

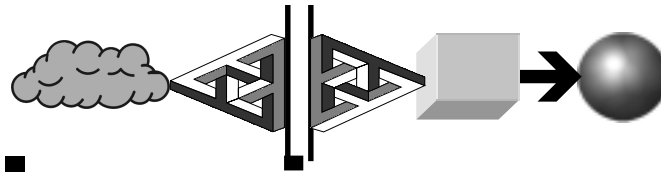
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Imagine

A forum for helping people work effectively together

Getting People to Talk - and Listen - to Each Other Using Consensus

By Ian Curtin

I don't know about you, but at one point in my life not so long ago, I realized that meetings were taking up far more of my time than they were worth. I would come out of a two or three-hour meeting with no clear idea of what, if anything, had been accomplished. And I knew that my colleagues were feeling much the same frustration.

Someone would put out an idea, and before anyone could give it any thought, there'd be another one offered, and yet another — with the inevitable result: all of them lost in the flurry. Or one idea would take over the entire agenda. Or the discussion would turn into a debate rather than a thoughtful exploration of the pros and cons of each idea. Too often, *nothing would be resolved or decided.*

And then I discovered a way to make the decision-making process uncomplicated, effective, and fair. It's called the consensus model, and is incredibly simple to use. The beauty of it, is that everyone is heard and is equally involved in the final decision. Here is a "thumbnail" sketch of the process:

Before the meeting gets underway, a couple of things must be decided.

- ☞ First, someone has to lead the meeting, or facilitate it.
- ☞ Then, the group must decide what percentage of members it will take to pass a vote. (75% is often seen as a reasonable percentage.)

Now the meeting can begin.

- ☞ One of the members voices an idea. The facilitator repeats the idea in the form of a proposal, to ensure that it is clearly heard by everyone in the group.
- ☞ The facilitator then asks the group if anyone has any questions. Does everyone understand the proposal that has just been made? Only after the group is satisfied that everyone is clear about the proposal, is a vote taken by show of hands.
- ☞ If 75% of the members are in favour, the proposal is deemed to be "on the floor" for discussion.
- ☞ If you disagree with the proposal, this is when you have a chance to say why. This is also an opportunity for you to suggest an alternate proposal, or for anyone in the group to suggest amendments to the original proposal.
- ☞ Only when everyone's dissent has been heard, and all amendments have been considered, can another proposal be offered and voted upon.

Continued on Page 3

The Reading Corner

Workshop participants have been asking for a bibliography of the writers who are presently influencing our work.

A Brief History of Everything by Ken Wilbur. The title always brings a smile to my face. This book provides some

wonderful insights into the mechanisms which contribute or hold us back from change. While the timeframe of the book is expansive, it offers an opportunity for the reader to reflect on the larger forces at play in coping with change.

Manual for Life by Bennett Wong & Jock McKeen. The authors have been

involved in their own living experiential laboratory to investigate relationships. They share their work in this easy to read manual. It is a wonderful reference book for understanding many aspects of human behaviour which they have developed through years of personal and group experiences.

Radical Honesty by Brad Blanton, PhD. The author challenges his readers to take another look at how honest they really are. "We all lie like hell." Dr. Blanton says. "It wears us out ...it is the major source of all human stress." A very provocative read.

Small Decencies: Reflections and Meditations on Being Human at Work by John Cowan. This is a wonderful collection of essays on incorporating small decencies into our daily work interactions. Cowan's easy style allows you to enter each story and reflect on your own workplace.

If you enjoy writing, consider, an in-depth journal writing workshop that provides excellent self-exploration skills. *Writing from the Heart*, with Ellery Littleton at pd Seminars, Gabriola Is., BC Canada (250) 247-9211 MAY 1-3, MAY 14-19, & Nov 6-8, 1998 ✍

IS SAFETY AN ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT FOR CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE ON CHANGE?

Your organization is probably seeking new maps to help navigate the sea of change which seems to be increasingly turbulent. They describe ideal structures and behaviours which you are striving towards. But they are read by each member of your organization who have their own unique feelings and responses to the latest map ranging from deep cynicism to renewed optimism. When put together, their individual responses determine whether a new map will be used by them to help change your shared culture. Because of the chaotic nature of feelings, and the lack of tools to engage in a dialogue about these feelings, it is easy to ignore this aspect of the change process and then become dismayed over lack of buy-in to your new program.

Our belief is that communication habits form the building blocks of work team relationships and even shape the culture of your entire organization. In these times when you are operating in a sea of change, sinking or swimming depends on whether old destructive/negative habits persist or are transformed. By creating an atmosphere of 'safety', your group will start risking. They'll begin to speak their truth about their thoughts and feelings related to the changes they are facing. This dialogue leads to the creation of constructive options taking into account their feelings and responses which otherwise will block or delay change.

How then do you create an atmosphere of 'safety' within which you may risk being more yourself and bring your creative energy into work? We believe there are specific tools each of us can practice at our own pace. Personal growth is the responsibility of each team member, but the result impacts your whole team. Our belief is everyone on your team is fully committed. The question is to what?. We encourage each team member to consider increasing their commitment to:

- ⦿ be aware of your personal context brought to any interaction
- ⦿ be aware of habitual patterns of behaviour and question their effectiveness
- ⦿ give and receive positive and negative feedback (i.e. recognition)
- ⦿ be curious in any interaction without moving to a right/wrong stance
- ⦿ be honest about thoughts/feelings within the context of working relationships
- ⦿ be willing to clear away your assumptions and unexpressed ideas which often form barriers to effective working relationships
- ⦿ hold your co-workers in good will
- ⦿ respect others' boundaries and define and respect your personal boundaries
- ⦿ accept divergent opinion

We bring a unique set of skills and experiences to work teams to help begin this dialogue. "We believe clearer communications help focus creative energy and make it available to your work team." ✍

Excepts from a speech to the Employee Involvement Association, B.C. Chapter-April 1997

Public Involvement:

Our newest service

As of the start of this year, we can now offer you public involvement services. The CREATIVE PLANNING method is a very effective tool for assisting communities and organizations trying to plan for the future. We can assist you if any of the following statements apply:

You...

