



Action Learning as a Leadership Tool

Leadership 201

U.S. Department of the Interior

U.S. Geological Survey

Plan for the Next 60 Minutes

- What is Action Learning?
- How is it being used in 201?
- How is this all going to work this week?
- What does this all of this mean for today?
 - Review materials
 - Identify questions to ask the ELT champion at 4:15 today

What is Action Learning?

Simply described, action learning is both a *process* and a *powerful program* that involves a small group of people *solving real problems* while at the same time focusing on *what* they are learning and *how* their learning can benefit each group member and the organization as a whole.

Michael Marquardt

Action Learning in Action

Why Action Learning & Leadership?

Leadership means *influencing* the community *to face its problems*.

Ronald Heifetz

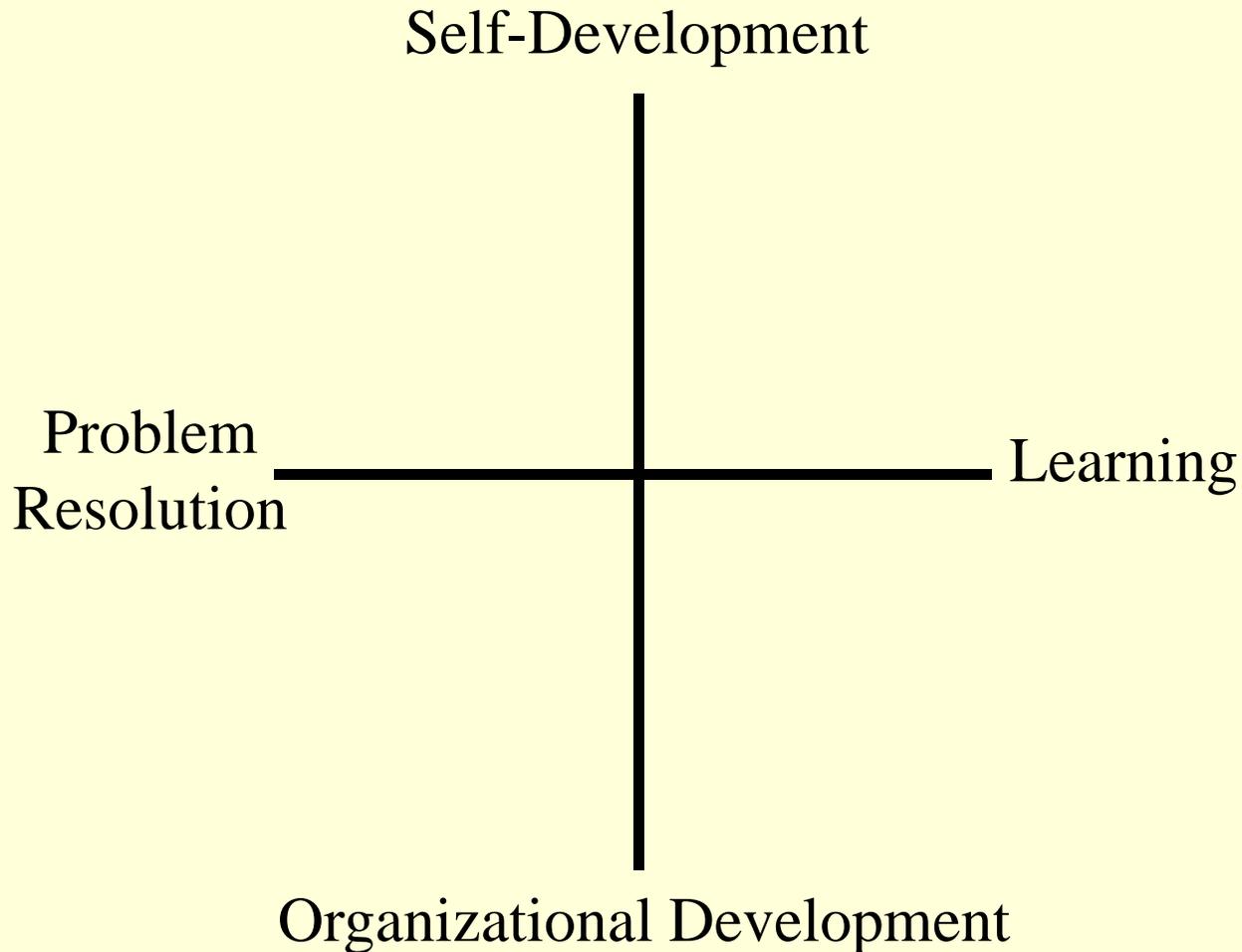
Leadership Without Easy Answers

Action learning develops leaders who have “the *capacity to find new and better paths* through the jungle, rather than be the first one down a path that already exists.”

