Facilitating Dialogue Cheat Sheet

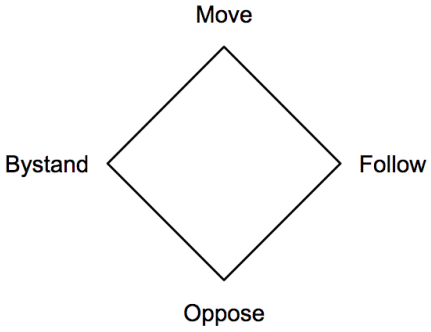
Dialogue and **Healthy Conflict** are essential skills for high performing teams and organizations to master.

- **To improve decision making**, by hearing perspectives and exploring our options thoroughly.
- **To generate commitment**. We don't need consensus, but we do need to give everyone a chance to have their voices heard.
- **To move faster**. By exploring options carefully, we will create greater alignment, greater commitment, improve our understanding of risks, and find a better path forwards once we start to implement.
- **To build psychological safety**. Leaders should create space to surface disagreement in a safe and constructive way in order to build a *generative* culture.

Kantor's 4-Player Model

Kantor's model posits that there are 4 possible speech 'acts'.

Communication problems occur when individuals become 'stuck' over-using one of these acts, or when certain sequences become entrenched, undermining group learning and decision making.



1. The **Move** act establishes direction and sets the team in motion.
2. The **Follow** act provides support for the move and serves as the function of completion.
3. The **Oppose** act questions the move that has been initiated.
4. The **Bystand** act provides perspective and invites the team to reflect.

Why we need these acts

- Without a mover, the team lacks direction.
- Without those who will follow, work won't get completed.
- Without an opposer, legitimate concerns are ignored.
- Without bystanders, we lose perspective and fail to explore all angles.

In practice

You should:

- Be aware of your own tendencies.
- Strike a balance.
- Cite the acts (e.g. *"I am going to play the Oppose role"*; *"I am going to act as Bystander"*; etc.)

Facilitators should:

- Listen to the balance of the room.
- Reflect back to the room the acts they're seeing and hearing.
- Encourage participants to play different roles, especially to get discussion "unstuck".
- Remind participants to state the acts they're performing.

Bohmian Dialogue

Bohm distinguishes between *discussion* and *dialogue*.

Discussion is like a game, with winners and losers: one sets out to prove one's point, or to get commitment to one's ideas.

The intent of **Dialogue** is not to win, but simply to understand something about how the group is thinking by surfacing assumptions and cognitive errors. If a mistake is discovered, everyone wins.

To engage in dialogue, one should surface one's **basic assumptions**, i.e. the assumptions, prejudices and defensive routines that are typically automatically invoked without our awareness.

How does this help?

As Peter Senge notes: *"Through dialogue, we become observers of our own thinking."* We can *"begin to take a more creative, less reactive stance toward thought."*

In Practice

You should:

- Maintain awareness of your internal feelings and responses.
- "Suspend your assumptions": surface them so that you and others can learn about how you are thinking.
- Focus on learning about how others are thinking, rather than being right or winning points.

Facilitators should:

- Ask participants to regard one another as colleagues "in mutual quest for deeper insight and clarity".
- Encourage participants to "suspend" their assumptions by making them visible to the group.
- "Hold the Context" of dialogue: if the group turns to point-seeking discussion, bring the group back to dialogue.