- ✓ need a new direction and vision, but we don't know where to start
- ✓ want to move past conflict
- ✓ need specific implementation steps to accomplish our shared goals



- ✓ want to focus on future actions instead of past problems
- ✓ need a plan that builds on our strengths and considers the changing environment and our current situation
- ✓ must have a realistic plan that everyone supports
- ✓ favour a democratic, participative approach
- ✓ wish to use the learning, creativity and thinking power of all involved
- ✓ want to help individuals with different needs and view points achieve a common goal

When change is proposed, interest groups often get their message across by polarizing issues. We can help you find a basis for cooperation/communication among people with different views. If building consensus is a growing part of your work, CREATIVE PLANNING helps get feedback from stakeholders and in setting a course aimed at building strong consensus around the proposed change.

Give us a call for a new approach to planning for the future. ✍

“Consensus...” Continued from Page 1

This process provides an orderly way for all proposals to be fairly heard, considered, and voted on. At the same time, those with differing views are respected and have an opportunity to influence the original proposal.

If it sounds simple, that’s because it is. If you would like more information about decision-making through the consensus process, IC Possibilities & Associates invites your enquiries. ✍

Questions & Answers

In teambuilding, is working with the whole team more effective?

I hear many stories of organizations sending their leaders — or a ‘problem’ employee — off for teambuilding

training. The hope is that they will learn enough to be able to change the whole team when they go back to work.

However, how your folks traditionally work together, usually overwhelms the person trying on new behaviours and the old patterns inevitably win.

By working with your entire team, old, ineffective patterns of behaviour can be identified by everyone. Also, having a common language for talking about your group’s process, cuts down on misunderstandings that often arise when one person returns from a course.

When you learn new things together, your mutual experience opens the way for understanding and acceptance.

Even though our team committed to the intention of letting each other know what’s going on with our thoughts and feelings (staying clear), over time it is difficult to live up to this. What can we do about this?

It might help you to know that all groups we have worked with experience this. It’s difficult when you are trying out new skills. People get defensive; people get ‘foggy’. It’s often easier to slide back into the old patterns of the workplace, even when they’ve proved to be ineffective.

‘Staying clear’ is a daily personal practice. Sharing your positive and negative judgments within the context of the work environment, requires you to notice when you are holding on to an appreciation or resentment.

My own ‘rule of thumb’ is when I have thought about a particular situation with a colleague three or more times, I know I am not ‘clear’ with him or her.

It’s important to note, by the way, that ‘getting clear’ is NOT the same as ‘getting your way’. It likely occurs when you think you have been heard — and understood. As a footnote, I also believe revisiting the *reasons* for ‘staying clear’ with each other is important. ✍

This Year’s Workshops

Creative Planning Facilitator Training \$595 Cdn

Date: May 1-3, Nov 6-8, 1998

Place: pd Seminars

Gabriola Is., BC Canada

This 3 day, 5 session training workshop will combine concepts, experiential learning and practice sessions in an environment of safety to learn and use the CREATIVE PLANNING method. Each participant will be able to approach, clarify, design and facilitate basic planning sessions using the comprehensive workbook supplied. Participants will be better able to conduct meetings in a faster, more effective manner without diminishing others in the process.

Effective Team Building \$595 Cdn

Date: May 8-10, Dec 4-6, 1998

Place: pd Seminars

Gabriola Is., BC Canada

This workshop combines effective communications concepts, experiential learning, and practice sessions. In a safe environment, participants will learn how to release energy needed to meet the challenges of change and feel better about themselves.

Participants will learn how to:

- ✓ identify their own communication blocks and transform old habits
- ✓ discover and apply the principles of effective teambuilding
- ✓ utilize communication skills/principles to bring clarity to working and other relationships
- ✓ lead effective teams and be an effective team-member

For more information, or to register for workshops, contact:

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We hope this forum becomes a place where your stories about change in your organization or community are welcomed and can be shared with others. Short articles, news notes and publications are warmly solicited.

*Do not allow the demands of the day
to interfere with seeing
the colours of the day and the
shadows of the night.*
...John Cowan, Author

Imagination's Power

By Ian Curtin

Welcome to the first issue of **Imagine**. I am excited by the possibilities this new forum offers. Over the last year, I spent many hours imagining ways of sharing ideas and keeping clients and workshop participants current on our work. I am always struck by the power of imagination and have often said I should be careful what I wish for. I am becoming more aware that what I envision often comes to pass in some form.

Recently I was thinking about how our ideas around teambuilding and facilitating groups would apply in other cultures. In January, a letter arrived from Bangladesh requesting three spots in our May courses. We are delighted to have this opportunity to exchange views on community development and how our ideas can be incorporated into their work.

So I continue to imagine, knowing I will have to find my balance between honouring where I am now and what I am capable of moving towards. Not all my imaginings are large. Some just deal with everyday events, but I am increasingly aware of the importance of staying conscious about where my imagination goes. With conscious attention to this, I am in a position to make some choices.

My experiments in harnessing my creative imagination continue to offer wonderful gifts. I imagined working with people who have passion for this field of work. My associates provide rich learning by their willingness to challenge all our assumptions continually. My deep feelings of appreciation for my colleagues and the collective power of our imaginations is a wonderful gift. ✍

Rick Jackson, Dianne Anderson, Leslie Alexander, Valerie Douglas and Anna Curtin are associates of IC Possibilities.

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