CARMEN KOESTLER

ADVANCED LEADERSHIP AND FACILITATOR SKILLS

Carmen's Collection of Advanced Meeting Facilitator Notes

Forward

Leadership is a journey — one filled with continuous learning, reflection, and growth. Over the course of my advanced facilitator training, I've immersed myself in resources, ideas, and strategies that have shaped the way I think about leading teams. This book is a collection of the notes, insights, and resources I gathered during that transformative experience.

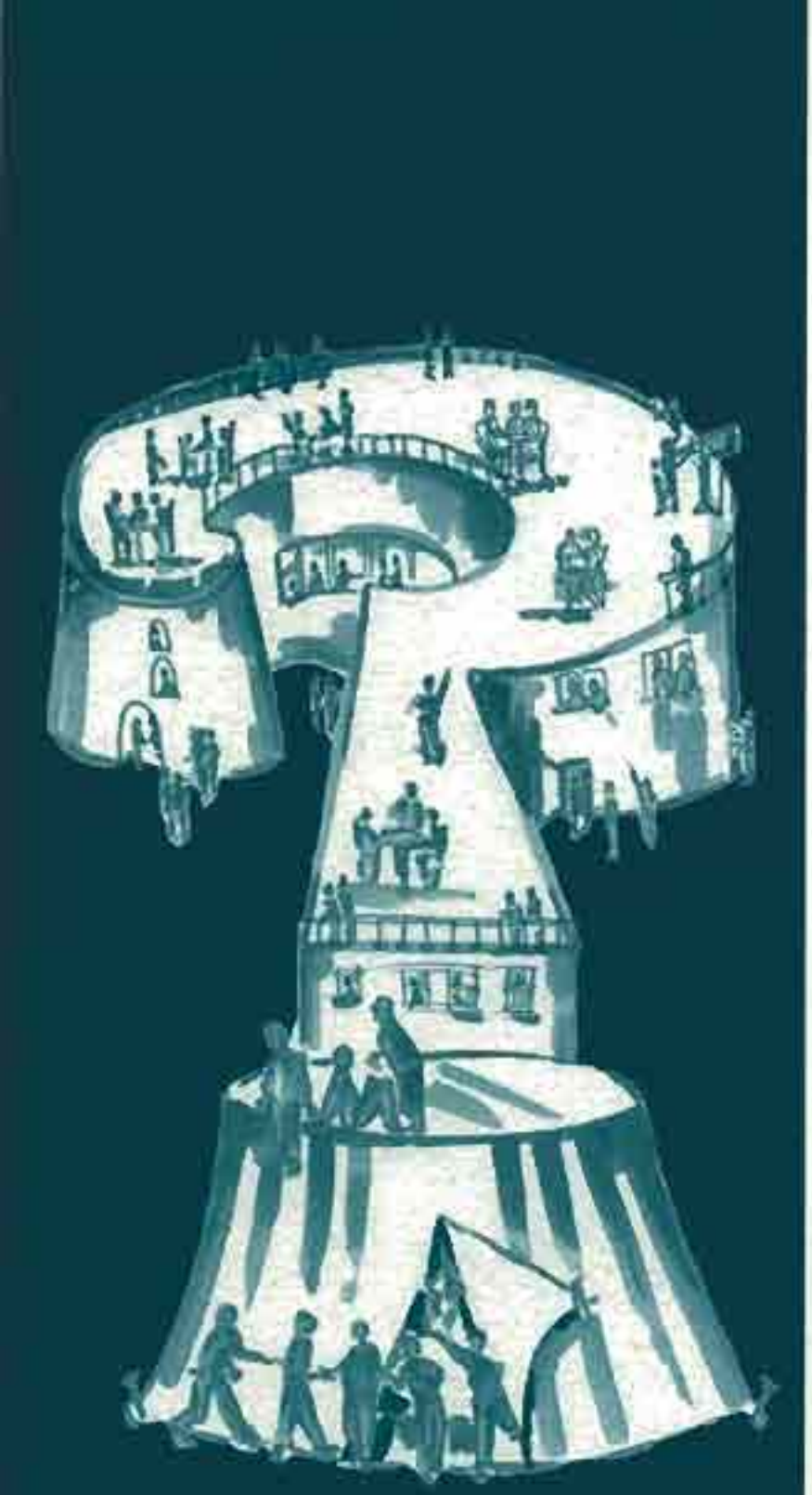
Inside, you'll find information drawn from a variety of sources: impactful books, thought-provoking authors, and dynamic presentations. Each of these elements played a part in deepening my understanding of how to guide teams toward becoming better, stronger versions of themselves.

What makes this compilation special is that it doesn't just present ideas — it serves as a practical resource to help you put what you learn into action. Whether you're facilitating a group, coaching a team, or simply striving to enhance your own leadership abilities, the insights in these pages will equip you with tools to inspire growth and foster collaboration.

I thoroughly enjoyed the process of taking this course and soaking up all it had to offer. Now, it's my great pleasure to share these learnings with you. I hope you find inspiration and application in these pages, just as I did.

Here's to growing, together!

Carmen Koestler



THE ART OF POWERFUL QUESTIONS

Catalyzing Insight, Innovation, and Action

by Eric E. Vogt, Juanita Brown, and David Isaacs

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WE'D LIKE TO THANK KEN HOMER FOR HIS INVALUABLE ASSISTANCE IN SHAPING THIS ARTICLE AND FRAN PEAVEY FOR HER PIONEERING WORK IN MAKING STRATEGIC QUESTIONS PART OF OUR LEXICON.

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by Eric E. Vogt, Juanita Brown, and David Isaacs; illustrations by Nancy Margulies

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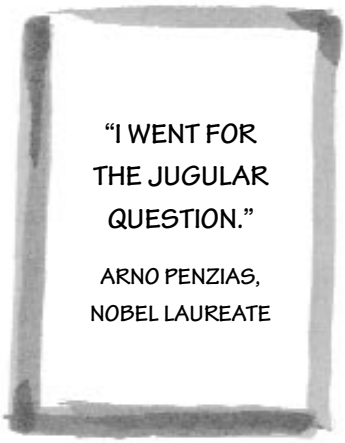
"If I had an hour to solve a problem and my life depended on the solution, I would spend the first 55 minutes determining the proper question to ask, for once I know the proper question, I could solve the problem in less than five minutes."

—Albert Einstein

When was the last time you sat through a meeting and said to yourself, "This is a complete waste of time!"? Was it yesterday, or even just a few hours ago? Why did that gathering feel so tedious? Perhaps it's because the leaders posed the wrong questions at the start of the session. Or, worse yet, maybe they didn't ask *any* engaging questions, and as a result, the meeting consisted of boring reports-outs or other forms of one-way communication that failed to engage people's interest or curiosity.

The usefulness of the knowledge we acquire and the effectiveness of the actions we take depend on the quality of the questions we ask. Questions open the door to dialogue and discovery. They are an invitation to creativity and breakthrough thinking. Questions can lead to movement and action on key issues; by generating creative insights, they can ignite change.



Consider the possibility that everything we know today about our world emerged because people were curious. They formulated a question or series of questions about something that sparked their interest or deeply concerned them, which lead them to learn something new. Many Nobel laureates describe the "Eureka!" moment of their discovery as when the "right" question finally revealed itself—even if it took them considerable time to come up with the final answers. For example, Einstein's theory of relativity resulted from a question that he had wondered about when still a teenager: "What would the universe look like if I were riding on the end of a light beam at the speed of light?" Einstein regularly practiced this kind of "thought experiment," which, over time, led to significant advances in the field of physics. Many years later, an empirical demonstration showed that light from distant stars actually curved as it passed through the gravitational force of our sun. Einstein's graduate students rushed to him as he was walking through the Princeton campus and exclaimed, "Dr. Einstein, light really *does* bend!" Einstein looked at them quizzically and said, "Of course!" He had come to this conclusion through exploring the question in his own thought experiment years before.

Another Nobel-prize winner, physicist Arno Penzias, when asked what accounted for his success, replied, "I went for the jugular question." Still practicing his questioning discipline today, Penzias recently commented at a *Fast Company* Conference, "Change starts with the individual. So the first thing I do each morning is ask myself, 'Why do I strongly believe what I believe?' Constantly examine your own assumptions." It's this type of self-questioning that keeps creativity alive.

In other key examples of the importance of powerful questions, a query by James Watson and Francis Crick, "What might DNA look like in a 3D form?" led to the discovery of the double helix and forever altered the scientific landscape. During the Tylenol crisis in the early 1980s, considering the question, "What is the most ethical action we might take?" enabled Johnson & Johnson to restore consumer trust and become a leader in corporate responsibility. And asking, "Where can I get a good hamburger on the road?" motivated Ray Kroc to create McDonald's, the fast-food chain that became an international icon. Even for ordinary folks, asking a question as simple as, "What does all this mean?" or "What can we do that could help shift this situation?" or "What haven't we thought of that could make a difference?" can have a startling impact on creating new knowledge and insight.

Why Don't We Ask Better Questions?

If asking good questions is so critical, why don't most of us spend more of our time and energy on discovering and framing them? One reason may be that much of Western culture, and North American society in particular, focuses on having the "right answer" rather than discovering the "right question." Our educational system focuses more on memorization and rote answers than on the art of seeking new possibilities. We are rarely asked to discover compelling questions, nor are we taught why we should ask such questions in the first place. Quizzes, examinations, and aptitude tests all reinforce the value of correct answers. Is it any wonder that most of us are uncomfortable with not knowing?

The aversion in our culture to asking creative questions is linked to an emphasis on finding quick fixes and an attachment to black/white, either/or thinking. In addition, the rapid pace of our lives and work doesn't often provide us with opportunities to participate in reflective conversations in which we can explore catalytic questions and innovative possibilities before reaching key decisions. These factors, coupled with a prevailing belief that "real work" consists primarily of detailed analysis, immediate decisions, and decisive action, contradict the perspective that effective "knowledge work" consists of asking profound questions and hosting wide-ranging strategic conversations on issues of substance.

The reward systems in our organizations further reinforce this dilemma. Leaders believe that they are being paid for fixing problems rather than for fostering breakthrough thinking. Between our deep attachment to *the* answer—any answer—and our anxiety about not knowing, we have inadvertently thwarted our collective capacity for deep creativity and fresh perspectives. Unfortunately, given the unprecedented challenges we face both in our own organizations and as a global community, we need these skills now more than ever.

Are there organizations that do place a high value on questions? Consider this: In Germany, the job title *Direktor Grundsatzfragen* translates as "Director of Fundamental Questions." As a German colleague said:

> "Yes, there's a job title of *Direktor Grundsatzfragen*. Some of the larger German companies have an entire department of *Grundsatzfragen*. These are the people who are always thinking about what the next questions will be. Of course, these people are only in the German companies headquartered in Germany, such as Daimler, Bayer, Siemens, or SAP. If the German company is acquired by a U.S. company, they usually eliminate the *Grundsatzfragen* positions."

The German understanding and appreciation of *Grundsatzfragen* may stem from a culture that highly values philosophy and the ongoing questioning of priorities and the meaning of life. Even today, this focus is reflected in some unique aspects of high-school education. In the German *Gymnasium*, from the ages of 14 to 17, students are typically assigned to study groups with 30 of their peers. In the words of one graduate, "We work intensely together in every subject, and then in the second year, we meet Goethe (the famous 19th-century German philosopher), and we question our entire world for two years. We emerge with a greater appreciation for the power of questions and the power of conversation."

As we enter an era in which systemic issues often lie at the root of critical challenges, in which diverse perspectives are required for sustainable solutions, and in which cause-and-effect relationships are not immediately apparent, the capacity to raise penetrating questions that challenge current operating

POWERFUL QUESTIONS AND KEY OUTCOMES

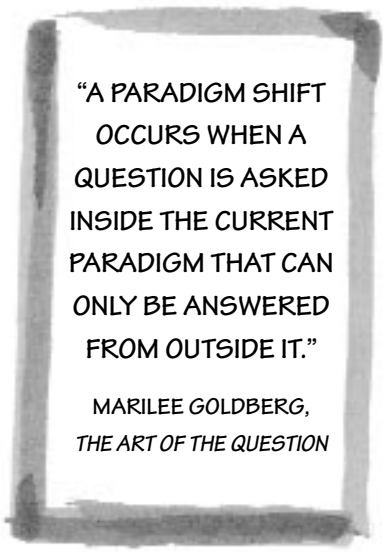
Who	Question	Outcome
Watson and Crick	"What might DNA look like in 3D form?"	Discovery of the double helix
James Burke, CEO, Johnson & Johnson	"What is the most ethical action we might take?"	Restoration of consumer confidence
Ray Kroc	"Where can I get a good hamburger on the road?"	Creation of McDonald's

assumptions will be key to creating positive futures. As Einstein said, "The problems we have cannot be solved at the same level of thinking that created them." And in her book *The Art of the Question,* Marilee Goldberg adds, "A paradigm shift occurs when a question is asked inside the current paradigm that can only be answered from outside it." It's this kind of paradigm shift, based on powerful questions, that may be necessary to create truly innovative solutions to our most pressing concerns.

What Makes a Question Powerful?

In a wonderfully evocative description, Fran Peavey, a pioneer in the use of strategic questions, observes:

> "Questions can be like a lever you use to pry open the stuck lid on a paint can. . . . If we have a short lever, we can only just crack open the lid on the can. But if we have a longer lever, or a more dynamic question, we can open that can up much wider and really stir things up. . . . If the right question is applied, and it digs deep enough, then we can stir up all the creative solutions."



While you may not immediately know the characteristics of a powerful question, it's actually quite easy to recognize one. For instance, if you were an Olympic judge scoring the power of questions on a scale from one to ten (with ten being the highest), how would you rate the following queries?

1. What time is it?
2. Did you take a shower?
3. What possibilities exist that we haven't thought of yet?
4. What does it mean to be ethical?

We have tested questions such as these in several different cultures. In the process, we've discovered that, despite cultural differences, people quite consistently rate questions one and two as being less powerful, and questions three and four as being more powerful. Clearly, powerful questions are ones that transcend many boundaries.

Not long ago, we hosted a conversation with a group of international colleagues about what makes a compelling question. Here are some of their reflections:

Finn Voldtofte (Denmark): The question has to catch people where they are, to meet them where there is the most energy and relevance for them, and then use that energy to go deeper. Action will flow naturally from that energy.

Felipe Herzenborn (Mexico): The question also needs to be simple and clear and penetrating. It's like a laser beam. A good question invites and challenges you to reflect at a deeper level—to find the knowledge or wisdom that's already there beneath the surface.

Verna Allee (U.S.): To me, the most energizing questions are those that involve people's values, hopes, and ideals—questions that relate to something that's larger than them, where they can connect and contribute. People don't have a lot of energy around questions that are only about removing pain.

David Isaacs (U.S.): Even though it's useful to acknowledge pain, I think it's also important to shift the question away from a problem focus or fix-it focus to a possibility focus. There's always a subtle feeling of disempowerment in a problem, a feeling that all the doors are shut. "We've got a problem . . . oh no! Not another problem!" There's a weariness and stuckness about it. Simply asking, "What's the possibility we see in this situation?" can make a big difference.

Toke Moller (Denmark): Here's an example of that approach. I was working with a local school to frame a possibility-oriented question. We asked teachers, students, parents, and administrators, "What could a good school also be?" This way of posing the question helped people to see their school in a different light. It resulted in some amazing new ideas. I'm quite sure they would not have been as innovative if the question had focused only on fixing problems.

Carlos Mota (Mexico): It's a real art to find as well as to shape the right question for your situation. Once a friend told me about a time she was being interviewed. The interviewer said, "We're just going to ask you one question: What's the question we

should be asking?" Sometimes the most important thing to do is to help the people themselves shape the questions in the most powerful way, since they know their own situation the best of anyone.

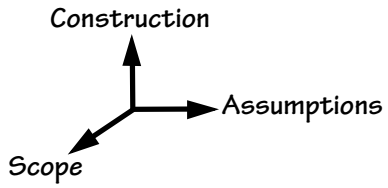
Thus, a powerful question:

- generates curiosity in the listener
- stimulates reflective conversation
- is thought-provoking
- surfaces underlying assumptions
- invites creativity and new possibilities
- generates energy and forward movement
- channels attention and focuses inquiry
- stays with participants
- touches a deep meaning
- evokes more questions

A powerful question also has the capacity to "travel well"—to spread beyond the place where it began into larger networks of conversation throughout an organization or a community. Questions that travel well are often the key to large-scale change. As we'll explore below, how such queries are crafted can make a difference in their capacity to move a system toward innovative futures.

The Architecture of Powerful Questions

As shown at the start of this volume, powerful questions can dramatically improve the quality of insight, innovation, and action in our organizations, in our communities, and in our lives. Therefore, understanding the basic architecture of formulating powerful questions is a key skill in today's knowledge economy. There are three dimensions to powerful questions: *construction, scope,* and *assumptions.* Each contributes to the quality of learning and knowledge creation that emerges as we engage with others in a generative inquiry.



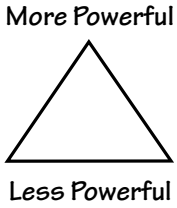
THE FIRST DIMENSION:

The Construction of a Question

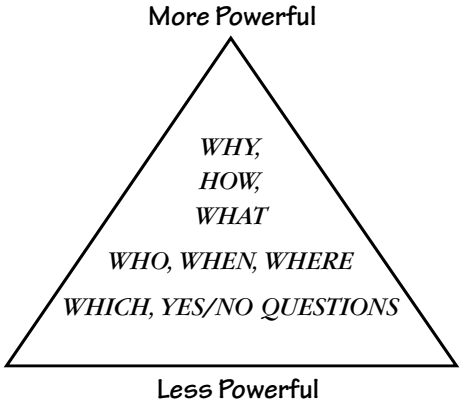
The linguistic *construction* of a question can make a critical difference in either opening our minds or narrowing the possibilities we can consider. Is it a yes/no question? Is it an either/or question? Does it begin with an interrogative, such as Who, What, or How?

WHO *WHAT*
WHEN *WHERE* *WHICH*
WHY *HOW?*

Just for fun, try placing these words in a pyramid of lower to higher power. Don't think too much; use your intuition.



When asked, most people rank these words from more powerful to less powerful as follows:



By using the words toward the top of the pyramid, we can make many of our questions more robust. For example, consider the following sequence:

- Are you satisfied with our working relationship?
- *When* have you been most satisfied with our working relationship?
- *What* is it about our working relationship that you find most satisfying?
- *Why* might it be that that our working relationship has had its ups and downs?

As you move from the simple "yes/no" question at the beginning toward the "why" question at the end, you'll notice that the queries tend to stimulate more reflective thinking and a deeper level of conversation.

That's what we mean by a powerful question—one that provokes thoughtful exploration and evokes creative thinking.

However, a note of caution: Unless a "why" question is carefully crafted, it can easily evoke a defensive response, as people try to justify their answer rather than proceed in a spirit of inquiry. For instance, the questions, "Why can't you ever tell me exactly what you are thinking?" or "Why did you do it *that* way?" can cause someone to defend a given position or rationalize some past decision, rather than open new possibilities. In contrast, when a "why" question stems from genuine curiosity, such as "I wonder why that happened?" then the inquiry has the potential to create useful insights.

Just because a question is situated near the top of the pyramid does not necessarily mean that it is more important or more relevant than its counterparts at the bottom. Depending on your goals, a "yes/no" question can be extremely important (particularly if you are closing a large sale!). Likewise, a question that gets at the facts of who, when, and where can often be crucial, such as in a legal case. However, when you want to open the space for creativity and breakthrough thinking, questions constructed around the words at the top of the pyramid will have more strategic leverage than those that use the words at the bottom.

> "A VITAL QUESTION, A CREATIVE QUESTION, RIVETS OUR ATTENTION. ALL THE CREATIVE POWER OF OUR MINDS IS FOCUSED ON THE QUESTION. KNOWLEDGE EMERGES IN RESPONSE TO THESE COMPELLING QUESTIONS. THEY OPEN US TO NEW WORLDS."
>
> VERNA ALLEE, *THE KNOWLEDGE EVOLUTION*

THE SECOND DIMENSION:
The Scope of a Question

It's important not only to be aware of how the words we choose influence the effectiveness of our query, but also to match the *scope* of a question to our needs. Take a look at the following three questions:

- How can we best manage *our work group?*
- How can we best manage *our company?*
- How can we best manage *our supply chain?*

In this example, the questions progressively broaden the domain of inquiry as they consider larger and larger aspects of the system; that is, they expand in scope. As you work to make your questions powerful, tailor and clarify the scope as precisely as possible to keep them within the realistic boundaries and needs of the situation you are working with. Avoid stretching the scope of your question too far. For example, compare the following question to the ones above:

- How can we best manage *the economy?*

While extremely interesting, this query is clearly outside the scope of most people's capacity to take effective action, at least in the short term. In many situations, this would be a less strategic question than one for which those involved had the capacity to make a more immediate difference.

THE THIRD DIMENSION:
The Assumptions Within Questions

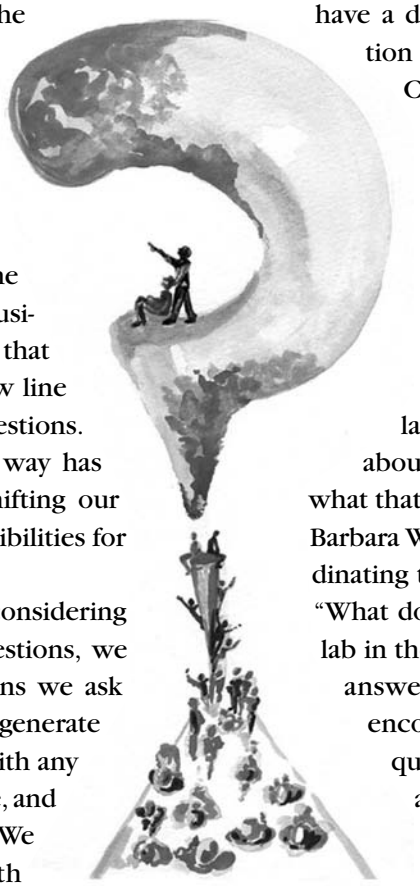
Because of the nature of language, almost all of the questions we pose have assumptions built into them, either explicit or implicit. These assumptions may or may not be shared by the group involved in the exploration; for instance the question, "How should we create a bilingual educational system in California?" assumes that those involved in the exploration have agreed that being bilingual is an important capacity for the state's students. However, some powerful questions challenge everyone's existing assumptions. For example, ask yourself what assumptions the following question might challenge: "How might we eliminate the border between the U.S. and Mexico?"

To formulate powerful questions, it's important to become aware of assumptions and use them appropriately. So, contrast the question, "What did we do wrong and who is responsible?" with "What can we learn from what's happened and what possibilities do we now see?" The first question assumes error and blame; it is a safe bet that whoever is responding will feel defensive. The second question encourages reflection and is much more likely than the first query to stimulate learning and collaboration among those involved.

It's often helpful to examine a question for any unconscious beliefs it may introduce to the situation. You can do so by simply asking your team, "What assumptions or beliefs are we holding that are key to the conversation we are having here?" and "How would we come at this if we held an entirely different belief system than the one we have?" Each of these questions invites an exploration into both conscious and unconscious assumptions and opens up the space for new possibilities to reveal themselves.

By surfacing or altering assumptions, we can shift the context of a strategic inquiry and create new opportunities for innovation. Compare the following two questions:

- How can we *compete* with the Chinese?
- How can we *collaborate* with the Chinese?



The second question changes the context by challenging our traditional business paradigm and the assumptions that underlie it. As a result, it opens up a new line of exploration and set of subsequent questions. The art of reframing questions in this way has important implications for not only shifting our assumptions, but also creating new possibilities for constructive action.

By understanding and consciously considering the three dimensions of powerful questions, we can increase the power of the questions we ask and, as a result, increase our ability to generate insights that help shape the future. As with any new skill, the best teacher is experience, and the best coach is a thoughtful listener. We encourage you to experiment with increasing the power of your questions and see what impact you have.

For example, in advance of an important meeting or conversation, spend a few minutes with a colleague and write down several questions that are relevant to the topic. Rate them in terms of their power. Referring to the three dimensions outlined above, see if you can spot why certain questions are more compelling than others. Experiment with changing the construction and scope, to get a feel for how doing so changes the direction of the inquiry. Be sure to examine the assumptions that are embedded in your questions and check to see if they will help or hinder your exploration. Just a few practice sessions will greatly enhance your ability to engage in productive conversations stimulated by dynamic questions.

Using Powerful Questions in Organizations

There are more and more examples of how the disciplined use of compelling questions is making a difference in organizational life. These changes often happen in surprising ways, opening new avenues that people never considered before.

HP "for the World." Sometimes something as simple as changing a preposition in a sentence can have a dramatic impact on how an organization conceives of its mission and role. Consider how a small shift in the construction of a question led to major changes in the scope and context of strategic inquiry at Hewlett-Packard, resulting in effective innovation and targeted action. The director of HP Labs wondered why the organization was not considered the best industrial research laboratory in the world. As he thought about it, he realized that he did not know what that designation really meant. He charged Barbara Waugh, a key staff member, with coordinating the effort to respond to the question, "What does being the best industrial research lab in the world mean?" Instead of looking for answers outside the company, Barbara encouraged the director to share his core question with all HP Lab employees around the world.

To that end, Waugh initiated a global network of conversations around that question, using the company's technology infrastructure along with face-to-face gatherings to support the dialogues. Just by exploring the practical implications of the question in a disciplined way, the Lab began to see productivity gains. But one day, an HP Lab engineer came into Barbara's office and said, "That question is okay, but what would really energize me and get me up in the morning would be asking, 'How can we be the best industrial research lab *for* the world?'"

That one small shift changed the entire game by scaling up the meaning of and shifting the assumptions embedded in the original question. It profound-

ly altered the context of the inquiry—to become the best *for* the world as the larger context for becoming the best *in* the world. This question obviously "traveled well"—it was no longer just the Lab's question, but something that many others at HP began to ask themselves as well. Employees at HP Labs and throughout the whole company responded to this new focus with a tremendous surge of collective energy.

"THE QUESTION NEVER FAILED US."

MIKE PFEIL, CORPORATE EXECUTIVE

Once they reworded the original question, Barbara and her colleagues could change the scope of related questions depending on the situation. For example, shifting the scope downward meant focusing on "What does HP for the World mean for me? What does it mean in my life, in my own work?" HP employees could also scale up the scope by asking, "What does HP for the World mean for my work group? For my department? For HP as a company? And what might it mean for the world itself?"

HP's E-Inclusion effort, a major project to enable the world's poor to enter the new economy while providing critical medical and other information to communities in the third world, stemmed in large measure from the HP for the World exploration. The question has now traveled far beyond the company: "What does it mean for us to be 'for the world'?" was a key question explored at a State of the World Forum with a group of more than 1,000 global leaders from every continent.

Creating a Sales "Community." Another case in which a catalytic question empowered leaders in new ways occurred in the sales organization of a major U.S. corporation. Mike Pfeil, the area director of sales, wondered how a *community*, rather than a traditional company, might deal with the challenges it confronted. As a learning experiment, he began to host conversations with employees from all levels in his organization to explore the meaning of community at work and how they might apply community principles to enhance performance.

To depart from the group's traditional focus on problems, the sales director framed questions that shifted the context within which workers normally look at their organization. He asked people to examine their best experiences of community and to reflect on times they had participated in a community experience that really worked, using queries such as, "What allowed that positive experience to happen? What kinds of activities were taking place? How did you fit into that?" As members shared what they knew from their own best community experiences, they began to see the analogies to business life. They posed follow-up questions, such as, "How does a community deal with adversity and adapting to change? What happens with members who don't uphold the community's standards?"

As the conversations evolved, important values that people really

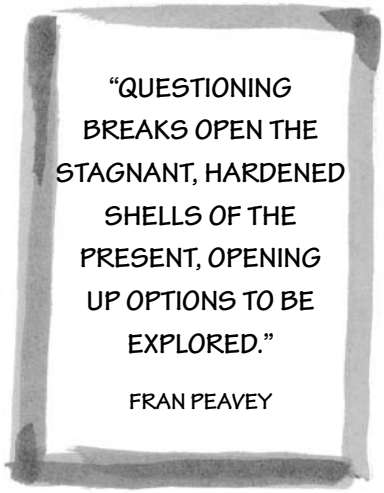
HOW CAN I FRAME BETTER QUESTIONS?

Here are some questions you might ask yourself as you begin to explore the art and architecture of powerful questions. They are based on pioneering work with questions being done by the Public Conversations Project, a group that helps create constructive dialogue on divisive public issues.

- Is this question relevant to the real life and real work of the people who will be exploring it?
- Is this a genuine question—a question to which I/we really don't know the answer?
- What "work" do I want this question to do? That is, what kind of conversation, meanings, and feelings do I imagine this question will evoke in those who will be exploring it?
- Is this question likely to invite fresh thinking/feeling? Is it familiar enough to be recognizable and relevant—and different enough to call forward a new response?
- What assumptions or beliefs are embedded in the way this question is constructed?
- Is this question likely to generate hope, imagination, engagement, creative action, and new possibilities or is it likely to increase a focus on past problems and obstacles?
- Does this question leave room for new and different questions to be raised as the initial question is explored?

Adapted from Sally Ann Roth
Public Conversations Project c. 1998

cared about started to come forward—values like learning, mutual respect, contribution, and sharing with others. Another simple but powerful question emerged from those early dialogues: "How can we create a community at work that enables each person to contribute our best, inspires us to keep learning, and produces valued results?" This simple shift of lens led other leaders in the company to look how it functioned *within* the larger communities in which it operates. The learnings from this project informed subsequent work in the area of corporate responsibility and in the creation of mission goals that include the perspectives of both internal and external stakeholders in creating the company's future.



The local leader who launched this effort is now a corporate vice president. In looking back on his experience with engaging powerful questions to shift the context for exploring business realities, he shared the following:

> "As we learned more, the meaning of the question continued to evolve. We asked ourselves, "How can we go out and plant this seed? How do we frame it as we bring other people into the conversation?" The question always worked in stimulating the dialogue. Sometimes as leaders it's important not to collectively work on what the answer is but to work on what the question is. That was a big insight for me as we did this work. *The question never failed us.*"

Improving Questions at Pfizer. In another recent case, professionals at Pfizer, the world-renowned pharmaceutical firm, are experimenting with a systematic method of improving the quality of their questions. Through a custom-designed workshop, marketing and finance professionals in Pfizer's European business unit have been learning to articulate powerful questions. These executives have discovered that meetings have more energy and creative ideas flow more quickly when they place attention on formulating catalytic questions. With this discipline in place, new ideas are more easily finding their way into key products and services.

From these examples, it's clear that improving the quality of the questions you ask and creating a framework of engagement that encourages their exploration can create business value. Because learning to engage thoughtful questions can lead to insight, innovation, and action, doing so will become an essential strategic capability for leaders of organizations who want to create sustainable results in the face of both short- and longer-term challenges and opportunities.

Fostering Strategic Inquiry

Beyond building the capacity of individual employees to ask powerful questions, an organization can design processes that use such queries to enhance the emergence of knowledge creation and strategic thinking. As the chairman and CEO of a major multinational corporation says, "Discovering strategic questions is like panning for gold. You have to care about finding it, you have to be curious, and you have to create an anticipation of discovering gold, even though none of us may know ahead of time where we'll find it. You head toward the general territory where you think the gold may be located, with your best tools, your experience, and your instincts. And then you begin a disciplined search for the gold." We've partnered with this leader to create a set of tools for fostering strategic inquiry and working with powerful questions in the service of positive futures called the "Game Plan" process. The following steps may not apply to all situations and they may not always play out in the same sequence. However, the Game Plan suggests ways that organizations can create both formal and informal processes to support individuals as well as teams in discovering the "gold" for themselves.

The Game Plan Process

The steps in the Game Plan can be used both as a process discipline by individuals looking at a particular situation, as well as by functional and cross-functional groups and leadership teams charged with the responsibility for key decisions regarding future courses of action. The Game Plan can also involve diverse stakeholders to provide important perspectives both on the current situation and on possible future actions.

THE GAME PLAN PROCESS

- Assess Your Current Situation
- Discover the "Big Questions"
- Create Images of Possibility
- Evolve Workable Strategies

Assess Your Current Situation. Get a feel for the larger context in which you are operating. Scan the internal and external business and organizational environments that may affect the future of the system or project you are working with. This situation analysis might include the assessment of critical results data, meetings with key stakeholders, and the mapping of your strengths, opportunities, and threats. It might also involve looking for "signals"—internal and external events, developments, and trends that can affect the future of your situation. Like trackers in the mountains, look for both obvious and subtle indicators that point to storms as well as sunny skies. Allow your curiosity and imagination to take the lead as you begin to identify the many questions that the broader landscape within which you're operating reveals.

It will be challenging, but important, to frame your findings as questions rather than as problems or concerns—questions that end with a question mark, not with a period or an exclamation point. To help in designing these queries, ask yourself, "How does *A* affect *C* and what questions does that suggest? If *X* were at play here, what question would we be asking? What's the real question underneath all this data?"

Discover the "Big Questions." Once you think you've posed most of the relevant questions (and there may be many of them), look for patterns and themes. This is not a mechanical process, even though it should be disciplined and systematic. You are on a treasure hunt, seeking the core questions—usually three to five—that, if answered, would make the most difference to the future of the project or situation you are exploring. Cluster related questions, and consider the relationships among them. Begin to clarify the "big questions" that the initial clusters reveal. Frame these as clear and concise queries, not as problems. Something fundamental changes when people begin to ask questions together—they go beyond the normal stale debate about problems that passes for strategy in many organizations.

Create Images of Possibility. Ask yourself, "What would our situation look like or be like if the 'big questions' were answered?" Creating vivid images of possibility differs from pie-in-the-sky visioning, especially if people with a variety of perspectives have participated in the earlier stages of your analysis. This part of the conversation can also provide clues for refining or reframing your big questions as well as inventing creative strategies. Developing scenarios—stories of the future based on different ways your big questions might be answered—can also be useful. These often reveal new territory and opportunities for action that are grounded in real life.

> "STRATEGIC QUESTIONS CREATE A RESONANT FIELD INTO WHICH YOUR OWN THINKING IS MAGNIFIED, CLARIFIED, AND NEW MOTION CAN BE CREATED."
>
> FRAN PEAVEY, *STRATEGIC QUESTIONING*

Evolve Workable Strategies. Workable strategies begin to emerge in response to compelling questions and to the images of possibility that these questions evoke. In a sense, such strategies are the "big answers"—the key initiatives you invent to address your "big questions." Once you clarify key initiatives, you can formulate and implement specific action plans.

Of course, the cycle is never complete. You need continuous "sensing" based on relevant business and organizational data, ongoing conversations with internal and external stakeholders, informal conversations among employees, and feedback from the organizational environment. This input enables you to continually reassess the landscape you're operating in—revealing new questions for exploration.

The innovative leader with whom we developed the Game Plan process has shared this tool with the entire organization. People from throughout the company have found that it provides a way to discover questions that matter to the future of individual units and to the firm as a whole. The company has also used the Game Plan as part of refining the corporation's

IS YOUR ORGANIZATION AN INQUIRING SYSTEM? ASSESSING YOUR ORGANIZATION'S CAPABILITIES

- To what degree do leaders in your organization foster an environment in which discovering the "big questions" is encouraged as much as coming up with workable solutions?
- Does your organization have rewards or incentives for members to work across functional boundaries to find challenging questions that create common focus and forward movement for knowledge creation?
- Do your leadership development programs contain as much of a focus on the art and architecture of framing powerful questions as they do on techniques for solving problems?
- Do your organization's strategic planning processes include structured ways to discover the "big questions" that, if answered, would have real strategic leverage?
- What enabling tools or technologies does your organization employ to "seed" itself with strategic questions that "travel well" and catalyze learning conversations both within and across functions?
- Does your organization use collaborative technology tools to enable people on the frontlines to ask each other questions related to their daily work (i.e. customer service, equipment maintenance) and receive help with these questions from colleagues in other locations?
- Do senior leaders in your organization see the process of strategy evolution as one that engages multiple voices and perspectives in networks of conversation?

mission and values in the midst of a volatile and changing external climate. By moving from a problem orientation toward a more rigorous and disciplined focus on essential questions, the organization is slowly shifting from a "fix-it" mode to an inquiry model for business and organizational strategy evolution.This company has found that maintaining a rigorous focus on "questions that matter" and hosting strategic conversations on the organization's "big questions" is a core competence for leaders at all levels.

How Can Leaders Engage Powerful Questions?

For all organizations, in today's turbulent times, engaging people's best thinking about complex issues without easy answers will be the key to creating the futures we want rather than being forced to live with the futures we get. Leaders will need to develop capacity in the design of "inquiring systems" in order to learn, adapt, and create new knowledge to meet emerging opportunities and challenges in the more fluid organizational structures of the future. For example, the leadership challenges of the next 20 years are likely to revolve around the art of engaging and energizing networks rather than solely managing hierarchies as in the past. Successful leaders will be those who see organizations as living networks of conversation and collective meaning-making through which members create new knowledge and bring forth the future.They will understand how to operate in networks that are both internal and external to their organization.

In particular, we believe the following core capabilities, rarely taught in today's MBA or corporate leadership programs, will help define leadership excellence in a networked world where knowledge and learning are keys to success:

Engaging Strategic Questions. How many leaders today know how to frame strategic questions that open the space for thinking about possibilities rather than solving problems? How many leaders are comfortable with not knowing and can constructively help others bring forth their collective knowledge? How many leaders can engage their workers in discovering the "big questions" that lie at the heart of their organization's future?

In a volatile and uncertain environment, one of the strongest steps leaders can take is to assist their organizations in discovering the right questions at the right time. One of their key responsibilities is creating infrastructures for dialogue and engagement that encourage others at all levels to develop insightful questions and to search for innovative paths forward. Leaders also need to consider reward systems that provide incentives for members to work across organizational boundaries to discover those challenging lines of inquiry that create common focus and new knowledge.

Convening and Hosting Learning Conversations. A core aspect of the leader's new work involves creating multiple opportunities for learning conversations around challenging questions.

However, authentic conversation is less likely to occur in a climate of fear, mistrust, and hierarchical control. When the human mind and heart are fully engaged in authentic conversation and listening for core questions, new knowledge often begins to surface. Thus, the ability to facilitate working conversations that enhance trust and reduce fear is an important leadership capability.

To succeed in this pursuit, it's essential for leaders to strengthen their skills in the use of dialogue and other engagement approaches that deepen mutual inquiry and foster collective intelligence. These capabilities include:

- Creating a climate of discovery
- Suspending premature judgment
- Exploring underlying assumptions and beliefs
- Listening for connections between ideas
- Encouraging diverse perspectives
- Honoring everyone's contributions
- Articulating shared understanding
- Harvesting and sharing collective discoveries

These skills are especially important in situations in which there are no simple answers and finding creative paths forward can make a positive difference.

Including Diverse Perspectives. Leaders must become connectors—of both people and ideas. Diverse voices and new perspectives that aren't limited by traditional boundaries of function, hierarchy, discipline, technology, tenure, and geographic region play an increasingly important role in a company's strategizing. As Gary Hamel of the London School of Economics points out, "Strategizing depends on creating a rich and complex web of conversations that cuts across previously isolated pockets of knowledge and creates new and unexpected combinations of insight."

"A QUESTION NOT ASKED IS A DOOR NOT OPENED."

MARILEE GOLDBERG, *THE ART OF THE QUESTION*

The connections among these diverse voices and perspectives allow employees to fruitfully explore critical strategic questions. Building and encouraging personal relationships through networks of collaborative conversations across traditional boundaries helps critical strategic questions travel well. In this way, workers enhance their collective intelligence and their capacity to nurture creative futures together.

QUESTIONING

- Stimulates creativity
- Motivates fresh thinking
- Surfaces underlying assumptions
- Focuses intention, attention, and energy
- Opens the door to change
- Leads us into the future

Supporting Appreciative Inquiry. Opening spaces of possibility in our organizations requires a shift in leadership orientation from focusing primarily on what *is not* working and how to fix it, to also discovering and appreciating what *is* working and how to leverage it. Appreciative Inquiry (AI), developed by David Cooperrider and his colleagues at Case Western University, is a process for leveraging emerging possibilities rather than just fixing past mistakes. When used in a disciplined way, this kind of inquiry stimulates lively conversations that use the best of what is as the foundation for what might be.

Leaders who ask, "What's possible here and who cares?" have a much easier time gaining the cooperation and best thinking of their constituents than those who ask, "What's wrong here and who is to blame?" In assessing the results of more than a decade of research and practice in the area of Appreciative Inquiry, Cooperrider has stated unequivocally that "the most important insight we have learned with AI to date is that human systems grow toward what they persistently ask questions about." By asking positive questions, organizations have the opportunity to grow in new directions and tap innovative sources of knowledge, vitality, and energy.

Fostering Shared Meaning. We make meaning of our experiences through stories, images, and metaphors. To tap into this pool of shared meaning, which is the ground from which both powerful questions and innovative solutions emerge, network leaders need to put time and attention into framing common language and developing shared images and metaphors. They can do so by constructing compelling scenarios—stories of the future—that provide a context for working on today's "big questions," as in the case of the Game Plan process described earlier. In addition, leaders must

QUESTIONS FOR ALL SEASONS

Here is a series of generative questions that we and other colleagues have found useful to stimulate new knowledge and creative thinking in a wide variety of situations around the world. Look at these questions to stimulate your own thinking about questions related to your own specific situation. Play. Use your imagination.

Questions for Focusing Collective Attention on Your Situation

- What question, if answered, could make the most difference to the future of (your specific situation)?
- What's important to you about (your specific situation) and why do you care?
- What draws you/us to this inquiry?
- What's our intention here? What's the deeper purpose (the big "why") that is really worthy of our best effort?
- What opportunities can you see in (your specific situation)?
- What do we know so far/still need to learn about (your specific situation)?
- What are the dilemmas/opportunities in (your specific situation)?
- What assumptions do we need to test or challenge here in thinking about (your specific situation)?
- What would someone who had a very different set of beliefs than we do say about (your specific situation)?

Questions for Connecting Ideas and Finding Deeper Insight

- What's taking shape? What are you hearing underneath the variety of opinions being expressed? What's in the center of the table?
- What's emerging here for you? What new connections are you making?
- What had real meaning for you from what you've heard? What surprised you? What challenged you?
- What's missing from this picture so far? What is it we're not seeing? What do we need more clarity about?
- What's been your/our major learning, insight, or discover so far?
- What's the next level of thinking we need to do?
- If there was one thing that hasn't yet been said in order to reach a deeper level of understanding/clarity, what would that be?

Questions That Create Forward Movement

- What would it take to create change on this issue?
- What could happen that would enable you/us to feel fully engaged and energized about (your specific situation)?
- What's possible here and who cares? (rather than "What's wrong here and who's responsible?")
- What needs our immediate attention going forward?
- If our success was completely guaranteed, what bold steps might we choose?
- How can we support each other in taking the next steps? What unique contribution can we each make?
- What challenges might come our way and how might we meet them?
- What conversation, if begun today, could ripple out in a way that created new possibilities for the future of (your situation)?
- What seed might we plant together today that could make the most difference to the future of (your situation)?

incorporate time for systemwide reflection in order to enable members to share insights and emerging questions. Collective reflection provides opportunities for the shared meaning-making that is essential in times of turbulence and change.

Nurturing Communities of Practice. Many of the most provocative questions that are vital to an organization's future are first discovered on the front lines, in the middle of the action of everyday life. But these key strategic questions are often lost because few of today's leaders have been trained to notice, honor, and utilize the social fabric of learning that occurs through informal "communities of practice" that exist throughout the organization.A community of practice is made of up people who share a common interest and who work together to expand their individual and collective capacity to solve problems over time.

Nurturing these learning networks and honoring the questions they care about is another core aspect of the leader's new work. It is important to understand how these communities deal with the questions and learning needs that arise in the course of the daily life of the organization. These understandings can provide clues about how the knowledge that resides in such communities might be engaged in the service of critical strategic questions. Leaders who take communities of practice into account as important strategic assets help assure that new work processes or organizational structures do not destroy the fabric of collective knowledge that is woven into these informal groups.

Using Collaborative Technologies. Intranet and groupware technologies are now making it possible for widely dispersed work groups to participate in learning conversations and team projects across time and space. As these tools become even more widely available, the notion of "network leadership" will expand to include supporting widespread online conversations where members throughout the organization can contribute their own questions and best thinking to critical strategic issues. The HP case shows how important enabling technology infrastructures are for strategic innovation. Several forward-looking companies, including Hallmark, Kodak, Discover Card, and General Motors, are now using an innovative online conversational technology, Communispace (www.communispace.com), to listen to their customers' concerns and questions at a deep level and generate insights about new products at a faster rate than was previously possible.

Such collaborative tools will be a critical factor in how well strategic questions can travel both within the organization and among customers and other stakeholders who are key to success. These technologies of engagement create possibilities for individuals and groups to connect with each other and to the larger whole in ways that were previously unimaginable. Leaders who are not skilled in their use or who do not recognize their strategic importance and support their use throughout their organizations will be at a significant disadvantage.

Co-Evolving the Future

It is quite easy to learn the basics of crafting powerful questions. However, once you understand the importance of inquiry, it's hard to turn back. As your questions become broader and deeper than before, so does your experience of life. There is no telling where a powerful question might lead you. Transformative conversations can result from posing a simple question such as, "What questions are we not asking ourselves about the situation in the Middle East?" Tantalizing possibilities emerge from the simple act of changing an article from "in" to "for," as in the HP example. Profound systemic change can emerge from creating a process discipline such as the Game Plan for discovering and acting on the "big questions" within a business setting.

For organizations that need collaborative learning and breakthrough thinking in order to create a sustainable future, asking "questions that matter" and engaging diverse constituencies in learning conversations are a core process for value creation. Because questions are inherently related to action, they are at the heart of an organization's capacity to mobilize the resources required to create a positive future. Seeing the organization as a dynamic network of conversations through which the enterprise develops encourages members at every level to search for questions related to real work that can catalyze collective energy and momentum. For all of us, thoughtful participation in discovering and exploring powerful questions can make a difference—to our team, to our organization, and to the larger communities of which we are a part.

