

**2013 In2In
Pre- Conference Workshop**

**Learning Together in Complex Environments:
Connection => Reflection => Action!**

Workshop Handout

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Learning Together in Complex Environments: Connection => Reflection => Action!

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Agenda

09:00-04:00 pm

Step	Event	Length	Time
1	Introductions / Review intentions / Link systems thinking / learning / teamwork	15 min	09:00-09:15
2	Systems Thinking / Learning I <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kinesthetic learning • Iceberg model • Exercise I 	75 min	09:15-10:30
3	Break	15min	10:30-10:45
4	Systems Thinking / Learning II <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The mutual learning model • The ladder of inference • Observations and assessments • Open and clean questions • Exercise II 	75min	10:45--12:00
5a	Lunch	60 min	12:00-01:00
5b	Debrief step 4	20 min	01:00-01:20
6	Designing opportunities for good teamwork <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Processes / decision making / meeting design • Exercise III 	70 min	01:20-2:30
7	Break	15 min	02:30-02:45
8	Report out / Q & A	30 min	02:45-03:15
9	Handout review	15 min	03:15-03:30
10	Check-out	30 min	03:30-04:00

“Lowering the waterline”

(Draw your own *iceberg*, with the water line just above “Patterns”)

Events

(Who does what to whom)

Reactive

What happened?

Patterns

(Recurring patterns of behavior)

Adaptive

What is happening over time?

Structure

(How the parts of the system are organized)

Creative

Why is this happening?

Mental Models

(Assumptions or worldview)

Generative

In what way have our mental models created or sustained the structures that are in place?

The “iceberg” metaphor provides us with a “Levels of Perspective” framework, which can help us go beyond responding only to events and begin looking for actions with higher leverage. The idea here is that often we only deal with an **event**, *reacting* to what happened and determining who did what to whom. In organizations or communities, this can happen over and over again. Organizational “fire fighting” is an example. Blame is often an outcome, intended or otherwise, of reaction. Events are only the “tip of the iceberg”, but we often let events drive our decision-making.

In reality, individual events are the results of deeper patterns and system structures. Sometimes we are fortunate enough to ask about or recognize a recurring **pattern** that we then try to *adapt* to over time. Although adaptation does not alter or interrupt the recurring pattern, asking about what is happening over time is an important step to understanding system behavior.

Most people find themselves stuck in the reactive and adaptive “action modes” – and this does provide some leverage in the short term. But to have lasting effect and greater leverage to influence our future, we need to learn to lower the waterline and learn about system structures and mental models.

At the next deeper level of thinking or organizational awareness, we recognize that the **structure** of the organization (or community or society or classroom) actually contributes to the patterns we experience over and over. It is more *creative* to ask why something is happening, and we have greater potential of devising lasting change and improvement. Can we change the structure? Structures are things such as rules and policies, relationships, reporting hierarchies, incentives, and election cycles. By creating new systemic structures, we can change the patterns and events we get. We alter the system, rather than just adapting or reacting to it.

Mental models are the beliefs and assumptions we hold about how the world works. We can think of these deep assumptions as “systemic structure generators”, because they provide the blueprints of those structures. When we question our own mental models in order to understand where the structure came from, we are thinking *generatively*. This is a big step that may lead to profound change. Can we change how we think? That’s the ultimate leverage point.

Mutual Learning Model

Argyris and Schon (1974).

The mutual learning model provides the fundamental framework for great team learning and teamwork. It has the following features:

Core Values and Assumptions:

- Valid information
- Free and informed choice
- Internal commitment
- Compassion
- I have some information; others have other information
- Each of us may see things the others do not
- Differences are opportunities for learning
- People are trying to act with integrity given their situation

Strategies:

- Test assumptions and inferences.
- Share all relevant information.
- Use specific examples and agree on what important words mean.
- Explain your reasoning and intent.
- Focus on interest, not positions.
- Combine advocacy and inquiry.
- Jointly design next steps and ways to test disagreements.
- Discuss undiscussable issues.
- Use a decision-making rule that generates the level of commitment needed.

