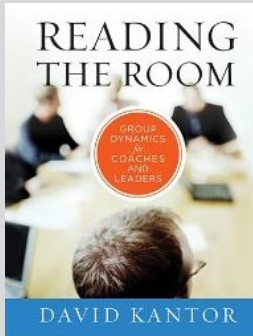


Metrics and the making of the modern team: Accelerating team performance

by Dr. David Kantor, Mobius Senior Expert



Reading the Room: Group Dynamics for Coaches and Leaders

by David Kantor

April 2012, Jossey-Bass, an imprint of John Wiley & Sons, New York NY

In the past decade, significant progress has been made in describing and finding good-to-great leaders and coaching them toward greater success, but both experts and high-placed leaders themselves still overlook this fundamental principle: *A leader falls short of greatness without great skill in face-to-face talk.* This is as true in the corporate world as it is in government, communities, and families. On some level, we “know” that effective talk in face-to-face relations and small group conversations lies at the heart of leading, but by and large, when we lead, we do not examine closely what dynamics are at work in a conversation, nor find ways to improve them.

The title of this book refers to a priceless leadership skill: the ability to read the room to understand what’s going on as people communicate in small groups, including how the leader himself or herself is participating, when the conversation is moving forward, when it may be just about to leave the rails, and possibly even how to guide it back on course.

Reading the Room is a guide for coaches and executives, designed to help untangle problems in communication in the office, at home, and in high-stakes situations. The text uses as a case study the story of ClearFacts, a fictional fast-growing green energy company, and the interactions of a credible cast of characters to illustrate Structural Dynamics—a theory of communication that defines leadership behavior both in easy and hard times. As the book unfolds, the “stories” of the leadership team of ClearFacts, how they live and love, the quality of their marriages, the nature of their alliances and antagonisms

at work, how they relate to their children, what their dreams for the good life are, and the kinds of worlds they want to live in, are told. These kinds of stories, which all of us possess, close the gap between leaders as abstractions and the human beings who dwell within, the real people who are our decision-makers. Without the human context of story, how-to guides and theory books remain incomplete and untrue.

Reading the Room introduces both a theory of face-to-face communication and a leadership development model, not as cold abstract theories, but as first steps in an evolutionary pathway towards creating a full life worth living. Early in the journey, each person is invited to self reflect and to begin to embrace their own model. Along the way, individuals learn how to expand what they see and how they think about what is going on around them, and then to experiment with new behavioral strategies for talking more effectively with each other.

Art Kleiner, author and Editor-in-Chief of *strategy+business*, the award-winning quarterly management magazine, writes of *Reading the Room*: “Great leaders must learn to see the hidden dynamics of the groups they lead, and the personal and social factors that shape their relationships with those groups. This combined story and practice guide — written by David Kantor, one of the very few master innovators and theorists in organizational leadership — can bring you to a high level of proficiency. I have worked with these concepts for years; they make all the difference with groups, and here they are explained crisply and clearly.”

The Accelerating Team Performance: Structural Dynamics Model

Structural dynamics is the broad term for a body of research that I and colleagues began in the 1970s in an effort to understand the nature of face-to-face human communication.

Structural dynamics is a basic theory and model or tool, if you will, for reading the room. Structural connotes the idea that there is an underlying, largely invisible structure to all human verbal exchange: when people converse, they construct and follow certain implicit understandings and patterns in which their conversation takes place. In turn, this structure—recognized or not—affects the outcome of the conversation. Those who want to be aware of this structure can become so, through the

lens of structural dynamics. Dynamics connotes the idea that ongoing patterns, functional and dysfunctional, are inherent in all continuing talk, and that dysfunctional ones result from clashes between people, their behavioral profiles, and the structures these bring into conversation.

Structural dynamics is not a lens that most of us consciously use, but its principles are in place nevertheless, guiding our perceptions and how we act on those perceptions. Mostly our attention is elsewhere: actively listening for and analyzing not the structure but the content and style of the communications in which we take part. We learn to frame our differences and conflicts in those latter terms. But structural dynamics

asserts that beneath style and content there exist deeper universal structures of how conversations proceed, and as the foundation on which all communications are built, these structures are the most significant predictors of the outcome of any verbal interaction.

