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## **Facilitating dialogue and decision-making in a family business**

Linda Tisue

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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Linda Tissue entitled "Facilitating dialogue and decision-making in a family business." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education, with a major in Educational Psychology.

John M Peters, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Dianne Whitaker, Ken Newton, Bob Kronick

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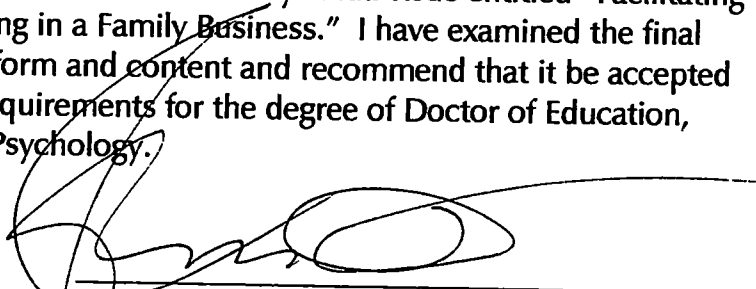
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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Linda Tisue entitled "Facilitating Dialogue and Decision-making in a Family Business." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education, with a major in Educational Psychology.



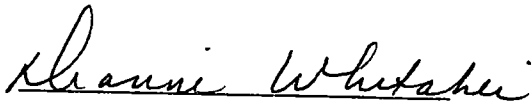
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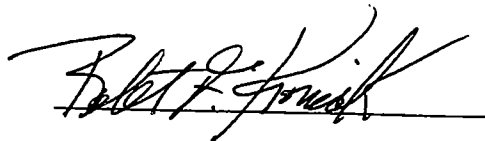
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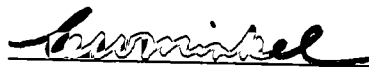


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Accepted for the Council:



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Associate Vice Chancellor and  
Dean of the Graduate School

**FACILITATING DIALOGUE AND DECISION-MAKING  
IN A FAMILY BUSINESS**

**A Dissertation  
Presented for the  
Doctor of Education Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville**

**Linda Tisue  
August 1999**

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family

My husband: Phil E. Tisue

and

My parents: Mr. & Mrs. Vernon Ferren  
who have given me invaluable educational opportunities.

Our children: Troy & Tara

and their spouses  
Nancy Tisue and Bryan Stanley

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The following made significant contributions to me personally and or professionally as I navigated the dissertation process.

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Editors and transcriber: Janie Bean, Ann Lavaca, Sharon Jakubowski and Betty Ragland

Miss Magnolia, my Doberman pincher and loyal companion.

Finally, my family, who all remained a source of faith and reassurance.

I had to do it myself but I was far from doing it alone.  
Love and gratitude to each of you.

## ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence of dialogue on decision-making within the context of a family-owned business and how to facilitate dialogue in a family business setting. Action research and case study methodology were utilized. Data were collected during six meetings with a management team over a nine-month period. A thematic analysis was conducted on all data sets. Analysis revealed the following eight themes that described the influence of dialogue on decision-making: environment, listening, learning, values, and practice. One theme, role and responsibilities described how the researcher facilitated dialogue with the management team. The study concludes with implications for research and practice in collaborative learning and family business practice.



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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The family business has played a major role in the history of the United States. In the past the family farm fed the family, produced goods for others outside the family, and continued to provide for the livelihood of family members in succeeding generations. There was a feeling of trusteeship for the farm. It was land entrusted to its owners for the purpose of handing it on to the next generation. Other family business scenarios in the history of the United States include the general store, the grocery store, and the hardware store. Here, like the farm, work and home were often in the same place.

Although the numbers of family farms and stores have declined dramatically in this century, there has been a corresponding increase in other forms of family-owned businesses. Today "family businesses generate half of the U.S. gross domestic product (GDP) and employ half the workforce" (Gersick, Davis, Hampton & Lansberg, 1997 p. 2). Although new family businesses are starting up at record numbers, family-owned businesses have a low survival rate. Succession from first to second generation is approximately 25 percent, and only 13 percent survive to the third generation.

The challenges of ongoing change, globalization, and competition create a

Facilitating dialogue and decision-making need for businesses to learn from their experiences (DiBella & Nevis, 1998). One necessity for business survival is the family members' ability to make sound decisions together. As families become more mobile, some family members accept other jobs and move away. Survival then becomes an issue for some family-owned businesses. Family planning and decision-making for the transition of leadership and ownership in the family business are necessary. Decision-making must broaden in length and scope. Long-term decisions include who learns the operations of the family business, who runs the business, and how ownership can be dealt with equitably for family members who chose to work outside the family business.

Effective decision-making continues to be crucial for the survival of the family firm. Historically, decisions in the family firm were made solely by the owner with little or no input from others (Gersick, et. al 1997). Thus, the concept of two or more people making decisions in teams is relatively new in the business setting. However, "organizations today face a degree of complexity that requires intelligence beyond that of any individual . . . yet in the face of complex, highly conflictual issues, teams typically break down, revert to rigid positions and cover up deeper views" (Isaacs, 1993, p. 28).

I believe that the introduction of collaborative learning, the modeling of this process by a facilitator and the consistent practice of this approach will positively

Facilitating dialogue and decision-making affect the decision-making process in a family firm. Collaborative learning has the potential to take the process of decision-making to a higher level, one based on the construction of new knowledge. Collaborative learning challenges assumptions and beliefs and builds on the knowledge of individual team members (Peters & Armstrong, 1998). It provides the potential for creating knowledge that none of the individual members could accomplish alone. Although families in business consider themselves a team, in actual practice each family member usually has an area of responsibility and makes the decisions for his area. In working with family-owned businesses, I have found debate and consensus as the modes of discourse used in decision-making. I have not found the use of dialogue or other such features of collaborative learning as the customary basis for decision-making. My experience has shown that family business owners do not know how to learn collaboratively or to make collaborative decisions. Learning the process of dialogue, as well as other collaborative learning skills, would seem to be a step to cohesive decision-making in family firms.

This study focused on dialogue as a feature of collaborative learning as it was experienced by members of a particular family business. Dialogue is a process people engage in to become open to the flow of a "larger intelligence" (Bohm, 1965). Dialogue allows a free flow of inquiry, the surfacing of fundamental assumptions, and insight into why those assumptions arise. It

Facilitating dialogue and decision-making requires listening for meaning and assumptions, which can then be examined and reflected upon as they relate to the decisions one make or the way in which one goes about making decisions. Dialogue can be introduced into an organization by a trained facilitator (Senge, 1990). Together members of the organization can learn through practice the process of engaging in dialogue. In this case, the facilitator's goal is to provide modeling and practice so that the team can ultimately dialogue without the facilitator.

The literature about family-owned businesses ranges from general business issues such as markets, decision-making, and leadership, to family issues such as sibling rivalry and divorce (Bork, Jaffe, Lane, Dashew, & Heisler, 1996). However, the family business literature lacks research on collaborative learning, including the process of dialogue. Research is needed to identify what role dialogue plays in decision-making in a family firm. In addition, there is a need to know more about how dialogue can be facilitated and how family members can learn to learn collaboratively.

In my own practice as a consultant to family firms, I have experienced glimpses of collaborate learning. I have experienced moments of intensity where the family is thinking and creating together. These would be times that Covey (1990) labeled synergistic. I wanted to find out what I could do as a facilitator to help a family experience more synergy, more times where they were thinking and

creating together.

### Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was twofold. As a consultant/facilitator working with family-owned firms, I wanted to study how members of a family business engage in dialogue to improve their decision-making process. I also wanted to know how to facilitate the process of dialogue in a family business. The research questions were these:

1. How does the process of engaging in dialogue influence decision-making in a family business?
2. How can I facilitate dialogue in a family business?

