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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

USING THE FACILITATIVE LEADER APPROACH TO CREATE AN ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE OF COLLABORATION

Roger Schwarz

Many leaders try to create a collaborative organizational culture, but they lead and design their organizations in a way that undermines the culture they seek to create. In this chapter, I describe how this occurs and describe the Facilitative Leader approach and how it can be used to create an organizational culture of collaboration. When leaders use this approach, they generate several outcomes: (1) increased quality of decisions or results, (2) increased commitment to implementing the results, (3) reduced time for effective implementation, (4) improved working relationships, (5) increased organizational learning, and (6) enhanced personal satisfaction. Several of these outcomes are particularly important to sustaining collaboration. From a task perspective, individuals consider collaboration more desirable to the extent that the results it produces are of higher quality than the parties could produce alone. From a process perspective, individuals find collaboration more desirable to the extent that it increases commitment to the outcomes

This chapter is adapted from “The Facilitative Leader” in *The Skilled Facilitator: A Comprehensive Resource for Consultants, Facilitators, Managers, Trainers, and Coaches, new and revised edition*, by Roger Schwarz (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), and *The Skilled Facilitator Fieldbook: Tips, Tools, and Tested Methods for Consultants, Facilitators, Managers, Trainers, and Coaches*, by Roger Schwarz, Anne Davidson, Peg Carlson, and Sue McKinney (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005).

and increases the quality of their working relationships and their personal satisfaction.

Culture and Collaboration Defined

Organizational culture is the set of fundamental values and assumptions that members of an organization share and that guide their behavior (Schwarz, 2002). Although organizational culture is manifested in the artifacts it produces—including individual and group behaviors, organization activities, policies, processes, and structures—it stems from shared mental models. Consequently, to create and sustain a culture of collaboration, it is necessary for members to share a set of values and assumptions congruent with collaboration and to generate behaviors and structures that embody the values and assumptions. In this chapter, I will explore both behavioral and structural challenges to creating a collaborative culture, both of which arise from the mental models that individuals use to guide their behavior.

Chrislip and Larson (1994) define collaboration as “mutually beneficial relationships between two or more parties who work together toward common goals by sharing responsibility, authority, and accountability for achieving results” (p. 5). They distinguish it from communication, which is sharing knowledge and information, and from cooperation and coordination, a relationship that helps each party achieve its own goals. As they define it, “The purpose of collaboration is to create a shared vision and joint strategies to address concerns that go beyond the purview of any particular party” (p. 5).

For genuine collaboration to occur, parties must be able to learn from and with each other, especially in difficult situations, and must be able to jointly design the process by which they collaborate. Consequently, I define collaboration as a mutually beneficial relationship between two or more individuals, groups, or organizations who jointly design ways to work together to meet their related interests and who learn with and from each other, sharing responsibility, authority, and accountability for achieving results.

Adapting the terminology of Argyris and Schön (1974), I distinguish between *espoused* and *genuine* collaboration. In an espoused collaboration, the parties declare their relationship to be a collaboration. In a genuine collaboration, the parties act in ways that are congruent with the definition of

collaboration. Although sometimes espoused collaborations are genuine collaborations, often they are not.

What Makes Collaboration So Difficult?

Why is it so difficult to create and sustain genuine collaboration, even among people who ostensibly have similar goals? Creating a culture of collaboration requires changing two interactive factors: (1) the conversations by which people interact and (2) the structures that shape these interactions. Both of these factors are determined by individuals' mental models. We will examine each of these separately, beginning with how mental models determine process.

The research of Argyris and Schön (1974) and my more than twenty-five years working with leaders offer a basic explanation about why collaboration is so difficult: to effectively collaborate requires people to shift their mind-set (or mental models) from one of control to one of learning. But collaboration is often psychologically threatening because it requires us, among other things, to give up our preconceived ideas of what the solutions should be in order to find solutions that take full advantage of the collaboration itself. And under conditions of psychological threat, we cling to the very mind-set that makes effective collaboration less likely. In short, our thinking undermines the outcomes we say we want.

Consider the real-life example presented in Exhibit 14.1. Jonathan and Parker are investment partners and developers in a very large, complex real estate development that uses principles of traditional neighborhood development (TND), a high-density mixture of residential, commercial, office, and retail space in a tight pattern of pedestrian-oriented streets. The men's work relationship fits the definition of collaboration: they share a vision of investment through TND, each has knowledge and skills that the other lacks, and both are responsible and accountable to each other for maximizing their return on investment. In their conversation, about maximizing the return on investment, Jonathan wants porches on the houses and Parker wants brick houses without porches. Jonathan submitted this example at a workshop of mine as part of his effort to increase his effectiveness with his partner. The conversation between Jonathan and Parker appears in the right column; Jonathan's thoughts and feelings appear in the left column.

