CLM

Center For Leadership and Management

EXECUTIVE Potential Program

Action Learning Handbook

Leadership Training to Shape and Direct Change

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Complexity, Management, Leadership and Action

Overview

Management and Leadership

Over the past six decades, a variety of management and leadership models have emerged as organizations have become more complex and new social challenges have come to the fore. Deeply entrenched social issues including gender and race affect how work is organized and managed and the quest for more efficient and effective organizational management methods and tools is ongoing. There are ever increasing expectations that managers and leaders will be able to address organizational challenges while navigating complex workplaces.

Managing and leading people, groups, and organizations now requires technical knowledge and experience, emotional intelligence, and a keen understanding and appreciation of the diversity of the evolving work force. In short, managers and leaders need both technical and emotional competencies as well as the practical skills to learn, adapt, and act. Managers and leaders need to be flexible and oriented to action, capable of adapting to change, aware of emerging trends and confident and courageous in the face of the unknown.

In this regard “leadership” is an action rather than a role designation. Leadership, rather than a static position, should rightly be seen as the ongoing development of skills and practices through individual and group reflection with the goal of creating new insights, mindsets, and capacities.

In rapidly changing environments, where traditional government and civil-society organizational structures create siloed decision-making, how can managers and leaders respond to new, more complex challenges?

Action Leadership

Most contemporary government agencies, bureaus and departments were designed to focus on a specific issue, i.e. infrastructure, security, housing, water, electricity, transportation or health, with little focus on the “linkages”, “externalities”, “unintended consequences” or “synergies” that may appear to be outside of their work domain. However, research into organizational development has shown that there are important links between policies, programs, and initiatives. Across federal, state, and local agencies it is clear that leadership must now contend with inter-agency and cross sector data sharing, communication, and decision making. In short, well-trained and experienced leaders capable of managing, organizing, and guiding responses to complex new challenges are needed. Newly emerging leadership challenges include:

- Increased demand for transparency
- Comprehensive information sharing, interoperability, and data security across multiple organizations and platforms
- Multi-stakeholder reporting requirements for responsibility and accountability

One method of developing effective management leadership is through the integration of evidence-based theoretical concepts and methods with real-world experience and personal reflection and the use of “Action Leadership” methods. An Action Leadership approach seeks to transform managers into strategic leaders by developing collaborative skills and working together in a team on meaningful projects that are of critical importance to an organization. There are three sets of inter-connected skills that inform Action Leadership: Action Learning, Action Research and Action Insights. All three areas have their own histories and evolution and it is now that they are being combined to provide the foundation of strengthening leadership skills to create “Action Leaders”.

Action Learning

One of the well-known methods of collaborative problem solving is **"Action Learning."**
Action Learning is an approach that focuses on how to engage the help and support of colleagues, in a safe and supportive environment. For over twenty years, this practice has gained credibility as a method of professional development that meets real and current needs and is taught and used across the world in government and business.

Action Learning offers a means to transition from more traditional "single sector" leadership approaches to more collaborative and "cross-sector" linking and integrative models. This transition is necessary because we now understand complex government and stakeholder organizations better. We now know that:

- Human organizations are social systems made up of dynamically interacting elements. The elements of all human social systems are actors, actions, and artifacts (outputs, outcomes, objects, etc.) in place and time.
- Human social systems are complex systems.
- Complex systems are defined by the continuous and ongoing interaction of the multiple elements.
- Interactions and relationships between the multiple elements in complex systems are often non-linear and emergent.
- Non-apparent, invisible and "hidden" elements of social interaction, such as human beliefs, values, and emotions influence human social systems.
- "Hidden" relationships affect "visible" outcomes.

Action Learning is designed to help understand the dynamic complexity of any human social situation, problem or challenge. At its foundation, Action Learning was designed to offer the opportunity to learn and practice collaboration oriented, cross-disciplinary and dynamic sets of skills that can be used to understand, manage and lead complex organizations.

Module 1

Action Learning and the Executive Potential Program

As a core component of EPP, Action Learning focuses on practical, experiential, evidence, and case-based skills development. It emphasizes the creative power of teamwork, the value of addressing real world problems together, and the need for structured opportunities to explore and implement iterative design strategies. It also facilitates opportunities to meet and network with senior level leaders across a variety of agencies. Participants gain firsthand experience in preparing briefings and papers for senior leaders while sharing the resources and experiences of fellow team members.

The goal of Action Learning for EPP is to support the acquisition of new action-oriented skills and practices. To achieve that goal, key learning objectives are to:

- Design and explore novel and creative solutions to urgent organizational challenges while building leaders and teams.
- Further develop individual leadership and Executive Core Qualifications.
- Expand participant knowledge of new subjects.
- Expand participant networks and experience leading teams.
- Understand and apply benchmarking techniques.
- Interact with a sponsor.
- Add to participant portfolios by completing a quality ALT product to share with sponsor and your own leadership.

All Action Learning oriented initiatives adhere to the basic principle that by cooperating, reflecting, and discussing ideas about difficult aspects of work, people will learn and move beyond solving problems in the same way, over-and-over again. In short, Action Learning recognizes that by systematically sharing questions and information, new insights, creativity, and more realistic solutions will emerge. In an Action Learning process, participants:

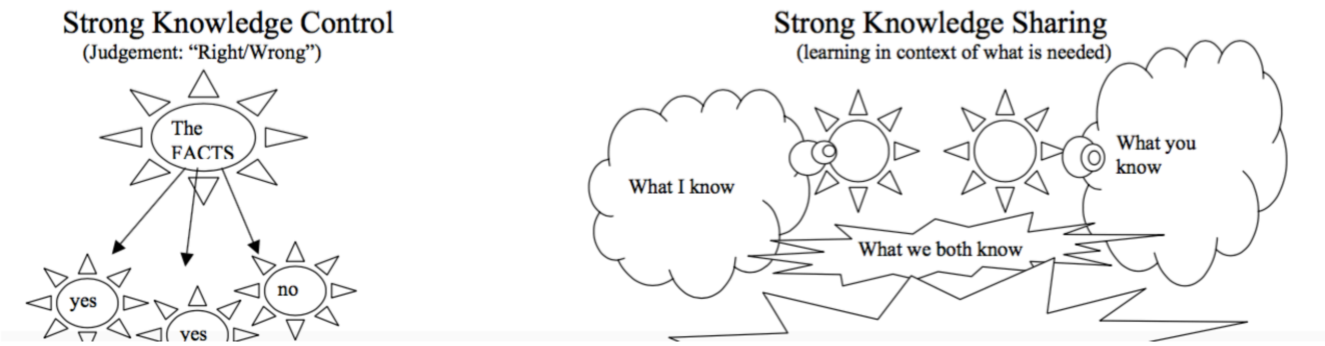
- Step back from their “normal” work to define a mutually agreed upon challenge
- Develop action plans to test new ideas.
- Talk about these plans with their colleagues.
- Test assumptions, challenge the original plan, explore the challenge, adapt a new solution, shift the action plan.
- Carry through with the new, modified action plan.
- Reflect about those actions and modify, expand, and refine the actions.
- Report back to colleagues about what has happened and how that has created new ideas and possibilities, etc.

The iterative aspect of Action Learning is a self- reinforcing cycle of knowledge, experience and insights. New skills lead to new knowledge and additional insights. By working in a group people have the chance to practice new ways of listening, observing, sharing information and conversing. Action Learning embodies two parallel learning areas; 1) learning how to be in a collaborative team and 2) learning about new “technical/content” options for solutions development. Often leaders will listen to other peoples’ problems with a focus on sharing a known solution, or promoting their idea. In Action Learning groups, suggestions and/or ideas are held back and the focus is on asking directed questions so that novel and new understandings emerge.

