

Session 8: Focus

GOAL: Your nearly there! During this final session teaching you the Culture in Action practices, you'll study FOCUS – how becoming aware of what's going on within yourself and within the team as a whole can promote understanding and connection, and avoid miscommunication and misperception.

WHAT TO DO:

1. Pick a leader.

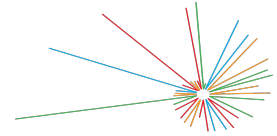
- Pick a team member to lead the session. You can select the same person who led an earlier session or rotate to give different people a chance.
- The leader should prepare the agenda. A standard agenda is with the course materials on the Culture in Action website. You can use the standard as is or adapt it to your needs.
- The leader should read the "Leader Tips," which are available on the Culture in Action website.

2. Get ready.

- The leader should schedule a 90-minute session, distribute this pdf (or a link to the website's "Course Materials" page) to all participants, and let participants know whether they should submit their session prep before the meeting.
- All participants should spend 30 minutes or so prepping for the session.
 - First, they should do the pre-reading (below), which discusses FOCUS.
 - Second, they should do the "Session Prep" (below).

3. Go.

- Hold the session. Go through each of the practices in order. As always, if you get stuck, the leader can refer to the Leader Tips for help.
- If you'd like, set aside a few minutes to discuss the role of FOCUS.
- Briefly review ACTIONS from the last meeting. Since you're coming to the end of the formal curriculum, make sure you're establishing a culture of accountability. If people are making commitments but not delivering on them, get to the heart of why and agree on what you'll do to change that dynamic.
- Name TENSIONS, select the one you'd like to focus on, and agree on any other actions you want to take on other TENSIONS.
- Continue to pay attention to making sure every person has a chance to be heard.



Session 8: Pre-Reading

Overview

Each Culture in Action session starts by letting participants take a moment to be fully PRESENT, and then turns to the practice of FOCUS – tuning into the energy and information within and around us.

The first step in FOCUS is about each individual. It involves each person paying attention to what’s going on in their heads and their hearts. Are they distracted? Excited? Nervous? Frustrated? Full of ideas? Is what they’re feeling making it easy to engage fully in the session? Or pulling them away?

The second step of FOCUS is about the group. Through “Check-In” (discussed below), the group directs its attention to the whole, as the team takes turns disclosing to others some of what is going on for each participant.

Through the two related steps, each member of the team can:

- Tap into what’s going on inside them, so they are aware and, if they wish, can choose to make a shift to a state more conducive to effective, successful participation in the session;
- Tap into what’s going on for others, so they can understand others’ reality and better understand their actions;
- Tap into what’s going on for the group as a whole, so they can improve the way they deal with the day’s TENSIONS, CONVERSATION, and ACTION.

FOR EXAMPLE:

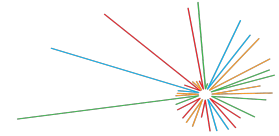
- Greg might notice how much he’s troubled by a relationship that he’s struggling with. During check-in, he might choose to disclose this so the group understands that he’s distracted or edgy. In addition, by becoming aware of his mood, Greg might choose to take another deep breath, focus on something positive in his life, even force a smile, to shift his mood in the moment.
- During check-in, when Mary hears that her colleague just learned about his grandmother’s death, she can shift how she interacts with him. She can have more empathy for him, and can avoid jumping to conclusions about what he says or does during the session – for example, by not taking a comment personally and by not assuming his silence has something to do with the TENSION they are discussing.
- When the group realizes through the check-ins that the TENSION to be discussed is one that creates discomfort or anxiety for many people, they can put extra effort into making sure they have a high quality CONVERSATION – for example, by listening more carefully and openly, by being more thoughtful in how they say what they choose to say, and by making sure that all voices are heard.

At a minimum, during check-in, each person should say that they are present and ready to participate.

TRY SAYING:

- “I am here and ready to go.” OR
- “I’m in.”

Sometimes, even that type of minimum statement is not true. In those cases, the person can use the check-in to let the team know they’re struggling while they also see whether they can make the necessary changes to become present and ready for the session.

**TRY SAYING:**

- “I just ran over here from a very contentious meeting and am having trouble letting go of my frustration. I’m working on it, so I can participate fully in this session.” OR
- “Today’s TENSION is hard for me to discuss. I hope you’ll bear with me since I know it’s important.” OR
- “I have a big deadline today. Feel free to let me know if you sense I’m losing focus.”

How is FOCUS different from PRESENCE?

PRESENCE is open and non-directional. For PRESENCE, we stop and take a few long, deep breaths, which is like pressing a reset button to engage fully in whatever is next. We settle our physiology to open our field of awareness.

FOCUS is a little different. FOCUS is paying attention to energy and information. It’s about recognizing patterns in that energy and information, directing our attention, and disclosing what we notice to others. FOCUS is about noticing all the ways we experience the world and about choosing how we want to direct our attention.