EXHIBIT 14.1. MAKING THE CASE FOR PORCHES.

Jonathan's Thoughts and Feelings	The Conversation
<p>This argument was used by critics when TNDs first started, but no one except Parker has used it in the last four years.</p>	<p><i>Parker:</i> Let me tell you, where I grew up we associate porches with poverty. Look at the poor parts of Washington. Very few of the houses built in the last 40 years have porches.</p>
<p>Where is the hard evidence when I need it?</p>	<p><i>Jonathan:</i> Porches have made a huge comeback in recent years. Virtually every TND has porches and I understand porches are starting to bring a premium to builders.</p>
<p>Can't he find a way to use language to indicate that there is some middle ground? How can we reach a compromise when he needs to state his case in black and white.</p>	<p><i>Parker:</i> Well, builders have told us that they will not build both brick and porches. It's too expensive to do both. It's either brick or porches and I want to have mostly brick.</p>
<p>The architect's plan is so logical. What is it he does not get about it?</p>	<p><i>Jonathan:</i> Yes, I know the builders have told us that. The reason why the architect's plan works so well in my opinion is that they have taken that into consideration. They have come up with a plan that balances brick and porches, putting brick townhouses with no porches where they are most prominent and using siding on the houses whose facades are mostly covered up by a full porch.</p>
<p>He states everything as a "fact." He just does not give an inch.</p>	<p><i>Parker:</i> Let me tell you, we are headed for disaster if we do not have more brick. I've been a builder in this region for more than 40 years. Residents expect brick. It gives them a sense of having a good solid house. If we don't have a preponderance of brick the builders will never be able to successfully sell these townhouses for the prices they need to get.</p>

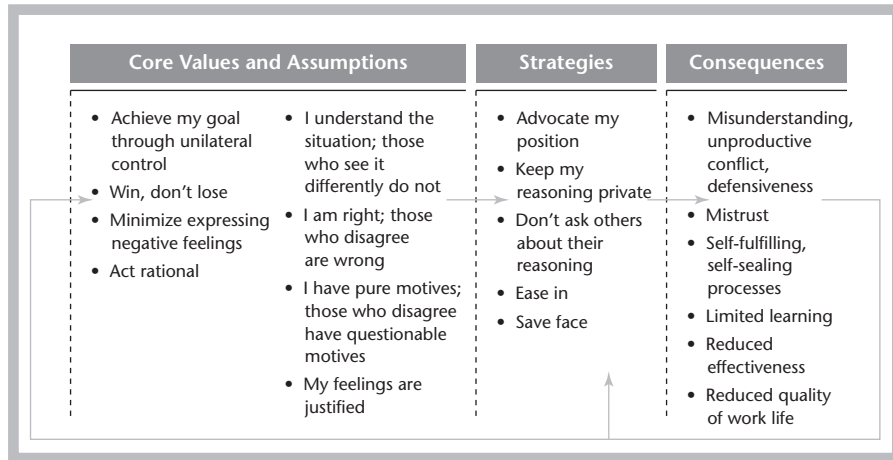
EXHIBIT 14.1. MAKING THE CASE FOR PORCHES, Cont'd.

Jonathan's Thoughts and Feelings	The Conversation
His apartment buildings that he built look like an engineer designed and built them. They have no redeeming architectural quality, though they provide him with a healthy cash flow.	<i>Jonathan:</i> I really respect that you have been at this a lot longer than I have, but I have spent the last two years studying this new concept of TDN. It is very new and there is not a lot of hard evidence of its value. At the same time many of the developers and designers I have talked with say that there are all kinds of details that are critical to the success of a TND but we do not have absolute evidence of what is critical and what is not. From everything I have read, all new urbanists agree that porches are critical.

The Unilateral Control Model

What is going on in this example? It is a simple instance of collaboration between two people in the same organization. By analyzing Jonathan's conversation and his thoughts and feelings, it is possible to infer the mind-set Jonathan adopted to approach this high-stakes conversation with his partner and identify the strategies and consequences that followed from this mind-set, which is a common one. In difficult situations—ones in which we feel some potential threat or embarrassment, including situations where our stake in the outcome is high—most of us operate from a set of values and assumptions that we are unaware that we're using but almost always lead to these consequences. This approach is called the *unilateral control model* (illustrated in Figure 14.1), which consists of three parts: *values and assumptions*, which together you use to generate *strategies* or behaviors, which in turn lead to *consequences*.

