Chapter 5
Group Process and Meetings

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We all went to the same different meeting together.
–Marvin Weisbord quoting Jim Maselko, at ODN Conference

Introduction

In any culture or organization there may be effective or ineffective meetings. There often are individual perspectives on what happened during a meeting and how effective it was, as illustrated by the quote above. It is not unusual to find subgroups of people rehashing a meeting after it has ended, offering criticisms they did not voice during the meeting. Although at the meeting the discussion addressed the content of such issues as problems to be solved, work to be coordinated, or progress on projects, team members were most likely also noticing the process of how discussions were conducted.

Many teams do not overtly discuss the process that is used to accomplish a task. Particularly in multicultural teams, where there are differing beliefs, assumptions, and values that impact how people behave and how they think others should behave, it is important to be aware of group process. Those who are aware of the process may then be able to intervene to improve the group's effectiveness. This will help move covert processes to more overt and intentional ones. This chapter will discuss principal components of small-group process: leadership, communication, conflict, and problem solving. The four chapters that follow will each focus on one of these components.

The chapter will also discuss roles and behaviors of team members, and describe procedures for effective team meetings.

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Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- Define group process
- Describe covert processes and the reasons for them
- Describe power dynamics in group process
- Identify individual functional and dysfunctional roles and behaviors
- Describe factors that are important for effective meetings

Overt and Covert Group Process

In any interpersonal or group interaction there are always two things happening simultaneously: content and process. Content is the *what*, or the task of a team. Process is *how* it is being discussed. For example, in a firefighting team, the content is about what equipment should be used, and where and how to rescue individuals. The process is who is giving directions, who is responding, the speakers' tones of voice, the pace and rhythm of the communication, and nonverbal communication. In a team of human resources managers from Japan and the United States in a multinational corporation, the content could be about methods of performance review and managerial development. The process would involve the same issues mentioned for the firefighters, with the added complication of differing cultural assumptions. These assumptions could lead to unexpressed emotional reactions related to both the communication process and the content of performance review and managerial development.

One can think of content/process as an iceberg with only one-eighth of what is happening, the content, above the water, and seven-eighths, the process, below. As with a steamship when it encounters an iceberg, it is the seven-eighths of group process below the water that is the most dangerous. What is not seen can cause damage. It is often not discussed, or brought above the surface, and therefore people can leave a meeting with different understandings and feelings about what went on. This underwater or covert process usually is not helpful, although, as explained below there are times when it might be strategic.

Covert processes derive from behaviors and beliefs that are not, or cannot be, openly discussed in team meetings. Marshak and Katz (1997) posit that something is likely to become covert when

> untested assumptions, beliefs, or constructs are limiting either reasoning or choice; the basis of the covert dynamic is in the unconscious or shadow of the individual, group or organization, or, behaviors, thoughts or feelings are defined by the prevailing rules, norms, and/or culture as inappropriate, unacceptable or out-of-place (p. 33).

They describe three dominant types of covert processes, which arise in the following circumstances:

- *Blind Spots and Blocks*. Members of the team are not able to think "outside of the box"; they are controlled by their beliefs, assumptions, values, and paradigms. They may be constrained because "this is the way we've always done it." An outside consultant or observer may wonder why they seem so constrained when the answer is clear. To the observer "it may appear as if everyone is trying to push open a door that is locked, while simultaneously ignoring a nearby window" (p. 34). For example, a team delivering a study abroad program may not discuss the implications of changes in passport requirements. If anyone suggests they revise procedures, he or she is challenged.
- *Unconscious or Shadow Dynamics*. The behavior of the team is influenced by collectively repressed or projected emotions, desires, or needs. Teams often operate as if everything is fine when there is physical, emotional, or psychological danger, behaving as if the danger does not exist. Higher values and creativity that could be sources of energy and high performance are untapped. For example, a team operating a soup kitchen in an area hit by a hurricane may minimize the dangers involved.
- *Conscious Disguises and Concealments*. Some or all members of the group keep things closed to discussion because of the prevailing culture of the group—certain beliefs, rules, or norms are considered unacceptable or out-of-place. There are two subcategories of this type:

  – *Protective Disguises and Concealments*. These are used when some or all members of a group are afraid of raising certain issues because of fear of harm. This is especially common in teams where there is a high degree of suspicion. For example, a team member could hide a "wild idea" or creative vision for fear of criticism. One way to manage this type of covert process in teams is to create a team climate that is supportive of "wild ideas" and respectful of a truly diverse array of viewpoints.
  – *Strategic Disguises and Concealment*. These are used to gain some advantage or goal. When cultures have different norms and values, they are sometimes used for strategic advantage. For example, North Americans want to work through conflict as rapidly as possible, whereas other cultures such as the Chinese engage in conflict regularly, enjoy it, and have procedures for managing it as part of normal business transactions (Nadler et al. 1985). The North American propensity to resolve conflict quickly could be used as an advantage by the Chinese team members.

Have you ever thought any of these covert processes were happening on a team? Have you, yourself, ever behaved covertly?

Sometimes subgroups will meet to covertly frame a discussion in order to have their idea approved. They may meet to anticipate types of resistance and plan how to respond. Members of an ongoing subgroup may support each other consistently, rather than considering the substance of their teammates' ideas. In multicultural teams, subgroups may form around demographics such as gender, nationality, or "race"/ethnicity.

