

SALT: a way of working

September 2017

I. Introduction

All local communities have capacity – and that capacity can be strengthened. The people themselves can address division, stigma and discrimination. They themselves can deal with huge conflict issues like HIV, AIDS, Ebola and civil war – and lesser issues too. They do that by working from their own human strengths – those of caring, belonging, changing, and hoping.

What we outsiders can usefully do is to engage in the profoundly effective and efficient practice of Human Capacity Development for Response (HCR) – see www.affirmfacilitators.org.

The core activity of HCR is SALT. SALT's principles and practices are the focus of this document.

Try it!

After gaining the general idea of SALT you can go and try it. Ultimately the SALT methodology is learned by doing it! We encourage you to start practising SALT now.

You should practise, however, within a cycle of action-reflection. That way you're always more likely to do your best. No matter how well you start you will improve!

Us and them

SALT practice goes beyond the conception of 'us helping them'. When we believe that it's we who have the answers and the resources then we are not helping. When it's more comfortable to assume 'them and us' then we are reinforcing the problem.

Instead, through allowing ourselves to change and to come alongside others, we shift from being part of the problem to part of the solution.

Community and neighbourhood

'Community' is a word with broad connotations. For the purposes of SALT, the functional geographic definition of neighbourhood is most useful, and most commonly used. It links conversations in homes with the neighbourhoods where they are found.

A Christian perspective

SALT is for everyone. It is well-founded and it has certainly been applied with great success by people with a range of world views or beliefs. For Christians, the belief that God is present with all, in all situations, as shown through Jesus, undergirds the strengths-based foundation of SALT practice.

Axiomatic to SALT is the attitude and practice of respect. That means that all of us stay sensitive to the communities and neighbourhoods that we visit. We strive to draw out the best in people and avoid imposing. Faith is a potent force, and is personal, and intimate, so we should carefully watch for and acknowledge personal faith in God by others.

The underlying approach of SALT is faith-inspired. We've found that SALT works best of all when we engage in it from within the practice of acknowledging the presence of a loving God, with whom we can connect through prayer.

About this document

SALT is based on the conception of learning from action and experience that are based on home and neighbourhood. It traces back to 1986 when profoundly effective actions were observed in a local village in Zambia. Since that time various parties have contributed to SALT descriptions and practices. The present document acknowledges that cumulative work. It reflects some small updates and a change of presentation rather than of practice.

The document is structured as follows:

- SALT methodology – what is it?
- Action reflection cycle
- Questions to ask
- Skills or disciplines
- Bringing it together

Resources

Resources and further information about Human Capacity Development for Response (HCR) are available at www.affirmfacilitators.org.

Insights and inspiration may be gained from viewing the TOGETHER film: www.affirmfacilitators.org/together.

The practice of facilitation is well-described in a document published by Forest Fire Management Victoria: [*Guiding principles – facilitating learning, understanding and change through relationships*](#).

For more SALT background and experience see *The Constellation for Community Life Competence* (www.communitylifecompetence.org).

II. SALT methodology: what is it?

SALT is a way of working:

- It is a way of thinking and of relating ourselves to a situation.
- It involves us – as a team – connecting, learning and enlivening response.
- That response occurs in our neighbours and community, in us and in our organisations.

SALT is represented below as a schematic diagram. It shows us as:

- leaving our centres
- going in teams to families and homes – this is a 'SALT visit'
- recognising that those families and homes are part of neighbourhood and wider community
- practising SALT core activities
- returning to our centres and organisations
- stimulating and supporting communities in themselves taking SALT to their neighbours.



SALT visits

A 'SALT visit' contains:

- Invitation or opportunity to visit, in teams of 2-3 people, with each team involving a 'bridge' person who will link the team to the situation. The bridge person is someone who is known in the situation.
- Preparation to visit. This involves hearing something of the context, reviewing the approach and praying together for the conversations to open.
- A visit. The team introduces itself as people who are there to learn. The team members introduce themselves as a person, not by role or title.
- Reflection as a team after the visit. The reflection is about what was learned, what might be next steps, and how the team could practise SALT better.

SALT should normally happen as a series of visits, not just one. Besides anything else relationships are important. That means going back.

SALT – what it stands for

SALT is an easy way of remembering four letters and the ideas each of them represents. SALT also alludes to the powerful characteristic of salt – that a small amount (such as in food) has a big effect.

