

A mindful plan for practice – Barbara

2 Replies

Before taking this class, I had little hope that change was truly possible in my workplace situation. So while I looked forward to the class even just from the title “Creative Thinking, Collaboration and Organizational Change”, I had no idea that I would actually learn practical skills that I could bring back to the workplace. I had recently met the new President of the college, and I was impressed by her fresh outlook and her down to earth demeanor, and by her frank and open conversation with me. However, given all that had transpired in the previous twelve years, it was difficult to be optimistic. And then things changed drastically the week before I was to embark on this exciting new adventure of finally taking a CCT class. The directors of both my department and another department we work closely with were let go – and those of us who work in the three departments were essentially told we would be rebuilding the organization. And while we are currently in flux – reporting to a Dean we do not know very well, with all eyes in the college are looking our way to see what will happen – it is a time filled with possibilities, as well as the inevitable challenges.

I have taken the time throughout the three workshops to fully immerse myself in the moment – to participate in the activities, to think about how they may apply in my current workplace and about how they were sorely lacking in the past twelve years, to look at what I may have done differently to make the situation better for myself and my coworkers, to look forward to how I may be able to effect positive change in the organization, to recognize that there are still limitations no matter how enthusiastic I may be, and to realize I will have to have patience and be open-minded as we transform into an organization in which I can proudly claim to be a member.

For me, when creating this plan for practice, it makes sense for me to first look at what I can do on an individual basis for me, to get me into a space where I am doing the best work I can do, where I am bringing in a fresh perspective and coming from a place of inquiry as opposed to advocacy.

The first tool, which I have already begun to implement, is the FourThought Process. While it seems very basic, it has actually been quite helpful in grounding me prior to meetings. Due to all the changes, I find myself in more meetings than ever before. The difference is that they are full of

possibilities, and the Dean and other administrators have actually stressed that they want and need our input (sadly, a novel concept in my department). At the same time, they are still getting to know us, and it is important to be thoughtful and patient and not to come in to meetings with a laundry list of all the things that didn't work before and my solutions for each and every problem.

The FourThought Process helps me to set my intention for a meeting. I make it a point to take two to three minutes prior to a meeting to close my door and do some deep breathing, since it is something I think we do need to remind ourselves to do on a regular basis. That prepares me for the "Before Thinking" preparation phase, when I get present with the topics of the upcoming meeting. That brings me to the "During Thinking" phase where I actually set my intention, typically to keep an open mind, to pause before speaking to ask whether I really need to say what I am thinking – will it truly add to the conversation at hand? – and to really listen to what others are saying rather than being immediately reactive. On my notebook I make sure to write "intention" at the top, middle and bottom of page, to remind myself to keep on track with my goal (third phase of "During Thinking"). And finally, something we all talked about in the workshops, this seemingly frenetic pace of rushing from one meeting to another without taking a moment to assess what just happened and get in the mindset for the upcoming meeting. Instead of getting up from the meeting right away and rushing out the door, I make sure to sit for one full minute and do my "After Thinking" where I reflect on how I was or was not able to keep with my intention during the meeting, and was there anything I noticed that seemed to have happened as a result (i.e., someone that does not often speak up in meeting had the space to do so, a pre-conceived idea I had before the meeting was perhaps changed even slightly, or I have a new action plan for myself as a result of being more mindful during the meeting).

While this FourThought Process at first seemed quite simplistic, I have found that it can be challenging, yet quite eye opening, to stick with it on a consistent basis. While I have not shared this tool with colleagues, it helps put me into a place where I can ultimately work more collaboratively with them – and I think it can certainly affect the direction or flow of the conversation at times.

Another skill I have been adapting in my own practice is ORID. Though initially presented as a way to help facilitate conversations – and I see a lot of value there – I am attempting to slowly introduce it through modeling. We were reviewing our current website on the college's portal by putting it up on a large screen and randomly saying things we thought did or did not work. There was a lot of emotion in the room, as my ex-director had often put a lot of these materials together without input

from the department (the people that do the work day in and day out). So when the Dean said, “Do you think this picture works here, is it representative of the work you do?”, for example, the response was something like “Well, that is the program he would talk about constantly since he thought he created it, so he would always choose pictures from that project to try to make himself look good.”

While emotionally I am right on board with those types of comment – after all, they are true and he belittled all of us by not asking us or even inviting feedback – I tried to steer the conversation back towards the ORID model. So instead of bashing the ex-director, I said something at least somewhat objective “The picture does represent one of our successful programs.” A few times that actually prompted others to follow suit and at least take the emotion out of the situation long enough to focus on the task at hand, namely in a short period of time to work with the new Dean and Communications Director to improve our website. By using ORID – even though I was not facilitating the process – I believe I was able to help us take a step back and objectively look at what was in front of us, reflect on how it was able to get or not get the message across, and get down to the decisional phase (the ultimate goal) in a more open-minded way.

