CULTURE
is
"the way
we do things
around
here."

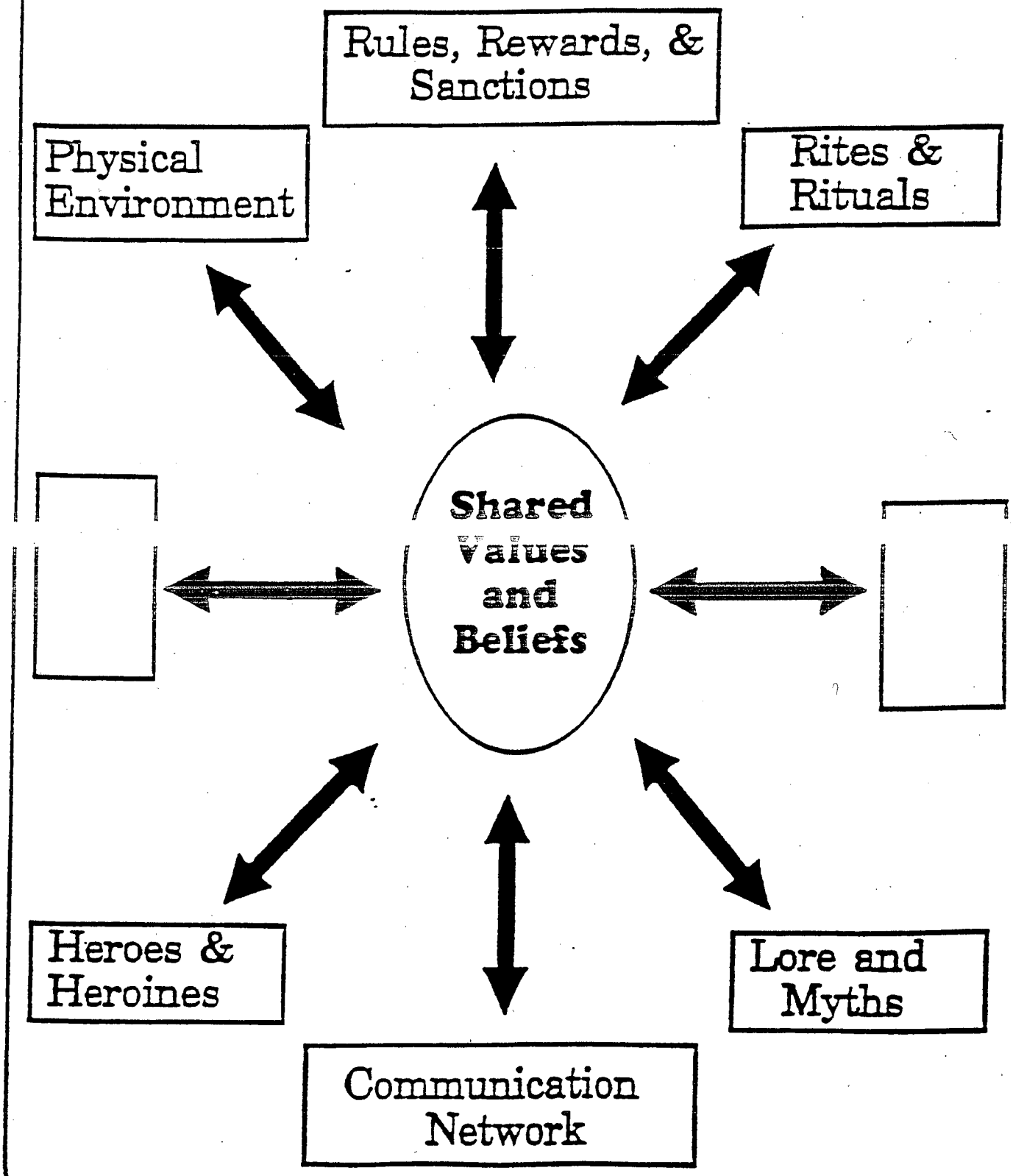
Organizational Culture consists of the values and beliefs that establish expectations and influence the behavior of people who work in a particular organization.

WHERE CORE VALUES SHOW UP IN SCHOOLS

If it really is a core value, it will be reflected in many of the following arenas of school life. A helpful question to ask is, "What would each of these arenas look like if _____ were a core value?"

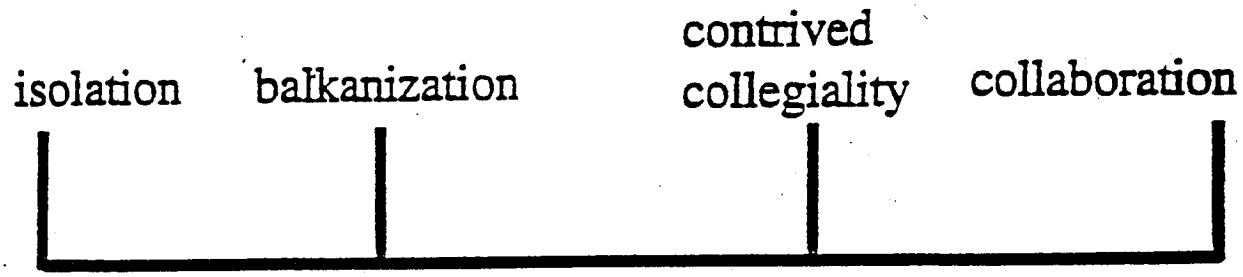
1. Curriculum
2. Materials – classroom and library
3. Classroom routines
4. Instructional patterns and lesson structures
5. Grouping practices between classes and within classes
6. Handling of negative behavior
7. Reward systems for students
8. Traditions and ceremonies
9. Posters and slogans
10. Cafeteria
11. Playground
12. After-school sports and activities
13. Student councils/class offices
14. Evaluation system of teachers
15. Professional development programs
16. Faculty meeting time
17. Interpersonal contacts

A Framework for Analyzing School Culture



Pam Robbins

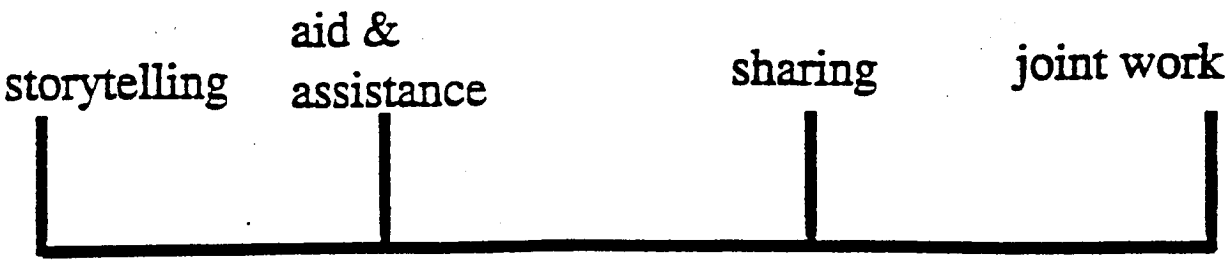
Relationships Among Colleagues



Source: Andy Hargreaves

low risk → high risk

Staff Development Experiences



Source: Judith Warren Little

The 4 T's That Influence the Success of Collaborative Work

Trust

Training

Time

Tangible support

TRUST ACTIVITY

One of the most important components or preconditions for the peer coaching relationship is TRUST

I. List the behaviors and qualities that you feel promote and maintain a trusting relationship.

1.

2.

3.

4

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

II. Take a few minutes to think about these items. You will probably become aware that some of the items on the list mean more to you than others. Rank the 3 behaviors or qualities that are most important to you and explain your ranking.

Behavior or Quality	Why You Ranked It This Way
1.	
2.	
3.	

Discuss your rankings with your partner or your team.

III. Inventory

Consider each of the behaviors or qualities listed in I. Give yourself a score, based on the following rating scale, that best describes your professional behavior with most people, most of the time, at this time in your life.

Points	Meaning
5	The behavior is exhibited most of the time. (consistently)
4	The behavior is exhibited much of the time. (frequently)
3	The behavior is sometimes exhibited, sometimes not. (inconsistent)
2	The behavior is exhibited sometimes. (infrequently)
1	The behavior is exhibited very little. (seldom)

IV. Choose 2 or 3 of the trust behaviors or qualities which you wish to improve. What specifically will you do? Discuss with your partner or team. How will you work on building and/or maintaining your trust relationship as you move into peer coaching?

Behavior	Plan for Improving
1.	
2.	
3.	

SCHOOL TEAM INNOVATOR

Practical Strategies for Promoting School Improvement

October 1996

School Culture: A Key to Improved Student Learning

by Joan Richardson

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Innovator Insights: Creating a Healthy School Culture is Everyone's Business

Innovator Tool Box Are You a Good Team Player?

Let Celebration Become Part of Your Culture

Parents on the Team Make Family Involvement a Reality in Your School

Lead the Way Successful Site-Based Management Means Redesigning Your School

School Snapshots Boyz Stay Out All Night in Detroit

Helping Others While Learning About Business

When Detroit's University Public School opened its doors for the first time in 1993, the school essentially had no culture.

Each 6th, 7th and 8th grader who took a seat on that first day had attended another school the year before. Every teacher had taught in another building. The principal and assistant principal had run different schools the year before.

"We had to create a culture from scratch," says principal Fred Borowski.

But, after living through a chaotic first year marked by numerous episodes of student violence, conflicts between students and teachers and between staff members, Borowski realized he had been wrong. "What we had was the clash of many cultures coming together," says Borowski. Every student had come in with their idea about how students should behave and learn and every teacher had their own ideas about how schools operated.

Cultures are built through the everyday business of school life.

"What we really needed to do was establish the University Public School culture," says Borowski.

So, in a very methodical way, Borowski and his staff set about to change the student and the professional culture of the school. Their goal was to improve student achievement by creating a peaceful school that valued student and adult learning and respect for others.

A school's culture is "the way we do things here." It's that undefinable feeling in a school that lets new students and teachers know what is important and how they are supposed to act.

"It's that powerful force that lurks beneath the surface of any organization, whether you're talking about schools or businesses. It's an unwritten set of norms that are grounded in values. It spells out what's right and rude to do in that particular organization," says consultant Pam Robbins.

A school culture is transmitted in elements as simple as who sits where during a faculty meeting or as elaborate as how money and time are spent to support staff development.

"Cultures are built through the everyday business of school life. It is the way business is handled that both forms and reflects the culture," say Jon Saphier and Matthew King in their article, "Good Seeds Grow in Strong Cultures" (*Educational Leadership*, March 1985).

