

Growing Pains

Workshop objectives

- Demonstrate and critique facilitation skills and strategies
- Examine meeting processes and decision-making
- Explore organisational responses to growth
- Reflect on workshop participants' organisational roles and contributions

Scenario

Your non-government organisation (NGO) has a long and illustrious record of environmental advocacy. The group's many victories testify to steady management and stable relations with government, industry and other NGOs. Definitely not radicals. And everything seems to be changing.

New members with a keen interest in the forthcoming local government election form the new "Local Election Action Group" (LEAG). The group recruits members rapidly and holds regular and well attended meetings. Few established members are involved. In fact, the 'old timers' barely know who these new people are. A LEAG member is interviewed for television news, stating that your organisation endorses conservative candidates in the election: "Their social and environmental policies are streets ahead of the incumbents."

Your organisation's internal communication channels go wild. The office atmosphere is explosive. Members of other committees and action groups express a need to curtail LEAG's autonomy. Emails suggest the LEAG interviewee is an infiltrator and other LEAG members have right-wing political affiliations. A meeting is called to resolve the dilemma.

Fishbowl participant instructions

1. Read the scenario and role descriptions carefully..
2. Allocate one or more roles to each member. Decide which participants are LEAG members.
3. Invent suitable names for your character. Make nametags.
4. While the fishbowl invites improvisation, it might help to have an idea how it might go - what contribution you each might make. Briefly discuss as a group how the scenario might unfold.
5. Choose a facilitator and other necessary roles. The facilitator should open the role-play by welcoming people and explaining the context and intended outcomes of the meeting.
6. Ensure all participants have an opportunity to portray their role.
7. Explore the issues through the exercise, but be sensitive to real dynamics in your organisation.
8. Stop or suspend the role-play when instructed.
9. Remember! You are playing a stereotyped role. Do not get attached to it. Have some fun. Drop the role when the fishbowl concludes.

Observer instructions

1. Spend some time discussing the scenario. What are the issues? How do you think they should be resolved?
2. Allocate one or more observer/s to each fishbowl participant. Observers are to watch the fishbowl closely, without getting involved, focusing on their designated participant/s. What is this person's position in the conflict? How do they participate in the group? Does their contribution assist or impede resolution of the issues? Do you see these dynamics at work in your organisation?
3. When the role-play concludes you will be invited to share your observations. Address your comments to the person you were observing: "I thought your role in the group was ... you seemed to help (or hinder) the resolution of the issues by ... "
4. Was the resolution satisfactory? How might the group have worked together better? What role or contribution might have helped the group move in the right direction?
5. Comment also on meeting process: how meeting process can advance resolution of issues and team building (or the opposite).

Fishbowl Roles

The Negotiator/ Facilitator

Engages with others about a particular issue where a mutually acceptable outcome is desired. Helps others communicate between each other to achieve shared outcomes.

The Patriarch/Matriarch

considers her/himself as an elder in the organisation, with experience and knowledge that should be held in high regard. Automatically assumes position of authority: "I'd be happy to convene a working group to look into that."

The Informer

Provides expert advice based on scientifically proven facts or events (through fact sheets, media releases, presentations, etc). Not wedded to any particular outcome.

The Gatekeeper

Assumes position of authority, arbitrating on the value of others' contributions. Uses process as a weapon: "We've already covered that issue and have moved on to the next agenda item." Discourages innovation and risk taking: "We've tried that before." Insists on sticking to established patterns and policies.

The Peacemaker

Looks for common ground between others and suggests helpful process. At best, this person is an excellent listener - a highly under-utilised role where the key purpose is to listen and feedback information gained through listening for the purposes of clarity.

The Rescuer

Continually comes to the rescue of others: defends those under attack and speaks up for those not being heard. "I think what Sue means to say is ..." "Bill has worked long and hard on this and deserves to be heard."

Debrief

- How does this situation compare to life in your organisation?
- Are similar roles evident?
- How would you respond to changes in the organisation that conflicted with your values?
- What role/s do you tend to occupy?
- How did it feel playing your particular role?
- Did you feel you were helping to resolve the issues?
- Comment specifically on the facilitator's role. To what extent was the facilitator able to resolve issues? To what extent was the facilitator able to ensure meeting participants were able to participate equitably and with respect? Were there opportunities to keep things on track?

The Victim

Interprets questions and criticisms as personal attack. Looks for intervention to punish aggressors. "I was just making a suggestion - and don't expect to be treated this way!" Sulks and complains.

The 'Process Junkie'

Obsessive about meeting process. More interested in working out *how* to make decisions than getting an outcome. Constantly refers to organisational policies, protocols and precedents.

The Executive

Considers consensus a waste of time: prefers decision making by delegation - preferably by informed and experienced individuals ("Ideally, a committee of 1").

The Seducer

Constantly 'on the make'. Rarely motivated to achieve the best result for group: more interested in charming others, especially interesting new members.

The advocate

Takes a persuasive role to change other people's attitudes or behaviour. Quick to develop a strategy to get your desired outcome.

The Aggressor

Plays the person, not the issue. Ignores process and the facilitator; pushes own agenda mercilessly.