chapter ONE

Keeping Difficult Situations from Becoming Difficult Groups

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We were managing a welfare-to-work meeting in a midwestern county to involve citizens in carrying out a new federal law. The meeting included bankers, business owners, social workers, county officials, and welfare recipients. People started with considerable goodwill as the sponsors spoke about the importance of finding solutions that would benefit families and employers, solutions that would take into account needs for training, transportation, and child care if full-time parents on welfare were to be employed. Early on, the welfare group told how hard it was for them to find work. Soon after, the employers' group announced that together they had one thousand unfilled jobs. "If you were really motivated," said one business owner to the welfare group, going on the attack, "you could easily get one those jobs!" A welfare mother rose to the occasion. "You have no idea what my life is like!" she shot

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back, anger building with every word. "I've applied for some of those jobs, and all your interviewer sees is my black face!"

In fifteen seconds, people were ready to fight. Our task was to help the stereotypical subgroups become functional. This we did by means that we will describe in this chapter. For purposes of this example, we can say that the turning point came after a long dialogue when another employer faced the angry woman and said, "You're right. I have no idea what your life is like, and I would like to know more."

For twenty years we have been leading planning meetings and teaching our methods in many of the world's cultures. Typically we work with groups of twenty to eighty people for two or three days. We work only on tasks with a goal requiring collaborative action. It could be creating a welfare-to-work program like the one cited here, demobilizing child soldiers in southern Sudan, devising a joint strategy among global agencies working on disaster risk reduction, or creating a sustainability plan for a worldwide retailer. Nearly always our groups include people from many walks of life who usually don't work together.

We have known difficult times in groups—when we've been anxious, annoyed, confused, and uncertain about what to do. We have greatly reduced our difficulties, however, by acting primarily on structural issues that we can control. We came to this decision during years of working with people in diverse cultures whose worldviews differed from ours and from each other's. We have come to believe that calling a group "difficult" is a perceptual act leading to a self-fulfilling prophecy. We now act on the assumption that we don't know how to fulfill the needs of people who have little cultural affinity except the task they share. The difficulty in such groups is in us, not them. To the extent that we treat differences as a problem to be solved rather than a reality to be managed, we set ourselves up for endless diagnosis and intervention at the expense of doing the work.

As a result, some years ago we stopped labeling individual and group behavior. We dropped categories like "defensiveness" and "resistance to change." Instead we chose to see people doing their best with what they had. We began paying attention to the way structure influences a group's dynamics. Instead of behavior, about which we could do little, we began attending to

what we could control. In particular, we interested ourselves in those aspects of meetings that predict whether a group will succeed or fail in its task. When we ran into difficult people, nearly always they were enmeshed in difficult structural situations that were mostly avoidable. So we taught ourselves by trial and error to control those few factors that help people find the best that is in them. We have found this to be the shortest route to helping people—regardless of age, culture, education, ethnicity, race, class, and language—create action plans they are committed to implementing.

We have identified four key conditions under which diverse groups are most likely to accomplish their tasks: (1) matching people to the task, (2) making sure we have enough time, (3) making sure everybody knows the goal, and (4) heading off potential conflict that might result in flight from the task. Whereas the first three points are widely understood, it is the fourth one that for us holds the key to productive meetings.

For this chapter, then, we will limit ourselves to describing how we head off fight or flight in a group otherwise structured for success. We will describe a theory and practice that we use to keep a group on task with minimal intervention. Our experience is that when differences cause frustration, fear, or anger, people will keep working on the task to the extent that they view the situation as normal. When people learn to contain their anxiety, they are unlikely to become a "difficult group." Our job is to help people accept their differences with the least intervention. In particular, we seek to minimize "authority projections"—that is, having people turn to us as saviors, or turn on us as enemies. Rather, we invite people to be responsible for themselves. Our interventions are few and brief. However, the underlying theory requires some explication lest you dismiss what we shall describe as oversimplified.

DEALING WITH DIFFERENCES

We trace the evolution of our practice back more than half a century. Not long after World War II, a German refugee psychologist named Solomon Asch (1952) conducted a series of legendary group experiments. Asch was interested in the conditions under which people will maintain their independence from group pressure. He hypothesized that individuals faced with an obvious choice will choose correctly no matter what other group members do. He presented student volunteers with a line drawn on a card. They were asked to select an

identical line from another card containing three lines, two of them of different lengths. All group members but the subject were briefed in advance to give wrong answers. The subject disagreed repeatedly, becoming more agitated and uncertain. Within a dozen trials, most subjects went along with the group, feeling a little crazy to deny their own reality. Although the correct line was obvious, only one person in four held out against group pressure.