Consequences:

- Increased understanding, reduced unproductive conflict and defensiveness
- Increased trust
- Reduced self-fulfilling, self-sealing processes
- Increased learning
- Increased effectiveness
- Increased quality of work life

The Skilled Facilitator Fieldbook by Roger Schwarz (et.al.) is a helpful reference that is available for facilitator learning and for team learning. Chapter 4 focuses on the Mutual Learning Model.

The Ladder of Inference

5. Actions we take

**4. Conclusions and determination
to act**

**3. Attributions about others and
interpretations about the world**

**2. Articulation of data into a
story or a theory**

**1. Data – the pool of selected
observations**

The Ladder of Inference

- **A metaphor that helps in understanding what can happen when we do not secure our words or our actions to a solid footing.**
- **It can remind us how conditional reality is in the first place.**
- **It has layers:**
 - 1. Our biological constraints**
 - 2. Cultural meaning**
 - 3. Layer of selection – we cannot take in all that is to be seen.**
- **The key to using the ladder of inference effectively is AWARENESS:**
 - that the ladder is in play**
 - Of others' perspective and mental models**
 - That climbing the ladder may provoke miscommunication**

- **Sharing our thinking process improves communication and can help us construct a new ladder in alliance with our learning partners.**
- **What we lose in self-righteousness and self-congratulations will be gained in increased effectiveness and improved partnership.**

How can we become more aware:

- 1. Recognize that you and your partner(s) are ascending the ladder.**
- 2. Become curious about the other person's data, reasoning, and concerns.**
- 3. Reveal your own data, reasoning, concerns.**
- 4. Diffuse tension by beginning with observations that are non-controversial.**
- 5. Share your background reasoning and become curious about the other person's.**
- 6. Ask for or provide examples or illustrations when you hear an abstract statement.**
- 7. Check to see if your mental model is preventing you from hear the other person's legitimate argument.**
- 8. Consider your intentions in evaluating your ladder of inference and that of your conversational partner.**
- 9. Be willing to be wrong.**

Observations & Assessments

Concepts

Observations	Assessments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facts – Owned by the community • Measuring Device – Acceptable to the community • Optical Test 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opinions – I own • Some facts • Standard & stories • Concerns & objectives • Implications for action • Authority to enact

Genuine Inquiry

Open & Clean Questions

An **Open** question requires more than a *Yes or No* answer

A **Clean** question is one with clean intent. There is *genuine intent* to learn or to help others...

What do you mean?

What is important to you about that idea?

Dirty, or unhelpful, questions are of several types, where there is no real intent to learn or to help.

Questions that carry inference of guilt or wrong doing...

When are you going to stop...?

Why do you always...?

Questions that trap, limit, demand, lead, or bind...

Don't you think it would be a good idea if...?

Don't you believe...?

Don't you think...?

Questions that imply...

What are you going to do about your problem?

Foundational Team Processes

Effective Processes help teams have effective conversations. They:

- Provide a road-map for focus
- Allow greater participation for the time available
- Provide methods for creative thinking
- Improve confidence in handling tough issues

Six Powerful Processes

There are hundreds of processes that can assist teams. The following six processes are **foundational** in developing a good learning environment, encouraging active participation, and developing a short list of options in minimum time. Each process is simple in both concept and application. However, when combined together, they provide a very powerful way for teams to begin thinking and working together. In addition, they provide an opportunity for individuals and teams to begin developing facilitation skills.

- Reflection
- Focused conversation
- Round Robin
- Idea Posting
- Affinity Diagramming
- Multi-voting

1. Reflection

Reflection is quiet time for everyone to think.

