

## Chapter 7

# Mobile Learning in Workforce Development: Cultivating Creativity on Action Learning Teams through Higher-Order mLearning

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### ABSTRACT

*There is potential for higher-order mLearning to enrich action learning teams. Especially as they engage in critical reflection while solving ambiguous, complex challenges by leveraging the affordances of mobile devices. Action learning teams create opportunities to learn from work on real-life challenges. Use of mobile learning can promote higher-order learning while bringing teams together around new ideas where their thinking may be challenged. In this way, action learning teams use mobile devices as tools of convenience to facilitate their learning. Mobile learning extends beyond simple content delivery and provides a platform that can introduce flow and make space for critical reflection. The integration of mobile learning into action learning teams allows for the cultivation of individual creativity and maximization of group virtual or face-to-face meetings. This chapter will discuss the integration of mobile devices and detail multiple mobile learning exercises that action learning teams may use to promote creativity.*

### A CASE FOR LEVERAGING MOBILE LEARNING IN ACTION LEARNING TEAMS

In Lewis Carroll's (1871) classic tale, *Through the Looking Glass* the Queen offers Alice jam as an employment benefit, and soon after refers to a rule restricting her access to said jam. "The rule is, jam to-morrow and jam yesterday— but never jam to-day." (Carroll, 2013, Kindle Location 524). Alice is seemingly the only one to see the obvious flaws in the Queen's interpretation of having access to jam. This caricature of company policy, seen through the eyes of Alice, is not too far off from how many employees feel about their own working situation. Unfortunately, it remains much more difficult to see the second and third order of consequences in our everyday norms, customs, or laws than it does to see the error in the Queen's jam policy. However, as Alice sees Wonderland through fresh eyes, there are

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-0251-7.ch007

ways to recognize contradictions within one's own organization, and thinking. With others, as a part of an action learning team, one may go through the looking glass and begin to deconstruct challenges, construct questions, and present solutions that address organizational challenges.

The formation of an action learning team may create the space for learners to come together and participate in a process to uncover their own untested assumptions and create new ways of thinking. In order to uncover the untested assumptions in our own thinking, one may participate in an individual or group critical reflection. Albert Einstein famously stated, "We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them." Critical reflection serves as the tool to recognize the kind of thinking that created the problem. The team may also endeavor to remedy much of the institutional contradictions (Voronov & Yorks, 2015; Seo & Creed, 2002), which brought about unintended outcomes that possibly originated from unchallenged norms. Mobile learning, when purposefully introduced to an action learning team's process and practice, affords a virtual extension of working space. This provides an additional space to support group development (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977), encourage social flow (Walker, 2010) and provide near *synchronous communication* (Mentor, 2011 dissertation).

Privileging the learning entails the team's acceptance of slowing down the action of racing toward the finish line, and allowing time for defining group norms, and terminology. Participating in a group reflection can feel cumbersome, akin to reading the minutes of the previous meeting. The difference in reflection, however, is the space it creates for the individual (first-person space) and the group (second-person space) to make meaning of the shared experience. Adding a critical lens to this process allows the group to go deeper, uncovering institutional contradictions (Seo & Creed, 2002). It may also help the group see the taken-for-granted customs and norms that they may have automatically conformed while "onboarding" or "adjusting" to the institution (Seo & Creed, 2002). Critical reflection opens space to review and revise the previously invisible institutional contradictions by helping learners to examine assumptions and beliefs that influence interpretations, decisions and actions.

This chapter considers how action learning teams can leverage higher-order mLearning—high level learning supported by use of handheld mobile devices with smart capabilities and Internet access—to enhance performance. After introducing this argument, the chapter discusses how critically reflective action learning teams function and then examines how higher-order mLearning can enhance critical reflection and creativity in such teams.

Action learning allows teams to focus on learning and leadership development while organized around a work related challenge. The challenge base and learning focus may cultivate higher performance by providing teams with the space to participate in the discourse required for testing assumptions and institutional norms. Marsick and O'Neil (2007) explain action learning as,

*An approach to working with and developing people that uses work on an actual project or problem as the way to learn. Participants work in small groups to take action to solve their problem and learn how to learn from that action. Often a learning coach works with the group in order to help the members learn how to balance their work with the learning from that work. (p. xvii).*

The formation of an action learning team often creates the space for learners to engage in critical reflection that uncovers and holds the potential to remedy institutional contradictions. This is especially the case when members take on the challenge to solve ambiguous, complex challenges that demand fresh insight and creative approaches.

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