HUMAN SYSTEMS DYNAMICS INSTITUTE

Be a STAR[1]

A tool to
assess and maintain team effectiveness

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Introduction

Teams have the potential to accomplish much more than any one individual. The startup of a team can be full of energy as team members sort out individual expectations and form a direction that is for the benefit of all. Over time, however, every team encounters challenges. These challenges can either help the team focus and work together, or they can threaten the working relationships that support the work of the team.

This Handbook includes tools and techniques to help teams recognize and resolve their issues, so that they can work most productively together. It is based on the STAR Model, designed and developed by Brenda Zimmerman. The STAR defines the four features of a team that allow it to work effectively toward common goals.

The first section of the Handbook includes an assessment tool that a team can use to evaluate its performance against the STAR criteria and to determine how the team might focus to build its skills and improve its work together.

Each of the other sections of the Handbook presents tools and techniques that a team can use to strengthen its capacity on a different point of the STAR Model:

► S—Similarities and differences. This aspect of the STAR provides the diversity and creativity required for the work of the team. Human systems dynamics depend on similarities and differences they form the patterns that emerge and change over time.

► T—Talking and listening. This point of the STAR establishes the interactions that support relationships across lines of difference that are necessary to the work. Talking and listening form the exchanges that allow for individual and group transformation in human systems dynamics.

► A—Authentic work. This facet of the STAR provides the satisfaction and progress of defining and completing concrete and useful tasks. The work of a group forms one kind of container to hold the individuals together as they form shared meaning and action in complex human system dynamics.

► R—Reason for being together. This point of the STAR provides the "glue" that brings a team together and holds it in the relationship that allows productive work. A shared reason for being together is a second kind of container that holds a group together as they find shared patterns of meaning and action.

We hope you find this assessment and its supporting handbook and its tools helpful. You may also want to add your own ideas for ways to strengthen your team in its role as a STAR team.

Assessment

The STAR Model Assessment provides an opportunity for a team to evaluate its own performance as a working team. Each participant in a team should complete the survey. Scores can be reported in a variety of ways.

Find the average values for each section across all responders to see how the team perceives its strengths and needs in each of the STAR categories.

Find the overall average of all questions to measure the team's perception of itself as a team.

Compare and contrast maximum and minimum scores on individual questions, sections of questions, or the whole to indicate how much members agree on the nature and work of the team.

This assessment is not intended to measure the absolute capacity of a team; rather it should be used as a discussion tool. It can uncover significant issues that a team should deal with to overcome its barriers and reach its full potential. Results of the assessment can help a team point toward its strengths and needs, so members of the team can make adjustments to sustain positive working relationships.

The following sections of the Handbook provide tools and techniques a team can use to strengthen the points of its STAR.

Star Assessment

Your team is working together to accomplish a task, reach a goal, or improve a process. Please answer the following questions to provide information about your experiences with this particular team. Your answers, and answers from other members, will be used to plan how best to improve your outcomes.

Date _____

Team name _____

Time with the team _____

Role with the team _____

For the questions that follow, please circle the number that best represents your response to the question. At the end of the survey, you can add any comments you wish.

1 = Disagree strongly

2 = Disagree

3 = Agree

4 = Agree strongly

Similarities and Differences

1. There are many valuable differences among members of the team.	1	2	3	4
2. We talk openly about our differences.	1	2	3	4
3. I feel a part of this team.	1	2	3	4
4. I notice that others feel a part of this team.	1	2	3	4
5. It is easy for someone new to join this team.	1	2	3	4
6. Most of the people who began with this team are still involved.	1	2	3	4
7. I feel that I can be myself with this team.	1	2	3	4
8. I feel that others can be themselves with the team.	1	2	3	4
9. We share history of experiences and learnings.	1	2	3	4
10. I know what differences make a difference in our team.	1	2	3	4
11. We are able to use the diversity in the team to learn and be creative.	1	2	3	4
12. We have had conflict in the past.	1	2	3	4
13. We have been able to resolve conflict in the past.	1	2	3	4
14. We face issues that will bring about constructive conflict in the team.	1	2	3	4
Total				
Similarities and Differences Grand Total				

Talking and Listening

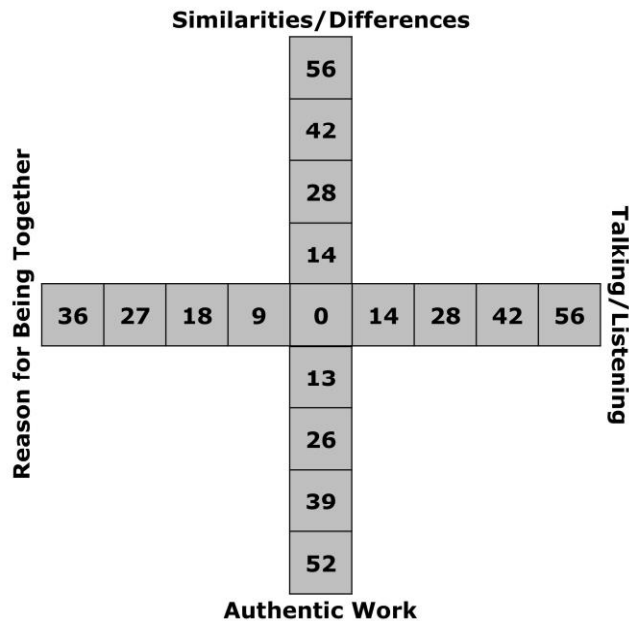|	1	2	3	4
15. I feel that others in the team listen when I speak.	1	2	3	4
16. I feel free to share personal information about myself with the team.	1	2	3	4
17. Everyone in this team has an opportunity to speak and be heard.	1	2	3	4
18. The conversation of the team is shared equally among members.	1	2	3	4
19. I usually understand what others in the team are saying.	1	2	3	4
20. I can predict what others in the team will say before they speak.	1	2	3	4
21. We spend time reflecting on our work together.	1	2	3	4
22. We ask many questions of each other as we talk.	1	2	3	4
23. I do not feel the need to repeat my points many times before they are heard.	1	2	3	4
24. I feel energized and excited when I leave a meeting of this team.	1	2	3	4
25. People in the team use words or phrases that are familiar to me.	1	2	3	4
26. We share common definitions of the words we use to discuss our work.	1	2	3	4
27. It is fun to be a part of this team.	1	2	3	4
28. We provide clear feedback to members when they disappoint us.	1	2	3	4
Total				
Talking and Listening Grand Total				