People often need time to think about how they wish to respond to questions or to develop thoughts about opportunities. A few minutes usually provides the time needed to gather our thoughts and will improve the quality of everyone's thinking. In addition, taking time for reflection will often shorten the meeting. This may seem counterintuitive. However, people often feel more satisfied and have a clearer view of what they want when they have the opportunity to think more deeply about the issues at hand.

2. Focused Conversation

Focused conversation simply means that a single topic will be the focus of the team conversation.

Lengthy team meetings often result from unfocused conversation. This can occur when people are unclear about the topic under discussion or simply begin talking about other topics. It is the job of the facilitator or team leader to keep the team focused on the topic at hand. This can be accomplished as follows:

- The facilitator states what the topic of the conversation will be and checks with the team to ensure clarity and understanding. If the topic is complex, it may be appropriate to write the topic on a flip chart and have a conversation about what is trying to be accomplished.
- The facilitator keeps the conversation on this topic.

3. Round Robin

Round Robin provides time for each member of the team to speak.

- Each person is given a fixed amount of time to speak. This is usually not more than 1-3 minutes. The purpose is not to have exhaustive conversation about the topic. Rather, it is to get input from every member of the team.
- It is a quick way to share information.
- It is advisable to make the topic very clear in advance and to give everyone a few minutes of reflection time before the round robin begins.

4. Idea Posting

Idea Posting is an individual form of brainstorming.

- The facilitator reviews the topic and tests for understanding.
- Each team member takes time for reflection on the topic.
- Each team member writes down ideas – one idea per sticker (highlights only using a marker pen).
- Stickers are posted. If there are a small number of team members, each sticker is read to the team as it is posted.

5. Affinity Diagramming

Affinity Diagramming is the process of grouping similar ideas.

- After ideas are posted (process #4), the facilitator requests that 2 or 3 people re-arrange the stickers.
- The volunteers put similar ideas together.
- Each set of ideas is given a theme (with a large sticker).
- Themes are presented to the team (by volunteers).
- A brief conversation can be held, if necessary, to ensure understanding of themes.
- A selection process is used to choose the most important themes. This can be the multi-voting process #6.

6. Multi-voting

Multi-voting is a process of selection - usually from a long list.

- The themes are presented and reviewed following the affinity diagramming process.
- The facilitator requests that each team member vote with a check mark on their favorite themes. The number of votes each team member receives is usually 20-30% of the total number of themes.
- The themes receiving the highest number of votes are identified.
- A conversation is held to review why people voted the way they did and how they feel about the top picks.

The process narrows the long list of ideas and allows the team to focus their efforts on a few themes they believe are important. It is seldom used to make final choices. Once the list has been narrowed, the team can begin the process of learning more about the themes, reviewing criteria to meet objectives, and making decisions about next steps.

7. Foundational processes

The six foundational processes noted above help the team learn together. A useful definition is that team learning is the process of increasing individual and collective capacity:

- To take effective action
- To create the future the team desires.

These processes are noted as “foundational” because, if used correctly, they allow each member of the team to contribute to the overall learning experience of the team. They are inclusive processes in two ways: One, they allow everyone to contribute. Two, they require everyone to contribute their thinking. Even if team members display indifference about particular topics, this is important for the rest of the team to understand.

These processes allow the team to understand the importance of using simple processes correctly and to benefit from the power of the team. Once these foundational processes are mastered, the many more complex processes that can help the team will become easier to master.

The Six SigmaTool Navigator by Walter J. Michalski provides 222 tools and processes that are useful for every team. The Navigator provides a review of each process, suggests best uses for the process, and provides step by step instructions.

References / Links

References:

1. Schwarz, Roger, et.al. The Skilled Facilitator Fieldbook, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 2005

Links:

1. Steve Byers website: <http://www.newhabitsofmind.com>
2. Jon Bergstrom website: <http://www.websweare.com/bergstrom>
3. Roger Schwarz & Assoc.: <http://www.schwarzassociates.com>
4. Infed: <http://infed.org/mobi/chris-argyris-theories-of-action-double-loop-learning-and-organizational-learning>