

13th Annual

# Thinking & Learning Conference

**BRUCE WELLMAN**

Saturday 21 May

**The Facilitators' Toolkit:**

Verbal and non-verbal resources for focusing  
and energising the work of teams and groups

Session 1

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**MELBOURNE**

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# BRUCE WELLMAN

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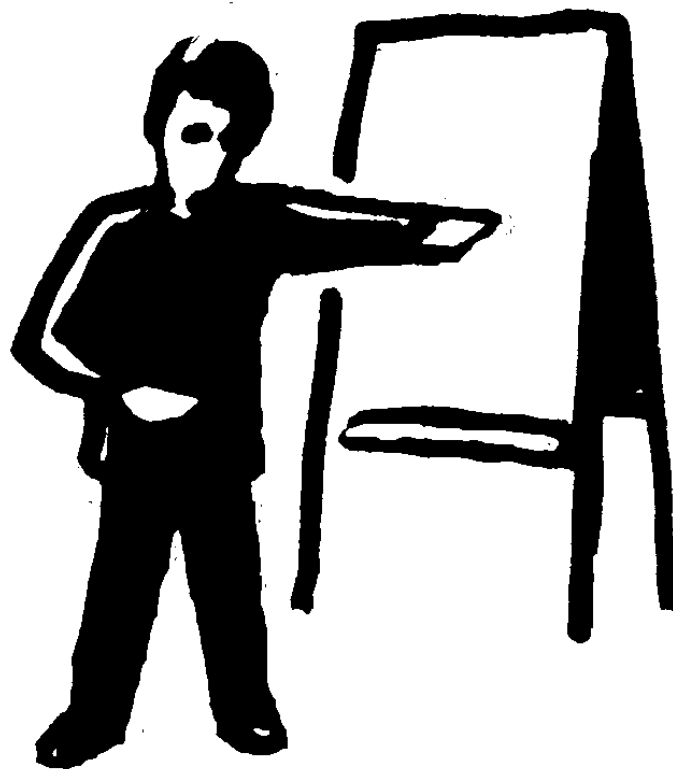
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# The Facilitator's Toolkit:

*Verbal and Non-verbal resources for focusing and energising the work of teams and groups*



# Organizing Principles

1. Meeting success is influenced more by the collaborative norms of the group than by the knowledge and skills of the group's facilitator.
2. The power of the group to produce results is rooted in the quality of the relationships among the participants.
3. In high-performing groups the five energy sources are the self-organizing values for every group and every meeting.

## Meeting Success Structures

1. Decide who decides.
2. Define the sandbox.
3. Develop standards.
4. Design the surround.

# Five Energy Sources for High-Performing Groups

## **Efficacy**

The group believes in its capacity to produce results and stays the course through internal and external difficulties to achieve goals. The group aligns energies within itself and outside itself in pursuit of its outcomes.

## **Flexibility**

The group regards situations from multiple perspectives, works creatively with uncertainty and ambiguity and values and utilizes differences within itself and the larger community of which it is a part. The group attends to rational and intuitive ways of working.

## **Craftsmanship**

The group strives for clarity in its values, goals and high standards. It applies these as criteria for its planning, actions, reflections and refinements. It attends to both short- and long-term time perspectives. It continuously refines communications processes within and beyond the group.

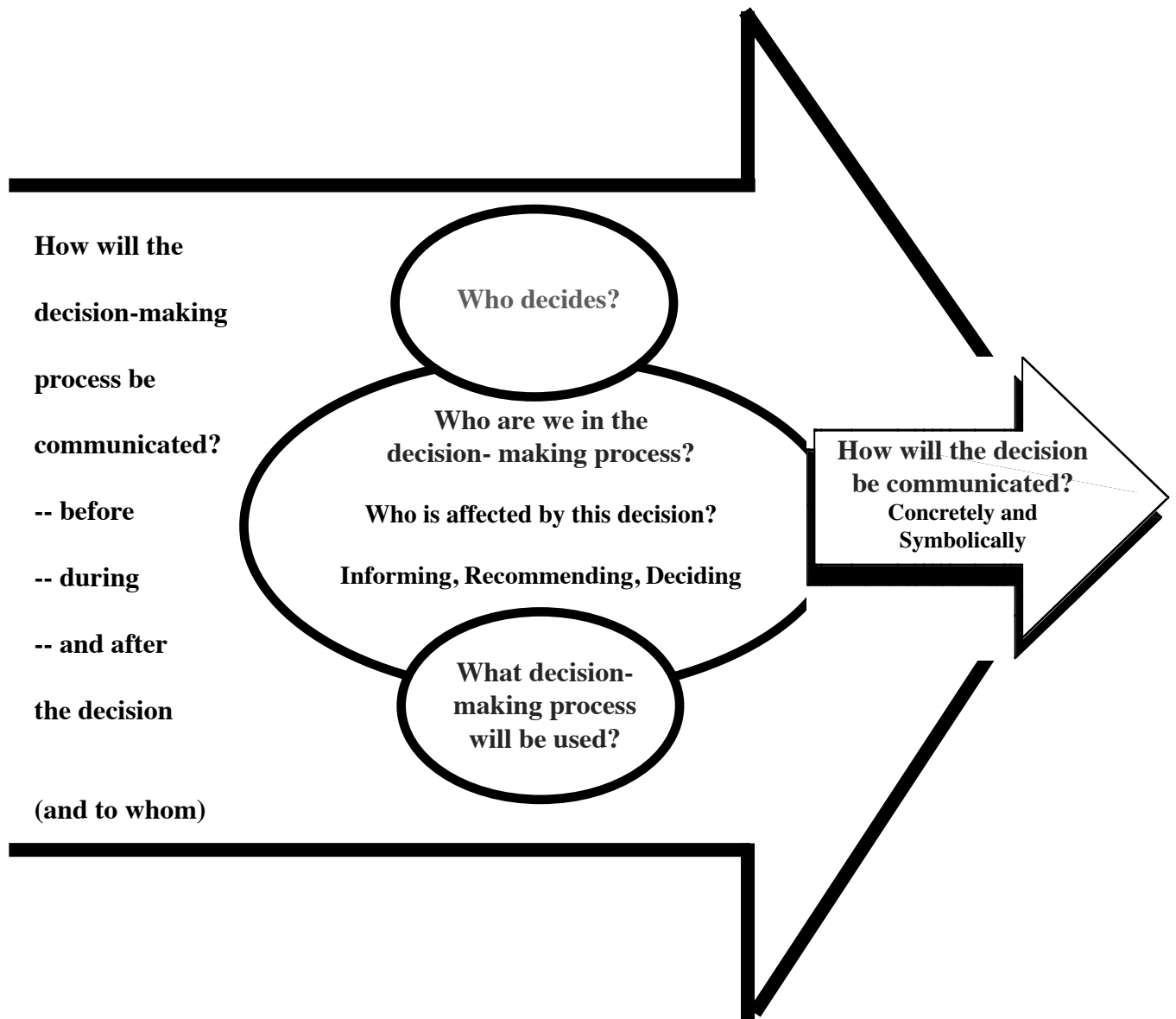
## **Consciousness**

The group monitors its decisions, actions and reflections based on its values, norms and common goals. Members are aware of the impact their actions have on each other, the total group and persons and groups beyond this immediate group.

## **Interdependence**

The group values its internal and external relationships. It seeks reciprocal influence and learning. Members treat conflict as opportunities to improve and learn about themselves, their own group and other groups. The group trusts its interactions and the processes of dialogue.

# Decision Making



## Six Group Decision-Making Methods

Successful groups are clear about the decision-making processes that frame data-driven explorations and influence how people talk and listen to one another. Explicitness about the decision-making process is critical to this endeavor so the appropriate energy is focused on the task of working with data and on the relational needs of working with colleagues.

There are six common decision-making methods (Schein, 1999). No decision making process is ideal. Depending upon a group's history, skill level and context some will be more problematic, some more productive. To increase effectiveness of application, the list below describes things to avoid and things to apply for each of these patterns.

1. Decision by default. When this occurs, the default is what Schein (1999) calls decision by "plop". This often unlabeled decision-making method occurs when a group member suggests an idea and before that proposal is examined another group member proposes a different idea, creating a random stack of ideas until the group selects one for action. The unsupported ideas lay in a heap of "plops" on the table or are left to die in the corners of the meeting room. In this circumstance, silence implicitly equals assent.

