



BETTER COMMUNICATION FOR EFFECTIVE DECISION MAKING

WORKSHOP



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Special thanks to E. Franklin Dukes, Ph.D

Goals of the Workshop



You will learn about:

- Communication theory.
- Building communication practice.
- Identifying and reinforcing group best practices.

What are your goals/aspirations for this workshop?

Communication Theory



Communication Theory

- ❑ Decision making is not all a group does. They also share information, socialize, relate to people and groups external to the group, educate members, define roles and status, have meeting rituals and physical activity (Poole and Hirokawa, 1996: 10-11).
- ❑ Decisions are the end result of many sub-processes and finer-grained decisions that lead up to it (Poole and Hirokawa: 1996, 8 and 286)
- ❑ “... many researchers equate information with communication and/or pay little attention to the form, function and responses to message exchange in group communication.” (Sieborld, Myers and Sunwolf in Poole and Hirokawa, 1996: 243).
- ❑ Information is communicated knowledge, so effective communication is central to understanding issues (Propp in Frey et al, 1999: 225).

Communication Principles...

1) “...groups have a greater likelihood of reaching appropriate and high quality or otherwise effective decisions under circumstances in which “*communication serves to ensure that essential task requirements are satisfied*” based on Dewey’s 1910 model of reflective thinking (Frey, 1999: 15).

Significance: Good communication is essential for good decision making.

Communication Principles...

2) Structuration: Developed by Anthony Giddens, looked at how internal factors (rules and resources) shape and are shaped by patterns of group interaction (Frey, 1999: 14).

Significance: Structures = combinations of rules and resources available to the group, affect group members' communicative behavior and, in turn, alter structures of decision making (Frey, 1999: 16)

In other words, the rules we follow, affect content and style of communication and this affects our decision making.

Communication Principles...

3) High quality communication = high quality decisions (Gouran et al in Poole and Hirokawa, 1996: 13)

Significance: To reach the best decisions possible, we need to have the highest quality communication.

What is Poor vs. Good Communication



- ✓ Low quality communication = highly abstract statements, internally inconsistent, facetious, withdrawal

VS.

- ✓ High quality communication = precise statements, internally consistent statements, relevant, positive, reinforcing, emphasizing cooperation and teamwork.

(Hirokawa, Erbert, Hurst in Hirokawa, Poole and Marshall, 1996: 277: Leathers 1992)

Discussion...

- ✓ What do these theories have to do with the BoRit CAG?
- ✓ How are they applicable to your work? (e.g. differences in communication style, comfort with conflict?)

List responses on flip chart

*Exercise #1 – Communication and Active Listening.
Pair up and choose an A and a B person.*

Different styles of communication

- ✓ Group communication is most important for decision making when knowledge is not equally distributed amongst members (Hirokawa et al in Frey et al, 1999: 168).
- ✓ Individual communication styles are important to consider. Individual differences in comfort with public speaking affect degree of participation and satisfaction (Poole et al in Frey et al, 1999: 124).
- ✓ Cultural differences may also affect information processing and perceptions (accommodating or avoiding styles vs. direct styles) (Haslett and Ruebush in Frey et al, 1999: 126-28).

The role of conflict in communication

- ✓ Culturally, some view conflict as inherently bad. But conflict is not bad when viewed as a tool.
- ✓ Groups need to surface conflict – those who table issues or do not surface them showed poorer results than those that did (Poole and Baldwin in Poole and Hirokawa, 1996: 237).
- ✓ Conflict helps to surface disagreement and fosters critical idea examination; often leading to better decisions (Schultz in Frey et al, 1999: 372)

Discussion...

Exercise #2 – Where do you stand in relation to conflict?



Individual Work and Discussion...

Kraybill's Conflict Styles Inventory Instructions

- 1) Fill in the scores and find your style critter.*
- 2) Read about the pros and cons of your style.*

