

# REDUCING THE PAIN, INCREASING THE GAIN

Laura J. Black, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Management  
Student Organization Leadership Conference – Fall 2015

# OR HOW TO MAKE YOUR MEETINGS MORE EFFECTIVE

© 2015 Laura J. Black

## Why meetings are important

- Expensive...or Priceless?
- Shared experiences
  - shared understandings
  - joint action

© 2015 Laura J. Black

## Very tiny summary of theories of social construction

1. Meanings exist because we agree that they exist.
2. These agreements emerge as we *repeatedly* refer to them *as if* they exist when we communicate with others.
3. Social agreements make joint action possible (and make living with others much easier).

*What is joint action?*

Joint action is acting on a shared objective but not doing the same thing to get to get there.

© 2015 Laura J. Black

## Very tiny summary of theories of social construction

- **Examples of *social agreements***
  - Time—clocks, calendars, time zones
  - Traffic rules
  - National, state, and province boundaries
  - Lots of examples...

© 2015 Laura J. Black

## Very tiny summary of theories of social construction

1. Meanings exist because we have come to agree that they exist.
2. **Process most evident when watching children develop, learn to function**
  - These agreements are learned because we repeatedly refer to them as if they exist as we try to convey meanings to others.
3. Social agreements make joint action possible (and make living with others much easier).

© 2015 Laura J. Black

## Very tiny summary of theories of social construction

1. Meanings exist because we have come to agree that they exist
2. **Process most evident when watching children develop, learn to function**  
These agreements are because we repeatedly refer to them as if they exist as we try to convey meanings to others.
3. **Unproblematic—as long as situations are routine**  
Social agreements make joint action possible (and make living with others much easier)

© 2015 Laura J. Black

## Why meetings are important

- They are opportunities to create
  - ...shared experiences
  - ...and shared meanings
  - ...which can lead to joint action

© 2015 Laura J. Black

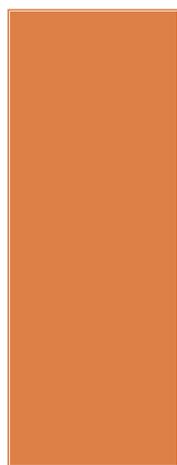
## Why meet?

- We meet to solve problems beyond the scope of a single person or unit.
- Interacting people create and change organizations.
- Building buy-in is imperative for execution.
- We want to harnesses stakeholders' voices productively.
- Shared meaning enables joint action.

© 2015 Laura J. Black

*Joint action = effectiveness*

## The (single) Meeting



*Designing*

*Executing*

*Debriefing and next steps / follow-up*

© 2015 Laura J. Black

## Designed for effectiveness?

Draw these activities to scale, based on the time you spend on them

Designing

Executing

Debriefing &  
next steps /  
follow-up

© 2015 Laura J. Black

## Designed for effectiveness?

Draw these activities to scale, based on the time you spend on them

Designing **Executing** Debriefing & next steps / follow-up

© 2015 Laura J. Black

## Planning a meeting

- What we usually **do well:**
  - ▣ When and where can we meet?
    - *Establish the calendar date, start time, and location*
  - ▣ What is the issue?
    - *Identify the focusing problem or question—but it's usually expressed as a nebulous noun*

© 2015 Laura J. Black

## Planning a meeting

- What we usually **don't do well :**
  - ▣ When can we **stop** meeting?
    - *Establish an end time as well as a start time*
  - ▣ **What is the desired outcome?**
    - *Articulate what we want to have accomplished by the meeting's end*
  - ▣ How will I create shared focus at the start?
    - ***Try a verb phrase or a full question!***

