

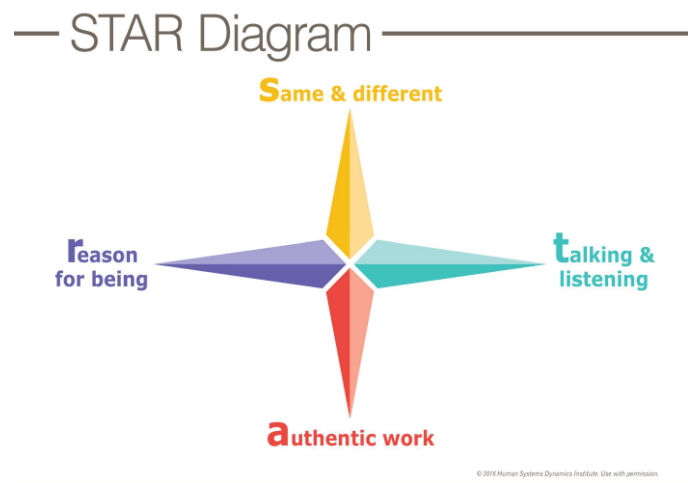


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STAR Diagram

Description of STAR Diagram

The STAR Diagram offers a way of seeing and understanding the conditions that shape a generative team. Whether you use it to plan for an effective team or to intervene when things go awry, the STAR diagram offers a way to see, understand, and influence the patterns in your team—at home, at work, or in your community.



What?

The STAR Diagram, initially framed by Brenda Zimmerman, represents four conditions that influence the nature of interaction and work in a group that comes together for a common purpose.

- ▶ **Same and Different** – Coherent, generative groups need enough similarity to hold them together and enough difference to create patterns and tension for energy and change.
- ▶ **Talking and Listening** – When people come together to accomplish a task, whether in the short term or across time, it's critical that each person is allowed to contribute and that each person listens to the contributions of others.
- ▶ **Authentic Work** – Teams need to do “real” work together. The challenges they face, the products they create, the opportunities they explore—all must be of real value to each of them and to the larger system of which they are a part.

Nothing is intractable.

- ▶ **Reason for Being** – Groups need a compelling reason for working together, both in short-term, periodic meetings, and in longer term of their overall purpose.

So What?

Patterns of interaction and decision making in highly functioning, generative teams reflect a balance among all four points of the STAR. The conditions are balanced and functioning well. You can use the STAR Diagram in a number of ways.

- ▶ Assess current patterns to infuse energy into a team that has become stagnant or dysfunctional.
- ▶ Identify when a team has finished its work and is ready to sunset.
- ▶ Engage members of the group in understanding their own patterns and checking for balance among the conditions.
- ▶ Set shared expectations and commitments as a new team forms.

Now What?

Use the STAR Diagram when you engage with teams/groups of all kinds to ensure generative, productive engagements.

- ▶ Define the patterns you have and/or the patterns you want.
- ▶ Discuss implications of those patterns for the individuals engaged in that team and identify actions that can set the conditions for the patterns you want.
- ▶ Engage with each other to set those conditions to build a generative team.
- ▶ Assess your progress regularly and adapt as necessary.

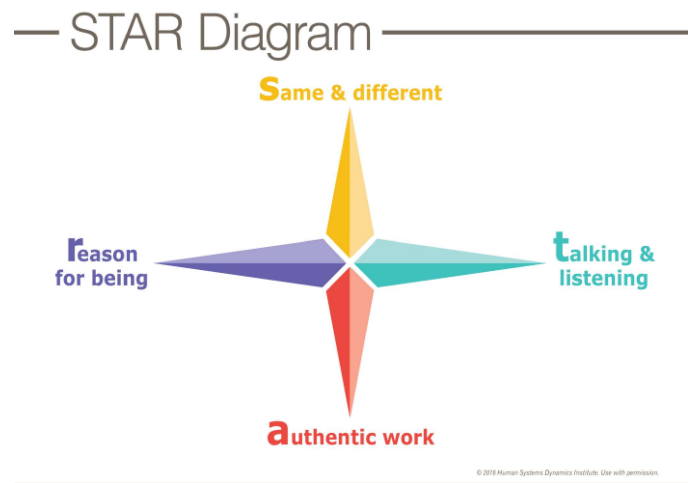


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What is the Purpose of STAR Diagram?