Asking questions rather than giving immediate answers, is a leadership talent that can be practiced and developed. The ability to ask good questions changes how people lead and manage others—and Action Learning teams offer the opportunity to practice and experience new ideas and ways to develop solutions.

In summary, Action Learning is a team-based process that fosters individual and team development while simultaneously solving real organizational problems. Teams utilize a structured process based on diversity of thought, inquiry (generating and asking questions) and reflection to address complex, systematic organizational problems. The end result is that organizations that engage in Action Learning are able to:

- Enhance their employees' creativity, critical-thinking and problem-solving abilities
- Generate solutions to pressing problems.
- Adapt more readily to changes internally and externally.



Fundamental Characteristics of Action Learning

- Creates and works in a chartered Action Learning team
- Focuses on a real organizational problem or opportunity to resolve/exploit
- Uses and supports rigorous questioning and reflection
- Priority commitment to knowledge for action - “walk-the-talk not just talk-the-talk”
- Shared commitment to learning – a regular part of any planning/debriefing activity
- Uses skills-based team facilitation as a core team process

Benefits

- Provides systemic solutions to complex organizational problems
- Enhances team and individual development
- Provides a method for ongoing management development
- Develops strong organizational networks and relationships
- Creates change adept learning organizations
- Provides a platform for implementing succession planning strategies

Pitfalls

- Inappropriate choice of projects
- Lack of support from top management
- Lack of time
- Poor mix of participants for the project selected
- Lack of observable commitment by participants
- All action and no learning

Action Learning Components

The application of Action Learning (AL) principles and practices in EPP has evolved over the years. The following components of AL are all used in EPP though they may be modified to accommodate the needs of the program and participants:

1. Action Learning Skill Sets
2. Action Learning Teams
3. Action Learning Leaders
4. Action Learning Team Members
5. Action Learning Projects
6. Problem or Challenge
7. Project Sponsors
8. Reflective Questioning and Listening
9. Research and Analysis
10. Recommendations and Report

1. Action Learning Skill Sets

In Action Learning, it is important that a variety of skills are recognized, practiced, and contribute to the Action Learning team building and sustaining process. To build these skills, it is useful to present some structure as a basis for discussion. The leadership skills practiced and reinforced in Action Learning are those related to management, technical knowledge and team participation.

a. Management Skills

Management skills are required to organize and maintain both teams and complex social organizations. These include the ability to maintain clarity of roles, status, delegation of authority, and supervision. An individual with management skills can oversee technical processes support administrative procedures and clarify goals, results, and achievements. People with management skills are able to build an enabling environment for progress and change, by helping to create the space within which concrete action can take place. They may also bring in resources for programs needed to ensure that deadlines are met, and that results are monitored and evaluated.

b. Technical Skills

Technical skills are required to understand underlying specific issues that are part of the work focus. Leaders will often have acquired new management roles based on their leadership and success in a technical area. Technical skills provide leaders with the ability to apply their knowledge and experience gained in a specific field in order to support effective solutions.

c. Participatory/Leadership Skills

Participatory skills are required to promote and sustain cooperation, engagement of team members, accountability, and action. A person with participatory leadership skills has the ability to support values clarification, visioning, and provide inspiration. Participatory skills help create a welcoming and engaging environment that brings people and organizations together, encourages individuals to express diverse views, creates consensus and builds ownership over decisions made. Managers and leaders use participatory skills to liaise with counterparts in another department or between national and subnational levels.

2. Action Learning Teams

Action Learning teams (ALTs) are the small groups that work together on a specific challenge and, to function effectively, will have to attend to both the climate within their group and the process by which they accomplish their tasks. Critical to a healthy climate and an effective process are strong communication skills. Although participants may already have strong communication skills they will benefit from opportunities to practice as well as to receive regular feedback on how they are doing.

At the beginning of the program each cohort is divided up into ALTs. Each team typically has between 6-8 participants and represents a cross section of the cohort as a whole. The ALTs are together for the duration of the program. This format helps participants develop personally and professionally, and experience how effective teamwork can be both challenging and rewarding.

Regular open communication, in which group members share their thoughts, ideas, and feelings, is a must for successful ALTs. Unspoken assumptions and issues can be very destructive to productive group functioning and by providing opportunities for participants to communicate openly with one another, a healthy climate will emerge and an effective process can be followed. Participants in ALTs are expected to participate fully in all team activities, conference calls, meetings, etc. Program activities such as developmental assignments should not be allowed to interfere with team participation.

a. ALT Communication Skills

To function successfully in the small group, participants need to be able to communicate clearly on intellectual and emotional levels. Examples of effective communication skills are:

- Ability to clearly explain ideas.
- Willingness to express feelings in an open but non-threatening way.
- Capacity to listen carefully or “actively listen” to others.
- Willingness to ask questions to clarify other people’s ideas and emotions.
- Ability to recognize nonverbal communication.
- Willingness to initiate conversations about group climate or process if they sense tensions.
- Openness to reflect on the activities and interactions of their group and encourage other group members to do so as well.

ALTs are valuable for practicing and strengthening leadership and management skills as they:

- Provide a systematic forum for participants to explore and address relevant issues and skills that leaders in the federal workforce are faced with.
- Learn and practice the dynamic skills of team development and processes through hands-on experience.
- Encourage the strengthening of team-building, interpersonal skills and planning strategies needed for effective team action and decision -making.
- Strengthen leadership skills as well as individual creativity.
- Stimulate a commitment to personal development and continued learning.
- Provide one-on-one support for learners throughout this developmental experience.

ALTs for EPP:

- Are organized randomly with goal toward balance in gender and across agencies.
- Stay together throughout the program.
- Meet regularly outside of class (ESSENTIAL).
- Are managed by circulating team lead position
- Will develop team name, motto and logo and start draft of team charter during the first week of training.

<u>It is highly recommended that ALTs meet weekly for the duration of the program.</u>

3. Action Learning Team Leaders

Team leaders are responsible for ensuring that the project moves forward in a timely and well-organized manner, and for reporting on their experience. Teams set up a schedule during the first week of training that designate team leader slots for every team member over the course of the program. (Individuals may serve two terms.) They are only required to submit one report as a program deliverable.

As a team leader, participants will reflect on their leadership and facilitation style. In addition, they will have the opportunity to see collaborative leadership in different contexts and understand how cultural expectations will lead to different ways of leading a group.

Key skills and responsibilities of team leaders include:

- Setting up and managing team meeting logistics.
- Ensuring that all required resources are assigned and clearly tasked.
- Managing assigned resources according to the defined scope of the project.
- Implementing project processes and performance (time, quality, change, risk, etc.)
- Reporting and escalating project risks and issues to the EPP advisor.
- Making adjustments to the detailed plan as necessary to provide a complete picture of the progress of the project at any time.
- Ensuring that the questioning process is followed and engaging the learners in the necessary reflection.

a. Group Leadership Skills

The following list can help each team member review and assess their readiness to serve as a team leader. Review the chart below and consider your readiness in various categories.

Team Leader Skills Assessment	
As a team leader, my commitment is to…	❑ Help the group establish its purpose ❑ Help the group establish its ground rules ❑ Help the group establish its core values and understand team member beliefs ❑ Help the group establish roles and responsibilities ❑ Help the group deal with leadership roles and authorities ❑ Help the group deal with start-up difficulties
In preparing for my role as the team leader I am…	❑ Still learning and/or aware of the stages of group development ❑ Simultaneously conscious of process and content in our group ❑ Able to intervene at either the content or the process level
In preparing for my role as the team leader I have…	❑ Models for and can use group decision making tools ❑ Models for and can use group planning tools ❑ Models for and can use group problem solving tools

Team Leader Skills Assessment	
As the team leader I know how to…	❑ Prepare for an effective meeting (See checklist for team meetings) ❑ Help the group clarify its purpose for a meeting ❑ Help the group establish expected outcomes for the meeting ❑ Help the group establish suitable roles for a meeting ❑ Help a group with a process agenda for a meeting ❑ Ensure both quality decisions and commitment in meetings
During a team meeting, I can…	❑ Elicit participation at meetings ❑ Make information visible ❑ Use audio visuals effectively ❑ Keep a meeting on time and on track ❑ Help the group arrive at decisions and plans ❑ Deal with typical dysfunctional meeting behavior ❑ Understand the need for both developmental and evaluative thinking ❑ Lead the group in brainstorming as needed ❑ Help the group set priorities ❑ Help the group sort out complex situations ❑ Give and receive feedback in a group setting ❑ Identify, summarize and assign action items

Facilitating an ALT Meeting: Participatory Meeting Checklist

Collaborative teamwork requires meetings where all stakeholders and participants are included and can actively participate. Therefore, a well-organized meeting that is designed for active participation needs planning. The following checklist includes some best practices.

