

# **ACTION LEARNING SET TOOLKIT**

A structured learning method which enables small groups to address complex issues.





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# WHY USE THIS GUIDE

We can solve problems better and faster if we bring people together to share their stories and collaborate. This Toolkit will help you bring people together in a productive way and jointly find better ways to integrate circular economy thinking in your business.

Action Learning Sets are a great way to complement and accelerate your other activities to move towards a circular business, providing you with a problem-solving opportunity for the organisations and individuals involved.

*'Through the Action Learning Set, we were able to congregate likeminded thinkers and doers in our organisation that hadn't met in any previous forum. We discussed challenges ... and came to some new solutions, which we are developing onwards. The ALS format provided by EMF enabled us to have structure to our meetups and fruitful discussions'*

**Laura Coppen - H&M Group, The Laboratory**

## HOW WILL IT BENEFIT BUSINESS PROFESSIONALS?

1. **A more engaging way** to expand your knowledge of the circular economy.
2. **Improved interaction** with peers & colleagues
  - Collaborative learning approach to translate circular economy ideas into practical work contexts via greater situational awareness
  - Finding support & advocates for future projects
3. **Build core capabilities** to create new circular economy inspired business opportunities

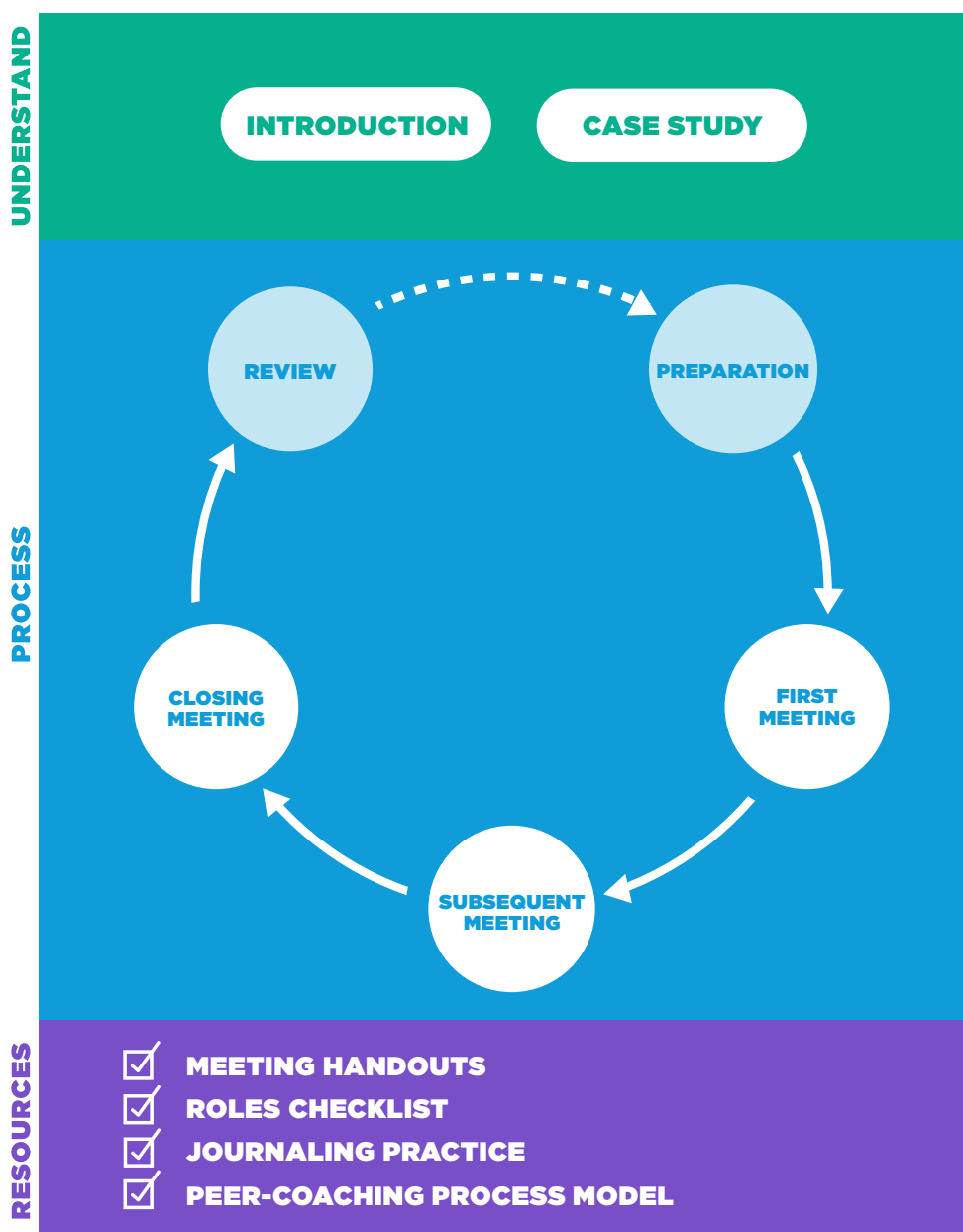
# HOW TO USE IT

This toolkit will guide you through each step of the Action Learning Set process and provide you with all the relevant handouts and tools to guide you to initiate and run this approach in your business.

The diagram below shows how this Toolkit is structured. Each of elements contains hyperlinks to lead you straight to the section that is most relevant to you.

**This document is divided into three main parts:**

1. **UNDERSTAND:** Including an introduction to the approach and a case study.
2. **ACTION LEARNING SET PROCESS:** Including information on how to prepare, run and review Action Learning Sets.
3. **RESOURCES:** Including useful handouts, checklists, models and instructions.





