

Sample Learning Event 3: Learning Trajectory on Power by Jethro Pettit and Irene Guijt

Overview

A “Learning Trajectory” is simply a name for a longer-term capacity building and “learning from experience” process that can be carried out within an organisation or with a group of similar organisations. It combines a series of actual workshops with periods of work-based learning and reflection on practice, supported by some form of coaching. Learning Trajectories are used in the Netherlands by NGOs, and the model shared here is based on the design and facilitation experience of Irene Guijt (Learning by Design) and Jethro Pettit (IDS) with the Dutch NGO consortium PSO and international NGO Oxfam-Novib.

Why do a Learning Trajectory?

A Learning Trajectory has both advantages and disadvantages. It takes more time than simply offering workshops and trainings, both from facilitators and from participants. The length of a Learning Trajectory can be anywhere from a few weeks to a few months to a year or even longer. It may involve only two workshops with a short period of practice in between, or three or more workshops spread out over several months of work-based learning. IDS runs an action research MA degree programme which follows the same kind of model over an 18-month period.

The advantages of a Learning Trajectory are that learning will be deeper and more practically applied to work experience, so that the desired changes in practice are embedded in the organisations involved. The methodologies build on effective and well-known principles of experiential and reflective learning, and use methods of organisational learning and action research. The learning and change processes are integrated, leading to firmer results than training or capacity-building alone.

In addition, the Learning Trajectory process can provide methods and spaces for exploring and addressing power internally, at the personal and organisational levels, in addition to applications “out there” in relation to achieving organisational aims. This opportunity to connect levels of “me, us and them” (first, second and third person) makes it more likely that the learning will “stick” and lead to changes in practice.

Design Process

As with any learning event, the objectives and process should be planned out in consultation with key stakeholders and where possible, including learners or their representatives. These discussions should identify:

- reasons for undertaking the Learning Trajectory
- expected learning and change outcomes
- links to organisational and individual aims and expectations
- capacity and availability of learners and organisations to take part

Because there is a time commitment, it is important to ensure that learners are given the time to attend and prepare for the workshops, to try out practical exercises while on the job, and to reflect upon and document their experiences. This can require getting leaders and senior managers to commit to the process – the more so if senior people are taking part themselves.

There is a fine balance between designing a Learning Trajectory to meet the time availability of learners, and ensuring there is enough time for the learning process. There is no point making the process too rushed and tightly scheduled, as this will simply undermine the possibilities for learning. At the same time, it should not take so much time that learners resent the process or find that it is preventing them from accomplishing their work.

To date we have completed the following learning trajectories:

- 4-month learning trajectory with about 10 staff from diverse NGOs. This involved a two-day residential workshop at either end (2007)
- 10-month trajectory with 15 staff from one NGO. This involved three 1-2 day workshops at the beginning, middle and end (2008-09)

In addition, we are aware of these similar processes under way:

- 12-month action research project with six grassroots partner organisations supported by Carnegie UK Trust and Joseph Rowntree Foundation (UK). This involves 6 one-day workshops.
- 3-week process involving 6 staff and partners from Christian Aid in Kenya. This involves 2, 3-hour workshops and a short exercise in between.

Sample Learning Outcomes

The broad objectives of a Learning Trajectory on power could be:

“to explore and apply concepts, methods and practical steps which can help learners and their teams or organisations become more aware of power issues and more coherent and strategic in their efforts to shift power relations.”

Specific outcomes for learners might include the following:

- To introduce and test out practical concepts, tools and methods for better understanding power, and for applying a “power lens” in practice.
- To experiment with innovations in “power-conscious” practice and strategy, to reflect on the process and outcomes, and to document the results.
- To develop common transferable lessons, methods and analytical tools that can be adapted and applied more widely (organisation or sector).

Sample design

A process is suggested outlined here which is based on the two Learning Trajectories in the Netherlands. This sample involves 3 short workshops over a period of 6-10 months, during which learners carry out “action learning” inquiries into their own organisational and professional practices, with coaching provided by the facilitators.

The design is in stages, and seeks to keep the overall pace light and manageable within the flow of learners’ existing work responsibilities, but building in significant opportunities for reflection and learning. This could be applied within one team or organisation, or involve a wider range of learners from a sector or movement.

If working with more than one organisation, try to identify clear criteria, issues or aims that are held in common. In either case, try to get small groups of 2-3 people (minimum) who work together to participate together.

1. Initiation phase

- a. Identify issues, purpose and learning outcomes
- b. Identify learners and/or organisations and facilitators
- c. Dialogue among stakeholders to clarify purpose and process
- d. Pre-workshop engagement with participants.
(face to face or via email, phone, skype, etc.)

2. Framing Workshop: 2 days (residential venue if possible, to allow use of evening and social time to deepen learning)

- a. Introduction to power analysis, Power Cube, tools and methods
- b. Introduction to action research and reflective practice methods
- c. Practical sessions to apply concepts and methods
- d. Development of draft action learning plans (individuals and groups)
- e. Agreement of timeline and plan for remainder of trajectory

3. Action Research – Part 1 with a duration of 2-3 months

- a. Participants develop/agree/initiate learning plans
- b. Initiation of action research and reflective practice activities
- c. Application of power analysis to practice (e.g. planning, strategising, monitoring, evaluation, alliances, partnerships, etc.)
- d. Regular coaching and contact with facilitators
- e. Brief progress reports by end from all participants

4. Progress Workshop – 2 days (or one evening plus one day), to take place 2-3 months after the first workshop.

- a. Presentations of progress from all participants
- b. Identification of key adaptations, lessons, issues, challenges
- c. Peer and facilitator feedback and support; exchange of methods
- d. Deepening of analysis and learning additional methods
- e. Review timeline and plan for remainder of trajectory

5. Action Research – Part 2 with a duration of 3-5 months

- a. Continuation of (refined) action research and reflective practice activities

- b. Application of power analysis to practice (e.g. planning, strategising, monitoring, evaluation, alliances, partnerships, etc.)
 - c. Regular coaching and contact with facilitators
 - d. Progress reports, documentation and methods shared be end
6. **Synthesis Workshop** – 2 days at end of action research and reflective practice process (if possible including evenings, in residential setting).
- a. Presentations and exchange of findings, learning and methods
 - b. Identification of key adaptations, lessons, issues, challenges
 - c. Peer and Facilitator feedback and support
 - d. Deepening of analysis and implications for practice
 - e. Documentation and communication plan, and next steps

Example of Schedule

Activity	Dates
Initiation Phase	Jan-Feb
Framing Workshop	Feb
Action Research – part 1	Mar-May
Progress Workshop	May
Action Research – part 2	Jun-Sep
Synthesis Workshop	Oct

Sustainability, Replication and Impact

One outcome of the process may be lessons learned and recommendations for changes in programming or direction of the organisation, movement or sector. Another outcome may be practical guides, tools, examples and methods that would make adaptation and spread of the approach feasible within the organisation(s) involved. Other outcomes may be published materials or events on methods, case studies and lessons learned, for influencing wider sectoral policy and practice.

For more information please contact Jethro Pettit (IDS) J.Pettit@ids.ac.uk or Irene Guijt (Learning by Design) iguijt@learningbydesign.org

