

# DOOR To Action Learning

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## Introduction

This workbook outlines some of the principles of learning that will be used in the program. You will be required to understand this process. Please read through this workbook and write down any questions or issues you need to clarify or explore. It is not the intent or expectation that you understand all that you read here as we will be covering it in more detail during the workshop.

One of the key ways we learn is by taking action in the world. The term Action learning (AL) is used to illustrate this more holistic way of learning.

## Action Learning

AL will help you to look at your work and to critically review and reflect on what you do. This review will allow you to apply new ways of doing things that you can use on the job the next time around.

AL is a very practical way to learn as it enables you to work on real issues of concern and to share your insights and learnings with a group of other participants. Through action learning you will learn with and from each other by working on real problems and reflecting on your own experiences. The process helps you to take a proactive stance towards life and helps to overcome the tendency to think, feel and be passive towards the pressures of life.

Essentially you follow a cycle with four stages. You Design, Operate,

Observe and Reflect. A convenient way to remember the cycle is to use the image of a DOOR. This is covered in detail in the next section.

Action Learning has a simple equation underlying the framework.

$$L = \frac{P + Q}{R}$$

Generally **L** = learning which is the accumulation of knowledge, **P** = programmed knowledge, **Q** = knowledge gained by questioning self or others in conditions of risk, and in the absence of a definitive answer and **R** our own resistance to try something new or different.

**'P'** or programmed knowledge, has often been peddled for its own sake—it is written up in text books, it is in the heads of experts, it is in university/college programs, its in manuals and procedures at work etc. However, by itself, it does not necessarily equate to learning. Just by reading a manual does not mean



understand or can apply what is there. Also, using established theory or another's insights as a basis for continued learning can be a powerful starting point, however

there is inherent danger in taking on 'P' at face value and not testing its relevance to your own situation at an appropriate time.

'P' may have been valued because it fits neatly within a rational paradigm—it tends to be quantifiable and available, and is determinate and output-focused. It also comfortably moves learning incrementally within the same paradigm. It survives because it fosters single loop learning i.e. learning that does not get you to challenge the underlying principles. Learning more about a technical area and increasing your knowledge could be classified as single loop learning.

Single loop learning is usually safe. It is generally not until 'Q' is incorporated into the equation that learning becomes double-loop.

**'Q'** is questioning insight, a vital commodity in these times of rapid change. Nonetheless, individuals and organisations, mainly due to pressure to produce, be busy, and the focus on immediate tasks in the short term, all too frequently overlook it.

The time and 'safe space' to be open, non-defensive, take risks, and challenge views or actions, is usually just not there. 'Q' allows you to achieve deeper learning, which we call 'Double Loop learning' – This is learning that asks you to explore the deeper patterns and the ways and means in which you look at the world and engage in it. 'Q' will also enable the analysis and surfacing of deeper patterns and 'ways of doing things' that are unchallenged at work.

**‘R’** is Resistance and we all exhibit a bit of resistance to try something new or different, it is generally more comfortable to try to do things the same way we have always done before. This is why it is so hard when we are trying to change our behaviour or response to a particular situation.

‘R’ is also inherent in teams, institutions and organizations. ‘R’ could also stand for blindly following rules and not questioning their relevance and or purpose.

‘R’ asks us to look at our own resistance as an obstacle to change.

## The DOOR Cycle and AL

You will be applying this cycle over the course of the program.

You will apply the DOOR cycle to each of the learning objectives you identified in the learning contract. We will explain how to do this effectively in the program.

The DOOR cycle is a simple way to enable Action Learning. Like real doors we can open them and wander in and check out what lies within.

D O O R  
e l e g a n t l y  
d e s c r i b e s  
t h e c y c l i c a l  
p r o c e s s  
o f  
d e s i g n -  
o p e r a t e -  
o b s e r v e -  
r e f l e c t .

These are the 4 stages in the DOOR cycle, when all 4 stages are covered you have completed one cycle, this then informs the next cycle.

The **‘D’** in DOOR stands for Design it draws on the wisdom and

insights generated by reflection. Design needs to offer something different and of real value to be meaningful. Design also includes thinking creatively, innovatively and unfolding this into a meaningful plan.

The **‘O’** stands for Operate. This is about translating the design and the plan into its operations. This is the action part that most of us are so good at. It brings to life what we have designed.

Together the letters ‘DO’ in DOOR represent ‘doing’ and many people and businesses are overdosed on ‘doing’. An overdose of ‘doing’ can keep us on a treadmill and hinder new insights or different ways of relating with people.

The **‘DO’** is about us doing something, most ‘doing’ actions are usually focused on the external world (as opposed to our inner world). Much of what we do over a period of time becomes unconscious and we unconsciously do it, like driving a car.

Likewise much of our ‘doing’ behaviours or how we relate to others have been learnt in the past and critically, we may be unaware of the impact of this behaviour on others.

To break away from the doing treadmill, try to Observe (the second **“O”** in DOOR) some of what we do and our current practices. In order to learn from what has occurred, we must first *know* what has occurred. *i.e.* we

must make *observations* about the action.

As Marcel Proust says ‘The real act of discovery consists not in finding the new lands, but in seeing with new eyes’. Regularly ask others how they see the situation, how they respond to you and what they suggest you do to achieve the desired outcome. Also observe the impact you have on others at work or in life.

The **“R”** in DOOR stands for Reflection, usually the most neglected ingredient. Reflection is the vital ingredient that incubates and illuminates new ideas. Deep reflection challenges your current mental models or world-views and can change the game altogether. It is uncomfortable, but without it we are likely to achieve no more than trivial change.

Reflection needs to happen at an individual and group level. At the individual level it requires going for a walk, a jog or taking a bath like Archimedes. Anything that breaks the conscious routine will do. Also, allow time for unstructured exploration for creativity to flourish. At the group level practice dialogue skills so that the best idea and not the strongest advocate wins.

The ‘OR’ in DOOR is a useful counterbalance to ‘DO’. It encourages asking ‘OR else’ questions, a simple but key ingredient to open up our thinking.

To summarise, Action Learning is not about just ‘knowing things’ the ‘P’, it’s about learning from ‘doing things’ and its about challenging ourselves to go beyond what we already know and do.



*The P+Q over R and the DOOR model are part of Eugene’s research and is copyright to him and Metanoa. The framework can be used freely for the purpose of self study. Permission and license fees apply if the frameworks are to be used for training, coaching, published as part of a package and other development activities. Mobile: 0423 669 531 Email: Metanoa@bigpond.com*

## Questions for Review

What is Action Learning?

What does 'P', 'Q' and 'R' stand for?

What do the letters of the DOOR stand for?

How can you apply the DOOR to what you do at work?

*Deep in the sea are riches  
beyond compare.  
But if you seek safety,  
it is on the shore.*