To avoid this problem, group members need to be clear that they are at the point of decision-making, illuminate a specific process for doing so and be prepared to participate fully in the selected process.

2. Decision by self-authorization. Groups that do not formalize process fall victim to pressures from self-empowered individuals or coalitions within the group who push their agendas for action without regard for a sense of the larger group. Here again, the assumption is that silence means consent. "Groupthink" (Janis, 1982) is one well-studied form of decision by self-authorization. The group moves forward with an assumption of full agreement without checking to see whether silent group members are in accord with the proposal.

To avoid this problem, groups must create space for deliberation, inquire into a proposal and preserve time for generating alternative courses of action.

3. Decision by external authority. There are times when the group is not authorized to make the decision, and someone outside the group is the ultimate decider. In this case, the group's mandate is to both craft a recommendation and persuade those with decision-making authority. When lines of authority are fuzzy, groups invest energy, time and emotion into honing a decision that may be rejected or modified by outside agents. To avoid this problem, it is essential for the group to be clear about its role in the decision-making process: who is making the decision and what information and presentation will have the most positive influence. In this way, the group can frame the recommendation in ways that will both inform and convince the decision maker.

4. Decision by majority vote. This common decision-making method occurs in two forms: when an informal poll is taken to get the sense of the group related to an issue, or when someone makes a formal motion and puts the decision choices up for a vote. The liability for collaborative groups is that voting can create win-lose situations that then impede implementation or, in the worst cases, trigger noncompliance or even sabotage.

To avoid this problem, groups can elect a decision rule that mitigates these effects. One such rule is to establish super-majority as the condition for reaching an agreement. Typically this number is set at 75% of the full group. Another solution is for group members to apportion their vote across multiple options, for example assigning percentages or dots to several choices within a list. This multi-voting method reduces the win-lose dynamic and increases the likelihood that at least one of each group member's options will be chosen.

5. Decision by consensus. Consensus requires sufficient time and structure for hearing all view points. Consensus means that while all group members may not fully agree with a course of action they are willing to move forward with a proposal and support it with integrity. A lack of time, tools, or when group members self-censor for fear that their comments and ideas might disrupt group harmony, limits the capacity for this method and can result in another form of “Groupthink”. The silent pressure to conform distorts the process and hides potentially important information and insights from the group. To avoid this problem, group members need to develop and refine their discourse skills so that consensus decision-making becomes a productive option. The rich patterns of dialogue and discussion embedded in the Collaborative Learning Cycle establish a firm foundation for this decision process, establishing a sense of group members’ ideas and perspectives. The opportunities for all group members to participate and find their voice ultimately develops shared understanding of issues and options smoothing the transition to decision-making by consensus.


6. Decision by unanimous consent. A common misconception is that complete agreement and commitment by all is the ideal. As groups develop they discover that this method does not always make the best use of their time or energy. However, some decisions are so high stake that they do require unanimous consent from group members. Typically, these decisions involve major changes in practices or structures that affect critical working conditions. Most groups do not have the developmental readiness and levels of skill needed to be effective with this mode of decision making. To avoid this problem, groups can tap the skills of an external facilitator. A skilled facilitator can push a group’s performance, structure for balanced participation, intervene when process breaks down and move the group forward by framing expectations for the group and the task. Unanimous consent still requires high levels of discourse skill, fluency with shared structures and processes, and high levels of performance. Therefore, for most decisions consensus or some clear process for voting is the practical way to proceed.

### **Tips for Maximizing Decision-Making Productivity**

1. Name and structure one mode of discourse at a time and mark clear transitions
2. Name the boundaries – what is negotiable and non-negotiable in process and outcomes
3. Name decision-making roles and responsibilities
4. Name who will be most affected by a decision and keep those people mentally and emotionally in the room.



# Define the Sandbox

- 
- Decide Who Decides
  - Define the Sandbox
  - Develop Standards
  - Design the Surround

Every group needs to be clear about which issues are within its sphere of responsibility and which lie outside its decision-making authority. Groups conserve precious energy by focusing resources where they have direct influence.

All groups have interests that intersect with other groups' decision-making authority. Collegial and political considerations must honor these overlapping areas of concern.

Individual and collective vigilance in this area is an essential ingredient of group success. Here are some examples of groups for which this structure is important:

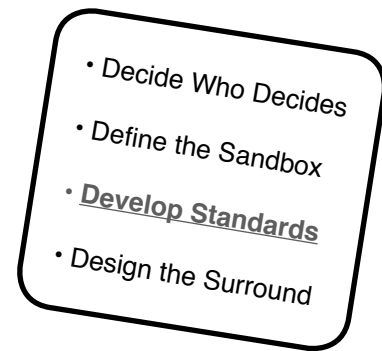
- Departments
- Curriculum task forces
- Ad hoc study or advisory groups
- Grade level teams
- Site councils
- Faculties

## Here is an example of a school site council defining its sandbox.

- Develop site plan
- Develop budgets
- Consult with bilingual advisory committee
- Consult with Title I parents
- Review student progress
- Review other data such as parent involvement survey
- Recommend the number of staff development days
- Review (annually) school discipline policy

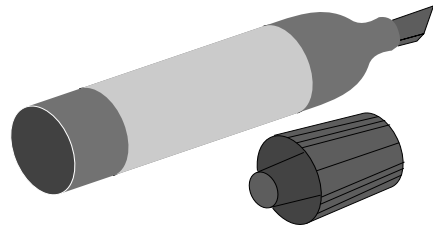
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# Develop Standards



- **One Process**
- **One Topic**
- **Balance Participation**
- **Engage Cognitive Conflict**
- **Understand and Agree on Roles**

# Meeting Standards



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# Four Possible Meeting Roles

- **Engaged Participant**
- **Facilitator**
- **Recorder**
- **Person With Role or Knowledge Authority**



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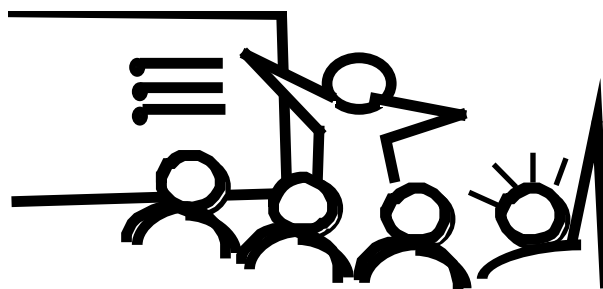
# Engaged Participant

- Uses seven norms of collaboration
- Monitors own and others' adherence to meeting standards
- Sets and tests working agreements
- Seeks and provides data
- Clarifies decision-making processes and levels of authority
- Opens the door for others to speak
- Tests consensus
- Listens to own listening
- Is conscious of own assumptions and knowledge and how these interfere with own listening



# Facilitator

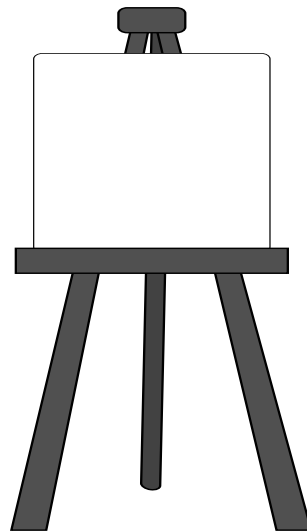
- Remains neutral to content
- Clarifies role with group
- Focuses group energy
- Keeps group on task
- Directs processes
- Encourages everyone to participate
- Protects participants and ideas from attack
- Contributes to agenda planning
- Elicits clarity regarding meeting follow-up



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# Recorder

- Remains neutral to content
- Supports facilitator
- Records basic ideas as the facilitator paraphrases them
- Keeps eyes on charts and not on group members
- Writes legibly using upper and lower case printing
- Uses alternating colors to separate ideas
- Uses icons and simple graphics
- Keeps all charts visible to support "group memory"



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# Person With Role Authority

## Before and After the Meeting

- Coordinates agenda design
- Develops group-member leadership
- Coordinates the activities of subcommittees
- Sees that meeting follow-through occurs
- Provides for evaluation

# Person With Role or Knowledge Authority

## During the Meeting

- Informs group about constraints and resources
- Advocates for own ideas
- Inquires about the ideas of others
- Actively participates



# Structuring Decisions

## Crafting the Container

- Starting the conversation
- Structuring the conversation
- Sustaining thinking in the conversation

Structuring choices greatly affect the outcomes of collaborative group work. These basic design elements set the stage for focusing energy on the task at hand, balancing the participation of group members and most importantly for producing a psychologically safe forum for participants to contribute ideas and to question the contributions of others. Effective design choices increase a group's capacity to address hard-to-talk about topics and shape thoughtful dialogue and productive discussion.

