Dynamic thinking

Glenys Bridges discusses a technique to solve problems and generate new ideas

Are you getting a worthwhile return on the investment you make in your team meetings? Routine team meetings are now a feature of dental teams' interactions, this is mostly due to regulatory requirements placed upon dental businesses.

Team meetings however require an investment of time and resources, for which it is reasonable to expect to see a return. Dental teams are increasingly seeing how their team meetings can be beneficial if they are well planned and have agreed aims and objectives.

Not lip service

There are a number of skills and techniques that can be applied to make team meetings productive and a worthwhile investment, rather than a disappointing experience which simply pays lip service to clinical governance and Care Quality Commission requirements.

The most frequently heard grumbles about team meetings are that they are either blame and moan sessions, or that ideas stimulated by the meeting are not followed through. Both of these shortcomings are easily addressed with good management.

The most worthwhile meetings are those that stimulate creativity and lots of new thoughts. It can be difficult to access that type of energy when dealing with the same old situations day in and day out. Here are some ideas and techniques that can get your team out of their rut and encourage inspirational thinking.

One way is to look for parallels to your team's challenges in stories you read, films or TV programmes you watch. Keep looking for links; it is amazing how your mind will link things together for you.

You may find features of how a hero saves the day (or the villain almost wins) that can be adapted into your team scenarios.

Correctly cultured new thoughts can lead to breakthroughs because insight arises from new thoughts. During team discussions thoughts arise and change all the time; although the prospect of new thoughts about old situations is ever present, they are unlikely to prosper if stifled by tired old thinking. Here is a tool that can give inspired thinking the impetus to make a difference.

SCAMPER

The SCAMPER tool has been widely used in the marketing sector since the 1950s to offer a practical and structured approach to creative thinking. It asks users to give answers to a checklist of idea-spurring questions. This technique is designed to reflect the thinking style of operational thinkers, and is a highly effective way of stimulating the creativity of individuals who like more structured processes.

Here is an example of SCAMPER:

- **Adapt** - Are there similarities between your problem scenario and other external or internal situations? If so, can you adapt the solutions others have applied?
- **Eliminate** - What is excessive or outdated and how can we eliminate this?
- **Rearrange** - Can we refresh people and ideas with new personnel combinations and/or sequences of events?
- **Substitute** - In underperforming areas explore what, or who, can be replaced with something better. This is the arm. In this way something that was working well in one area of operation was adapted and applied in a completely new area. The SCAMPER process was as follows:
  - **Modify and magnify** - What changes would increase the benefits/ drawbacks?
  - **Put to other uses** - What new applications can you see for your strengths and aptitudes?
  - **Eliminate** - What is excessive or outdated and how can we eliminate this?
  - **Rearrange** - Can we refresh people and ideas with new personnel combinations and/or sequences of events?
  - **Substitute** - In underperforming areas explore what, or who, can be replaced with something better.

The objective of the technique is to solve problems and generate new ideas by using a checklist of questions. Ask your team to explore the SCAMPER questions in relation to a task or situation and see what new ideas emerge.

**About the author**

Glenys Bridges is managing director of the Dental Resource Company and has provided training for dental teams since 1992. For more information, visit www.dental-resource.com or call Glenys Bridges on 0121 241 6693.

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