

Layers of Analysis Exercise

Experiment with the layers-of-analysis approach by interviewing another person. See whether you can identify layers of a problem that were not clear initially.

As you do this, remember: The gift the consultant has to offer is to clarify issues—layers of the problem— not to offer solutions. If statements of solutions were going to be helpful at this stage, the line manager probably would have already thought of them. Even if the solutions are indeed novel, the chance of their acceptance now is slim.

Try to keep moving closer to the center of the issues, not farther away. If you listen carefully, you'll notice side trips (usually about people who aren't in the room). Allow the side trips, but don't take the journeys yourself.

Some Responses to Use in the Interview

You have several options in responding to a person in a discovery interview. Try these responses.

1. *Restatement.* Put what is said into other words that communicate and check understanding.
2. *Open-Ended Question.* Ask a question in a way that does not program a certain answer or allow a yes or no answer.
3. *Hypothesis About the Next Layer.* Make tentative guesses about how the person is feeling about others involved in the drama, or how the person feels about his or her own role. "You must feel frustrated." "You must feel angry with them." "You must have wondered why they didn't tell you directly."

Small Group Discovery – Avoiding the Leadership Love Trap

Small groups are the vehicle for integrating activity in organizations. Two people can be a small group—or maybe forty. Small group discovery is one step more complex than individual discovery, for it encompasses the interaction among people. It is understanding this interaction that is the core task of small group discovery. Even if the task of the small group is very technical—for example, planning a new product introduction, the interaction of people and

viewpoints has to be part of the data collection.

There are two ways of understanding small groups. One is to ask them (either through interviews or questionnaires) what is happening. The second is to observe, firsthand, what is happening.

The complexity of small group functioning can be understood most easily through the concept of group norms. Group norms are statements of common and acceptable ways of behaving in the group. Acceptable ways of dealing with. From the instant of its inception, each group, whether consciously or not, develops certain ways of dealing with the issues all groups have to deal with—power, conflict, support, risk taking, leveling, problem definition, problem exploration, solution finding, decision making.

Norms can be identified via interview, questionnaire, or observation. They are nonjudgmental statements of behavior. “Support in this group is expressed by silence.” “Until Alice agrees, the group does not move on.” “The group starts its meeting with a discussion of solutions, almost before the problem is defined.”

The reason for focusing on group norms is to try to balance the overwhelming emphasis organizations and consultants alike give to “leadership style.” There is a great tendency to give the leader total credit or blame for how well a group is performing. People think that the solution to most organizational problems is to get a new leader. It’s a sports mentality. Fire the manager.

It takes two to tango, and if a group is having trouble solving a problem, the members of that group have a part in the problem and should be a part of the solution. Pinning too much responsibility on the leader can be a defense for the rest of the group and for the consultant. The group says, “If it weren’t for that manager, we could get the job done.” Well, the group always has a part in the melodrama. They must be colluding in some ways to keep the situation from improving. They might be a part of the problem by remaining silent, or their sin may be one of resisting everything the manager suggests. If group members can support one another and confront the difficulty they are having with the manager, the situation usually improves. When a manager is blamed and changed, it just means that everyone has to wait around for six months or more until the new person “gets up to speed and gets a feel for the situation.”

Resist putting the problems at the door of the manager only. View the group as a self-maintaining system, sharing the blame and the credit. I believe it is important to view all problems as organizational problems. And what you're really trying to do is change the norms and methods the organization uses to do business.