Untangling from Group Pressure

Seeking to free people from group pressure, Asch tried variations. He gave dissenters a (secret) ally briefed in advance to give an answer contrary to the majority. Now the subjects stood firm. The correctness of the ally's answers didn't matter. So long as one other person dissented from the majority, subjects stayed true to what they believed to be right. Asch then had the ally leave the room on a pretext. Many subjects reverted and after a few trials went along with the wrong choice. To maintain their reality, people needed support from another dissenter (Asch, 1952; Faucheux, 1984). We now call what Asch did in his experiments *subgrouping*. He created two-person subgroups united by their dissent. Without support, few people could stay independent. (See also the discussion of "pluralistic ignorance" in Chapter Eight.)

Validating the Power of Subgroups

Now fast-forward several decades. Yvonne Agazarian (1997), developer of Systems-Centered Group Theory, was experimenting with a theory that groups develop new capacity as they discover and integrate differences. She found that a person who makes an anxiety-producing statement risks being ignored, coerced, or attacked. Should that happen, the group abandons its task, moving instead to feelings, overt or unstated, about right and wrong. In effect, people create informal subgroups in the moment, pro, con, or neutral about every statement. Given enough emotionality, such subgroups can easily divert a meeting down unintended paths.

Agazarian hypothesized that all it takes to keep groups whole and working on their task is to make sure that nobody risks ridicule or rejection for saying something out of synch with other group members. Such statements could be as simple as, "My time is being wasted in this meeting, and I don't like it!" or more complicated—for example, "We have talked a long time about X and Y, and what none of you will accept is that Z—as I have said repeatedly—is the key to the

problem." The key to managing these challenges is to make visible an informal subgroup of those who share the feelings being expressed. When people at risk have allies, as Asch showed long ago, they are more likely to stay engaged in an authentic way. More, as Agazarian has shown, when people realize that more than one person has a particular concern, all are more likely to stay on task.

Agazarian learned that she easily could make people aware of informal subgroups whenever differences threatened to subvert a task. By surfacing a subgroup for emotionally charged differences, she reduced the possibility of fight or flight. Often, nothing more was required to keep a group working than to say, "Anyone else feel we are wasting time?" or "Are there others who believe Z also is relevant?" Simply having allies identify themselves was all that was needed to keep people engaged and working. Exploring these dynamics, Agazarian made a further significant discovery. Between subgroups that appeared to differ, there were always similarities. Within subgroups of people sharing similarities, there were always differences. When a group was at risk of splitting apart, now and then surfacing allies was not enough to keep the task alive. In those cases, Agazarian found that helping people express the whole spectrum of thoughts and feelings held the key to integrated solutions for complex problems.

Heading Off Group Splits

Over time, we adapted Agazarian's insights to task-focused meetings, using techniques that she developed. If you choose to use the practice outlined here, you will discover a simple way of keeping groups on task regardless of their differences. You can let go of diagnosing a group's behavior, its stages of development, or its members' personalities. You won't have to confront anybody's behavior. You may free yourself from the burden of needing to fix every problem that comes up. You become active only when disagreements might end productive work. Instead of dreading conflict, you may come to experience differences as a creative opportunity to keep people working without their having to agree on everything.

A THEORY OF DIFFERENCE: WHY WE CAN'T ALL GET ALONG

What makes leading meetings a challenge is that nobody is indifferent to differences. We may hate them, love them, avoid them, or rub everybody's noses in them, but the one thing we are not likely to do is remain neutral about

them. When a group starts poking at contrary views, dialogue may turn into dismissal or attack. The task goes out the window. Some may feel the need to convince others they are wrong; some may worry about hurting other people's feelings; some may start labeling others as "change resisters" or "touchy-feelies" or whatever comes into their heads.

Whether any of this is said or not, once these (largely unconscious) processes get under way, you can say good-bye to task focus, creative solutions, and committed implementation. When a topic is hot, what ought to be ordinary matters of fact—"You believe this; I believe that"—quickly become "my good views" versus "your bad ones." Those who feel superior start throwing their weight around; those who feel inferior give up or rebel.

Frustration rises. How will you keep the lid on? When views collide, you may be tempted to smooth over the differences. We want to fortify you to respond to tension by moving toward it. Getting people to differentiate themselves—to heighten their awareness of their differences—holds the key to integrated problem solving and decision making.

