

**WORKING AT THE ROOTS OF OUR APPROACH TO WORK: ACTION FOCUSED
STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING WORKLOAD AND ENHANCING JOB
SATISFACTION**

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Introduction

The purpose of this workshop was to engage participants in an exploration of their work behaviors and to identify practical strategies to manage work demands more effectively. The workshop challenged participants to choose specific behaviors that would help them to balance work and non-priorities. The workshop consisted of four cycles of content followed by a paired dialogue sessions. The purpose of the dialogue sessions was to allow each participant to apply concepts to his/her own work behavior and develop personalized insights and basis for action.

A Theory of Change

The workshop began with a theory of change based on Complexity Science and Systems thinking. The theory relates how all systems inherently resist change. In order to change a system (i.e., a work behavior system), one needs to include three necessary conditions: challenge to the system, feedback between the system and the environment, and support to help the system adapt and to sustain the change. This theory was used as the basis of interpreting and applying workshop concepts. Several postulates of system thinking were suggested as guiding principle of change:

- The harder you push, the harder the system pushes back.
- The easy way out usually leads right back in.
- Small changes can produce big results, but the area of highest leverage is often the least obvious.

- There is no blame.

Cycles of Dialogue

The workshop progressed with a series of dialogue sessions designed to engage participants in a progressively deeper levels of analysis of their work behaviors. The cycles were organized around four levels of systems thinking:

- Behaviors – current and observable work actions.
- Patterns – history of work behavior including changes in work.
- Structures – organizational and environmental factors impacting work behavior.
- Mental Models – deeply engrained beliefs and convictions about work behaviors.

Participants engaged in a series of structured dialogue sessions at each of these four levels as the basis of insight and increased options for new behaviors.

Strategies considered at each of the four levels included:

Behavior Level

- Track and record the ways in which you use time.
- Prioritize your use of time using a structured approach.
- Establish a discipline for how you will allocate time.

Patterns Level

- Learn from your history. Find energy in the activities that naturally engage you.
- Eliminate activities that drain energy without the commensurate rewards.
- Beware the “just until” trap.

Structures Level

- Interview someone who is successful in an area of challenge for you. Identify specify supports that made them successful.
- Discuss you need for individual support with your faculty chair, dean, or appropriate support office.
- Conduct a needs assessment related to faculty support

Mental Models Level

- Dialogue with a friend, sibling, significant other, or spouse about each other’s mental models relating to work. Look for consistency and inconsistencies between beliefs and action.
- Engage your colleagues in a dialogue about mental models.

Explore how shared mental models are shaping your work

environment.

Conclusion

The workshop concluded with participants identifying one area of work behavior which they would modify in the next 30-days. Participants were also invited to follow up with their dialogue partner in 30-days to reflect and learn from the process.