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## Getting On-The-Same-Page

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### Abstract

Work teams are intrinsic to how 21<sup>st</sup> century organizations operate. For several decades, business research has therefore focused on work team performance. De Bono thinking tools have also been used extensively by work teams, for several decades. However, there is a paucity of research on the correct use of de Bono thinking tools in business organizations. The getting on-the-same-page classic grounded theory is therefore a new theory explaining what happens when work teams utilize these tools. The research problem was the main concern of people using de Bono thinking tools in this substantive area. The study revealed their concern is resolved with a three-stage process of change in personal cognitive capability. This process is fragile and can cease at any time. When it continues however, there are three stages of emergent change: tooling-up, tensing and enabling. Discovery of this process contributes to work team theory and praxis, particularly in the area of work team processes and effectiveness.

**Keywords:** classic grounded theory, de Bono thinking tools, work teams, business organizations, cognitive capability.

### Introduction

With an estimated 25 million meetings each day in the USA alone, work team meetings have become ubiquitous in 21<sup>st</sup> century business organizations (Allen et al., 2015; Beneshick & Lazzarra, 2019). Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, with online video services, workplace meetings have also become more pervasive (Carroll & Conboy, 2020; Soni, 2020). By April 2020, over 300 million people worldwide were holding regular work-related meetings via the Zoom on-line meeting platform (Wiederhold, 2020).

Work team research identifies meetings, discussions and conversations as "work team occasions." These occasions have become a major feature of business operations, therefore interest in work teams has significantly increased, with research paying particular attention to improving work team performance (Kozlowski, 2018; Tannenbaum & Salas, 2020).

Every year since the mid-1990s thousands of adults, worldwide, have been trained in the correct use of de Bono thinking tools in a work team context (D'Angelo Fisher, 2006; Dudgeon, 2001; Walter, 2017). While there is a significant number of anecdotal claims about the positive impact de Bono thinking tools have on work team performance, in contrast to extensive research

in the area of work teams per se, there is a paucity of rigorous research focusing on work teams using these particular thinking tools (Burgh, 2014; D'Angelo Fisher, 2006; Hartnett, 2016; Merrotsy, 2017; Puccio & Cabra, 2010).

Getting on-the-same-page is therefore a new theory helping to address a significant gap in knowledge regarding, work team performance.

### **De Bono Thinking Tools**

With a background in physiology and medicine, Dr. Edward de Bono was researching and teaching at Oxford, Cambridge, London, and Harvard Universities in the early-1960s, when he started focusing on the need for new thinking, to counteract what he considered to be inefficiencies in how the human brain processes information (D'Angelo Fisher, 2006; Dudgeon, 2001). After the publication of *The Use of Lateral Thinking* in 1967 and an ongoing invention of a raft of new thinking tools, Dr. de Bono is now widely acknowledged as the inventor of the term and tools of lateral thinking, designer of the CoRT program for the teaching of thinking in schools and inventor of the Six Thinking Hats, a methodology that has proliferated through educational systems and business organizations across the world since the mid-1980s (D'Angelo Fisher, 2006; Dingli, 2009; Merrotsy, 2017; Puccio et al., 2010; Walter, 2017).

### **Correct Utilization of de Bono Thinking Tools**

The term "utilize" is defined as the act of using something in an effective way (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022). If a work tool, such as a hammer for example, is not correctly utilized in accordance with how it was designed for practical use, this causes problems for the user. Similarly, if a de Bono thinking tool is not used correctly the cognitive outcome it was intended to achieve will not eventuate (de Bono, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c).

In the 1990s, a global network of organizations responsible for certifying instructors to deliver de Bono authorized training, was established to ensure thinking tools invented by de Bono are applied by adults as intended. By 2020, 700 certified instructors were working in 74 countries, delivering training for adults to correctly utilize de Bono thinking tools in a business context (de Bono, n.d.).

### **Study Organizations and Participants**

Six organizations were involved in the study such as government agencies, not-for-profit organizations, and social enterprises ranging in size from 12 to 1300 employees. Seventy-nine people were involved, with 73 people in nine work teams ranging from strategic planning teams, to operational and task specific teams. Participating teams were observed, utilizing de Bono thinking tools, for 386 hours. Experience using the tools within a work team context ranged from 15 years, to no experience prior to being involved in the study.