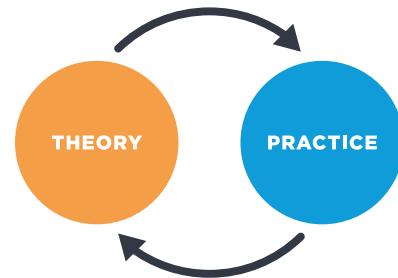
# 1. INTRODUCTION

## What is our approach to business learning?

Learning for circular economy works best when you put your theory into practice and in return learn from your experience. This approach to learning is also reflected in the Action Learning Set process.

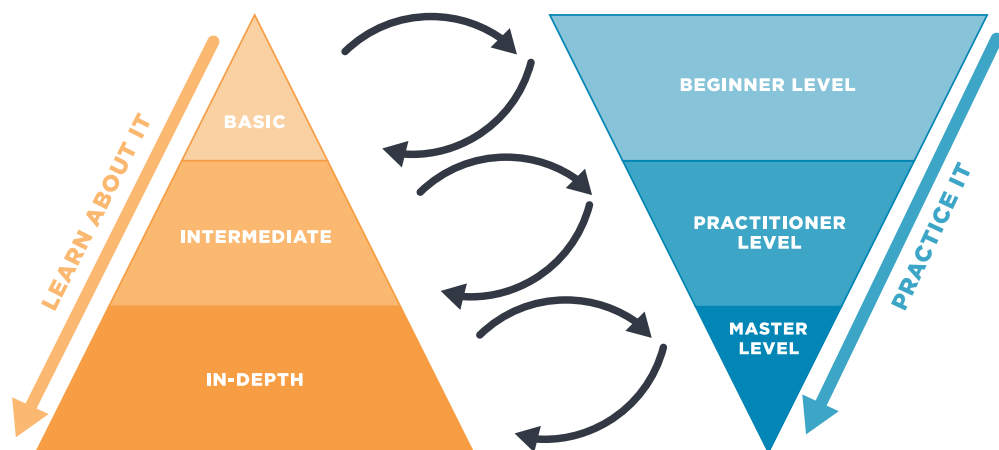
Theoretical understanding is deepened by developing a better grasp of the concepts - progressing from a basic, to an intermediate and lastly to an in-depth level of theoretical comprehension.

Your skills as a practitioner are gradually improving by applying your theoretical understanding into real life contexts and thus developing beginner, practitioner and finally mastery level practitioners' skills.



**Theory:** Creating conceptual understanding

**Practice:** Applying the theory & developing practitioner skills

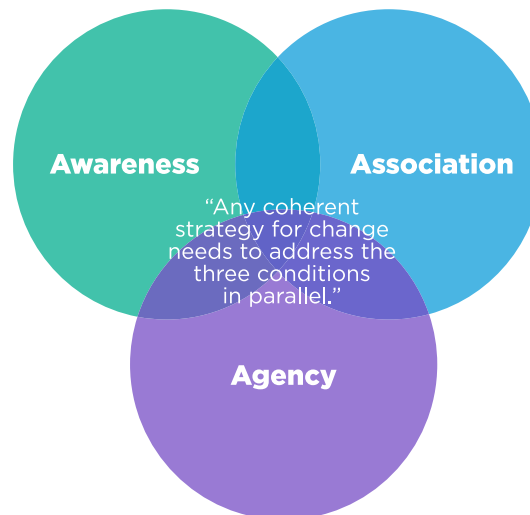


Everyone is engaged in learning through action albeit it almost always happens in a tacit, unconscious way. Engaging in an Action Learning Set brings attention to the process of learning and making the practical skills which you acquire (or need to acquire), more explicit.

Engaging with an **Action Learning Set approach provides organisations with a coherent way of developing three conditions** that are needed to transition to a circular business<sup>1</sup>:

<sup>1</sup> David Ballard: 'Using learning processes to promote change for sustainable development' published in Action Research (Special Issue on Change for Sustainable Development), Volume 3 Issue 2, June 2005, by Sage Publications Ltd

1. **Awareness** (contextual, theoretical and conceptual understanding of circular economy)
2. **Agency** (individual and organisational purpose, motivation, drive and skills to lead and manifest circular economy ideas)
3. **Association** (networks, alliances, collaborators and peers)



Developed by  
David Ballard (2005),  
University of Bath

## What is an Action Learning Set?

An Action Learning Set is structured in a way that enables a group of 4-6 participants who have similar concerns and interests to meet regularly and address complex issues together. They are a great way to complement your ongoing activities to move towards a circular business.

The members of the group help each other to learn from their real-life experiences. Through conversations and peer-to-peer coaching they make sense of the situation, (re-)define their problems in creative ways, identify new opportunities and improve ways of working as illustrated by Reg Revans' story below.

**The following story describes the origins of the Action Learning Set approach from the 1930s:**

*Back in the 1930s, Reg Revans, a young PhD student in Astrophysics at Cambridge University, was working alongside eight Nobel Prize winners. None of them worked in his field, but he noticed that when they were faced with difficult research problems, they would sit down together and ask one another lots of questions. No one person was considered more important than any other and they all had contributions to make, even when they were not experts in a particular field. In this way they teased out workable solutions to their own and others' problems.*

*Revans was struck by how powerful this technique was. When he went to work for the Coal Board, he introduced the technique there. When pit managers had problems, he encouraged them to meet together in small groups onsite to discuss their issues by asking one another questions about what they saw. This allowed them to find their own solutions rather than bringing in 'experts' to solve their problems for them. The technique proved so successful and managers went on to write their own handbook on how to run a coal mine.*

*Some years later, Professor Reg Revans tested and formalised the theory which now forms the basis for the Action Learning Set process and is the cornerstone of many management and organisational development programmes.*

## What are the benefits?

Engaging in an Action Learning Set provides both a learning and problem-solving opportunity for the organisation and individuals involved.