Ann Brooks in the *Performance*

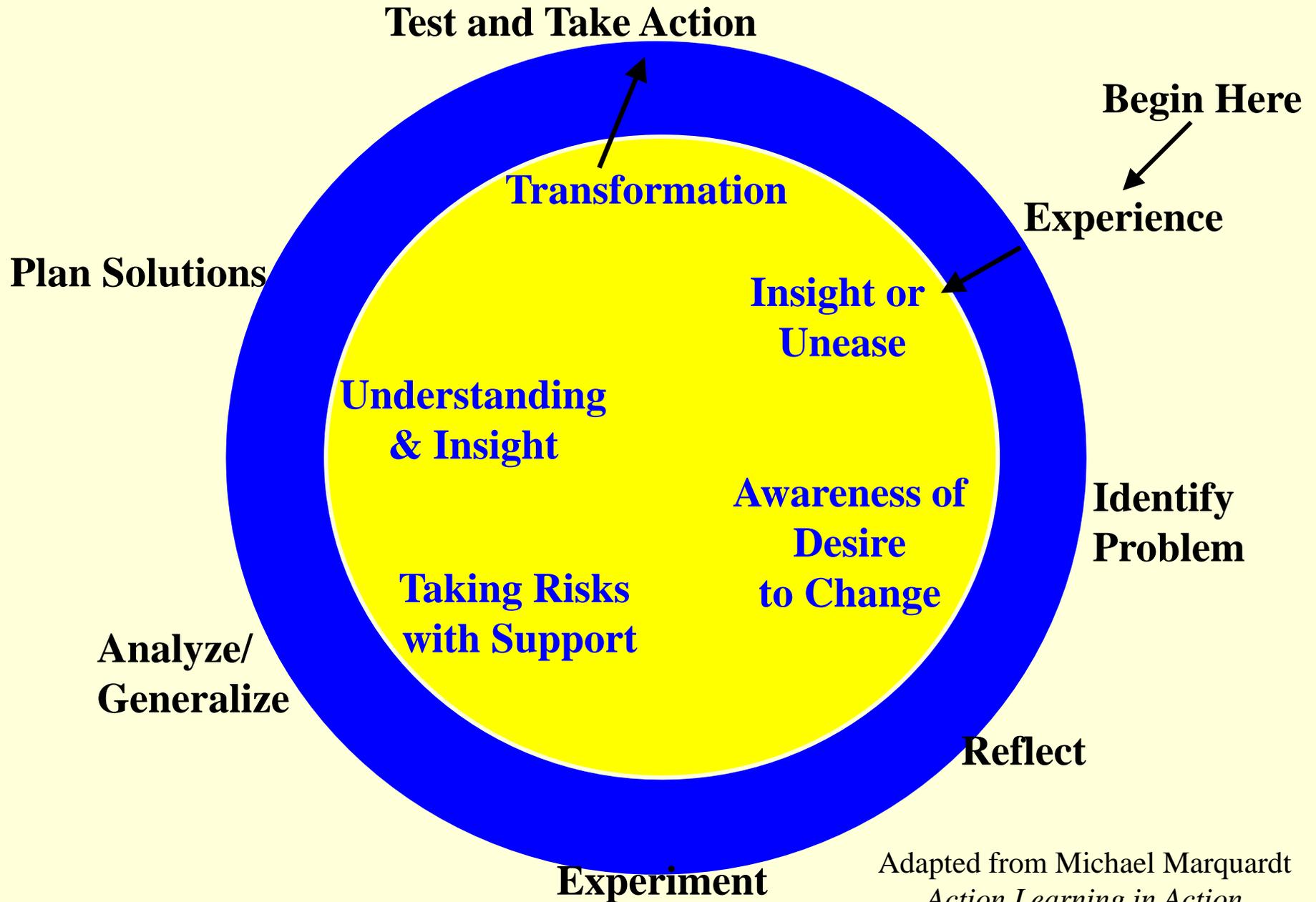
Improvement Quarterly, 1998

The Domain of Action Learning



Michael Marquardt, *Action Learning in Action*

The Outer & Inner Learning Circles



Adapted from Michael Marquardt
Action Learning in Action

Elements of this Experience

An Action Learning Scenario

- A problem – *not a puzzle* – to be solved
- An opportunity to be capitalized on
- A dilemma to manage – *dilemmas can't be solved*

The scenario is real, relevant and important.

