develop Action Learning methods in group and individual level. In sum there is a model of learning by experience name "by doing" that explains environment duty and duties as instrument for planning method as learning exist. We suggested supposing Action learning as a philosophy with planning that commonly based on these thoughts:

- Instrument participating of solve actual problems (not actual response) at an actual time.

- Collection participant in small learning communities which exist constant.
 - Problems related to participants facts in the shop.
 - Supportable community of learning process that exist in collection.
 - -reflection process, questioning, dowsing and proving problems by logical argument.
- 2): participatory Action for solving problems (Smith and Abby Day, 2000).
- A frame for Action Learning as planning:
 - Action learning planning frame (ALPF) introduce a method as performance learning. Performance learning supplies a close shop and strategic union for Strategic Planning.
 - Intuitive meeting process which is not complicated.

All in All this paper encourage organizations to put planning method as learning in their strategic planning and consider Action Learning as a simple practical instrument.

P4: Action learning effects on Action Strategy.

Action Learning is an instrument to solve problems that at similar time make leaders, teams and organization succeed. One of the axiomatic principles in Action Learning is that: there is no actual learning without action and shouldn't exist any action without learning. Learning is so remarkable when we suppose some of our action as conclusion. Proceedings consist of those things that happen in parts of Action Learning and solving problems. Confirmation of purposes and develop strategies is one the most important elements in learning that consist of:examine,attract avocation and sources and launch strategically. Specifically, an Action Learning group is working through four level which has been examined in the first stage and when strategic proceedings come off and it has 4 stage:

- 1)Understanding and reframing the question.
- 2)Framing and characterize purposes.
- 3)Codification of strategies.
- 4)Proceeding and evaluation (Marquardt, 2004).

Kaplan and Norton have suggested four elements to successful implementation of strategies and one of mentioned by them is strategic learning(Kaplan and Norton,1996).Action Learning with three method ,is base of strategy in different projects. First of all participant must learn how to work in a group and learn how to share their knowledge and ideas or else they wouldn't be able to maximize their co-workers variety. Without divergent thought they wouldn't be able to achieve strategic success. Then plan must be developed supporting examination. In the organization during planning period, leaders need innovation examination to get lesson from their mistakes.

Such a ideal experiment, block divergent thought and strategy Action and successful implementation of strategy. Then this group can arrange blocks and gift that to considering major leaders who need to apply solutions before finishing program. In the third step, members must find ways to repeat their experience with those who guide and experience and these 3methods are bases to Strategic Action and success strategy in a different project. (KuhnandMarsick, 2005).

Sandilands (1998) see Action Learning as a kind of learning by trying on actual problems and concentration on learning and implementation of learning (Raclin, 1997).Action Learning is a process that encourages us to learn the best action case in action and through working in an organization that hasten our efficiency(Peters, 1996).Harrison(1996) claims that Action Learning is a mutual learning process in a small collection of managers. That steps through question and reflection in order to produce action in the work place and develop individual ability. Mumford (1995) suggests essential elements to Action learning that consist of:

1. Learning must be efficient as a concept of learning to get action.
2. Learning for efficient action includes action not just doing action recommendation.
3. Operation learning project must be important to learners.
4. Learners can learn better from each other (Mumford1995).

For today's organization moving toward "organization learning "has a vital importance that some of researchers believe that: learning levels in organizations maybe the only key factor which make distinction between successful organization. It's obvious that leaders of organizations are looking for new methods to develop organizational abilities by learning and relearning.

Action learning procedures, clarifies conveniences to learning strategy implementation in the work place. In the first step, organizational problems being searched and found next apply incremental procedures which increase managers learning. It helps manager's ability through learning and managers replication to organizational topics. Learning in a work place play a key role in efficiency.Miller (2003) introduces details about case studies that by using Action Learning

methodology starts learning process in network place in organizations and then discover topics to appear in intervention process. At the end Miller offers new lessons to those who are responsible for learning in the work place and introduces learning knowledge as new strategic property of organizations (Miller, 2003).

Conclusion

In this research tried to offer a vivid perception of effect of Action Learning on strategic topics in organizations. Studies in this research showed that Action Learning has been noteworthy in different ways of scientists. Offered definitions show numerous effect of Action Learning on strategic topics of organization. In this paper clarified that Action Learning effects on any strategic topic of organization that consist of: Strategic Thinking, Strategic Innovation,

Strategic Planning and Strategic Action. Our aim of this model is to obtain necessary context to achieve a comprehensive theory.

Our suggestion in this paper is to:

Offered models could be a base to design a transcendental frame in strategic management which is formed based on Strategic Thinking.

