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World of Community Building

FACILITATOR AS DANCER

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Abstract

Did you ever think about groups having rhythms? Or facilitators as choreographers? This is an innovative and experiential workshop that goes beyond forming, storming, norming and performing. Participants will learn five group rhythms, listen and move to music exemplifying these rhythms and discuss facilitator tools that assist groups in and out of these rhythms.

Target Audience

Workshop participants should have some fundamental knowledge of facilitation, its uses, tools and practices. This workshop is meant to give an added perspective to their basic knowledge.

Learning Objectives

1. Understand, observe and experience the five rhythms in groups
2. Be able to relate these experienced rhythmical patterns to groups you facilitate
3. Understand how a facilitator's preferred rhythm can effect a group



4. Learn how facilitator tools can be used to encourage and to change rhythms.

Background

My interest in developing this workshop came from attempting to integrate my avocation, dance, with my vocation, consulting in the field of training and organizational development.

When I first began designing this workshop, I was taking classes at The Movement Center in San Rafael, CA (just north of San Francisco). These classes are based on the work of Gabrielle Roth, a dance teacher, recording artist, and author who lives in New York City. Subsequently, as part of a graduate school program in management, I looked at applying the five dance rhythms in Roth's work to the team environment in the corporate world.

Premises and Theory

There are two premises used throughout this workshop. The first is that facilitators are dancers. At times a facilitator may lead and at other times, follow. Knowing the difference between leading and following group energy is critical to effective facilitation. Also essential to facilitators is creating the choreography, the tools of the trade used to work with a group. And as with all dancers and facilitators, it's those moments when choreography meets the new and unexpected that a new dance is born.

The second premise in this workshop is that all groups have rhythm and therefore, dance. My hypothesis is that all groups have an underlying basic rhythm, one that is created by this particular grouping of individuals and which becomes their own group rhythm. This rhythm or dance has underlying patterns and behaviors that can be observed.

During the course of a project, or period of time, group rhythms can and do change, sometimes going back to their original group rhythm, other times taking on a new rhythm. Rhythms can change because of the nature of the work or task the group is doing (the project

scope is narrowed, the timeline is extended), outside influences (the company is undergoing a reduction in force, a new company was just acquired) and inside influences (members are added or others leave the group).

The Five Rhythms

The five rhythms are based on the work of Gabrielle Roth and are: flow, staccato, chaos, lyrical and stillness. Roth believes that all of us have a primary rhythm in which we move through life. I believe that groups also have a primary rhythm. Our role as facilitators is to observe and understand that rhythm and then work with the group as it dances. To do this, we have to still our mind enough to sense the movement around us.

In the workshop, "Facilitator as Dancer," participants physically move to the rhythms of the music. The first rhythm is flow. Flow music is played (see references for CD/cassette name) and the group follows a specific exercise. Afterwards there is a discussion about one's experience during the exercise and then about how this particular exercise relates to groups and teams. This process is repeated for each of the remaining four rhythms.

If one were to experience flow, images that come to mind include: the Great Wall of China, tai chi, an autumn leaf falling, an eagle in flight. Flow is a state of being grounded and connected to the earth. Its edges are curved. Staccato is represented by red light/green light, lightening, pinballs and hiccups. It's about being on fire, energized and angular. Chaos is a feeling one gets on a roller coaster, of popcorn popping, encountering the massiveness of Niagara Falls, and the experience of a junk yard. It can be about emptiness or filling up and exploding, about being out of control or freedom from restrictions and structure. It's large and all consuming.



Lyrical is a sense of flexibility and complexity; it's like playing jazz, listening to wind chimes in the breeze, watching Calder mobiles, and spring. It's being a work in progress and knowing it, it's using both the right and left brain, it's the process of lightening up. Stillness is more than quietness, it's self reflection: the Buddha, a pond, a library, the pyramids. It's holding a deep connection with one another.

Thoughts about Rhythms in Groups

Seeing groups as rhythms is an alternative to the forming, storming, norming and performing stages of group development. There isn't necessarily a correlation between these two models although chaos may often seem like storming and lyrical may be closest to performing.

From an organizational perspective, the culture in which the groups exist plays a large role in determining the initial rhythms groups adopt.

In addition there is a shadow side to the rhythms. For example, chaos can be seen as a positive experience, a breaking up of old ideas and ways of thinking, or it can be seen as randomness, energy draining and subversive. Dancing the rhythm gets us in touch with our own beliefs and feelings about chaos and gives us an opportunity to work through them. As facilitators this is an opportunity to see how the shadow is no longer hidden but front and center. We can then work with the group to move into another rhythm or continue in the same one.

Another aspect of rhythms is their speed. They can slow down and stop/breakdown or increase and intensify. They can also change, such as going from chaos to lyrical. I believe that the facilitator can and does play a major role in orchestrating these changes. A facilitator can become familiar with her/his primary rhythm and so, entering the group, will bring an awareness about how he/his rhythm will connect with the group or if needed, disrupt the group, nudge it or push it along.

Facilitators can use a variety of tools and techniques to change, sped up or slow down rhythms. One example is an agenda. It is often used in the flow state. We even say, "What's the flow of the agenda?" An agenda is a means of keeping the group on target and in a grounded state. Brainstorming, on the other hand, creates a staccato state with lots of ideas being spontaneously generated, a sort of hiccuping effect. Conflict often happens in the chaos rhythm. This is also an opportunity for paradigm shifts and an assertion of one's beliefs, values and perceptions surface. Facilitating discussions and using decision matrices may be helpful here. Facilitating tools in the stillness rhythm include appreciative inquiry and dialog.

Stages of Dance Skill Acquisition

Outlined below are the four stages of acquiring mastery applied to facilitating rhythms in groups. The stages move from Learner to Performer, integrating process skills and our own behaviors and judgment.

References

Roth, Gabrielle, *Sweat Your Prayers*, New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher, 1997.

Roth, Gabrielle, *Initiation*, CD

The Presenter

Roxann is an expert in working with teams and groups. She has lead numerous teams to success, coached and trained leaders and team members on how to be a great team, and facilitated teams when they've been stuck and have had to regroup and redirect their goals. Her skills include group process as well as foundation building. She excels at strategic planning, team building, and coaching and mentoring.



Underlying her skills are core competencies in organizational cultural change and developing and leading learning organizations. She is known for her use of possibility thinking, improvisation and experiential activities to move people and groups to greater heights. In November, 1999, Roxann was a featured speaker at The Best Practices in Mentoring Conference in Washington, DC.