The process provides learning opportunities for here and beyond.

Elements of this Experience

The Action Learning Team

A diverse group of people with leadership potential and equal commitment to the team's success

Hail the “**Pizza Man**”!

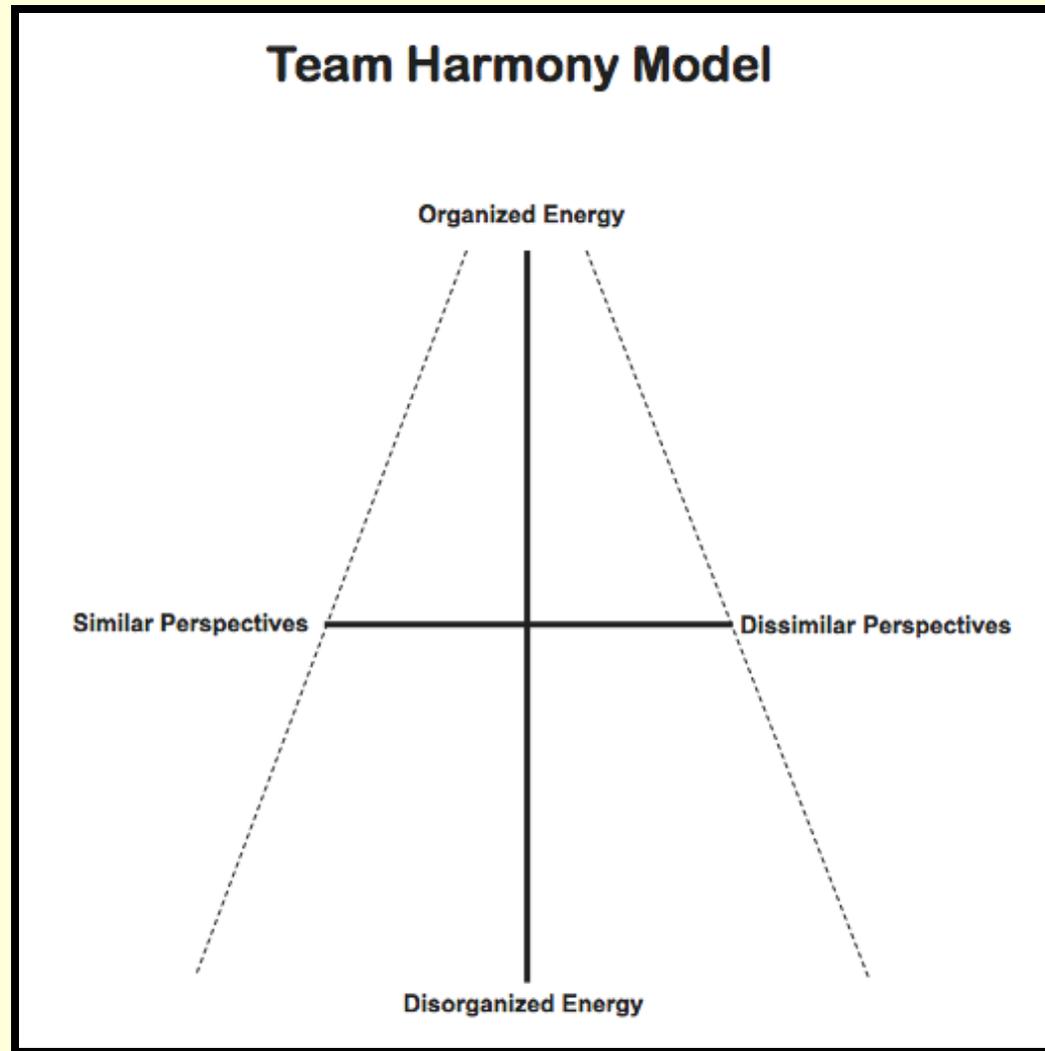
The team is responsible for:

- Defining and reframing problem, issue, opportunity
- Determining the *leadership challenge or question*
- Identifying creative and innovative solutions
- Presenting ideas and learnings to the class and the champion

Elements of this Experience

Team Roles

- **Team:** Responsible for deliverable and the team's learning.
- **Facilitator:** Responsible for insuring that the processes are properly run and that each team member has a voice in the outcome.
- **Recorder:** Responsible for keeping a written record of the team activities and developing the final report.