Saphier and King identified 12 norms of school culture that needed to be strong in order to create a healthy school culture. The norms were:

1. Collegiality:
2. Experimentation:
3. High expectations:
4. Trust and confidence:
5. Tangible support:
6. Reaching out to the knowledge base:
7. Appreciation and recognition:
8. Caring, celebration, and humor:
9. Involvement in decisionmaking:
10. Protection of what's important:
11. Traditions:
12. Honest, open communications.

If those norms are strong, then improvements in instruction will be significant, continuous, and widespread, say Saphier and King. But, if those norms are weak, then improvements will be infrequent, random, and slow.

Although their article was written 11 years ago, Saphier said during a recent interview that he believes the same set of norms applies today. He now organizes all of his school improvement work around strengthening school culture.

(Continued on page 4)

National Staff Development Council

http://www.nsdc.org

School Culture: A Key to Improved Student Learning

(Continued from page 1)

But, of the 12 norms, Saphier points to three — collegiality, experimentation, and reaching out to a knowledge base — that have the strongest correlation between changing the school environment and improving student achievement.

Saphier says educators often don't see the connection between a school's professional and student culture. "We underrate the capacity of adults working in harmony in the school to influence the practice and beliefs of students about the school," he says.

When faculty members begin seeing themselves as part of a cohesive unit rather than individual artists, Saphier says, a school develops synergy that promotes change. "When that happens, you end up working in the same direction but with more total power," he says.

"When you have these elements in place what you do is liberate the creativity and energy of the people in the [illegible] around the common goals that they have for children," Saphier says.

Robbins says most elements of culture are so interconnected that trying to change one element will affect other areas as well. By focusing school change efforts on one of the 12 elements, schools will see the ripple effect into other areas as well.

"Using time is a profound way to change a culture," says Robbins. "If you change the use of time, you will change the values. That will impact the stories they tell. It will change the rituals and ceremonies that go on."

Detroit's University Public School tackled changing its culture because of disruptive student behavior and low student achievement. Although the goal was to create a healthier student culture that would support academic learning, the faculty approached that by first transforming their professional relationships and by reordering how they used time in their school.

The school identified a work year for teachers that is different from the students' school year. Teachers begin their work year four weeks before students and spend that time preparing themselves as teachers. Last year, they focused on learning how to work more effectively in teams. They continued throughout the year in an on-site staff development program run by a professor from nearby Wayne State University. This year, they are working jointly to learn how to improve students' social skills and writing across the curriculum.

HOW ONE SCHOOL CHANGED ITS CULTURE

University Public School's culture-changing experience included four key elements:

1. Reordering the school calendar. This change recognized that the teachers' work year is different from the students' school year. Teachers began work four weeks before students arrived for classes.
2. [illegible] teachers to meet with each other. This aided teams in keeping better track of students which helped diffuse behavior problem and focus on low-achieving students.
3. Introducing on-site staff development to aid in creating professional teams in the school. This started in classes before the school year began and continued in weekly meetings with a professor from a nearby university.
4. Working together to develop consistent schoolwide and classroom practices and policies. For example, teachers worked together to write the school's discipline policy and then explained the policy to the parents of their students during a formal orientation at the beginning of the school year.

Saphier says giving teachers time to learn together is a key component of boosting collegiality at a school. "If we, as a school, all have something in common that we are experimenting with, it creates a safe common ground," he says.

Each UPS team meets for one hour every day to go over lesson plans as well as to share information about their classes. They seek each other's advice as they share stories about misbehaving students, learning successes, or challenges.

That regular time together has helped weave the staff into more cohesive teams whose members are comfortable sharing their experiences and providing feedback. Sharing information about students every day insures that teachers are more knowledgeable about kids' behavior and achievement. That means students are less likely to slip through the cracks. That attention enhances students' sense of belonging in the school which, in turn, tends to improve both their behavior and academic performance, principal Borowski says.

Saphier says the UPS example demonstrates that focusing on developing the professional culture within a school has paybacks in improved student culture. [illegible] of planning together and making common assessments that the beliefs actually get spread, strengthened, and manifested," he says.■

Resources for School Culture

"Building Professional Community in Schools," Sharon Kruse, Karen Seashore Louis and Anthony Bryk, *Issues in Restructuring Schools*, Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools, Issue No. 6, Spring 1994. Reviews critical elements of a healthy school culture.

"Good Seeds Grow in Strong Cultures," Jon Saphier and Matthew King, *Educational Leadership*, March 1985. Identifies the 12 norms of a healthy school culture.

Transforming School Culture: Stories, Symbols, Values & The Leader's Role, Stephen Stolp and Stuart Smith, ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, Univ. of Oregon, 1995. Synopsizes research while offering numerous examples of schools' experiences with culture changes 800-438-8841. $12.50 plus $4 for shipping and handling.

SCHOOL TEAM INNOVATOR

Practical Strategies for Promoting School Improvement

April 1996

Collaborative Culture Supports Improvement

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

2 **Innovator Insights:** More Thoughts on... Collaborative School Cultures

3 **From the Innovator Tool Box** Team Scavenger Hunt

4 Safety Committee Action Improves School Environment

5 Strategies Enhance School Safety

6 Schools Must Upgrade Computers

7 Communications Foster Parent Participation

8 Administrators Must Take the Lead in Making Schools Safer

School Snapshots: Partnerships Aid Illinois Educators

Teamwork Benefits Baltimore Students

National Staff Development Council

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Developing a more collaborative culture helps to provide a foundation for needed change, improvement, and renewal in urban schools. While no single approach can address all the challenges facing urban educators and the children and families they serve, all stakeholders benefit when a school has a collaborative culture that promotes the continuous renewal of instructional methods and curricular offerings in an atmosphere of collegiality and shared mission.

What is school culture and what are the components of collaborative cultures? "The school culture is a complex web of norms, values, beliefs and assumptions, and traditions and rituals that have been built up over time as teachers, students, parents, and administrators work together, deal with crises, and develop unstated expectations for interacting and working together," Kent D. Peterson and Richard Brietzke write in *Building Collaborative Cultures: Seeking Ways to Reshape Urban Schools* (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 1994).

In some schools, teachers still work largely in isolation and spend little time discussing ideas and problem solving, but in schools with collaborative cultures, teachers regularly work together to share knowledge and explore possible solutions to challenging problems. "In collaborative school cultures," Peterson and Brietzke write, "the underlying norms, values, beliefs, and assumptions reinforce and support high levels of collegiality, team work, and dialogue about problems of practice." As a result, schools with professional collaboration exhibit the following relationships and behaviors that support quality work.

- A richer technical language
- Complex problem solving and extensive sharing of knowledge
- Greater risk taking
- Increased willingness to discuss failures mistakes, and disagreements
- Increased interdependence
- Dispersed leadership
- Increased job satisfaction
- More continuous efforts to improve the schools
- Improved student achievement

In schools with collaborative cultures, teachers also have opportunities for continuous improvement and career-long learning, engage in more team teaching and shared decision making, plan cooperatively, are committed to the improvement of practice, and network externally with other teachers, schools, and programs.

Teachers interact with each other by sharing complaints and anecdotes about their work, helping each other when asked to do so, and sharing resources, but the most extended form of collegiality involves joint work. When teachers are engaged in team teaching, collaborative planning, peer coaching, mentoring, and action research, they experience expanded opportunities to develop strong ties to colleagues and build more productive professional relationships. "Joint work is the highest and most extended form of collegiality," according to Peterson and Brietzke, but while joint work is critical in fostering collegial relationships, these other factors are also important:

- For collegiality to take hold, schools must have committed teachers who are open to change, willing to share concerns and ideas, and eager to learn.
- Schools must have organizational norms that overcome the isolation of teaching by supporting an open exchange of ideas and debate over issues.

(Continued on page 5)

Collaborative Culture Supports Improvement

(Continued from page 1)

➤ Schools must support the development of reference groups, such as grade-level teams or interdisciplinary units that support collaborative practices and professional dialogue.

➤ Schools must make time available to teachers for meeting, talking, thinking, interacting, conducting research, and planning.

➤ Administrators must provide encouragement and support for teachers who are engaged in professional dialogue and team work.

The process of shaping a collaborati[illegible] school culture is [illegible] It requires that members of each school study the existing culture to identify the aspects of the underlying norms and assumptions that serve the core mission of the school and the needs of students. They also must work to reinforce and celebrate those aspects that support development of a collaborative culture while changing those norms that work against collegiality.

In addition, they must develop shared definitions of success and achievement by working out the answers to questions such as these:

❶What is a successful school year?

❷What is evidence of good relations with colleagues?

❸What should students know and be able to do at the end of the school year?

Agreeing on definitions of success important because what teachers and administrators view as the measures of success often determines which problems they try to solve together. ■

To Ponder .... What You Pay Attention to Communicates What You Value ...

The following pages were posted on the hallways of a school.

What are the beliefs or assumptions implicit in these quotes?

In what ways might the culture of the school be reflective of these sayings?

Thinking about schools in which you have worked or spent time, reflect upon artifacts on the walls, or in the halls and the messages they provide about the culture. Jot down some examples.

Reflect upon a school that has realized a vision of job-embedded learning. What might be on the walls, in the halls? Describe your vision of this; paint a picture in the space below.