Living systems evolve by developing a coherent identity, creating connections in complex webs of relationships, and distributing information widely throughout the organization. At the same time, human systems naturally evolve toward the questions that they ask. Seeing the ways in which the art and architecture of powerful questions can help an organization create its path into the future, and utilizing process principles, tools, and technologies that support this evolution, is everyone's job. For it is only in this way that organizations are able to cultivate both the knowledge required to thrive economically today as well as the wisdom needed to ensure a sustainable future.

For Further Exploration

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www.communispace.com provides software and services to support creative work conversations and large-scale corporate communities.

www.interclass.com is a high-trust community of experienced practitioners in large organizations exploring innovations in learning and human performance.

www.theworldcafe.com is a global resource for hosting conversations around questions that matter in both for-profit and nonprofit settings.

About the Authors

Juanita Brown (juanita@theworldcafe.com), Ph.D., collaborates with senior leaders to create strategic dialogue forums focused on critical organizational and societal issues.

David Isaacs (david@theworldcafe.com) is president of Clearing Communications, an organizational and communications strategy company working with corporate leaders in the U.S. and abroad.

Eric E. Vogt (eric.vogt@interclass.com) operates as a catalyst for innovation and accelerated change with the global corporate members of InterClass, a high-trust network of experienced practitioners at the intersection of human performance and business strategy.

Powerful Questions

Powerful questions are provocative queries that put a halt to evasion and confusion. By asking the powerful question, the coach invites the client to clarity, action, and discovery at a whole new level. As you can see from the following examples, these generally are open-ended questions that create greater possibility for expanded learning and fresh perspective.

Anticipation
What is possible?
What if it works out exactly as you want it to? What is the dream?
What is exciting to you about this?
What is the urge? What does your intuition tell you?

Assessment
What do you make of it?
What do you think is best?
How does it look to you?
How do you feel about it?
What resonates for you?

Clarification
What do you mean? What does it feel like?
What is the part that is not yet clear?
Can you say more? What do you want?

Elaboration
Can you tell me more? What else?
What other ideas/thoughts/ feelings do you have about it?

Evaluation
What is the opportunity here?
What is the challenge?
How does this fit with your plans/way of life/values?
What do you think that means? What is your assessment?

Example
What is an example?
For instance?
Like what? Such as?
What would it look like?

Exploration
What is here that you want to explore?
What part of the situation have you not yet explored?
What other angles can you think of?
What is just one more possibility?
What are your other options?

For Instance
If you could do it over again, what would you do differently?
If it had been you, what would you have done?
How else could a person handle this?
If you could do anything you wanted, what would you do?

Fun as Perspective
What does fun mean to you?
What was humorous about the situation?
How can you make this more fun?
How do you want it to be?
If you were to teach people how to have fun, what would you say?

History
What caused it?
What led up to it?
What have you tried so far?
What do you make of it all?

Implementation
What is the action plan?
What will you have to do to get the job done?
What support do you need to accomplish it?
What will you do?
When will you do it?

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Integration
What will you take away from this?
How do you explain this to yourself?
What was the lesson?
How can you make sure you remember what you have learned?

Learning
If your life depended on taking action, what would you do?
If you had free choice in the matter, what would you do?
If the same thing came up again, what would you do?
If we could wipe the slate clean, what would you do?
If you had it to do over again, what would you do?

Options
What are the possibilities?
If you had your choice, what would you do?
What are possible solutions?
What will happen if you do, and what will happen if you don't?
What options can you create?

Outcomes
What do you want?
What is your desired outcome?
If you got it, what would you have?
How will you know you have reached it?
What would it look like?

Perspective
When you are ninety-five years old, what will you want to say about your life?
What will you think about this five years from now?
How does this relate to your life purpose?
In the bigger scheme of things, how important is this?

Planning
What do you plan to do about it?
What is your game plan? What kind of plan do you create?
How do you suppose you improve the situation? Now what?

Predictions
How do you suppose it will all work out?
What will that get you?
Where will this lead?
What are the chances of success?
What is your prediction?

Resources
What resources do you need to help you decide?
What do you know about it now?
How do you suppose you can find out more about it?
What kind of picture do you have right now?
What resources are available to you?

Starting the Session
What's occurred since we last spoke?
What would you like to talk about?
What's new/the latest/the update?
How was your week?
Where are you right now?

Substance
What seems to be the trouble?
What seems to be the main obstacle?
What is stopping you?
What concerns you the most about . . . ?
What do you want?

Summary
What is your conclusion?
How is this working?
How would you describe this?
What do you think this all amounts to?
How would you summarize the?

Taking Action
What action will you take? And after that?
What will you do? When?
Is this a time for action? What action?
Where do you go from here? When will you do that?
What are your next steps?
By what date or time will you complete these steps?

CO-ACTIVE® TRAINING INSTITUTE

1

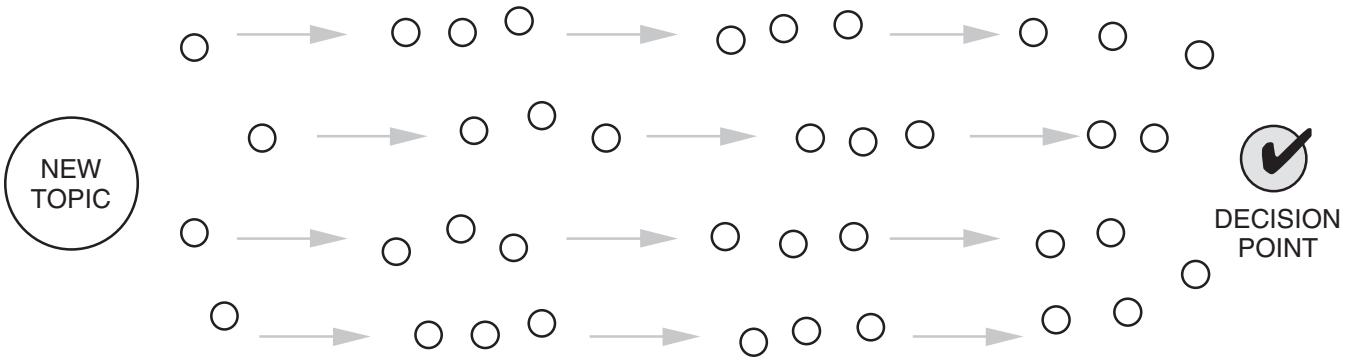
THE DYNAMICS OF GROUP DECISION-MAKING

IDEALIZED AND REALISTIC MODELS OF COLLABORATION IN GROUPS

- **Misunderstandings About the Process of Group Decision-Making**
- **The Struggle to Integrate Diverse Perspectives**
- **The Diamond of Participatory Decision-Making**

DYNAMICS OF GROUP DECISION-MAKING

INTRODUCTION



This picture portrays a hypothetical problem-solving discussion.

Each circle – ◯ – represents one idea. Each line of circles-and-arrows represents one person's line of thought as it develops during the discussion.

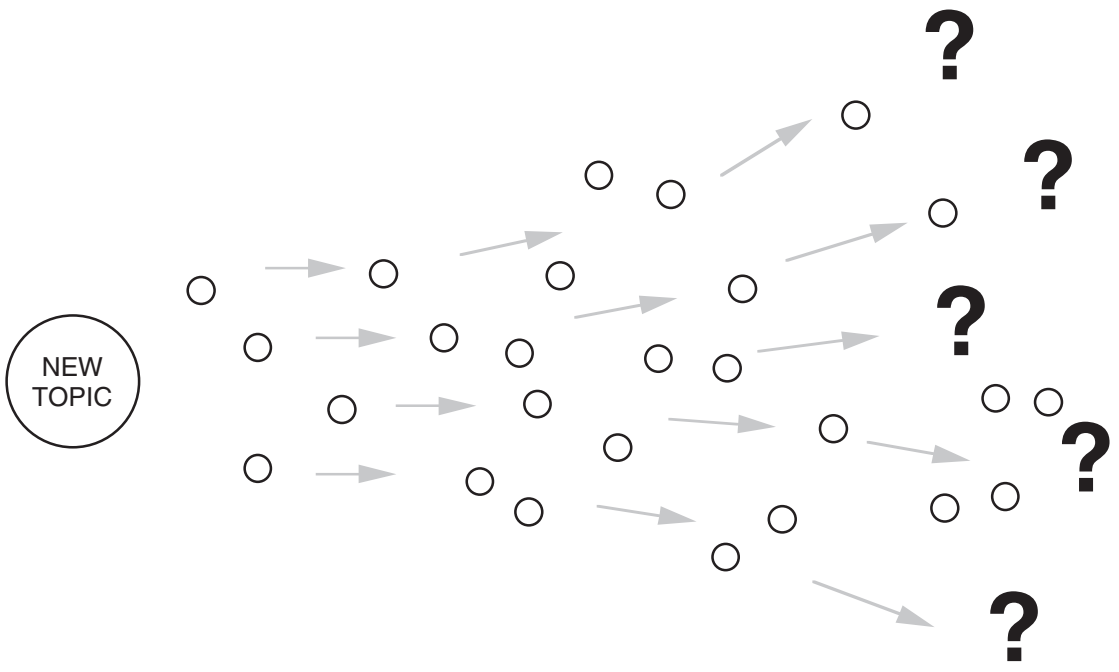
As diagrammed, everyone appears to be tracking each other's ideas, everyone goes at the same pace, and everyone stays on board every step of the way.

A depressingly large percentage of people who work in groups believe this stuff. They think this picture realistically portrays a healthy, flowing decision-making process. And when their actual experience doesn't match up with this model, *they think it's because their own group is defective.*

If people actually behaved as the diagram suggests, group decision-making would be much less frustrating. Unfortunately, real-life groups don't operate this way.

DYNAMICS OF GROUP DECISION-MAKING

SAD BUT TRUE

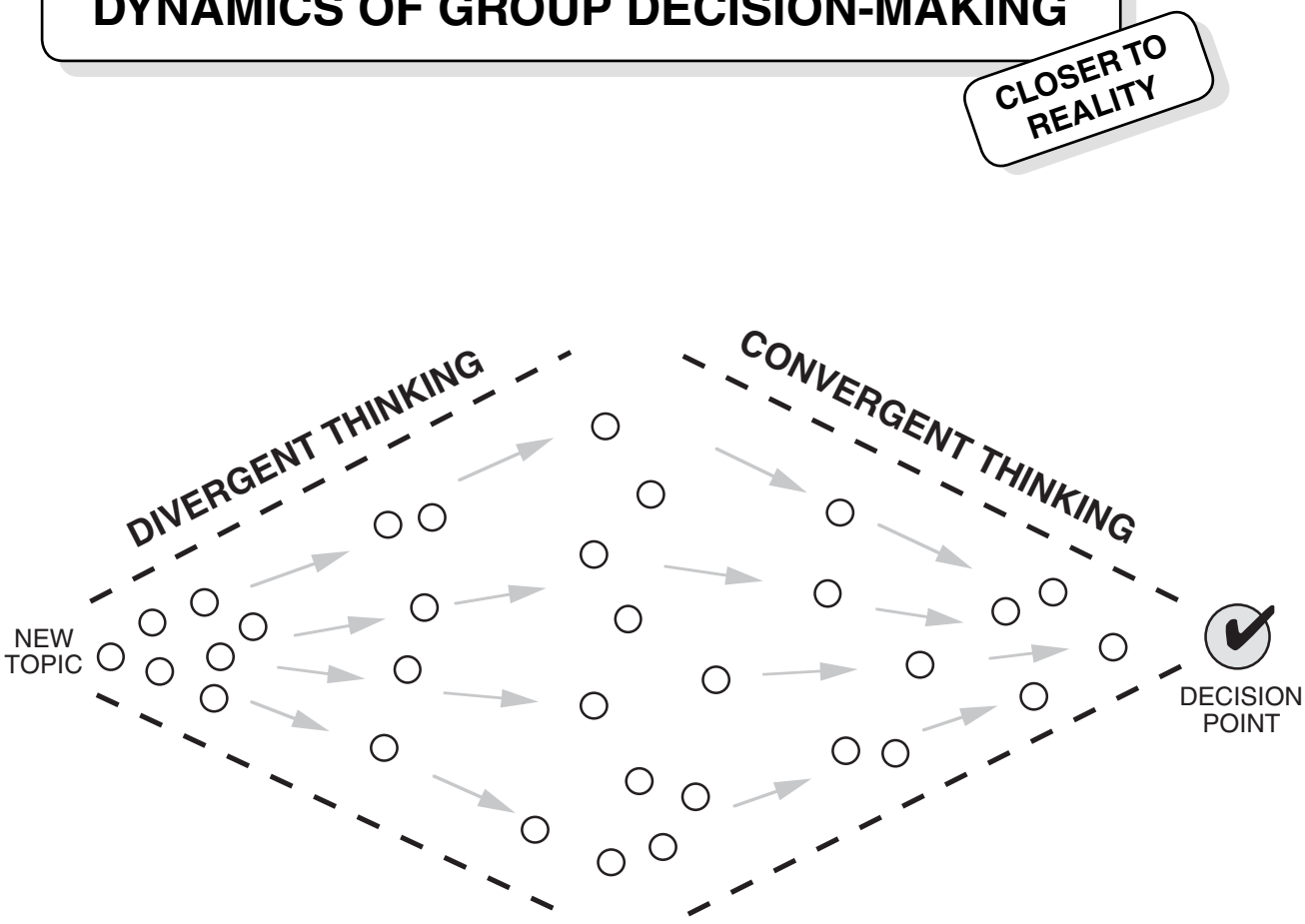


Group members are humans. We *do* go on tangents. We *do* lose track of the central themes of a discussion. We *do* get attached to our ideas. Even when we're all making our best effort to "keep focused" and "stay on track," *we can't change the fact that we are individuals with diverging points of view.*

When a discussion loses focus or becomes confusing, it can appear to many people that the process is heading out of control. Yet this is not necessarily what's really going on. Sometimes what appears to be chaos is actually a prelude to creativity.

But how can we tell which is which? How do we recognize the difference between a degenerative, spinning-our-wheels version of group confusion and the dynamic, diversity-stretches-our-imagination version of group confusion?

DYNAMICS OF GROUP DECISION-MAKING

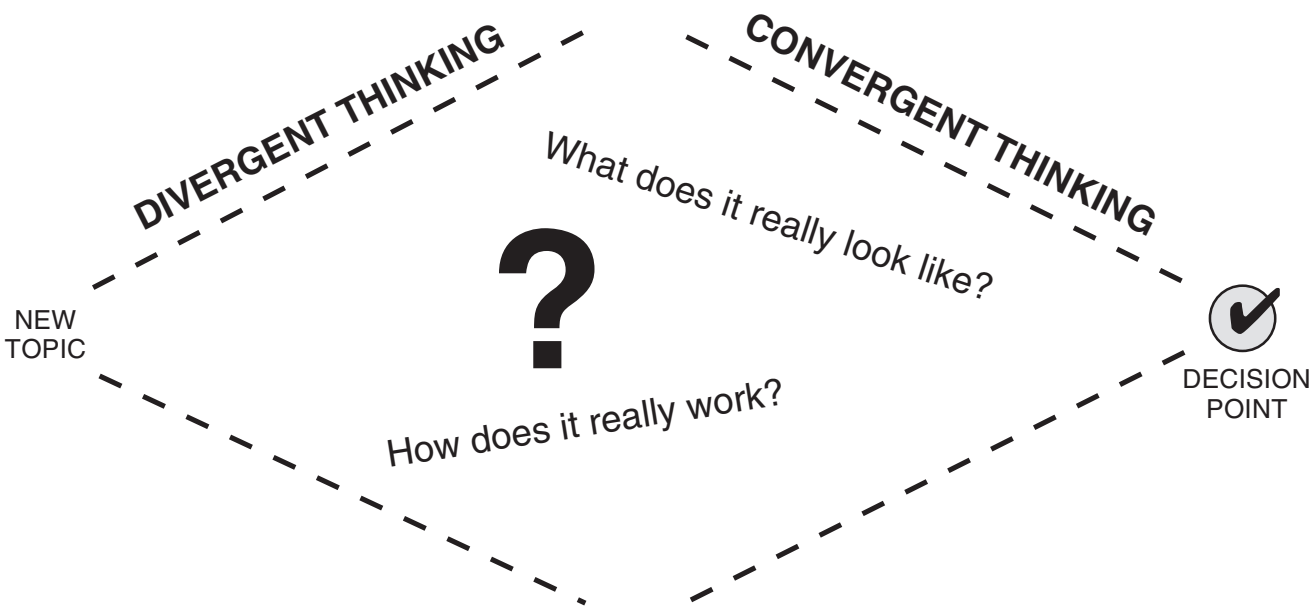


At times the individual members of a group need to express their own points of view. At other times, the same people want to narrow their differences and aim the discussion toward closure. Throughout this book, these two types of "thinking processes" are referred to as *divergent thinking* and *convergent thinking*.

Here are four examples:

DIVERGENT THINKING		CONVERGENT THINKING
Generating alternatives	vs.	Evaluating alternatives
Free-flowing open discussion	vs.	Summarizing key points
Gathering diverse points of view	vs.	Sorting ideas into categories
Suspending judgment	vs.	Exercising judgment

DYNAMICS OF GROUP DECISION-MAKING



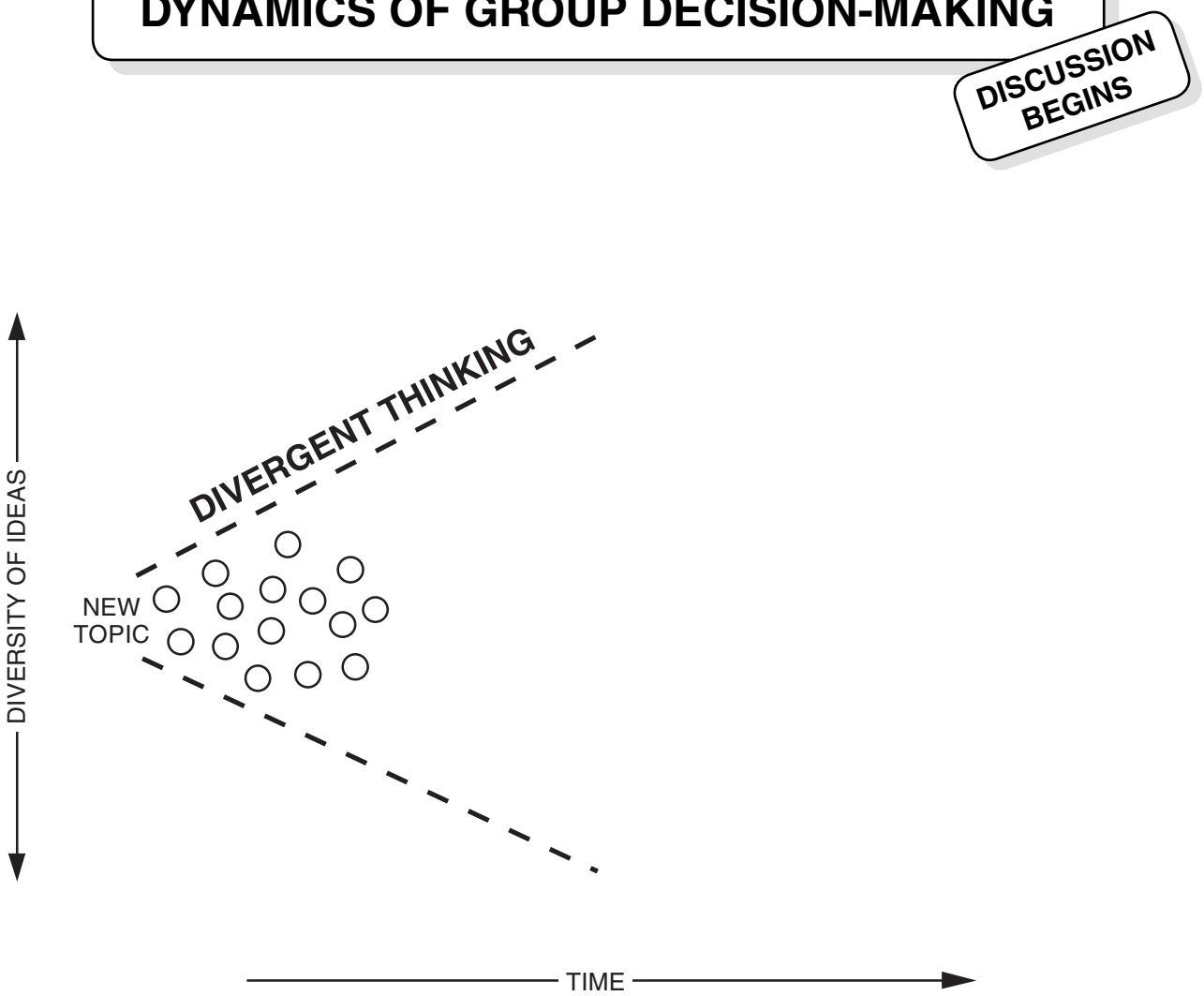
Some years ago, a large, well-known computer manufacturer developed a problem-solving model that was based on the principles of divergent thinking and convergent thinking.

This model was used by managers throughout the company. But it didn't always work so well. One project manager told us that it took their group *two years* to revise the reimbursement procedure for travel expenses.

Why would that happen? How does group decision-making *really* work?

To explore these questions in greater depth, the following pages present a series of stop-action snapshots of the process of group decision-making.

DYNAMICS OF GROUP DECISION-MAKING

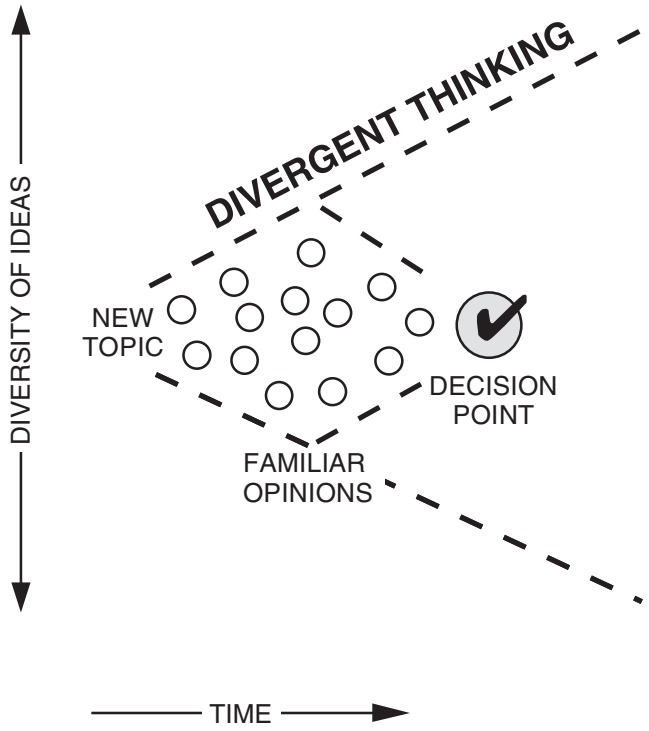


The early rounds of a discussion cover safe, familiar territory. People take positions that reflect conventional wisdom. They rehash well-worn disagreements, and they make proposals for obvious solutions.

This is the normal (and human) way for any problem-solving discussion to begin. *The first ideas we express are the ones that are easiest to think about.*

DYNAMICS OF GROUP DECISION-MAKING

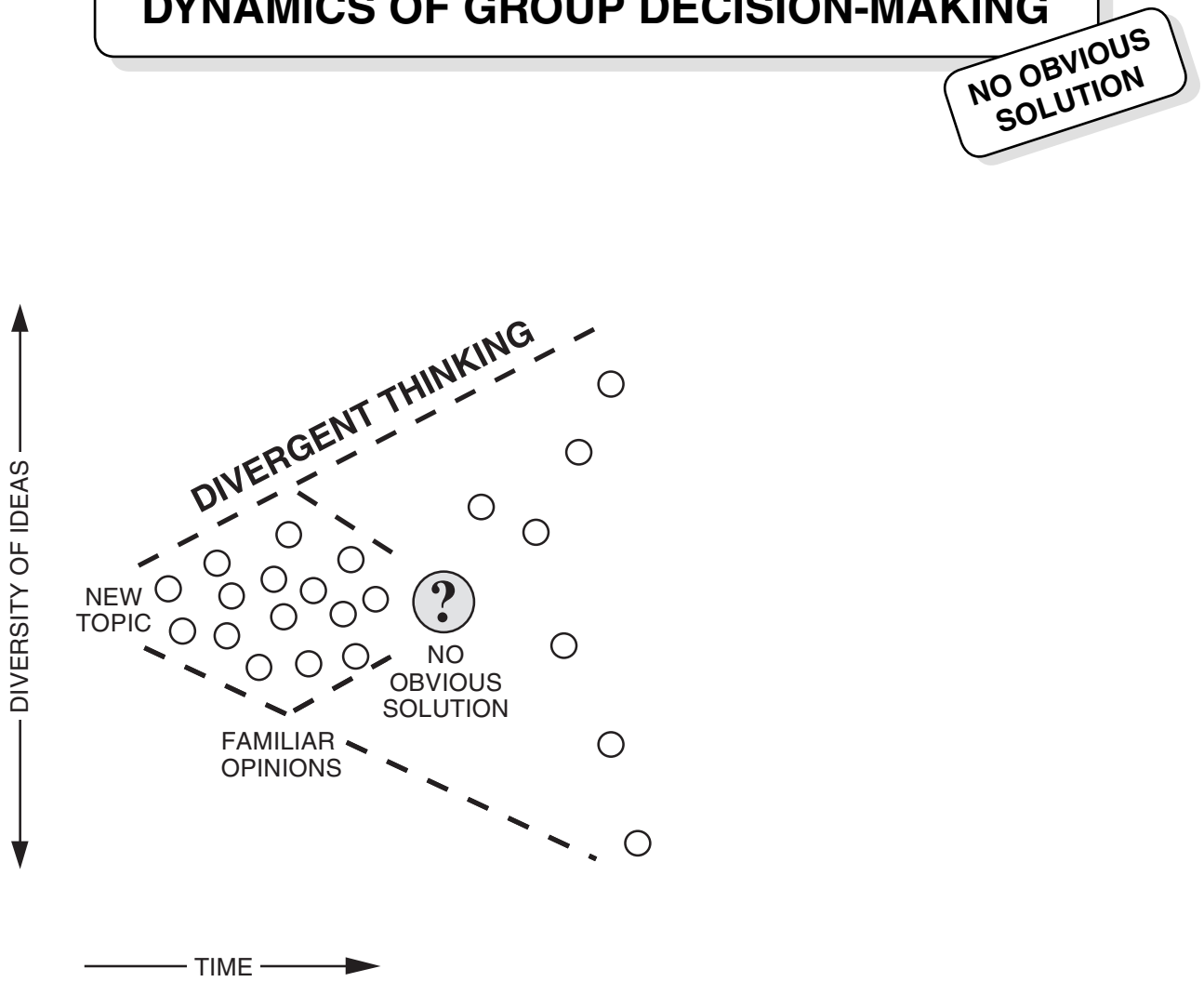
QUICK DECISIONS



When a problem has an obvious solution, it makes sense to close the discussion quickly. Why waste time?

There's only one problem: most groups try to bring *every* discussion to closure this quickly.

DYNAMICS OF GROUP DECISION-MAKING

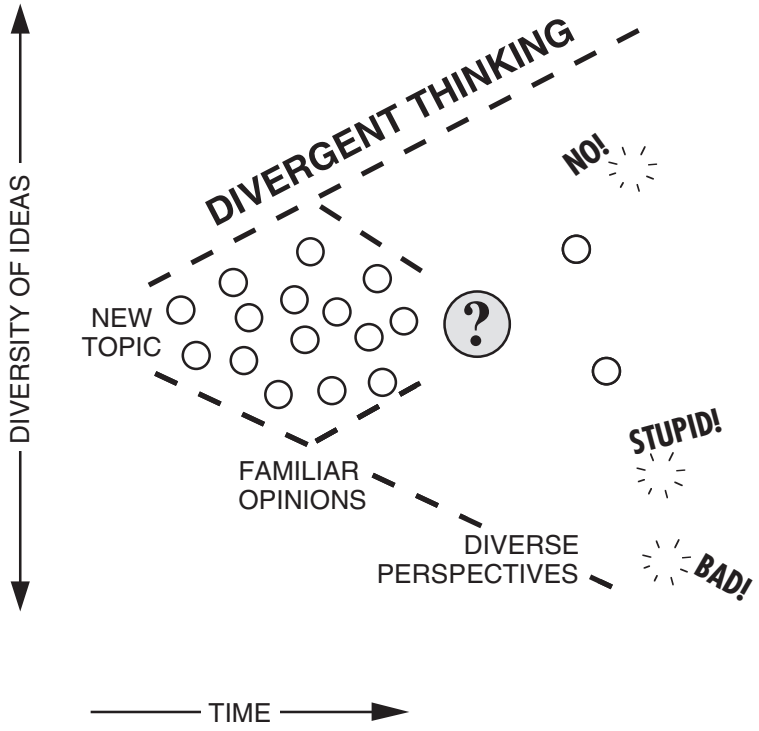


Some problems have *no* easy solutions. For example, how does an inner-city public school prevent campus violence? What steps should a business take to address the needs of an increasingly diverse workforce? Cases like these require a lot of thought; the issues are too complex to be solved with familiar opinions and conventional wisdom.

When a group of decision-makers has to wrestle with a difficult problem, they will not succeed in solving it until they *break out of the narrow band of familiar opinions* and explore a wider range of possibilities.

DYNAMICS OF GROUP DECISION-MAKING

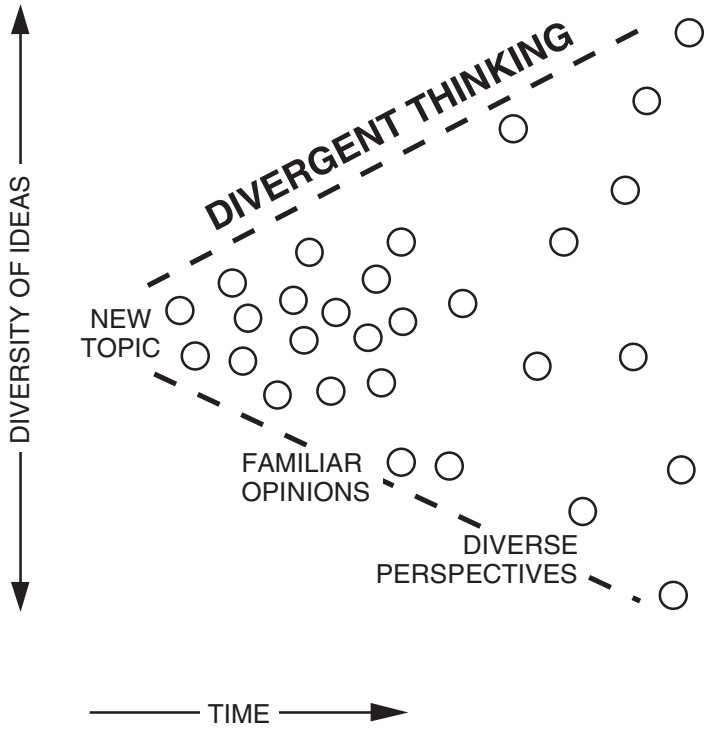
THE CLASSIC DEAD END



Unfortunately, most groups aren't very good at cultivating unfamiliar or unpopular opinions.

DYNAMICS OF GROUP DECISION-MAKING

EXPLORING POSSIBILITIES

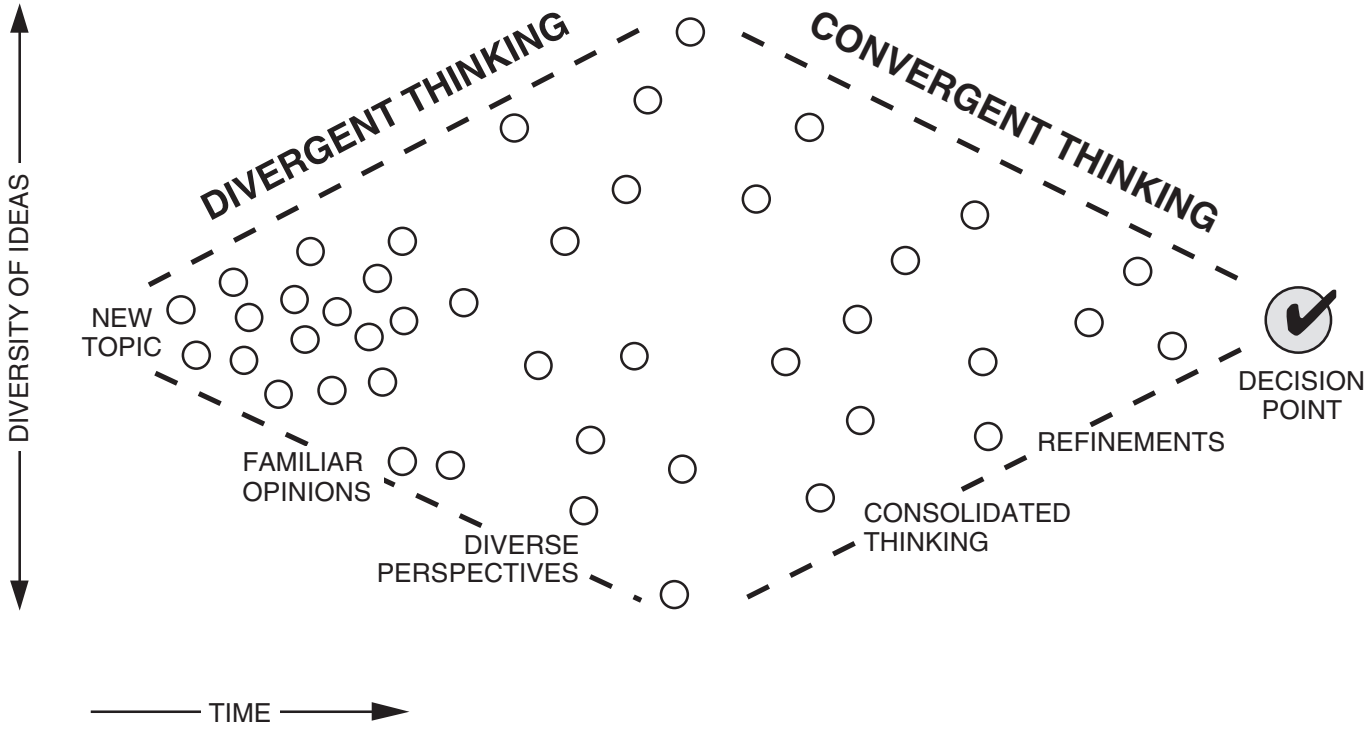


Now and then, when the stakes are sufficiently high and the stars are in proper alignment, a group can manage to overcome the tendency to criticize and inhibit its members. On such occasions, people tentatively begin to consider new perspectives. Some participants might take a risk and express controversial opinions. Others might offer ideas that aren't fully developed.

Since the goal is to find a new way of thinking about the problem, variety is obviously desirable . . . but the spread of opinions can become cumbersome and difficult to manage. Then what?

DYNAMICS OF GROUP DECISION-MAKING

IDEALIZED PROCESS

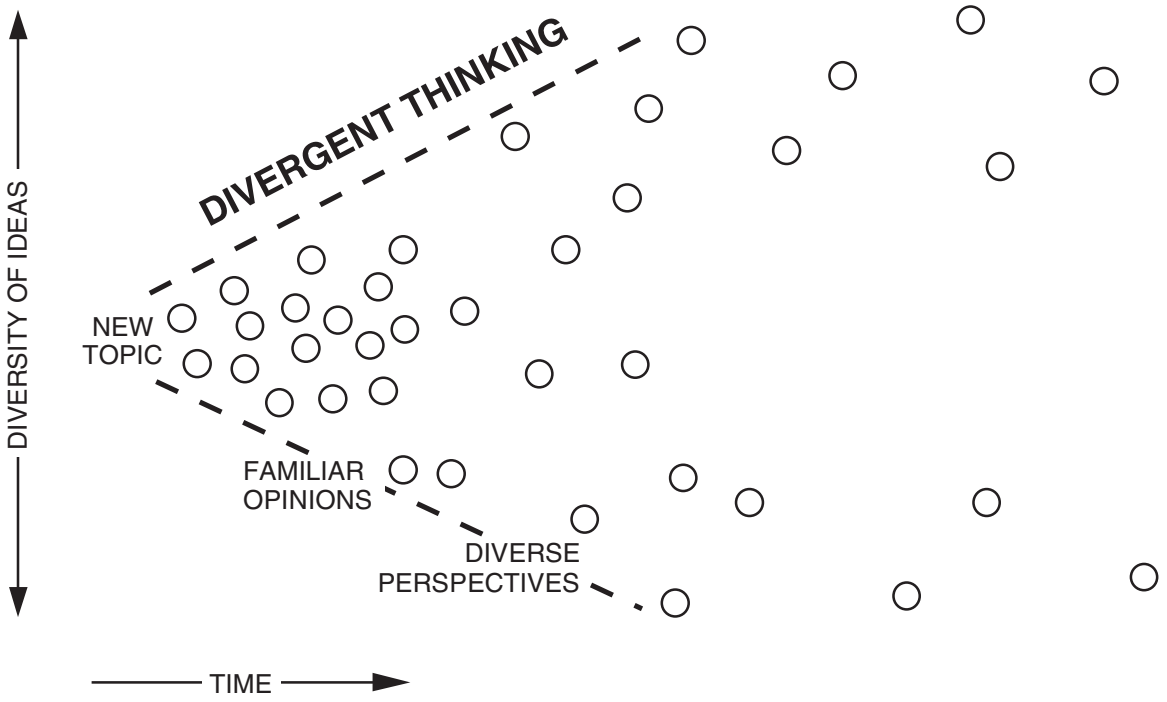


In theory, a group that has committed itself to thinking through a difficult problem would move forward in orderly, thoughtful steps. First, the group would generate and explore a diverse set of ideas. Next, they would consolidate the best thinking into a proposal. Then, they'd refine the proposal until they arrived at a final decision that nicely incorporated the breadth of their thinking.

Ah yes . . . if only *real life* worked that way.

DYNAMICS OF GROUP DECISION-MAKING

TYPICAL PROCESS

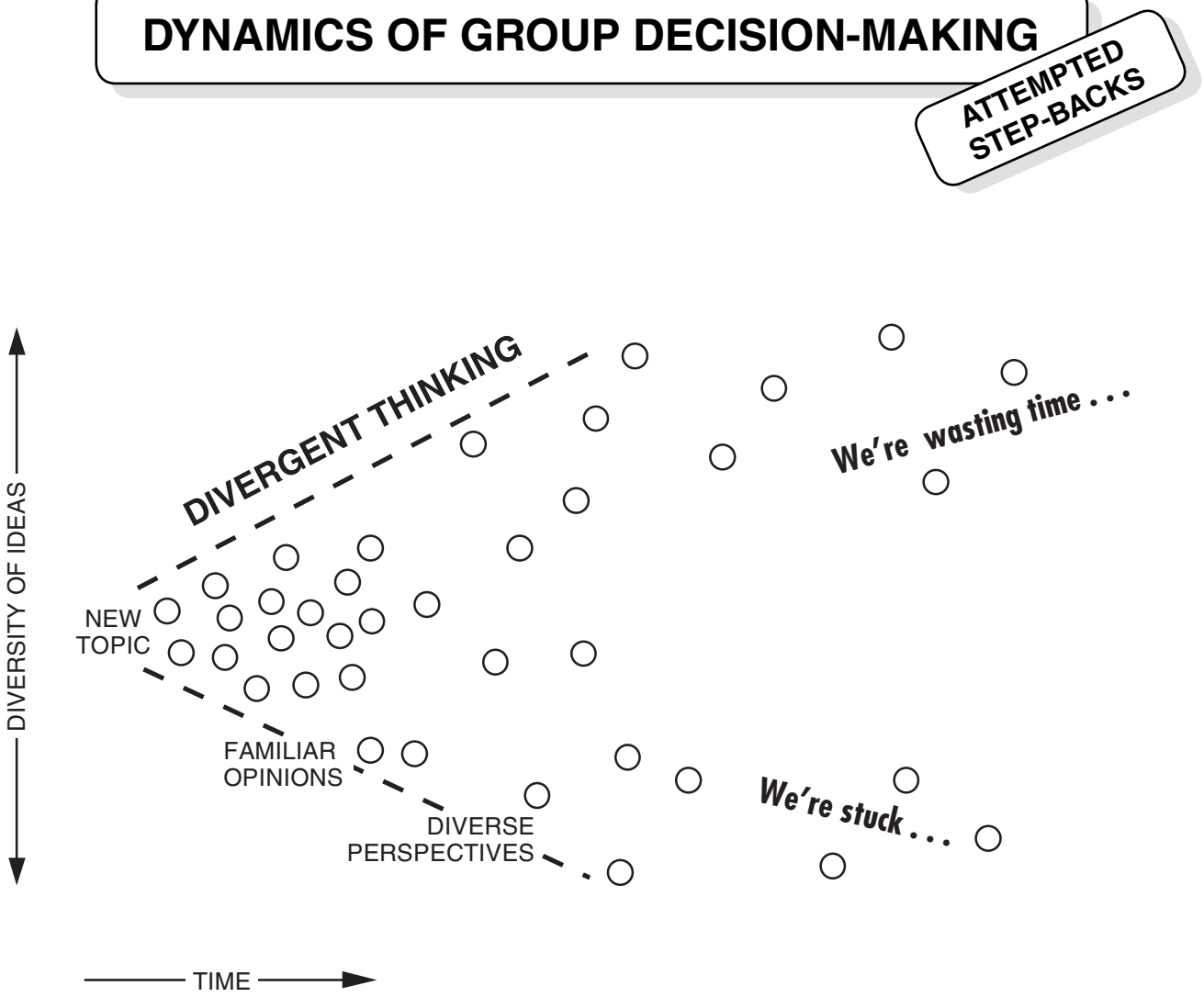


In practice, it can be hard for some people to stop expressing their own opinions and shift to listening to, and understanding the opinions of others.

And it can be particularly challenging to do so when a wide diversity of perspectives are in play. In such cases people can get overloaded, disoriented, annoyed, impatient – or all of the above. Some people feel misunderstood and keep repeating themselves. Other people push for closure . . .

Thus, even the most sincere attempts to solve difficult problems can – and often do – dissipate into confusion.

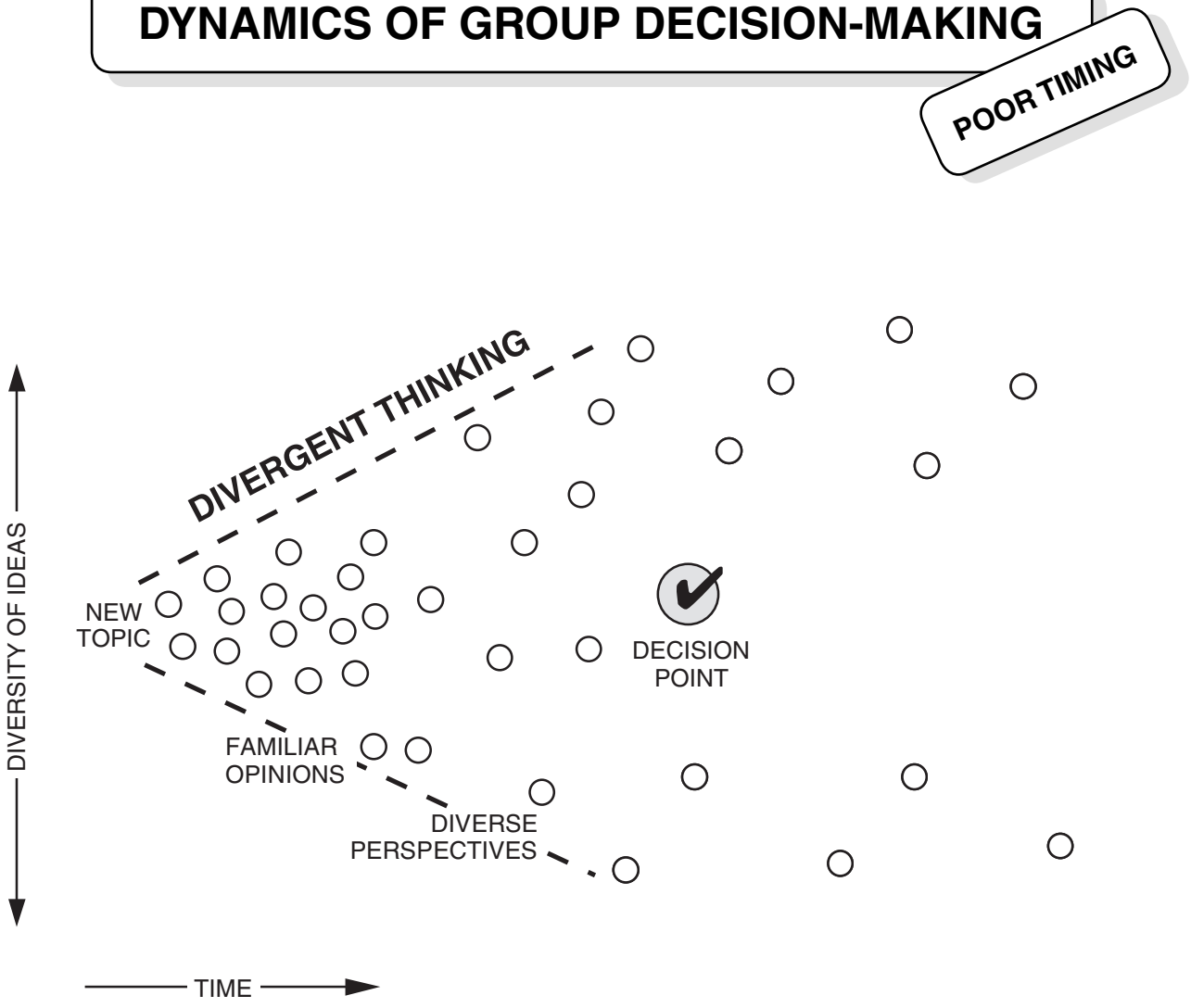
DYNAMICS OF GROUP DECISION-MAKING



Sometimes one or more participants will attempt to step back from the content of the discussion and talk about the process. They might say things like, "I thought we all agreed to stick to the topic," or "Does anyone understand what's going on here?"

