

Designing MindsTM

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Getting Groups Started: WAGON WHEELS

OVERVIEW: As a group gathers, many individuals who will now need to work together do not feel connected to each other. There are also times in which individuals carry an experience history that is negative. This activity personalizes the meeting enabling the task to be completed even better as relationships balance.

PROCESS: Group stands in a circle. After counting off the group into one's and two's, the two's step into the middle of the circle and face the outer circle of one's. After obtaining the discussion question from the facilitator, the pairs greet each other and share their responses. As people have discussions around the circle, the facilitator should become aware of movements, the sounds being made, the time of the voices, and the mood of the individuals and the group. Ask the pairs to now thank each other and say good-bye. Rotate the wagon wheel by asking either the inner group or outer group to move 1,2 or 3 people to the left or right. They again greet each other and now share responses to a second discussion question. Continue moving the wagon wheel for 5-6 discussion questions greeting, thanking and saying good-bye to each other each time.

Close this activity by asking people to go back to their original places. Repeat each question slowly while participants make eye contact with the person they shared the discussion with today. Finally, ask participants to form in groups of 2-3 to share "how they felt about the wagon wheel" and "what they learned during their conversations."

Sample discussion questions: Where and when was your first paid job? Describe a hero/heroine who has influenced your life. Share an event/project/activity in which you know you made a difference. Describe a challenge you have had in the past. What is your favorite movie and what makes it memorable for you? Describe a characteristic about yourself that's a strength and one that is limiting for you. Describe a dream vacation trip.

OUTCOMES:

- The process fully honors and acknowledges each individual's presence.
- Greetings are symbolic gestures of peaceful intent and set the meeting tone.
- Individuals greet the person they will work with not the role or stereotype.
- After the physical contact of a handshake and eye-to-eye greeting, relationships are developed and differences are more likely to stay content-based..

BEST HOPES/WORST FEARS

OVERVIEW: In this process, the fears and the hopes participants bring with them are explored and acknowledged. All events/issues have a potential worst fear or best hope outcome. Either is possible. People cannot look positively toward the future until they each take care of the fears they have for it. Once worst fears have been expressed and shared with the group, the imagination is now freed to move on to the best possibility for their future outcome. This process is useful as new groups are forming to focus their tasks towards their **best hopes**.

PROCESS: Participants are given 3 X 5 cards to express first their worst fear for "this workshop/committee/project" and then to express on the other side their best hope for "this workshop/committee/project". The individual statements are read aloud to the whole group and recorded on flip charts exactly as they are expressed. (See *Round Robin Recording* process)

The worst fears are all recorded first and acknowledged. Then the best hopes are recorded and affirmed. This leaves the image of the best hopes in the participant's mind. Place the best hopes on one wall and the worst fears on the opposite wall. Continue with *Activating Potential* process to emphasize this point. After the meeting, the individual statements can now be developed into collective statements to represent the collective view of the entire group. (See the *Collective Statements* process).

OUTCOMES:

- This process allows each person to express the worst fear and best hope they carry for this situation or event. It also allows silence, or quiet, to be part of the process. This silence allows each person to reflect internally, to relax and balance, and finally to become connected to self expectations.
- **Worst Fears:** These are feared future outcomes, often based on past experience, with a presently experienced emotion and physical reaction. When people believe their worst fears, this belief affects their perceptions, beliefs, values, decisions, contributions, and willingness to invest in strategies. Fears tend to be self-fulfilling prophecies when strongly held.
- **Best Hopes:** These are hoped for future outcomes, sometimes not previously experienced but intensely imagined. When people believe their best hopes are possible, this belief also affects their perceptions, beliefs, values, decisions, contributions, and willingness to invest in strategies. They, like worst fears, tend to be self-fulfilling prophecies when strongly held.

WHAT EVER YOU FOCUS ON . . .