All participants used tools as prescribed by Edward de Bono's Six Thinking Hats<sup>®</sup>: Tools for Parallel Thinking<sup>®</sup> (de Bono, 2009c); several, if not all tools, as prescribed by Edward de Bono's The Power of Perception<sup>™</sup>: Ten Thinking Tools for Making Better Business Decisions (de Bono, 2009b); Purpose Focus and several other, if not all tools, prescribed by Edward de Bono's

Lateral Thinking: Fast Track to Creativity (de Bono, 2009a). Many participants also utilised TEC, a thinking tool originating from CoRT (Devine Media, n.d.).

Interviews were held with 29 people, 24 of whom were members of work teams involved in the study. The six interviewees not involved with these teams had extensive experience utilizing de Bono thinking tools in a work team context, ranging from eight to 20 years.

Throughout the study de Bono thinking tools were referred to as "the tools" and study participants were referred to as "prospective users," "users" or "enabling users," these being people utilizing the tools during the last stage of getting-on-the-same-page.

### **Methodology**

The study was conducted in accordance with the tenets and procedures of classic grounded theory (GT) methodology, as prescribed by Glaser (1978, 1992, 1998, 2001, 2003, 2005), Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Holton (2007, 2008). This methodology was chosen because of the flexibility afforded a classic GT researcher to conduct research within any philosophical paradigm. It was also selected because of the methodological objective, unique to classic GT, to protect the process of emergence and generate theory as an emergent phenomenon (Glaser, 1978, 1992, 1994, 2001, 2005b), this objective being highly compatible with the researcher's complexity-based philosophical perspective. Furthermore, as Glaser (1978, 1998) pointed out, new theory that is generated from an issue of concern to people participating in everyday activities, provides a valuable theoretical foundation for bringing about change and improvements in practice. This aspect of classic GT was highly compatible with the researcher's motivation to help contribute to the improvement of work team productivity in 21<sup>st</sup> century business organizations.

Data included field notes and interview transcripts. Field notes were written during, or shortly after, weekly or fortnightly sessions in the field with work teams that utilized the tools for periods of no less than 14 weeks. Decisions as to which group to engage with and subsequently which members of a team to interview, or other individuals to interview during the study, were made in accordance with theoretical sampling procedures prescribed by Glaser (1978), Glaser and Holton (2004) and Glaser and Strauss (1967), in particular.

As proscribed by Holton and Walsh (2017), forcing the data was mitigated by starting every interview with a grand tour question: What do you experience when a work team you are involved with, uses de Bono's tools. After the main concern of people who utilize de Bono thinking tools in a work team context emerged, a second grand tour question was included with all interviews: "What do you experience when a work team you are involved with, doesn't use de Bono's tools.

Glaser (2013) warned researchers about problems associated with taping interviews. However, as doctoral (PhD) research, the study had to conform with Human Ethics Committee requirements to record and transcribe interviews. To help ameliorate problems identified by Glaser, all interviews were conducted using a non-intrusive Livescribe Smart Pen with an inbuilt recording facility. As recommended by Glaser (2002, 2005) and Glaser and Holton (2004), all coding was undertaken manually by the researcher, without using computer software.

Constant comparison analysis of data collected during the open coding stage of the study resulted in the generation of 192 codes, with most being conceptual rather than descriptive. Delimiting categories during saturation, writing copious memos on possible theoretical codes, choosing theoretical codes and then abandoning them as saturation progressed, commencing memo sorting, going back to check empirical data, re-sorting memos, writing and sorting new memos with several different perspectives regarding the overall theoretical framework and constantly making changes to the emerging framework, progressed to the stage when the theory was written up. During this advanced stage of the study the generation of new theoretical memos and on-going constant comparison, initiated subtle adjustments to the theory.

### **Main Concern of People who Utilise de Bono Tools in Business Organisations**

With the very first interview, and subsequently throughout the study, "on-the-same-page" was a term consistently used when study participants talked about their experiences utilizing de Bono thinking tools during work team occasions. As a colloquial term "on the same page" is commonly understood as people being in harmony and without disagreement. However, study participants specifically used this term to differentiate work team occasions when the tools are utilized, from those when the tools are not utilized.

People who utilise the tools during work team occasions feel stressed, frustrated, concerned, or at the very least annoyed, when they are involved with a work team occasion where they believe no-one is on-the-same-page, because no-one is utilizing the tools:

If everyone in my organisation used de Bono's tools it would be my dream world because I would never have to go into another meeting with a dreadful sinking feeling that I'm going to totally waste another hour of my life.