Groups rarely respond intelligently to such comments, especially ones that sound like cranky rhetorical questions. More commonly, a process comment becomes merely one more voice in the cacophony: yet another poorly understood perspective to be absorbed into the general confusion.

DYNAMICS OF GROUP DECISION-MAKING



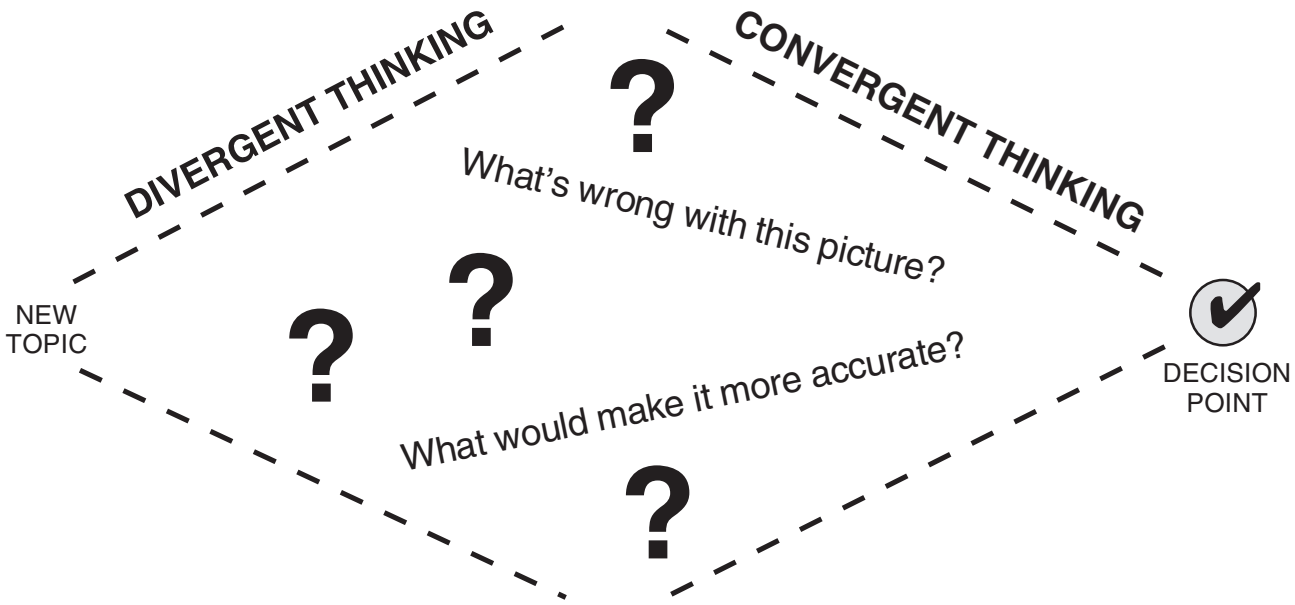
At this point in a process, the person in charge of a meeting can make the problem worse, if he or she attempts to alleviate frustration by announcing that s/he has made a decision. This is a common mistake.

The person-in-charge may believe that s/he has found a perfectly logical answer to the problem at hand, but this doesn't mean that everyone else will telepathically grasp the reasoning behind the decision. Some people may still be thinking along entirely different lines.

This is the exact case in which the person-in-charge *appears* to have made a decision before the meeting began. *"Why did s/he tell me I'd have a say in this matter, when s/he had already made the decision?"* Thus a good faith effort to streamline a rambling conversation can lead to distrust, and even cynicism.

DYNAMICS OF GROUP DECISION-MAKING

WHAT'S MISSING?

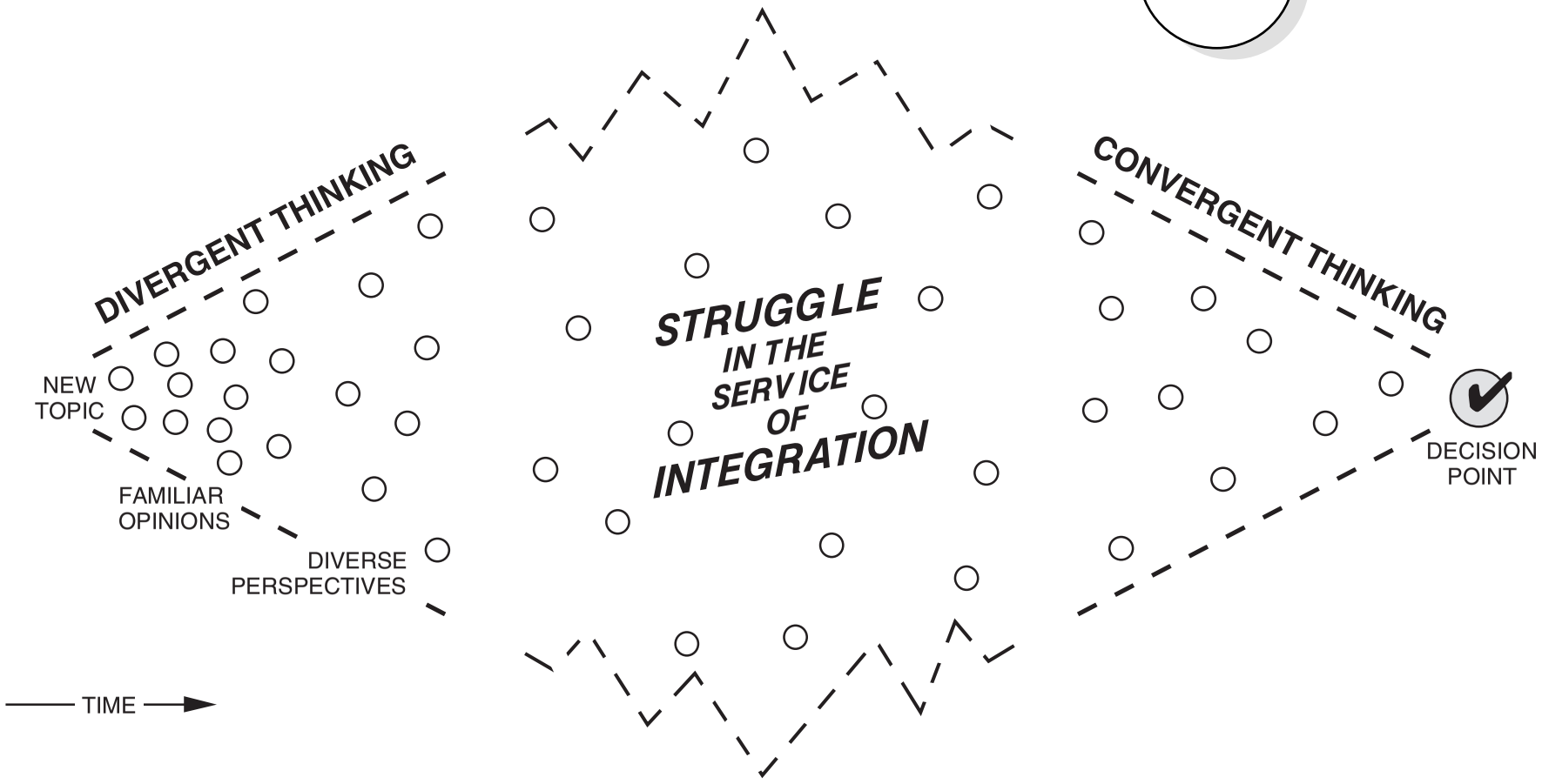


Obviously, there's something wrong with the idealized model. In real life, groups do not automatically shift into convergent thinking. Even after spending substantial time in divergent thinking activities, most groups who make it that far will run into obstacles like those noted on previous pages. In other words, they can easily get "stuck" in their divergence.

None of this is modeled in the diagram shown above. What's missing?

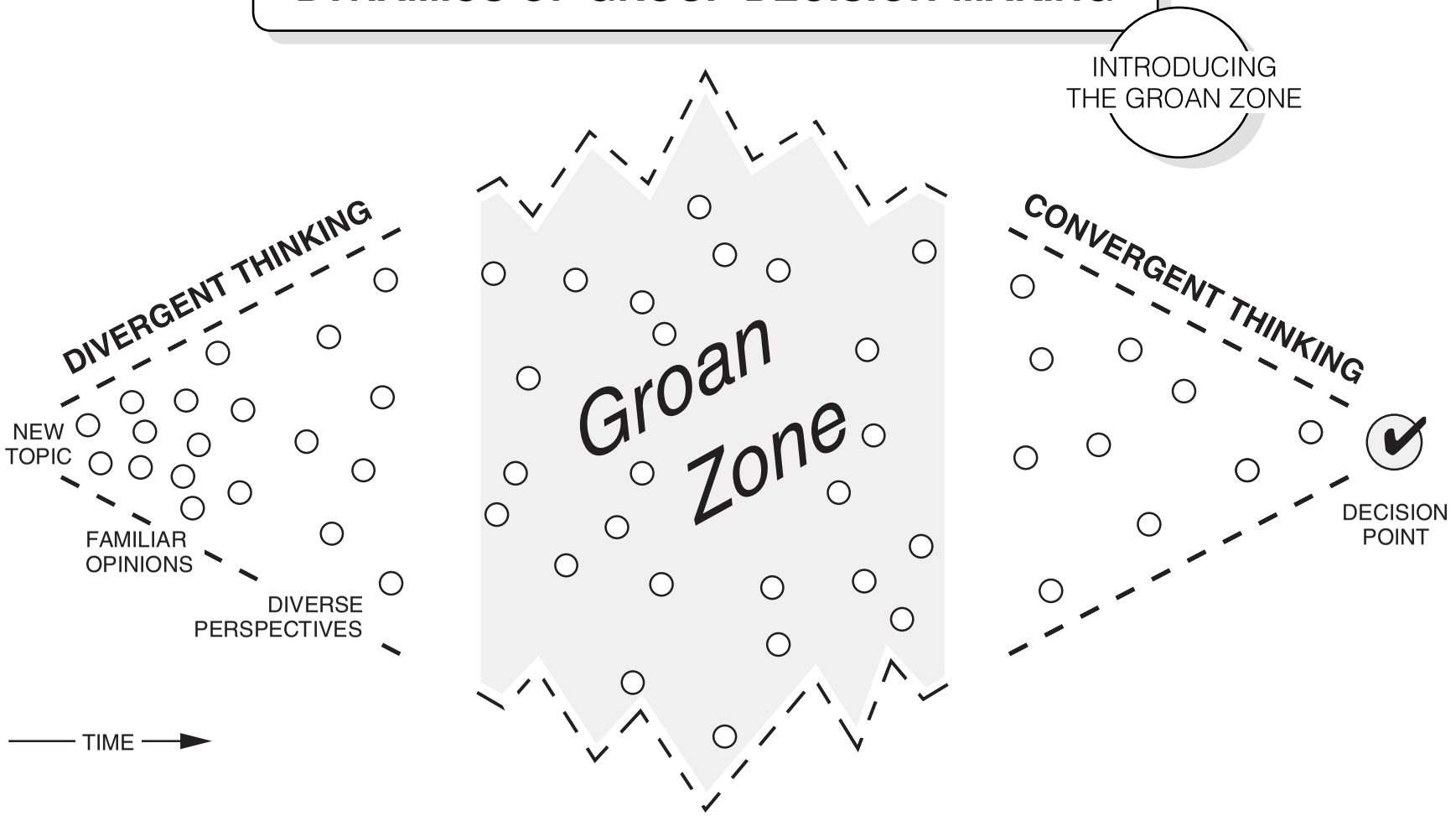
DYNAMICS OF GROUP DECISION-MAKING

A REALISTIC MODEL



A period of confusion and frustration is a natural part of group decision-making. Once a group crosses the line from airing familiar opinions to exploring diverse perspectives, *group members have to struggle in order to integrate new and different ways of thinking with their own.*

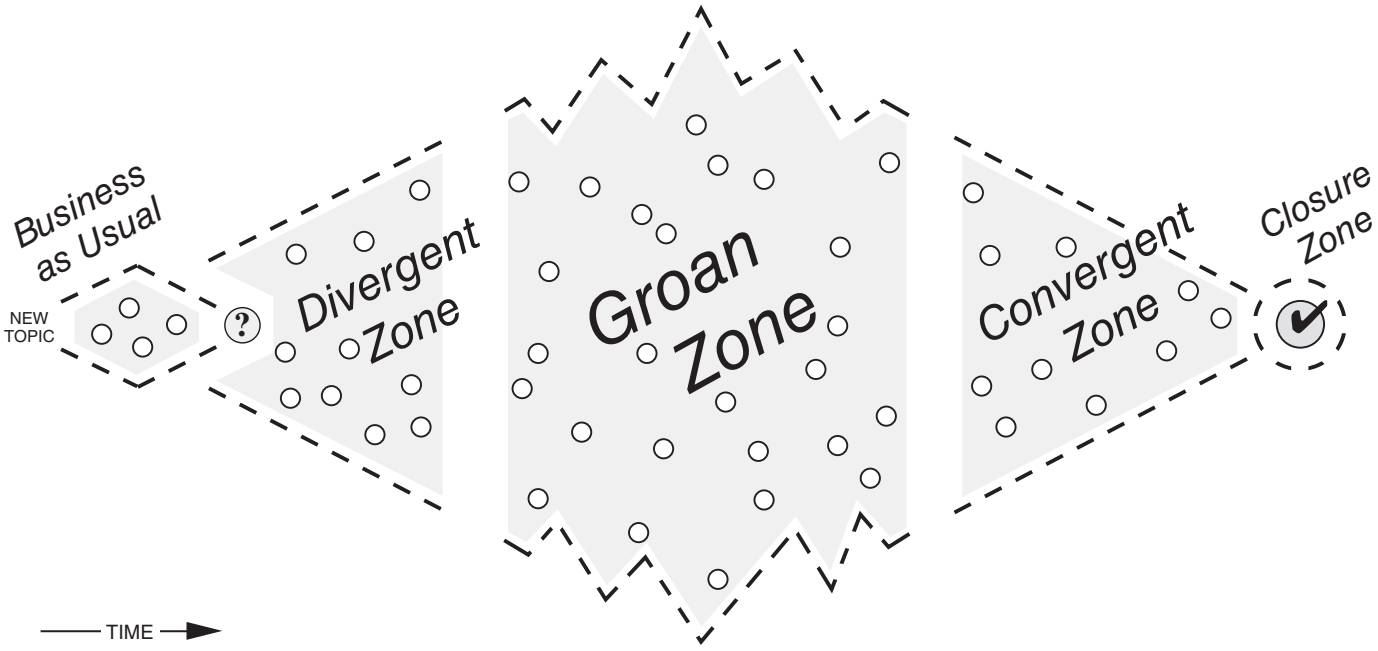
DYNAMICS OF GROUP DECISION-MAKING



Struggling to understand a wide range of foreign or opposing ideas is not a pleasant experience. Group members can be repetitious, insensitive, defensive, short-tempered – and more! At such times most people don't have the slightest notion of what's happening. Sometimes the mere act of acknowledging the existence of the *Groan Zone* can be a significant step for a group to take.

DYNAMICS OF GROUP DECISION-MAKING

THE DIAMOND OF PARTICIPATORY DECISION-MAKING



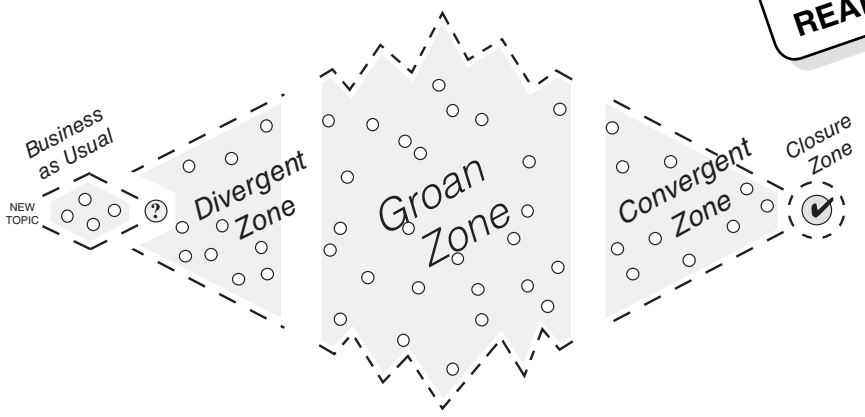
This is the *Diamond of Participatory Decision-Making*. It was developed by Sam Kaner with Lenny Lind, Catherine Toldi, Sarah Fisk and Duane Berger.

Facilitators can use *"The Diamond"* in many ways. It's a lens through which a facilitator can observe and react to the communication dynamics that occur in meetings. It can also be useful as a roadmap for designing agendas – especially to anticipate and plan for challenging conversations. And it can be used as a teaching tool, to provide group members with shared language and shared points of reference that enable them to be more adept at self-managing their meeting processes.

Fundamentally, though, this model was created to validate and legitimize the hidden aspects of everyday life in groups. Expressing difference is natural and beneficial; getting confused is to be expected; feeling frustrated is par for the course. *Building shared understanding is a struggle, not a platitude.*

DYNAMICS OF GROUP DECISION-MAKING

THE POWER OF A REALISTIC MODEL



Understanding group dynamics is an indispensable core competency for anyone – whether facilitator, leader, or group member – who wants to help their group tap the enormous potential of participatory decision-making.

When people experience discomfort in the midst of a group decision-making process, they often take it as evidence that their group is dysfunctional. As their impatience increases, so does their disillusion with the process.

Many projects are abandoned prematurely for exactly this reason. In such cases, it's not that the goals were ill conceived; it's that the *Groan Zone* was perceived as an insurmountable impediment rather than as a normal part of the process.

This is truly a shame. Too many high-minded and well-funded efforts to resolve the world's toughest problems have foundered on the shoals of group dynamics.

So let's be clear-headed about this: misunderstanding and miscommunication are normal, natural aspects of participatory decision-making. The *Groan Zone* is a direct, inevitable consequence of the diversity that exists in any group.

Not only that, but the act of working through these misunderstandings is what builds the foundation for sustainable agreements. Without shared understanding, meaningful collaboration is impossible.

It is supremely important for people who work in groups to recognize this. Groups that can tolerate the stress of the *Groan Zone* are far more likely to find their way to common ground. And discovering common ground, in turn, is the precondition for insightful, innovative collaboration.

2

PARTICIPATORY VALUES

HOW FULL PARTICIPATION STRENGTHENS INDIVIDUALS, DEVELOPS GROUPS, AND FOSTERS SUSTAINABLE AGREEMENTS

- The Four Participatory Values
- How Participatory Values Affect People and Their Work
- Full Participation
- Mutual Understanding
- Inclusive Solutions
- Shared Responsibility
- Benefits of Participatory Values

PARTICIPATORY DECISION-MAKING CORE VALUES

In a participatory group, all members are encouraged to speak up and say what's on their minds. This strengthens a group in several ways. Members become more courageous in raising difficult issues. They learn how to share their "first-draft" ideas. And they become more adept at discovering and acknowledging the diversity of opinions and backgrounds inherent in any group.

For a group to reach a sustainable agreement, members have to understand and accept the legitimacy of one another's needs and goals. This basic recognition is what allows people to think from each other's point of view. And thinking from each other's point of view is the catalyst for innovative ideas that serve the interests of all parties.

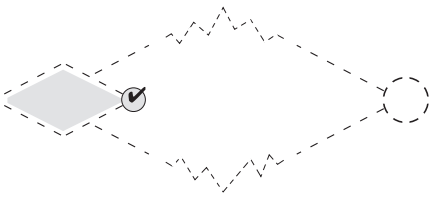
Inclusive solutions are wise solutions. Their wisdom emerges from the integration of everybody's perspectives and needs. These are solutions whose range and vision are expanded to take advantage of the truth held not only by the quick, the articulate, the influential, and the powerful, but also the truth held by those who are disenfranchised or shy or who think at a slower pace. As veteran facilitator Caroline Estes puts it, "Everyone has a piece of the truth." *

In participatory groups, members recognize that they must be willing and able to implement the proposals they endorse, so they make every effort to give and receive input before final decisions are made. They also assume responsibility for designing and managing the thinking process that will result in a good decision. This contrasts sharply with the conventional assumption that everyone will be held accountable for the consequences of thinking done by a few key people.

* Caroline Estes, *Everyone Has a Piece of the Truth*. U.S. Cohousing Association, http://www.cohousing.org/cm/article/truth

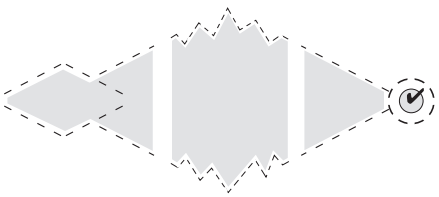
HOW PARTICIPATORY VALUES CAN AFFECT GROUP DECISION-MAKING

FULL PARTICIPATION



QUANTITY AND QUALITY OF PARTICIPATION DURING A BUSINESS-AS-USUAL DISCUSSION

In a typical business-as-usual discussion, self-expression is highly constrained. People tend to keep risky opinions to themselves. The most highly regarded comments are those that seem the clearest, the smartest, the most well polished. In business-as-usual discussions, thinking out loud is treated with impatience; people get annoyed if the speaker's remarks are vague or poorly stated. This induces self-censorship, and reduces the quantity and quality of participation overall. A few people end up doing almost all the talking – and in many groups, those few people just keep repeating themselves and repeating themselves.

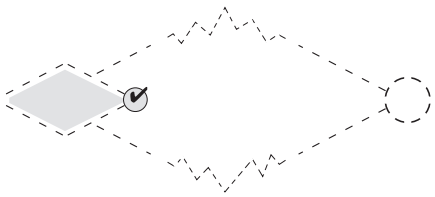


FULL PARTICIPATION DURING A PARTICIPATORY DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

Participatory decision-making groups go through a business-as-usual phase too. If familiar opinions lead to a workable solution, then the group can reach a decision quickly. But when a business-as-usual discussion does *not* produce a workable solution, a participatory group will open up the process and encourage more divergent thinking. What does this look like in action? It looks like people permitting themselves to state half-formed thoughts that express unconventional – but perhaps valuable – perspectives. It looks like people taking risks to surface controversial issues. It looks like people making suggestions "from left field" that stimulate their peers to think new thoughts. And it also looks like a roomful of people *encouraging each other* to do all these things.

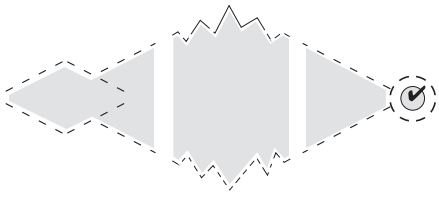
HOW PARTICIPATORY VALUES CAN AFFECT GROUP DECISION-MAKING

MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING



EXTENT OF MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING DURING A BUSINESS-AS-USUAL DISCUSSION

In a business-as-usual discussion, persuasion is much more common than dialogue. The views of "the other side" are dissected point by point for the purpose of refuting them. Little effort, if any, is put into discovering the deeper reasons people believe what they do. Even when it appears unlikely that persuasion will change anyone's mind, participants continue to press home their points – making it appear as though the pleasures of rhetoric were the true purpose of continuing the discussion. Most participants tend to stop listening to each other, except to prepare for a rebuttal.

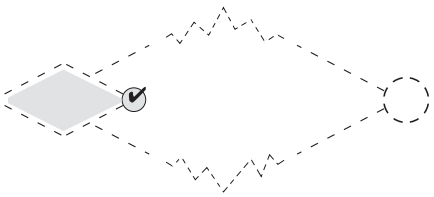


EXTENT OF MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING DURING A PARTICIPATORY DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

Building a shared framework of understanding means taking the time to understand everyone's perspective in order to find the best idea. To build that framework, participants spend time and effort questioning each other, getting to know one another – learning from each other. *Participants put themselves in each other's shoes*. The process is laced with intermittent discomfort: some periods are tense, some are stifling. But participants keep plugging away. Over time, many people gain insight into their own positions. They might discover that their own thinking is out-of-date or misinformed or driven by inaccurate stereotypes. And by struggling to acquire such insights, members might also discover something else about one another: that they all truly do care about achieving a mutual goal.

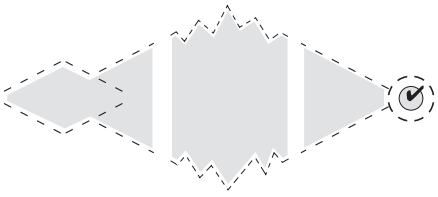
HOW PARTICIPATORY VALUES CAN AFFECT GROUP DECISION-MAKING

INCLUSIVE SOLUTIONS



SOLUTIONS RESULTING FROM A BUSINESS-AS-USUAL DISCUSSION

Business-as-usual discussions seldom result in inclusive solutions. More commonly, people quickly form opinions and take sides. Everyone expects that one side will get what they want and the other side won't. Disputes, they assume, will be resolved by the person who has the most authority. Some groups settle their differences by majority vote, but the effect is the same. Expediency rather than innovation or sustainability is the driver of such solutions. When the implementation is easy, or when the stakes are low, expedient solutions are perfectly good – but not when the stakes are high, or creativity is required, or broad-based commitment is needed.

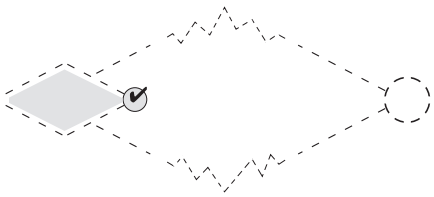


SOLUTIONS RESULTING FROM A PARTICIPATORY DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

Inclusive solutions are not compromises; they work for everyone who holds a stake in the outcome. Typically, an inclusive solution involves the discovery of an entirely new option. For instance, an unexpected partnership might be forged between former competitors. Or a group may invent a nontraditional alternative to a procedure that had previously "always been done that way." Several real-life case examples of inclusive solutions are presented in Chapter 16. Inclusive solutions are usually not obvious – they *emerge* in the course of the group's persistence. As participants learn more about each other's perspectives, they become progressively more able to integrate their own goals and needs with those of the other participants. This leads to innovative, original thinking.

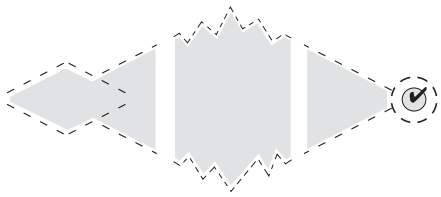
HOW PARTICIPATORY VALUES CAN AFFECT GROUP DECISION-MAKING

SHARED RESPONSIBILITY



THE ENACTMENT OF RESPONSIBILITY DURING A BUSINESS-AS-USUAL DISCUSSION

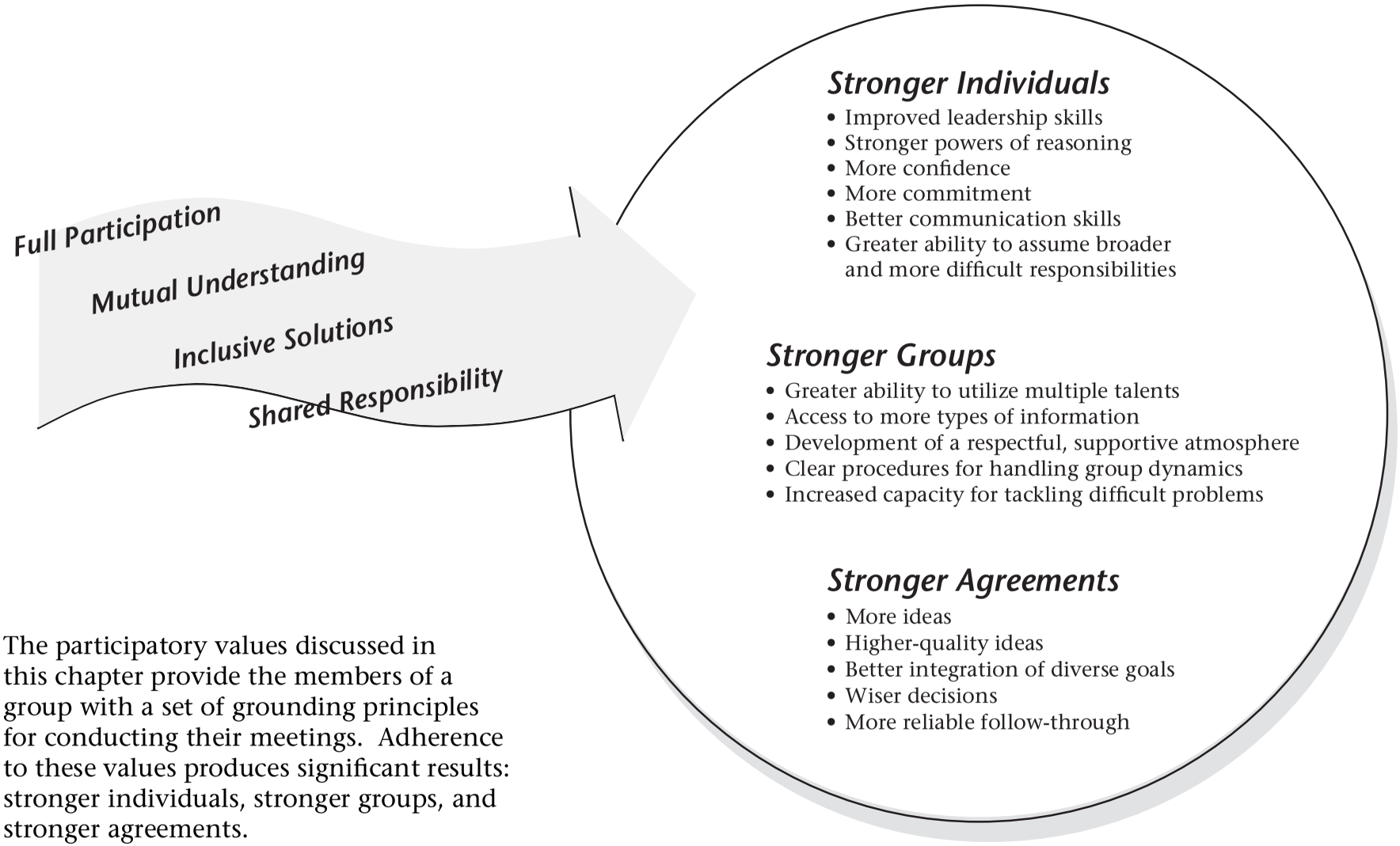
In business-as-usual discussions, groups rely on the authority of their leaders and their experts. The person-in-charge assumes responsibility for defining goals, setting priorities, defining problems, establishing success criteria, and arriving at conclusions. Participants with the most expertise are expected to distill relevant data, provide analysis, and make recommendations. Furthermore, the person-in-charge is expected to run the meeting, monitor the progress of each topic, enforce time boundaries, referee disputes, and generally take responsibility for all aspects of process management.



SHARED RESPONSIBILITY DURING A PARTICIPATORY DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

In order for an agreement to be sustainable, it needs everyone's support. Understanding this principle leads everyone to take personal responsibility for making sure they are satisfied with the proposed course of action. Thus, people raise whatever issues they consider to be important. And everyone is expected to voice concerns if they have them, even when doing so could delay the group from reaching a decision. Furthermore, *shared responsibility* applies to the process of a meeting, not just to the content. Group members are willing to discuss and co-create the procedures they will follow; they share in designing their meeting agendas; they are ready to take on roles – facilitator, recorder, time-keeper, mediator, data-keeper, and so on. Overall, in a participatory process everyone is an owner of the outcome; participants acknowledge this as a core value and they act accordingly.

THE BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATORY VALUES



The participatory values discussed in this chapter provide the members of a group with a set of grounding principles for conducting their meetings. Adherence to these values produces significant results: stronger individuals, stronger groups, and stronger agreements.

3

INTRODUCTION TO THE ROLE OF FACILITATOR

THE EXPERTISE THAT SUPPORTS A GROUP TO DO ITS BEST THINKING

- **When Is a Facilitator Needed?**
- **First Function: Encourage Full Participation**
- **Second Function: Promote Mutual Understanding**
- **Third Function: Foster Inclusive Solutions**
- **Fourth Function: Cultivate Shared Responsibility**

THE ROLE OF FACILITATOR

WHAT IS A FACILITATOR, AND WHY HAVE ONE?

The facilitator's job is to *support everyone to do their best thinking.* S/he encourages full participation; s/he promotes mutual understanding; s/he fosters inclusive solutions, and s/he cultivates shared responsibility.

How much value does this role have for a group? The answer depends on the group's goals.

Consider the "status update" meetings that consist solely of announcements and reports. Do the participants in those meetings need support to do their best thinking? Not really. And the same might be said of many *business-as-usual* monthly staff meetings, at which routine decisions are made about scheduling, task assignments and so on. Such issues could be handled for years without any facilitation whatsoever.

But what about more difficult challenges? For example, suppose a group's goal is to reduce violence on a high school campus. The participants are parents, teachers, administrators and a police officer. This group will quickly learn how difficult it is to make progress without facilitation. Despite a common goal, their frames of reference are very different. What seems to a parent like an obvious solution may seem simplistic to an administrator. What seems reasonable to an administrator may seem cowardly to a teacher. What seems responsible to a teacher may place too many demands on a parent. For such groups, it takes plenty of support to do their best thinking!

Groups face difficult challenges all the time. Long-term planning is hard to do well. So is restructuring or reengineering. This list goes on: resolving high-stakes conflicts; introducing new technology into a workplace; defining the scope of a project that hasn't been done before. In situations like these, a group is likely to make wiser, more lasting decisions if they enlist a facilitator who knows how to support them to do their best thinking.

Most individuals working in groups *do not know how* to solve tough problems on their own. They do not know how to build a shared framework of understanding – they seldom even recognize its significance. They dread conflict and discomfort, and they try hard to avoid it. Yet by avoiding the struggle to integrate one another's perspectives, the members of such groups greatly diminish their own potential to be effective. They *need* a facilitator.

THE ROLE OF FACILITATOR

FIRST FUNCTION

THE FACILITATOR ENCOURAGES FULL PARTICIPATION

A Fundamental Problem: Self-Censorship

Inherent in group decision-making is a basic problem: *people don't say what they're really thinking*. It's hard to take risks, and particularly so when the response is likely to be hostile or dismissive. Consider these comments:

- "Haven't we already covered that point?"
- "Let's keep it simple, please."
- "Hurry up – we're running out of time."
- "What does *that* have to do with anything?"
- "Impossible. Won't work. No way."

Statements like these are oppressive. They discourage people from thinking out loud. The message is: if you want to speak, be simple. Be polished. Be able to say something smart or entertaining or keep your mouth shut.

We call these "*injunctions against thinking in public.*" They run like an underground stream below the surface of a group's discussion, encouraging participants to edit their thinking before they speak. Who wants his or her ideas criticized before they are fully formed? Who wants to be told, "We've already answered that question"? Who wants to make an effort to express a complex thought while others in the room are doodling or whispering? This type of treatment leaves many people feeling embarrassed or inadequate.

To protect themselves, people censor themselves.

The Facilitator's Contribution

Helping a group to overcome these subtle but powerful norms is a basic part of the facilitator's job. Effective facilitators have the temperament and the skills to draw people out and help everyone feel heard. They know how to make it safe for people to ask the "stupid question" without feeling stupid. They know how to make room for quiet members. In sum, facilitators know how to build a respectful, supportive atmosphere that encourages people to keep thinking instead of shutting down.

THE ROLE OF FACILITATOR

SECOND FUNCTION

THE FACILITATOR PROMOTES MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING

A Fundamental Problem: Fixed Positions

A group cannot do its best thinking if the members don't understand one another. But most people find it difficult to detach from their fixed positions enough to actually listen to what others are saying. Instead, they get caught up in amplifying and defending their own perspectives.

Here's an example. A group of friends began exploring the possibility of forming a new business together. When the topic of money came up, biases emerged. One person wanted the profits divided equally. Another thought everyone should be paid on the basis of how much revenue they would generate. A third person believed the two visionaries should be paid more to make sure they would not leave. None of them were able to change their minds easily. Nor would it have been realistic to expect them to do so. Their opinions had been forming and developing for years.

And it gets worse! Each person's life experiences are so individual, so singular; everyone has remarkably different views of the world. What people expect, what they assume, how they use language, and how they behave – all these are likely sources of *mutual misunderstanding*. What's more, when people attempt to clear up a misunderstanding, they usually want their *own* ideas understood *first*. They may not say so directly, but their behavior indicates, "I can't really focus on what you are saying until I feel that you have understood *my* point of view." This easily becomes a vicious cycle. No wonder it's hard for people to let go of fixed positions!

The Facilitator's Contribution

A facilitator helps the group realize that sustainable agreements are built on a foundation of mutual understanding. S/he helps members see that thinking from each other's points of view is invaluable.

Moreover, the facilitator accepts the *inevitability of misunderstanding*. S/he recognizes that misunderstandings are stressful for everyone involved. The facilitator knows that people in distress need support; they need to be treated respectfully. S/he knows it is essential to stay impartial, honor all points of view and keep listening, so that each and every group member has confidence that *someone* understands them.

THE ROLE OF FACILITATOR

THIRD FUNCTION

THE FACILITATOR FOSTERS INCLUSIVE SOLUTIONS

A Fundamental Problem: The Win/Lose Mentality

It's hard for most people to imagine that stakeholders with apparently irreconcilable differences might actually reach an agreement that benefits all parties. Most people are entrenched in a conventional mind-set: "It's either my way or your way." As a result, problem-solving discussions often degenerate into critiques, rationalizations, and sales jobs, as participants stay attached to their fixed positions and work to defend their own interests.

The Facilitator's Contribution

An experienced facilitator knows how to help a group search for innovative ideas that incorporate everyone's points of view. This can be a challenging task – the facilitator is often the only person in the room who has even considered the possibility that inclusive alternatives may exist.

To accomplish this goal, a facilitator draws from knowledge acquired by studying the theory and practice of collaborative problem solving. Thus s/he knows the steps it takes to build sustainable agreements:

- S/he knows how to help a group break free from restrictive business-as-usual discussions and engage in divergent thinking.
- S/he knows how to help a group survive the *Groan Zone* as its members struggle to build a shared framework of understanding.
- S/he knows how to help a group formulate creative, innovative ideas that reflect a weaving-together of several perspectives.
- S/he knows how to help a group complete its deliberations and arrive at a sound decision.

In short, the facilitator understands how to build sustainable agreements.

When a facilitator introduces a group to the values and methods that foster inclusive solutions, the impact is profound. Many people scoff at the very suggestion that a group can find meaningful solutions to difficult problems. As they discover the validity of this new way of thinking, they often become more hopeful about their group's potential effectiveness.

THE ROLE OF FACILITATOR

FOURTH FUNCTION

THE FACILITATOR CULTIVATES SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

A Fundamental Problem: Reliance on Authority

In group settings, many people defer to the group's leaders and experts – often without giving their deferential behavior a second thought.

It's easy to understand why. Leaders wield power. They control resources. They have access to privileged information. They are networked with others who hold power. Likewise, experts have the training, the knowledge, the connections, and the familiarity with key issues.

Furthermore, remaining passive often seems to make such good sense! For one thing, speaking truth to power can have adverse consequences. For another thing, it may not be worth the bother if "nothing I can say would matter anyway." And finally, if the expert knows more than the others, why not accept that person's judgment and follow his or her advice?

Yet, terms like *empowerment, collaboration* and *self-managing teams* reflect a growing consensus that over-reliance on authority can be ineffectual. *"People support what they help to create,"* is how Marvin Weisbord put it.* But even when a leader *wants* to empower a group, many people find it hard to break the pattern. In turn, that passivity induces leaders to "get on with it" and do the work themselves — a self-perpetuating cycle of dependency on authority.

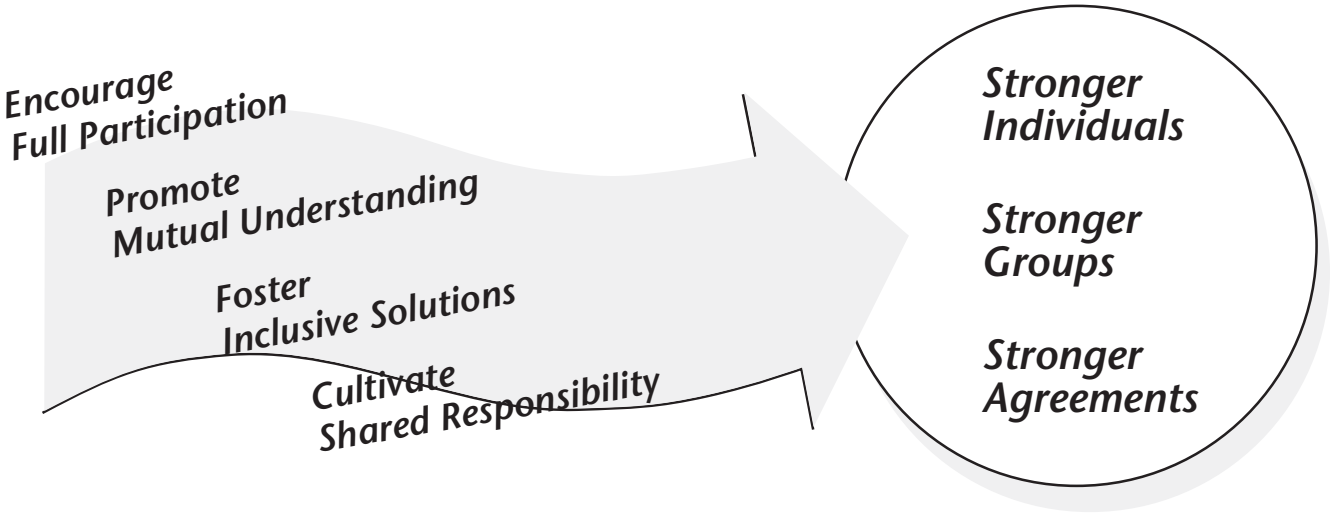
The Facilitator's Contribution

Creating a culture of shared responsibility requires serious effort. The group's leader has to endorse the value of shared responsibility, and both the leader and the members have to develop the procedures and acquire the skills to make participatory decision-making work.

The existence of a facilitator often makes the crucial difference. S/he helps the group evolve from business-as-usual deference and dependency to assertiveness, collaboration, and shared responsibility. To help this happen, s/he is sometimes a coach, sometimes a teacher, sometimes a co-designer of systems and procedures, and sometimes a motivational speaker who inspires the group members to stand up and take risks. In this sense a facilitator is the steward of a profound culture change.

*M. Weisbord, *Productive Workplaces: Dignity, Meaning & Community in the 21st Century* (Pfeiffer, 2012).

FACILITATOR SKILLS FOR PARTICIPATORY DECISION MAKING



The facilitator's mission is to *support everyone to do their best thinking.*

This mission is enacted by the facilitator's four functions:

- *Encourage full participation*
- *Promote mutual understanding*
- *Foster inclusive solutions*
- *Cultivate shared responsibility*

When a facilitator effectively performs these functions, the results are impressive. S/he strengthens the skills, awareness, and confidence of the individuals who work in that group; s/he strengthens the structure and capacity of the group as a whole; and s/he vastly increases the likelihood that the group will arrive at sustainable agreements.

4

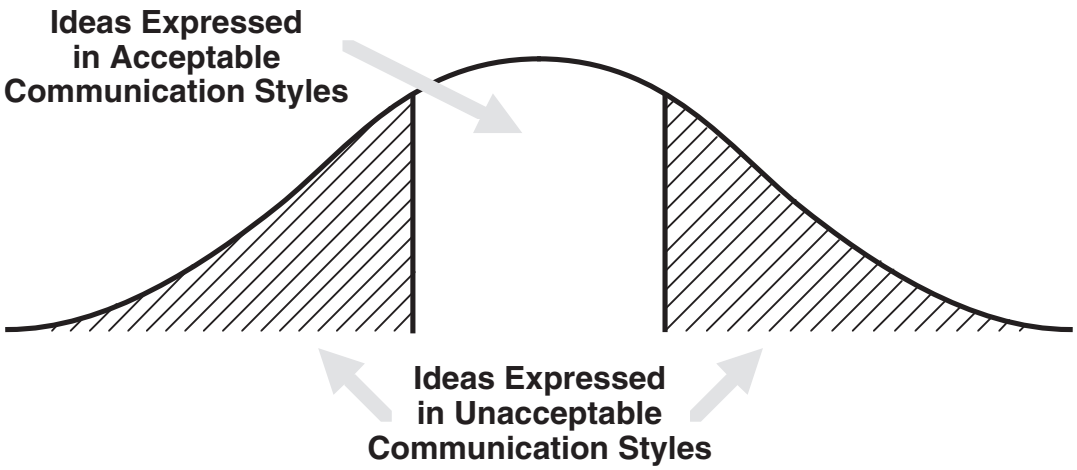
FACILITATIVE LISTENING SKILLS

TECHNIQUES FOR HONORING ALL POINTS OF VIEW

- Respecting Diverse Communication Styles
- Paraphrasing
- Drawing People Out
- Mirroring
- Gathering Ideas
- Stacking
- Tracking
- Encouraging
- Balancing
- Helping People Listen to Each Other
- Making Space for a Quiet Person
- Acknowledging Feelings
- Validating
- Empathizing
- Intentional Silence
- Linking
- Listening for the Logic
- Legitimizing Differences
- Listening for Common Ground
- Listening with a Point of View
- Summarizing

THE CALCULUS OF DIVERSITY

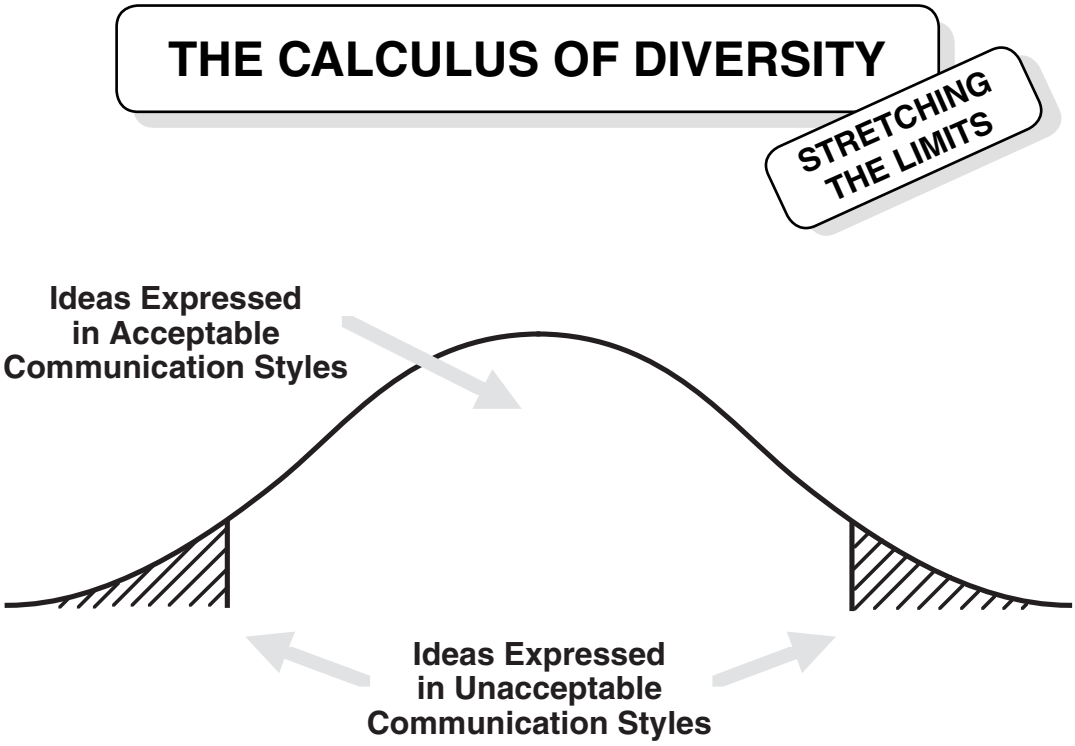
THE LIMITS OF TOLERANCE



An idea that is expressed in an acceptable communication style will be taken more seriously by more people. Conversely, ideas that are presented poorly or offensively are harder for people to hear. For example:

- Many people become antsy when a speaker is repetitious.
- Group members can be impatient with shy or nervous members who speak haltingly.
- Others may not want to listen to exaggerations, distortions, or unfounded pronouncements.
- Some people become overwhelmed when a speaker goes on a tangent and raises a point that seems unrelated to the subject.
- And some people are profoundly uncomfortable with anyone who shows too much emotion.