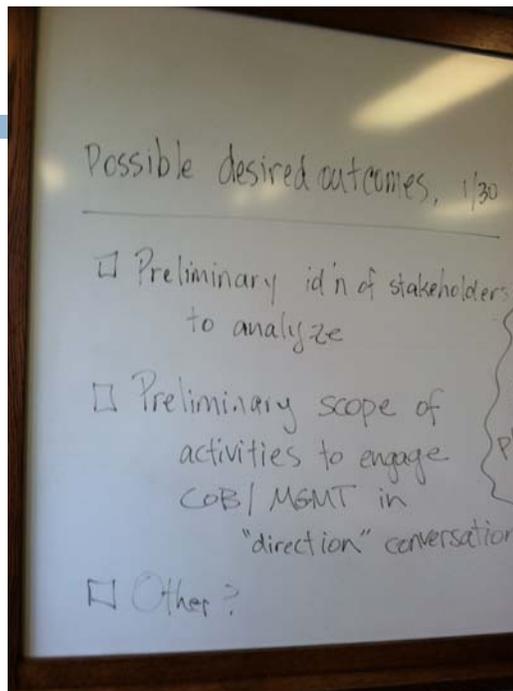
© 2015 Laura J. Black

# Simple tools → Big differences

Make Progress  
Planning the Meeting

<p><b>Initiative / Project Name:</b></p> <hr/> <p><b>Objective / Focusing Issue:</b> <i>What do we need to discuss?</i> <i>Tip: Phrasing this as a question often helps clarify focus—or try finishing one of these phrases: How to... or I wish I knew...</i></p> <hr/> <p><b>Desired Outcomes:</b> <i>What deliverables will this meeting produce? Note: Agreement or awareness can be a deliverable, as can a tangible product.</i></p> <hr/> <p><b>Key Participants / Stakeholders</b> <i>Who (name, representing whom?) Why (expertise? buy-in?)</i></p> <table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr><td><hr/></td><td><hr/></td></tr> <tr><td><hr/></td><td><hr/></td></tr> <tr><td><hr/></td><td><hr/></td></tr> <tr><td><hr/></td><td><hr/></td></tr> </table>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<p><b>Possible Processes for Conducting the Meeting</b></p> <table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="text-align: left;"><i>Process</i></th> <th style="text-align: right;"><i>Est. duration</i></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td><hr/></td><td><hr/></td></tr> <tr><td><hr/></td><td><hr/></td></tr> <tr><td><hr/></td><td><hr/></td></tr> <tr><td><hr/></td><td><hr/></td></tr> <tr><td><hr/></td><td><hr/></td></tr> <tr><td><hr/></td><td><hr/></td></tr> </tbody> </table>	<i>Process</i>	<i>Est. duration</i>	<hr/>											
<hr/>	<hr/>																						
<hr/>	<hr/>																						
<hr/>	<hr/>																						
<hr/>	<hr/>																						
<i>Process</i>	<i>Est. duration</i>																						
<hr/>	<hr/>																						
<hr/>	<hr/>																						
<hr/>	<hr/>																						
<hr/>	<hr/>																						
<hr/>	<hr/>																						
<hr/>	<hr/>																						