Diagnosing covert processes is an art form that is developed by understanding the many factors that can lead to them: organizational context, team history, cultural perspectives, and the dynamics of one-up/one-down relationships. One clue that something covert is going on is when you sense something is going on but you cannot figure out what it is. It is crucial that team members recognize their own covert behaviors and the reasons for them, and assess whether or not it is to the team's advantage that they reveal them. In multicultural teams, it may or may not be appropriate to discuss what is "under the water." Members who are from cultures that are diffuse may be more uncomfortable with such directness (see Chapter 2). Much will depend on the norms that are established within the team.

Power and Group Processes

Power has been the subject of numerous studies that cross disciplines, including sociology, psychology, anthropology, and organizational behavior. Analysis of power and control in organizations varies based on the theoretical approach and definition of power. A common working definition of power is that it involves a relative relationship in which an actor is able to influence another actor to act on his/her directions through position, numbers, or personal characteristics. Power differentials lead to unbalanced relationships, including dependency, which affect behavior and roles in teams (Sisaye and Siegel 1997). These differentials can include membership in one-up/one-down groups based on factors such as gender, race/ethnicity, social class, or age; relationships with other powerful people in the organization; and longevity or position in the organization.

Sisaye (2005) draws upon the work of Amitai Etzioni to analyze the use of power and members' responses in teams. Etzioni's research identified three aspects of power: normative, coercive, and utilitarian. *Normative power* is associated with symbolic rewards (e.g., prestige) and uses norms to incite positive responses from team members. Team leaders exercise normative power and practice normative decision making when making decisions by consensus. Team leaders can use *coercive power* by distributing rewards and punishment to ensure that team members comply with organizational goals. Rewards and punishment can be either material or symbolic. *Utilitarian power* refers to rational reasons why the team should follow a certain course.

Effective teams most often use normative power because exercising power coercively is not effective when decisions are supposed to be collaborative. Organizations are more effective when power and information are shared in collaborative teams (Conger 1989).

Size, organizational position, and one-up/one-down status influence the power of individual members. Within a team, groups that are larger, one-up, and have positional power are able to dominate discussions to have their opinions heard. In a predominately male team, one man may make a suggestion, another may endorse it, and all of a sudden, a decision has been made. Of course, they may have been discussing

these ideas over lunch or in other places where they gather. When members of less powerful, one-down groups do give opinions, sometimes their opinions will be granted less weight, ignored, or challenged. They may form a subgroup, meeting outside the larger group to strategize methods to increase their influence (Kabanoff 1991). The two women on the team mentioned above may meet to strategize how they can be heard on the team. Methods of increasing influence such as appealing to members' sense of loyalty or moral values, will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Effective multicultural teams should strive for empowerment in order to enhance team collaboration in decision making and problem solving. As stated by Forrester (2000), empowerment implies that individuals and teams have the capacity to make decisions, not just make suggestions. In other words, empowerment means that a team has decision-making responsibility for a project. Further, empowered team members understand the relationship between the project and their organization's goals (Ford and Fottler 1995). Trust is a major component of empowerment, since leaders must have complete trust in teams to be task-oriented and to make decisions that uphold the organization's goals. Kirkman and Rosen (1999) found a positive correlation between team empowerment and outcomes such as productivity, job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

Components of Team Process

Principal components of team process—leadership, communication, conflict management, and decision making—will be outlined below and discussed more thoroughly in subsequent chapters.

Leadership

Empirical studies of differences in team processes across cultures have shown that perceptions of leadership affect team process. Perceptions of appropriate leader behavior vary significantly across cultures. Ayman and Chemers (1983) found that responsiveness to group norms explained leader behavior in Iran and Mexico, while group norms played a much smaller role for US team leaders. Similarly, Pillai and Meindl (1998) showed that charismatic (often referred to as visionary) leadership is common in collectivistic cultures. In this case, team members may have role perceptions that favor charismatic leadership. On the other hand, team members from individualistic cultures may base their roles on assigned tasks, and thereby prefer a task-oriented leader. For task-oriented leaders, a tension between behaviors that focus on individual power and the collaborative skills necessary for teamwork present a challenge.

There has been a global trend from authoritarianism to democracy, which has affected team leadership. Teams are more participatory, so that leadership is

shared, and there are more self-managed teams (Burbidge 1994). Increased participation among team members requires strong leadership, which might seem paradoxical. As Rosabeth Moss Kanter (in Burbidge 1994, p. 3) notes, "It is almost a paradox. Participation requires better management than a machine-like bureaucracy. The leadership tasks may be shared or rotated, but they must be performed. And one of the leadership roles is to provide a structure for participative planning."

Team process benefits from a leader who can disseminate power, authority, and responsibility among team members rather than directing (Pfeffer and Veiga 1999). Delegating decision-making responsibility is essential for effective team process and accomplishment of tasks, but the leader needs to assess the developmental stage of the team since teams are more dependent on the leader in the forming stage. Also, team members from high-power distance or ascription- oriented cultures may lose respect for a leader who does not show sufficient direction. Leaders must have enough trust in their teams to empower them to access information, manage conflict, and make decisions (Forrester 2000).As mentioned in Chapter 1, in self-managed teams decision-making authority is turned over to the group. It has the responsibility of deciding which tasks should be carried out and how team goals will be achieved. Team members make decisions collaboratively, but often the team has an external leader who acts as a coach. Team autonomy allows members to learn from one another and make changes to team process as they see fit. It is important that the functions of leadership related to the task and the relationships of team members are clearly designated to various team members.