School

If this is not a place where tears are understood, where do I go to cry,

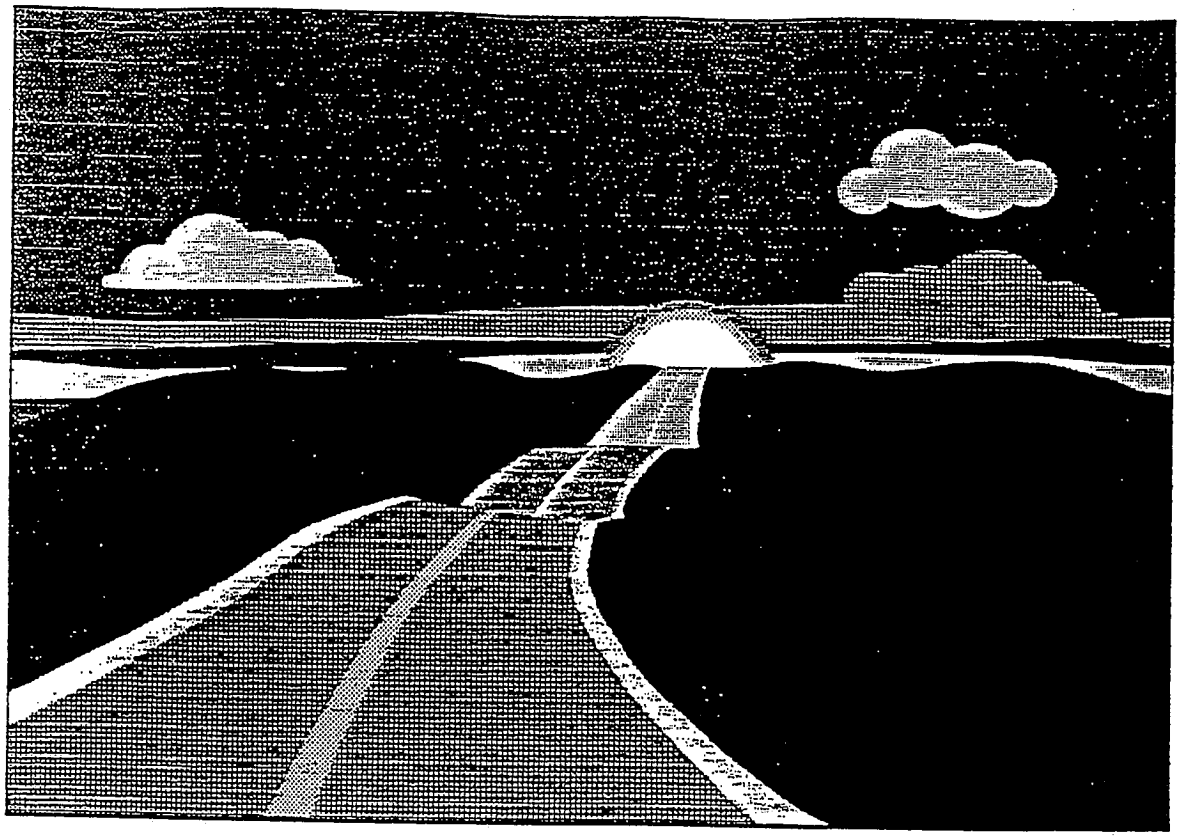
If this is not a place my spirit can take wing, where do I go to fly,

If this is not a place where my questions can be asked, where do I go to seek,

If this is not a place where my feelings can be heard, where do I go to speak,

If this is not a place you'll accept me as I am, where can I go to be,

If this is not a place where I can try, and learn, and grow, where can I just be me?



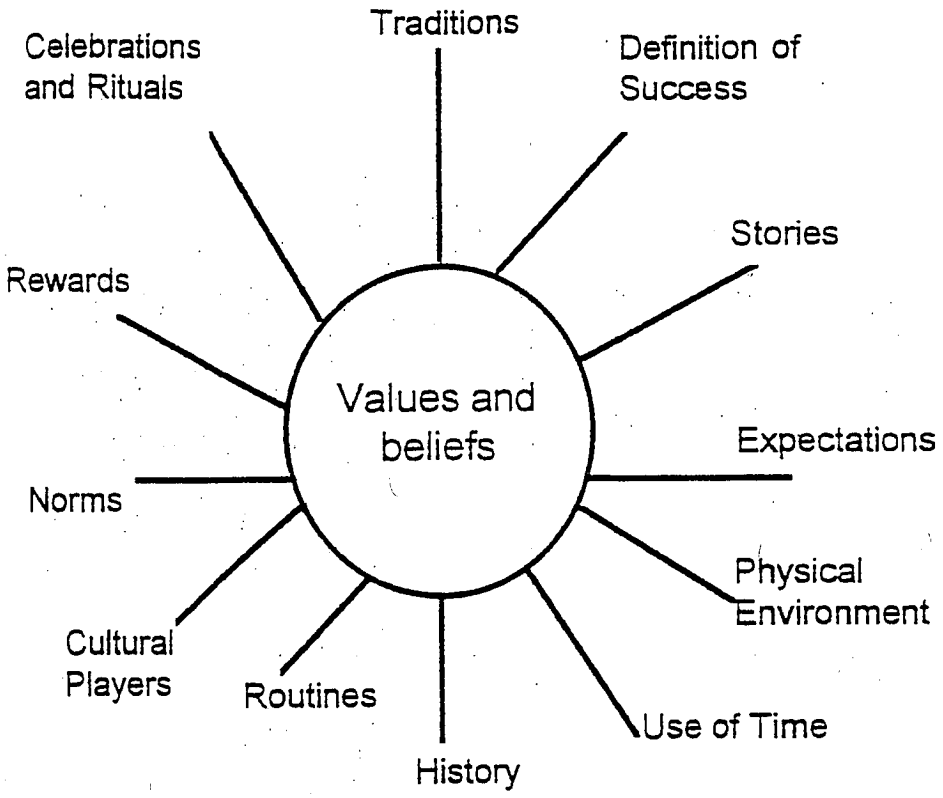
"Knowing how to learn... is at least as important as possessing any body of knowledge at a given moment in a student's progression through school...Mastery of the skills of learning, and early experience of the profound satisfaction of learning, lay the foundation for lifelong learning..."

Jean Dowdall
President
Simmons College

Archaeological Dig

School reform will be accomplished best in schools that function as learning communities. However, not all schools have organizational cultures that will foster the development of learning communities. The workplace context plays a crucial role in determining school success. The activity that follows offers an opportunity for you to dig into your school's or organization's culture in order to determine "What are the prospects for building a collaborative learning community?" "Will culture 'busting', 'building', 'enhancing' or 'reinforcing' be required?"

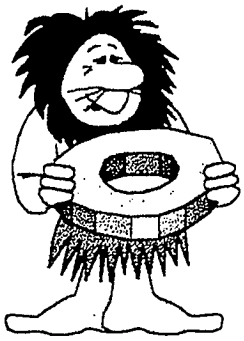
Pam Robbins, 1997



Element	*Assessment*
Values and beliefs	
Stories	
Expectations	
Physical Environment	
Use of Time	
History	
Routines	
Cultural Players	
Norms	
Rewards	
Celebrations, Rituals	
Traditions	
Definitions of Success	

Pam Robbins, 1997

"Tools"



"Tools"

- Self Awareness
- The Ability to Communicate
- The Ability to Build Trust
- The Ability to Problem Solve
- The Ability to Use Decision Making Tools
- The Ability to Productively Resolve Conflict
- Awareness of the Literature on Change
- Awareness of Key Aspects of Teamwork
- A Support System (Collegiality)
- An Awareness of School Culture

Teamwork

Characteristics of a Well-Functioning and Collaborative Team

1. The team's members understand and share a vision.
2. Members respect and, ideally like one another.
3. There is a feeling of satisfaction derived from being a member of the team.
4. Communication is open and members feel comfortable about playing a role in the decision-making process.
5. There is very little conflict on the team and when there is, it is quickly resolved.
6. The efforts of individual team members are recognized regularly.
7. The team has a sense of pride.
8. Team members are excited about new curriculum projects or innovations in methodology.
9. Members cooperate with each other.
10. Team members support each other.
11. There is a strong, effective leadership on the team.
12. Members of the team are accessible to help each other.
13. There is a high level of trust between team members.
14. Members of the team enjoy each other.
15. There is a sense of ownership that is felt by members on the team.
16. Competition between team members is not tolerated.
17. Members offer their unique talents towards achievement of team goals.
18. The team creates an atmosphere of excitement.
19. Team members are sensitive to each other's needs.

From: "Bringing It All Together" by Sophic Stavro

NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS IN GROUPS

Regardless of the nature of the group and its purpose, some basic needs must be met within the group setting for it to be as productive as possible. A good facilitator looks for signs of each of these characteristics within the group to determine whether it provides the kind of satisfaction which members need. Although it is possible for group members to participate and contribute to the process without some of the "intangibles" indicated below, the team will not be as effective. From time to time, it may be helpful to make a checklist which includes these items and give it to members so that they may evaluate the extent to which the group is meeting their individual needs.

The following are important needs group members value:

1. Group members need to feel a SENSE OF BELONGING.

   Although retaining their individual autonomy, group members need to feel that they belong to a team, that they are valued members of it and receive a sense of security in the importance of their presence and their contribution to the group process.

2. Group members need to feel a COMMITMENT TO GROUP GOALS.

   The process of goal-setting and achieving some consensus on identified goals is a very important one. Group members achieve this commitment when they see the value of the goals selected, regard them as attainable, and clearly view themselves as having a part in defining those goals and directing the group process.

3. Group members need a sense of PROGRESS.

   Although members may work hard to achieve goals, it is important that there be concrete messages which convey systematic progress toward reaching those goals so that members can feel a sense of accomplishment.

4. Group members need CLARITY OF EXPECTATIONS.

   It is important that team members are clear about the role which is expected of them in the group and have some say about altering that role should they find it uncomfortable or inappropriate. Coupling these clear expectations with meaningful assignments which are challenging yet within the scope of the person's ability is important in maintaining member interest and commitment.

5. Group members need to have CONFIDENCE IN THE LEADERSHIP.

   A good facilitator fosters a sense of security in group members through clarity of the role of the identified leaders and maximum flexibility for group members to assume leadership where appropriate. The security of knowing that the person in charge is capable and trusting of group members will allow them a greater freedom to assume leadership and ultimately reduce the necessity for structure and control within the team.

Stages of Team Development

Teachers and administrators spend more and more of their time serving on various school and systemwide teams. While such teams can serve many useful purposes, participants often find the process to be confusing and frustrating. It can be helpful for these participants to know that teams go through five predictable stages in their development.

During the ***forming stage***, team members often wonder: Why am I on this team and how will I fit in? What authority do we have? Can I trust these people? The team leader should encourage members to discuss, question, and clarify the team's mission and objectives.

In the ***norming phase***, participants would like to know: How will we make decisions? How will I be treated by others? What can we expect of one another? As members begin to establish expectations of one another and determine operating procedures, they may want the leader to be a guide rather than a boss. Therefore, it's important that the leader seek participants' advice and redirect questions back to the group.

During the ***storming stage***, problems arise based on differences and team members may ask: How will conflict be handled? How do individuals respond to conflict? How can conflict be used constructively? It is important that team leaders not suppress conflict but use it to promote growth.

In the ***producing phase***, the team generates its highest quality work. Team members may ask: How can we continuously improve? How will we monitor our results? During this stage, the leader must help the team avoid "groupthink" in which members "go along to get along."

During the ***ending phase*** the team deals with issues ranging from the departure of one member to the group's disbandment. Members wonder: Will we be as good a team as before? How can we bring a new member into the group? How will we deal with our feelings of loss? In this stage, the leader must keep morale high by addressing the issues related to loss and inclusion.

Source: "Developing Teams," *Training*, August 1992.

