GET CONNECTED

Skilful Discussion
Purpose

To collectively enhance your team’s awareness of the impact of Skilful Discussions on daily performance.

Objective

At the end of the exercise everyone should be aware of what impact their behaviour in a discussion could have on the outcome and how to achieve a better result.

A recommendation is to conclude with an agreement that everyone will strive to apply these skills in future meetings.
Agenda

1. Introduction

2. Reflection in Small Groups

3. Group Dialogue

4. Reflection

Source: Barrett Values Centre
Handouts

What is a Skilful Discussion?

In skilful discussion, the team intends to come to closure, in order to make a decision, reach agreement, or identify priorities. Skilful discussion incorporates some of the techniques of action learning and dialogue, but it is always focused on a real task at hand. It helps a team learn to make their thought processes transparent, to bring to the surface and challenge assumptions, and to look more closely at sources of disagreement.

The most important part of skilful discussion is the commitment team members make to follow the five protocols.

1. Pay attention to your intentions. It is important that each team member understands what she/he wants to accomplish in the discussion. If you are not willing to be influenced, what is the purpose of the conversation? Be clear on what you want and do not mislead others as to your intentions.

2. Balance advocacy with inquiry. If you do not do this, the team will just sit and listen to each other's position statements. People's assumptions will not even surface, much less be challenged. In this case, people are really thinking while the discussion is underway.

3. Build shared meaning. If people understood that words are symbols and have different meanings to different people, then everyone would routinely check what others mean and there would be far less miscommunication. If you want to create shared meaning it is very important to use language with precision and be clear what is really meant – what is the meaning behind the words? By asking questions, we can work together.

4. Use self-awareness as a resource. When you are feeling confused, angry, frustrated, concerned, or troubled in a meeting, ask yourself the following questions:
   a. What am I thinking? (pause)
   b. What am I feeling? (pause)
   c. What do I want at this moment? (pause)

You will often end up with insights about the team's assumptions or your own concerns, which you can then discuss with the team.
## Handouts

### HANDOUT

#### Skilful Discussion

<table>
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<tr>
<th>5. <strong>Explore impasses.</strong> When the team seems to be running into a brick wall, ask: <strong>What do we agree on, and what do we disagree on?</strong> Can we pinpoint the source of our disagreement? Often sources of disagreement fall into one of four categories.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. <strong>Facts</strong> – What exactly has happened? What is the truth?</td>
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<tr>
<td>b. <strong>Methods</strong> – How should we do what we need to do?</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. <strong>Goals</strong> – What is our objective?</td>
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<tr>
<td>d. <strong>Values</strong> – Why do we think it must be done in a particular way? What do we believe in?</td>
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Simply agreeing on the source of disagreement often allows people to learn more about the situation, clarify assumptions, and then move forward.

Three things might help the team when this happens:

a. Listen to ideas as if for the first time. Work at being open to new ideas.

b. Consider each person’s “mental model” as a piece of a larger puzzle. Look at the issues from the other person’s perspective.

c. Ask yourself (and everyone else), “What do we need to do to move forward?”

The Skilful Discussion pocket card also lists nine ways to improve listening in skilful discussion.

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# Handouts

**Handout:** Skilful Discussion

## Questions for reflection of own experiences

1. What has dominated the meetings you have taken part in during the last month? Debates, Discussion or Dialogue? What impact has the discussion climate had on your team's performance and results?

2. Recall a situation when you left a meeting saying to yourself “This was a good and constructive meeting.”
   - What was the situation?
   - What was at stake?
   - How were you involved?
   - What made this meeting so successful?

3. What individual and team skills are needed to have fruitful and skilful discussions in our meetings?