

Embodied Learning Module

Rake, Spokes and Circles

Aims

1. Provide a lived experience of organizational structure, including the transformation of a traditional linear hierarchy into a double-linked circular hierarchy.
2. Provide a lived experience of the relationship between operational circles and the general circle and the functions of the upward and downward links.
3. Demonstrate the impact of organizational structure on the qualities of connection, equivalence and effectiveness for members of the organization.

Environment

Open space with room for all participants to move around freely.

Materials

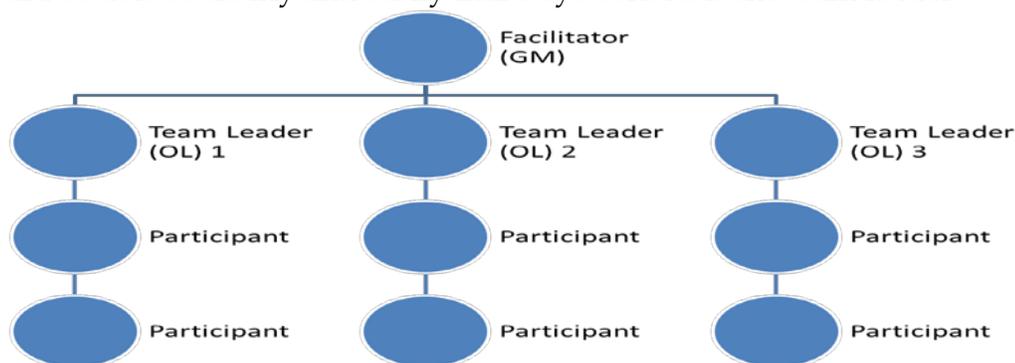
None.

Preparation

1. Decide how many teams / circles will be formed for the activity, preferably between three and five.
2. Select a leader for each team, either an assistant or a randomly chosen participant.

Activity Description (see diagram below)

1. Ask the team leaders to stand in front of you in a line from left to right. Name the teams if it contributes to clarity and shared understanding.
2. Invite your participants to form a linear hierarchy by dividing into relatively equally sized groups and lining up behind the team leaders so each person is directly behind the person in front of her. The only person with whom you should be able to clearly and easily make eye contact is the team leader.

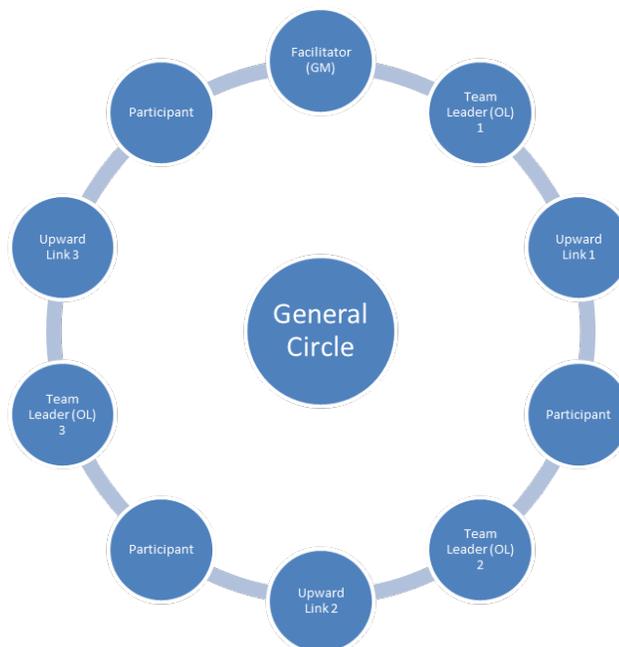


3. Invite the teams to rotate outward from center to form “spokes” rather than a “rake,” to accentuate the lack of visibility from top to bottom and vice versa.
4. Inquire about the experience of people in different levels of the linear hierarchy (see Inquiry Framework below).

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5. Introduce the transformation from linear to circular hierarchy by asking the last person in each line (team) to move forward and stand next to the team leader, facing toward the team. This person is now the upward link.
6. With the upward link facing the team and the downward link facing the facilitator (GM), introduce the concept of double-linking and the structurally established two-way flow of power and information.
7. Invite the teams to form circles, with the upward and downward links standing next to each other.
8. Introduce the concept of the circle meeting, the configuration in which the team makes policy decisions to define the conditions in which they work together.
9. Demonstrate the formation of the General Circle by inviting the upward and downward links of each team to join you in a circle standing in front of the group. Introduce the concept of policy decisions in the GC made by OL, Reps and the GM by consent.



10. Demonstrate the transition back into the linear hierarchy for operational matters by inviting each team to return to the spoke configuration with the upward and downward links at the head of each line.
11. Inquire about the experience of people in different roles in the circular hierarchy (see Inquiry Framework below).

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Inquiry Framework

Use inquiry to harvest the experience of the participants. Use the main points listed below as a reference point for framing the responses to these questions.

1. What is the main benefit of a linear hierarchy? What is the main challenge?
2. What did you learn about how you experience being in a linear hierarchy as a team lead? A team member?
3. What is the impact of adding an “upward link” to each team in the linear hierarchy?
4. How does the GC contribute to connection, equivalence and effectiveness for the entire organization?
5. What insights do you take away from this activity?

Main Points

1. A linear (power-over or domination) hierarchy is very effective at accomplishing tasks because people at different levels engage their work with different levels of abstraction / detail.
2. A linear hierarchy allows people at relatively higher levels to ignore feedback from the relatively lower levels, because power and information structurally flow only in the relatively downward direction.
3. Adding an upward link (representative) to each branch of a linear hierarchy provides a structurally define pathway for the relatively upward flow of power and information. The downward link (leader) continues to provide the relatively downward flow of power and information.
4. A circular (power-with or actualizing) hierarchy allows each person in each team (circle) to have a say in the policy decisions defining the conditions of their work by consent. These consented policies are implemented using the linear hierarchy.
5. People who have a say in the policies defining the conditions of their work are more likely to support the implementation of these policies than if the policies are created by autocratic decision.
6. Consent-based policies may delegate operational decisions to one or more individuals for autocratic implementation, so that day-to-day work may be carried out in much the same manner as in a purely linear structure.
7. The General Circle makes policy decisions affecting the entire organization or when consent cannot be reached at a relatively lower level. The members of the GC are the General Manager, Operational Leaders of each team (downward links) and one or more representatives from each team (upward links). The GC does not make operational decisions.