Chapter 3
Communicating in Organizational Groups and Teams

Learning Objectives

3.1 Describe two important categories of leader behavior in addition to flexibility
3.2 Examine three membership competencies affecting team performance
3.3 Identify the activities that characterize decision making and meetings in teams
3.4 Evaluate the issues of too little or too much conflict in a group environment

Despite the portrayal of the organization as the home of rugged individualism, professional work is often done in groups and teams. Developing, marketing, and selling any product or service in a global market involve the coordinated efforts of many people.

A group is a collection of three or more individuals who perceive themselves as a group, possess a common fate, and communicate with one another over time to accomplish both personal and group goals. Therefore, people waiting in line for a ride at an amusement park are not a group, but several students who decide to study together do represent a group. Groups can take many forms, including senior management groups, regional sales groups, accounting groups, or engineering groups.

In the past 20 years, however, the term group has gone out of favor, replaced by one of the newest management innovations, the self-directed team. Teams emerged as an explicit attempt to do more with less in an era of global competition and shrinking resources. The self-directed team eliminates the job of supervisory managers on a design team, for instance, and places all authority for the product in the hands of the team. The team also hires, fires, and disciplines its own members; sets its own work goals; and completes jobs on its own with little or no supervision. Because decisions are in the hands of a small number of teams, the company can react quickly to changing markets, producing a leaner, more flexible organization. The self-directed team is the central unit of organization for most of America’s top creative organizations, including Google, Dropbox, Apple, and Pixar.

Teams differ from groups in several important ways. First, teams have more decision-making authority than do groups. Second, because of that authority, teams are more interdependent and communicate more frequently than do groups. Teams often meet several times a day to coordinate activity, avoid duplication, and make necessary decisions. Finally, teams emphasize constant training and assessment of progress toward clearly articulated performance goals.

Although most of the concepts we discuss in this chapter apply equally to teams and groups, we will focus on team building. We begin with a discussion of the leadership role and team member competencies. We then cover the most frequently practiced team activity, the meeting, and close the chapter with a discussion of conflict management.

3.1: The Leadership Role

3.1 Describe two categories of leader behavior in addition to flexibility

Team members operate by taking a variety of roles. A role is an expectation about individual behavior patterns. Just as members of a family perform behaviors that distinguish them as parents, grandparents, and children, people in teams take on a limited set of repetitive behaviors that distinguish their membership roles. Leader is a term used to describe particular behaviors. Taken together, these behaviors are called a role. The leadership role is crucial to team performance.
Leadership is a complex phenomenon that is sometimes confused with management. Managers guide members by explaining job requirements, setting performance criteria, and monitoring output; they provide compensation for successful work and punish failure. The authority to set goals and deliver rewards is conferred by the organization, and employees comply with the requirements to the degree that they desire the manager’s rewards and want to avoid punishments. Referring to Chapter 1, management represents a contractual agreement whereby each person gives up something he or she would rather not part with in order to get something valuable from the other person. Supervisors in fast-food chains, retail stores, and other service industries usually function as managers rather than as leaders. Because of the part-time nature of these types of employment, their high turnover, and the unskilled work involved, the simple employment contract provides adequate motivation for group members.

Self-directed teams, however, require more member commitment than managers can create using simple employment contracts. The increased authority and independence of the self-directed team require that members be motivated and work hard without the benefit of direct supervision. Leadership provides a way to address these needs.

Leaders are able to specify issues of importance to members, raise employees' awareness of these issues, define how they should be interpreted or perceived, and then motivate members to transcend individual self-interest for the sake of the group. Unlike simple management, where the authority is granted by the organization, the leader’s authority comes from the members themselves, who voluntarily give up part of their right to specify goals and define issues to the leader. Members follow the leader not for rewards, but because they buy into the leader’s vision. In Chapter 1 we referred to this kind of agreement as consensual shared meaning, where people agree about basic objectives and values. Steve Jobs, cofounder of Apple Computers, is the classic example of a leader, a person who can drive individuals to innovate, create, and sacrifice for the larger vision of changing the world—not for financial rewards.

Although some managers do emerge as team leaders, it is equally likely that management and leadership roles are concentrated in different people. Although Jerry is the manager of his work group, he doesn’t spend much time on the shop floor and doesn’t know much about manufacturing details. He tries to hire good employees and protect the department’s budget from cuts. Juan is the senior operator, and Jerry gives him wide latitude in deciding manufacturing priorities. Juan has no control over resources, but employees follow his lead because they like him and believe he knows what’s best for the department.

What kind of person is likely to emerge as a team leader? Research indicates that emergent leaders are more communicatively flexible than nonleaders. In other words, leaders emerge by adapting their behavior to individual members of the group, to different tasks, and to different group priorities, depending on the circumstances.

A study of several decision-making teams exemplifies leaders’ adaptive behavior. In one meeting, the leader needed an open-ended, creative discussion of an agenda item. To facilitate this, he made few procedural comments, such as calling for votes, limiting discussion, making critical evaluations, or seeking critical evaluation. Instead, he encouraged people to talk and be creative, and used group identity comments to emphasize the creative and nonbureaucratic nature of this team. In a later meeting the same leader needed to reach resolution on three agenda items. His procedural comments increased from the first meeting, and his identity comments about the group’s special role and creativity diminished. This leader adapted his performance to meet the different needs of the team in two different meetings.

Team leaders are audience centered; they can assess member needs in the context of the larger goal and enact behaviors that move the team forward. Despite the importance of flexibility, it is possible to describe two important categories of leader behavior: Leaders organize team efforts and define the team’s context.

3.1.1: Leaders Organize the Team’s Work

Team activity is usually disorganized and messy, characterized by circular discussions, dead-end ideas, and conflicting solutions. Leaders use their communication skills to bring order to chaotic processes. Professors John F. Cragan and David W. Wright divide leadership communication behaviors into three categories: task, procedural, and interpersonal (see Figure 3.1). Task communication skills focus on accomplishing the team’s performance goals. Therefore, contributing ideas and solutions is an important leadership function. If other members are hesitant to express their ideas, the leader can ease fears by laying out his or her own ideas. If members are still reluctant to contribute their ideas, it is up to the leaders to seek ideas from all group members through direct questions such as “Kim, do you have any ideas on this problem?” or “Gabrielle, we haven’t heard from you for a while. What’s your opinion?”

Effective teams must not only develop ideas but also cull poor ideas so that only the strongest solutions remain. The leader must evaluate ideas in such a way that members do not feel attacked. This means rejecting other people’s ideas without disconfirming their experience or emotional reactions. The leader must also seek idea evaluation from other group members through such direct questions as “What do you think of our first solution?” “Are there ways to improve this concept, or should we set it aside for now?” Finally, under task communication behaviors, the group leader must stimulate creativity,
allowing members to propose wild and offbeat ideas without criticism.