Authentic Work

29. Leadership is shared among members of the team.	1	2	3	4
30. When I need information, I know where to go for help.	1	2	3	4
31. I say positive things about this team to others.	1	2	3	4
32. I would encourage others to join this team.	1	2	3	4
33. The work of the team meets my expectations.	1	2	3	4
34. The work of the team exceeds my expectations.	1	2	3	4
35. Over time, we tend to be more effective as a team.	1	2	3	4
36. Most of us do what we say we will do.	1	2	3	4
37. I expect myself to fulfill my commitments to the team.	1	2	3	4
38. We complete our work within schedules we expect.	1	2	3	4
39. We use our human resources wisely.	1	2	3	4
40. We use our financial resources wisely.	1	2	3	4
41. I always know what I am supposed to do.	1	2	3	4
Total				
Authentic Work Grand Total				

Reason for Being Together

42. I know why I participate in this team.	1	2	3	4
43. I know why others participate in this team.	1	2	3	4
44. We share the same reason for working together.	1	2	3	4
45. We have spent enough time talking about why we are here.	1	2	3	4
46. We have a shared vision of the future.	1	2	3	4
47. I usually know what will happen when I meet with the team.	1	2	3	4
48. We are making progress toward our goals.	1	2	3	4
49. The reason for our being together is the same as when we started our work.	1	2	3	4
50. The goals of the team match my personal goals.	1	2	3	4
Total				
Reason for Being Together Grand Total				

51. What else would you like to say? Please add any comments or questions you have about these or other aspects of your experience in your team.

Balancing the STAR

Similarities/Differences

	56
	42
	28
	14

Reason for Being Together

36	27	18	9	0	14	28	42	56

Talking/Listening

	13
	26
	39
	52

Authentic Work

Mark your total points on each of the four arms of the STAR. Consider the following questions yourself.

> ► Which arm is the longest?
>
> ► Which is the shortest?
>
> ► How much variation is there among the arms of the STAR?
>
> ► What do these relationships tell you about the work of your team?

After your own reflection on these questions, talk to other members of your team. Discuss the following questions with others.

> ► How are your STAR maps similar?
>
> ► How are they different?
>
> ► What does this tell you about the work of your team?

Depending on what you find, you may want to focus on strengthening one or another aspect of the STAR. The following pages provide some ideas for ways you might wish to strengthen your Similarities and Differences, Talking and Listening, Authentic Work, or Reason for Being Together. Repeat the assessment often and use it to shape the on-going growth and development of your team.

Similarities and Differences

Similarities and differences fuel the work of the productive relationship. As the difference in height causes water to run downhill, so differences among members of a team allow for learning and change. Similarity provides the encouragement for a team to remain together to complete its work. Together, similarity and difference, allow for both stability and change as a team comes together to do work.

When a team is not dealing effectively with its similarities and differences it will:

- ► Demonstrate patterns of bias or prejudice

- ► Cause hurt feelings

- ► Make some members feel excluded from the team

- ► Focus on individual, rather than team, needs

- ► Live with underlying conflict

- ► Encourage potshots and other passive aggressive behaviors

- ► Establish cliques or factions within it

The following pages provide tools and techniques to help a team develop its capacity to use similarity and difference. It includes:

- ► Exploring Differences

- ► Pushing the Difference

- ► Difference Matrix

- ► Decision Map

- ► Clustering

- ► Personal Stories

- ► Patterns of Similarity and Difference

Exploring Differences

Purpose

Many teams are uncomfortable focusing on difference. Often teams who come together to provide service see themselves as more alike than different, so they hesitate to see or celebrate the ways in which individuals are unique within the team.

This exercise is designed to help teams uncover their hidden differences, so that they can use them to build creativity into their efforts.

Materials

Easel pad and marker

Process

Explain the significance of differences in a well-functioning team. Make it clear that differences provide the energy for action in a complex system. Give some examples to get them started. Differences also define what the emerging pattern can look like. If there are too few differences, then the team will go nowhere. If there are too many differences and not enough similarities, they won't be able to work together as a unit.

Point out ways that differences have supported and enriched the work of the team in the past. Explain that any team of people represents an enormous number of differences—some significant and others not. Ask the team to brainstorm a list of the differences among them. Write down the differences as they are expressed. The team will identify a wide variety of differences (hair color, size of family, height, education, and so on). List all of the differences. Minimize conversation about particular differences at this time. When the team has listed all of the differences they can think of, review the list. Ask the team to focus on each difference in order. Determine whether each 1) Contributes to the work of the team. Mark these with a plus (+) sign; 2) Distracts from the work of the team. Mark these with a minus (-) sign; or 3) Is irrelevant to the work of the team. Mark these with a zero (0).

After reviewing the entire list, ask the team to select one distracting difference to focus on. Have the team determine an action they can take to transform this difference into a constructive one. Build an action plan to convert this negative difference into a positive difference. Do not try to focus on more than one difference at a time. Allow the team to take action on the single difference. At the next meeting, ask what the outcomes were from the action plan. Either develop another action plan for that difference or focus on another difference that needs to be transformed for the team to work together.

Reference

For more information about exploring differences, refer to *Facilitating Organization Change* (Olson & Eoyang, 2001) and *Beyond Race and Gender* (Thomas, 1991).

Pushing the Difference

Purpose

It is sometimes difficult for a team to articulate and deal with its significant differences. This exercise is a fun way for a team to surface and come to understand the differences that have potential to enrich the work of the team or to split it into factions.

Materials

None required.

Process

Identify a difference that is problematic for the team. Examples may include:

 ► Age

 ► Race

 ► Ability to deal with conflict

 ► Education

 ► Time with the team

 ► Flexibility with change

Determine a description for two sides of the difference. For example, a difference in age might fall into two categories: Over 30 and under 30. Ask all members who fall on one side of the difference to go to one side of the room and all members who fall on the other to go to the other side.

Ask one or more of the following questions to "push" the difference and uncover the issues that it represents. You may want to give individuals in the group time to frame their own responses before asking for group reactions.

 ► What do you think the people on the other side of the room say about you?

 ► How do you feel when you encounter someone from the other side of the room?

 ► What is the best experience you ever had with someone who would be standing on the other side of the room?

 ► What is the worst experience you ever had with someone who would be standing on the other side of the room?

 ► What can the people on the other side of the room offer to your work together that you cannot offer yourself?

 ► How can the people who are standing on the other side of the room help you the most?

Be sure that all participants listen carefully to the comments from the other side of the room. Ask for each participant to reflect on his or her learnings and identify team commitments that will allow each side to use the gifts of the other in the work of the team.

Reference

For more information about dealing with difference, refer to For more information about exploring differences, refer to *Facilitating Organization Change* (Olsen & Eoyang, 2001) and *Cultural Diversity in Organizations* (Cox, 1993).

Difference Matrix

Purpose

Two dynamics drive the activities of a team--their similarities and differences and the amount of interaction between team members or subgroups. The Difference Matrix allows a team to examine these forces that shape its actions. It can be used to analyze the current situation of a team, to describe a preferred state, and plan interventions that will change the dynamics of the team.