### Benefits

- Improve your understanding in Circular Economy
- Develop of a 'can-do' and creative problem-solving mindset
- Enhance your network and collaboration across different business functions
- Increase your confidence and motivation to continue working towards circular goals
- Develop of a peer-to-peer coaching culture
- Creating real business results that align with circular goals

## What does it look like in practice?

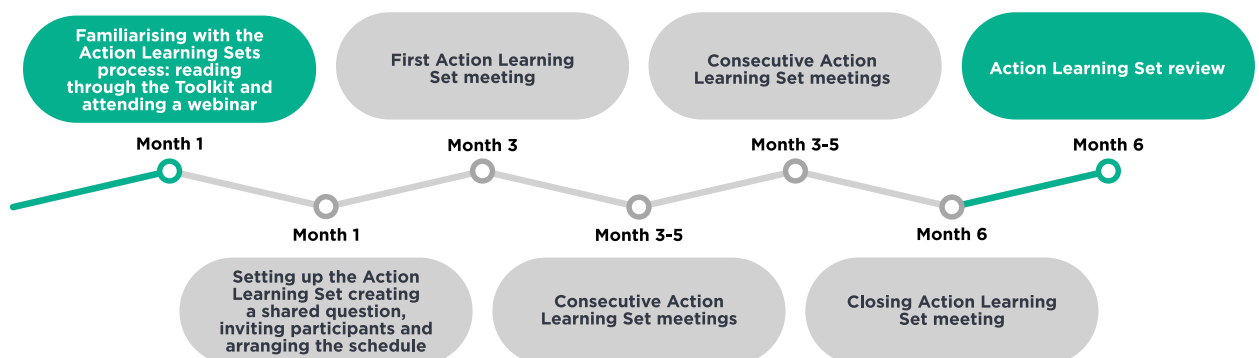
4-6 people meet regularly in a semi-formal setting to discuss a pre-defined overarching theme, challenge or question.

The meetings can be run virtually or face-to-face.

All meetings follow roughly the same flow as you can see in the sample agenda to the right.

### Action Learning Generic Flow (60 min)

1. **Introductions & Group Prep** (30 min) only for 1st ALS
2. **Check-in** (15 min) Discuss learning momentum since previous ALS (N/A for 1st ALS)
3. **Individual(s) present particular cases** (5-10 min) real life scenario, challenge or question
4. **Group conversation and peer-to-peer coaching** (20-30 min) to explore the issue, identify new ways forward and support the case holder (if time allows, another person could present his challenge/case in more detail)
5. **Wrap-up** (5-10 min) capture key insights





## 2. CASE STUDY

### Where have we done this before?

At the end of the Acceleration Workshop in Reykjavik in 2017, the companies in the Ellen MacArthur Foundation's CE100 Network expressed the need to offer a more engaging way of learning about circular economy. We also saw the need for professionals to better understand how to apply circular economy theory and concepts in practice and adapt the new ideas in their own contexts. The Action Learning Set approach outlined in this document was designed to address that need and in March 2018, we ran a pilot Action Learning Sets with 11 organisations.

#### The aim of the Action Learning Set approach was to...

- Offer an engaging way for people to develop their understanding about circular economy and how they can best introduce these new ideas into their workplace;
- Improve understanding in their respective areas of Marketing, Finance, Research and Innovation and Supply Chain Management;
- Gain more confidence to talk about circular economy at work (and outside of work);
- Generate new ideas for their teams/organisation;
- Make meaningful connections with colleagues from other functions (i.e. improve peer-to-peer support).

### Who was involved?

A total of 80 participants across 11 organisations took part in the Action Learning Sets pilot programme. They were based in 8 different countries and thus the Action Learning Sets were run in 5 different languages. The participating companies came from a variety of industries such as construction, finance, electronics, retail-fashion, and Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG).

In preparation for their Action Learning Sets, participants of the various businesses attended a live webinar held by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation to give them a more detailed overview of this approach. This webinar introduced the overall process, the role of the host and the GROW peer-coaching model. The participants received an Action Learning Set Guide which gave them in-depth information on every specific aspect of an Action Learning Set.

Each Action Learning Set group identified a host whose role involved coordinating the planned subsequent Action Learning Set meetings and guiding the participants in the meetings. A small number of the groups decided to rotate the host role which worked well too



## Forming the Action Learning Sets:

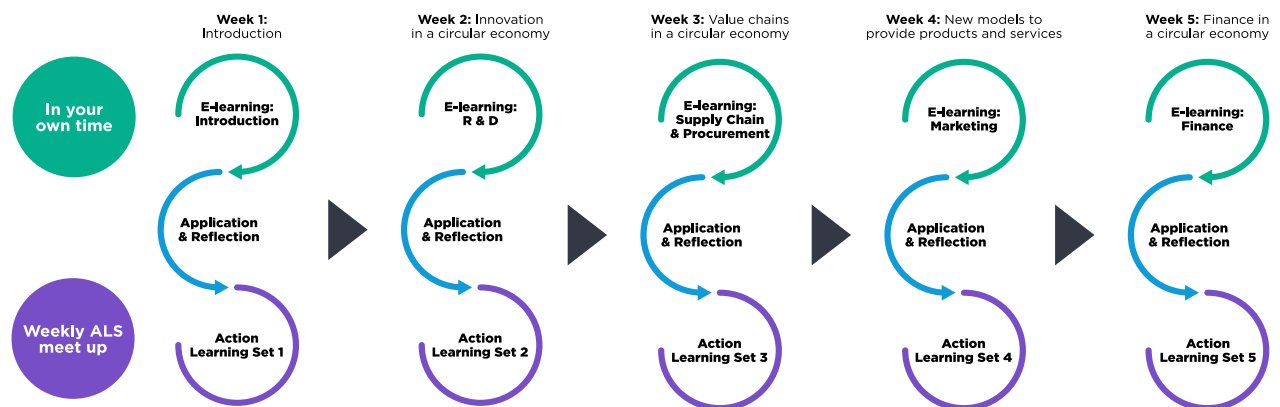
Each of participating organisations formed an Action Learning Set which on average included 6 participants from various roles and functions across that organisation.

