

NetWork Field Notes  
Interel, Inc

Action Learning Lab Procedure

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## Introduction & Overview

This Action Learning procedure highlights and underscores the importance of "dialogue" in creating a shared understanding. Author Peter Senge in his book *The Fifth Discipline* suggests that dialogue is the cornerstone of "learning organizations." Dialogue is created when every individual approaches organizational issues with the simultaneous positions of high advocacy and high inquiry. Such openness and willingness to share perceptions while each person remains grounded in the position that they do not have the ultimate answers, allows the emergence of a collective intelligence and a shared understanding. This realization is unattainable in debate and more politicized "discussion." This abstract concept is dramatically and clearly demonstrated through the following Action Learning task.

The task highlights:

- Team learning
- *Dialogue versus discussion*
- Team alignment
- Collective intelligence
- Strategic unity

## Facilitation

Action Learning is most effective in this task when at least four and as many as eight persons operating the strings of each Network device. It is an appropriate activity for groups of up to 30 to 40 persons. However, every group of eight must have their own Network device. The devices and their marking targets must be oriented identically; the targets' Velcro corner tabs should be used to make sure the targets do not rotate during the activity.

To initiate the Action Task, give instructions as follows...

### Step 1

*I would like everyone to experiment with moving the marker around the target and practice hitting self-selected areas on the target. This will provide the group with a training and familiarization period.*

Make the learning point that "learning organizations" and "learning teams" are defined as organizations and teams which are constantly enhancing their capacity to get the results they want. Announce the beginning and end of the period.

### Step 2

*Now that you have gained some skill with moving the marker, I would like to impose the additional constraint of "no talking or any verbal communication" during the next phase of the exercise. Each group at each Network now has the same challenge which is: to make a mark on the outer edge of the target that will be at the point of True North. This is important to our organization because for purposes of this exercise "True North" represents our team or organization's strategic direction. If the mark is off by even one segment, then we lose time, money, and energy. You will have 5 minutes to make one mark. You will only get to make one mark during this first round.*

Announce the beginning and end of the period.

### **Step 3**

*During the next round you will have ten minutes to mark the direction of "True North" on your target. This time you can talk and share the reasoning, logic, and data behind your particular assessment of the direction. After arriving at a shared understanding or "collective intelligence" produced by this dialogue the group should then make its mark on the target. During this round group members can only talk among themselves at their device.*

Announce the beginning and end of the period.

### **Step 4**

*For the final round we would like to hear report-outs from all the groups in the room about which way is "north" and the round will be over when we can reach collective, best guess decision on exactly where to put the mark on the target. We have to keep practicing high advocacy and high inquiry until we are able to reach alignment around our perceptions.*

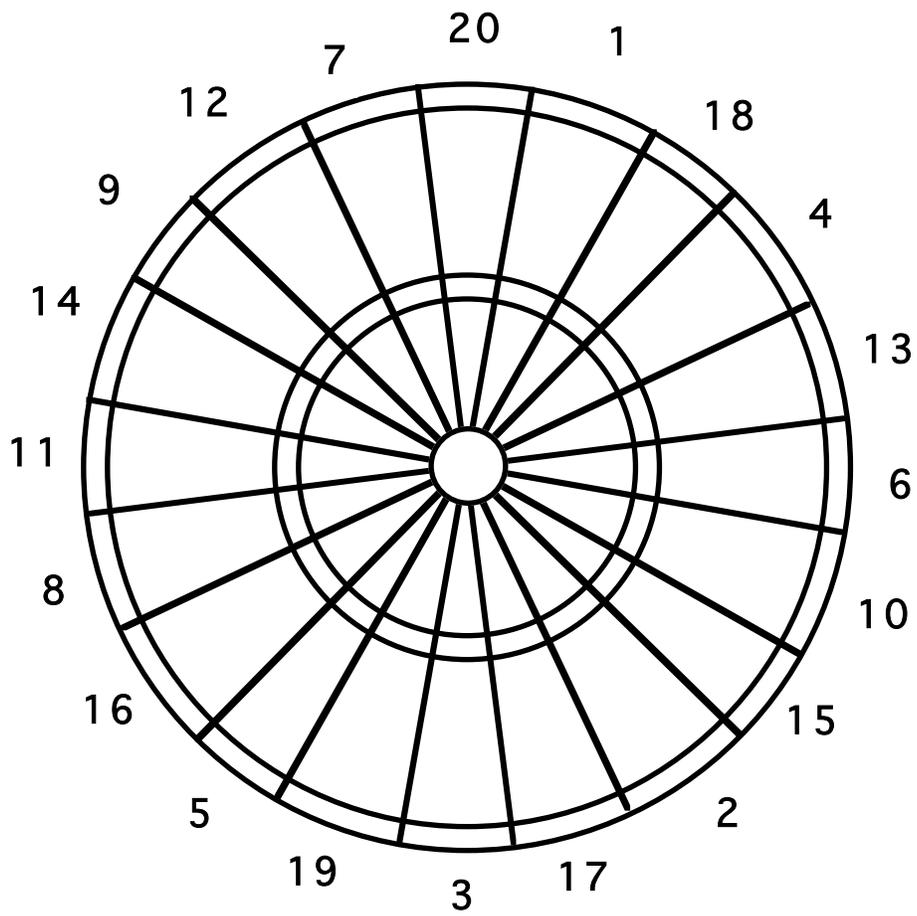
## Debriefing

The debriefing period can focus on the following questions...

- To what extent were you individually able to maintain and practice dialogue— both high advocacy for your point of view and yet simultaneously, high enquiry for new information and the genuine interest in the perceptions of others?
- How successfully did your group practice dialogue? How successfully did the entire room (the organization) practice dialogue?
- In strategy, how often do we each have idiosyncratic understandings and perceptions of what "direction" we are moving and /or how we think that direction is best expressed?
- How might this same exercise be applied in the areas of diversity and values?

### Learning point:

Alignment and direction setting involve communications and openness to on-going feedback. First, we must agree and commit to the same direction or we remain simply pulling against each other. Second, once we start the journey, we must follow the same process of dialogue in order to incorporate new feedback and information that we discover along the way.



NETWORK TARGET