The letters of SALT help us to recall and focus on ideas as follows:

- **S** is for Support, Stimulate and Story
- **A** is for Appreciate and Analyse
- **L** is for Listen, Learn, and Link
- **T** is for Transfer and Team

SALT foundational attitudes

Primary amongst the SALT ideas are three foundational attitudes – those of Appreciation, Learning and Support:

Appreciate The foundational attitude is **APPRECIATION**. The team strives to appreciate what people in a family and neighbourhood are already doing, their lives and their story. As a team enters a community the first attitude is not one of looking for all the problems and weaknesses, but rather one of appreciating what is working.

Learn The second foundational attitude is **LEARNING**. The team is visiting to learn and to understand the strengths of people to manage their own lives. This involves listening with appreciation.

Support The third foundation is **SUPPORT**. Support takes place not by bringing material or technical things but instead by

encouraging people. As the visiting team appreciates and learns more about the strengths revealed in a story, it is possible to encourage people by saying aloud the strength we see in them. Often people are not aware of their own strength – this is true for all of us!

A team develops these foundations by observation and conversation. Conversation focuses on the hopes and concerns of people and the way in which they already work together on those hopes and concerns. The team works to identify and name strengths.

SALT practices

The other SALT ideas are practices:

Stimulate Specific themes emerge through the conversations. The team can **STIMULATE** reflection by community members on the connections between their concerns and the major issues affecting the community. The team **LISTEN** carefully to the **STORY, ANALYSE** what is heard, and ask questions to encourage community members to **ANALYSE** as well. For example, if a concern is expressed about young people being 'careless', it is possible to ask questions to explore how that is connected to issues such as risk.

Here it is important for the **TEAM to LEARN**, to **SUPPORT** each other, to ask questions about the connections, and not to point out the team's thinking or attempt to 'enlighten' about the connections as the team sees them. The responses must be kept in the hands of the community and not taken over by 'knowledgeable' persons.

Analyse The team will continually **ANALYSE** and **STIMULATE** analysis as people and groups within a community gradually open discussion and acknowledge underlying roots of significant issues. Discussion of this kind can lead to reflection on what the community itself can do in response.

Link The **LINK** function will be expressed when the team begins to ask themselves the question: 'who is not in this discussion?' For example, if discussion happens mainly with elders in a first visit, the team will find a way to meet youth. If discussion happens with the 'upright' citizens of a place, the team can seek a way to talk to 'troublemakers'. If men are the first to discuss, then the

team will want to discuss with women. This does not happen by criticising those who are already active, but by always including others. And as discussion opens with different people in a community, the team will help to create opportunities to **LINK** the different conversations together.

Team

TEAM itself is an attitude that can be developed with practice. Team members learn to think together, see connections, analyse and respond with increasing effectiveness.

The concept of team is not intended to be bounded or restricted to the people who are visiting. The composition of teams is inclusive. Over time a key aim is that team participation broadens and local people become local team. This is an important aspect of **TRANSFER**.

The team experience is joyful. Throughout the process teams that are inspired by faith will celebrate the presence of God and be immersed in prayer.

Transfer

TRANSFER is a function of the team members – the team members take something back to their own communities and organisations and apply the approach there. **TRANSFER** also happens when community members link to others outside their own neighbourhood, and influence change in other places. For example, as stigma is reduced in one neighbourhood, the idea that it is possible to live well with an issue will be shared to other places, through extended family links, and sometimes more systematically as well. The SALT team can encourage **TRANSFER** from one community area to another.

III. Action-reflection cycle

The team should prepare. As it prepares it should remember the meaning of SALT and the main topics of discussion. Those main topics are:

- **Strengths**
- **Concerns**
- **Hopes**
- **Ways of working:** how do the family and community now respond to the concerns and hopes mentioned? How could they respond?

During each SALT visit the team members strive to help each other to follow the SALT approach.

After a SALT visit it is very important that the team immediately (before going home) discuss what they have learned from the experience, and how they could do better as a SALT team. That is called reflection. The following questions are useful:

- What did we Learn – about strengths, concerns and hopes – and about ways of working that the family or neighbourhood uses to address those concerns and hopes?
- How well did we work as a Team?
- How did we experience the presence of God in the process?
- What are the next steps?

IV. Questions and activities

In preparing for visits the members of a SALT team orient themselves by engaging with some core questions, steps and activities. Initially the process is just informal but over time it may be steered to become a more intentional group activity.

SALT teams should strive for group activities to be inclusive and to involve a diversity of perspectives. Bringing together conflicting perspectives is particularly valuable and will demand the team's best efforts in preparation and facilitation. The emphasis is on learning – not on making decisions or taking actions. Group activities may involve using simple devices such as flip-charts – whatever fits well in the local context.