Communication

Multicultural teams have some advantages and potential traps in terms of team communication. They can have an advantage of increased communication, and differing perspectives, which helps creativity and generation of ideas. Milliken and Martins (1996) noted two studies in which diversity in organizational management teams correlated with more frequent communication within the team. Mutual knowledge in teams derives from such frequent and open communication. However, if team members do not share knowledge, individuals can resort to stereotypes that cause mistrust. Mutual knowledge is enhanced by setting up a decentralized communication network, or all-channel system (see Chapter 7), in which team members communicate with one another directly rather than through one team member.

Communication is essential for the development of a hybrid culture (Kopp 2005). This points to the need for meta-communication, defined as communication about the way the group communicates (Enayati 2001). By openly communicating needs, styles, and values, multicultural teams can develop a hybrid culture characterized by inclusive norms. Open communication involves stating one's needs as well as giving and receiving feedback about the impact of one's behavior on others.

Communication patterns are usually established such as who talks to whom, who supports whom, evenness of participation by team members, pacing and rhythm, pace, and circular or linear flow of ideas. It is important to watch for nonverbal clues, although the meaning may vary across cultures. For example, Japanese leave spaces between individual contributions, US Americans start as soon as the last person has spoken, and Brazilians tend to overlap on top of each other. What may be seen as polite in one culture would not seem so in another. It is important to watch for nonverbal clues such as eye contact, although the meaning may vary across cultures. Pacing is very important when there are language differences among team members. Different types of communication are needed to help the team function effectively on the task such as seeking opinions, clarifying the tasks, and creating harmony.

Virtual communication can have the advantage of slowing the discussion down and allowing greater participation, although nonverbal communication is lost. Some teams incorporate words such as *smile* or *frown* in parentheses to convey feelings.

In general, communication convergence is possible for multicultural teams, and national culture is not the most significant barrier to effective communication (Bargiela-Chiappini et al. 2003). Organizational culture and an individual's position or role has been shown to have a stronger influence on communication than national culture.

Conflict Management

Conflict can be overt or covert, and, as was mentioned earlier in the chapter, covert processes can be more destructive. Chapter 8 will discuss two types of conflict—*relationship conflict* and *task conflict*. Task conflict is more common and is related to issues such as differences in the content of important decisions that affect the work of the team, allocation of resources, and lack of role clarity. These can generally be resolved through discussion. In the forming stage, different points of view are often not addressed. Sometimes reasons for holding a point of view are related to deep-seated personal issues such as a threat to a team member's perceived status or competence, and real reasons for the difference remain covert.

Relationship conflict includes such deep-level issues as differences in values, perceived competence or status in the group, personality, and visible diversity. While the discussion of the difference may be around task issues, the covert process may be around relationship issues. In teams, visible surface-level diversity in areas around which there are societal one-up/one down status differences can increase relationship conflict (Pelled 1996). Studies have found that diversity in gender, race, ethnicity, and ability can aggravate relationship conflict (Jehn et al. 1999; Pelled et al. 1999; Iles 1995).

When there is common commitment to an overriding purpose for the team, which occurs in the forming stage, diversity is less apt to cause conflict (Jehn et al. 1999). When the team has developed norms related to decision making, coordination,

communication, conflict management, and leadership, deep-level diversity issues are less of a problem (Mohammed and Angell 2004; Harrison et al. 2002). After sufficient trust and norms about openness have been developed, conflicts can be discussed openly and managed more effectively. Thus, there is both *preemptive* conflict management—preventing conflict by establishing a team climate of flexibility and compromise—and *reactive* conflict management—addressing conflicts after they occur (Marks et al. 2001).

Problem Solving and Decision Making

As teams approach problems, individual members can be defining the problem differently and a common definition of the problem is not clear. Once the problem is defined, alternative solutions need to be generated and their advantages and disadvantages discussed. The trap here is to not decide on a solution before a range of alternatives has been generated. Both who makes the decision and how it is made are important elements of this process. There is a range of methods for making the decision such as voting, consensus, and railroading that are discussed in Chapter 9. Sometimes teams continuously bring up problems, but no decision is made about the solution. Therefore, the status quo remains, and a decision is made by default. Other times, the perception of the decision that has been reached varies among team members.

Diverse perspectives are advantageous for decision-making processes. Team members with diverse perspectives can provide the team with alternative views on the team's task and strategies. Thus, diverse teams have great potential for enhanced performance and productive decision making (Enayati 2001). Diverse teams must be aware of the potential for social influence, even when problem solving and decision making are participatory. Participatory decision making, with all members involved in the decision-making process, reinforces individual commitment. Yet, power complicates this process. Decision making is not just rational information gathering; rather, decision making can reflect covert power disparities within the team (Enayati 2001). Social influence is another way of expressing power differentials between team members. Social influence privileges the ideas and input of more powerful team members. Research on decision-making processes has shown that formal procedures can decrease social influence (Enayati 2001). If some team members feel that their input or interests have been ignored in the decision-making process, conflict can arise. Team norms on decision making can help prevent conflict caused by social influence.