Therefore, the main concern of people who utilize de Bono thinking tools within the substantive area of work teams operating in business organizations, is the emotional stress they feel when they perceive what they consider to be a major problem in all business organizations. This problem being, the types of cognitive interplay that occur when no-one uses de Bono thinking tools during work team occasions. "Cognitive interplay" being the convenient descriptor adopted by the study, for the complex mix of personal cognition and interpersonal behaviours that occurs during work team meetings, discussions or conversations.

The types of cognitive interplay a user perceives as always occurring during work team occasions when the tools are not used, indicates to them a work team is not-on-the-same-page.

"The not-on-the-same-page problem" is the convenient descriptor adopted by the study, for what causes this main concern.

Because the use of de Bono thinking tools is not ubiquitous in business organizations, in addition to this problem impacting significantly on their personal ability to be productive, users also worry about their role in perpetuating a problem, which they perceive as "plaguing" all business organizations, when the tools are not utilised by work teams.

Successfully resolving their concern does not occur however, immediately a user is introduced to the tools. Firstly, they have no experience utilizing the tools and therefore perceive

the cognitive interplay during work team occasions when the tools are not utilized, as being normal. Secondly, it is only after particular changes in their cognitive capability have emerged, as a result of utilising the tools during work team occasions, that they perceive this cognitive interplay as being a problem for themselves; work teams and organizations per se.

**Getting On-The-Same-Page**

Getting on-the-same-page is a complex multivariate theory. As the core category of the theory, getting-on-the-same-page is a process of change in personal cognitive capability. This process is fragile and given particular conditions and consequences, can cease at any time. When the process continues however, it consists of three cumulative stages of change. These sub-core categories are conceptualised as tooling-up, tensing and enabling.

Each of the sub-core categories of the theory, also have several properties. These properties are listed in Figure 1.

Figure 1. List of Getting on-the-same-page theory Conceptual Categories

LIST OF GETTING ON-THE-SAME-PAGE THEORY CONCEPTUAL CATEGORIES		
CORE CATEGORY		
<i>Getting-on-the-same-page cognitive capability process.</i>		
SUB-CORE CATEGORIES		
TOOLING-UP (Stage One)	TENSING (Stage Two)	ENABLING (Stage Three)
Properties	Properties	Properties
Structuring	Distinguishing	Taking-it-On
Straining	Structuring	Structuring
Suppressing	Regulating	Regulating
Bettering	Bettering	Bettering
Blocking	Suppressing	Suppressing
Closing Down	Straining	Straining
Regulating	Angst-ing	Tooled Strategising
	Fiddling	No-Wavering
	Rationalising	
	Closing Down	

**Tooling-Up: Stage 1 of the Getting-On-The-Same-Page Process**

The getting-on-the-same-page processes commences immediately a prospective user is introduced to de Bono thinking tools by a more knowledgeable other--someone who has capability with a cognitive skill and guides a less capable person to develop that skill within the Zone of Proximal Development, which is the difference between what a learner can do with and without help, from a more knowledgeable other (Allal & Ducry, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978). In the context of the study, a more knowledgeable other was someone who utilized de Bono thinking tools correctly, such as authorised instructors delivering off-the-job training, professional facilitators skilled in the utilisation of the tools, or other members of a study participant's organisation who had learned how to utilise these tools correctly during work team occasions.

### **Structuring**

Structuring characterises particular changes in a user's cognitive capability that start occurring immediately they start utilising a de Bono thinking tool. Structuring is complicated, with several phases, dimensions and elements emerging during different stages of the getting-on-the-same-page process. Some of these elements also have particular aspects that emerge during different stages. Structuring also occurs within a thinking space, with this context having different dimensions that emerge during tooling-up, tensing or enabling.

Structuring new thinking commences, as soon as a prospective user of de Bono thinking tools attempts to use one of these tools. Having never encountered the tools before, this experience is very unfamiliar: "the tools are different from usual thinking, different, it's new thinking". This unfamiliarity is characterised with the cognitive languaging, cognitive disciplining, cognitive focusing, cognitive levelling elements of structuring.

With cognitive languaging during tooling-up, a user is introduced to new and unfamiliar terminology which they are expected to use for active thinking, rather than passive description:

I've had to build the skill of thinking and talking in the language at the same time, the names and the language (for example) of what all the Hats are that I'm using, then I'm really using them to actively think about things, not just talking about the Hats.