Overview: This is an activity using threaded needles that challenges groups to reflect on where they are putting their attention. Whatever you focus on . . . expands. The best outcomes or hopes are often not experienced by people in conflict or in system stress because the groups' energy frequently focuses on talk about their worst fears. This only adds to the stuckness and being unresourceful. It takes energy away from the possibilities. However, the best outcome is just as possible as the worst outcome but less likely to be possible if a group stays stuck with their fears. The **hopes** provides goals, or directions, that all can agree to seek and focus their efforts towards. Use this process after the *Best Hopes and Worst Fears* process. The following needle activity is an exercise to demonstrate and acknowledge that both the worst feared and best hoped for outcomes are present and inherent in each moment, up to, and often after the event -- "if you think you can or you think you can't, you are always right." Be careful what you want to be right about because if you argue for your limitations, they most surely can be yours.

Process: Pass out threaded needles to each participant. Ask them to hold the thread between their thumb and pointer finger with the needle hanging down like a pendulum. Now direct them to steady their arm on a table on by putting their elbow in their opposite hand. Without moving their hand, challenge them to think "side to side" and notice what happens to the needle. Now ask them to think "counter clock wise" and notice what happens to the needle. Finally think "clock wise."

Close this activity with participants sharing with 2 or 3 others what they experienced and what they feel. Call for any group comments. Closing point: At the smallest atomic level, wherever your attention moves, your body organizes towards that thought. As they sit with the wall of hope statements and the wall of fear statements on either side of them, ask the group to take responsibility for what they **really** want to happen as they begin their work.

"If you think you can or you think you can't,
you're ALWAYS right." -- Henry Ford

"Whatever you focus on . . . expands"
-- anonymous

THE ROLE OF THE FACILITATOR with Flip Chart Groups

OVERVIEW: The role of the facilitator is to design processes and take responsibility for making sure the participants are using the most effective methods for accomplishing their tasks in the shortest time. There are many skills and process tools used by facilitators to support groups in **HOW** they work together. The process described below describes the role of facilitator in *Flip Chart Groups* as a process.

PROCESS: A key function of the facilitator is being a "meeting chauffeur" ensuring that everyone has an opportunity to participate, be protected from personal attack, and that no one is allowed to dominate the meeting's air space.

Either proceeding to the left or to the right, ask group members to express only one idea at a time by going around the circle. Do not let any other group member add, delete, or editorialize any ideas expressed by the member presently speaking. Individuals are either taking their speaking turns or listening. Taking other people's "air space" is a form of dominance or control. Speaking during other's turns is also a sign of disrespect for others in the group. It also takes more group time if idea sharing degenerates into "chit-chat."

OTHER ROLES OF GOOD FACILITATION:

- Builds a sense of community
- Invites group members to take ownership in the process and leadership roles
- Manages the group's energy
- Deals with conflict and negative behaviors when necessary
- Brings out uniqueness and potentials of each group member
- Transfers skills and responsibility of group into the hands of individuals
- Monitors group dynamics, learning atmosphere and creativity
- Observes non-verbal communications
- Provides information, opportunities, experiences and resources
- Knows processes for when things get heated up, stuck or bogged down
- Comfortable "letting go" of power
- Understands that participants should do 95 percent of the talking
- Focuses the group's energy on a common problem/topic with a common process
- Suggests alternative methods and procedures
- Models flexibility, open-mindedness and possibility thinking

THE ROLE OF THE RECORDER with Flip Chart Group

OVERVIEW: The role of the recorder is to create a combined short-term and long-term group memory by writing down in full view of the group the exact words of the group members. It is a powerful visual tool! See *How to Make Meetings Work: The New Interaction Method* by Michael Doyle.

PROCESS: The recorder is a neutral, non-evaluative servant of the group. It is a role that requires "deep listening" to words of the groups without paraphrasing or editorializing their personal ideas. Key ideas are recorded on flip charts using large markers or on a computer with an LCD projection system. Each member shares the responsibility of letting the recorder know if something important has been missed or not heard correctly.

