Chapter 10
Enhancing Group and Team Performance

Chapter Outline

• What Effective Group and Team Members Do
• Structuring Group and Team Problem Solving
• Enhancing Group and Team Leadership
• Enhancing Group and Team Meetings
• Study Guide: Review, Apply, and Assess Your Knowledge and Skill

Never doubt that a small group of concerned citizens can change the world; it’s the only thing that ever has. —MARGARET MEAD

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Chapter Objectives

After studying this chapter, you should be able to

10.1 Identify six functions that effective group members perform.
10.2 List and describe the five steps of group problem solving (reflective thinking).
10.3 Compare and contrast the trait, functional, styles, situational, and transformational approaches to understanding leadership.
10.4 Develop and use strategies to structure meetings appropriately, keep meetings on track, and promote appropriate dialogue and interaction.

What’s so great about groups? Why does every organization, from the U.S. Congress to the local Parent Teacher Association, use groups, teams, and committees to get things done? The simple fact is: Groups work. Collaborating with other people produces clear benefits that just don’t happen when a task is given to an individual. Research clearly supports the following conclusions:

• Groups and teams come up with more creative solutions to problems than a person does working alone.
• Working with others in groups improves group members’ comprehension of the ideas presented.
• Group and team members are more satisfied with the group’s conclusions and recommendations if they participated in the discussion than if they did not.
• Groups have access to more information when they tap into the experience of group members.¹

All these advantages sound wonderful. But these benefits of collaboration don’t occur automatically when people work in groups and teams. Sometimes there are significant disadvantages to working collaboratively:

• Overly talkative or insensitive, overbearing people may speak too much. The advantage of working collaboratively is lost when one or more people dominate the conversation.
• Group members sometimes feel pressure to conform to what other members are doing and saying. It can be difficult to stick up for your own ideas when everyone else sees issues differently.
• It may be easy for some people to loaf and not do their share of the work. If not enough people carry part of the load, the advantages of working together as a group don’t materialize.
• Working in groups and teams takes more time than working individually.²

This chapter is designed to help you achieve the advantages of working in groups and minimize the disadvantages of working collaboratively. We can’t claim that if you follow all the strategies we suggest, your life will be free of unpleasant and unproductive group experiences. We do believe, however, that group members who both understand how groups work (see Chapter 9) and know principles and strategies for enhancing the quality of group work are much more likely to avoid the pitfalls and reap the benefits of working in groups.
Underpinning all the suggestions we offer in this chapter are the same five Communication Principles for a Lifetime that we introduced in Chapter 1 and have been discussing throughout the book. Effective group members are aware of what they are doing. They effectively use verbal and nonverbal messages, listen and respond, and then appropriately adapt their messages to others.

What Effective Group and Team Members Do

10.1 Identify six functions that effective group members perform.

“I hate groups,” mutters an exasperated group member who has just finished a two-hour meeting in which nothing was accomplished. “Not me,” chirps another group member. “Meetings and team projects are fun. I like the energy and productivity that occur when we work together.” What does the second person know that the first one doesn’t? As we noted at the start of this chapter, working in groups can have drawbacks, but you can reduce those disadvantages if you and other group members learn some fundamental ways to perform effectively as group members.

Identify a Clear, Elevating Goal

Among the first questions that a vigilant-thinking group asks relates to the group’s goal: What are we trying to do? According to one research team, the goal should be not only clear, but also elevating, or exciting to the group. The group needs to know that it is pursuing a goal that is significant; the group goal needs to be something more exciting and important than anything a group member could achieve individually. A professional baseball team during spring training camp may hang up signs in the locker room that say “World Series Champs!” A professional football team may see itself as a Super Bowl contender at the beginning of preseason. Groups also need to identify a clear, exciting, yet realistic goal that drives all aspects of what the group does. Without a goal and a results-driven structure to achieve it, group performance sputters. Research has found that it’s important not only to set goals, but also to develop contingency plans in case a
goal is not reached. Being able to react and adjust the group’s plans to achieve a goal is especially important.6

Develop a Results-Driven Structure

A group or team may have a clear goal, such as winning the Super Bowl, getting an “A” on a group assignment, or selling more widgets than other groups in the company, but just having a clear, elevating goal doesn’t mean that the group will achieve what it wants to achieve. The group also has to carry out actions that contribute to reaching the goal. If you want to win the Super Bowl, you have to invest time in becoming physically fit and working on executing successful football plays. If you want to get an “A” on the assignment, you need to be doing what the instructor wants you to do rather than socializing and just having fun.

A group with a results-driven structure is organized around the action steps it needs to take to achieve its goal.7 To be driven by results means “keeping your eyes on the prize” and then developing a group or team structure to secure the prize. Perhaps you’ve been part of a group or team that was quite busy but didn’t seem to accomplish much; that kind of activity reflects a non-results-driven structure. Results-driven groups focus on verbs—action words—that provide the road map to success.

Gather and Share Appropriate Information

Another question that vigilant thinking groups ask is “Does something need to be changed?” To answer that question, high-performing groups and teams don’t just rely on the unsupported opinions of group members. Instead, they gather information and analyze the situation.8 Sharing information is just as important in virtual groups as it is in face-to-face groups.9

To analyze an issue, an effective group should do at least three things:

1. Gather the information the group members need. Computer programmers are familiar with the acronym GIGO: “Garbage in, garbage out.” If you develop a computer program using bad information or a bad program command (garbage), you’re likely to get low-quality output (more garbage). Information is the fuel that makes a group function well.10

2. Share the information among group and team members. Group members have a tendency to share with other group members information that everyone already knows. Research has found that better decisions are made when group members make an effort to share information that others may not know.11 So if you are uncertain whether other group members know what you know, don’t hesitate to share that information with the entire group.

3. Draw accurate conclusions from the information. Having too little evidence—or no evidence at all—is one reason groups sometimes fail to analyze their current situation correctly.12 Even if group members do have plenty of evidence, however, it may be bad evidence, or perhaps they have not tested the evidence to see whether it is true, accurate, or relevant.

One team of researchers found that when there is missing or unknown information, effective group members will do their best to make inferences or to find the missing or unknown information.13 Group members who use evidence to support their well-reasoned arguments are more likely to have their conclusions accepted by the entire group than group members who do not.14 Group members who don’t gather and use information effectively are more likely to make bad and less creative decisions than others.15 Here are some tips for gathering and using information effectively:

- In group deliberations, ask for expert advice sooner rather than later. Seeking expert advice results in better group outcomes.
• If you find that just a few people are doing the talking and sharing information, invite quieter group members to participate. Groups that have more equal participation by all group members generally are more effective than other groups.
• Don’t rush to make a quick decision. To reach a better outcome, take your time and sift through the information you have.

Develop Options
Another hallmark of a vigilantly thinking group is that the members generate many ideas and potential solutions after gathering information and analyzing a situation. Effective groups don’t just settle on one or two ideas and then move on. They list multiple creative approaches.

Sometimes groups get stuck, and ideas just don’t flow. If that happens to your group, you may want to take a break from the difficult issues or problems rather than continue to hammer away at them. Taking a break gives you space to thrash through the issues. You may generate a breakthrough solution when you are not actively trying to; perhaps you’ve had a great idea come to you when you were taking a walk or driving. The principle of self-awareness operates here: As a group member, you have a responsibility to become aware of the group’s ability to generate high-quality ideas. Be sensitive to the group’s need to take a fresh look at the problem or issue.

Evaluate Ideas
High-performing groups know a good idea when they see it. They are able to evaluate evidence, opinions, assumptions, and solutions to separate good ideas from bad ones. Low-performing groups are less discriminating. A group that does not critically evaluate ideas because members are too eager to make a decision just so they can get a job done usually comes up with low-quality decisions.

As we’ve seen, a group of vigilant thinkers examines the advantages and disadvantages of an idea, issue, or opinion. When the group is zeroing in on a particular course of action, the effective group has at least one member who suggests, “Let’s consider the positive and negative consequences of this decision.” Research reveals that it’s especially important to talk about the negative consequences of a specific proposal. Some groups use a chalkboard or flipchart and make a written list comparing...
the pros and the cons. Groups that do so are likely to come up with a better decision than groups that don’t systematically evaluate the good and bad aspects of a potential solution or decision.