Preparing for and Running Effective Meetings	
Pre-meeting	❑ Find a location with adequate seating ❑ Decide is there will be refreshments and who would bring ❑ Decide if you need visuals, technical support, signage, name cards, flip charts, markers, etc. ❑ Clarify meeting purpose and expected outcomes ❑ Identify potential costs and benefits ❑ Publish agenda with the following: o Participants o Expected outcomes o Expected preparation o Timeline and tasks o Location and time o Access information for remote attendees o A clear framework for the meeting (If you don't, no one else will!) ❑ Contact attendees and confirm attendance
Starting the meeting	❑ Welcome people ❑ Make introductions

Preparing for and Running Effective Meetings	
	❑ Restate the meeting purpose and expected results ❑ Clarify ground rules e.g., how decisions will be made roles ❑ Review agenda ❑ Ask if there are any items not on the agenda that need to be
Ensuring participation	❑ Keep introductory comments brief ❑ Ask for participation ❑ Accept ALL contributions ❑ Be comfortable with some silence ❑ Listen actively to what people say by summarizing what is said ❑ Don't feel like you have to have all the answers
Structuring the presentation (when there is one)	❑ "Tell them what you are going to tell them" ❑ "Tell them" ❑ "Tell them what you told them" ❑ Write out the framework for your presentation in point form
Getting closure on a topic	❑ Remind people of the purpose, objectives and of time constraints ❑ Summarize and ask that we go on ❑ Distinguish between unanimity and consensus ❑ Visibly write up decisions
Gaining commitment	❑ Clearly ask for what you want ❑ Present benefits as much as features ❑ Always explain why, why, why
Dealing with people who control the discussion	❑ Recognize people by a listening response - summarizing or paraphrasing ❑ Remind of time constraints/purpose. ❑ Ask for discussion of side topics after meetings
Keeping a meeting moving	❑ Remind of participants of the purpose and expected outcomes ❑ Ask for closure ❑ Make information visible ❑ Remind of time constraints ❑ Make process suggestions ❑ Maintain a balance between control and letting a discussion go
Listening to increase participation and commitment:	❑ Summarize before reacting, especially evaluating ❑ Note key words visibly ❑ Respond at three levels: • content • process • emotions ❑ Closing a Meeting: ❑ Review progress ❑ Make a list of plans/what was decided: ❑ who, what, when, where, how ❑ Ask for feed back

Preparing for and Running Effective Meetings	
Using visuals	❑ Use models and visuals where words would be difficult to follow. People remember about: o 10-20% of what is heard o 40-60% of what is heard and seen o 80-90% of what is heard, seen and done ❑ Be prepared

4. Action Learning Team Members

Team member skills are as necessary as team leadership skills. To work together successfully, group members must demonstrate a sense of cohesion. Cohesion emerges as ALT members exhibit the following skills:

Openness: Team members are willing to get to know one another, particularly those with different interests and backgrounds. They are open to new ideas, diverse viewpoints, and the variety of individuals present within the group. They listen to others and elicit their ideas. They know how to balance the need for cohesion within a group with the need for individual expression.

Trust and self-disclosure: Group members trust one another enough to share their own ideas and feelings. A sense of mutual trust develops only to the extent that everyone is willing to self-disclose and be honest yet respectful. Trust also grows as group members demonstrate personal accountability for the tasks they have been assigned.

Support: Group members demonstrate support for one another as they accomplish their goals. They exemplify a sense of team loyalty and both cheer on the group as a whole and help members who are experiencing difficulties. They view one another not as competitors (which is common within a typically individualistic government system) but as collaborators.

Respect: Group members communicate their opinions in a way that respects others, focusing on “What can we learn?” rather than “Who is right”.

An effective process will emerge as team members exhibit these skills:

Individual responsibility and accountability: All group members agree on what needs to be done and by whom. Each participant then determines what he or she needs to do and takes responsibility to complete the task(s). They can be held accountable for their tasks, and they hold others accountable for theirs.

Constructive feedback: Group members are able to give and receive feedback about group ideas. Giving constructive feedback requires focusing on ideas and actions, instead of individuals, being as positive as possible, and offering suggestions for improvement. Receiving feedback requires listening well, asking for clarification if the comment is unclear, and being open to change and other ideas.

Problem solving: Group members help the group to develop and use strategies central to their group goals. As such, they can facilitate group decision making and deal productively with conflict. In extreme cases, they know who to approach for additional advice and help.

Management and organization: Group members know how to plan and manage a task, how to manage their time, and how to run a meeting. For example, they ensure that meeting goals are set, that an agenda is created and followed, and that everyone has an opportunity to participate. They stay focused on the task and help others to do so too.

Knowledge of roles: Group members know which roles can be filled within a group (e.g., facilitator, idea-generator, summarizer, evaluator, mediator, encourager, recorder) and are aware of which role(s) they and others are best suited for. They are also willing to rotate roles to maximize their own and others’ group learning experience.

An ALT member is responsible and accountable to undertakes all tasks necessary to provide and articulate ALT project recommendations.

Key skills and responsibilities include:

- Completing assigned tasks per the AL Project Plan.
- Reporting progress of the execution of tasks to the Team Leader on a frequent basis.
- Maintaining all documentation related to the execution of allocated tasks.
- Escalating risks and issues to be resolved by the Team Leader.
- Sharing lessons learned and best practices as they are identified.
- Asking for assistance when needed to keep project on track.
- Proactively maintaining connection with team and key stakeholders.
- Keeping the team culture healthy through appropriate interpersonal interactions.

5. The Action Learning Project

Action Learning Projects (ALPs) are completed by ALTs by the end of their EPP course. Each team comes up with a project that addresses a real-world problem or challenge facing an agency. The issue or problem must be one of substance so that it can be addressed over a period of time - it is not a "puzzle", i.e. something where there is a correct answer that just needs to be discovered. Defining the ALP is an interactive process with the other participants who help clarify issues and develop ways of addressing them. The process gives each participant valuable insights into other people's situations, and the opportunity to develop their own skills in clarifying, reflecting, and questioning. ALT members are not uncritical supporters of the presenter, rather their role is to challenge assumptions, help the presenter check out reality, etc.

To be successful, each project needs the following:

1. A sponsoring agency and individual
2. A functional team
3. A process for understanding the problem and researching best practices
4. A focus on recommendations, *not solutions*
5. A plan for execution, completion, and presentation of findings.

6. The Action Learning Problem or Challenge

ALPs address a significant problem or challenge facing an organization. Each team selects a problem from a slate of options offered through Individual Team Project Proposals (ITPPs) submitted by members of the team. (See section on the ITPP below.)

The ideal choice should be one that meets the following criteria:

- Organizational or departmental issue (keeps the leadership up at night)
- Individual's departmental issue-qualities, competencies, or behaviors that one seeks to improve.
- Individual's management issue, quandary, irritation, or responsibility.
- Does not already have a presumed solution.
- Offers learning opportunities for everyone on the team.
- Is defined in scope so the team can tackle the research and analysis within the timeframe of EPP
- Is primarily a people, process, or product problem.