*"We were able to congregate likeminded thinkers and doers in our organisation that hadn't met in any previous forum."*

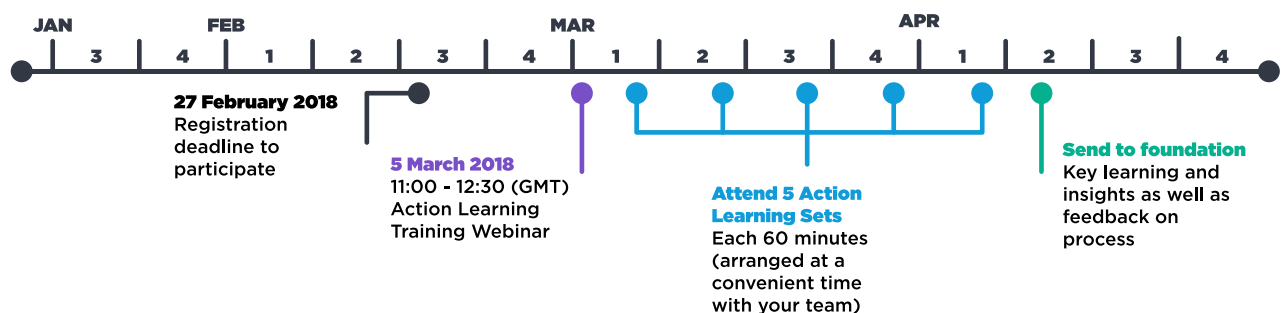
(Quote from a participant)

## Action Learning Set meetings alongside e-Learning programme:

The pilot Action Learning Set programme was designed to complement the Ellen MacArthur Foundation's existing e-Learning programme<sup>2</sup> and thus create a more engaging learning experience. The recommendation was to have 5 Action Learning Sets running along the 5 online modules on a weekly or bi-weekly basis (see overview below).



## Example Timeline



## How did it work?

During each meeting, one participant shared their circular economy challenge that they were facing in their line of work and that related to the module of the e-Learning tool for that week, e.g:

- How can we work with the suppliers or with customers to help them see and value circular product cycle approaches?
- Or how we can create a circular business model?
- What could new costing models look like?

At each Action Learning Set, the participants used the [GROW coaching model](#) to address their respective challenges. The model offered a peer-to-peer coaching process that took the participants through a set of questions to establish the desired **goal** of the situation, the current **reality**, the possible **options** to realise that goal and finally a **way forward**.

## What did the participants say?

The majority of the participants reported:

- An improved understanding about circular economy
- That they could talk to others about circular economy with more ease
- That they have made useful connections with their peers from different business functions

About half said they were more likely to apply their new insights at work.

A third felt they were able to generate new ideas for their organisation.

**The following set of testimonials were shared with us by the participants after the pilots were completed:**

*"It worked well to gather cross functional persons together to discuss the varying challenges, opportunities that we face when working towards a CE, we rarely have that opportunity in a co. this size, so everyone commented this was valuable"*

*"The action learning was a great way to connect people from different parts of our business and connect dots, share learnings. I think they are a necessary addition to e-learning in order to make the content relevant and actionable to our company reality."*



## 3. PROCESS OVERVIEW

**The Action Learning Set process consists of three parts:**

1. **PREPARATION** - Familiarising yourself with the Action Learning Set approach, setting up the group
2. **ACTION LEARNING SET MEETINGS** - Participating or Hosting in a series of Action Learning Sets. The first one and the last have a slightly different purpose and therefore a different content and flow.
3. **REVIEW** - Capturing your own and the participants' feedback at the end of the last Action Learning Set and evaluating how you would improve it in the future.

### STEP 1: PREPARATION

There are several things to consider when initiating an Action Learning Set, such as your shared question, the number of participants and who they will be and, most importantly, the schedule and required logistics of the Action Learning Set meetings.

#### How do I start?

Begin by asking yourself, in relation to circular economy, what are we trying to do in our organisation?

**Here are some examples:**

- How can we become a Zero Waste company?
- How can we move towards a more circular business model?
- What could a reverse logistics process for our business look like?

#### A good shared question will be:

- Aligned with the organisation's circular goals
- Ambitious enough to inspire
- Broad enough for people working in different roles/functions to be able to relate to it to the questions or concerns they have in their own line of work

In general, "How can we...?" or 'What would it take to...?' is a good way to form a shared question.

The shared question frames the overarching theme of an Action Learning Set and helps participants come together to address it in relation to their individual concerns or questions.

#### Before inviting others, make sure you are clear:

- What you are inviting them to. What topic/ area or key question are you proposing for the Action Learning Set?
- How long you would like this Action Learning process to run for, e.g. 1, 3 or 6 months? What is your rationale for this length of time?
- What meeting frequency would work best for your topic and the group of people which you are aiming to bring together? (e.g. weekly, monthly, quarterly?)

## Who do I invite?

When deciding who to invite to an Action Learning Set, it is useful to think about the different functions that are, or could be, involved in the circular business efforts. In principle, anyone can join the Action Learning Set if they have an interest in the shared question, have a related individual concern or question in their line of work and are able to commit to the schedule of meetings.

### A good participant will have:

- An interest in the shared question
- A basic understanding of circular economy
- Motivation to engage in the Action Learning Set process
- An ability to commit to the schedule of meetings

The key is for participants to choose to participate in the Action Learning Set voluntarily and eagerly.

## What roles are involved?

When setting up an Action Learning Set you need to think about the roles in the Set and the logistics required to run one.