We Upset Ourselves over Differences

There is one near-universal experience that makes the practice we advocate a personal challenge. Heading off potential splits requires new behavior if you are not used to staying with tension when differences arise. From the days when our ancestors lived in caves, people have stereotyped without a moment's reflection other families, tribes, or villages. It is our lot to categorize people before we know them.

We walk into a meeting with strangers and gravitate toward people similar to us and away from those who are not. We judge people on the basis of very little contact. This process is as natural as breathing. Much of the time our judgments do no harm. If we need to work with others, however, we may escalate first impressions into divisive stereotypes. Think how easily we dichotomize men and women, rich and poor, old and young, fat and thin, light skin and dark, able and disabled, short and tall, sick and healthy, housed and homeless, working and unemployed.

The list never ends. And our negative predictions about "them" can turn deadly, as anyone can tell you who has lived in Northern Ireland, the Middle East, and parts of Africa. There, stereotyping begins with "Catholics are . . . ," "Protestants are . . . ," "Israelis are . . . ," "Palestinians are . . . ," "Blacks

are . . . ," "Whites are . . . ," "Latinos are . . . ," "Asians are . . . ," "The rich are . . . ," "The poor are . . . ," and ends with vile attributions, hostility, and aggression persisting over centuries. To experience the tip of this iceberg, you need not go to places of hair-trigger conflict. You may encounter incipient aggression in any meeting. Indeed, if you look hard enough, you may find some inside yourself.

Subgrouping Goes on All the Time in Meetings

Every meeting provides a forum for mutual stereotyping, drawing on the best and worst parts of our psyches. No matter what formal structures you use, group members from the first moment will be drawn into informal subgroups. Because people keep most projections secret, even those meetings that seem smooth and orderly have as subtext a jumble of unspoken wishes, energies, and frustrated impulses. Somebody forms a judgment and becomes part of a subgroup that includes every other person with similar thoughts. Of course, none know this unless somebody polls the group. There is at work in every meeting an informal system functioning apart from the people in it. This system only becomes a problem when some people silently stereotype a speaker's comments to the point where they abandon the task. On the surface, you have people doing what they do in meetings, speaking, listening, doodling, daydreaming. Underneath, people are aligning with, distancing from, or ignoring every statement made. Each audible remark becomes a focal point for new subgroups forming and reforming from moment to moment. If a meeting were a cartoon panel, you would see little cloudlike balloons over each person's head. Inside would be unspoken comments like "That's the dumbest thing I ever heard" or "I'd never say anything like that!" or "This is a huge distraction" or "I'm glad someone had the guts to speak up." If the comment stirs enough emotionality, informal subgroups, unknown to participants, can derail a meeting.

Rarely do people voice their judgments of one another. Most of us discover early in life the psychic risks of antagonizing a group. When somebody heeds the impulse to do that, tension rises. Some manage their discomfort by hoping, even expecting, that the leader will take care of it. Others ask challenging questions. Others patiently explain how the deviant missed the point. Some practice a firm, friendly coercion toward their own view. No wonder so many people sit on ideas or feelings that might violate a group's unspoken norms.

YOU CAN TURN STEREOTYPICAL SUBGROUPS INTO FUNCTIONAL ONES

Fortunately, just knowing about this phenomenon gives you leadership options you never had. With a few well-chosen words, you can change a stereotypical subgroup, one based on emotional judgments, into its functional equivalent. We use the adjective *functional* here to mean "contributing to growth," not to describe people's jobs. Functional subgroups transcend the stereotypical subgroups that people form and reform in their heads. Asch showed that so long as each person has an ally, people maintain their independence. Agazarian demonstrated that so long as there is a subgroup for every viewpoint and all voices can be heard, the whole group is more likely to keep working on its task. This point is so easy to miss that it bears repeating. So long as every person has a functional ally—somebody who carries similar ideas or feelings—a group is more likely to keep working. It will not distract itself with side trips into rejecting, rescuing, or scapegoating the member with a difference. Our minimal job becomes helping people experience their functional differences when stereotypes might cause them to abandon the task. If we do this job right, group members will take care of the rest. Our practice, derived from Agazarian's work, is simple, fast, and effective.

