

## Using process breaks with highly task-focused teams Or, when a highly task-focused team cannot collaborate well. . . .

*Extracted from [Group and team coaching](#) by Christine Thornton, Routledge 2010, available from Amazon and all good booksellers. If you use this material, please acknowledge the source [©Christine Thornton + book title, publisher and year +website address]*

Problem behaviours provide individual learning opportunities in any group, but for a team there is the added benefit of having their dynamics worked with 'live'. Even very task-focused groups can be persuaded of the value of understanding their team dynamic better, when their work is disrupted by problem behaviour. With teams resistant to the idea that collaboration is a necessary work skill, use problem behaviour as an opportunity to educate them. Working with these issues may of course reveal more complex underlying problems. See pages **Error! Bookmark not defined.,Error! Bookmark not defined. & Error! Bookmark not defined..**

### Process breaks and process skills

A process break is simply taking 'time out' from working on the group's task to focus on how the interactions between them are helping or hindering the task. At the outset of your work with the team, establish with them that you may do this. You can explain that *your* job is to help them work together more effectively, and that from time to time they may need to give their attention to *how* they are working together as well as what they are working on. On the next page is a simple tool you can use to start things off.

A process break allows a team or group time out to review *how* they are working together to achieve the task as well as working directly on the task. Use it with teams who need to communicate more openly, and invoke it when something seems to be getting in the way of the task, either something unspoken or some eruption of apparently inapposite emotion. Encourage a degree of honesty that is manageable for the particular group – a little out of their comfort zone, *not* way off the scale.

The process break gives teams permission to speak about and make use of emotional and non-conscious information (see page **Error! Bookmark not defined.**), and so is a useful device in training them to do so. If necessary, stress that it is in the service of the task.

As teams develop more robust communication, the process break more rarely needs to be invoked. In a team that has learned to value fuller feedback as part of its collaboration on shared tasks, it becomes more automatic to share thoughts

and feelings in the course of the work, including sharing questions and disagreement in a robust way.

With task-focused groups, simple conceptual frameworks can spell out what is involved in collaborating effectively, or underline its importance. In the box is one, a simple but flexible collaboration framework with many uses. It sets out desirable collaborative behaviours when engaged in a group discussion task. Some are directly task-directed, and some help the task by improving group process.

### **Working together effectively**

<b>Activities which forward the task directly</b>	<b>Activities which forward the task by sustaining the group</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Defining the issue and summarizing</li> <li>• Questioning and clarifying</li> <li>• Asking for/ giving information</li> <li>• Making suggestions</li> <li>• Discussing pros and cons of suggestions</li> <li>• Testing relevance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Testing for consensus</li> <li>• Encouraging participation</li> <li>• Acknowledging others' contributions</li> <li>• Releasing tension, expressing feeling</li> <li>• Mediating</li> </ul>

This tool can be used in several ways to educate task-oriented groups in the value of attention to process in forwarding the task; it can be used as a tool within process breaks. It can be shared with a group at the start of a session, and used for a group evaluation towards the end. You can set up a 'fishbowl' exercise with part of the group participating in the discussion, and part observing, with a plenary discussion to improve understanding of the behaviours. You can use it over several sessions to focus on improving collaboration skills. Use it early in the coaching relationship, to set parameters.