Not only is it a good idea to evaluate the conclusions of the group, but research suggests that it is useful to evaluate the team’s process periodically and talk about how well team members are coordinating the work. Don’t wait until the project is finished to evaluate the team’s process; discuss how well the team is achieving its goals as the team is working on a project.¹⁸

Develop Sensitivity Toward Others
Most of the functions we’ve described so far focus on getting work done effectively and efficiently, but group success is about more than just focusing on the task. Being solely task oriented is not beneficial to the way a group functions. Effective group members balance concern for the task with concern for the feelings of others.

Fostering a climate of fairness and supportiveness is essential to developing a well-functioning team.¹⁹ In groups that function effectively, members are aware of how their comments might be perceived by others. Effectively functioning group members make comments that confirm the value of others’ contributions and nonverbally show that they are genuinely interested in what others are saying. Group members also listen to what each group member has to say—even members who hold a minority opinion. One benefit of working in a group is that you can hear a variety of ideas. If opinions of some members are quickly squelched because they are not what most other group members think or believe, the group loses the power of many different points of view.

A recent study found that one sign of a competent group is that group members simply like spending time with one another.²⁰ They also explicitly talk about the importance of trusting one another, clarify misunderstandings by collaboratively defining key terms, listen effectively, consciously talk about what makes the group effective, share personal information, and use humor and laugh together.²¹ In summary, competent group members are sensitive to how individual members relate to one another.

Develop a Positive Personal Style
You may have heard the story about a boy who awoke on the morning of his birthday to find only a large pile of manure where he’d hoped to find birthday presents. Undaunted, he smiled and said, “With this much horse manure, there’s got to be a pony here somewhere!” Effective team members are optimistic like that boy: Even in bad times, they find something to be positive about.

One thing effective team members are optimistic about is themselves. Researchers have found that effective teams and effective team members believed that they were effective, that they had the skills and resources to accomplish their task. Teams that were less effective thought that they were less effective.²² Was the team effective because of a self-fulfilling prophecy (just expecting to be effective caused the team to act effectively)? Or did team members think that they were effective because they really were a top-notch team? We’re not quite sure what the precise cause-and-effect relationship is between self-perceptions of being effective and actually being effective. We do know, however, that teams that have a positive, can-do attitude perform better than teams whose members have doubts, worries, and uncertainties about whether they will get the job done. The bottom line is that optimism enhances effectiveness.

As we’ve seen, being driven by results also makes a group member more productive. Furthermore, perhaps not surprisingly, team members also like colleagues who are encouraging, patient, enthusiastic, and friendly. To be perceived as an ineffective team
member, argue with others frequently, be intolerant and impatient, and cultivate skills that will help you win the “pain-in-the-neck” award. To be an effective team member, you need to find a way to deal with group members who may dominate, block, bully, or have no follow-through. Table 10.1 offers suggestions.

You may wonder whether these attributes of team effectiveness can be enhanced through study and training. There’s good news: Evidence suggests that by learning more about teams and participating in training development courses, you can indeed improve your team skills.²³

### Structuring Group and Team Problem Solving

#### 10.2 List and describe the five steps of group problem solving (reflective thinking).

How many of us have uttered the plea “Just tell me what to do”? When we do, we are usually looking for simple techniques or steps to help us achieve our goal. Several researchers have sought to identify the sequence that works best to help groups solve problems and achieve their goals. In fact, more than seventy methods or sequences of steps and techniques have been prescribed for structuring problem solving in groups and teams.²⁴ Despite all of these recommendations, however, researchers have concluded that there are no magic techniques that always enable a group of team members to come up with the right solution to a problem. No single prescriptive method or series of steps works best in every situation. There is some good news, though: Research shows that having some structured sequence of steps or questions works better than having no structure.²⁵

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**Table 10.1** How to Collaborate with Difficult Group Members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Suggestions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dominator:</strong> A group member talks too much.</td>
<td>1. Consider giving the group member responsibility for a specific task. 2. Use gatekeeping skills to invite others to talk. 3. Privately ask the “oververbalizer” to give others an opportunity to talk. 4. If necessary, the group may collectively decide to confront the domineering member.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Blocker:</strong> A group member has a negative attitude and consistently suggests what can’t be done.</td>
<td>1. Consider defusing the tension with appropriate humor. 2. Ask the blocker to be the devil’s advocate, a role that gives the blocker permission to be negative at certain times rather than all the time. 3. Ask for evidence to support the blocker’s claims. 4. Gently confront the blocker, noting how the negative attitude is affecting the entire group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>No Follow-Through:</strong> A group member is irresponsible and doesn’t perform assigned tasks.</td>
<td>1. Assign a mentor to help the group member. 2. Clarify that only those who do the work will be recognized for accomplishing the task. 3. Privately ask the irresponsible group member to do his or her share of the work. 4. If need be, confront the irresponsible group member as a group, explaining how the lack of follow-through is hurting the group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bully:</strong> A group member is unethically aggressive and verbally abusive and tries to take the credit for work others do.</td>
<td>1. Support those who are bullied. 2. Don’t tolerate unethical behavior; describe the offensive behavior to the bully and explain its effect on the group. 3. As a group, confront the bully, explaining how the bullying behavior is hurting the group’s climate. 4. If need be, seek help from someone of authority outside the group (supervisor or instructor); sometimes a bully responds only to a person with greater power.</td>
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**RECAP**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What Effective Group and Team Members Do</th>
<th>Description of Function</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group Function</strong></td>
<td><strong>Description of Function</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify a Clear, Elevating Goal</td>
<td>A clear, elevating, or important goal provides an anchor for group discussion.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Develop a Results-Driven Structure</td>
<td>Structure helps the group stay on task and do the things that will help it achieve its goal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gather and Share Appropriate Information</td>
<td>Effective teams conduct research, share information with all group members, and take steps to confirm that they have accurate information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop Options</td>
<td>Effective groups expand the number of options before choosing a course of action.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate Ideas</td>
<td>Effective groups or teams examine the pros and cons of an option before implementing the strategy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop Sensitivity toward Others</td>
<td>Members of effective groups express sensitivity to the needs and concerns of group members by using appropriate verbal and nonverbal messages, listening, responding, and adapting messages to others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop a Positive Personal Style</td>
<td>Effective group members have optimistic attitudes about the prospects for overall group success and use effective strategies to change ineffective member behavior.</td>
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</table>
Another important conclusion of group researchers is that whatever structure the group uses must be balanced with interaction.

- **Structure** is the way a group or team discussion is organized to follow a prescribed agenda. Groups and teams need structure to keep them on task and on track. According to research, groups that engage in free-ranging discussion without an agenda change topics about once a minute. Besides having difficulty staying focused, a group without adequate structure or focus is more likely than a well-structured group to take excessive time to do its work, jump at the first solution recommended, find that one or more people dominate discussions, and have problems managing conflict.

- **Interaction** includes give-and-take discussion and the responsiveness of group members to the comments of others. In an interactive group, there are fewer long utterances, more people contribute, and more people take turns talking. People listen and thoughtfully respond to one another. In a highly structured meeting, there is more control over who talks, about what and for how long; overly structured meetings include less interaction.

As Figure 10.1 suggests, the key is to find the right balance between structure and interaction. When there is too much interaction, the group experiences the chaos of unbridled talk, which might not be focused; group and team members may need help focusing on one idea at a time rather than bouncing from topic to topic. When there is too much structure, however, the group loses the freedom to listen and respond with sensitivity to what others are saying.

In the pages that follow, we present a set of steps that can help you develop a sequence of things group members should be talking about. These five steps are inspired by educator and philosopher John Dewey, who in 1910 wrote a book called *How We Think*. His book described how individuals go about the problem-solving process. In essence, he described the scientific method that scientists still use to solve problems: defining and analyzing a problem, identifying solutions, picking a solution, and putting the solution into practice. He called this process **reflective thinking**. We present these steps here not as a one-size-fits-all prescription that you should always follow, but as a way of structuring the problem-solving process to manage uncertainty and ensure that the key functions we talked about earlier are accomplished during your discussion. These steps incorporate the ideas we presented earlier in the chapter when describing what effective group members do. In addition to describing each step of the reflective thinking process, we present several techniques to help you structure discussion.

**Figure 10.1** Groups Need a Balance of Structure and Interaction

Structure
- Manages the task
- Is achieved through a well-organized agenda
- One person may dominate

Interaction
- Manages relationships and reactions to the task
- Involves considerable give-and-take discussion
- There is much talk and participation from the group or team members
Step 1: Identify and Define the Problem

“What’s your problem?” As we noted earlier, groups work best when they have identified a clear, elevating goal that unites their effort. Whatever method or technique a group uses, it is essential that the group members know precisely what problem they are trying to solve. To reach a clear statement of the problem, consider asking the following questions:

- What is the specific problem that concerns us?
- What do we want more of or less of?
- What terms, concepts, or ideas do we need to define so as to understand the problem?

