

Common Group Problems

Directions: Read over these scenarios. Picture your Collaborative Inclusion Action Team. Choose two issues that you have already had to deal with or can see the potential for having to deal with. Brainstorm ideas for what the coaches and team could do to address this issue. What sentence stems might be helpful to start a conversation that would help the team/team members get “unstuck.” Also, consider how ground rules might help in each response.

Floundering – Group has trouble starting and ending, making decisions, moving on, reaching consensus, staying on task. Possible explanations are that the group is unclear or overwhelmed by task; individuals are not formed as a team yet; their work is not the product of consensus; the group has bonded and is unwilling to separate at end of charge.

What can be done?

Overbearing Participants – Some members wield a disproportionate amount of influence in the group, perhaps because of authority by position or expertise. These members may discourage discussion encroaching their expertise (“We are taking care of that... What you don’t understand is... We tried that in 1968 but...”). They may signal “untouchability” of an area by using technical jargon or by talking in absolutes. (“The only feasible solution is...”; “The law clearly states...”)

What can be done?

Dominating Participants – Some members who, may or may not have authority or expertise, consume too much “air time.” They talk too much, over-explain, tell overlong anecdotes, fill normal group silences. Some dominating participants do so because they feel that their input is not being heard or valued. Dominating may reflect individual style (some people “think out loud” – they “talk to think” while others “think then talk”). Another explanation is that some people express themselves through story or experiences while group work often requires individuals to function at an interpretive or decisional level.

What can be done?

Reluctant Participants – Some members rarely speak though they may be listening. This may be a function of the process (pace too quick, focus unclear, task not important), a function of team make-up (unbalanced participation) or a function of individual style (introverted, selective talker, thinks then talks, etc.)

What can be done?

Unquestioned Acceptance of Opinions as Facts – Some members express personal beliefs and assumptions with such confidence that other listeners assume they are hearing facts.

What can be done?

Discounts and “Plops” – Sometimes group members discredit or fail to give notice to another’s opinions. Sometimes a statement is made that “plops”. No one acknowledges it or the conversation picks up in a totally different direction. Some discounted comments are irrelevant; others are relevant but the meaning is missed. Sometimes the next speaker has a preconceived comment that they’re making in response to a much earlier point in the conversation. No matter what the reason, discounted members may need help articulating or surfacing points that are important to them.

What can be done?

Rush to Accomplishment – Some participants want to “just do it” and are impatient for group outcomes. This person may not value group process, may be set on an individual solution, may feel pressured by urgency or deadlines, may be decision-oriented. Too much pressure can lead a group in a series of random, unsystematic efforts to make improvements or may lead to a solution without full team support.

What can be done?

Early Evaluators – Often times conversations informally or formally start with generative discussion. Someone poses a question that openly calls for ideas to be freely shared. Some people are able to suspend comfortably in brainstorming forums while others tend to listen evaluatively. Early evaluators judge ideas before individuals have a chance to form them clearly, present them fully, or consider them in relation to other ideas.

What can be done?

Wanderlust: Digression & Tangents – When group members lose track of the meeting’s purpose or want to avoid a sensitive topic, discussions often wander off in many directions at once. Wanderings can sometimes be loosely chained where one person says something that triggers another person’s related experience that triggers a third person until the topic being discussed doesn’t seem on-task at all.

What can be done?

Feuding Members – Some group conflicts are related to differences around the task at hand. Others arise from differences in styles, personalities, or histories. Some tensions predate the team, and in all likelihood will outlast it, too.

What can be done?