OUTCOMES:

- It provides a physical focus for the group -- focusing the energy of the group on the issue or problem rather than at each other
- Individuals no longer have to hold on to an idea in their short-term memory --it can be captured and "remembered" in full view of everyone. This releases their energy to focus on the topic at hand
- Since ideas are written down without the name of the author, an individual's ideas tend to become the group's ideas
- Because the words have been recorded under the watchful eyes of all participants (with the understanding that the group members have the responsibility to see that their ideas are accurately portrayed by the recorder), the group memory becomes an **agreement** of what was decided, produced or accomplished by the group
- Recorded ideas can be voted on, circled, prioritized, initialed, and signed off on by the group.

THE ROLE OF REPORTER with Flip Chart Groups

OVERVIEW: The role of reporter is to "read out" their group's ideas and thinking. It provides another role of participation for the group members.

PROCESS: After the flip chart groups have finished, ask the reporters to read out loud to the whole group what they charted. They should read exactly what is on the flip chart without commentaries nor extra explanations nor side stories. This is especially important when the group is large with many flip charts to share.

VARIATIONS: If there does not seem to be enough time for all the groups to read out everything on each chart, try one or two of these process alternatives.

One method: ask the Reporters from half of the groups to select one or two statements from their flip charts and report to a microphone. Ask the Reporters from the other half of the groups to select one or two statements from their flip charts and report to another microphone. If Reporters have trouble or take too much time selecting statements, announce to groups to choose for example, statements number 5 and 8 on their charts. After everyone has moved to the microphones, begin the reading out process. The Reporters can then return to their flip chart groups. This way every group presents but not everything.

A second method: ask for the odd numbered groups or certain lettered groups to read out everything from the first question or issue presented. Then ask for the even numbered or other lettered groups to read out everything from the second question or issue presented. This way everyone presents but not each time.

OUTCOMES:

- Groups hear the work of others not in their group
- Patterns emerge from similar ideas generated from other groups
- After being in small groups, the reading out allows the group to feel whole and collected again.

PEAK PERFORMANCE: Group Energizers

OVERVIEW: Csikszentmihalyi of the University of Chicago defines "flow" state as a particular mental and physical condition that allows us to cross the boundary from our usual level to truly superior performance -- peak performance. See *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. Also, Michael McCarthy describes in *Mastering the Information Age* many processes that allows individuals and groups to perform at their best.

Aromas: Certain scents enhance mental alertness: Cinnamon, lemon, peppermint aromas or hard candies are excellent for this--have plenty available.

Sounds: Music can improve both cognitive and physical abilities -- experiment with different selections to help groups with energy and learning states. Sometimes music selections can just add "plain ole fun" to a work environment!

Movement: Moving helps groups stay flexible and resourceful. If groups are stuck or have just finished a tense discussion, move them to another space. If possible, have several rooms available. One to "think tank", one to "generate solutions" and one to "give advice on what could go wrong." This method is called the *Walt Disney* method. If changing rooms is not possible, have the group change seats after a break. Another change is to rearrange which way they are facing in a room. Finally, if groups are on overload or need to process a complex information -- a quick, brisk walk without talking is just the trick.

Nutrition: Foods can increase mental alertness and perk you up or act as natural tranquilizers. While there is a great deal of controversy among scientists, no one argues that food can change your cognition and mood. Use hard candies, popcorn, or crunching vegetables to keep left and right brains working together. Be aware that serving foods like beef slow people's energy down. Notice the effects of different foods on your self, *Managing Your Mind and Mood through Food* by J. Wurtman.

Humor: Playfulness adds energy. Humor is a very resourceful state. Try water guns for groups in conflict. Give out bubble gum or tootsie roll pops to mentally connect people to being young. Add funny hats or glasses to start meetings. Try a bubble gun while brainstorming. Play silly music. Have fun!

