



# Action Learning for Federal Agencies

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## How to Make Action Learning Work for You

# Reg Revans



“For any organisation or business to survive, the rate of learning must be at least equal to the rate of change.”

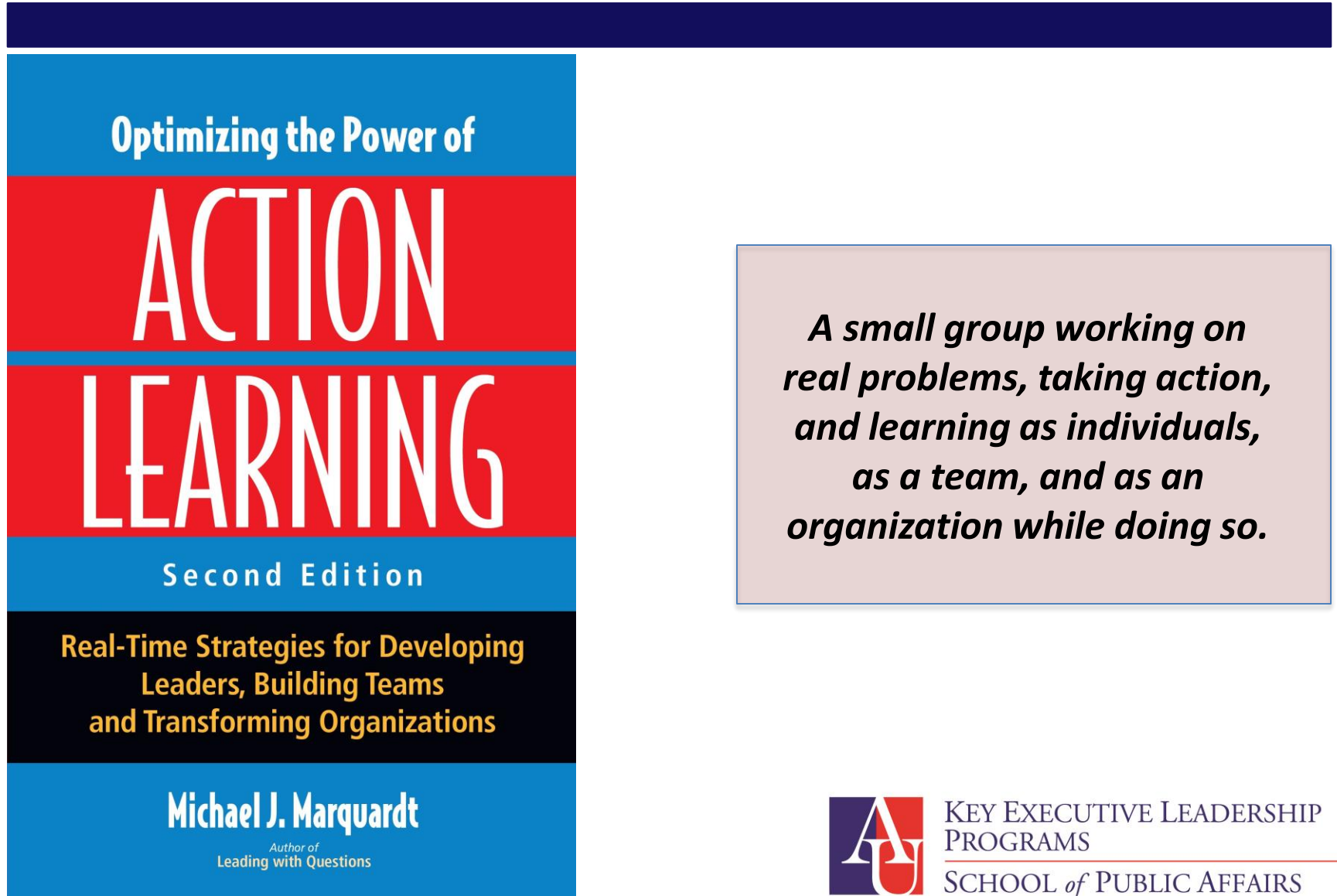
Reg Revans



KEY EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP  
PROGRAMS

SCHOOL of PUBLIC AFFAIRS

# Action Learning



*A small group working on real problems, taking action, and learning as individuals, as a team, and as an organization while doing so.*



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# Action vs. Org learning

## Action Learning

- Current real issues
- Group-based
- Learning about self and others
- Questions and programmed knowledge
- Results-based
- Higher risk
- Active

