☀ | Community Agreements: Implementing, Monitoring & Repairing

Overview

Once developed, community agreements must become a living, breathing entity, not just words on a page. Adding your agreements to every meeting agenda can help to keep them visible; however, the vitality of your agreements depends upon the collective commitment and attention of your team. This document offers a set of principles and processes for maintaining the group's attention on these powerful commitments.

During Meetings: Implementing and Monitoring

- **Remind the group of their commitment:** "We have committed to actively resolve conflicts and break-downs of the agreements, rather than allowing tensions to build up, resorting to gossip, or engaging in other types of unproductive behavior."

- **Attach the agreements to all meeting agendas,** and briefly review them out loud at the beginning of each meeting.

- **Invite a different colleague each meeting to reflect on one agreement** they have been using or paying attention to and what it means to them.

- **Administer a staff culture survey** at the beginning, middle and end of the year that includes questions about how consistently we are following our agreements.

- **Schedule staff meeting discussions to evaluate the survey data** and problem-solve when and why the agreements are breaking down. An activity called "Totems and Taboos" can be helpful when there is a consistent break-down around one agreement.

Build the following structures into your meetings:

1. **Process Observer Role:** Always include and assign a process observer among your meeting roles. You may rotate who takes on the role each meeting to promote wide engagement. Empower the process observer to intervene at any time during a meeting. Encourage process observers to choose a focus area for their observations and end-of-meeting report out, such as how well the group is honoring agreements, the general "vibe" of the conversations, or the patterns of participation (e.g., race, gender, frequency of comments, type of comments).

2. **Time for Process Observations:** If there is an emotionally difficult agenda item, create time for process observations after that item rather than only at the meeting's end. Also designate a specific agenda item near the end of the meeting for the process observer to report on group dynamics observed. Make it clear that anyone else in the group can also raise concerns.

3. **Meeting Written Reflections:** Distribute a reflection sheet at the end of each staff meeting for anyone to write concerns that they did not want to raise verbally during the meeting. The facilitator should review these forms and follow up as appropriate. In addition to these formal elements, ask that staff to agree that anyone can raise a concern at any point in the meeting about a breakdown in the agreements.

Outside of Meetings: Repairing

When a staff member perceives a break-down of the agreements outside of a meeting, he or she should run a mental check to decide how urgent the problem is and the best way to handle it.

Consider the following options:

1.   **Raise the concern directly to the other person as soon as possible.** Festering conflicts are the death knell of adult culture.

2.   **If you are not ready or do not know how to approach the other person, ask a trusted colleague to consult with you in confidence.** Be certain that your conversation revolves around how to approach the colleague you have an issue with rather than venting about them.

3.   **If you approach your colleague and are not satisfied with the outcome, talk to another colleague to consider ways to resolve the problem.** The purpose of this dialogue is, again, to figure out how to best address the problem directly with the person involved, *not to vent or gossip.* You might even ask the third colleague to help facilitate a conversation with the other person.

4.   **For more serious or unresolved conflicts, the staff can designate one or two strong communicators as conflict resolution mediators.**

Product vs. Process
There is a very real tension between product and process. We don't want to be so process-driven that important business cannot be completed, nor so product-driven that bad interpersonal dynamics are ignored. When a participant perceives a break-down of the agreements during the meeting, he or she should run a mental check to decide if the problem needs to be dealt with during the meeting or after the meeting.

Some questions to consider in making this decision are:

- Do I need some time or perspective from others before I raise the issue?
- How serious is the breakdown of the agreements vs. how urgent is the business to be completed in the meeting?
- Does this problem need to be addressed and resolved by the whole group or is it better addressed one to one or within a smaller group?

Conflict Resolution: Suggested Process

1.   **Pre-Reflection Form:** The conflict resolution mediator asks the parties to complete an optional confidential form prior to the mediation to help define the facts, emotions, issues, and potential solutions to be addressed. This form is only shared with the mediator and returned to the writer after review.

2.   **Post-Mediation Reflection:** The conflict resolution mediator asks the parties complete an optional confidential form within a week after the mediation to evaluate how successfully the mediation resolved the conflict. This form is only shared with the mediator and returned to the writer after review.

3.   **Second Round of Mediation (optional):** If the conflict was not satisfactorily resolved by one of the conflict mediators, you may approach the other conflict mediator for further mediation.

4.   **Professional Working Agreement:** If the conflict is still unresolved after both conflict mediators have facilitated a session, the mediators will propose an optional professional working agreement for both parties to sign that outlines protocols for them to work together as colleagues in future interactions.

5.   **Principal/Leadership Intervention:** If the conflict cannot be resolved by either conflict resolution mediator, and the professional working agreement is unsatisfactory, you may approach the school principal or other senior leader for final arbitration of the conflict. Any policy issues related to the conflict can also be submitted to the professional development team as potential agenda items for a staff meeting.