Improving Climate
From Where You Are Right Now
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INTRODUCTION

Improving campus climate for working and learning is a priority within the campus strategic plan under “Nurturing Human Resources.” Literally hundreds of groups, organizations, committees and individuals are currently working to improve climate. The Office of the Provost has created a web site at http://www.provost.wisc.edu/climate to centralize information on these various initiatives and opportunities.

A Campus Climate Networking Group (CCNG) has been convened by the Provost to help identify and connect climate efforts. While recognizing that climate is a concept with multiple context-dependent meanings, the CCNG has identified the following working definition of campus climate:

Behaviors within a workplace or learning environment, ranging from subtle to cumulative to dramatic, that can influence whether an individual feels personally safe, listened to, valued, and treated fairly and with respect.

The CCNG has consciously chosen this behavior-based definition in order to focus on the drivers of climate—personal conduct and human interaction.

This document includes activities and approaches that can be employed at the level of departments or administrative offices as well as by individuals wishing to improve climate in their own work groups.

Part I includes information and “how-to” guidelines on a brief (eight-items) survey that can be a first step in improving climate in a department or office. General guidelines on surveying for climate are included.

Part II describes formal actions and activities that can be undertaken by an office or department with the goal of improving climate.

Part III includes tools that can be used by virtually anyone at anytime for collaborative work and which are grounded in respect, fairness, and participation—ingredients of a positive climate.

Part IV indicates where additional resources may be found.
PART I. SURVEYS

A survey can be useful for better understanding climate in a department or office. See Kristine Hafner’s suggestions at the end of this section on how to approach climate surveys.

Eight Questions to Ask About Climate

If you as a leader want to check on the work climate, ask people in your department or office to indicate the extent to which they agree with these eight statements.

In my immediate unit or department:

1. There is a spirit of cooperation among those with whom I work.
2. I am clear on my roles and responsibilities.
3. I have the resources I need to do my work well.
4. I have ample opportunities to do what I do best.
5. I feel appreciated for my work.
6. I am encouraged to grow professionally.
7. Someone seems to care about me as a person.
8. Differences among people are valued (including age, gender, race, ethnicity and sexual orientation)

This brief questionnaire is based on the “One Minute Climate Assessment” developed at University of Wisconsin-Stout, recipient of the 2001 Macolm Baldrige National Quality Award and the questions posed by authors Buckingham and Coffman in First, Break All the Rules (1999).

Buckingham and Coffman, researchers for the Gallup organization, have identified twelve questions that they believe measure the essentials needed to attract, focus and keep the most talented employees (p. 28). From these, they have isolated the most powerful questions, those with the strongest links to productivity. According to Buckingham and Coffman, these are questions that deal with knowing expectations, having resources to do a good job, opportunities every day to do what one does best, recognition and praise, people at work seeming to care about one as a person and encourage one’s development. These concerns are reflected in the above questionnaire which also includes items from the UW-Stout survey which is conducted across campus every year. See Figure 1.

Conspicuous by their absence are questions dealing with pay, benefits, senior management or organizational structure (p. 20). Buckingham and Coffman do not include these in their list of climate questions, not because they are not important, but “because they are equally important to every employee, good bad, and mediocre” (p. 29). Pay and benefits they say, “are like tickets to the ballpark—they can get you into the game, but they can’t help you win” (p. 29). The authors say, it is the manager, not pay, benefits, perks, or a charismatic leader at the top who is the critical player in building a strong workplace (p. 32).

These questions should be asked only if leaders are willing to take action to improve the work climate.
### Eight Questions To Ask About Climate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In my immediate office or department:</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. There is a spirit of cooperation among those with whom I work.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I am clear on my roles and responsibilities,</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I have the resources I need to do my work well.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I feel appreciated for my work.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I am encouraged to grow professionally.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Someone seems to care about me as a person.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I have ample opportunities to do what I do best.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Differences among people are valued (including age, gender, race, ethnicity and sexual orientation).</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2 provides an alternative way of asking and analyzing the questions posed in Figure 1. The same questions are used; however, faculty and staff are asked two questions: how important is this to you and how satisfied are you with how things are going in this regard?
Eight Questions to Ask About Climate

Following are eight questions about working in this department or administrative unit. Each question reflects an essential element for a workplace that is positive and productive.

For each question, indicate how important this issue is for you personally. Then indicate how satisfied you are with how these things are going in your department or unit.

Answer on a scale of 1-5 with “1” being a low level of importance/satisfaction and “5” being a high level of importance/satisfaction. Please circle your responses.

1 = Less Important/Satisfied
5 = More Important/Satisfied

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance &amp; Satisfaction of These Measures to Me in My Immediate Office or Department:</th>
<th>Importance</th>
<th>Satisfaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Spirit of cooperation among those with whom I work.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Clarity of roles and responsibilities.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Resources to do my work well.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Feeling appreciated for my work.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Encouragement to grow professionally.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Being cared about as a person.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Ample opportunities to do what I do best.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Differences are valued (including age, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation).</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 2. Eight Climate Questions: Importance and Satisfaction*
Steps in Tabulating and Interpreting the Results of the Importance/Satisfaction Questionnaire Format

1. Create a cross-hair grid in which the horizontal axis represents importance and the vertical axis represents satisfaction. Each axis should be numbered from 1 to 5 with a midpoint (where the axes cross) of 3. (Blank grid provided in Figure 5.)

2. For each question, total the individual scores, both for importance and satisfaction, and divide by the number of participants to obtain an average score. For our example with ten participants, total the individual scores and divide by ten.

3. Plot each question on the grid according to its importance and satisfaction score. Question 2 with an importance score of 4.5 (total individual scores of 45 divided by 10) and a satisfaction score of 1.3 (total individual scores of 13 divided by 10) would look like this on the grid.

Figure 3. Importance/satisfaction diagram (grid)
4. The grid indicates that members are less satisfied with the element of workplace identified in question 2, “I am clear on my roles and responsibilities,” which received 1.3 points total for satisfaction. They also rate it as more important with 4.5 points. This suggests a potential area on which to focus improvement. Creating a Roles and Responsibilities Matrix could be a helpful next step. (See pp. 17-19 in *Facilitator Tool Kit* at [http://www.wisc.edu/improve/factoolkit.pdf](http://www.wisc.edu/improve/factoolkit.pdf))

5. A complete diagram is formed in Figure 4 by plotting the importance and satisfaction totals for each question.

6. Discuss the results, focusing first on the quadrant that contains items that people feel are most important, but about which they are less satisfied (bottom right).
Discussion Questions

Questions for discussing #2 (Clarity of roles and responsibilities) could be:

a. What are the expectations that are most unclear for you personally? Is there a pattern among us as a group?

b. Can you recall a situation or event when we all knew clearly what was expected of us? What accounted for this? What could we do to recreate that situation?

c. Should we consider creating a roles and responsibilities matrix? (See pp. 17-19 in Facilitator Tool Kit at http://www.wisc.edu/improve/factoolkit.pdf)

d. Are position descriptions up to date?

e. What else can we do to create greater clarity of expectations?

Other discussion questions might be:

a. What are the areas that we feel as a group are most important and about which we feel the most satisfied? What should we do to ensure that our level of satisfaction remains high and/or is even higher?

b. What are the areas that are less important to us overall?