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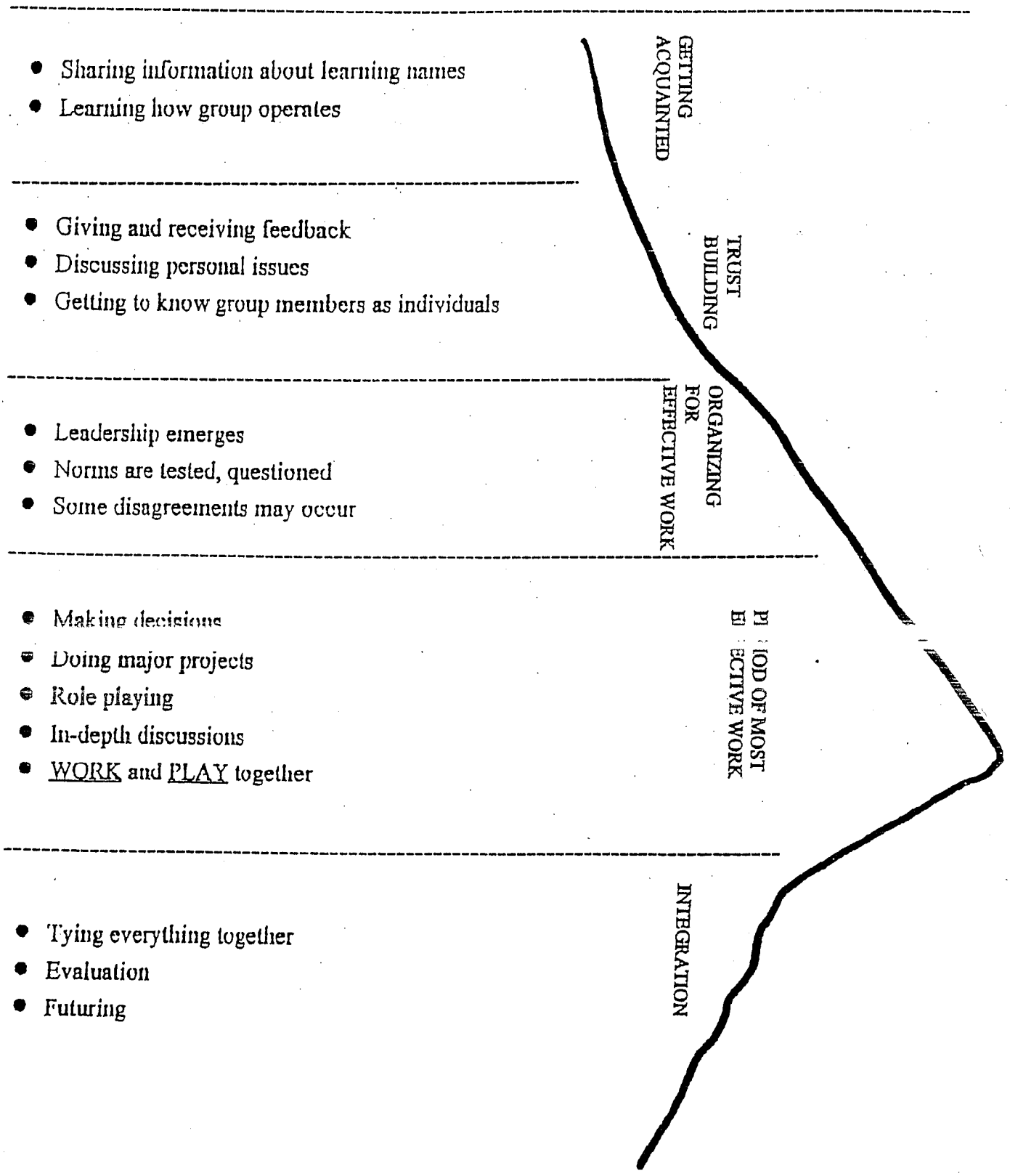
QUALITY OF GROUP WORK



- Sharing information about learning names
- Learning how group operates

- Giving and receiving feedback
- Discussing personal issues
- Getting to know group members as individuals

- Leadership emerges
- Norms are tested, questioned
- Some disagreements may occur

- Making decisions
- Doing major projects
- Role playing
- In-depth discussions
- WORK and PLAY together

- Tying everything together
- Evaluation
- Futuring

TEAM BUILDING

Background

"Motorola, recently acclaimed for surpassing its Japanese competition in producing the world's lightest, smallest, and highest-quality cellular phones with only a few hundred parts versus over a thousand for the competition, relied heavily on teams to do it.

....So did Ford, which became America's most profitable car company in 1990 on the strength of its Taurus model. At 3M, teams are critical to meeting the company's well-known goal of producing half of each year's revenues from product innovations created in the prior five years."[1]

There is more urgency to team performance today because of the link between teams, individual behavior change and high performance. Research demonstrates that "high performance organizations" out perform the competition over an extended period of time and outperform the expectations of key constituents: customers, shareholders, and employees. What is also evident is that the same team dynamics that promote performance also support learning and behavioral change more effectively than larger organizational units or individuals.

A Definition

"A team is a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable" (Katzenbach and Smith, 1993).

Why Teams Perform Well

1. They bring together complementary skills and experience that exceed those of any individual team member.

2. The broader mix of skills allows teams to respond to multifaceted challenges like innovation, quality, and customer service.

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[1]Katzenbach, Jon and Smith, D. The Wisdom of Teams. Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1993.

3. The joint development of specific, clear goals and approaches to meet those goals establish communications and commitment that support real-time problem solving and initiative. Teams, because of their flexibility, can respond quickly, accurately, and effectively to changing events and demands.

4. Teams provide a social dimension to enhance the economic and administrative aspects of work. Real teams develop only when the people within them work hard to overcome barriers that stand in the way of collective performance. Then, the meaning of work and the effort brought to bear upon it deepen until team performance becomes its own reward.

5. Teams have more fun. This fun is integral to sustained performance.

6. Behavioral change occurs more readily within the team context. Teams are not as threatened by change as are individuals left to fend for themselves.

7. Because of their focus on performance, teams motivate, challenge, reward, and support individuals who are trying to change the way they do things.

Team Basics

2. There are specific results for which the team is collectively responsible.

3. The "performance ethic" of the company demands results and is clear and consistent.

4. Team commitment to a common purpose and set of related performance goals for which the group holds itself mutually accountable is essential.

5. The team assesses its performance, relative to its purpose, and reflects an internal team discipline.

Skills Needed

1. Technical or functional expertise.
   (For example, marketers and engineers.)

2. Problem solving and decision-making skills.
   (Strategies to identify problems and opportunities, options for action, and decisions about how to proceed.)

3. Interpersonal Skills
   (Communication skills, risk-taking, helpful criticism, conflict resolution techniques, active listening, giving the benefit of the doubt, support, recognition of others' achievements.)

Interesting Findings That Impact On A Team Building Training Design

1. Not a single team studied had all the needed skills at the outset.

2. The performance focus helped teams quickly identify skill gaps and the specific needs of team members to fill them.

3. Teams develop direction, momentum, and commitment by working to shape a meaningful purpose. This is not incompatible with taking initial direction from outside the team. Direction from management helps teams get started by framing the performance requirements of the company. Bob Waterman and Tom Peters call this "Solution Space." "Solution Space" defines boundaries and identifies direction but allows flexibility for modification and involvement and provides opportunities for commitment.

4. "The best teams invest a tremendous amount of time and effort exploring, shaping, and agreeing on a purpose that belongs to them individually and collectively." Purposing is revisited frequently.

5. Specific performance goals are an integral part of the purpose. They define team work-products. The specificity of performance objectives facilitates clear communications and constructive conflict within the team. The attainability of specific performance goals helps teams maintain their focus on getting results.

6. Teams that succeed evaluate what and how each individual can best contribute to the team's goal without a focus on a person's status or personality.

7. Small "wins" build members' commitment.

8. Performance goals help teams track progress and hold themselves accountable. Team purpose supplies meaning and emotional energy.

9. Teams need to develop a common approach -- how they will work to accomplish their purpose.

10. Team members assume social roles -- challenging, interpreting, supporting, integrating, remembering, summarizing -- as well as leadership roles.

11. Team Accountability is critical. It is based on trust and commitment.

12. A "focus on performance -- not chemistry or togetherness or good communications or feelings -- shapes teams more than anything else."

(Ideas excerpted from The Wisdom of Teams, Katzenbach, J. and Smith, D., Harvard Business School Press, 1993.)

AN ACTION AGENDA
FOR IMPROVING TRUST BEHAVIORS

- Clarifying roles in the meeting
- Exchanging perceptions of ideas (paraphrase, clarifying)
- Sharing feedback on in-meeting dynamics. debriefing
- Problem solving group areas of growth
- Discussing subgroups, cliques, and natural divisions within the group
- Confronting "hidden agendas"
- Discussing the need for fundamental behaviors such as:

Openness	Commitment	Participation
Facilitation	Sensitivity	Collaboration
Risk taking	Flexibility	

- Managing equitable participation
- Managing interpersonal conflicts
- Reinforcing effective member behavior
- Celebrating group successes and group learnings
- Always think and say "we"
- Create interactions
- Focus on gains and solutions, not losses and problems
- Keep everyone informed
- Fully sharing thoughts and feelings rather than remaining silent, encouraging others to do the same
- Paraphrasing and checking your impressions of others thoughts, feelings, wants, etc.
- Describing observable behaviors that influence you
- Respecting confidential information
- Being dependable, delivering on commitments
- Pitching in and helping other team members who need assistance
- Reading and responding to nonverbal clues that suggest a lack of opennes

Strategies for Productive, Efficient Team Meetings

(A good starting point for a team is to negotiate which of these they will use.)

1. Start on time.

2. Encourage *Excitement Sharing*. Each meeting begins with the leader saying something like, "What is new and exciting in your lives since we last met?" Anyone who feels like it then briefly shares with the group any new and exciting experience, insight, feeling, etc. Some advantages of excitement sharing are: *it helps start meetings on time* since everyone does not have to be there to begin (since it is enjoyable, however, it encourages people to arrive on time); it helps participants get to know each other better. Caution: One danger is that excitement sharing could go on for hours; therefore, don't go beyond an agreed-upon limit, say 10 minutes.

3. Review and develop the meeting *agenda*. Near the beginning of each session, the agenda should be reviewed so that it can be changed or expanded to accommodate new ideas and priorities. The agenda should be handed out or recorded on newsprint in view of the whole group.

4. *Set time limits* for the meeting and perhaps for individual agenda items. You may have to set some agenda priorities.

5. Take *Action Minutes*. It is easy for a group to forget "*who* was going to do *what* by *when*?" *Action Minutes* provide a very complete but streamlined material record. See

6. Conduct one piece of business at a time. It may help to appoint one member of the group as a *task minder*.

7. Route off-task insights or problems to an *Odds and Ends List* for later attention. Often in the course of a meeting, problems or issues are raised that can sidetrack the group from its agenda. When these problems or issues are significant but not relevant to the task at hand, they can be routed to an *Odds and Ends List* which is carried forward to future meetings on the *Action Minutes*.