Leadership in the **procedural area** sets the agenda for the team’s process. **Goal-setting** behaviors establish short- and long-range objectives. Leaders are also responsible for **agenda making** to keep meetings on track. Leaders must ask members to **clarify** their abstract ideas. This can be accomplished through specific questions, such as “What do you mean by that?” “Can you provide an example of how this idea would work in practice?” and “How will this help us reduce our costs?” When asked in a nonthreatening manner, these questions can encourage members to think more deeply about their ideas.

Good leaders also keep the team on track by **summarizing** the group’s progress. Consistent summary statements help members understand where the group is going: “So, what I hear is that we have not one, but two problems. We don’t deal adequately with members of the environmental community, and we are terrible with the press.” Consistently summarizing members’ ideas brings order to disorderly discussions. **Verbalizing consensus** involves finding the areas on which members agree. Such comments as “I believe we agree that in the future the press will not be invited to attend our meetings,” made throughout the meeting (rather than at the end of a meeting), increase the chances of eventual agreement.

Finally, **interpersonal communication** skills create a productive environment for members. First, the leader must **regulate participation**. Dominant members must be held in check, and less active members must be encouraged to participate. For instance, a comment such as “Karina, I know you’re very concerned about this issue, but let’s take the time to hear from people who haven’t spoken” can open up a meeting to other opinions. **Climate making** means creating a nonthreatening atmosphere so that members feel comfortable contributing even their “crazy” ideas. Censuring members who make personal attacks and focusing criticism on ideas rather than on individuals help create a positive climate. Finally, teamwork creates conflict, and good leaders are able to **resolve conflicts** and move the group forward. The last section of this chapter discusses a variety of conflict management skills. In addition to organizing group activity, good leaders must define important issues for members and motivate them to transcend individual self-interest.

### 3.1.2: Leaders Define the Team’s Focus

According to Professors Carl E. Larson and Frank M. J. LaFasto, effective teams adopt elevating goals that inspire lofty and sincere aspirations. **Charisma** is the word we use to describe leaders who can focus members’ attention and devotion to a goal, and charismatic leadership is the effective use of symbols. As we said in Chapter 1, events do not have any particular meaning; we use symbols to give meanings to events. Charismatic leaders are exceptional at communicating their interpretations of an event, and their vision or goals, in such a way that followers accept the interpretation as correct.

For example, the founding leaders of Pixar, Ed Catmull, Alvy Ray Smith, John Lasseter, and Steve Jobs, got employees to buy into their goal of creating feature films that were animated entirely on a computer. The future of the entire company rested on the 1995 debut of Toy Story, which was hailed as gigantic, artistic, and commercial success. Along the way, the leaders motivated employees with the vision of being the first to do something that not even Disney had accomplished. In addition, they created an open climate that encouraged individual expression, engaged the collective creativity of employees, and created a physical environment that emphasized open communication and honest expression of ideas. Pixar eventually took its charismatic leadership ideas and reinvigorated Disney Studios. Group leaders use a variety of strategies to communicate and gain commitment to their vision.

**Labels** are catchy symbols that categorize or describe a thing or event. A good label can help employees grasp the vision the leader wants to communicate.

Tech companies are known for applying cheeky or inspiring labels to projects in development. For example, a Microsoft project named “Janus,” after the Roman gatekeeper to heaven, manages digital music and videos on computers or mobile devices. Apple’s “Killer Rabbit” was renamed AppleShare 3.0 when it came out. “In Apple’s early years, the right name helped fire up engineers faced with the tedious prospect of spending years writing millions of lines of computer code. You needed a cool name...
Leaders can specify important group values by encouraging rituals that reinforce those values. Rather than try to create new rituals from scratch, wise leaders capitalize on events the team has already developed, adjusting them to reinforce appropriate visions.

Identification occurs when members’ interests and goals overlap. Employees who identify with their team experience feelings of commitment, membership, and similarity with the group. Members who identify with the team are devoted to its tasks and committed to success. Leaders can encourage team members to identify in a number of ways. The first method is praise for the team’s accomplishments, which raises members’ esteem and reminds them of the team’s importance within the larger organization. Another method of creating identification is by espousing shared values. For example, during a meeting, the team leader emphasizes, “We all believe that customer service is our number one priority.” In essence, members are told that they all share the same interests and priorities.

Constant references to a presumed “we” often go unnoticed but reinforce a taken-for-granted common bond among members. Statements such as “We must work together to solve this problem” or “We are going to improve quality in the next year” subtly suggest that all team members are committed to the same mission.

Finally, nothing unites a group like a common enemy. Companies often emphasize threats from “outsiders” as a way to stress togetherness and identification among employees. Portrayals of powerful enemies bent on destroying the team can lead to an increased sense of unity and stronger collective acceptance of group values. Enemies should be chosen with care, however. Making an enemy of another unit in the company can poison relations between teams and prevent cooperation on important projects. A less destructive approach is to create a healthy sense of competition between teams to spur members to increased performance. Outside the company, portraying competitors as enemies creates a sense of commitment to team goals.

Figure 3.2 Methods of Creating Identification

| Praise for a Team’s Accomplishments: Raises members’ esteem for the team. |
| “I want to congratulate the entire team on its efforts over the past 6 weeks. You’ve worked harder and accomplished more than any team I have ever led. Your efforts will play an important role in the coming product rollout.” |

| Espousing Shared Values: Explicitly state that the team members share the same values. |
| “I know none of you would have come to this agency if community service were not your primary goal.” |

| The Presumed “We”: Subtly suggest that all members are committed to the same mission. |
| “We are going to move forward with this project despite the setback because we know how important it is to our company’s future.” |

| The Common Enemy: Portray outside interests that are trying to destroy the team. |
| “This is not a level playing field, because competitors in other countries have the benefit of government subsidies and low wages operating in their favor. To combat these unfair practices, we must become as efficient as possible in our own operation.” |
methods of encouraging identification with a team are summarized in Figure 3.2. Although leadership is vital, without committed followers, leaders can’t accomplish much.

3.2: Membership Competencies in Groups and Teams

3.2 Examine three membership competencies affecting team performance

A team’s performance is partly determined by the competencies of the individuals involved. Three competencies include working knowledge, empathy or perspective taking, and conversational turn-taking.

According to communication researchers LaFasto and Larson, two kinds of working knowledge are required for effective team work. Working knowledge includes both a practical understanding of the task at hand (experience) and overall problem-solving skills. Although leaders should feel free to add new, inexperienced team members, the newcomers must be balanced by knowledgeable, competent members who thoroughly understand the task. The second knowledge factor is the member’s problem-solving abilities. Problem solving includes the ability to clarify problems, contribute ideas, seek ideas from others, and evaluate ideas, stimulate creativity, and clarify solutions.