It is also helpful to phrase the problem as a question and to clarify the problem.

**DEVELOP A QUESTION** Most group experts recommend that an effective way to give your problem-solving task appropriate structure is to phrase your problem in the form of a policy question. A policy question is phrased so that the group will recommend some action (policy) to eliminate, reduce, or manage the problem. Policy questions begin with the words “What should be done about . . .” or “What could be done to improve . . .”

Here are some examples:

- What should be done to lower the cost of tuition at our university?
- What could be done to decrease property taxes in our state?
- What should be done to make health care more affordable for all U.S. citizens?

**CLARIFY THE PROBLEM** One specific technique for clarifying the problem is to use the journalists’ six questions method. Most news reporters are taught to include the answers to six questions—who, what, when, where, why, and how—when writing a news report. Answering each of these six questions about the problem the group has identified can help further define and limit the problem. For example, a group might ask who and when questions such as “Who is harmed by the problem?” and “When do the harmful effects of the problem occur?” The group’s answers can also help it move to the next step in the process: analyzing the problem.

Step 2: Analyze the Problem

Many groups want to “cut to the chase” quickly and start spinning out solutions without taking the time to analyze the problem thoroughly. Resist this temptation. Analyzing a problem well is an important prerequisite to finding an effective solution. To analyze something is to break it down into smaller pieces. To analyze a problem is to consider the causes, effects, symptoms, history, and other information that will inform the group about how to best solve the problem. Essential questions that can help you analyze problems include the following:

- How long has the problem been in existence?
- How widespread is the problem?
- What are the causes of the problem?
- What are the effects of the problem?
- What are the symptoms of the problem?
- Who is harmed by the problem?
- What methods already exist for managing the problem?
- What are the limitations of existing methods?
- What obstacles keep the group from achieving the goal?
In addition to considering these questions, group members should develop criteria for an acceptable solution. Criteria are standards for an acceptable solution to a problem. Identifying clear criteria can help you spot a good solution when you see one. Sample criteria for solutions include the following:

- The solution should be inexpensive; the cost should not exceed a specified percentage of the budget.
- The solution should be implemented by a certain date.
- The solution should be agreed on by all group members.
- The solution should be agreed on by all individuals affected by the recommendations.

Don’t rely on your memory when you verbalize criteria. Write down on a highly visible chalkboard, flipchart, or projected image the list of criteria your group has identified, and include the list in the minutes or notes that summarize the meeting.

After you have gathered information and developed criteria, your group may need to develop a systematic way of analyzing the information you’ve gathered. One technique that can help structure the analysis of your problem and also help your team identify criteria is the force field analysis technique shown in Figure 10.2. This technique works best when your group has identified a clear goal and needs to assess what is happening now that would increase the probability that the goal will be achieved.

After identifying a goal, the group lists all the driving forces currently at work that would help achieve the goal. Then the group does just the opposite: It identifies the restraining forces that are keeping the group from achieving the goal. When complete, the task of the group in developing solutions is now clear: Increase the driving forces and decrease the restraining forces.

**Figure 10.2** Force Field Analysis

This analysis was conducted by a group that wanted to increase the number of students who volunteer for community projects. The goal is written on the top. Driving forces, shown on the left, are factors that increase the group’s chance of achieving its goal. Restraining forces, listed on the right, are factors that reduce the group’s ability to get more students to volunteer.

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Step 3: Generate Creative Solutions

Now that you’ve identified a specific problem, analyzed its causes and history, and established clear criteria for solutions, you’re ready to generate creative options to solve the problem. Creativity is the generation, application, combination, and extension of new ideas. Researchers have found that your entire group is more likely to be creative if individual group members are creative, are open to new ideas, have diverse backgrounds, and believe that they can be creative; it’s important not to rely on others to be creative but to develop your own creative skill. It’s simply not true that only a few gifted and talented people are creative. Creative ideas can come from anyone. Author Malcolm Gladwell believes that our powers of intuition and creativity harbor the greatest potential for generating the breakthrough ideas that can change the world. Your group is more likely to be creative if you do the following things:

- Make sure everyone in the group knows the precise nature of the problem.
- Review and summarize the analysis of the problem.
- Promote a climate of freedom; let people experiment and play with ideas.
- Don’t judge and evaluate the ideas of others prematurely.
- Listen to minority points of view; you never know who may have the next great insight.
- Provide enough time for creativity to occur; don’t rush the creative process.

Brainstorming is the classic technique for identifying possible solutions to a problem. This technique, in which group members try to generate, without evaluating them, as many ideas as possible within a set period of time, was developed by an advertising executive about fifty years ago to encourage a group to be creative. You’ve probably used brainstorming before. Many groups, however, don’t use the technique effectively.

PROBLEMS WITH BRAINSTORMING The key to making brainstorming work—to generating many creative ideas—is to separate the generation of ideas from the evaluation of ideas. This means that group members should feel free to offer ideas without fear of criticism, snickering, or being made to feel foolish. Reality, however, may be quite different. When group members start suggesting ideas, there may be verbal or, more likely, nonverbal evaluation of ideas. People may laugh at the more offbeat suggestions; or when someone announces a suggestion, others may frown, sneer, voice an editorial comment, or talk over the person and ignore the suggestion. Another subtle form of evaluation occurs when some group ideas are praised and some are not. Group members whose ideas are not praised may feel that their ideas are considered stupid. Clearly, when ideas are evaluated as soon as they’re offered, brainstorming doesn’t work well; members may be reluctant to share ideas. This is
especially true of group members who are shy or uncomfortable talking in a group; however, these people may have great ideas that are worth sharing.

**BETTER BRAINSTORMING** One solution to this problem is to have a period of silent brainstorming before members share their ideas verbally. Another name for silent brainstorming is the **nominal group technique**. For a few moments, people work individually, and for that period of time, they are a group in name only (hence the term **nominal**). After group members have brainstormed individually, they share their ideas with the group.

Several variations of silent brainstorming can also be effective. You may ask group members to do some individual brainstorming before they come to the group meeting. For example, you could say, “Each group member should bring five or ten suggestions for solving our problem.” Group members can also be asked to do some private brainstorming and e-mail their responses to the group leader or other group members. Electronic brainstorming websites and apps can help virtual groups share ideas without meeting in person.

For groups that do meet in person, group members can brainstorm ideas silently for a few minutes and then move into small groups to share and piggyback ideas before the entire group comes back together. When groups use silent brainstorming, it’s usually best to go around the group one at a time to have group members share what they have written down.

Another creative way to generate ideas is to have group members first write each of their ideas or suggestions on a sticky note. Once the ideas are on the sticky notes, group members can stick them to the wall and then arrange them in groups. Seeing other group members’ ideas may trigger additional creative ideas from the group.

In all variations, the goal is to separate generating or listing ideas from critiquing the ideas. Evaluate the ideas after all the group members have finished sharing. When the two parts of brainstorming get mixed together, fewer ideas flow because of group members’ fear of being criticized.

As we’ve noted, the purpose of brainstorming is to think of as many ideas as possible. To generate a lot of options, encourage members to piggyback each other’s ideas. List all ideas where everybody can see them; referring to the list can fuel more ideas. Try to identify one or more zany or wild ideas—this triggers creativity and may lead to a less zany but workable idea.

### Step 4: Select the Best Solution

After the group has generated a long list of ideas, the next step is to evaluate the ideas that were generated to determine which ones best meet the criteria the group identified when they analyzed the problem. It’s really important that group members have both a clear goal and specific criteria. Without them, the group members will have difficulty recognizing a good solution when they see it.

It is usually easier for groups to expand alternatives (brainstorm) than to narrow alternatives. The methods that groups use to whittle a long list down to a manageable number for more serious debate include these five approaches:

1. **Decision by expert.** Let someone who has high credibility narrow the list.
2. **Rank.** Tell group members to rank their top five choices from 1 to 5.
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Communication & ETHICS

What If Someone Can’t Stop Judging?

Sarah likes to be in charge of group meetings. She has lots of good ideas, and other group members benefit from her leadership and wealth of suggestions. But during traditional brainstorming sessions, she can’t stop criticizing other people’s ideas. One or two group members have asked Sarah not to evaluate others’ ideas because they have noticed how some members don’t share as frequently because of her criticism, but she just can’t seem to stop critiquing ideas during the brainstorming sessions.