### Organization of the study

The study is organized into five chapters. Chapter one gives the reader some background on family businesses in the United States and their importance to the U.S. economy. It then defines the problem of the study. Chapter two contains a review of the literature of decision-making in family-owned businesses, and that of collaborative learning, particularly dialogue. The third chapter describes the methodology used in the study and the family business with which I worked. In the fourth chapter, I report the findings of my study. In the final



Facilitating dialogue and decision-making chapter, I discuss the findings, give implications for my practice and for Weeks & Leo, the company whose managers were involved in my study. I also include recommendations for additional research.

#### Definition of terms

The following definitions were used for the purposes of this study:

Family business "is one that will be passed on for the family's next generation to manage and control" (Ward, 1987 p. 252).

Dialogue is "sustained collective inquiry into the processes, assumptions, and certainties that compose everyday experience . . . the experience of the meaning embodied in a community of people" (Isaacs, 1993, p. 25).

Collaboration "means that people labor together in order to construct something that did not exist before the collaboration, something that does not and cannot fully exist in the lives of the individual collaborators" (Peters & Armstrong, 1998, p. 75).

Collaborative learning is working together to construct knowledge through engaging in dialogue and inquiry into each other's assumptions.

Decision-making is a plan to act as a result of engaging in dialogue.

## Facilitating dialogue and decision-making

### CHAPTER II

#### LITERATURE REVIEW

##### Introduction

Collaboration has become an important business concept in the nineties. Yet for many the term collaboration, collaborative learning, and dialogue lacks a clear meaning. In business, (for clarity) dialogue and collaboration have been popularized by Peter Senge, author of the best-selling book, The Fifth Discipline, in which he describes the learning organization with its emphasis on team learning. "The organizations that will truly excel in the future will be the organizations that discover how to tap people's commitment and capacity to learn at all levels in an organization" (Senge, 1990. p. 4). Hargrove (1998) also believes in the potential of collaboration: "We stand at the edge of history . . . the millennium, which is more grounded in human values. It is time to lay down a new track . . . in which these human values surround and shape economic means and technology, . . . a shift to an era of creativity, collaboration, . . . reconciliation, an era of compassion that will help solve some of the world's worst problems" (xi-xii).

In education Slavin (1990) and Johnson & Johnson (1989), are recognized as experts on cooperative learning in the classroom. In cooperative learning

Facilitating dialogue and decision-making groups students learn from and with each other. They also regularly process how they are doing as a group learning together. According to Johnson & Johnson (1989), students in cooperative learning groups must "believe they are responsible for and benefit from one another's learning . . . and must regularly process how effectively the group is functioning" (p. 111). Collaborative learning is "constructing knowledge collectively as people work, inquire, and learn together based on a shared purpose" (Peters, 1997). Adult educators, also proponents of group learning, refer to a community of learners as those coming together for the purpose of learning from and with each other. It is clear that both education and business communities share the concept that learning in groups is beneficial. However, this chapter will focus on the business aspect of collaboration.

I focused on decision-making in the family business literature that I reviewed for my study; the literature described how decisions are typically made within a family business. Finding ways to further creativity and effectiveness in decision-making within family-owned businesses is important because "nearly half of all family-owned businesses will transition in [leadership and ownership] the next five years. Only a third will survive into the second generation, and less than half of those into the third" (Geisel, 1999, p. D-4). The main problem identified in the literature regarding survival of family firms is succession from one generation to the next. That, too, is becoming increasingly more complicated as families face

Facilitating dialogue and decision-making complex decisions on liquidity and management for example, most family business owners do not understand or have time to keep themselves current with the complexities of everchanging tax laws. With such issues facing family businesses, family members could benefit from collaboration with each other as well as with family owners not active in day-to-day operations. Outside the family, members could benefit from collaboration with a diverse team of experts, such as business consultants, attorneys, CPA's, and insurance professionals. Collaboration with these professionals could assist the family in planning and annually reviewing for succession of the business, a process that should begin at least ten years before the transition of leadership.

### Dialogue

Dialogue is a communication process. I think of communication as being on a continuum, ranging from simple to complex. Dialogue is a complex form of communication found on the opposite end of the continuum from simple, one-way communication models.

To understand dialogue, I reviewed more basic communication models. Opposite from dialogue on the communication continuum is Berlo's (1960) SMCR model. This model is considered one of the most simplistic and familiar models of communication. As defined in Berlo's model, "Communication occurs when a

### Facilitating dialogue and decision-making

sender (S) transmits a message (M) through a channel (C) to a receiver (R). The sender 'encodes' an intended meaning into words and the receiver 'decodes' the message when it is received" (Berlo, 1960). Berlo's model is one example of an information transfer model that "rests on one or more of the following assumptions: 1) language transfers thoughts and feelings from one person to another person; 2) speakers and writers insert thoughts and feelings into words, 3) words contain those thoughts and feelings and 4) listeners or readers extract those thoughts and feelings from the words" (Axley, 1984 p. 429). The main purpose of this one-way communication is influencing the receiver of the communication.

Somewhat more complex is the transactional process model of communication, which does not differentiate between senders and receivers. "All persons are engaged in sending (encoding) and receiving (decoding) messages simultaneously. Each person is constantly sharing in the encoding and decoding processes, and each person is affecting the other" (Wenberg & Wilmot, 1973. p. 5). Although this model recognizes that the meaning of communication rests with the people involved in the communicating process, the meaning in the information transfer model is with the sender. The transactional model acknowledges each person's affecting the other. Although the SMCR model implies meaning for each person, the transactional model acknowledges each person's affecting the others' meaning.

## Facilitating dialogue and decision-making

Many more communication models are located on the continuum.

Dialogue is the communication model associated with collaborative learning, therefore, it is the communication model where I focus the review of literature. I also include a review of literature on the facilitation of dialogue.

Dialogue is "sustained collective inquiry into the processes, assumptions, and certainties that compose everyday experience . . . the experience of the meaning embodied in a community of people" (Isaacs, 1993, p. 25). One could assume dialogue is as old as language and conversation between people. The theory of dialogue, however, developed from the work of the modern philosopher Martin Buber, physicist David Bohm and psychologist Patrick De Mare. Buber believed that we live and come to know ourselves through others. De Mare drew on the processes of reflection, learning and dialogue in socio-therapy. It was in working with large masses of people on the social ills of society that De Mare saw the process of dialogue useful. In quantum physics theory, Bohm viewed the process as a way of examining the assumptions that influence human action. He was referring to the assumptions that are not questioned, the ones that tend to fragment groups into individuals rather than support a group member's ability to make meaning. (Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, & Smith, 1994).

Bohm viewed human interaction in discussion as much like colliding electrons. The more intense people feel about a topic, the more they separate

Facilitating dialogue and decision-making themselves from one another. In contrast, engaging in dialogue seems to have a way of "cooling" the environment that enables human thinking and interaction to connect and build rather than separate and collide.

Isaacs (1993), building on the work of David Bohm, stated that "Fragmentation is a condition of thought, and dialogue is one tentatively demonstrated strategy for stepping back from the way of thinking produced by fragmentation and incorporating another way of thinking. Dialogue is an attempt to perceive the world with new eyes, not merely to solve problems using the thought that created them in the first place" (p. 29-30).

Assumptions that fragment thinking tend to surface in groups, once these assumptions surface, they can be examined. When a group works, thinks and reflects as a group, Isaacs (1993) refers to this process as the group's developing a collective mindfulness. Referring to our usual way of thinking, Isaacs suggested "that coordinated action occurs when different people reach a shared agreement then create an action plan" (Isaacs, 1993. p. 25). However, Isaacs (1993) also uses the flock of birds as a metaphor expressing the belief that "some of the most powerful forms of coordination may come through participation in unfolding meaning . . . a flock of birds suddenly taking flight from a tree reveals the potential coordination of dialogue: this is movement all at once, a wholeness and listening together that permits individual differentiation but is still highly interconnected"

(p. 25).