Discussing questions with outliers:

It is often useful to discuss questions where the average score has obscured some differences of opinion. For example, the average score for an item might be Importance of 5 and Satisfaction of 4, but there might have been several individual scores of 5 for Importance and 1 for Satisfaction. Understanding these differences in individuals’ experiences can illuminate new alternatives and opportunities.

Figure 5 is a blank grid for plotting answers to any of the questions posed here.
Figure 5. Blank grid for plotting scores

References

One-Minute Climate Assessment. (2002). Menomonie, WI: EO/AA Office UW-Stout
**Climate Survey Tips**

A common first step in improving climate in an organization is administering a climate inventory or survey. A survey can establish a baseline against which improvement can be measured and can point up areas of particular concern. Results can also be a means of increased communication throughout the organization.

Surveys are not helpful in all situations, however, so the decision of whether or not to begin a climate initiative with a survey is one that should be made carefully.

A survey should not be conducted if there is little or no potential of taking corrective action. In such a situation, a survey is likely to do more harm than good, highlighting the problems and creating additional cynicism.

If, however, there are people with intention and means within a group who are committed to improving the climate, a survey can be helpful as a launching step.

Kristine Hafner, a management consultant for the University of California says surveys can be effectively used as a means of improving the climate and communicating with members of the organization. She suggests that results should be used, not as a report card, but rather, as a road map. She offers tips for increasing effectiveness of climate surveys which are summarized below.

**Do**
- Keep the data anonymous but communicate the actions
- Decide how to analyze the data before collecting it
- Involve a cross-section of employees in the survey process
- Clearly communicate the survey process, recommendations and actions
- Use surveys with high validity and reliability
- Include the survey as part of an annual plan and larger measurement effort
- Field test the survey before administering it

**Do Not**
- Survey without action
- Rely solely on the survey data and numbers
- Identify individuals or small units that would make identification of individuals obvious
- Look for what you already see
Haffner summarizes the “seven survey sins” identified by International Survey Research Corporation, an organization with 21 years of experience in designing and conducting surveys. The seven pitfalls she describes are these:

- Bad timing
- Surveying the entire organization instead of a representative sample
- Surveying too frequently
- Oversimplified surveys
- Sample is too small
- Results tied to performance bonuses
- Arbitrary target numbers are set

She recommends utilizing professionals experienced in creating and interpreting employee opinion surveys.

Survey Instruments

The Office of Quality Improvement maintains a collection of climate surveys used in institutions of higher education across the country. The binder may be checked out of the OQI library. URLs are provided where available. Contact P.J. Barnes at barnes@bascom.wisc.edu. A description of the sample studies is also available on the Provost’s climate web site.

Reference

**PART II. FORMAL ACTIONS**

This section suggests *four actions* that can be taken in a department or office where improving climate is a goal.

**ACTION I: Language for a Position Description or Position Vacancy Listing**

The position description provides an opportunity to reaffirm that behaviors that support a positive climate for working and learning are an expected part of job performance. Below is an excerpt from positions descriptions in the Office of Human Resource Development. Headings C, D and E all describe behaviors that create a positive working climate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MS</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>NI</th>
<th>NS</th>
<th>NA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More than satisfactory</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>Needs Improvement</td>
<td>Not Satisfactory</td>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**C. Demonstrate commitment to diversity.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>NI</th>
<th>NS</th>
<th>NA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C1</td>
<td>Communicate via oral, written, and electronic media with diverse populations in an educational environment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2</td>
<td>Apply understanding of learning styles to the design and delivery of professional development/educational workshops</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C3</td>
<td>Represent professional development/learning needs of diverse university employee population through attendance at or participation on departmental and university committees (<em>limited so far</em>)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**D. Demonstrate a commitment to organizational success.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>NI</th>
<th>NS</th>
<th>NA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D1</td>
<td>Exhibit a commitment to continuous quality and process improvement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D2</td>
<td>Demonstrate flexibility and adaptability to change</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D3</td>
<td>Demonstrate commitment to customer orientation and excellence through professional actions and behaviors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D4</td>
<td>Lead/initiate improvements in both process and content in area of responsibility</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D5</td>
<td>Lead/initiate improvements in both process and content in the development of the organizational climate and culture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**E. Promote respect and the practice of civility in the workplace.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>NI</th>
<th>NS</th>
<th>NA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E1</td>
<td>Develop positive working relationships with staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E2</td>
<td>Develop positive working relationships with collaborative partners and customers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E3</td>
<td>Demonstrate respect for others through personal actions and behavior</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E4</td>
<td>Recognize others’ achievements and contributions to the workplace</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 6. Position Description Example*
**ACTION II: Creating Operating Principles**

Defining a set of operating principles can be an early step in creating a more positive climate for working and learning. A number of departments and administrative units on campus have identified their operating principles. Operating principles articulate the values that define how things are done within an organization. According to Spencer (1989), these include:

- How the organization relates to [those it serves]
- How it relates to its product or service
- How members of the organization relate to each other
- What is valued
- What is discouraged (p. 128).

Senge (1990) uses the term “core values.” The question, he says, is “How do we want to act, consistent with our mission [purpose], along the path to achieving our vision [for the future].” Senge quotes the leader of a large organization:

Core values are necessary to help people with day-to-day decision-making….People need ‘guiding stars’ to navigate and make decisions day to day. But core values are only helpful if they can be translated into concrete behaviors (p. 225).

A common question that has been used on campus to help departments and units identify operating principles is, “What values, beliefs, principle do we share about: the work we do, how we conduct business, how we treat each other and how we treat those we serve?”

 Organizations and groups sometimes take action that is inconsistent with their operating principles. Also, individuals may act in a way that is not consistent with those principles. These situations offer the opportunity to revisit the principles and either affirm them or decide if alternatives exist that are more congruent. (Such discussions require a confident leader.)

For organizations interested in identifying operating principles or core values, it may be helpful to know that the list of values that are truly shared may be short. It is better to identify a few principles that have widespread support than a long list of everyone’s favorites, but about which there is little consensus.

Operating principles look very different from department to department or office to office. Various terms are used synonymously to describe them such as “guiding principles” or “principles of practices.” Samples are shown in Figures 7-11. Following the examples are suggestions on how to identify operating principles.
The staff of the Wisconsin Union’s Central Reservations Office (CRO) identified guiding principles shown in Figure 8.

**Central Reservations Office (CRO) Guiding Principles**

As staff of the Wisconsin Union Central Reservations Office, we would like to work in an environment where:

- Each individual is considerate, open minded and takes responsibility for their own actions
- The group values each individual’s talents and contributions.
- Through these guiding principles:
- Staff are friendly, professional and collaborative
- We work together towards our well being as well as the customers’.