Minimal Intervention: When to "Just Stand There"

When we lead meetings, we just stand there so long as people are

- Putting out their own ideas
- Asking questions
- Answering questions
- Asking for or giving information
- Building on each other's ideas

All these behaviors contribute to the task. We even stand there when people flounder, stumble, express confusion, wander off the subject, or dream out loud. Usually a group recovers quickly from occasional side trips. We also believe deep in our beings that every contribution has value, even though that value may not be obvious. Groups usually ignore one person's stumbling, and so do we. If the flow of conversation veers away for several comments in a row, we consider it our job to point that out. Typical comment: "Let's pause and see where we are. I think I'm losing the thread."

Now and then one of us will ask someone who seems to have wandered far alone and is at risk of not coming back, "I know there is a connection between what you are saying and the topic we're discussing. How does it connect up for you?"

Even when we seem quiet on the outside, just standing there for us involves actively listening with awareness of the way informal subgroups can influence the work.

FOUR WAYS TO ENABLE FUNCTIONAL SUBGROUPS

When people say or do something that visibly heightens tension, when we hear the crackle of fragmentation and splitting, fight or flight, we go on high alert. Those are the moments when we must be ready to act. Here we describe four key techniques that make up the core of our meeting management.

Technique 1: Ask an "Anyone Else" Question

This practice is stunningly simple. Take action when you hear people make statements so emotionally charged that they put themselves at risk of being isolated or labeled. For example:

Participant: "We have been at this for two hours, and I'm frustrated that the rest of you just want to talk instead of acting!"

We judge the impact of such statements by the extent to which tension rises in the group. Sometimes people jump in to challenge the statement, putting the speaker on the defensive. The temptation is to let the antagonists have it out while others watch. This can make for entertaining reality television, but it rarely expedites the task.

You can do better. What is needed now is neither confrontation nor a search for "truth." Rather, you need to head off the split so that people keep working. The best way to do that is to invite a *functional* subgroup for the risk taker. For many people, this will be counterintuitive. Rather than look for somebody who is *not* frustrated to counterbalance the first person, your best move is to get the frustrated person joined.

Leader: "Anyone else feeling frustrated?"

We expect one or more people to raise their hands. When they do, we ask for their experience. Usually we discover they have a spectrum of frustrations. The speaker is not alone. Frustration is OK. Confrontation is avoided. Everyone has

new information on where others stand. The group moves on. We call such subgroups functional because they advance the task. Note that in highly charged situations, we do not ask people to join the speaker's contention, only the feeling. If some share any source of frustration, let them say so. Often, people have other reasons. Rather than debate talk versus action, we seek to legitimize frustration by finding a subgroup for that feeling. Only then can we attend to what the meeting should be doing.

Sometimes, however, people ignore the frustrated person, moving on to other topics, leaving emotionality hanging like fog in the air. Is frustration legitimate?

Leader (recognizing unfinished feelings): "I want to go back to what _____ said a minute ago. Is anyone else feeling frustrated?" We stop. We look around. We repeat the question if necessary. We watch for heads to nod.

Leader (to those nodding): "What frustration do you experience?"

One person gives his or her version. Perhaps another chimes in. At this point the group is working again. What might have been a fight becomes a dialogue on a key issue—the degree to which the work frustrates people. This is not a denial of the reality of the person who brought up the issue.

In the welfare-to-work meeting cited at the outset, we allowed the confrontation between the employer and welfare mother to continue for a bit as tensions rose in the room. Before things turned really ugly, we invited the contentious parties into the same functional subgroup by asking, "Anyone else feeling deeply about this issue?" Hands went up around the room from all stakeholder groups. Now several people chimed in with their concerns, enlarging the subgroup. This paved the way for the employer who then asked to know more about the lives of welfare mothers.

By finding an ally, in effect creating a subgroup, we kept both the employer and the welfare mother from becoming isolated and perhaps unwitting scapegoats. We acted to help the group accept frustration rather than turn it into further aggression. See Exhibit 1.1 for specifics.

Informal Subgroups Emerge During Meetings Note that we expect functional subgroups but cannot know who will be in them, or when they will become important. We discover all this as the meeting progresses. It takes only one ally to form a subgroup, validate a person's right to an opinion, and keep the meeting on track. As people learn that there is a subgroup for every issue that matters, they

Exhibit 1.1
Rules for Asking "Anyone Else?"

1. Listen for the intensity of feeling, and note what happens in the group. If anxiety rises, if you sense more tension in yourself, that could be a moment to ask an "Anyone else" question. (Many statements require no response. The person making them is satisfied to get it out, and people accept the comment as part of the dialogue.)
2. Cite the content of a statement only when the content does not threaten a personal attack or a divisive argument.