The second member competency is empathy or perspective taking, which we discussed in Chapter 1. Empathy or perspective taking involves the ability to discern, through nonverbal cues, what another person is thinking and responding in some appropriate way. Empathy is a social sensitivity skill—a kind of interpersonal literacy—that is absolutely vital for team success. It is possible to test your empathy skills by taking a simple online test (Google: “Reading the Mind in the Eyes Test”). Research at MIT shows that the higher the collective empathy scores of the group the more successful they are at a large variety of tasks. In other words, the single most important element of effective groups is their average social sensitivity, as measured on the “Reading the Mind in the Eyes Test.” The group’s ability to read and react appropriately to one another produces many positive outcomes. When team members can read each other they are better at creating collegial interactions. They know what will inspire their colleagues; they know when someone else needs support or if they can handle criticism of their ideas. A team of highly empathic people can meet the unique needs of every team member, creating a context for success in many different tasks.

Research suggests a number of things about empathy. First, there is a genetic element to this ability. For example, women generally score higher in empathic abilities than men. Whereas men tend to express their mental capabilities in systematizing the physical world—in other words, attempting to find the order and pattern in the physical environment, women tend to express their mental capabilities in understanding and predicting behavior in the social world. This latter characteristic is the one more fundamentally related to group success and these gender-based abilities are evident at birth. However, both men and women can improve their empathic abilities with practice. For example, at University of Missouri Health Care, over 1,000 physicians have gone through a program in which they practice giving life-changing diagnoses (e.g., cancer) to actors, which are recorded. Obviously, delivering a life-changing diagnosis will be better managed if the physician is able to read the patient and adapt their message based on what they are seeing. Later, with communication facilitators and other physicians in the program, the videos are critiqued in a sort of “after action review,” where suggestions are made for improvement. The program demonstrates that people can improve their ability to read and react to others. The key to improving your empathy skills is practice.

The third member competency is conversational turn-taking. The members of the very best groups interact in several distinct ways. First, they generate a large number of ideas in a short period of time. This means that ideas are contributed quickly, with no member going on at length or dominating the conversation. Members are constantly alternating between putting forward their own ideas and responding to others’ ideas. Good members ask questions when they don’t understand and are able to reach consensus on ideas that are moving the group forward and those that are not helping. Finally, the time members spend talking is more or less equal. Members who dominate conversation, talk over others, and refuse to listen are poisonous to a team and, if possible, they should be moved off the team, or, barring that, given individual work to perform. If you can select members for your team, it’s best to get those who demonstrate working knowledge, empathy, and turn-taking.

Because teams are responsible for so much decision making, they spend an enormous amount of time in meetings.

3.3: Decision Making in Group and Team Meetings

3.3 Identify the activities that characterize decision making and meetings in teams

According to an article in USA Today, meetings have become the bane of American workers and an impediment
to productivity. Roger Mosvick, a communication professor at Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota, says the number of meetings has jumped enormously, and many of these meetings are mind-numbing in their mundane content. Business professionals spend 25% to 60% of their time in meetings, and as much as half of that time is unproductive. The length of most meetings also increased, inducing some companies to require attendees to stand as a way to shorten the proceeding.

3.3.1: Preparing and Conducting Meetings

The agenda is the map or guidebook for the meeting, and if it is thrown together thoughtlessly or not created at all, the meeting is very likely to spin off in unproductive directions.

Developing the agenda starts by soliciting topics from members. Team leaders should avoid scheduling oral reports during meetings. Reports are interesting only to a small subset of attending members and are better handled electronically. John E. Tropman, author and organizational consultant, recommends that each item for inclusion be sorted into one of three categories depending on the kind of activity it represents: announcements, discussions, or decisions.

**Announcements** are brief information items (not reports) that the entire group needs to hear. **Discussions** allow members to share information or examine a problem from a variety of different angles. **Decision items** require the group to vote or reach consensus on a topic. A sample agenda follows.

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**Agenda**

Portneuf Valley Community Advisory Panel, Friday, May 16, 2015

1. Jeri Taylor from AGP will briefly explain why the company postponed plans for the liquefied gas plant in Michigan (announcement).
2. Teresa Martinez from the state Division of Environmental Quality will discuss the new proposals for hazardous waste cleanup (discussion).
3. Phillip Wilson wants the group to choose a date for the upcoming open house (decision item).

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Notice also that this agenda is appropriately detailed. Many agendas do not include enough detail for members to know what is happening. Examine the following sample agenda.

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**Minutes**

Staff Sales Meeting

1. Members discussed falling sales in the southern region. Moved: Meet with advertising at the next opportunity and discuss changing ad agencies. Approved by 6 to 2 vote.

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This review is too brief to fully explain the content of the meeting. On the other hand, transcribing the entire content of the meeting is not a viable option. Instead, team
leaders should create content minutes. Each heading in the agenda should have a corresponding heading in the minutes. The recorder writes a summary of the discussion in one or two paragraphs and highlights the team’s decision, if any, in bold or italics. Take a look at the following example:

Minutes
Portneuf Valley Community Advisory Panel,
September 7, 2015

1. The group reviewed its early planning for a PM-10 study.
   Several people discussed concerns they had about the study, including the time it would take, the number of respondents that would have to be involved, and the kind of help needed to conduct it properly. The number one problem, of course, is money. Sue Wong reported that she might be able to come up with $15,000 to $18,000 to fund the project. The agency has some money set aside for such things. The only condition is that the study methods be approved by the agency prior to disbursement of the funds.

   Decisions: The group formed a subcommittee of Bill, Jean, and Bob to contact both the university and the agency in order to set up the study and procure the funds.

Content minutes are superior to regular minutes because the summaries include relevant details and highlight decisions.

Finally, leaders must follow through on the team’s decisions. Remind the team about the implementation of previous decisions in the announcement phase. Members are more likely to see meetings as productive when decisions are carried out and assessed for effectiveness.

3.3.2: Decision-Making Agendas

Although the research is somewhat mixed, there is support for the notion that rational decision-making schemes produce more reasonable and intelligent results than teams that follow no particular procedure. Most writers on decision making acknowledge the seminal influence of the philosopher John Dewey, who identified a set of mental operations for decision making referred to as the “Reflective Thinking Sequence.” The basic steps of the Reflective Thinking Sequence are

I. Define the Problem: A concise statement of the problem and its type, nature, and causes.
   A. What is the harm? What are the symptoms of the problem?
   B. How serious is the harm? Does the problem warrant a solution?
   C. Is there any way to look at the problem as a benefit?
   D. Who is affected by the harm?
   E. How widespread is the harm?
   F. What are the root causes of the harm?
   G. What, if any, obstacles are there to developing a solution?

II. Develop Criteria: A set of standards against which to evaluate the worth of various solutions.
   A. What are the important standards that a solution must meet?
   B. Rank-order criteria in terms of importance.

III. List Solutions: A list of possible solutions.

IV. Select a Single Solution: The solution that best meets the established criteria.
   A. Eliminate solutions that obviously fail to meet the criteria.
   B. What solution or combination of remaining solutions will solve the problem?
   C. Does the solution adequately meet the criteria previously elaborated?

V. Implement the Solution: The steps necessary to implement the solution.
   A. What must be done, and who will be responsible for implementing the solution?
   B. How will we know if the solution has been effective?

