



ACTION INQUIRY GROUP

- ▶ **How can we work better with our internal or external colleagues?**
- ▶ **How do we know what good practice is, and how do we know if our 'audiences' share our views?**
- ▶ **How do the frames of our gender, race and class affect our personal and professional lives?**

Why do we need action inquiry?

Improving sustainable development communications isn't just about using better tools and techniques. It's also about generating a deeper understanding of ourselves as we go about our work. As the bearer of news which sometimes either depresses people or is simply ignored by them, doing this work can be a confusing, frustrating, lonely and dispiriting experience. But it can also be exciting and creative, and provide a strong sense of purpose and fulfilment. How can we find ways to flourish as change agents, even in difficult times?

Emotional and cultural assumptions and habits can sometimes be significant yet unnoticed obstacles to a more sustainable society, for 'sustainability professionals' as much as anyone else. So improving our practice as communicators is also about understanding how we relate to colleagues, stakeholders, and the wider organisational, social and political contexts in which we operate. What do we take for granted about our relationships and working environments? How might challenging these habits or telling different stories unlock new potential, for our lives and our work?

In order to explore such questions together face to face, the Compass Network is inviting UK members to join a pilot action inquiry group. Action inquiry is all about personal development. An action inquiry group offers a supportive yet challenging space for peers to share and reflect on their experiences of such issues, develop their professional practice in their workplaces, and gain practical insights into engagement, co-decision making, listening, story-telling and appreciating different viewpoints. Essentially democratic, all the participants 'own' the process and its outcomes, and the facilitator is also a group participant pursuing her own lines of inquiry.

The approach invites group participants to draw on their full range of emotional, experiential, practical and theoretical knowing, and introduces a range of techniques for enhancing reflective skills.

How does the action inquiry process work?

The inquiry process is founded on cycles of action and reflection. Group members agree the question/s they intend to explore together, consider them whilst in action in their respective workplaces, then reflect on their learning, both personally and together in the group (see diagram below for an example).

So this is not simply a talking shop; participants are supported (both at the group meetings and through on-going contact between meetings) in trying new ways of working for themselves, all in the service of improving their own performance and thereby the quality of sustainable development communications.

Over a series of action and reflection cycles, for example, four half day meetings with a month in between each one, this group approach creates a strong sense of trust and support amongst its members. For many, it is a more friendly, fun and engaging approach to personal and professional development than eg. one to one mentoring, and has been used successfully in the Cabinet Office's Public Service Leaders Scheme, with over 250 managers improving their leadership practice through group support and challenge.

1. DECISION ON INQUIRY AREA

Example:

Cycle 1: How can I engage my non-communications colleagues more effectively?

Cycle 2: If I change my habitual approach in x ways, does that make my engagement more effective?



2. ACTION IN THE WORKPLACE

Example:

Cycle 1: Heightened awareness of engaging my non-communications colleagues

Cycle 2: Experimenting with a new approach to engaging my colleagues

3. PERSONAL AND GROUP REFLECTION

Example:

Cycle 1: Exploring what was going on before, during and after those encounters. Sharing others' experiences; support and advice and challenge on finding different ways to engage colleagues.

Cycle 2: What was it like this time? How did I feel, did anything different happen? Why?

Getting involved

You'll need to become a Compass network member first – registration is quick and free.

If you'd like to join the Compass action inquiry group, please register online at

www.compassnetwork.org

If you would like to chat to someone about action inquiry, please email Esther Maughan McLachlan on esther.maughan@strong-language.co.uk. Esther is a sustainable development communications consultant and part-time PhD student working with action inquiry methodologies. Esther will be running the Compass action inquiry group.