

Consensus Building Workshops: Creating a Culture to Encourage and Sustain Change as Adjunct to NIATx

Gerald Melnick, PhD

Harry K. Wexler, PhD

Center for the Integration of Research to Practice
National Development and Research Institutes, Inc. (NDRI)

Survival of an Organization Depends on Change

“It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but rather the one most responsive to change.”

---- *Charles Darwin*

Adding One More Step to NIATx Change Process

- NIATx Steps 1-5
 - 1. Understanding the customer
 - 2. Fix the key problems
 - 3. Pick a powerful change agent
 - 4. Get ideas from outside the organization
 - 5. Use rapid-cycle testing to establish effective changes

Teams of Experts Do Not Necessarily Evolve Into Expert Teams (Burke et al., 2006)

6. Development of an organizational culture to encourage and sustain change

Support for Innovation as Seen by Team Members

Effect Sizes: Meta analysis of 104 studies over 3 decades

- Internal Communication .590
- External Communication .558
- Vision .527
- Cohesion .513

*Hulsheger, Anderson & Salgado, 2005)

Cohesion

A supportive, cooperative work atmosphere where coworkers help each other and collaborate in problem solving

Vision

Extent of involvement in decision-making

When

people participate in decision-making

people feel they have influence in what happens on the job

people feel they can speak up

They show a higher commitment and invest more energy in their work

West & Anderson, 1996

External Communication

Enhances the likelihood of obtaining new knowledge and new perspectives

Internal Communication

Internal communication maximizes the exchange of information between all levels of the organization.

(Clampitt & Downs, 1993; Tschan, 1995)

Internal Communication

Psychological Safety is Central in Determining Internal Communication and How Teams Adapt. It affects:

- Plan Formation – promotes interpersonal risk taking that enables team members to speak up and contribute their idiosyncratic ideas and viewpoints
- Plan Execution – effects the degree to which team members accept mutual performance monitoring
- Team Learning – encourages team members to discuss their errors, ask questions, seek feedback and reflect on alternative viewpoints

Safe Communication Leads to Better Understanding of an Innovation

Safe communication allows misunderstandings about an innovation to be resolved, whereas

Downward communication results in differences in understanding due supervisors:

- (1) Overestimating how clearly they communicate (Callan, 1993)
- (2) Underestimating the amount of information that subordinates possess (Likert, 1961).

How Safe Communication Affects Innovation

- People feel and perform better when they experience more influence in the workplace (Sagie, 1995; Bandura, 1997, Backer, 1988)
- People are more willing to accept policies if their input has been considered in the actual implementation (Sagie et al., 1995; Wanberg & Banas, 2000).
- Alternatively, discouraging staff from expressing their opinions produces passive resistance that undermines planned changes (Kassing & Avtgis, 1999).
- Builds consensus within staff as to the right or correct procedures and results in **mutual reinforcement that sustains behaviors** and leads to the indoctrination of new staff members in these procedures.

Effect of Consensus in Treatment Organizations

- High consensus will result in a consistent set of expectations and better coordination of effort by all those involved with the treatment program so that **the same treatment** is delivered by each staff member.
- High consensus leads to mutual reinforcement among staff members that sustains innovations

Programs with little Consensus

- in programs with less consensus staff will come to different interpretations of the same client behaviors and deliver inconsistent treatment
- more often work at cross purposes
- fail to adequately teach new staff members how to apply the treatment technology
- fail to reinforce or support each other in the delivery of new innovations.
- Consequently, low consensus will result in greater uncertainty as to how a particular event will be responded to and decrease the ability of program participants to coordinate their efforts.

Experimental Studies on the Effect of Staff Consensus on the Treatment Process

- *Safety in Communication → Staff Consensus about the Treatment Protocol → Client Engagement in Treatment
- *Staff Consensus → Client Consensus about the Treatment Protocol
- *Client Consensus → Better 1-year Treatment Outcomes

Melnick et al., 2006; 2008; 2009

Training for Safe Communication

Consensus Building Workshops
(CBWs)

Role of Positive Disagreement

Task (substantive) Disagreement – Communication involves viewpoints, ideas, opinions, about the task, not the person

Leads to:

- Raising important issues

- Information exchange

- Clarifying misunderstandings

- Exploration of opposing opinions

- Re-evaluation of the status quo (new ideas and solutions)

- Reaching a common ground

Jehn, 1995; Shalley & Gibson, 2004

Role of Negative Disagreement

Relationship (affective) conflict – communication involves social emotional conflict stemming from interpersonal disagreements

Leads to:

- Wasted energy

- Distraction from task

- Narrowing of the range of attention

- Rigid thinking

- Reduction in cognitive complexity

- Reduction in receptiveness to new ideas

General Training Principles

1. Training to generalize principles rather than accomplishing a specific task:

Individuals trained on tasks involving barriers impeding them show better transfer of training to new tasks. (Frese et al., 1991)