Examples of viable problems or challenges include:

- Hiring security personnel in hard to recruit locations.
- Information overload for doctors serving veterans.
- A stalled project (bridge, building, etc.)
- Bottlenecks in supply chains.

Note – a challenge is not one with an already defined solution.

Examples include:

- Management has determined that we have poor communications and need an internal communications plan.
- We need predictive analytics to help us in an effort to mitigate safety mishaps.
- We often lose track of inventory and want to research tracking systems.

7. Action Learning Project Sponsor

An ALP sponsor is the individual at the agency or organization who is familiar with the problem or challenge, and who is willing to serve as a mentor for the team for the duration of the project. This individual should be a senior manager or executive who has decision making power and will advocate for implementation of the final recommendations. The sponsor may sit in on team meetings and be consulted or informed of progress throughout the project.

Key responsibilities usually include:

- Defining the vision and high-level objectives for the project
- Approving the requirements, timetable, resources, and budget
- Authorizing the provision of funds / resources (internal or external)
- Approving the project plan and quality plan
- Ensuring that major business risks are identified and managed
- Approving any major changes in scope
- Receiving Project Review Group minutes and taking action accordingly
- Resolving issues escalated by the Project Manager / Project Review Group
- Ensuring business / operational support arrangements are put in place
- Ensuring the participation of a business resource (if required)
- Providing final acceptance of the solution upon project completion

Sponsors must understand that the ALP is first and foremost a learning exercise for the team.
In cases where the sponsor's expectations override the team objectives, or the sponsor is unable to continue to help the team, the team should let an EPP advisor know.

8. Reflective Questioning and Listening

Asking questions and active listening are critical elements of the AL practice. Learners are encouraged to create a culture of inquiry in their teams, and to develop a practice of asking questions of one another and of others they come across in their research.

Reflective questions and listening help:

- Provide clarity and agreement on the problem that is being addressed
- Encourage broad, systems thinking, rather than task-oriented, quick solutions (dialog about possibilities rather than debate about merits)
- Generate reflection and deeper understanding of the problem
- Build trust

What is a "good" question?

Action Learning is guided by a series of questions that team members pose. Asking questions is a necessary and important iterative process. One important tool in working with questions is "Bloom's Taxonomy" which is a useful model to help structure questions with respect to complexity of kind of information needed to answer the question. The taxonomy provides a clear system of classifying different types of questions. The power of the taxonomy is that it moves along a continuum of complexity that parallels the steps of understanding---from simple description of an issue to complex insights, creative synthesis and evaluation. The six levels of understanding (from lowest to highest) are:

- Knowledge
- Comprehension
- Application
- Analysis
- Synthesis
- Evaluation

In general, most initial questions are framed in the "knowledge" category and many initiatives rest at this level of "description". Knowledge questions are important for descriptive purposes and are used at the beginning of an Action Learning project process. As the questions become more complex, an understanding of the issue and the information needed also increases in depth and understanding.

The following terms offer insight into the kinds of questions that can be formulated and how the data will be used:

Bloom's Taxonomy Terms Associated with Level of Question					
Knowledge	**Comprehension**	**Application**	**Analysis**	**Synthesis**	**Evaluation**
Label	Prove	Report	Sort	Invent	Solve
Locate	Explain	Construct	Classify	Examine	Appraise
Name	Debate	Solve	Survey	Design	Justify
Memorize	Give and overview	Illustrate	Debate	Formulate	Judge
Define	Repeat	Design	Graph	Hypothesize	Criticize
Who? What? Where? When?	Answer to « Who did what, where, when? »	How is ... an example of ...?	What are the parts or features of ...?	Re-tell differently	Conclude
		How is ... related to ...?	How does ... compare/ contrast with ...?	Report	Editorialize
		Why is ... significant?		Develop a game	
				Song	
				Experiment	
				Generate	
				Compose	

This structure of posing questions can be used to help define the questions that will be asked as different phases of the ALT project emerge.

Example questions are:

Knowledge level:

"*Which organizations are the key actors in the infrastructure planning process?" For the educational plan? Health? Etc.*

Comprehension level:

"If there are current health activities in "X" region, how are they linked to agriculture or water and sanitation activities?"

Analysis level:

"What led to the current organization and management of how food and agricultural products are transported to various regions?

9. Research and Analysis

Research and analysis are conducted by ALTs in order to understand the current state of knowledge, information, activities and ideas related to the team challenge and project.

- The focus of gathering information to be used in decision making is through “benchmarking”.
- Benchmarking is an assessment and research process that compares an organizational management issue or problem, such as logistics and purchasing, product quality, customer service, etc. with what is viewed as “industry best” or “best practices”.
- Research and discussion of benchmarks focuses on discovering what is considered best practice and why.
- Benchmarking is done both internally and externally. This means that ALTs capture information about the problem in the organization, and then about what other organizations have done to address similar issues.

Once the research on best practices is gathered – in some cases from other industries or sectors – ALTs conduct an analysis of the data with the purpose of making recommendations to the sponsoring agency on how they could address the problem, given what others have done.

10. Recommendations and Report

A standard practice of ALTs outside of EPP is to implement their recommendations by taking it into further practices of action research and insights. Given that this is beyond the scope of EPP, we encourage the sponsoring agency take the recommendations and move forward with them and, where or when possible, contact Graduate School USA for further training in this area.

Action Learning Project Phases

The following is an overview of the phases of the Action Learning activities in the EPP.

Phases	Timeframe	Activity
Establish team brand charter	Session I	During Session I of EPP, ALTs are introduced to Action Learning and to the requirements for the program. During this week, teams develop a team name, logo and slogan, and draft a team charter that includes a schedule for meeting and rotation of team leadership.
Individual Team Project Proposals (ITPPs) presented to Graduate School USA and Action Learning Team	Between Session I and II	Each member of the ALT researches a potential team project between Session I and II, and submits the proposal to the EPP Advisor for approval before submitting it to their ALT. The ITPP identifies an issue or challenge facing an agency, nonprofit organization, or the like. Each proposal must include a summary of the problem or challenge, background information, risks, benefits and a sponsor.
Vetting of ITPPs and choosing a final team project	Between Session I and II	Once ITPPs are approved by the EPP Advisor, they are submitted to and vetted by the team in order to choose a final project the team will work on for the duration of the program.
Presentation of final project choice and draft Action Learning Project Plan	Session II	Teams make an informal presentation about their first and second project choices, and begin to draft their project plan.
Internal Benchmarking	Between Session II and Session III	Teams capture the “current state” of the problem of challenge inside the organization using vehicles such as focus groups, surveys and research.
External Benchmarking	Between Session III and IV	Teams identify best practices related to the problem or challenge outside the organization. Research can extend to other agencies, nonprofits and for profit organizations.
Data analysis and presentation of final report to sponsor and Graduate School	Between Session III and IV	Teams compile findings from their research, analyze the data and make recommendations to the sponsoring organization.
Final presentation to Graduate School	Session IV	Teams make presentation of team project findings to Graduate School USA

Action Learning Teams

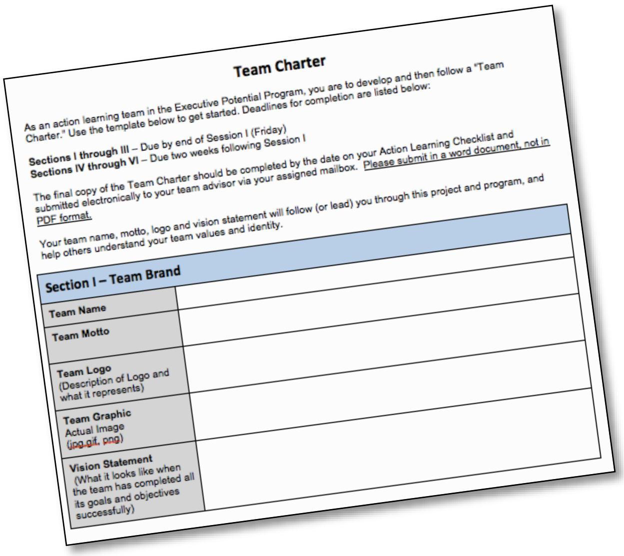
Action Learning Teams are set up before learners arrive on their first day. Team members come from different agencies, backgrounds and levels of experience and remain together for the program duration. As can be expected, teams may face challenges, opportunities and learning from working together. This section focuses on how to make the most of your team and project.