Purposeful structures maximize the efficient use of time and increase the quality of interactions and results. Novice groups require formal structures to scaffold success. More expert groups know when to select formal structures to match the emotional and cognitive demands of their work. Higher performing groups are not harmed by structure. Groups and group members that need it will be greatly aided by tighter designs. It is always wise to remember that not every participant in a high performing group may be personally skilled in group processes. The following two broad categories describe considerations for group leaders.

### Group Size, Composition and Length of Time as a Working Group

Working group size is an often-overlooked variable that affects group task success. Using pairs, trios and quartets increases active participation and establishes a safer working climate. Many groups, both large and small, err in attempting to do the bulk of their work as a committee of the whole. Partners or trios can be pre-assigned, or determined during the work session using pre-recorded grouping sheets such as seasonal partners. With this method, participants mingle and use recording sheets with seasonal icons, exchanging names and creating partnerships in the space allotted. Count-offs or physical repositioning, such as turn to a neighbor or stand and find a colleague are other time efficient ways to subdivide and energize groups.

Group composition is another factor to consider. Criteria for grouping, such as roles, years of experience, work style preference or degree of expertise creates small groups that are specialized or diversified, as is appropriate to the task. This intentional design choice spreads the talent within the larger group and breaks down factions that might exist. Purposely structured pairs, trios or quartets increases success with many tasks. At appropriate points, pairs can join other pairs to widen the conversation.

Length of time as a working group should vary according to task requirements. Small groups are effective for text-based activities, idea generation and data exploration. By varying the length of time that groups work together and regrouping periodically, individuals within a larger group develop deeper working relationships and greater knowledge of one another. Switching partners also provides a period of purposeful movement for energy and brief social interaction. One pattern for intact groups is to establish base groups that meet regularly and employ informal partnering for designated tasks.

### Interaction Patterns, Materials and Space

Structuring the patterns of interaction increases productivity and engagement. As indicated above, most groups are not harmed by structure. By developing a shared repertoire of strategies, protocols and grouping patterns, working groups enhance success and satisfaction. Fundamental structuring moves include: the use of active public recording on chart paper so that all can see ideas and information; providing individual writing time and space to think before a conversation or data exploration starts; using a round-robin pattern for sharing ideas; using a public timer to guide processes; and assigning roles such as that of a facilitator, recorder, and a materials manager. Having supplies such as index cards, sticky notes, pens, pads, markers and chart paper available saves time and allows for flexibility in meeting designs.

One last consideration is the arrangement of the physical space within which the group is working. Group members need to be able to see and hear one another and have a clear view of charts on the walls and on chart stands during active public recording. Table and chair arrangements need to be adjusted in some cases to facilitate interaction. Too many and too few tables and chairs are equally problematic. Visual clutter in the room is an additional distraction. Key charts noting a projects purpose, outcomes and logistics should be posted prominently where all participants can see them.

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# Recovery

## Structuring Decisions:

The first level of recovery is to consider modifications to the structuring decisions guiding the design and delivery of the session.

### 1. Working group size, composition and length of time

- Do your working groups need to be modified? too large? too small? wrong composition?
- Do you need to adjust the time that group members engage with one another? Less time? More time?

### 2. Interaction patterns, materials and space

- Do the strategies and structures you are applying require tightening or loosening in any way?  
e.g. providing time to think and write before sharing, adding a round-robin pattern, using a public timer, using public charting to focus attention.
- Are materials readily available for recording and highlighting information?
- Are resource materials and access to technology available to support the work?
- Are table and chair arrangements and wall displays arranged appropriately to support the work  
e.g. adding or subtracting chairs to avoid energy drains from open spaces or energy blocks from double layers, adding or removing tables, modifying table arrangements (U-Shape, square, chevron), anchoring charts with key information, removing visual clutter.

## Direct group leader intervention:

If needed, apply the following patterns.

Anchor a neutral space away from your facilitation or presentation space. Then do one of the following:

- **State the issue as a principle or abstraction.**

*“When there is more than one topic on the table at a time, group members have trouble focusing their energy which wastes meeting time.”*

Then reframe the task and process focus. (Modify as needed)

- **Share the specific behaviors that are problematic as “data” and ask the group about the impacts of these behaviors?**

*“Since the break there has been an increase in ‘storytelling’. Five people have shared different examples. What is your sense of the ways this might be affecting your task accomplishment?”*

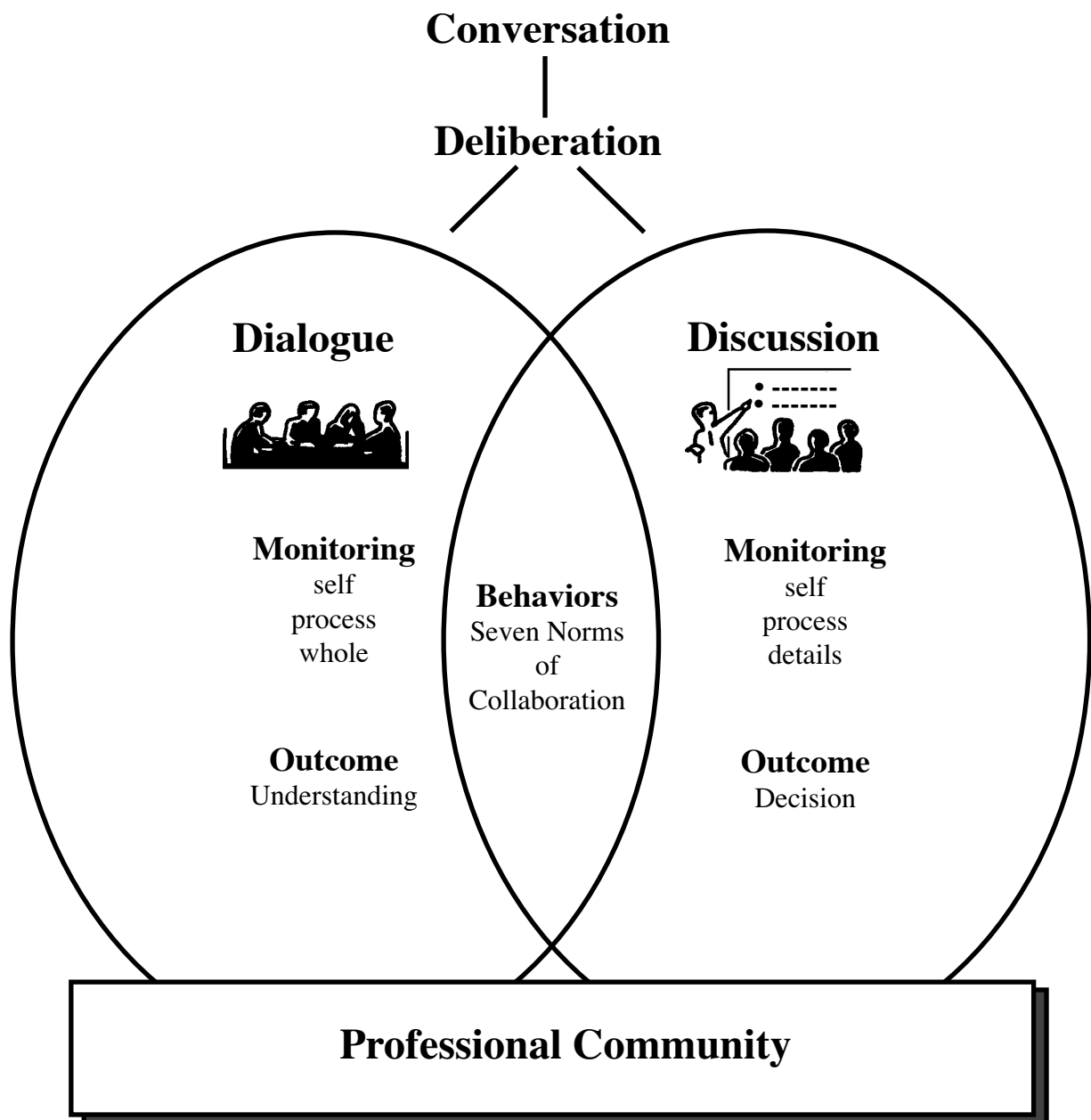
Paraphrase participant responses then reframe the task and process focus. (Modify as needed)

- **Take the group members to the balcony and inquire about their perceptions and feelings regarding what is transpiring.**

*“Please pause. Mentally step back from the conversation and take a look from the balcony. What is your sense of what is occurring and how that is influencing your participation?”*

Paraphrase participant responses then reframe the task and process focus. (Modify as needed)

# Ways of Talking



# Ways of Talking

**“In order to have a conversation with someone you must reveal yourself.”**

**--- James Baldwin**

Professional communities are born and nurtured in webs of conversation. What we talk about in our schools and how we talk about those things says much about who we are, who we think we are and who we wish to be, both in the moment and in the collective future that we are creating for ourselves as colleagues and for the students we serve.

