

Using ACT in Team Facilitation - Managing Team Based Values Discovery Processes

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ACT has the potential to be a powerful tool in team facilitation. Used well it can help to create rich and meaningful workplaces where people flourish. However much of the language used in ACT and many of the experiential exercises aren't really workable for workplace teams who view their problems very differently to clients seeking help with symptoms. This session offered practical ways of using ACT in team facilitation and explored ways to address the issues and risks that lead to intervention failures.

Note –We don't tend to tell teams we are using ACT unless they ask – we just use it as an extension of the values work they are used to. We also try to avoid ACT jargon.

When called in as an external facilitator the first step is to clarify with the senior management team the outcomes they are trying to achieve from the intervention and also to contract with them on issues such a confidentiality, follow up etc.

This is then followed by individual sessions with the team leader and members of the team with the aim of: building rapport; developing an understanding of the issues in the team and the context they work within (including the organisational values etc); developing clear contracts with team members; starting to explore individual values and starting to create some defusion and openness.

At the start of the team session some clear ground rules for the day are developed – this often includes issues such as approaches to listening and contributing. We tend to encourage teams to pause and get grounded regularly thought the session.

It is then often helpful to define what we mean by the term 'values' – some terms might include:

1. Values are chosen life directions
2. Values are intentional qualities that join together a string of moments into a meaningful path
3. Values cannot be possessed as objects because they are qualities of unfolding actions, not of particular things
4. Values are verbs and adverbs and are not possessed, for example, Love is a direction, not an object
5. Values are choices
6. Values are not goals or outcomes
7. The response you can always engage in is valuingeven when there is little you can do about the situation
8. Values are NOT feelings, judgements or in the future
9. Values are ALWAYS perfect and entail responsibility

Team valuing exercises are varied and include activities like 'The sweet spot'; 'If you could read your customer's mind when they were thinking about this team; what would you want them to be

thinking about this team?’ ‘If I could do magic and tomorrow this team was a wonderful team, what would be different and what would be the same, what would I see and hear you doing?’

In the ACT ANZ session we used the QSort response grid which has a list of 50 work related values to sort into order of preference.

We might then ask team members to form into small groups of 2 or 3 and explore their values together. We encourage participants to be curious about what these valuing words mean to each person. And also to notice similarities and differences – how would those impact on people’s ability to work together?

We then facilitate the team working together to develop a team values statement. It is important here to encourage the team not to fuse with getting the wording just right –the statement can be a living document that develops over time.

Many teams are cynical about team sessions because values statements often don’t lead to behaviour change. We suggest that this is often because of experiential avoidance on the part of both the facilitator and team – people feel safer making broad statements rather than getting into specifics of behaviours. It is important therefore to turn this value into a behavioural agreement – as a team what do you need to **stop, start, continue** doing in order to live this value? Encourage them to get specific.

When they struggle, gently ask ‘What is difficult about this?’. A response of curiosity by the facilitator is often helpful when members of the group resist a task. We remember that values and vulnerability are closely linked.

As we facilitate we notice participant’s body language, our own response and make decisions about how to intervene (the 3 step model). We particularly look for lack of vitality in the discussion and explore this with the group. Difficulties in the workplace usually also manifest themselves in the session – we bring these events to the attention of the group and explore the possibility of different responses.

