



Micro-skills

by a head of global operations

It has always amazed me how difficult it can be to get colleagues or team members to contribute freely and willingly without inhibition. This can arise from many pressures, real and imaginary, which include concerns such as hierarchy, competitiveness, rivalries, distrust, lack of confidence and even fear. At meetings and workshops we often used to use some form of facilitation to break the ice, with mixed success. More recently I have found micro-skills a much more effective way of stimulating creative contributions from all.

As an example, I remember talking with the leader of a large manufacturing plant in Brazil. He described how his relationship with his employees had improved since he had changed his method of communication. Previously he had used a regular newsletter to all employees as the principal means of informing them of business performance and changes and issues affecting the factory.

After attending a workshop where some micro-skills were being used and taught, he had the idea of replacing the newsletter with talking circles (see my page 214). Now he meets each shift once a month under a large banyan tree, a lovely setting which takes advantage of the Brazilian climate. There they have a dialogue sitting in a circle under the tree.

As time has progressed he has found that discussion has become increasingly two way, with much greater participation by his employees. The conversations are positive and creative and have had the result of developing much greater understanding. It has not only been the employees who have learned.

Although I have not witnessed a meeting, the image of the talking circle under the tree has remained with me, as has the enthusiasm with which the leader spoke of the improvement in relationships and performance in the plant.

Having used micro-skills myself for the past few years, I believe they have contributed to a much more inclusive organizational culture. There is a great enthusiasm to participate and some truly amazing changes have occurred. Simple techniques, fantastic results!

