Be a STAR[1]: A tool to assess and maintain Effective Collaborations

Designed and Developed by:

Human Systems Dynamics Institute

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[1] The Generative Relationship STAR, on which this work is based, was invented by Dr. Brenda Zimmerman of York University. The authors thank Dr. Zimmerman for her pioneering work in applications of complexity theory to group dynamics and community development.

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Introduction

Collaborations have the potential to accomplish much more than any one individual or organization. The start up of a collaboration can be full of energy as members sort out expectations and form a direction that is for the benefit of all.. Over time, however, every collaboration encounters challenges. These challenges can either help the group focus and work together, or they can threaten the working relationships that support the collaborative efforts.

This Handbook includes tools and techniques to help collaborative groups recognize and resolve their issues, so that they can work most productively together. It is based on the STAR Model, designed and developed by Brenda Zimmerman. The STAR defines the four features that support generative relationships and allow groups to work effectively toward common goals.

The first section of the Handbook includes an assessment tool that a collaborative group can use to evaluate its performance against the STAR criteria and to determine how the group might focus to build its skills and improve its work together.

Each of the other sections of the Handbook presents tools and techniques to strengthen its capacity on a different point of the STAR Model:

- S—Similarities and differences. This aspect of the STAR provides the diversity and creativity required for the work of a collaborative. Human systems dynamics depend on similarities and differences they form the patterns that emerge and change over time.
- T—Talking and listening. This point of the STAR establishes the interactions that support relationships across lines of difference that are necessary to the work. Talking and listening form the exchanges that allow for individual and group transformation in human systems dynamics.
- A—Authentic work. This facet of the STAR provides the satisfaction and progress of defining and completing concrete and useful tasks. The work of a group forms one kind of container to hold the individuals together as they form shared meaning and action in complex human system dynamics.
- R—Reason for coming together. This point of the STAR provides the "glue" that brings a collaborative group together and holds it in the relationship that allows productive work. A shared reason for coming together is a second kind of container that holds a group together as they find shared patterns of meaning and action.

We hope you find this assessment and its supporting handbook and its tools helpful. You may also want to add your own ideas for ways to strengthen your collaboration in its role as a STAR generative relationship.

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Assessment

The STAR Model Assessment provides an opportunity for a collaboration to evaluate its own performance as a working group. Each participant in should complete the survey. Scores can be reported in a variety of ways:

- Find the average values for each section across all responders to see how the group perceives its strengths and needs in each of the STAR categories.
- Find the overall average of all questions to measure the group's perception of itself as a collaboration.
- Compare and contrast maximum and minimum scores on individual questions, sections of questions, or the whole to indicate how much members agree on the nature and work of the collaborative group.

This assessment is not intended to measure the absolute capacity of a group, rather it should be used as a discussion tool. It can uncover significant issues that a group should deal with to overcome its barriers and reach its full potential. Results of the assessment can help a group point toward its strengths and needs, so that the members of the group can make adjustments to sustain positive working relationships.

The following sections of the Handbook provide tools and techniques a group can use to strengthen the points of its STAR.

STAR Assessment

Your group is working together to accomplish a task, reach a goal, or improve a process. Please answer the following questions to provide information about your experiences with this particular group. Your answers, and answers from other members, will be used to plan how best to build improve your outcomes.

Date _____

Group name _____

Time with the group _____

Role with the group _____

For the questions that follow, please circle the number that best represents your response to the question. At the end of the survey, you can add any comments you wish.