**School of Human Ecology Values and Operating Principles**

Our values and operating principles:

- We are deeply committed to enhancing development of students.
- We prepare graduates to assume leadership positions in their personal, civic and professional lives.
- We value the complementary relationship of professional and liberal arts education.
- We believe that teaching, research, creative innovation and outreach are enhanced when they are integrated.
- We recognize that all members of the School contribute to its mission.
- We are committed to creating a supportive working and learning environment.
- We value our long history as part of the land grant mission of this university and the contribution of the home economics profession to our current mission.
- We are caretakers of unique university assets including care facilities for children and a collection of historic textiles that directly contribute to the implementation of our mission and are important to the community.
- We value our many and diverse connections with other units, departments and disciplines of the University in our programs, research and outreach.
- We believe our endeavors must extend beyond the university into the various public, private, for profit, not for profit and professional communities to which we are related.

*Figure 7. SoHE Values and Operating Principles, Strategic Plan, 2000-2005*

*Figure 8. CRO guiding principles*
Operating principles for the Office of Quality Improvement are shown in Figure 9.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Office of Quality Improvement (OQI) Operating Principles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Following is a list of operating principles that underlie all aspects of how the Office of Quality Improvement conducts daily business. There is consensus among all members of the OQI staff that these values are critical for us to honor now and in the coming years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Achieving the outcomes desired by those we serve is our paramount concern. Processes are means to ends, not ends in themselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- We listen to our clients and are committed to meeting and exceeding their expectations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- We recognize the value of time and continually strive to learn and use efficient planning and improvement approaches to save time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- To foster creative change, we guide our clients in challenging basic assumptions, exploring alternatives, and taking risks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Diversity of people, personalities, backgrounds, views, and talents adds value to planning and improvement efforts and is sought, celebrated, supported and promoted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- We recognize our responsibility to model best practices of a quality-driven organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Each staff member is essential to the work of the whole and can add value to every encounter. We achieve an effective balance between individual excellence/specialization and collaboration within our office.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- We work together, sharing ideas, successes, and failures so that we also learn together and ultimately serve our customers more effectively. As individuals, we continually challenge ourselves to grow and learn new skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- In documenting and sharing success stories, we protect the confidentiality of departments, offices, and other clients with sensitive issues or problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- We highly value honesty, trust and mutual respect in our interactions with each other and those we serve. Problems are solved through direct and open communication between individuals.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 9. OQI Operating Principles*

Using a very different approach, Professor Warren Porter, while serving as chair of the Department of Zoology, shared his own values with faculty and staff and invited them to operate within those same principles. (Examples included, “Promote honesty without fear, encourage risk taking, keep communication real and open.”) Porter credited authors Arnold and Plas (1993) with helping him crystallize and articulate these principles.
When Jeff Nicholson assumed the position of Director of the Physician Assistant Program in 2001, he presented his own vision of the role or program director beginning with the interview process. This statement reflects not only the roles and responsibilities, but also underlying values about communication, consensus, work ethic, morale, and the like. See Figure 10.

### Vision of My Role As Director of the Physician Assistant Program

- Builds morale
- Facilitates open communication
- Emphasis on team approach—consensus-building
- Takes pride in faculty—publicly acknowledges accomplishments of faculty
- Promotes the program publicly and privately
- Promotes the profession, especially within our own institution
- Encourages research and publication
- Attempts to further own clinical, professional and leadership skills
- Sets the example of work ethic
- Is forthright
- Expects to earn respect, not assume it
- Does not abuse role/authority
- Treat each faculty fairly and impartially
- Promotes student morale, leadership development, participation in professional organizations, and projects
- Acquires resources so the faculty can meet their individual goals as well as program goals

*Figure 10. Director’s Vision of Role*
Identifying Operating Principles

It can be helpful to have an outside facilitator assist the group in clarifying its operating principles. However, any faculty or staff member with skill in group facilitation could serve in the role of facilitator.

1. Convene department or office members. Explain purpose.
2. Ask members to respond in writing to this question, “What values, beliefs, principles do we share in this department/office about: the work we do, how we conduct business, how we treat each other and how we treat those we serve?”
3. Have members break into groups of 3 or 4 and discuss their lists, and identify no more than ten values, principles, beliefs that all members agree are important for the department/office to honor. These are written on 5 x 8 cards.
4. All cards are read by the facilitator and then grouped in clusters according to similarity.
5. The final step is deciding together on a name, title or brief statement for each cluster. A small group may take responsibility after the meeting for polishing the language of each principle while retaining the essential idea(s).

Office of Human Resource Development (OHRD) Principles of Practice

The Office of Human Resource Development at UW-Madison strives to advance these principles in our daily interactions with others.

**Principle 1: Community through Respect and Civility**
It is critical to promote respect and the practice of civility in the workplace community.

**Principle 2: Excellence through Diversity**
Diversity of gender, ethnicity, disability, religion, sexual orientation, culture, position, job function, and years of service are crucial components in the pursuit of excellence.

**Principle 3: Success through Learning**
Continuous professional development is vital to individual and organizational success.

*Figure 11. OHRD principles of practice*
Keeping Operating Principles In the Forefront

The fact that a group discusses and publicly identifies operating principles usually creates a stronger sense of commitment to those values. In addition, departments, offices, and groups on campus have taken these steps:

- Included operating principles in strategic plans, on web sites, in program brochures and public documents. (The Office of Human Resource Development (OHRD) used its principles of practice shown in Figure 11 as one of the foundations of its strategic planning.)
- Shared them with new faculty and staff
- Created posters displaying operating principles
- Periodically evaluated how the department or office is doing in manifesting its operating principles
- Used operating principles as a guide in addressing conflict

As more new members join the department or office, it will be necessary to revisit the operating principles and update them.

Campus Resources

Two campus resources that can help identify operating principles are the Employee Assistance Office http://wiscinfo.doit.wisc.edu/eao/ and the Office of Quality Improvement http://www.wisc.edu/improve/.

References


**ACTION III: Community-Building Activities**

A characteristic of effective academic departments is that effort is devoted to department-building opportunities (Chabot, 2002). This refers to activities specifically devoted to strengthening a sense of community and which extend beyond operational responsibilities that every department must fulfill. The same would apply to administrative units and offices. Examples include:

- Seminars and special symposia
- Unit-wide professional development experiences
- Faculty/Staff meetings
- Newsletters
- Regular social events
- Communal space if possible (mail room, coffee room, etc.)
- Others

*Figure 12. WCER Annual Event*
The Wisconsin Center on Education Research (WCER) which is one a top recipients of extramural funds has a long tradition of community-building. Each year a cooking event is held which involves the entire center. Traditionally the men of the center did the cooking and even produced a cookbook. Professor Paul Baker says, “…each year’s cooking event produces a slightly different lineup of cooks and a slightly different set of guests. I would imagine that some folks may meet for the first time at this event…”

Lois Opalewsi, a 28-year WCER employee, observes that “People don’t come to this event because it’s a free lunch—it’s part of the culture here. This is a good place to work and to be, and our social events are one reason that’s true.”

Early in her tenure as Dean of the School of Human Ecology, Robin Douthitt created a coffee room where faculty and staff could meet informally over coffee, tea and hot chocolate. The coffee room is frequently mentioned by both faculty and staff in discussions of how SoHE is strengthening community and enhancing the work climate.

Accounting Services launched an intensive effort to improve climate earlier this year and one of the outcomes was the installation and maintenance of a bottled water system for the staff which is located in a communal space.

Although no single event by itself can create a sense of community, these efforts combined with other purposeful actions described in the guide and on the Provost’s web site can stimulate and strengthen development of a positive climate.