In an ideal world, useful insights and ideas would be valued regardless of how they were expressed. But in the real world, when a speaker has an unpleasant communication style people just stop listening to the substance of the ideas being expressed – no matter how valuable those ideas might be.



Groups that tolerate diverse communication styles can utilize more of the ideas put forth by its members than groups who need those ideas to be expressed in an "acceptable fashion." By using good listening skills, a facilitator can be an excellent support to such groups. For example:

- When someone is being repetitious, a facilitator can use paraphrasing to help that person summarize his or her thinking.
- When someone is speaking haltingly, in awkward, broken sentences, a facilitator can help the speaker relax by drawing him or her out with open-ended, nondirective questions.
- When someone is exaggerating or distorting, a facilitator can validate the central point without quarreling over its accuracy.
- When someone goes off on a tangent, a facilitator can treat the speaker with full respect by asking the person to help everyone see how his or her point connects with the broader context.
- When someone expresses himself or herself with intense feeling, a facilitator can first acknowledge the emotion, then paraphrase the content of the thought to ensure that the speaker's point does not get lost amid the group's gut reactions to the feelings.

These situations demonstrate how important it is for a facilitator to listen skillfully and respectfully to *everyone*.

PARAPHRASING

WHY

- *Paraphrasing* is fundamental to active listening. It is the most straightforward way to demonstrate to a speaker that his or her thoughts were heard and understood.
- The power of *paraphrasing* is that it is nonjudgmental and, hence, validating. It enables people to feel that their ideas are respected and legitimate.
- *Paraphrasing* provides the speaker with a chance to hear how his or her ideas are being heard by others.
- *Paraphrasing* is especially useful on occasions when a speaker's statements are convoluted or confusing. At such times, it serves as a check for clarification, as in, "Is this what you mean?" followed by the paraphrase.
- In sum, *paraphrasing* is the tool of choice for supporting people to think out loud.

HOW

- In your own words, say what you think the speaker said.
- If the speaker's statement contains one or two sentences, use roughly the same number of words when you paraphrase.
- If the speaker's statement contains many sentences, summarize it.
- To strengthen the group's trust in your objectivity, occasionally preface your paraphrase with a comment like one of these:
  - "It sounds like you're saying . . ."
  - "Let me see if I'm understanding you . . ."
  - "Is this what you mean?"
- When you have completed the paraphrase, look for the speaker's reaction. Say something like, "Did I get it?" Verbally or nonverbally, the speaker will indicate whether s/he feels understood. If not, *keep asking for clarification until you understand what s/he meant.*

DRAWING PEOPLE OUT

WHY

- *Drawing people out* is the skill that helps participants clarify, develop and refine their ideas without coaching or intrusion.
- It's common to ask a speaker directive questions, such as "What is your goal?" or, "How long will it take?" or, "How can you fix that problem?" Directive questions like these are often useful, but they work by pointing the speaker in the direction that the questioner thinks would be helpful. This interrupts the speaker's own train of thought, which can be problematic when the speaker is still formulating his/her own point of view.
- By contrast, open-ended, non-directive questions help the speaker – rather than the asker – do the thinking.
- *Drawing people out* sends this message: "I'm with you; I understand you so far. Now tell me more." This message supports people to think in more depth, and to say more of what they're thinking.

HOW

- First paraphrase the speaker's statement, then ask open-ended, nondirective questions.

  Here are some examples:

  - "Can you say more about that?"
  - "What do you mean by . . . ?"
  - "What's coming up for you now?"
  - "How so?"
  - "What else can you tell me . . . ?"
  - "How is that working for you?"
  - "What matters to you about that?"
  - "Tell me more."
  - "Can you give me an example?"
  - "What's your thinking about that?"

- Here is a less common method that also works well. First, paraphrase the speaker's statement; then use *a connector* such as, "So . . ." or "And . . ." or "Because . . ." For example, "You're saying to wait six more weeks before we sign the contract, because . . . ?"

MIRRORING

WHY

- *Mirroring* is a highly structured, formal version of *paraphrasing,* in which the facilitator repeats the speaker's words verbatim. This lets the speaker hear exactly what s/he just said.
- Some people experience *paraphrasing* as veiled criticism. For them, *mirroring* is evidence of the facilitator's neutrality.
- Newly formed groups and groups unfamiliar with using a facilitator often benefit from the trust-building effects of *mirroring*.
- *Mirroring* speeds up the tempo of a slow-moving discussion. Thus, it is the *tool of choice* when facilitating a brainstorming process.
- In general, the more a facilitator feels the need to establish neutrality, the more frequently he or she should *mirror* rather than paraphrase.

HOW

- If the speaker has said a single sentence, repeat it back verbatim – in the speaker's own words.
- If the speaker has said more than one sentence, repeat back key words or phrases.
- In either case, *use the speaker's words, not your words*.
- The one exception is when the speaker says, "I." Then, change the pronoun to "you."
- Mirroring the speaker's words and mirroring the speaker's tone of voice are *two different things*. You want your tone of voice to remain warm and accepting, regardless of what the speaker's voice sounds like.
- Be yourself with your gestures and tone of voice; don't be wooden or phony. Remember, a key purpose of *mirroring* is building trust.

GATHERING IDEAS

WHY

- *Gathering* is the listening skill that helps participants build a list of ideas at a fast-moving pace.

- *Gathering* combines *mirroring* and *paraphrasing* – the reflective listening skills – with physical gestures. Taking a few steps to and fro, or making hand or arm motions, are physical gestures that serve as energy boosters. Such gestures help people stay engaged.

- When *gathering,* be sure to mirror more frequently than you paraphrase. This establishes a lively yet comfortable tempo that is easy for most participants to follow. Many people quickly move into a rhythm of expressing their ideas in short phrases – typically three to five words per idea. These phrases are much easier to record on flipcharts than long sentences.

HOW

- Effective *gathering* starts with a concise description of the task. For example, "For the next ten minutes please unpack this proposal by calling out all the areas that might warrant further discussion. I'd like to gather up all the ideas first, so we can see the full range of issues before we get specific."

- If it's the group's first time listing ideas, spend a little time teaching them *suspended judgment*. Example: "For this next activity, I'd like everyone to feel free to express their ideas, even the offbeat or unpopular ones. So please let this be a time for generating ideas, not judging them. The discussion can come as soon as you finish making the list."

- Now have the group begin. As members call out their items, mirror or paraphrase whatever is said.

- Honor all points of view. If someone says something that sounds off the wall, just mirror it and keep moving.

STACKING

WHY

- *Stacking* is a procedure for helping people take turns when several people want to speak at once.
- *Stacking* lets everyone know that they are, in fact, going to have their turn to speak. So instead of competing for airtime, people are free to listen without distraction.
- In contrast, when people don't know when or even whether their turn will come, they can't help but vie for position. This leads to various expressions of impatience and disrespect, especially interruptions.
- Facilitators who do not stack have to pay attention to the waving of hands and other nonverbal messages that say, "I'd like to speak, please." Inevitably, some members are skipped or ignored. With *stacking,* a facilitator creates a sequence that includes all those who want to speak.

HOW

- *Stacking* is a four-step procedure. First, the facilitator asks those who want to speak to raise their hands. Second, s/he creates a speaking order by assigning a number to each person. Third, s/he calls on people when their turn to speak arrives. Fourth, after the final speaker, the facilitator asks if anyone else wants to speak. If so, the facilitator starts another stack. Here's a demonstration:
- Step 1. "Would all who want to speak, please raise your hands."
- Step 2. "James, you're first. Deb, you're second. Tyrone, you're third."
- Step 3. [*When James has finished*] "Who was second? Was it you, Deb? Okay, go ahead."
- Step 4. [*After the last person has spoken*] "Who'd like to speak now? Are there any more comments?" Then, start a new stack, and repeat Step 2 through Step 4.

TRACKING

WHY

- *Tracking* means keeping track of the various lines of thought that are going on simultaneously within a single discussion.

- For example, suppose a group is discussing a plan to hire a new employee. Assume that two people are talking about roles and responsibilities. Two others are discussing financial implications. And two more are reviewing their experiences with the previous employee. In such cases, people need help keeping track of all that's going on, because they are focused primarily on clarifying their own ideas.

- People often act as though the particular issue that interests *them* is the one that *everyone* should focus on. *Tracking* makes it visible that several threads of the topic are being discussed. In so doing, it affirms that each thread is equally valid.

HOW

- *Tracking* is a four-step process. First, the facilitator indicates that s/he is going to step back and summarize the discussion so far. Second, s/he names the different conversations that have been in play. Third, s/he checks for accuracy with the group. Fourth, s/he now invites the group to resume discussion.

- Step 1. "It seems that there are three conversations going on right now. I want to make sure I'm tracking them."

- Step 2. "One conversation appears to be about roles and responsibilities. Another has to do with finances. And a third is about what you've learned by working with the last person who held this job."

- Step 3. "Am I getting it right?" Often someone will say, "No, you missed mine!" If so, don't argue or explain; just validate the comment and move on.

- Step 4. "Any more comments?" Now resume the discussion.

ENCOURAGING

WHY

- *Encouraging* is the art of creating an opening for people to participate, without putting any one individual on the spot.

- There are times in a meeting when some folks may appear to be "sitting back" or "letting others do all the work." Does this mean that they are lazy or irresponsible? Not necessarily. Perhaps they're just not feeling engaged by the topic at hand. Some people find that a bit of gentle encouragement helps them to relax and / or focus and / or connect with the topic on a meaningful level.

- *Encouraging* is especially helpful during the early part of a discussion. As people warm up to the subject, they are more likely to speak up without further assistance.

HOW

- Here are some examples of the use of *encouraging* during a discussion:
  - "Who else has an idea?"
  - "Is there a student's perspective on this issue?"
  - "Does anyone have a war story you're willing to share?"
  - "What do others think?"
  - "Jim just offered us an idea that he called a 'general principle.' Can anyone give us an example of this principle in action?"
  - "Are there comments from anyone who hasn't spoken for a while?"
  - "What was said at table two?"
  - "Is this discussion raising questions for anyone?"
- At times it's useful to restate the objective of a discussion before posing the question. For example,
  - "We've been looking at the root causes of this problem. Who else has a comment?"

BALANCING

WHY

- The direction of a discussion often follows the lead set by the first few people who speak on that topic. Using *balancing*, a facilitator helps a group broaden its discussion to include other perspectives that may not yet have been expressed.
- *Balancing* undercuts the common myth that silence indicates agreement. It provides welcome support to individuals who don't feel safe to express views that they perceive as minority positions.
- In addition to the support it provides to individuals, *balancing* also has a positive effect on the norms of the group. It sends the message, "It is acceptable for people to speak their mind, no matter what opinions they hold."
- When a group appears to be polarized, a *balancing* question can elicit fresh new lines of inquiry.

HOW

- Here are some examples of *balancing* in action:
  - "Are there other ways of looking at this issue?"
  - "Does everyone else agree with this perspective?"
  - "Okay, we have heard where many people stand on this matter. Does anyone else have a different position?"
  - "So, the group has raised various challenges to this proposal. Does anyone want to speak in its favor?"
  - "Can anyone play devil's advocate for a few minutes?"
  - "We've heard opinions from [stakeholder 'group A'] and [stakeholder 'group B']. How about some comments from [stakeholder 'group C']?" For example: "We've heard from the police; we've heard from the store owners. How about some comments from the youth in our neighborhoods?"

HELPING PEOPLE LISTEN TO EACH OTHER

WHY

- The questions on this page support people to interact with each other's ideas. Doing this work is a critical step towards building *mutual understanding*.

- The goal of good listening is to gain a window into the speaker's mind. But many group members feel that they are doing a good job of listening by simply paying attention to what's being said. They don't often take the step of questioning what they hear in order to gain a view of that person's context, assumptions, and values.

- This technique also plays an important role in group development and cohesion, as it helps everyone discover that they can question or challenge each other's ideas without upsetting people.

HOW

- Here are some questions that *Help People Listen to Each Other.*
  - "What did you hear Jim say?"
  - "Does anyone have any questions for Joan?"
  - "Who else is resonating with what Kaneesha just said?"
  - "What part of Armando's idea doesn't work for you?"
  - "Who's got a response to William's comments?"
  - "Sue, how would Naomi's idea play out from where you sit?"
  - "Can you restate Ichiro's remarks in different words?"
  - "Do you feel that Alan understands what you said?"
  - "I wonder if we're getting your point, Ronnie. Can someone summarize?"
- After someone responds to one of these questions, follow by encouraging others to speak too. For example, "Does anyone have a similar view?" or "Did anyone else want to weigh in?"

MAKING SPACE FOR A QUIET PERSON

WHY

- *Making space* sends the quiet person this message: "If you don't wish to talk now, that's fine. But if you *would* like to speak, here's an opportunity."

- Every group has some members who are highly verbal and others who speak less frequently. When a group has a fast-paced discussion style, quiet members and slower thinkers may have trouble getting a word in edgewise.

- Some people habitually keep out of the limelight because they are afraid of being perceived as rude or competitive. Others might hold back when they're new to a group and unsure of what's acceptable and what's not. Still others keep their thoughts to themselves because they're convinced their ideas aren't "as good as" those of others. In all of these cases, people benefit from a facilitator who makes space for them to participate.

HOW

- Keep an eye on the quiet members. Be on the lookout for body language or facial expressions that may indicate their desire to speak.

- Invite them to speak. For example, "Was there a thought you wanted to express?" or "Did you want to add anything?" or "You look as if you might be about to say something . . ."

- If they decline, be gracious and move on. No one likes being put on the spot, and everyone is entitled to choose whether and when to participate.

- If necessary, hold others off. For example, if a quiet member makes a move to speak but someone jumps in ahead, say, "Let's go one at a time. Terry, why don't you go first?"

- If participation is *very* uneven, consider suggesting a structured go-around to give each person a chance to speak.

ACKNOWLEDGING FEELINGS

WHY

- People communicate their feelings through their conduct, their language, their tones of voice, their facial expressions, and so on. These communications have a direct impact on anyone who receives them.
- That impact is much easier to manage when feelings are communicated directly rather than indirectly, and intentionally rather than unconsciously.
- Yet the fact remains that human beings are frequently unaware of what they're feeling. In other words, our communications are often driven or shaped by information that we aren't even aware of sending.
- By identifying a feeling and naming it, a facilitator raises everyone's awareness. By then *paraphrasing* and *drawing people out,* the facilitator assists the group to recognize and accept the feelings of its members.

HOW

- *Acknowledging feelings* is a three-step process:
- First, when a group is engaging in a difficult conversation, pay attention to the emotional tone. Look for cues that might indicate the presence of feelings.
- Second, pose a question that names the feelings you see.
- Third, use facilitative listening to support people to respond to the feelings you named.
- Here are some examples of the second step in action. As the examples suggest, be sure to pose any observations as a question.
  - "You sound a bit worried. Is that accurate?"
  - "Looks like you're having a reaction to that. I'm guessing you're frustrated. Am I close?"
  - "From your tone of voice, you seem pleased. Is it true?"
  - "This discussion seems to be bringing up some feelings for you. Are you upset?"
  - "Is this what you're feeling . . . ?"

VALIDATING

WHY

- *Validating* is the skill that legitimizes and accepts a speaker's opinion or feeling, without agreeing that the opinion is "correct."
- Many facilitators wonder whether it is possible to support the expression of a controversial opinion without appearing to take sides. Can we acknowledge someone's feelings without implying we agree with the speaker's rationale for feeling that way?
- The answer is yes. *Validating* means *recognizing* a group's divergent opinions, not taking sides with any one of them.
- Just as you don't have to agree with an opinion to paraphrase it, you do not have to agree that a feeling is justified in order to accept and validate it.
- The basic message of *validating* is, "Yes, clearly that's one way to look at it. Others may see it differently; even so, your point of view is entirely legitimate."

HOW

- *Validating* has three steps. First, paraphrase. Second, assess whether the speaker needs added support. Third, offer the support.
- Step 1. Paraphrase and draw out the person's opinion or feeling.
- Step 2. Ask yourself, "Does this person need extra support? Has he or she just said something that takes a risk?"
- Step 3. Offer that support by acknowledging the legitimacy of what the person just said. For example:
  - "I see what you're saying."
  - "I know just how that feels."
  - "I get why this matters to you."
  - "I can see how you got there."
  - "Now I see where you're coming from."
- Some people, when they feel validated, are prone to open up and say even more. When this happens, be respectful. You're not agreeing; you're supporting someone to speak his / her truth.

EMPATHIZING

WHY

- *Empathizing* is commonly defined as the ability to understand and share the feelings of another.

- This involves putting oneself in another person's shoes and looking out on the world through that person's eyes. The listener then imagines what the person might be feeling, and why – and forms this insight into a statement of acceptance and support.

- *Empathizing* and *validating* both serve to identify and legitimize feelings. *Empathizing* goes one step further: the listener attempts to *identify with and share the actual feeling*. For example, "If it were me I'd be worried!" "That must be really hard." "I'd be feeling very, very sad."

- Moreover, *empathizing* benefits the entire group, providing everyone with a fuller, compassionate understanding of a person's subjective reality.

HOW

- *Empathizing* can be performed using different techniques.

- The most basic technique is to name what you think a person is experiencing. For example, "I imagine this news might be quite upsetting to you."

- Another technique is to mention the factors that led up to the person's experience: "After all the effort you made to keep this project alive, I imagine this news might be quite upsetting."

- A third technique is to speculate on future impacts. "I can see how this news could also play havoc with your other commitments. Has that brought up any feelings yet?"

- A fourth option is to identify concerns about communicating these feelings to others. "I can imagine it might be hard to talk about this topic in this group."

- Always ask for confirmation. If the speaker says, "That's not my experience," encourage him or her to correct your perception.

INTENTIONAL SILENCE

WHY

- *Intentional silence* is highly underrated. It consists of a pause, usually lasting no more than a few seconds, and it is done to give a speaker that brief extra "quiet time" to discover what s/he wants to say.

- Some people need brief silence in order to organize a complex thought and turn it into a coherent statement. Others need a bit of time to consider whether to take the risk to say something that might be controversial. Still others need the silence to digest what has already been said, so they can assess their own reactions and formulate their responses.

- *Intentional silence* can also be used to honor moments of exceptional poignancy. After a statement of passion or vulnerability, intentional silence allows the group to pause, reflect, and make sense of the experience.

HOW

- Ten seconds of silence can seem a lot longer than it really is. The crucial element of this listening skill is the facilitator's ability to tolerate the awkwardness most people feel during even brief silences. If the facilitator can survive it, everyone else will too.

- With eye contact and body language, stay focused on the speaker.

- Say nothing, not even, "Hmm" or "Uh-huh." Do not even nod or shake your head. Just stay relaxed and pay attention.

- If necessary, hold up a hand to keep others from breaking the silence.

- Sometimes everyone in the group is confused or agitated or having trouble focusing. At such times, silence may be very helpful. Say, "Let's take a few moments of silence to think what this means to each of us."

LINKING

WHY

- *Linking* is a listening skill that invites a speaker to explain the relevance of a statement he or she just made.

- In conversations about complex subjects, it is hard for everyone to stay focused on the same thing at the same time. People often raise issues that seem tangential – in other words, irrelevant – to everyone else.

- When this occurs, it's not uncommon to hear a group member say something like, "Let's get back on track." Or, "Can we take this off-line?" Remarks like those are hard to take. Unless a facilitator intervenes, *the speaker is likely to simply stop talking.*

- Yet ideas that seem unrelated to the main topic can actually be connected with it, often in unexpected ways. *The thought that comes from left field is often the one that triggers the breakthrough.*

HOW

- *Linking* is a four-step process. First, paraphrase the statement. Second, ask the speaker to link the idea with the main topic. Third, paraphrase and validate the speaker's explanation. Fourth, follow with an action from the list below.

- Step 1. *Paraphrase.* (Embarrassed by the group's complaints, some speakers will need the support.)

- Step 2. Ask for the linkage: "How does your idea link up with **. . .** [our topic]? Can you help us make the connection?"

- Step 3. Validate the explanation: "Are you saying **. . .** [paraphrase]?" Then say, "I see what you mean."

- Step 4. Follow with one of these:
  - *Draw out* the speaker's idea.
  - Use *balancing* or *encouraging* to pull for other reactions.
  - Return to *stacking.* ("Okay, we have Jim's idea. Whose turn is it to go next?")
  - If the idea is genuinely off-topic, record it on a *parking lot* flipchart.

LISTENING FOR THE LOGIC

WHY

- Solutions to challenging problems often emerge in phases. First, someone has an insight. Then other people see it and shape it into an idea that has good potential to be useful. Then comes the critical thinking that can refine the idea until it is worthy of implementation.
- But often when an idea hits that "good-but-still-rough" stage, some folks become impatient, preferring to delegate the critical thinking to one or two people to do the "detail work" elsewhere.
- In this climate an individual might try to give constructive criticism of the new idea, only to be dismissed by others who don't want to risk derailing the group's enthusiasm.
- *Listening for the logic* supports the person with the critique to express his / her thoughts fully. It also grounds the group. The message is, "If a facilitator can hear this line of reasoning, so can you."

HOW

- From a standpoint of facilitator's technique, *Listening for the logic* is very similar to *paraphrasing* and *drawing people out.*
- What's different is what you are *listening for*. Rather than listen for signs of someone struggling to make a point, you're *listening for the logic of the speaker's reasoning,* and you are assessing whether the group appears to be digesting it or resisting it.
- A speaker is providing a logical analysis when, for example, s/he:
  - Challenges an assertion.
  - Identifies a bias.
  - Questions a requirement.
  - Seeks to clarify an ambiguity.
  - Makes explicit an assumption.
  - Points out a contradiction.
- When someone offers this type of reasoning and the group responds constructively, stay back and let everyone work.
- However, when you see a speaker's logic being pushed away, *paraphrase* it, *draw the speaker out,* and ask the group for their reactions.

LEGITIMIZING DIFFERENCES

WHY

- When someone feels strongly about a position s/he holds, it is often hard to see the merits of a competing point of view.
- When two or more parties hold different views, it's easy for them – and therefore, an entire group – to become mired in tiresome, repetitive advocacy and argumentation.
- *Legitimizing Differences* is a way for a facilitator to break this logjam. By recognizing that each party is making legitimate points, the facilitator demonstrates that everyone's views are being respected. This creates an opportunity for everyone to step back, take a breath, and acknowledge that their own perspective is not the only one with validity.
- It's surprising how often people are better able to understand one another's competing points of view when those differences are both legitimized by a neutral third party.

HOW

- *Legitimizing Differences* is a three-step process.
- Step 1. Start with a sentence that demonstrates your good faith and neutrality; then tell people what you intend to do:

  "You're both making good points here. I want to now summarize them, so we can treat both views as legitimate."
- Step 2. Summarize their views:

  "Gina, if I'm getting you right, you're emphasizing the need for [doing XYZ] because not taking that step could lead to serious repercussions. Correct?"

  "Daniel, my impression is that you're pointing out that acting now, without data or a support system in place, will turn out even worse. Yes?"
- Step 3. Explicitly legitimize, and invite others to comment:

  "Your arguments both sound compelling – even though they lead to opposite conclusions! Does anyone have thoughts about this?"

LISTENING FOR COMMON GROUND

WHY

- *Listening for common ground* is a powerful intervention when group members are polarized. It validates the group's areas of disagreement and focuses the group on their areas of agreement.

- Many disputes contain elements of agreement. For example, advocacy groups often have heated internal debates over tactics, even while remaining agreed on key strategic goals. When members of a group take polarized positions, it can be tough for people to remember that they have *anything* in common. Such dichotomies can sometimes be transcended when a facilitator validates *both* the differences in the group *and* the areas of common ground.

- *Listening for common ground* is also a tool for instilling hope. People who believe they are opposed on every front may discover that they share a value, a belief, or a goal.

HOW

- *Listening for common ground* is a four-step process. First, indicate that you are going to summarize the group's differences and similarities. Second, summarize differences. Third, note areas of common ground. Fourth, check for accuracy. Here's an example:

- Step 1. "Let me summarize what I'm hearing from each of you. I'm hearing a lot of differences but also some similarities."

- Step 2. "It sounds as if one group wants to leave work early during the holiday season, and the other group would prefer to take a few days of vacation."

- Step 3. "Even so, you all seem to agree that you want *some* time off before New Year's."

- Step 4. "Have I got it right?"

- Caution: To use this technique effectively, make sure that all parties are included. People whose views have not been at least partially integrated into a shared framework tend to stay focused on their own positions.

LISTENING WITH A POINT OF VIEW

WHY

- On occasion a group's facilitator is also the group's leader (or expert, or staff person) – in other words, a person who is not a neutral third party. This creates a dilemma: How does this person promote his or her own point of view effectively, while still making room for all other opinions to be voiced?
- The resolution – first and foremost – involves *the mind-set* of the person who is playing the dual role.
- On the one hand, s/he has to retain the mind-set of a leader, and *be responsible for clarifying his or her own thinking and communicating it effectively.*
- On the other hand, s/he has to adopt the mind-set of a facilitator, and *care about helping the group do its best thinking*. This requires a focus on supporting others to develop *their* lines of thought.
- *Listening with a point of view* supports this person to keep both roles in balance.

HOW

- *Listening with a point of view* is a five-step process:
- Step 1. As the leader (or expert or staff person), raise the issue about which you have an opinion. State your position.
- Step 2. Ask for reactions.
- Step 3. Respond to participants' comments as a facilitator would, by *paraphrasing* and *drawing people out*. Err on the side of more drawing out rather than less. (Many people find it hard to challenge authority; they may need extra support to risk voicing a differing opinion.)
- Step 4. After *at least two* moves of facilitative listening, give yourself the floor to speak. Now make statements that reflect your own perspective. Answer questions, provide information, explain, advocate, and so forth.
- Step 5. Repeat Steps 2 through 4 as needed, remembering to balance expressing your own point of view with at least twice as much facilitative listening.

SUMMARIZING

WHY

- Good facilitators know the value of encouraging participants to engage in vigorous discussion. But the most interesting conversations can also be the hardest ones to close.

- Making a deliberate effort to summarize a discussion helps participants consolidate their thinking. A restatement of key themes and main points helps people build categories and internalize them. These categories help improve one's understanding of what just transpired, and they also serve as memory aids to improve future recall.

- Ending a discussion abruptly can make a facilitator seem pushy. For example, suppose a facilitator said, "OK, time's up. Let's move to the next topic." This statement, while inoffensive, can be taken as an expression of impatience. Sometimes people respond with knee-jerk resistance. By comparison *summarizing* feels congenial and supportive.

HOW

- *Summarizing* is a 5-step process:

- Step 1. Restate the question that began the discussion: "We've been discussing the success of your program."

- Step 2. Indicate the number of key themes you heard: "I think people raised three themes."

- Step 3. Name the first theme, and mention one or two key points related to that theme: "The first theme was about your strategy. You explored its effectiveness and suggested some improvements."

- Step 4. Repeat this sequence for each theme: "Another theme was the validity of your main goal. You questioned whether it was feasible and realistic. Finally, you examined some personnel issues and you created a new staff role."

- Step 5. Pose a question to bridge to the next topic: "You have done some solid thinking about the effectiveness of the program. Anything else before you move to the next topic on the agenda?"

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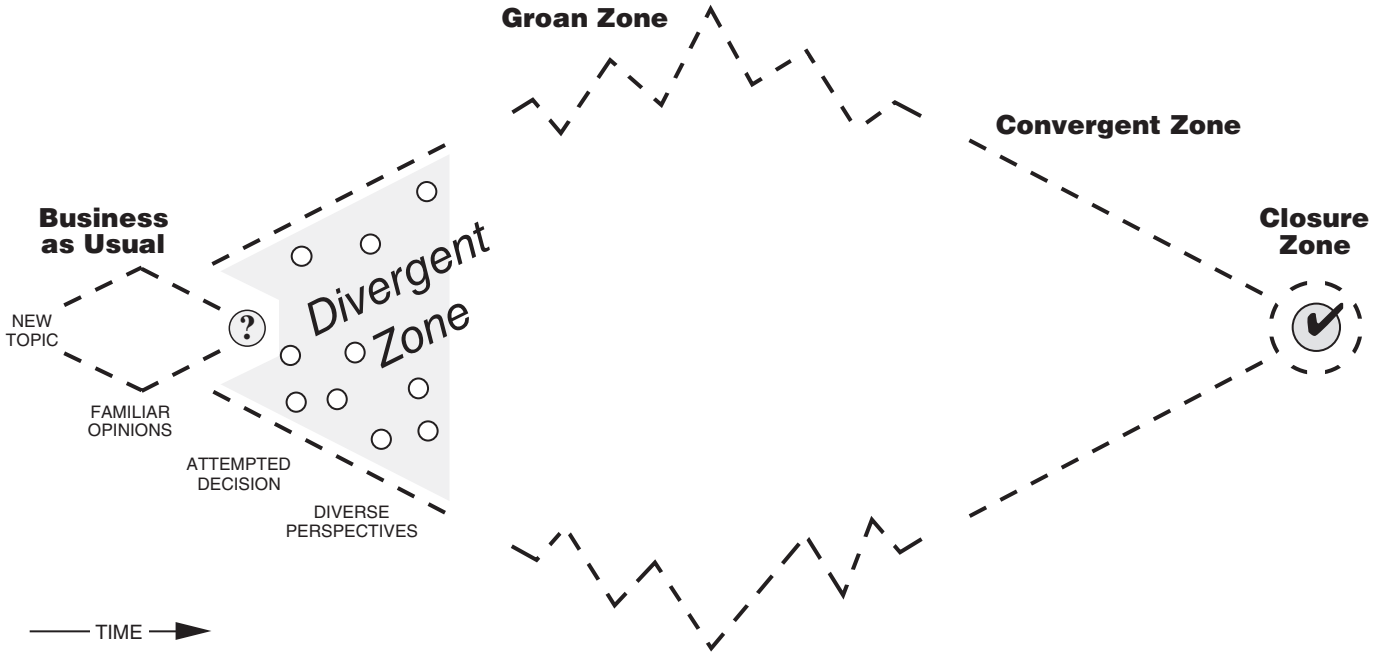
FACILITATING IN THE DIVERGENT ZONE

PRINCIPLES, TECHNIQUES AND TOOLS TO ENCOURAGE FULL PARTICIPATION

- Introduction to the Divergent Zone
- Common Facilitation Techniques
- Responding to Challenging Situations
- Structured Activities
- Summary

LIFE IN THE DIVERGENT ZONE



When a diverse group begins work on a complex problem, people's views are not unified. Instead, they vary widely across many parameters: goal(s), priorities, problem definition, critical success factors, options for action, resources needed, people who should be at the table, and many more.

To reconcile these differences, the first step is to make them visible. This typically requires a lot of listing and sorting and defining: all the processes that epitomize divergent thinking! In groups whose members are veterans of the *Divergent Zone,* behavior tends to be guided by principles like *suspend judgment* and *accept different perspectives*. In contrast, many people have not experienced full-on divergent thinking. In those groups, behavior tends to be cautious, reserved – even to the point of withholding – yet impatient with thoughts that are different than the majority's view.

FACILITATING IN THE DIVERGENT ZONE

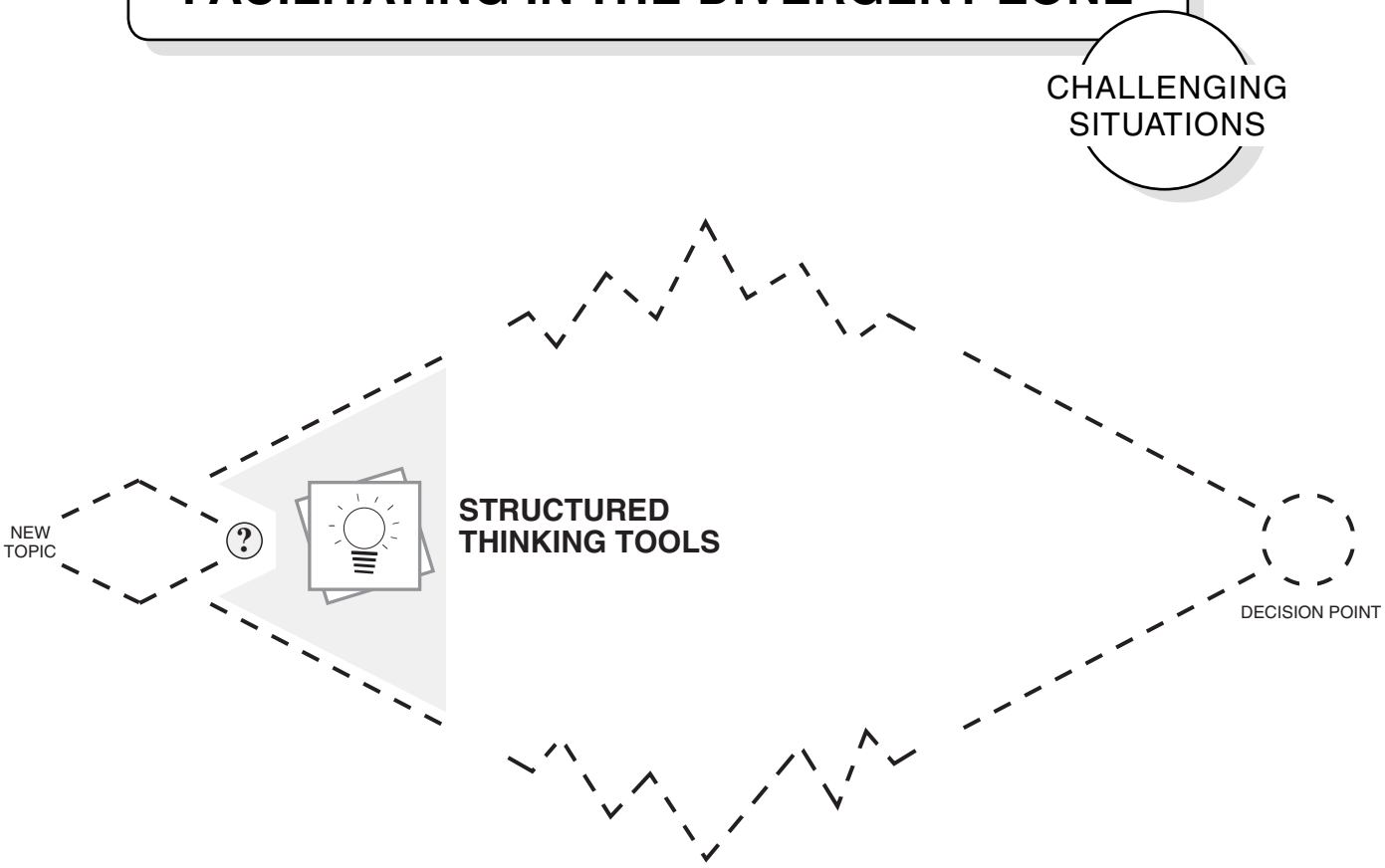
FACILITATOR'S OBJECTIVES

Using a facilitator in the *Divergent Zone* has two purposes: one pertains to the *content* of the issues at hand; the other to *the process of communication.*

Regarding matters of *content,* divergent thinking *expands the range of perspectives and possibilities*. A facilitator can help a group do this by using simple formats and skills like those shown above. Probably the most important of these, for content management, is *chartwriting*. Good recording is the *sine qua non* of effective divergent thinking.

Regarding *the process of communication*, a facilitator is a neutral third party, whose listening skills can make all the difference in building a supportive, respectful atmosphere. Encouraging people, drawing them out, mirroring and validating – these are some of the many basic tools that help people relax, and express what they're really thinking. So do simple formats like small groups, go-arounds, trade show, and a well-managed open discussion.

FACILITATING IN THE DIVERGENT ZONE



The common techniques for facilitating in the *Divergent Zone* (as listed on the preceding page) are adequate for most situations, most of the time. When members feel secure and encouraged to participate, they speak up – especially when they see, via chartwriting, that their own ideas and views are indeed different from those expressed by other group members.

There are occasions, however, when the common facilitation techniques don't have sufficient impact. For example, when there's a wide disparity in education level, subject-matter expertise, or fluency in the dominant language – these and other inequities can influence less privileged members to stay quiet. Similarly, difficult or controversial subjects can be hard to talk about, particularly when taking a position risks offending other participants.

Experienced facilitators can respond to such challenges by complementing their repertoire of fundamental skills with structured activities that are designed specifically to elicit divergent thinking in situations that are challenging. Many such tools are provided in this chapter.

SPEAK FROM YOUR OWN PERSPECTIVE

WHY

This is a basic, straightforward activity that encourages participants to offer their own points of view on the topic at hand.

The purpose of this activity is to enable members to quickly gain a picture of the breadth of the group's thinking. By seeing all the parts, the group gains a sense of the whole.

Another purpose of the activity is to legitimize and validate every perspective. By allowing the group to hear each person's contribution, this activity sends the message that "Everyone has something to offer."

HOW

1. Pose an open-ended question such as:
   - How would you describe what's going on?
   - How does this problem affect you?
   - What is your position on this matter?
   - Why, in your opinion, is this happening?
2. Ask each person to answer the question without commenting on each other's ideas.
3. Optional Step:
   When everyone has had a chance to express their views, ask,
   "Is there anyone absent today who might have a significantly different perspective? What might that person tell us?"
4. Debrief by asking participants for reactions, insights and learnings.

WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, AND HOW?

WHY

When solving problems in groups, people come to the table with *very different questions* based on their individual perspectives. Everyone wants their own questions answered, which prevents them from seeing that others' questions need to be answered, too. This element of divergent thinking is one of the most difficult aspects of group decision-making.

At a recent meeting, for example, one person who was mystified by the budgeting process requested clarifications and explanations repeatedly. Another asked several questions about why certain people had been invited to the meeting while others had not. A third person appeared to understand everything but one little detail, about which he kept asking questions. Each was focused on his or her own questions and could not see that others were struggling with entirely different questions.

This activity supports a group to identify *the whole range of questions* before they get too focused on wrestling with any single question.

HOW

1. Hang five sheets of paper titled respectively, "Who?" "What?" "When?" "Where?" and "How?"
2. Start by naming the general topic. For example, "We're now going to start planning the annual staff retreat."
3. On the "Who?" page, brainstorm a list of questions that begin with "Who?" For example, "Who will set the agenda?" "Who knows someone who can rent us a conference room?" "Who should be invited?" "Who said we can't spend more than $500?"
4. Repeat Step 3 for each of the other sheets.
5. When all five lists are complete, identify the easy questions and answer them. Then make a plan to answer the rest.

This tool was inspired by an exercise called "Five W's and H" in A. B. VanGundy, Jr., *Techniques of Structured Problem Solving,* 2nd ed. (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1988), p. 46.

SPECIFYING REQUIREMENTS

WHY

To be sustainable, the solution to a difficult problem must reflect the requirements of every stakeholder – which often are quite diverse. As an example, take the case of a meeting held by an appliance manufacturer to discuss the development of a new, low-energy light bulb. The purchasing department wanted the bulb to be built from parts and materials that were readily available. The marketing department wanted the shape of the bulb to fit standard packaging. The engineering department wanted precise timetables from research and development in order to schedule their staff efficiently. And the company president wanted assurance that the new product would be a salable commodity.

For groups like these, the challenge is to take stock of *all* requirements before getting bogged down in specifics. This activity helps a group to gain a preliminary understanding of everyone's conditions for success.

HOW

1. Hang two sheets of chart paper, one titled "Requirements and Necessary Conditions" and the other "Topics for Further Discussion."
2. Break the group into pairs. Ask each person to take a turn describing his or her own requirements and necessary conditions for success.
3. Reconvene everyone. Give each person three minutes to state his or her conditions and five to take questions. Record each requirement on a chart. Also record questions requiring further discussion.
4. After repeating Step 3 for each person, have the group examine the lists and decide how to organize the subsequent discussion.

MIND MAPPING

WHY

A simple example of a *Mind Map* is described in "Step 1" below.

Mind mapping supports four different types of thinking: generative, logical, associative, and classifying. Generative thinking is the act of calling out any items while suspending judgment. Logical thinking is the art of reasoning. Associative thinking is a particular type of generative thinking, in which one thought inspires a second thought even though the two are not linked logically. Classifying involves putting items into categories and sub-categories. *Mind mapping* enables a group to do all of them at once.

HOW

1. First create a simple *Mind Map* to show the group how it works.
   - Choose a topic everyone can relate to, such as, "Improving our workplace." Write those words in the center of a big sheet of chart-paper.
   - Ask the group for subtopics that connect with the main topic.
   - As people call them out, draw branches from the center and label each branch. (For example "Parts we enjoy" could be a branch).
   - Continue a few more times, adding subtopics to the branch as they arise. (For example, "Water cooler chats.")
   - Soon someone will call out an *association* – an idea that is a different branch altogether, such as, "We need a better printer." Draw a new branch for each new association.
   - After a few more subtopics and associations, end the demonstration.
2. Encourage questions about the method.
3. Begin working on the group's actual subject. Allow 15-25 minutes.
4. When the activity is done, encourage discussion of key insights.

Mind Mapping was first developed by the great English psychologist Tony Buzan in 1960. See *The Mind Map Book*: *How to Use Radiant Thinking to Maximize Your Brain's Untapped Potential,* Plume, 1996.

STARTING POSITIONS

WHY

This activity is a perfect way to begin dealing with a contentious issue – especially when the conflict is fueled by many opposing perspectives.

When people are brought together to resolve a dispute, many participants arrive with strong opinions and well-rehearsed arguments. They need to be given a chance to express their opinions fully, so they can let everyone else see where they stand.

When people aren't able to speak without being interrupted or discounted, it is predictable that they will insert their positions into the discussion at every opportunity. Conversely, when people *are* supported to state their positions fully, they frequently become more able to listen to one another. This often leads to better mutual understanding, which is a precondition for finding creative solutions to difficult problems.

HOW

1. Introduce the activity by indicating that there may be several diverse perspectives in the room. Encourage everyone to give each other the time and the attention each person needs to express his or her views.
2. Using a go-around format, ask each speaker to take a turn answering the following questions from his or her individual perspective:
   - What is the problem and what solution is s/he advocating?
   - What are his or her reasons for taking this particular position?

   Note: This step is often done by having each speaker come up to the front of the room and present his or her ideas standing up.
3. When each person has had a turn, ask the group to reflect aloud on what they're learning.

HOW HAS THIS AFFECTED ME?

WHY

This activity gives people permission to express their fears, confusions, hurts, or resentments openly. This supports people to become more aware of what they're feeling so they can discuss the situation in more depth.

Also, this activity enables people to step back from their own individual perspective and see a bigger picture. It is frequently surprising and highly informative for them to hear what other people are feeling.

HOW

1. Ask people to reflect on the following questions:
   - "How do I feel about this situation?"
   - "How has it affected me so far?"
2. Ask each person to take a turn sharing his or her reflections and feelings with the whole group. A go-around format works best for this activity because it discourages back-and-forth discussion.
3. When everyone has spoken, ask the whole group, "Now that you have heard from everyone else, what reactions are you having?"
4. If responses indicate that this activity has surfaced a lot of emotion, encourage the group to do a second go-around. Say something like, "Use this time to let the rest of us know whatever is on your mind."
5. End by summarizing the main themes. Validating everyone's self-disclosure helps provide people with a temporary sense of completion, even when the source problems remain obviously unresolved.

THREE COMPLAINTS

WHY

Inviting people to complain about their situation gives them the chance to say things that are normally unacceptable. This can be powerful, as often useful information is revealed that would otherwise remain hidden.

Furthermore, when people have a chance to vent their negative feelings instead of stewing in them, they are more able to move forward on a task.

After an activity like this one, it is common for people to make significant progress on the topic under discussion.

HOW

1. Give the group an overview of the upcoming steps. Then have each individual write on a separate slip of paper three complaints about the situation under discussion.
2. Have everyone throw the slips of paper into a hat.
3. Pull out one note, read it aloud, and ask for comments. The author may or may not wish to identify himself or herself.
4. After three or four comments, pull out another complaint and repeat the process.
5. After 10 or 15 minutes, ask the group how much longer they would like this activity to continue.
6. When time runs out, ask people to close by saying what the experience was like for them.

