NetWork Field Notes
Interel, Inc.

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On Track Learning

The following Action learning Lab, developed for an intact group of
public accountants, was designed to help the group reflect on productivity
and change management.

<u>Methodology:</u>

In this lab there were several groups, each with their own NetWork
device. The groups had an equal number of participants, with no more
than eight members per group. After each group was situated at their
NetWork the following instructions were given:

Step 1
The facilitator told the participants that they would soon be given a list of
"deliverables" requested by a very important client, and that they would be
using their NetWork to act on those deliverables. The participants were
then encouraged to spend a few minutes practicing moving the marker
over the targets and experimenting with different methods for marking the
various targets provided with the NetWork.

Step 2
The facilitator then displayed a flip chart showing the list of deliverables
requested by the client. The groups were told that they must complete all
items in set period of time, keeping in mind that the client expected the
highest possible quality of work. The groups then talked amongst
themselves and decided which groups would accomplish which tasks.

> ### *A Sample Task List*
> - the number 8
> - the sum of 587 and 483
> - a value you share
> - your best guess at the direction of due north

- a smile
- a circle
- a stick figure
- a square
- the group's favorite day of the week
- a rendition of your company logo

Step 3

When all the tasks had been chosen the facilitator announced the beginning of the designated time period (based on number of tasks and number of participants) for completion of the tasks, and the groups began their work. During this period, the facilitator was free to do two things: impose time-outs and introduce outside forces.

Time Outs
A 3-5 minute time out was called to allow groups to discuss what was working, what was not working and what corrections or modifications could be made.

Outside Forces
The facilitator introduced outside forces into the groups that would directly effect of the way the groups worked. These included:
- having an entire group mute for 1 minute
- having all but one member of a group mute for 1 minute
- having two members of a group blindfolded indefinitely
- having three members of a group rotate to a different group

Debriefing:

Upon completion of the tasks, several questions were raised for discussion. Among them:
- How did the groups go about splitting up the tasks? What criteria were used?
- What did your group do well?
- What sorts of communication between groups/within your group worked best? Why?
- What pulled you into the process and inspired you to contribute towards the success of the group?

- How was frustration dealt with? How is it dealt with in the workplace?
- What could the groups have done differently, more of, or less of to enhance their effectiveness?
- What other connections to workplace behaviors do you see?

<u>Observations</u>

Several important observations were made in the course of this learning lab. First, when the groups are given an opportunity to practice moving the markers around the targets to prepare for delivering on the list of client requests they tend to spend the time simply hitting numbers on the targets rather than brainstorming to anticipate what their tasks might be. Though anticipation has become a key strategy for many organizations engaged in change management, most of the participants felt that they rarely have opportunities for practicing this skill. The discussion about this helped participants to see the value of anticipation and gave them some insight into how to create more anticipatory behaviors in their work environment.

Most groups found the forced time outs welcome and valuable, though they felt that, as in their work environments, the constant pressure to focus on and produce results made it difficult to stop what they were doing and assess the process. This issue was further discussed by asking some simple questions:
- If the time outs proved valuable, what prevented you from calling one on your own?
- What would be the value of engaging in time outs in the workplace?
- What form might they take?
- What might prevent you from calling them there?

The "outside forces" introduced during this activity were meant to reflect the issues of change management. For a variety of reasons, both individuals and groups typically resist change. Change means learning new behaviors which, in turn, involves asking questions, making mistakes, seeking support, and becoming somewhat vulnerable to embarrassment and potential failure. Most people do not like to find themselves in uncomfortable, unfamiliar territory, especially in the workplace. It was acknowledged, however, that growth and change are integral parts of life and of successful organizations.

The challenge lies in creating an environment that supports people going through change. Asking the following questions helped the participants to probe this issue further:

- What effect did the outside forces have on the way your group worked together?
- How did you personally respond to the changes?
- Did you anticipate any of the changes?
- Did you allow for a temporary lowering of standards while the group adapted to the changes and learned new behaviors?