2. Training to foster flexibility:

Presenting task principles from many angles and points of view. (Spiro et al., 1992)

Training Formats

Scenario Based Training (SBT)

Scenario Based Training (SBT) – using simulations to promote active learning and illuminate multiple perspectives

- *Provide organizing principles
- *Learning from errors
- *Guided discovery
- *Reflect on one event at a time
- *Development of skill at recognizing group process

Training Formats

Acceptance and Commitment Training (ACT)

Acceptance and Commitment Training – focuses on the barriers and frustrations

- * Simulation of expected barriers
- * Recognition and control of emotional thoughts

Training Formats

Workshops Based on Team Dimensional Training (TDT)

Team Dimensional Training was originally developed by the U.S. Navy to train shipboard teams to increase the effectiveness of communication.

Training consists of both didactic and learning from experience formats

Consensus Building Workshop

Integrated Team Building Approach Based
on Safe Communication

1. The Prebrief

A didactic session that focuses the objectives of the workshop on the process goals to be achieved, the development of norms for safe and open communication.

1. Ten principles of safe and open communication are reviewed.
2. An outline of the process is presented to the participants to help them understand and prepare for the learning experience.
3. The importance of team member input and growth is stressed to establish a positive learning environment

Prebrief - Principles of Safe Communication

1. Reframing, changing affective to substantive statements/disagree with ideas, not with people
2. Listening with empathy
3. Showing understanding – paraphrase frequently
4. Defining the issues shared
5. Focusing on the future, not the past
6. Disagree without punishing
7. Avoid non-constructive feedback such as ridiculing or ignoring
8. Provide positive reinforcement before raising disagreement – agree with something or some part of the other has said.
9. Discuss reasons for a decision
10. Use positive reinforcement for what is done right without ignoring problems

Prebrief - Communication Traps

1. Ineffective listening – can you accurately rephrase what you have heard
2. Need to get our own way – when you force something towards an end, you frequently produce the contrary
3. Assuming that someone will have to lose
4. Staking out a fixed position

Prebrief – The Query

Participants asked about the most significant barriers that they foresee in their agencies:

1. Use of the NIATx procedure
2. Transference of new technology to the wider agency

2. The Simulation

- Exercises focusing on reported common barriers to implementing new practices.
- Assigning roles ensure that the needed disagreement within the exercise will occur *while at the same time these assigned roles will create a context that will enable counselors to disagree with supervisors or directors without the risks that typically accompany the expression of disagreement.*
- Instructors avoid communicating with participants to allow the exercise to develop naturally, providing an opportunity for the group to make mistakes in communication and to observe the consequences.
- Instructors collect detailed data on positive and negative interactions that the participants analyze later in the workshop, and include representative samples of the strengths and weaknesses of the group.

3. The Debrief

- Participants are given an advanced “organizer,” as to how the debrief will be conducted.
- The instructor solicits examples from the participants related to the important points of the exercise, asking for concrete examples of specific communication successes and breakdowns, such as ridicule, talking over someone, ignoring, pulling rank, etc. The instructor uses his or her own examples only if the group fails to provide sufficient examples of its own.
- The debriefing provides a forum for team self correcting behavior as the interactions are analyzed. Instructors provide positive reinforcement for participants’ input, and particularly when participants offer their own self-critique.

4. The Change Agent

- This person links the program to the technical assistance staff to provide continuous trouble-shooting in the form of corrective feedback to staff members regarding their communication skills.
- Approximately 15 to 20 minutes of weekly staff meeting time for a two month period following the Consensus Building Workshop is used to review communications issues that took place during the previous week. The format is similar to the Debrief keeps attention focused on the application of the principles of communication.
- This time allocation provides sufficient time to review the most pressing communication skills issues while permitting the program to address routine issues usually covered at these meetings.
- The Local Change Agent is also available to staff on a daily basis to resolve communication issues including barriers to open communication.

The WHO

The need for inclusiveness –
not just the “Go Getters”

Consensus Building Workshop Evaluation Instruments

- The TCU *Workshop Evaluation*
- The TCU *Workshop Assessment Follow-Up*
- Constructive Conflict/Open communication Scale
- *Risk Taking*
- *Readiness for Change*. Scales of interest include: Staff growth, efficacy, influence, adaptability, and organizational climate consisting of separate scales measuring mission, cohesion, autonomy, communication, stress, and (openness to) change
- Sustainability of the intervention

Contacts

Gerald Melnick PhD and
Harry K. Wexler, PhD,
Principal Investigators

Center for the Integration of Research to Practice
National Development and Research Institutes, Inc (NDRI)
71 West 23rd Street, 8th Floor, New York, NY 10010
[http//ndri.org](http://ndri.org)
Fax: (212) 845-4650

Contact:
(212) 845-4426
melnick@ndri.org