UNREPRESENTED PERSPECTIVES

WHY

People in a group often share so many assumptions in common that they may not recognize their own blind spots. Yet omitting a key perspective can ruin the outcome of an otherwise participatory process.

For example, in the 1980s, urban-based environmental organizations, in collaboration with state and federal agencies, drew up many unpopular and ultimately unacceptable proposals for rural conservation. These plans were rarely supported by the loggers or miners whose livelihoods were being threatened. In many cases, the plans were unworkable because they had been designed without adequate understanding of the needs and goals of the working people in the affected communities.

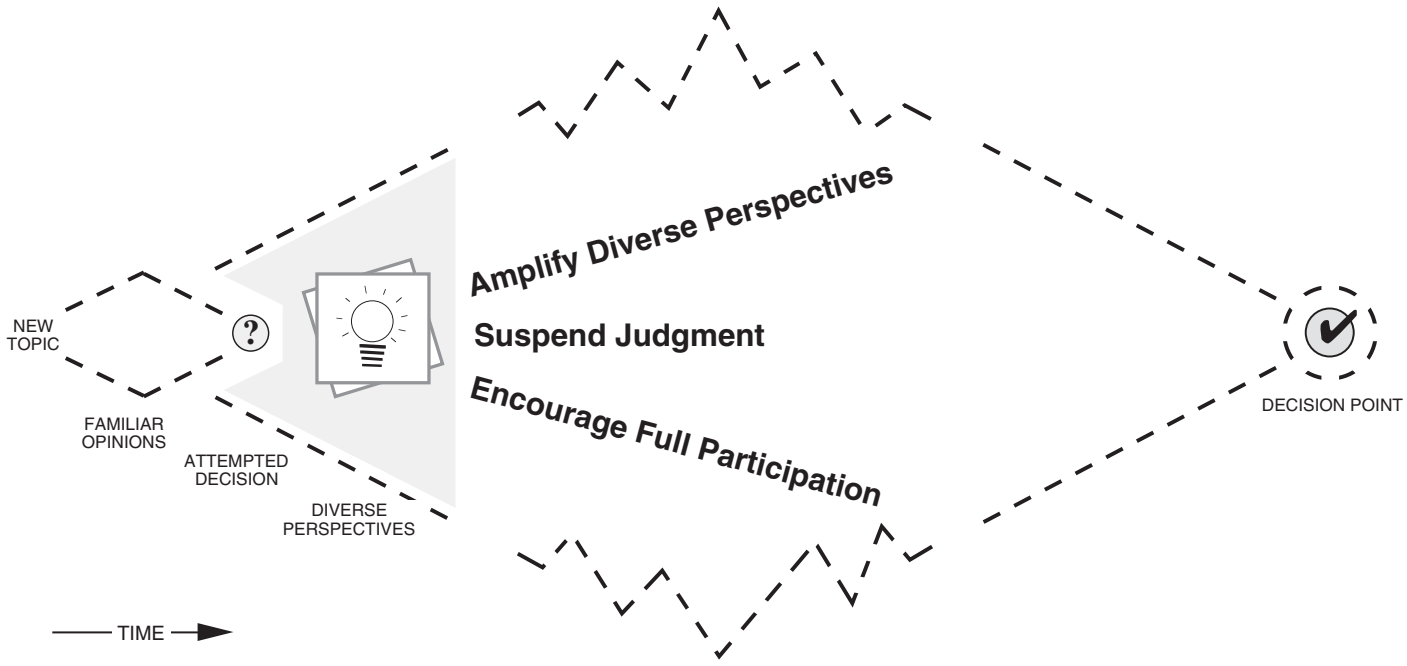
This activity assists a group to determine whether there are stakeholders whose perspective should be better represented at future meetings.

HOW

1. List every group of stakeholders that might be affected by this problem. Don't forget to include less-than-obvious stakeholders. For example, does your issue affect trainees? Suppliers? Neighbors? Does it affect the families of employees? For this activity, every affected stakeholder group matters.
2. One by one, go down the list considering each group in the following way: "How does the situation at hand affect this stakeholder group?" Example: "How does our project expansion for next year affect our trainees?"
3. When the list is complete ask, "Has anyone spotted a problem that wasn't previously identified?" and "Is there someone missing from these meetings who should be included from now on?"

FACILITATING IN THE DIVERGENT ZONE

SUMMARY



Most groups will go along with almost anything a facilitator suggests in the *Divergent Zone*. For one thing, people generally appreciate the chance to talk. For another, most members are reluctant (at this stage) to challenge the facilitator. However, this compliance can be deceptive. Superficial or pat activities may get everyone talking – but most people will know, when the exercise is done, that they've just had a "fast food experience."

Structured activities are strong and effective for the purposes described in this chapter. But they shouldn't be overused. They're directive and pre-packaged. Often people just want to have a conversation, or call out ideas to a silent chartwriter. Identifying differences doesn't always require a production!

Facilitators can keep it simple with low-key formats like go-arounds or pairs. And they can use non-directive listening skills like paraphrasing, drawing people out, mirroring, encouraging, stacking, validating, and making space. This approach is usually more than adequate to encourage full participation.

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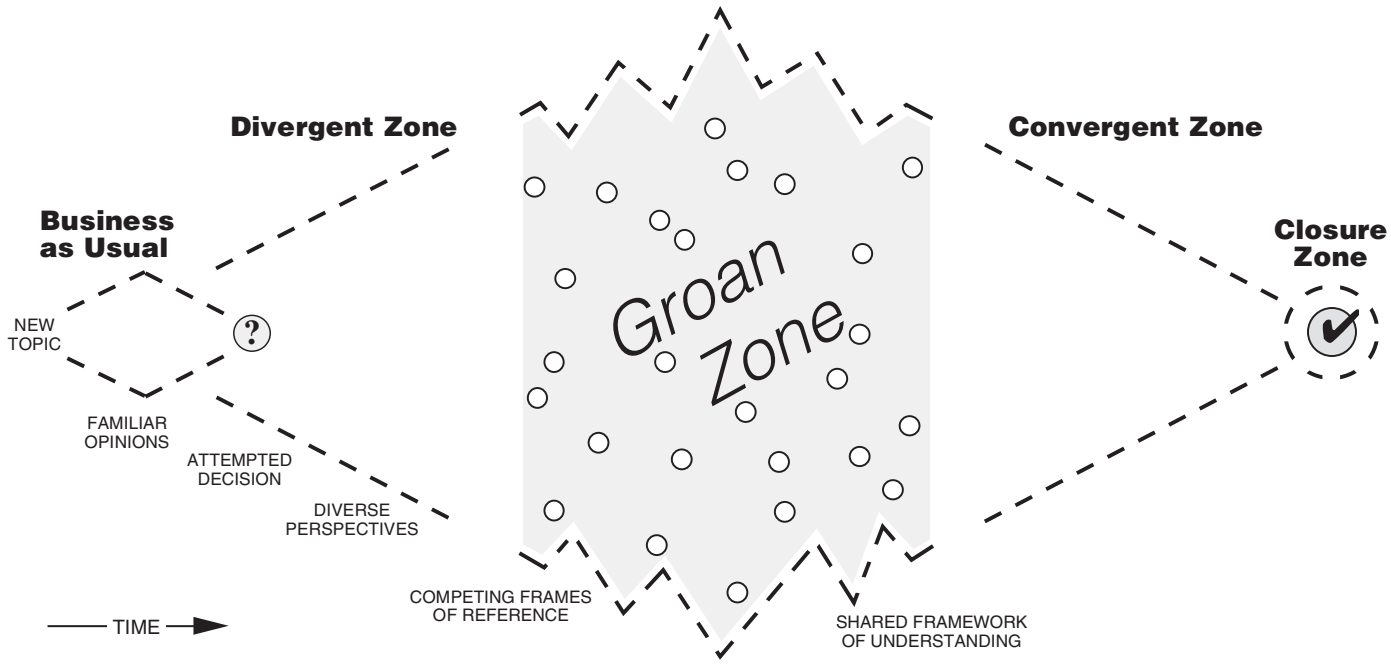
FACILITATING IN THE GROAN ZONE

PRINCIPLES, TECHNIQUES AND TOOLS TO BUILD MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING

- Introduction to the Groan Zone
- Common Facilitation Techniques
- Responding to Challenging Situations
- Structured Activities
- Summary

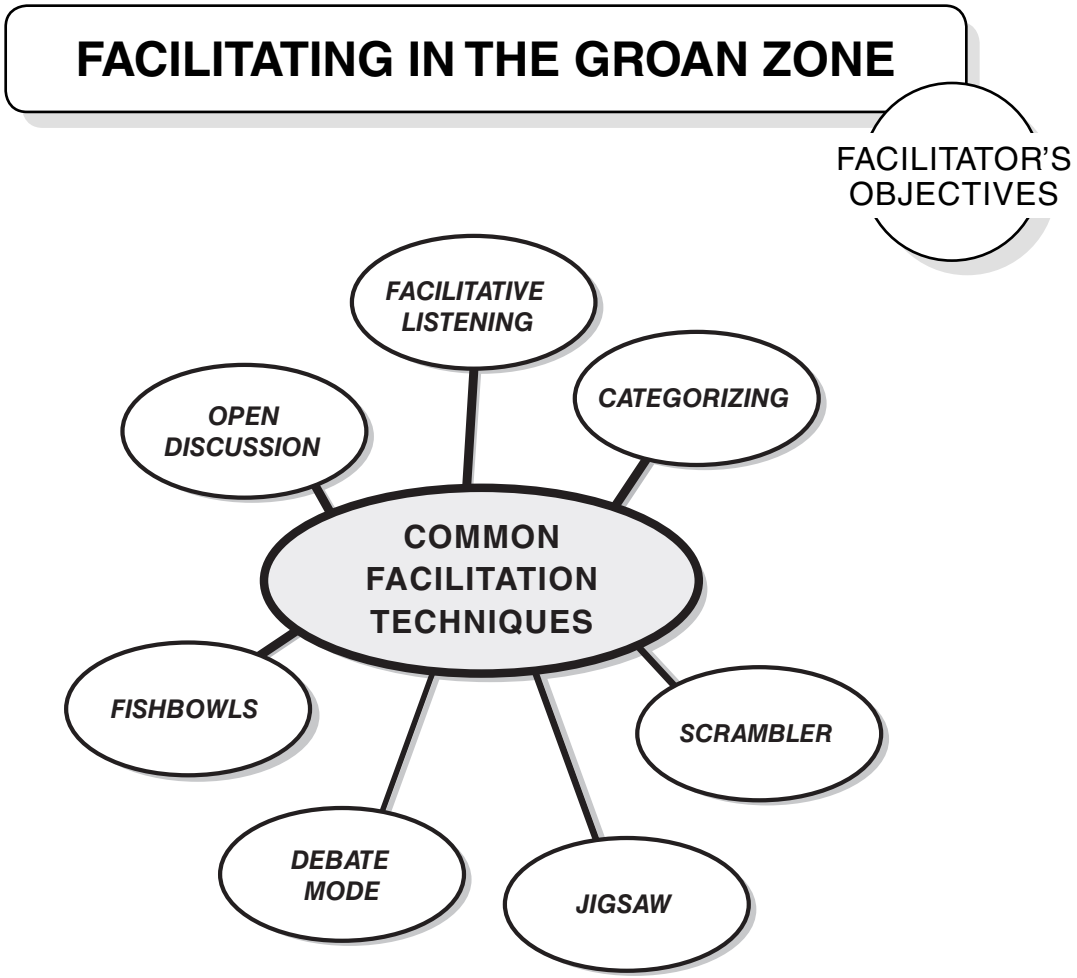
LIFE IN THE GROAN ZONE



After a period of divergent thinking, most groups enter a *Groan Zone*. It's almost inevitable. For example, suppose a group has just brainstormed a list. In theory, the next task is simple: sift through the ideas, and pick a few to discuss in depth. But in practice that task can be grueling. Everyone has their own frame of reference. Moreover, when people misunderstand one another, they become more confused, more impatient, more self-centered – more unpleasant all around. People repeat themselves, they interrupt, they dismiss other people's ideas and rudely put each other down.

Behaviors like these usually produce even more behaviors like these; it becomes a vicious cycle. Without a facilitator, the cycle often continues its regressive descent until participants give up altogether. At that point, they will agree to almost anything – any half-baked, unrealistic, mediocre compromise – just as long as it will get them out of the room.

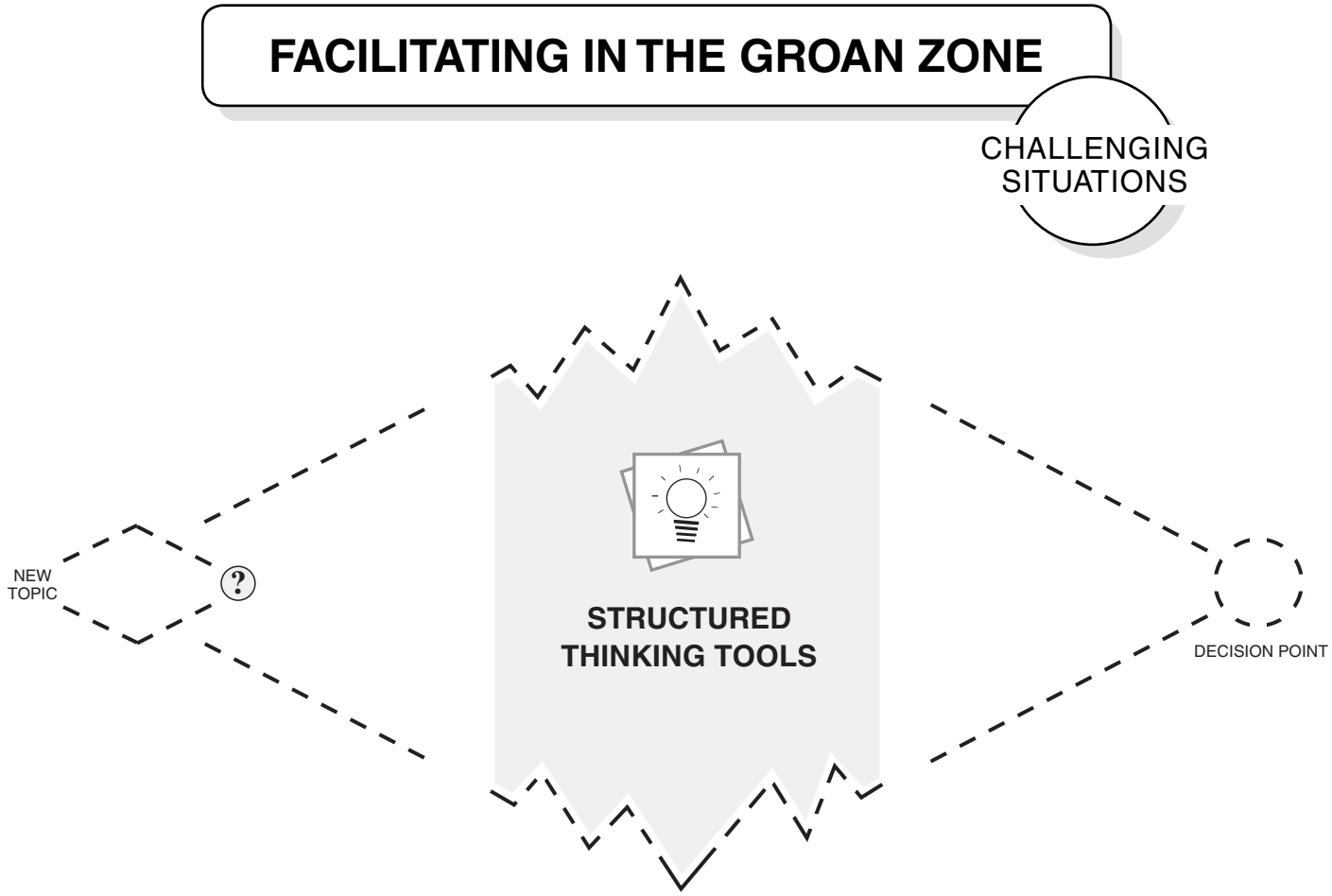
FACILITATING IN THE GROAN ZONE



The facilitator's main objective in the *Groan Zone* is to help the group develop a shared framework of understanding. This is anything but easy.

Whether the facilitator is helping one person stand up to pressure from others, or helping two people clear up a misunderstanding between them, it takes a lot of careful, responsive listening. At times, the facilitator may be the *only* person in the room who is listening at all. The classic listening skills – paraphrasing and drawing people out – are indispensable now. So are empathizing, validating differences, helping people listen to one another, linking, and listening for common ground (all described in Chapter 4).

Furthermore, energy management is a critical success factor for facilitating in the *Groan Zone*. To prevent exasperated participants from shutting down, switch participation formats frequently, as discussed in Chapter 9. All the formats shown above are designed to promote mutual understanding.



The simplest way to help group members gain a deeper understanding of each other's perspectives is to encourage them to ask direct questions of one another, and listen carefully to the answers. This common-sense approach would be enhanced by using any and all of the standard facilitation techniques listed on the previous page.

But some participants fear that asking questions might seem confrontational or rude, especially when a speaker's statement is difficult to comprehend. Also, many people simply can't sit with the ambiguity of unstructured inquiry and dialogue for very long, whether or not a facilitator is refereeing the process. And most of all, it's hard for everyone – participant and facilitator alike – to tolerate the poor behaviors and emotional turmoil that surface when people feel misunderstood. Under any of these challenging conditions, structured activities provide the added firmness, the safe container, that many participants require in order to settle down and keep working in a *Groan Zone*. Many such activities are presented in this chapter.

LEARNING MORE ABOUT EACH OTHER'S PERSPECTIVES

WHY

The most basic method for promoting mutual understanding is to ask questions. Sometimes, however, people hesitate to ask questions about each other's perspectives because questioning is so often perceived as criticism. By providing structure, this activity helps people understand that the questions are not intended as attacks. Using this simple tool builds trust and patience, and it greatly improves mutual understanding.

Some facilitators may hesitate to use this tool, feeling that it burns up precious time. But the alternative – proceeding in the absence of mutual understanding – ends up consuming much more time, with worse results.

HOW

1. Ask for a volunteer to be the "focal person." S/he begins by saying, "Here's the point I want to make." S/he has three minutes to talk.
2. When s/he is done, invite anyone to ask the speaker a question, such as, "What do you mean by . . . ?" or, "Can you say more about . . . ?"
3. The focal person then answers the first question.
4. Turn to the questioner, and ask, "Is this clear to you now?" If so, continue to Step 5. If not, ask the questioner to state, first, what s/he believes the focal person has said, and then what s/he still finds unclear. For example, someone might say, "I hear the focal person saying that we should all share the cleanup chores equally. But I still don't understand why he feels so strongly about it."
5. When both the questioner and the focal person feel understood, ask for another questioner to take a turn.
6. After three or four people have had a chance to ask questions, ask for another person to volunteer to be the new focal person.

   The goal of this activity is to promote understanding, not to resolve differences. This should be emphasized beforehand and, if necessary, throughout the activity.

IF I WERE YOU

WHY

Another straightforward way to promote mutual understanding is to have people look at the world through each other's eyes.

Exploring someone else's perspective helps people to suspend their own points of view. This activity thus provides some participants with insights they may not have acquired through conventional discussion.

Furthermore, the process supports participants to feel understood and "seen." If necessary, it allows them the opportunity to correct any misperceptions.

HOW

1. Have the group choose a statement to work with. The statement should begin with the words, "If I were you . . ." For example, two common choices are, "If I were you, a main concern of mine would be . . ." or "If I were you, one of my goals would be . . ."
2. Write each member's name on two separate slips of paper, and put them into a hat.
3. Have each person draw out two slips, so that each person has the names of two different people. (If a person pulls his or her own name, s/he puts it back or trades with someone.)
4. Give everyone a turn being the focal person. The two people who have that person's name say to him or her, "If I were you . . ."
5. After listening to both people, the focal person may respond.
6. When everyone has had a turn, ask the group members to reflect on the activity and share any new insights they have gained.

MEANINGFUL THEMES

WHY

Each participant comes to a meeting with his or her own unique set of interests and concerns. And in many cases, the participant wants to find out where others stand on the area of his or her special concern. For example, one person may need to know whether other members are committed to remaining in the group. Someone else may need to discuss the group's track record on diversity issues. Another member may want to know people's attitudes about retaining a consultant.

Often, however, it is not clear how or when to raise those issues for discussion. Any of these themes might be very meaningful to a few people, yet not particularly important to others. This creates a dilemma. How can a group devote sufficient time to such concerns – enough to prevent individual participants from becoming impatient or withdrawn – yet not so much time that the agenda becomes derailed by topics that seem tangential to other members? This activity offers a method for balancing the two concerns, by enabling members to make a *preliminary assessment* of the attitudes pertaining to their area of interest.

HOW

1. Begin by having each group member write down one or two questions that, if everyone's answer were known, would enable that group member to participate more effectively. For example, "Do others think we should be prepared to spend a lot of money on this project?"
2. Collect one question from each person and put them in a hat.
3. Draw one sheet of paper out of the hat, read that question, and ask the person who wrote that question to explain, in two minutes or less, why s/he wants to understand everyone's position on that question.
4. Ask for brief responses from everyone: "I feel this way because . . ." When everyone has spoken, draw another question. If time is short, the remaining questions can be carried over to the next meeting.

KEY WORDS

WHY

Everyone makes assumptions. People often think that everyone else shares the same assumptions about such things as a word's meaning, an event's likelihood, or someone's motives for their actions – to name just a few. When groups are unaware of their differences in assumptions, they may find it difficult to understand each other's thinking or behavior.

For example, the director of a city agency asked her staff for input on a proposed reorganization. A few people took her request seriously, but many others treated it lightly. This caused turmoil at staff meetings until the explanation was found. Several people had heard a rumor that the director was leaving; they doubted the reorganization would ever occur. The few who worked hard to give input were those who had not heard the rumor. These differences in assumptions were never mentioned, but they influenced everyone's commitment to the task.

Key Words helps people explore the meaning of the statements they make to one another. By discussing the meanings of key words, people can identify unspoken assumptions that are causing miscommunication.

HOW

1. Have the group compose a problem statement. For example, "New computers are too expensive to purchase." Write it on a flipchart.

2. Ask group members to identify the key words in the statement. Underline all key words. For example, "New computers are too expensive to purchase."

3. Have the group identify which word to focus on first. Then ask, "What questions does this word raise?" Record all responses. Then ask, "Does this word suggest any assumptions that can be challenged? For example, is 'purchase' the only way to obtain new computers?"

4. Repeat Step 3 for each key word. Encourage discussion throughout.

This tool was inspired by an exercise called "Lasso" in M. Doyle and D. Straus, *How to Make Meetings Work* (New York: Jove Books, 1982).

FACTS AND OPINIONS

WHY

This activity enables a group to trade a lot of information without getting bogged down in a discussion of who is right or what is true.

For example, suppose a group needed to begin thinking about next year's budget. *Facts and Opinions* would help them to generate statistics ("last year we spent $4,000 on legal fees") and speculation ("we might want to initiate two new lawsuits next year") both within a short period of time.

Note that in this example, *Facts and Opinions* postpones the debate over the budget. Instead, the thrust of the exercise is to gather a lot of material on many different subjects. Once group members see the big picture, they can decide which topics to discuss and in what order.

HOW

1. Hang two large pieces of paper on a wall. Title one "Facts" and the other "Opinions." Also, make available sticky notes in two colors, with enough for every member to receive at least ten of each color.

2. Ask the group members, "What do you know about this topic?" Have each group member write his or her answers on the sticky notes, using one color for "Facts" and the other color for "Opinions." (If asked how to know whether something is a fact or an opinion, answer, "Please decide for yourself. If you're not sure, write it both ways.")

3. Have each person post his or her sticky notes on the wall. The notes should be posted as soon as they are written, so everyone can read the posted notes whenever they like. Reading often prompts new thinking. Participants can continue posting ideas until time is up.

4. After all data have been collected, ask for observations and reflections.

HOW WILL THIS PROPOSAL AFFECT OUR JOBS?

WHY

Sometimes a participant is clearly unhappy with a proposal but s/he is having trouble finding words to express his or her concerns effectively. The difficulty may be rooted in the fact that most proposals affect different roles in different ways. When participants do not understand the nuances of one another's roles – a common state of affairs – they may have trouble understanding one another's concerns.

This activity helps the group focus their whole attention on how a proposal will affect each participant. As a result, many confusions and misunderstandings clear up as people gain insight into the subtle realities of each other's situations.

HOW

1. Identify which members are likely to be affected by the proposal on the floor. Ask for a volunteer to become the focal person.
2. Have a 3–5 minute brainstorm session to list answers to the question: "If we implement our proposal, how will it affect this person's role?" While the brainstorm is in effect, no disagreements are allowed.
3. When time is up, ask the focal person to come to the front of the room. S/he educates the group by elaborating on the items s/he thinks are important for everyone to understand. Encourage participants to ask questions.
4. Have the group choose a second focal person. Repeat Steps 2 and 3.

TAKING TANGENTS SERIOUSLY

WHY

Tangents are a major cause of the frustration and confusion of the *Groan Zone*. When someone raises an issue that seems peripheral to the discussion, other participants often become nervous. They don't want the speaker to derail the conversation and take the group off track. But the speaker may believe that s/he has identified a crucial "side problem" that the group must face before the "main problem" can be resolved.

This dilemma comes up regularly. Because everyone has a unique perspective, it's not unusual for one person to spot a hidden problem that no one else has noticed. Group members may think that the speaker is wasting their time on a tangent, when in fact the speaker might be *ahead* of the group in articulating hidden complexities. And when that happens, the group is plunged into the *Groan Zone*.

Taking Tangents Seriously mitigates misunderstanding by supporting the group to gain a deeper appreciation of each person's perspective.

HOW

1. At the beginning of a discussion, or when the first tangential issue arises, post a blank sheet and title it "Side Issues." Add to it as tangents are identified.
2. At every meeting, ask the group to choose one topic from the list and discuss it for 15 minutes.
3. After 15 minutes ask, "Are we done, or would you prefer to extend the time?"
4. When time is up, finish with a quick summary. Ask, "What have you learned? Are there any next steps you should take?"
5. Repeat Steps 2 to 4 at subsequent meetings.

IS THIS WHAT YOU MEAN? NO, THAT'S NOT IT!

WHY

Anyone whose job involves serious writing knows that clarifying an important thought often takes several drafts. The same is true for ideas that are being birthed in group conversation, rather than in private writing. However, when a group is the medium for doing rough-draft thinking, the potential for misunderstandings and frustration is high.

If group members become impatient, the person trying to express the idea usually just gives up, even when the idea could be very important. This activity counters that tendency, by reversing it. Here, the person taking the risk of looking clumsy (or worse) is permitted to express frustration non-verbally, just as long as his/her energy is not aimed directly at anyone in particular.

HOW

1. When someone is having trouble consolidating a thought, ask if s/he would like some support from the group.
2. Explain that this activity involves two roles: the *idea-drafter* – the person trying to articulate an idea s/he feels might be important – and the *assistants* – anyone willing to follow the ground rules. (See below.)
3. Ask the *idea-drafter* to tell everyone what s/he is thinking.
4. Next have the *assistants* tell the *drafter* what they understand him/her to be saying ("So is this what you mean . . . ?")
5. Early attempts by the *assistants* will probably miss the mark. The *drafter* can say, "No, that's not it!" (. . . or words to that effect.) The *drafter* has permission to use tone of voice and/or nonverbal gestures to vent exasperation at feeling misunderstood. (In order for this activity to work, everyone must acknowledge that the *drafter* can scowl, etc., without fear of being spurned for rudeness.)
6. In a few rounds, you'll see the idea's depth and insightfulness emerge.

COUPLES COUNSELING

WHY

Incessant bickering between two people can be quite disruptive to a group. For any pair caught in this dynamic, their quarreling *might* be rooted in a deep subject-matter disagreement. But it's just as likely that the source of the problem is in their relationship. This activity helps the two parties step back and give each other feedback about the ways they're interacting.

Note that this activity is best done with a well-formed group, not with people who are only together for a few meetings. Note too that the activity can also be done "offline" – in private, between the two parties and a facilitator, without involvement by the other group members.

HOW

1. Explain that this activity is for only two people at a time. Other group members can expect to sit in respectful silence for the 10-20 minutes this normally requires. A few minutes of debriefing may follow.
2. Have the two participants move their chairs to face each other. Guide them to speak to each other – not to the facilitator. Explain that one person will offer feedback while the other listens, after which they will reverse roles. When one person speaks, the other must not interrupt.
3. Decide who speaks first and who listens first, then invite the speaker to begin. (Note: The first time through, you may need to stop the listener from interrupting.)
4. When the speaker finishes, ask the listener to paraphrase what s/he heard. Then ask the speaker if the listener "got it right." If not, ask the speaker to restate key points. Then ask the listener to paraphrase again.
5. Continue the cycle described in step 4 as many times as necessary, until the speaker feels understood. Then have them switch roles and repeat.
6. Continue switching roles until both people feel complete – or until time runs out. Then offer the larger group an opportunity to debrief.

IS THERE ANYTHING I'M NOT SAYING?

WHY

People often refrain from saying what they're really thinking. Sometimes they hold back because the risk is too great. But some people stay silent when they aren't sure if their ideas are worth saying; or when they can't turn the kernels of their ideas into fully formed presentations. In other words, there are many times when group members – if they were given a little support, a little permission, a little nudge – might go ahead and say what's on their mind. Yet without support, they often remain quiet.

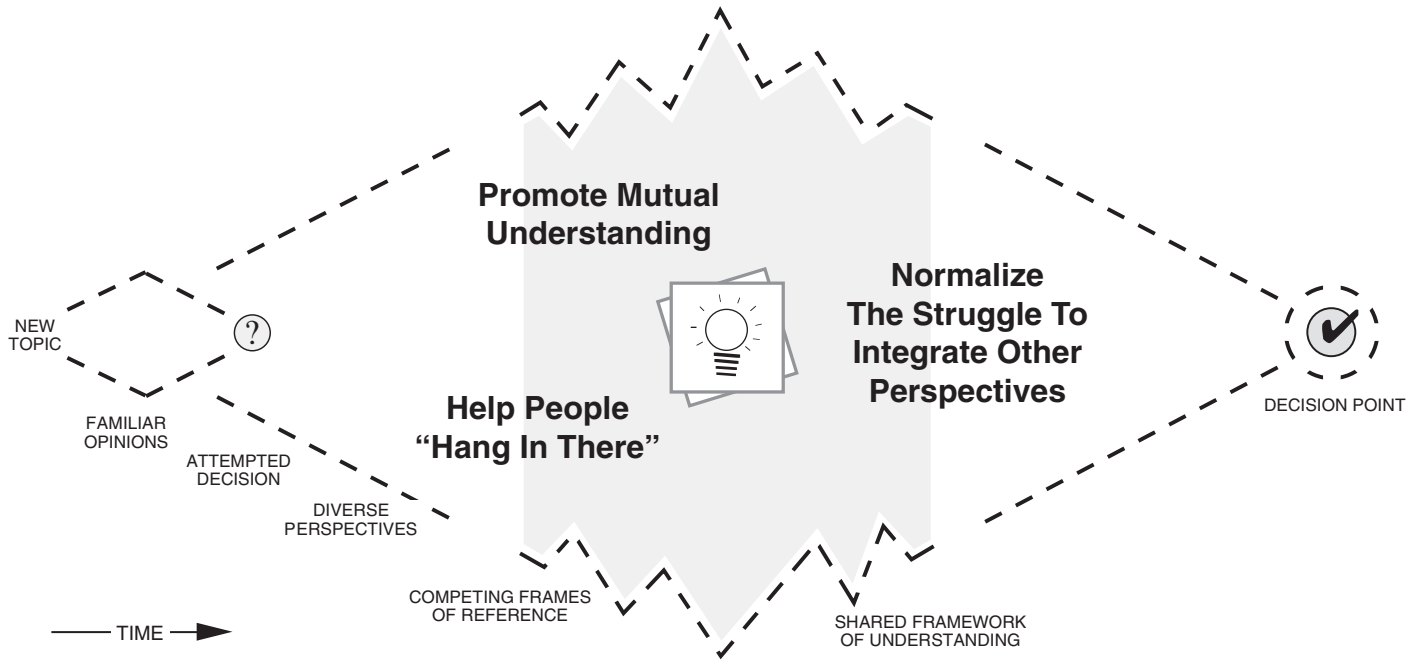
This activity helps group members take a look at the thoughts they've been having (but not speaking) during a discussion. It also gives members an opportunity to reflect on whether the group would be served if a person did open up and share his or her perspective.

HOW

1. Describe this activity. Explain why people can benefit from structured activities that give them permission to speak up. Obtain agreement from the group to proceed.
2. Break the group into pairs. Ask all to answer this question: "During this discussion, have I had any thoughts I haven't said aloud?" Assure people that no one is required to say anything they don't want to say.
3. Next, ask everyone (still in pairs) to answer this question: "Would the group benefit from hearing your partner's thinking?"
4. Return to the large group. Ask for volunteers to share any of their own thoughts that might be useful for others to hear.

FACILITATING IN THE GROAN ZONE

SUMMARY



Structured activities are directive, they're designed to let people follow clear procedures, and they pull for sincerity, earnestness and relationship building. All these characteristics can ground a group whose communication is poor.

Those qualities can calm a troubled group and keep it focused – but getting agreement to *do* the activity is another matter. In the *Groan Zone,* when trust is low and tensions run high, everyone's ideas are easily misinterpreted – and yours will be too. You might be seen as pushing the group into feelings they don't want to share. Or as manipulating the group in the direction of your own secret biases. Or someone may simply think you're a control freak.

So if you propose a structured activity in the *Groan Zone,* keep in mind that your role is to help, not to be "right." Be patient, be tolerant, be flexible; don't be attached to what you suggest. *Honor objections, and ask for suggestions* – that's how to install a structured activity in this phase of work.

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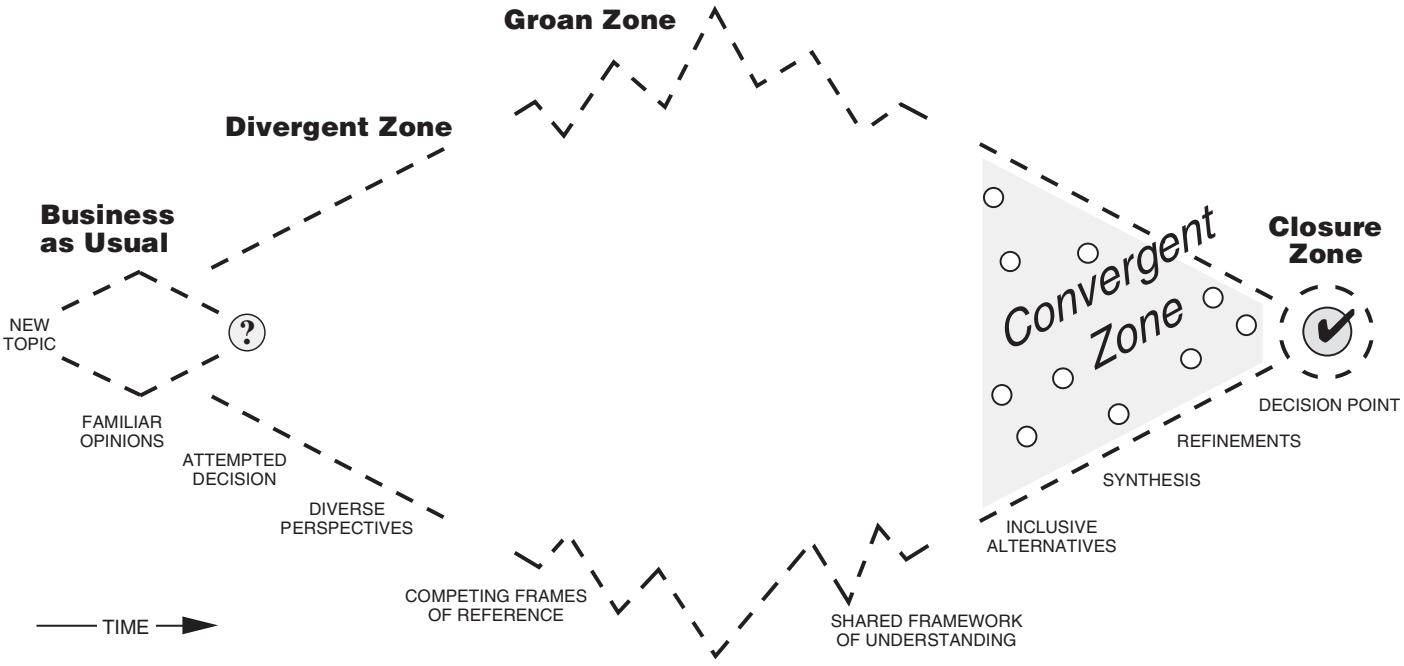
FACILITATING IN THE CONVERGENT ZONE

PRINCIPLES, TECHNIQUES AND TOOLS FOR STRENGTHENING GOOD IDEAS

- Introduction to the Convergent Zone
- Common Facilitation Techniques
- Responding to Challenging Situations
- Structured Activities
- Summary

LIFE IN THE CONVERGENT ZONE



Once a group has developed a shared framework of understanding, everything feels faster, smoother, easier. The pace of discussion accelerates. People say, "Finally, we're getting something done!" Ideas take shape. Vague notions become workable, and goals become detailed plans.

Confidence runs high during this period. People show up on time and stay until the end of the meeting. Between sessions, work that needs to be done gets done.

During this time people engage in problem solving from a place of shared understanding. There isn't nearly as much complexity as in the *Groan Zone.* People are paying attention to each other and the need for facilitation has dwindled. This is a time when people can talk to each other with minimal confusion. They can play with ideas, plan them, and evaluate them.

FACILITATING IN THE CONVERGENT ZONE

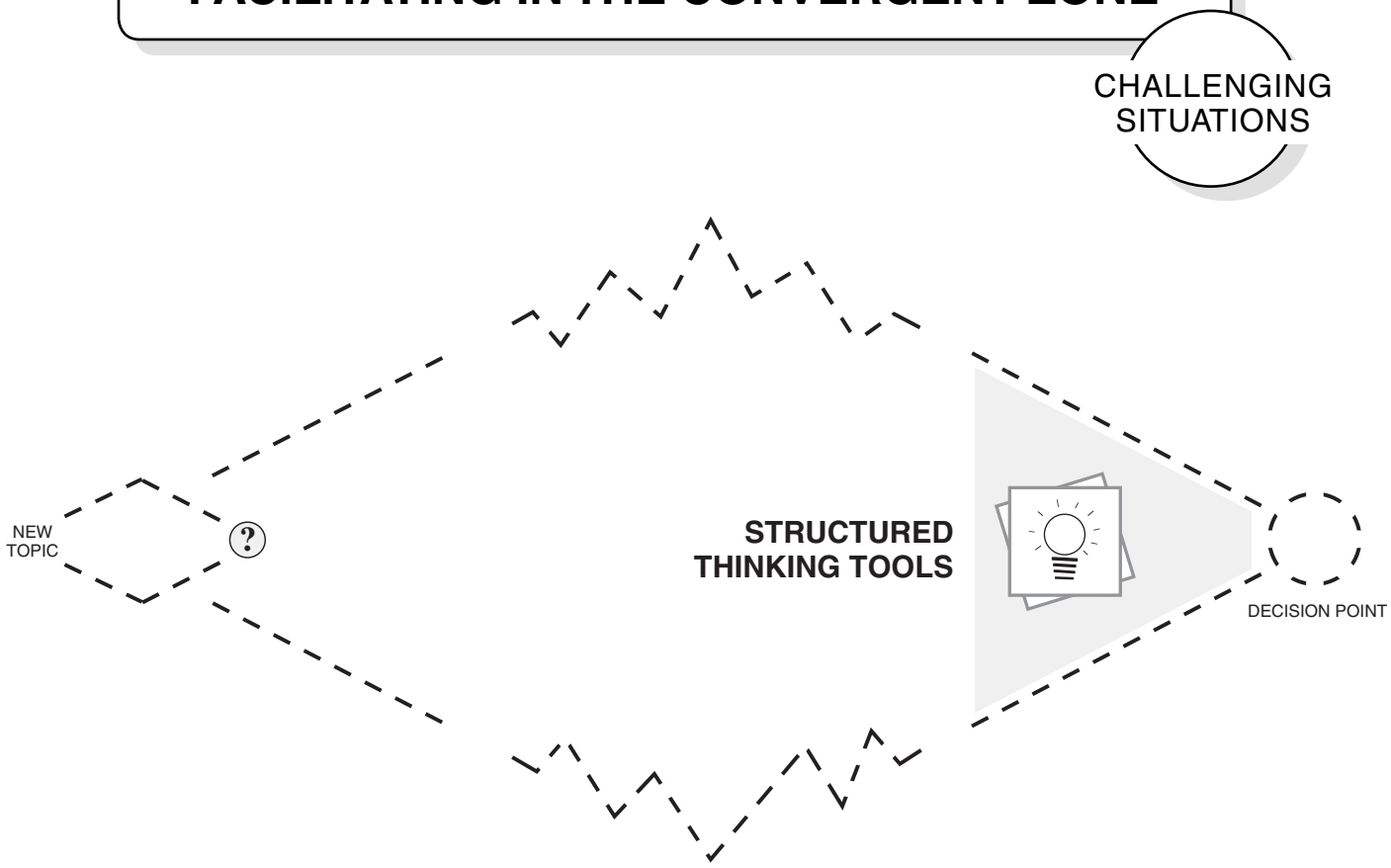
FACILITATOR'S OBJECTIVES

In the *Convergent Zone*, the facilitator's objectives are first, to help the group develop inclusive alternatives; second, to synthesize the alternatives into an approach that will work for everyone; third, to strengthen and refine the practical logic of that approach; and fourth, to plan it and bring it to life.

While much problem-solving may remain to be done, it takes the form of planning, designing, quantifying, evaluating – in other words, rational and logical analysis. The heavy lifting can often be done with formats like *reports & presentations, breakout groups, ask the expert, trade show* and *listing ideas*.

A lot of chartwriting happens in the *Convergent Zone;* seeing one's thinking in print is the easiest way to refine it – and that goes triple for groups! The facilitator's listening becomes focused rather than open-ended, using skills like *listening for the logic* and *summarizing*. Non-directive technique is rarely used, whereas *directive questioning* and *facilitating with a point of view* are common.

FACILITATING IN THE CONVERGENT ZONE



Convergent thinking, by definition, is thinking among people who have developed mutual understanding. Thanks to good communication they can make significant progress with merely the type of support described on the previous page. But communication is not the only variable that plays a critical role in the success of a participatory process. Two others are just as important: the creativity and inclusiveness of the general approach, and the logical and practical strength of the idea as it develops into an action plan.

Most groups need the boost of one or more structured activities to stretch and reach for an *inclusive solution*. Chapter 16 describes and demonstrates how case studies can be utilized in just that way. Likewise, Chapter 17 provides many structured activities that employ *creative reframing* to support convergent thinking to be more innovative and more inspired.

As for logical and practical effectiveness, a valuable collection of structured tools for strengthening good ideas are provided on the following pages.

DEFINING STEPS AND MILESTONES

WHY

Thinking into the future is one of the hardest challenges for any group. We don't have good points of reference to distinguish between a large-scale goal and a small-scale goal. Yet every complex project contains many levels of goals-within-goals.

For example, consider a project with the overall goal of restoring the vitality of an impoverished neighborhood. That goal would no doubt contain many stages and milestones (such as attracting new business to the area). Furthermore, each stage would contain various steps that must be taken before the milestones at the end of that stage could be attained.

Since we lack good points of reference to make the distinctions described above, most groups find it difficult to engage in a planning process that requires them to set overall goals and define stages and milestones.

HOW

1. Hang a long sheet of paper across the front of the room. At the far right-hand end of the paper, write the group's goal – for example, "Goal: Open a new office in Denver."

2. Ask the group to generate four or five milestones that must be completed in order to reach the goal – for example, "Complete our financial projections."

3. Write the milestones from left to right across the long sheet of paper. Leave as much space as possible between milestones.

4. Break into small groups, and assign one milestone to each group. Each group identifies and lists each step it would take to attain that milestone. Have them write each step on a sticky note.

5. Have someone from each group put the sticky notes on the wall, left to right, in the space provided for their milestone. Others can read what's being posted, and add any missing steps.

CLARIFYING SELECTION CRITERIA

WHY

How should a group choose one proposal over another? One way is to agree on the criteria to use in evaluating each proposal. For example, suppose a group agreed that its most important criteria were "easy to do" and "inexpensive." These criteria could help them reject a proposal that would be expensive or difficult, even if the project seemed interesting.

This activity helps groups discuss and agree on a list of five or fewer criteria, by defining them *before* specific proposals are considered.