Materials

> ► Public writing surface, such as an easel pad or white board

> ► Markers

Process

Explain that the levels of difference and communication shape how members of a team work together. Draw a Difference Matrix to show the four states that emerge from the interactions of these two factors.

	High Difference	Low Difference
High Communication	Rich interactions Open, productive disagreements Learning Growth Problem solving Friction Anger Conflict Hard work	Fun Feeling of acceptance Public agreement Reinforcement for team norms Feeling of solidarity "Singing to the choir" Lack of progress Reinforce past behaviors Cliques
Low Communication	Introverted problem solving Reflection Rest Avoidance of irrelevant issues Personal care taking Isolation Seething discontent Avoidance of relevant issues Lack of resolution	Common bonds Shared history Shared assumptions Cultural values Shared expectations No change Boredom Silence Unspoken bias

1. Discuss the following regarding the Matrix:

   ► Each square includes some constructive features and some destructive ones.

   ► Too much time in any square leads to its negative consequences.

   ► Individuals and groups move from one square to another over time.

   ► Different people in the same group can be in different squares at the same time.

   ► A group can intentionally move from one square to another. Different individuals have preferences for different squares.

   ► Provide a Matrix with blank squares. Ask the team to identify which of their issues fall into each category. Write each issue in the square that matches it.

2. Ask the team which issues are in the most productive squares and which ones would be better dealt with in different squares. For example:

   ► Is the team avoiding communication about an important difference?

   ► Are they talking about a difference that is irresolvable or irrelevant and should be ignored?

   ► Does the team need to talk more about the things they hold in common, rather than making assumptions?

   ► Does the team avoid disagreement altogether, so that they are not able to identify or address important differences?

3. Identify one issue that needs to move to a different square. Determine where it is currently and where it needs to be.

4. Talk about ways to move that issue to its more appropriate square. Consider using the following strategies to move an issue from one quadrant to another:

   ► To move toward the right, focus on common ground. Find out what the group shares and talk about those things.

   ► To move toward the left, push the differences. Find small disagreements and talk about them to uncover the hidden, but significant, differences in the group.

   ► To move up, ask questions to get a conversation started.

   ► To move down, take a time out or ask people to have some private reflecting time.

5. Work with the team to determine ONE thing they will do to shift the issue from its current place. Get commitment from everyone to try the plan.

6. Check in some time later to see how the new strategy has affected how the team works together.

The Difference Matrix can also be used to plan activities for a meeting, resolve conflicts as they arise, focus the attention of a team, meet individual needs for clarification and resolution.

Reference

For more information about the Difference Matrix and its applications, refer to *Coping with Chaos: Seven Simple Tools* (Eoyang, 1997).
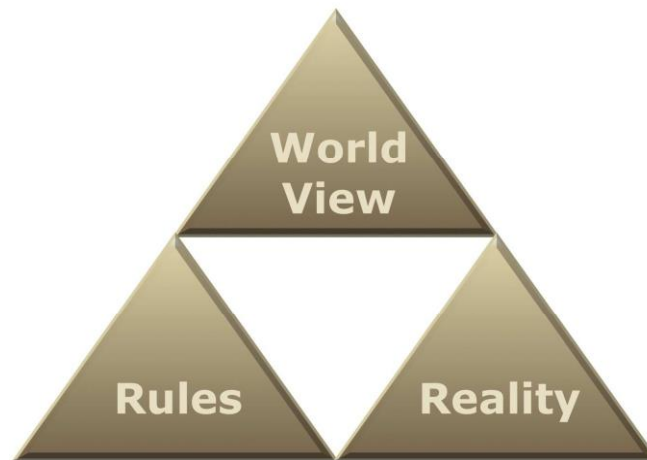
Decision Map

Purpose

Many factors affect individual and team decisions. The Decision Map is a tool to help a team talk about its differences and identify tactics for using the differences to form better team decisions.

Materials

► Public writing surface, such as an easel pad or white board

► Markers

Process

Ask each individual or small group to identify the foundations for a decision they have made. The foundations fall into three categories, shown on the Decision Map.

World view includes all assumptions and beliefs that are held about the decision to be made. **Reality** includes data and observations that affect the decision. **Rules** include all regulations, laws, and social norms that relate to the decision.

Different people or groups will include different factors as the world view, reality, and rules that form their decisions. By clarifying the underlying assumptions, the team can be clear about what causes one group's decision to be different from another's. Through discussion, the team can come to consensus about the shared world views, realities, and rules that can form the foundation for a common decision.

Reference

For more information about decisions and how they're made, refer to *The Care and Feeding of Ideas* (Adams, 1986).

Clustering

Purpose

Both similarities and differences affect how teams form and how individuals relate to each other in a team. Clustering can help a team recognize their critical similarities and differences.

Materials

Room large enough for team members to move around

Process

Identify a particular question or issue on which there is disagreement in the team. State two or more positions as clearly as possible. Ask members to claim one or another of the positions and move around the room to join others who share their views. Each group of like-minded members forms a single cluster. Make it clear that members can move from one cluster to another as the conversation continues.

Give each cluster five minutes to prepare a statement that clarifies its position on the issue. Have each group report back to the whole with its perspective. Then ask each cluster to take one of the other positions (one with which they disagree). Again, give the clusters a few minutes to state their new position as clearly as possible and have them report out. Continue this process until each cluster has had an opportunity to present its own perspective and those of all other clusters.

Bring the whole team back together again to state a single position that captures the most significant insights from all of the clusters. Ask the following questions to encourage the process of consensus:

► How were all of the positions similar? How can the whole team make a decision or recommendation that depends on these similarities?

► What were the differences among the points of view? Which of these differences are trivial and can be ignored? Which of the differences are critical and how can they be reconciled?

Use the insights of the team to state a solution that all can agree to support.

Reference

For more information about group techniques, refer to *Discovering Common Ground* (Weisbord, 1992) and *Mindmapping* (Wycoff, 1991).

Personal Stories

Purpose

Each person in a team brings a wealth of experience to the work. Each experience is unique and can add richness to a conversation or a decision-making process. On the other hand, we are all human beings, so our experiences often follow similar patterns. Hearing another's story helps uncover how their experiences are the same as and different from yours.

Materials

None

Process

Appreciative Inquiry is an approach to organizational change that focuses on the strengths and assets of a group. The following questions will help a group focus on stories that are encouraging and give energy toward vision and action.

► Describe a time when you feel the team/group performed really well. What were the circumstances during that time?

► Describe a time when you were a proud member of a team/group. Why were you proud?\What do you value most about being a member of this team/group? Why?

► Describe an incident when you or someone you know went the extra mile to proved the customer what they really wanted. What made that possible?

► Describe a time when you faced a huge challenge, you relied on strong personal values, and the outcome was successful.

Ask each member of the team to describe an experience he or she has had that relates to the point of interest. Take time to listen to all of the stories from the group. When all stories have been told, discuss how the stories are similar and how they are different. Ask the group to develop a shared story that captures the experiences of all.