Sarah makes important contributions to the group and is a good leader except for this one flaw of continually evaluating what others say. What would you do if you were in this group with Sarah? Would you speak to Sarah, as other group members have done, to ask her to stop critiquing? Or would you say nothing? What are your ethical obligations to help the group perform as effectively as possible?

Some members have suggested asking Sarah to leave the group during brainstorming sessions, since her behavior hurts group creativity. On the basis of what you've read so far in this chapter, what other ideas might help Sarah avoid critiquing ideas as they are generated?

Table 10.2  Suggestions for Reaching Group and Team Consensus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effective Group Members</th>
<th>Ineffective Group Members</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Keep the Group Oriented Toward Its Goal</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remind the group what the goal is.</td>
<td>Go off on tangents and do not stay focused on the agenda.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write facts and key ideas on a flipchart or chalkboard.</td>
<td>Fail to summarize or rely on oral summaries to keep group members focused on the goal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk about the discussion process, and ask questions that keep the group focused on the agenda.</td>
<td>Do little to help clarify group discussion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Listen to the Ideas of Others</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarify misunderstandings.</td>
<td>Do not clarify misunderstandings or check to see whether others understand their message.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasize areas of agreement.</td>
<td>Ignore areas of agreement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain eye contact when listening to someone and remain focused on the speaker without interrupting.</td>
<td>Do not have eye contact with the speaker, do not focus attention on the speaker, or interrupt the speaker.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Promote Honest Dialogue and Discussion</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek out differences of opinion.</td>
<td>Do not seek other opinions from group members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not change their minds quickly to avoid conflict.</td>
<td>Quickly agree with other group members to avoid conflict.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Try to involve everyone in the discussion.</td>
<td>Permit one person or just a few people to talk too much and dominate the conversation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Consensus

Agreement among all members of a group or team to support an idea, proposal, or solution.
Be cautious if all group members agree too quickly or too consistently. You may be experiencing groupthink instead of consensus. Groupthink occurs when group members seem to agree but primarily just want to avoid conflict. On the surface, it seems as though group members have reached consensus, but it may be an illusion of agreement. Another way of describing groupthink is to call it faulty consensus; too little disagreement often reduces the quality of group decisions. If a group does not seriously examine the pros and cons of an idea, the quality of the decision it makes is likely to suffer because the group has not used its full power to analyze and evaluate ideas.

Failure to test ideas and the resulting groupthink can have serious consequences in the form of wrong, dangerous, or stupid decisions. The following list identifies a few well-known disasters or problems in which groupthink was a key factor:

- In 1986, American TV viewers watched in horror as the Challenger space shuttle, carrying the first teacher in space, exploded on their screens. The tragedy resulted from both faulty engineering and groupthink: Some people knew that the shuttle might not fly in cold temperatures but, because of pressure to stay on schedule, decided not to stop the launch.
- In 1999, several students were killed in a traditional pre–football game bonfire at Texas A&M University. Some people thought the bonfire construction unsafe before the accident occurred, but because of tradition the bonfire continued to be built, and tragedy was the result.
- The commission that investigated the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks concluded that the nation’s lack of preparedness for the attacks was attributable in part to groupthink. The commission found that evidence of a terrorist threat existed before the attacks, yet not enough action was taken to address the problem fully.

The headlines are not the only places to look for examples of groupthink. If you think about it, you’ll find plenty of examples in groups and teams you’ve worked with.

**Causes of Groupthink** Groupthink is more likely to occur in your group under the following conditions:

- The group feels apathetic about its task.
- Group members don’t expect to be successful.
- One group member has very high credibility—group members tend to believe what he or she says.
- One group member is very persuasive.
- Group members don’t usually challenge ideas—it’s expected that group members will agree with one another.

Be on the lookout for these symptoms in your groups and teams.

Of course, as the saying goes, “Hindsight is 20/20.” After the fact, it can be easy to spot an example of groupthink. The hard part is to be aware of groupthink when it is occurring in your group. Knowing the causes and symptoms of groupthink can help you spot it and then put an end to it.
How to Avoid Groupthink  The first thing to do is to be aware that groupthink is occurring. In addition to awareness, here are several additional strategies to avoid groupthink:

- Don’t agree with someone just because that person has high status; examine the ideas of others carefully, regardless of their position.
- Consider asking someone from outside the group to evaluate the group’s decisions and decision-making process.
- Assign someone to be a devil’s advocate—to look for disadvantages to a proposed idea. One of the hallmarks of effective decision making is verbalizing the negative, as well as positive, consequences of an idea or suggestion.
- Ask group members to break into smaller teams or pairs to consider both the pros and the cons of a proposed solution. An easy way to structure a discussion of pros and cons is to list the pros in one column of a two-column T-chart and the cons in the second column.

Step 5: Take Action

Once you have identified your solution or solutions, your group needs to consider the question “Will it work?” You may want to do a pilot test (practice test) or ask a small group of people what they think of your idea before you “go public” with it. Bouncing your proposed solution off an expert and checking to see whether your solution has been successful when others have adopted it can help you test the solution’s effectiveness.

If your group has to not only identify a solution but also put it into action, your group will need structure to make sure that details don’t get overlooked in getting the job done. Perhaps you know the people in the following story:

This is a story about four people: Everybody, Somebody, Anybody, and Nobody. There was an important job to be done, and Everybody was asked to do it. Everybody was sure Somebody would do it. Everybody got angry about that because it was Everybody’s job. Everybody thought Anybody could do it, but Nobody realized that Everybody wouldn’t do it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when actually Nobody asked Anybody.

Make a written list of who should do what. Follow up at the next group meeting to see whether the assignments have been completed. Effective groups and teams develop an action plan and periodically review it to make sure Anybody asked Somebody.

Enhancing Group and Team Leadership

10.3 Compare and contrast the trait, functional, styles, situational, and transformational approaches to understanding leadership.

Leadership is the ability to influence others through communication. Some people view a leader as someone who delegates and directs the group. Others see a leader as someone who is primarily responsible for ensuring that whatever task is assigned
or designed by the group is completed. Actually, most groups have many leaders, not just one person who influences others. In fact, each group or team member undoubtedly influences what the group does or does not achieve. Regardless of who serves as leader, research suggests that the quality of group and team leadership has a significant effect on how satisfied team members are. Members of an effectively led team feel greater satisfaction, are more productive, and are less likely to be absent than members of less effective groups. The quality of team leadership influences virtually every aspect of what it feels like to be a team member. The prevailing approaches to analyzing the behavior of effective leaders are the trait, functional, styles, situational, and transformational approaches to leadership.

Trait Approach

Are leaders born or made? The trait approach to leadership suggests that there are certain attributes or traits that make leaders. According to this approach, if you are born with these traits or if you cultivate leadership skills, you will be a leader. Research has identified intelligence, confidence, social skills, general administrative skill, physical energy, and enthusiasm as some of the traits effective leaders possess. Researchers have also found that effective leaders develop persuasive arguments and are comfortable expressing their ideas to others. Another research study found support for two of the Communication Principles for a Lifetime presented in this book: Effective leaders are self-aware and adapt to the people they lead and the context in which they lead. Although many leaders do seem to have traits or special skills that can enhance their ability to influence others, just having these traits does not mean that you will be an effective leader. Traits alone will not ensure effective leadership behavior. Leadership is more complicated than that.

Functional Approach

Rather than identifying personality characteristics or other traits, the functional approach to leadership categorizes the essential leadership behaviors or functions that need to be performed to enhance the workings of a group. According to the
functional approach, there are two broad leadership functions: (1) task functions and (2) process functions. These two functions should look familiar. They are similar to the types of group roles discussed in Chapter 9.

**Task functions** include behaviors that help the group or team get the work done. Whether the leader is appointed or elected, one of the responsibilities of leaders is to ensure that the group completes the task it is tackling. The functional approach to leadership suggests that several people can share the leadership functions. These are some of the jobs that often need to be done:

- Helping set the group’s agenda
- Recording what the group does
- Determining when meetings begin and end
- Preparing and distributing handouts
- Initiating or proposing new ideas
- Seeking and giving information
- Suggesting options
- Elaborating on the ideas of others
- Evaluating ideas

In most groups, these key functions are assumed by many if not most group members. A group member who rarely helps with any of these tasks often earns the uncoveted title of “slacker.”