GROUP BUZZES: Processing Information

OVERVIEW: According to Bob Garmston and others' research on adult learning, adults do not learn from experiences! They learn from reflecting on their experiences. It is estimated that without reflection, up to 50 to 70% of what might have been learned or understood is lost. There is a suggested rule of thumb . . . for every ten of information given or shared, there needs to be two minutes of some type of reflection. The more complex or emotionally overloading the information, the more significant this reflection time becomes. You can almost feel the silence and inertia in a room as people become overloaded. This has major implications on designing meetings and group events. If groups are to make meaning of information shared or information learned, time and processes need to be incorporated during the event.

PROCESS: Provide intermittent "buzzes" within groups by asking them turn to one or two other members of the group to discuss what they heard as well as what they learned. Allow 2-4 minutes for small groups. Notice the energy of the group swell and then taper off. If you are unsure whether they have had enough time, ask if anyone needs more time. It is also O.K. to stop the process before they are completing finished. Then bring the group back together again and allow another 2 -3 minutes for any comments individuals might want to share with the whole group from their small group discussion.

VARIATIONS:

- If time, encourage individuals to find other people from across the room to "buzz" with rather than those closest.
- Provide time to journal questions or "ah's" and then to share with another person what they wish from their writings.
- Ask for partner reviews by taking turns "teaching" the key points from the information.
- In flip chart groups, use go-arounds to record what they heard and what they learned.
- In flip chart groups, use go-arounds to record ideas and ways to use the "information learned" when they leave the event.
- With an overhead or flip chart, record the large group's list of what they learned.

OUTCOMES:

- Participants make more connections and more use of information / learnings
- Participants have conscious awareness of their own thinking and learning
- Groups can handle more complex and emotionally laden work

FORCE-FIELD ANALYSIS: A System Tool

OVERVIEW: This process planning tool allows change agents to identify dimensions of a problem/issue and to devise thoughtful strategies for solving it through a systems thinking tool used to analyze the "big" picture. A force-field analysis identifies the forces that are supporting or driving the change and identifies the forces that are opposing or resisting the change. It is important to note that if there is balanced tension or equilibrium between forces for and forces against, there is no motivation in the system to change. This is *status quo*. In planning for changes, one should be aware that only increasing the driving forces to change the status quo without dealing with the barriers produces increased tension and resistance. Planning teams need to deal with both forces consciously.

Think of ALL forces as energy. The key to successful change in the system is to sustain the forces that support change while converting opposing forces into opportunities.

PROCESS: Brainstorm and create two lists: What are the forces that support the change? What are the forces that oppose the change? Then evaluate the individual items 1 to 5:

1. It has *almost nothing* to do with the drive toward change in this situation.
2. It has *relatively little* to do with the drive toward change in this situation.
3. It is of *moderate importance* in the drive toward change in this problem.
4. It is an *important factor* in the drive toward change in this situation.
5. It is a *major factor* in the drive toward change in this situation.

Finally, select two or more restraining forces from your list to generate strategies for converting into opportunities using that resisting energy or force **FOR** the change! This is a perfect time for possibility thinking -- group think tanks-- and for answering the following question:

Now that we know it CAN'T be done,
HOW are we going to do it anyway?

Closing Activity: LAST WORDS

OVERVIEW: This ends events with the group's voices. Often a group meeting has been tightly structured for tasks. This process allows for the group NOT the facilitator to have their last word. It also frequently builds community as members have the opportunity to honor their work together.

PROCESS: At the end of the event or meeting, have the group meet in a circle so they can see each other. Invite each person to share a last thought, word, quote, bit of advice, a song, a poem or a foot stomp, if they like. Go around the room without anyone commenting on another individual's last word. As a facilitator, pause after the last group member shares and feel the silence. Non-verbally honor each member and dismiss the group. It is important that the group member's voices NOT the facilitator's voice be the last in the air.

VARIATIONS: Ask participants "how do they feel?" and "what did they learn today?" as a guided but open ended closure to the gathering or meeting.