## Traditional Learning

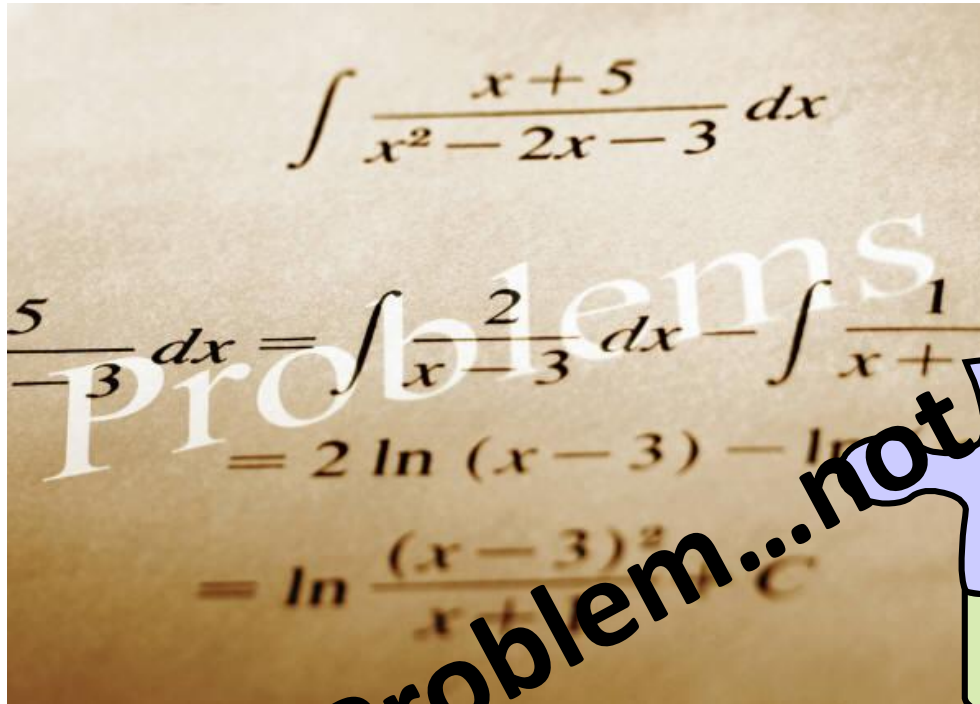
- Historic examples
- Individual-focused
- Learning about others
- Programmed knowledge
- Input-based
- Low risk
- passive

# What A/L does

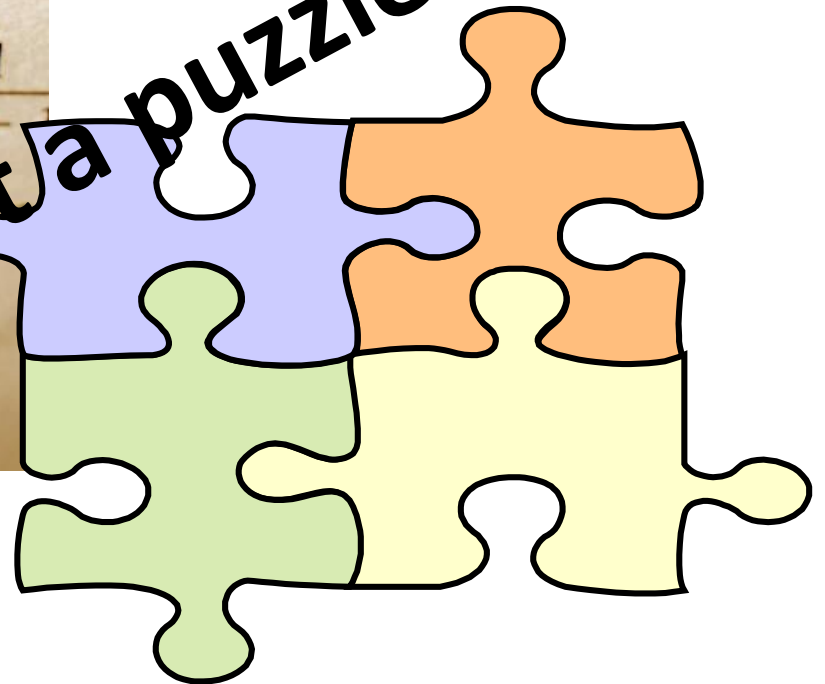
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- ✓ Leadership Development
- ✓ Building Teams
- ✓ Develop Critical Skills
- ✓ Systems Thinking
- ✓ Organizational Change and Learning
- ✓ Culture Change
- ✓ Problem Solving...the real problem
- ✓ Innovation

