

FACILITATORSM

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Initiating change - black hole activity



By Shirley Lee, VP Communications
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When I teach change management or facilitate a change agent/leader work session, I use an activity I created called “Black Hole.” In it the participants brainstorm change initiatives that succeeded or failed. Afterwards we discuss why some failed and why others succeeded. It makes them much more receptive to learning about how to facilitate change since they do not want their initiative to go into a black hole.

I have shared this activity with several of my colleagues since July 1997 and they have found it useful to introduce change ideas or as a wrap-up activity at the end of a session to drive home key learning.

Below I share the basic facilitator instructions. Please use it or adapt it to fit your change management or transition planning needs.

Purpose:

Emphasize the need for a good sponsor or champion in the change process.

Supplies required:

- Flip Chart Pads and stands
- Tape
- White index cards
- Blue or green index cards
- Flip chart markers (for instructor and participants)

Prior to activity:

Prepare Flip Charts:

- Swirling Black Hole (draw with black marker)

- Upward Shooting Star (draw with orange marker)
- T column chart with “Black Hole” over 1st column and “Change Star” over the other

Introduction to activity:

Explain the necessary roles in the change process.

Table activity:

Divide participants into small teams at tables

Then:

- Give the teams white index cards,
- Have teams “Brainstorm change initiatives you can remember over the last __ (months or years) that did not happen as expected or did not happen at all. List each one on an index card.”
- Allow 10 minutes for brainstorming.
- Collect cards

Next:

- Give the teams green (go) or blue (sky) index cards
- Have teams “Brainstorm change initiatives you can remember over the last __ (months or years) that did happen as expected or went well. List each one on an index card.”
- Allow 10 minutes for brainstorming.

Black hole, continued on page 11

Black hole, from page 10

- While team is brainstorming for new cards, arrange the white cards on the black hole flip chart and tape it on the wall.

Then collect the colored cards, arrange them on the shooting star and tape to wall.

Group activity:

- Explain the negative phenomenon of a black hole.
- Then explain the beauty and fascination of the shooting star.
- Have room brainstorm the differences they saw in the changes and write response in appropriate column on T-chart.

(Examples: Management Support was high/low, training was/wasn't given, communication well handled/non-existent, etc.)

Debrief the activity

Give helpful hints in the Change Management Process using some of the items they noted on the T-chart. Sponsor and/or Champion role should be one of the hints. ∞

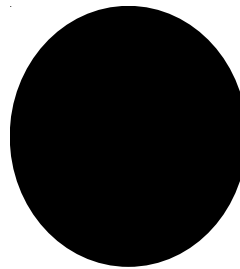
Shirley Lee is a consultant/facilitator who helps organizations increase employee and system capacity to produce results. Involved with teams since 1985, Shirley designs and facilitates a variety of team building, problem solving, and productivity improvement events.

Check out http://www.geocities.com/slee_rightfit/ or call her at 214-457-5736.

Editor's Note:

This type of activity is versatile in its application across many situations. I've used a similar approach to learn about participant perceptions of the reasons past projects were or were not successful. The results were then used to craft project communications highlighting how the new project was different from the "black hole" projects and similar to the "shooting star" projects.

The activity can also be an interactive method for lessons learned.



Wikipedia definition of a black hole

A black hole is a region of space in which the gravitational field is so powerful that nothing can escape after having fallen past the event horizon. The name comes from the fact that even electromagnetic radiation (e.g. light) is unable to escape, rendering the interior invisible.

Seen on the web

Shirley was interviewed by the PayScale website for their Salary Stories career blog. Salary Stories are true tales about working people who do what they love and love what they do. Check out Shirley's article to read her views about what she does as a facilitator and her thoughts about facilitation.

Check out <http://blogs.payscale.com/salarystories/2007/10/meeting-facilit.html>