Also, encourage people to tell stories about the experiences of the team and its history. Use stories to orient new members. When a new member has arrived in the team, ask each member to tell a story that captures the history and life of the team. What makes it successful or fun or satisfying to be a part of the team?

Reference

For more information about storytelling, refer to *Storytelling: Process and Practice* (Livo & Rietz, 1986) and *Appreciative Inquiry* (Watkins & Mohr, 2001)

Patterns of Similarity and Difference

Purpose

In a complex system, the same patterns of behavior or relationship appear over and over in different places and different contexts. By understanding the patterns of similarity and difference, one can begin to develop a deep understanding of the environment and the individuals who inhabit it.

Materials

None

Process

Some individuals have a gift for seeing patterns. Identify who those persons are in your team, and rely on them to help identify repeating patterns.

When a new issue or concern develops, use pattern thinking to gain some understanding by asking the following questions and discussing them as a team:

► Where have we seen something similar before?

► How is this the same and different from another situation?

► Which of the following figures is most descriptive of the experience and why:

Circle	Curvy line	Triangle
Straight line going up	Straight line going down	Square
Straight line going at an angle up or down		

► Are there similarities and differences between two or more situations in terms of:

Time	Balance	Power
Space	Size or weight	Emotional content
Relationship		

As a team begins to recognize patterns, they may want to record their learnings for later reference.

Meeting minutes or project reports are good places to document patterns when they are observed. Frequently patterns repeat themselves. Understanding the patterns builds a capacity for understanding and more responsible action. As you recognize patterns, you can use other tools in this handbook to help shift toward more productive patterns.

Reference

For information about a pattern language, refer to *A Pattern Language* (Alexander, 1977).

Talking and Listening

Talking and listening provide the means to connect across differences in a working relationship. Presenting one's ideas and listening to the ideas of others allow for members of the team to grow, and it allows new and creative solutions to emerge from their interactions.

When a team is not talking honestly or listening respectfully, it will:

► Cause frustration to individual members

► Repeat the same conversations over and over

► Lose members who disagree

► Become boring

► Be dominated by one or another member

The following pages provide tools and techniques to help a team develop its capacity to talk and listen well. Activities include:

► Circle Process

► Giving and Receiving Feedback

► Questioning

► Talk and Listen

► Email

► Response Loops

► Roberts Rules of Order

► Phone

► Unconventional Communications

► Written Words

► Reflections

Circle Process

Purpose

Many of our communications habits are based on talking rather than listening. The purpose of a Circle Process is to encourage people to listen carefully to others' experiences, insights, and perspectives.

The Circle Process emerges out of Native American traditions in which members of a group are allowed to share their reflections in an unhurried and uncompetitive way. This approach is frequently used in Restorative Justice contexts, where victims, perpetrators, and team members reflect on an offense and consider how justice might be done for all concerned parties.

Materials

Participants should be seated in a circle without tables. You may want to place some significant objects in the middle of the circle to focus vision and minds on common symbols. A "talking piece" can be used to help symbolize that only one person should talk at a time. The person holding the "talking piece" has the floor and the attention of all participants. No other materials are required.

Process

The leader, sometimes called the Circle Keeper, begins the process by asking a reflective question. He or she responds to the question from his or her perspective. The "talking piece" is then handed to the person to the Keeper's left.

This person responds to the question and passes the piece along to the next person. In this fashion, all members of the team have uninterrupted time to respond to the question. No one is allowed to speak out of turn. No questions or statements of any kind are allowed from other members of the team.

The conversation continues around the circle until the "talking piece" returns to the Keeper, who can reflect on the whole, open the talk up to another type of interaction, or ask another question to begin another circuit of reflection.

Reference

For more information about the Circle Process and how it is used in community settings, refer to *Wisdom Circles* (Garfield, 1998) and *Calling the Circle* (Baldwin, 1994).

Talk and Listen

Purpose

Too often, people in our culture do not listen well. We spend our listening time thinking of what we will say next, rather than hearing the perspectives of the other person. The purpose of this exercise is to help us take time to listen without interrupting and to speak without being interrupted.

Materials

Timepiece with a minute hand or a stop-watch.

Process

Ask each participant to choose a partner. The two should sit or stand facing each other. Ask a question or set a frame for a reflection. Ask one member of the pair to talk for two minutes while the other listens. This listening should be without interruptions, questions, or comments. At the end of the two minutes, ring a bell to stop action. Then switch, and have the second member talk for two minutes while the first listens, again without questions, interruptions, or comments.

We have used the following Talk and Listen questions productively in group settings:

- ► I appreciate you because . . .

- ► My experience about a particular issue has been . . .

- ► I am most satisfied when I . . .

- ► My current frustrations are . . .

- ► You could be most help to me if you would . . .

- ► I think we should . . . because . . .

- ► I have been most happy when I have . . .

You might plan an entire cycle of Talk and Listen, so that each member of the group has an opportunity to partner with each of the other members of the team. If the group is larger than five people, it might be helpful to provide a list of members, so that each person can check off others as they partner with them. Be sure to include time for transitions between groups.

Reference

For more information about group communication exercises, refer to *The Art of Facilitation* (Hunter et al., 1995a).

Robert's Rules of Order

Purpose

Some decision-making processes require a formal procedure. Robert's Rules of Order provide a traditional structure for group interaction. Use this approach when:

► A team has experience with Robert's Rules or has an opportunity to learn

► A team is large

► A formal decision must be made

► Perspectives are quite different and emotions are strong enough to make listening difficult

► When there is at least one person who has (or can take) a formal leadership role in the team

Materials

None

Process

Robert's Rules describe a formal and structured approach to group interaction. The rules are described in detail in books. If a team decides to follow Robert's Rules, they should:

► Be explicit about the approach and why this approach is being used.

► Ensure that one person in the team is identified as Parliamentarian to resolve disputes that might arise about the process.

► Provide background information and formal or informal training to help participants understand the rules and expectations.

► Use the process ethically:

▷ Never use it to gain support for a pre-determined outcome.

▷ Be sure that all team members are treated fairly and equitably.

▷ Keep the process as simple as possible, so that everyone can know what is happening at all times.

▷ Revert to more informal discussion techniques as soon as possible

Reference

For detailed information about using this facilitation technique, refer to *Webster's New World Robert's Rules of Order: Simplified and Applied* (Robert, 1998).

Written Words

Purpose

"Where is it written?" This is an old Yiddish saying that acknowledges the power of the written word. Human perspectives, perceptions, and understandings change over time. Even if immediate understanding is complete, no two people's memories work in identical ways. The written word captures the "truth" at a point in time and forms a touchstone that the team can rely on for future work together.

Materials

Record keeping materials, such as an easel pad or computer; method to distribute, review, and make revisions to documents; common repository, library, or archive to store important documents.

