Program Ideas: HOW TO…

association for
experiential education

…ANALYZE BEHAVIORS

One way to understand teams and their leaders is to analyze their behaviors, especially their verbal **communication**. Teams commonly view their communication as effective and tacit. This means that they rarely surface and address miscommunications, while failing to identify or nurture their functional communications.

Rackham's **Behavior Analysis** framework arranged 18 verbal behaviors into 4 categories:

A. **Initiating** or introducing new ideas to group conversations so as to create opportunities for others to react, clarify or build upon:
   1. proposing procedures for conversation,
   2. proposing content about the task,
   3. building to expand on other ideas.

B. **Reacting** or responding to information or ideas put forth by another member:
   4. supporting what was said,
   5. disagreeing with what was shared,
   6. defending or attacking others (with emotional or personal disapproval, as often sarcastic or disguised humor).

C. **Clarifying** or seeking transparency for self or others that deepens conversations and explores previous initiating or reacting:
   7. testing understanding with others,
   8. summarizing previous contributions.
   9. seeking proposals or suggestions,
   10. seeking reasons behind logic or ideas,
   11. seeking reactions to what was shared,
   12. seeking information or facts,
   13. giving information in reply to the above,
   14. giving feelings as feedback to the above.

D. **Processing** or managing airtime for self and others (may include some prior behaviors):
   15. interrupting by talking over or shutting out by answering on behalf of others,
   16. bringing in others to the conversation by giving them the chance to speak,
   17. behavior labeling or announcing which behavior is exhibited or will come next,
   18. label disagreeing by beginning a shared contribution with dissension**.**

A **team-aware** leader or facilitator is conscious of how a team behaves and communicates at a meta-level. They identify the precise group development stage of their team (*see group development previous to this topic*) and **apply Behavior Analysis** to accelerate team progress and transition to the next stage. They adjust their own verbal behaviors, helping their team to make the most of a current stage in order to improve teamwork and move to a future stage.

In **forming**, teams typically need direction from a leader. Directive leadership shapes the necessary psychological safety and lays the groundwork for later risk taking, maturation of trust, shared vision, and team identify. Lack of directive leadership can prematurely tip teams into storming and irreparably damage relations. Leader behaviors such as proposing procedures and content provide necessary direction. Giving feelings sets a tone for inclusiveness and comfort. Giving information and summarizing key points improves shared understanding.

In **storming**, often characterized by disagreeing, interrupting, label disagreeing, and defending or attacking behaviors, teams are fraught with messy and very anxious processes that require courageous leadership to transition beyond. A leader must exhibit behaviors such as seeking proposals, seeking reactions, bringing in, or building to encourage ideas and inclusion.

In **norming**, the team establishes ground rules for conducting processes and treating others, as characterized by a willingness to put the team needs before those of self and others. A leader solidifies the team through behaviors such as testing understanding, seeking reasons, seeking information, supporting, and earlier ones.

In **performing**, the team flourishes and airtime is shared more equally. Here, the team and its leader display a full range of behaviors with coherent communication and problem solving. They delight in their innovation synergy and do not hesitate to disagree with one another.

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FURTHER RESOURCES

READING

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VIEWING

ABAI. (2022). What is Behavior Analysis? https://www.abainternational.org/about-us/behavior-analysis.aspx

Video examples of the 18 verbal behaviors: https://vimeo.com/showcase/exemplar