## Examples



# Examples

## Meeting Planning Worksheet Sagebrush Steppe Vegetation Workshop

**DATE AND TIME:** Monday, August 29, 1:00 – 5:00  
Tuesday, August 30, 8:00 – 4:00

**LOCATION:** USGS Office, Northern Rocky Mountain Science Center, 2327 University Way, Suite 2, Bozeman, MT 59715

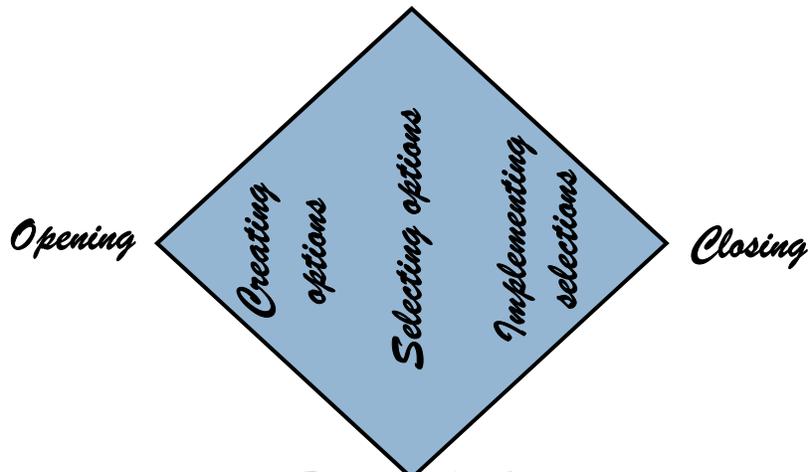
**FACILITATOR:** Laura Black

**ISSUE(S):** To explore options for integrating sagebrush steppe vegetation local monitoring data within the GNLC

- DESIRED OUTCOME(S):** *By the end of this meeting, we will have:*
- A shared vision of what we can accomplish by leveraging existing ongoing work on sagebrush steppe vegetation.
  - Familiarity with one another and the nature and extent of sagebrush-community monitoring that each of us does.
  - Collective information and some understanding of:
    - Past, current, and future collection of sagebrush vegetation data;
    - Sampling and analytical methods used; and
    - Ideas on how to approach multi-scale analysis.
  - Next steps to synthesize monitoring data and analyses of sagebrush steppe vegetation communities.

What (Content)	How (Process)	Who	Time (Minutes)	Mat'ls
<b>Setup:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Roles</li> <li>• Desired Outcomes</li> <li>• Agenda</li> <li>• Ground Rules</li> <li>• Decision Making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Role contracting</li> <li>• Revisit Desired Outcomes</li> <li>• Review agenda</li> <li>• Propose / build ground rules</li> <li>• Consider decision-making by emergent consensus</li> </ul>	Kathi - Laura	10	Map and push pins? Name tags Tents Notepaper (for individuals) and pens
<b>Introduction to purpose/focus</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Articulate Big Picture context for this workshop</li> <li>• Articulate focus for this workshop</li> </ul>	Kathi - other? Sponsor?	10	Ask Tom?
<b>Introduction to participants</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Round-the-room, 60-second introductions: Name, agency, monitoring location + 1 thing learned from work during the last year</li> </ul>		40	

# Executing: The meeting DIAMOND



Adapted from Facilitating Change, ©1996 Interaction Associates

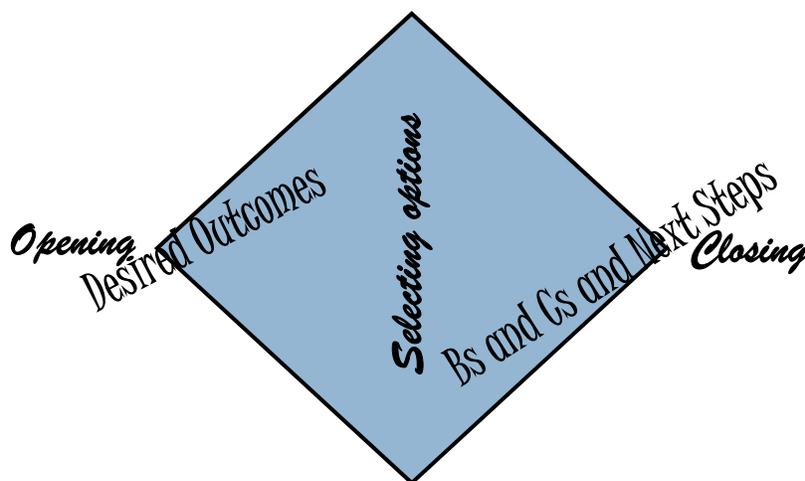
## The meeting DIAMOND

- A good meeting has an **opening out**, or diverging conversation from the initial “point of departure.”
- Making meeting participants **“turn the corner”** and agree on a decision before they have aired options (thoughts, feelings) results in decisions that don’t “stick.”
- A good conversation converges, or **narrows down**, before the meeting concludes.