To develop shared understanding and be ready to take collective action, working groups need knowledge and skill in two ways of talking. One way of talking, dialogue, leads to collective meaning making and the development of shared understanding. The other way of talking, discussion, leads to decisions that stay made.

Dialogue honors the social/emotional brain, building a sense of connection, belonging and safety. As a shape for conversations, it connects us to our underlying motivations and mental models. This way of talking forms a foundation for coherent sustained effort and community building. In dialogue we hear phrases like “An assumption I have is....” and, “I’d be curious to hear what other people are thinking about this issue.”

Discussion in its more skillful form requires conversations infused with sustained critical thinking, careful consideration of options and respect for conflicting points of view. This way of talking leads to decision making that serves the group’s and school’s vision, values and goals. In a discussion we hear phrases like “We need to define the problem we are solving before jumping to solutions.” and, “I’d like to see the data that these assumptions are base on before we go much further.”

## **Conversation and Deliberation**

When groups come together they “converge” and “converse”. Drawing from these words’ respective Latin roots means that group members “turn together” and “associate with one another”. Conversation is informal talking in which participants share information, anecdotes and opinions to learn from one another or simply enjoy each other’s company. When the conversation takes on an organized purpose to either deepen understanding or make a decision, a group that understands that there are two ways of talking acknowledges this point of deliberation and consciously chooses to engage in either dialogue or discussion. Deliberation in its Latin root, *deliberare*, means to weigh as in evaluate, assess or ponder.

Group members only have this choice point available to them when they have roadmaps for ways of talking and consciousness about group processes and group purposes. A significant part of this

awareness is recognizing that culturally embedded patterns shape behaviors – patterns from the greater surrounding culture and patterns from organizational and group culture. Many groups default into the western cultural habit of polarized discussion and debate. Our media-saturated world bombards us with arguments framed by commentators as point-counterpoint, pro and con, left versus right and other polarities. These models transfer to conversations in working groups; they then frame how participants listen to others and how and when participants speak. If group members are not careful, they listen not to understand but in order to hear gaps in the logic of other speakers or they interrupt to make a point, whether or not the current speaker is finished. Conversations then break down into verbal combat with winners and losers.

All too often, valued colleagues become conscientious objectors, choosing not to participate in the fray. The group then loses perspective and potential alternative viewpoints. The loudest and most persistent voices become the policy makers, and in the worst cases, the process sows the seeds of passive noncompliance or sabotage in those who feel excluded or devalued.

When groups understand that they have more than one way of talking available to them, they can then consciously choose whether to pursue the path of dialogue or follow the path of discussion. Most important issues require explorations along both pathways. Many sensitive issues, especially those with high stakes attached for the participants, may call for separate sessions in which the dialogue and discussion are separated in time and sometimes space. One useful facilitation technique is to explicitly mark agenda items as either dialogue or discussion and offer language models to further mark the distinctions between the two forms of discourse.

As group members become more sophisticated with the ways of talking, the pathways become more malleable. For example, during a dialogue, a group member senses an emerging consensus on an issue. He or she then inquires if this is so and frames a proposal to move the item to a decision. In another case, during a discussion, emotions rise and the details become muddled. Someone then proposes that the group switch to a dialogue format for a set period of time to explore the feelings and underlying issues that are present.

## The Path of Dialogue

Dialogue is a reflective learning process in which group members seek to understand each other's viewpoints and deeply held assumptions. The work dialogue comes from the Greek *dialogos*. *Dia* means “through” and *logos* means “the word”. In this “meaning-making through words,” group members inquire into their own and others' beliefs, values, and mental models to better understand how things work in their world. In dialogue listening is as important as speaking. For skilled group members, much of the work is done internally.

Physicist and philosopher David Bohm described dialogue as process of surfacing and altering the “tacit infrastructure of thought.” As a quantum physicist, Bohm draws an analogy between dialogue and superconductivity. Electrons cooled to extremely low temperatures dramatically change their behavior, operating more as a coherent whole and less as separate parts. In supercool environments, electrons flow around barriers and each other without resistance, creating very high energy. The same electrons

radically change behavior in a new environment. At higher temperatures they operate as separate entities with random movement and loss of momentum.

Dialogue creates an emotional and cognitive safety zone in which ideas flow for examination without judgment. While many of the capabilities and tools of dialogue and skilled discussion are the same, their core intentions are quite different and require different personal and collective monitoring processes.

### **Monitoring Dialogue**

Mindful group members pay attention to three essential elements during productive dialogue. They monitor themselves, fidelity to the process of dialogue and maintain awareness of the new whole that is emerging from and within the group.

### **Self**

Dialogue is first and foremost a listening practice. When we “listen to our listening” we notice whether or not we are internally debating with the speaker, reviewing our mental catalogue of related information and personal anecdotes, or composing a response. Noticing these common internal processes allows us to switch them off so that we can hear others without judging.

Dialogue requires choice making. Typical choices include how and when to talk ---- Do we paraphrase prior comments as a check for understanding and or synthesis? Do we inquire into the ideas and assumptions of others? Or, do we put a new idea or perspective on the table to widen the frame?

Suspension is an essential internal skill in dialogue. To suspend judgment, group members set aside for a time their perceptions, feelings impulses and carefully monitor their internal experience. Points of personal conflict can easily emerge when we feel that others are not hearing us or that they are distorting our point of view. Points of conflict also surface when our own values conflict with those of a speaker. These areas of discomfort influence our listening and our responses, which in turn influence the thoughts and behaviors of other group members.

Peter Senge notes that suspension also involves developing awareness of our own assumptions and purposely hanging them from the ceiling – suspending them in front of the group so that all can examine them. These assumptions are beliefs – often unexamined—of why we think things work as they do. Our assumptions drive our perceptions, simultaneously opening and blinding us to possibilities in the world around us.

### **Process**

Dialogue as a process requires focusing on the goal of developing shared understanding. In our action-oriented work environments this is often countercultural. Yet, in every group with which we’ve worked participants can all recite examples of decisions that were poorly conceived, poorly communicated, simply ignored or in the worst cases violated by many organizational members without consequence. At the root of all of these stories were group processes that were not thought out, often hurried and inappropriately facilitated. The rush to action pushed unclear decision-making processes and timelines onto the group without sufficient attention to developing shared understandings of both problems and solutions.

By going slow and honoring the flow of dialogue, groups can often go fast when they get to the choice points within decision-making. When the assumptions and the implications of those assumptions have been explored during dialogue, group members don't second-guess the motives of others during discussions.

Meetings should be safe but not necessarily comfortable. When a group confuses safety with comfort, it sacrifices productive tension for the ease of conviviality. Humor and banter can be avoidance strategies as much as they can be social lubricants. A lack of comfort with discomfort weakens dialogue and undermines the learning possibilities in that moment.

### **Whole**

Thought is both a personal and collective process. We influence and are influenced in turn by others. During dialogue, the line between self and others blurs when we open ourselves to the possibilities within the communal thought space. This created whole is in itself a goal of dialogue. Communities move forward together. Collective understanding leads to shared goals and shared practices that tap the power of cumulative effect for student learning and for the adult learning community.

