



**A study on the effectiveness of using projective drawings
in an intervention to improve inter-group collaboration:
a journey of discovery, abduction and transition**

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Abstract

Inter-group collaboration is often ineffective. It does not create the intended results and even destroys company value. Efforts to get rid of silo-working and silo-mentality often fail (Willcock, 2013). The aim of this study is to explore the effectiveness of using projective drawings in an intervention to improve inter-group collaboration. The approach is based on conducting an intervention in a case, and combines qualitative research approaches like action research, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis and abduction. Through this study, a new concept “Collaboration-in-the mind” has been developed. The results show that using drawings during the intervention contributes to the discovery of “Collaboration-in-the mind” and supports the development of explanatory, working hypotheses on interpersonal and inter-group dynamics and relations (abduction). Using drawings also contributes to the creation of “flow” and an engaging space which is perceived as fun, giving different perspectives and productive. There is limited explicit, conscious proof that the use of drawings triggered the creation of a transitional space. This study confirms the power, capacity and potential value of using drawings in the complex context of improving inter-group collaboration. The main contribution is the positioning of a new concept “Collaboration-in-the mind” and the initial development of a specific socio-technical, systems-psychodynamic method to improve inter-group collaboration.

Keywords

Inter-group collaboration, Projective drawing, “Collaboration-in-the mind”, Socio-analytic map, Action research, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, Abduction, Transitional space.

Introduction

Why inter-group collaboration matters?

In organizations I worked for and consulted over the past 20 years, I experienced the challenges of collaboration and daily struggles to get rid of silo-working and silo-mentality. Inter-group collaboration is often ineffective. It does not create the intended results and even destroys company value. Efforts to get rid of silo-working and silo-mentality often fail (Willcock, 2013). Missed client opportunities, mistakes, delay, waste of time due to conflict, wrong decisions, lack of shared learning are examples of cost drivers of this ineffectiveness.

Research focusing on the evolution of organization of work indicates an increase in models like meta-organizations, new eco-systems, “recombinant collaboration”, more horizontal organizations. These emerging models are based on the critical foundation of effective collaboration (Mortensen, 2012; Gulati, Puranam & Tushman, 2012).

This thesis starts by reviewing research on inter-group collaboration through the main lines of research. Insights from different disciplines are brought together and structured around the followings questions:

1. What makes it so difficult, challenging to collaborate?
2. What is already known about the dynamics in a collaborative?
3. Why do initiatives to improve collaboration often fail?
4. How to discover socio-analytic maps of a collaborative and dynamics?
5. How to engage and make transition towards more effective collaboration?

Then, research aim and objectives, methodology and research setting are described. Afterwards data is gathered, analyzed and key findings are discussed. The study ends with the limitations of the study, suggestions for future research and a conclusion.

Research aim and objective

This study takes a novel perspective by combining the use of projective drawings in the complex context inter-group collaboration. The aim is to explore the effectiveness of using projective drawings in interventions to improve inter-group collaboration.

Underlying research questions are: Does the use of drawings, contributes to :

1. the discovery of socio-analytic map of the collaborative?
2. the development of working hypotheses on interpersonal and inter-group dynamics and relations in the collaborative?
3. the creation of an engaging, transitional space to improve the collaboration?

By this study I want to contribute to the further development of approaches to improve inter-group collaboration. My ultimate goal is to increase the success rate of newly set-up collaboratives and interventions to improve inter-group collaboration by taking a socio-technical, systems psychodynamic perspective on this adaptive challenge.

Conclusion

Inter-group collaboration is often ineffective and a highly complex phenomenon. Although the start of a collaboration can be conscious and rational, the process is often influenced by hidden, emotional and unconscious motives and dynamics (Prins, 2006). Exploring and understanding the socio-analytic map of the collaborative and interpersonal and inter-group dynamics is mostly underexposed or forgotten in improvement intervention, with failure as result.

Existing research on projective drawings shows that using drawings is a powerful tool in the socio-analytic explorations. This study takes a novel perspective by combining the use of projective drawings in the complex context of inter-group collaboration. The aim is to explore the effectiveness of using projective drawings in interventions to improve inter-group collaboration.

The approach taken is based on conducting an intervention in a case and combines qualitative research approaches like action research, Interpretative phenomenological analysis and abduction.

The effectiveness of using projective drawings in an intervention is analyzed and discussed from 3 angles: (1) discovery of the socio-analytic map, (2) development of working hypotheses on interpersonal and inter-group dynamics and relations, and (3) creation of an engaging, transitional space to improve the collaboration.

Through this study, a new concept “Collaboration-in-the mind” has been developed. This new concept is the combination of the socio-analytic maps developed for the groups involved. The study shows that using drawings in the intervention contributes to the discovery, construction and emergence of “Collaboration-in-the mind”. It allows the facilitator, researcher to develop initial explanatory, working hypotheses on the interpersonal and inter-group dynamics and relations specific to the collaborative (abduction). Using drawings also contributes to the creation of an engaging space which is perceived as fun and giving a different perspective. Participants also emphasize that it creates a productive dialogue and curiosity, appetite for further discussion. Several properties are identified which contribute to the state of “flow” (Csíkszentmihályi, 1997).

There is limited explicit, conscious proof that the use of drawings triggered the creation of a transitional space. During the intervention, very little expression has been given to ambivalence, dilemma's, conflicting priorities. Also, most of the language used was "sustain talk" rather than "Change talk". Results from the participant's survey show that they "somewhat" agreed that the face-to-face session brought up elements of the collaboration they were not aware of. The question remains if using drawings triggered an unconscious transition process, which is more difficult to proof.

Overall, this study confirms the power, capacity and potential value of using drawings in the complex context of improving inter-group collaboration... a support in the journey of discovery, abduction and transition.