Formal and Informal Roles in Teams

Teams have both formal roles relates to jobs and responsibilities, and informal roles related to the team process.

Formal Roles

According to a study by Morrison (1994), cooperative team behavior depends on the way that team members define their team roles. Trust is a major factor in how team members view their roles and the roles of others. In a team where conditional trust is the norm, team members base their roles on expected team roles and behaviors. In teams characterized by unconditional trust, members are more likely to define their roles more broadly, which leads to behaviors that fall outside of assigned team roles. In other words, in teams that share unconditional trust, individuals will assume larger roles because they are willing to diverge from their assigned roles in order to contribute to team process and performance.

A corollary of research on unconditional trust is that in collectivist cultures, team members are likely to view teamwork as less temporal and more integrated with daily life. A study by Cox et al. (1991) demonstrated that collectivistic teams behave more cooperatively than individualistic teams. Further, collectivistic teams have fewer conflicts than individualistic teams, and employ cooperative rather than competitive strategies (Oetzel 1998). Members rotate roles and understand the jobs of others so that they can work more collaboratively, and so that they can step in if a member is absent for a period of time. One's work is done when the team is done. Job descriptions are more likely to be vague, with "leaky boundaries." By contrast, in individualistic cultures, team members are likely to see teamwork as isolated to a specific time and task (Gibson and Zellmer-Bruhn 2001). Individualistic cultures are likely to have formal and specific job descriptions. When jobs are defined in this manner, team members may be more concerned with their individual role at the expense of the team goal.

The following are role-related questions that teams need to address:

- How clear are individual jobs and responsibilities?
- How much agreement/commitment is there to individual jobs and responsibilities?
- Are jobs matched to skills of team members?
- Is the overlap of job responsibilities appropriate and clear?
- Is the workload and responsibility equitable?
- Are all the tasks that need to be done accounted for?
- Is the workload manageable?
- Are the rewards sufficient and appropriate?
- Are the rewards perceived to be equitable?

On multicultural teams, cultural identity may influence perceptions and stereotypes about the role members should have, as the following examples portray.

> *In one team in the U.S., a Euro-American administrative assistant asked an African American secretary to serve coffee in the morning to the staff. The other staff members were extremely uncomfortable with this arrangement and asked to have the responsibility rotated or dropped.*
>
> *In Japan, it is common to have "office ladies" who are college-educated serving tea, although there is now some resistance to this type of role.*
>
> *A nurse from the U.S. who was working in a rural community health clinic in Latin America rejected the expertise of the local staff. They could have*

helped her understand the belief system in the community regarding health practices and the availability of local substances for healing.

In an agricultural project in the Sudan, the Dinkas occupied unskilled and lower-level positions and the Equatorians filled the technical positions. The project was in the north, which is Dinka land. The Dinkas, who are quite traditional in their lifestyles and orientation, have historically preferred administrative, police, and political careers as opposed to technical professions. Traditionally, they live by cattle raising and herding. They consider themselves "born to rule." The Equatorians are more educated. This role differentiation contributed to strained relationships.

Informal Roles

In addition to formal job roles, informal roles and behaviors also influence team process. Kenneth D. Benne and Paul Sheats (1948) originally developed a classification of informal member roles (behaviors) based on an analysis of participation functions in the first National Training Laboratory in Group Development. Prior to this article, the assumption was that effective group process depended on the leader. Although it was initially developed for human development learning groups, this concept has applied to work groups, or teams.

Benne and Sheats divided behaviors into *functional roles*, those behaviors related to task and maintenance of the group which help it to accomplish its task, and *dysfunctional* or *individual roles*, those which are directed toward satisfaction of the participants' needs and which are not helpful to either the group task or the effective functioning of the group. Mudrack and Farrell (1995) have developed a similar list. The original roles are modified in the list below. Each member may, of course, enact more than one role in any given time period, and over the course of time, a wide range of roles.

Functional Roles Related to Task

These roles have as their purpose the facilitation and coordination of team efforts in the selection and definition of a common problem and its solution.

- Initiating—Proposing tasks, goals of action; defining team problems; suggesting a procedure or a new way of organizing the team for the task ahead
- Information or Opinion Seeking—Requesting facts or information about the team task
- Information or Opinion Giving—Providing facts, personal experiences, opinions or information about team concerns
- Consensus Testing—Checking with the team to see how much agreement has been reached
- Summarizing—Pulling together related ideas, restating suggestions, offering a decision or conclusion for the team to consider

- Clarifying—Interpreting ideas or suggestions, clarifying issues before the team; elaborating suggestions in terms of examples and trying to deduce how an idea or suggestion would work
- Evaluating—Questioning the practicality, logic, facts, or procedure of a suggestion or of some part of team discussion; questioning the direction the group is taking
- Recording—Recording team decisions or the product of the discussion

Functional Roles Related to Maintenance

These roles describe behaviors oriented to building team and interpersonal relations, morale, and motivation.

