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*Every month **Attractors** shares tips and tools from human systems dynamics.
In this month's edition, Glenda Eoyang reflects on*

COLLABORATIVE ACTION

Do you remember when teams had stable memberships, clear goals, long-term relationships, unambiguous accountabilities, and constant scopes of work? My clients' teams face a different reality today.

- A high-tech product development unit establishes long-term relationships with their clients and colleagues around the world.
- A grant funds diverse disciplines from multiple institutions to explore opportunities for interprofessional practice.
- A state agency convenes multiple stakeholders to develop a system-wide strategic plan for child support enforcement.
- A concerned citizen, inspired by Bill Moyers, hosts an "impeachment dinner."
- A Washington consulting firm establishes an ad hoc cross-functional group to collect and analyze business intelligence.

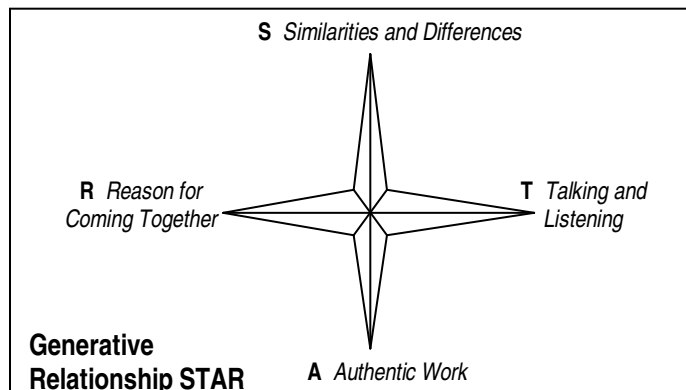
In all of these cases, diverse individuals come together to accomplish shared goals. You might call them teams, but they are different in kind from our stable and organizationally grounded teams of the past.

Members of these 21st century teams:

- Report to many different masters.
- Represent diverse institutions and/or perspectives.
- Expect to come together, do their work, and disband in a relatively short time.
- Hold little or no formal authority.
- Focus on issues of systemic significance.

What competencies and processes help these teams succeed in turbulent and temporary relationships? We have found one tool—**Generative Relationship STAR**—that helps groups short circuit the traditional stages of group development and move quickly into productive action.

The **STAR** was developed by Brenda Zimmerman. It is a four-part model that represents the conditions that contribute to productive and creative relationships. When members of a group are conscious of their **STAR** profile, they see and influence patterns of collaborative action.



S—Similarities and Differences. A group needs some identified similarities to call them together for shared work. If similarities are too few or unacknowledged, the group may not stick together long enough to do their work. On the other hand, if the group is too homogeneous, it may not be able to generate enough energy to move forward.

T—Talking and Listening. Communication is key to effective group work. Formal and informal, giving and receiving, internal and external—all modes of communication connect members to each other and to the environment that shapes their shared work.

A—Authentic Work. Concrete tasks, products, and outcomes focus the energy of a group and reinforce collaborative action. Without the grounding of authentic work, a group can wander aimlessly and quickly lose motivation for action.

R—Reason for Coming Together. All members of a team, no matter how diverse, need to share a reason for coming together. That doesn't mean that all of their motivations are identical. It does mean that everyone shares an explicit reason for coming to this particular task at this particular time.

The **STAR** forms a nonlinear combination of factors that shape successful group work. There's no necessary sequence in which the four factors should be considered. No one of the four dominates the others. In a healthy and productive group, all four are in balance. When a team is stuck, usually one of the conditions is receiving more or less attention than all the others. An example will demonstrate the complex interactions among the four **STAR** conditions.

A cross functional team was formed to lead a strategic planning process for their manufacturing plant. Their authentic work (A) was clear: Set strategies, objectives, and action plans to prepare the organization for the future. In the first few meetings, differences (S) predominated as product designers, labor leaders, safety engineers, accountants, and logistical experts talked (not much listening) (T) about the challenges they saw in the future. When they finally identified a shared reason (R)—responding to global competition—their similar(S) concerns moved them into more productive interactions (T) where they could listen respectfully to each other. When their **STAR** was balanced, their work became productive.

You, too, can use the power of the **STAR** to help complex teams improve their performance.

You will find more information about the **STAR** among the HSD resources available from the OD Network website at www.odnetwork.org/resources/HSD/. **Be a STAR** provides an assessment tool to judge the capacity of your team as well as a handbook of techniques to balance the four conditions. **Voices from the Field: An Introduction to Human Systems Dynamics** includes a chapter on the **STAR** and how to bring your team's performance into balance. Contact us for information about this and other tools and techniques of human systems dynamics.

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