Three core questions are listed below, together with some activities to help explore them:

- Identity: who are we?
- Transferable concepts (or strengths): what do we have in common?
- Story: what's your story?

Core question 1: Identity – who am I?

Ask the participants to answer the question 'who am I?' without mentioning position, qualification, role in a job, or title.

Begin with the question exactly as stated above. Then, when working with the same group over time, adapt the question so it varies but follows the same idea.

These are the steps to follow:

- Form a small group of three people – those who are not known well to you. Stay standing. It will be a three-minute exercise.
- Discuss the core question – make sure each person speaks.
- Debrief in the large group – ask a person from each small group to say what they heard from their group members, and then ask if the other group members want to add anything further.
- A member of the visiting SALT team catches exact key words and writes them on a flip chart in full view of the group (but without dominating the conversation).

Core question 2: Strengths – what do we have in common?

In looking for strengths we can keep in mind some transferable concepts:

- Care – presence, participation, accompaniment
- Community – belonging, mutual wellbeing
- Change – facilitated, locally-owned
- Hope.

Also (if time allows):

- Leadership – by influence, example
- Transfer – community to community

Steps

- Assemble and display a collection of images. They may be photos or they may come from a variety of sources such as magazines. Each image represents a story.
- Divide the group into four small groups. Each small group takes a name (or concept, or strength for response) of 'care', 'community', 'change' or 'hope'.
- Each small group is asked to send a person from their group to the collection of images on display.
- The images are discussed by the small group for about 3-5 minutes, and a person from the group is asked to answer this question: 'Why was this image chosen and how does it express your group's name?' That is to say – what makes your concept real? What are the elements, or characteristics, of your particular strength, illustrated in the image?
- The characteristics of each concept are listed on a flip chart as the group explains what they chose, why they feel the image shows the concept, and how the concept is expressed.

Core question 3: What's your Story?

A core and powerful part of the SALT process is for people to share their story. However, how do we invite someone to share it?

The SALT conversation explores what people feel about concerns and issues in their lives, and what they do, or what they could do, for themselves. In conversation with people, whether at home or in the street or the neighbourhood, it helps to have in mind these ideas: concerns, hopes, ways of working and faith.

Concerns

Concerns are not the same as needs. Needs are usually physical and immediate. If you come from a group that is known for meeting needs then a conversation about needs usually leads to an expectation and an offer of help. Sometimes that is appropriate, but it doesn't build a deeper relationship. Sometimes the expectation must be adjusted.

Concerns are things about which people feel responsible, feel are part of their own role, and think they can do something about. Parents think about their children. Some people think about their neighbourhood, and how to be good neighbours. People look for good connections and relationships. People are concerned about unwanted change, or they seek positive change in situations.

Hopes

Questions about people's hopes can come at any point in the conversation, usually when there is a sense of comfort and trust.

Ways of working

People can be encouraged to talk about ways of working by asking them questions such as:

- How do people work on the things they are concerned about, or work toward the things they hope for?
- How does the family work on the challenges?
- How does the neighbourhood work together when there is a problem?
- Do neighbours look out for each other or express a neighbourly spirit? How?

Faith

For many people, faith is an undergirding element of how they live life and face challenges, raise family and develop community. Once the conversation has opened up, and a connection is made with the person or family, a visiting team can ask an open question, for example, "does faith play a part in your story – how does it work for you?"

This is not meant to be a question about religious affiliation, but it is a more personal question about the energy and strength that faith provides, to be asked if it seems appropriate, and to open a conversation about faith.

V. Skills or disciplines

Each person in a SALT team may contribute a skill, and team members can learn from each other. Some will already have natural abilities, and other practices should be developed by us all.

As we think through the process we can name some of the skills involved:

- Look at and listen to the person and context
- Make an easy atmosphere
- Find good questions
- Clarify concerns and explore
- Discern responses
- Think together as a team
- Reflect back the strengths we saw
- Pray throughout the process

Self-assessment questions

SALT practice will improve as each member of the team reflects on these questions:

- What am I contributing, and what can I work on this time?
- Which part can we work on as a team and help each other to do better this time?

Personal change

A notable aspect of the SALT process is that each of us learns and each of us changes. Change is for the team not just for others!

The process of action-reflection and self-assessment can be confronting. It is very important to focus on strengths and to support each other.

VI. Bringing it together

In applying the SALT methodology we:

- Ask about concerns, hopes, ways of working and faith.
- Analyse through the ideas of appreciate, learn, story and transfer.
- Review our efforts by asking ourselves about strengths, team, God's presence and next steps.

The above summary is represented in the diagram below.