References


ACTION IV: Mentoring

Serving as mentor for someone else or becoming a mentee can enhance campus climate in several ways. First, the experience has the potential to expand both the mentor’s and mentee’s understanding of how the campus is experienced by others. Raised awareness can then lead to more effort to create a welcoming community. Best practices in creating a positive environment can be shared by mentors and mentees, thereby increasing the overall campus effort toward improving climate. Finally, a positive experience as a mentor or mentee is of great value to both parties in terms of professional development and personal satisfaction.

Opportunities to participate in a mentoring program abound. Following are some examples.

Mentoring Programs for Students

- Students of color and underrepresented groups
  http://www.lssaa.wisc.edu/mentor/inex.shtml

- Undergraduate student research
  http://www.lssaa.wisc.edu/urs/

- Mentoring of current students by alumni (Physics, Bacteriology, Geology, School of Education, College of Engineering, etc.)

- Partners for Success for graduate students of color
  http://info.gradsch.wisc.edu/mp/partners/partnershome.html

Mentoring Programs for Faculty and Staff

- Non-represented Classified Staff Mentoring Program

- Academic Staff Mentoring Program
  http://www.physics.wisc.edu/people/mentor/

- Women Faculty Mentoring Program

- Others?
PART III. COLLABORATIVE TOOLS

The conversations that take place in a department or office are both indicators and determinates of climate. This section provides three tools for encouraging conversations that can enhance climate—Dialogue, Appreciative Inquiry, and Critical Friends Reflection Process.

Dialogue

Engaging in a dialogue is not the same thing as engaging in a discussion. “Discussion” is a word whose origins mean “to break apart.” Discussions are conversations in which people highlight and defend their differences perhaps hoping that this concussive process will illuminate productive options. Often discussions polarize people even more and reinforce the problems. Certainly discussion is the preferred style of discourse in higher education. Defense of our ideas, hypotheses, and conclusions is second nature in an academic environment.

Dialogue is something different. It is intended to explore the field of thought within a group of people. The word comes from Greek and signifies a “flow of meaning” (Isaacs, 1999).

The essence of dialogue is an inquiry that surfaces ideas, perceptions, and understanding that people do not already have. This is not the norm: We typically try to come to important conversations well prepared. A hallmark for many of us in that there are ‘no surprises’ in our meetings. Yet this is the antithesis of dialogue. You have a dialogue when you explore the uncertainties and questions that no one has answers to. In this way you begin to think together (p. 2).

The late David Bohm, a distinguished physicist, known for his work on quantum theory and relativity theory, was an early champion of dialogue. He set out three basic conditions for dialogue:

- **Participants must suspend their assumptions**
  This means that people are willing to hold their own assumptions up for exploration, but also be willing to explore the assumptions of others with the goal of creating some common meaning. Bohm used the metaphor of assumptions suspended in the air before us, as if hanging on a string a few feet before our noses.

- **Participants must view each other as colleagues or peers**
  Regardless of the formal positions people may hold, in a dialogue people appreciate that they are involved in a mutual quest for understanding. “Hierarchy has no place in a Dialogue” (Bohm, Factor, & Garrett, 1991).

- **A facilitator must be present, at least at first**
  The facilitator ensures that the dialogue remains “dialogic” (i.e. doesn’t become an ordinary discussion) and helps the group move ahead, unobtrusively, if it gets stuck.

Bohm, Factor, and Garrett (1991) suggest groups of no smaller than 20 and no larger than 40 for dialogue. They recommend that people be seated in a circle and that the optimum amount of time for a dialogue session is two hours. They recommend trying at least three sessions before deciding whether or not dialogue is accomplishing its purpose of creating shared meaning. Participants are encouraged to speak to the center of the circle rather than to the group or anyone in particular.
Campus Climate

Isaacs also (Senge et al. 1994, p. 363) insists that a skilled facilitator is essential.

Factor (1994) later said that a facilitator is not necessary or even desirable for a dialogue. He also said that in his experience, frustration was an inevitable and necessary part of a dialogue.

The painful experience of frustration is, therefore, something that needs to be sustained in the dialogue so that its meaning can be displayed and understood. I have come to suspect that frustration may have to be seen as the crucial motivating force that can drive the dialogue deeper into unknown territory and thus toward the experience of creative insight….It's all very non-linear and ambiguous and frustrating and doesn't sit easily with our normal cultural assumptions.[n.p.]

Dialogue is not appropriate for every situation, but it can be a powerful means of creating understanding and perhaps ultimately leading to new opportunities that would not have emerged in a regular discussion. Action, however, is not the purpose of dialogue. Thus people need to be clear on the purpose, so that they are not expecting that a decision will be reached in the process of a dialogue. (Consider the converse--the chagrin experienced when one is in a meeting where a decision must be made and it is more like a dialogue.) “This sort of dialogue is about the process of thought, not its products” (Factor, 1994).

An overview of dialogue by Bohm, Factor, and Garrett (1991) follows as Figure 13. It is a lengthy segment. Presented in the voice of the originator of dialogue, David Bohm, the piece adds immeasurably to the richness of the discussion. (The site from which it is taken grants reprint permission.)
Dialogue — A Proposal
By David Bohm

Dialogue, as we are choosing to use the word, is a way of exploring the roots of the many crises that face humanity today. It enables inquiry into, and understanding of, the sorts of processes that fragment and interfere with real communication between individuals, nations and even different parts of the same organization. In our modern culture men and women are able to interact with one another in many ways: they can sing, dance or play together with little difficulty but their ability to talk together about subjects that matter deeply to them seems invariably to lead to dispute, division and often to violence. In our view this condition points to a deep and pervasive defect in the process of human thought.

In Dialogue, a group of people can explore the individual and collective presuppositions, ideas, beliefs, and feelings that subtly control their interactions. It provides an opportunity to participate in a process that displays communication successes and failures. It can reveal the often puzzling patterns of incoherence that lead the group to avoid certain issues or, on the other hand, to insist, against all reason, on standing and defending opinions about particular issues.

Dialogue is a way of observing, collectively, how hidden values and intentions can control our behavior, and how unnoticed cultural differences can clash without our realizing what is occurring. It can therefore be seen as an arena in which collective learning takes place and out of which a sense of increased harmony, fellowship and creativity can arise.

Because the nature of Dialogue is exploratory, its meaning and its methods continue to unfold. No firm rules can be laid down for conducting a Dialogue because its essence is learning - not as the result of consuming a body of information or doctrine imparted by an authority, nor as a means of examining or criticizing a particular theory or programme, but rather as part of an unfolding process of creative participation between peers. However, we feel that it is important that its meaning and background be understood.

Our approach to this form of Dialogue arose out of a series of conversations begun in 1983 in which we inquired into David Bohm's suggestion that a pervasive incoherence in the process of human thought is the essential cause of the endless crises affecting mankind. This led us, in succeeding years, to initiate a number of larger conversations and seminars held in different countries with various groups of people which in turn began to take the form of Dialogues.