Core Values. Beginning with values, you try to achieve your goal as you defined it before the conversation. You see the conversation as a contest in which you seek to win, not lose. Every comment that someone makes that is consistent with your goal is a small win; every comment that introduces information that may challenge your goal is a loss. You try to minimize the expression of

FIGURE 14.1. UNILATERAL CONTROL MODEL.

Source: Models derived from the work of Argyris and Schön (1974), who originally labeled them as Model I and Model II, and adaptations by Putnam, Smith, and MacArthur at Action Design (1997), who refer to them as the Unilateral Control and Mutual Learning models. Action design is an organization and management development firm that has built on the work of Argyris and Schön. Putnam and Smith are the coauthors with Argyris of *Action Science* (1985).

negative feelings, believing that if people start expressing negative feelings, it will only make things worse. Finally, you act rational. You think that the way you are approaching the issue is perfectly logical. And if it isn't completely logical, you should act as if it is. People use a mix of these core values, to different degrees.

In our example, Jonathan is seeking to achieve his goal of including porches. He frames the conversation as a contest in which he needs better evidence to win his case. His private question about what Parker doesn't "get" about the architect's logical plan illustrates the value acting rational. He has concerns about Parker's approach to design but withholds them. And he sees his reasoning for porches as flawless.

Core Assumptions. You operate from a matching set of assumptions. You assume that you understand the situation and anyone who disagrees doesn't. In this model, other people can't understand the situation and so see things differently. Consequently, you are right and others are wrong. You often question

the motives of those with different views while believing that your motives are pure; you see yourself as a steward for the organization, while others are trying to advance their careers or otherwise meet their own needs. Finally, you assume that your feelings are justified. If you get angry, you have a right to be angry; others don't understand, are wrong, and have questionable motives. Remember that all this is at best at the edges of your awareness: you usually don't realize you are holding these values and assumptions in the moment.

Jonathan assumes that he is correct about the porches and doesn't entertain the notion that Parker's views may be valid. He attributes to Parker the sole motive of pursuing a healthy cash flow without attention to architectural quality.

Strategies. This combination of values and assumptions leads you to design strategies that seek to control the conversation and win. You don't fully explain your point of view because it might lead others to question and challenge it. You don't ask others to explain their points of view (except to shoot holes in them) because they may consider things that you hadn't, which would put your goals in jeopardy. To minimize people expressing negative emotions, you may ease in. Easing in is asking questions or making statements in a way that is designed to get the others to understand what you are privately thinking without your having to say it. It includes asking rhetorical questions starting "Don't you think that . . ." or asking leading questions so others will "see the light" and think that they have come up with the ideas that you want them to implement. If someone raises negative points, you may say they are irrelevant or unproductive or may suggest addressing them at a later time (privately thinking that the right time will be "never"). Because you assume that you understand the situation, you act as if your reasoning is foolproof without bothering to test whether your assumptions and data are accurate. Together, these strategies enable you to unilaterally control the situation and protect yourself and others. Through all of this, you keep your strategy for controlling the conversation private because divulging it would thwart the strategy or, even more likely, because you are not really aware of the strategy you are using.

Jonathan continues to advocate his point of view that porches are the solution. To his credit, he does not ease in. He does admit that there is not a lot of hard evidence to support his view, but he still continues to advocate it. He privately wonders what it is about the architect's logical plan that Parker doesn't get and does not ask Parker to explain his view. Because Jonathan has

assumed that his view about Parker's favoring a healthy cash flow over redeeming architectural quality is valid, he does not ask Parker's view on the matter. Finally, Jonathan does not turn to a collaborative process to resolve their disagreement; instead, he tries to resolve it using a unilateral strategy.

Consequences. Ironically, by trying to control a situation, you contribute to creating the consequences you are trying to avoid. You create misunderstanding because you assume that the situation is as you see it, and you base your actions on untested assumptions about others. If you make negative assumptions about others' motives and do not test them, you build up your own mistrust of others and theirs of you. This leads them to be wary and cautious in their responses, which you perceive as defensive. In this way, you create a self-fulfilling process, generating the very consequences you set out to avoid. You also create a self-sealing process when you do not inquire into another person's defensive reaction because you believe it will only generate more defensiveness. Consequently, you seal off the opportunity for learning how your own behavior may be contributing to the collaboration's reduced effectiveness. All of this reduces the collaboration's ability to learn, its effectiveness, and quality of work life. It can be stressful when you cannot say what you are thinking without negative consequences. A great deal of mental energy gets tied up in trying to withhold what you are thinking or carefully craft what you are saying to dress up your intentions. The quality of decisions decreases, the amount of time needed to implement decisions increases, the commitment to those decisions decreases, and the quality of relationships suffers.