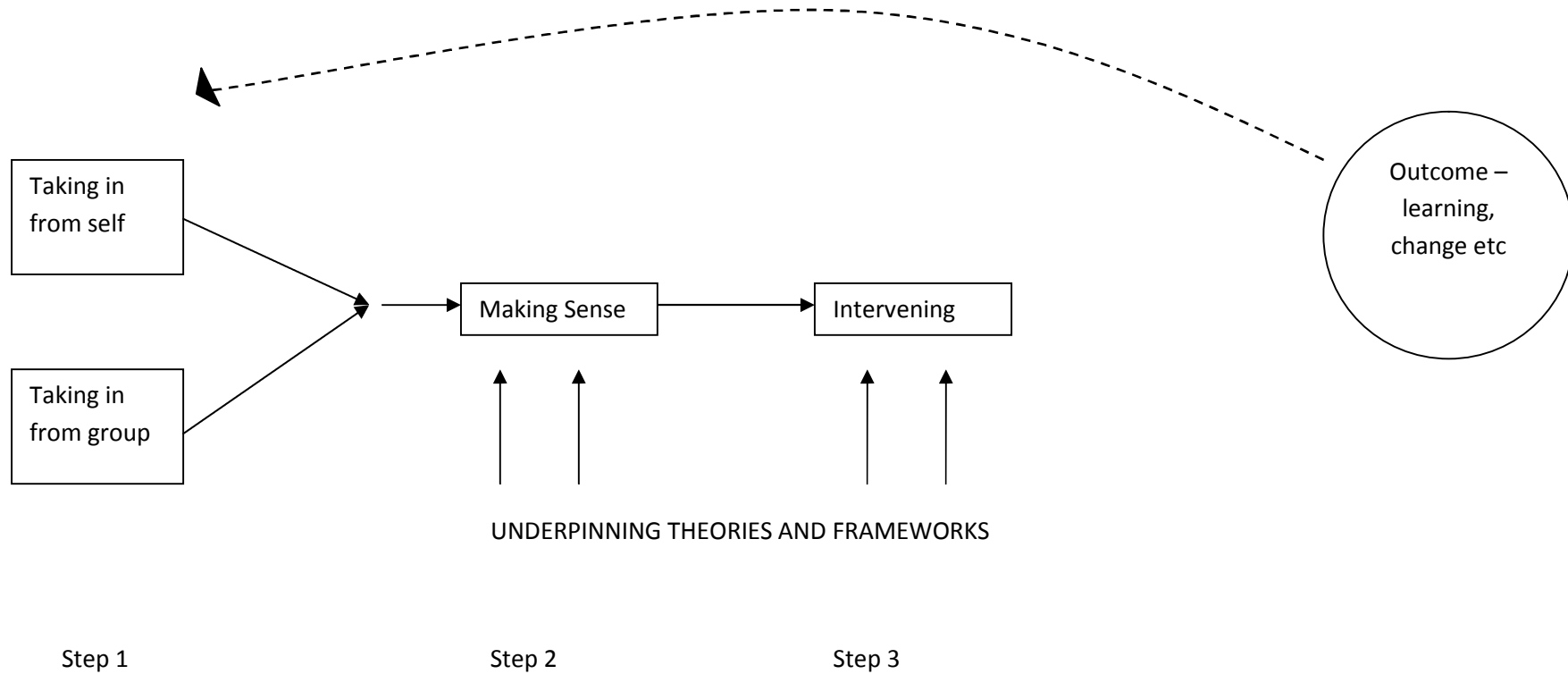
It is important at some point to facilitate a discussion around how they will respond when a team member is not behaving in line with their agreement. We find that teams often avoid these follow up discussions and again this leads the values statement to become meaningless.

ACT tends to weave throughout the session. For example the facilitator defusing from what her mind is telling her (for example, “I want the group to say...” Or “What do I need to say to ensure the group agree to this by 10am?”), the facilitator creating a space where people are able to feel their anxiety or anger and then make flexible choices etc. Using mindfulness to get in touch with what is happening in the room. Making space for feelings of anxiety in oneself. Asking questions with an openness to whatever answer is given.

We usually arrange a follow up session with the group to see whether they are taking the committed actions they agreed in the session. This isn’t to tell them off if they haven’t taken action but to trouble shoot and explore unforeseen obstacles.

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3 Steps in Group Facilitation



Adapted from : Facilitating Learning in Groups. Learn how to take in what is going on, make sense of it and intervene to help the group.
David Casey, Paul Roberts and Graeme Salaman.
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