8. Continually work on the *group's process*.

   Encourage participation by all, even the quietest members. (Participation is a right ...and a responsibility.)

   Communicate authentically. What a person says should reflect what he or she thinks as well as feels.

   Conduct group business in front of the group; conduct personal business outside of the meeting.

   Develop conditions of respect, acceptance, trust, and caring.

Role of Decision Maker ⇒				
Types of Decisions ⇓				

The Developer
Powerful Ideas for Promoting Improvement

Promoting Diverse Forms of Thinking

You are leading a group that is deep in a discussion to define and determine the causes of the problem the group has been charged with solving. Someone whose thinking is stimulated by a point made in the discussion proposes a creative solution for the problem, even though it is not yet clear to everyone exactly what the problem is. Another participant, who is quite often negative, points out how this solution is like one from several years ago that was unsuccessful then and would not work now. A third person, perceiving that the first person has been unfairly attacked, quickly jumps to support the solution. Before you know it, group members have chosen sides, abandoning the cool, factual discussion regarding the nature of the problem for an emotional debate that is as much about the past as it is the future.

Bono contends that human beings [illegible] through conscious effort and that [illegible] is "thinking hats" provide a way [illegible] direct ourselves and/or others to [illegible] various forms of thinking.

This type of all-too-common problem can be avoided, Edward de Bono believes, if all group members are familiar with the diverse forms of thinking described in his book, *Six Thinking Hats*, (Little, Brown and Company, 1985). de Bono contends that human beings can apply different thinking modes through conscious effort and that his "thinking hats" provide a way to direct ourselves and/or others to various forms of thinking. The six hats are each described by a color that helps distinguish that particular form of thinking.

de Bono's six thinking hats are:

- **White**: White hat thinking includes facts and figures, including both well established facts and those that are believed to be true even though they have not been fully verified. White hat thinking, however, does not include extrapolation or interpretation of those facts.
- **Red**: Red hat thinking consists of feelings, hunches, and intuition. This [illegible] not be logical or justified.
- **Black**: Black hat thinking is logical, but points out only what is wrong with an idea or plan. Black hat thinking doesn't need to be fair or to consider both sides of an issue. Nor is it concerned with problem solving; its only responsibility is to point out the problem.
- **Yellow**: Yellow hat thinking is positive and focuses on benefits. It may be based on experience, available information, logical deduction, trends, guesses, and hopes. Yellow hat thinking may be used to generate concrete proposals or refine existing proposals.
- **Green**: Green hat thinking is concerned with change and creativity. Ideas can be expressed for their "movement value" (using ideas to see where they will take the individual or group). Green hat thinking recognizes that there is usually more than one answer to a problem and that alternatives should be sought.
- **Blue**: Blue hat thinking provides direction regarding which of the five other hats to wear. It provides a structure or approach in which the other hats can be appropriately worn to reflect on an issue or problem. In addition, blue hat thinking can be used to call upon other forms of thinking with which the person is familiar (e.g., assessment of priorities).

The six thinking hats are most useful if everyone in the organization or group understands the type of thinking called for with each hat. The leader or a group member may then request that an individual or the group engage in a particular form of thinking. For instance, the leader may recognize that facts may be needed at this point in the discussion and [illegible] members do white hat thinking. Or a group member might ask a participant who is focusing only on the negative to

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Diverse Forms of Thinking

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try out some hat thinking to see the situation from another perspective.

"I am not suggesting," de Bono writes, "that at every moment in our thinking we should consciously be using one hat or another. This is quite unnecessary. Occasionally we may want to go through the hats in a formal structured sequence and in such cases we would lay out the structure beforehand. More often we would want to put on one or another hat with some formality in the course of a discussion."

The six thinking hats are intended to make thinking simpler and more enjoyable. "The biggest enemy of thinking is complexity," de Bono argues, "for that leads to confusion. When thinking is clear and simple, it becomes more enjoyable and more effective." Clarity of thought and enjoyment of the thought process are attractive benefits, whether we are thinking alone or with others.

Six Action Shoes (Harper Business, 1991) is Edward de Bono's sequel to *Six Thinking Hats*. de Bono's six action shoes are:

- **Navy formals**: used for routine behavior, helps free up energy to think about other matters.
- **Grey sneakers**: used for collecting information and thinking about that information.
- **Brown brogues**: used when pragmatism and practicality are necessary and when effectiveness and simplicity are important.
- **Orange gumboots**: used during crises when urgent action is required.
- **Pink slippers**: used to express caring, often in the form of listening to understand the values and perceptions of others.
- **Purple riding boots**: used to play an official role or to express authority.

Addressing Learning Styles in Training

Just as teachers should understand the influence of students' learning styles on their learning, so should trainers take participants' learning styles into consideration when designing workshops. Doing so effectively, however, requires more than simply knowing that learners may have visual, auditory, kinesthetic, or tactile preferences, according to Bob Filipczak in "Different Strokes: Learning Styles in the Classroom" (*Training*, March 1995).

Filipczak cites the research of Rita Dunn, who identifies 21 variables that affect learning. He also discusses the significance on learning of global (benefit from an overview of the subject first) and analytic (facts before the big picture) processing styles, again citing Dunn, who says that 55 percent of adults are global learners, 28 percent are analytic, and the remainder can process information equally well either way.

The ideal approach, according to Dunn, is to teach individuals in their primary receptive style, then reinforce it with a secondary preference. Her other recommendation is to have participants do something creative with the material to solidify the learning, such as write poems or songs regarding the content.

How can trainers apply these recommendations given the diversity of the groups with whom they work? One technique is to use a self-scoring test to assess the group. Another approach mentioned by Filipczak is to use norms to estimate the mix of learners who are in the group (30 to 40 percent of a group are likely to be visual, 20 to 30 percent auditory, and 30 to 50 percent kinesthetic/tactile). Learning activities can then be tailored to reflect that distribution. What is most important, the article argues, is to realize the ineffectiveness of analytic approaches that are primarily auditory with visual reinforcement while ignoring the global and kinesthetic/tactile styles of a large number of learners.

To address the problems of diverse styles within a group, Filipczak mentions the work of Bob Pike, president of a Minneapolis consulting firm, who argues that trainers need to learn to flex their instructional approach and move at a fast pace by switching activities about every 10 minutes.

While warning that presenting new and difficult material through processes that are outside of participants' "comfort zones" is not a good idea, Filipczak argues that learners also have a responsibility to strengthen styles with which they are less comfortable. "As learning becomes a more important part of our jobs," Filipczak concludes, "understanding our own learning preferences as well as the styles of our co-workers is going to become an imperative."

Study Reveals Hours Teachers Give to Their Jobs

According to a study done by the National Center for Educational Statistics, public school teachers work an average of 9.25 hours per day and spend another 11 hours per week outside of the classroom in activities related to their jobs (preparing lessons, reviewing homework, etc.). Public secondary teachers average 4.9 periods of instruction per day and have an average class size of 23 students.

Copies of the two-page "Issues Brief" that describes the findings of this study may be obtained by calling the Center at 800-424-1616.

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Decision Making

Methods of Decision-Making

Method	Advantage	Disadvantage
Decision by leader		
Reliance on expert member		
Decision by leader after seeking input from individual group members		
Decision by leader after group discussion		
Decision by leader to support or contradict committee decision		
Majority vote		
Two-thirds majority		
Nominal group process		
Consensus		

Source: Johnson, D. W. & Johnson, F., P. (1982). Joining Together. Group Theory and Group Skills. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc., pp. 108 - 109

Nominal Group Process

Steps

- Individual Brainstorming
- Round-Robin Listing
- Individual Ranking
- Tabulation of Ranks
- Discussion
- Second Round of Individual Ranking
- Tabulation of Ranks

Advantages

Gives everyone an equal voice and equal vote

Decreases emotion regarding controversial issues

Can be used for problem identification and resolution or goal-setting

Disadvantages

Is time consuming

Does not encourage creativity

National Center for Effective Schools, 1991

Consensus

Goal: Arrive at a solution which each group member can support

- Problem
- Brainstorming
- Ideas Considered
- Unworkable Ideas Discarded
- Remaining Ideas Discussed
- Modification of Ideas
- Decision on Two or Three Workable Solutions

Fist to Five -- A Consensus Technique

Five Fingers	-	It's a great idea, and I'll be one of the leaders in implementing it.
Four Fingers	-	It's a good idea, and I'll work on it.
Three Fingers	-	I'm neutral.
Two Fingers	-	It's not my first choice, but I'll try.
One Finger	-	I don't agree, but I promise not to block it.
Fist	-	That's a dumb idea, and I'm going to block you if you try to implement it (in other words, a "no" vote).

Skills Helpful in Reaching Consensus

- Seeking input from all members
- Defining terms
- Changing focus; for example, change from most desirable to least desirable
- Active listening
- Knowing when to take a break
- Seeking similarities and combinations
- Moving to higher levels of generality
- Using quiet thinking.

National Center for Effective Schools, 1991

Guidelines for Consensus Decision Making

1. Avoid blindly arguing for your own individual judgements.

2. Avoid changing your mind only to reach agreement.

3. Avoid "conflict-reducing" procedures such as majority vote, tossing a coin, etc.

4. Seek out differences of opinion. They are natural and expected. Disagreement [illegible] decision.

5. Don't assume someone must win and someone must lose when discussion reaches a stalemate. Instead, look for the next acceptable alternative.

6. Listen carefully to one another, and encourage the participation of all members of the group.

(Johnson and Johnson, 1975)

Consensus Commitments

* I will explain my perception of the problem/issue.
* I will discuss my feelings.
* I will explain my needs/goals concerning the issue.
* I will let others know how important this issue is to me.
* I will respect others' needs for space, privacy, and identity.
* I will negotiate.
* I will grant permission to the majority with a minority report.
* I will implement the decision.

Building Systems for Professional Growth,
Arbuckle and Murray, 1990

The Pyramidal Process for Reaching Consensus

This process is most useful when a group needs to come up with one "answer." It has been used most effectively with developing mission and/or philosophy statements for some specific activity.

1. Thoroughly introduce and discuss the task at hand. For example, if the group is working on a mission statement for the staff development team, the characteristics of a well written mission should be discussed and agreed to. Everyone needs to have a good grasp of what the final product will look like.

2. Group members are first asked to write their own individual version.

3. After each member has written his/her own draft, pairs are formed. Their task is to reach a consensual agreement on one statement which satisfies them both.