Ask participants to appreciate someone's ideas or support or efforts during the meeting. This builds strong group self-esteem and can be used as a on-going ritual in long term groups.

Ask participants who will continue to work together "what worked today?" and "what needs to work even better next time we are together?"

OUTCOMES:

- Builds community and respect for individuals by giving them the last word
- Gives group members a chance to reflect and add anything they feel like adding
- Gives group members a chance to honor the work and relationships with others
- Gives the closing ownership to the group
- Provides general information to facilitator

OBTAINING STATEMENT "BUY OFF"

OVERVIEW: Getting consensus on group vision statements, mission statements and/or goal statements is a key facilitated process in creating total ownership and commitment that extends powerfully beyond the meeting. As a facilitator works through a draft statement, groups can resolve different mental models, negotiate and enrich the statements with diverse perspectives, and metaphorically rehearse how common ground and thinking can be found.

PROCESS: *Assumptions:* 1) Diverse perspectives have been invited to participate 2) A draft statement has been co-created with previous group activities 3) Time has been spent balancing and bonding the group so they are in the "flow of leadership" rather than using the content of this task to balance themselves with a group. 4) Time spent on this task not only completes the work but creates a container for groups to build shared mental models and focus their commitments.

"*Word-smithing*" is the first focus of many group members. They want the statement to have parallel construction, proper punctuation, or a different verb tense. Keep setting aside the editing focus until the last stage of the "Buy Off." Content first -- editing last!

Temperature reading is a process of going around the circle and asking for a voice vote of JUST "yes" or "no." After the temperature reading, have the "no's" dialogue by inviting them to talk to you. What is their thinking? What does that do for them? No rebuttals are allowed from "yeses" at this time. This keeps conversation in dialogue form rather than discussion or debate form. Then when the energy of the "no's" has dissipated, pause and leave some silence. Now ask the "yes's" to share their thinking. After listening to the whole dialogue, generate proposed choices that would meet the overall thinking. The facilitator often serves this role but should invite the group to also share this responsibility.

Personal choice or Personal conviction? Asking "if you can live with it" means that something does **not** go against core values or beliefs. **Personal choice** means that if a participant were Emperor or Empress of the project, s/he would use a comma here or choose this word that s/he liked even better. **Personal conviction** means that the concept or word choice has a connotation or meaning to them that is in conflict with their core belief systems.

Cont'd STATEMENT "BUY OFF"

If something is just personal choice, the group member is asked to yield to the group with a **I-can-live-with-it** voice and posture. If something is a personal conviction, a group stays with the **dialogue** until meaning is made and a concept is formed that works for everyone!

The facilitator models interest and curiosity on how an individual thinks about this part that goes against their value system. Use questions to check assumptions. Be alert for coercion or group think. The facilitator must demonstrate that people can risk having differences and protect that conversation space even if it is only one person. The quality of the statements almost always improves after the dialogue AND the quality of commitment absolutely improves.

Putting it Together: Working with a draft statement, the facilitator first asks if there is any **significant** concept missing? This is not the time to fuss with word smithing -- you are looking for concepts. List all suggestions to the side. Take these one by one for a group "*temperature reading*:" "Can you live with this being included?" Ask for a "yes" unless it is **personal conviction**. If they are not sure, they are to say "no." Do not take conditional "yes's."

Watch the body language for anyone saying "no" while their words say "yes." Are they hesitating? Is the energy of the voice flat? Do their heads shake "no" while saying "yes?" Are there frowns on their faces? etc.

Do this process for each concept that the group identified as missing until you have them sorted to put into the statement or leave out. Have someone weave the additional concepts into the draft statement language.