Process

The more things change, the more important good documentation becomes. Effective written records:

► Confirm decisions, so the team does not have to rehash them later

► Provide continuity for members who miss meetings

► Set context for new members

► Support formal reports and evaluation processes

► Provide a sense of progress for the team

A team should agree which documents will support their work.

Possibilities include:
► Meeting agendas
► Meeting minutes
► Project plans
► Resolutions or letters of agreement
► Lists of standards or norms used by the team
► History of actions and activities
► Statements of purpose, goals, objectives

To produce effective documentation:
► Be clear about who's responsible to write and save documents
► Use consistent formats
► Make documents accessible to all members
► Date all documents when they are created

Reference

For more information about writing effective documents, refer to *English Simplified* (Ellsworth, 2001), *Miss Manners' Basic Training: Communication* (Marlin, 1997), and *The Communicator's Handbook* (Calvert, 1990).

Giving and Receiving Feedback

Purpose

When a team works together, differences arise between and among individuals. As a team comes together, each person must adapt to the needs and expectations of others, and needs and expectations must adapt to the capacities of the members of the team. Feedback is a formal way to support adaptation.

Materials

None

Process

Feedback should be encouraged in a team because it allows members to influence each others' behaviors. The following guidelines shape appropriate feedback in groups. Effective feedback should be:

- ► Positive, whenever possible. People need to hear when things are going well! Reinforcement encourages repetition of the positive behavior.
- ► Behavioral. Feedback should describe the behavior that should change, not the assumed intention of the behavior or the imagined motive of it.
- ► Immediate. Delayed feedback can be misunderstood or seem irrelevant. It is much easier for a person to understand a request and change a behavior when the feedback comes soon after the action.
- ► Requested. Unsolicited comments are not nearly as effective as feedback that has been requested by the receiver.
- ► Represented in "I" statements. No one person can judge the universal effect of another's behavior. He or she can, however, talk about how a behavior affects them personally.

The following pattern can be used to present feedback in an appropriate way: When you do XXXX, I feel YYYY, I wish you would ZZZZ. For example:

- ► When you answer every question, I feel that I don't have a chance to be heard. I wish you would allow me to speak first sometimes.
- ► When the team makes decisions so quickly, I feel that I don't have a chance to consider all of the options. I wish we would take more time to discuss alternatives before making a decision.
- ► When you whisper to your neighbor while I'm talking, I feel that you are not listening to what I say. I wish you would be quiet while I'm talking.
- ► When you give good feedback, I feel that I learn new behaviors. I wish you would continue to provide such helpful information.

Reference

For more information about using feedback, refer to *The Power Pyramid* (Tracy, 1990), and *Coaching through Effective Feedback* (Jerome, 1994) and *What did you say?: The Art of Giving and Receiving Feedback* (Seashore, Seashore, & Weinberg, 1997).

Reflections

Purpose

Everyone wants to be heard and understood, even if they are not agreed with. Reflections allow team members to be heard and to feel that they've been heard.

Materials

None

Process

Reflection is a simple and powerful tool. When one person makes a statement, the other person repeats the statement directly, without a question and without judgment. They "reflect" the content of the statement without challenging it or agreeing with it. An example will be helpful.

John:	*I am angry with my neighbors. They don't talk to me when I see them on the street. Their dog digs in my garden. Their walk is never shoveled. I think I am just going to have to move out of the neighborhood.*
James:	*(not a reflection) You think that's bad, I once lived in a neighborhood where the kids climbed my trees and broke down my hedges.*
John:	*You don't understand, these people are real jerks, and I have to live with them every day.*
Jerry:	*(reflection) You are angry with your neighbors.*
John:	*Yeah! That's right. What do you think I might do about it?*

Jerry demonstrated that he understood John's dilemma. Being understood freed John from having to state and re-state his concern with his neighbors and his neighborhood. He was able to look beyond his frustration and begin to think about solutions.

As simple as this technique is, it works wonders. Even if you know that someone is giving you a reflection, it relieves whatever emotional needs you have and frees you to think about a situation in new ways. This release is a gift you can give others when they are tied up in trying to express personal or emotional perspectives.

Reference

For more information about effective communications, refer to *Communicate with Confidence* (Booker, 1994).

Email

Purpose

Electronic mail is an effective and efficient communications medium, but it has its drawbacks. Like other modes of communication, email should be used carefully and appropriately. Research has shown that email improves communications that are already good, but it makes bad communications worse!

Materials

Computer access to the Internet or other email service device for all team members.

Process

Email is not always the best solution to your communication needs.

Use email when:

► The team agrees to appropriate uses
► All team members have access
► Messages are clear and unambiguous
► You do not include sarcasm or humor
► Communicating facts
► Face-to-face conversation is not necessary or possible
► You know the person you are communicating with
► You need to communicate the same message to many people

Avoid email when:

► Team members do not agree on it
► Some team members would be left out
► Messages are complicated or unclear
► You want to express humor
► Communicating opinion
► Face-to-face communication is available
► You don't know the other person well
► You want to tailor your message to the needs of one person

Always follow the etiquette of on-line communications (netiquette):

► Don't send unnecessary messages or information.
► Do not use UPPERCASE. It looks like you're yelling.
► Do not copy large amounts of text into a reply message.
► Always include identifying information for yourself.

► Check your spelling and grammar. On-line communication may be informal, but it should still be readable.
► Mark messages "urgent" only when they are.
► Use descriptive "subject" lines to help the reader know what the note is about.
► Save and re-read a message before you send it if it contains emotional or sensitive contents. The message may convey more than you intend it to.

Reference

For more information about effective email communications, refer to *Better, Faster Email* (Tunstall, 1999) and *Can I Fax a Thank-You Note?* (Glassman, 1998).

Phone

Purpose

The telephone is a primary means of communication in our culture. Voice mail, answering machines, and caller ID have all contributed to the convenience of phone communications. Thoughtful use of the phone can support effective talking and listening on your team.

Materials

Phone and accessories and phone log.

Process

Like email, telephone contact is not always the most effective means of communication.

Use the phone when:

- ► You know who prefers home or business calls
- ► Calls can be short
- ► Information pertains to only one person
- ► It is a good time for the other person
- ► You need or want to hear voice inflections
- ► You have made an agenda for the call
- ► The communication cannot wait for a meeting

Avoid the phone when:

- ► You cannot contact someone at his/her preferred location
- ► The conversation will be long
- ► You need to talk to many people
- ► The time is inconvenient for the other
- ► You can leave a message, rather than talking in person
- ► You are unclear about the purpose
- ► The conversation can wait until a regular meeting

Always follow the etiquette of phone communications (phonetiquette):

- ► At the beginning of a call, confirm that the time is convenient and clarify the purpose.
- ► Leave sufficient information in a message: purpose, name, time, and number to call back.
- ► Repeat your number at least two times.
- ► Respond to phone messages as soon as possible.
- ► Reduce background noise.