Unfortunately, defining the problem is the most misunderstood step in the process. Most teams rush past the problem on their way to solutions, leading to ineffective decisions. Imagine, for example, that you manage a large state recreation area. You want to address a recent drop in attendance at picnic and campground sites along the river. Several rangers believe the dropoff is the result of recent fee hikes at the park. An overzealous team will inappropriately define the problem as “visitor decline caused by increased user fees.” By asking questions under “Define the problem,” the team can develop a more thorough understanding of the decline. For example, by inquiring about the harm and seriousness of the dropoff, the team can determine whether the problem is truly serious. Perhaps a decline might help the local environment recover. As such, fewer visitors become a benefit, and the problem is how to capitalize on the decline to help the environment recover. It is also important to ask who is affected by the harm. If the state allocates money based on usage, then the reduction signifies less money for future improvements at the facility. This might be serious enough to warrant action. The group must also understand root causes: Are the fee hikes really the cause of this problem? Or is the new state-of-the-art
swimming facility in town the source of the decline? Finally, it is important to inquire about the obstacles to developing a solution. If, for example, the state legislature sets fees for all state facilities, then reducing the fees is not an option.

The definition of the problem greatly influences the team’s solution. As you can see in Figure 3.3, the solution depends on how the team defines the problem. If the team decides the decline is caused by the new pool, then one solution is better advertising to encourage customers to come to the park on weekends, the most crowded time at the pool. If, however, the group defines the problem as a benefit to the environment, the solution is to invest in environmental recovery. Finally, if the group decides the problem is really related to fees, then one solution is to add amenities to the facility, making the fee increase seem less burdensome. As you can see, a thorough understanding of the problem is necessary for creative problem solving.

The next step is to develop criteria against which to evaluate solutions. Criteria must be specific and detailed, rather than general. When hiring a new employee, it is not enough to say, “We want the best candidate.” The team needs to decide what standards it will use to determine the “best” candidate. The best candidate may have to meet the following criteria: a degree from a top-10 school according to industry rankings, a GPA above 3.2 in computer programming classes, and strong letters of recommendation. The park rangers developed the following criteria for their decision concerning the state recreation area:

1. The solution cannot change fees because these are set by the legislature.
2. The solution can cost no more than the $90,000 allocated for improvements to this area for the year.
3. It is preferable that the money be spent on capital improvements at the site rather than on noncapital expenses.
4. The solution should not increase environmental degradation to the recreation area.

Those criteria are rank-ordered from the most important to the least important.

Following the development of criteria, the team generates a list of possible solutions and then culls unworkable plans. Techniques such as brainstorming, morphological analysis, or computer decision support systems are useful methods for generating solutions.

The team selects a plan by eliminating plans that are obviously unworkable or fail to meet the specified criteria. For example, solutions that adjust fee structures are eliminated because they fail to meet the first criterion. Other ideas that cost more than $90,000 can also be dismissed. The remaining list represents solutions that are at least minimally appropriate. If one solution clearly meets all the criteria, then this is the appropriate choice. If, however, there are several competing solutions, each of which meets some, but not all, of the criteria, use the rank ordering to help make the decision. The park rangers evaluated two competing solutions: creating an advertising and education program to encourage attendance or adding improved playground and parking facilities to make the fee increase less onerous to patrons. Although both solutions met the first two criteria, the advertising campaign did not meet the third criterion, that money should be spent on capital improvements. The team therefore decided to add playground and parking facilities to the site. Finally, the team should spend time deciding who will implement the solution, and the team should meet again to evaluate the solution after its implementation. Although the procedural order presented here is not the only one available, it is serviceable for many kinds of decisions.

Recent technological advances have made it easier and cheaper to hold virtual team meetings through the teleconference, the videoconference, and the webconference. The technology brief in Box 3.1 explains these tools and how to use them to your advantage.

3.3.3: Collaboration Channels

In Chapter 1, we discussed different channels of communication. Selecting the appropriate channel is especially important in facilitating group and team interaction. Channel choices for group and team communication include...
Box 3.1 Technology Brief: Virtual Conferencing

The practice of virtual conferencing, especially the teleconference, has been used in business and the professions for many years. Recently, the cost-saving imperatives imposed by globalization and the Great Recession, combined with improving technology, have made all three forms of virtual conferencing—the teleconference, the videoconference, and the webconference—more common. The virtual conference is a less expensive substitute for face-to-face meetings. This brief will address the different kinds of virtual conferencing that are available and how to adapt one’s communication habits to ensure the most effective meeting.

Teleconferencing is the oldest and most established of these technologies, requiring only that a square, low-slung speaker phone be located in each remote location. The primary disadvantage of the teleconference is that it is limited to voice transmission only. A more sophisticated and rich virtual meeting can be had with videoconferencing, which uses Integrated Service Digital Network (ISDN) lines that allow the high-speed transfer of large quantities of data, including voice, visual, and document transfers. Previously, most large national and international organizations had an expensive, dedicated videoconference room that includes large-screen TVs, cameras, and microphones. However, as technology has improved many, if not most, companies have moved away from dedicated and expensive videoconferencing services, relying instead upon one of the many Voice-over Internet Protocol (VoIP) services.

VoIP, the newest distance conferencing technology, is commonly thought of in terms of Skype, Google Hangouts, or Apple FaceTime, but can include any chat client that has audio and visual data transfer capabilities. Participants must have a computer, tablet, or cell phone, a microphone and webcam (often built-in to the device), and an Internet connection. Skype, which was originally developed as a way to make free phone calls over the Internet, also supports high-quality webconferencing with full-screen and screen-in-screen modes, screen sharing, and file transfer abilities. Google Hangouts also supports these same functions, as well as being integrated with the Google suite of products, making sharing and collaborating on documents, spreadsheets, and presentations across locations easy. FaceTime is more limited in its application, because it is restricted to the Apple family of products and does not currently allow for screen sharing or file transfers, but is rapidly gaining ground due to the ubiquitous nature of iPads and iPhones. Using these virtual conference systems requires some adjustment of traditional, face-to-face meeting habits and communication patterns.