You can see the beginning of these consequences in Jonathan's case as he starts to make negative attributions about Parker's motives. By continuing to advocate his point of view and not be curious about Parker's views, Jonathan contributes to escalating the conflict, which he then uses as evidence to support his notion that Parker is not willing to compromise. They find themselves at an impasse, without a strategy for jointly learning which of their assumptions, if any, are valid. There is no commitment to a common course of action.

The Give-Up-Control Model: A Variation of Unilateral Control

When people recognize that they use the unilateral control model, they often want to change. Unfortunately, they often shift from one form of control to another—the give-up-control model, which I think of as a variant of the unilateral control model.

The core values of the give-up-control model are as follows: (1) everyone participates in defining the purpose, (2) everyone wins and no one loses, (3) you express your feelings, and (4) you suppress your intellectual reasoning (Argyris, 1979; Argyris, Putnam, and Smith, 1985). A key assumption is that for people to learn and be involved and committed, they must come to the right answer by themselves. Of course, the right answer is the one you have already decided on. When others don't see the answer that you prefer, a common strategy is to ease in or ask leading questions to help the people get the answer by themselves. The results of the give-up-control model are the same as those of the unilateral control model: increased misunderstanding, unproductive conflict and defensiveness, and reduced learning, effectiveness, and quality of work life.

People often move back and forth between the unilateral control model and its give-up-control variant. This commonly occurs when a manager seeks to empower his employees. After recognizing that he has been micromanaging and unilaterally controlling the group, the manager shifts to letting his group make decisions. He delegates an important decision to the group. However, in an effort not to influence his employees, he withholds relevant information he has, including criteria that the solution must meet. When the group proudly returns with a solution, the manager rejects it because it does not meet the criteria (which he did not communicate) or does not take into account the information he withheld. As a result, the group infers that the manager doesn't want to give up control and that he thinks the group is not ready to be empowered. The manager responds by shifting back to a unilaterally controlling approach. The give-up-control model is thus a variant form of unilateral control because it is imposed unilaterally.

Unilateral Control as Organizational Culture

When I describe these models to people involved in collaborative efforts, they often smile; they recognize themselves in the picture and the way their organization often operates. When I described it to one group of leaders, they told me that not only was unilateral control the model they often used but that their organization had been rewarding them for this behavior for years. They were trying to change but didn't have another approach to replace it with. Unfortunately, people are usually unaware that they are using the unilateral control model, although others can clearly see it. Fortunately, with practice, you can identify it for yourself and begin to learn a more effective approach.

The Facilitative Leader Approach: Creating Collaborative Outcomes by Changing Your Mind-Set

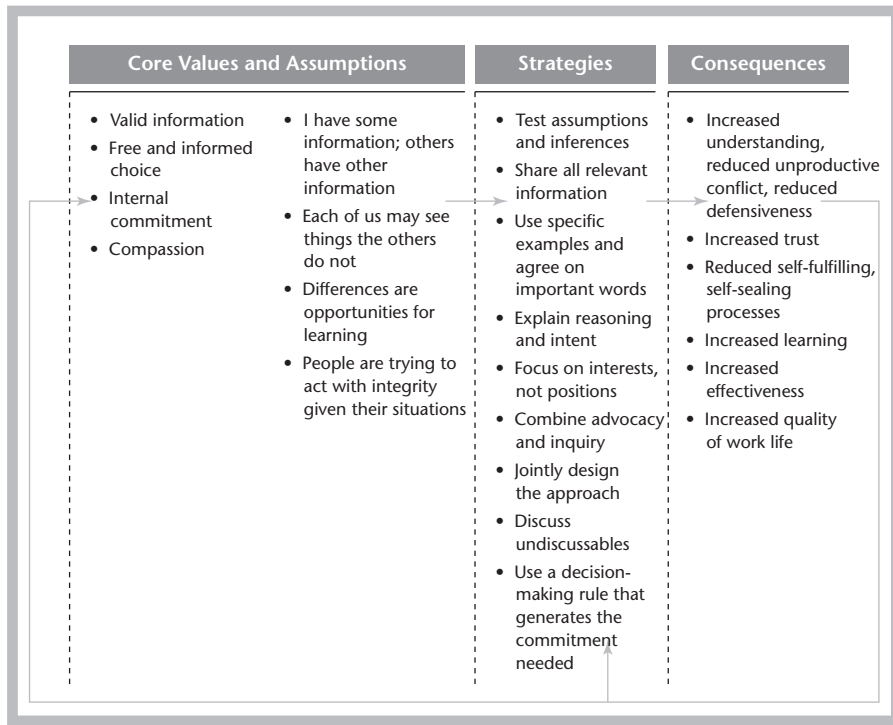
What would it look like if you approached challenging collaborative situations without using some form of the unilateral control model? In Jonathan's example, Jonathan might begin by saying, "Parker, let's discuss our views regarding the use of porches and brick. It looks like we disagree about whether porches will increase the value of the homes and, if they do, whether it is possible to have porches and brick together. Do you see our disagreement differently?" If Parker agrees that this is the disagreement, Jonathan can continue, "Rather than trying to convince each other, how about if together we figure out a way to find out whether porches will increase the value of the homes and, if they do, whether it is possible to have porches and bricks together? I'm open to the fact that I might be missing some key information. We would agree beforehand on what data we need to look at, what assumptions we want to make, and whom to talk with. What do you think? Do you have any concerns about doing it this way?"

