Action Learning sets as a form of supervision for Masters students: How can we make it work?

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The following is a short insight into my first experience of action learning sets. I have found myself with more questions than answers and hope that through discussion in the wider group, I can come to understand the correct workings of an action learning set and feel more confident in facilitating one.

I was recently asked to facilitate an Action learning set for a group of Master’s students. I had no previous experience; however, I had some experience of action research.

The university has agreed that instead of individual supervision, students will participate in action learning sets.

While the students have agreed through registration to fulfil the requirements for the master’s programme, challenges have arisen in using the action learning set as a form of supervision.

We met for three hours, once a month, 7 sessions in total. Students also had to submit drafts of chapters to me in preparation for the final thesis submission. I had seven students in my action learning set.

I have found the group both invigorating and frustrating. I began to wonder if in fact I was facilitating an action learning group or just addressing individual concerns in a group session. I also found it difficult dealing with the tensions that arose during the sessions.

While the group agreed they would come to each session with their learning needs and actions identified, this did not happen.

Challenges

- Meeting Individual needs of students
- Broad subject matter
- Broad range of experience in the group
- Dealing with tension between group members
- Action research dissertation
- Student individual organisational structures
- Ethics approval
- Providing feedback

Questions

- How can we meet the supervision needs of students in an action learning set
- How can students be best supported in the ALS?
- Is ALS an adequate way for students to voice and address their individual learning needs?