The whole is always greater than the sum of the individual parts. In many ways it is both process and product simultaneously. By learning to observe the processes, patterns and results that emerge from our dialogues we can more consciously participate and more consciously contribute to the whole of which we are a part.

### **Understanding as the Outcome**

Well-crafted dialogue leads to understanding. This is the foundation for conflict resolution, consensus and professional community. Decisions that don't stay made are often the result of group members feeling left out and or having their ideas discounted by the group. Dialogue gives voice to all parties and all viewpoints.

Misunderstanding lies beneath most intra and intergroup conflict. Dialogue illuminates and clarifies misunderstandings when the underlying values and beliefs surface for examination. Often there is alignment at this level. It is at the solution level that opinions differ. Working from a foundation of shared understanding, group members can more easily and rationally resolve differences, generate options, and make wise choices when they move to the discussion side of the journey.

### **The Path of Discussion**

Discussion in its Latin root *discutere* means to shake apart. It focuses on the parts and their relationships to one another – the causes, the effects and the ripple effects of proposed actions and solutions. In its most ineffective forms, discussion takes the form of serial sharing and serial advocacy without much group member inquiry into the thinking and proposals of others. Participants attempt to reach decisions through a variety of voting and consensus techniques. When discussion is unskilled and dialogue is absent, decisions are often low quality, represent the opinions of the most vocal members or leader, lack group commitment, and do not stay made.



Three elements shape skilled discussions: (a) clarity about decision-making processes and authority, (b) knowledge of the boundaries surrounding the topics open to the group's decision-making authority, and (c) standards for orderly decision-making meetings. (See Section 3 for details.) Most meetings are, in fact, structured discussions.

### **Monitoring Discussion**

Mindful group members pay attention to three essential elements during productive discussion. They monitor themselves, fidelity to the processes of skilled discussion and the details of the problem-solving, planning and decision-making processes with which they are engaged.

### **Self**

Productive discussions require group members with emotional and mental flexibility. When our outcome is to influence the thinking of others and we give up models of “winning and losing”, we are more able to notice our thoughts and actions and the affects of those thoughts and actions on others.

Mentally, this requires taking a balcony view. This perceptual position is neither *egocentric* (I am intensely aware of my thoughts, feelings and intentions and know my own boundaries) nor *allocentric* (I am aware of how something looks, feels, and sounds from the point of view of another). The balcony view is a third perceptual position, a *macrocentric* perspective, in which with compassion and detachment we try to understand the nature of the situation the group is in at the moment. It is with this view, looking down upon the group, that we gain the most knowledge about our group, the group's interactions and ourselves.

From the balcony we can make the most strategic choices about how and when to participate. Should I advocate or should I inquire? At what points should I press? When should I probe for detail or let go? How might I phrase an idea for greatest influence? These are the same internal skills that teachers employ when they “monitor and adjust” in their classrooms.

### **Process**

Skilled discussion as a process requires mindfulness about focusing on one topic and applying one process tool at a time. When topics and processes blur group members lose focus. To maintain focus requires clear structure, purposeful facilitation, impulse control on the part of individual group members and recovery strategies if the group strays off course.

Effective group members share responsibility with the facilitator for maintaining the flow of the discussion, for encouraging other group members to share knowledge and ideas, and listening for and surfacing points of confusion or murkiness.

When working groups stray from skilled discussion, they may move to an unskilled form of debate. This occurs when group members overshoot useful advocacy of ideas and proposals and start listening for and challenging the fallacies in the arguments of others. The Latin origins of the word debate, *battuere* means to fight or beat down. When meetings descend to the level of street debate, not academic debate, we focus on beating down the ideas of others. Scoring points becomes the goal and winning comes from intimidation and intonation as much or more than from logic or reason.

**Details**

While successful dialogue requires attention to the whole, successful discussion focuses on the details, both in isolation and in their interactions. The path of discussion is also the path of decision. As such, groups need to identify any constraints under which they might be working such as, timelines, deadlines, budgets, product standards, the negotiable items, the nonnegotiable item, task assignments and most importantly who they are in the decision-making process.

Groups skilled in discussion employ many intentional cognitive skills. There is no set sequence for these efforts. The task before the group determines the necessary intellectual toolkit.

Groups need tools for:

- Generating ideas, including a repertoire of brainstorming and creative thinking strategies and protocols.
- Organizing ideas, including both conceptual and graphic tools.
- Analyzing ideas, including a variety of tools for surfacing assumptions and clarifying particulars.
- Deciding among alternatives, including clarification of decision-making roles and processes.

**Decision as the Outcome**

Decision, in its Latin root *decidere* means to cut off or determine. In practice this means to cut off some choices. The purpose of discussion is to eliminate some ideas from a field of possibilities and have the stronger ideas prevail. Groups must learn to separate people from ideas in order for this to work effectively. If ideas are “owned” by individuals, then to cut the idea away is the same as cutting the person away. Ideas once stated should belong to the group, not to individuals. In this way they can be shaped, modified, and discarded to serve the group’s greater purposes.

**Professional Community**

Professional community is both a cause and an effect of the two ways of talking. As a cause being in community provides the motivation and vision of ways of interacting and working together. As an effect, strong professional community results from both what is talked about and how people talk. Such talk requires courage, confidence in self and others and skillfulness in applying the maps and tools for developing shared understanding and strategic decision-making practices.

# The Seven Norms of Collaborative Work

**Pausing:** Pausing before responding or asking a question allows time for thinking and enhances dialogue, discussion and decision-making.

**Paraphrasing:** Using a paraphrase starter that is comfortable for you: “So...” or “As you are...” or “You’re thinking...” and following the starter with a paraphrase assists members of the group to hear and understand each other as they formulate decisions.

**Posing questions:** The intentions of posing questions are to explore and specify thinking. Questions may be posed to explore perceptions, assumptions and interpretations and to invite others to inquire into their own thinking. For example. "What might be some outcomes we are envisioning?" Use focusing questions such as, "Which students specifically?" or "What might be an example of that?" to increase the clarity and precision of group members' thinking. Inquire into the ideas of others before advocating for one's own idea.

**Putting ideas on the table:** Ideas are the heart of a meaningful dialogue. Label the intention of your comments. For example, you might say, “Here is one idea...” or “One thought I have is...” or “Here is a possible approach...”.

**Providing data:** Providing data, both qualitative and quantitative, in a variety of forms supports group members in constructing shared understanding from their work. Data have no meaning beyond that which we make of them; shared meaning develops from collaboratively exploring, analyzing and interpreting data.

**Paying attention to self and others:** Meaningful dialogue is facilitated when each group member is conscious of self and of others and is aware of not only what she/he is saying, but also how it is said and how others are responding. This includes paying attention to learning style when planning for, facilitating and participating in group meetings. Responding to others in their own language forms is one manifestation of this norm.

**Presuming positive intentions:** Assuming that others’ intentions are positive promotes and facilitates meaningful dialogue and eliminates unintentional put-downs. Using positive intentions in your speech is one manifestation of this norm.

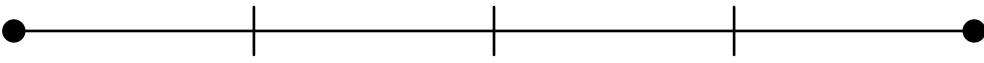
## Norms Inventory

### Rating the Consistency of My Personal Behavior In a Specific Group that I Facilitate

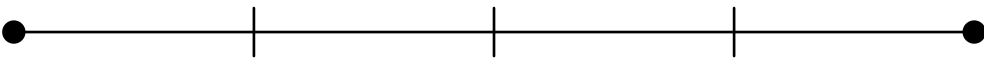
Place a mark on each scale, to reflect your perception of your personal behavior in a group of which you are a member.

#### 1. Pausing

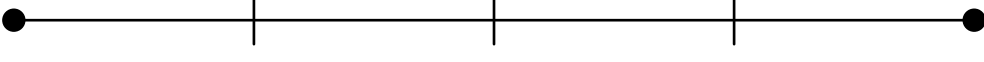
A. I pause after asking questions.