The Mutual Learning Model

The example just given illustrates the Facilitative Leader approach. At the heart of this approach is the *mutual learning model* (see Figure 14.2), which can generate long-term positive results that the unilateral control model or give-up-control model cannot. You do not have to be in a formal leadership role to be a facilitative leader; team members and even individual contributors serve as facilitative leaders by virtue of using the core values and assumptions, principles, and techniques. In short, the Facilitative Leader approach enables you to lead collaboratively from any position. Although it can be easier to establish collaborative relationships when all the parties understand the Facilitative Leader approach, it is not necessary.

Like the unilateral control model, the mutual learning model has a set of values and assumptions, strategies, and consequences. As its name indicates, the model values learning and shared control rather than winning and unilateral control.

Core Values. The mutual learning model has four core values. First, you seek to collect and share valid information. Valid information includes all the rel-

FIGURE 14.2. MUTUAL LEARNING MODEL.

Sources: Adapted from Argyris and Schön's Model II (1974) and Putnam, Smith, and MacArthur's Mutual Learning Model (1997).

evant information you have on the subject (whether it supports your position or not). Ideally, others can independently validate the information you share. Effective collaboration requires that you create a common pool of data and shared meaning. Second, you seek to encourage free and informed choice so that people agree to do things because they have the relevant information and because they believe the decision makes sense, not because they feel manipulated or coerced into it. You seek internal commitment to the decisions, which often flows from the first two values—with this level of motivation, people will do whatever is necessary to implement the decisions.

Finally, you value compassion, which means temporarily suspending judgment in order to appreciate others' perspectives. It means having empathy for others and for yourself in a way that still holds people accountable for their

actions rather than unilaterally protecting others or yourself. When you act with compassion, you infuse the other core values with your intent to understand, empathize with, and help others. *Compassion* literally means “suffering with,” although it is sometimes mistakenly thought of as having pity for others. The kind of compassion I have in mind enables you to have empathy for others and for yourself in a way that still holds you and others accountable for your actions. This kind of compassion does not involve unilateral protection and enhances the other core values, rather than diminishing them. Compassion comes from the heart. If you act out of compassion rather than out of fear and guilt, you are able to move beyond defensiveness and be open and vulnerable. This enables you to engage in conversations in which you can mutually learn with others how to increase your effectiveness.

Core Assumptions. As a facilitative leader, you assume that you have some information and that others have other information and therefore that other people may see things you have missed and vice versa. In other words, you know that you don’t know all that you need to know. This includes recognizing that you may inadvertently be contributing to problems. This leads you to be curious and to ask about the ways in which others see you as contributing to the problems.

You assume that differences are opportunities for learning rather than conflicts to be avoided or contests in which you must show that you’re right and others are wrong. And you assume that people are trying to act with integrity, given their situations. If people are acting in ways that do not make sense to you or that you think you understand but disapprove of, you do not conclude that they are acting that way out of some dubious motive. Instead, you begin from the assumption that people are striving to do the right thing; part of your task becomes understanding the reasons for their actions and then evaluating them accordingly.

You see these interactions as an intriguing puzzle—everyone has some pieces to offer, and the task is to complete the puzzle together. By exploring how people see things differently, you can help the group reach a common understanding that enables you all to move forward in a way that everyone can support. You are eager to explore differences because you see them as possible routes to greater understanding and solutions that integrate multiple perspectives. Compare these core values and assumptions with those of the unilateral control model.