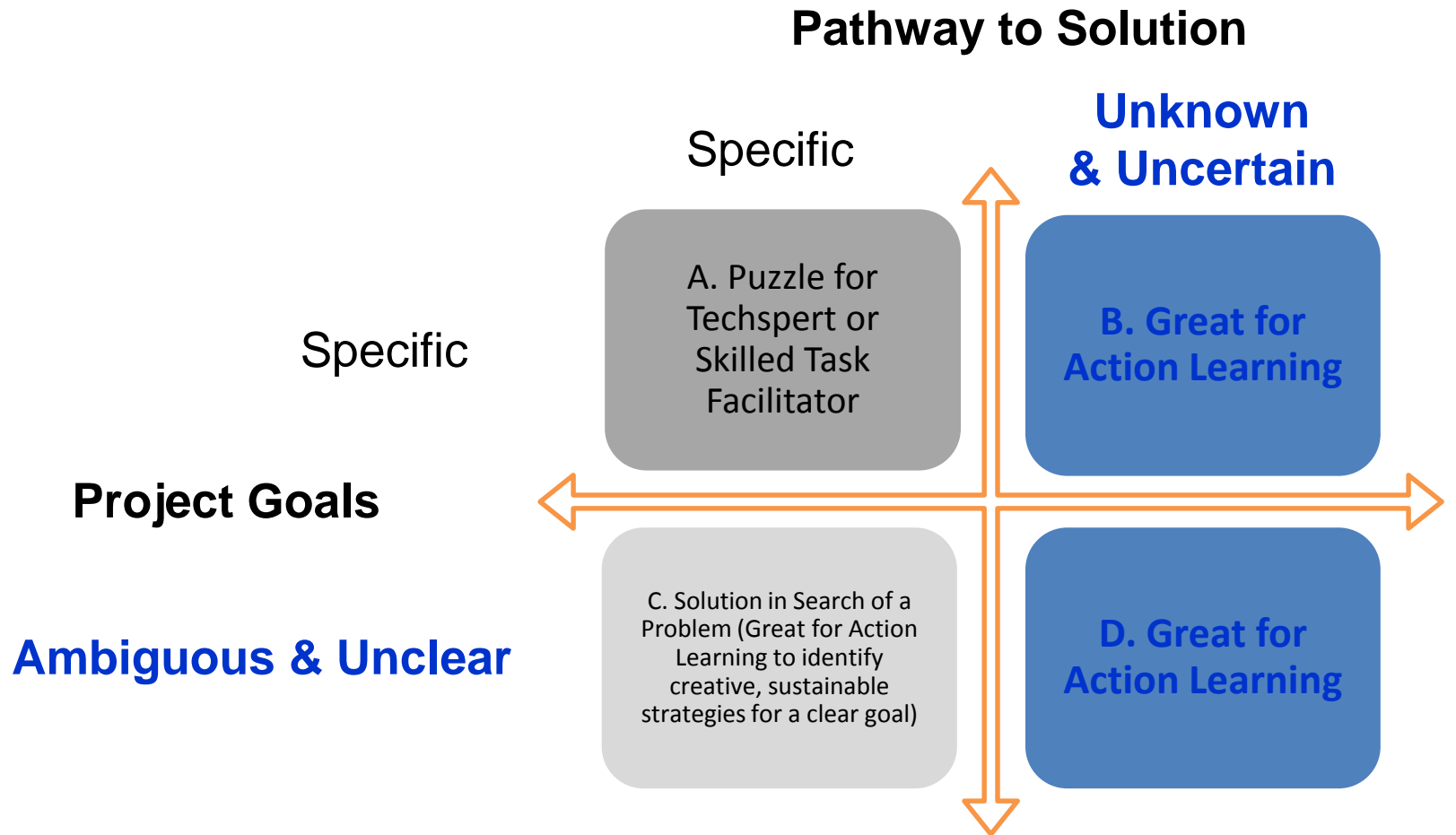
# When to use AI?



**Problem...not a puzzle**



# When to use A/L



# White Water

- Full of shocks and surprises
- Produce novel predicaments with no single correct solutions
- Feature wicked problems that are messy, ill-defined, unpredictable and difficult to solve
- Expensive
- Tend to recur

Source: Peter Vaill



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# Types of problems

- Designing leadership development programs
- Improving information technology systems
- Improving customer service
- Resolving conflict between departments
- Developing a new performance appraisal system
- Establishing work schedules
- Introducing new products
- Surviving difficult economic environment
- Reinvigorating fatigued contributors/donors

# Example questions

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What role can the private sector play in the communities we serve?