Isaacs (1993) describes dialogue as a discipline that conducts "field experiments that attempt to make conscious the underlying field in which different frames and different choices for action emerge" (p. 31). What became known as the field experiment originated with Lewin in the 1920's during his work with students at the University of Berlin. He was "inspired by the ideas of Carl Stumpf's to bring will and emotion into the laboratory" (De Rivera, 1976 p. 2). Isaacs made conscious the automatic responses to stimuli. The philosopher Polani (1967) referred to these automatic responses as "tacit knowledge." We don't remember learning something; we just know that we know. Isaacs (1993) pointed out that our use of language is an example of tacit knowledge. We don't know how we know our native tongue. We don't remember learning it we just know.

Argyris (1990) in describing "defensive routines" was building on the notion that tacit knowledge of one's social world is different from person to person and often a source of conflict between people. When individuals with differing tacit knowledge of the world work together in organizations, their group experience can be characterized by members defending their own truth. Isaacs (1993) states that "Our emerging dialogue theory claims that tacit thought among a group comprises a field of 'meaning' and that such fields are the underlying constituents of human



experience" (p. 31).

The importance of relationship between group members was emphasized by Friedman, (1992) who has devoted much time to the study and translation of Buber's works. Friedman talked about the value of dialogue in another setting, psychotherapy. He says, "The revelation of the human image is the revelation that takes place between therapist and client or among members of a group . . . The coming into the light of the hidden human image is inseparable from the dialogue itself-a dialogue of mutual contact, trust and shared humanity . . . The rightness of the relationship depends upon mutual existential trust-and upon an existential grace that is not in the therapist or in the client but moves between the two" (Friedman, 1992, p. 220). Buber (1957) described dialogue as an individual personally engaged with another with the intent of being open to the other and able to respond to him. According to Buber (1957) this "I-Thou" relationship exists when a deep realness in one meets a deep realness in another. Pollio (1997) interpreted this as a presentness with another person, a "true conversation between people . . . where the participants do not know how it will progress and in which they find themselves saying and experiencing things they had no idea they were going to do or say" (p. 139).

Bakhtin (1992) agreed with Buber that we need others in order to understand and to define ourselves. "We can never see ourselves as whole; the

Facilitating dialogue and decision-making other is necessary to accomplish, even if temporarily, a perception of the self that the individual can achieve only partially with respect to himself" (p. 95). Buber and Bakhtin share a common belief that humans are social animals that need each other to achieve a wholeness possible only through the understanding of self offered by others. One primary mode of reaching this wholeness characterized by Buber and Bahktin is through dialogue.

"Dialogue is one of the richest activities that human beings can engage in. It is the thing that gives meaning to life, it's the sharing of humanity, it's creating something. And there is this magical thing in an organization, or in a team, or a group, where you get unrestricted interaction, unrestricted dialogue, and this synergy happening that results in more productivity, and satisfaction, and seemingly magical levels of output from a team" (Evered & Tannenbaum, 1992, p. 48).

Isaacs (1993) outlined the process or evolution of dialogue by using the metaphor of containers. Within each container Isaacs housed specific skills and behaviors. "A central factor in this has been to uncover the concrete ways dialogue requires the creation of a series of increasingly conscious environments or fields of inquiry" (Isaacs, 1993, p. 34). There are four phases, or containers, in Isaacs's model of dialogue. Phase one was characterized by "instability in the container" (p. 34). The steps involved in phase I consisted of an invitation into

Facilitating dialogue and decision-making conversation. "People began by speaking together, and then flowed deliberation or weighing out of different views" (p. 34). This step usually resulted in what Isaacs described as the "initiatory crisis" because the group had to make a choice in direction. The choice was between discussion or suspension of assumptions. When groups chose discussion, individuals defended their positions. When a group chose to be influenced, then dialogue took place. Isaacs referred to this choice as the "crisis of suspension" and the beginning of Phase II. Phase II was also characterized by "instability in the container" (p. 34). Phase III began with dialogue, resulting in meaning flowing through the group. This phase consisted of inquiry "in the container" and climaxed with the group moving to "metalogue" which involved meaning moving with and among members of the group. Metalogue was considered to be Phase IV and was characterized by "creativity in the container" (p. 34). Isaacs explained Metalogue as "the conscious, intimate, and subtle relationship between the structure and content of an exchange and its meaning . . . the group does not have meaning, in other words it its meaning" (Isaacs, 1993, p. 38).

There is no time frame for moving from one container to the other, and at times participants will revert back to "instability in the container" by tipping the balance scale too far toward advocacy and away from the inquiry. When participants were able to suspend their assumptions and inquire, the result was

Facilitating dialogue and decision-making  
the building of meaning by the group, meaning flowing among the group  
members, and the creating of metalogue.

Covey (1990) emphasized the importance of listening in relationships. He believed that a relationship between two or more was affected by the purpose of the listener. To Covey effective communication meant listening for the purpose of understanding and not for the purpose of responding. He called this "the single most important principle of interpersonal communication" (p. 237). Listening for understanding was in agreement with the thinking of Isaacs (1993) and Peters & Armstrong (1998). Covey said, "Seek first to understand involves a very deep shift in paradigm, because he felt we typically seek first to be understood. Most of us listen with the intent to reply. We are either speaking or preparing to speak. We are filtering everything through our own paradigms, reading our autobiography into other people's lives" (p. 239). Isaacs, Covey, Peters, and Armstrong express a belief that we tend to have a set pattern of assumptions that drives our behavior. These behaviors are learned responses. Polanyi (1967) refers to such learned responses (or firmly hold patterns of assumptions) as "tacit knowledge." When situations arise, we automatically respond according to a pattern, unless that automatic response comes into question, as it might in a group. When our actions or ways of thinking based upon our long-held assumptions are questioned, then the automatic response is to defend our position or our way of thinking.

## Facilitating dialogue and decision-making

Covey (1990) addressed another area of dialogue. What Isaacs (1993) refers to as creativity, Covey called "the third alternative" (p. 221). The third alternative refers to the result of two or more people's commitment to understanding the other's point of view and staying in the process long enough to reach the third alternative something different from either persons' intentions. Covey referred to people who are collaborating as synergistic. Synergism is seen as a philosophy of human interaction where people are interdependent and seek to reach win-win agreements in their interactions. "A win-win agreement is a belief in the third alternative . . . not based on your way or my way, but a better way, a higher way" (Covey, 1990, p. 207). This is a result that neither party would have thought of independently and one they can only accomplish together.

Setting the stage or creating an environment for dialogue involves many of the elements already mentioned by others: beginning with conversation; establishing purpose, trust, respect, relationship, empathy toward other group members, an attitude of openness; setting aside assumptions; and displaying a willingness to be influenced.

Besides elements relating to the environment for dialogue and collaboration, Hargrove (1998) referred to the common characteristics of collaborators. "Collaborative people tend to see where their own views, perspectives, or experiences are limited and have a basic attitude of learning and a

Facilitating dialogue and decision-making  
beginner's mind" (Hargrove, 1998, p. 51). Additional characteristics of collaborative people identified by Hargrove (1998) are excellent relationship skills, intent listening skills, the ability to find opportunities within groups of diverse people, as well as, the ability to be creative and visionary.

### Collaborative learning in organizations

Eleven characteristics of collaborative learning have been identified by Oliver (1992). According to Oliver, collaborative learning is cooperative and non-competitive, participation is voluntary, and the atmosphere is democratic with all members being equal. The group participants set the agenda, take part in decision-making, and determine the outcome. The results of collaborative learning cannot be preconceived nor predicted. Members actively express their views and reflect on their experiences. Learning is evaluated by the group members themselves. Group learning is reinforced by application. Isaacs believes that any organization has the ability to form groups that can engage in dialogue and learn collaboratively; however, in most organizations this capability is not being tapped.

