Team Effectiveness: Working with Difficult Behaviors

Introduction:

Schoolwide planning often occurs in teams. Sometimes those teams have members whose behaviors make decision making difficult. In an earlier REFORM TALK, we looked at positive group roles. In this issue, we will examine some difficult behaviors that make groups less effective and decrease the quality of decisions and plans. Many of us would rather ignore negative behaviors, thinking that they will go away or that we can simply overlook what is occurring. But this is not always possible. In the following section we will look at several types of difficult behaviors and discuss what team leaders can do about them (Scholtes et al. 1990).

The Silent Member

These group members say little if anything in the group. They silently sit in meetings and listen, but do not add to the discussion, share their opinions or suggest ideas for consideration. While this might not seem a difficult behavior, it does not support the work of the group. What can the leader do?

There are several approaches to addressing this behavior. Always begin by considering the reasons behind the silence. Perhaps the person is shy, bored, or scared of participating. Addressing these concerns may solve the problem. The leader can do several things: structure the discussion, include input from everyone, be encouraging whenever they comment, ask for their ideas directly, or before the meeting talk to them about the value of their ideas.

The Dominating Member

Some group members like to dominate the discussion, push their ideas or projects, and generally pressure the group to implement what they want. This can be very destructive to the group and group planning.

The leader still should start by trying to understand why the person needs to be in control. It could be a need for power, insecurity, or a strong belief in their viewpoints. To address dominating behavior, the leader can do several things such as: encouraging everyone's views and thoughts on an issue, structuring decision making to lessen the time the dominating individual has the floor, reiterating the importance of gaining a broad perspective, and, finally, talking privately with the individual about their behavior.

The Critical Member

Some groups have a member who is critical of others' ideas, suggestions, and comments. This behavior is quite harmful to group function and success. Ongoing criticism dampens dialogue, lessens trust, and decreases the sense of commitment.

Again, leaders should first try to understand the reasons for the behavior, whether it is personal style, a need for attention, or a lack of understanding of positive group behavior. Group leaders can address this behavior in several ways including: setting ground rules that limit negative or critical behavior in the group, commenting directly upon the critical statements and asking if the person meant to be critical, and talking with the person privately about how

the criticisms are affecting the group. Leaders as well as group members should get members to desist in these behaviors early because they are so poisonous to group functioning.

General Approaches to Dealing with Negative Behavior

Negative behaviors can seriously affect group effectiveness. To foster more positive behaviors it helps if the group does several things including: learning about positive and negative group roles and behaviors, establishing guidelines and expectations for group interaction and discussion before each meeting, encouraging all members to provide feedback when they see behaviors that are destructive to the group, and discussing the behaviors that helped the group succeed following every meeting. The more the group focuses on positive roles and behaviors, the more insights and skills the group will develop in group decision making and planning schoolwide projects.

References

Scholtes, Peter. (1990). *The Team Handbook: How to use teams to improve quality* Madison, WI: Joiner Associates.

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