



The 7 Problems with Strategy and Team Sessions ... and what to do about them

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The 7 Problems with Strategy & Team Sessions – and what to do about them

Before you get the team together to plan or review strategy, create a new future or respond to market shifts ... be sure to address these 7 problems when you:

- design the agenda
- choose the facilitator
- select the venue and
- develop activities and processes.

1. Suspicious minds and low levels of trust

With restructures, redundancies and reshaping sweeping industries and sectors around the globe, when groups come together there can be an underlying feeling of ‘ok, so what’s this get-together all about?’

The song may have been about love but Elvis Presley singing Knight Baker’s lyrics in ‘Suspicious Minds’ says it perfectly:

‘we can’t go on together with suspicious minds, and we can’t build our dreams on suspicious minds’.

The same applies to a team, board or group getting together to plan, envision, create and collaborate.

When there are low levels of trust or uncertainty in the agenda and purpose, it will be tough going. It will be a slow start and getting commitment to action will be challenging.

What to do:

- *Be clear – and honest - about the reason **why** the session is being held.*
- *Create a safe environment for people to create and collaborate.*
- *Allow people to talk, tell stories and share their views and experiences.*
- *Acknowledge the challenging things that have been happening in the lead up to the session – and the levels of uncertainty that may be ahead.*



2. Event not designed for collaboration

Collaboration is when people work together to achieve a goal or outcome. And many strategy, planning and team sessions aren't designed for collaboration.

When you go to the time, effort and expense of getting people together, ensure your people have the greatest opportunity for success when they do work together.

Poorly designed sessions are easy to recongise. The agenda usually features lengthy presentations of data-rich slide packs from people in different teams. The rest of the team gets to sit and listen. After the presentations there are too few opportunities for questioning, conversation, collaboration and ideation.

What to do:

- *Create time for presentations and time for active collaboration across all parts of the event.*
- *The whole group involved in one big discussion is not collaboration. Break the group into smaller groups. Mix up the groups.*
- *Include tasks, activities, questions and challenges for the team to work on to identify issues, create solutions, map out the future.*
- *Bring creativity to all corners of the event. Innovative teams need innovative environments. Help the team push their own thinking beyond their usual limits.*

3. Dated approaches and cheesy team games

The world of groupwork, collaboration and creativity is changing and innovating.

Your strategy and team sessions need to innovate and progress too.

That means cheesy icebreaker puzzles and games like Pass the Orange and out-of-date business models and approaches need to stay in the last century.

Leave the book of 100 team-building games on the shelf and instead create activities that align with organisation values and build team capability, capacity and confidence.

Move on from the strategic and business models from the 1970s and include contemporary and creative approaches from modern day business models.

What to do:

- *Identify the organisational and individual values that are desired and ensure they are the ones reflected across the total event, in every activity.*
- *Inject some creativity into your sessions from the world of theatre, performance and improvisation by using games, activities and thought starters from the Improv Encyclopaedia. You'll find it here: <http://improvencyclopedia.org>*
- *Use current, contemporary and real case studies when you're looking at what other industries do.*
- *Model desired behaviours by leading with innovative, creative and contemporary thinking.*



4. The team can't see a wide range of possibilities

When groups meet up and work together, they're in danger of heading into 'groupthink'. This is where conflict is avoided and consensus is desired. To keep the peace. To keep things easy.

With groupthink, wider views and creative thinking don't get much of a chance.

For groups that know each other well or work with each other regularly, this can be a real danger. When you're investing time, effort, resources, people and finances to bring the team together, you want to get the best out of that investment.

Steering things towards a polite and harmonious outcome isn't creative, innovative or designed to address the future needs of the organisation or team.

A wider view of possibilities needs to be held open for the whole team to see, throughout the entire event or session.

What to do:

- *Keep on the lookout for groupthink behaviours and ask for different views and differing opinions before moving to decision-making.*
- *Seek and reward different views and different ways of seeing things.*
- *Build short, energising creative thinking sessions into the agenda to keep minds open and possibilities broad.*
- *Present diverse options using visuals : one view at one end of a chart or whiteboard; a contrasting view at the opposite end.*



5. One mode or one dimensional = big yawn

Too many team and strategy sessions involve sitting around a table or sitting in a room ... talking.

This is one-dimensional. It works for a short while and then leads to low engagement levels.

Build creative and innovative thinking by extending the range of dimensions that members of the team engage in.

Use different dimensions in each segment of the agenda including moving team members around the room and venue, indoors and out, when appropriate.

What to do:

- *What process, model or series of steps are you following? (logic)*
- *What information can participants see, look at, read or review? (visual)*
- *What activities can they do or experience? (kinaesthetic)*
- *What can they do alone? (single)*
- *What could they discuss, plan or strategise with other members of the team? (social)*
- *What sounds or audio do you have on the agenda? (auditory)*

6. Uninspiring future – who cares?

When teams meet to plan a future strategy, that future needs to be compelling, connecting, inspiring and motivating – so that actions in the workplace can drive towards the desired outcomes.

Avoid the boring PowerPoint presentations from team leaders on what figures, data and charts will look like in the future.

Involve the team members in creating a compelling future that they want to be a part of and will contribute to achieving.

Push for creative and innovative possibilities – beyond what might first be imagined.

Use tools that engage the senses, fire up change-weary minds and build buy-in that will ensure the ongoing success of the business.

What to do:

- *In preparation for your strategy or team day, skill-up the team in techniques like storytelling, visioning, creative thinking and visualisation.*
- *Celebrate and acknowledge recent successes and challenges. Build on these to lead in to the next round of change and progress.*
- *Invite a relevant guest speaker to share their story - create a compelling link between their story and yours.*
- *Identify the real reason for being – why the business exists, what it does for customers, clients and communities. Connect to the bigger cause.*

7. Key content vanishes into thin air

Discussion, conversation, ideas, thoughts, views, opinions. The exchange between members on the team is what gives the strategy or team session its content.

How much of that content is vanishing, upwards, turning into vapour?
How much of that content have you truly captured?

Avoid the solemn figure tapping away on a keyboard to scribe the minutes or notes into a document.

Capture conversations, key points and the essence of thinking using visual tools like scribing, sketchnoting and graphic recording.

Teams will see what others are thinking. They will see their ideas take shape. They will see what you mean. And they'll see so many more possibilities.

The increasing popularity of graphic recording is sweeping through conferences, meetings and workplace conversations. Make sure it is a part of the program when your team gets together.

What to do:

- *Engage graphic recorders or graphic facilitators to scribe group conversations, capturing in words and images the key content of the session.*
- *Skill-up the team with visual thinking skills so they can confidently capture their individual and small group conversations.*
- *Invite participants to present their thoughts back to the larger group after small group activities.*
- *Hang the visual charts, flip charts and visual notes pages on the venue walls like a gallery – invite participants to take a walk through the gallery as a wrap-up, reflection or summary activity.*
- *Keep the charts from the event; display them back in the office and continue to share the story throughout the organisation of the compelling future you're working to create.*

In conclusion

Getting teams, boards, committees and leadership groups together is an investment of your organisation's valuable resources. Plan to get a plentiful return on that investment by designing and executing a strategy or team session that really delivers.

Avoid these 7 problems at all costs.

When you're planning your next team session or strategy retreat, work to keep the team engaged and the outputs will make a difference for the organisation and the important work you all do.

Now.... it's time to go and collaborate with your team – creatively! 😊



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