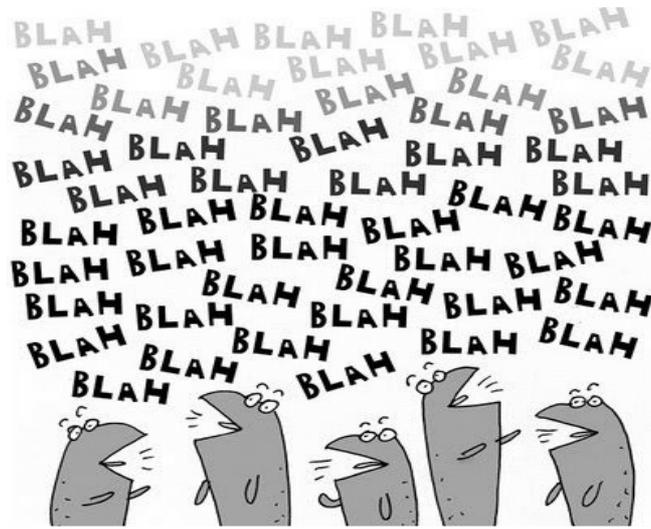


How to cultivate shared airtime in teams



Our article '2 key success factors for teams' set out the essence of the conclusions of Google's 3-year research into effective teams. One conclusion was that more effective teams engage in what the researchers called 'conversational turn taking'. They share airtime (over the course of a meeting or a day) so that contributions are roughly equal.

So how do you create a habit of sharing airtime in a team and set team members up to think well without bruising the egos of those who tend to speak more or causing embarrassment or exposure for quieter members of the team?

Here's a tool you can adapt and use.

Name of Tool: Rounds

Group size: up to 20

Problem statement: This team doesn't share airtime well – some people dominate the discussion, others interrupt. We don't always hear each other out.

This exercise is particularly useful if your team needs to develop strength in the following 2 elements of the Team Health Check: Enabling High Quality Thinking and Commitment

Key message/ outcome of the exercise:

Using rounds creates space for everyone to be heard. It often surprises people because new thinking emerges. This process starts to create a culture where team members hear each other out, listen well and don't interrupt. The result is higher quality discussion, thinking and decision making.

Facilitation step by step:

1. Start with a clear question and invite each member of the team to respond clearly and succinctly (see some examples below).
2. Ask others to give this person their full attention (rather than taking their turn in their own head or doing the kind of listening we call waiting to speak!) and suggest demonstrating this by keeping their eyes on the eyes of the speaker.
3. Set up the deal – that each person has uninterrupted time to speak... and that for the privilege of not being interrupted, they have the responsibility to be succinct
4. Say that you will start with the person who would like to speak first and go round the circle (you choose which direction).

Questions to use at the beginning of a meeting:

- What's going well in your work?
- What are you pleased with?

Why ask this kind of positive and safe question? Neuroscience indicates using a positive question creates a sense of psychological safety and stimulates blood flow to the part of the brain needed for thinking and solving complex problems).

Questions during the meeting e.g. before an agenda item

- Frame a clear question e.g. "What are your thoughts about how we can increase our market share in this sector by 25%?"
- Say that we'll give each person a chance to share their thinking for a period (you choose – 1 or 2 mins)
- Start with the person who wants to go first and say you will go round the circle (either clockwise or anticlockwise is fine)
- Once you have done this, you can open up the conversation for further dialogue (and it helps to ask team members to continue the practice of giving each other space and attending fully to others' contributions).

Top Tips:

- As you prepare: Try answering your question to test whether it's the right one – if not, keep refining it.
- Sharing questions in advance with the agenda can help more reflective people to feel prepared. If you know you have one person who takes a lot of airtime, consider choosing someone to start who will be able to be succinct. The first speaker often sets the tone.
- When you set up the process: The words you use as you do this set the tone. It may sound obvious to say this and it's a subtle process. If you say something like "I've decided we need to share airtime and I want you to take turns", this is likely to set a directive tone. To create a sense of engagement, use an inviting tone, for example share the fact that Google's research



indicates that effective teams share airtime. Then say, “How about experimenting with an approach that will help create that habit in the way we work together?”

Variants on the exercise:

When you notice that energy is failing or a conversation is getting stuck or going in circles, try breaking the group into pairs. Invite partners to take turns to respond to a relevant question and give them 2 or 3 minutes of uninterrupted time each to share their thinking with their partner. When the team comes back together you can invite people to share their freshest thinking on the question.

Alyse Ashton

References:

For more fresh thinking, resources and practical tools visit <https://eye2eyedev.com/resources/>

To learn more about similar tools we recommend reading Nancy Kline’s Time to Think or More Time to Think. <http://www.timetothink.com/thinking-environment/testimonials/>

For more information on Google’s research visit:

http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/28/magazine/what-google-learned-from-its-quest-to-build-the-perfect-team.html?_r=0

<https://hunterwalk.com/2016/09/03/google-finds-that-successful-teams-are-about-norms-not-just-smarts/>

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