

Group-Member Capabilities

Four capabilities organize group-member decisions and actions. They are also critical to effective facilitation (Garmston, 2008).

A capability names what a person is able to do. It is different from capacity, which refers to how much one can hold. Capabilities are the metacognitive maps and models that individuals use to guide behavioral choices: when to use, how to use or not use specific skills (Dilts, 1994).

Capabilities organize and direct the application and effectiveness of knowledge and skills. With these capabilities, self-authoring individuals can then choose how to listen, how to speak and how to pay attention to others in the group.

The four group-member capabilities are (Garmston & Wellman, 2009):

1. To know one's intentions and choose congruent behaviors
2. To set aside unproductive patterns of listening, responding and inquiring
3. To know when to self-assert and when to integrate
4. To know and support the group's purposes, topics, processes and development

1. To Know One's Intentions and Choose Congruent Behaviors

Clarity of intention in the moment and over time drives attention, which in turn drives action, the what and how of a group member's meeting participation. Clarity of intention precedes and influences the other three capabilities. It is the source of impulse control, patience, strategic listening and strategic speaking.

This capability is the foundation of flexible and effective behavior. If, for example, a person's intention is to positively influence the thinking of others, various behaviors can be used congruently with this intention. In some circumstances, a skillful paraphrase conveys an attempt to understand and open the door for reciprocal understanding. In other circumstances, an inquiry into the thinking of another speaker might be more influential. In other cases, direct advocacy may be more persuasive.

Intention supports achievement of clear outcomes for tasks, processes and group development.


2. To Set Aside Unproductive Patterns of Listening, Responding and Inquiring

For each meeting participant, there are two audiences. One is external, made up of the other group members. The other is internal, made up of feelings, pictures and self-talk going on inside each individual. Group members need to continually decide which audience to serve.

Three common patterns of listening, responding and inquiring must be set-aside to support this decision and allow fuller, more non-judgmental participation:

- a) Autobiographical listening, responding and inquiring: "Me, too!"
- b) Inquisitive/curiosity listening, responding and inquiring: "Tell me more!"
- c) Solution listening, responding and inquiring: "I know what to do!"

The autobiographical frame leads to several problems in group work. The first is the filtering process that goes on when individuals try to hear another person's story through the lenses of their own experience. While this can be a source of empathy, it can also lead them to distorting and miscommunicating.



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