Hargrove (1998) thinks people learn together through the process of engaging in "collaborative conversations" (p. 161). He differentiates collaborative conversations and dialogue by their purpose. Hargrove believes organizations are constantly in the process of finding new and better ways of producing results.

## Facilitating dialogue and decision-making

Collaboration, according to Hargrove (1998) is working with another to discover or create something new or the third alternative.

### Facilitation

Senge (1990) believes that dialogue can be introduced into an organization by a trained facilitator. Peters & Armstrong (1997) introduce dialogue through personal stories or what Brookfield (1990) refers to as critical incidents.

Participants are asked to write about an incident that was critical to them and share their incident with the group. The group then begins to inquire about the incident in order to explore underlying assumptions, Brookfield (1990) states that "critical incident responses stand alone as primary data sources giving insights into learners' assumptive worlds in expressions that are indisputably the learners' own" (p. 188).

According to Bohm, the goal of dialogue is to learn, and there are no firm rules. Besides inviting a group into dialogue, there are a number of other considerations that a facilitator can attend to. Logistical considerations, such as time and frequency of the sessions are addressed by Bohm. According to Bohm (1993) participant's should agree upon a beginning and ending time. He suggested that two hours is optimum. The more often the group meets, the more that can be explored at greater depths. However, participants need time between meetings for reflection to take place. Bohm suggested at least one week intervals

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for group members to think and reflect on their experience. He also advised against a fixed number of meetings for the group.

Although some guidance is needed when a group first convenes, Bohm advised that "dialogue is essentially a conversation between equals . . . hierarchy has no place in dialogue" (Bohm, 1993, p. 17). Pointing out the differences between dialogue and other forms of group communication is a useful function that a facilitator can perform for the group. One such example is the general rule that experience as equals seeking to learn from and with each other. It is also the responsibility of the facilitator to point out to the group areas that seem to obstruct their process. Bohm stressed the importance of leaders' being group members who lead gently and then move quickly back to the participant role again.

Peters & Armstrong (in press) believe it is important for a group to stop from time to time and examine what they are doing in the process of learning together. This, too, is a time when the facilitator can help the group examine behaviors that inhibit instead of aid the process. The group also has an opportunity to reflect out loud about what and how they are learning what they are learning. Peters & Armstrong (1997) state that their goal as facilitators is to balance current knowledge with the construction of new knowledge. Like Bohm, they see the facilitator as a member of the group.



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Their model demonstrates types of teaching and learning that illustrate roles for both the teacher/facilitator and the learners differ. These roles differ in Type I, Type II and Type III types of teaching and learning (Peters & Armstrong, 1997). The role of the teacher/facilitator in Type I teaching and learning is the model used by many teachers in high school and college courses. The teacher has the knowledge that is thought to be needed by the learners. The content is set either by the teacher or the institution with no input from the learner. The mode of information transfer is direct and one-way from teacher to learner. The lecture often used in organizational settings is an example of Type I teaching and learning.

Type II teaching and learning includes some exchange between the teacher and the students. The teacher is still seen as the person with content knowledge, and the students are learning mostly from the teacher. The teacher also helps students share information with other students. Therefore, the students are sometimes in the role of teacher, but mostly in the role of learner. Like Type I teaching and learning, the purpose of Type II is individual learning. An example of Type II teaching and learning is a lecture by an organizational trainer followed by a discussion among the trainer and the trainee.

Type III teaching and learning features different roles for both teachers/facilitators and students. Membership in the group takes on an egalitarian nature, with teachers and learners all sharing membership within the

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group. The teacher might or might not have more knowledge regarding specific content, but knowledge of other members of the group is also recognized. Members of the group see their responsibility as taking care of the group. In part that responsibility is serving in the role as facilitator. In Type III teaching and learning, dialogue takes place between individual learners, between individual learners and the group, and between the group and individual learners.

Where lecture was the mode of discourse in Types I and II teaching and learning, dialogue is the primary mode of discourse in Type III. Yet, according to Peters & Armstrong (1997), it is possible to move between and back and forth from Types I and II as well. Type III teaching and learning differs from Types I and II in that it has a focus on both individual learning and also on group learning. The purpose of Type III teaching and learning is joint knowledge construction among members of the group.

### Decision-making

Historically, organizational models in the United States have been patterned after military models. Authoritarian leadership meant that decisions came from the top down through the ranks of the organization. These decisions were expected to be carried out without question. Usually the model included not only the decisions but also the process for carrying out the decisions made at the

Facilitating dialogue and decision-making top. Highly disciplined military troops were evaluated on how well they carried out the duties assigned rather than on the results achieved. Promotion was by merit and merit was measured by the capacity to carry out assigned tasks and missions. Another feature of a military model that Corporate America embraced was mobility. When troops were mobile, an officer always had fresh new talent to recruit from. "Today's general is not necessarily the son of yesterday's general" (De Geus, 1997, p. 137). Training was also a component of the military that made it highly successful.

Family-owned businesses tended to adopt the military style of authoritarian leadership. Although, the components of mobility of the troops and precision training, which aided the success of the military, were not usually adopted by family business owners.

In assessing strengths and weaknesses in family-owned businesses, Bork, Jaffe, Lane, Dashew, Heisler, (1996) found that, when the pressure was on, old pattern of patriarchal decision-making took over. This held true even for a family whose decision-making practice had evolved from delegating upward to the patriarchal and delegating downward in the organizational structure. The consequence of this type of decision-making was disempowerment and lost opportunities (p. 52).

Decisions in first-generation family-owned businesses are usually made by

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one person, the founder. "First-generation founders generally create a paternalistic organization, . . . the governing boards are an extension of the founder's power" (Dyer 1986, p. 68). Dyer, (1986) identifies three advantages of this paternalistic structure to a family firm's survival in its early years: "employee loyalty and commitment to the founder's vision are high. Power and authority are not problematic; no one ever has to wonder where the power lies. If decisions need to be made quickly to meet certain contingencies, the founder can move swiftly to mobilize the firm's resources" (p. 69). This type of management, however, is not without drawbacks to a business in the long term. One potential danger lies in filtering information that goes to the decision-maker. "Bad news gets screened out, and the founder ends up either making a decision that should have been made at a lower level or making a decision based on biased and incomplete information" (Dyer, 1986, p. 71). The founder is also unwilling to have an outside board that reviews decisions, so there is no objective source asking questions. According to Dyer (1986), when the decision-making is not shared or developed in other members of the organization, subordinates may become dependent on the founder. Typically single leaders focus on present organizational problems which are so time consuming, that they are not adequately preparing other family members for leadership positions. "Non-family members are generally not considered for top-management positions . . . it is not

Facilitating dialogue and decision-making uncommon to find relatively unambitious, mediocre talent in the ranks of middle management in a family business" (p. 71).

"Delegation and empowerment are not just buzzwords; they are desperately needed antidotes to the elitism that robs so many companies of so much brain power" (Hammel & Prahalad, 1994, p. 144). Dyer (1986) talks about power and lack of power in a first-generation family business. When one person in the firm holds the power "they have the power, to reward and punish others; they have formal authority; they have certain expertise, information and connections with key clients that make them indispensable" (p. 72). Having power inflates the way we feel about ourselves, and not having power deflates our feelings about ourselves. "Powerless individuals in family-owned businesses suffer from feelings of self-doubt and lower self-esteem" (Dyer, 1986, p. 73). Often family members who work in the business and yet feel powerless engage in behaviors that negatively affect themselves as well as the business. One such behavior is over controlling others that they supervise, thus making them also feel powerless. Powerless family members tend to see those they supervise as a threat. To exercise control they in turn do not teach subordinates skills of self-management in decision-making. The human potential in this style of management is left undeveloped. "This makes any form of collaboration or joint decision-making virtually impossible" (Dyer, 1986, p. 74).