As we proceeded it became increasingly clear to us that this process of Dialogue is a powerful means of understanding how thought functions. We became aware that we live in a world produced almost entirely by human enterprise and thus, by human thought. The room in which we sit, the language in which these words are written, our national boundaries, our systems of value, and even that which we take to be our direct perceptions of reality are essentially manifestations of the way human beings think and have thought. We realize that without a willingness to explore this situation and to gain a deep insight into it, the real crises of our time cannot be confronted, nor can we find anything more than temporary solutions to the vast array of human problems that now confront us.

We are using the word "thought" here to signify not only the products of our conscious intellect but also our feelings, emotions, intentions and desires. It also includes such subtle, conditioned manifestations of learning as those that allow us to make sense of a succession of separate scenes within a cinema film or to translate the abstract symbols on road signs along with the tacit, non-verbal processes used in
developing basic, mechanical skills such as riding a bicycle. In essence thought, in this sense of the word, is the active response of memory in every phase of life. Virtually all of our knowledge is produced, displayed, communicated, transformed and applied in thought.

To further clarify this approach, we propose that, with the aid of a little close attention, even that which we call rational thinking can be seen to consist largely of responses conditioned and biased by previous thought. If we look carefully at what we generally take to be reality we begin to see that it includes a collection of concepts, memories and reflexes colored by our personal needs, fears, and desires, all of which are limited and distorted by the boundaries of language and the habits of our history, sex and culture. It is extremely difficult to disassemble this mixture or to ever be certain whether what we are perceiving - or what we may think about those perceptions - is at all accurate.

What makes this situation so serious is that thought generally conceals this problem from our immediate awareness and succeeds in generating a sense that the way each of us interprets the world is the only sensible way in which it can be interpreted. What is needed is a means by which we can slow down the process of thought in order to be able to observe it while it is actually occurring.

Our physical bodies have this capability but thought seems to lack it. If you raise your arm you know that you are willing the act, that somebody else is not doing it for or to you. This is called proprioception. We can be aware of our body’s actions while they are actually occurring but we generally lack this sort of skill in the realm of thought. For example, we do not notice that our attitude toward another person may be profoundly affected by the way we think and feel about someone else who might share certain aspects of his behavior or even of his appearance. Instead, we assume that our attitude toward her arises directly from her actual conduct. The problem of thought is that the kind of attention required to notice this incoherence seems seldom to be available when it is most needed.

Why dialogue

Dialogue is concerned with providing a space within which such attention can be given. It allows a display of thought and meaning that makes possible a kind of collective proprioception or immediate mirroring back of both the content of thought and the less apparent, dynamic structures that govern it. In Dialogue this can be experienced both individually and collectively. Each listener is able to reflect back to each speaker, and to the rest of the group, a view of some of the assumptions and unspoken implications of what is being expressed along with that which is being avoided. It creates the opportunity for each participant to examine the preconceptions, prejudices and the characteristic patterns that lie behind his or her thoughts, opinions, beliefs and feelings, along with the roles he or she tends habitually to play. And it offers an opportunity to share these insights.

The word "dialogue" derives from two roots: "dia" which means "through" and "logos" which means "the word", or more particularly, "the meaning of the word." The image it gives is of a river of meaning flowing around and through the participants. Any number of people can engage in Dialogue - one can even have a Dialogue with oneself - but the sort of Dialogue that we are suggesting involves a group of between twenty and forty people seated in a circle talking together.

Some notion of the significance of such a Dialogue can be found in reports of hunter-gather bands of about this size, who, when they met to talk together, had no apparent agenda nor any predetermined
Dialogue — A Proposal
By David Bohm

purpose. Nevertheless, such gatherings seemed to provide and reinforce a kind of cohesive bond or fellowship that allowed its participants to know what was required of them without the need for instruction or much further verbal interchange. In other words, what might be called a coherent culture of shared meaning emerged within the group. It is possible that this coherence existed in the past for human communities before technology began to mediate our experience of the living world.

Dr. Patrick de Mare, a psychiatrist working in London, has conducted pioneering work along similar lines under modern conditions. He set up groups of about the same size, the purpose of which he described in terms of "sociotherapy". His view is that the primary cause of the deep and pervasive sickness in our society can be found at the socio-cultural level and that such groups can serve as microcultures from which the source of the infirmity of our large civilization can be exposed. Our experience has led us to extend this notion of Dialogue by emphasizing and giving special attention to the fundamental role of the activity of thought in the origination and maintenance of this condition.

As a microcosm of the large culture, Dialogue allows a wide spectrum of possible relationships to be revealed. It can disclose the impact of society on the individual and the individual's impact on society. It can display how power is assumed or given away and how pervasive are the generally unnoticed rules of the system that constitutes our culture. But it is most deeply concerned with understanding the dynamics of how thought conceives such connections.

It is not concerned with deliberately trying to alter or change behavior nor to get the participants to move toward a predetermined goal. Any such attempt would distort and obscure the processes that the Dialogue has set out to explore. Nevertheless, changes do occur because observed thought behaves differently from unobserved thought. Dialogue can thus become an opportunity for thought and feeling to play freely in a continuously of deeper or more general meaning. Any subject can be included and no content is excluded. Such an activity is very rare in our culture.

**Purpose and meaning**

Usually people gather either to accomplish a task or to be entertained, both of which can be categorized as predetermined purposes. But by its very nature Dialogue is not consistent with any such purposes beyond the interest of its participants in the unfoldment and revelation of the deeper collective meanings that may be revealed. These may on occasion be entertaining, enlightening, lead to new insights or address existing problems. But surprisingly, in its early stages, the dialogue will often lead to the experience of frustration.

A group of people invited to give their time and serious attention to a task that has no apparent goal and is not being led in any detectable direction may quickly find itself experiencing a great deal of anxiety or annoyance. This can lead to the desire on the part of some, either to break up the group or to attempt to take control and give it a direction. Previously unacknowledged purposes will reveal themselves. Strong feelings will be exposed, along with the thoughts that underlie them. Fixed positions may be taken and polarization will often result. This is all part of the process. It is what sustains the Dialogue and keeps it constantly extending creatively into new domains.
In an assembly of between twenty and forty people, extremes of frustration, anger, conflict or other difficulties may occur, but in a group of this size such problems can be contained with relative ease. In fact, they can become the central focus of the exploration in what might be understood as a kind of "meta-dialogue", aimed at clarifying the process of Dialogue itself.

As sensitivity and experience increase, a perception of shared meaning emerges in which people find that they are neither opposing one another, nor are they simply interacting. Increasing trust between members of the group - and trust in the process itself - leads to the expression of the sorts of thoughts and feelings that are usually kept hidden. There is no imposed consensus, nor is there any attempt to avoid conflict. No single individual or sub-group is able to achieve dominance because every single subject, including domination and submission, is always available to be considered.