HPT - assimilate differences in perspectives into their thinking

Elements of this Experience

The Champion and Sponsor

- Understands the nature of the problem and its importance to the USGS
- Provides background information about the problem
- Answers questions raised by the Action Learning Team
- Listens to team solutions/ideas
- Provides feedback to the team on its solutions/ideas

Elements of this Experience

The Coach

Helps team reflect on

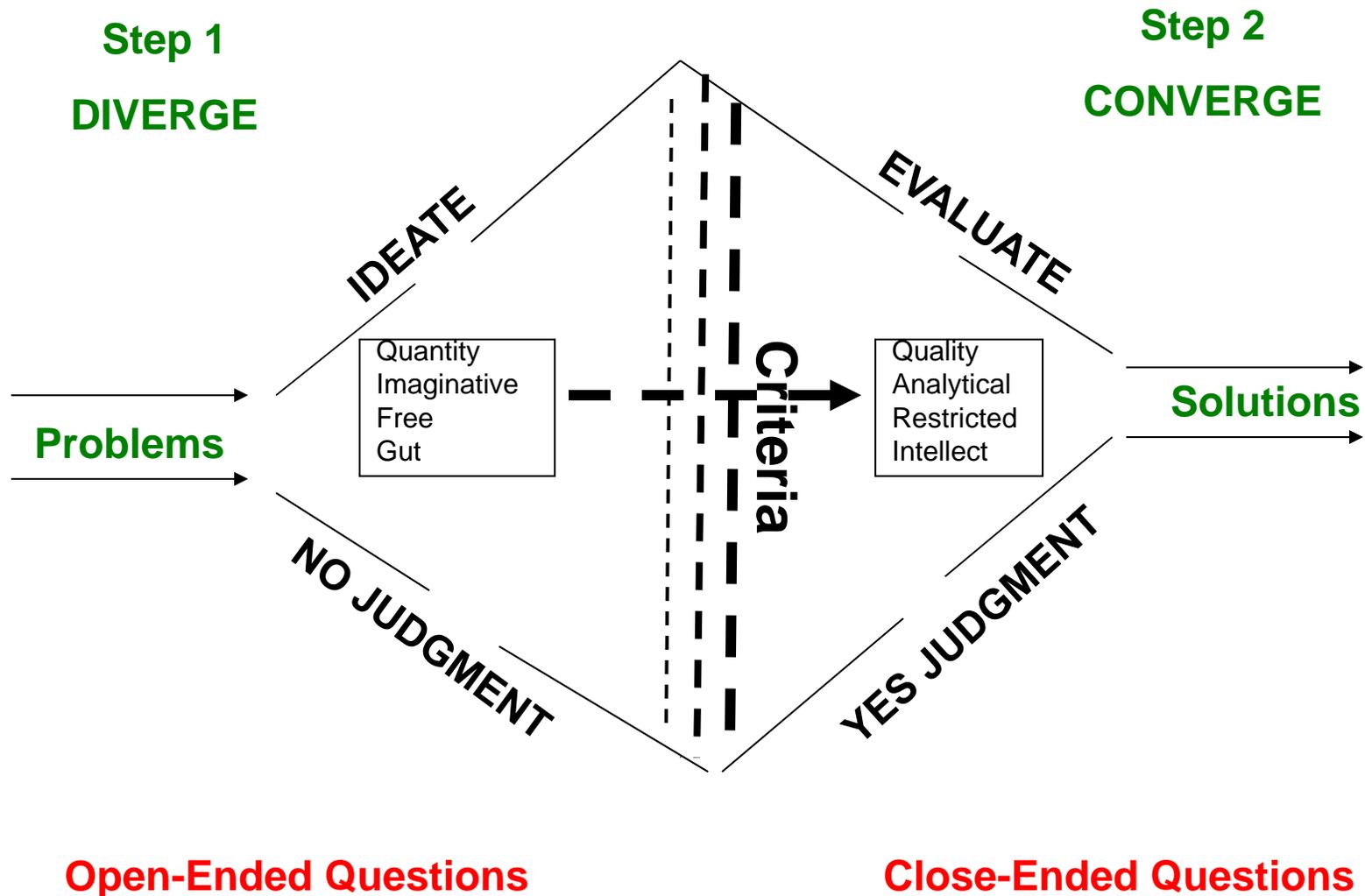
- What they are learning
- How they are solving problems
- How they are working together