That said, the two are connected and it may be easiest to think of them as related practices, linked through a series of five steps:

- Pausing
- Noticing
- Making sense
- Directing our energy and attention
- Disclosing some of what we sense to others (check-in)

The Importance of Awareness

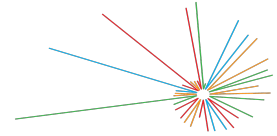
The first three steps – pausing, noticing, and making sense – are about increasing our level of awareness by cultivating our senses.

We are all familiar with the five senses: seeing, hearing, touch, smell, and taste. But we sense so much more. We sense our balance and our body position. We sense emotions in ourselves and others. We sense internal, physical sensations like butterflies in our stomach, warmth in our chest, or tightness in our shoulders. We sense our mental activity, our thoughts.

Different people develop unique ways of sensing, which often are not available to others. We “tune in” in different ways.

FOR EXAMPLE:

Greg has spent over 20 years with teams, listening for what is present but unsaid. This is his extra sense. Once he was hired to facilitate an all-day meeting for an executive team. They had created a productive agenda together, and all was going well—so much so that Greg had felt no need to speak for the entire morning. In the afternoon, during a critical conversation, however, he sensed that something was present in the room that wasn’t being said. So he asked a single question, and it shifted the meeting back toward a more valuable conversation. He asked the VP of HR afterward how he felt about hiring him for the day for us to ask one question. Fortunately, the VP told Greg that that one question was worth significantly more than what the company had paid Greg.



The Importance of Choosing

The last two steps – directing and disclosing – are about choosing rather than merely being.

Through the practices of PRESENCE and FOCUS, we can learn to exert choice and control over our experience. Learning to notice our thoughts and feelings as they drift through us, without getting lost in those thoughts and feelings, is an important skill. For example, there is a big difference between *being* angry and *noticing* anger rise in you. In the first case, you are part of the anger – in a grammatical sense, it is the subject. In the second case, you disconnect from the anger, creating space to choose how you will respond to it. In a grammatical sense, you have chosen to retain your role as the subject, the actor, and to relegate the feeling of anger to the object.

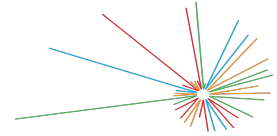
Check-In

The final practice within FOCUS is about taking what we've sensed and how we are choosing to direct it and choosing what to disclose to the group.

The practice of checking-in has a variety of benefits:

- It shifts the group to a "*connected*" state, where members are more open, empathetic, and inviting, rather than an "*isolated*" state, where members are more closed off, defensive, and protective.
- It calls upon every member of the group to speak and be heard. This sets the foundation for a productive CONVERSATION that taps into all perspectives and leads to better thinking, decision-making, and performance.
- It lets people name concerns and emotions so the group can acknowledge them and focus on how to promote productive thinking and decision-making. In this way, it avoids traps team meetings commonly fall into – such as:
 - Unspoken thoughts, assumptions, and distractions that distract from the meeting.
 - Emotions that enter and exit one's consciousness – and the group discussion – in an uncontrolled or counter-productive way.
 - Uncertainty or ambiguity about the purpose of the meeting or each individual's role in it.
- It expands possibilities. We each "see" the world differently. When individuals share their information and energy with the group, the team expands its capacity to sense possibilities and its collective wisdom.

Checking-in is quick and focused. It isn't about open-ended conversations or team members catching up on what's happening for others. It is about naming – briefly and succinctly – the thoughts, feelings, and moods one is having in the moment. During the check-in process, others should not react, ask questions, or discuss those thoughts, feelings, or moods. That can happen at another time.



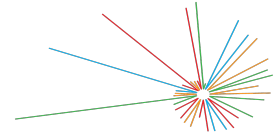
Session 8: Session Prep

Before every session, each participant should read the background materials for the session and think: about the last session, about what’s happening and what it means to them, and about the session to come.

The following chart will help you prepare. You can use this written form if it’s helpful.

If you like, your group can collect submissions in advance and share them. Doing so can help make **STORIES** more visible and streamline the identification of **TENSIONS**.

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>PRESENCE: What are your current practices and how do you feel you’re doing with them?</p> | <p>The goal of this pre-work is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Think about PRESENCE, ACTION, STORIES and TENSIONS before the session. ➤ Collect TENSIONS in advance in order to make the session as efficient as possible. ➤ Make the STORIES, TENSIONS and ACTIONS public and a normal part of work. <p>Even though you won’t have time to address all TENSIONS during the session, it’s still valuable to spend some time naming them.</p> <p>At a minimum, it helps the group see things more clearly.</p> <p>Sometimes, simply naming TENSIONS is enough to make slight shifts to the system over time.</p> <p>If you want, you can agree to get together to talk about them in another setting.</p> |
| <p>ACTION: What actions did you agreed to at your last session? What progress have you made?</p> | |
| <p>STORY: Jot down a positive culture story – a real, recent example of something that you believe demonstrates the best of your culture in action.</p> | |
| <p>TENSION(S): What TENSION(s) do you want to FOCUS on/raise with the group? Remember to phrase them as questions: “How might I/we?”</p> | |



Session 8: Additional Resources

For more on FOCUS, see the Additional Resources page on the Culture in Action website.