Participants find that they are involved in an ever changing and developing pool of common meaning. A shared content of consciousness emerges which allows a level of creativity and insight that is not generally available to individuals or to groups that interact in more familiar ways. This reveals an aspect of Dialogue that Patrick de Mare has called koinonia, a word meaning "impersonal fellowship", which was originally used to describe the early form of Athenian democracy in which all the free men of the city gathered to govern themselves. As this fellowship is experienced it begins to take precedence over the more overt content of the conversation (sic). It is an important stage in the Dialogue, a moment of increased coherence, where the group is able to move beyond its perceived blocks or limitations and into new territory. But it is also a point at which a group may begin to relax and bask in the "high" that accompanies the experience. This is the point that sometimes causes confusion between Dialogue and some forms of psychotherapy. Participants may want to hold the group together in order to preserve the pleasurable feeling of security and belonging that accompanies the state. This is similar to that sense of community often reached in therapy groups or in team building workshops where it is taken to be the evidence of the success of the method used. Beyond such a point, however, lie even more significant and subtle realms of creativity, intelligence and understanding that can be approached only by persisting in the process of inquiry and risking re-entry into areas of potentially chaotic or frustrating uncertainty.

What dialogue is not

Dialogue is not discussion, a word that shares its root meaning with "percussion" and "concussion," both of which involve breaking things up. Nor is it debate. These forms of conversation contain an implicit tendency to point toward a goal, to hammer out an agreement, to try to solve a problem or have one's opinion prevail. It is also not a "salon", which is a kind of gathering that is both informal and most often characterized by an intention to entertain, exchange friendship, gossip and other information. Although the word "dialogue" has often been used in similar ways, its deeper, root meaning implies that it is not primarily interested in any of this.

Dialogue is not a new name for T-groups or sensitivity training, although it is superficially similar to these and other related forms of group work. Its consequences may be psychotherapeutic but it does not attempt to focus on removing the emotional blocks of any one participant nor to teach, train or analyze.
Nevertheless, it is an arena in which learning and the dissolution of blocks can and often do take place. It is not a technique for problem solving or conflict resolution, although problems may well be resolved during the course of a Dialogue, or perhaps later, as a result of increased understanding and fellowship that occurs among the participants. It is, as we have emphasized, primarily a means of exploring the field of thought.

Dialogue resembles a number of other forms of group activity and may at times include aspects of them but in fact it is something new to our culture. We believe that it is an activity that might well prove vital to the future health of our civilization.

How to start a dialogue

Suspension

Suspension of thoughts, impulses, judgments, etc., lies at the very heart of Dialogue. It is one of its most important new aspects. It is not easily grasped because the activity is both unfamiliar and subtle. Suspension involves attention, listening and looking and is essential to exploration. Speaking is necessary, of course, for without it there would be little in the Dialogue to explore. But the actual process of exploration takes place during listening -- not only to others but to oneself. Suspension involves exposing your reactions, impulses, feelings and opinions in such a way that they can be seen and felt within your own psyche and also be reflected back by others in the group. It does not mean repressing or suppressing or, even, postponing them. It means, simply, giving them your serious attention so that their structures can be noticed while they are actually taking place. If you are able to give attention to, say, the strong feelings that might accompany the expression of a particular thought - either your own or anothers -- and to sustain that attention, the activity of the thought process will tend to slow you down. This may permit you to begin to see the deeper meanings underlying your thought process and to sense the often incoherent structure of any action that you might otherwise carry out automatically. Similarly, if a group is able to suspend such feelings and give its attention to them then the overall process that flows from thought, to feeling, to acting-out within the group, can also slow down and reveal its deeper, more subtle meanings along with any of its implicit distortions, leading to what might be described as a new kind of coherent, collective intelligence.

To suspend thought, impulse, judgment, etc., requires serious attention to the overall process we have been considering -- both on one's own and within a group. This involves what may at first appear to be an arduous kind of work. But if this work is sustained, one's ability to give such attention constantly develops so that less and less effort is required.

Numbers

A Dialogue works best with between twenty and forty people seated facing one another in a single circle. A group of this size allows for the emergence and observation of different subgroups or subcultures that can help to reveal some of the ways in which thought operatives collectively. This is
important because the differences between such subcultures are often an unrecognized cause of failed communication and conflict. Smaller groups, on the other hand, lack the requisite diversity needed to reveal these tendencies and will generally emphasize more familiar personal and family roles and relationships.

With a few groups we have had as many as sixty participants, but with that large a number the process becomes unwieldy. Two concentric circles are required to seat everybody so that they can see and hear one another. This places those in the back row at a disadvantage, and fewer participants have an opportunity to speak.

We might mention here that some participants tend to talk a great deal while others find difficulty in speaking up in groups. It is worth remembering, though, that the word "participation" has two meanings: "to partake of", and "to take part in". Listening is at least as important as speaking. Often the quieter participants will begin to speak up more as they become familiar with the Dialogue experience while the more dominant individuals will find themselves tending to speak less and listen more.

Duration

A Dialogue needs some time to get going. It is an unusual way of participating with others and some sort of introduction is required in which the meaning of the whole activity can be communicated. But even with a clear introduction, when the group begins to talk together it will often experience confusion, frustration, and a self-conscious concern as to whether or not it is actually engaging in Dialogue. It would be very optimistic to assume that a Dialogue would begin to flow or move toward any great depth during its first meeting. It is important to point out that perseverance is required.

In setting up Dialogues it is useful at the start to agree the length of the session and for someone to take responsibility for calling time at the end. We have found that about two hours is optimum. Longer sessions risk a fatigue factor which tends to diminish the quality of participation. Many T-groups use extended "marathon" sessions which use this fatigue factor to break down some of the inhibitions of the participants. Dialogue on the other hand, is more concerned with exploring the social constructs and inhibitions that affect our communications rather than attempting to bypass them.

The more regularly the group can meet, the deeper and more meaningful will be the territory explored. Weekends have often been used to allow a sequence of sessions, but if the Dialogue is to continue for an extended period of time we suggest that there be at least a one week interval between each succeeding session to allow time for individual reflection and further thinking. There is no limit to how long a Dialogue group may continue its exploration. But it would be contrary to the spirit of Dialogue for it to become fixed or institutionalized. This suggests openness to constantly shifting membership, changing schedules, or other manifestations of a serious attention to an implicit rigidity which might take hold. Or merely, the dissolving of a group after some period.

Leadership

A Dialogue is essentially a conversation between equals. Any controlling authority, no matter how carefully or sensitively applied, will tend to hinder and inhibit the free play of thought and the often
delicate and subtle feelings that would otherwise be shared. Dialogue is vulnerable to being manipulated, but its spirit is not consistent with this. Hierarchy has no place in Dialogue.

Nevertheless, in the early stages some guidance is required to help the participants realize the subtle differences between Dialogue and other forms of group process. At least one or, preferably two, experienced facilitators are essential. Their role should be to occasionally point out situations that might seem to be presenting sticking points for the group, in other words, to aid the process of collective proprioception, but these interventions should never be manipulative nor obtrusive. Leaders are participants just like everybody else. Guidance, when it is felt to be necessary, should take the form of "leading from behind" and preserve the intention of making itself redundant as quickly as possible.

However, this proposal is not intended as a substitute for experienced facilitators. We suggest, though, that its contents be reviewed with the group during its initial meeting so that all the participants can be satisfied that they are embarking upon the same experiment.

**Subject matter**

The Dialogue can begin with any topic of interest to the participants. If some members of the group feel that certain exchanges or subjects are disturbing or not fitting, it is important that they express these thoughts within the Dialogue. No content should be excluded.

Often participants will gossip or express their dissatisfaction or frustration after a session but it is exactly this sort of material that offers the most fertile ground for moving the Dialogue into deeper realms of meaning and coherence beyond the superficiality of "group think", good manners or dinner party conversation.