Individual work = 20 minutes

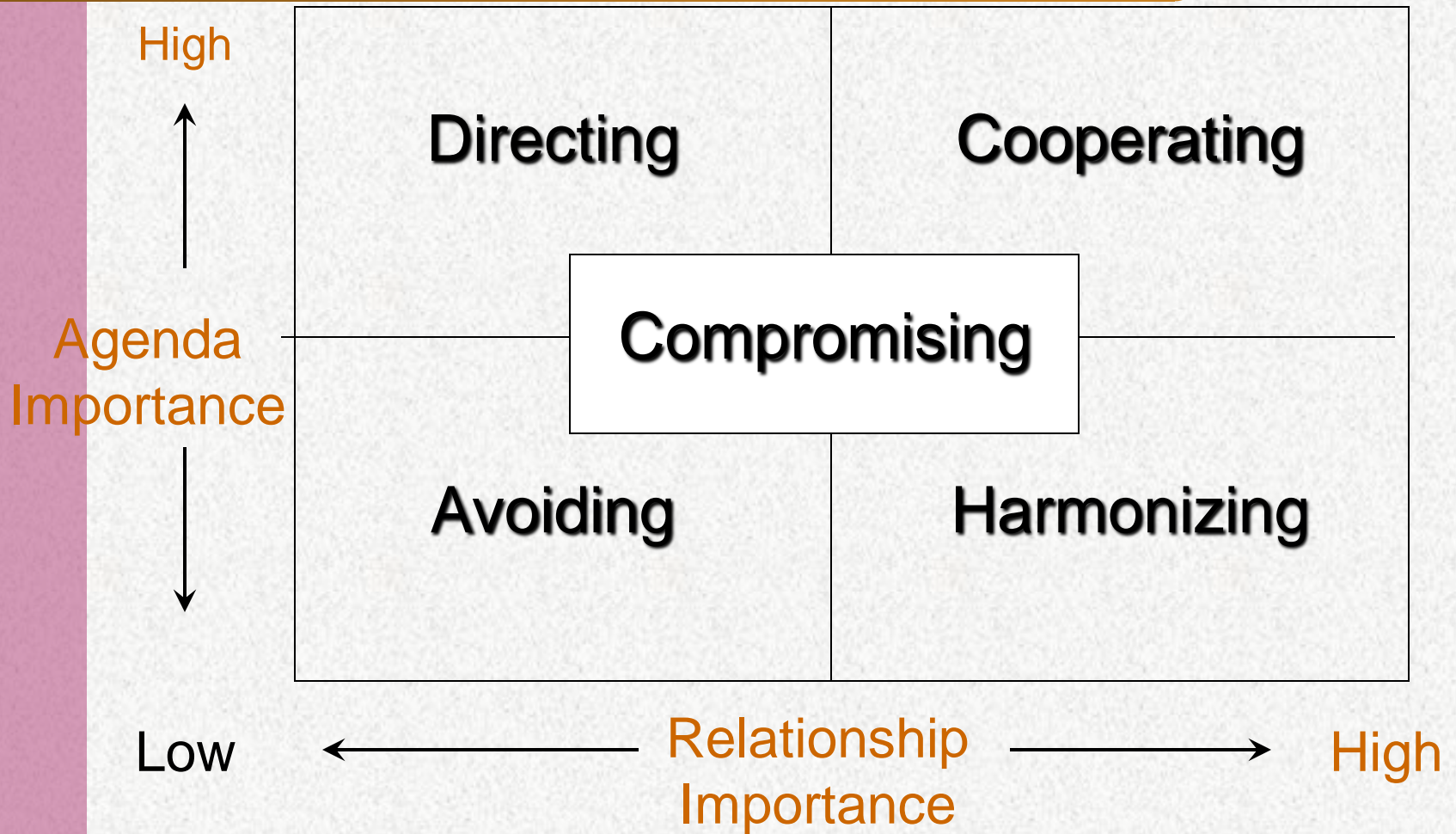
Get together with similar styles and caucus = 20 minutes

- 1) What was surprising?*
- 2) When is this style appropriate and working well for you?*
- 3) Describe situations when a change in style is necessary.*

Discussion and reflections = 15 minutes

How do our individual communication styles affect our group?

Kraybill's Conflict Styles



Individual Conflict Styles and Principled Communication



Key Elements of Principled Communication

- **Pursue Interests:** Avoid getting stuck on stated positions, demands, or premature solutions. Explore underlying interests of each party. Don't assume each party's interests are understood.
- **Separate People from the Problem:** Acknowledge the feelings first, then focus on the issues. Be soft on people and hard on the problems.
- **Invent Options:** Separate decision-making from idea generation.
- **Develop Objective Criteria:** Pursue agreement about principles, procedures, and standards, then seek solutions that meet those criteria.
- **Encourage Involvement:** Inclusiveness is a matter of fairness and practicality.

Effective Behavior in Collaborative Groups

Avoid...

- Labeling, name calling, blanket generalizations
- Postponement or conflict avoidance: *“Let’s just avoid it – I don’t want to get into a fight.”*
- Tit for tat: *“You exaggerated first, I’m going to do the same.”*
- Compromise for the sake of getting along

Work For...

- Positive confrontation: *“Let’s address this behavior right away.”*
- Building positive, enforceable ground rules that reflect your values and principles
- Consistent, principled support for your interests

Strategies for Handling Intense Emotions

- **Healthy expressions of emotion are okay** - An opportunity to vent may be appropriate and necessary.
- **Allow silence** - Don't rush to fill an "empty" space. People may benefit from a time of silence, to regain composure, to collect thoughts.
- **Acknowledge the emotion** - A simple statement such as "this is hard for you" affirms that the feeling is understood and accepted.
- **Remind people of their agreement to follow the ground rules** - Sometimes a firm reminder about behavior may be both necessary and effective.
- **Avoid responding in kind** - Put downs and other inflammatory language can harm discussion.
- **Call a "time out"** to allow for emotions to cool down

Dealing with Values Disagreement

- Provide a **clear explanation** of your concerns
- Recall the initial **protocols and ground rules**
- Don't be **obstinate** (unwilling to listen), but offer **principled opposition** (explain why you will not compromise fundamental values and goals)
- Talk with the facilitator or chair in **private** if your concerns are not being aired to your satisfaction.



