



DYNAMIC LEARNING AGENDA

Originally developed by: *Reflexive Monitoring in Action*¹

OBJECTIVE

Connect long-term aims and concrete perspectives

TARGET AUDIENCE

Project monitors or managers

TIME NEEDED

Recurring: one hour preparation, one hour sessions

LIST OF MATERIALS

DLA document
Space to meet

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QUICK OVERVIEW

The Dynamic Learning Agenda (DLA) provides a structured approach to ensure alignment between long-term project goals and concrete actions by capturing challenges as "learning questions." These questions evolve over time, helping teams track, address, and adapt to complex, changing dynamics. Designed for project managers and monitors, the DLA promotes reflective learning and adaptability, making it a valuable tool for projects focused on system innovation.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Formulate learning questions that address system innovation needs, translating project challenges into questions that drive progress.
- Use the DLA in meetings to structure and prioritize challenges, transforming project obstacles into actionable insights and solutions.
- Engage in ongoing reflection by regularly updating and refining the DLA, keeping actions oriented toward innovation goals.
- Build collective ownership of the DLA, integrating it into the project's identity and ensuring it remains a living, collaborative tool across the team.



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¹ Reflexive Monitoring in Action – A guide for monitoring system innovation projects (van Mierlo et al, 2010).

Step-by-step process

Before you start – learning questions

The DLA allows for ensuring that long-term project aims and concrete actions are aligned, by formulating the challenges that arise, recording them, and keeping track of them. Therefore, this tool is useful to apply during the implementation of a project. The challenges are outlined in a specific format – as **learning questions**. Learning questions should be about addressing system innovation needs, and it's the responsibility of the project manager to frame them in that way.

What could the application of learning questions look like? Here's an example from the RMA Guide:

Eric is working on a system innovation project in sustainable agriculture. At one of the project meetings, he cries out, "But the farmers aren't cooperating! All they want are increases in scale!" This situation ends up on the dynamic learning agenda in the form of a question: "How can I ensure that the farmers cooperate?" Those present at the meeting note that this formulation gives too little insight into possible solutions. Following on from that, the monitor facilitates a dialogue in which the situation is clarified using questions such as "Why do farmers want increases in scale?" and "What benefits will a farmer get from this project?" Finally a number of specific questions are placed on the learning agenda, such as "How can we link the goals of this project to farmers' concerns?" This has changed the unwillingness of the farmers that Eric experienced from an external system characteristic into a point of leverage for the project to help shape the interaction between the project and the farmers. Eric's frustrated outburst evolves into a second-order learning question: a question that reflects on your own framework and actions.

Learning questions on the Dynamic Learning Agenda vary with time – some get addressed, some aren't relevant anymore and get deleted, some are reformulated, and new questions are added. This is the point of the DLA. Rather than being a permanent list, it's a tool that keeps you focused on keeping your actions oriented on system innovation.

Table 1 Evolution of Learning questions in a DLA

<u>DLA (First session)</u>		<u>DLA (Second session)</u>		<u>DLA (Third session)</u>
Learning question A		Learning question B		Learning question B
Learning question B	→	Learning question C	→	Learning question E
Learning question C		Learning question D		Learning question F

First step - Setting up the initial learning agenda

As a project manager or observer, you can use project meetings, events, communications to listen to different project stakeholders and see where they experience hindrances, struggles and challenges. Identify the aspects of their comments that can be meaningful from the system innovation point of view. Express these aspects as second-order learning questions; this is important because system change also requires changes in your own framework and actions. You can also formulate the questions together with the project participants by probing further to uncover the nature of the situation. Combine your own knowledge of system innovation here with sensitivity for the project participants' point of view. The result of this first step is an initial version of the dynamic learning agenda.

You can use the template attached to this tool to put your learning questions in a useful format.

Second step – making the Dynamic Learning Agenda work for you

Make use of the agenda as an aid during project meetings. A whole pile of statements, actions, plans, ideas and annoyances will be mentioned in meetings such as these. The dynamic learning agenda can help structure and order this 'clutter' using second-order learning questions. This de-cluttering can happen via intervening questions at meetings: how do the various struggles and comments of the participants relate to the system innovation aims of the project? The process of juxtaposing one on top of the other will allow for a creation of a new version of the learning agenda. As shown in Table 1, some questions are persistent and will remain on the agenda. Provisional answers will be formulated for others, often phrased in terms of activities. Yet other questions will disappear from the agenda because merely stating the question provides enough insight for effective action to be taken.

Third step – Deep dives on persistent learning questions

If a question remains on the agenda for a longer period, then it is worthwhile making an effort with the project team to consider this persistent question thoroughly. The greater depth of understanding that this results in may lead to various large or small interventions. It can also result in a meeting of the people and organisations concerned, at which the question is tackled. In the role of monitor, you are also able to bring in new expertise by doing research yourself and giving a presentation about it, or by calling in an external expert.

Fourth step – Making the Dynamic Learning Agenda a part of the project identity

Dynamic learning agenda should be discussed regularly by the project team. It should also be reflected on. Have the learning questions and resulting interventions achieved results? Can some questions be taken off the agenda? Do new questions have to be added? This process produces a new version of the agenda each time. Do keep the old version, because it describes

the results and the lessons. Those are also useful for accountability purposes and for other system innovation projects. You should therefore always put a new date on the agenda.

Responsibilities around the DLA should also be distributed, not dependent on one person. This way, it's ensured that the DLA becomes a way of doing things, and won't go away if a single person leaves the project. This means the roles should be circulated, and multiple people should be aware of ways to access old versions of the DLAs.