HOW

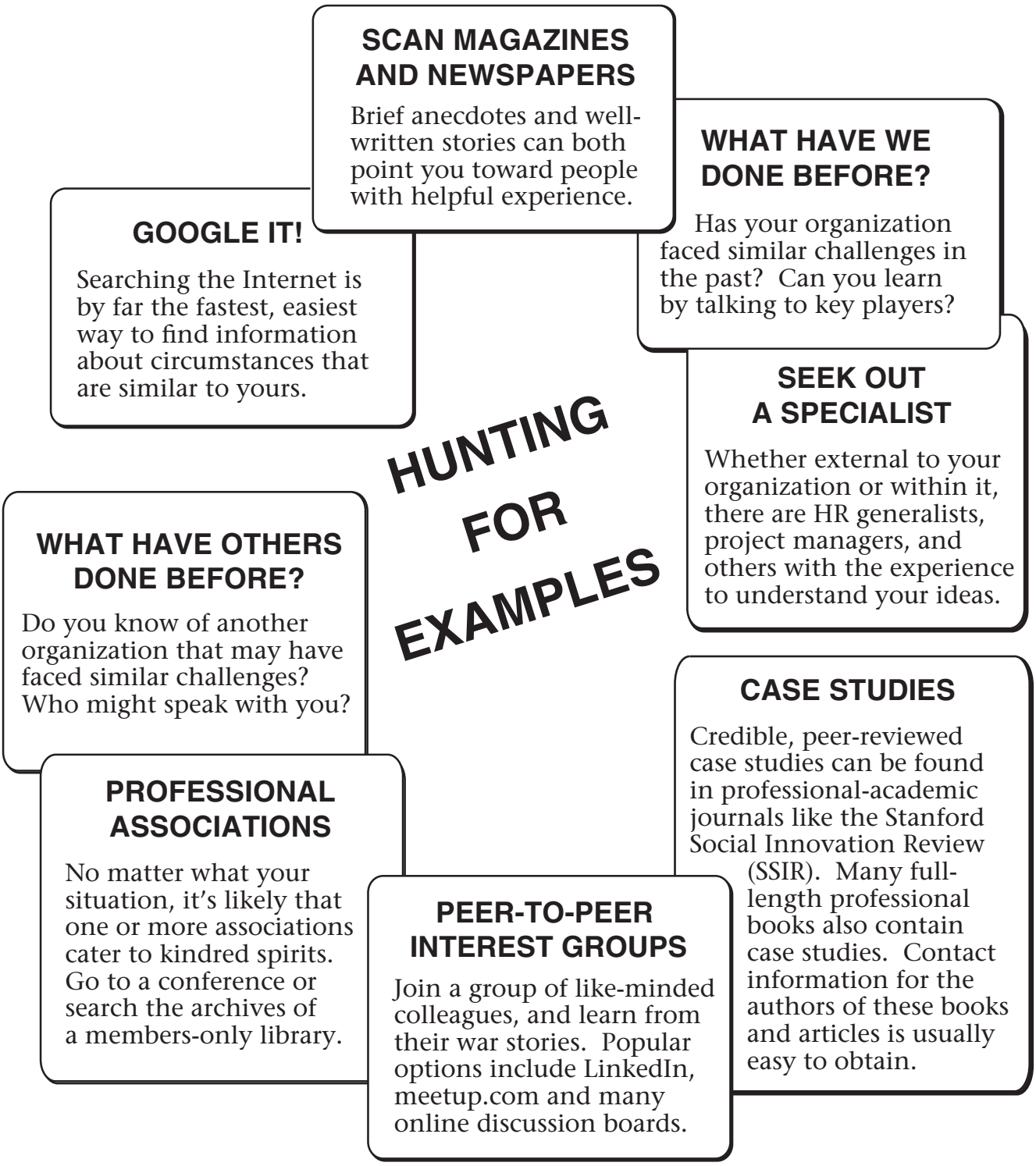
1. Have the group brainstorm a list of answers to this question: "By doing this project (or solving this problem, or developing this plan, for example), what are we trying to accomplish?"

2. Start a new chart titled "Selection Criteria." Facilitate the group to reword each item on the first list as a possible selection criterion. For example, if an item from the brainstorm list is, "We're trying to get two opposing factions to work together," the rewording might be, "It lets both factions work together" or "It appeals to both factions."

3. Explain that the list will soon be reduced to no more than five items. To prepare members for that judgment, have people break into small groups and discuss which criteria seem most important, and why.

4. Reconvene the large group. Have people select items from the list of criteria, and ask them to advocate for retaining those items on a final list of five or fewer criteria.

5. Give everyone five votes. Tally the results, and eliminate all but the top five vote-getters. This may not be a final decision on criteria. It will provide the membership with a sense of what people value most.



There is often a wide gap between the discovery of a great idea and the successful implementation of that idea. One effective way to mitigate risk and tilt the odds toward positive outcomes is to study and learn from other people's experiences of success or failure in similar circumstances. Examples are abundantly available, as noted above, to anyone willing to make a modest effort to seek them out.

PAYOFFS AND RISKS

WHY

This activity improves the viability of a proposal by reducing the costs and risks that are associated with it.

For example, a big city mayor recently received several million dollars to improve public transportation. The public favored spending the money on new bus routes. But the mayor was committed to a previously announced hiring freeze: no new city employees could be hired until the budget was balanced. On one hand, without new bus drivers, no routes could be added. On the other hand, if new bus drivers were hired, other government agencies would lobby for exemptions for *their* programs.

Payoffs And Risks helped the mayor's planning staff explore in detail the risks they would face if they went ahead with a route expansion. Through the analysis, they discovered a way to reduce their risk. They enlisted the local newspapers in an editorial campaign to build political support for this exception to the hiring freeze. It was successful, and they were able to add three new bus routes without opposition.

HOW

1. Hang three sheets of flipchart paper. Title the first page "Payoffs" and the second page "Risks." Leave the third page untitled.
2. On page one, list the payoffs associated with the proposal.
3. On page two, list the risks associated with the same proposal.
4. Now title page three "Ways to Reduce Risk." For each risk listed on the "Risks" page, discuss options for reducing the costs and the extent of the risk. Record the discussion on page three.
5. After the options for cost-reduction are better understood, ask for new proposals that retain the payoffs of the original proposal, while incorporating the insights gained through this activity.

WORK-FLOW PLANNING TOOLS

PERT Chart

This tool analyzes and maps a project's deadlines and other time requirements by representing them visually.

Milosevic, Dragan Z.
Project Management ToolBox: Tools and Techniques for the Practicing Project Manager.
Wiley, 2003.

Flow Chart

This tool uses everyday symbols – like circles, squares and arrows – to analyze the logic of a sequence of goals and the steps needed to reach each one. *Go / no-go* decision points can also be mapped.

Damelio, R.
The Basics of Process Mapping, 2nd Ed.
Productivity Press, 2012.

Gantt Chart

This tool keeps track of the progress toward completion of various sub-tasks within one or more stages of work in a complex project.

Kerzner, H.R.
Project Management.
Wiley, 2013.

Critical Path Method

This tool organizes and illustrates dependencies among different elements of a complex project. It shows which tasks must be finished before others can be started.

Klastorin, T.
Project Management: Tools and Trade-offs, 3rd Ed.
Wiley, 2003.

WBS Chart

A *Work Breakdown Structure (WBS)* chart is a tool for dividing a project into manageable chunks of work. Assigning responsibility for handling each chunk is also done by the *WBS*.

Haugan, G.T.
Effective Work Breakdown Structures,
Management Concepts, 2001.

Implementing any great idea requires quite a bit of planning. Elements like time, money, roles and communication are among many variables that must be defined, monitored and controlled. The tools on this page help planners think through the logic of the tasks to be done, in what order, by whom, and by when. The citations will lead you to write-ups that offer practical guidance for using each related tool.

RESOURCE ANALYSIS: CAN WE REALLY MAKE THIS WORK?

WHY

Sometimes groups agree to proposals that sound good but have not been thought through. This is usually not a problem, because issues dealt with in this way are usually insignificant. But occasionally, a group will agree to a huge undertaking with absolutely no sense of what they're in for.

For example, eight nurses decided to organize a major conference that would bring together representatives from over one hundred agencies. Their aim was to build a coalition that could influence state and county funding policies. The organizers did not have the slightest grasp of the effort it would take them, yet they publicized the conference and kept taking on new responsibilities as they came up. Eventually one person lost her job, and another got very sick. The conference itself was poorly attended, disorganized and ultimately inconsequential. In hindsight the nurses said, "We should have been more realistic to begin with."

HOW

1. Ask the group to list the major tasks that must be achieved if the proposal under consideration is to be implemented.
2. Assign two or three people to think about each task. Have them choose a record keeper and a spokesperson.
3. Say to each group: "For 10 minutes, think about the steps necessary to complete your assigned task. Break it down to doable action steps."
4. When time is up, reconvene the large group and ask the spokesperson from each group to report on his or her group's work.
5. After all committees have reported, ask everyone to discuss whether the overall proposal is adequate or requires modification.

WHO DOES WHAT BY WHEN?

WHY

Group decision-making is often viewed as an exercise in futility. In the experience of many, agreements reached during meetings are likely to be implemented poorly, if at all.

The odds of successful implementation increase when a group takes the time to spell out specifically what needs to be done, who will do it, by when, and with what resources. But often this step does not occur. Instead, people act as if they assumed that once an agreement has been reached, the follow-through will happen magically. "Someone else" will tend to the details later.

When a group stays fuzzy about the specifics of implementing an agreement, two or three people will probably wind up with all of the tasks – often without adequate resources. Alternatively, no one takes responsibility, and nothing happens.

This activity supports a group to consider in advance who will do each task, and when. As a consequence, responsibilities are often distributed more evenly, and more effectively.

HOW

1. Draw a matrix with four vertical columns. Title the columns: "Tasks," "Who," "By When," and "Resources Needed."

2. Under the first heading, "Tasks," list all tasks that need to be done. If additional tasks are identified later, add them to the list.

3. Number each task listed. Then discuss: *"Who will do this? By when? What resources are needed?"* This thinking can done in open discussion format, with no prescribed sequence for answering the questions.

4. As specific agreements are made, write them on the chart.

WHO ELSE NEEDS TO EVALUATE THIS PROPOSAL?

WHY

Most decisions do not just affect the people who make them. Obviously, not everyone who will be affected can participate in making a decision and planning its implementation. Nonetheless, it can be very, very costly to overlook the perspectives of those who did not participate in developing the reasoning that led to the decision.

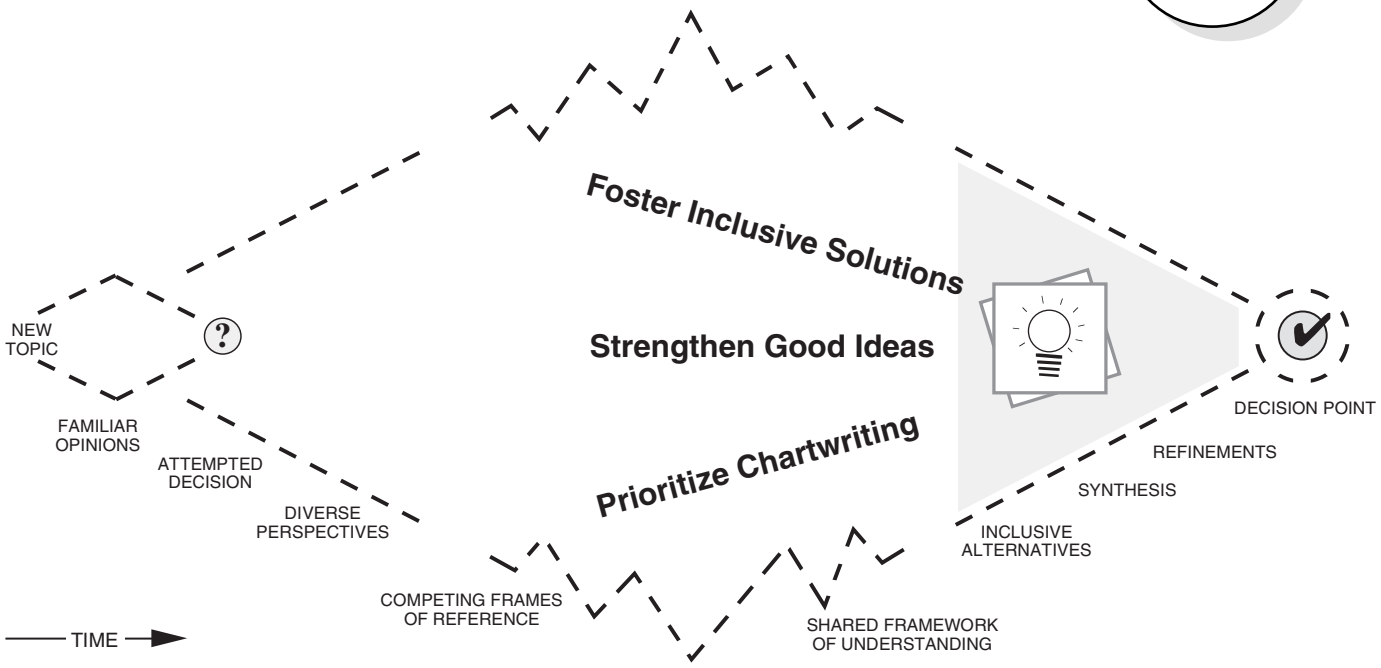
This activity helps a group to think proactively about the question, "Who else needs to be consulted?" *It usually takes a group two or three hours – sometimes longer – to go through the steps*. Taking this time at the start of a planning process might be the difference between success and disaster.

HOW

1. Have group members generate lists of people who:
   - Will be directly affected by this decision.
   - Have final sign-off authority.
   - Have to implement the decision.
   - Could sabotage the process.
2. Take a few moments to examine the list. Discuss the following questions: "What's the likelihood that any of these stakeholders would disagree with our ultimate decision? If any of them did not support the decision, how might that affect our ability to implement?"
3. Next consider each person or group on the list. Who needs to be consulted before the final decision is made?
4. For each person or group who will be consulted, choose a consultation method. Some options are interviews, focus groups, questionnaires, and an invitation to a core group meeting.

FACILITATING IN THE CONVERGENT ZONE

SUMMARY



Sustainable agreements require well-thought-out ideas that incorporate everyone's needs and goals. If the struggle of the *Groan Zone* is the heart of a sustainable agreement, the ingenuity of the *Convergent Zone* is the brain.

Structured thinking activities can be quite useful when a group seems trapped in an *either/or* mentality. Groups in this condition need inspiration and stimulation – which members are unlikely to provide to one another, when they're focused on their own positions. Chapter 16 *(Inclusive Solutions)* and chapter 17 *(Creative Reframing)* are helpful for this purpose.

Structured activities will also support groups to be more disciplined at refining the logic of their ideas, and at planning the nitty-gritty work that will enable their ideas to be implemented.

But it would be misleading to imply that groups in the *Convergent Zone* spend much time engaged in structured thinking. The truth is the opposite. Convergent discussions are largely self-managing. For many facilitators, the hardest part of working in the *Convergent Zone* is learning to pick up the markers, face the flipchart, and otherwise stay out of the group's way!

23

STRIVING FOR UNANIMITY

WORKING WITH GRADIENTS OF AGREEMENT

- Unanimity and Consensus
- Intro to the Gradients of Agreement Scale
- Gradients of Agreement Scale In Real Life
- Using the Gradients of Agreement Scale
- Gradients of Agreement in Action:
  - Enthusiastic Support
  - Lukewarm Support
- When to Seek Enthusiastic Support
- What Level of Support is Optimal?
- Gradients of Agreement in Action:
  - Ambiguous Support
  - Majority Support with Outliers
- Adapting the Gradients of Agreement Scale
- Methods of Polling the Group

STRIVING FOR UNANIMITY

INTRODUCTION

THE POWER OF UNANIMOUS AGREEMENT

The word *unanimous* comes from two Latin words: *unus*, meaning "one," and *animus*, meaning "spirit." A group that reaches unanimous agreement is a group that acts from one spirit. By this understanding, a unanimous agreement can be expected to contain wisdom and soundness of judgment, because it expresses an idea that is felt by each person to be true. As the Quakers say, the decision speaks for everyone.

To reach unanimity, everyone must agree. This means each person has a veto. Thus, anyone can keep the discussion alive for as many hours or weeks or months as it takes to find a solution s/he can believe in. This veto capacity is the crux of the power of unanimous agreement. When a group is committed to reaching unanimous agreement, the members are in effect making a commitment to remain in discussion until they develop an inclusive solution – one that takes everyone's needs into account.

UNANIMITY AND CONSENSUS

Consensus also has Latin origins. Its root word is *consentire,* which is a combination of two Latin words: *con,* meaning "with" or "together with," and *sentire,* meaning "to think and feel." *Consentire* thus translates as "to think and feel together."

Consensus is *the process*: a participatory process by which a group thinks and feels together, *en route to* their decision. Unanimity, by contrast, is the point at which the group *reaches closure*.

Many groups that practice consensus decision-making *do not use unanimity* as their decision rule for reaching closure. For example, Seva Foundation uses "unanimity minus one." Some chapters of the Green Party use 80% as the acceptable level of agreement. Yet all such groups see themselves as sincere practitioners of consensus decision-making. While no single member has personal veto power, individual voices wield significant influence – enough to ensure that the group will engage in a genuine process of thinking and feeling together.

STRIVING FOR UNANIMITY

A SILENCE IS NOT AN AGREEMENT

Many managers want their teams to be strongly aligned on the high-stake, high-impact issues that most affect their work. When tackling such issues, these managers come to meetings with statements like, "I need everyone's buy-in today." Clearly, these managers *want* their groups to find unanimity.

Yet if we look at how such meetings play out, what actually happens? The discussion may go well for a time, but once the group becomes mired in the *Groan Zone,* the person-in-charge often feels pressure to bring the discussion to closure and make a decision.

To close discussion, it's common for a person-in-charge to summarize a key line of thought and say something like, "It sounds like people want to do such-and-such." Then s/he will follow with, "Does everyone agree with this proposal?" Typically, after a few seconds of silence, this person will say, "All right, we're agreed. That's what we'll do. Now let's move on."

Is this actually a unanimous agreement? Not really. The manager has no idea, really, what the people who didn't respond were thinking.

THE PROBLEM WITH YES AND NO

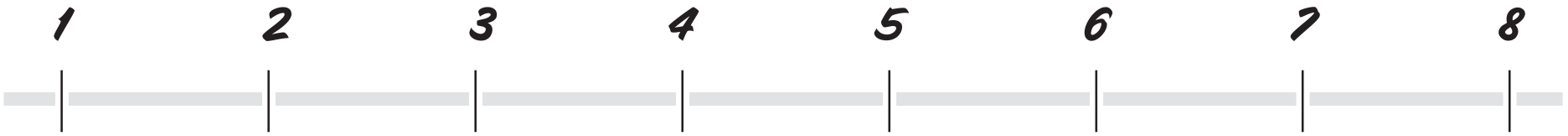
Unanimity means that every person has said "yes." But "yes" does not necessarily mean, "Yes, this is a great idea." It could also mean, "Yes… well… I have reservations, but I guess I can work them out when we implement it," or even, "Yes, though actually I don't much care for this idea, but I'll go along with the majority. I want to be seen as a team player."

Moreover, someone who says "no" is saying, in effect, "I require the group to spend more time on this discussion." Most group members are reluctant to be that person. Who wants to be the one dragging things out?

Thus, the "yes-no" language is a fundamental problem. To strive for unanimity, group members need a way to accurately and authentically convey the extent of their support (or non-support) for a proposal.

GRADIENTS OF AGREEMENT

BETTER VOCABULARY



1 Whole-hearted Endorsement

"I really like it."

2 Agreement with a Minor Point of Contention

"Not perfect, but it's good enough."

3 Support with Reservations

"I can live with it."

4 Abstain

"This issue does not affect me."

5 More Discussion Needed

"I don't understand the issues well enough yet."

6 Don't Like But Will Support

"It's not great, but I don't want to hold up the group."

7 Serious Disagreement

"I am not on board with this– don't count on me."

8 Veto

"I block this proposal."

This is the *Gradients of Agreement Scale*. It eliminates the arbitrary confinement of "yes" and "no." Instead, it allows for many possible nuances of meaning, enabling individuals to express support for a proposal in degrees, along a continuum – in line with the way many people actually think.

The *Gradients of Agreement Scale* was developed in 1987 by Sam Kaner, Duane Berger, and the staff of *Community At Work*. With the passing of time this tool has been translated into numerous languages, and it has been adapted for use in organizations large and small throughout the world.

Aloha Sam,

Thank you for your "gradients of agreement" work. Introducing this in the context of a faculty retreat enabled the group to make a major breakthrough regarding an issue critical to the program's future. Extreme polarization moved to enthusiastic support as a result of the description and use of the tool. I've always appreciated the efficacy of the tool, but have seldom seen as dramatic a breakthrough in a relatively short period of time.

January, 2014
Linda Colburn, President
Where Talk Works, Inc.
Honolulu, Hawaii

AS TOLD BY LINDA COLBURN, ACCLAIMED CONSULTANT *

A university faculty member asked for facilitation support to resolve an impasse associated with scenarios for future program development. Results from interviews with individual team members surfaced promising conceptual alignment but also a degradation of trust and an increase in tensions between the parties. The chair invoked involvement of a facilitator to reach an accord the entire team could support.

A *gradients of agreement* template was drawn on a whiteboard along with a preliminary statement describing the most critical issue in dispute. The group modified the statement to better reflect the issue at hand. Each member selected the number on the continuum that best described his / her current thinking about the revised proposition.

Faculty members were permitted to further elaborate on their aspirations, assumptions, and fears regarding the issue at hand. This dialogue afforded them a number of opportunities to seek clarification on key points, supply relevant data, and dispel misunderstandings that had deepened over time.

The faculty were asked to state their position number a second time. Their new positions reflected near unanimous agreement to move forward with the proposed initiative. They volunteered to work on collectively determined tasks, and they mapped out an implementation timetable.

There was a discernible improvement in their interactions as evidenced by a marked reduction in interruptions and challenging behavior. The engagement level balanced out as group members offered to take on various tasks to move the effort forward.

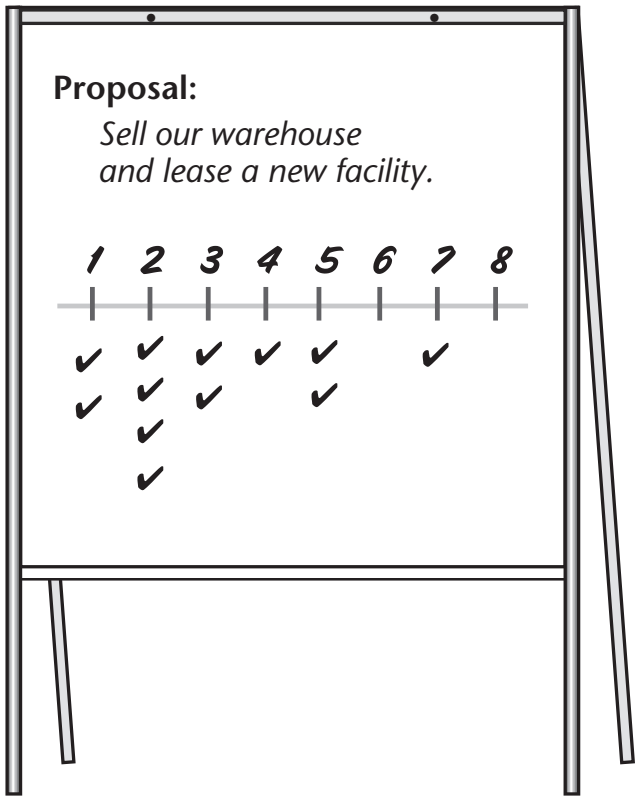
This process helped the group:

- better understand their colleagues' actual motivations and concerns;
- arrive at shared definitions of key terms;
- realize they were actually more aligned in their thinking than their earlier, polarized positions suggested; and
- move forward collectively as a team with less concern about passive-aggressive resistance or sabotage.

The *Gradients of Agreement* tool provided a face-saving and systematic framework for clarifying a collectively crafted path forward.

* Linda Colburn has long been regarded as one of Hawaii's leading collaboration specialists. A chapter of *When Talk Works* by Deborah Kolb, (Jossey-Bass 1997) described Linda's practice as a mediator. The book profiles 12 accomplished mediators including Jimmy Carter.

HOW TO USE THE GRADIENTS OF AGREEMENT SCALE



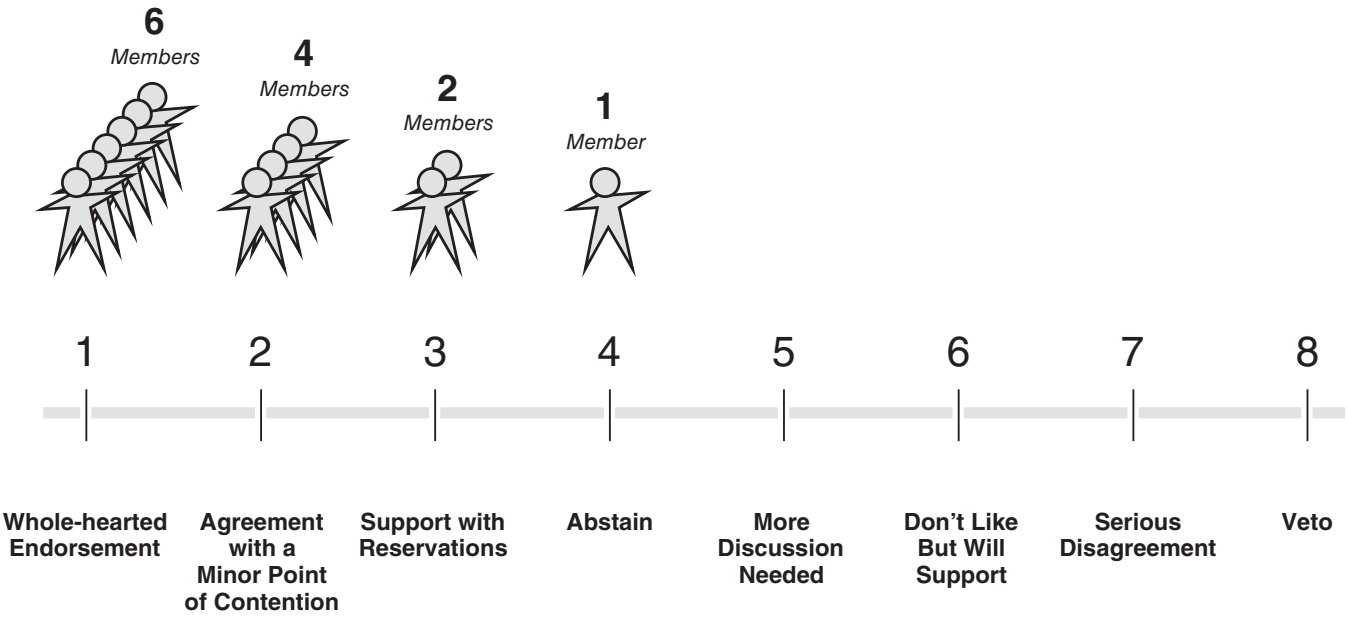
If you prefer, you can show the *Gradients of Agreement* early in a meeting, offering it as a tool that requires endorsement from the group. Or you can wait and introduce it when the time arrives to make a substantive decision.

When using the scale to take a poll, follow these steps:

Step 1: Record the proposal being discussed on a flipchart.
Step 2: Check to see that everyone understands the proposal.
Step 3: Ask for final revisions in the wording of the proposal.
Step 4: Draw a "scorecard" below the proposal, as shown on this page.
Step 5: Define the gradients. (For example, "#1" means "I really like it.")
Step 6: Ask the group, "On this proposal, where do each of you stand?"
Step 7: Take the poll. Capture everyone's positions on the scorecard.

Be sure the group understands that this process is not a vote; it's just a poll. The results show *level of support* for a proposal; no decision has been made.

GRADIENTS OF AGREEMENT IN ACTION: ENTHUSIASTIC SUPPORT

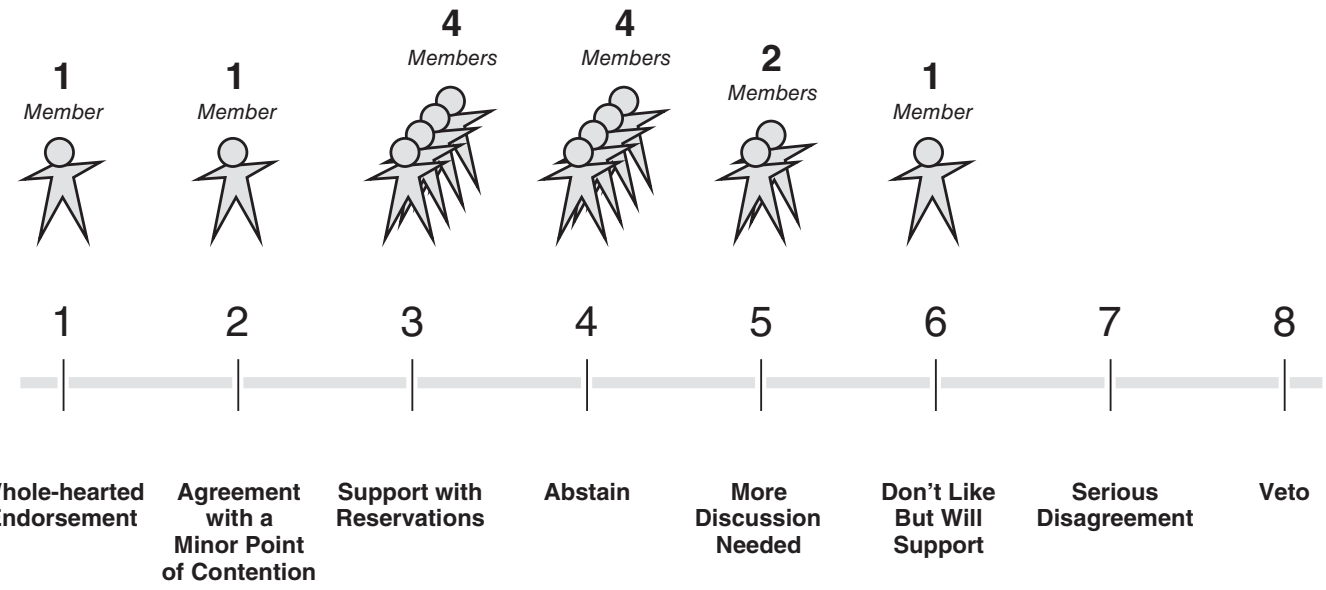


This diagram portrays the result of a hypothetical poll, taken in a group of 13 members. The pattern of responses – also known as "the spread" – indicates a high level of enthusiastic support for the proposal.

An agreement based on this much support will usually produce a successful implementation. After all, six members of the group are whole-hearted in their endorsement, and the others are not too far behind. One could reasonably expect that these participants would care about the results they produce.

Words like *buy-in* and *ownership* carry the same connotation as *enthusiastic support* – they express the depth of enthusiasm and commitment groups experience when they engage in a high-quality thinking process.

GRADIENTS OF AGREEMENT IN ACTION: LUKEWARM SUPPORT



This diagram portrays a different result. Here, the spread indicates significantly less enthusiasm for the proposal. Nonetheless, this spread also indicates unanimous agreement. Not one person would veto this proposal and block it from going forward. In fact, there is no serious disagreement here whatsoever.

For many purposes, lukewarm support is perfectly adequate. For example, when the stakes are low, it is usually not worth pushing for a higher level of support. But in other cases, when achieving a goal will require high motivation and sustained effort, lukewarm support won't get the job done.

WHEN TO SEEK ENTHUSIASTIC SUPPORT

Enthusiastic support is desirable whenever the stakes are so high that the consequences of failure would be severe. By contrast, when the stakes are lower, a group may not wish to invest the time and energy it takes to develop enthusiastic support.

Some decisions are not easily reversible – for example, the decision to relocate headquarters to a new city. Decisions like these are worth spending whatever time it takes to get them right. But other decisions – such as the question of how to staff a project during an employee's two-week vacation – have a short life-span. To get such a decision perfectly right might take longer than the entire lifetime of the decision.

The chief factors that make problems hard to solve are complexity, ambiguity, and the severity of conflict.* The tougher the problem is, the more time and effort a group should expect to expend. Routine problems, by contrast, don't require long-drawn-out discussions.

When many people have a stake in the outcome of the decision, it is more likely to be worth the effort to include everyone's thinking in the development of that decision. When the decision affects only a few people, the process need not be as inclusive.

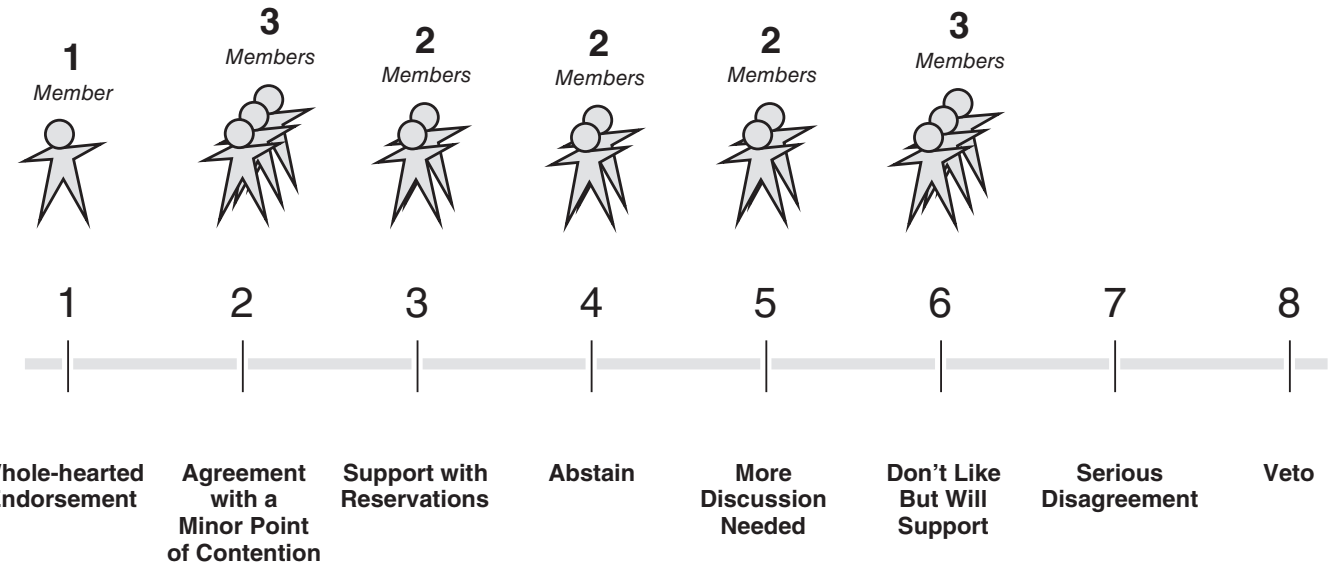
The more likely it is that members will be expected to use their own judgment and creativity to implement a decision, the more they will need to understand the reasoning behind that decision. The process of seeking enthusiastic support pushes people to think through the logic of the issues at hand.

*Source: Paul C. Nutt, *Solving Tough Problems* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1989).

WHAT LEVEL OF SUPPORT IS OPTIMAL?

Enthusiastic Support **is necessary when the issue involves:**		***Lukewarm Support*** **is good enough when the issue involves:**
HIGH STAKES	OVERALL IMPORTANCE	LOW STAKES
LONG-TERM IMPACT	DURATION OF IMPACT	SHORT-TERM ONLY
TOUGH PROBLEM	DIFFICULTY OF THE PROBLEM	SIMPLE PROBLEM
HIGH INVESTMENT	STAKEHOLDER BUY-IN	LOW INVESTMENT
HIGH AUTONOMY	EMPOWERMENT OF GROUP MEMBERS	LOW AUTONOMY

GRADIENTS OF AGREEMENT IN ACTION: AMBIGUOUS SUPPORT

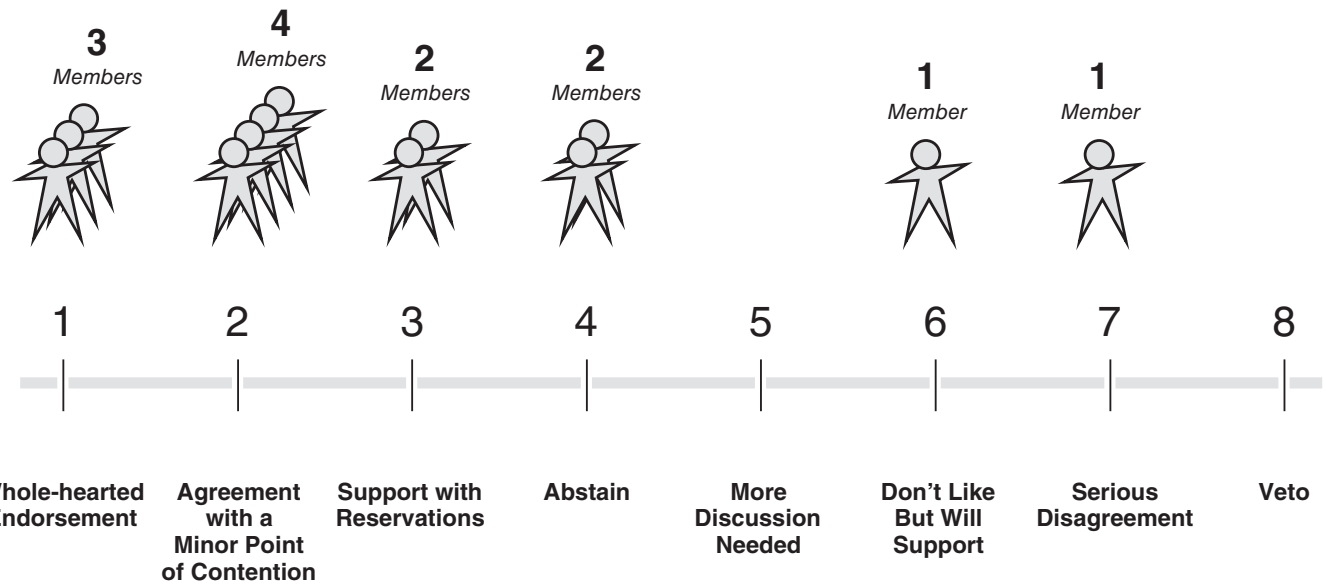


This diagram portrays a group of people who are all over the map in their response to the proposal. The group would surely benefit from more discussion.

Ambiguous results frequently indicate that the original problem has not been defined effectively. As Michael Doyle and David Straus have stated, "You can't agree on the solution if you don't agree on the problem."*

* Source: M. Doyle and D. Straus, *Making Meetings Work* (New York: Berkeley Books, 1993).

GRADIENTS OF AGREEMENT IN ACTION: MAJORITY SUPPORT WITH OUTLIERS

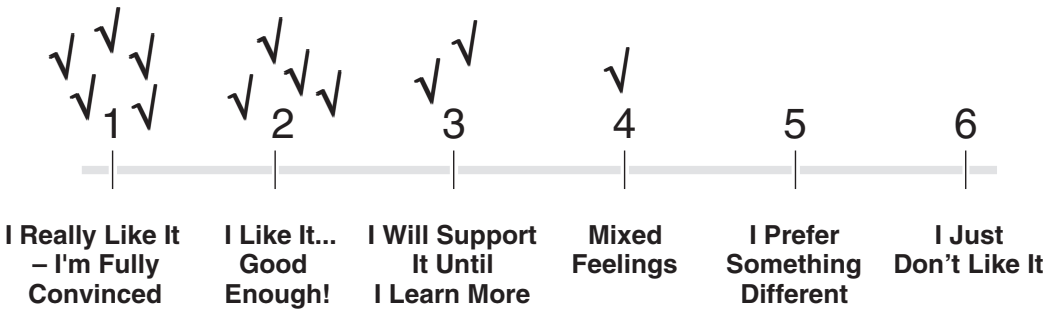


This spread is surprisingly common. When it occurs, the question arises as to whether the group should disregard the objections of the outliers or whether the group should keep making efforts to resolve those objections.

Often the person-in-charge of the group will try for a compromise, asking those with objections if they can suggest remedies that would increase their level of support. Sometimes this works.

But not always. It depends on whether or not there is a benefit in obtaining enthusiastic support for the eventual decision. When everyone's strong support is needed, lukewarm compromises will not do. In those cases, the group must continue searching for a genuinely inclusive solution.

ADAPTING THE GRADIENTS OF AGREEMENT SCALE



This adaptation of the *Gradients of Agreement Scale* was created by Pierre Omidyar, and used effectively by several planning groups at *Omidyar Network*, in 2006-2007.*

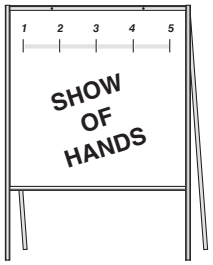
* Used with permission

Many group leaders prefer to create their own set of gradients, whether to suit their leadership style or to fit the group's culture. To assist in this effort:

1. Explain the benefits of using *Gradients of Agreement.*
2. Show the "generic scale" – the one used throughout this chapter.
3. Ask whether s/he would like to customize the scale.
4. Once the person-in-charge has revised the scale, have him or her present the scale to the group, soliciting further revisions if desired.

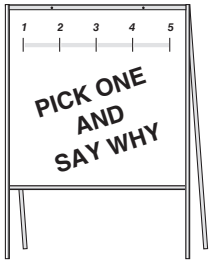
Even when a group uses the generic scale for the first few decisions, it is entirely fine for the leader (or the participants) to propose modifications at a later time.

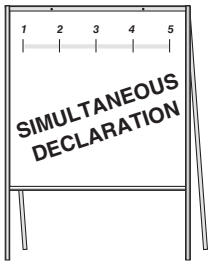
METHODS OF POLLING THE GROUP



Say, "Please raise your hands if you are a '1'." Record the data on a flipchart. Now say, "Please raise your hands if you are a '2'." Repeat for all gradients.

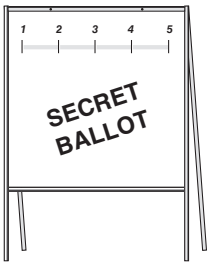
Go around the room and ask each person to state which gradient s/he prefers and why. No discussion is allowed. Record each preference on a flipchart.

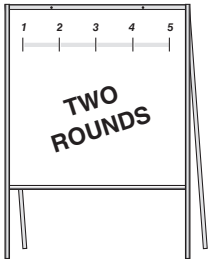




Have each person write his or her preference on a sheet of paper. On cue, have everyone hold up his or her card. Record the totals on a flipchart.

Have each person write his or her preference on a slip of paper. When everyone is done, collect the ballots and tally results. Post totals on a flipchart.





Before beginning, explain that there will be a preliminary poll followed by a brief discussion and then a final poll. Gather the first poll's data in any of the ways listed above. After a brief, time-limited discussion, poll again. This method lets people see where others stand before stating final preferences.

Meeting Focus Ideas

Tips on How to Lead a Meeting

This is meant to be just a guideline, do not overwhelm your pod members with asking all these questions at once if they are not comfortable. Use your best judgement. This should be more of a conversation.

Questions to Ask Your Members:

Are you proud of the choices you made this week?

What were the guides you watched?

What goal did you work on this week?

In what ways were you 1% better than your previous self?

What have you learned since last week?

Do you have any questions (point them to resources, if that doesn't help then have them reach out for help).

12 things to do daily for personal success:

Get sunlight (or happy lamp) within 2 hours of waking up

Weigh yourself.

Drink between 8-12oz of water before each meal or snack.

Eat a whole fruit (this means with the skin on) before each meal or as a meal.

Get movement. Try to keep improving and increasing your steps or time.

Take pictures of your food, be mindful of what you are eating.

Keep track of every day's WIN.

Write and say out loud an affirmation daily.

Check in with a friend who makes a positive impact on your life.

Bedtime routine – close at least 5 doors.

Overhead lights dimmed 2 hours ahead of bedtime.

Suggested Structured Meeting Framework

Each pod meeting can follow a structured format with flexibility to adapt based on the group's needs. Below is a suggested agenda:

1. Opening (10-15 minutes)
Purpose: Set the tone, build rapport, and establish focus for the meeting.

- **Welcome and Check-In:**
  - Start with a quick icebreaker or "roundtable check-in."
  - Ask members to share:
    - One success or positive update since the last meeting.
    - One challenge they're currently facing.
      (Example: "What's one win you're proud of from this week, and what's one thing you'd like support with today?")

- **Review Meeting Goals:**
  - State the purpose of today's meeting. *(Example: "Today, we'll focus on strategies for managing setbacks and setting achievable goals for the next week.")*

2. Education/Skill Development (20-30 minutes)
Purpose: Provide a focused topic or skill that benefits the pod members' goals.

- **Present a Mini-Topic:**

  - Share a short, actionable lesson or discussion based on common pod challenges. Examples:

    1. **Health & Wellness:** "How to Manage Triggers for Sustainable Eating Habits."
    2. **Mindset:** "Overcoming Perfectionism and Building Resilience."
    3. **Productivity:** "How to Prioritize Micro-Steps for Long-Term Success."
    4. **Stress Management:** "Practical Techniques for Immediate Stress Reduction."
  - Use stories or examples from your own journey or the Kaizen Method to make it relatable.

- **Interactive Discussion:**
    - After presenting the topic, ask open-ended questions to engage the group:
        - "What resonated most with you about this?"
        - "How could you apply this to your goals?"

3. Peer Problem-Solving/Support (30 minutes)
Purpose: Foster community by allowing members to learn from and support one another.

- **Spotlight Sharing:**
    - Invite 1-2 members to share a specific challenge they're facing. *(Example: "Does anyone have a challenge they'd like help brainstorming solutions for?")*
- **Facilitated Brainstorming:**
    - Guide the group in offering constructive feedback and ideas:
        1. Encourage questions to clarify the issue.
        2. Prompt members to share similar experiences or solutions that worked for them.
        3. Help summarize and prioritize actionable next steps for the person in the "spotlight."
- **Follow-Up:**
    - Confirm that members feel supported and have clear steps. *(Example: "What's one thing you'll try before our next meeting?")*

4. Action Planning (15-20 minutes)

Purpose: Help members set realistic and measurable goals.

- **SMART Goals Setting:**
    - Guide each member in defining their specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) goals. *(Example: "Instead of 'I'll walk more,' try 'I'll walk 5,000 steps daily for the next 7 days.'")*

- **Accountability Pairing (Optional):**
    - Pair members to check in on each other's progress mid-week.
      (Example: "Let's pair up so you can encourage each other to stay on track with your steps or meal planning.")

5. Closing (10-15 minutes)

Purpose: Reinforce key takeaways and maintain momentum.

- **Recap Key Points:**
    - Summarize the most important ideas from the meeting.
      (Example: "Today, we explored ways to overcome setbacks and set small, meaningful goals. Remember, progress isn't linear, but consistency is key.")
- **Action Commitments:**
    - Ask each member to state their primary goal out loud to reinforce accountability.
      (Example: "Let's go around and share what you'll focus on this week.")
- **Encouragement & Reflection:**
    - End with a motivational quote or reflection question.
      (Example: "What's one thing you're grateful for today?")
- **Next Meeting Reminder:**
    - Confirm the date, time, and focus of the next pod meeting.