**Dialogue in existing organizations**

So far we have been primarily discussing Dialogues that bring together individuals from a variety of backgrounds rather than from existing organizations. But its value may also be perceived by members of an organization as a way of increasing and enriching their own corporate creativity.

In this case the process of Dialogue will change considerably. Members of an existing organization will have already developed a number of different sorts of relationship between one another and with their organization as a whole. Here may be a pre-existing hierarchy or a felt need to protect one's colleagues, team or department. There may be a fear of expressing thoughts that might be seen as critical of those who are higher in the organization or of norms within the organizational culture. Careers or the social acceptance of individual members might appear to be threatened by participation in a process that emphasizes transparency, openness, honesty, spontaneity, and the sort of deep interest in others that can draw out areas of vulnerability that may long have been kept hidden.

In an existing organization the Dialogue will very probably have to begin with an exploration of all the doubts and fears that participation will certainly raise. Members may have to begin with a fairly specific agenda from which they eventually can be encouraged to diverge. This differs from the approach taken.
with one-time or self-selected groupings in which participants are free to begin with any subject matter. But as we have mentioned no content should be excluded because the impulse to exclude a subject is itself rich material for the inquiry.

Most organizations have inherent, predetermined purposes and goals that are seldom questioned. At first this might also seem to be inconsistent with the free and open play of thought that is so intrinsic to the Dialogue process. However, this too can be overcome if the participants are helped from the very beginning to realize that considerations of such subjects can prove essential to the well-being of the organization and can in turn help to increase the participants self-esteem along with the regard in which he or she may be held by others.

The creative potential of Dialogue is great enough to allow a temporary suspension of any of the structures and relationships that go to make up an organization.

Finally, we would like to make clear that we are not proposing Dialogue as a panacea nor as a method or technique designed to succeed all other forms of social interaction. Not everyone will find it useful nor, certainly, will it be useful in all contexts. There is great value to be found in many group psychotherapeutic methods and there are many tasks that require firm leadership and a well-formed organizational structure.

Much of the sort of work we have described here can be accomplished independently, and we would encourage this. Many of the ideas suggested in this proposal are still the subjects of our own continuing exploration. We do not advise that they be taken as fixed but rather that they be inquired into as a part of your own Dialogue.

The spirit of Dialogue is one of free play, a sort of collective dance of the mind that, nevertheless, has immense power and reveals coherent purpose. Once begun it becomes continuing adventure that can open the way to significant and creative change.
**How Might We Use Dialogue to Improve Campus Climate?**

Dialogue—seeking to understand and create meaning together—can be a tool for both discussing campus climate and for creating a safe venue for examining almost any issue facing a department or office. One UW-Madison school used dialogue as a means of discussing diversity issues among faculty, staff and students. The effort to understand how others saw the same situation through dialogue was the foundation for action.

Former Chancellor David Ward used this technique in regularly scheduled dialogues about the campus priorities. These dialogues were wide-ranging conversations intended to capture the thinking of those directly involved in advancing the priorities and uncovering the assumptions of the group. The dialogue sessions on priorities of the strategic plan were not debates about what should be done, but rather intellectual and emotional explorations of what we were doing and why. The discussion during the dialogue illuminated potential actions, but immediate action was not the aim.


Gradually people recognize that they have a choice: they can *suspend* their views, loosening the grip of their certainty about all views, including their own. They can observe the ways they have habitually made and acted upon, assumptions…They can question the total process of thought and feeling that produced the conflict—and everything else—in the room: ‘Let’s see where this divergence, this chaos, this instability came from’ That will move them toward dialogue. (pp. 361-362)

A rule of thumb for a dialogue is that when people begin to debate with each other, it is no longer a dialogue. Thus either a facilitator or group members themselves need to be attuned to argumentation. One way to redirect a conversation that is turning into a traditional discussion is to ask anyone who has challenged another’s point of view to rephrase what he or she has just said in the form of a question. For example, faculty member A says, “I don’t agree. I think we should be doing XYZ.”

The facilitator or anyone in the group courageous enough to attempt to maintain the dialogue could ask faculty member A, “So that we keep this a dialogue rather than an argument, could you rephrase what you just said in the form of a question to B?”

Almost any exploratory question (vs. confrontational question) will help move away from argumentation. Faculty member A could say, “Could you talk more about your assumptions about the cause of the problem? or Could you explain how your own experiences have led you to your conclusions? I would like to know more about the possible unintended consequences of doing ABC. What are your assumptions about it?”

When A has had a chance to answer the question(s) and hopefully is answering in a similar spirit of exploration, B has the opportunity to examine his or her own assumptions. The facilitator could ask A, “What are your underlying assumptions about the problem? About XYZ as a solution? What in your own experiences have led you to your conclusions?” This may not necessarily be a pure dialogue as David Bohn envisioned, but it is in the spirit of dialogue and it may be as close as a working group in a particular department or office can come to Bohn’s ideal.
In summary, there should be, within a dialogue, no effort to force people to come to agreement or to try to talk anyone out of their beliefs (Isaacs in Senge et al, 1994). The aim is to unearth and examine the implicit assumptions that underlie opinions. What may emerge is a pattern of understanding and some areas where there is shared agreement and new insights into possibilities.

References


Appreciative Inquiry

One can read *The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry* in less than an hour. It will probably take longer than that to fully realize what powerful tools it offers. The Appreciative Inquiry assumption described by Sue Annis Hammond (1996) is that in every organization something works and that change can be intentionally shaped by identifying what works [emphasis added]. A tenet of Appreciative Inquiry is that as organizations change to adapt to new realities, they should take with them those beliefs, values and practices that have worked and that give people energy and inspiration.

Hammond says that the act of asking questions of an organization or group influences the group in some way. Thus the choice of questions becomes exceedingly important. (See http://www.thinbook.com.)

Berhard J. Mohr (2001) similarly emphasizes that organizations grow in the direction of what they repeatedly ask questions about. In Mohr’s recent article on Appreciative Inquiry in *The Systems Thinker*, he says, “Research in sociology has shown that when people study problems and conflicts, the number and severity of problems they identify actually increase, but when they study human ideals and achievements, peak experiences, and best practices, these things—not the conflicts tend to flourish.” (p. 2)

Thus Mohr offers suggestions for “appreciative inquirers.” The next time someone suggests critiquing a meeting, ask if he or she, “would be willing to have everyone describe what they felt were the best parts of the meeting and offer suggestions for how the group can do more of that in future meetings.” Similarly in evaluating someone’s performance, ask, “Tell me about the times when you have felt most competent and effective,” and “What do you think you and I could do to increase the frequency of those times in the future?”

The Office of Human Resource Development began its recent strategic planning process by asking, “What are the processes and functions of OHRD that really work well? Where, when and how do we do our best work? This question helped the office focus its efforts and determine how to function with diminishing resources.