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Ward (1987) talks about decision-making when families are in the transition period, the time between when the new successor is named and the day he/she takes over as president and owner. According to Ward (1987) this period is one that is highly stressful for most families. In fact, Davis (1982) reported the stress so high that over a third of the families entering this transition process do not make it through successfully and end up selling the business. Often this happens after the newly-named president quits or gets fired.

Ward (1987) claims that "the transition period is a time for shared decision-making, accommodating differences in values and desires and planning the shift of power from one generation to the next" (p. 70). Ward warns against simply asking for a reaction to a decision that has already been made. The spirit of shared decision-making means "making every effort to understand the other, sincerely asking the successor's opinion on key issues, listening to his/her answers and factoring that assessment into a final decision" (Ward. 1987, p. 70).

A key factor in decision-making, according to Ward (1987), is dealing with differences in values. In consulting with family-owned businesses, he sees, more often than not, differing values within the same family, despite conventional wisdom that family members have the same values. Ward believes these value differences are the result of growing up in different generations and having different personalities; moreover, values are influenced and sometimes change

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with maturity, age, and stages in life. These differing values impact decision-making between the new owner and former owner during the transition period. Ward says, "The underlying distinctions in values will prevent them from ever seeing eye to eye because it is difficult to agree on a course of action when opponents cannot even agree on the fundamentals that underscore it" (p. 71).

Secretan, (1998) refers to seeking information and knowledge as activities of the soul. Decision-making is the opportunity for the soul to apply the information in meaningful ways. "Two needs of the soul are simple and straightforward. They include adequate information and the freedom to participate in and make decisions . . . without these two, the soul remains frustrated in its pursuit of wholeness and balance" (p. 156-157).

American culture has fostered the single great leader concept beyond its time of effectiveness. According to De Geus (1997), we live in a "shrinking world in which technological and political complexity increase at an accelerating rate which offers fewer and fewer arenas in which individual action suffice" (p. 1). We talk about collaboration and may intellectually realize its importance; yet we are bombarded by our media with heroes, celebrities, and leaders-individuals who stand apart and are recognized for individual achievement. "The myth of the triumphant individual is deeply ingrained in the American psyche" (De Geus, 1997, p. 1).

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Problems arise when the business grows beyond the capability of the single great leader if adequate training in managing and decision-making has not been taking place among the ranks. Dyer feels this lack of training are contributing factors to the 70 percent of family-owned businesses that fail during the first generation.

Kreps (1991) feels the answer to complex issues facing the business is team decision-making. He thinks teams come up with more information about a problem and more ideas for solutions. Team participation in decision-making makes team members more aware of issues and more proactive in warding off problems. Together team members are more synergistic in their efforts and tend to come up with better solutions when faced with a problem. According to Kreps (1991) this involvement makes team members more responsible for their work and more productive. The team approach differs from that of the single great leader where decisions are made at one level and implemented at another level within the organization. In support of team decision-making Kreps (1991) says that "the more complex and challenging the issues under evaluation, the more powerful the outcomes of decisions, and the greater the number of people affected, the better groups are for making the decisions" (p. 173-174).



## Facilitating dialogue and decision-making

### Summary

I reviewed literature in the business context that related to my research questions. My review was specific to the topics of dialogue, decision-making and facilitation. I focused the review further as these topics related to family-owned businesses. In the next section I describe how I studied these issues with one family-owned business using action research.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter describes the methods used to examine dialogue and decision-making within a family business. The first part of the chapter describes the design of the study. The second part describes the study procedures. The chapter ends with a description of how data were analyzed and reported.

Design

I engaged in action research and utilized a single case study design as I investigated my work with a family-owned business. Action research challenges the ideas of traditional research practice in a number of ways. One such challenge is in the relationship between researcher and the researched. As the researcher I designed the study, but I also involved members of the family business in setting the agenda for each of our team meetings where data were collected. All of us intentionally learned about our own practices and made changes in our practices based on our experiences in the research project.

Case study research, according to Yin, (1989), "investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between

Facilitating dialogue and decision-making phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used" (p. 23). When choosing a site for a study, Stake, (1994) advises that "the primary criterion is opportunity to learn" (p. 244). Stake adds, "Qualitative case study is characterized by the main researcher spending substantial time, on site, personally in contact with activities and operations of the case, reflecting, revising meanings of what is going on" (Stake, 1994, p. 242). My study involves the collection and analysis of qualitative data.

#### Procedure

To find a business interested in this study I contacted the Iowa Family Business Forum. Its members own family businesses and meet to explore ideas with possible applications for their business enterprises. The name Weeks & Leo emerged as a family-owned company that might be interested in my research.

I first met with the Chief Financial Officer of Weeks & Leo and explained the purpose of the study. She gave me a complete tour of the plant and offices of the company. The Chief Financial Officer seemed very interested in participating in the study and pursued the idea with the other corporate officers of Week & Leo.

The corporate officers at Weeks & Leo reached consensus to participate in the research, however, Joe the President was not available to participate. A meeting date was set to present the formal plan of my study to those participating.

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The participants over the ten-month period were three of the four corporate officers of Weeks & Leo along with myself. Their participating corporate officers were the General Manager and Vice President, the Chief Financial Officer, and the corporate officer in charge of Customer Service.

To find answers to my research questions I believed I needed to collect various kinds of information. First I collected information about the history of Weeks & Leo. Second, I gathered information from team meetings where dialogue would take place. Third, I collected information on myself as a facilitator of the dialogue process. Fourth, I collected information based on individual reflections of team members regarding team meetings. Finally, I interviewed individual team members about their experiences with dialogue and its role in their decision-making.

We established six meeting dates for data collection. At our first meeting in May we selected two-hour blocks of time on Friday when the offices and plant were closed so that we would not be interrupted. Other considerations were to space sessions several weeks apart in order for the team members to have time to integrate what was learned. Additional considerations we worked around were summer vacations and business commitments that interfered with scheduled meetings.

Information was collected from six meetings which took place over a period

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of nine months from June 18, 1998 to February 5, 1999. Our meetings were initially held in the company's lunch/multipurpose room, a very large room that resembled a gymnasium. The room was furnished with tables, chairs, soda and coffee machines, and an employee recognition board. However, we later moved our meetings to a smaller space, after I discovered that the taped recordings of our meetings were difficult to hear. This new space was light and bright, it had a conference table and comfortable chairs, along with a desk and product displays, including the company's new line of herbals. The smaller room served our purpose of making a better recording. We also found the space more intimate, which seemed to favorably influence the dynamics of the group.

To help team members learn about dialogue, I mailed or distributed the following journal articles and book chapter: Isaacs, B., Hanig, R., Harinish, V. Woolley, A. W. (1999). *Listening and Dialogue*; Isaacs, W. (1993) *Taking flight: Dialogue, collective thinking, and organizational learning*; Peters, J. (1990) *The action-reason-thematic technique: spying on the self*. During the meetings we reviewed what we knew and what we were learning about dialogue from these readings and from experience.

The process of engaging in dialogue was introduced to the group through the participants' "critical incidents" (Brookfield, 1990, p. 189). At our first meeting each team member was asked to identify a critical business decision she had

Facilitating dialogue and decision-making made. Between the first and second meetings each team member wrote about the incident including how she felt about it. Each team member then read her critical incident during a team meeting. The critical incidents provided for conversation and questions into the writer's assumptions. According to Brookfield, (1990), "critical incident responses stand alone as primary data sources giving insights into learners' assumptive worlds in expressions that are indisputably the learners' own" (p. 188). This was an opportunity for inquiring into each other's life-world. After each critical incident was shared, the rest of us inquired into the author's views of the incident, its consequences, and how the author felt about the outcome. The inquiry also helped the author examine her own underlying assumptions that surfaced as a result of the inquiry. Subsequent meetings focused on the practice of dialogue.