Principles. Several key principles are associated with the mutual learning core values and assumptions.

Curiosity is a desire to learn more about something. It motivates you to find out what information others have that you might be missing and to explore how others came to a different conclusion rather than simply trying to persuade others that their conclusions are wrong.

Transparency is the quality of sharing all relevant information, including your strategies, in a way that is timely and valid. It includes divulging your strategy for discussion with the other participants so that together you can make free and informed choices about your collaboration. Transparency is difficult when you are acting unilaterally because revealing your strategy would render it ineffective. But being transparent when using a mutual learning approach actually increases the effectiveness of your strategy, which is now to learn together rather than to control the situation.

Joint accountability means that you share responsibility for the current situation, including the eventual consequences. Being accountable means that you are responsible for addressing your problems with others directly rather than avoiding them or asking others to do this for you. Instead of seeking to blame others, you recognize that because you are part of a system, your actions contribute to maintaining the system or changing it.

These three principles—curiosity, transparency, and joint accountability—are interwoven with the core values and assumptions of the mutual learning model. Together they are put into action in the strategies that follow.

Strategies. The strategies that facilitative leaders use to implement their core values and assumptions are also known as the *ground rules for effective groups* (for more information, see “Ground Rules for Effective Groups,” by Roger Schwarz, published by Roger Schwarz & Associates, <http://www.schwarzassociates.com>). Many of these ground rules are designed to generate valid information. For example, you test whether the assumptions that you are making about others are valid before you act on them as if they are true. You share all the relevant information you have about an issue (whether or not it supports your position) by using specific examples, by explaining the reasoning that leads to your conclusions, and by stating the underlying needs, interests, or criteria that are important for you to meet. You create learning opportunities for yourself and others by asking others to identify things you may have overlooked after you have shared your thinking. To increase free and informed

choice and internal commitment, you jointly design next steps with others. And you raise the undiscussable issues that have been keeping the team from increasing its effectiveness. Using these strategies does *not* mean that you have to make decisions by consensus. Although that is an option in the Facilitative Leader approach, it's not a requirement.

Consequences. Leaders who use this approach make several outcomes possible, including increased quality of decisions or results, increased commitment to implementing the results, reduced time for effective implementation, improved working relationships, increased organizational learning, and enhanced personal satisfaction. These outcomes are generated through the following consequences.

Increased Understanding, Reduced Unproductive Conflict, and Reduced Defensiveness. With the mutual learning approach, you increase understanding because you test assumptions and assemble valid information. You also assume that others have information you do not have and that they may see things you have overlooked. By assuming that people are striving to act with integrity, you reduce the negative attributions you make about others. You test attributions you do make with the people about whom you are making them. By doing so, you reduce the unproductive conflicts that arise from acting on untested, inaccurate assumptions and the defensive behaviors associated with them. Similarly, you increase trust. Using a mutual learning approach does not ensure that others will respond nondefensively; however, it does reduce the chance that you will provoke or contribute to others' defensive reactions.

Reduced Self-Fulfilling, Self-Sealing Processes. Acting on untested, inaccurate assumptions is the first step in self-fulfilling and self-sealing processes. By testing out your assumptions, you reduce the likelihood of such processes. Even if you do create a self-fulfilling process, your openness to learning how you created the problem will reduce the chance that it becomes self-sealing.

Increased Learning, Effectiveness, and Quality of Work Life. All of this information enables you and others to develop shared meaning that increases learning opportunities for yourself and the group. This includes learning how you and group members each contribute to the group's effectiveness and ineffectiveness. Together these results increase the group's effectiveness—its performance,

its process, and the satisfaction of group members' personal needs. The mutual learning values and assumptions enable you to increase understanding and trust and reduce defensive behavior. This reduces feelings of anxiety, fear, and anger that create stress.

How You Think Is How You Lead

When I introduce the Facilitative Leader approach and the mutual learning model to people, it often seems like common sense to people, and sometimes they say, "I already do this." Not until they examine their own specific situations (often with help from others) do they begin to see the gap between how they think they lead and how they really lead.

The challenge in becoming a facilitative leader is not understanding the approach or even learning the strategies; it is learning to think differently. It means unlearning years of employing a unilateral control mind-set that you used skillfully and effortlessly. Here's why. If you only learn to apply the strategies of the mutual learning model, you will end up using them with a unilateral control model set of values and assumptions, which will generate the same negative consequences you've gotten in the past. That's because it's your core values and assumptions that drive your strategies and their eventual consequences.