The ATP process makes this invisible structure visible. Problems in face-to-face communication are often due to the unseen influence of this deeper, invisible structure. So long as it remains unnoticed, the structure can violate and undermine people's communicative intentions. Without understanding why, people try to communicate and end up passing each other by, clashing and repeating old battles when they meant to connect and conciliate. Once the structure is made visible, individuals can learn to observe and even change it.

When we are causing or solving problems, most of our typical behaviors are fueled by structure-forming stories themselves springing from the nuclear childhood stories of love. Structural dynamics strongly suggests that leaders make connection between their work and personal relationships. This allows (people) to choose to opt out of linking work and personal relationships.

—David Kantor

Speech as an Act

Structural dynamics regards speech as an act, so its basic unit of consideration (or measurement) is a personal utterance—for example, “Let’s start the meeting, shall we?”. Structural dynamics focuses heavily on the actual words that people use. That may sound limiting, considering that context, body language, eye contact, and other evidence can enter into what a person’s comment really means. Structural dynamics uses a concept it calls voice to capture these other forms of communication. But a record of words and word phrases is a powerful handle, allowing us to encode a speech act in measurable terms. After a contentious meeting, we can look back on the record and surmise what was going on below the surface. Being able to encode what goes on at the level of words also enables us to see when people’s conversational practices actually change and improve.

Speech acts often follow one another in recognizable patterns. For example, one states an opinion, a listener disputes it, then another supports it, and eventually the original opinion carries.

We call such combinations of speech acts sequences; and when they keep occurring, we call them patterns.

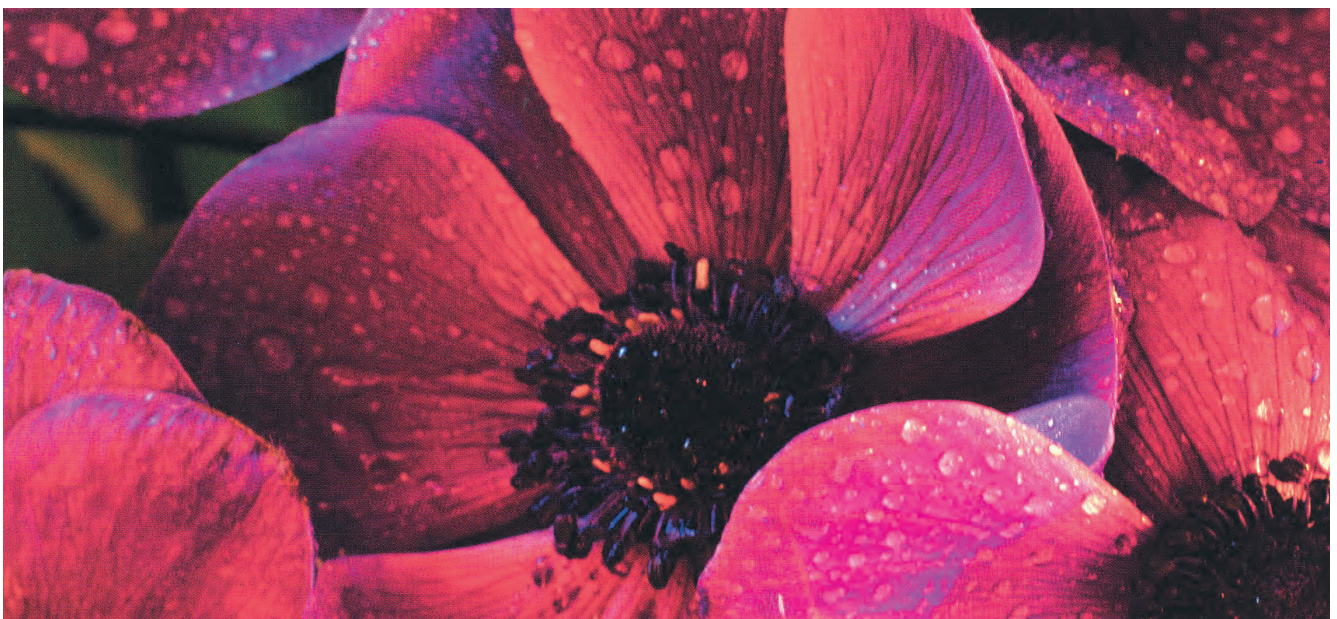
Learning to Read the Room

The structural dynamics model identifies three interacting levels of structure that describe a speech act and can be “coded”: Action Modes, Communication Domains, and Operating Systems.