- **Plan ahead:** Make sure the team members all have proper hardware and software prior to the event. If this is the first time you and your team are using the technology, set up a short practice session so you can all use the system confidently. This is especially important with the webconference because failure to update the software can prevent you from connecting to the service.
  - **Use programs intelligently:** Most VoIP applications are built with interaction in mind and will switch the focus of the screen to whomever is talking, making it easy to identify who is talking and feel engaged with the content. However, this automatic switching can be problematic if one or more individuals are in a noisy space, engaging in side conversations, or simply generating extra noise. If necessary, be prepared to ask participants to temporarily mute their microphones when not talking (particularly on calls of more than four people) or “lock” the focus of their call on the primary speaker.
  - **Keep virtual meetings short:** Somewhere between 60 and 90 minutes is the most a speaker or team leader on a webcast can be expected to hold attendees’ attention.
  - **Avoid presentations in the teleconference:** Presentations do not translate well via teleconference because the technology does not allow the audience to see the speaker’s eyes, gestures, movement, or visual aids. In this low-density medium, it’s easy to see that an extended presentation could put people to sleep.
  - **Let attendees interact with the presentation:** To keep the audience from losing interest, let them interact with presentations as often as possible with questions and comments. Unlike a traditional presentation in a face-to-face meeting, wherein the speaker might prefer to speak uninterrupted and then take questions, it’s vital that the audience be allowed to interact throughout the virtual conference.
  - **Have people introduce themselves:** Presenters in any kind of virtual conference should always identify themselves at the beginning of the event. In a teleconference, where you can’t see the speaker, it’s best to identify oneself each time a comment is made. It can be very difficult, especially on a teleconference with eight or more people, to identify who is speaking by voice recognition alone.
  - **Be enthusiastic:** In a virtual conference, nonverbal cues are more difficult to see and hear, and the establishment of eye contact is challenging. Presenters and speakers must exploit the power of their voice to keep people’s attention.
  - **Keep graphics simple:** When using PowerPoint or other graphic programs, keep your graphics large, simple, and easy to see. In a videoconference, your graphics may be presented on a television that is smaller than the traditional pull-down screen.
  - **Make sure people are not left out:** If you are leading the discussion, make a point to call on people who you haven’t heard from and ask their opinion about what they are hearing. People’s hesitation to speak may be the result of unfamiliar technology, not lack of an opinion.

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message boards and texting, telephone, voicemail, text messages, video conferencing, and face-to-face meetings.

You may be surprised to learn that the number one communication channel in organizations is e-mail, followed by landline telephones, voicemail, standard cell phones, intranets, audio conferencing, message boards, instant messaging, smartphones, and video/webconferencing. Thus, more traditional communication channels still dominate organizational life.30

Figure 3.4 depicts the ease of use, the ability of the collaborative channel to communicate emotional/nonverbal cues, and the optimal uses for eight group communication channels. When selecting a channel for communication, select one that is most likely to accomplish your goals.

3.3.4: Discussion Techniques for Enhancing Creativity

In Chapter 1 we briefly discussed the challenges that both organizations and individuals face in the new global environment. Globalization—the free movement of goods, services, people, and culture across national borders—creates intense competition, which leads to the ever-present possibility of losing customers to newer or more cheaply produced products and services. Government agencies must look for ways to reduce costs because taxpayers are reluctant to ante up more money, even for existing programs. As the rate of change increases, so does every organization’s need for creative ideas. Most organizations justify the expense and time it takes to establish self-directed teams on the belief that they represent a more stimulating, creative environment than traditional, top-down bureaucracies. This section describes the basis of creative thinking and suggests several team-based discussion methods to enhance creativity.

According to communication researchers Johnson and Hackman, creative ideas reflect three qualities. First, a creative idea is innovative or novel. The goal of creativity is to produce a new product, ad campaign, manufacturing process, or service that hasn’t been seen in the past. Rather than springing into existence out of nothing, most creative ideas combine existing elements into new and different combinations. For example, the company that created Post-it Notes, 3M, combined two already existing elements, minimally adhesive glue and paper, into a new product. Second, an idea is creative when it is relevant to the problem the team must address. Thus, in organizational teams the creative effort is made to solve some problem or take advantage of an opportunity. Third, creativity includes both lateral and horizontal thinking. Lateral thinking involves linking concepts that seem totally unrelated prior to the new idea. For example, the creator of the electric guitar combined a Hawaiian steel guitar with parts from a radio and telephone. Horizontal thinking is aimed at developing and evaluating ideas once they are proposed.31 For example, the company that invented the Fruit Roll-Up, General Mills, needed to use lateral thinking to come up with a flat candy that could be rolled up and horizontal thinking to evaluate, develop, manufacture, and market the product. Creative thinking is different from mere problem solving, which involves adopting and implementing existing solutions to organizational problems.

People are often encumbered in their thinking about creativity—and their ability to be creative—by the myths that surround the process. Arguably, the most significant myth is the belief that creativity is limited to the small number of geniuses that a society produces each generation. We’re tempted to believe that figures like Einstein, Mozart, Stephen Hawking, or Steve Jobs are endowed with something special in their genetic code that makes them creative, and the rest of us mere mortals are stuck in our noncreative ruts.32 Although sudden insights and dramatic breakthroughs do occur during the creative process, most researchers see creativity as an extension of everyday problem solving.

According to many psychologists, creative thinking is the result of preparation and knowledge, diligent work, tolerance for ambiguity, and a willingness to take calculated risks. Obviously, extensive preparation and knowledge increase the probability of finding creative solutions. Creative problem solvers are able to tolerate messy, vague problems and resist settling on quick solutions. Creative thinkers take chances with new ideas. They apply their superior knowledge to take the most appropriate calculated risks, those most likely to succeed. They are not reckless because they have the experience and background to properly evaluate risks and accept only those most likely to pay off. These are traits that we can all cultivate in ourselves.

Most researchers also believe that the creative potential of any team can be increased by careful attention to the discussion process employed. Over the years, a variety of methods have been developed to improve team-based creative abilities. Some of these processes, like the standard agenda, encourage a clearer problem definition, whereas others are designed to encourage more horizontal thinking. We will describe and explain each of these creativity-enhancing discussion methods, starting with the best-known method, brainstorming.

BRAINSTORMING In his famous book on creative thinking, Alex Osborn invented the technique of brainstorming. Brainstorming is a frequently used and effective means of developing creative solutions to team problems. Because it emphasizes creativity and innovation, it is useful when unconventional solutions are required. Brainstorming includes the following steps:

I. Instruct members in the procedures and warmup.
II. Brainstorm.
III. Clarify ideas and eliminate redundancy.
IV. Evaluate ideas and select the best solution.33
### Figure 3.4 Collaboration Channels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Channel</th>
<th>Ease of Use</th>
<th>Emotional/Nonverbal Cues</th>
<th>Optimal Uses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Message Boards</td>
<td>• Easy to create&lt;br&gt;• Reaches the entire team&lt;br&gt;• Rapid dissemination and response</td>
<td>• Two-way communication&lt;br&gt;• Allows a semblance of conversation&lt;br&gt;• Difficult to communicate complex emotional or relational information, leading to misunderstanding</td>
<td>• Discussions of simple ideas&lt;br&gt;• Collecting comments or ideas prior to a face-to-face meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-Mail</td>
<td>• Easy to create&lt;br&gt;• Reaches the entire team&lt;br&gt;• Rapid dissemination but usually delayed response</td>
<td>• Two-way communication&lt;br&gt;• Difficult to communicate complex emotional or relational information, leading to misunderstanding&lt;br&gt;• Delayed feedback&lt;br&gt;• Etiquette requires short messages</td>
<td>• Short messages that confirm information or issue reminders&lt;br&gt;• Brief supportive messages&lt;br&gt;• Short questions and answers&lt;br&gt;• Discussion of simple ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text Messages</td>
<td>• Easy to create&lt;br&gt;• Reaches the entire team&lt;br&gt;• Rapid dissemination and response&lt;br&gt;• Longer messages difficult to send</td>
<td>• One-way communication&lt;br&gt;• Difficult to communicate complex emotional or relational information, leading to misunderstanding&lt;br&gt;• Difficult to communicate complex information&lt;br&gt;• Short messages are preferred&lt;br&gt;• Delayed feedback</td>
<td>• Short messages that confirm information or issue reminders&lt;br&gt;• Setting up meetings&lt;br&gt;• Brief supportive messages&lt;br&gt;• Short questions and answers&lt;br&gt;• Communication when team members are traveling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memos</td>
<td>• Easy to create&lt;br&gt;• Reaches the entire team&lt;br&gt;• Dissemination speed depends on mode (snail mail or electronic)</td>
<td>• One-way communication&lt;br&gt;• Considered informal&lt;br&gt;• Few nonverbal cues to help with interpretation&lt;br&gt;• Delayed feedback</td>
<td>• Providing simple information&lt;br&gt;• Confirming information already agreed to by the team&lt;br&gt;• Memorandum of understanding outlining points already agreed to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal Letter</td>
<td>• Form requires care and effort&lt;br&gt;• Reaches the entire team&lt;br&gt;• Dissemination speed depends on mode (snail mail or electronic)</td>
<td>• One-way communication&lt;br&gt;• Considered very formal&lt;br&gt;• Allows careful expression of ideas&lt;br&gt;• Few nonverbal cues to help with interpretation&lt;br&gt;• Delayed feedback</td>
<td>• Use almost exclusively for formal issues such as hiring, firing, raises, resignations, changes to contract terms, official congratulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voicemail</td>
<td>• Easy to create&lt;br&gt;• Messages must be left for one person at a time&lt;br&gt;• Longer messages are difficult to send</td>
<td>• One-way communication&lt;br&gt;• Informal&lt;br&gt;• Vocal nonverbal cues help with interpretation&lt;br&gt;• Short messages make it difficult to communicate complex information&lt;br&gt;• Delayed feedback</td>
<td>• Making an information request&lt;br&gt;• Responding to an information request&lt;br&gt;• Confirming information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Videoconference</td>
<td>• Difficult and expensive to put together&lt;br&gt;• Brings together entire team despite geographic dispersion&lt;br&gt;• Allows extensive discussion&lt;br&gt;• If technology is not fully functional, most of the advantages are lost</td>
<td>• Two-way communication&lt;br&gt;• Informal and conversational&lt;br&gt;• Full range of nonverbal cues available to all&lt;br&gt;• Immediate feedback for all questions, answers, and comments&lt;br&gt;• Time delays, microphones, cameras can inhibit free expression</td>
<td>• Effective for basic meeting functions such as announcements and decision making&lt;br&gt;• Somewhat less effective for complex discussions and brainstorming because of time delays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-Face Team Meeting</td>
<td>• Easy and inexpensive if people are co-present&lt;br&gt;• Brings entire team together&lt;br&gt;• Allows extensive discussion</td>
<td>• Two-way communication&lt;br&gt;• Informal and conversational&lt;br&gt;• Full range of nonverbal cues available to all&lt;br&gt;• Immediate feedback for all questions, answers, and comments</td>
<td>• Effective for basic meeting functions such as announcements and decisions&lt;br&gt;• Effective for brainstorming and all other creative activities</td>
</tr>
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</table>
In step I, inform members of the rules and engage in a warmup session that brainstorm ideas to a non-sense problem (“Think of all the different ways to use an empty Coke can”). The warmup helps members get into the spontaneous, freewheeling frame of mind necessary to develop creative ideas. In step II, lead the group in an actual brainstorming session while recording ideas on a flip chart, overhead, or board. The rules for the brainstorming session are as follows: First, all evaluation or criticism of ideas is forbidden. The leader must interrupt criticism and discipline members to refocus their energies on generating ideas. Because putting limits on ideas dampens the creative process, wild and offbeat ideas are encouraged. Third, encourage members to make connections among ideas.

In step III, eliminate or combine redundant ideas. In step IV, evaluate and dismiss clearly unworkable solutions. After this, the team discusses and decides on the best solutions to the problem.

NOMINAL GROUP TECHNIQUE Sometimes organizations use ad hoc groups whose members do not know one another, do not meet regularly, but come together on a one-time basis to solve a problem. The nominal group technique equalizes participation among ad hoc group members who don’t know one another and may be reluctant to speak.34

Most versions of the nominal group technique follow four steps:

I. Silent generation of ideas
II. Round-robin recording of those ideas
III. Clarification of ideas through discussion
IV. Preliminary vote or ranking of ideas

One of your authors facilitated a meeting for the U.S. Forest Service that used the nominal group technique. The agency wanted to protect migrating elk from off-road vehicles. After a presentation from Forest Service officials about elk habitat, 20 citizens were arranged into five groups and asked to silently generate solutions to the problem. In step II, each group facilitator recorded member ideas on a flip chart. The facilitator moved around the group recording ideas until all the solutions were represented on the chart.

In step III, members briefly clarify and discuss each idea. Members explain their ideas, and statements of agreement or disagreement are allowed, but this must not degenerate into open argumentation. Finally, in step IV, each group ranks its solutions. In the case of the Forest Service, each group’s rankings were given to the forest supervisor, who made a final decision in consultation with his management team. In other cases, the entire assembly can come back together to discuss each group’s ideas and craft a single solution. Nominal group procedures save time and ensure equal participation among members who have no history together.

SENSATIONAL THINKING The sensational thinking technique is an excellent way for a team to improve a product or service and reposition it in the market. The theme in this exercise is to look at the product or service from the perspective of the five senses: sight, sound, smell, touch, and, if relevant, taste.35 If, for example, a team of consultants was asked to redesign an old Walmart into a super center, they might proceed by using sensational thinking.

Sight: Inside the store, the aisles are narrow. Center-aisle displays throughout the main aisles only serve to increase the crowding. People must constantly stop and turn around to avoid other shoppers and move through the store.

Sound: The background music is audible, but not disturbing. You’re never alone in the store, so you constantly hear parts of other people’s conversations. Any privacy to stand and mull over a particular product is interrupted by other people and their conversations.

Touch: The major activity is maneuvering the cart: stopping, turning, and pushing around other people to make space and continue to get where you need to go. On occasion, people bump into you from behind.

Smell: The store smells musty, like a large, dusty warehouse.

Comments like these might give the redesign team ideas about how to improve the shopping experience in the new store.

MORPHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS The morphological analysis method encourages members to think laterally by “forcing” together elements that seem completely unrelated.36 It’s an ideal way to develop new products or services or create new solutions to existing problems. A morphological analysis breaks a problem into its major components and lists all the possible topics or subdivisions under each major heading. Then, by randomly combining those elements, the team generates new ideas that might solve a problem or produce a new product or service. An example of morphological analysis is depicted in Figure 3.5.