### Roles

There are two roles in an Action Learning Set: being a host or being a participant.

#### The role of a Host entails the following:

- Initiating the Action Learning Set;
- Introducing the shared question;
- Inviting people to join the Action Learning Set;
- Scheduling the Action Learning Set meetings and taking care of logistics;
- Running the Action Learning Set meetings following the templates in this Toolkit.

More experienced groups may take a joint responsibility to cover the role of a host while following the instructions set out in this Toolkit. Alternatively, once the Action Learning Set has been going for a while, the group may choose to rotate the hosting role for each meeting.

**The role of a participant** is to respond to an invitation, commits to attending the Action Learning Set meetings and brings their own individual concern or question.

**Tip:** We recommend that the hosts and all the participants attend an Ellen MacArthur Foundation [webinar](#) on how to run an Action Learning Set.

You can find a more detailed check-list of what each role requires in the Appendices, [Appendix B – Roles Checklist](#).

For webinar dates and registration, please go to the [Ellen MacArthur Website / Our Work / CE100 / Learning Resources](#)



## Scheduling and Logistics

We strongly recommend sending the invitation to the Action Learning Set requested participants 2-3 months in advance, communicating the schedule of the meetings so that people can commit as they reply to your invitation.

### Other things to consider when planning the meetings:

- **The size of the group:** 4-6 people
- **Frequency of meetings:** every 2-4 weeks
- **Duration:** it can last a month, several months or be indefinite
- **Length of the meeting:** 60-75 min
- **Room setup:** sitting around the table, flipchart stand and markers
- **Virtual or face-to-face:** Face-to-face is a recommended option, but with the help of technology (Zoom, WebEx etc.) virtual or blended meetings work just as well. We would recommend meeting face-to-face for the first time, however.

## STEP 2: MEETINGS

### How do I run an Action Learning Set?

Once you have established an Action Learning Group, use both the checklist below and the handouts included in this Toolkit to help you to prepare for and run the first and all subsequent Action Learning Set meetings.

#### Checklist

##### Before the Action Learning Set starts to run:

- ☐ Have you familiarised with this toolkit?
- ☐ Have you created a shared question/intention?
- ☐ Have you invited and secured the participants?
- ☐ Have you arranged the schedule and the meeting place?

### What to do in-between meetings?

We recommend taking time to prepare for each upcoming meeting and after each meeting taking a little moment to reflect.

The Action Learning Set meetings provide a special opportunity for you to present your particular challenge or question and receive input and coaching from your peers.

Consider if you would like to be presenting a case (challenge or question) at the next meeting. If so, what input are you looking for from your peers? How could your peers help you?

After each meeting, reflect on what new insights have come up for you and what actions or new ideas you would like to follow-up on.

See resources for useful questions.

## How do I close an Action Learning Set?

Once you decide to bring the Action Learning Set to a close, organise the final meeting and use the Closing Action Learning Set meeting [handout](#) to prepare for, and run, the final session.

At the end of the last meeting, it is an important step that you jointly reflect how useful this process has been to you as individuals and to you as a group.

### **When closing the Action Learning Set gather feedback:**

- What new insights & learnings have come up for you and your group?
- What do you think went well?
- What would need to be improved when running future Action Learning Sets?

## STEP 3: REVIEW

After the closing meeting take the time to review the feedback which you gathered at the closing event and from other stakeholders related to the Action Learning Set group (e.g. line managers, project leads, etc) reflect on how useful you have found this process for your yourself, your colleagues and the various projects that were addressed:

- Would you recommend running Action learning Set's again in your team/ your business?
- What would you improve?
- Which other topics or challenges would you address in future Action Learning Sets?

Based on your review you may decide to continue with the same Action Learning Set format (and even topic and team), or initiate a new Action Learning Set (with a new question and/or new participants).





# RESOURCES

## A - MEETING HANDOUTS

### FIRST MEETING HANDOUT

#### Purpose:

- Getting acquainted with each other
- Creating group agreements
- Sharing individual concerns and questions

**Time:** 75 min

#### Preparation:

- Print this handout to bring to the meeting prior to the meeting
- Use the guiding questions at the bottom to prepare for your first meeting
- Recommended: Bring along a journal or dedicated notebook for all your Action Learning Sets where key insights, take-aways or your reflections on the guiding questions below can be captured

SECTION	DETAILS	TIMING	RESOURCES
Welcome	Host welcomes everyone, explains the reasons and intentions behind convening an Action Learning Set.	5'	
Introductions	Everyone introduces themselves (split the time equally among everyone): <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Name and role</li><li>• Department and years in the company</li><li>• What attracted you to join the Action Learning Set?</li></ul>	15'	List participant names
Theme/ question	Host briefly explains why the particular topic or question being discussed for the Action Learning Set has been chosen.  Everyone shares their individual concern or question that they have brought with them. This may be tentative at this stage. Asking "How can I...?" and thinking out loud is a good first step.  (split the time equally among everyone)	20'	Flipchart + markers

Group agreements on how to work together	<p>Host shares a list of suggested group agreements with everybody and asks the group to agree to or make changes to the suggestions as they see fit to better work together. Suggested agreements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confidentiality</li> <li>• Punctuality</li> <li>• Diversity of views</li> <li>• Respect and listening</li> <li>• Commitment to attend the meetings</li> </ul> <p>Record the final list of agreements and bring them to each meeting. (e.g. on a flipchart or handout).</p>	20'	
Individual reflection	Everybody takes 5 min on their own to reflect on the questions suggested below.	5'	Notebook + pen
Group closing	Everybody shares one thing they are taking away from this meeting which they will try to apply/focus on until the next meeting.	10'	

When participating in the Action Learning Set, pay attention to potential pitfalls (Don't...) and behaviours that will help you to succeed (Do...):



- ☐ Speak an equal amount of time as the others
- ☐ Listen attentively
- ☐ Attempt to see things from the other person's point of view
- ☐ Ask good questions which encourage thought and exploration
- ☐ Respect and value everyone's capacity to make their own decisions



- ☐ Interrupt
- ☐ Impose your own values, views, opinions and advice
- ☐ Be judgemental about the person's values
- ☐ Criticise, negate or trivialise what the person is working on
- ☐ Assume that their situation is similar to ones you have experienced



## Guiding Questions for Reflection

The following guiding question for reflections will help you get the most out of your participation in the Action Learning Sets. You can use this handout to capture your responses below or alternatively use your own dedicated notebook or journal where you can capture your thoughts and reflections for this and all consecutive meetings.