   Note: At this stage it is often necessary to review the "rules" of reaching consensus

4. Each pair is then joined by another pair, and the consensus-building process begins again.

5. The size of the consensus-building groups continues to grow until one product/statement is arrived at with which every member of the group can agree.

Notes:
This process is seldom completed in a day. Often it is possible to arrive at two or three versions in the first session.. It is useful for people to have some time to think about the various versions before trying to reach a consensus on the one and only. Often three or four sessions are necessary to complete the task.

If the group appears to be stalemated – unable to agree on one version or another – the discussion and negotiation process can be speeded up by using a "fish bowl." The opposing groups each select one or two spokespersons for their point of view. The spokespersons come to the front of the room and continue negotiations in front of the rest of the group; thus, a "fish bowl' is formed. An empty chair or two should be provided for the observers to temporarily join the "fish bowl" group whenever they want to make a particular point or put forth a particular argument.

Arbuckle, M. and Murray, L. (1989). Building Systems for Professional Growth. MA: The Regional Lab.

SILENT CONSENSUS

Purpose: Use this as a way to help a group begin planning projects or goals.

Time Needed: approximately 1 to 1 1/2 hours

Procedure:

1. Establish a clear question that will generate diverse responses.

2. Brainstorm responses and record all ideas on Post-it notes or cards.

3. Randomly place the Post-it notes or cards on chart paper, a blackboard, or other flat surface.

4. Push for breakthrough thinking, then end verbal brainstorming.

5. Ask participants to silently sort random ideas into categories by placing like ideas in the same area.

6. Participants continue moving and removing Post-it notes or cards.

7. Consensus is reached when no one moves any more Post-it notes or cards.

8. Ask participants to develop a category statement that describes the essence of the ideas in each category, and place this statement at the top of each category.

9. Ask participants to prioritize categories using common sense or other prioritization tools.

From Leadership for Tomorrow's Schools, Jerry L. Patterson, 1993

Decision Making Matrix

OPTIONS →								
CRITERIA ☐								
☐								
☐								
☐								
☐								
TOTALS →								

SPEND A BUCK

Purpose: Use to provide a ranking system.

Time Needed: approximately 15 minutes

Procedure:

1. Distribute 3" x 5" cards to participants and ask them to write each predetermined issue or category on a card. Each participant will need as many cards as there are issues.

2. When they have finished, inform them that they have one dollar to spend. Their task is to determine which idea or ideas are most important and then divide their money accordingly. Participants write on each card how much they are willing to spend on that item.

3. Remind participants that no one can spend more than a dollar.

4. Collect the cards and tabulate.

From Leadership for Tomorrow's Schools, Jerry L. Patterson, 1993

THE 1-3-6 TECHNIQUE

Purpose: Use to obtain information when group members are reluctant to speak or when some group members tend to dominate. This is an easy and fair way to priortize issues in a relatively short time.

Time Needed: approximately 35 minutes

Procedure;

1. State the topic and allow 2 to 3 minutes for each person to list 1 or 2 ideas concerning the topic on a card.

2. Form the participants into groups of 3. The groups of 3 discuss the ideas of each person and select 1 or 2 ideas that the group can support. This usually takes 7 to 10 minutes

3. Once each group has selected their priorities, they should join another group to form a group of 6. Again the goal is to discuss the choices and choose the best 1 or 2 items to represent this group of six.

4. Ideas from the groups of six are charted for everyone to see. Every person is given 5 sticker dots and must choose what he or she believes are the best alternatives. All 5 dots cannot be put on one alternative; they must be divided in some way among the alternatives. The results are graphic and apparent to all.

From Leadership for Tomorrow's Schools
Jerry L. Patterson, 1993

Guidelines for Goal-Setting

To set effective goals -- goals which will carry you along the road to your definition of success -- consider these characteristics. Is your goal:

1. *Conceivable?* Is it understandable? From it, can you identify what the first step or two would be?

2. *Believable?* Few people can believe a goal that they have never seen achieved by someone else.

3. *Achievable?* Is your goal accomplishable with your given strengths and abilities?

4. *Controllable?* If your goal includes the involvement of anyone else, have you tested the waters beforehand?

5. *Measurable?* Is your goal stated so that it can be measured in time and quantity?

6. *Desirable?* Is your goal really something you want to do?

7. *Stated with no alternatives?* Set only one goal at a time. Even though you may set out for one goal, you may stop at any time and drop it for a new one. But when you change, you again state your goal without an alternative.

8. *Growth-facilitating?* Will your goal contribute to yourself, to others, or to society?

Adapted from *Choose Sucess: How to Set and Achieve All Your Goals* by Dr. Billy B. Sharp with Claire Cox, Hawthorne Books, New York, 1970.

Problem Solving

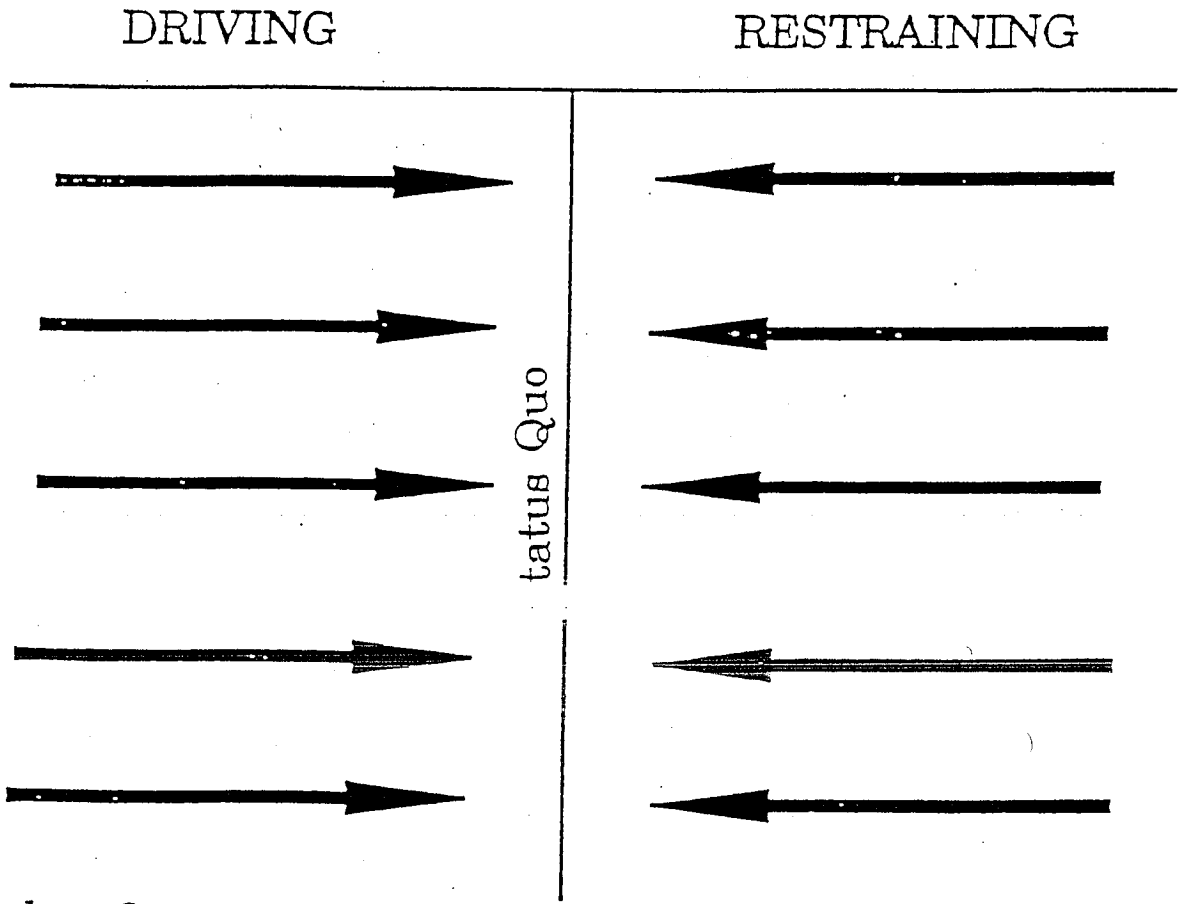
OPENERS AND ENERGIZERS

Match each of the deliberately verbose phrases with the common phrase of the same meaning in the opposite column.

Convoluted Phrases	Commonplace Equivalents
Scintillate, scintillate, asteroid minutia.	A watched pot never boils.
Surveillance should precede salvation.	A rolling stone gathers no moss.
Members of an avian species of identical plumage congregate.	All that glitters is not gold.
Pulchritude possesses solely cutaneous profundity.	All work and no play makes jack a dull boy.
It is fruitless to become lachrymose over precipitately departed lacteal fluid.	Beauty is only skin deep.
Freedom from encrustations of grime is contagious to rectitude.	Beggars can't be choosers.
The stylus is more potent than the claymore.	Beginner's luck.
It is fruitless to attempt to indoctrinate a superannuated canine with innovative maneuvers.	Birds of a feather flock together.
All articles that coruscate with resplendence are not truly auriferous.	Charity begins at home.
Eschew the implement of correction and vitiate the scion.	Cleanliness is next to Godliness.
The temperature of the aqueous content of an unremittingly ogled saucepan does not reach 100 centigrade.	Dead men tell no tales.
Opting on the part of mendicants must be interdicted.	He who laughs last laughs best.
Where there are visible vapors having their provenance in ignited carbonaceous materials, there is conflagration.	Look before you leap.
A plethora of individuals with expertise in culinary techniques vitiates the potable concoction produced by steeping certain combustibles.	No use crying over spilled milk.
Eleemosynary deeds have their incipience intramurally.	Nothing ventured, nothing gained.
Individuals who make their abodes in vitreous edifices would be advised to refrain from catapulting petrous projectiles.	People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones.
Neophyte's serendipity.	Spare the rod and spoil the child.
Male cadavers are incapable of yielding any testimony.	Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.
Exclusive dedication to necessitous chores without interlude of hedonistic diversion renders John a hebetudinous fellow.	The pen is mightier than the sword.
A revolving lithic conglomerate accumulates no congeries of minute, verdant bryophitic vegetation.	Too many cooks spoil the broth.
The person representing the ultimate cachination possesses thereby the optimal cachination.	Twinkle, twinkle, little star.
Missiles of a ligneous or petrous consistency have the potential of fracturing my osseous structure, but appellations will eternally remain innocuous.	Where there's smoke, there's fire.
Abstention from elevatory undertakings precludes a potential escalation of a lucrative nature.	You can't teach an old dog new tricks.