In the future, I would like to introduce this model for focused conversation in a staff meeting. Because we are now meeting on a regular weekly basis, I believe there will be an opportunity to do so once we get through the more immediate concerns of the department.

Another tool I think would be quite effective in our transforming department is the Dialogue Process. Because we are going through so many changes, because we are being charged with creating a new department out of three existing ones, and because the entire organization has been fraught with so many emotional issues, having an open forum and a safe space for everyone to have a chance to express themselves could go a long way in both healing from the past and giving everyone hope that things will indeed be different moving forward.

Our organizational retreat is scheduled for the end of October. My plan is to speak with the facilitators on a break and simply ask if they are familiar with the dialogue process or similar method for eliciting open conversation within a group. I am not sure how much information will have been divulged to them prior to the retreat, but I imagine they will have some knowledge of the emotional turmoil that has existed for several years. While we had someone come in the day the directors were let go to “talk about our feelings”, the focus was more on maintaining stability. While it is probably

not helpful to drudge up all the ways things did not work and how terribly many of us were treated, I think we also cannot pretend that it did not happen. If we want to move forward, we have to recognize where we have been, and to come up with a shared vision of how we hope to operate in the future.

My goal – whether it is to introduce the dialogue process directly or perhaps some other method they share at the retreat – is to ensure that every member of the team feels they have something of value to contribute, and that there is a foundation of respect created at the retreat so we can bring that back to the workplace and continue to build from there.

This brings me to the concept of the “4Rs” – and while not a tool per se, it is certainly a framework for looking at how to help us cultivate collaboration in our department and organization. Because most of the individuals in our department were not treated with respect and were not valued as an integral, productive member of a team, many shut down and just came to work to “do their job” and go home. Therefore, we missed a lot of opportunities for coming together to do more innovative programming, solve problems creatively, and feel more invigorated by the work and ready to re-engage further.

I have begun the process of introducing this framework into our department by bringing up the idea of Respect in the early meetings with the Dean. When she talked about how things were going to be different in the organization moving forward, I did add to the conversation by stating that one of the greatest changes I would like to see is the fostering of an environment of respect. Again, while not wasting time and energy bashing the old regime, I made it clear that this was one area that would be so important moving forward for us to rebuild. And since we were talking about the transformation of the department, I thought it was an obvious place to talk about the need for everyone to feel respected and valued. The Dean was a bit confused at first; it seemed she thought that would be a given at the College in all departments that people would be treated with respect. It was interesting, because one of my colleagues brought up the idea that because he felt his input did not seem appreciated and because he did not feel respected, he found himself tuning out at staff meetings rather than risking giving his opinion on how to improve a particular process or program. Without the foundation of respect, he was uncomfortable taking a risk. And therefore we could not even come to a place of revelation, never mind re-engagement. Truly a sad testament to the state of affairs; but exciting that we are having the dialogue around these issues somewhat organically – in hopes that we

will be able to move along the chain of the 4 Rs rather than be stuck from the start.

This led to a discussion about the Values of the College, and it was a perfect segue for me to bring up another one of the vital components I was hoping we would be able to introduce into the department. We are being charged with reformulating our vision and mission statement at the retreat and October. This discussion of respect at our staff meeting gave me the space to bring up the idea of our departmental values as well. We had virtually none when looking at our department from a hierarchical top down viewpoint, and this led to a toxic work environment. I now felt comfortable to suggest that when we have our retreat we also ensure we add in time for values discussion. I am no longer interested in working in an organization that does not have stated values that we can all stand behind and can use as a benchmark when taking on new projects, dealing with clients and colleagues, and assessing our individual contributions to the team.

The College's new vision, mission, and values statement will be shared at Convocation at the end of August. In the Equity and Inclusion Workshop, we talked at length about this topic, and about how each individual should have their own vision, mission, values. This was a novel concept to me – but it really got me thinking as to how valuable this would be in the workplace on several levels. As mentioned, we will be addressing these areas at the retreat and I think it will be the foundation for our transformation. In addition, it got me thinking about taking the time to create my own vision, mission and values statement – and then looking for (hopefully many) points of intersection with the the College's.

And when it comes to Equity and Inclusion, I can see how this tool could be quite effective in the hiring process. While resumes are vetted to ensure we have a diverse pool of candidates, the ways we look at diversity can be somewhat limited. Hiring is done by committee, in which each person of the committee goes around and ask questions of the interviewee. I think it would revitalize the process to use our College's vision, mission and values statements to formulate questions to ensure that the candidates we hire are not only diverse candidates in the traditional sense of the word, but whose values are also in line with what we strive to achieve every day at the College. Not just in terms of rhetoric, but looking for real life and work examples of how the candidate lives the value of “respect” for example. So while I cannot change the entire hiring process on an institutional level, I can still effect change by bringing up this concept when on my next hiring committee – and hopefully it can build momentum from there.