Team Charter

The first order of business for ALTs is to draft a Team Charter. The Charter helps to establish common processes and procedures that guide teamwork in order to avoid debates over the "how to do it." It is imperative that every team effort-- be it sharing information, making decisions, solving problems -- starts with an agreement on outcomes to be reached and procedures to reach them. These are usually referred to as team agreements or ground rules.

There are eight fundamental sets of ground rules or team agreements needed for an ALT effort to be truly successful:

1. Communication – sharing and accepting relevant and timely information
2. Decision Making – selecting the right style – unilateral, consultative, consensus, delegated, majority rule
3. Conflict Resolution – creating the win-win solution
4. Learning – maintaining a focus on the learning not just the project
5. Commitment to project and team– assigning and testing for reality of commitments
6. Meeting Management - staying focused and results oriented
7. Planning – setting direction and establishing goal clarity of a work effort
8. Recognition – ensuring contributions are properly tracked and acknowledged



Team Charter

As an action learning team in the Executive Potential Program, you are to develop and then follow a "Team Charter." Use the template below to get started. Deadlines for completion are listed below:

Sections I through III – Due by end of Session I (Friday)
Sections IV through VI – Due two weeks following Session I

The final copy of the Team Charter should be completed by the date on your Action Learning Checklist and submitted electronically to your team advisor via your assigned mailbox. Please submit in a word document, not in PDF format.

Your team name, motto, logo and vision statement will follow (or lead) you through this project and program, and help others understand your team values and identity.

Section I – Team Brand	
Team Name	
Team Motto	
Team Logo (Description of Logo and what it represents)	
Team Graphic Actual Image (jpg.gif, png)	
Vision Statement (What it looks like when the team has completed all its goals and objectives successfully)	

The Team Charter for EPP includes the following sections:

- Team Brand
  - Team Name
  - Team Motto
  - Team Logo
  - Team Graphic
  - Vision Statement
- Contact Information
- Team Member Skill Inventory
- Team Leadership Rotation Schedule
- Team Agreements
- Signatures

Examples of Team Agreements	
Learning	For ensuring quality learning, we will: • Identify all learning goals at the outset of every effort, stage or deliverable • Incorporate our learning objectives into the task assignment process • Conduct learning debriefs at the end of every meeting and deliverable • Determine how to incorporate our new knowledge and skills into the • next stage of our efforts and into our daily work • Create a lessons learned repository for the team and agency to continue to use • Ask for appropriate assistance when our knowledge and skill level is insufficient to lead us to success
External Communication	For ensuring quality communication, we will: • Ensure we have a communication method and strategy for each • critical message • Communicate for buy-in and support regularly • Ensure key stakeholders are never surprised due to a lack of communication on our part • Ensure the messenger is the right person • Use all methods of delivery necessary to reach all parties • Proactively communicate bad news as well as good news
Internal Communication	For ensuring quality internal communication, we will: • Openly and honestly state our opinions • Proactively share information that affects the team and it's mission • Use effective "I" statements to express opinion, and feedback • Speak for myself- let others speak their own minds • Actively listen to others – listen to understand first, respond second • Ask questions to get to total understanding and clarity before taking action • Test assumptions especially when misunderstandings occur • Go directly to the person, not to third parties, to clear up misunderstandings or provide feedback • Take personal responsibility for our own part in the misunderstanding • Give quality constructive feedback and input in a timely manner • Maintain the self-esteem of the members by avoiding put downs, derogatory statements, and judgmental labels
Meetings	For ensuring quality meetings, we will: • Have an agenda that is <u>short and focused</u> on or actions to be taken • Sent out ahead of time an agenda to all stakeholders along with the roles and expectations statement (why they are being invited, what they are expected to contribute or do at the meeting) • Have a start and end time and location information listed in the agenda • Start and end on time. If time runs out the group will decide (see decision process) on whether to continue or reschedule • Only discuss agenda items. If the agenda is completed ahead of schedule and the group agrees to pursue other topics, then and only then can new items be introduced • Be on time, contribute, and abide by the meeting ground rules • Not talk over each other, active listening is expected • Have and rotate the roles of gatekeeper and note taker

Individual Team Project Proposals

Once an ALT is established, the next step is to begin the process of choosing a project that the team will focus on for the duration of the program. This process starts with each member of the team identifying a significant problem or challenge they believe would qualify as an ideal Action Learning Project (ALP). This activity happens between Sessions I and II and is captured in a deliverable called the Individual Team Project Proposal (ITPP). Each ITPP is submitted to the EPP Advisor for approval, and, once approved, to their team for review.

The ITPP includes:

- A summary of the problem or challenge
- Background (overview of the organization)
- Problem/Challenge statement (drivers, symptoms, consequences of not fixing the problem)
- Sponsors and key players
- Required/available resources
- How the project would meet team goals
- Benefits and risks

Identifying a Problem or Challenge

The problem challenge represented in the ITPP should be an issue facing an agency, nonprofit organization, or the like. It should be pressing enough that it keeps leaders up at night, and that there could be a business case made that would argue why it deserves attention by leadership.

For many learners in EPP, this initial assignment can seem overwhelming. “Where do I even start?” Learners can start by talking with their supervisor, mentor or program coordinator and asking questions.

Questions to Ask When Looking for a Viable Project and Sponsor	
❑	What keeps you up at night?
❑	What recurring problems impede meeting mission critical objectives?
❑	What underlying factors play the biggest role in the problem?
❑	Is this primarily a process, people or product problem?
❑	What is the magnitude of the problem, challenge or opportunity?
❑	What aspect of the problem would be appropriate for an AL team to investigate?
❑	Does the project offer learning opportunities for everyone on the AL team?
❑	Is there a sponsor who is committed and can devote the time to guide the team?
❑	Does the sponsor have authority to take action?
❑	What needs/concerns does the project identify?
❑	What is the risk of not addressing the problem?
❑	What benefits could result from tackling the issue?

Identifying a Sponsor

The team project must have a project sponsor who is a senior manager/executive and who is directly involved with the problem/challenge. In recruiting this sponsor, team members should explain that the expectations for working with the sponsor are that they would be available to provide general guidance, propose project objectives, help set milestones, suggest or provide resources, facilitate contracts as needed, and approve the proposed solutions.

It is important that the sponsor understand that there will be multiple project proposals submitted but only one project proposal will be selected. It is also imperative that sponsors understand that the team will only be delivering ***recommendations****, not solutions – and that it's possible that the team's research may uncover underlying issues that may influence the definition of the problem.*

Evaluating Benefits and Risks

Use the following questions to help to evaluate the viability of the project for the team.

- What is a recurring problem or clearly identifiable area in need of improvement in the organization or non-profit organization?
- What might be contributors to the problem? (Root causes, players, resources, history)
- Is there a sponsor or key political/power holder who would be interested in working with your team on addressing the problem? (See information about sponsors above.) If so, who would this sponsor(s) be?
- How will solving this problem help your team meet their learning goals?
- What are the benefits, issues and risks of taking on this problem?
- What are potential benefits of fixing this problem?
- What are potential costs to fixing this problem?
- What are potential risks or issues of fixing this problem? Write a statement of the opportunity or problem(s) the team wishes to pursue
- What would the learning opportunity be for the team if they chose this project?
- What would the learning opportunity be for individual team members working on this project?

