

## The structure of group process

A group's process looks like the group itself: the parameters of a group's culture and communication style dictate how the group process will look. In some groups, the process may look like a moderated discussion, while in other groups, at other times, it has more of an emotional and non-linear quality.

The following steps to a group process are meant as a guideline or blueprint. Of course, each group process doesn't always follow the steps as they are outlined, however, these steps are a summary of the processes groups tend to go through and clarify the facilitator's role:

1. Sorting and filtering through issues
2. Framing, naming and consensus
3. Identifying roles and ghost roles
4. Watching for communication edges and hotspots
5. Framing topics, levels of conflict, and communication style
6. Noticing and framing momentary resolutions and atmosphere changes

### I. Sorting and Filtering for Topics

This step helps the group focus on a topic. Some groups already have a topic chosen, while other groups need to go through a sorting process to find what topic they want to choose. Even if a topic is chosen, sometimes the group still needs to go through the topic to find the specific focus within that topic.

There are different ways of doing this. People can name topics, or write them down on a piece of paper. The method depends on the group's culture and communication style.

#### Some helpful pointers to remember while sorting:

- If the floor is open for topics, those who can speak up right away will list their topic. Be mindful of those who don't feel free speaking up. Solicit input or encourage topics from those who otherwise haven't spoken.
- Take some time to clarify the topics people suggest. You might want to flesh it out by asking the person more about their topic. Be careful that this doesn't slide into a process. However, it's useful later when trying to reach a consensus because it's easier to see if some topics overlap when they've been fleshed out a bit.
- Topics may be implicit in the atmosphere. Sometimes the facilitator can sense unspoken tensions, topics or feelings in the mood or atmosphere of a group, such as fear, criticism, or conflict. These topics may be difficult for participants to

name, but the facilitator often picks up and feels the atmosphere, and can offer the feeling or atmosphere as a topic.

## **II. Gaining Consensus** – coming to a momentary agreement about what to focus on.

Consensus is a method of framing a direction the group, or a part of the group, seems to be heading. It is not a unanimous agreement to go in a direction, but a momentary agreement of one part of the group to focus on a topic, and on another part of the group to put their issues on hold in order to focus on that topic.

Consensus means framing and focusing on something, and in order to so, marginalizing other topics temporarily. By framing it this way, the facilitator and group acknowledge that important issues have been temporarily side-lined, appreciates those whose topic has been put aside for the time being, and, if necessary, might even discuss a time when that issue can be addressed.

## **III. Identifying Roles/Polarities**

The topic contains various points of views or polarities, that we call *roles*. Roles are often communicated as positions, feelings, points of view, and some of them can be named and identified with by people. Other roles are less obvious, and are just felt in the atmosphere or implied, for instance, one point of view is against another that isn't explicitly named, and no one in the group, at that moment, identifies with that point of view.

Roles emerge organically as different positions or polarities. It is helpful to explicitly name and make room for these roles, and even role play them until their meaning and message is clear, and until someone in the group can occupy the role authentically.

**Roles and Individuals:** At some point, individuals feel very strongly and drawn into a role. They may even feel they are personally 'in' the role. This is when the individual has little distance to the role. When an individual fills a role in a personal way, it is still a role, and yet it is personal, and often needs to be personally addressed. Sometimes this can be very relieving; the group's process is worked out through a personal or relationship experience. Other times, the individual alone cannot work through the issue, and is free to also step out again, and have others come in to take that role.

**Role Switching:** It is important in a group process that people feel free to go in and out of roles, and to take various roles. If the interaction between roles is allowed to go very deeply, role switching often organically occurs. People suddenly feel themselves moved to the other side, or they notice an aspect to their role, or another feeling or role in the conflict, that they feel moved to represent. Role switching helps the field process itself. It is important to remember that the roles are bigger than the individual – many people are often needed to fill out the role. At the same time, the individual is also bigger than any one role – no one role captures our whole complexity.

**Ghost Roles:** Some roles aren't named explicitly, but are implied in what has been said, or are felt in the atmosphere itself. Ghost Roles are the roles that people name and talk about but do not directly represent. For example, 'the government' or the 'the environment' are sometimes mentioned in group processes about political issues. These are ghost roles whose information is critical to the resolution of the group process. If people talk about safety, then the possibility of danger is a ghost role. Safety can't be fully resolved as an issue until the dangerous role is represented and known.

**Roles in the atmosphere:** The atmosphere itself can be a role. You, the facilitator, will often take up the ghost role in the atmosphere. You may feel things that aren't being named. Identifying the atmosphere is a self-preserving way of noticing the pressures the group feels, and the roles that trouble with it, without becoming frozen by it.