### **BEFORE attending the First Action Learning Set meeting, please reflect on the following questions:**

Taking a few moments to reflect will help you come into the Action Learning Set more prepared and have better clarity of what you want to achieve, thus contributing to the higher learning efficiency.

What attracted me to join the Action Learning Set formed around this topic?

What concern or question do I have that relates to the Action Learning Set topic?

Why is this question important to me?

What do I need from the group in order to openly share and discuss my concerns or questions?

**AFTER attending the First Action Learning Set meeting, please reflect on the following questions:**

Taking a few moments to reflect will help you come into the Action Learning Set more prepared and have better clarity of what you want to achieve.

What am I taking away from the first meeting? What struck me the most?

How has my question or concern changed since attending this first meeting?

What actions am I going to take before attending the next meeting?





## SUBSEQUENT MEETING HANDOUT

### Purpose:

- Reflect on the learning so far
- Group coaching to address a particular concern

**Time:** 75 min

### Preparation:

- Print this handout to bring to the meeting prior to the meeting
- Print the GROW coaching model
- Use the guiding questions at the bottom to prepare for this meeting
- Optional: Bring along a journal or dedicated notebook for all your Action Learning Sets where key insights, take-aways or your reflections on the guiding questions below can be captured

SECTION	DETAILS	TIMING	RESOURCES
Check-in	<p>Everyone checks-in by briefly sharing about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• New developments in relation to each individual's concern or question which they brought to the last Action Learning Set</li><li>• General updates at work</li></ul> <p>(split the time equally among everyone)</p>	15'	Handout
Identifying the concern of the day	<p>Participants with a pressing concern or question in their individual line of work:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Very briefly share their concern</li><li>• Rate the urgency and importance of their concern on the scale of 1 to 10</li></ul> <p>Everyone decides together whose concern they are going to address in this meeting (based on the urgency and importance ratings).</p>	10'	

Presenting the concern in detail	<p>The chosen participant shares their concern in more detail using the following questions:</p> <p><b>Goal:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the outcome you want from this situation?</li> <li>• What is the result you want to generate?</li> </ul> <p><b>Reality</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is happening at the moment?</li> <li>• Why is there is a problem?</li> </ul> <p><b>Everyone else:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listens attentively and gives their undivided attention to what is being presented</li> <li>• Asks brief clarifying questions</li> </ul>	5'	<a href="#">GROW Peer Coaching Model handout</a> for additional questions
Capturing ideas for possible solutions	<p>Everyone else discusses how best to address the presented situation using the following questions:</p> <p><b>Options:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What possibilities for action do you see?</li> <li>• Who might be able to help?</li> </ul> <p>The participant with the concern may choose to briefly respond or ask clarifying questions.</p>	25'	Handout: GROW Coaching Model instructions (8)
Next steps	<p>The participant with the concern reflects back to the group using the following questions:</p> <p><b>Way forward:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which option do you like the most?</li> <li>• What are the next steps?</li> <li>• What support do I need?</li> </ul>	10'	
Individual reflection	Everybody answers individual reflection questions (see questions below).	5'	Notebook + pen
Group closing	<p>Everybody shares one thing they are taking away with them from this meeting and will try to apply/focus on until the next meeting</p> <p>Ideas to improve the future sessions should be recorded by host.</p>	5'	



The success of the Action Learning Set depends on the quality of questions asked. The questions presented in the handout follow the GROW Coaching Model. These are additional good questions to ask during goal and reality:

### Good questions for clarification

- ☐ What happened?
- ☐ How do you see it?
- ☐ What makes you say that?
- ☐ What else can explain the situation?
- ☐ Who might help you?
- ☐ What obstacles do you envisage?
- ☐ Who will be affected by your success?

### Good questions for probing

- ☐ Can you explain...?
- ☐ What exactly...?
- ☐ Who else matters to this process?
- ☐ Can you give an example?
- ☐ What happened...and...?
- ☐ Who are “they”?
- ☐ How do you feel about/when...?
- ☐ What assumptions are you making?
- ☐ Is that assumption stopping you?

When participating in the Action Learning Set, pay attention to potential pitfalls (Don't...) and behaviours that will help you to succeed (Do...):



- ☐ Speak an equal amount of time as the others
- ☐ Listen attentively
- ☐ Attempt to see things from the other person's point of view
- ☐ Ask good questions which encourage thought and exploration
- ☐ Respect and value everyone's capacity to make their own decisions



- ☐ Interrupt
- ☐ Impose your own values, views, opinions and advice
- ☐ Be judgemental about the person's values
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- ☐ Assume that their situation is similar to ones you have experienced

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The following guiding question for reflections will help you get the most out of your participation in the Action Learning Sets. You can use this handout to capture your responses below or alternatively use your own dedicated notebook or journal where you can capture your thoughts and reflections for this and all consecutive meetings.

### **BEFORE attending the First Action Learning Set meeting, please reflect on the following questions:**

Taking a few moments to reflect will help you come into the Action Learning Set more prepared and have better clarity of what you want to achieve.