Vetting Proposals

Choosing a final team project starts with vetting each ITPP. Once an ITPP has been approved by the EPP Advisor, the team member submits it to their team to be “vetted.” The goal is that the team finalize a first and second choice for the final project and be ready to share the choices and vetting processes during Session II training.

Teams are encouraged to develop their own vetting criteria. For consistency, the same vetting criteria should be used for each proposal. (See suggested vetting criteria below.)

Learners should submit their ITPP proposals and vet them on a “rolling” basis. *Do not wait for all ITPPs to come in before vetting begins*. Vetting should begin once the first ITPP is disseminated to team members, and continue until all are vetted. Do not attempt to discuss all proposals in one meeting.

Team Leader Role - After receiving the first proposals, the incumbent Team Leader should schedule a teleconference/meeting. Select one or two proposals per meeting to allow adequate consideration of each proposal.

Proposal Presenter – During the vetting process, the proposal presenter should be given at least five minutes to discuss their proposal, highlighting key elements and making sure that everyone understands the problem or challenge. The presenter should be open to questions and answer them as concisely as possible, observing physical and emotional responses to being asked questions. If the presenter doesn’t know the answer to a question, they can say, “I need to think about that” or “I need to clarify that with the sponsor and get back to you.”

Team Member Role - It is the responsibility of all team members to thoroughly read and know the important information and details of the proposal in advance of the vetting meeting. Team members should come prepared with questions to pose to the presenter/author of the proposal and to members of the team. At some point members will be asked to rate the ITPP proposal according the criteria and rating scale the team has agreed upon.

Asking questions gives the team an opportunity to:

- Understanding the problem or challenge at a deeper level
- Reframe the issue as needed
- Evaluate the scope and value of the project for all team members
- Support one another in the overall process of choosing a project everyone can get behind
- Agree on a team project

Once all proposals have been vetted and evaluated against the criteria, select the one your team believes will best serve the team as a whole. Selections will be determined by whatever team agreement process (majority vote, consensus, etc.) the team has decided upon. Note: if there is disagreement on the final choice, the team should reach out to their EPP Advisor for help. The goal is to come into Session II with a final choice so that the training during Session II can help the team start to develop and project plan.

Guidance on Vetting Individual Proposals

It is tempting to rush to make a decision about a team project because the problem might seem obvious or the opportunity inviting.

Take the time to:

- ❑ Keep asking questions and stay open minded
- ❑ Review the vetting criteria
- ❑ Break components down into smaller chunks
- ❑ Evaluating the quality or merit of the project
- ❑ Determine if there is any other information you need to know or other people you might need to contact
- ❑ Clarify who the client is and what will the impact or outcome might be
- ❑ Ask yourselves if the focus is on the "real" problem or might you be just skimming the surface

Suggested Criteria for Vetting Projects

It is up to each team to establish a set of vetting criteria.

Some suggestions are included in the list below.

- ❑ This project is relevant, applicable and transferable to other agencies.
- ❑ We completely understand the cause(s) of the problem and the outcome that is expected.
- ❑ This project will leverage team member's collective strengths.
- ❑ This project will require specialized knowledge.
- ❑ This project will allow team members to address their learning goals.
- ❑ This project is at an appropriate level of complexity.
- ❑ The scope of this project is too large for us to make a value-added contribution.
- ❑ The scope of this project is too small for us to make a value-added contribution.
- ❑ The scope of this project needs to be redefined.
- ❑ We have clarity about what will be required for a successful outcome.
- ❑ This project would allow team members to contribute equally regardless of geographic location.
- ❑ We have strong sponsorship for this project (sponsor accessible and committed).
- ❑ The project has a well-defined problem that our team can _____________.
- ❑ This project is appealing to me/us and something I/we have interest in.
- ❑ This success of this project will result in a significant improvement to stakeholders.
- ❑ This project may require travel and or funding.
- ❑ We will have the access to information needed for research and action.
- ❑ This project requires security clearance to access needed information.

Choosing and Presenting a Final Project Choice

Once a team has a first and second choice for their project, they will present those choices during Session II in an informal presentation to the rest of the cohort. Classmates will have an opportunity to ask questions and offer suggestions. This is an excellent opportunity for the team to offer insights into how the project was chosen and to get valuable feedback that may or may not influence the course of the project.

Module II

Planning and Research

Action Learning Project Plan

During Session II, teams will be given time to draft their Action Learning Project Plan that is due several weeks after Session II. Guidance is provided on how to approach this process during training. A template for the plan is provided in the assignments section of the online learning system. (The team does not have to use this template though the plan should include the elements specified.) This is a living document that will be updated throughout the program.

Step 1. Map the Organizational Universe

An organization is an open system that exists with a larger system, referred to as the organizational universe. When planning and implementing organizational change of any magnitude, it is necessary to scan the systems and their relationships to understanding where the benchmarking fits in relationship various organizations and thus to minimize the risks and optimize the potential benefits of what is viewed as “best practice.”

Exercise: Organizational Universe Mapping

Directions: *Using your project topic and create a possible environmental map of your project. This will help identify key people, groups and organizations who need to be contacted.*

Map the Human Environment (Who or Actors)

- ❑ Sponsors
- ❑ Key internal stakeholders
- ❑ Key external stakeholders
- ❑ Customers/Clients
- ❑ Vendors/Strategic Alliance Partners
- ❑ Organizational Culture
- ❑ Power Distribution

Map the Physical Environment (What)

- ❑ Facilities
- ❑ Equipment
- ❑ Tools
- ❑ Materials
- ❑ Map the Business Process Environment (How)
- ❑ Financial
- ❑ Production
- ❑ Customer Service
- ❑ HR
- ❑ IT
- ❑ Facilities Management
- ❑ Regulatory Compliance
- ❑ Vendor Management

Step 2. Identify Stakeholders (The Actors)

Stakeholder analysis is an important step in research work as it is a process that can provide insights into and an understanding of the interactions between a project and its stakeholders. This tool can identify and prioritize which stakeholders can have impact on the project's success and is often the first step in solutions design. It is also important for developing engagement strategies for building and maintaining the networks necessary to achieve project outcomes. It makes for a clearer understanding of the range and roles of project stakeholders.

List the key stakeholders for this project. A 'stakeholder' is simply a person or entity outside of the project who has a key interest in the project. For instance, a company financial controller will have an interest in the cost implications of the project, a CEO will have an interest in whether the project is conducted in accordance with the vision of the company. Examples of stakeholders include:

- ❑ Agency executives
- ❑ Legislative bodies
- ❑ Regulatory bodies
- ❑ Strategic partners
- ❑ Vendors
- ❑ Community groups

The following table includes examples of stakeholders and their interest in the project:

Stakeholder	Interested in
Executive Director/CEO	• Alignment with company vision and strategy
Financial Controller	• Alignment with company budget
Union President	• Alignment with contract
HR Officer	• Compliance with labor legislation and policies
Advertisement media	• Revenues from ads
State Universities	• Graduates job placement record

Working with a Project Sponsor

The sponsor of the project needs to understand how their involvement will be of benefit to them. In addition, the relationship with the partner will evolve over time and all aspect of that relationship need to be cultivated. The cultivation of the "sponsor/team relationship" begins with the initial inquiry to partner and continues up to the first meeting. Everything you say and do during this stage will set the tone for the entire effort. Here is where you establish your credibility and trustworthiness as a partner. It is also where you determine if this partner is really who you need.