Even just the language of “Equity and Inclusion” instead of “Diversity” seems to be a step in the right direction. In my workplace, my ex-director had a document on our shared drive – and it was simply a list of “who” was in his department, i.e., one Asian female, one African American male, one Jewish female, to show that he “supported diversity in the workplace”. As if he had anything to do with who was hired by the college – and as if one could be summed up by some objective fact that was not of their choice or creation. While some identify with their particular culture or race or heritage, many do not – and even if they do, that is not the totality of who they are. And by summing someone up like that it completely negates who they are as an individual. If instead of the sometimes exclusionary term “diversity” we look at equity and inclusion, our list of what makes someone “diverse” opens up to many more ways of looking at what makes someone an individual.

When looking at implementing the tools introduced in these workshops in a Plan for Practice, I have found it helpful and empowering to break it into three segments. First, what tools I can implement right away (and some I have already) to help make my workplace a better place for me to be and hopefully to make me a more effective team member. Especially because we are in a time of transition, keeping myself grounded in these concepts allows me space for more patience and open-mindedness and possibilities.

Second are the tools I have begun to share with colleagues and would like to expand upon these as we move forward, both in weekly meetings and at our upcoming retreat. The focused conversation and ORID, the dialogue process, and helping us to slowly make our way through each and every one of the 4Rs.

Lastly are the tools that I hope to explore in the future, as we have a more solid sense of who we are and where we are going as a department. Most exciting to me is the goal of doing a Future Ideal Retrospective as a group when looking at where we would like to see our department one year from now – using Group Zap and the sticky note process so that everyone is included as we come up with a solid sense of who we are and the possibilities for where we can go in the future.

In order to evaluate the success of implementing this plan for practice, I will need to continue to be mindful in the workplace. I already feel the shift in attitude as I prepare for the workday, and I am continually engaged throughout the day (as opposed to a lot of checking out that happened in the past). As I move forward, I believe a daily check in will be vital to my success. So again, I come

back to using one of the tools from the workshop as a means for evaluation. A three minute freewrite at the beginning and end of the workday – as well as the setting of intention and follow through at meetings using the FourThought Process – should help me with a continual evaluation of progress on an individual level.

Another means of gauging progress with practice will be following through on specific goals, i.e., creating my vision, mission, values statement and looking for points of intersection with the college's new statements, introducing the dialogue process with the help of the facilitator at the retreat, making sure that we do address not only vision and mission at the retreat but that we also give ample time and energy with creating values statement.

As I work towards helping to create a culture of respect in my department, I will consider it a success when individuals who have not contributed to meetings in the past continue to make recommendations and give their input. Though we are not quite there yet, I have begun to see the difference in terms of the first 2 Rs.

As we transform into a new team and a new organization, it will be important for me to evaluate the forward momentum, to help guide us towards a place of Revelation and Re-engagement. An objective measure of success will come when we look at the Results in the months to come: Are we expanding our client base into new industry sectors? Is our revenue increasing as a result? Are we more fully integrated with the academic side of the college? Have we created new and innovative programming? And maybe most importantly – Are we happier and more engaged when we come to work each day?

This entry was posted in [Plans for Practice](#) on [August 17, 2014](#) by [barbararosenberg001](#). [Edit](#)

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2 thoughts on “A mindful plan for practice – Barbara”



peter.taylor

August 17, 2014 at 7:47 pm

The changes in your workplace provide a wonderful opportunity for putting the tools and frameworks you have identified from CrCrTh 618 into practice. A few challenges I see:

1. Making space(s) under pressure to move ahead to allow people recover from their wounds from the past as you also recover from your wounds.
2. Dealing with supervisors/higher admin who want to assume, but who don't have much insight/interest/skills re: cultivating collaborators.
3. Arranging an assistant/ally to support your initiatives, where support sometimes includes slowing you down so you take the time you know that you need to debrief on what happened and so you're not trying to do too much too soon on your own.
4. Turning the evaluative questions at the end into specific evaluations from which you can learn

how to improve (as well as recognize what you have done well).

When you have a chance, it'd be great for the rest of us to hear about your successes as well as how you recover from any setbacks.

Best wishes for this exciting time ahead,

peter

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rhodamaurer001

September 1, 2014 at 5:49 pm

Barbara – You've made me want to review the FourThoughtProcess again in more detail. I'm inspired to try your writing of your meeting intention at the top, middle and bottom of your notebook page to see what I learn from the process!
