

## Dialogue and Discussion

A team performing at peak levels creates an alignment of energies—the group functions as a whole—learns from its activities and keeps getting better. Such collective learning from experience has three critical dimensions: the need to think insightfully about critical issues, act in innovative, coordinated ways and foster the development of peak team performance by other teams within the organization.

The power for such generative learning in organizations comes from the synergy between dialogue and discussion. Dialogue is diverging, discussion is converging. To capture this synergy, several factors must be present.

1. Team members are on the way to mastering the skills of discourse that use both dialogue and discussion.
2. Team members can distinguish between the purposes and processes of the two forms of discourse and know when to enlist them.
3. Team members can engage the three conditions for dialogue.
  - suspend assumptions
  - regard one another as colleagues
  - engage a facilitator who holds the context of dialogue
4. Team members become observers of their own thinking.
5. Team members monitor and respectfully divert forces opposing productive dialogue and discussion.

### Dialogue

- Different views are presented as a way of discovering a new view
- Free and create exploration of complex and subtle issues
- A deep listening
- A suspending of one's views
- Deepens understanding

### Discussion

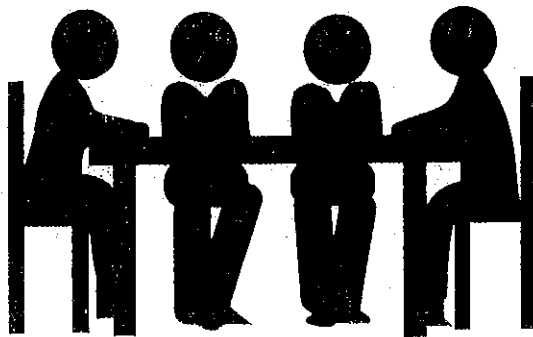
- Different views are presented and defended in search of the best view to support a decision
- Analyze and dissect an issue from many points
- Winning is usually the goal (one's view prevails) but must take second priority to coherence and truth
- From percussion, concussion—a ping-ponging of something between us
- Decisions are made

*The Adaptive School*  
*Developing Collaborative Groups*  
by Robert Garmston and Bruce Wellman

# Balcony View

Macrocentric

3rd Position



Egocentric

1st Position

Allocentric

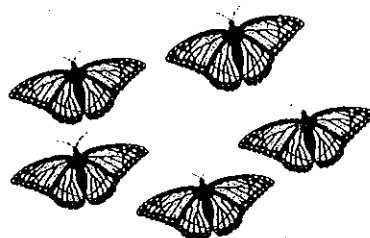
2nd Position

## **Seven Tips for Managing Yourself During Conflict**

1. Remember that people (even you) are rarely as benevolent as they perceive themselves to be.
2. Remind yourself that others are rarely as evil as their opponents perceive them to be.
3. Be aware that people rarely spend as much time thinking about the issues as believed.
4. Realize that the behaviors of others are rarely planned or thought out. Most aspects of conflict spin off other events and are not the result of cold-hearted calculation.
5. Almost all behaviors are motivated by positive intention. Frequently these intentions are to take care of and protect themselves.
6. Previous patterns taint present perceptions. Every conflict has a history that extends beyond the present.
7. Go to the balcony and observe the interactions within the group whenever you have difficulty remembering any of the above.

## Four Stages of Community Building

- **Pseudocommunity**



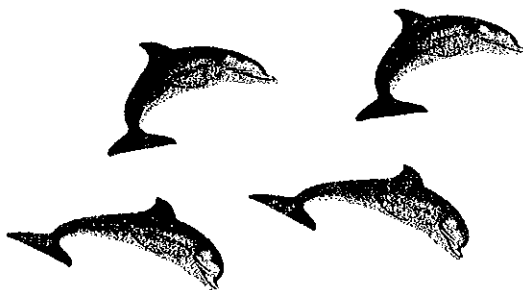
- **Chaos**



- **Emptiness**



- **Community**



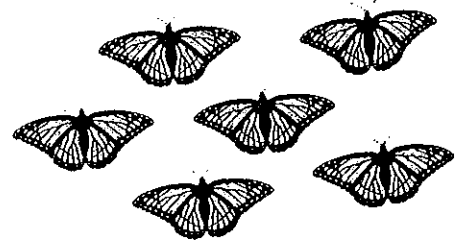
# Building a Sense of Community

## Four Stages of Development

The concept of community is impossible to express meaningfully. It is like trying to describe the taste of an artichoke to someone who has never eaten one. In his book, The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace, M. Scott Peck provided the following definition: "A community is a group of individuals who have learned how to communicate honestly with each other, whose relationships go deeper than their masks of composure and who have developed some significant commitment to rejoice together, mourn together and to delight in each other, making other's condition their own."

### 1. Pseudocommunity

This is the stage of faking it -- the cocktail party. People are overly polite and nice to each other.



**Symptoms:** Members tell little white lies to withhold true feelings and to avoid conflict. Pseudocommunity embodies conflict avoidance. Individual differences are ignored and people who make others uncomfortable are avoided. When the status quo is interrupted, members act as if nothing happened and change the topic. People speak in generalities, avoiding specifics of the current situation.