Second, ask if there are any concepts in the statement that can't be lived with. Circle or highlight each. **Note:** additions identified earlier have already been agreed upon. Do not redo previous agreements. No word smithing at this time. Then take one concept at a time until all are resolved. Obtain a temperature reading by going around for "no's" and "yes's" based on personal conviction. Dialogue and look for intent that will create more choices for resolving the issue. Many times it is word choices that have certain connotations -- the group can brainstorm for alternative choices that maintains the original intent. Sometimes the barrier implies word choices like using the word "all" and people needing to work out the impact of that on their work.

Cont'd STATEMENT "BUY OFF"

Finally, when finished with the pieces of the content, ask the group if s/he can now live with the content of the whole piece. Do not backtrack on any items previously "bought off." This is just an extra validation as the group now looks at the whole piece.

Special Note: Unless you're using a computer, you might want to take a break to have members of the team rewrite the draft statement for the next steps.

Now, the group starts the *word smithing* process. First collect and mark all parts that are a concern to anyone. Then, start with each piece usually sentence by sentence. Clearing up the items sentence by sentence is usually a conversation about grammar rules. The sequencing of items can also deliver meaning. "Buy off" sentence by sentence with the temperature reading and dialogue processes. At the end, ask the group do a final temperature reading vote on the whole piece.

Celebrate!!! There is usually an energy burst -- take advantage of it.

OUTCOMES:

- Delivers a collective and consensus Statement
- Creates ownership and focused commitment by groups
- Uses diversity as a resource
- Develops shared mental models and respect for differences
- Rehearses the process of how the group thought about their differences that is useful when individuals go back to their colleagues
- Uses "deep listening" as a tool for resolving differences while creating statements that are even better
- Honors all values and ways of seeing the world that individuals bring to the table as they also co-create statements

Closing Activity: EXIT CARDS

OVERVIEW: This process brings closure to an activity, event or time period. It is research based from McRel Region Labs (Marzano, Robert and Arredondo, Daisy, *Tactics for Thinking*, "Deep Processing." McRel, 1985)

PROCESS: As a group finishes an activity or a time period, ask them to complete a sentence (i.e. One BIG idea I got this today was....). These can be shared with small groups or the whole group either sharing orally, using flip chart recording or posting a 3X5 card where the group can read them.

VARIATION: Ask participants to draw a picture of what they have learned -- this accesses the right brain for patterns, making meaning and metaphoric connections of what they learned. The process of creating the image, **NOT** the art work itself, is the value of this closure.

Ask participants to write 2-3 things they learned today. Use the *Round Robin Recording* process. Or use a *Collective Statement* process with the cards.

Ask participants to write 2-3 things they valued that was shared by someone else in the group. Use the *Round Robin Recording* process. Or use a *Collective Statement* process with the cards.

OUTCOMES:

- In order to select one idea, the participant will need to review all information, synthesize, prioritize and develop criteria for selecting the most meaningful event or information
- Information gives the whole group the opportunity to respectfully and thoughtfully see or hear what others selected as valuable
- Information can be used by the facilitator to gauge what experiences or information was valued by the group
- The process allows groups to mentally "switch" and "focus" on the next activities.

Closing Activity: Last Words

OVERVIEW: Often a group meeting has been tightly structured for tasks. This process allows for the group NOT the facilitator to have their last word. It also frequently builds community as members have the opportunity to honor their work together.

PROCESS: At the end of the event or meeting, have the group meet in a circle so they can see each other. Invite each person to share a last thought, word, quote, bit of advice, a song, a poem or a foot stomp, if they like. Go around the room without anyone commenting another individual's last word. As a facilitator, pause after the last group member shares and feel the silence. Non-verbally honor each member and dismiss the group. It is important that the group member's voices NOT the facilitator's voice be the last in the air.

VARIATIONS: Ask participants for "how do they feel?" and "what did they learn today?" as a guided but open ended close to the gathering or meeting.

OUTCOMES:

- Builds community and respect for individuals by giving them the last word
- Gives group members a chance to reflect and add anything they feel like adding
- Gives group members a chance to honor the work and relationships with others
- Gives the closing ownership to the group
- Provides general information to facilitator