- ► Avoid interrupting a call with another call or a side conversation.
- ► Don't call too early in the morning or too late at night.
- ► Do not drive while talking on a cell phone.
- ► Turn off cell phones during meetings.
- ► Avoid listening in on others' calls.
- ► Keep a log of important calls you make and receive.

Reference

For more information about telephone use and etiquette, refer to *Telephone Skills from A to Z* (Freedman, 1995) and *Letitia Baldrige's Complete Guide to the New Manners for the 90's* (Baldrige, 1990).

Questioning

Purpose

The secret to good listening is good questioning. A good question opens a door to meaningful communication and understanding. Steven Covey puts it best when he encourages us to, "Seek first to understand, then to be understood."

Materials

Open ears and an open mind.

Process

Asking good questions is a skill that can be developed over time. When a team practices good questions, they build mutual understanding and respect. To encourage questioning:

- ► Focus a meeting on question asking. In the meeting introduction, suggest that the team focus on its questions. At the end of the meeting, reflect on the questions that were asked and how they affected the progress of the conversation.

- ► Give question feedback to each other. Reinforce people when they ask good questions and suggest restatements when questions are not well stated.

- ► Practice good questioning skills yourself.

Questioning is a process that requires thought before, during, and after.

Before you ask a question—
- ► Try to build a picture of the other's point of view.
- ► Think about the underlying assumptions that shape your view and others'.
- ► Look for the most important differences. Try not to get side tracked.
- ► Think about the overriding purpose of the conversation. What is the end you are both moving toward?
- ► Establish a common ground as context for working out differences.

During the question—
- ► Use language that matches the other person's.
- ► Don't ask a question that you already know the answer to. Ask only one question at a time.
- ► Make the question as short as possible.

After the question—
- ► Give the other time to respond. Allow some silent time for reflection.
- ► Listen intently to the answer.
- ► Do not interrupt.
- ► When the answer is complete, restate the answer as you understood it, and give the other a chance to correct any misunderstanding.
- ► Express your appreciation for thoughtful and complete response.

Reference

For more information about effective questioning techniques, refer to *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (Covey, 1989) and *Dynamics of Effective Listening* (Alessandra, 1994), and *More than Manners videocassette* (New Leaf Media, 1994).

Response Loops

Purpose

Difficult conversations or negotiations can generate friction within a team. Understanding the options for response helps teams avoid pitfalls of ineffective talking and listening.

Materials

None

Process

When a disagreement arises, four options present themselves. We call these "response loops."

► Loop 1: All parties agree. This the easiest loop. It is based on shared assumptions and values. It leads easily to common action.

► Loop 2: Parties initially disagree, but they continue conversation until all agree. This loop may take some time. It is the basis for healthy consensus decision making. Usually both sides have to come to new insights and options before complete agreement is possible.

► Loop 3: Parties initially disagree, after some conversation both parties appear to agree, but they do not. The disagreeing party leaves the conversation unsatisfied. Frequently this loop leads one to question, undermine, or sabotage the decision at some later date (loop 3 behavior).

► Loop 4: Parties disagree, and cannot work out a foundation for agreement. Ultimately one of the disagreeing parties abandons the effort because he or she sees no possibility for resolution (loop 4 behavior).

A group generally will have no difficulty dealing with loops 1 and 2. Dealing with 3 and 4 can generate ill will and lack of trust.

To deal with loop 3 behavior:
► Discourage insincere agreement
► Continue the conversation
► Delay or defer the conversation to a later time
► Give all parties an opportunity for small-group reflection
► Identify points of agreement; leave other points alone
► Confront members of the team who participate in loop 3 behaviors

To deal with loop 4 behavior:
► Clarify common ground to encourage persistence
► Ask good questions and listen carefully to naysayers
► Succinctly state the foundations of the disagreement
► If the differences cannot be resolved, and they are essential to the work of the team, allow the dissenter to leave gracefully

Reference

For more information about group dynamics, refer to *Human Dynamics* (Seagal & Horne, 1997) and *No More Teams!* (Schrage, 1995).

Unconventional Communications

Purpose

Not all team members communicate in the same ways. Opportunities to use unconventional communication techniques allow others to participate fully in the emerging dialogue.

Materials

Various

Process

People can express themselves in many different ways. Here are some possible ways to encourage unconventional communication. Use your imagination to find many more.

► Silence. Silence can be golden in groups. Allow time for individuals to reflect on their own perspectives by providing silent times during meetings.

► Pictures. Some people think with images more easily than words. Keep drawing materials handy for the team and encourage members to use pictures to represent their ideas. You might ask members to draw pictures to represent expectations or insights about an issue.

► Music. Listening to and/or making music allows a team to come together in non-verbal ways. Incorporate group singing or background music into your agendas.

► Data. Focused observation and data collection allow persons to communicate their needs and understandings clearly. Give a data-collection task to members and ask them to come back and share their data with others. Not all data collection and analysis have to be scientific, formal affairs. What did you see? What does it mean?

► Physical movement. The body carries deep understanding and ability to build connections. When a group is together in some physical activity, they come to understand each other in profound ways. Structure activities in which movement, rather than words, express insights, needs, and perspectives.

► Physical space. The physical surroundings affect how people interact. Think about where the team meets, how it is lighted, how seats and resources are arranged. Design an environment that encourages the kinds of communication you desire for the team. Members can take turns preparing the space for meetings, so expresses himself or herself through the environment.

► Cultural icons. Ritual objects, ceremonies, poetry, and music bring the cultural dimension into group work. Take turns sharing experiences that are common to members' native cultures.
Use this opportunity to come to know each other better.

Reference

For more information about unconventional communications, refer to *The Power of Team Building Using Rope Techniques* (Snow, 1992), *Games Trainers Play* (Newstrom & Scannell, 1980), and *Make Your Meetings Count* (Humes, 1995).

Authentic Work

Authentic work produces the results and outcomes that are intended by the team. It includes the tasks and responsibilities that lead to effective action.

When a team is not focusing on authentic work, it will:

► Be unproductive

► Lose energy and focus

► Spend considerable time in conversation, rather than action

► Lose members because of apathy

► Fail to justify its existence

► Disappoint those who depend on the work of the team

The following pages provide tools and techniques to help a team develop its capacity to do its authentic work effectively. Activities include:

► Project Plans

► Clear Roles and Responsibilities

► Reporting

► Evaluation

Project Plans

Purpose

Authentic work often requires that a team analyze and plan its activities. A project plan provides a framework in which a team can discuss what needs to be done, by whom, and when.

Materials

The following materials support the Project Planning process:

► Handout sheets of the project plan (see next page)

► Easel pad and markers to record major points

The outcome of the project plan should be documented and distributed to all members following the meeting.