1 = Disagree strongly
2 = Disagree
3 = Agree
4 = Agree strongly

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Similarities and Differences

1. There are many valuable differences among members of the group.	1	2	3	4
2. We talk openly about our differences.	1	2	3	4
3. I feel a part of this group.	1	2	3	4
4. I notice that others feel a part of this group.	1	2	3	4
5. It is easy for someone new to join this group.	1	2	3	4
6. Most of the people who began with this group are still involved.	1	2	3	4
7. I feel that I can be myself with this group.	1	2	3	4
8. I feel that others can be themselves with the group.	1	2	3	4
9. We share history of experiences and learnings.	1	2	3	4
10. I know what differences make a difference in our group.	1	2	3	4
11. We are able to use the diversity in the group to learn and be creative.	1	2	3	4
12. We have had conflict in the past.	1	2	3	4
13. We have been able to resolve conflict in the past.	1	2	3	4
14. We face issues that will bring about constructive conflict in the group.	1	2	3	4
Total				
Similarities and Differences Grand Total				

Talking and Listening

15. I feel that others in the group listen when I speak.	1	2	3	4
16. I feel free to share personal information about myself with the group.	1	2	3	4
17. Everyone in this group has an opportunity to speak and be heard.	1	2	3	4
18. The conversation of the group is shared equally among members.	1	2	3	4
19. I usually understand what others in the group are saying.	1	2	3	4
20. I can predict what others in the group will say before they speak.	1	2	3	4
21. We spend time reflecting on our work together.	1	2	3	4
22. We ask many questions of each other as we talk.	1	2	3	4
23. I do not feel the need to repeat my points many times before they are heard.	1	2	3	4
24. I feel energized and excited when I leave a meeting of this group.	1	2	3	4
25. People in the group use words or phrases that are familiar to me.	1	2	3	4
26. We share common definitions of the words we use to discuss our work.	1	2	3	4
27. It is fun to be a part of this group.	1	2	3	4
28. We provide clear feedback to members when they disappoint us.	1	2	3	4
Total				
Talking and Listening Grand Total				

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Authentic Work

29. Leadership is shared among members of the group.	1	2	3	4
30. When I need information, I know where to go for help.	1	2	3	4
31. I say positive things about this group to others.	1	2	3	4
32. I would encourage others to join this group.	1	2	3	4
33. The work of the group meets my expectations.	1	2	3	4
34. The work of the group exceeds my expectations.	1	2	3	4
35. Over time, we tend to be more effective as a group.	1	2	3	4
36. Most of us do what we say we will do.	1	2	3	4
37. I expect myself to fulfill my commitments to the group.	1	2	3	4
38. We complete our work within schedules we expect.	1	2	3	4
39. We use our human resources wisely.	1	2	3	4
40. We use our financial resources wisely.	1	2	3	4
41. I always know what I am supposed to do.	1	2	3	4

Total				
Authentic Work Grand Total				

Reason for coming together

42. I know why I participate in this group.	1	2	3	4
43. I know why others participate in this group.	1	2	3	4
44. We share the same reason for working together.	1	2	3	4
45. We have spent enough time talking about why we are here.	1	2	3	4
46. We have a shared vision of the future.	1	2	3	4
47. I usually know what will happen when I meet with the group.	1	2	3	4
48. We are making progress toward our goals.	1	2	3	4
49. The reason for our being together is the same as when we started our work.	1	2	3	4
50. The goals of the group match my personal goals.	1	2	3	4

Total				
Reason for Coming Together Grand Total				

What else would you like to say? Please add any comments or questions you have about these or other aspects of your experience in your group.