**Process functions** are the second major type of function leaders assume in groups. Process leaders seek to maintain a friendly environment that promotes honest, frank discussion. Process leaders have “people skills.” They listen sensitively to others and are observant of nonverbal cues. They focus on managing relationships by adapting to the needs of individual members. Another key process leadership task is to seek support from people and resources outside the team. An effective team leader keeps the team informed about how external influences affect the team’s work goals. Although a single person can perform all these functions, just as with task leadership, it is more than likely that several people will help maintain the group’s process. Specific process roles include the following:

- Energizing the team by encouraging team members to keep at it
- Mediating conflict
- Compromising or helping others to compromise
- Gatekeeping: monitoring discussion to ensure that some members don’t talk too much and others too little

In most groups or teams, these process roles are not formally assigned. Although some of the task functions may be explicitly assigned (“Daria, would you make copies of this report?”), process roles are assumed when needed; they emerge according to the needs of the group and the personality, skills, sensitivity, and past experiences of the group members who are present. It is unlikely that you will start a meeting by saying, “Okay, Janice, you’re in charge of settling the arguments between Ken and Daryl. And Carl, you try to encourage Muriel and Russell to talk more.” Effective leaders look for opportunities to enhance the overall climate of the group. They try to catch people doing something right and then offer sincere praise and recognition.

**Styles Approach**

The **styles approach to leadership** suggests that leaders operate in one of three primary styles: (1) authoritarian, (2) democratic, or (3) laissez-faire. The methods used to influence group members usually fall into one of these broad categories, outlined in Table 10.3.52
Authoritarian leaders influence by giving orders and controlling others. Dictators and military officers assume this leadership style. But you don’t have to be in the military or living in a dictatorship to experience an authoritarian leadership style. Perhaps you’ve felt like mumbling, “Who put her in charge?” during a group meeting. Or maybe you have observed that some action needed to be taken and asked someone in the group to do what you thought was needed. As we discussed, groups need a certain amount of structure. The authoritarian leader assumes that he or she knows the type and amount of structure the group needs and proceeds to tell others what to do. Authoritarian leaders may be self-aware and may use appropriate verbal and nonverbal messages, but they are not always known for listening and responding to others; they also may not be worried about adapting their messages to those whom they lead. They often speak and expect others to follow. Of the three primary leadership styles, the authoritarian leader is least effective over a long period of time. Yet when a group or team experiences increased stress, a decisive leader is perceived as more charismatic than other types of leaders. Group members don’t like an authoritarian leader all the time, but they may tolerate or even appreciate a bold, charismatic leader when there’s a need for someone to make an important decision quickly.

The democratic leader, as you might guess from the name, consults with the other group members before issuing edicts. The democratic leader listens and adapts messages to others. This type of leader seeks to join in the process of influencing without bulldozing or shoving the group into action its members may resent. Sometimes formal votes are taken in larger groups or assemblies; in smaller groups, the leader or leaders gauge the reaction of the group through dialogue and nonverbal cues. The democratic leader leads by developing a consensus rather than telling people what to do or think.

The laissez-faire leader takes a hands-off, laid-back approach to influencing. This type of leader shies away from actively influencing the group. He or she influences only when pushed to lead. Like the authoritarian leader, this type of leader often does not adapt to the needs of the group. A laissez-faire approach is easiest to spot when an elected or appointed leader simply won’t lead. Sometimes, a laissez-faire approach may fit the group’s needs. In other instances, laissez-faire leaders fear making a mistake, or they just want to be liked and don’t want to ruffle anyone’s feathers. But as the slogan goes, “Not to decide is to decide.” The laissez-faire leader is influencing the group by his or her silence or inactivity. The team may have a problem to unravel, but the laissez-faire leader leaves the task entirely to the rest of the group members.

Which leadership style works best? As we discuss next, it depends on the situation. It also depends on the leader and the members. One study found that a democratic, collaborative leadership style works best when the leader is perceived as credible and charismatic. And as we’ll see, a more directive, authoritarian style of leadership is generally more effective when group members doubt that they can effectively accomplish the work and value direct assistance and guidance. Remember that leadership in groups and teams is usually shared by several people. Even when someone has been appointed or elected to be “the leader,” leadership roles are often assumed by several group members.
Situational Approach

The situational approach to leadership views leadership as an interactive process in which such factors as culture, time limitations, group member personalities, and the work the group needs to do determine a particular style of leadership. The situational leadership approach is based on Principle Five: Appropriately adapt messages to others. The effective leader adapts his or her style to fit the needs of the group and the task at hand. Sometimes a group needs a strong, authoritarian leader to make decisions quickly so that the group can achieve its goal. Although most groups prefer a democratic leadership style, during times of crisis a group needs a decisive leader who can help manage uncertainty and provide appropriate structure. An authoritarian style may be acceptable then.56

Groups with highly structured goals and a high level of stress also may operate best with a more authoritarian leadership style. For example, firefighters who are battling a house fire with a family of five people inside have a clearly structured goal: to save lives. In this situation, the group needs decisive authoritarian leadership. If the group’s task is to solve a problem or make a decision collaboratively, the group will likely benefit from a democratic leadership style. If a group’s goal is primarily social or creative, a laissez-faire leader may be best. Compared to the firefighters, for example, a book club that is trying to select its next reading selection has less structured goals (there are many possible options) and a less stressful situation (there is no fire!). This less structured and less stressful task calls for a more participative democratic style of leadership or a hands-off, laissez-faire style of leadership. So according to the situational approach, the answer to the question “What’s the best leadership style?” is “It depends.”57

The readiness of the group also plays a major role in which leadership style would work best.58 Readiness refers to a group member’s ability to assume responsibility to accomplish a task; his or her overall knowledge, background, and experience; and his or her general level of motivation. Leadership experts Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard suggest that a directive or more authoritative, “telling” style of leadership seems to

Deep and Surface Diversity: Which Differences Make a Difference?

People work in groups because “two heads are better than one.” More people bring more—and more varied—approaches to solving a problem or illuminating an issue. But are all differences created equal?

Researchers have found that some differences among group members are more significant than others.59 Surface-level diversity encompasses the human differences that are easily visible to us, such as differences in ethnicity, race, age, sex, gender, and other social and observable features. Deep-level diversity involves differences that aren’t always visible on the surface, such as differences in attitudes, opinions, values, information, culture, and other factors that take time to become evident in groups. Group communication researcher Ralph Rodriguez has found that these differences in underlying values or approaches to problems affect a group’s performance more than do differences in such surface characteristics as race, gender, and ethnicity. Rodriguez also suggests that groups can enhance the quality of their outcomes if they discuss their differences.60

- Be cautious of making sweeping generalizations about people who are from a culture that appears to be similar to yours. Researchers have found that we often expect people who look like us at the surface level to agree with us. Yet the deep-level differences may be the best predictors of whether someone agrees or disagrees with our perspective.61
- Take time to explore group members’ deep-level differences in perspectives and approaches. These deep-level differences are noticed only after people spend time with one another and are engaged in conversation.
- Encourage people to share ideas and information via e-mail or text messages. Because some members of a group may be quieter than others, the opportunity to respond individually rather than orally in the presence of others may bring out more differences in perspective that can help a group reach a better outcome.
- Group members need the benefit of different perspectives. If you’re in the surface-level minority or the deep-level minority in a group, make sure that you tactfully yet assertively express your ideas, opinions, facts, and information to the group.
work best when groups have a low level of readiness. A high degree of readiness suggests that a more delegating style of leadership would help the group function well. An exceptionally ready or mature group may need minimal direction—more of a laissez-faire leadership style. Wise leaders also consider the cultural backgrounds of those whom they lead. Research supports the important role of culture in influencing the style of leadership that seems to be best suited to a team. Group members from collective cultures seem to appreciate more participative styles of leadership.

One simple rule for determining your leadership style is that when the leader emerges naturally from the group or leads a one-time-only group, the group will permit him or her to be more directive. If the group will be together for some time and the quality of group relations is important to the functioning of the group, a more participative, democratic leadership style is in order.

Transformational Leadership

One of the newer leadership approaches to emerge is called the transformational approach to leadership. The transformational leader influences the group or organization by transforming the group—giving it a new vision, energizing or realigning the group culture, or giving the group a new structure. The leader leads by helping the group see all the possibilities within the group. The transformational leader also develops a relationship with those whom he or she leads. Author Peter Senge suggests three fundamental skills of transformational leadership: (1) Build a shared vision, (2) challenge existing ways of thinking, and (3) be a systems thinker—help a group or team see that everything is connected to everything else. Articulating a shared, or collective, vision is an important part of what a transformational leader does. An authoritarian leader would just tell the group, “Here’s your vision; now get to work.” The democratic leader would ask, “What vision do you want?” The laissez-faire leader would do nothing about a vision unless asked to do something. The situational leader would say, “Let me see what type of group I’m leading and listen to group members, and then I’ll share a vision.”