Process

First, the team should define the objective or outcome of the activity. When this has been determined, the team should:

1. Identify the tasks required to complete the activity, and record these tasks on the Project Planning form.

2. Define the start date and end date for each task, considering the urgency of the outcome, the interdependency of each of the tasks, and the resources available to take required action.

3. Define the person or persons responsible for each task.

The team should confirm the Project Plan and accept responsibility for the actions they have committed to. The plan can be used to track progress against the plan.

Often, the Project Plan will change as tasks are completed and other tasks are identified. The team should think of the Plan as a living document, used to focus action and communicate accomplishments.

Reference

For more information about project planning, refer to *Project* Management for Dummies (Portny, 2001), Implementing Self-Directed Work Teams (Ankarlo, 1992), and *Team-Based Project Management* (Lewis, 1998).

Project Planning Form

Our objective is to:

Task	Begin and End Dates	Responsible	Status

Clear Roles and Responsibilities

Purpose

One of the most common sources of discord in a team is unrealistic or unshared expectations among members. Clear roles and responsibilities help shape expectations and minimize disappointments, while increasing levels of trust.

Materials

Easel pad for taking notes

Process

Identify the roles that will be required to complete a task or project. Roles might include:

> ► Record keeper
>
> ► Motivator
>
> ► Leader
>
> ► Supporter
>
> ► Communicator
>
> ► Director

For each role, identify the expectations, including deliverables, activities, outcomes, and timelines and one or more persons who will fill the role. Remember that one person does not always have to play the same role. For example, someone might lead one task, while doing communications on another.

Determine when and how each person will report on his or her work within the role. Decide ahead of time how and when feedback will be provided by the team on performance of each role and responsibility.

It is sometimes difficult to provide feedback, especially when one is not meeting expectations of the team. For help giving feedback, refer to Giving and Receiving Feedback in the Talking and Listening section of the STAR Handbook.

Reference

For more information about dealing with roles and responsibilities, refer to *Making the Team* (Thompson, 2000), *Team-Managed Facilitation* (Kinlaw, 1993), and *Project Management* (Haynes, 1996).

Reporting

Purpose

During the planning, doing, and adapting phases of the team's work together, many different people will be doing different things between team meetings. Regular reporting holds people accountable to their tasks and helps others know what is going on.

Materials

None

Process

Reports should be given regularly either in writing or in person at meetings. Reports should be documented. If the reporter doesn't present a written report, the minutes of the meeting should reflect the contents of the report.

Reporting will be easier for all concerned if it:

- ► Is required at regular intervals from all members who are involved in projects
- ► Follows a standard structure, including:
- ► Name of task
- ► Person responsible
- ► Activities planned for previous period
- ► Activities performed in previous period
- ► Activities planned for next period
- ► Questions or issues for team consideration
- ► Actions, suggestions, or information required from other team members
- ► Receives appreciation from the members for the work performed to date

Team members should refrain from critiquing the work of a project team during its report. The purpose of the report is to share information about how things are going. Members should offer suggestions only when they are solicited by the reporter.

Reference

For more information about effective reporting, refer to *Project Management* (Knutson, 1991).

Evaluation

Purpose

Evaluation answers two questions: Are we making a difference? How can we do it better?

Materials

Various, depending on evaluation design

Process

Evaluation can be very sophisticated and expensive, or it can be simple and cheap. As long as it answers the question, it is "good enough." Follow the KISS (Keep It Simple, Stupid) principle in evaluation whenever possible.

Some questions you should ask yourself before you plan an evaluation:

► What are we trying to accomplish? How will our activities accomplish our outcomes?

► Who wants to know whether we are making a difference?

► What is a reasonable time period over which to evaluate our work? Months, years, decades?

► What are the questions we need to answer to know if we are making a difference?

► What kind of data (statistics or stories) will answer our questions?

► How will we change our activities based on the evaluation?

► Will we need the support of a professional evaluator to answer our questions?

These are the steps:

Design the evaluation	Collect the data
► Define the audience for the evaluation report ► Frame the question(s) that the evaluation will answer ► Identify source(s) of data to answer question(s) ► Define the timeframe for the evaluation ► Identify tasks and timelines for evaluation activities	► Collect baseline data to describe the current state ► Integrate data collection a part of other activities ► Be consistent with collection of data ► Be clear about what the data means
Analyze the data	**Report the findings**
► Include multiple points of view in analysis ► Ask, "What does the data mean?" ► What are trends? Surprises? Expected outcomes? ► What changes should we make to respond to the data?	► Summarize findings and expected actions to be taken to respond to the data. ► Present information in charts and graphs. ► Distribute findings ► Ask for feedback and reactions to the evaluation data

Reference

For a guide to qualitative research methods, refer to *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods* (Patton, 1990). For information about documenting your results, refer to *How to Write a Report* (Newman, 1980). For information about running effective focus groups, refer to *The Focus Group* (Templeton, 1994).

Reason for Being Together

The reason to be together is a central theme of group work of all kinds. To be productive and sustain its work, a group must identify and share a common purpose.

When a team does not have a common reason for working together, it will:

▶ Disagree about many, and sometimes trivial, details

▶ Frustrate members of the team

▶ Waste energy in multiple, perhaps conflicting, activities

▶ Elicit feelings of resentment from some members for the behavior of other members

▶ Lose its credibility with others outside the team

The following pages provide tools and techniques to help a team develop its capacity to build a common reason for being together. Activities include:

▶ Metaphors

▶ Pictures

▶ Shared Stories

▶ Nominal Group Techniques

▶ Symbols

▶ Rituals

Metaphors

Purpose

A team's reason for being together may be clear to some and fuzzy for others. It might also be perfectly clear at one point in the work and confusing at another. One way to capture a common reason and to hold it through time is to build a metaphor that captures the purpose of the team. This process helps a team identify and adopt a metaphor that encapsulates the team's common reason for being together.

Materials

This process requires large sheets of paper and colored markers.

Process

Divide the members into small groups of three to five people each. After talking about the shared work, ask each small group to complete the following sentence:

> *Our work is like . . .*

Using the colored markers and paper, ask each group to draw a picture that represents their answer to the question. Examples we have found include:

> *Our work is like . . .*

► Sailing a ship.	► Swimming through jello.
► Dropping a stone in a pond.	► Floating in a hot air balloon.
► Playing a game.	► Paddling a canoe.
► Competing in the Olympics.	► Growing a garden.

After each group has completed its picture, have all of the groups share their pictures and explain how each represents the work of the team. After all have shared their pictures and their stories, identify how the pictures are all alike. Ask the team to come together around a single metaphor that captures the most important insights of all of the small groups.

You may use this metaphor to build a logo for the team, establish rituals or stories, explain your work to others, make critical decisions about activities and resource allocation.