Low  High

B. I pause after others speak to reflect before responding.

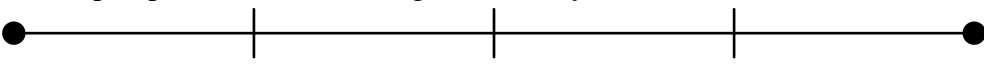
Low  High

C. I pause before asking questions to permit thoughtful construction.

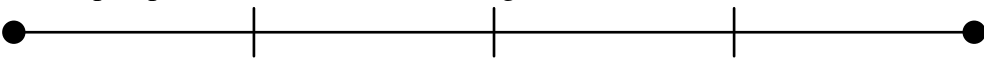
Low  High

#### 2. Paraphrasing

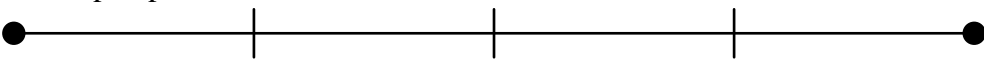
A. I listen and paraphrase to acknowledge and clarify.

Low  High

B. I listen and paraphrase to summarize and organize.

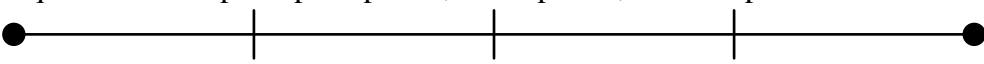
Low  High

C. I listen and paraphrase to shift levels of abstraction.

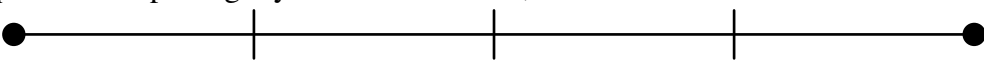
Low  High

#### 3. Posing Questions

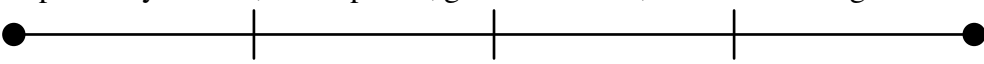
A. I pose questions to explore perceptions, assumptions, and interpretations.

Low  High

B. I inquire before putting my ideas on the table, or before I advocate

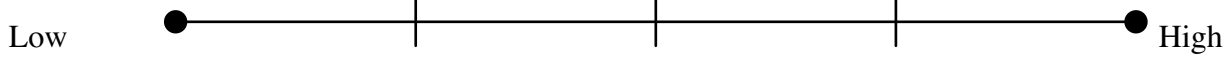
Low  High

C. I seek specificity of data, assumptions, generalizations, and the meaning of words.

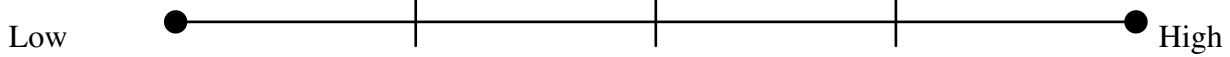
Low  High

**4. Putting Ideas on the Table and Pulling Them Off**

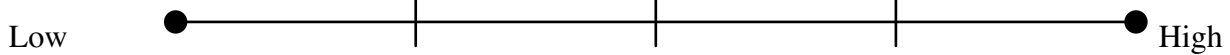
A. I state the intentions of my communications.



B. I provide relevant facts, ideas, opinions, and inferences.

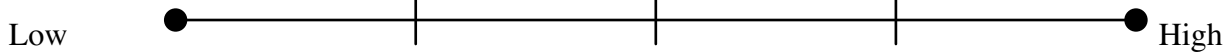


C. I retract or announce modification of previously offered ideas, opinions, and points of view.

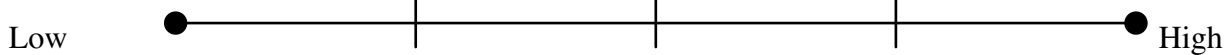


**5. Providing Data to Structure Conversations**

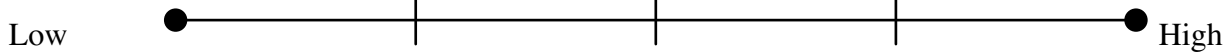
A. I present specific, measurable, and observable data.



B. I present data without judgments, opinions, or inferences.

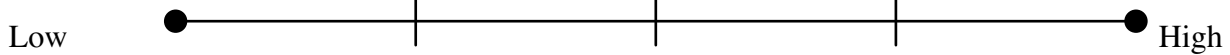


C. I explore the implications and consequences of proposals and plans.

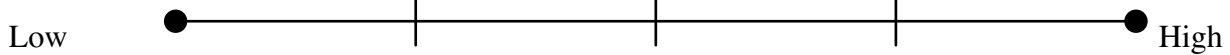


**6. Paying Attention to Self and Others**

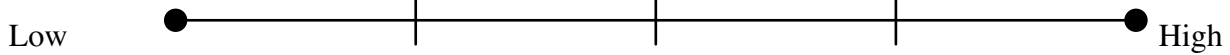
A. I balance participation and open opportunities for others to contribute and respond.



B. I restrain my impulses to respond, react, or rebut at inappropriate times & in ineffective ways.

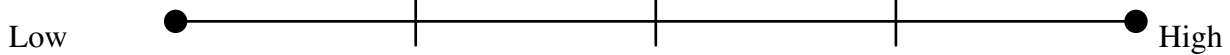


C. I maintain awareness of the group's task, processes, and development.

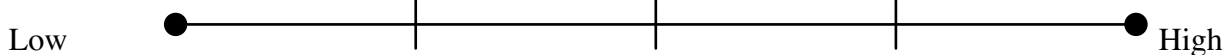


**7. Presuming Positive Intentions**

A. I communicate respectfully, whether I agree or disagree.



B. I embed positive presuppositions in my paraphrases, comments, and summaries.



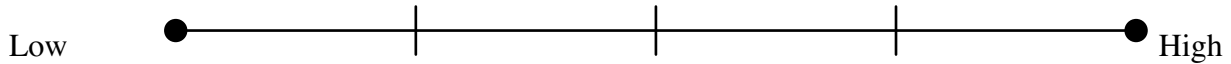
C. I embed positive presuppositions when I inquire or probe for specificity.



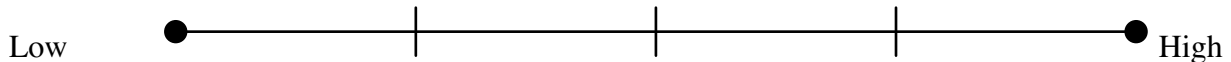
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# Personal Seven Norms Assessment

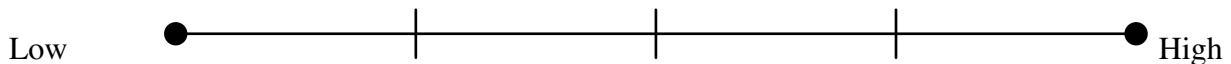
## 1. Pausing to allow time for thought



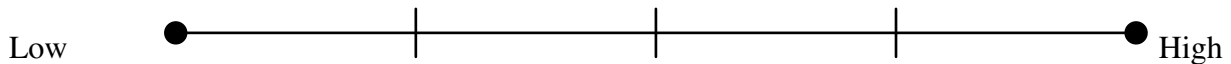
## 2. Paraphrasing within a pattern of pause - paraphrase - inquire



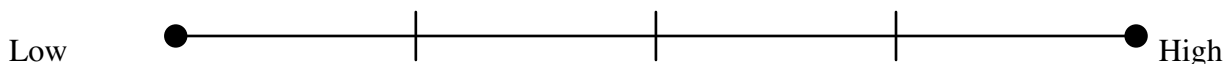
## 3. Posing questions to reveal and extend thinking



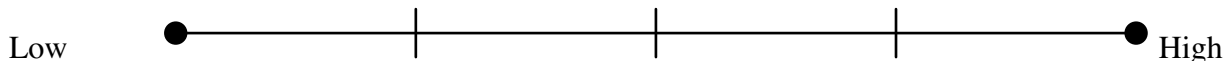
## 4. Putting ideas on the table



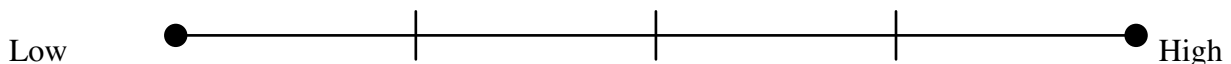
## 5. Providing data to structure conversations



## 6. Paying attention to self and to monitor our ways of working



## 7. Presuming positive intentions to support nonjudgmental atmosphere



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# Principles for Leading Groups

**A** SET OF basic principles of practice guides the work of skillful group leaders. Thoughtful application of these elements leads to mastery of the art and science of group leadership, supporting groups in greater task accomplishment and improvements in working relationships. These principles form the invisible inner structure that produces confident, efficient and effective orchestration of group processes in meetings, seminars and workshops. They underpin the design and delivery of high stakes sessions, especially when a group is working on critical projects, emotionally charged material and/or relational tensions in the room.

