Final Tasks: Team action setting and mini-After Action Review

Part 1 of this last set of suggested tasks is designed to help teams review the collective learning and reflection process which has taken place over the course of the entire series, and to collaboratively identify some feasible, priority actions which could help shift them closer to a deeply participatory, learning- and action-oriented systemic approach. Part 2 is designed to guide teams in a mini-After Action Review in order to reflect on and assess how the actions went, what can be learned, and what they could do next.

Part 1. Team action setting (2 hrs)

Purpose: Teams decide which actions they could take to move closer to a participatory, learning- and action-oriented systemic approach, and how they will implement them.

Teams will need to set aside about two hours so that there is adequate time to reflect and make a decision. Teams may also choose to facilitate this session, perhaps by taking turns as facilitator. Each person will need their notebooks and the River of Life drawing made during Brief 4. *After Action Reviews*. A participatory action-setting method is suggested below, however teams may also choose to use another preferred participatory method.

Suggested method

1. Preparation: Set up five different white boards (real or virtual) or five separate spaces on a big wall. Label each board or space with the title of a learning and reflection brief. You'll also need sticky notes and coloured dot stickers (if available) alongside some pens for the sticky notes.

2. Sharing and reflecting on actionable learning: As a group, referring back to your notebooks and your River of Life drawing, revisit the various individual ideas for action, one by one, under each learning and reflection brief topic. Group members could share one idea for action, per sticky note, and add it to the relevant whiteboard until all the ideas have been stuck on the whiteboards. Take some time to read and reflect on the notes. Perhaps move them around and group those which seem similar under each topic. Ask questions and discuss as a team what each idea is about, and if you consider it as still relevant, or feasible. Are there perhaps some new ideas you

now want to add? As an example, actions might be around team skills building or using a particular approach or method – that is for your team to decide upon. Aim to spend around 15 minutes discussing each board.

3. Prioritising actions: Once teams have been through all the boards together, each team member should decide their two top priority actions from all of the ideas shown. If you are a group of more than ten people, consider choosing only one priority per person. Use the coloured dots or simply mark an 'x' on the priority sticky notes. Be prepared to explain your choice to the team in the next activity. Consider aspects such as any existing organisational or programmes goals, objectives or plans, relevancy, feasibility, and opportunities. It may be helpful to consider 'small' but concrete actions to start with.

4. Team review: Next, it is suggested that teams aim to agree on one or two overall priority actions. As a team, review the actions which each team member has chosen, and make some observations. For instance, is there general agreement, or are the choices very diverse? Spend time discussing and reflecting. Perhaps there is already clear consensus on what the team should try?

5. Reaching consensus: If needed, discuss further as a team to try and reach a consensus about the 1-2 top priority actions which you could take as a team.

6. Planning the action: Once an agreement about the priority action(s) has been reached, spend time planning the action(s). This should include agreeing what you hope will happen (suggest short-term outcomes) as a result of the action, and which can be later reviewed during a mini-After Action Review. For example, if a team decides they would like to become more reflexive and keep reflective journals, several of the team members would hopefully report that they have been regularly writing in and using reflective journals during the mini-After Action Review. Agree a date in your calendars when you can come back together for a two-hour mini-After Action Review. Depending on the action, it might be helpful to identify a date which is far enough away to give time to implement, but not so far in the future that teams lose momentum. Make a note of the expected change and any plans in your notebooks for reference later.

Part 2: Mini-After Action Review

Purpose: Inclusive team reflection on the planned action(s) – what changed, what didn't change, for whom and why – in order to identify learning and integrate into future plans.

Preparation: For this activity, it can be useful to go back and <u>revisit the video</u> and Brief 4. *<u>After Action Reviews</u>* to remind you of the key aspects of an After Action Review. Plan about two hours for this activity. Teams may also choose to facilitate this session, perhaps by taking turns as facilitator. Each person should bring their notebook.

Suggested methods: If there has been a relatively long interval between the action setting and this mini-After Action Review, for instance a few months, or the planned action was substantial, your team could consider using Rivers of Life to support the reflection process. In this case, you'll need to set up your meeting space accordingly.

For many teams, there may have been a relatively short interval between action setting and reviewing, for instance a few weeks, and the action may have been 'small'.

In this case, it is preferable to use a different method. For example, individual team members could answer the questions below (a,b,c) on sticky notes which are then stuck on the whiteboard or wall under each relevant question. The team could then review the different answers by using a gallery walk type activity before coming back together to discuss questions d-g and share thoughts and perspectives. Take up to 90 minutes for this part of the task.

Firstly, remind yourselves as a team what the precise actions were and what you expected to see change. Remind yourselves that being reflexive is not about judgement or fear of failure, it is about remaining objective, asking why something did or didn't work, and using this to inform a revised strategy as needed. Then, as individuals, use the river/sticky notes to reflect on and answer these questions:

  a. As an individual, what actually happened?

  b. As an individual, why do you think this was?

  c. As an individual, what were the highlights and the challenges? What were the reasons for each?

Then, as a team, discuss:

  d. Did everything go according to plan or were there deviations? What can we learn about why the deviations happened?

  e. The highlights and the challenges? How did different team members experience these?

  f. What can we learn as a team from this?

  g. What does the learning tell us about the specific steps we should take next?

Once the team has finished discussing, spend the remaining time – about 30 mins – discussing what the next actions will be. As with the first plan, be clear about what your team hopes to see happen or change. As a team, note if and how the revised steps you discussed today differs from the original plans, and how the learning has fed into these revised plans.

At this point, you may agree as a team that you'd like to come back together once more to undertake another mini-After Action Review at suitable date to review progress. Additionally, some teams or organisations might be seeking to go further, for instance, by working to institutionalise some or all of this approach within their organisational programme guidance. Where this is the case, the reflection sessions for each brief, alongside the final team action setting and mini-After Action Review can help orient and guide teams and organisations to undertake this process.

IDS would love to hear from anyone who has used this resource. Please get in touch here (**s.reddin@ids.ac.uk**) if you'd like to share some feedback, or if you have questions regarding the resource.

This is an extract from the learning and reflection resource for practitioners: Lucy Hillier (2024). *People-driven solutions: An introduction to facilitating deep participation for systemic change through Systemic Action Research programming*. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies. DOI: **10.19088/CLARISSA.2024.040** The full resource can be accessed via the DOI link provided and on **participatorymethods.org** and **Child Hub.**

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