- Encouraging—Being friendly, warm, and respectful to others; showing regard for others; offering commendation and praise and in various ways indicating understanding and acceptance of other points of view
- Expressing Group Feelings—Sensing feelings within the team and sharing feelings with other members
- Harmonizing—Attempting to reconcile disagreement; reducing tension; getting people to explore differences
- Compromising—Offering a compromise that yields status when one's own idea or status is involved in a conflict; admitting error
- Gate Keeping—Attempting to keep communication channels open; facilitating and encouraging the participation of others; suggesting procedures that permit sharing remarks
- Standard Setting—Expressing standards for the team to achieve; applying standards in evaluating team functioning and production
- Observing—Recording various aspects of the team process and feeding such data back to the team

Dysfunctional Roles

These behaviors are attempts by members to satisfy their individual needs that are irrelevant or unhelpful to the team's task, and are either not oriented, or negatively-oriented, to team building and maintenance. These roles may be conscious or unconscious. Individuals may demonstrate these behaviors due to (1) their own long-standing needs for ego gratification, focus on self at the expense of the team, or insecurity; or (2) short-term physical or emotional problems they may be facing. When there is a high incidence of these behaviors occurring in a number of participants there may be one or more team issues related to the storming stage, morale issues, inappropriate leadership style, or an inappropriate or unachievable task. This indicates a need for team building and training of members, or for redefining the task.

- Showing Aggression—Deflating the status of others; expressing disapproval of opinions, acts, or feelings of others; attacking the team or the problem it is working on

- Blocking—Being negativistic and stubbornly resistant; disagreeing and opposing without or beyond reason; attempting to maintain or bring back an issue after the team has rejected or bypassed it
- Recognition-seeking—Working to call attention to oneself whether through boasting or reporting on personal achievements; showing envy toward another's contribution by trying to take credit for it
- Withdrawing—Psychologically leaving the team; showing no interest in connecting with the people or the task
- Dominating—Interrupting the contributions of others; asserting one's own opinion frequently and forcefully; giving directions authoritatively
- Distracting—Overuse of, or inappropriate, joking, horseplay, or other forms of inappropriate behavior, which make a display of the lack of involvement

Mudrack and Farrell (1995) named dysfunctional roles the stage hog, the clown, the cynic, and the blocker.

Which of the functional roles do you most often take? Which functional roles may have been missing in a team on which you were a member? Have you behaved in a way that was dysfunctional, and if so, what led you to do this?

Use of Informal Roles

The type of task of the group may influence the need for different roles. At the initial stage of problem solving, for example, initiating, and information or opinion giving and seeking are important, while in the stage of coming to a decision, roles of consensus testing, summarizing, and evaluating are more crucial.

Traditionally, many of the functional roles or behaviors identified above are seen as the responsibility of the leader. In low-power distance (ascription-oriented) cultures, it has been traditionally assumed that the designated group leader will run the meeting by keeping to the time schedule and assuming facilitation roles related to the task. Some leaders who have had training in group process will also assume maintenance roles, such as encouraging, harmonizing, offering process comments, and drawing out those who have not expressed their views. Often, however, these roles are shared, with other members assuming some of this leadership responsibility. If this happens, the leader is more able to be an equal participant. This concept of shared leadership is discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 6. This egalitarian approach to team leadership has been traditionally encouraged by organizational behavior literature (Benne and Sheats 1948), and more recently by the move to self-managed or empowered teams (Orsburn 1990; Wellins et al. 1991).

The American Friends Service Committee uses the Quaker business meeting style, in which the power to guide the course and outcome of the meeting is widely distributed. The formal role of the clerk, which rotates among members of a work group is to introduce the business at hand and facilitate the flow of discussion. This egalitarian approach to team leadership has been traditionally encouraged by organizational behavior literature (Benne and Sheats 1948), and more recently by the move to self-managed or empowered teams (Orsburn 1990; Wellins et al. 1991).

In high power distance (achievement-oriented) cultures the role of the leader is distinct from the participants. The leader is the one with the highest amount of formal authority. If there is no one with organizational authority, the leadership falls to someone with informal authority, based on factors in the hierarchical status such as age or gender. The leader moderates the discussion. In fact, leaders may seldom speak and appear to have little influence, but their influence is in controlling the agenda and in making the final decision after others have been heard.

Observing Team Process

For a team to function effectively, it is important for all team members to develop the skill of observing team processes such as covert behaviors, communication patterns, formal and informal roles, and decision- making. This is true for both self-managed and leader-led teams. In the latter, the leader does not have the entire responsibility for the effective functioning of the team if the team operates with democratic principles; members and the leader can jointly share this. The skill of process observation is the first step in intervening to improve effectiveness, either by providing missing functional roles, or by pointing out processes to heighten the group awareness and need for intervening or revisiting group norms.

The same behavior can be interpreted differently cross-culturally. Since members usually have the tendency to judge behavior by their own cultural standards, what might seem like opinion seeking or initiating by a young US participant may be seen as dominating by someone from a culture where younger people are expected to listen to older group members, or to allow more silence between interactions. A French participant, coming from a culture where disagreement is seen as a form of engaging with another, may seem aggressive to someone from a country where harmony and non-confrontational behavior is seen as important. Lack of eye contact, a sign of respect in some cultures, might be interpreted as withdrawing in other cultures. Therefore, when noting behavior in multicultural settings, it is very important to be able to describe the behavior rather than interpret the reasons for the behavior or pass a value judgment on it.