Reference

For more information about using metaphors to understand and shape the work of a group, refer to *Imaginization* (Morgan, 1997) or *Metaphors We Live By* (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

Pictures

Purpose

"A picture is worth a thousand words." This is certainly true as teams come together around their common reasons for working together. This exercise helps teams identify and share pictures that capture and communicate for them their reason for being together in a productive working team.

Materials

 ► Magazines for cutting up

 ► Scissors

 ► Poster board for displaying pictures

 ► Glue or glue sticks

Process

Ask each person to consider his or her reasons for being together to work with the team. Ask each one to build a collage that represents his or her reason for working with the team. Give the materials to the group and allow them time to find, cut out, and arrange the pictures that they find compelling. When all have completed their work, ask them to post their creations on a single wall, side by side. Then, ask each person to talk about the images that they found most meaningful and why they included them in their collages.

Next, help the team focus on the whole wall of images--the collage of collages. Ask them to talk about the patterns and themes they see and what those themes mean to the shared purpose of the team.

Take a photograph of the collages and include it in publicity or communications about the work of the team. If a digital camera is available, you can even take a photo and put it up on a web site for others to see. The similarity and the variety of images included provide an effective visual reminder of the diversity and similarity represented in the whole team.

Reference

For more information about visual tools to improve decision making, refer to *Aha! 10 Ways to Free Your Creative Spirit and Find Your Great Ideas* (Ayan, 1997) and *Drawing on the Artist Within* (Edwards, 1986).

Shared Stories

Purpose

A story builds a verbal picture of the past, present, or future. It helps individuals and teams wrap language around their shared reasons for working together. This exercise provides an opportunity for a team to build a shared story to represent the world as they hope it to be in their shared future.

Materials

None

Process

Participants should sit in a circle facing each other. Ask them all to think about the future as they would like it to be in their team. Then, begin the story.

As the first storyteller, provide a beginning to the story about the future. Then, each person in turn adds some more to the story. The only rule is that one storyteller has to stop his or her part in the middle of the sentence. No one can pass a "period" along to the next teller. Each person adds a few sentences to the story until it is your turn again, and you give a positive end to the tale.

Story beginnings can be of any kind. The following are some samples you might use.

> ► I really was excited about being a member of this team when . . . .

> ► I most appreciated this team when . . .

> ► With regard to my work on this team, I ma most proud of . . .

Reference

For more information about innovative group techniques, refer to *Imaginative Events for Training* (Jones, 1993) and *Thinkertoys* (Michalko, 1991).

Nominal Group Techniques

Purpose

Sometimes a decision process involves a large number of persons with divergent ideas. Nominal group techniques were designed to facilitate bringing individuals together to define common goals, objectives, or activities.

Materials

Blank sheets of paper or sticky notes

Process

This technique requires one or more facilitators who are familiar with the process. The role of the facilitator is to:

► Explain the process to participants

► State the question to be addressed

► Collect and report insights

► Facilitate a conversation to identify patterns of similarity and difference in the insights

► Help describe and document the emerging perspective of the team

This technique begins with a question. Individuals or groups record their own perspectives or responses to the question. Each response is written on a single sheet of paper.

All papers are collected and read aloud to the group. Similar ones are grouped together and displayed on a wall. After all items have been grouped, they are considered as a whole. Some sheets might be moved, others might be consolidated because they are similar. Participants are invited to clarify their statements and to suggest changes to the organization of the sheets. When everyone is satisfied with the clustering, each cluster of ideas is labeled, and all are arranged to display the insights of the whole team.

In conversation, the whole team talks about common themes and significant differences that emerge from the individual statements. The common perspectives are recorded and represent the perspective of the whole. Divergent perspectives are discussed and integrated into the emerging picture of the whole. The product is a coherent statement that encompasses the variety of ideas that emerged from the team.

Reference

For other ways to facilitate group decision making, refer to *Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision Making* (Kaner, 1996), *The Facilitator's Fieldbook* (Justice & Jamieson, 1999), and *The Zen of Groups* (Hunter et al., 1995b).

Symbols

Purpose

A symbol is a powerful tool that reinforces the identity of a team. It is a physical thing or an image that summarizes the most important aspect(s) of the team and its reason for being together. Examples of powerful group symbols include:

► Christian cross   ► Corporate logos

► Jewish Star of David   ► Family coats of arms

► National flags

Sometimes the process of selecting a symbol helps a team identify its common ground and reason for being together. It also presents a common identity to the team and helps them recognize their work together.

Materials

None

Process

A team should select its symbol, and then use the symbol to communicate the purpose of the team. Selecting a symbol may be easy or quite difficult. Follow these guidelines when considering a symbol for your team:

Select a symbol:

► Be sure that the symbol represents the whole team, not just one part of it.

► Use something that is concrete and easy to recognize. Consider the work of the team and tools that are critical to the work. Often the most powerful symbols are ones that are already attached to the work.

► Use the graphical gifts of members to represent the symbol in a pleasing and powerful way.

► Consider the variety of messages a symbol might carry in different contexts, cultures, or environments.

► Try not to use a symbol that is identified with another group.

Use it well:

► After the symbol is selected, it should be used consistently.

► Create team letterhead that incorporates the symbol. Have a physical representation of the symbol available during meetings.

► Print coffee cups, tee shirts, or other common objects with the symbol.

► Talk about the symbol and its meanings in opening and closing rituals.

► Be sure new member orientation includes an explanation of the symbol and its significance to the team's work.

Reference

For more information about the meanings and uses of symbols, refer to *Designing Pictorial Symbols* (Holmes, 1985) and The Secret Language of Symbols (Fontana, 1993).

Rituals

Purpose

Rituals provide shared experiences that bring groups together in reflection and celebration. They do not have to be complicated to be effective, but they do need to be regularly practiced and fit with the culture of the team.

Materials

None

Process

The team should identify regular points in its activities that should be marked in some formal way. Possible times for ritual include:

► Beginning and ending meetings

► Annual celebrations

► Initiation or completion of a project

► Initiation of new members or "retirement" celebrations for members who leave the group The most successful rituals:

▷ Involve all members of the team

▷ Include some form of art (poetry, beautiful objects, music, etc.)

▷ Are repeated at predictable intervals

▷ Reflect the reason why the team works together

▷ Respect the spiritual and cultural traditions of the team members

▷ Involve repeated patterns of activity

▷ Do not detract from the on-going work of the team

▷ Allow time for reflection and renewal

Consider instituting a new ritual or changing an old one when:

► A team is coming together for the first time

► New members join the team

► The team is facing dissention or factions are beginning to form

► Team members feel burned out, tired, or irritable with each other

► The team is losing focus on its products and core work

Reference

For more information about how rituals can support group work, refer to *The Art of Ritual* (Beck & Metrick, 1990) and *Fanfare for a Feather: 77 Ways to Celebrate Almost Anything* (Eisner et al., 1991).

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