*Understanding the “shape” of a good meeting can keep us from panicking when others don’t agree with us at the outset.*

© 2015 Laura J. Black

## The meeting DIAMOND



Adapted from *Facilitating Change*, ©1996 Interaction Associates

## Beginnings and endings

- **Desired outcomes**
  - Can be **tangible** (a list of options for...; identified next steps to...) or **intangible** (an agreement to...)
  - *Be explicit —and make them **visible!***
- **Bs and Cs and Next Steps**
  - **Benefits** / +s – *What was good / useful / fun about what just happened?*
  - **Concerns** / Δs – *“How to...” and “I wish I knew...”*
  - **Next Steps** – *For each concern, identify Who / What / When*

© 2015 Laura J. Black

## The meeting DIAMOND



- **Opening out (generative):** Structured processes for brainstorming, generating
  - Ensure equitable participation from everyone
  - Keep the meeting from converging too soon or diverging too long
- **Tip:** *Make sure question /problem is well-posed—and participants are willing to address it*
- **Tip:** *Cue participants up front—e.g., before first idea is spoken, remind “no censoring, no criticizing, no evaluation—just get the ideas out”*

© 2015 Laura J. Black

## Useful phrases

- **Opening:**
  - ▣ *Here's what I hope we'll accomplish in the next 45 minutes...(point to desired outcomes)*
  - ▣ *To make sure we're taking a broad view of this...(explain divergent process)*

© 2015 Laura J. Black

## The meeting DIAMOND



- **Narrowing down** (selective): Structured processes for selecting which items generated merit more attention
  - ▣ Ensure equitable participation from everyone
  - ▣ Ensure a rationale (and sense of fairness) in focusing on some items to the exclusion of others
- **Tip:** *Check whether divergent products address question / problem*
- **Tip:** *Prevent premature closure / false consensus: Have discussions before polling or gradual elimination*

© 2015 Laura J. Black

## Useful phrases

- **Closing:**
  - ▣ *So before we close out, let's take stock of what was useful and what concerns we still have...(introduce Bs and Cs)*

© 2015 Laura J. Black

## The meeting DIAMOND



- **Turning the corner:** Clear transitions that cue participants that process / shape / objective is changing
- **Useful phrases:**
  - ▣ *I want to do a process check... Are we ready to consider which of these ideas we want to move forward?*
  - ▣ *Does anyone have ideas we haven't heard yet?... If not, then...*
  - ▣ *Have we covered the terrain of options for this?... If so, then....*

© 2015 Laura J. Black

## Beginnings and endings

- Desired outcomes
  - Were they achieved?
- Bs and Cs and Next Steps
  - Follow-up *begins in the meeting*
  - Debrief visibly, real-time
    - **Benefits** / +s – *What was good / useful / fun about what just happened?*
    - **Concerns** / Δs – *“How to...” and “I wish I knew...”*
    - **Next Steps** – *For each concern, identify Who / What / When*

© 2015 Laura J. Black

## Premise

- People want to be competent
- If we tell them how to be competent...
  - *They cooperate*
  - *They are surprisingly grateful for structure*

© 2015 Laura J. Black

## Facilitative physics

- The one who holds the pen holds the power
- Move close to disruptive people
  - ▣ Help them feel heard
  - ▣ From their physical position, engage others
  - ▣ If necessary intimidate them with your presence
- Use pink erasers if necessary 😊
- Others?

© 2015 Laura J. Black

## Visual representations

- *Throughout any meeting, use **visual representations!***
  - ▣ *Bold*
  - ▣ *Ugly*
  - ▣ *“Real”*

© 2015 Laura J. Black

## Visual representations

- **Important and useful** because...
  - “How do I know what I think until I see what I say?”
  - Create a shared experience
  - Serve as shared memory
  - Eliminate many “bad” meeting behaviors
    - E.g., wandering off-topic, repeating previous points
      - How does this relate to our desired outcome of ...?
      - Is what you’re saying different from this (point to board)...?
  - Take a picture for fast, useful meeting documentation

© 2015 Laura J. Black

## Visual representations

- To be effective
  - Use low-tech, high-touch—really!
  - Keep words sparse
  - Capture what is said (use **their** terms)
    - If paraphrase, ask, “Is it all right if I capture it like this?”
  - **Transform** based on ongoing input!