Additional Tips for Meetings

1. **Rotating Roles:**

   Assign roles to encourage participation:

    - A timekeeper to keep discussions on track.
    - A note-taker to record key insights and goals.

2. **Follow-Up Communication:**

   After the meeting, send a quick recap via email or chat, including:

   - Highlights of the discussion.
   - Members' stated goals.
   - Any resources or tools shared during the meeting.

3. **Use Tools to Foster Engagement:**

   Incorporate tools like:

   - **Shared tracking apps** (e.g., for steps or wellness goals).
   - **Visual aids** (e.g., slides or diagrams for skill-building topics).
   - **Interactive polls or quizzes** to make sessions dynamic.

Sample Meeting Agendas

Here are sample tailored meeting agendas for each challenge: **managing setbacks**, **increasing activity**, and **long-term habit sustainability.** Each agenda includes interactive components to engage your meetings and actionable steps to keep members motivated.

Meeting Focus: Managing Setbacks

Meeting Objective: Help pod members reframe setbacks, learn from challenges, and create actionable strategies to move forward.

Agenda:

1. Opening (10 minutes)

- **Check-In:**
    - Ask members to share one recent setback and how it made them feel.
      (Example: "What's one thing that didn't go as planned this week, and how did you handle it?")
- **Meeting Focus:**
    - Introduce today's theme: "Setbacks are stepping stones, not stop signs."

2. Education/Skill Development (20 minutes)

- **Mini-Lesson:**
    - Teach members how to reframe setbacks as learning opportunities. Key points:
        1. **Normalize Setbacks:** Explain that setbacks are inevitable and part of growth.
        2. **Identify Root Causes:** Use reflective questions to understand what led to the setback.
        3. **Develop a Plan:** Emphasize small, specific adjustments.

Example Activity:

- Share a personal story about a setback you've experienced (e.g., dietary slip-ups or missed steps) and how you turned it into a learning moment.

3. Peer Problem-Solving (30 minutes)

- **Spotlight Activity:**
    - Ask 1-2 members to share a specific setback in detail.
    - Facilitate group brainstorming to identify possible solutions and strategies.
- **Guiding Questions for the Group:**
    - What might have triggered this setback?
    - What's one small adjustment that could prevent it next time?
    - How can we support this person moving forward?

4. Action Planning (15 minutes)

- **Goal Setting:**
    - Ask members to set one goal to address a recent or ongoing setback.
      (Example: "Instead of skipping a workout after a busy day, I'll aim for 5 minutes of light stretching to stay consistent.")
- **Accountability Pairing:**
    - Pair members to check in mid-week for encouragement and progress updates.

5. Closing (10 minutes)

- **Key Takeaways:**
    - Reinforce that setbacks are temporary and valuable for growth.
      (Example: "What you learn from setbacks builds the resilience needed for long-term success.")
- **Motivational Quote:**
    - Share a quote like: *"Success is not final; failure is not fatal: It is the courage to continue that counts." – Winston Churchill*
- **Next Steps:**
    - Confirm the next meeting and encourage members to reflect on today's strategies.

Setback Tracking Chart

Suggested usage:

1. Fill in mentee names
2. Record setbacks in weekly columns using brief descriptions
3. Use the Resolution Status column to track progress
4. Consider using color coding in Excel:
    - Red: Critical setbacks
    - Yellow: Moderate setbacks
    - Green: Minor setbacks

You can add additional columns for:

- Priority level
- Action items
- Follow-up dates
- Notes/Comments

Meeting Focus: Increasing Activity

Meeting Objective: Motivate members to incorporate more movement into their daily routines and overcome barriers to staying active.

Agenda:

1. Opening (10 minutes)

- **Check-In:**
    - Ask members to share their current activity levels and how they feel about them.
      (Example: "What's one way you moved your body this week that felt good?")
- **Meeting Focus:**
    - Highlight the importance of finding joy in movement and making small, manageable changes.

2. Education/Skill Development (20 minutes)

- **Mini-Lesson:**
    - Teach members how to overcome common barriers to activity. Key tips:
        1. **Make it Convenient:** Identify opportunities for movement in daily routines (e.g., walking during calls).
        2. **Focus on Small Wins:** Start with micro-goals like 500 extra steps per day.
        3. **Find Joy:** Encourage fun activities like dancing, hiking, or playing with family.
- **Interactive Activity:**
    - Lead a short stretching or movement break during the meeting to show how easy it is to incorporate activity into the day.

3. Peer Problem-Solving (30 minutes)

- **Brainstorming Session:**
    - Ask members to share their biggest obstacles to staying active.
    - Facilitate group brainstorming for practical solutions.
- **Guiding Questions for the Group:**
    - What's one way you could add more movement without feeling overwhelmed?
    - What activities do you genuinely enjoy?

4. Action Planning (15 minutes)

- **Setting Activity Goals:**
    - Help members create specific, measurable activity goals. *(Example: "I'll walk for 10 minutes after dinner every day this week.")*
- **Tracking Progress:**
    - Suggest using tools like a pedometer or smartphone app to track steps or minutes of activity.

5. Closing (10 minutes)

- **Key Takeaways:**
    - Reinforce that every small movement matters. *(Example: "It's not about being perfect—it's about being consistent.")*
- **Motivational Quote:**
    - Share a quote like: *"Movement is a medicine for creating change in a person's physical, emotional, and mental states." – Carol Welch*
- **Next Steps:**
    - Encourage members to check in with their accountability partners mid-week.

Increasing Activity Chart

Here is an increasing activity chart. It is a tool used to track and visualize the progress of activities or tasks over time.

Here's how to effectively use such a chart:

1. Define Your Goals:

- Identify Activities: Choose specific activities to monitor.
- Set Objectives: Determine what you want to achieve (e.g., increase productivity, fitness levels, project milestones).

2. Choose a Format:

- Chart Type: Decide on the chart type (line, bar, or area chart) that best represents your data.
- Time Frame: Choose a time interval for tracking (daily, weekly, monthly).

3. Collect Data:

- Monitoring: Regularly record the data points for each activity, noting both quantitative measures (e.g., hours worked, tasks completed) and qualitative aspects (e.g., effort level).
- Consistency: Ensure data collection is consistent to maintain accurate tracking.

4. Plot the Data:

- Input Information: Enter the data points into the chart at regular intervals.
- Visualize Trends: Use the chart to visualize trends over time. An upward trend indicates increased activity or progress.

5. Analyze Results:

- Review Patterns: Look for patterns, peaks, and troughs in the data.
- Identify Factors: Analyze what factors contributed to increases (or decreases) in activity levels.

6. Adjust Plans:

- Adapt Strategies: Based on your analysis, adjust your strategies to improve activity levels. This might include setting new goals, reallocating resources, or changing schedules.
- Set New Benchmarks: Use the information gathered to set new benchmarks for the future.

7. Regular Review:

- Ongoing Checks: Schedule regular reviews of the chart to stay on track.
- Modify as Needed: Update your goals and activities based on what is working and what isn't.

Tips for Effective Use:

- Visual Clarity: Ensure the chart is clear and easy to read.
- Annotations: Use annotations to explain significant changes in activity levels.
- Collaboration: If applicable, involve team members to gain insights and foster accountability.

By following these steps, you can effectively use an increasing activity chart to monitor progress and make informed decisions to enhance productivity.

Meeting Focus: Long-Term Habit Sustainability

Meeting Objective: Teach strategies for creating and maintaining habits that stick over the long term.

Agenda:

1. Opening (10 minutes)

- **Check-In:**
    - Ask members to share one habit they've maintained and one they've struggled with.
      (Example: "What's one habit you've kept up recently, and what's one you'd like to improve?")
- **Meeting Focus:**
    - Discuss the science of habit formation and how to make habits sustainable.

2. Education/Skill Development (20 minutes)

- **Mini-Lesson:**
    - Teach the key components of habit sustainability:
        1. **Start Small:** Begin with habits that feel effortless to build momentum.
        2. **Attach to Existing Routines:** Use habit stacking (e.g., "After brushing my teeth, I'll do 5 squats.").
        3. **Reward Progress:** Celebrate small wins to reinforce positive behavior.
- **Interactive Example:**
    - Share how you've built and maintained a sustainable habit, such as consistent meal tracking or hitting 10,000 steps daily.

3. Peer Problem-Solving (30 minutes)

- **Spotlight Activity:**
    - Ask 1-2 members to share a habit they're struggling to sustain.
    - Facilitate group brainstorming to refine their approach.
- **Guiding Questions for the Group:**
    - Is the habit too ambitious? How can it be simplified?
    - What reminders or cues could help make it stick?

4. Action Planning (15 minutes)

- **Sustainable Habits Goals:**
    - Guide members to set one habit-building goal for the week. *(Example: "I'll drink a glass of water with breakfast every morning.")*
- **Accountability Plan:**
    - Encourage members to share progress updates in your pod's chat group.

5. Closing (10 minutes)

- **Key Takeaways:**
    - Reinforce the importance of consistency over perfection. *(Example: "Success is built on small, repeatable actions over time.")*
- **Motivational Quote:**
    - Share a quote like: *"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit." – Aristotle*
- **Next Steps:**
    - Remind members to reflect on their progress before the next meeting.

Long Term Sustainability Chart

Suggested Performance Indicators:

- Exceeding Target: 🟢
- Meeting Target: 🟡
- Below Target: 🔴

Additional Tracking Features:

1. **Goals Set**
   - Specific sustainability targets
   - Timeline for achievement
   - Measurable outcomes

2. **Weekly Progress**
   - Percentage completion
   - Key achievements
   - Challenges faced

3. **Monthly Target**
   - Year-end goals
   - Cumulative progress
   - Impact assessment

4. **Sustainability Metrics**
   - Environmental impact
   - Resource consumption
   - Waste management
   - Energy efficiency

Recommended Add-ons:

- Implementation strategies
- Resource allocation
- Training completed
- Best practices shared
- Innovation initiatives

A chart can be created and customized in Excel with:

- Dropdown menus for status updates
- Conditional formatting for visual tracking
- Automated calculations for progress
- Data visualization options
- Comment sections for detailed notes

A Full Time Facilitator?

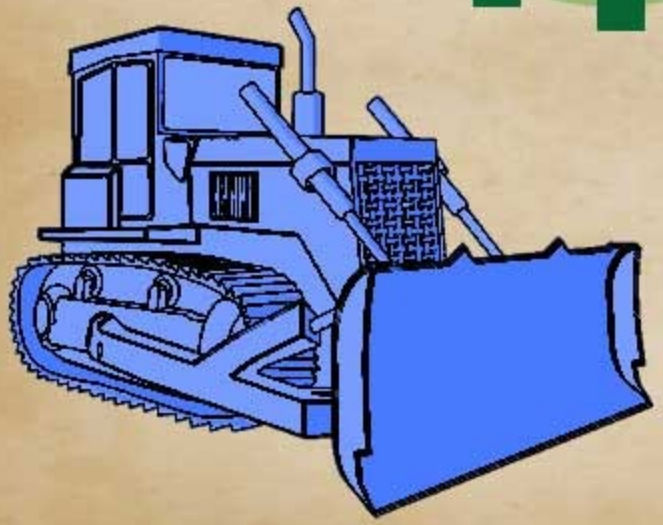
An adequate Scrum Master can handle two or three teams at a time. If you're content to limit your role to organizing meetings, enforcing timeboxes, and responding to the impediments people explicitly report, you can get by with part time attention to this role. Probably nothing catastrophic will happen.

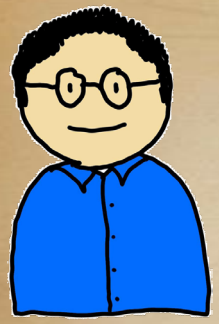
But if you envision a team that succeeds at things they didn't previously realize they could do, consider being a *great* Scrum Master.

A great Scrum Master can handle *one* team at a time.

We recommend one dedicated Scrum Master per team of about six when starting out.

Source: scrummasterchecklist.org

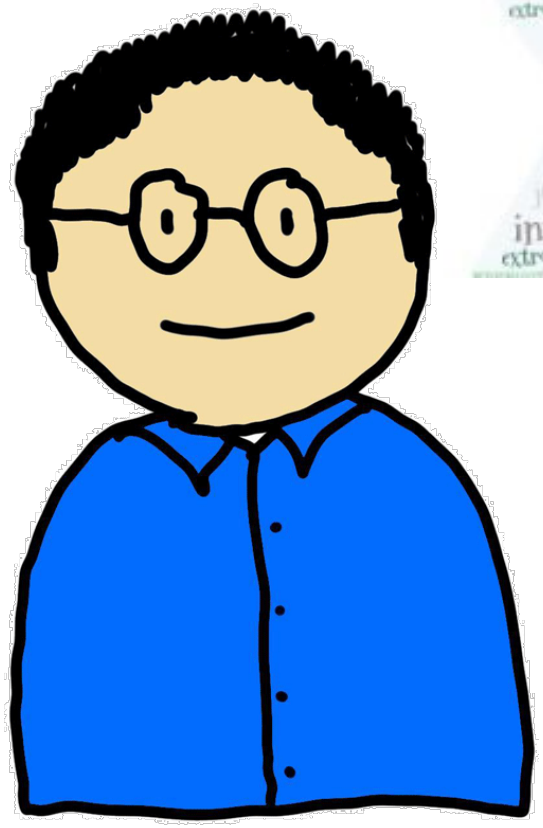




Serving the Organization

- Leading, training, and coaching the organization in its Scrum adoption;
- Planning and advising Scrum implementations within the organization;
- Helping employees and stakeholders understand and enact an empirical approach for complex work; and,
- Removing barriers between stakeholders and Scrum Teams.

Source: Scrum Guide



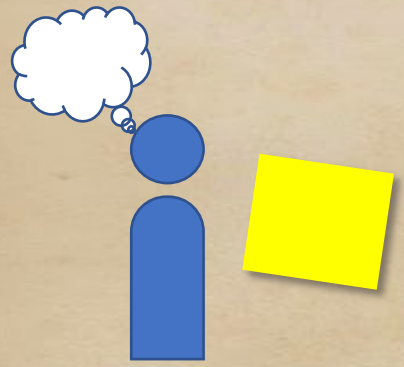
Scrum Master Facilitator

Time Box: 6 Min.

What are the personality traits of an excellent Scrum Master?

liberatingstructures.com

1



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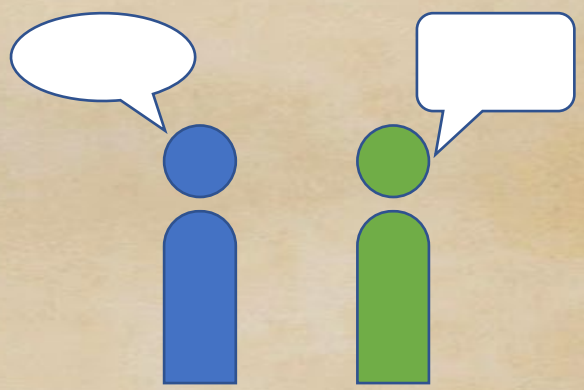

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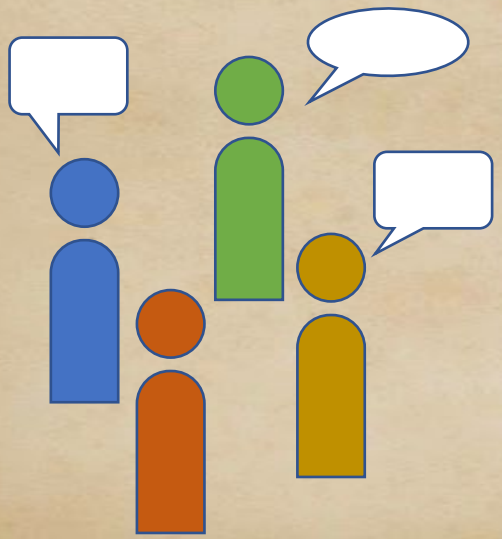

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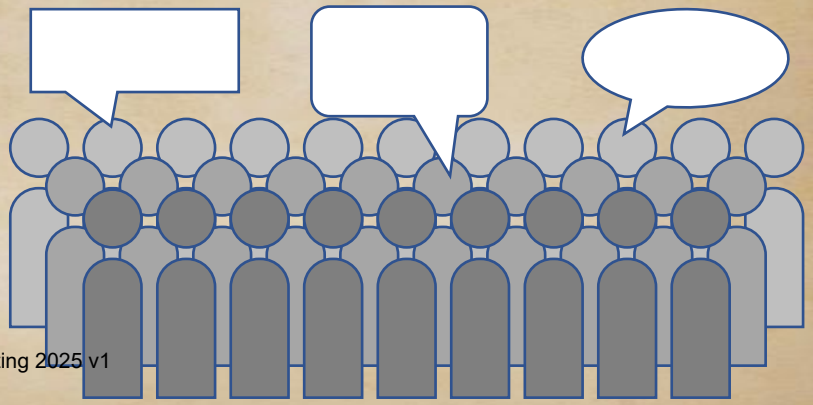


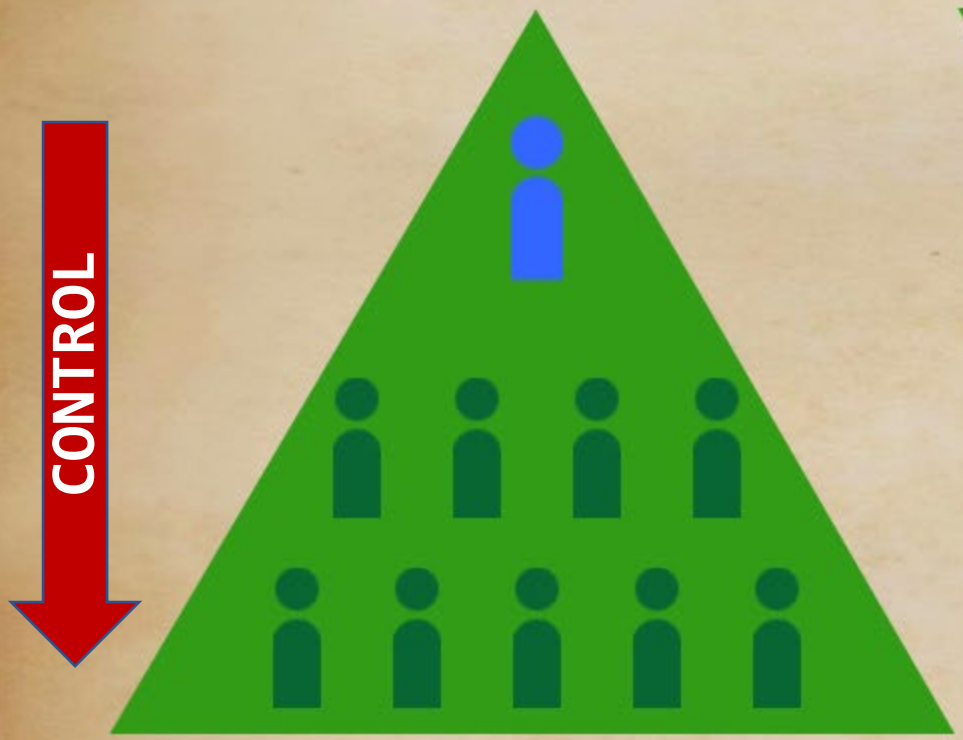
The Breakout Bunch

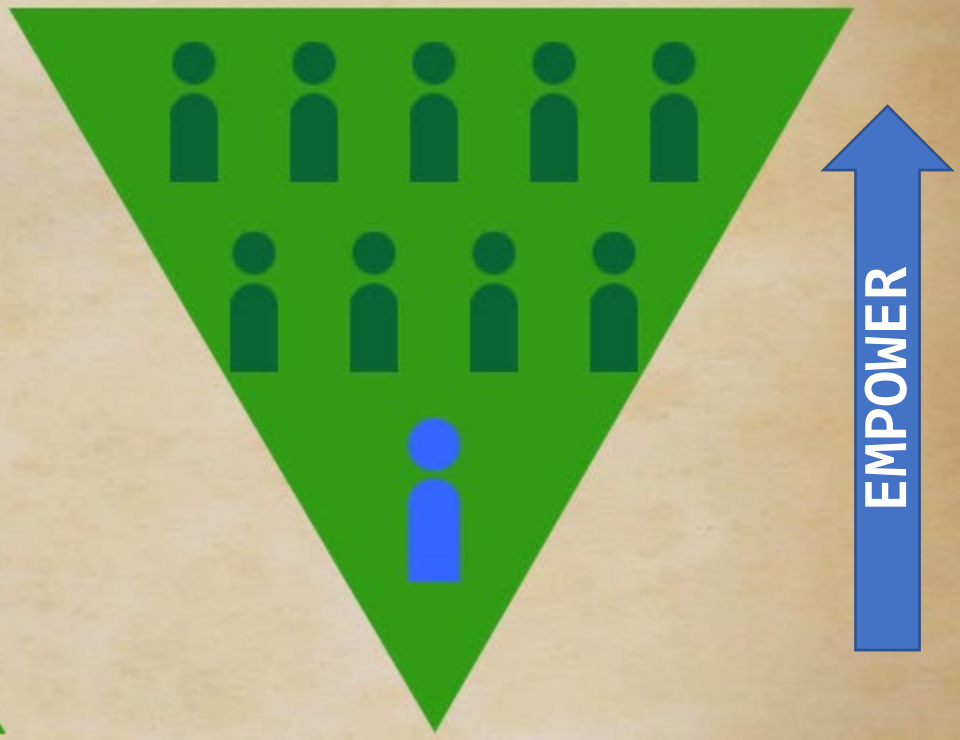
How would you describe Effective Leadership?

What are some key attributes of an effective leader?

Traditional Leadership
(hierarchical teams)

True Leadership
(Agile teams)





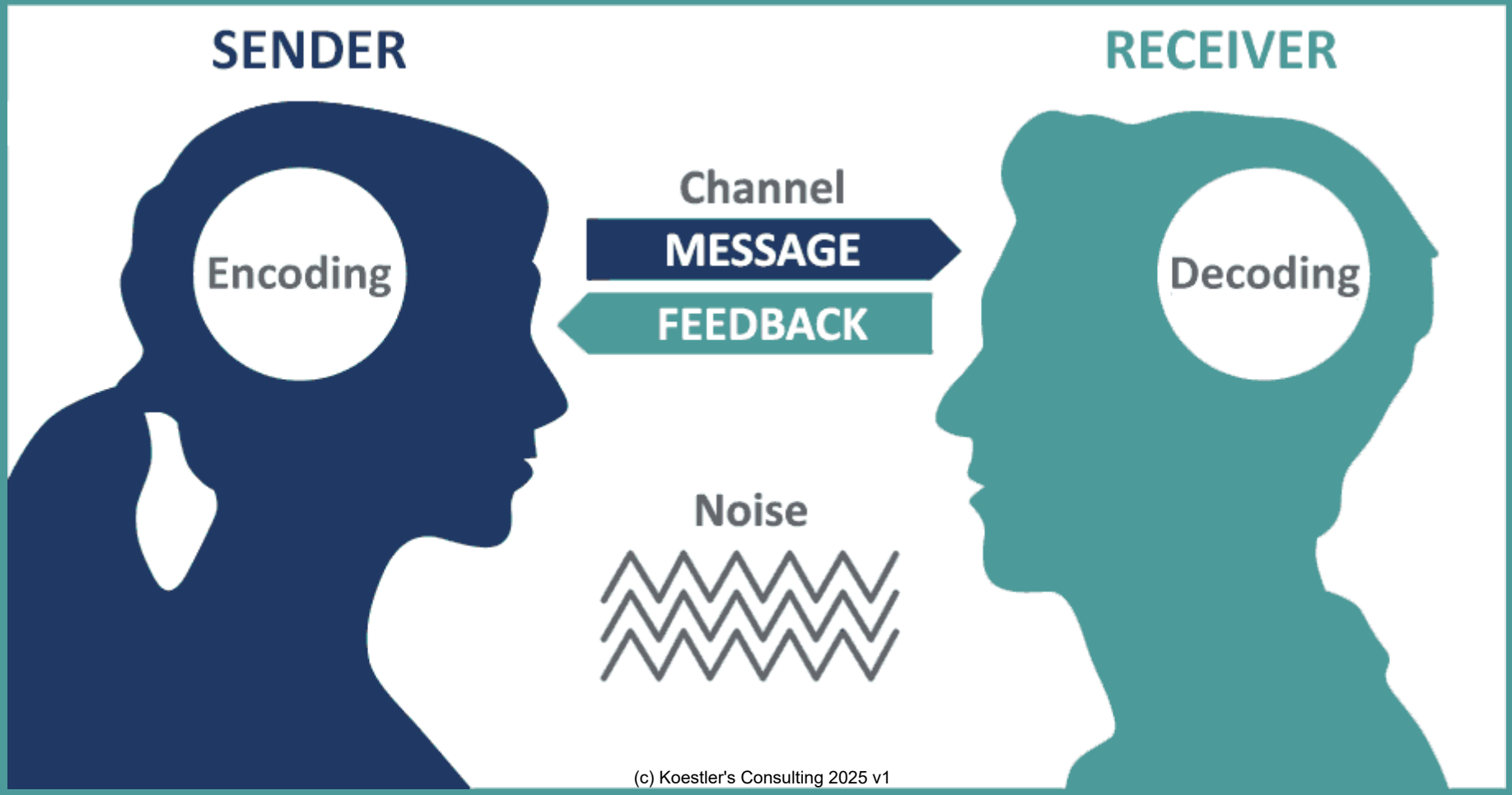
ScrumMaster as Facilitator

- Facilitation: “make easier; help bring about”
  - Clear Communication and Teamwork
- ScrumMaster facilitates:
  - Scrum events as requested or as needed
  - other conversations and meetings as necessary
- Facilitating takes preparation and focus
  - Not merely writing on whiteboard / taking notes
  - Requires paying attention to many ***non-verbal cues*** (e.g. facial expressions and body language)
  - Requires ***actively listening*** *(facilitative listening)*

- **Neutral Facilitator** - not advocating for any one solution
- **Active Facilitator** - not tuning out, typing, etc.
- Help the Scrum Team (Product Owner and Developers) and the Organization reach their goals and continue to improve the delivery of business value with each Sprint

Sender, Receiver, Noise

COMMUNICATION MODEL

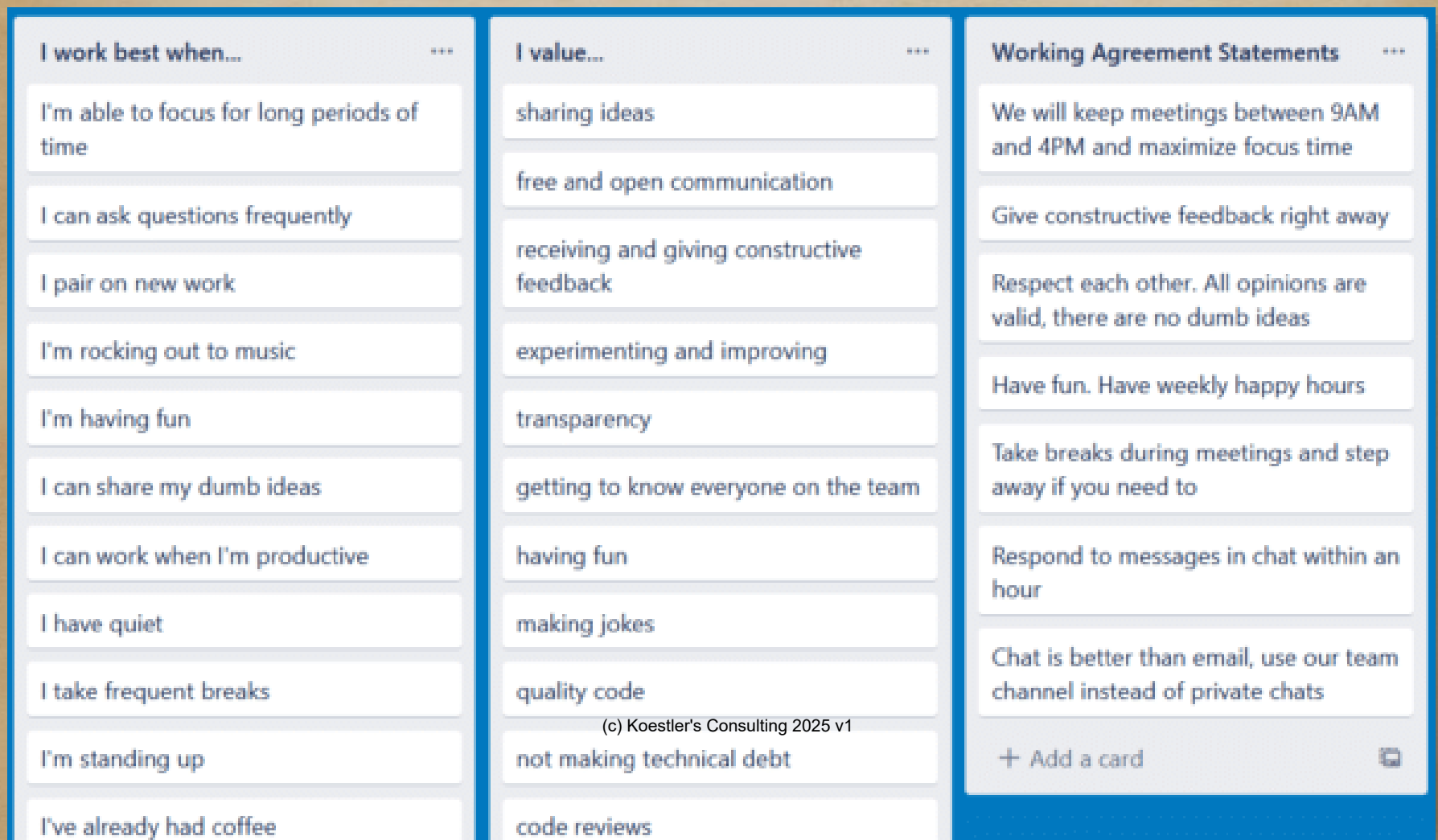


How do we resolve obstacles to Clear Communication?

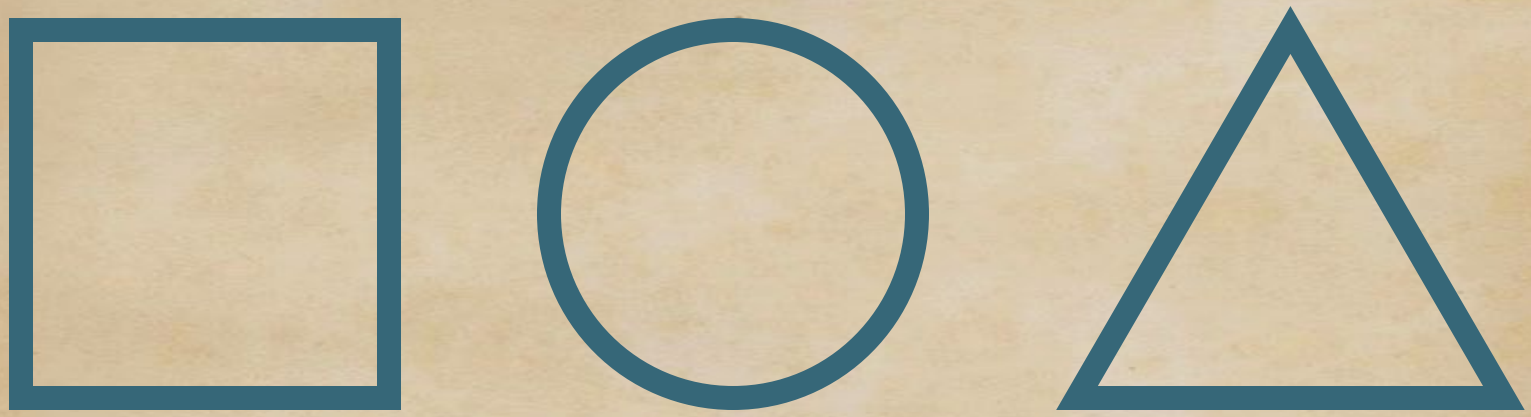
Verbal	Jargon, Slang, Regional language Disorganized messages, Ambiguity Information overload, Tone
Cultural	Attitudinal differences No shared experiences Demographic differences
External	Noise Technology Physiological (health, vision, hearing)

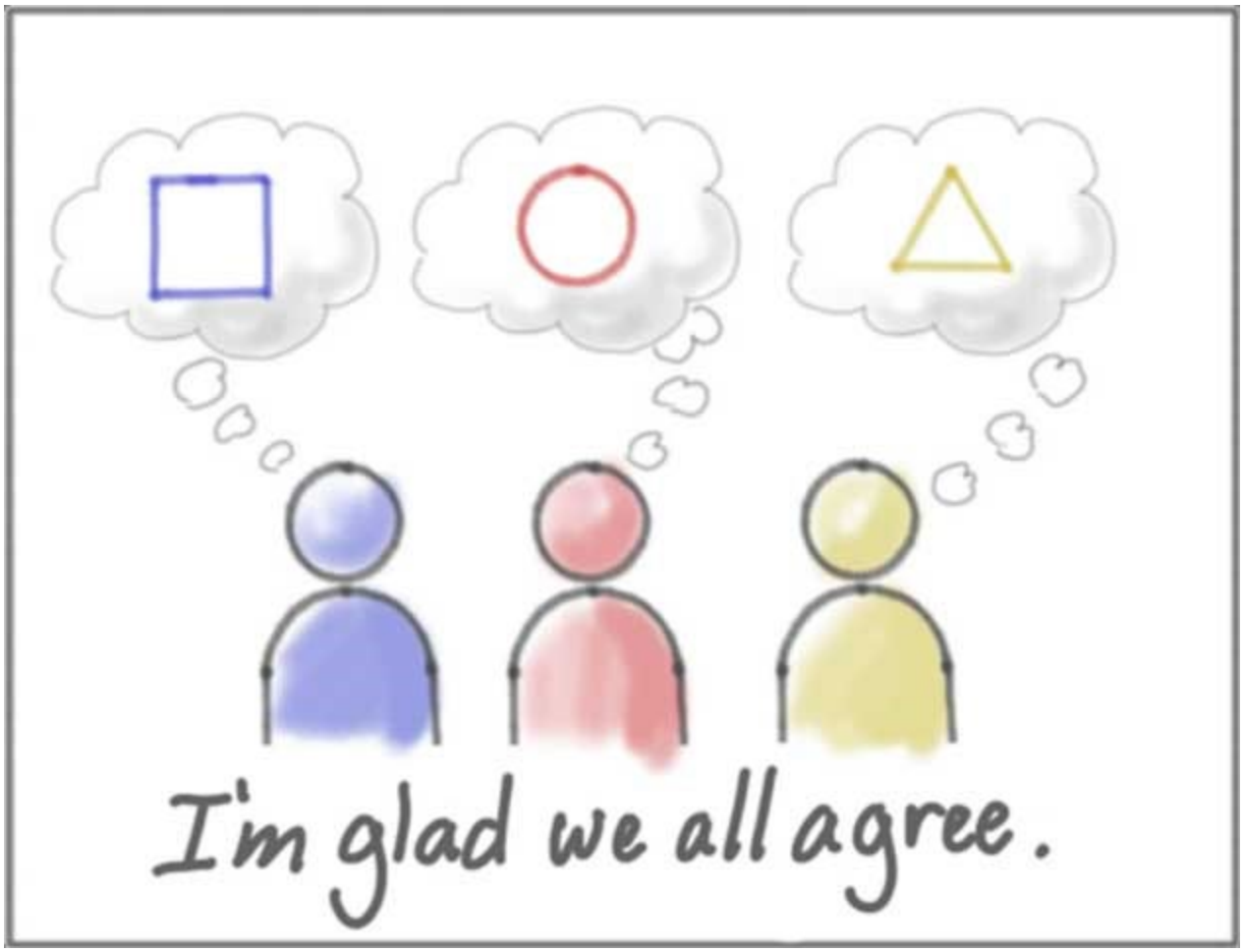
Working Agreements foster Clear Communication and Teamwork

Source: https://www.ruralsourcing.com/blogs/five-steps-for-improving-team-communication-with-working-agreements/



Everyone has their own Unique Frame of Reference



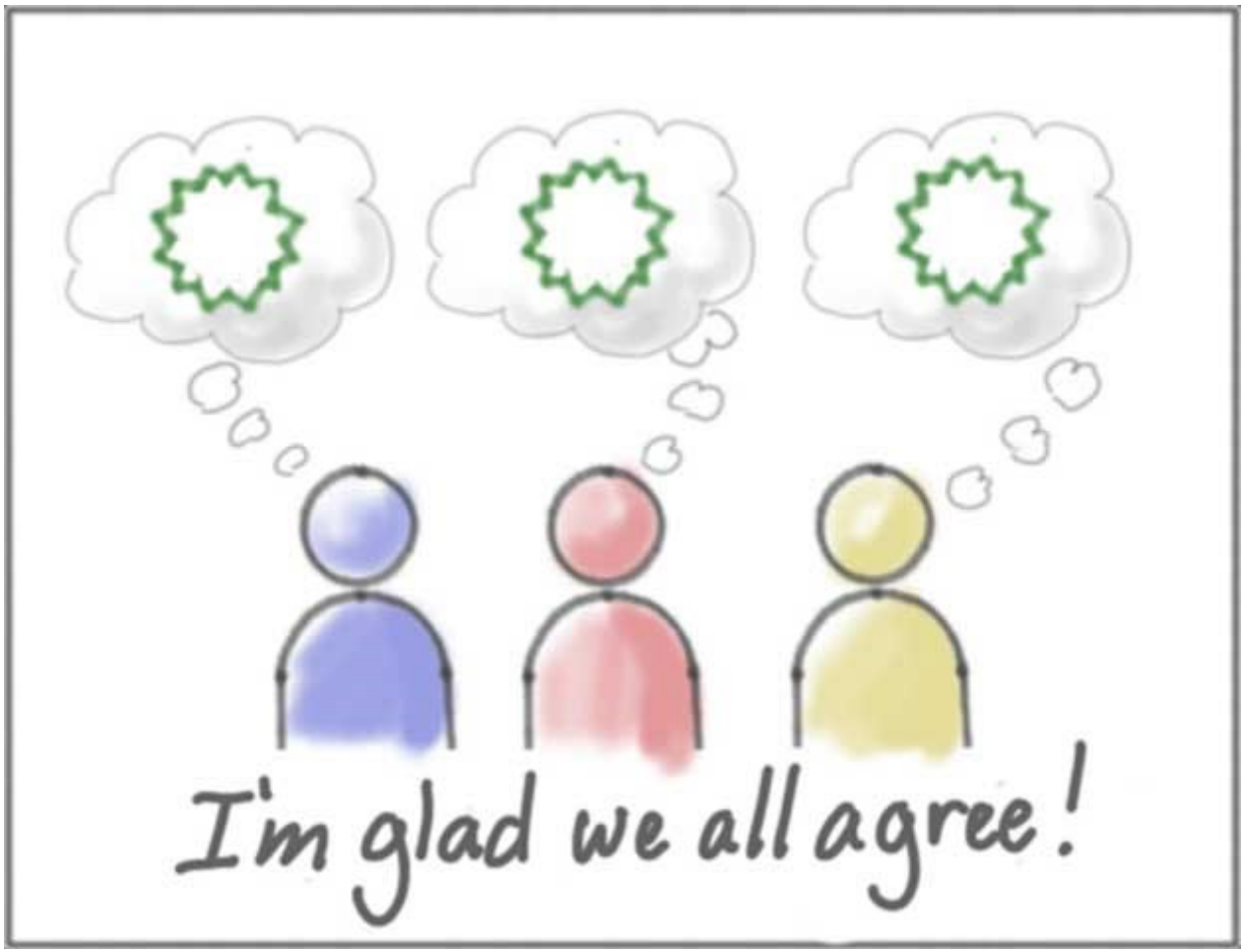


With a shallow discussion,

we each might take away something different.

When we externalize our thinking
with words and pictures, we detect differences.

When we combine and refine,
we arrive at something better.



Afterwards, when we say the same thing, we actually mean it.

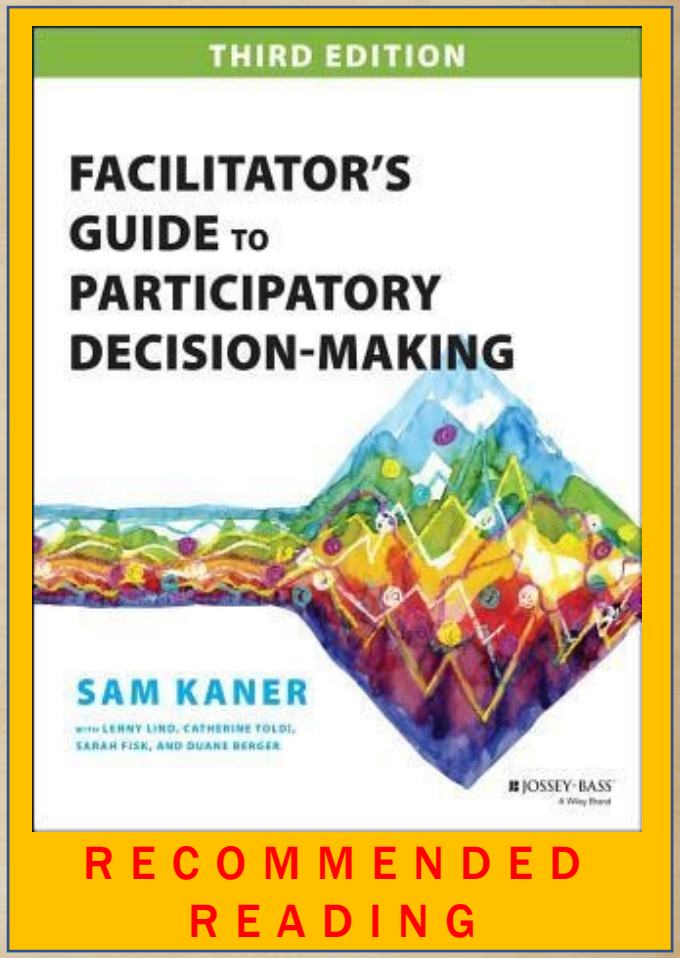
Shared understanding and alignment are the objectives of collaborative work.

✳ Credit for this illustration goes to ThoughtWorks' Luke Barret. Jeff Patton drew these illustrations based on Luke's. Luke doesn't recall where he first saw this cartoon.

Jeff Patton & Associates, jeff@jpattonassociates.com, twitter@jeffpatton

Facilitation Reference: Sam Kaner

- Active listening is also referred to as ***facilitative listening***
- The facilitator's goal is to get participants to listen to each other and collaborate to achieve the session's goal
- It is important for the facilitator to remind participants of their roles and to establish any ground rules or agreements necessary to achieve the goal of the session



RECOMMENDED READING

Facilitative Listening

Kaner offers many Facilitative Listening techniques:

- ***Paraphrasing***: supporting a speaker when thinking out loud and allowing them to review the contribution. An example would begin by saying something like “Let me see if I am understanding you” – then “play back” what was said – close with “Is that right”?

- ***Mirroring***: This can help establish or re-establish your neutrality as a facilitator and is just restating the speaker’s words verbatim.

- ***Making Space*** for a Quiet Person: Offers people who are more introverted, quiet or who need to take information in before speaking the chance to do so. Calling on them by name, ask if they have anything to add or if they would like to say something.

Facilitative Listening

- ***Drawing People Out***: When someone is having trouble expressing their idea, is being vague or confusing, helping to gain clarity. Try asking "Can you say more about that?" or "Can you give me an example?"

- ***Using the Clock***: To provide a subtle clue to quieter participants that if they want to contribute the time is now. "There are 5 minutes left in our timebox. Does anyone have anything else to add or to bring up?"

- ***Validating***: Legitimizes and accepts speaker's opinion or feeling without agreeing that the opinion is correct. First, paraphrase, then assess if the speaker needs support (and offer support if needed). "I heard you say ___. What's next?"

The Breakout Bunch

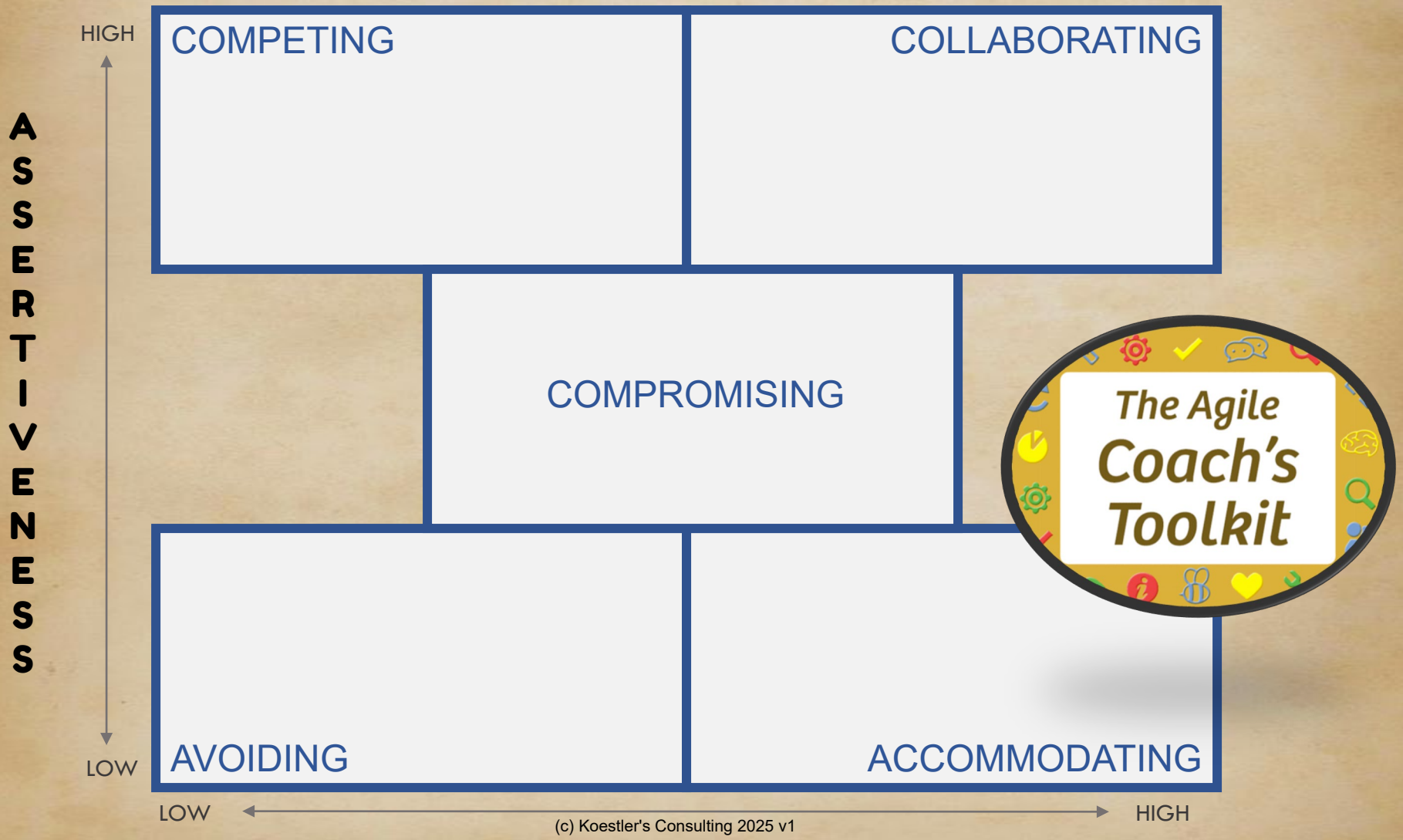
Have you used any of the Facilitative (Active) Listening techniques referenced from Kaner?