How Unilateral Control Reduces Collaborative Structures and Outcomes

To develop a sustainable culture of collaboration, it is not enough to create conversations congruent with the mutual learning model.* Even when individuals have the ability to engage in mutual learning conversations, if group or organizational structures have unilateral control elements in them, they can have a powerfully negative effect on organizational members' ability to collaborate. (Borrowing from Allport, 1967, I define structure simply as a stable recurring process that results from individuals interacting with each other in certain ways. Using this definition, policies and procedures are forms of structure.)

*Portions of this discussion are adapted from Schwarz and Davidson (2005).

Unfortunately, the unilateral control model that leaders use and that generates dysfunctional conversations and relationships also leads them to design team and organizational structures that have unilateral core values and assumptions embedded in them. This is predictable. Leaders use their theory in use (or mental model) to design group and organizational structures. Given that many of these structures are designed to avoid some past or potential threat and that almost everyone uses a unilateral control approach under conditions of threat, you can expect to find unilateral elements embedded in many of these structures.

Examples of Unilateral Structures

Here are two examples of unilateral structures in client organizations and how they reduce genuine collaboration.

Managing Performance Problems in Teams. Many organizations tout the importance of their teams and at the same time set up structures that reduce teams' ability to tackle their own challenges. In many organizations, if a team member is not performing adequately and the supervisor is taking progressive disciplinary action to address the performance, the supervisor can't share with other team members that she has taken these actions or what they are. She can state only that she is "handling the issue." This is true even if the other team members initially raised the performance issue with the entire team and team leader present and if the team members continue to provide the member and leader with feedback about that team member's performance. This policy protects that employee's privacy and reduces the risk of liability associated with possible violations of privacy. It is also based on the unilateral value of minimizing the expression of negative feelings and the strategy of saving face. It potentially avoids difficult conversations that the manager might have to have with other employees who want to know what the manager is doing about the situation. Team members are left making inferences about whether and how the supervisor is addressing the team member who is having a problem. It makes undiscussable the poor performance that team members were likely to have not only seen but also brought to the attention of the leader. Essentially, it creates a situation in which team members can no longer work together to support the member having a problem. Removing this support increases the chance that the person will be moved or fired. The message implicit in this structure is that when situations get difficult, team collaboration and support

are inappropriate. And the structure is the direct result of leaders' using a unilateral control model.

Establishing Organizational Budgets. Many CEOs exhort their executives to collaborate to enhance organizational performance and learning rather than simply focus on their own organizational areas. At the same time, the budgeting process is often designed so that executives each seek to win out over the others and hence share and withhold information strategically.

In one organization, department heads prepare their annual budget requests independently and then submit them to the finance director. Each advocates for as much as possible, knowing that there will be subsequent cuts. The finance director consolidates the requests and takes them to the COO, along with recommendations for cuts. The COO and finance director then go back to each department head individually to tell each one how much (and in some cases, where) to cut their budgets. Department heads never see one another's requests or detailed line-item breakdowns. Most feel that the process is unfair and assume that cuts are based in part on favoritism, so they try to outmaneuver one another by the way they present and justify their budgets. They sometimes make tenuous or questionable links to the COO's or finance director's favored initiatives. This process of competition, inflated requests, and hidden agendas is commonly referred to as "the budget game."

Not only does this kind of budget process encourage the withholding of information, but it also prevents department heads—key organizational leaders—from learning about critical organizational issues and opportunities. It reinforces the traditional "silo" mentality that often causes leaders to work at cross-purposes and limits their understanding of interdependence. They are subsequently blamed by those above and below them in the organization for not thinking systemically when in fact they lack important information that would lead them to see key interrelationships in different ways. The structure itself is designed to reduce collaboration. And the structure is typically established using the unilateral control model as a template.

Redesigning Structures for Collaboration

Unless you are working in a relatively new organization, yours probably has many structures (perhaps too many) for dealing with various issues. Consequently, the task in your organization is likely to be one of redesigning existing

structures so they generate the outcomes of learning and collaboration without leading to unintended consequences. Ultimately, designing collaborative structures (like designing collaborative conversations) requires leaders who can operate from a mutual learning model or who are willing to work with someone who can help them rigorously reflect on their mental models. In either case, there are several steps you can take to redesign structures to make them collaborative.

Identify the Source

Find out whether the structure (policy, procedure) in question stems from a law, a generally accepted industry or professional practice, a formal or informal organizational policy, or a norm in the organization. A policy that originates in law is obviously more difficult to change than a policy developed independently by your organization or a policy that is a norm.