What concern or question am I bringing to the Action Learning Set?

What have I learnt since the last meeting?

What do I need from today's Action Learning Set meeting?



**AFTER attending the First Action Learning Set meeting, please reflect on the following questions:**

Taking a few moments at the end of the meeting to reflect will help you capture emerging insights, new ideas, additional questions and potential next steps, thus propelling your learning and understanding of circular economy.

What are my key take-aways from today's meeting?

What actions will I take before the next meeting?

How can we improve our Action Learning Set meetings?



## CLOSING MEETING HANDOUT

### Purpose:

- Reflect on individual actions and learning
- Reflect on the group experience
- Reflect and gather feedback on the Action Learning Set process

**Time:** 75 min

### Preparation:

- Print this handout to bring to the meeting prior to the meeting
- Use the guiding questions at the bottom to prepare for this meeting
- Optional: Bring along a journal or dedicated notebook for all your Action Learning Sets where key insights, take-aways or your reflections on the guiding questions below can be captured

SECTION	DETAILS	TIMING	RESOURCES
Check-in	Everyone checks-in by briefly sharing about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• New developments in relation to the individual concern or question</li><li>• General updates at work</li></ul> (split the time equally among everyone)	10'	Print and complete this handout prior to the meeting
Reflecting on individual action and learning	Host acknowledges that this is the last Action Learning Set meeting and reminds all participants of the shared question.  Everyone shares their individual learning experience following these questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What have you learnt about circular economy?</li><li>• What has changed trying to address the individual concern or question?</li><li>• Are there any other related learning points, insights or experiences?</li></ul> (split the time equally among everyone)	30'	



Reflecting on working together	<p>Everyone shares how it was to work and learn together following these questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What did you really appreciate about this experience and the Action Learning Set process?</li> <li>• What could be improved?</li> </ul> <p>(split the time equally among everyone)</p>	20'	
Individual reflection	<p>Everybody answers individual reflection questions at the end of this handout.</p> <p>Use journaling practice technique and give 2 minutes per question.</p>	10'	Notebook + pen
Group closing	<p>Everybody shares one thing they are taking forward from this Action Learning Set.</p>	5'	

When participating in the Action Learning Set, pay attention to potential pitfalls (Don't...) and behaviours that will help you succeed (Do...):



- ☐ Speak an equal amount of time as the others
- ☐ Listen attentively
- ☐ Attempt to see things from the other person's point of view
- ☐ Ask good questions which encourage thought and exploration
- ☐ Respect and value everyone's capacity to make their own decisions



- ☐ Interrupt
- ☐ Impose your own values, views, opinions and advice
- ☐ Be judgemental about the person's values
- ☐ Criticise, negate or trivialise what the person is working on
- ☐ Assume that their situation is similar to ones you have experienced

# B - ROLES CHECKLIST

## Host

### When initiating an Action Learning Set (ALS)

- ❑ Familiarise yourself with the ALS Toolkit
- ❑ Attend an Ellen MacArthur Foundation training webinar (offered 3 times per year)
- ❑ Think of the overarching theme/question for the ALS
- ❑ Set all the dates and times for the ALS meetings
- ❑ Send an invitation to colleagues to join the ALS, communicating the purpose and process of the group discussions, together with the dates and times of the meetings (this toolkit can also be shared with those who would appreciate reading more about ALS)
- ❑ Organise the physical/virtual space for the meetings

### During the ALS meetings

- ❑ Before the ALS: Familiarise yourself with the meeting agenda and process (read through the handouts included in this Toolkit)
- ❑ Hold the 'process' and stick to the agreed timings; this may involve pointing out when the participants in their discussions or questioning start moving away from the intended focus of the conversation
- ❑ Create an atmosphere where it is safe to speak openly
- ❑ Ensure the focus remains on learning about the real issues
- ❑ Act when appropriate to prevent digression and intervene by asking 'Can you rephrase the question?' or saying 'I observe that you are giving advice rather than letting the presenter find their own answer'
- ❑ Ensure good questions are asked and formulated in an 'open way' (why, what, how...)
- ❑ Ensure only one person speaks at a time
- ❑ Role-models to the rest of the group what it looks like to be a good listener and/ or to ask good questions
- ❑ Gathers the feedback from the group to improve subsequent sessions. Also will send final feedback of the overall experience to the Business Learning Team at the Ellen MacArthur Foundation.

## Participant

### During the initial stage of an Action Learning Set (ALS)

- Attend an Ellen MacArthur Foundation training webinar (offered 3 times per year)
- Respond to the invitation to join an ALS
- Mark all the ALS meetings in your diary
- Familiarise yourself with the ALS Toolkit
- Think about the overarching theme/question and how it relates to your particular job function

### During the ALS meetings

- Bring an issue/problem/opportunity/question that is real and relevant for you in your line of work and relates to the overarching theme/question
- Share openly your experiences and insights
- Listen deeply and do not try to 'fix' the problems of others
- Listen to feedback of other participants and choose what to respond to



# C - RECORDING PROGRESS - JOURNALING

## Overview

Journaling is an individual reflection practice that allows you to access deeper levels of self-knowledge and connect this knowledge to concrete actions.

## Purpose

Journaling can be used whenever you want to contain the thoughts and feelings about a particular situation, observe what happened in a more detached objective way, spot patterns and links, or identify potential next steps.