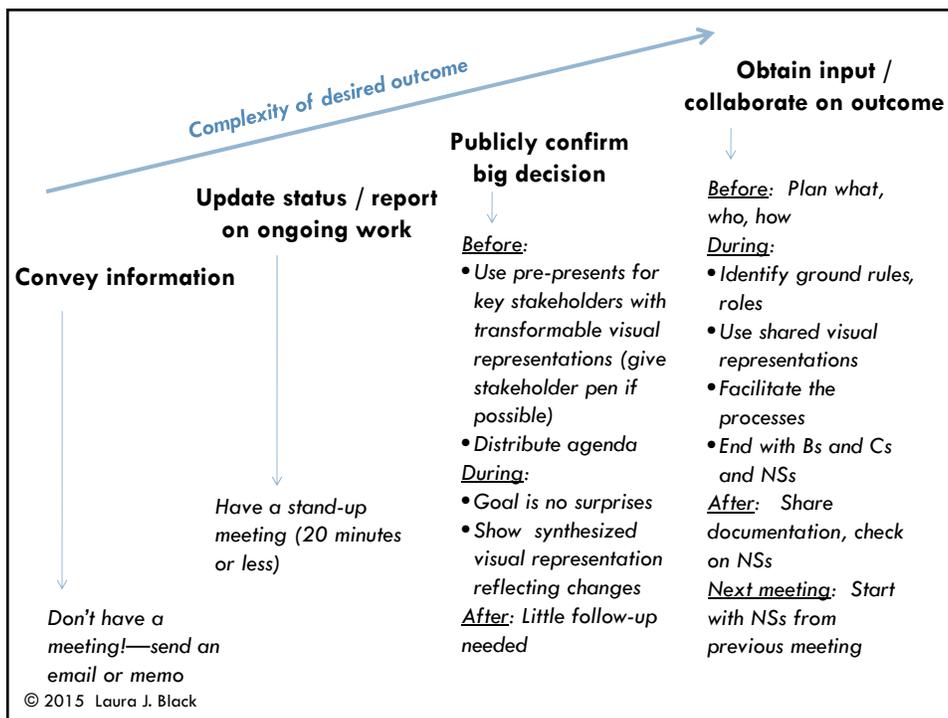
*To be effective, visual representations should function as “boundary objects.”  
A robust boundary object represents dependencies among participants  
(relatively) concretely and is transformable by all participants.*

© 2015 Laura J. Black

# Meetings: A continuum

What kind of meeting is appropriate?

© 2015 Laura J. Black



## Liberation!

*Meeting roles*  
*Decision making  $\neq$  meeting*  
*Continuum of meetings*

© 2015 Laura J. Black

## Roles: Facilitator responsibilities

- **Planning**
  - *Desired outcome*
  - *Participant / stakeholder analysis*
  - *Agenda / meeting roles / process choices*
- **Conducting**
  - *Ground rules*
  - *Decision-making processes in meeting*
  - *Meeting roles executed*
- **Closing**
  - *Comparing desired outcome to actual outcomes*
  - *Leading Benefits / Concerns / Next Steps / WWW conversation*
- **Following-up**
  - *Ensuring documentation shared*
  - *Checking on WWW for Next Steps*
  - *Beginning the next meeting with updates since last meeting's closing*

© 2015 Laura J. Black

## Roles: There are many!

- **Participant**
- **Leader—aka** meeting owner
  - *Calls*
  - *(Maybe) designs*
- **Facilitator**
  - *Designs*
  - *Manages in-meeting processes and conversations (not content!)*
- **Recorder / scribe**
  - *Documents elements of processes, conversations, outcomes during meeting*
  - *Distributes documentation post-meeting*
- **Other**

© 2015 Laura J. Black

## Roles: There are many!

- You can own and call the meeting and not participate.
- You can own the meeting and participate but not facilitate.
- You can facilitate the meeting and not scribe.
- You can change roles across and even within meetings as long as you're clear—with yourself and others—about what you're doing.