A UW-Madison campus network has been created to support its members in using Appreciative Inquiry. The group provides learning opportunities and shares literature on using Appreciative Inquiry techniques in everyday work. For information, contact Jay Eckleberry at jpekblebe@facstaff.wisc.edu

References


“Critical” Friends: A Process Built on Reflection
Useful for sharpening listening skills of leaders and finding new solutions

Introduction:
The Critical Friends process can be used whenever one has an issue or question or problem for which colleagues can provide feedback, suggestions and new insights. The process focuses on developing collegial relationships, encouraging reflective practice, and rethinking leadership. This process is based in cooperative adult learning, which is often contrary to patterns established in work environments. It also addresses a situation in which many leaders find themselves – trained to work as independent units; certified as knowing all that is needed to know; feeling like the continuation of professional learning is not essential to the creation of an exciting, rich, learning environment; and that they are simply supervisors in the leadership role.

Critical in the context of the group is intended to mean “important” or “key” or “necessary.” Those who have used this process have found that many leaders are clumsy at being “critical.” They have further discovered that many leaders are trained to talk around and avoid difficult issues, not carefully confront them. The Critical Friends process provides an opportunity both to solicit and provide feedback in a manner that promotes reflective learning.

Background:
The Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University first developed the Critical Friends model for collegial dialogue. It is currently in use by an estimated 35,000 teachers, principals, and college professors in over 1,500 schools. In July 2000, the National School Reform Faculty program, which currently houses Critical Friends Groups and coordinates the training for Critical Friends Coaches, relocated to the Harmony School Education Center (HSEC) in Bloomington, Indiana.

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Each activity in the Critical Friends group contains elements of careful description, enforced thoughtful listening, and then questioning feedback – which may well be the basic elements of reflection. The feedback arrived at through the discussions also has been grouped in these ways: “Warm” feedback consists of supportive, appreciative statements about the work presented; “Cool” or more distanced feedback offers different ways to think about the work presented and/or raises questions; and “Hard” feedback challenges and extends the presenter's thinking and/or raises concerns. In general, this process utilizes time limits and agreed-upon purpose and norms help reduce interruptions in discussion and the rush-to-comment approach that our busy lives seem to promote.

The basic format for collegial dialogue is the same for each protocol: facilitator overview; presentation of observations, work or issue; clarification questions; feedback/discussion by participants (discussants); presenter reflection; debriefing of process. The questions and issues that presenters offer typically spring from feelings of concern, from moments in work without closure, and from issues for which they have not been able to find a solution through solitary thinking.

There are three roles in the Critical Friends process: facilitator, presenter, and discussants. The group can vary in size from four to seven people.
Group Member Roles

**Facilitator:**
Reviews the process at the outset, even if everyone is familiar with it. Sets time limits and keeps time carefully. Participates in discussions but is on the lookout for others who want to get in conversations. Adjusts time slightly depending on participation. May end one part early or extend another, but is aware of the need to keep time. Reminds discussants of roles, warm and cool feedback, and keeping on topic that the presenter designated. Leads debriefing process and is careful about not “shorting” this part. Is careful during the debriefing not to slip back into discussion.

**Presenter:**
Prepares an issue for consultancy. Is clear about the specific questions that should be addressed. Unlike most discussions of this nature, the presenter does not participate in the group discussion. Sits outside the group and does not maintain eye contact during the discussion but rather takes notes and gauges what is helpful and what is not. Later, is specific about the feedback that was helpful.

**Discussants:**
Address the issue brought by the presenter and give feedback that is both warm (positive) and cool (critical). The feedback should be given in a supportive tone and discussants should provide practical suggestions.

The “Consultancy” Process

The consultancy process allows colleagues to share issues confidentially and seek suggestions for positively overcoming or managing them. Consultancy creates opportunities for colleagues to find ways collaboratively around the obstacles and barriers that often limit or stifle effective action.

The process works best in smaller groups (4-7 people) where colleagues can feel comfortable sharing complex issues. Presenters share an issue, and members of the Critical Friends group offer “warm” and “cool” feedback, talking to each other not to the person who presented the issue. The presenter sits out of the group, listening, taking notes, and deciding what has been useful. The actual process (with maximum time allotted) follows.

**Step One: Facilitator Overview** (3 minutes)
- Review process
- Set time limits

**Step Two: Presenter Overview** (5 minutes)
- Share issue
- Provide context
- Frame key question for specific consideration

**Step Three: Probing or Clarifying Questions** (5 minutes)
- Group members ask more questions to learn about the issue
- Reminder, this is not a time to give advice or get into the discussion
Step Four: Discussant’s Group Discussion (12 minutes)
Group discusses issue (both warm and cool)
Presenter is silent, taking notes
Group addresses possible suggestions related to the issue

Step Five: Presenter Response (5 minutes)
Presenter responds to group feedback

Step Six: Debriefing (5 minutes)
Facilitator leads discussion, critiquing the process

Not sure if you have any issues to present?

- Ever wonder if you took the appropriate action?
- Challenged by a particular employee and not sure how to proceed?
- Looking for fresh ideas or a different approach to a challenging dilemma?
- Not sure how to follow-up with an issue that needs to be addressed?
- Have you recently been “stumped” by a situation?

These are precisely the issues that you could bring to the “Presenters” table through the Critical Friends Consultancy process.

Framing the Issue:
It is important to provide the discussants with enough information to discuss effectively and create solutions for the issue you are presenting. As you prepare your issue, consider including the following:

- Context in which the issue presents itself – does this situation come up in department meetings, or is this related to a philosophical disagreement in a particular discipline?
- Important components surrounding the case – past history between the actors, or personnel structures that affect your ability to act
- If there is a meta issue looming behind the issue?
- Your actions and/or reactions about the issue
- What you would like the group to discuss or the outcome you seek from the discussants – alternate suggestions, reinforcement for your actions, identify potential obstacles for you, etc.

Preparing to Present:
Consider bringing notes to the meeting at which you present. Remember that you only have five minutes to present your issue. Discussants do have five minutes to clarify but that is really time for them to get a better idea of the scenario. It is very important to let the group know what you want to get as a result from their discussion.
**Following Your Presentation:**
Listen carefully; take notes. Often the discussants will try to bring you back into the group, but it is more useful if you are able to distance yourself from the discussants so that you can capture all the information discussed. Hold yourself back from making judgments during the discussion as this might affect your ability to hear all the ideas and feedback.

**For the Presenter Response:**
This time portion is your opportunity to respond to the group discussion. This is not the time to continue the discussion with you involved. This is an opportunity for you to summarize your impressions of the discussion. Consider all the information gathered and identify which ideas might be useful and which ones you are unlikely to pursue.

**References**


Note: Other articles and materials were used to create this document; unfortunately, many of the materials used in this compilation did not have identifying information and therefore it was impossible to cite the original source.

**Resources**


Critical Friends Groups at the National School Reform Faculty, which is a professional development initiative of the Harmony School Education Center in Bloomington, Indiana [http://www.harmony.pvt.k12.in.us/www/cfg1.html](http://www.harmony.pvt.k12.in.us/www/cfg1.html)
PART IV. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Provost’s Web Site on Campus Climate
  http://www.provost.wisc.edu/climate

- Collection of Climate Surveys from Higher Education
  Office of Quality Improvement. Contact P.J. Barnes, barnes@bascom.wisc.edu

- How To Lead Effective Meetings
  http://www.ohrd.wisc.edu/meetings/howto1.htm