Force-Field Analysis

In the following chart, diagram the forces driving toward change and restraining change.



Select 2 or more restraining forces and outline a strategy for reducing their potency. Apply the following goal-setting criteria (the SPIRO Model) to your change strategy:

S - Specificity: Exactly what are you trying to do?
P - Performance: What behavior is implied?
I - Involvement: Who is going to do it?
R - Realism: Can it be done?
O - Observability: Can others see the behavior?

Kettinger In-basket

1. Form groups of 5-7

2. Each group member describes a problem.

3. The group selects a problem from those that have been generated.

4. The person whose problem has been selected describes the problem in detail. (5 minutes)

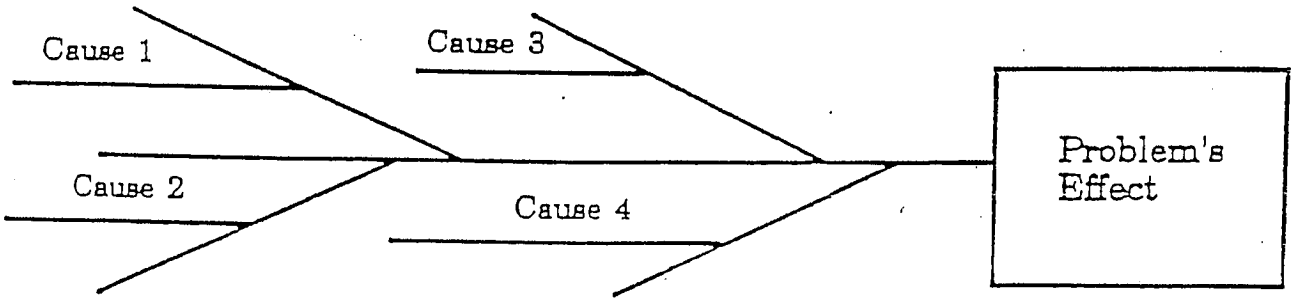
5. Group members ask clarifying questions about the problem. (10 minutes)

6. Group members offer solutions. (record ideas)

7. The person whose problem was selected asks clarifying questions about the solution ideas. (5 minutes)

8. The person selected (problem owner) takes the solution ideas, tries them out, <u>and</u> reports back at the next session.

Fishbone



HOW IS IT DONE?

- Name the effect; determine the specific problem to be analyzed; draw the diagram with process arrow to the effect; and draw a box around it.
- Decide what the major categories of the causes are (i.e., manpower, materials, machinery, methods, policies, procedures, people, plant).
- Label categories important to your situation. Make it work for you.
- Brainstorm all possible causes and label each cause under the appropriate category.
- Post the diagram where others can add causes to it. (Experts, Affected People, Process Owners, etc.)
- Analyze causes and eliminate trivial and/or frivolous ideas.
- Rank causes and circle the most likely ones for further consideration and study.
- Investigate the circled causes. Use other techniques to gather data and prioritize findings.

GUIDELINES

1. Try not to go beyond the span of control of the group.
2. Promote participation by everyone concerned.
3. Keep chart up-to-date so it can be used throughout the improvement cycle.

Presentation SKILLS

Facilitating Collaborative Problem Solving in Workshops

Teachers need time to engage in reflective examinations of teaching: the concrete challenges and problems they face, the range of possible solutions, and whether they are making progress in addressing these challenges (Goldenberg and Gallimore 1991). Profound learning—whether by adults or students—is facilitated by "posing one's own problems, risk taking, collaboration with other learners, compassion, humor, modeling, and the presence of a moral purpose" (Barth 1993). Although many teachers obviously know a lot about teaching, researchers have found that teachers rarely have an opportunity to articulate that knowledge to colleagues (Diegmueller 1992).

To help teachers begin the dialogue that is so essential to professional growth, you may want to use the following activity, developed by PDI presenter **Pam Robbins,** in your next workshop. It's called **Mail Call.**

Materials and Set-Up

Set up tables to accommodate six participants per table. Place 50 blank 3″ x 5″ index cards on each table and place a #10 business envelope on each chair at the table.

Directions

1. Assuming you are working with a group of 24, divide the room in half with two tables of 6 participants on each side of the room. Designate one side of the room "Side A" and the other "Side B."

2. Ask participants to each reflect on a professional dilemma or problem related to classroom instruction that they would like to solve. Then ask participants to write the details of their problem on the front of the business envelope, along with the solutions they have already considered or tried.

3. Ask participants to put an identifying mark on their envelope so that their problem remains anonymous, but they can identify their own envelope at the end of the activity. The identifying mark could be something like the digits of their home address, the last four digits of their social security number, or the date of their spouse's or child's birthday.

4. Ask one person at each table to serve as materials manager and to collect the envelopes at the table and bring them to the front of the room. There should be two boxes at the front of the room, one on Side A and one on Side B. The materials managers from the tables on Side A should place their envelopes in the box on Side A, and Side B managers should place their envelopes in the box on Side B.

5. After depositing the envelopes, the materials managers go to the box on the opposite side of the room and pick up six envelopes of "mail" from that box.

> "Teachers need time to engage in reflective examinations of teaching"

6. The materials managers distribute their six envelopes to their table mates in random order. Each person now has an envelope with a problem on it (one that is not their own problem or the problem of anyone at that table).

7. Using the stack of index cards at the center of each table, participants now silently read the problem, reflect on possible solutions, and individually write their proposed solutions—one on each index card, along with a word or two of encouragement. At the facilitator's signal, participants fold their index cards, place the folded index cards in the envelope and pass the envelope to the person seated to their right at the table. All this takes place without any group discussion. It is an *individual* reflection and writing activity.

8. The process repeats again, this time with each person silently brainstorming and writing ideas to a new problem on a new set of index cards. Allow three to five minutes for participants to silently brainstorm and write proposed solutions. At the facilitator's signal, participants place the index cards in the envelope and pass the envelope to the person on their right.

9. The process repeats until all six people at each table have brainstormed and recorded ideas for all six problems on index cards and placed them in the appropriate envelopes.

10. The materials managers now bring all the envelopes to a central location at the front of the room.

11. "Mail Call": Participants go to the front of the room and retrieve their "mail" (looking for their identifying marks on the envelopes).

12. Participants return to their tables, read their "mail," and jot down their thoughts about next steps they will take, based on the ideas in their envelope.

13. Mail reading can be followed by either a group sharing at each table or reports from two or three participants about their problem and the ideas they received.

14. Finally, the facilitator asks participants how they felt about the process.

This simple activity promotes dialogue and helps participants become comfortable working in a group problem-solving mode. The activity can be facilitated by a teacher leader, assistant principal, counselor, or principal and can easily be completed within 45 minutes in place of a staff meeting or as part of a school-based staff development day.

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Professional Development
TRAINING

Learning the Art and Science of Team Problem Solving

Regardless of the specific mission of your school leadership team, you deal in the realm of problem solving. Learning the art and the science of problem solving in a group is hard work. But the rewards that result from helping your team become more productive and more participatory are well worth the investment of time and energy. If your team is interested in improving its group problem-solving capabilities, here are five tips to start you on your journey.

Robby Champion

1. Adopt a problem-solving process and use it often. Whether you select a five-step process, a six-step process, or even a 10-step process is not really important. Pick one that feels comfortable and makes sense to your team, and then practice using it on various problems until it becomes

After watching school teams in various settings several years ago, I developed a process that purposefully dwells on the problem-identification phase. This seven-step process prevents teams from wasting valuable meeting time talking about the wrong problem or "unsolvable dilemmas":

Step 1. Determine if this is our problem.

Step 2. Examine the problem from various perspectives.

Step 3. Define the problem in a sentence.

Step 4. Generate potential solutions.

Step 5. Weigh the merits, costs, and consequences of the potential solutions.

Step 6. Select a solution and list the actions needed to implement it on a trial basis.

Step 7. Evaluate the results and determine the next steps.

2. Agree on group norms for problem solving. The idea of openly dealing with the group's norms scares some teams and seems like a waste of time to others. In effective teams, it is a critical preparation for success. All good teams have structure, and norms provide a structure that can guide the group's work together. For example, consider the potential of adopting this norm: "Here we talk only about issues over which we have control and responsibility." Consider how much confusion could be avoided when a team adopts and uses this norm: "We shall decide together how we shall decide issues one at a time."

Developing a list of norms is only one step. Keeping that list alive and powerful is

norms visible. Write norms on every agenda. If you use cardboard table-tent cards, have the norms printed on the cards. Post your norms on a laminated wall chart. Make sure you refer to the norms at least once in every work session. You may find, as many teams do, that norms that are made public make visitors to the meetings much more comfortable in contributing to the problem-solving discussions.

3. Use all the tools in your problem-solving kit, not just brainstorming. Let's face it: brainstorming has become a tired strategy for many groups, partly because it deals with only one step in the problem-solving process—*idea generation.* Experiment with other tools, such as nominal group process, team webbing, and carousel brainstorming (see *The ASCD Human Resource Development Program Handbook: A Practical Guide for Staff Developers,* page 31), and discover the wide array of group process tools that can help your team be more productive at each step of the process.

When selecting a problem-solving tool for your team to use, be careful to choose one that will produce the "product" needed at this particular stage in the process. For example, a fishbone diagram is a useful tool at the earliest stage of the problem-solving process because it helps people examine a problem from various perspectives. Each of the fishbone sections focuses on a particular cause or factor in a problem. Tools that can help the group define the scope of the problem and determine the appropriate problem-solving approach are vital. Remember that at the end of your problem-solving sessions, the product you will have produced is not a solution but a big picture of the problem (see steps 1 through 3 of the seven-step problem-solving process above).

Always take time to remind your team members of where you are in the process and what your product will be when you finish. Otherwise, you may find team members grumbling later in parking lot

> "Write group norms
>
> solving on every agenda... Post your norms on a laminated wall chart."

meetings that nothing was accomplished. For example, after completing a fishbone analysis of the problem, you might say: "Before our next meeting, please use the fishbone analysis to come up with a one-sentence definition of the problem. Then we will be ready for step 4 of the process, generating possible solutions."

4. Use visual props to prompt discussion and make a public record. Working on difficult problems in new ways in an often unfamiliar setting with new norms is tough work that requires tremendous concentration. Use visual props to prompt

"... an agreed-upon problem-solving process... ensures that all are playing from the same sheet of music."

the group members and the facilitator of the meeting. Wall charts, index cards, table-tent cards, and step-by-step written directions are important aids that can keep everyone focused and actively participating. In addition, such visual props assist the latecomer who needs to be brought on board quickly without taking the group off task.

