

Hopes & Fears Exercises

Hopes and fears exercises are techniques that help members of a working group share their perspectives on the task at hand and build a common understanding of goals and potential problems. It is a way to help answer the question, "Do we share the same idea of what's supposed to happen here?"

Shared perspective for effective work. Coming to a more thoroughly shared perspective is necessary for effective group work and communication among its members. It is also useful to identify where hopes held by some members may be unattainable or even inappropriate to your overall goal.

Prevent sources of frustration. If these unrealistic or inappropriate hopes are identified early in the process, they are less likely to become sources of frustration and resentment that can interfere with your group's effectiveness. It is also reassuring to some members to learn that others in the group share their fears.

Simple, effective icebreakers. These exercises are also simple, unthreatening activities that are useful as icebreakers for new groups. They allow the members to learn about each other and begin useful interaction smoothly. The process of eliciting individual members hopes and fears, and giving them credence, also emphasizes the value of each person's contributions and can promote more enthusiastic participation in subsequent activities.

What are they?

Share hopes for project outcomes. A facilitator or team leader first asks each member of the group to articulate his or her hopes for the outcomes of the process. These are recorded on a board or other display so all members can see them, and organized into related clusters. Each item is discussed to be sure that it is well understood by the members.

Prioritize and discuss group hopes. You may use rating or prioritizing techniques to show the relative importance of the different hopes or expectations. The discussion can also include ideas about how to ensure that the most important hopes are realized.

Express project fears. The same process is then used to elicit and discuss the fears. Each member is asked to articulate what undesirable outcomes they fear will occur, followed by clustering and discussion.

Determine ways to prevent fears. As with the hopes, the discussion can include attention to preventing the most important or costly fears from being realized.

What are they good for?

Build common understanding of goals and barriers. These exercises are most useful in building a work group's shared perspective of its tasks and potential problems. This is particularly important near the beginning of a group work assignment. It is at these early stages that the members are likely to have the greatest differences of opinion about what they are supposed to do.

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Some limitations and considerations

Reluctance to reveal feelings. Since these exercises are commonly used for new groups or new tasks,

members may be hesitant to reveal their hopes and fears to an unfamiliar group of people.

Skillful facilitation necessary ingredient. A good facilitator is required to get the hopes and fears process moving. Even with such skillful facilitation, it is likely that some members will withhold information for strategic purposes, or simple embarrassment. So the full range of hopes and fears may be unavailable for discussion.

Smaller groups most effective. Because the process depends on active and relatively free-flowing discussion, it is inappropriate for very large groups. The effectiveness of the discussion may also be reduced by disruptive behavior.

Visioning

Visioning is a tool you use to establish an image of what you want your organization to look like in the future. The time frame associated with the vision depends on the needs of the group and may range from months to years. The point of creating a vision is to "stretch" your organization and establish a vision of a "preferred state." Growth in terms of size or scope of operations may indeed form part of a vision, but does not always constitute a vision. Circumstances facing your group need to inform the vision. Being realistic is important, as is remembering the concept of stretch. Ultimately, the vision should express the work that all participants will need to do in order to accomplish the desired outcomes.

What is it?

Various methods. The task of visioning can be completed in several ways. You will find listed here a generic example. Regardless of which method you use, your main focus is ideas. You must get everyone to share their ideas, reach a shared understanding, build consensus, and craft a meaningful vision statement.

One approach:

1. Use a round robin format and elicit responses from those in the room regarding the characteristics they want to see embodied in your project. You might consider grouping these by categories such as products, customers, etc.
2. Display, in some appropriate format, all of the responses from step 1.
3. Clarify what is being expressed in each statement, but avoid debate at this time.
4. Establish one or more small groups to take the statements and report back with alternative vision statements that reflect the key ideas.
5. Encourage the full group to discuss the statement and begin modifying it-this is when debate begins.
6. Repeat steps 4 and 5 until you produce a statement that satisfies your needs.

Important activity for any group. In short, a well-crafted vision statement that has buy-in from everyone involved is often a crucial first step in beginning any group activity.

What is it good for?

Shared goals. Vision statements are often very good at "getting everyone on the same page." In the process of constructing a vision statement, preferences will be stated and conversations stimulated in order to reach consensus on ultimate goals.

Reflect interests, needs, skills. Remember that vision statements should reflect your interests and be attuned to their specific needs and capabilities. Otherwise, the likelihood of accomplishing the vision will be greatly reduced.

Some limitations and considerations

We've done this before. Almost everyone has been through a process like this at one time or another. Some of the most prolific buzzwords around involve the words vision, mission, empower, and group consensus. Depending on people's previous experiences, the level of cynicism may be very high when an exercise like this begins and may remain high even when a vision statement is developed. Obviously, the only way to overcome this attitude is do everything to make sure things are different this time.

Address skeptics. Perhaps the best advice is to directly address participants' cynicism. Let them know that they are in the room to make things different. Participants have to find a way to cooperate and take responsibility for

the outcomes of their efforts if your integration project is to succeed.

Predict the future. The final pitfall associated with vision statements is that people often make lousy prognosticators. Time and experience may necessitate revisiting the vision and modifying it as circumstances dictate. After all, integration takes place in a very dynamic environment and reality may dictate changes. The real key here is to see the vision as a dynamic statement and not simply a static document meant for framing on the wall.