How do we assure a pool of people who are ready for leadership positions in accordance with our needs for future growth?

What are we not currently providing our customers that would not only meet their needs, but ensure our relevance?

# A/L Components



# Group / Team

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- Diverse backgrounds?
- 4-8 members?
- From inside and outside the organization?
- Individuals familiar and unfamiliar with the problem and the context?
- Willingness to commit?
- Sense of ownership of the problem?
- Types, dates, frequency of meetings?



# For the Sponsor

*As a high-level leader / executive outside the team, you are in a unique position to lend support through resources, time, and commitments. Make sure you and the Learning Coach are on the same wavelength. And, by the way, you needn't provide the answer. It would be wrong anyway. Nothing personal.*



- Role model for behaviors sought
- Create supportive, open environment
- Expect participants to grow personally
- Contract with the Learning Coach

# For the Presenter

*You have the floor! Your job is to describe the problem and why it's important to you. Be clear about the result or outcome you're seeking.*



- Focus on what help you need from the team
- Listen closely to team questions, assumptions, and reframes
- Reflect and answer / reflect and consider later
- Describe the action plan you intend to take

# For the Participants

*Congratulations! Your colleague clearly values your ability to contribute to the solving of this ill-structured problem that is causing your agency heartburn. Help problem owner reflect on and think about the problem they're presenting. Immediate solutions, advice, and opinion is not your job man!*

Openness to Learning

Personal commitment to the success of  
the team

Support team members

# The Coach

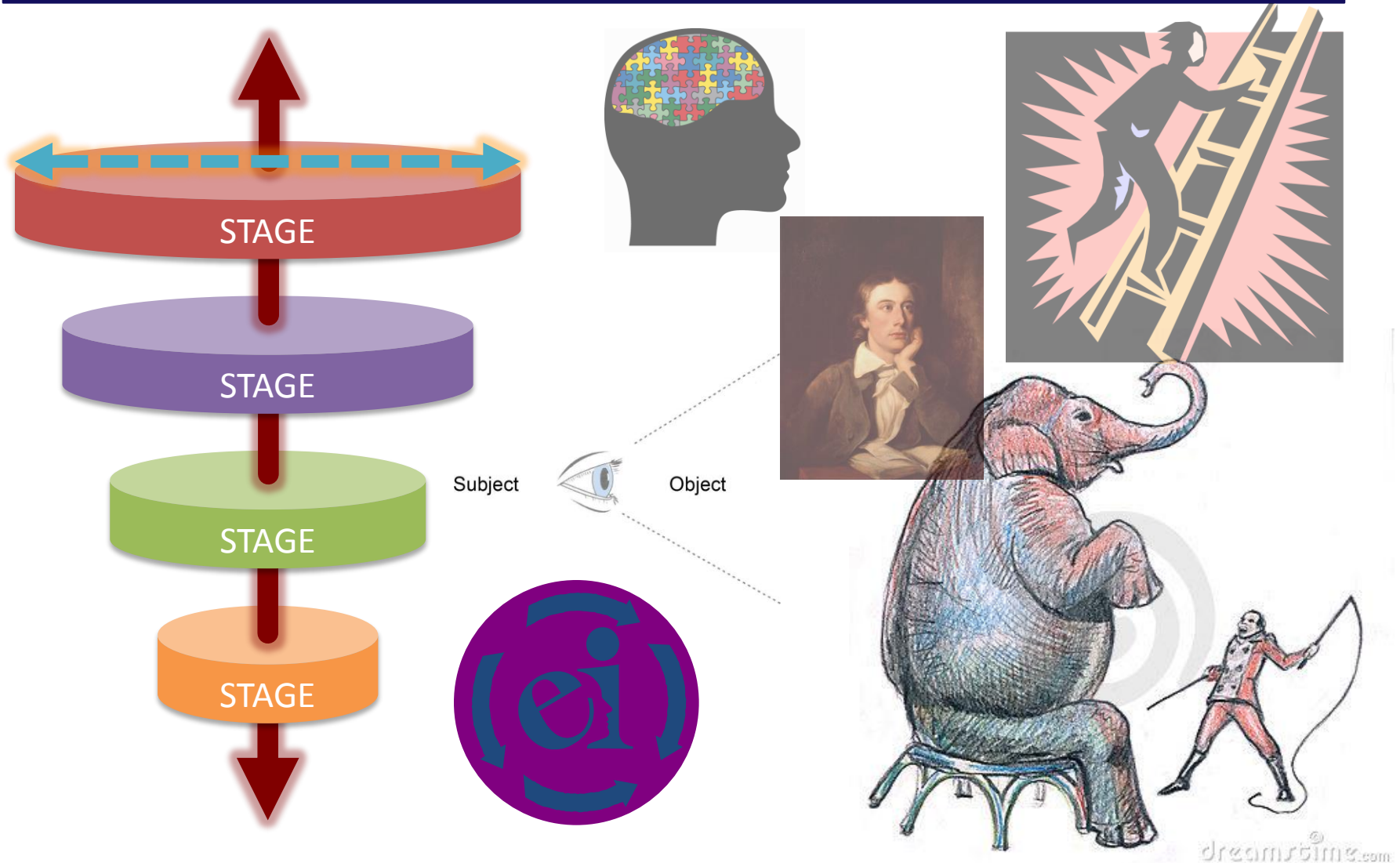
*Not everyone uses, but when they do, you will be busy! You act as an intervener, reflector, trainer, and coach. Observe closely!*