The principles are associated and operate as a package. Many of them work together in bundles as group leaders focus the attention of group members, frame tasks and processes, present information and facilitate productive conversations. For each principle, there is also a list of associated principles.

As the building blocks of successful group leadership, the principles become factors for anticipating and preparing for sessions, analyzing procedural glitches as they occur within group work and recovering focus and flow when it is appropriate to redirect a group in a task or process.

To develop fluency with the principles for leading groups requires isolating specific examples for purposeful practice in low-risk settings. There are many opportunities in daily work with groups both small and large to apply these principles. Frequent and consistent use is essential for internalizing these elements so that they can be applied with grace and confidence, especially when the stakes are high.

<b>Principles</b> Code  E- can explain M- can model A- apply when I remember I- integrated into my practice	<b>Learning Goals</b>  • New learning • Applying & refining skills • Integrating skills	<b>Practice Opportunities</b>
Backtrack and Foreshadow ____  Capture Attention First ____  Choose Voice ____  Create A Third Point ____  Decontaminate Problem Space ____  Describe What, Why, How ____  Establish Spatial Anchors ____  Go Visual ____  Make Text The Expert ____  Separate Attention from Message ____  Show-Don't Say __  Signal Stance Change ____  Use Pronouns with Purpose ____		



## Backtrack and Foreshadow

To backtrack and foreshadow is to remind group members of where they've been and to alert them to what is to come. Skillful leaders use visual references and verbal elaboration to backtrack and foreshadow such elements as: process steps, task stages and outcome targets. These physical, cognitive and emotional markers support group members in managing the flow of the work by reminding them of what has been accomplished and what lies ahead.

Group members who are embedded in the tasks at hand don't always stick their heads up to notice the flow of goal achievement for their tasks and relationships. Because groups are not always aware of their progress, highlighting what has been accomplished supports a group cognitively and emotionally, while keeping the bigger picture in mind.

Backtracking and foreshadowing helps group members manage time and energy by establishing an appropriate pace for the work. They can then apply their full focus to the present tasks and processes and not become distracted by project elements that may reside in future sessions once current efforts are successfully completed.

### Associated Principles:

*Choose Voice*      *Use Pronouns with Purpose*

## Capture Attention First

To capture group members' attention means to establish a shared focal point for their collective physical, cognitive and emotional energies. Effective group leaders capture group members' attention first --- before starting a session, presenting information, giving task directions or asking questions. By pausing to ensure a central point of focus, the confident leader goes slow to go fast. This principle is especially important when making transitions between activities, such as moving from small group to larger group processes or returning from breaks.

This principle may seem counterintuitive when time is tight and stakes are high. However, time is often lost or wasted when group members are not fully attending to purpose statements or process directions. The resulting lack of clarity can lead to confusion, frustration and annoyance for those group members who were listening and are ready to begin. Establishing a pattern of capturing attention first unifies and focuses the group as a whole that is ready to move forward together.

### Associated Principles:

*Choose Voice*      *Establish Spatial Anchors*      *Separate Attention from Message*  
*Use Pronouns with Purpose*

### Patterns for Focusing Attention

- Freeze body
- Freeze gesture
- Use a credible voice
- Break and breathe
- From a new space deliver a new message

## Choose Voice

Human speakers naturally vary their vocal pitch to match the intention of their communication. Statements typically have an intonation pattern that is different than the pattern for a question. To increase participant engagement, group leaders choose a voice pattern that is appropriate to the intended purpose, operating across a vocal range that runs from a credible to a more approachable tone (Zoller & Landry, 2010; Grinder, 1997). By developing purposeful vocal patterns, successful leaders communicate clear messages and promote trust.

The credible voice has narrow range of modulation and flat tone that drops at the end of a sentence. Speakers produce this tone by holding their heads still and dropping their chins and shoulders to relax the neck and diaphragm muscles. This physical pattern works to lower the pitch while projecting a sense of purpose and authority to the message being conveyed. Leaders use the credible voice to focus attention, frame tasks and processes and present information. This voice communicates confidence and credibility.

The approachable voice has a wider range of modulation with a rising tone at the end of a statement. Speakers produce this tone by leaning towards the group, maintaining eye contact and head movement. This physical pattern signals high engagement and that the leader is seeking information or wishing to explore the information being presented. Leaders use the approachable voice to create a sense of psychological safety, to invite thinking, encourage responses and communicate acceptance of ideas.

### Associated Principles:

*Capture Attention First*    *Describe What, Why, How*    *Separate Attention from Message*  
*Signal Stance Change*    *Use Pronouns with Purpose*

## Create a Third Point

A third point is an inanimate object in the room that becomes the focus of attention. Productive group work often requires the skillful application of a third point to focus a conversation and create the appropriate level of emotional protection so individuals and groups can engage with the topic and one another (Zoller & Landry, 2010; Grinder, 1997). Three-point communication operates with the group leader as one point of the triangle, the group as the second point and some data or focusing information as the third point. For group work, the third point might include a chart or projected slide containing a data-display, purpose statement, problem scenario, project outcomes, timelines or other pertinent information.

This same principle applies when pairs are working together with a “third-point” on the table between them. In that case each partner is a point and the text or graphic material is the third point. Third points might include professional articles or text selections, samples of student work, displays of quantitative or qualitative data, or expected standards.

A focus on the third point increases psychological safety by separating the third-point information from the group leader and centering group-members talk and eye contact on the “data” and not on one another. Skillful group leaders support this process by depersonalizing the information being considered.

**Associated Principles:**

*Go Visual    Establish Spatial Anchors    Show-Don't Say    Use Pronouns with Purpose*

### **Decontaminate Problem Space**

Problem spaces develop in a meeting or seminar room when the leader or a participant shares information that triggers some form of strong emotions for group members. Because location holds memory, thoughtful group leaders are purposeful about their use of space as they deliver information and feedback to their groups. Space gets contaminated when a message that might be perceived as negative or corrective is given from a location that the group associates with facilitation or presentation.

To intentionally contaminate a space for a potentially problematic message and decontaminate protected spaces move to the side of the room away from such preserved spaces and call the group to attention from there. This physical shift is especially important when the group leader needs to directly intervene with a group that has gone off course or when a process has broken down. By delivering the corrective messages from this now “contaminated space” the leader separates the visual and verbal intervention from the prime presentation and facilitation spaces. NOTE: It is important to break eye contact and not talk as you walk between the facilitation space and the intervention space. It's as if you are playing the part of two different characters in a theater production; the facilitator/ presenter character speaks from one area, the intervening leader from another.

Specific events or previous speakers sometime contaminate whole meeting spaces. In those instances, the room arrangements and grouping patterns need to be adjusted to clear the space, create new sightlines and new relationships between participants. Removing chairs and tables or in some way altering the seating arrangements and visual information on the walls can decontaminate and freshen the space to energize more productive work patterns.

**Associated Principles:**

*Go Visual    Establish Spatial Anchor    Separate Attention from Message*

### **Describe What, Why, How**

Skillful group leaders intentionally describe the what, why and how of structures, strategies and protocols. This principle embodies a spirit of transparency and communicates to the group the thinking behind design choices and the benefits to them as individuals and as a group. The “what”

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names the structure, strategy or protocol with which the group is about to engage. The “why” describes the intended outcomes for these choices for the group and the work. The “why” includes benefits such as greater task focus leading to project success and outcomes such as time efficient task completion, more balanced participation and the opportunity for all voices to be heard. The “how” offers the directions and describes the procedures and processes that will be involved. The “how” may require graphic support and modeling for multi-step or complex processes.

While there is typically some “boilerplate” language for strategies and protocols, the “whys” need to be customized to the particular group and its context. When group members understand why they are being asked to do something, especially if that something breaks or upsets established patterns, there is reduced push back, resistance or subversion for the procedures and processes.