Provides structure for

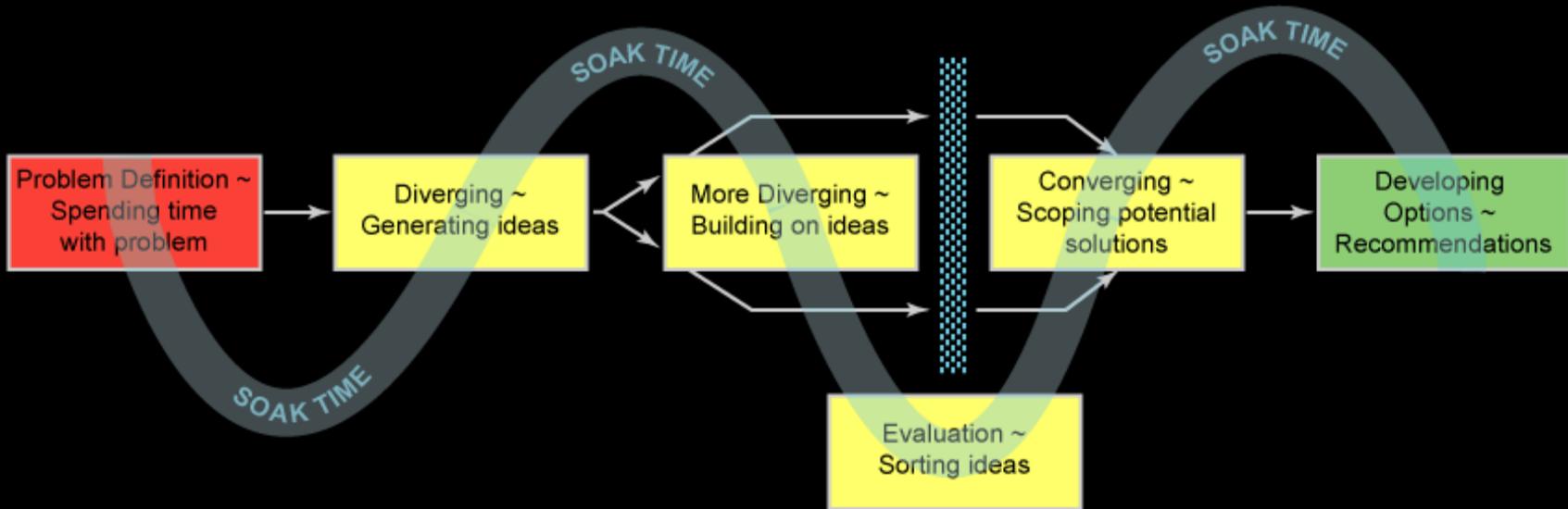
- Defining problem
- Identifying solutions
- Using creativity tools and techniques

Is not involved in content!

Creativity & Judgment in the Problem Solving Process*



CREATIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING MODEL



Problem Solving Methodologies

<u>Analytic Approach</u>	<u>Creative Approach</u>
1) Define problem or issue	Ask questions to gather information
2) Investigate	Apply creative techniques
3) Isolate causes & variables	Conclusions & redefine issues
4) Propose solutions	Propose solutions
5) Experiment with solutions	Apply creative techniques
6) Modify conclusions	Reach new conclusions
7) Refine solutions	Experiment w/new solutions
8) Draw conclusions & report	Modify solutions
9)	Try new solutions
10)	Draw conclusions & report

Source: William Rothwell, *The Action Learning Guidebook*

Questions: Ultimate Leadership Tool

*Managers focus on getting right answers.
Leaders focus on getting to the right question.**

- “Dumb” questions can be powerful.
- Questions help avoid “group think.” Help us test assumptions and challenge the status quo

**Leading with Questions by Michael Marquardt*

He who asks
is a fool for five minutes
but he who does not ask
remains a fool forever.