With cognitive disciplining during tooling-up, when they utilize the tools, a user experiences a shift from never consciously being disciplined with their thinking, to thinking about issues in a restrained and prescribed way. They experience a change from being, what one user described as "free-wheeling with my thinking," to being very orderly with their thinking when they utilize the tools: "I don't waver, it's deliberate, nothing's careless about it."

With cognitive focusing a user experiences a particular shift in the way they deal with an issue when they specifically use de Bono Purpose Focus or Area Focus tools. These tools are integral to all de Bono tool sets for utilization by adults in a work group context (de Bono, 2009a, 2009b, 2009e). Purpose Focus is utilized by a user to define what they need to achieve with their thinking, about any issue, problem or task they need or want to deal with (de Bono, 2009a). For prospective users, this is an unfamiliar shift, from being issue-centric, to concentrating on determining the objective of their thinking. Being issue-centric described by one user as being "totally immersed in a problem, not seeing the wood for the trees."

With cognitive focusing during tooling-up, a user also starts to perceive their ability to define a Purpose Focus as a necessary capability that enables them to be a better thinker: "you focus only on the purpose focus you've now got for your thinking, it stops you going down all these little rabbit holes with your thinking."

### ***Straining***

Straining is the confluence of emotional discomfort and utilization of a de Bono thinking tool. It occurs at the time a prospective user is introduced to the tools, and when the tools are utilized at any time after this introduction. When they are introduced to the tools, prospective users always react with some level of discomfort. This can range from mild uneasiness to feeling very distressed, as illustrated by comments such as "it made my head hurt;" "it was doing my head in;" "ouch, hard on my head;" and "I was stressing big time."

There are at least three reasons straining emerges. First, a prospective user is completely un-used to complying with the cognitive tasks associated with correct use of the tools. Second, while they often perceive being introduced to the tools as an opportunity to gain some kind of personal benefit, they have to respond to this opportunity by immersing themselves in unspecified cognitive skill-building. There is no guarantee they will gain any benefits from changing the way they think and this is disturbing: "What was I getting into? What was I going to get out of it? What changes was I going to have to make, what was learning these tools going to do for me? That made it uncomfortable, difficult."

Third, having to change the way they think also effects a user's confidence. They have always taken for granted that the way they think is adequate. As cognitive languaging, cognitive disciplining, and cognitive focusing emerge during tooling-up, they start to feel they may not be as "smart" as they had assumed and falter in their confidence about being an "OK thinker."

### ***Suppressing***

Suppressing is the self-induced tempering of straining. When a prospective user is introduced to the tools and continues to utilize them, they are constantly controlling any discomfort arising from the requirement to use them correctly: "there's always this need to dampen down any angst you feel, keeping a lid on it, so you can get on and keep using the tools." With robust suppressing, a user adopts various strategies which enable them to handle any discomfort they are feeling, for example: "I've been really trying, like to forget, put aside my niggles about not getting it with the tools . . . it makes me keep going with it, without giving up 'cos I'm too angst'."

Suppressing only occurs however if strong or mild bettering is present at the time a prospective user is introduced to the tools by a more knowledgeable other.

### ***Bettering***

Bettering characterises the disposition a prospective user of de Bono thinking tools has towards learning. A disposition towards learning is an individual's tendency towards putting emotional and cognitive effort into engaging with learning, further to this, as a tendency, an individual's learning disposition is a default response to indeterminate learning opportunities (Claxton & Carr, 2004; Crick & Goldspink, 2014).

With strong bettering a prospective user has an unwavering belief that making an effort to learn is always necessary and valuable. Therefore, when they are introduced to the tools by someone who is skilled at using them correctly, suppressing tempers any discomfort they feel and the not-on-the-same-page process commences, as illustrated by the following comment:

I realised there are ways you have to think with the tools and it's unfamiliar, the thinking is very unfamiliar, but I just had to try and deal with that, if I didn't, well then I wasn't going to know what I was going to miss out on, what I could learn.

### ***Blocking and Closing Down***

If there is no bettering when a prospective user is introduced to the tools, blocking occurs and the getting-on-the-same-page process doesn't commence. With no bettering a prospective user believes there is no need to learn anything more than what they already know or feel comfortable with. Therefore, from their perspective there is no value in making an effort to learn how to use unfamiliar thinking tools; they intentionally avoid any utilization of any de Bono thinking tool and stonewall any efforts from a more knowledgeable other to help them use the tools with their thinking.