- Help team balance task and learning
- Challenge the team
- Say nothing
- Help team reflect
- Help transfer learning to the job





# The Questioning/Reflection



# Groundrules

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***1 - Statements should be made only in response to questions.***

***2 – Questions can be asked by anyone to anyone.***

***3 - The AL Coach has the power to intervene to improve the performance and learning of the group.***



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# The Stages

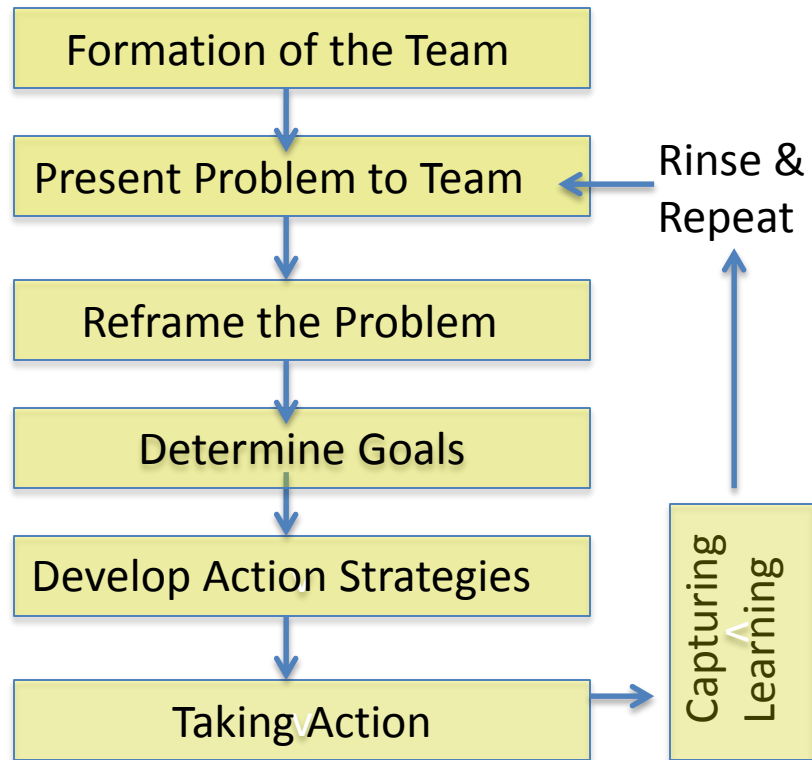
## The Variables

1. Real problem, ill-structured
2. Group not to exceed 5-7 people
3. Reflective questioning & listening
4. Commitment & accountability for action
5. Learning path, not judging
6. Action learning coach

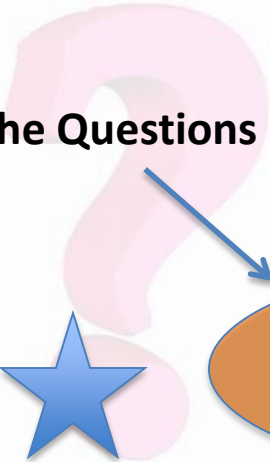
## The Rules

1. Process stops when the Action Learning Coach intervenes
2. You can ask questions to anyone
3. Everyone plays a role
4. Debrief is required

## The Stages



## The Questions



Objective	Reflective
Interpretive	Clarifying
Explorative	Decisional