If your team is new at using wall charts to make a "group memory" for its products, you must provide some guidelines. Otherwise, charts can be seen as a nuisance and actually become a distraction. Letters and numbers on charts should be at least three inches high so the charts can be read by people across the room. If one person is given the role of recorder/scribe, be certain that person records the actual words of the speaker without editorializing. Each group member needs to feel that the ideas expressed have been captured accurately for the record.

Keep your charts for later use by your team or by the team's successors. You can roll them up and tag them, or you can fold them in a stack. Include the date, topic, and facilitator's name. I once worked with a savvy team that saved all of its charts and then hung them all over the walls during an important summer retreat. They had team members sign important charts to provide a chronology of this school's improvement calendar for the new principal at the school.

5. Break problem solving into manageable chunks. The idea of occasionally getting a team away from the school for a retreat is simply not an option for most leadership teams, so they must find ways to break their work into manageable chunks and hold their meetings amidst the clamor of beepers, walkie-talkies, schedule bells, telephone messages, intercom interruptions, and other duties that sometimes take precedence over the meeting.

One solution is to avoid viewing the problem-solving process as an all-in-one meeting task. Breaking the process into small chunks allows some parts of the process to be done outside the meeting by individual team members, pairs, subcommittees, or other established or ad hoc groups. The outside work can be done on any part of the problem-solving process, and the work products then shared in a later meeting. (With a process like this, it's easy to see how an agreed-upon problem-solving process is essential. A defined process ensures that all team members are playing from the same sheet of music.)

To get your overloaded team members to do work outside the meeting, make the tasks simple. For example, instead of asking team members to get together to write a draft of a document, distribute index cards and ask them to record one idea on each card. You'll find that cards are easy to cluster, tally, and read aloud as a group. In addition, members who must be absent can send their cards to the meeting with a colleague.

To summarize, remember that some teams never reach their potential because they keep doing "the same old thing in the same old way." Contrast those "stuck" teams with teams that use feedback from the outside and from their own reflections to grow and improve. These teams view mistakes as a natural part of the process and turn them into important lessons. In fact, "lessons learned this year" is an important running log that needs to be kept so that next year your team will be several steps ahead as problem solvers.

— Robby Champion

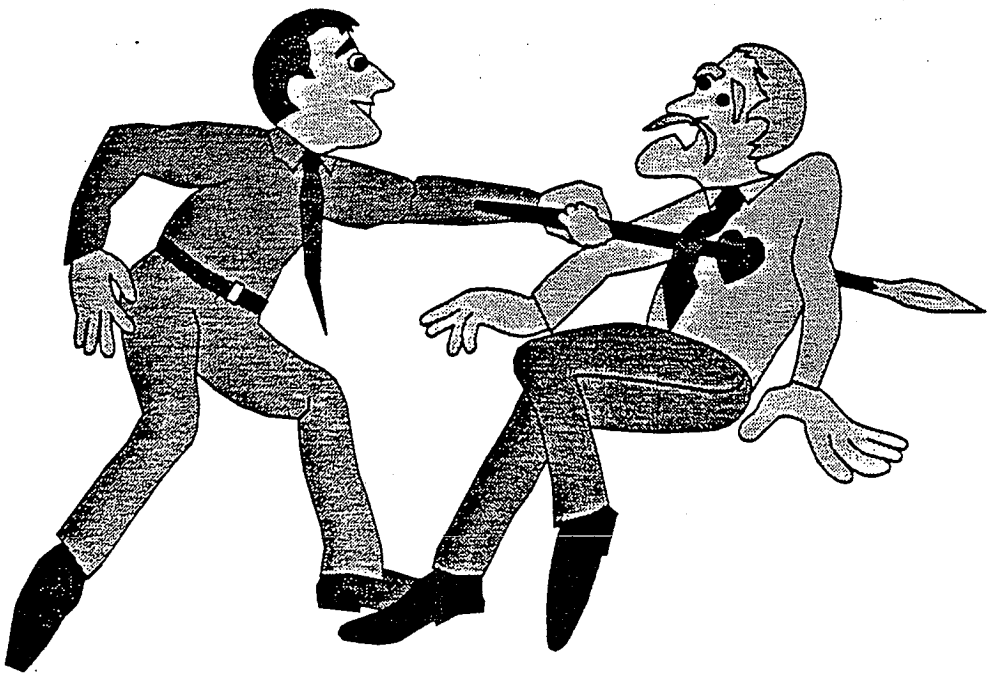
Tips on Learning the Art and Science of Team Problem Solving

1. Adopt a problem-solving process and use it often.
2. Agree on group norms for problem solving.
3. Use all the tools in your problem-solving kit, not just brainstorming.
4. Use visual props to prompt discussion and make a public record.
5. Break problem solving into manageable chunks.

Editor's Note: Robby Champion is an independent consultant who works as a trainer, facilitator for strategic planning, and project consultant in the areas of change, team development, school improvement, and facilitator training. She formerly served as Chief of the Staff Development Branch of the Maryland State Department of Education. She may be reached at 9712 Riverside Circle, Ellicott City, MD 21042; phone: (410) 750-1920; fax: (410) 750-6259.

Four Steps in Problem Solving

1. Describe the problem that requires a response, and explain why a response is necessary.
2. Identify a number of possible solutions.
3. Choose the best solution.
4. Take action to implement.

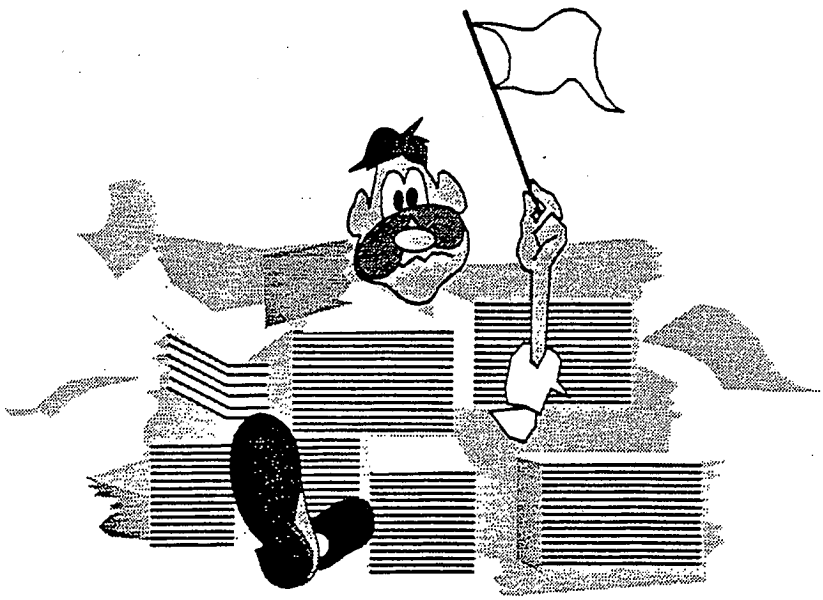


S - T - P Approach to Solving a Problem

Situation: Where are we now?

Target: Where do we want to be?

Proposal: How can we get there?



Presentation SKILLS

Facilitating Interactive Problem Solving

There is a growing recognition in the staff development field that one of the most valuable roles staff developers can play is that of facilitator of substantive dialogue and problem solving among teachers (**Diegmueller** 1992). Many experts believe that the focus of staff development will shift from the workshop to the work group–from individual teachers to groups of teachers within and across schools–teachers who have mutual interests and can serve as resources to one another for professional development.

Noted teacher educator **Judith Warren Little** (1993) suggests that the most promising forms of professional development "engage teachers in the pursuit of genuine questions, problems, and curiosities over time in a way that leave a mark on policy and practice." Researchers **Louis and Miles** (1992) note that "problems are our friends, and seeking assistance is a sign of intelligence." For too long, teachers have had to grapple with complex problems in the isolation of their classrooms, without the benefit of structured dialogue with colleagues. Pedagogical problems can become the stimulus for team learning and critical and creative thinking.

To facilitate problem solving and knowledge generation among teachers, here are two strategies you can try during your next staff development session: **Pinwheel** and **Consulting Trios.**

Pinwheel

Pinwheel is a team problem-solving strategy introduced by educational consultant **Pam Robbins** at the ASCD Professional Development Institute (PDI) "Tools for Site-Based Decision Makers." It is a stimulating and fun activity to promote reflective inquiry and multiple perspectives about issues in curriculum and instruction.

As the facilitator, you begin the activity by posting a large copy of the pinwheel graphic (Figure 1) on a wall. Divide participants into teams of six, and follow these instructions:

1. Each team forms a pinwheel, using Figure 1 as a guide. Three people stand in the center facing out (Persons A, B, and C); and three stand on the circumference (Persons 1, 2, and 3), each facing one of the people in the center.

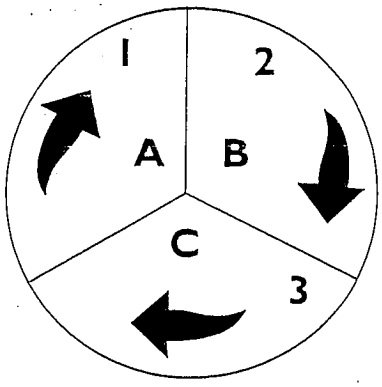


FIGURE 1 Pinwheel

2. Person A is now ready for discussion with Person 2; and Person C partners with Person 3. The partners briefly introduce themselves–often describing a favorite leisure-time activity.

3. The facilitator then asks Persons A, B, and C to describe a challenge they are currently facing in the classroom to their respective discussion partners.

4. The partner listens, checks for understanding, asks questions if necessary to clarify the issue, and then offers as many positive suggestions as possible.

5. After five minutes, the facilitator announces that time is up, and Persons A, B, and C thank the discussion partners for their input.

6. Persons 1, 2, and 3 move in a clockwise direction so that Person 1 now faces Person B, becoming Person B's discussion partner; Person 2 becomes Person C's partner; and Person 3 is ready to discuss and help solve Person A's problem.

7. After brief introductions, the discussion process is repeated. Person A describes to Person 3 the same challenge that was discussed with Person 1; Person B talks to Person 1; and Person C talks to Person 2. Again, the people on the outside of the pinwheel listen, ask clarifying questions, and offer suggestions.

Pam Robbins

8. After five minutes, the facilitator calls time and asks the people on the outside of the pinwheel to move in a clockwise direction for the final round in which they form their third discussion partnership and repeat the process.

9. After the third discussion, the facilitator asks the people on the inside of the pinwheel to exchange places with those on the outside and assume the problem-solver role. The process is repeated until each pinwheel member has had three chances to both pose a problem and offer suggestions to a partner.

> "Problems are our friends, and seeking assistance is a sign of intelligence."