   Participant: "I'm confused about what's going on right now."

   Leader: "Anyone else confused?" (Rather than "Let me explain it to you.")
3. Cite only the feeling behind the statement if the issue is potentially divisive. In other words, find a subgroup for the *emotion,* so that all emotions remain legitimate.

   Participant: "I'm getting impatient with the idea that _____."

   Leader: "Is anybody else impatient right now—for any reason?"

are more likely to join the conversation and create a more realistic portrait of the whole. The "Anyone else" question also preempts a habit that we often run into, namely somebody saying, "I'm sure I'm the only one who feels this way, but . . . " or "I know I speak for many others when I say . . . " Whenever we hear this, we ask the person to ask if anyone else feels the same way.

In managing meetings, we need to emphasize, we are not standing there saying "Anyone else?" every few minutes. Even in meetings lasting two or three days, we rarely ask this question more than once or twice. We attribute this to the fact that we seek from the start to validate every person's experience. When the context includes everyone, most groups then handle what comes up without fleeing or fighting. When groups come to recognize the power of joining, individuals will ask as a matter of course if anyone else feels the way they do. Indeed, if you are participating in a group, not leading, and wonder whether you are alone with a particular view, you can easily ask, "Anyone else?"

rather than wonder. That is the best form of reality check. You keep yourself engaged by surfacing your own subgroup.

Suppose Nobody Joins? In our learning workshops, somebody inevitably asks, "Suppose nobody joins?" Well, we have been there too. Once in a great while—maybe every year or two—one of us will ask an "Anyone else" question and be greeted by silence.

Participant: "This has been a big waste of time for me."

Leader: "Anyone else feel they are wasting their time?"

Nobody says a word.

In that case, we see whether we can authentically join the person who has gone out on a limb. We may wait as long as twenty seconds after asking, "Anyone else?" which seems like an eon longer than eternity. When nobody speaks, tension builds while we consult our experience for an honest response.

Leader: "I've had moments here when I thought I was wasting my time, too."

Suppose we can't authentically join. The meeting has been great from our point of view.

Leader: "It seems you're the only one at this moment. Are you able to move on?"

Technique 2: Use Subgroup Dialogue to Interrupt Polarization

Asking "Anyone else?" is not always the end of the story. Now and then people become deeply polarized over conflicting beliefs, problem definitions, solutions, or decisions. In such cases, people may strongly disagree without stereotyping each other, but their conflict threatens to derail the task. There is a second technique we use for instances that paralyze a group. Our objective is to have people explore both sides of the conflict, but not in the way you might imagine. So if people overtly split on an issue, we stop the action. We ask people to identify which subgroup they belong to. However, we do not encourage a confrontation between subgroups, as you might do in a debate. Rather, we encourage the A's to talk *with each other* while the B's listen. After all the A's have had their say, we ask subgroup B to do the same while subgroup A listens.

The reason for this may not seem obvious. When people engage in dialogue with those who are ostensibly similar, comparing notes on what they believe and why, they nearly always discover differences that were not apparent at first. There is a spectrum of views within subgroup A and within subgroup B (just as

members of a political party vote the same way for different reasons). Often this comes as a surprise to both subgroups. Moreover, as people listen in on conversations among those they consider different, they nearly always discover positions similar to theirs that they could not discern until now.

In short, we affirm Yvonne Agazarian's principle that similarities always exist within apparent differences, and that within apparent similarities there always are differences. As people make these finer distinctions, they develop a more grounded sense of what they consider relevant. They experience a continuum of opinions rather than two opposite poles. They suspend for the time being their stereotypes and projections and get on with the business at hand. Differentiation leads to integration. Both-and replaces either-or as the unspoken group assumption.

Example: Mending a Split over Decision Making In a business meeting, people split over what they believed were the principles underlying effective company decisions. Fact-based decision making ranked high for one vociferous person. A vice president hesitantly noted that feelings and intuition often entered into his decisions. The first speaker, surprised by this, heatedly asserted the centrality of facts. We asked her to find out if anyone else shared her view. Several raised their hands. Next, we asked who believed intuition and feelings entered in. Many other hands went up. Two functional subgroups became visible. We asked each subgroup to explore thoughts and feelings among themselves while the other subgroup listened. Members of both soon found differences in their apparent similarities. One woman, for example, admitted that to stay fact based, she had to struggle to keep feelings and intuition out. On the other side, one man said, "Of course I pay attention to data, and I also use information that is not based on hard numbers."