Chinese proverb

Elements of this Experience

You!

- What leadership skill or competency do you want to develop?
Based on: experiences from 101 to today, 360 feedback, what you already know about yourself...
- Share this with your team – use the handout to select or write in a new one
- Practice and monitor yourself and your team members – your coach will remind you

How well are you modeling the skill you are trying to improve?

Expected Action Learning Outcomes

Learn to lead by demonstrating new ways of processing information using creativity tools and techniques.

Presentation to ELT Champions

- **Demonstrate your team's:**
 - Use of good/great questions.
 - Assessment of the situation - what is the problem definition?
 - Experimentation with creative ideas.
 - Recommendations for addressing this issue
- **Requirements**
 - Participation of all team members
 - Electronic product as a take away for the ELT champion
 - Examples of process in presentation

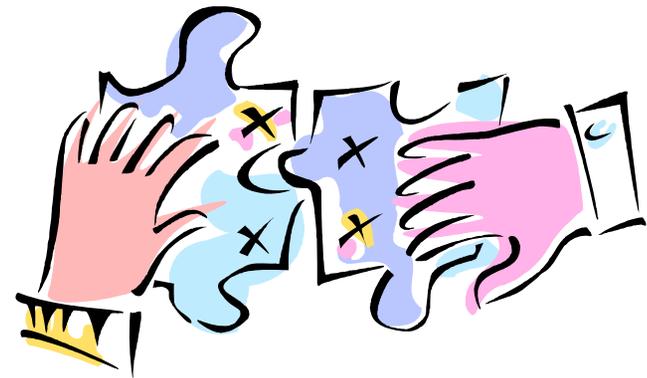
Elements of this Experience

Your Presentation

- The team's assessment of the situation
- Two or more creative ideas for resolution
- Final recommendations for the champion/sponsor to consider in addressing the issue
- Participation of all team members
- Hard and electronic copies of presentation
- Examples of process in presentation
- Demonstrate new ways of processing information using creativity tools

Worksheet – Making the Connections

- During each module use the *Making the Connections* worksheet to reflect on how you process information
- Capture how the module's content can be used to help the team find new solutions



Senior Manager Champion Worksheet

No information/ knowledge

Questions you would like to ask

Worksheet - Understanding the Influencers of Your Action Learning Topic

- Major concerns to be addressed
- Key people whose concerns need to be addressed and their concerns
- Based on above responses, determine kinds of information and recommendations needed to address Champion's expectations

Team Time

- Monday 4:15 – 5:30 meet with champions – ask questions and strategize
- Tuesday 9:45 – 3:30 work intermittently as part of creativity exercises
- Wednesday 1:00 – 2:00 apply storytelling
4:00 – 5:30 creativity & application
- Thursday 8:00 – 9:30 creativity & application
1:00 – 4:15 creativity & application
9:30 p.m. – Lights Out!
- Friday 8:00 – 9:45 presentations to champions
10:00 – 10:30 debrief with champions

Action Learning Themes

A New Vision for Laboratories in the Water Mission Area

- Champion: Bill Werkheiser
- Sponsor: Jerad Bales

Strengthening the Bonds between USGS Diversity Sub-Councils and USGS Employees

- Champion: Leslie Holland Bartels
- Sponsor: Alesia Pierre-Louis

Sustainability, Science and the USGS

- Champion: Marcia McNutt
- Sponsors: Ione Taylor, Carl Shapiro, Sally Brady

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“According to the charts, it should be all clear sailing after this.”

“

“According to the charts, it should be all clear sailing after this.”

The word "Creativity" is rendered in a 3D, light blue font. The letter 'C' has a white fedora hat on top. The letter 'i' has a red heart shape inside. The letter 'v' has a red heart shape inside. The letter 't' has a yellow string tied around its stem. The letter 'y' has a green grass tuft at its base. Above the word, a string of colorful beads (yellow, red, green, blue, purple) is draped in an arch. The word is reflected on the dark blue background.

Creativity

**Relax, learn, stay open to new
ideas
and have FUN!!**