Research suggests that transformational leaders can enhance team cohesiveness and improve perceptions of team performance. They achieve these benefits by linking with other groups and teams either inside or outside the organization, helping the group span boundaries and stay connected with issues and forces that influence the group.

Another skill of transformational leaders is the ability to encourage new ideas. Teams that emphasize learning do a better job of both accomplishing the task and fostering positive, supportive interpersonal relationships. Transformational leaders like to think of themselves as coaches or mentors rather than leaders who dictate or even just facilitate interaction. They are sometimes viewed as the “guide on the side” rather than the “sage on the stage.”

Can transformational leadership skills—or any leadership skills—be taught, the way you can teach someone to drive a car? Some researchers suggest that experience is the best teacher. You can learn how to communicate, listen, relate, and solve problems, but having an opportunity to practice these skills in real-life settings may be the best way to develop your leadership skills. Whether you learn leadership skills and principles from a
book or from the “school of life,” the role of a good leader is that of a servant, helping others accomplish a goal. This ancient description of a wise leader offers considerable insight into what makes a leader great:

The wicked leader the people despise.
The good leader the people revere.
Of the great leader the people say,
“We did it ourselves.”
—Lao Tsu

Enhancing Group and Team Meetings

10.4 Develop and use strategies to structure meetings appropriately, keep meetings on track, and promote appropriate dialogue and interaction.

Humor columnist Dave Barry said, “If you had to identify, in one word, the reason why the human race has not achieved, and never will achieve, its full potential, that word would be meetings.” Meetings are an inescapable fact of life for most people and will undoubtedly be inescapable for you as well.

Why does meeting participation inspire such a negative reaction—not just from Dave Barry, but from many people? Often, it’s because meeting leaders and participants have not mastered the principles we’ve stressed as fundamental to communication success in any context. Meetings are more productive if participants are aware of their behaviors and the behaviors of others and if they believe they have the necessary skill to make meetings effective. Using and interpreting verbal and nonverbal messages effectively are also vital for meeting effectiveness, as are listening and responding to messages with sensitivity. Because of the complexity and uncertainty that arise when people collaborate, being able to adapt message content and message structure is essential. We conclude this chapter by providing some tips for managing one of the most likely collaborative contexts you’ll encounter: meetings.

What specific problems occur most frequently in meetings? According to a survey of meeting participants, the most common meeting “sin” is getting off the subject. The second-biggest problem is not having clear goals or a meeting agenda. Meeting goers also reported that often meetings were too long, people weren’t prepared, nothing really happened, meetings started late, and there were no follow-up action plans.

Meetings need two essential things to be effective: structure and interaction. Sound familiar? As we noted earlier in this chapter, groups also need a balance of these two things.

Manage Meeting Structure

The essential weapon to combat disorganized, rambling meetings is a clear, well-developed agenda, a list of the key issues, ideas, and information that will be discussed, in the order of discussion. How do you develop a well-crafted agenda? Consider these three steps.

STEP ONE: DETERMINE YOUR MEETING GOALS
Every meeting seeks to accomplish something. (If you don’t have something to accomplish, don’t hold a meeting!) Most meetings have one or more of the following three goals: (1) giving information, (2) discussing information, and (3) taking action.

• Giving information. An information-giving meeting is like a briefing or a series of short speeches. If the only
task is to share information, you may not really need a meeting at all; a written memo or an e-mail message will suffice. If you want to emphasize the importance of the information by sharing with others face to face, however, then giving information is an appropriate primary meeting goal.

- **Discussing information.** An information-discussion meeting is one in which there is considerable give and take. The key to this type of meeting is not to let it become a series of long-winded speeches. Also, if you’re not careful, discussions digress from the topic. The meeting leader or meeting participants should be aware of the goals of the discussion so that the comments remain relevant.

- **Taking action.** A meeting may involve making a decision, solving a problem, or implementing a decision or solution. If the purpose of the meeting is to take action, it’s helpful if group members know before they arrive for the meeting that they will be asked to take some action.

**STEP TWO: IDENTIFY WHAT NEEDS TO BE DISCUSSED TO ACHIEVE THE GOAL**  After you have determined your goal(s), you need to determine how to structure the meeting to achieve the goal. What topics need to be covered to achieve the goal? What information do you need? What issues do you need to focus on? Brainstorm answers to these questions, but don’t worry about the precise order of the items yet; focus on organizing the agenda after you know what you need to discuss.

**STEP THREE: ORGANIZE THE AGENDA**  Once you have identified your meeting goals (giving information, discussing information, taking action) and assessed what you need to talk about, take time to arrange the items in the most effective way to achieve your goals. Table 10.4 identifies several meeting problems and possible solutions. In addition, here are several specific strategies for organizing effective meetings:

- Organize the agenda around your meeting goals. If you’re meeting to solve a problem, you could use the five problem-solving steps as an agenda-setting guide: (1) Identify and define the problem, (2) analyze the problem, (3) generate creative options, (4) select the best option, and (5) take action. A single meeting may focus on only one or two of those steps; don’t feel that you have to cram all five problem-solving steps into every meeting.

- Use the subheads “Information Items,” “Discussion Items,” and “Action Items” as you construct your agenda to signal to group members the goal of the discussion, as shown in the sample meeting agenda.

- Consider putting your most important agenda item first, because what is introduced first usually takes the most time.

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Table 10.4  Solving Meeting Agenda Problems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential Meeting Agenda Problem</th>
<th>Suggested Meeting Agenda Strategy</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meeting participants tend to spend more time on the first or second agenda item than on later items.</td>
<td>Make sure that the early agenda items are something the group needs to spend time on.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting participants want to talk, even if the meeting leader wants them to just listen.</td>
<td>Take advantage of the desire to participate by inviting input and discussion early in the meeting rather than trying to squelch discussion or having to deal with interruption of group members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting participants aren’t prepared. They haven’t done their “homework.”</td>
<td>Allow a few minutes for silent reading. Let members get up to speed by reviewing information or quickly looking at key pieces of data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting participants won’t stick to the agenda.</td>
<td>Continue to remind the group of the agenda and the overall goal of the meeting. Make sure to distribute a written agenda ahead of the meeting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is an agenda item that may produce conflict and disagreement.</td>
<td>Help the group develop a sense of success by putting one or more noncontroversial items on the agenda ahead of the item that may produce conflict. Build on the group’s ability to reach agreement.</td>
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• There may be times when you will want to put your most challenging issue for discussion in the middle of the meeting. This gives the group a chance to get oriented at the beginning and ease out of the discussion at the end.76

• Consider making your first agenda item something that will immediately involve all meeting participants in active discussion. If you start with routine reports (a common practice), you establish a norm of passivity, and boredom is the usual result.

• If you are going to discuss a conflict-producing topic, you may want to put that agenda item after an issue on which you think the group will reach agreement. Groups may be more likely to reach agreement on a contentious issue if they have already reached agreement on another point.

• Start the meeting by asking meeting participants whether they have any other agenda items to consider. That way, you aren’t as likely to be surprised by people who want to add something after you’ve planned the meeting agenda.

• After you’ve prepared your agenda, estimate how long you think the group will take to discuss each agenda item. Most groups take more time than you would expect to talk about issues and ideas.

A sample agenda is shown above. Notice that the meeting has clear goals. Also notice how many of the agenda items are phrased as questions. Questions give an agenda focus and help to manage discussion.

When your job is to lead the meeting, you have several specific tasks to perform, including the following:

1. Call the group together; find out when is the best time to meet (finding time is often a major problem for busy people).

2. Develop an agenda, using the steps already described.

3. Determine whether there is a quorum—the minimum number of people who must be present at a meeting to conduct business.

4. Call the meeting to order.

5. Keep notes (or delegate note-taking). Use a flipchart, chalkboard, or dry-erase board or a computer projection method to make notes visible to members during the meeting. Such written notes of the meeting become the “group mind” and help keep the group structured.

6. Decide when to take a vote.

7. Prepare a final report or delegate to a group member the preparation of a report or minutes.

Sample Meeting Agenda

Meeting Goals:
1. Discuss new product proposal: evaluate the pros and cons.
2. Decide whether to implement the personnel policy and mentor program.
3. Receive updates from committees.