Although critical incidents were the focus of our dialogue during the second and third meetings, in the third meeting we also generated and prioritized a list of issues for consideration. Family members chose the focus for dialogue from current business problems. At the end of each subsequent meeting, we selected an issue or issues from the list as a focus for our next meeting. Examples on the list were personnel issues, officer roles and responsibilities, job outsourcing, and employee motivation. Members were expected to practice dialogue between meetings.

Evaluation of dialogue

Team meetings provided the opportunity for us to check our progress as a collaborative group. At the end of each meeting we reflected together on our ability to dialogue. For the purposes of this analysis, dialogue is defined as having occurred when there was evidence of stages of dialogue as outlined by Isaacs (1993). Examples of dialogue use were identified from our meetings along with what facilitated the dialogue; e.g., questions, listening, feedback and inviting others into the dialogue.

We also identified ways that dialogue influenced family business decisions. Evidence of decision-making was the indication of a plan to act on specific issues. The family members also provided feedback on my role as facilitator, at the end of each meeting, of ways in which I helped or hindered the process of engaging in dialogue and decision-making. At the end of each meeting we assessed our actions as they related to dialogue and decision-making and my role as the facilitator. 1) Based on Isaacs' model of dialogue (1993), what from our meeting showed evidence of dialogue in our meeting? 2) What did I do as the facilitator to help or hinder dialogue?

Journals

Journals were also a source of data. Journals included reflections by each individual on her experience in our team meetings. We first wrote Journal entries

Facilitating dialogue and decision-making at the end of each team meeting while participants sat around the table. After the first meeting, it was suggested that more reflection time could be useful to participants, so we agreed that we would journal on our own after each meeting and on the same day while the meeting was fresh in our minds. Participants mailed journal entries to me after each meeting.

### Interviews

Within two days of our fourth meeting I conducted a phenomenological interview with each team member. This was the only source of data collected that was not part of or connected with our meetings. The purpose of the interview was to find out if members were incorporating dialogue into their process of decision-making. The interview question was this: "Please describe a recent experience when you were engaged in decision-making." Any additional questions asked were for more information or clarification from a statement made by the interviewee. An example was, "Please say more about. . ." The interviews were conducted in the corporate offices of Weeks & Leo, and each lasted approximately one hour. Interviews were audio-taped and later transcribed for analysis purposes. Transcriptions of the interview were mailed to the interviewee for verification of accuracy, following Guba and Lincoln's suggestion that "A final check, called phenomenon recognition, involves presenting the inquirer's "reality" to those who live it, and asking them whether it does, indeed, represent their



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common and shared experience" (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p. 186).

These interviews were conducted after I completed a bracketing interview with an interviewer trained in capturing lived experience. The purpose of the bracketing interview is "a process of removing conceptual biases that may serve to distort one's interpretive vision" (Pollio, Henley & Thompson, 1997, p. 47). I learned from my bracketing interview that I valued relationships and shared decision-making. The awareness of my bias helped to keep me from leading the interviewee with my follow-up questions.

#### Analysis of Data

My three sources of data were participants' journals, the phenomenological interviews, and the responses to evaluation questions asked at the end of each team meeting. These sources were in written form, the interviews and responses having been transcribed from taped sessions. All three data sets were analyzed by the data driven, inductive, hybrid approach to thematic analysis as outlined by Boyatzis, (1998). "A theme is a pattern found in the information that at the minimum describes and organizes possible observations, or at the maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon" (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 4).

I examined each data set one at a time, beginning with participants' journals. I looked at each set in terms of statements that related to my research

Facilitating dialogue and decision-making variables, coding each statement that spoke to one or more of these variables: dialogue, decision-making, and facilitation.

I began the process for each set of data by identifying statements that were specific to the three variables and then grouping these statements under either dialogue, decision-making, or facilitation headings. I then identified themes that ran through each group. At this point in the process, I went back to the data source, to verify these themes. If a theme could not be supported by the data source, this theme was discarded. After I completed this process for each participant's data, I looked for common themes across each set of data. All three sets of data were examined following the same procedure.

Reliability and validity were checked in my study in the following ways. Each code was described and checked for differentiation from other codes for purposes of validity (Boyatzis, 1998). I double coded data to ensure that my codes were reliable and that I was using the same codes consistently. I also had two independent coders code samples from my data. A discussion of our differences helped me to add clarity to my coding.

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### Chapter IV

#### FINDINGS

##### Introduction

Chapter four presents the findings of my study. Specifically the chapter describes the themes that relate to dialogue, facilitation, and decision-making within the context of a family-owned business. An overarching theme that runs through all data sets is reported at the end of the chapter. These emerged from the participants' journals, participant interviews, team meetings, and my own field notes.

My research questions were:

- 1) How does dialogue influence decision-making in a family business?
- 2) How can I facilitate dialogue in a family business?

In May of 1998 was a preliminary meeting in which I introduced to the participants the study and a schedule of meetings. Data were collected between June of 1998, and February of 1999 that included six team meetings.

Prior to the meeting in June 1998, I gave the participants three articles on the topic of dialogue. I began the second meeting by reviewing the study and describing the data collection methods. We talked about components of the Isaac's (1993) model of dialogue. At the end of the meeting we adopted practices that we would follow in future meetings. We discussed dialogue and decision-

Facilitating dialogue and decision-making making, and examined our own actions as they related to both. We also evaluated my role as the facilitator and ways in which I helped or hindered dialogue during that session. Participants recorded their reflections in a journal at the end of each meeting.

Between the first and second meetings the participants were asked to write about a critical incident regarding a business decision they had recently made. They were also asked to read another article on dialogue.

On July 10, 1998, the second meeting, like the first, began by reviewing what we were learning about dialogue. Two participants, Jane and Mary read their critical incidents during this meeting. I modeled questions to help us uncover assumptions that were imbedded in Jane's and Mary's approach to reaching their decisions. Others were encouraged to ask questions that would reveal assumptions and increase understanding of the decision-making related to the critical incidents. At the end of our meeting we assessed ourselves in terms of our use of dialogue and my role as facilitator. Participants sat around the table and completed their journal entries.

The third meeting took place one week later on July 17, 1998. We began by reviewing an article about listening and dialogue. We then listened while Ann read her critical incident. Once again the critical incident account provided material for inquiry and learning about our assumptions. We identified and listed future

Facilitating dialogue and decision-making dialogue topics relating to current business issues at Weeks & Leo. At the end of the meeting we evaluated ourselves on dialogue and on my role as facilitator. In order to provide more time for participants to reflect on the meeting, we decided to write journal entries after the meeting and mail them to me.

In October, I conducted individual interviews with Ann, Jane and Mary. These interviews were to discover whether participants were integrating dialogue into their decision-making. A second purpose was to inform my own practice in planning for future meetings.

We changed locations for our October meeting to a room with better acoustics for tape recording. We moved from the lunch room, which was very large, with the feel of a gymnasium, to an office. We reviewed an article on dialogue, then selected two business issues from the list we created at our last meeting. The first issue selected for dialogue involved the hiring of a new person for the Corporate Office at Weeks & Leo. The second issue selected was a personnel problem related to an employee's job performance.

I proposed an action research cycle as a way of introducing change into the organization. An action research cycle includes steps for planning, implementing, observing, and reflecting that can be used for collaborative decisions. Participants were encouraged to use the model in their decision-making and report back on their experience with the model. We then evaluated our dialogue and decision-

Facilitating dialogue and decision-making making and my facilitation. Journal reflections were written and mailed to me after the meeting.