Working with a Sponsor Checklist	
❑	Identify the appropriate contact to sponsor the effort on their end– preferably the final decision maker.
❑	Create a professional letter of introduction – not an email – signed by someone of equal or higher status from your agency.
❑	What you want from them – be very clear and complete about your needs Process Maps/Work samples (Access, People, Time)
❑	What is in it for them – why they should spend their time and effort to help you
❑	When you want to complete the effort
❑	Follow up with a phone call. It is occasionally appropriate to start with the informal phone call and follow up with the letter to recap the initial verbal agreement.
❑	Establish the initial ground rules for going forward for both sides. • Code of conduct agreement • Logistics agreement • Confidentiality and security agreements • Deliverables agreement
❑	Co-create the agenda for the first meeting which is usually a planning session. If it is the one and only site visit then make sure the agenda covers everything the team needs to accomplish while onsite.

Step 3. Conduct Benchmarking

Benchmarking is the practice of capturing the current state of the problem or challenge. Action Learning Projects uses benchmarking that is both internal and external to the organization. An overview the benchmarking process is included below.

Identify your problem areas - Because benchmarking can be applied to any business process or function, a range of research techniques may be required. They include: informal conversations with customers, employees, or suppliers; exploratory research techniques such as focus groups; or in-depth marketing research, quantitative research, surveys, questionnaires, reengineering analysis, process mapping, quality control variance reports, or financial ratio analysis. Before embarking on comparison with other organizations it essential that you know your own organization's function, process, and performance metrics.

Identify other industries that have similar processes - For instance if one were interested in improving handoffs in addiction treatment s/he would try to identify other fields that also have handoff challenges. These could include air traffic control, cell phone switching between towers, transfer of patients from surgery to recovery rooms.

Identify organizations that are leaders in these areas - Look for the very best in any industry and in any country. Consult customers, suppliers, financial analysts, trade associations, and magazines to determine which companies are worthy of study.

Survey companies for measures and practices - Companies target specific business processes using detailed surveys of measures and practices used to identify business process alternatives and leading companies. Surveys are typically masked to protect confidential data by neutral associations and consultants.

Visit the "best practice" companies to identify leading edge practices - Companies typically agree to mutually exchange information beneficial to all parties in a benchmarking group and share the results within the group.

Select benchmarking case study organizations - It is crucial to select the right benchmarking partners. Otherwise, you will end up with a best practice that will not work in your environment without significant retooling. Even worse, you may implement a "best" practice that will introduce significant disruption and conflict between units.

Benchmarking Partners	
Industry	❑ A designated or recognized best practice holder ❑ Similarity at a process or metric level ❑ Open to benchmarking efforts ❑ Accessibility of data and physical environments
Culture	❑ Compatible ❑ Aligned with business strategies
Processes	❑ Reasonable level of comparability in major metric areas ❑ Quantitative and qualitative metrics ❑ Size and structure of the organization ❑ Process complexity ❑ Environmental complexity ❑ Regulatory constraints
Personnel	❑ Sufficient KSA's in benchmark partnering ❑ Availability is compatible with benchmark timeline

The Benchmarking Process

The benchmarking process itself should include the following elements:

- Introductory text – what it is and why it is being done and with whom
- A detail oriented methodical discovery process
- An improvement method
- An objective, process-based analysis

Preparing the Team to Benchmark

Roles and Responsibilities	
Select the right team members to conduct the benchmarking effort.	❑ Management ❑ Technical skills ❑ Participatory skills ❑ Availability
Review the roles and responsibilities for each team member	❑ Interview the partner's personnel ❑ Set up meetings ❑ Conduct correspondence – formal and informal ❑ Keep the rest of the team informed ❑ Maintain the teams files and documentation ❑ Act as a formal focal point ❑ Conduct walkthroughs of the questions and strategies before going to the partner's location and/or attending conference calls. ❑ Practice the presenter, note taker, and observer roles ❑ Practice the greeting and opening remarks ❑ Check the alignment with the partners organizational culture ❑ Complete any required travel and offsite work authorizations for those who require it ❑ Create a backup strategy to cover a team member's unavailability at a benchmarking meeting or on a site visit. Do not inconvenience the partner with schedule changes.

Benchmarking Data Collection

The first step in benchmarking is to map the current state of the organization the team is focused on or the "target" organization. "Internal" benchmarking identifies evidence of the issue(s) or problem in the organization under question. Key questions include, who is involved, where are the issues in the organization and relevant current performance metrics.

External benchmarking focuses on organizations that are engaged in similar work. The goal of external benchmarking is to understand the "what" and "how" other organizations function. There are all factors that influence the understanding of organizational processes and for discussing best practice experts to share their perspective.

There are several ways to find organizations that offer valuable lessons though it the effort could require significant research time. It may also require some cost to acquire lists of best practice winners or available data on industry standard performance metrics and acknowledged best practices. The table below provides more information on benchmarking.

Benchmarking	
Types of Benchmarking	❑ Internal – unit in another area of the agency ❑ External – direct competitors ❑ Functional - like kind industry ❑ Generic – unrelated industries
Reasons for Benchmarking	❑ Identify and adapt best practices ❑ Achieve superior performance ❑ Encourage creative thinking ❑ Understand methods available to achieve objectives ❑ Remain competitive
Focus for Benchmark Efforts	❑ Specific, measurable problems or opportunities ❑ Specific, mapable functions and processes (inputs- transformations-outputs)
Levels of Benchmarking	❑ Industrial Touring ❑ Modified Benchmarking ❑ True Benchmarking

Benchmarking Questions

Process Questions

All organizations have processes have several elements that need to be considered when benchmarking. Some examples of process questions focus on products---and what goes into the creation of the product.

Purpose

- ❑ What organizational goal or strategy does this process support?
- ❑ What are the critical success factors/metrics used to determine this processes effectiveness?
- ❑ How do those metrics get tracked, analyzed and reported?

Inputs for products

- ❑ What materials are needed?
- ❑ Where do they come from? Who supplies them?
- ❑ Where are they stored prior to processing?
- ❑ What are the steps for getting them to the processing area?
- ❑ What skills do the people need to have to process the inputs?
- ❑ What quality control checks occur at this stage?

Throughputs

- ❑ How will work and materials be allocated?
- ❑ What steps are taken and in what sequence?
- ❑ What equipment and facilities are needed at each step?
- ❑ What skills do the people need to have to create the product/service?
- ❑ What quality control measures are taken at each step?

Outputs

- ❑ Where do they go next?
- ❑ What does it take to move it to the next step?
- ❑ How long and what resources does it take?
- ❑ What is done to ensure the critical success factors have been met before handing it off to the next unit or end user?
- ❑ How is the output packaged, grouped, labeled, and tracked?
- ❑ What skills do the people need to have to perform a successful handoff?

Context Questions

Many organizations, and those in the federal government, are focused on providing "services" where context plays an important role in delivery. These will assist you in assessing the viability of adapting the best practice to your own environment or to achieving the desired results of implementing it in your environment. Some examples are below.

Culture:

- ❑ Which corporate values does this process support?
- ❑ Which values or critical success factors drive this process (time, cost, quality, quantity)?
- ❑ Which values does it negatively impact?
- ❑ What did you need in your culture to get your people to develop/adopt this best practice?

Customer/Consumer/Beneficiary Feedback:

- ❑ How do they get feedback in a meaningful and useable manner?
- ❑ Do they track internal feedback on the process as well as end user/customer feedback?
- ❑ What is the overhead for the tracking and reporting?
- ❑ How do they check their value against the competition?

Business Environment:

- ❑ How does this process help you remain competitive and/or meet your key business objectives?
- ❑ Who else had adopted/adapted your best practice?
- ❑ What challenges do you face to keep this process performing at the desired levels?

Financial Environment:

- ❑ What were the one-time start-up costs for implementing this process?
- ❑ What are the ongoing explicit and implicit costs of using this process?
- ❑ Has this process resulted in any litigation/settlements?

- ❑ Are there any significant future anticipated costs, such as a required vendor upgrades to keep the process viable?

Regulatory Environment:

- ❑ Who are the regulatory bodies associated with this process?
- ❑ What are the compliance benefits/risks of using this process?