In this example, a development team needs to create a new food product for quick, one- or two-person dinners. The team members break the problem into its major parts, including the kinds of food that might be included in the product, the various properties that a food product could possess, the various methods of cooking the product, and the kinds of packaging available. Then the team combines the elements from each category to come up with new product combinations. Although some combinations will not appeal to consumers, such as fish that comes in a can and is cooked on the stove, other combinations are more promising. For example, by combining elements from columns 1, 3, and 4, this team came up with an idea for a pasta meal, spaghetti and marinara sauce, that comes in a waterproof pouch and is cooked by boiling the pouch,
which is then opened onto a plate for a quick and convenient meal. Other products can be invented by combining different elements from different categories. Some form of morphological analysis may have been at work in the development of single-serving macaroni and cheese and Fruit Roll-Ups.

3.4: Conflict in Groups and Teams

3.4 Evaluate the issues of too little or too much conflict in a group environment

Conflict is an unavoidable part of human relationships. This is especially true in teams where contrary opinions are common. Conflict is defined as the interaction of interdependent people who perceive incompatible goals and interference from one another in achieving those goals. The parties to a conflict are interdependent in that the actions of any member affect the entire team. Although managers often attribute conflicts to differing personalities or faulty communication, the vast majority of conflicts would not exist without a real difference of interests or opinions. Each party to a conflict interferes with the other as they attempt to achieve their goals. The part of the team that wants to make concessions encounters interference from the side that does not, and vice versa. Despite the fact that most people prefer to avoid conflict, too little conflict can be as bad for a team as too much conflict.

3.4.1: Too Little Conflict

Conflict is absolutely necessary for team performance. A healthy dose of conflict keeps a team from becoming complacent and forces members to constantly analyze and evaluate their decisions. In contrast, too little conflict leads to a phenomenon called groupthink. Groupthink occurs in teams that are so cohesive and lacking in conflict that members cease critical thinking, often leading to disastrous results. Irving Janis, the social psychologist who developed the groupthink hypothesis, believes several historical U.S. policy failures, such as the Bay of Pigs invasion in Cuba (1961), the Nixon Watergate scandal (1972), and the destruction of the U.S. Pacific fleet at Pearl Harbor (1941), resulted from groupthink. More recently, some have attributed groupthink to the explosion of the space shuttle Challenger (1983), the decision to invade Iraq (2003), and Toyota Motor Company’s many quality problems (2009–2010).

Some of the symptoms of groupthink include the illusion of invulnerability, whereby members believe nothing bad can happen to the team and its decisions will always work out for the best. This illusion, especially common in highly successful groups, can lead to decisions that are not carefully evaluated. A second symptom is closed-mindedness, characterized by rationalizations to discount critics of any proposal. Group members also tend to stereotype outside critics as enemies who don’t merit attention; thus, their opinion is ignored. Within the group, members work to enforce conformity to emerging decisions by putting direct pressure on dissenters (“You can’t possibly believe that criticism is accurate”) and using self-appointed mind guards to protect the group from contrary opinions.

Leaders who want to avoid groupthink should assign every person the role of critical evaluator, encouraging every member to analyze and critique proposals. Leaders must also evaluate ideas if other members fail in this role and seek idea evaluation to ensure adequate decision making. Leaders should also insist on using the Reflective Thinking Sequence described earlier in this chapter. Despite the importance of conflict to decision making, it is possible to have too much conflict. In such cases, the conflict must be managed or resolved.

3.4.2: Too Much Conflict

Although too little conflict can lead to groupthink, too much conflict tears at the fabric of group cooperativeness and hinders task accomplishment. It may surprise you to learn that people adopt certain strategies for handling conflict at the expense of other strategies. For example, Kim comes from a traditional Asian family that emphasizes deference to authority and resolving differences individually rather than in public. As such, he de-emphasizes direct
confrontation in favor of resolving issues in a one-on-one setting. Anthony comes from a loving but boisterous Italian family that is not hesitant about “having it out” when differences of opinion are apparent. Based on their different backgrounds, these two people developed different conflict styles. A conflict style is a person’s orientation to conflict, which emphasizes certain strategies and tactics and ignores others. People have characteristic conflict styles that they use repeatedly, regardless of the situation.

Five traditional conflict styles are distinguished along two different dimensions: assertiveness and cooperativeness (see Figure 3.6).39

**Assertiveness** is the degree to which the participant attempts to satisfy personal needs in the conflict. Cooperativeness is the degree to which the person attempts to satisfy the other’s concerns. Each style inside the matrix represents a different combination of assertiveness and cooperativeness.

In the top left corner, the competitive style is marked by high assertiveness and minimal cooperativeness. Forcing, threatening, and toughness are common tactics in the competitive conflict style. Although it may appear to be negative, the competitive style is useful when the issues involved are extremely important, time is short, you don’t trust the other party, and you aren’t interested in maintaining a long-term relationship with the other person.

At the bottom left corner is the avoidance style, marked by low assertiveness and low cooperativeness. Avoiders are apathetic and refuse to engage in conflict. This style is useful if preserving the relationship with the team member is more important than the issue. The accommodating style is characterized by high cooperativeness and low assertiveness. The accommodating person will engage in conflict but quickly cave in to the other person’s demands. Accommodation is useful when the other person is more powerful and you will lose any competition.40 It is also useful if preserving the relationship is more important than the issue.

In the middle of Figure 3.6 is a style that emphasizes moderate levels of assertiveness and cooperativeness. The compromising style means that participants are willing to give in on some demands in return for concessions on others. Trade-offs and tit-for-tat bargaining are common tactics for the compromiser. Compromising is superior to withdrawing or accommodating when both the issues and the relationship are important. If, however, the other person refuses to concede anything, the compromiser may feel betrayed. Even if the other party compromises, both sides often leave feeling they gave too much to the other person, which is why some people view compromising as a lose–lose proposition.

In the upper right corner of the matrix is the problem-solving style, characterized by high assertiveness and high cooperativeness. In problem solving, the team member works to create solutions that meet the important interests of both parties. An example of this kind of solution is found in the 1978 negotiations between Egypt and Israel over the Sinai Desert. The Sinai was Egyptian land before Israel won it during the Six-Day War. Egypt’s main interest was in the return of their ancestral lands without dividing them with Israel. Israel wanted to keep the Sinai as a buffer to give the country time to respond should Egypt ever mount an armed offensive. “Time and again, people drew maps showing possible boundary lines that would divide the Sinai between Egypt and Israel. Compromising in this way was wholly unacceptable to Egypt.”41 A solution was developed that forced neither side to compromise. Although the entire Sinai was given back to Egypt, it was not allowed to station any military forces near Israel. A problem-solving approach met the needs of both parties.

Which strategy is the most effective? It depends on the circumstance. Competing is best when there is one best solution and when conflicting values make the issue unresolvable through compromise. Problem solving is more effective when parties have to work together in the future, they are open-minded, they show a willingness to ignore power differences and work together as equals, and problem-solving tactics are initiated before the conflict escalates.42 Problem solving is also a useful first approach in a conflict, whereas competing and compromising serve as useful backups. In general, competing, compromising, and problem solving are superior to avoiding or accommodating because they encourage open discussion rather than deny the conflict. To help members resolve conflicts, we present a four-phase process that emphasizes problem solving and compromising (see Figure 3.7).