When the content of speech is set aside, there are four, and only four, action modes which people use in all face-to-face discourse—*Mover*, *Op-poser*, *Follower*, and *Bystander*. All four are necessary for productive communication to take place in groups of two or more individuals. Each action mode contributes something unique to effective discourse. The Mover initiates and provides direction. The Follower supports and provides completion. The Opposer challenges and provides correction. The Bystander bridges and provides perspective. Most individuals have incomplete repertoires; they do not move facily between the four

action modes. Instead, they have de-veloped “Strong,” “Weak,” and “Stuck” action propensities.

The four action stances do not take place in a vacuum. They are embedded in one of the three language domains. In other words, a move in power is different from a *move in affect*, and likewise in *meaning*. Thus, the model identifies three language domains, domains of discourse which add content to the four action structures. They are *Power* (a focus on getting things done, dominant in business organizations; for example, “Get that report to me by 5 o’clock today!”); *Meaning* (a focus on accumulating and analyzing data in business organizations, and, let’s say, in a Philosophy Department of an educational organization, arriving at higher truths; for example, “Your calculations are off,” or “Your theory interests me.”); and *Affect* (a focus on people’s feelings and experiences, dominant in Human Service organizations; for example, “Our new hire is out of place in an organization that cares as much as we do.”) While organizational culture has a tremendous influence on how



people are expected to behave publicly, individuals in every organization exhibit their preferences, or propensities, for one or more of these communication domains.

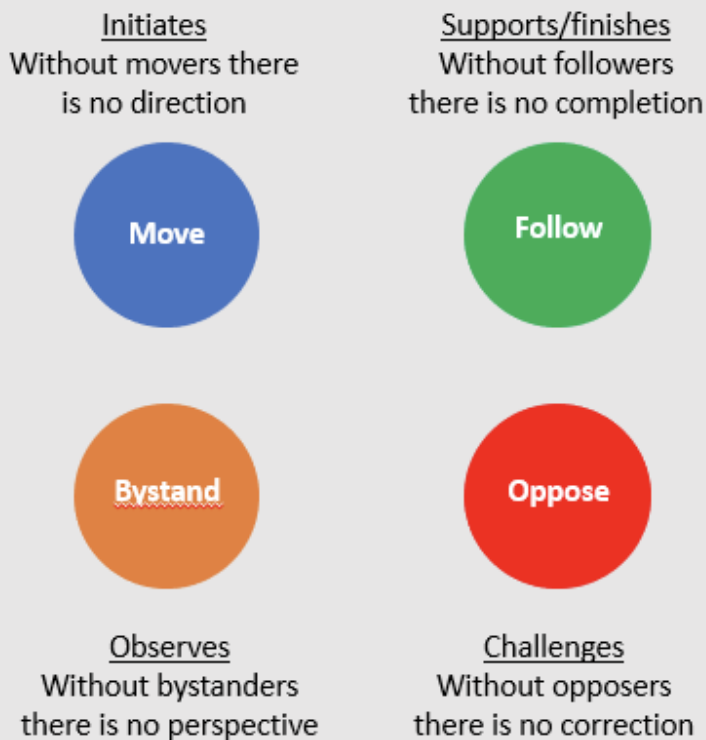
Finally, there are three operating systems—*Open*, *Closed* and *Random*. Closed systems operate under the assumption that the best way to proceed is through clear rules and roles in a hierarchical order. Open systems thrive on collective input and many solutions to a problem. Random systems are unpredictable and creative, often with unexpected starting and finishing points. All three are good and valid but each deals differently with hierarchy, rules of order, and boundaries. Again, people develop and maintain preferences for one of these systems, even as organizational culture may assign another system.