#### **IV. Watching for Edges & Hotspots**

In groups, an edge is a place where the known meets the unknown. The edge is frequently characterized by a communication block or difficulty speaking. When roles cannot speak, or complete what they are saying, they are at an edge. Noticing edges to communication helps the roles speak, and unfolds the deeper interaction in the group's field.

When roles begin to interact and express themselves, there are often one or several hotspots: a strong, intense, surprising, or emotional expression. Or, there is a silence, frozenness, or laughter. Hot spots are communication edges, and represent a potential transformation or deepening of the interaction. They are an invitation to go more deeply into what is happening. Sometimes hotspots may be subtle; they can be overlooked in the heat of the moment. Even if it's subtle, it's important to hold the group at that point, and find out more about that communication or interaction. Giving the person or people a chance to speak more deeply about the feelings moving them can have a transformative effect. As well, hotspots tend to escalate if they are not focused on.

#### **V. Framing topics, levels of conflict, and communication style**

The facilitator is a role in a group., It is the designated facilitator, but it is also anyone who can frame and report on what is happening, and help the group become aware of its different parts, experiences, roles, and atmospheres. This kind of "weather reporting" functions like a metacommunicator, and helps bring awareness to what is happening.

Some of what makes a group process confusing are the overlapping levels of the conversation: the topic is a consensus reality issue, but it is also an emotional interaction between people right in the moment. And at a sentient level, it is impersonal, mythic experience that is deep and often indefinable. These different levels of experience each have a different way of processing what is happening, and often different communication styles. While the consensus reality level deals with facts, history, and outer events, the interaction between people can be emotional, volatile, and intimate. At the same time, the conflict and the roles are impersonal. A facilitator framing and naming the different

levels as they occur helps the group focus on these different levels, and can deepen what is happening.

### **XI. Momentary Resolutions and Shifts in Atmosphere.**

There are moments in a group process where the atmosphere changes temporarily, perhaps edges have been crossed, things become more personal, an interaction becomes completed, roles seem to drop away and there is a sense of unity, silence, or a new learning, experience or insight that has arisen. The intensity and excitement of a group process can marginalize 'cool spots' or subtle moments of transformation, learning, agreement or resolution. Sometimes the facilitator has to bring the group back to focus on and notice these moments of agreement, and hold them for a little while, before the group cycles back into conflict or process again.

### **Day 2: Small Group Exercise: Tasks and Steps of a Group Process**

1. **20 minutes.** Choose who will facilitate which phase of the group process. You can self select, or spin pens. Depending on the size of your small group, there may be three to four people in each team.

2. The teams:

- Team One: Your task is to sort through issues, frame and name them and gain consensus on an issue for the group to focus.
- Team Two: Your task is to identify roles and polarities, to notice ghost roles and to support them to be represented.
- Team Three: Your task is to notice hot spots and edges and try to focus on them and help them to unfold more fully.
- The facilitation tasks of metacommunicating, framing, noticing and holding temporary resolutions, and time keeping will be a joint task for all to share.

3. **40 minutes.** Let the group process unfold.

4. **20 minutes.** Break into dyads, and debrief your experience with each other. Reflect on your task:

- How did it go? What did you learn?
- Were there difficulties you encountered?
- Was there an overlap between your personal experiences in the group process, the roles that emerged in the group, and the task you attempted?

**Inner work exercise – Connecting with the Land and Spirit of our Ancestors**

1. Think of your expectations for this week at Worldwork. Scan your experiences so far -- how it is going for you?
2. Put those thoughts aside for now and take a moment to remember a spot on this Earth that you feel at home spiritually. It could be a place you come from, or from where your ancestors come, or a spot that calls to you, or just feels like home. Wherever it is, you feel connected to it in some mysterious way. Where is it? What is so special there for you?
3. Notice what you see, feel, and sense as you recall this place.
4. Trust yourself now as you move into this time and space. Notice everything about this spot– its smells, atmosphere, sounds, any distinctive features of the landscape, the way that the light falls on the ground there. Pay attention to the feeling of that land.
5. Now let yourself sink into its very essence or core – just relax, trust and allow the spirit of the place to enfold you. As you do, you may notice a sound, image, movement or a sensation in your body – it may come as a combination of some of these. Catch it, believe in it and let it come to life within you.
6. Step inside this essence and become the spirit of the place. Feel it deep within you, and let it move you, make its sounds, and let it express itself through you until you become aware of its central message or meaning.
7. What is the special power or magic of this place? Why has it chosen you? What gifts and powers does it have, that you carry with you?
8. From within this space look back at the everyday “you.” What do you notice about your everyday self from this new space? How might these powers and gifts be used here this week? What do you bring to the group that is specially connected to the place on Earth you come from?