

Playing the Long Game:

USING COMMUNICATION SKILLS AND
STRATEGIES TO CREATE A CULTURE WHICH
EMBRACES AND CELEBRATES ASSESSMENT

2021 Assessment Institute



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**IF YOU ONLY
FOCUS ON THE PROBLEM**



**YOU MIGHT
MISS THE EASY SOLUTION**

Ice breaker:

On your own paper, list the five BARRIERS to faculty, staff, students or stakeholders at your institution to embracing your assessment endeavors:

Communication Theories and Strategies

- Today, we are going to discuss a few over-reaching theories and widely accepted strategies originating from Psychology, Sociology and primarily Communication Studies research
- Additionally, we will discuss practical applications to using these insights and strategies that may work in progressing your assessment efforts and creating a more assessment-friendly culture on your campus

Theory and Strategy No. 1

Basic Communication Studies research has a few cardinal rules which can help you advance efforts on your campus:

1. Communication can't be blamed for every problem
2. Communication can't solve every problem
3. Communication relies on filters of experience
4. Communication creates a climate which dictates future behavior

To have long-term change, we must recognize that we can't convince everyone and you can never start with a clean slate. But, you can over time change the relationship and climate of an organization action by action.

Practical Applications

At your organization:

1. Recognize the historical communication strategies used surrounding assessment.
2. Recognize the people that preceded you and their successful (and failed) strategies and institutional policies.
3. Identify the current climate surrounding assessment.
4. Be patient through deliberate communication interactions.



Theory and Strategy No. 2

Communication Network Theory:

- This theory is applied in a variety of contexts throughout academia, however, in strategic communications it is often used to identify types of leadership and communication channels

1. Formal leadership and communication channels are like the skeleton of a body and prescribed – with allies and opponents
2. Informal leadership and communication channels are like the central nervous system of a body and not prescribed but very powerful – with allies and opponents

Practical Applications

At your organization:

1. Identify allies with formal and informal leadership roles and their motivations
2. Identify possible opponents with formal and informal leadership roles and their motivations
3. Identify new leaders (even when implausible) to change culture surrounding assessment over long term



Theory and Strategy No. 3

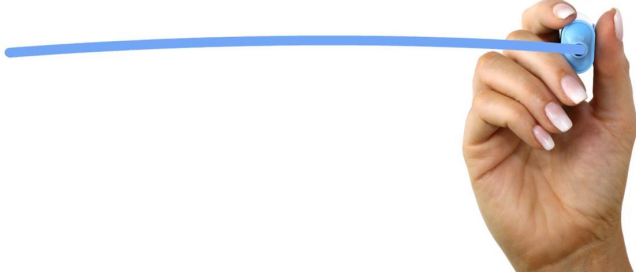
Culture Identification Theories:

- There are multiple theories and strategies around the next core culture concepts you should identify at your organization for long-term assessment success

1. Low versus High Power Distance – how much is power revered?
2. Low versus High Uncertainty Avoidance – how much is risk-taking rewarded?
3. Nurturing versus Achievement – how are people defined as “successful”?
4. Monochronic versus Polychronic – how do people define their work “time”?

Practical Applications

POWER



At your organization:

- Most organizations take decades to change the answers to the questions posed before, however, the people within that organization especially leadership have the ability to change it quickly if motivated.

- But, working within the cultural norms can make assessment strategies more successful. For example, if most faculty are low power distance (as they usually are) then giving them greater license in decision-making at the departmental level could create a greater sense of ownership and sense of cultural control.

Theory and Strategy No. 4

Communication Conflict Management Strategies:

- There are five basic conflict management strategies that can be used based on the conflict itself; the players; and the desired long-term outcome. But, before choosing, always remember: Interest over Positions!

1. Avoidance – Ignore the known conflict
2. Accommodation – Give in willingly and openly to other party
3. Competition – Fight to win (direct, not passively)
4. Compromise – Negotiate a middle
5. Collaborate – Come to a new, previously not prescribed solution together

Practical Applications



At your organization:

- Before reacting and choosing a conflict management strategy to a conflict – think about your long-term goals for assessment initiatives. You might ask yourself:

1. Does this conflict really matter and why?
2. Can I “win” or “lose” without damaging important relationships?
3. Can allowing someone else to “win” gain me support in some way that is necessary to progress my long-term strategy?

Theory and Strategy No. 5

Communication Diversity and Complexity:

- Conflict does not occur in a vacuum and the cultural approach to conflict can have an affect on the strategy you might employ. For example, is conflict a war, a game, a garden, or a tide?
- Conflict resolutions have a cumulative effect – not on actual outcomes but emotional ones. People can “lose” conflicts but if they leave feeling positive and “win” with negative ones. This is why what appears from the outside as irrational arguments are actually the straws that break the camel’s back as the last negative outcome a person, group, or organization can handle.
- Take note of process versus content conflicts and conflict managers – Content is the what, process is the how. Process conflict managers can often agree with you – but not your methods to get there.

Practical Applications

At your organization:

1. Identify your conflict management complexities and how they change your decision-making – for the good and bad
2. Identify the complexities of major players and the culture overall
3. Work towards – even in seemingly negative conflicts – positive process outcomes to change/maintain the perception of assessment initiatives



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Thank You!

If you have further questions, please feel free to reach out to us at:

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