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**Figure 3.6 Conflict Styles**

![Conflict Styles Diagram]

- High Assertiveness: Competitive, Compromising, Problem-Solving
- Low Assertiveness: Avoidance
- High Cooperativeness: Accommodating
- Low Cooperativeness: Competitive, Compromising, Problem-Solving, Avoidance
The process in Figure 3.7 can be used to resolve conflicts between or within teams. In the introduction phase, the team leader or mediator opens with a brief review of the agenda for resolving conflict. The leader should remain neutral and emphasize the importance of understanding the source of the conflict before proceeding to solutions. In the explanation phase, each side of the conflict discusses the source of its disagreement. The leader can open by asking, “What is the problem we are confronting?” or “What is creating the discord in the team?” Each person should be allowed to speak his or her mind and explain concerns. The leader should use all the listening skills mentioned in Chapter 2 to understand each person’s concerns. Don’t interrupt or let others interrupt the speaker. Remind all participants that they, too, will have a turn to express themselves.

During the explanation session, the team leader should listen for both the positions people express as well as the interests behind those positions. A position defines what one person wants. For example, a property owner may want $100 per square foot for office space in her building, although property in that market usually rents for $80 per square foot. The rental price is the landlord’s position. The landlord’s interests are the needs, desires, fears, and concerns that motivate her to select the rental price. Although that price may be high for the area, the landlord wants it so that she can, for example, upgrade the wiring for faster Internet access. Rewiring the building is one of the interests that motivates the price demand. It is easy to reach an impasse when parties negotiate over positions. Reconciling interests is much easier and more likely to lead to successful conflict resolution. Learn to listen for the motivations that drive people to adopt positions.

During the clarifying phase, the leader or mediator develops a better understanding of each person’s positions and interests. Open questions that begin with such words as how, what, or why encourage people to clarify their interests. The leader can keep track of the issues by keeping a list of the positions of each party on a two-column sheet of paper. For each position, list the interests down the column. In the example in Figure 3.8, the landlord’s position is $100 per square foot. She needs this for Internet wiring upgrades, for electrical rewiring, and to meet new fire and earthquake codes. The potential tenant is the head of an engineering firm whose position is $75 per square foot, which he claims is the market rate in that area of town. His interests are in keeping the cost of the services provided by his company as low as possible. To try to negotiate on the positions is very difficult. The best that could be hoped for is a compromise between $75 and $100. The interests, however, will prove useful in the resolution stage.

In the problem-solving phase, parties to the conflict develop a list of possible solutions using the brainstorming technique described earlier. Solutions that obviously do not meet the interests of either party are eliminated. Once the list is narrowed, parties take the remaining solutions and craft problem-solving ideas that meet the interests of both parties. For example, our hypothetical engineering team overcame their impasse by suggesting that the landlord drop the price to $80 per square foot, and in return, the firm would draft the designs for the building improvements free of charge. The landlord said this was acceptable if the rent was set at $81. The minor increase was acceptable to the head of the engineering firm. If a solution that meets all parties’ needs cannot be developed, the leader or facilitator will have to suggest compromises that force each party to make concessions. The four-phase model is an efficient way to resolve many conflicts within and between groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Figure 3.7</strong> A Four-Phase Model of Conflict Resolution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Explanation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clarifying</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Problem solving</strong></td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Figure 3.8</strong> Sample List of Positions and Interests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Landlord</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100 per square foot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs extra money to upgrade lines for the Internet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs money to upgrade electrical wiring.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs money to meet new fire and earthquake codes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

A group is a collection of three or more individuals who perceive themselves as a group, possess a common fate, and communicate with one another over time to accomplish personal and group goals. A self-directed team has full authority for coordination, development, manufacturing, and delivering of a product or service.

A role is an expectation about individual patterns of behavior. The management role guides group activity by explaining job requirements, setting performance standards, and monitoring output. Leaders, on the other hand, specify issues of importance, raise employees’ awareness of these issues, define how they should be interpreted, and motivate employees to transcend individual self-interests for the sake of the team. Leaders organize group activity through their communication behaviors in the task, procedural, and interpersonal areas. Leaders are also responsible for defining the team’s focus through labels, recognizing heroes, enacting rituals, and encouraging identification. Membership competencies include working knowledge, empathy or perspective taking, and conversational turn-taking.

Prior to team meetings, the leader should prepare an agenda of announcement, discussion, and decision items. After the meeting, the leader should create content minutes that summarize the group’s discussion and highlight its decisions. The Reflective Thinking Sequences includes five basic steps: define the problem, develop criteria, list solutions, select a single solution, and implement the solution. Team leaders and members should match the collaboration channels they select to their goals for the communication. Team creativity can be enhanced through several discussion techniques, including brainstorming, nominal group technique, sensational thinking, morphological analysis, and group decision support systems.

Too little conflict creates groupthink, which leads to poor critical thinking and ineffective decisions. People adopt one of five preferred styles for handling conflict: competition, avoidance, accommodation, compromising, and problem solving. The four-phase model of conflict resolution emphasizes problem solving and compromising. The phases include the introduction, where rules are explained; the explanation, where each party stakes out his or her position; clarifying, where the mediator attempts to understand interests behind positions; and the resolution phase.

Questions and Exercises

3.1 Recall several successful team members you have encountered in classroom or work groups in the past. Which membership competencies did these teammates display? What were their effects on the group’s or team’s performance?

3.2 Think of a supervisor you have worked for in the past. Was this person’s supervision oriented toward leadership or management? What behavior did you see that supports your assessment?

3.3 Have any of your supervisors used the symbolic behaviors of leadership described in this chapter? Which strategies did they employ? How effective were these strategies, and why?

3.4 Google the “Reading the Mind in the Eyes Test.” Take the test and submit it for scoring. The score represents your empathy abilities. What was your score on the test? Have some of your friends take the test. Did you score better or worse than your friends? Think of a friend who is very sensitive to other peoples’ feelings and emotions. Have him or her take the test. Did he or she score better or worse than you? In future conversation in and out of class, practice interpreting peoples’ emotions through their nonverbal cues, especially their eye behavior. Empathy abilities can be improved with practice.

3.5 Write an agenda for one of your classes with enough detail so that someone who did not attend can understand what happened. Show your agenda to someone who did not attend the class. Can this person understand the basic outline of that class period? If not, rewrite the agenda in the appropriate detail.

3.6 Recall your last creative or innovative idea. It could be an idea that you came up with for a class assignment or something new you proposed at work. Was this idea an example of lateral thinking, horizontal thinking, or some combination of the two?

3.7 List a conflict you have had with a classmate or co-worker in the past month. List the positions people took. List the interests that motivated your positions. Put yourself in the shoes of the other person, and attempt to list the major interests for each position he or she took. Compare the two lists of interests. Can you see any problem-solving solutions that meet the interests of both parties? If not, what compromises could be worked out to resolve this conflict?