

# UAS2003 Team building\*

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## 1 Overview

In Capetown, 2003, we did:

- Intros
- Conflict resolution
- Communication in organisations
- Diversity sensitivity
- Group values
- Division of responsibility
- Rules of the truck

## 2 Conflict Resolution

There are three stages to communication: the message, the reception, and the acknowledgement. The first step in any resolution, initiating the communication, is by far the hardest both to conceive of and to do. To help, there is (1) opening communication

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\*For some of the ideas I bring together here I am grateful to various teachers and groups over the years, including Columbae, NOLS, and Teton Science School.

channels in advance on difficult issues, (2) having a language that both sides can appeal to in order to make things go more clearly, and (3) care in raising issues so that they are couched with optimism.

## **2.1 Message:**

- "I language": awareness of the difference between one's own physical perceptions (ie seen and heard), beliefs (including interpretations of perceptions), feelings, and prescriptions. For instance, rather than "It's clear that you don't want my input", you might say "I felt unappreciated when I didn't get to contribute my opinion."
- Generalisations about people and about time:
  - People: it is natural for humans to categorize things, and we naturally have traits we tend to use to do so. However, don't need to project these tendencies into our message/language. When some group (e.g. racial, national) are to be referenced, consider referencing them always as individuals.
  - Time: When something at issue has happened more than once, we tend to generalize to "often", "many times", or "usually". Instead, it can be just as clear and more effective to mention just a single time, and give specific details.

## **2.2 Listening:**

Acknowledging:

- Paraphrase. e.g. "I hear that you're feeling hurt. I can really see how you would be feeling left out."
- Take ownership: "That's true that I didn't ask for your input directly, but it was not because I don't value your opinion." This is often missed; when done explicitly it can go a long way to creating understanding.
- Active listening: "Have you felt that this has happened other times?"

# **3 Group communication**

## **3.1 Concensus Decision Making**

Different methods may be good for different group sizes, but many people assume democracy is somehow natural. It is not; it is as contrived as any other method. Democracy gives no voice to the losers. In consensus decision making, everyone has, fundamentally, a veto power, so everyone must be comfortable with decisions that are made.

Here is one framework for doing this; it's due to Columbae co-op at Stanford, and others.

One person, hopefully someone detached from the issue at hand, facilitates. This means they keep a running first-in/first-out list of who has put up their hand to speak, and they keep order. They may also opportunistically try to summarize what ideas have been put out, and suggest a "vote", or "fist of five". As an aid to encouraging people only to express contributive ideas, rather than opinions, people indicate their agreement with a speaker by snapping their fingers.

Voting is qualitative, according to something like the following. Each person shows between zero and 5 fingers.

- 5: suggested outcome is perfect for me.
- 4: suggested outcome is acceptable; there might be a drawback.
- 3: abstain, or need to discuss something
- 2: proposal is no good. We need more discussion and other alternatives.
- 1: suggested outcome is very bad for me. I will be very upset if this happens.
- 0: (a "block", or fist, or veto): I would sooner see the group break up than have this happen.

### **3.2 Other ideas**

- One way to start meetings (due to Teton Science School, Wyoming) is to go around the circle and give each the opportunity to say a thank-you. Go around again and give each the opportunity to explain an "issue" (typically, not for the agenda, rather in announcement form).
- Avoid negativity
- Give (public) credit to others when they help, have an idea, or do a good job.
- Transparency
- Respect for others mistakes when they hold responsibility. i.e. you can identify when someone with some responsibility has made a mistake, but assume that they will not repeat the mistake. When possible, stand behind their action..
- Think now of a frustration you have internalized or not addressed. Challenge yourself to raise it, constructively, with the relevant person(s) in the next day.

## **4 Diversity sensitivity**

We brainstormed on issues that could be divisive, and tried to find differences within these, especially where people thought there were none ("I eat everything" or etc). Focused on individual diversity, not cultural. The idea was to open communication

channels. Examples were: HYGIENE (tasting while cooking; hand washing; coughing; dropped food while cooking), FOOD/DIET (fat/grease; misunderstanding of "vegetarian" food; list of allergies and dislikes), PRIVACY (nudity), PRIVATE PROPERTY (borrowing); SEXUAL DISCRIMINATION [not sexism!!] (labour division; chivalry); RELIGION; ALCOHOL use; MONEY spending (impositions to spend private money); LEADERSHIP STYLES (sensitivity to speed at which people rise to opportunities); CULTURAL MIXING; NOISE; WORK/NON-WORK time.