Identify Elements That Are Within Your Control

If a structure is actually a norm or a guideline that you have discretion to adapt, consider amending it so that it reduces unintended consequences. One client organization has adopted a collaborative budget process in which everyone involved sits down together at the same time each year and develops an organizational budget. Department heads frequently offer funding priority to other departments with more critical needs. All feel responsible for devising a fair and realistic budget that reflects organizational rather than departmental priorities. After several years of collaborative budgeting, these leaders say they no longer play the budget game, the budget-making process is faster overall, they engage in better long-range planning and capital budgeting, and the role of the finance and budget staff has moved from control of others to support and involvement in decision making. The department heads see themselves as partners rather than competitors.

Similarly, some clients have created teams in which the entire team addresses problems of team member performance that affect the team. To implement this fundamental change, team members reframed their idea of what it meant to be accountable to other team members. This included the assumption that if you have relevant information to share about someone on the team, withholding it or not sharing it in a straightforward manner pre-

vents the team from identifying the issues and understanding how various members may have contributed to the problem. By reframing what it means to be accountable, team members were able to solve problems that had previously gone unsolved and increased the ability to work together as a team.

Understand Exactly What the Structure Says and Does Not Say

If it is a written structure such as a policy, examine it and learn firsthand what it says and does not say. If the structure is based on law, explore whether it is more restrictive than the law requires. If it seems more restrictive than your understanding of the law on which it is based, find out whether that is the intent. If it's not, you may have more freedom to redesign it. If the structure is unwritten, explore with the people responsible for it what it requires. Do not assume that a practice is a formal policy or law simply because someone tells you it is. Verify the information; ask the relevant people to document the details. In my experience, organizational members sometimes cite something as policy or law because they have been told it is policy or law, yet when asked to do so, no one is able to produce any evidence to that effect.

Explore the assumptions, values, and interests that the designers used to generate the structure. Share your assumptions, values, interests, and the unintended consequences you see of the current structure. Structures are solutions that leaders design to address perceived problems or opportunities. Interests are needs that the structure takes into account or criteria that the structure needs to meet. For example, a typical interest or criterion for any performance feedback system is that it be designed in a way that provides the recipients with accurate and usable information. Be curious about the interests that generated a particular structure. Identify interests that are not being met by the current structure, and ask for reactions from relevant parties.

Leaders also use their own values and assumptions to design structures—and this is how structures often become embedded with unilateral control elements. For example, using the unilateral control core value of minimizing expression of negative feelings, leaders usually structure performance feedback to be anonymous (unless it comes directly from the boss). Similarly, using the unilateral control assumption of “I’m right and anyone who disagrees is wrong,” leaders design the structure so that when a manager gives a direct report feedback, the performance rating is already established and is rarely open to being changed. These core values and assumptions lead to the misunderstanding,

defensiveness, and limited learning associated with the unilateral control outcomes. Helping leaders explore the unintended consequences of their core values and assumptions is a crucial step in redesign.

Explore Redesigns in Accordance with the Mutual Learning Model

Explore whether and how a structure or policy can be designed and implemented so that it reflects the values and assumptions of the mutual learning model and also addresses the interests you have identified. In one learning organization I know of, when policies come up for review (because they are not meeting organization needs or are perceived as being inconsistent with the values), the leadership team or a selected group of employees is given the task of reviewing the policy and identifying the interests that a new policy must satisfy. When a new policy is written, the interests that it is attempting to meet are stated in the first paragraph. Then the guidelines are given. There are usually several acceptable ways to meet the stated interests, and providing choices significantly increases commitment to following desired practices.

In the case of performance feedback, new solutions become possible with the shift from unilateral control to mutual learning values and assumptions. For example, if the person giving feedback does not assume that he or she is necessarily right, the feedback conversation becomes a setting in which both parties can be genuinely curious about how to work more effectively together, which includes the possibility of the manager's changing his or her behavior.

By rigorously examining organizational and team structures and redesigning them when appropriate, leaders create structures that foster genuine collaboration and learning.

Conclusion

Creating a culture of collaboration requires that all parties involved jointly design ways to work together to meet their related interests and learn with and from each other, sharing responsibility, authority, and accountability for achieving results. Sustaining a culture of collaboration involves facilitating collaboration conversation and supporting structures that make collaborative behavior possible. The Facilitative Leader approach, which has the mutual learning model at its core, is one successful approach to creating an organizational culture of collaboration.

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