The STAR Diagram, created by Brenda Zimmerman, provides a useful tool to support any group that works together toward a shared commitment or common goal. It provides guidance for groups that want to maintain generative relationships that are resilient and sustainable across the life of the team. In such a relationship, each point of the star is equal in size. When one or more point is out of balance, the group will struggle to sustain itself.



As a “model,” the STAR Diagram offers a visual of the four conditions that can shape patterns of resilience and adaptability in a team, and it reflects the need for balance among those conditions. Each of the conditions is necessary in its own right, and it contributes to the effectiveness of the other three. It gives you a “picture” of what a highly performing, generative team looks like, relative to these four conditions.

- ▶ A balance of **Same and Different** ensures a diversity of thought and perspectives as you consider your work together.
- ▶ A balance of **Talking and Listening** means that all perspectives have voice in the decisions and actions of the team.
- ▶ **Authentic Work** says that the task of the group is meaningful and important to each of the group members.
- ▶ **Reason for Being** means that the group is together to accomplish something more than any of them could accomplish alone.

As a “method,” the STAR Diagram informs your decision making and action taking as you explore your team’s performance in each of the conditions.

Nothing is intractable.

So What Can You Do to Use STAR Diagram?

Given the dual purpose of the STAR Diagram, you can use it to ensure the generativity of your team. When you and your team members consider your shared performance in each of the points of the STAR, you can make judgments about where you need to shift your work together to move toward greater balance and fit. Where one of the “points” of the star falls short, you shift your interactions to bring them all back into balance. If you realize your work is complete or that there is no real reason to remain together, you dissolve the team to move on to other obligations and opportunities.

- ▶ **Same and Different** – Any group needs a balance. When too many similarities exist, the group’s self-similarity prevents it from being stimulated to do work. At the same time, when there are too many differences, activity in the system cannot settle into a pattern. As you consider the members of the team, you consider their similarities. What commitments, interests, experiences, etc., are shared or similar among them? What diversity of thought, backgrounds, perspectives, and opinions do they bring? Are they similar enough to work together effectively? Are they different enough to explore new ideas and create new directions?
- ▶ **Talking and Listening** – Each individual needs to participate actively, even as they honor others’ contributions. No one individual or group can dominate the conversation, and no individual or group can hold back, withdrawing from the work at hand. The reason for inviting diversity in the membership is to be sure that multiple perspectives are represented in decision making and action. If any of those perspectives are not granted voice in the work that must be done, there is no benefit derived from the diversity. At the same time, if group members only talk “at” each other, they don’t hear the diversity of thought that could enhance their productivity or adaptability. As you participate in the work, are all perspectives given voice? Are the members of the team listening to each other, building on others’ ideas and learning from each other?
- ▶ **Authentic Work** – Group members must feel their work is important and has meaning—it has to feel authentic to them. Often teams do “busy” work because they believe they have to accomplish something together, but they don’t really buy into the work they are doing or they are unable or unwilling to contribute their best work. The work can lose meaning to the group. In a *Knowledge @ Wharton* article, “Putting a Face to a Name: The Art of Motivating Employees,” authors point to research that talks about real engagement that comes from the chance to make a real contribution to work that has meaning. Work is authentic to the extent that it accesses the contributions of diverse, committed perspectives.

- ▶ **Reason for Being** – Similar to needing authentic work, group members have to believe in their reason for coming together. When they lose that, they no longer feel any commitment to the success of the group. There are times when teams finish the authentic work they have to do, but they continue meeting because they believe they should. Or a team or committee is formed without a meaningful reason—tradition, policy, procedural committees, for instance. Again real engagement requires that the members of the group know they are together for a reason that contributes to the success of the whole.

When you have explored your team against the points of the STAR, you can formulate a plan of action for setting conditions for generative work together.

Now What Can You Do to Use STAR Diagram in Your System?

After you and your team members understand what it takes to set the conditions for patterns of generativity, you can take action to take adaptive actions as members come and go, as situations change, and as opportunities emerge.

- ▶ Consider your patterns in a moment of time and evaluate the balances between and among existing conditions—**Same and Different**, **Talking and Listening**, **Authentic Work**, and **Reason for Being**.
- ▶ Understand the implications for what you find and identify options for action to address the challenges and amplify the strengths.
- ▶ Take action and watch for the impacts on the team's performance.
- ▶ Continue to function together, watching patterns as they emerge and fade.