Unlike blocking, closing down only occurs after someone has started utilising the tools and only occurs if mild bettering is present at the time a prospective user is introduced to the tools. With mild bettering a prospective user believes learning is useful, however, only up to the time when it gets too difficult for them to justify the effort it requires. If the discomfort they feel with structuring new thinking escalates with nil-suppressing, a tipping point occurs and closing down emerges. With closing down, the getting-on-the-same-page process is terminated, because a user makes a definitive decision not to use the tools, unless they are required to by a work manager or supervisor: "mostly I just avoid using the tools, even though I know the basics of how to use the Hats etc. etc."

However, when the process continues unabated during tooling-up, suppressing causes more structuring and over time, relative to each user, this causes regulating.

### ***Regulating***

With developmental psychology and cognitive education, a person's self-management of their thinking is referred to as metacognition, meaning higher-order or second order thinking (Flavell, 1997; Hussain, 2015). Flavell (1997) specifically defined metacognition "as an individual's ability to consciously monitor and control their thinking" (p. 906).

Regulating characterises the self-initiated metacognitive guidance of a user's personal thinking when they utilise de Bono thinking tools. Prior to being introduced to the tools, users seek actionable solutions to problems as quickly as possible, as this is what is expected of them in an organisational environment. However, the more they "mechanically" adhere to the principles and rules associated with the tools, the more their thinking slows down and they start to deliberately pay attention to the thinking they are doing about a problem or issue.

When a user continues to utilize the tools, they continue to experience changes with their cognitive capability, as characterized by the elements of structuring. This causes more regulating, which causes more structuring.

When the getting-on-the-same-page process is un-interrupted, over time a system of reinforcing feedback loops emerges between particular dimensions, elements and/or aspects of structuring, bettering, straining, suppressing and regulating, this causes distinguishing. When distinguishing emerges tensing commences.

### **Tensing: Stage 2 of the Getting-On-The-Same-Page Process**

With distinguishing, a user of de Bono thinking tools starts to "separate out" work team occasions when de Bono thinking tools are used from occasions when these tools are not used. Therefore there are two dimensions of distinguishing: distinguishing-on-the-same-page when the tools are utilized by a work team; distinguishing-not-on-the-same-page when the tools are not utilized, as illustrated by the following comment: "I started to get it after a while, like when the tools are in play, the team's just generally operating differently, the way everyone operates with each other it's very different from normal teamwork."

Furthermore, distinguishing-on-the-same-page occurs within the in-mind-in-relationship context of structuring. This context is very different from the context of structuring prior to the emergence of distinguishing, this being conceptualized as an in-mind context.

With the in-mind context of structuring, when they utilize the tools without being involved with anyone else, a user feels they are thinking in a "personal mind space." This is a personal cognitive context, specific to their private utilization of the tools. They put all of their attention into using the tools with their thinking and perceive this as being distinctly different from "mixing thinking with everything else I'm doing." They deliberately get into "a quiet thinking space" where they privately utilize the tools in their own mind.

In comparison, the in-mind-in-relationship context of structuring only emerges when a user starts utilizing de Bono thinking tools privately during a work team occasion, while everyone else involved are also privately utilizing the tools, described by one user as "a private thinking space" within a "collective thinking environment."

### ***Distinguishing-Not-On-The-Same-Page***

The more a user utilizes de Bono thinking tools with other people during work team occasions, the more structuring occurs within the in-mind-in-relationship-context and a user starts to differentiate types of cognitive interplay they consider indicate a work team is not on-the-same-page because these tools are not being utilized. These particular types of cognitive interplay are characterized as polarizing, powering, holding back or bouncing around.

With polarizing a user perceives one or more people placing their thoughts, ideas, comments or points of view, in direct opposition to each other during work team occasions when the tools aren't utilized. They identify a variety of adversarial communication styles, ranging from people being very polite while judging and counteracting someone else's ideas, through to being

overtly argumentative or aggressive. Users also perceive little or no willingness, to abandon polarizing: "sooooo much time wasting with no thinking together."

With powering a user perceives one or more people who are participating in a work team occasion when the tools are not utilized, positioning their point of view as being more legitimate, more valuable, or more correct than everyone else involved. They consider this way of operating, as a form of hierarchical cognitive interplay where one or more members of a work team considers their ideas are more legitimate than the ideas of others, often because they are managerially superior, as illustrated by a comment from a user:

From my experience it tends to be very hierarchical, thought processes are based on someone's position. So, if an executive manager has a thought on the way things are done, most of the time people are expected to, and do, toe the line on that.