**Transition:** Reflection and examination are often framed by questions. Challenging generalities is one way to begin the transition. When individual differences are allowed and encouraged, the group moves to the next stage -- chaos. Peck believes that most groups stop here.

### 2. Chaos

This is the time of fighting and struggling. Chaos develops as differences move into the open.



**Symptoms:** Members are trying to convert others to their way of viewing issues. They demonstrate fix-it behaviors and attempt to heal. In response, others demonstrate a resistance to change. New leaders emerge and try to escape into organization as a way of reducing chaos. A significant change is that instead of trying to hide, group members might openly attack or attempt to obliterate others. They move into a frame of blaming. This is often directed at the facilitator. The motives are to attempt to make everything normal.

**Transition:** Many groups need to experience a sufficient amount of chaos before they can be motivated to begin the struggle out. A skilled facilitator will say, "There are two ways out of chaos, ... one is into organization -- but organization is never community. The only other way is into and through emptiness." Most groups will ignore this the first time it is said, as most groups resist this stage. The patient group developer waits until someone asks for an explanation of emptiness.

### 3. Emptiness

Emptiness means specifically to "empty oneself of barriers to communication" and to make a transition from rugged to soft individualism.



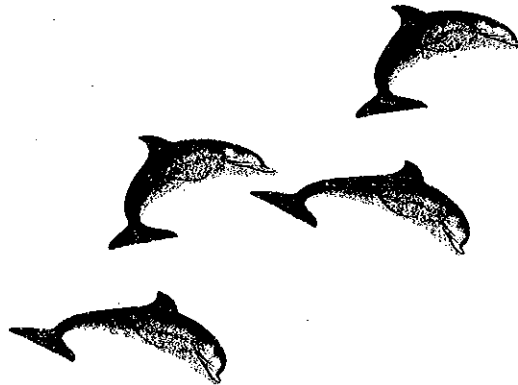
**Symptoms:** Elimination of the following barriers to communication:

- a. Expectations and preconceptions of what community is supposed to be like.
- b. Prejudices and judgments made about other people.
- c. Ideology, theology and solutions -- the one right way to do something.
- d. The need to heal, convert, fix or solve the problems of others.
- e. The need to control -- this is often an issue for the facilitator. Emptiness is a time to sit back, watch, listen and let it happen.

**Transition:** Moving through emptiness requires silent reflection. "What is it that we most need to empty ourselves of in our own unique lives?"

### 4. Community

True community is a final stage when a soft quietness enters the group.



**Symptoms:** When a group reaches this stage, people are open, vulnerable and lucid. No one is uncomfortable with silence. The emotions can range from sadness to happiness. Peck suggests that groups formed to do a task must pay attention to community building first and problem solving second. The power of true community is in the caring and creativity unleashed by group synergy.

**Transition:** It is important for communities to give themselves time for ending. This is especially important for short-term communities. This requires "a joyous funeral with some kind of liturgy or ritual of conclusion." Metaphors are one way of bringing closure. Peck calls this myth making.

Source: Peck, M. (1987). *The Different drum: Community making and peace*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

## Group Dynamics in Communities

Wilfred Bion (The Tavistock Model) developed a remarkably comprehensive understanding of group behavior out of his work with World War II veterans. Bion believed that a group has a task whether stated explicitly or not. Sooner or later every group will attempt to avoid its task. He described four task avoidance assumptions. Each group will behave as if they assume that their purpose is to avoid their task in accord with one or more of those assumptions.

M. Scott Peck states, "Bion's foremost ground-breaking contribution was his recognition of a group not simply as a collection of individuals but as an organism with a life of its own. His "task-avoidance assumptions" are realities that do in fact shape peoples' behavior in both community building and maintenance. It is virtually impossible for a group to stay in community without understanding these realities and coming to terms with them."

**Flight:** A strong tendency is to flee from troublesome issues and problems. Group members act as if their purpose was to avoid the issues. When someone makes an emotional statement, the group will often run away to noisiness (everyone talking and not listening). Most often this behavior is observed at levels one and two of community development.

**Fight:** This occurs during the chaos stage. People try to heal and convert. This is fruitless conflict, going nowhere. It is an uncreative form of fighting.

**Pairing:** Alliances, conscious or unconscious, can interfere with a group's mature development. This is most often seen as side conversations that others cannot hear. This is most prevalent when people come in preformed groups such as couples, or share the same job title or same role.

**Dependency:** This can be most devastating to community development. A community cannot exist if members depend on others to lecture or carry their load. This is a trap for the leader as it is often difficult to resist the temptation to take the leadership role. Leaders must empty themselves of their need to control and be willing to enter a state of helplessness. The purpose of the leader is not to tell the group what to do or not to do, but to awaken it to awareness of its behavior.

Source: Peck, M. (1987). *The Different drum: Community making and peace*. New York: Simon and Schuster.