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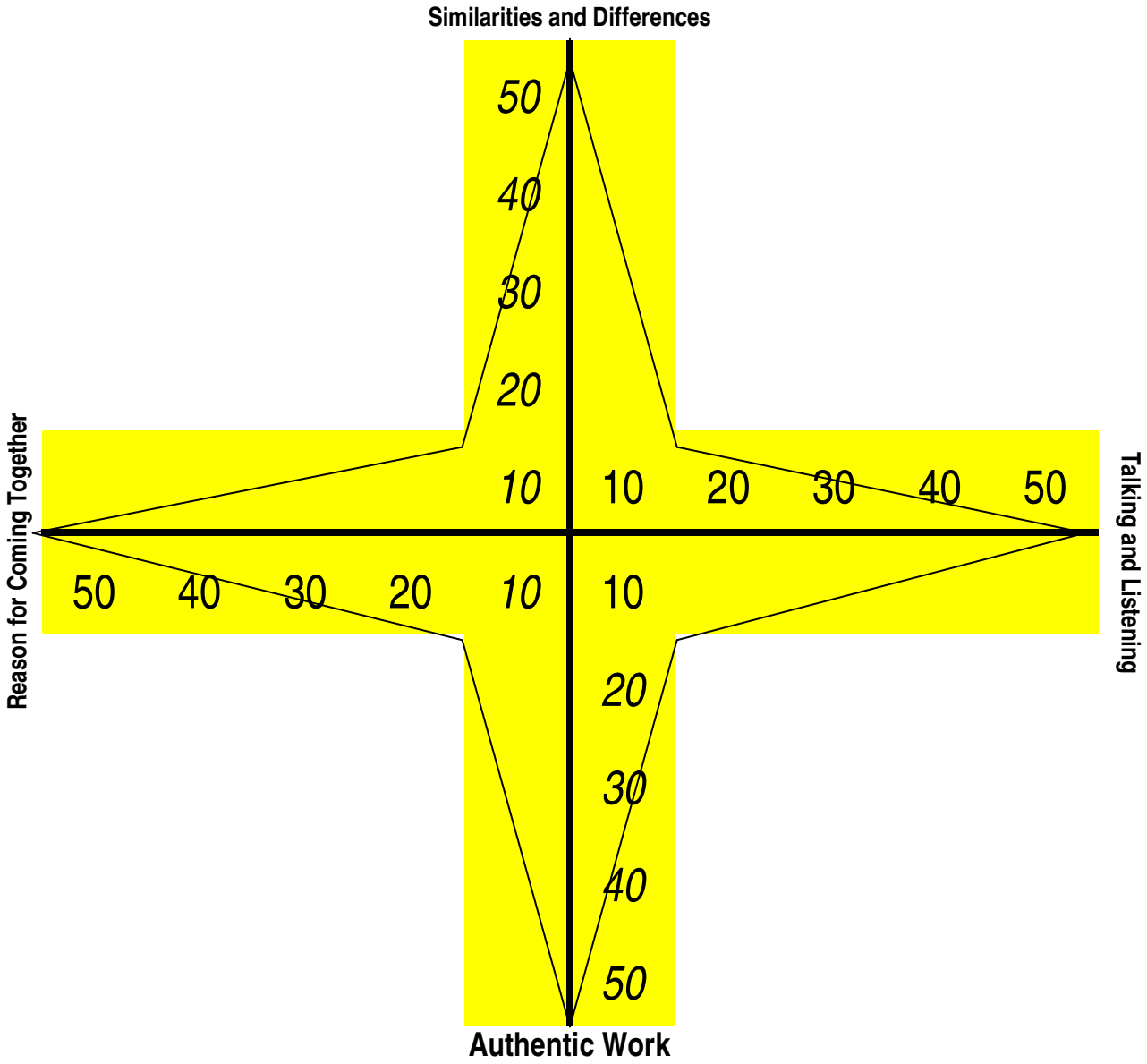
Balancing the STAR



Mark your total points on each of the four arms of the STAR. Consider the following questions yourself.

- Which arm is the longest?
- Which is the shortest?
- How much variation is there among the arms of the STAR?
- What do these relationships tell you about the work of your group?

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After your own reflection on these questions, talk to other members of your group. Discuss the following questions with others.

- How are your STAR maps similar?
- How are they different?
- What does this tell you about the work of your group?

Depending on what you find, you may want to focus on strengthening one or another aspect of the STAR. The following pages provide some ideas for ways you might wish to strengthen your Similarities and Differences, Talking and Listening, Authentic Work, or Reason for coming together.

Repeat the assessment often and use it to shape the on-going growth and development of your group.

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