I. Discussion Items
   A. How should we revise today’s agenda?
   B. Identify new problems: What new issues or problems have you identified?
   C. React to new product team proposal (distributed by e-mail): What are the pros and cons of the proposal?

II. Action Items
   A. Should we approve the new personnel policy (distributed by e-mail)?
   B. Issue: Should we implement the new mentor program? If so, what should the program policies be?

III. Information Items
   A. New employee orientation report
   B. Planning committee report
   C. Finance committee report
   D. Announcements

Manage Meeting Interaction

Interaction, as you recall, is the back-and-forth dialogue and discussion in which participants engage during meetings. Without interaction, meetings would be like a monologue, a speech, or a seminar rather than a lively discussion. It’s important for people in a meeting to be involved in the discussion and share the information that they have with one another.77 Research has found that meetings that have more equal quorum—The minimum number of people who must be present at a meeting to conduct business.
participation by all participants generally are more effective than meetings dominated by a few people. But too much unfocused interaction can result in a disorganized, chaotic discussion. To keep a meeting on track, meeting leaders and participants need facilitation skills. The most important facilitation skills include being a gatekeeper, using metadiscussion, monitoring discussion time, and structuring discussion techniques to keep discussion focused.

**Gatekeeper**

Encourages less-talkative members to participate and tries to limit long-winded contributions by other group members. Gatekeepers need to be good listeners so that they can help manage the flow of conversation. Gatekeepers make such comments as “Ashley, we haven’t heard your ideas yet. Won’t you share your thoughts with us?” or “Mike, thanks for sharing, but I’d like to hear what others have to say.” Polite, tactful invitations to talk or limit talk usually work. As we noted earlier in this chapter, you may need to speak privately with chronic oververbalizers to let them know that you would appreciate a more balanced discussion.

**Metadiscussion**

Discussion about the discussion process; comments that help the group remain focused on the goals of the group or that point out how the group is doing its work. Metadiscussion is important to keep a meeting on track. Metadiscussional statements include “I’m not following this conversation. What is our goal?” “Can someone summarize what we’ve accomplished so far?” and “Peggy, I’m not sure I understand how your observation relates to our meeting goal.” These comments contain information and advice about the communication process rather than about the issues being discussed.

**Virtual Meeting Tips**

A virtual meeting occurs when you use the Internet or some other electronic means of connecting with others rather than meeting face to face. Increased globalization of the economy, rising travel costs, and technological advances in electronic collaboration make it likely that you will hold meetings in cyberspace. What are ways to maximize your electronic collaboration? Here are several research-supported tips to help you make the most of mediated meetings:

- **Start live.** If at all possible, make your first meeting a face-to-face meeting. Getting to know your team members in person helps to develop positive relationships at the outset of a longer project in which you will be interacting over a period of time.

- **Develop communication ground rules.** Aside from communicating during a planned virtual meeting, determine how and when you will communicate with other team members. Will you call someone on the phone? Skype? Use only e-mail? Clarify communication expectations about the method of communication and when it’s best to reach your fellow team members.

- **Communicate frequently.** One ground rule we suggest is to contact team members when questions or issues arise even if you’re not in a scheduled meeting. Don’t hesitate to send virtual meeting members short notes and messages. Resist the temptation to hold onto information until you have a longer message. Frequent communication helps virtual meeting participants get to know one another.

- **Use technology to monitor team progress.** Invite team members to provide periodic reports via e-mail or on the team home page. Also distribute meeting minutes via e-mail very soon after the group has held a virtual meeting.

- **Encourage the development of relationships.** Virtual meetings have a tendency to be task oriented. To foster good team relationships, allow time at the beginning of a virtual meeting for relationship building; during this time, encourage meeting participants to engage in off-task talk, communicating personal information. During the meeting, ensure that every person is heard from and that all are engaged and participating in the meeting.

- **Be positive.** Research suggests that, like members of face-to-face groups, virtual group members who have a positive perception of their own abilities to achieve results are more effective. So fostering a can-do spirit in a group or team is a good thing to do.

Metadiscussion and gatekeeping skills help to keep a virtual meeting on track. Metadiscussion allows participants to talk about their goals and what’s working and what’s not. Gatekeepers can help keep the meeting focused, even if you’re not in a scheduled meeting. Don’t hesitate to send virtual meeting members short notes and messages. Resist the temptation to hold onto information until you have a longer message. Frequent communication helps virtual meeting participants get to know one another.
like to return to the issues at hand. Use “I” messages rather than “you” messages to bring the group back on track. An “I” message begins with the word I, such as “I am not sure where we are in our discussion” or “I am lost here.” A “you” message is a way of phrasing a message that makes others feel defensive—for example, “You’re not following the agenda” or “Your point doesn’t make any sense.” Another way to express these same ideas, but with less of a negative edge, is to use “I” messages such as “I’m not sure where we are on the agenda” or “I’m not sure I understand how your point relates to the issue we are discussing.” The ability to carry on metadiscussion is an exceptionally powerful skill because you can offer metadiscussional statements even if you are not the appointed leader.

**MONITOR TIME**  Being sensitive to the time the group is spending on an issue is yet another skill that is necessary to manage meeting interaction. Think of your agenda as a map, helping you plan where you want to go. Think of the clock as your gas gauge, telling you the amount of fuel you have to get where you want to go. In a meeting, keeping one eye on the clock and one eye on the agenda is analogous to focusing on the map and the gas gauge on a car trip. If you are running low on fuel (time), you will need to either get more gas (budget more time) or recognize that you will not get where you want to go. Begin each meeting by asking how long members can meet. If you have two or three crucial agenda items and one-third of your group has to leave in an hour, you may need to reshuffle your agenda to make sure that you can achieve your goals.

**USE STRUCTURE TO MANAGE INTERACTION**  Another way to manage interaction is to use some of the prescriptive structures talked about earlier. For example, you can use silent brainstorming is a way to gain maximum participation from everyone. Yet another strategy is to ask people to come to the meeting with written responses to questions you posed in the agenda, which group members received in advance of the meeting. This signals that you want people to prepare for the meeting beforehand rather than doing their “homework” at the meeting.

An essential task of the meeting facilitator is to orchestrate meaningful interaction during the meeting so that all group or team members have the opportunity to share. Another structured method of inviting involvement is to have group members first write individually and then share their ideas with the group. Having members write before speaking is like providing them with a script, which can be effective in garnering contributions from all group members, not just the people who talk the most or who aren’t shy about speaking up.

What are the best strategies to make yourself a valuable meeting leader or participant? The five Communication Principles for a Lifetime that we emphasize throughout the book will serve you well. In general, be aware of your own behavior and the behavior of others. Monitor your verbal and nonverbal messages to make sure that you are making comments relevant to the task at hand, but also be sensitive to the needs of the people in your group. You develop that sensitivity by listening to others and responding thoughtfully. Ineffective meeting participants make little effort to link their comments to what others are saying. They also don’t adapt to the messages of others. Effective communicators adapt what they say and do to help achieve the goals of the group. There is evidence that putting these principles into practice will enhance group and team performance.84

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**“I” message**  A message in which you state your perspective or point of view.

**“you” message**  A message that is likely to create defensiveness in others because it emphasizes how another person has created a problem rather than describing the problem from one’s own perspective (“I” message).
Review Your Knowledge

What Effective Group and Team Members Do

10.1 Identify six functions that effective group members perform.

Effective group members identify a clear, elevating goal; develop a results-driven structure; gather, share, and use information effectively; develop options; evaluate ideas; and are sensitive to group social and relationship concerns.

Structuring Group and Team Problem Solving

10.2 List and describe the five steps of group problem solving (reflective thinking).

Although there is no single series of steps that will ensure high performance, five classic steps can help groups organize the problem-solving process: (1) identify and define the problem, (2) analyze the problem, (3) generate creative solutions, (4) select the best solution, and (5) take action.

Enhancing Group and Team Leadership

10.3 Compare and contrast the trait, functional, styles, situational, and transformational approaches to understanding leadership.

High-performing groups have competent group leaders. Researchers have devised several approaches to analyzing leadership. The trait approach to leadership seeks to identify certain characteristics or traits that all leaders possess. The functional approach to leadership suggests that leaders need to be concerned with both task functions and group process functions. A third approach to understanding leadership, the styles approach, identifies leaders as authoritarian, democratic, or laissez-faire. No one style seems to work best all the time. The situational leadership approach suggests that the best leadership style depends on a variety of factors, including the readiness of the group, cultures of group members, the urgency of the problem, and the type of issue the group is discussing. Finally, transformational leadership is an approach that encourages leaders to help shape the vision and goals of the group by being in touch with followers.