With increasing ability to identify behaviors of team members, individuals can intervene to improve team effectiveness. The following are some examples:

- *A team member can identify functional roles that are missing and consciously supply them. For example, if many team members are giving information and opinions, a team member could summarize, or check for consensus.*
- *A process observation may lead to an appropriate intervention. For example, if the group seems stuck or tired, a team member can simply express what she thinks the group is feeling and check it out with others. The intervention might be taking a break, or it could be identifying a covert protective disguise.*
- *With increasing ability to identify dysfunctional behaviors, any individual can assess his/her capability to be an effective team member, and can modify his/her behavior to be more effective.*

- *If one is in the cultural minority in a team as for example, a Canadian working in India, one can use the skill of process observation to learn about the normative behavior of the team in order to identify what behaviors are appropriate.*

It is a learned skill to be able to focus on both the process and content, although the more strongly a member feels about a content issue, the more difficult it is to simultaneously focus on process. The following suggestions may facilitate the development of process observation skills:

- A team can adopt a norm that anyone can make a process observation.
- A team can appoint a rotating process observer who will give feedback on his/her observations to the team. The process observer can use the assessment at the end of this chapter, Process Observation Guidelines. The process observer might interject at crucial points if the team is getting stuck on decision making, for example, or the team could agree to process observations midway through a longer meeting or at the end of a meeting. After making a process observation, it is important to check with the team for understanding.
- Although individual team members may have a proclivity for certain roles more than others, the individual and the team are more effective when many members are skilled in a variety of roles and can supply them as needed. Individual team members can be assigned specific functional roles that are missing.

Meetings

Many of us spend a lot of time in team meetings. Sometimes these are productive, but often people complain the meetings are not effective or productive. *Have you experienced meetings that were ineffective and unproductive? What leads to an effective meeting?*

Effective facilitation is very important. To facilitate means "to make easier" (The Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 1998). It is *fácil* in Spanish and *facile* in French. The facilitator may or may not be the team leader. Not all leaders or managers are effective facilitators (Weaver and Farrell 1997). Self-managed teams need facilitators, at least in the early stages of the team's development. The facilitator is responsible for setting up the meeting, conducting it, and seeing that follow-up work after the meeting is done.

The necessary work for setting up the meeting includes deciding on the outcomes, determining and distributing the agenda, making sure the right people are there for the topics to be discussed, and distributing relevant reading and pre-work that should be done before the meeting. The outcomes of the meeting can be to clarify issues, share knowledge, make decisions, or convey important information which cannot be left to memos. *Have you ever been in a meeting when it was not clear what the purpose of the discussion was, when the necessary information or people were not there, or when the information conveyed could have been more effectively given by a memo?*

The agenda may be set by the facilitator, or the facilitator may ask for agenda items from the team. The facilitator may want to ask others to facilitate a portion

of the meeting about a topic on which they have been working, or, during a longer retreat meeting (1 or 2 days), in order to share the responsibility. Additionally, it is not usually possible to remain neutral and successfully facilitate a discussion around a topic about which you feel passionate; when this is the case, the facilitator should ask someone who does not have this personal stake to take over.

During the meeting the facilitator needs to clarify and get agreement on the agenda, and pay attention to process and content issues. The facilitator may want to ask for help from other team members with such tasks as recording, observing process, time keeping, or summarizing outcomes. One of the most frustrating aspects of meetings can be when the same topic gets rehashed in meeting after meeting, and no decision is made. I have found it helpful to ask what the purpose of the discussion is, or to ask for a summary of what was decided. *Have you experienced this frustration? What have you done about it*? Additionally, in groups which are at the forming or performing stages, all team members will be taking responsibility for supplying functional roles as needed. Particularly after longer meetings, it is important to have an oral evaluation of the meeting at the end. A quick round of statements by each person is helpful.

After the meeting, the facilitator needs to be sure minutes are distributed and someone has been assigned to act on decisions.

Virtual meetings have particular challenges in finding a time to meet when members are in drastically different time zones, and in the fact that members are not able to see nonverbal expressions. Both virtual and face-to-face meetings can take advantage of web technologies such as a wiki, which allows visitors to easily add, remove, and otherwise edit and change available content. This can be done with decisions and meeting notes.

The following is a checklist for facilitating a meeting:

- Before the Meeting
  - Identify the hoped-for outcomes
  - Determine who should facilitate specific topics
  - Identify who should be there
  - Determine the appropriate site, time, and setting
  - Distribute the agenda
  - Arrange for any necessary preparatory work, such as providing information on a problem to be solved
- During the Meeting
  - Conduct personal check-in, introductions
  - Clarify the purpose and expected outcome
  - Develop and/or clarify and agree on the agenda
  - Clarify and/or assign roles such as facilitator, process observer, note-taker, and interpreter
  - Define norms for how the work will be accomplished
  - Maintain a balance between content (what is discussed) and process (how it is discussed)
  - List and revise any decisions, including follow-up

  - Decide what to do with agenda items that were not discussed or were unresolved
  - Evaluate the meeting

- After the Meeting
  - Act on decisions made
  - Communicate the minutes

The factors that determine a meeting's effectiveness vary across cultures. Michael Olsson (1985) identifies some factors that vary across cultures as follows:

- Leader/participant roles (leader-audience; leader-participant; facilitator-participant; participant only)
- Sequence of participation (ordered/monitored/open)
- Topic control (fixed/flexible/open)
- Decision-making process (vote/vocal assessment/consensus)
- Pace (efficient/tolerant/patient)
- Space orientation (formal rows/layered circle/loose circle/unstructured)
- Punctuality (fixed/flexible/loose)
- Language choice (prestige/common/multilingual)
- Amenities (minimal/moderate/extensive)

Orientation toward time and space affect punctuality, the scheduling of an agenda, and where a meeting is held. In low-context cultures, it is expected that meetings start exactly or within five minutes of when they are scheduled, an agenda has been developed beforehand and is adhered to, and the meeting should end on time. Topics should be separated, and people should confine their comments to the topic at hand and not get off the subject. Furthermore, meetings should be as short as possible. In order to increase efficiency, it is best to hold a meeting in a closed-off room where distractions such as other people coming by or telephone calls will not interfere. The following are some examples of this:

In my initial experiences in a multicultural group, I found that the high-context African American and Latino members wanted to spend the first 30 minutes of the meeting socializing, while I wanted to get on with the task. When I relaxed about my need to start on time, I found the business was completed in the time allocated. The others were more ready to work once they had connected with each other.

A Euro American woman who had spent several years in Brazil returned to the United States for several weeks for an operation. She arrived late to a work meeting with others she had worked closely with before going to Brazil. No one stopped the meeting to acknowledge her, and she was not able to successfully link up with the task, due to her need to connect with the people.

Meetings in high-context cultures usually start after the agreed-upon time, which gives those who arrive earlier a chance to connect with others and settle in. Others may be late because they have been unwilling to cut short another interaction. Although there may be an agenda, the discussion may actually move

> *among several items simultaneously. In fact, several meetings may be going on at once. The meeting will take place in an open area, or in a room with an open door, so that others who have business can get to those who are in the meeting*.

The following describes meetings in Arab cultures, which are high-context:

> Arabs prefer consultation on a person-to-person basis; they hate committee and group meetings. Arabs make decisions in an informal and unstructured manner. Some of our professional business approaches seem to them rigid and impersonal. Their heritage is not one of enclosed offices but of open spaces, tents, and generous hospitality. As a result, you may find your meeting interrupted by the constant commotion of people coming and going, telephone calls, and servants offering beverages. If you insist on a more formal style, you may be at a disadvantage (Copeland and Griggs 1985, p. 124).

Another factor that varies across cultures is the purpose of a meeting relative to decision making. Low-context, time-oriented cultures view meetings as a time to exchange information and/or to hammer out decisions. A meeting is considered successful, usually, if some decisions have been made. High-context relationship-oriented cultures often view meetings as a time to further relationships in order to accomplish the task. A meeting may be used to announce a decision when the manager has explored people's views outside the meeting. The following excerpt describes *nemawashi*, a decision-making process in Japan:

> Nemawashi ("going around the roots") is a gardening term and is translated as the necessity of digging around the root system of a tree being transplanted. The gardener makes certain that he does not kill the tree by digging into the root system. In the same way decisions must be made in such a way that members' morale does not decrease and harmonious relations are not disturbed. The process of making a decision must contribute to the workers' morale as well as solving a problem.
>
> To the Japanese executive, a meeting achieves more than a decision or the exchange of information. A meeting allows the chairperson to evaluate the emotional temperatures of those involved. Voting or making the final decision is delayed until the feelings of all of those present are expressed. A meeting is held to "go around the roots" by making sure the interests of those involved and their feelings have been considered. Within the context of teams, this involves achieving agreement for a proposed project before members meet together (Alston 1985, p. 298).

A proposal sponsor will meet informally with others, hear their concerns, and modify the proposal. Concessions are made in private since public concessions are considered a sign of weakness and no one wants to lose face publicly. Whoever has made a concession or compromise can expect a concession from the other person at a later date. The Japanese keep careful accounts of their debts and there is a net balance of mutual debts and favors. To an outsider who is unfamiliar with this process, it may seem like an iceberg, with much below the water that cannot be seen or understood.

Relevant Competencies

- Observe and describe team process
- Recognize the possibility of covert process

- Recognize functional and dysfunctional roles on a team
- Contribute functional roles to the team as needed and appropriate
- Describe power dynamics in a team
- Plan and facilitate an effective multicultural meeting

Summary

In summary, group interactions always involve both content, the *what,* and process, the *how*. Team process is not often discussed, and teams can benefit from paying more overt attention to it. Some aspects of process, however, are covert and hard to discuss. Team members may be unconscious of or blind to them, making them hard to identify. Or they may be consciously self-protective or strategic; in this case it may or may not be appropriate to discuss them. It is also important to recognize one's own covert processes, and it is also important to understand the power dynamics of a team both internally and within the organization.

Four important components of team process are leadership, communication, conflict management, and decision making.

Roles can be both formal—related to job descriptions—or informal—related to behaviors of members. Informal functional roles include those related to task and those related to process. Dysfunctional roles may be either unconscious or attempts by individual members to satisfy their personal needs. A team member skilled in diagnosing functional roles may identify some that are missing and provide them for the team.

Meetings need to be carefully planned and facilitated, taking cultural differences into account.