With holding-back, a user perceives people who are participating in work team occasions when the tools are not utilized as refraining from sharing their thoughts or opinions, because they are not confident in their ability to make a worthwhile contribution.

With bouncing around however, users don't perceive any of the characteristics of polarizing, powering or holding-back. Nevertheless, perceiving bouncing around when the tools aren't utilized, still indicates to them a work team is not on-the-same-page, because from their perspective the team has no purpose or direction with their collective thinking, as illustrated by the comment:

When there's no tools being used and no proper Focus for anyone to hold onto, more often than not the meeting is directionless, thought is unfocused, so you can jump around from one topic to another and find at the end of the meeting that you've not resolved anything.

### ***Distinguishing-On-The-Same-Page***

In contrast to distinguishing not-on-the-same-page, when the tools are utilized, a user perceives distinctly different types of cognitive interplay which indicate to them a work team is on-the-same-page. These types of cognitive interplay are characterized as collective purposing, collective aligning and collective equalizing.

With collective purposing, a user perceives everyone during a work team occasion putting their energy into using the same Purpose Focus: "you get to do group work, all together around what's the Purpose Focus for what we are trying to do, so you spend time on problem definition in a different way than normal."

When they use the tools with other people users also adhere to parallel thinking, this being a fundamental process underpinning the use of de Bono thinking tools by groups (de Bono, 1994, 1997a, 1999a, 1999c, 1999d). With Parallel thinking, rather than paying any attention to what might be right or wrong about the thinking that's going on, everyone concentrates on contributing to the group's thinking about an issue, by constantly adding their thoughts to the thoughts of others. Therefore, with collective equalizing a user perceives work team occasions when parallel thinking is adopted, as a distinctly different kind of work team environment from occasions when the tools aren't used.

### ***Cognitive Levelling***

When a user continues to utilize de Bono thinking tools within the in-mind-in-relationship context, cognitive levelling emerges as an additional element of structuring. With cognitive leveling a user changes their personal cognitive modus operandi when they utilize the tools with other people. These changes are characterized by specific aspects of cognitive levelling: focused levelling and levelled forwarding.

With focused levelling, a user experiences their thinking about the issues a work team wants to deal with, being confined to a shared Purpose Focus, rather than “thinking about anything and everything.” There may be several shared Purpose Focuses during a work team occasion and a work team may define these themselves or be given Purpose Focuses that are defined by, a more knowledgeable other, or one or more members of the work team. Regardless of how a Purpose Focus originates however, when the tools are utilized, a user focuses their attention on what needs to be achieved with a work team’s collective thinking about an issue, as defined by the team’s shared Purpose Focus.

With levelled forwarding a user’s intent during a work team occasion when the tools are utilized, changes from their normal habit of evaluating other people’s thinking, to building on the thinking of others, as explained by a user:

If you are using the tools, everyone’s views that come from using the same tool, are put down one after the other no matter what they are, you just have to keep thinking with an ‘and’, not a ‘but’ and just keep adding your own ideas, not contrasting them with anyone else’s, that’s what you have to do to help us all get where we want to go with our thinking as a group, you know achieve our Purpose Focus.

### ***Angst-ing, Fiddling, Rationalizing, Closing Down, and Taking-It-On***

The more a user perceives collective purposing, collective aligning and collective equalizing when a work team utilizes de Bono thinking tools, the more they perceive polarizing, powering, holding-back or bouncing around when the tools are not used, and angst-ing emerges.

Angst-ing characterizes the level of emotional stressing a user experiences when they encounter polarizing, powering, holding-back or bouncing around, as illustrated by the comment: “I’m starting to get fed up with meetings where the tools aren’t used, everyone’s thinking’s all over the place, it’s awful.”

Because they consistently perceive these types of cognitive interplay when de Bono thinking tools are not utilized, mild angst-ing persists and this causes fiddling. Fiddling characterizes a user’s early attempts to get a work team on-the-same-page. At first fiddling is informal, a user makes spontaneous, reactive attempts to stop polarizing, powering, holding back or bouncing around from occurring, as illustrated by a comment from a user explaining her reaction during a meeting when no-one was using the tools: “I suddenly started on about Hats to stop the arguing.”

However, as users continue to use the tools with others during work team occasions, over time relative to each user, mild angst-ing transitions to extreme angst-ing: “No-one is

on-the-same-page, everyone's all over the place with their thinking when the tools aren't used and it, well to be honest, it completely drives me bonkers."