© 2015 Laura J. Black

## Roles

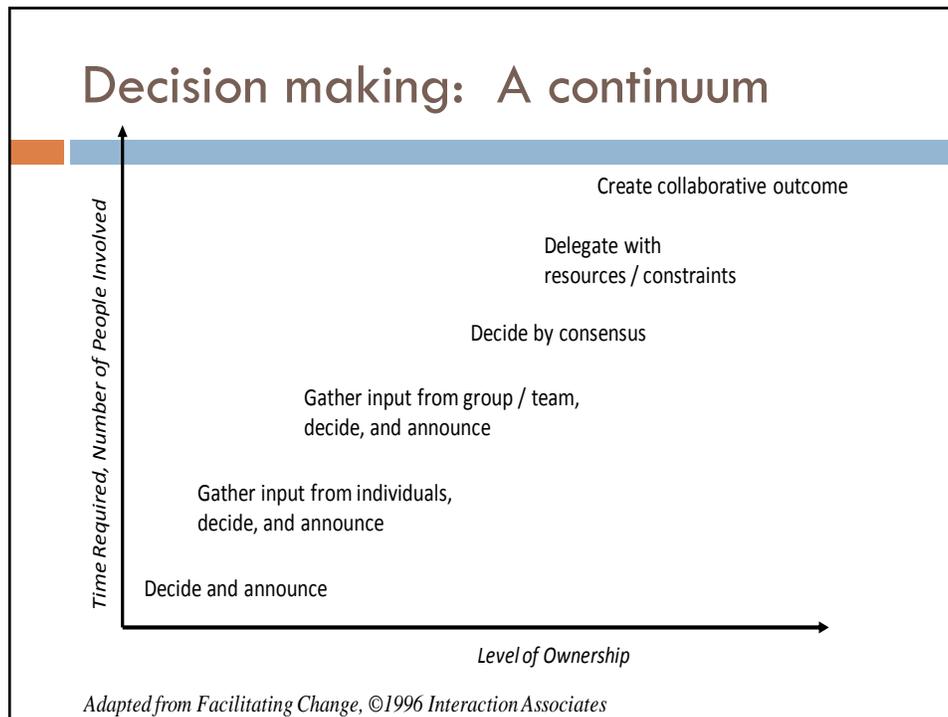
- Do NOT default to playing all roles!
  - ▣ *No, no, no!*
- Expand your group members' capabilities.
- Expand your group members' expectations for meeting quality and productivity.

© 2015 Laura J. Black

## Decision making $\neq$ meeting

- Be as clear as you can about the decision making process for *each* desired outcome.
- If you aren't, people may infer that talking about an issue means the decision-making process is *consensus*.
  - ▣ *That means they get upset if outcome is different from their perception of what was discussed.*

© 2015 Laura J. Black



## Decision making

- When choosing a process, consider:
  - ▣ *How important is the decision?*
  - ▣ *How much time is available?*
  - ▣ *What information is needed?*
  - ▣ *How critical is buy-in?*
  - ▣ *What are people's capability levels?*
  - ▣ *Do we need to build group capability?*

© 2015 Laura J. Black

## Some practical references

- **Michael Doyle and David Straus**
  - *How to Make Meetings Work*
  - *How to Make Collaborations Work*
- **David Sibbett**
  - *Visual Meetings*
  - *Visual Teams*
  - *Visual Leaders*
- **Michael Brassard**
  - *Memory Jogger Plus*