Our fifth team meeting was held on December 4, 1998. We reviewed the action research cycle introduced at our last meeting. We then reviewed the two collaborative decisions made during our last meeting in relation to the action research cycle. We continued our procedure of evaluating our own dialogue and decision-making process and my role as facilitator, both during the meeting and in journals.

The sixth and final team meeting was held on February 5, 1999. We focused on employee motivation. At the request of family members, I provided these articles that presented different perspectives of the issue. The group also reflected on our overall accomplishments since our first meeting, and we evaluated our dialogue process and my role as facilitator through the course of our time together.

The next section presents the results of my analysis of data collected during the six meetings.

## Facilitating dialogue and decision-making Dialogue

The analysis of data produced three themes relating to dialogue. The themes are environment, listening, and learning. Environment refers to safety, trust, openness, and respect. Participants used environment and "container," a term borrowed from Isaacs (1993), interchangeably in their descriptions. Listening refers to seeking understanding, being more aware, listening in new ways, and listening "beneath" words. Learning includes learning from practice and learning about each other as a result of dialogue. The following excerpts from my data illustrate the development of these themes of environment, listening and learning through the course of the study.

In our first team meeting we discussed Isaacs's (1993) model of dialogue. Mary talked about the "container" referred to in Isaac's model. The container refers to the interaction inside a group during each of the four phases of dialogue. Mary wrote this in her journal after the first team meeting:

Today we learned the guidelines of dialogue and how to start training ourselves to be able to dialogue effectively. It is a process that will take practice to master. We dialogued about the Container: the instability of it, the instability in it, the inquiry in the container and the creativity in the Container. It is not just the process of communication between people, but more the process of thinking and expressing our thoughts. I was apprehensive before our meeting, now I am anxious for the ideas that will

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come from our next session.

Even though at our first team meeting we were trying to learn about dialogue, Jane said it was at that first team meeting that we started incorporating what we were talking about, especially our awareness of how we were listening and responding to each other. Her journal states:

I felt in our talks about dialoguing , we even today, began to examine a bit things like how well we listen, how we respond to what is being said by another in our group. In other words, what we are talking about we were already recognizing and incorporating into our talks. I felt very positive about what we are going to do, what we are going to experience as a group.

Ann's first journal entry contains similar views:

I have a lot to learn on successful dialogue. I am very excited to work at becoming a person who can effectively reflect on what has been said, accept others thoughts as well as respect others' views, and leave the dialogue feeling good.

In our second team meeting Jane and Mary shared their critical incidents. Jane's incident was about a conflict involving several employees and her resolution of that conflict. Mary's critical incident was about her decision to move back to Iowa from the West Coast and run the family business. In each case participants were familiar with each other's critical incident, and in some cases participants



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Facilitating dialogue and decision-making had been involved in the other's incident. In every case, learning and new understanding were expressed. During the first meeting I had asked the questions. During this team meeting, however, the participants began to ask questions of one another.

According to my field notes taken during the second team meeting, The questioning of each other began today. Participants continue to share openly and without hesitation in our meetings. I believe there's progress toward dialogue.

After the second team meeting Mary wrote about her feelings in sharing her critical incident in the group:

My experience of telling my critical incident heightened my feelings regarding that time in my life. First, to relive it by putting it into words and then by telling it to the group. And finally by answering your (Ann, Jane and Linda's) questions put more life into the incident. It made it three dimensional.

Also after second team meeting, Ann reflected on the difference in listening to a conversation and in listening to a written incident:

The meeting today was very interesting. Our group read from their own papers on a critical incident. I thought the project to sit down and actually write out the critical incident was an excellent method to facilitate one aspect of dialogue by listening. If you don't truly listen to one another

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dialogue can not be successful. Most people respect the action of reading aloud (maybe it stems from childhood when someone would read a story to us). After the critical incident was read, Linda would direct out thoughts to specific elements conveyed in the paper. How did you feel about. . .? What did you pick up on? I felt understanding of Mary's critical incident. I was extremely interested in her story because I have always been curious about what motivated her to be a leader. I view Mary in a different way now. (Even better).

Jane also emphasized listening differences when she referred to her experience with the critical incident activity:

The other nice thing about reading your critical incident, you had to draw from the heart to write that and nobody interrupts you when you are reading it. Like if I'd been telling it we would all jump in with questions, but there's an unwritten respect when somebody's reading and I think that's good. Maybe that's why we did it. I felt as a person listening I found myself maybe listening better. Cause you know there's a span of time when a person's reading that I guess you can process your thoughts maybe a bit whereas when someone's speaking they're actually talking to you. Because you don't feel that need to be responding.

As participants began to question each other in our second session, they also began to express what they were learning from these questions. Jane ties question-asking to the critical incident exercise in her journal entry:

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I do think we reached a level of dialogue in that we listened and understood meanings brought out in the critical incidents discussed. I felt at times uncomfortable when we discussed my critical incident because I seemed to be receiving a lot of praise and that often makes me feel sort of strangled, feeling-like I want to hurry up and get through it, and have the focus on something else. I really liked the insight of Mary's that I seemed to want to let them know that I thought I handled the incident well and was proud of myself. I believe that is true, but I was surprised at how obvious it seemed to Mary. I especially appreciated Linda's questions about how I leave confrontational conversations open-ended because it made me think really hard about why I do that.

Ann expressed how listening to her sisters helped her to learn more about them and their decisions:

Well I understood where Mary was coming from regarding her decision to run the company. I guess we never put it into a sequence on how you arrived at your decision. I came to an understanding because of our dialogue and that helped me a lot. And Jane, I never realized that you were so nervous about conversation in the same way that I am. You just seem so calm on the outside like it doesn't bother you. So that was something that was good about our dialogue. It seemed like there was a moment when there was some revelation where it went beyond words actually.

Participants came to understand that the process of dialogue is complex

Facilitating dialogue and decision-making and requires time, patience, and practice. By the third team meeting participants talked more about what they were learning and how they were incorporating learning into their everyday interactions with others.

Toward the end of the second team meeting Jane said, I felt today's session was more relaxed. I imagine that's partly because we feel more comfortable with each other and with our critical incidents we were discussing on a more personal level. I felt like we strayed a lot more often today than last time. It makes me a little uncomfortable when that happens, I think because I worry about Linda's time being valuable and I feel a need to help her keep us focusing on the matters we're discussing. But as dialogue is not supposed to have an end result or a feeling of 'staying on task' I guess straying isn't such a bad thing. Listening to and talking about Ann's critical incident makes me think that, even though I don't remember a lot of 'I feel' statements or 'I believe' statements the idea that those kinds of things were more present came from what she chose to write about I suppose and how she worded it. It made me feel we reached dialogue and I wonder if you can ever reach dialogue truly if a person's feelings, ideas, beliefs aren't present. If dialogue is reaching a point of 'understanding' I think understanding has to include feelings, ideas and beliefs. I felt I did a better job of listening this week, perhaps because the article we talked about was about listening and I was very aware of it. I think too, though, when someone is relaying something to you that is so

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apparently intimate and emotional, it's our nature to listen more carefully. I guess a lesson is that if you want to achieve dialogue, the atmosphere created should be one in which people feel safe enough to relay true feelings. I also liked Linda's idea of coming up with some relevant topics to begin to dialogue about. I like the idea of putting into practice some of what we've been learning.

Ann talked about her interacting with her daughter Vanessa. After our third session Ann wrote in her journal:

Today was a very exciting day! The discussion on our reading all made sense! I felt tremendous accomplishment. I felt we all were dialoguing during segments of our meeting. . . . Hopefully, we will all benefit from this experience. More and more at (41 years old) I am reminded of how our journey through life is a learning experience. Our meetings require studying the readings, practicing our listening, working very hard on not bringing our preconceived opinions and thoughts into a dialogue situation. This is homework! I practice on Vanessa. I find myself turning her off in my mind sometimes as I line up all of my goals I need to accomplish for the evening. Since we have been studying dialogue, I have really made a conscious effort to listen and listen more and then not inflict my opinion on what she has just said. She is enjoying her time with me as much as I am with her!