For more information

French, W. L., & Bell, Jr., C. H. (1995, 5th ed.) **Organization Development: Behavioral Science Interventions for Organization Improvement**, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

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Strategic Framework

Strategic framework is a tool to analyze a project proposal in relation to goals and resources. It is a way to help answer the question, "What are we trying to do and what do we need to do it?" Like the stakeholder analysis, the strategic framework considers customers and other stakeholders. It is similar to a SWOT analysis (see page 55) but is more specific in terms of helping you identify resources, partners, and innovations that might help you achieve project goals.

What is it?

One objective at a time. To be most effective, the strategic framework should work with one project-specific objective at a time. Strategic frameworks can be devised by one person and then presented to and reviewed by others, or they can be created through a facilitated group decision conference.

Clear statement of project goal. The core element is a clear statement of the service or project objective.

Examine factors necessary to achieve goal. Completing the framework includes identifying and analyzing the internal and external factors that you must consider in order to achieve your justice integration objective. Those factors will include an initial identification of potential resources, including current and potential partners.

Identify relevant technologies. You should also identify potential uses for information technology and other innovations that may be necessary to achieve your objective.

What is it good for?

40,000-foot-view. The framework prompts you to take a high-level view of the full array of internal and environmental factors that can support a particular service objective.

Identify partners, customers, resources, technology. By creating a strategic framework for your integration project, you can readily identify potential partners to help achieve your objectives, details about the customers of your service, information and other resources that will be needed, and innovative products and services that might be relevant.

Thinking "outside the box." Using this tool enables you to expand your thinking about the project. Thinking outside the box will open up new avenues and possibilities to explore.

Refine goals. Once you know what partners, resources, and technologies your environment has to offer, you can refine the project objectives.

Some limitations and considerations

Good with enablers, poor for barriers. The strategic framework is limited in that it focuses on enablers, but largely ignores barriers. This can lead to an overly-optimistic assessment of your project's prospects. Or, you may fail to anticipate critical problems.

Ignores availability, cost of resources. The analysis also fails to deal directly with the availability and cost of identified innovations, resources, and partners. As a result, the stakeholder analysis by itself does not include the

detail needed to craft a project plan or design a system. While important, it's only a part of the overall planning process.

For more information

Andersen, D.F., Belardo, S., and Dawes, S.S., *fiStrategic Information Management: Conceptual Frameworks for the Public Sector*.fl **Public Productivity and Management Review**, 17 (Summer, 1994) 4, 335-353.

Consensus Building, Collaboration, and Decision Making

Projects don't happen in a vacuum. Work with groups from other agencies and organizations is often required to successfully plan and implement an integration project. These tools are ways of answering the question, "How can we help the work teams function effectively?" Consensus-finding and building tools are often needed to help your team resolve different views and conflicting objectives or interests. Teams also frequently need models for collaboration, especially if they've never worked together before. Effective teamwork will also involve difficult decisions about details and how to proceed with development, so some decision-making tools and techniques can be useful.

What are they?

Meeting management methods, ground rules. Managing meetings involves ground rules, agendas, clear purposes, facilities planning and preparation, careful recording of results, notification of members, and communication.

Effective group processes. Group facilitation is one widely used method. A facilitator is someone trained in group process and methods to build the group's capacity for managing its own activity. The facilitator typically works with a group for a limited time to build its capacity for effective work or to accomplish a specific task.

Effective conflict resolution. Conflict is a normal part of group work that can result from adversarial relationships, different interests, or both. Techniques for conflict management include diagnosing the causes of the conflict, mediation, negotiation, and problem solving. Mediation involves helping the parties understand the possibilities, communicate effectively, and recognize opportunity for compromise. Negotiation provides a framework for finding a mix of compromises that will resolve the conflict. Well-understood rules and guiding principles can be particularly effective in conflict negotiation.

What are they good for?

Elicit information, brainstorming. Facilitators often use nominal group process to elicit information from the group. In this technique, a facilitator provides an opportunity for all group members to contribute to the discussion and share ideas. The results can be prioritized by voting methods in which all group members have equal influence on the results.

Multi-voting, where each group member can vote for more than one choice or has multiple votes to distribute, can be very effective for complex decisions and help avoid forming factions within a group.

Understand issues, resolve conflicts. Consensus building tools are useful in facilitating the two key requirements for reaching agreements in a work group setting: identifying and understanding issues, and resolving conflicts. Some of the tools for identifying and understanding the issues are described in other sections (SWOT analysis, hopes and fears exercises, strategic framework, and stakeholder analysis).

Some limitations and considerations

Effective group process takes time. It is unreasonable to expect new groups to accomplish substantive work immediately. It is usually necessary to invest in building skills, shared understandings, and commitment to the group process.

Vulnerable to disruptive, subversive behavior. Individual members can wreak havoc on a group's efforts to work collaboratively. Without effective internal controls and norms, such behavior can derail group efforts.

Right people at the table. Good decisions on who is involved in group processes are often critical to success. It is possible to have too much as well as too little participation. Choosing the most effective level requires careful

consideration of the needs of the group and the participating organizations.

For more information

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Schweiger, D. M., and William R. Sandberg (1991). fiA team approach to top management"s strategic decisions.fl In H. E. Glass (ed.), **Handbook of Business Strategy** , 6: 1-20. New York: Warren, Gorham and Lamont.