Key Behaviors for Success

- *Early involvement and sufficient time.*
- *High-quality knowledge, monitoring and evaluation capacity.*
 - Use of expert knowledge and local knowledge
 - Monitoring and evaluating the outcomes of the process
- *Cultured conflict.*
 - Follow principles of civil discourse while encouraging challenges to assumptions
 - Participants listen, take others' perspectives seriously, and address participant concerns
- *Sustained dialogue.*
 - Seek consensus only after exploring the issues and interests
 - Distinguish between positions or demands and underlying needs and interests

Mechanisms and tone matter...

Studies have shown that the most effective method for communication that avoids misunderstanding from most to least effective is...

- 1) Talking
- 2) Letter writing
- 3) Emails

Emails were found to have the highest level of miscommunication potential. Why?

In emails, we often avoid salutations such as Dear _____ or caring statements such as “How are you?” We often jump straight to the “facts.” We also forget basic common civility such as “please and thanks” and instead we bark orders and instructions. With emails you can’t see smiles or frowns.

Consider two examples...

Chair, Why have you avoided scheduling the discussions on toxic compound x? Your delays have serious ramifications! Inform me immediately of your plans so I can determine who else I need to notify to ensure this is done in case you are not paying attention or taking this seriously enough. Becky

vs.

Dear Fred, How are you? Well, I hope! I am writing to ask about your plans for scheduling discussion on toxic compound x. If I recall correctly, the group made a plan in March to have that discussion by December and I am getting worried that we might not get to it, as that is just a month away. Can you advise me of the plans to do this or, if there needs to be a delay, I would really appreciate knowing the reasons. If this is too complicated for an email, please do call me after 5 at 123-4567. Thanks for your attention to this matter. I'm sure it isn't easy scheduling all these issues. Regards, Becky

Be intentional in fostering good communication.

Exercise #3

- 1) When we operate at our **worst**, we (look like... feel... sound like...)...
- 2) When we operate at our **best**, I (see... feel... hear...)...
- 3) When I envision how we should best **communicate**, my **highest aspirations** are that we...
- 4) In order to make these aspirations come alive, the **communication principles and behaviors** (ground rules) we must follow are...*(you may want to address email protocol)*

Group Communication Practice



De Bono's Six Thinking Hats

- ✓ We have tendencies for interaction that may get in the way of collaboration and constructive conversation. We might make “killer statements” or continually act as the critic. We may want to over analyze = analysis paralysis.
- ✓ It is natural to begin to address problems by instantly seeking solutions. However, the pattern in which we seek to understand, evaluate and address a problem can affect the possibility for a good outcome.
- ✓ De Bono suggests a way to parse your type of thinking in a disciplined way to ensure all styles of evaluation and communication can be harnessed. The order is very important to ensuring comprehensive and successful approaches.

Six Hats



White Hat: Neutral, objective facts and figures

Red Hat: Emotional response, feelings, intuition

Black Hat: Cautious and careful, critique, what can go wrong?

Yellow Hat: Positive and optimistic, what are benefits, what if...?

Green Hat: Creative, abundant, outside the box thinking!

Blue Hat: Organizational process and outcomes – how can we do this and what will we achieve?

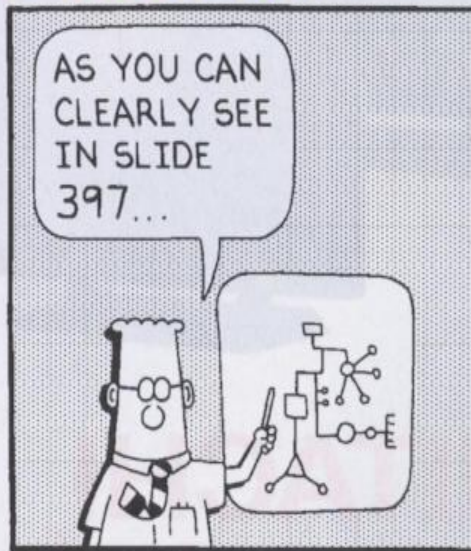
Work through a scenario with the above hats in that order.

Conclusion: Necessary Conditions for Success for any Group

- *Clear purpose, goals.*
 - A well-defined purpose that is real, practical and shared
- *Clear structure and process.*
 - Well-defined decision rules and process rules
 - Supported and developed by convener and participants
- *Sufficient resources to conduct the process.*
 - Funding for skilled facilitators or trained chairs
 - Funding to support consistent staff participation
- *Inclusion and effective representation.*
 - Representatives of all relevant and different interests
- *Collaboration capacity among staff and participants.*
 - Training in communication, outreach, leadership, & collaborative problem solving skills

Thanks for your attention -- Phew!

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