For a user with mild bettering, extreme angst-ing eventually causes rationalizing. Their belief learning is useful until it gets too difficult to justify the effort, counteracts fiddling until a tipping point occurs; closing down emerges and the getting-on-the-same-page process is terminated. For a user with strong bettering however, as extreme angst-ing escalates, informal fiddling transitions to formal fiddling. Their attempts to prevent polarizing, powering, holding back or bouncing around become pre-mediated rather than reactionary. With emotional stress still increasing when they experience the not-on-the-same-page problem, eventually a user with strong bettering stops "fiddling around at the edges," a tipping point occurs and taking-it-on emerges.

With taking-it-on a user with strong bettering, commits to helping other people to get on-the-same-page during work team occasions when the tools are not utilized and the third stage of the getting-on-the-same-page process commences.

### **Enabling: Stage 3 of the Getting-On-The-Same-Page Process**

With taking-it-on a user's rationale for introducing de Bono thinking tools to other people, as characterized by fiddling, starts to change. In addition to looking after their own wellbeing, they start contemplating how introducing the tools to work teams might impact on the people involved: "I had to think about the consequences, the more longer-term impact of them getting to use de Bono's tools not just have me zip in with a few new tools and then zip out again, leaving them stranded."

They consider their role as someone who has working knowledge of how to use de Bono thinking tools and what difference they can make to another person's working life by introducing them to de Bono's tools. Taking-it-on causes more structuring and cognitive listening emerges as a new aspect of structuring, as a user with strong betting gets to be an enabling user.

### ***Cognitive Listening: An element of Structuring Emerging During Enabling***

By the time enabling commences as the third stage of the getting-on-the-same-page process, changes in cognitive capability that first emerged during stage one and characterized as particular elements of structuring (cognitive languaging; cognitive disciplining; cognitive focusing and cognitive levelling), are always consistent and therefore always stable. This causes cognitive listening, the last element of structuring, to emerge during enabling.

With cognitive listening, an enabling user comprehends another person's thinking when they articulate their thinking while using a de Bono thinking tool. More specifically, there are two aspects of cognitive listening: hearing operative thinking and hearing general thinking.

When an enabling user engages in hearing operative thinking, they gauge whether someone who is using the tools has adopted the practice of operacy. Operacy is a construct created by Dr de Bono to indicate the integration of thinking with practical action, for improving thinking in practical everyday life (de Bono, 1990; Perkins, 1995).

With hearing operative thinking, enabling users get adept at hearing the practical and precise application of a de Bono thinking tool, as illustrated by the following comment: "After using the tools quite a long time with my own thinking, I know the difference between the outcomes of someone's thinking if they've used de Bono's tools properly and the outcomes if they haven't."

With hearing general thinking an enabling user comprehends the flow, preciseness and clarity of someone's thinking when they are utilizing de Bono thinking tools. They get adept at hearing someone jumping to conclusions or solutions too soon, analyzing an issue at an inappropriate time, making hasty decisions or rambling with their thinking.

When an enabling user continues to utilize the tools, the stabilized changes in their cognitive capability, engendered by the utilization of the tools during tooling-up; then tensing, and the emergence of cognitive listening during enabling, causes tooled strategizing.

### ***Tooled Strategizing***

With tooled strategizing an enabling user proactively utilizes the tools to create and respond to opportunities to help people in business organizations use de Bono thinking tools during work team occasions. By the time tooled strategizing emerges, they are adept at utilizing the tools to deal with a wide range of issues. Devising strategies to introduce other people to the tools, is now perceived by them in the same way as any another issue with which they need to deal:

Whenever I introduce de Bono's tools to people who don't know the tools, there's a lot of thought goes into it, I put a lot of thought into how and what I'm going to do to introduce the tools and of course I use the tools with my own thinking to work out what to do.

Tooled strategizing causes more structuring and this causes no wavering.

### ***No Wavering***

With no wavering an enabling user adopts a decisive position regarding the utilization of de Bono's tools during work team occasions. They no longer vacillate about the value of the tools with their personal utilization, or the utilization of the tools during work team occasions involving one or more other people. Therefore, they totally commit to resolving the not-on-the-same-page problem, as the cause of their main concern.