The subgroups integrated their views by validating each other's stand under certain conditions. People later said they were astonished that no confrontation was necessary. Indeed, they had created a larger third subgroup, those who could accept that this might be a both-and proposition. The whole exchange took less than ten minutes.

Technique 3: Listen for the Integrating Statement

How do you know when a group is ready to take a next step? One clue is when people start recycling earlier statements. This usually indicates that a

spectrum of views is now on the table. No one has more to add. An even more reliable sign that a group has all it needs to move on is what we call an *integrating statement.* Polarized groups often get stuck in tense either-or conversations. An integrating statement takes the form of a both-and comment, recognizing that each side of a polarity has validity. When we wait long enough for a dialogue to run its course, a group member will nearly always volunteer such a statement.

In a housing conference, people split over what kinds of housing they wanted to see built. The group was on the verge of a stalemate. At that point, a group member, who had been listening intently, said, "Well, some people want to build high-rise apartments, and others are in favor of townhouses, and others fear public housing in their neighborhoods. We all agree more affordable housing is needed. We don't have to agree on what form it should take in order to move forward at this stage. We have to take everybody's concerns into account."

Technique 4: Get Everybody to Differentiate His or Her Position

Throughout, no matter what else goes on in a meeting, we stay mindful that people can integrate only to the extent that they make functional differences public. People need to know who they're dealing with and what they bring to the table. If they don't, their apparent agreements could be perfunctory, superficial, and unlikely to stand up. We never run an interactive meeting without giving all participants a chance to comment on what they do, why they came, what they want, and what they know. In groups of up to fifty or sixty, we nearly always start with a go-around. We might ask people for their name, role, and interest; for their expectations; or for their understanding of the goal. In larger groups, we might have several small groups do this simultaneously. This technique also becomes a dependable security blanket when there is uncertainty about what to do next. We use the go-around any time we feel stuck and need to break an apparent logjam.

We were managing a workshop in Germany on 9/11. When the news came, several group members said they felt they could no longer stay with the agenda. They wanted to change to a conversation about terrorism, peaceful change, and other concerns. Feelings ran high. Everyone was upset. We stopped the action and said, "We'd like to hear one sentence from each person who wants to speak. How do you feel about this situation? What would you like to do now?" About a

third of the fifty participants spoke. Soon there was a spectrum of views to consider. In the end, the group decided to proceed with the original agenda.

Nearly always, this act of differentiation produces information that gives everyone choices not obvious a few minutes earlier.

SUMMARY

For twenty years we have been leading planning meetings in many of the world's cultures. We learned to reduce our difficulties in multicultural groups by acting on structural issues that we can control. We stopped labeling individual and group behavior and dropped categories like "defensiveness" and "resistance to change." Instead we chose to see people doing their best with what they had. In this chapter, we described how we head off fight or flight in groups otherwise structured for success—that is, groups that include the right people for the task, have sufficient time, and accept their goals. We described a theory and practice of subgrouping that we use to keep a group on task with minimal intervention.

We cited the work of German refugee psychologist Solomon Asch (1952) and of Yvonne Agazarian (1997), developer of Systems-Centered Group Theory. Both did experiments showing how to help people stay reality focused and engaged despite their differences. Our practice relies on recognizing the existence of informal subgroups that form and reform around every statement people make. We noted the differences between stereotypical subgroups, based on people's judging others on little information, and functional subgroups, based on people sharing feelings and views relevant to their work. Such subgroups become significant when somebody makes a statement so emotionally charged that others may project negative stereotypical characteristics on that person, causing people to abandon the task. Our intervention is to surface a functional subgroup for the person at risk by asking "Who else feels the same way?" This legitimizes that a spectrum of responses is possible. Most times, this simple intervention is enough to keep groups whole and working. We use it sparingly, as groups tend to catch on quickly that we consider all statements valid.

Sometimes groups polarize around a sticky issue. In such cases, we identify subgroups for each position and ask each subgroup's members to engage in dialogue among themselves while others listen. Usually this leads to a realization

that a full spectrum of views exists in each group. The issue appears more nuanced than it seemed at first. This procedure usually produces enough new information for people to find a creative resolution. We described two other techniques ancillary to our method: listening for a both-and integrating statement and asking group members when they are stuck to differentiate themselves by hearing each person who wishes to state his or her views.