Enhancing Group and Team Meetings

10.4 Develop and use strategies to structure meetings appropriately, keep meetings on track, and promote appropriate dialogue and interaction.

An effective meeting needs a balance of structure and interaction. Groups maintain appropriate structure if meeting planners develop and use an agenda to keep the discussion focused and on track. Meetings also need appropriate amounts of dialogue and discussion. Effective meeting participants monitor the amount of participation from other group or team members and serve as gatekeepers to ensure that oververbalizers don’t monopolize the discussion and quiet members don’t feel intimidated.

Key Terms

- Results-Driven Structure, p. 224
- Structure, p. 228
- Interaction, p. 228
- Reflective Thinking, p. 228
- Criteria, p. 230
- Force Field Analysis Technique, p. 230
- Creativity, p. 231
- Brainstorming, p. 231
- Silent Brainstorming (Nominal Group Technique), p. 232
- Consensus, p. 233
- Groupthink, p. 234
- Leadership, p. 235
- Trait Approach to Leadership, p. 236
- Functional Approach to Leadership, p. 236
- Task Function, p. 237
- Process Function, p. 237
- Styles Approach to Leadership, p. 237
- Authoritarian Leader, p. 238
- Democratic Leader, p. 238
The Principle Points

Principle One:
Be aware of your communication with yourself and others.
- Be sensitive to your group’s need for appropriate structure to organize and focus the discussion or interaction and to encourage dialogue.
- Be aware of the appropriate leadership style to meet your group’s needs.

Principle Two:
Effectively use and interpret verbal messages.
- Clearly describe the goal of the group.
- Evaluate the merits of ideas by verbalizing both the pros and the cons.
- Use verbal “I” messages to express your need for information and your sensitivity to other group members’ feelings.
- Develop and use written agendas to give meetings structure.
- Manage the amount of interaction in a group by encouraging quiet members to participate and overly dominant members to let others express ideas.
- Use metadiscussion to keep a meeting on track.

Principle Three:
Effectively use and interpret nonverbal messages.
- Use appropriate nonverbal messages to establish and maintain a positive group climate.
- When brainstorming, do your best to avoid nonverbally expressing your evaluation of other people’s ideas.

Principle Four:
Listen and respond thoughtfully to others.
- Listen to other group members to determine whether your group is accomplishing the appropriate group functions.
- Listen and respond to others to express your sensitivity to others’ ideas and opinions.
- To be an effective leader, listen and thoughtfully respond to all members.
- Listen and respond to provide appropriate contributions to group meetings and problem-solving discussions.

Principle Five:
 Appropriately adapt messages to others.
- Adapt your leadership and group membership styles to achieve the goals of the group.
- Adapt your messages to help the group identify, define, and analyze the problem; create solutions; select the best solution; and take action.
- Adapt your messages to give group meetings appropriate structure and to foster interaction.

Additional terms:
- Laissez-Faire Leader, p. 238
- Transformational Approach to Leadership, p. 240
- Situational Approach to Leadership, p. 239
- Agenda, p. 241
- Surface-Level Diversity, p. 239
- Quorum, p. 243
- Deep-Level Diversity, p. 239
- Metadiscussion, p. 244
- “I” message, p. 245
- “You” message, p. 245
- Laissez-Faire Leader, p. 238
- Transformational Approach to Leadership, p. 240
- Situational Approach to Leadership, p. 239
- Surface-Level Diversity, p. 239
- Deep-Level Diversity, p. 239
- Metadiscussion, p. 244
- “I” message, p. 245
- “You” message, p. 245
Apply Your Skill

Consider the following questions. Write your answers and/or share them with your classmates:

1. Describe the best group member or teammate you have encountered. How did that person’s behavior compare to this chapter’s description of effective team members?
2. Think of a successful brainstorming session or a session with problems in which you’ve participated as a group leader or member. What factors caused the success or led to the problems? If there were problems, what could be done to address them?
3. How can group members adapt to work effectively if the leader is using an authoritarian style and the group would prefer a more democratic style?
4. Using the suggestions and following the examples presented in this chapter, draft a brief agenda for an upcoming meeting of a group you’re in.
5. Review Table 10.1. What other patterns of difficult group behavior have you encountered in groups? How would you suggest dealing with the behavior?

Assess Your Skill

Assessing Group and Team Problem-Solving Competencies

Use the evaluation form on pages 250 to 251 to assess the presence or absence of small group communication competencies in a group or team discussion. Competencies are specific behaviors that group and team members perform. The assessment form includes nine competencies organized into four general categories. Here’s how to use the form:

1. Observe a group or team that is attempting to solve a problem. Write the names of the group members at the top of the form. (If the group includes more than five members, photocopy the form so that each group member can be evaluated.)

2. When using the form, first decide whether each group member has performed each competency. Circle NO if the group member was not observed performing the competency. Circle YES if you did observe the group member performing the competency (for example, defining the problem, analyzing the problem, identifying criteria).

3. For each competency for which you circled YES, determine how effectively the competency was performed. Use a scale from 0 to 3:

   0 = The group member performed this competency but did so inappropriately or inadequately. For example, the person observed tried to define the problem but did so poorly.

   1 = Overall, the person’s performance of this competency was adequate.

   2 = The person performed this competency twice.

   3 = The person performed this competency three or more times.

4. Total the score for each group member in each of the following four categories.

   Problem-oriented competencies consist of items 1 and 2. These are behaviors that help the group or team define and analyze the problem. If a group member performed the competencies, his or her point total for this category ranges from 0 to 6. The more points the person scores, the better he or she performed this competency.

   • Communicate your sensitivity to other group members through your nonverbal behavior.
   • Use appropriate eye contact and other nonverbal cues to regulate the flow of interaction in group and team meetings.

   Solution-oriented competencies include items 3, 4, and 5; the point total for this category ranges from 0 to 9. These competencies focus on how well the group or team member helped to develop and evaluate a solution to the problem.
Discussion management competencies, competencies that helped the group or team remain focused or helped the group manage interaction, are items 6 and 7. The point total for this category ranges from 0 to 6.

Relational competencies are behaviors that focus on dealing with conflict and developing a positive, supportive group climate. Items 8 and 9 reflect this competency; point total for this category ranges from 0 to 6.

5. You can also assess the group’s or team’s overall ability to perform these competencies. The column marked “Group Assessment” can be used to record your overall impressions of how effectively the group or team behaved. Circle NO if no one in the group performed a particular competency. Circle YES if at least one person in the group or team performed this competency. Then evaluate how well the entire group performed this competency, using the scale already described.

Sometimes it is difficult to make so many judgments about group competencies by just viewing a group discussion once. Many people find that it’s easier to make a video recording of the group discussion so that they can observe it more than once.
## Competent Group Communicator

### Problem-Solving Group Communication Competencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMPETENCIES</th>
<th>Group Member A</th>
<th>Group Member B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Problem-Oriented Competencies</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Defined the problem the group attempted to solve.</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Analyzed the problem the group attempted to solve. Used relevant information, data, or evidence; discussed the causes, obstacles, history, symptoms, or significance of the problem.</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Solution-Oriented Competencies</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Identified criteria for an appropriate solution to the problem.</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
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<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Generated solutions or alternatives to the problem.</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Evaluated solution(s): Identified positive or negative consequences of the proposed solutions.</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Discussion Management Competencies</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Maintained task focus: Helped the group stay on or return to the task, issue, or topic the group was discussing.</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
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<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Managed group interaction: Appropriately initiated and terminated discussion, contributed to the discussion, or invited others to contribute to the discussion. Didn’t dominate or withdraw.</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
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<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Relational Competencies</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Managed conflict: Appropriately and constructively helped the group stay focused on issues rather than personalities when conflict occurred.</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Maintained climate: Offered positive verbal comments or nonverbal expressions that helped maintain a positive group climate.</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Scoring</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>NO = Not observed</td>
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<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>0 = Overall inappropriate or inadequate performance of competency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 = Overall adequate performance of competency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 = Person performed this competency twice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 = Person performed this competency three or more times</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Member C</td>
<td>Group Member D</td>
<td>Group Member E</td>
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<td>----------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
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<td>0 1 2 3</td>
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<td>0 1 2 3</td>
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<td>NO</td>
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<td>0 1 2 3</td>
<td>0 1 2 3</td>
<td>0 1 2 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Problem-Oriented Competencies (0–6)
Solution-Oriented Competencies (0–9)
Discussion Management Competencies (0–6)
Relational Competencies (0–6)