**Associated Principles:**

*Choose Voice      Use Pronouns with Purpose*

### **Establish Spatial Anchors**

A spatial anchor is an area in a presentation or meeting room that is assigned a specific purpose. Spatial anchors are based on the psychological phenomena that locations hold memory. By establishing spatial anchors in meeting and presentation spaces, group leaders connect ideas and emotions to specific locales in the room. These spaces then anchor the functions and essential content delivered or facilitated from those spots. Consistently using the same spot for the same purpose marks the purpose for that location. These functions might include a space for calling the group to attention; a space for giving directions, a space for presenting information and a space for eliciting participant comments and questions. Applying this principle is especially important with large groups.

Spatial anchors are vital for holding important information for ongoing projects. Anchored graphics such as timelines, product specifications, legal requirements and project outcomes should be posted on a sidewall that is visible to the group. When group members engage with a project over time, these nonnegotiable items need to be visibly alive in the room and held in a space where the leader can refer to them away from other protected spaces in the room.

**Associated Principles:**

*Go Visual      Decontaminate Problem Space*

## Go Visual

Skillful group leaders go visual for hard to talk about information. We live in a graphically rich world in which many learners prefer visual forms of input, yet we try to communicate sensitive or complex messages orally. When the information is emotionally loaded or conceptually complex, many listeners have trouble tracking what is being said. This is especially true when listeners experience emotional flooding and drop into an internal conversation and stop attending to the leader.

Oral input makes listeners dependent on the speaker and establishes a one-up relationship causing the listener to ask for clarification or repetition of the message (Grinder 1997). Visual displays allow participants a greater degree of autonomy since they can take in the information for themselves and examine the details as many times as they want to. By getting the visual sources off to the side the leader can separate the message from the messenger and facilitate a three-point conversation about the displayed information. (See Create a Third Point)

### Associated Principles:

*Create A Third Point    Separate Attention from Message    Show Don't Say*

## Make Text the Expert

Making text the expert moves the attention of group members from the leader to the information being considered. By applying a variety of paired and small group protocols, leaders increase group members' engagement with ideas and with each other. This deeper engagement and small group interaction increases psychological safety and allows for the messiness of true learning. Rather than focus on what the leader thinks about the information, group members develop their own understanding and questions about the material.

Text as expert or some form of media as expert brings a deeper knowledge base and perspective to the group. This is especially important with controversial topics or when a group is exploring options that might be challenging long-established patterns in the organization. Applying this principle also allows leaders to work with ideas and information more confidently when they or group members do not feel knowledgeable about the topic.

### Associated Principles:

*Create A Third Point    Go Visual    Show Don't Say*

## Separate Attention From Message

Calling a group to attention is always some form of an interruption. No matter how skillfully performed, the attention move intrudes on the thoughts, conversations and present engagement of group members. At the beginning of meetings and other work sessions participants are likely to be engaged in social conversations or connecting about some shared project. During work sessions the

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shift from small group to large group work breaks into the processes occupying those groups. In many cases, group members stop talking and turn toward the group leader but may not have fully focused their attention on what the leader is then attempting to communicate.

Given these tendencies in groups, thoughtful leaders separate their attention moves from the messages they want to transmit by standing still (See Capture Attention First) using a credible voice and a frozen gesture then applying a pattern called break-and breathe to deliver their message from a slightly different space (Grinder 1997). To break-and-breathe, the group leader exhales, breaks eye contact with the group and takes a small step to establish a space for the new message.

**Associated Principles:**

*Capture Attention First   Choose Voice   Establish Spatial Anchors   Use Pronouns with Purpose  
Signal Role Change*

### **Show Don't Say**

By showing and not saying what they wish to communicate group leaders attract the attention of group members and focus it on essential messages. Human brains are wired to detect changes in the immediate environment. Our involuntary attention systems note these changes and respond accordingly. When group leaders “show” but “don't say” they engage the involuntary attention system of group members and efficiently focus their attention on the desired information.

The principle operates when a group leader points or gestures toward the intended focus, such as a screen or chart, using a frozen gesture. While keeping his or her own eyes on the screen, the leader invites group members to bring their attention to the focal point. For example, a leader might say in a credible voice: “Please bring your attention in this direction and consider the question noted here.” The group's eyes will follow the leader's eyes to the screen and by not reading the question aloud, the group leader encourages visual processing and deeper engagement. This principle also applies when a group leader uses a physical gesture such as holding up a number of fingers to indicate a time span for task completion. Again, the key is to show but not say the message.

**Associated Principles:**

*Capture Attention First   Separate Attention from Message*

### **Signal Stance Change**

Skillful leaders utilize three primary stances for structuring interaction patterns with their groups: facilitating, collaborating and presenting. The ability to switch between stances is an essential capacity for successful work with groups. Group members need to know which stance a leader is employing in a given moment. Successful leaders label the present stance they are taking so group members know how to relate to the leader in that moment and how to consider any information or ideas that the leader

is offering. A leader's choice of stance is based on his or her intention and purpose at any given time. Effective group leaders have an extensive repertoire of strategies and skills related to the three stances that support group development, task focus and relational development. To support group members in these tasks, mindful group leaders signal when their stance is changing.

To signal stance change requires both verbal and nonverbal clarity and congruence. For example, a leader who is operating in a presentation stance might signal a change to a facilitative stance by verbally announcing the change, breaking eye contact with the group, physically moving to a new space in the room and shifting from a credible to a more approachable voice. Or, a leader in a facilitative stance would verbally announce a change to a more collaborative stance, take a seat at the table with the group and join the conversation on a more equal footing.

#### **Associated Principles:**

*Choose Voice*      *Establish Spatial Anchors*      *Use Pronouns with Purpose*

#### **Use Pronouns with Purpose**

Expert group leaders use pronouns with purpose. Pronoun use conveys the relationship between the leader and the group, as well as the relationship between the group and the work. It might be “our” work, “your” work, or “the” work. If the leader is a member of the group, such as a team leader or department head, it is most likely “our” work with the leader being a full participant in the effort. If the leader is not a working member of the group, such as a principal or curriculum consultant, it may then be “your” work, especially if the leader is framing the task but will not be participating in the hands on completion of the project. “Your” would also be most appropriate for leaders who are from outside agencies, as well. In the case where the task is emotionally hard to handle for some or all group members, or the relationships are unclear, the safest course is to use neutral language and say “the” work.

Inappropriate pronoun choice can alienate group members by implying that they are in some way working for the leader and not for some greater purpose. When leaders say things like, “here’s what I want you to do” or “please give me your attention”, they imply a power or charisma relationship in which the group is there to serve the leader’s needs. Instead, thoughtful leaders say, “The next task is . . .” or “Please pause and turn your attention to the screen for the next steps in the process.”

#### **Associated Principles:**

*Capture Attention First*      *Create a Third point*      *Describe What, Why, How*  
*Separate Attention from Message*      *Signal Stance Change*

# Learning Partners

Make an appointment with 3 different people—one for each image. Be sure you each record the appointment on your page. Only make the appointment if there is an open slot at that spot on each of your forms.



The Facilitator's Toolkit: Verbal and non-verbal resources for focusing and energising the work of teams and groups





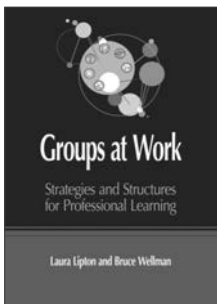




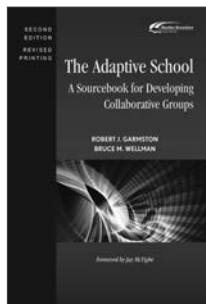
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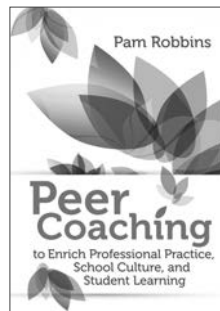
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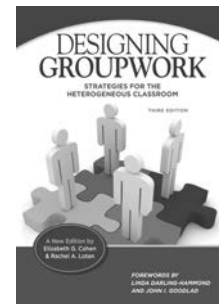
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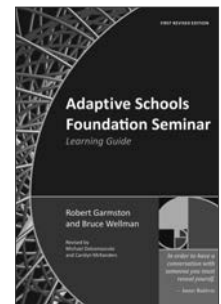
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