Comparison of Data Collection Methods

The following table provides an overview of methodologies for collecting data.

Method	Advantages	Potential Problems
Questionnaires	• Responses can be quantified and easily summarized • Easy to use with large groups • Relatively inexpensive • Can obtain large volume of data	• Non empathy • Poorly designed questions and/or scales • Predetermined questions/missing issues • Over interpretation of the data • Response bias
Interviews	• Adaptive • Source of rich data • Empathic • Builds rapport	• Expensive • Interviewer bias • Coding and interpretation difficulties • Self-report bias
Observations	• Collect data on behavior rather than reports on behavior • Real time, not retrospective • Adaptive	• Coding and interpretation difficulties • Sampling inconsistencies • Observer bias-questionable reliability • Expense
Existing Data	• Non-reactive- no response bias • High face validity • Easily quantified	• Access and retrieval difficulties • Relevance and validity concerns • Coding and interpretation difficulties

Ending the Benchmarking Sponsor Partnership

At the close of the benchmarking research process the sponsor/partnership can still continue. In fact, it may be the beginning of a long-term strategic alliance.

Ending the benchmark process may include:

- Thank you letters to everyone who participated
- Data reports and findings shared with the partner
- Recommendations you want to share from your observations of their operation
- Request for a post implementation follow-up meeting to share lessons learned about the process and how it can be adapted to fit other environments

Although you may not actually take all the steps listed above, you will always send out thank you letters to each and every participant. It plants the seeds for future efforts.

Module III

Final Report and Analysis

The "Team Project Final Report" is a written report that summarizes the ALP and the recommendations made to the sponsoring agency. The report should be a minimum 15 pages and submitted electronically via Blackboard before the final week of the program. The report is also submitted to the sponsor, often in conjunction with a formal in person presentation. (See more about the final presentation to sponsor below.)

Written team project final report should include:

- Problem statement
- Options and solutions that were considered
- Business case for recommended option
- Implementation plan and status
- Recommendations (if applicable)
- Team learning

Options/Solutions Description Scope

This section provides a full listing of all solution options, their benefits, costs, feasibility, risks and issues. Options suggested may include doing nothing, doing something that will achieve a similar result or doing something that will achieve a better result than current performance. Try to minimize the number of options available by conducting a detailed Feasibility Study beforehand. For each solution option identified, the following information is required:

Define the scope of the option in terms of the business:

- *Processes* which will change
- *Organizational areas* which will be affected
- *Locations* which will be impacted
- *Data* which will be altered
- *Applications* which will be installed and/or altered
- *Technologies* which will be deployed and/or decommissioned

Where relevant, identify the related business areas which will not be affected as a result of this option.

Recommendations

Highlight the key project deliverables in table format (include examples).

Item	Components	Description
New physical premises	New physical building Interior fit-out Telecommunications	1200 sq m premises near city center with outdoor facilities, parking and signage. Open plan environment with 5 offices, 3 meeting rooms and a staff games room Voice / data telecoms infrastructure and video conference facilities
New financial system	Accounts payable module Accounts receivable module Payroll module	• A new system module which enables staff to quickly enter accounts payable transactions • A new system module which enables staff to quickly enter accounts receivable transactions • A new system module which enables staff to quickly enter payroll information

Ranking Recommendations

Identify the criteria by which each of the recommendations will be assessed. Then agree a rating mechanism for each criteria so that ratings can be added to determine a total score for each option. NB Ratings may be weighted to stress the importance of the criteria being assessed. Complete the following table:

Criteria	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
Benefits • Increased revenue • Reduced expenditure • Improved efficiency • Enhanced quality • Other	*[1-10 Rating]*	*[1-10 Rating]*	*[1-10 Rating]*
Costs • People • Physical • Marketing • Organizational • Other			
Feasibility • Technology components • People components • Process components • Asset components • Other			
Risks • Resources • Technology • Organizational • Other			
Total Score			

Final Presentations

ALTs will make two final presentations – one to their agency sponsor and one to their EPP peers and advisors at the Graduate School.

Presentation to Sponsor

Each team will make a presentation to the sponsor and related stakeholders, scheduled at the sponsor's discretion any time prior to graduation week. (In some cases, teams need to make their presentation to their sponsor during graduation week. Teams should consult with their EPP Advisor as to when they can schedule that meeting.) *Team dynamics are not addressed in this presentation.* Instead, the focus should be on the problem, the findings, and the recommendations. The presentation should be polished and team members dressed professionally. Depending on each team member's geographical distance from the event, all team members may not be physically present.

Presentation to Graduate School USA

ALT's are expected to make a 45 minute presentation of their project to other EPP teams during graduation week. The presentation should include approximately 5-10 minutes about the team and the team's journey, 35-40 minutes on the project and recommendations, and 15 minutes for questions and answers. (Some teams share their team learnings at the end and some at the beginning. Either way is fine, as long as the audience is introduced to team members at the beginning of the presentation.)

The presentation should be engaging and informative. Teams are encouraged to be creative when delivering the presentation and every member should have at least one speaking part. Teams will have time to practice and do a dry run during graduation week before their final presentations.

Team Development Process and Evolution (5-10 minutes) - Introduce your team members. Tell us how your team evolved during the year. How did your team progress through the traditional team stages (forming, norming, storming, performing etc.) from being total strangers to a high performing team? Discuss how you met challenges, weathered storms, faced obstacles, celebrated success, etc. How did the team dynamics change? What leadership lessons did each learn while completing the tasks? What did you learn about the team process? What did you learn about yourselves?

Team Project Research and Results (35-40 minutes) – This part of the presentation should include: purpose, problem statement, background, research methodology, analysis, obstacles, findings, conclusions, recommendations, leadership issues influencing the issue, and future questions and implications.

Questions and Answers from the Audience (15 minutes) - At the conclusion of the team presentation, be sure to leave at least 15 minutes for Q&A. Your team should anticipate and rehearse responses to likely questions, especially if you anticipate skepticism from the audience abut your proposed solution(s). You do not want to get caught unprepared for tough questions.

Visuals

Teams will have access to:

- Computer
- LCD projector
- Sound system
- Podium and Microphone

Dress

Dress for the presenting team should be professional. Team shirts or other team swag are welcome and encouraged.

Pointers for Giving Effective Presentations

- Remember who your audience is.
- Tell stories. Problems are about people and sharing the story of one individual or incident can capture the essence of the problem in ways the audience can relate to.
- Believe in yourself and what you are saying.
- Be prepared and rehearsed. Have everything with you and know your material.
- Remember voice volume, voice expression, stance, facial expressions and gestures matter.
- Articulate deliberately. You want people to understand every word.
- Put a "smile" in your voice so that you are not speaking in monotone.
- Do not be static. Occasionally move forward towards people. Catch their eye. If you are energetic and passionate about your topic, your audience will feel it and be energetic and passionate, too.
- Be interactive! Throw out some questions to your audience as part of the presentation. It is one way to engage your audience. If no one has a response, consider it a rhetorical question and answer it yourself, or have a team member answer it.
- Avoid fidgeting with hair, clothes, glasses, and papers.
- A safe, appropriate joke or brief anecdote can grab your audience's attention.
- Be prepared to answer any question related to your topic. Be informative when answering a question, but be concise. If you do not know the answer, say more than, "I don't know." Better to say respond, "That's an interesting question I/we had not considered. Any of my team members want to address that?" Or "That's something that we didn't discover in the process, but I certainly think it's worth investigating."
- Avoid slides that are complicated or have a lot of text on them making them impossible to read. Stand in the back of the room and see if you can read them. A slide no one can read is useless. Slides filled with text are your "NOTES"—and your audience will try to read your notes even if complicated. Simplify your slides and talk to your audience.
- Sum up your presentation and remind the audience what you would like them to do or remember.