- If so, which ones?
- If you have not had an opportunity to use these yet, which ones do you plan on applying?

Conflict

Recognize Conflict with TKI

(Thomas-Kilmann conflict mode instrument)



Recognizing your Conflict Mode

Think about the last time you were in a conflict.

- It doesn't have to be from work; any conflict will do.
- What was your response mode?
  - Were you driven by a desire to assert your own needs or satisfy another's concerns?

Go through the same process for a few more conflict scenarios. Try to find your native conflict response mode (natural tendency) *so that you can notice it when it arises*.

When constructive interaction becomes destructive conflict

Level 5: World War
- Destroy the Other!
- Little or No Language is Exchanged

Level 4: Crusade
- Protecting One's Own Group becomes the Focus
- Language is Ideological

Level 3: Contest
- Winning trumps Resolving
- Language includes Personal Attacks

Level 2: Disagreement
- Personal Protection trumps Collaboration
- Language is Guarded and Open to Interpretation

Level 1: Problem to Solve
- Information Sharing and Collaboration
- Language is Open and Fact-based

Source: Speed Leas (1985); Lyssa Adkins (2010)

What is Open Discussion?

unstructured dialogue within a meeting

allows for the greatest freedom in the conversation, which also makes it the approach most likely to result in dysfunctional meeting interactions

Alternatives to Open Discussion

Listing Ideas
Small Groups
Gallery Walk
Roleplays / Skits
Fishbowls
Ask The Expert

Individual Writing
Debate Mode
Presentations / Reports
Trade Show / Science Fair
Rotating Breakout Groups
Structured Go-Arounds

Agile Coaching Institute

8262 Kinross Drive
Boulder, CO 80301
www.AgileCoachingInstitute.com

Developing Great Agile Coaches

Towards a Framework of Agile Coaching Competency – Part I

Published in alignment with the *IC Agile Coaching & Facilitation Track*

By: *Michael K. Spayd, Co-President*
Lyssa Adkins, Co-President

Purpose

Getting good results with Agile is relatively easy: form a cross-functional team, prioritize backlog items, create shippable product each iteration. Basically, follow the process and your team is likely to deliver value. No surprise here.

Getting truly great results, especially consistently, is a bit more rare. Great results require a great team. And great teams rarely just happen. A team aspiring towards greatness often needs a coach: trained, experienced, competent in her craft.

Ah, there's the rub! How do we create good (even great) Agile Coaches? We maintain that, as an industry we do not know how.

Beyond basic Agile training, there is no clear path a coach can take towards competence, let alone mastery. For instance, how do Agile coaches know *what* to study, with *whom*, and for *how long*? Just as bad, who (or what) will recognize them when they achieve competence?

Consistently creating competent Agile coaches requires *guidelines* for what coaches do, *criteria* related to what they must know, and one or more *methods or pathways* to help them get there. In former times, the guild structure developed 'craftsmen,' who became skilled practitioners. In the modern world, the concept of a *profession* has replaced the guilds. Agile coaching has neither. It is conducted in an *ad hoc*, even erratic manner. It is not a profession.

We believe, however, that Agile Coaching is an *emerging* profession. And we hope to be agents in—and accelerators of—that evolution.

Our intention is to begin giving form to the discipline of Agile Coaching. In this paper, we focus on the core element needed for Agile Coaching to become a profession: we propose the *beginnings* of a competency model, namely a framework for a competency model. We believe that now is the time for such a framework: to begin using it, to learn from its use, and to evolve the framework through new situations, uses and needs.

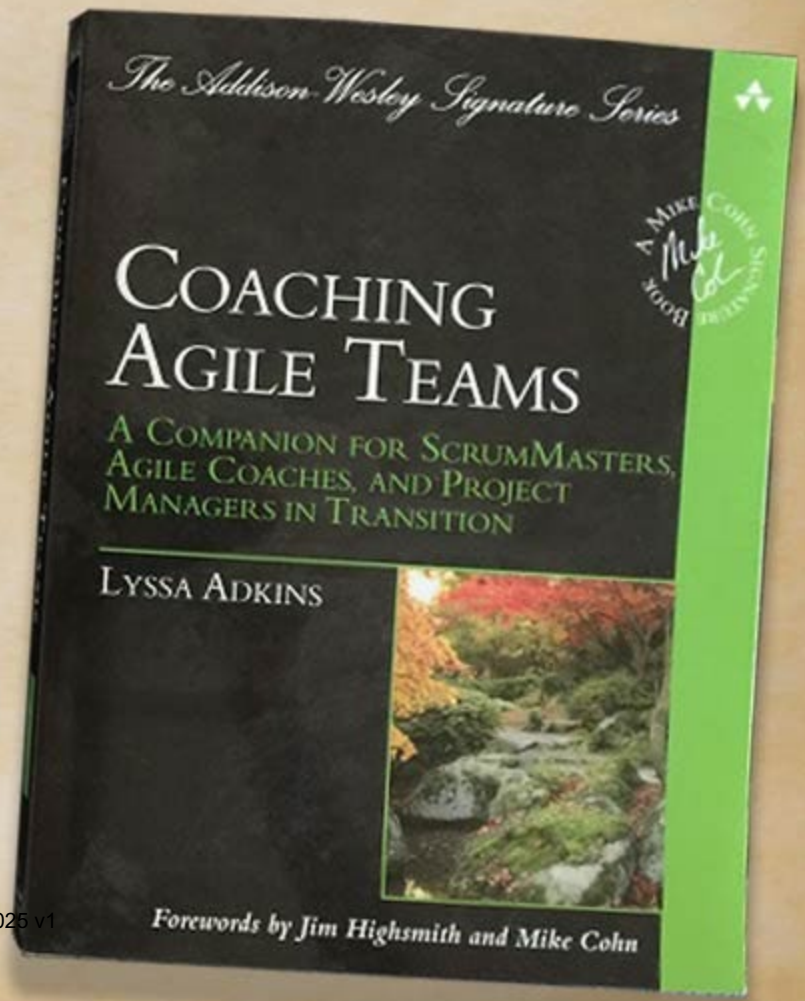
We welcome your feedback at agilecoachinginstitute.com/resources/competency-model/.

A Competency Framework

A competency model is a key prerequisite for a serious profession. Here we want to distinguish a competency model from the competency *framework* outlined in this paper.

To make clear the contrast, let's look at an example competency *model* from the International Coach Federation (ICF): (http://www.coachfederation.org/research-education/icf-credentials/core-competencies/). Here is an excerpt from the ICF competency model revealing its very specific level of detail:

> **C. Communicating Effectively**
> **6. Powerful Questioning** - Ability to ask questions that reveal the information needed for maximum benefit to the coaching relationship and the client
> 1. Asks questions that reflect active listening and an understanding of the client's perspective.



Coaching Skills: Listening

Level 1: **Internal Listening** (*Listening to Me*)

- Listening to own, inner voice and thoughts
- Making judgements and assumptions

Level 2: **Focused Listening** (*Listening to You*)

- Laser-focused on client; inner voice is ignored
- Empty mind before the conversation
- Beware writing while the other person is talking

Level 3: **Global Listening** (*Listening to Us*)

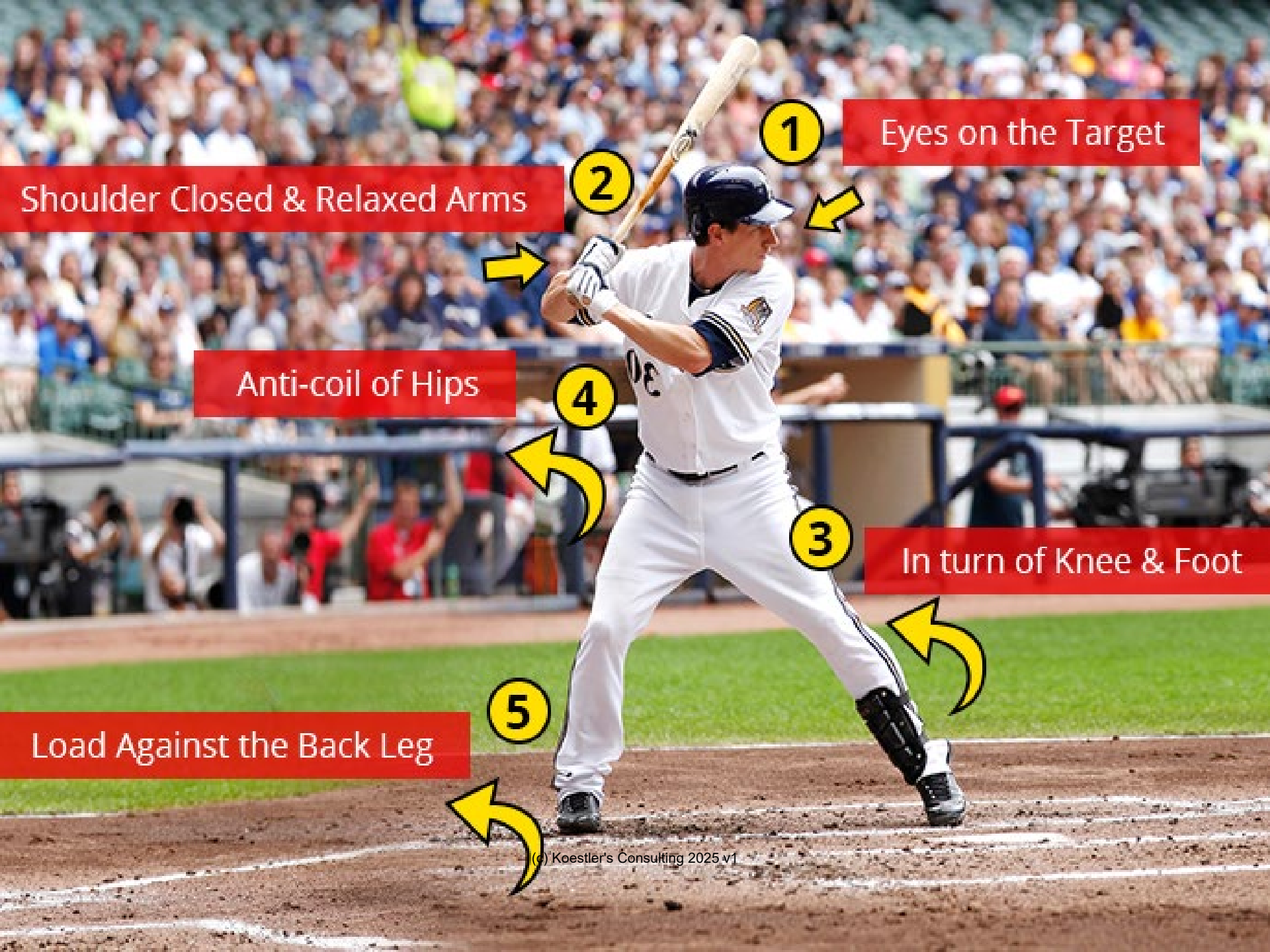
- Tuned in to non-verbal gestures and facial expressions
- Picking up on mood from tones used within the group

WAIT

Why Am I Talking ?

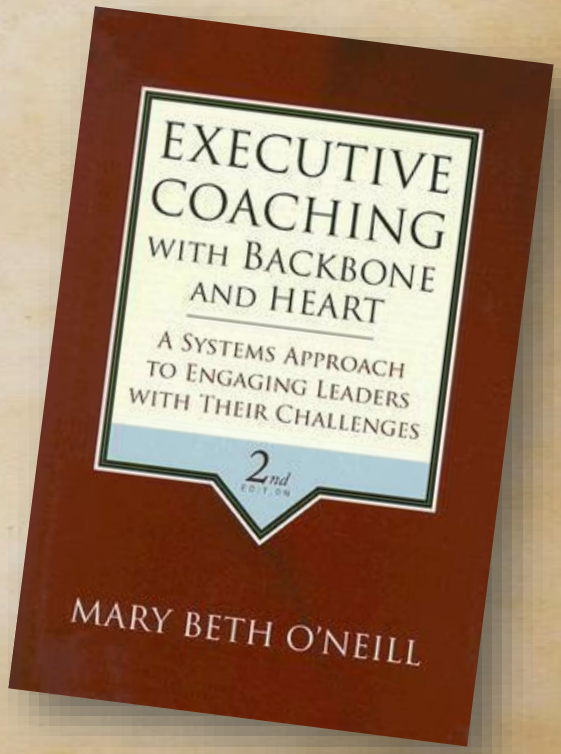
The ‘Coaching Stance’: The Heart of the Competency Framework

The “coaching stance” is the place we start from, the place we return to, and ideally the place we include when using any of the other competencies.



Watch-words of the Coaching Stance:

- Maintaining neutrality
- Serving the client's agenda
- Reducing client dependence
- Not colluding
- Signature presence



The Breakout Bunch

Scrum Master as Coach

How would you describe your ideal “coaching stance”?

Coaching Uses Several Techniques

The Arc of the Coaching Conversation

COACHEE is:

Venting!

Listening

Articulating the topic

Teaching or reinforcing Agile. Recalling goals, dreams, previous actions, etc.

Over the hump!

Coaching through powerful questions and envisioning. NOT problem-solving.

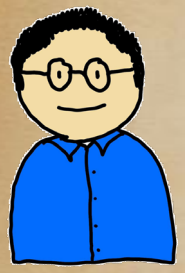
Keeping the momentum going. Supporting, encouraging. Helping the coachee get BIG!

Brainstorming ideas & actions

Supporting the narrow-down process. Creating an accountability for the action chosen.

Getting into action

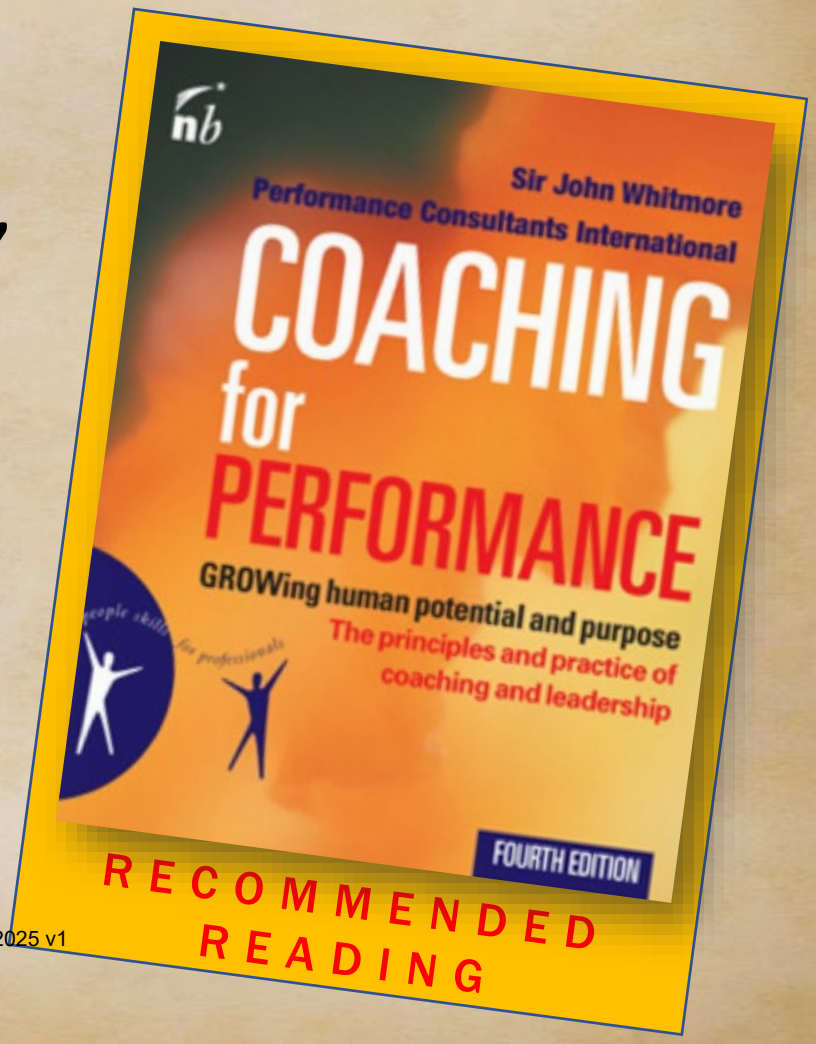
Acknowledge the coachee for who they are being.



COACH is:

The GROW Model

- We are using the version made popular in the book Coaching for Performance, by Sir John Whitmore
- This approach does not just focus on growing performance but also on growing learning and enjoyment



The GROW Model

G	R	O	W
GOAL	**REALITY**	**OPTIONS**	**WILL**
What do you want?	Where are you now?	What could you do?	What will you do?

Grow Model: **Goal**

- What would you like to have by the end of the session?
- Imagine a year from now. What's the ideal state?
- What elements are you most drawn to?
- How important is each? (Rank, i.e. 1-10)
- So your goal would be what? By when?
- Deep down, what do you really want?
- What would be some stepping stones?
- What would be a good first step from where you are now?

Grow Model: **Reality**

- How much of this do you feel is within your control?
- On a scale of 1–10, if an ideal situation is 10, what number are you at now? What number would you like to be at?
- What gives the most dissatisfaction?
- What is the concern?
- What could meet that concern?
- What sort of people and activities do you dislike?
- What gives you most satisfaction?
- What sort of people and activities do you like?

Grow Model: **Options** (or ***Obstacles***)

- What ideas or options do you have?
- What would the benefits be? Costs?
- What alternatives do you have? Is there anything else?
- If there were anything else, what would it be?
- What has worked in the past?
- What steps could you take?
- Who could help you with this?
- Where could you find out the information?
- How could you do that?

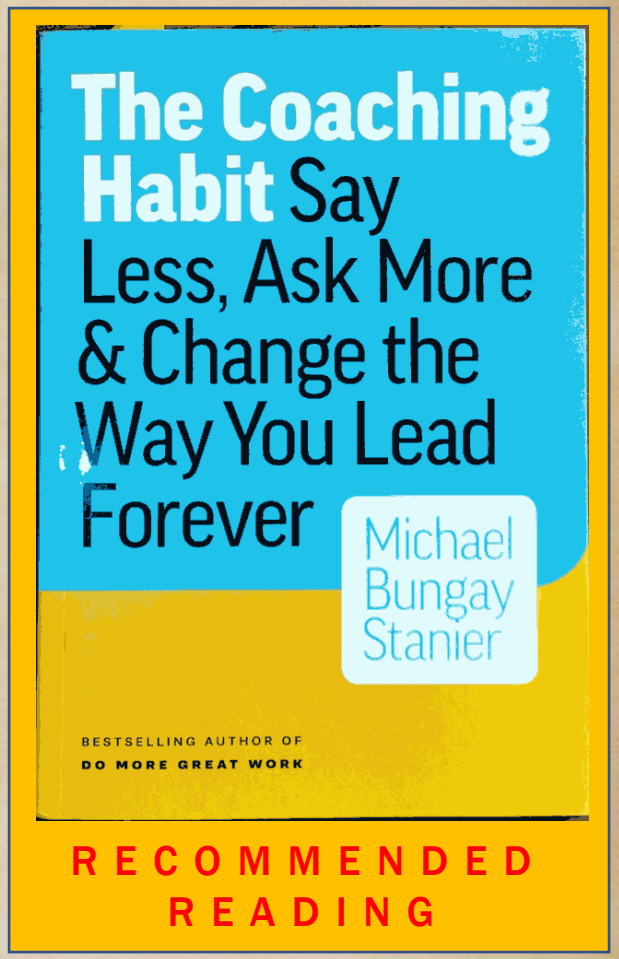
Grow Model: **Will** (or ***Way Forward***)

- What will you do?
- How will you do it?
- When will you do it?
- What obstacles exist?
- Who needs to know?
- On a scale from 1-10, how motivated are you to do it?
- What will it take for you to commit to that?
- What are the specific tasks, times, costs, etc.?
- How/when would you like me to check in with you?

The Coaching Habit

Seven Questions:

- Kickstart *What's on your mind?*
- AWE *And what else?*
- Focus *What's the real challenge?*
- Foundation *What do you want?*
- Lazy *How can I help?*
- Strategic *What will you say No to?*
- Learning *What was most useful for you?*



Coaching with **Powerful Questions**

Open-ended

Asked with genuine curiosity

- **Build Understanding**

  What challenges are you facing?
  What matters to you right now?
  What's on your mind today?
  What opportunities are you seeing?

- **Set Direction**

  What is the best possible outcome?
  What are you trying to achieve?
  What does success look like?
  How will you know if you've succeeded?

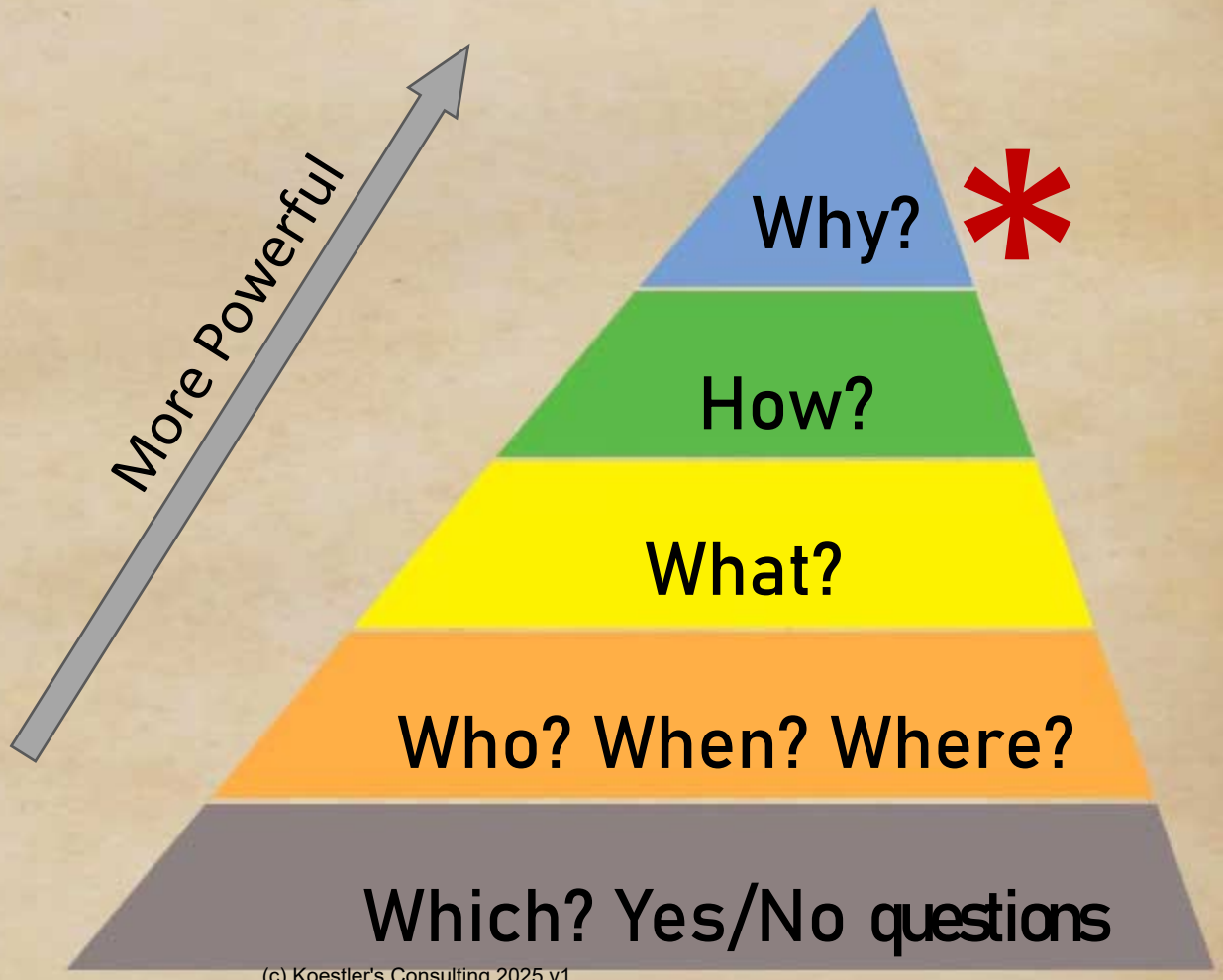
- **Shape Options**

  What have you tried?
  What options do you have?
  How possible is each option?
  What would you have to believe for this option to be right?

- **Define Next Actions**

  What info / data do you need to make a decision?
  What action can you take now?
  What are you taking away from this conversation, as a next step or new way of thinking?
  What support do you need? Where will you get it?
  How can I help?

Powerful Coaching Questions



The Art of Powerful Questions, Eric E. Vogt, Juanita Brown & David Isaacs

The Breakout Bunch

Scrum Master as Coach

Have you ever applied a coaching technique with a team or individual?

Under what circumstances?

What was the outcome?

Catalyzing Organizational Change

Some frameworks:

- ADKAR Model
- Appreciative Inquiry
- Kotter 8-Step Process for Leading Change:
  - Create → Build → Form → Enlist → Enable → Generate → Sustain → Institute
- McKinsey & Company's 7-S Framework:
  - Style, Skills, Systems, Structure, Staff, and Strategies = Shared Values & Goals
- Satir Change Management Model:
  - Late Status Quo → Resistance → Chaos → Integration → New Status Quo

ADKAR Model

Awareness *of the need for change*

Desire *to support and participate in the change*

Knowledge *of how to change*

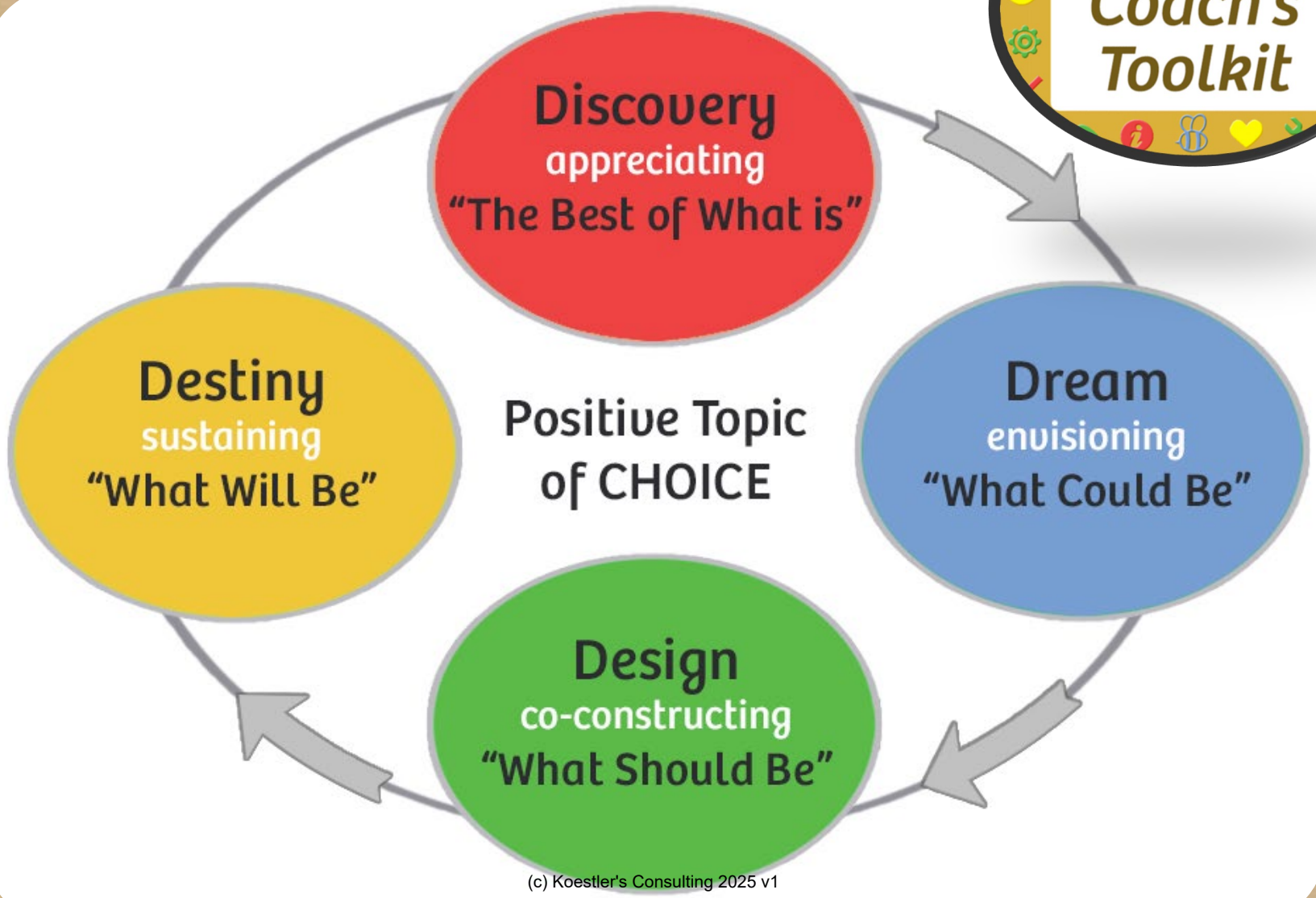
Ability *to implement required skills and behaviors*

Reinforcement *to sustain the change*

Prosci Research, Jeffrey Hiatt, 2006

Appreciative Inquiry (AI)

The Agile Coach's Toolkit



The 4-D Model was developed by Suresh Srivastva, Ron Fry, and David Cooperrider in 1990

Traditional Problem Solving

vs.

Appreciative Inquiry

- *Identify the problem*
- *Analyze the causes*
- *Plan the actions*
- *Basic assumption:*
  - *the organization is a problem to be solved*

- *Value what is*
- *Envision what could be*
- *Discuss next steps*
- *Basic assumption:*
  - *the organization and the people in it know the possibility*

A.I. is Future-Oriented

"Appreciative inquiry in organizational life" Cooperrider, D. L. & Srivastva, S. (1987)

The Breakout Bunch

What is the difference between a Vision and a Goal?

Why might they have removed “vision” from the Scrum Guide?

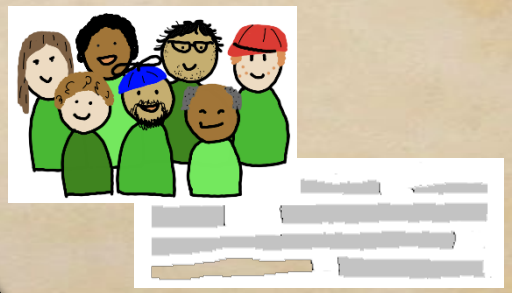
Why did they add “Product Goal”?

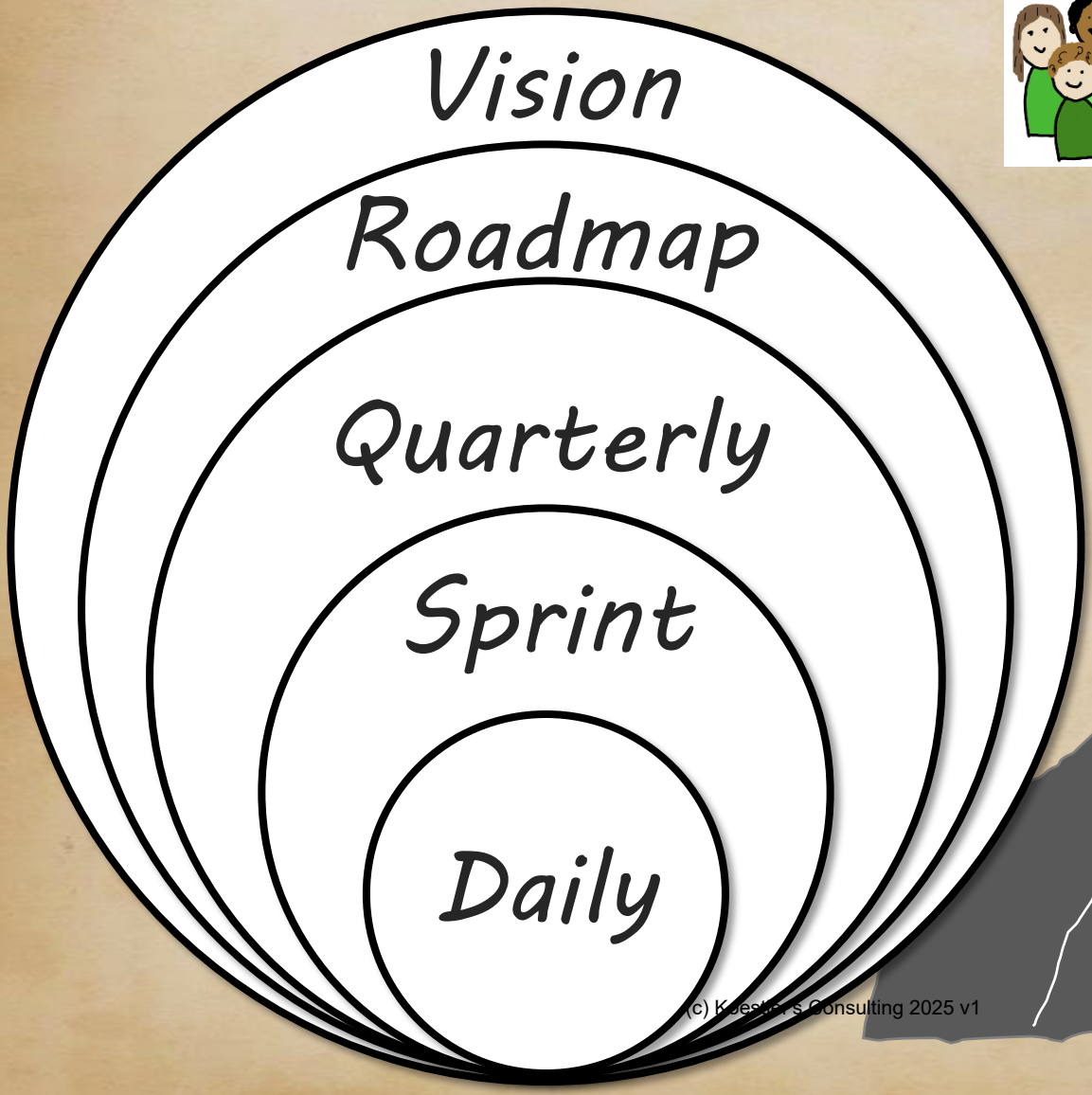
Goals *vs* Visions

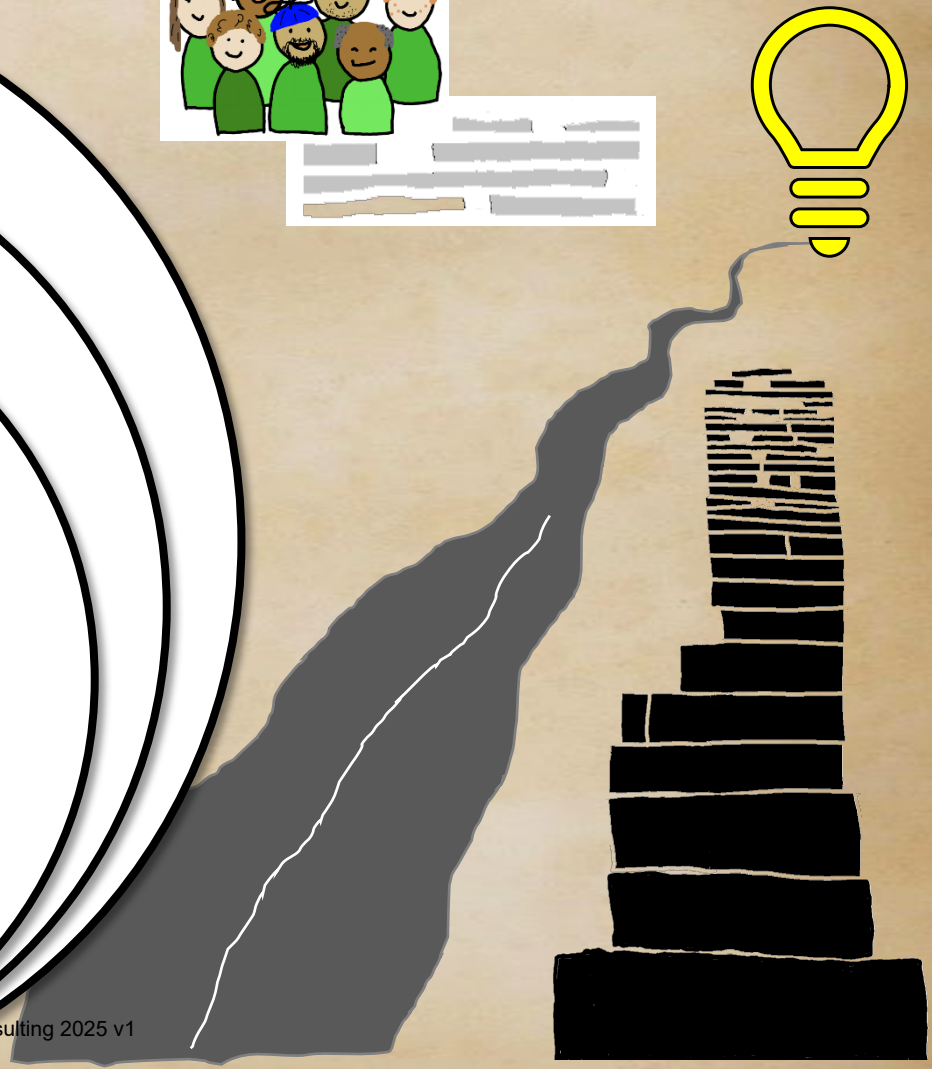
- Visions are limitless, goals are not
- Goals require action, visions don’t
- Goals are short term, visions are not
- Goals are realistic
- Goals produce results

5 Differences between setting a goal and a vision - Bhattacharyya (2016)

The Five Levels of Planning







Adapted from Hubert Smits Five Levels of Planning

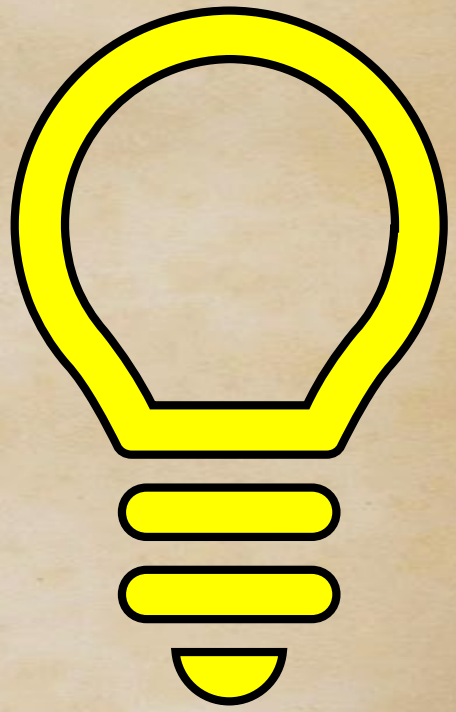
The Five Levels of Planning

Vision

BIG IDEA

>1 year

Elevator Pitch



Vision

For _____

who _____,

the _____

is _____.

Unlike _____,

our product _____.

Geoffrey Moore - Crossing the Chasm

Product Vision

Vision

- Client/stakeholder's version of the product idea
- Aspirational, abstract, high-level
- Long-lasting (years)
- Hard to reach, but not impossible

Product Goal *bridges the gap*

Product Goal

- Derived from Vision
- Gives Focus to Vision
- Measurable
- Attainable (perhaps within 3-6 months)
- Product Goals emerge and change over time
- Each Product Goal may have multiple features

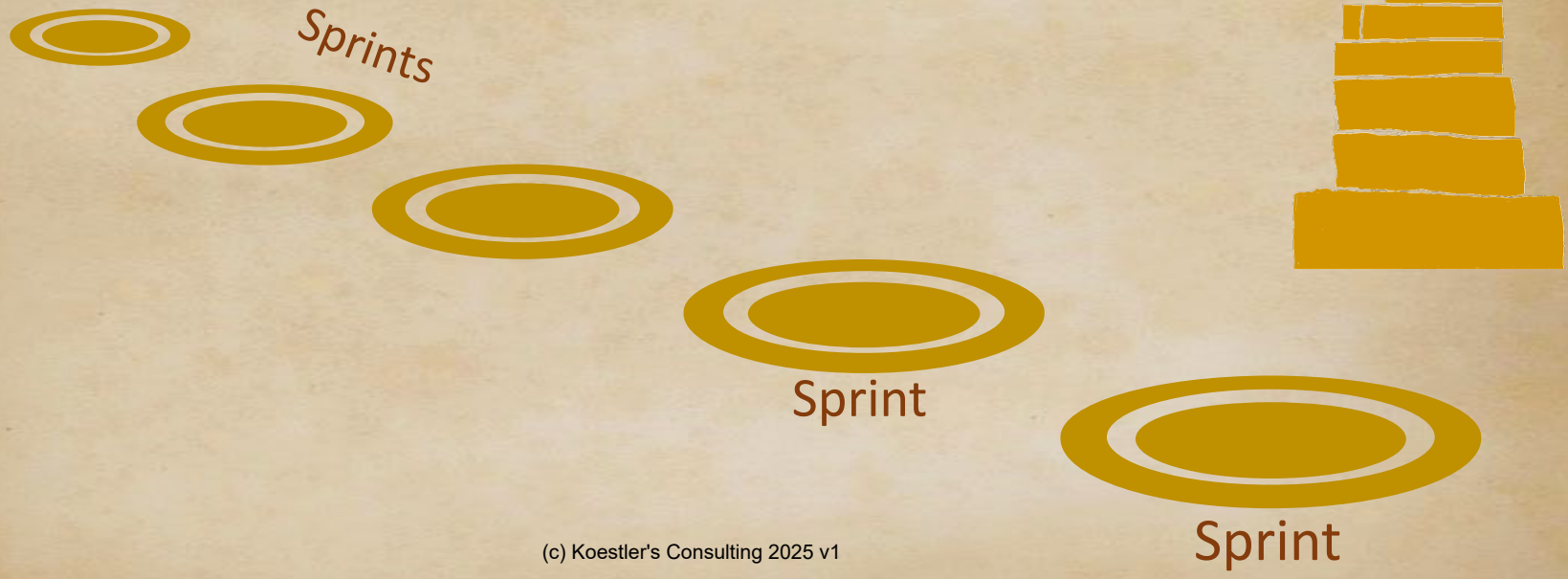
Adapted from Hubert Smits Five Levels of Planning

Decompose the **Vision** into **Product Goals**

VISION

Decompose the **Product Goal** into **Sprint Goals**

Product Goal



INVEST

Independent	The story should be self-contained, in a way that there is no inherent dependency on another story.
Negotiable	User stories, up until they are 'in-implementation', can be negotiated (between PO and team), changed or rewritten.
Valuable	A user story must deliver value to the end user.
Estimable	You must be able to estimate the size of a user story.
Small	User stories should not be so big as to become impossible to plan/task/prioritize with a high level of certainty.
Testable	The user story or its related description must provide the necessary information to make test development possible.

Root Cause Analysis

Helps answer **why** a problem or impediment has occurred:

- what happened?
- why did it happened?
- what can be done to reduce the likelihood of the problem happening again?

Root Cause Analysis

Define the Problem:

- *What is happening? What are specific symptoms?*

Collect Data:

- *What proof do you have that the problem exists?*
- *How long has it existed? What is the impact?*

Identify Possible Causal Factors:

- *What sequence of events lead to the problem?*
- *What conditions allow the problem to occur?*

Identify the Root Cause:

- *Why does the causal factor exist?*
- *What is the real reason the problem occurred?*

Recommend and Implement Solutions:

- *What can be done to prevent the problem from happening again?*
- *How will the solution be implemented?*
- *Who will be responsible?*

The 5 Whys

- An iterative technique that repeats the question “Why?” to identify the root cause of a problem
- Formally developed and used within Toyota (Japan)
- No hard and fast rules about lines of questioning or how long to keep looking for additional root causes
- Analysis can be tested by reversing the order and using “Therefore”

The 5 Whys at Leno's Garage

The 5 WHY's
at
Jay Leno's Garage

The "5 Whys" analysis could be used to investigate why there is oil on the floor of Jay Leno's classic car garage by systematically peeling back the layers of the issue to uncover its root cause:

Why is there oil on the floor?
A car in the garage is leaking oil.

Why is the car leaking oil?
A gasket in the engine has failed.

Why did the gasket fail?
The gasket was old and had exceeded its service life.

Why was the gasket not replaced?
Regular maintenance had been delayed.

Why was maintenance delayed?
Maintenance schedules were not properly tracked or prioritized.

The root cause is identified as a failure to manage and adhere to maintenance schedules. By addressing this, such as implementing tracking systems, future oil leaks can be prevented, protecting both the garage and the classic cars

Written by

Carmen Koestler from © KoestlersConsulting.Com 2025 v1