## Uses and Outcomes

- Access deeper levels of self-reflection and knowledge
- Connect self-reflection to concrete actions and next steps
- Make sense of various situations and your role within them
- Recommended to use in preparation for Action Learning Set meetings and at the end of each meeting

## How-to principles

- **Set a time for your journaling practice.** Ideally this is a regular time in your diary when you have some peace of mind to engage in a reflective practice. We recommend doing this for 5-10 minutes on each occasion; ensure you set an alarm.
- **Keep the hand moving.** We suggest writing without pausing - writing without putting your pen down, regardless of what comes up, and only stop when the alarm goes off.
- **Don't think - write.** Journaling seeks to break through the chatty cluttered mind and to allow the deeper self-knowledge and observations come to the forefront, therefore, the goal is to write whatever comes to mind, continuously, even if it doesn't seem to make sense.
- **Show, don't tell - give the sensuous detail.** Recreate the experience in full detail and place yourself back in the middle of it.
- **Go fear-ward.** If something uncomfortable comes up try to dive right into it, as the biggest learning might lie there.

## Set up

- **Journal and pen:** we recommend having a dedicated journal for your practice.
- **Timer:** it is useful to give yourself a time limit for each question, which can vary from 2 minutes (when you're very short on time) to as long as 10 minutes (when you really want to make a deep dive into the situation).

- **Find a place** where you can remain undisturbed for your journaling practice. Pick a place where others cannot see what you will be writing so that you can do it freely and openly.

### Practice Exercise

Think of a situation upon which you would like to reflect. This could be a recent work or personal situation which has caused you a particularly strong emotional reaction (such as “wow” or “ouch”). With this situation in mind, answer the questions listed below.

For each question, set your timer for 5-10 minutes (depending on how much time you have).

What happened?

How did it make you feel?

Why did I feel this way?

What was really going on?

What specific insights and conclusions are emerging?

For further insights, observations and potential next steps, you may want to reread your answers either immediately after finishing your exercise or later on.



# D - PEER-COACHING (GROW MODEL)

## Overview

The GROW model is a simple method that can help you with your goal setting and problem-solving which also can be used as a coaching tool in a group setting. GROW stands for Goals, Current Reality, Options and Way Forward.

## Purpose

The GROW model allows the Action Learning Set participants to coach each other and act as facilitators helping one another to unveil and select the best option without offering direct advice.

### What's the challenge or issue?

What is the outcome you want from this situation?

What is the result you want to generate?

What will be an outstanding result?

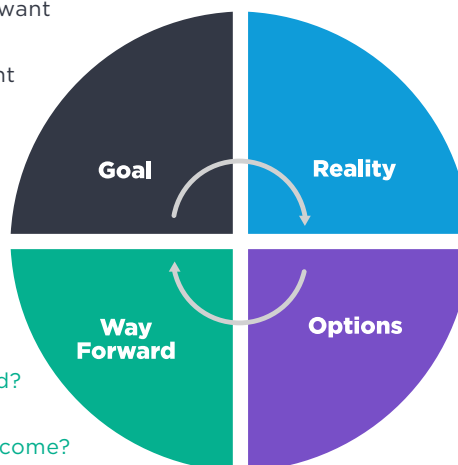
What are the next steps?

When will you do them?

What get in the way?

What support do you need?

How will you know you've achieved your desired outcome?



What is happening at the moment?

How do you know there is a problem?

Where are you right now?

What have you tried so far?

What do others think of this situation?

What have you tried so far?

What possibilities for action do you see?

Who might be able to help?

What are the benefits and pitfalls of that option?

Which option do you like the most?

## Uses and Outcomes

- Discover your aspirations
- Name the current situation and underlying assumptions
- See the possibilities and resources open to you
- Define the actions you want to take
- Use in a group during the Action Learning Set meetings to help your Action Learning Set group better understand the raised concern or question and ultimately find a good way forward
- When on your own, combine the journaling practice and GROW model techniques to help answer the questions posed in both of these learning/coaching tools

## How-to principles

- **Powerful Questioning.** Start by asking a set of questions from one of the quadrants. Ask open questions – start broad, then narrow to generate focus. Start with What? / Where? / Who? / How? / When? Make sure your questions are not leading or judgemental.
- **Stay flexible.** Move around the GROW sequence according to your intuition and revisit each step as necessary, in any order.
- **Active listening.** Listen to the answers with attention, curiosity and empathy. Listen for potential, not problems, and let go of filters and perceptions. Listen at a deeper level - beyond the words - in order to get to the root cause of the presented concern/question. Reflect, summarise, clarify, and reframe when needed.

## Set up

### When done in a group setting:

- Use a flipchart with markers to visualise and clarify aspects of the conversation more easily
- Provide a pen and paper for group members

### When done on your own:

- Use a notebook and pen

## GROW – Guiding questions

### Goal:

- What is the outcome you want from this situation?
- What is the result you want to generate?
- What will be an outstanding result?
- What will the result enable you to do?
- What will other people be saying to you?
- What will you have that you don't have now?

### Imagine 3 months from now, all obstacles are removed, and you have achieved the goal:

- What do you see/hear/feel?
- What new elements are in place?
- What is different?

### Reality:

- What is happening at the moment?
- How do you know there is a problem?
- Where are you right now?
- What have you tried so far?
- What do others think of this situation?
- What are you doing that takes you towards your goal?
- What are you doing that is getting in the way of your goal?
- Who else does it affect?

### Options:

- What have you tried so far?
- What possibilities for action do you see?
- Who might be able to help?
- What are the benefits and pitfalls of that option?
- Which option do you like the most?
- What has worked in the past?
- What steps are available to you?
- Where could you find out the information?
- How could you do that?

### Way Forward:

- What are the next steps?
- When will you do them?
- How will you do them?
- Who will you talk to?
- What might get in the way?
- What support do you need?
- Is there anything you need to put in place before that?
- How will you know you've achieved your desired outcome?
- How committed are you to taking that action?
- What will it take for you to commit to that?

## Practice Exercise

You will be using the GROW model questions during the Action Learning Set meetings to help each other address the individual concerns or questions.

**You may also decide to use this model for a personal reflection following these steps:**

1. Think of the concern you want to explore
2. Answer 2-3 questions from each GROW section.