This proactive, self-initiated commitment to resolving this problem causes more tooled strategizing; this causes strong structuring to transition to robust structuring and maturing tooling transitions to nuanced tooling. Nuanced tooling characterizes the nature of an enabling user's cognitive capability when the getting-on-the-same-page process has advanced to the enabling stage. This dimension of tooling, as a higher-order sub-core category of getting-on-the-same-page, is conceptualized as a system of feedback loops between strong structuring/strong regulating yielding strong structuring/strong bettering/robust suppressing/minimum straining.

This system of feedback loops maintains an enabling user's commitment to solving the not-on-the-same-page problem ad infinitum: "The time I stop using the tools and trying to help others with them, that's when I'll no longer be here."

### **Discussion**

With a paucity of research focusing on the correct utilisation of de Bono thinking tools by work teams the getting on-the-same-page, classic grounded theory is a benchmark study. It provides clarity for decision makers in business organisations regarding what to expect when work teams utilize de Bono thinking tools. For people who utilise the tools it provides a framework to monitor their own praxis. It also contributes to work team theory.

A major research interest with business studies has been team processes, as primary factors contributing to team effectiveness (Kozlowski, 2018; Rico et al., 2011). These processes include team member cognition, with work team studies the focus is on this cognitive activity being "shared mental models" (Fernandez et al., 2018, Kozlowski, 2018).

Shared mental models are conceptualised as stable cognitive structures and described mostly as mental representations of knowledge that members of a work team share (Fernandez et al., 2018; Wildman et al., 2014). Extant literature considers the presence of shared mental models, as indicating each person in a work team has the same understanding about selected phenomena external to each of them; this shared perception is an emergent outcome of static individual cognition.

With the getting on-the-same-page theory, structuring within an in-mind-in-relationship context, is a dynamic process of collective cognitive capability because everyone involved adheres to parallel thinking. This is a fundamentally different kind of shared cognition than a work team having the same knowledge about phenomena external to everyone involved, as proposed by extant literature focusing on shared mental models. The theory therefore explains cognitive functions, not previously explained or explored by work team effectiveness studies.

There is also a difference between the getting-on-the-same-page theory and extant research focusing on work team cohesion and more specifically, work team conflict.

Work team conflict is a core predictor of work team success and productivity and productive teamwork is critical for organizational effectiveness (Humphrey et al., 2017; Maltarich et al., 2018). General definitions of conflict vary considerably, however there is a general understanding as to what constitutes interpersonal conflict (Barki & Hartwick, 2004) pointed out there is considerable research linking interpersonal conflict to "behaviours such as debate and argumentation" (pp. 232-234) and consider interpersonal conflict as a construct that incorporates the simultaneous presence of cognitions, emotions and behaviours relevant to conflict contexts.

The getting-on-the-same-page theory makes a theoretical contribution in the area of work team conflict resolution, because it provides a new perspective on the role of conflict during work team occasions, and the relationship between interpersonal conflict and work team productivity.

The types of cognitive interplay perceived by users when distinguishing-not-on-the-same-page emerges, align with definitions and characteristics of interpersonal conflict, as explicated in the literature. However, there is no similarity regarding strategies to prevent conflict, regardless of how mild or disruptive it may be, as discovered with getting on-the-same-page theory. Further to this, the theory challenges the normative position taken in the literature, that some form of conflict during work team occasions is beneficial.

### Limitations

The getting on-the-same-page classic grounded theory is a substantive theory because it emerged and developed within a specific setting. Furthermore, because the core phenomena of the theory, is concerned with the utilization of de Bono thinking tools, it cannot evolve with further data collection to formal theory, because this would require the getting-on-the-same-page process of change in cognitive capability to be applicable to all groups of people, not only people who utilise de Bono thinking tools.

However, as a substantive theory it meets the criteria for a quality classic grounded theory, these being: fit, workability, relevance, modifiability (Glaser, 1992). The theory was discovered through diligent application of the classic grounded theory constant comparative method. It was also conducted with extensive time in the field gathering data to ensure saturation of concepts. As recommended by Glaser (1978), the study also involved top informants. Feedback on the appropriateness of the concepts to people who were regularly utilising de Bono thinking tools, was diligently collected. During the study several top informants started using terminology associated with the theory and discussed their personal utilisation of the tools, in alignment with the three stages of the getting-on-the-same-page process. This demonstrated the 'grab' of the theory, for users and particularly enabling users of Edward de Bono thinking tools.

Limited resources did impact on the study however, and while the researcher is confident all categories of the theory were saturated, further data collection could possibly discover additional properties that would more comprehensively explain what causes the continuation or discontinuation of the process, other than bettering.

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