

OD Case 2: Intervention to Improve Inter-Group Communications

(This case illustrates how a short, issue-focused survey can help improve intervention effectiveness.)

An HR Director asked us to help resolve conflict between the HR and Finance departments. While acknowledging that personality differences existed between the two Dept. Heads, the conflict also involved several team members in each department. The groups needed to interact on a variety of projects and poor communication was impacting morale and productivity.

We interviewed each Director to understand their perspective about the conflict. We also interviewed a couple of key team members from each department.

To gather advance information for the meeting, we developed a short, issue-focused survey for the two groups. Each person was asked to assess their group's performance and the performance of the other group on various communication topics. They were also asked to describe how they viewed themselves, how they viewed the other group, and how they felt the other group viewed them.

The data from the survey was summarized and sent to members of both teams a couple of days prior to the meeting. All department members also completed an on line Myers Briggs assessment.

The full day workshop began with a two-hour, Myers-Briggs communications workshop with all Department members. This helped people understand that all the preferences are needed to obtain best results and to appreciate the different preferences of their peers and leaders. We gave them information about how to communicate effectively with different types.

The rest of the morning was spent reviewing the results of the survey and breaking into small, action planning teams with HR and Finance represented on each team. The groups were asked to look at the data from each group's perspective and then develop some specific plans to improve communications. The morning session was closed out by reassembling the entire group and asking each person to share something they personally planned to do to help improve future communications.

In the afternoon, our facilitator met for a coaching session with just the two Directors. The survey data was reviewed with them and the morning workshop debriefed. The Directors were also asked to talk honestly about what their personal contributions to the conflict issues were and to brainstorm ways that they and the two groups could begin to improve their inter-group communications.

The feedback on the workshop from the team members and the Directors was very positive. They felt that the honest discussions about communication issues would help them improve.

We checked back with the Directors two months after the workshop and they indicated that inter-group communications had improved dramatically. They were pleased that each group's perceptions of the other group were now more positive as were their own understanding of each other.