ATP holds that people in relationships, groups, and teams often communicate poorly because they speak different “languages” without being aware of it. When they learn to “code” what is going on in the room (for example: “Do what I say!” is a Closed-System Move in the Power domain; “Every voice must be heard” is an Open-System Move in Power; and “Schedules be damned—let’s find a more creative solution!” is a Random-System Move in Power) they can begin to *read the room*, to decipher what may be going wrong between communicants who speak different languages, and to help create bridges between them.

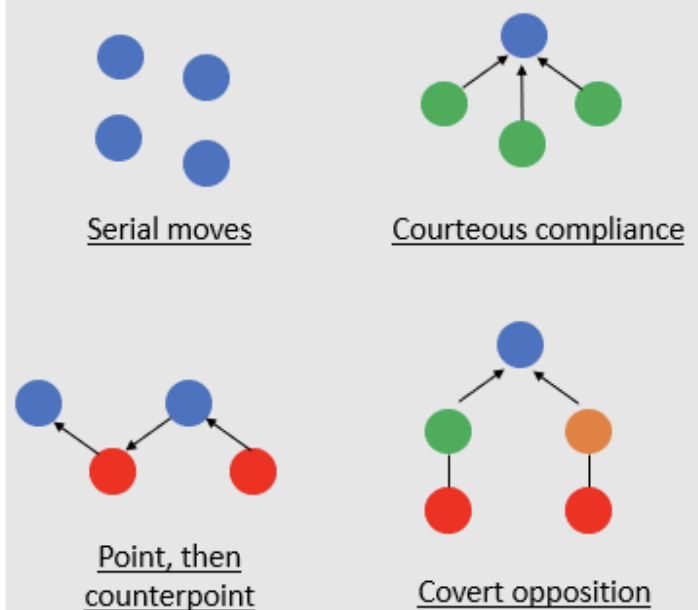
Once the model is mastered, its language will allow team members to better understand how they as leaders differently succeed and fail in discourse with key figures in up, across, and down relationships. The end goal is knowing what one’s own speech preferences are, knowing how and why those preferences shift in contexts of raised stakes, knowing how to expand one’s limited repertoire, and learning to have the flexibility to correct ineffective language patterns when necessary. In short, the goal is to develop communicative competency.

Mobius Senior Expert David Kantor’s Four-Player Model

Conversations can be coded one of these 4 speech acts



Common Stuck Patterns





David Kantor, Ph.D.

Over the past fifty years, David Kantor, Ph.D., has been instrumental in bringing his unique model and counseling expertise to families, couples, organizations, leaders, and interventionists as they work to achieve success through generative relationships with others.

David began his career as a clinical psychologist and lecturer in Harvard University's Department of Social Relations. From 1965 to 1975, he was an assistant professor of clinical psychiatry at Tufts University School of Medicine and served as the director of psychological research and later as chief psychologist at Boston State Hospital. He also founded and became director of the Boston Family Institute, the first systems training program in Massachusetts; the Kantor Family Institute; and the Center for Training in Family Therapy at Boston State Hospital.

David has also served as a charter member of the American Family Therapy Association; an approved supervisor, clinical member, and fellow of the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy; a diplomate of the American Board of Family Psychology; and an editor and referee for the *Journal of Family Process*. In the 1980s and 1990s, David began introducing his models to businesses, top-level executives, and organizational consultants, among them Arthur D. Little, Innovation Associates, MIT's Dialogue Project, Origins, and Dialogos. From 2000 to 2009, David served as a thought leader and partner at Monitor Group, where he developed innovative products, such as Leadership Model Building, a leadership development program; Observation Deck, speech-coding software; and the Kantor Profiles, a suite of assessment instruments.

During his career, David has trained over a thousand systems interventionists and has written dozens of articles and several books, including research-based *Inside the Family* (coauthored with William Lehr; Jossey-Bass, 1975, and Meredith Winter Press, 2003) and *My Lover, Myself* (Riverhead Books, 1999), producing a rich breadth of work that grounds his communication theories and practices today. David feels that his most important contributions to organizational theory and practice spring from two sources: his meta-model (model of models) and his trainees themselves.