REFERENCES

- Cardno, C. (2003). "Action Research: a developmental approach", Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.
- Coghlan, D. & Brannick, T. (2001). "Doing Action Research in Your Own Organization", Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Dick, B. (1991), "Evaluation As Action Research", Interchange Brisbane.
- C. Chenhall, Everon, J. Chermack, Thomas, (2010), "Models, definitions, and outcome variables of action learning: A synthesis with implications for HRD", *Journal of European Industrial Training*, Vol. 34 Is: 7 pp. 588 - 608.
- Fullan, M. (1993), "Change forces. Probing the depths of educational reform". New York: The Falmer Press.
- Hamel, G. (2003), "Innovation as a deep capability", *Leader to Leader*, 27, 19–24.
- Handford, P. (1995) "Developing Director and Executive Competencies in Strategic Thinking". In B. Garratt (Ed.), "Developing Strategic Thought: Reinventing the art of Direction – Giving, London: McGraw-Hill.
- Harrison, R. (1996) "Action learning: route or barrier to the learning organization?"
- *Employee Counseling Today*, The Journal of Workplace Learning Vol. 8 No. 6 pp 27- 38.
- Heracleous, Loizos (1998), "Strategic Thinking or Strategic Planning"? *Long Range Planning*, Vol. 31, No. 3, pp: 481-487, 1998.
- Inglis, S. (1994). "Making the Most of Action Learning". Alder shot, England: Gower.
- Kaplan, R. S., Norton, D. P. (1996). "The Balanced Score-card – Translating Strategy into Action", Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Kuhn, Jeffrey S., Marsick, Victoria J. (2005). "Action learning for strategic innovation in mature organizations: key cognitive, design and contextual considerations". *Action Learning: Research and Practice* Vol. 2, No. 1, April 2005, pp. 27–48.
- Liedtka, Jean. M. (1998), "Linking Strategic Thinking With Strategic Planning", *Strategy and Leadership*, Vol. 26, No. 5.
- Marquardt, J. Michael. (2004), "OPTIMIZING THE POWER OF ACTION LEARNING", *Concentrated Knowledge™ for the Busy Executive* • www.summary.com. Vol. 26, No. 8 (2 parts) Part 2, August 2004 .pp 20-26.
- Martha A. Gephart and Victoria J. Marsick , (2007) , " Strategic Organizational Learning : How Organizations Leverage Learning to Meet Strategic Challenges". Butterworth-Heinemann.

- Mezirow, J. D. (1991), " Transformative dimensions of adult learning" (San Francisco, CA, Jossey-Bass), Mezirow, J. D. & Associates (2000), " Learning as transformation " (San Francisco, CA, Jossey-Bass).
- Miller, Peter (2003). " Workplace learning by action learning: a practical example", Journal of Workplace Learning, vol. 15, no.1, pp.14-23.
- Mintzberg , H. (1994), "The Fall and Rise of Strategic Planning", Harvard Business Review, 72(1), 107-114.
- Mumford, A. (1995) "Learning in action" *Industrial and Commercial Training* Vol. 27 No. 8pp 36-40.
- Passfield, Ron. (2002). "Creating innovation and synergy through a parallel action learning structure", *Learning Organization*, Vol. 9 Iss: 4 pp. 150 - 158.
- Peters, J. (1996). "A learning organization's syllabus". *The Learning Organization* Vol. 3 No.1, pp 4-10.
- Pietersen, W. G. (2002), "Reinventing strategy: using strategic learning to create and sustain breakthrough performance" (New York, John Wiley & Sons, Inc.).
- Porter, M.E. (1980) , "Competitive Strategy", The Free Press: New York.
- Porter, M.E., (1981). "The Contributions of Industrial Organization To Strategic Management", *Academy of Management Review*, 6(4), pp. 609-620 .
- Raelin, J. A. (1997) "Action Learning and Action Science: Are They Different?" *Organizational Dynamics* Vol. 26 No. 1 pp 21-34
- Revans, R.W. (1980). "Actionlearning new techniques for management", London: Blond & Briggs.
- Revans, R.W. (1982). "The Origin and Growth of Action Learning", Brickley ,UK: Charwell-Bratt.
- Revans, R. (1997). "Action Learning: Its Origins and Nature. In *Action Learning in Practice*", 3d ed., edited by M. Pedler, pp. 3-14. Brookfield, VT: Gower.
- Revans , R.(1998) , " ABC of Action Learning" , Empowering Managers to Act to Learn from action , The Mike Pedler Library , Lemos and crane , London .
- Sandelands , E. (1998) "Creating an online library to support a virtual learning community"
- *Internat Research: Electronic Networking Applications and Policy* Vol. 8 No. 1 pp75-80.
- Schäffer, Utz, Willauer, Bianca. (2003), " STRATEGIC PLANNING AS A LEARNING PROCESS", *Schmalenbach Business Review* u Vol. 55 u April 2003 u pp. 86–107.
- Senge, P. M. (1990). "The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization". New York: Currency Doubleday.
- Silins, Halia. (2001) , " Action Learning: A Strategy for Change". *International Education Journal* Vol 2, No 2, 2001.
- Smith, Peter A.C., Abby Day. (2000). "STRATEGIC PLANNING AS ACTION LEARNING", *Organizations & People*, Vol. 7, No. 1, February 2000.
- Watkins, K. E. and Marsick, V. (1993). "Sculpting the learning organization". San Francisco: JosseyBass.
- Watkins, K. E., & Marsick, V. J. (1999). "Sculpting the learning community: New forms of working and organizing". *National Association of Secondary School Principals: NASSP Bulletin*, 83(604), 78–87.
- Yorks, L., O'Neil, J. & Marsick, V. J. (1999), "Action learning: theoretical bases and varieties of practice", in L. Yorks, J. O'Neil & V. J. Marsick (Eds) *Advances in developing human resources* (vol. 2) (London, Sage), 1–18.
- Zuber-Skerritt, Ortrun. (2002). "The concept of action learning", *The Learning Organization*, Vol. 9 Iss: 3, pp. 114 - 124.