

12 The Situation

How do you break the status quo mindset in a group or team?

Signs and Symptoms

People are saying that they are doing the best they can under the circumstances.

People are saying, “been there, done that.”

People are saying, “this too shall pass” or “this is the best we can hope for with these kids (people, community, company).”

People are saying, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.”

Blaming external issues for the reasons why they haven’t been able to improve.

Underlying Causes

People don’t feel responsible for the results they are getting.

People may not feel capable of getting improved results.

There has been a past pattern of bringing in all the latest and greatest programs with little or no improvement.

I have used the Negative Vision Process frequently when teams are stuck in the status quo. This process can often be used inside strategic planning processes in which the planning team is simply re-packaging what it has always done in new and fancier language.

A story that particularly sticks out to me around the Negative Vision is when I used it with a leadership team from a large high school in Southern California. This particular high school was part of a state-wide program for the most underachieving schools in California relative to special education students.

The leadership team had just experienced the departure of their fifth school principal in a six-year period. Their shared experience was that they were doing the best they could in light of the low socioeconomic status of the community and the frequently changing leaders. When I met with them they appeared to be in a blame-frame and exclaimed that they were satisfied with their student results. They appeared unwilling to actually look at themselves and their system, but preferred to blame external reasons for the results.

They were as a site and as a district in a three-year leadership and planning process and they were facing sanctions from the state.

At the beginning of the Negative Vision Process, team members were angry with me because I was pushing them to look at the negative consequences of their inactivity. However, they quickly started to share how disempowered and incapable they felt to make changes that would help children. Some shared that their health was being impacted by the constant stress and that

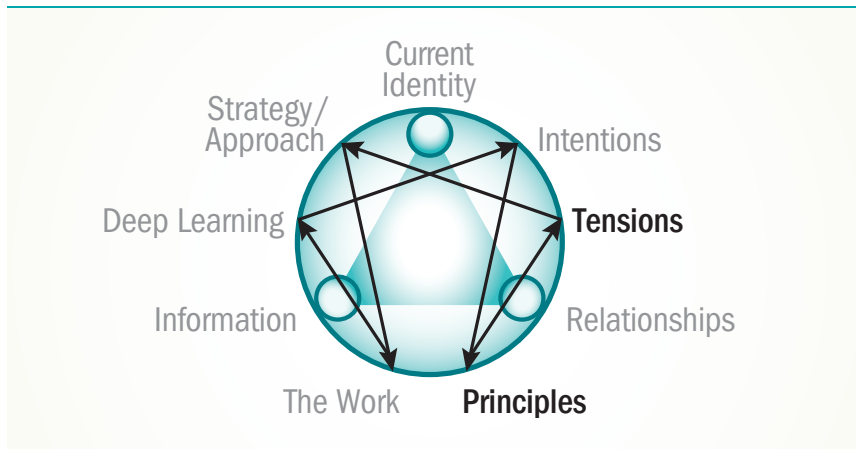
their families were tired of hearing them complain. Several shared that they were actively looking for employment elsewhere.

This was a breakthrough moment for the group and perhaps the first time in a long time that they had an honest and open conversation with each other. When the leadership team realized that they were all feeling the same, it mobilized them to want to change their culture and ways of operating.

THEORY

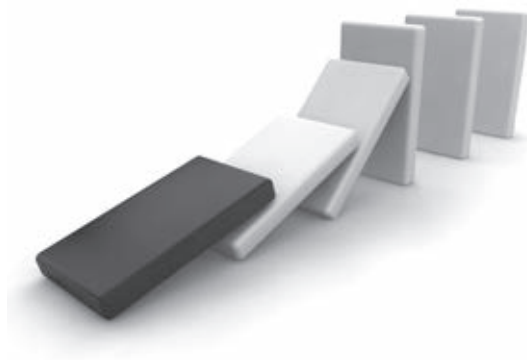
On the Enneagram

TENSIONS
PRINCIPLES



PRACTICE

Negative Vision Process



Process Description

There are times and situations that necessitate a not-so-subtle push to get groups going. A Negative Vision is developed during the early stages of an intervention in order to push a group through apathy, conflict, denial or immobility. In this process,

the group is taken through a guided visualization and asked to identify what it would be like if nothing were accomplished through their work together.

The facilitator poses the question, “What will happen if we work for one year, meeting every week or month, and nothing is accomplished on our task?” Standing at a flipchart, the facilitator asks the group, “What will be the specific consequences?”. The group’s first impulse is to talk about the system, organization or clients.

What Process Do I Use?

The facilitator must push each individual in the group to personalize the consequences by asking questions like:

- What consequences will there be for our clients?
- What are the personal consequences for you professionally?
- What are the consequences to you in your home life if this situation persists?

After people disclose the negative personal consequences, the facilitator asks the group to reflect on what they have said. Most times people comment that the negative consequences are already occurring and they wouldn't have to wait another year to experience these consequences. This process generally allows people to see that the status quo is not necessarily a desirable place to be and that the group needs to take actions unless it wants to experience this "picture of negative consequences" in the future.

NEGATIVE VISION PROCESS



Outcome

Rational Outcome

Typically this process is utilized at the point of Tension on the Process Enneagram. It can be used to create a set of agreements about how to move forward out of gridlock.

Experiential Outcome

The Negative Vision Process is used to break the cycle of apathy and encourages a group to experience the negative consequences of their current way of operating (status quo is good enough). This creates momentum away from the negative vision elicited through the process.



Tips and Reminders

Process Tips & Reminders

This process should only be used when a whole group is apathetic and stuck in status quo.

The facilitator must have a high degree of permission with the group to effectively utilize the process, because the facilitator must be in a challenging role with individuals and the groups as a whole.

After all the negative consequences are charted, the facilitator writes Negative Vision at the top of the chart. The chart should be posted in the room away from the workspace but easily seen by the group. The chart becomes a powerful *third point* when the group falls back into their past behaviors.

Next Steps for the Team

Generally some very personal and useful insights come out of this conversation process. It is often appropriate to do some reflection on what has been learned through this process. The After Action Review can be effective – what happened through the process? – what did we learn about us as a team, and what are we going to do differently to break this negative vision? This naturally leads into a conversation about group agreements or operational principles (*see Totems, Taboos and Repetitive Interactions page 198*).

Alternative Approaches

As can be seen from the enneagram template (*page 121*), there are multiple processes that can be used to address tensions. This particular type of tension – apathy and status quo – might best be addressed through the Confidence Line if the group is larger than 10-12 people. If little safety exists in a group, using the Crumple and Toss method would be an alternative approach to surfacing the underlying causes behind the status quo mindset.

What if this Process Doesn't Work?

It is helpful to understand that apathy often comes from people feeling either not responsible or not capable of making a difference (see Sustainability Reminders). Understanding this would help a facilitative leader talk about these dynamics directly, especially the issue of capability, and assist the team in developing a plan to address these underlying dynamics.

Sustainability Reminders

Things to remember...

Frequently the biggest barrier for a team to feel like they can create significant improvements is that they lack the internal experience of *possibility*. Many people have worked for the same organization for most of their career and they have never seen successful examples – they don't actually think it is possible. The best strategy to create this sense of possibility is to bring your team together with a team that has actually achieved the desired results under the exact same conditions. They can talk as colleagues and find out how people just like themselves were able to create success.

Another model to consider comes out of NLP (neurolinguistic programming). This model indicates that in order for a person or group of people to feel responsible and accountable they must feel that:

- The issue is important.
- The issue is their work to do, and
- They feel capable of doing the work.

If any of these three variables is absent, then a person or team will not feel responsible or accountable.