Case Study: A Meeting of a US School Diversity Committee Whose Members Have Different Agendas

As you read the case study below, consider the following questions:

- *What could have been done before the meeting?*
- *What functional roles were or were not demonstrated by the facilitators?*
- *What was the outcome of the meeting?*
- *What do you think should have been done after the meeting?*

I am a U.S. Euro American female teacher in an independent female K-12 school. The population of the student body is 20% minorities with the largest group being first-generation Americans whose parents came from the Indian subcontinent and are both Hindus and Moslems. The school also has a sizable Jewish population. Other minority groups represented include Latinos, African Americans, and Asian Americans.

Last year a few minority members of the faculty approached the principal with their concern that the students in the school often displayed a lack of intercultural sensitivity. The principal formed a Committee on Diversity. The committee included three African Americans, including one who is a Baha'i who is married to a Czech, four Euro Americans including one who is of Jewish background and one who has an adopted Korean daughter, two Moslems, and a Hindu.

The first meeting was short, with two purposes—to clarify the purpose of the committee and to elect a chair. The principal asked the committee to make a list of recommendations of ways in which the school community could work to enhance appreciation of our diversity. Cynthia, one of the African Americans, and I, a Euro American, were chosen to be co-chairs. In preparation for the next meeting, Cynthia invited me to her home for dinner. After socializing during dinner, Cynthia and I sat down to plan our first meeting together. We began with a lengthy discussion of the term multicultural versus the term intercultural. Based on the articles I had seen in professional journals, I thought that multicultural referred to differences in race and ethnic background, gender, religion, sexual preference, and physical ability, but intercultural included international aspects. Cynthia was concerned that including all these dimensions would dilute the issues of race and ethnicity. We did not resolve this issue. We set the agenda for the meeting and included in it a discussion of the two terms. The intent was to begin to build awareness of the immensity of our topic. I left feeling stimulated but uncertain as to whether or not we had communicated effectively with each other.

The committee meeting was held a couple of weeks later, and Cynthia and I touched base by telephone to be sure we were clear about our plans. We agreed we would share facilitation in a fluid manner and that we would share the responsibility of taking notes. At the meeting, we presented the agenda: discussion of the terms multicultural and international, and recommendations. We passed the facilitation back and forth; when Cynthia was speaking, I felt that she and I were interpreting the direction of the meeting in two different ways. When I took the lead, I was concerned that she did not agree with what I was saying.

The discussion surrounding the terms was heated. Some members felt strongly that we were neglecting to include physically challenged students. Others discussed the need for the students to understand prejudice and exclusion, and differences in values and perspectives at a deeper level than some kind of "Mexican night." Others thought similarities were most important. The European American with an adopted Korean daughter said that her own extended family included three races and several nationalities, and that it was her constant struggle with her own children to teach tolerance and appreciation for the common bond of humanity. Several members agreed with her in passionate tones, and I thought that this was a difference of perspective that could immobilize the meeting and the work of the committee as a whole. I said something intended to validate both

views, hoping to harmonize. Several others did not express their opinion and seemed disinterested in this topic; they thought we were spending too much time philosophizing and not getting anywhere.

We then moved on to brainstorming the kinds of activities that we might recommend. Time ran out, and we ended the meeting about 30 minutes later than we had planned. We had set the next meeting date, but both Cynthia and I felt that it was unclear what we should do next.

Through the months that followed, the tendencies that came to light in that first meeting returned repeatedly to stall meetings and raise tensions. Cynthia and I spent a great deal of time on the telephone with individuals who were withdrawing because they felt that their own agenda was not being addressed.

Assessment[1]

Process Observation

This is a suggested guideline for process observation. Your team may want to add additional questions. It is helpful to appoint a process observer at meetings sometimes and designate time occasionally to discuss what was observed. Additionally, the process observer could be responsible for intervening to supply necessary roles. As the team matures, all members will develop the skill of maintaining a balance between process and content. Track both individual behavior and patterns by relevant group (nationality, race, gender, age, position, etc.)

- Communication and Participation
- How even was participation?
- Was there any overlapping speech or cutting people off?
- How did people demonstrate they were listening to others?
- What was the pace and rhythm of communication?
- Were different points of view expressed?
- Were ideas and opinions acknowledged and expanded upon?
- What communication patterns were observable? Who talked to whom? Who followed whom?
- Was the flow of content and ideas circular or linear?
- Who had eye contact with whom?
- What other nonverbal behaviors were evident?

[1] Claire B. Halverson

Roles: Informal

- To what extent were task behaviors exhibited (initiating, information seeking and giving, opinion seeking and giving, clarifying and elaborating, summarizing, consensus testing and evaluating, coordinating)?
- To what extent were maintenance behaviors exhibited (managing conflict, encouraging, gate keeping, diagnosing and facilitating group functioning, active listening, acknowledging others)?
- To what extent were self-oriented behaviors exhibited (controlling, distracting, resisting leadership, forming alliances, over-depending on leadership, withdrawing)?
- How was leadership exhibited (directive or shared)?

Decision Making

- Was the issue or problem clear?
- How were alternatives proposed?
- What methods were used to make decisions (voting, railroading, consensus, default)?
- Were decisions clearly recognized and accepted by all?
- Were plans made to implement decisions?

Climate

- How would you describe the climate (humorous/serious, relaxed/tense, energetic/de-energized, cautious/tumultuous, etc.)?

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Resources

Organizations
International Association of Facilitators: iaf-world.org
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