Reflecting in teams with a focus on solutions

A process to surface collective wisdom to solve problems

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In brief

Purpose of Solution Focus Team Reflection

The purpose of the Solutions Focus Reflecting Team discussion is to bring out the collective wisdom of a group to address a specific challenge. It usually creates an atmosphere of mutual respect to support positive problem-solving.

When to use Team Reflection?

To support the following processes: action learning, team learning, team support – especially temporary or transitory teams, trouble-shooting, project support, coaching and mentor support, training.

Who can participate?

Teams with a minimum of five people. The exercise can be facilitated externally, or can be self-facilitated. It is most easily applied in small groups, but also works well in large groups.

How long does the process take?

Approximately 25 minutes, although this can vary.

This is a tool introduced by the Solutions Focus.
For more information, see www.thesolutionsfocus.co.uk

Development projects often bring together diverse teams to tackle complex issues. These teams rarely start out with all of the answers to the problems they are trying to solve, and regularly meet barriers to achieving their intended outcomes. This tool offers an opportunity to listen to colleagues and make the most of the wealth of expertise available around you. This technique can be used to support positive problem-solving and knowledge-sharing within teams.

Description

There are six phases in the Solutions Focus Reflecting Team approach. Time flow is quite flexible:

1. Preparing: The person who wishes to receive help (the presenter) comes to the meeting with a specific request.

Solution focused team reflections are useful to explore complex issues such as resilience and plan for action. (Photo: "Forum Theatre can help explore complex situations and different pathways for action. (Photo: Mohamed Diop)

Fictitious examples: I would like to know how to improve my interaction with my project counterpart; I would like to talk to a representative from the Met Services and I am not sure how to approach them.

2. Presenting: The presenter outlines the situation to the team. The team listens attentively without interrupting and lets the presenter finish.

3. Clarifying: The team asks questions to understand the situation more clearly. They also ask solution-focused questions, such as, 'What are you aiming to achieve?' 'What signs will tell you that you are making progress?' 'What have you already achieved in relation to this?' 'What will be the first signs of progress you'd be pleased to notice?' 'Who can support you in this?' 'How can we help you in this conversation?' The presenter replies after each question.

4. Affirming: Each team member tells the presenter what has impressed him or her most about how he or she is handling the situation. Or, they engage in 'positive gossip' together about what has impressed them. Positive gossip simply entails saying positive (kind, encouraging) things about someone in the third person. So, for example, 'Mary has done a great job

organising this meeting and bringing together these two actors who were not aware of each others' existence.' The presenter listens silently to each item of positive feedback and says, 'Thank you', at the end.

5. Reflecting: The presenter retreats a little from the group and the team members take it in turn to go round the table and offer one item at a time of appropriate input. If one person has nothing to offer they say, 'Pass', and this cycle continues until everyone has said all they want to say or they run out of time. Inputs may build creatively on each other. The input offered at this stage includes anything each member considers relevant. This can be technical input, advice, reflections, metaphors or other forms of input. While the team is reflecting, the presenter remains silent and listens. The presenter may want to take notes.

6. Responding: After the reflections, the presenter responds briefly to what has been said, thanks everyone and (usually) sets him or herself a next step.

Tip! It helps to have one member of the team as a process monitor, to keep track of the phases and enforce the rules of the format.