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Mary also spoke of the importance of the effort involved in creating the container in her journal entry after the third team meeting:

In our group today, we dialogued about the model in the Isaac's article, especially creating the container. This is very important because if the container isn't solid it'll break down before dialogue begins. The physical setting must be right as well as the timing. Trust and respect are necessary and we have to be able to listen and concentrate.

Having first met in the lunch room at Weeks and Leo, we moved to a much smaller space after our third meeting. Mary remarked on the physical aspects of the environment in her description when she referred to our change of venue:

I was very happy with the new container, Joe's office. It has many good attributes. 1) It's more comfortable, yet feels business like 2) It is a less disruptive atmosphere 3) It is much warmer and conducive to everyone opening their views to others. I feel it strongly helped us to stay focused on one idea at a time.

Participants often referred to the fact that they wanted Joe, the President, involved in dialogue.

After the fourth session Mary noted in her journal, I hope Joe will be able to work with us in the future using dialogue effectively. I see, more than ever, why dialoguing takes constant practicing and that we need to remind ourselves of all of the components to be successful.

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At the end of our sixth team meeting Jane described the progression of dialogue:

I think when we first started out I tried to concentrate on actually dialoguing the way dialogue works. Now either I feel we're getting away from it or we're getting so good at it that I don't think I have to concentrate on it like I used to. I'm hoping that we are good at it.

Participants recorded their assessment of their own progression in dialogue over a series of meetings. Participants started with no dialogue skill and progressed to the point of actively engaging in dialogue.

## Facilitation

My analysis of data revealed one theme related to the facilitation: the role and responsibilities of the facilitator. Participants viewed my role first and foremost as providing a container in which they felt comfortable and safe to share honestly and openly with each other. The container was first introduced as a component of Isaac's (1993) model of dialogue. The container as described by participants included trust, listening, and respect.

I introduced the process of engaging in dialogue to our group through critical incidents. Learning to listen and to ask questions is at the core of dialogue. I modeled questions that would help us understand assumptions. We inquired

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into and examined assumptions which led to further understanding of ourselves and others. This activity was different with family members who know each other both in the family and on the job. At the end of our second team meeting, when referring to the critical incident activity, Mary reflected on my role and responsibility as facilitator:

I like the way you look at things, you catch things differently than I do sometimes. You hear something that, the way somebody says something in a voice that I might not have caught. It is partly because I've known Ann and Jane all my life. I kind of get used to people and how they talk after awhile. So maybe I don't hear some things with family like you do and then sometimes I think I already know what they're talking about, but you ask them to explain.

Jane referred to the critical incidents when she said,

I like the approach of listening to somebody talk, taking something that's happened to them and taking it apart into pieces and figuring out what people's, I can't remember the words they use, motivations and attitudes and that kind of thing to help them understand themselves better and how they make decisions based on all the stuff that has, they've absorbed in their lives. All of the things that they've learned. I like the idea of picking up on attitudes that you might not know you have. In particular I like that. My responsibility also was to provide reading materials about dialogue and



Facilitating dialogue and decision-making model questioning that helped us learn to inquire into each others' assumptions. I was also seen as the person responsible for keeping the group on track.

To start a dialogue over the assigned articles, I asked the participants a phenomenological question: "What stood out for you in the reading?" This approach was different from what the group members expected. Yet, all participated by sharing what they understood from Isaac's (1993) article on dialogue. Mary stated her perception of my role in her journal after our third group meeting and how it was different from what she had expected:

At first, I had the preconceived ideas that she'd be our teacher and we were her students. In actuality she steers without leading us by the nose, she shows us new ways without preaching and it seems like the ideas come to us by themselves. She dialogues effortlessly and is fluid with her words and reactions. I feel she is trustworthy and that she listens and concentrates on what we're saying. She has created a comfortable, yet stable container.

As we reacted to articles about dialogue, and in particular Isaac's (1993) model, we talked about creating a container conducive to dialogue. Characteristics of the container that we discussed were the need for trust and respect among participants. We talked about being open and honest with ourselves and each other. The presence of these characteristics helped each of us to feel safe in sharing our thoughts and feelings. Toward the end of our first

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meeting, I said to the team members,

There is very good eye contact from the group. I know you are family members but the respect is there. Its not something that we're going to have to try and create and the trust is there. I mean there were some things that you shared today with me that made me feel that there was trust being established. You were willing to share a painful family experience and you're willing to share some decision-making that you're going through right now as a company. So trust is a big part of what's in the container.

July 17, 1998 during the third team meeting, Jane spoke of the importance of creating a container for dialogue:

If you want to achieve dialogue, the atmosphere created should be one in which people feel comfortable and safe enough to relay true feelings.

During the same meeting she described my role as it related to creating this safe container for dialogue:

You have an expression on your face, 'that one right there' that is good for making people feel comfortable and safe to say anything. Like you have a face that says you're okay, you know.

Our team meetings were on Friday afternoons after employees of Weeks & Leo finished their work week. The management team then rushed into our meetings. As the facilitator I felt a need to be sensitive to the demands of their

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respective roles, responsibilities, and stresses. This awareness required listening beyond words and trying to understand what participants were feeling as they came in for our meetings. Group members mentioned my demonstrating patience and sensitivity in my role as facilitator. During our fourth team meeting, October 16, Mary said,

I think you have done a wonderful job of listening to us because you, you're able to see through the banter that we have at the beginning to kind of get down to you know what the meat of the problem is. You work quickly to get down there without saying okay today we're just going to do this. You kind of let us get started on our own because I thought we were spending a lot of time at first. I thought we are just spinning our wheels here and just kind of wasting our time. But actually it was a very stressful week for us and really it didn't end until 1:30 or quarter to 2:00 when Joe and Walter walked out the door cause you walked in right behind them and we had no time to even take a breath. So I think you gave us a little bit of time to just kind of get that immediate stuff right out of the way and let the feathers fly out of the way and just see the meat of it you know, get to it. That helped a lot rather than saying no, no, you know, its time, we've got to get started.

After the fourth team meeting, Mary described my sensitivity to their need in her journal:

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At the beginning of our session, I felt we were helter-skelter and not being productive. But I should have known better. . . you probably recognized we had so much to say and needed to do our weekend venting before we could focus on our business needs.

During our final meeting, Ann spoke about how she had changed. She talked about having watched the clock and wanting to answer the phones during our sessions. Jane referred to my role in helping Ann change. At the end of the sixth team meeting, Jane said,

I'll tell you what. You,[referring to the facilitator] are very good at making and creating an atmosphere where people feel like they can change. A lot of her ability to be able to do that is because of the way you are. Very safe. Feeling of being comfortable, it's okay, this tranquil feeling when we're around you. So you'll have to keep coming back.

The participants generally saw me as responsible for keeping the group on track. Part of this involved pausing to look at our process. At the end of the third team meeting, Mary said,

You know, by listening, if we're dialoguing or mumbling; you do a real good job of bringing us back to where it is we should be headed. You do a good job of pulling us back without us knowing or being insulted.

After the fourth team meeting Ann remarked on my role as facilitator in her journal,

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Linda . . . has, great listening skills, good timing on how to and when to move the group into the direction it should be going to.

Toward the end of the fifth team meeting, December 4, Ann said,

Linda . . . does not dominate, she guides and directs at appropriate times.

. . . We relax and have fun as well as learn and grow with her!

My role as the facilitator changed over the six meetings from discussion being directed from and to me to dialogue flowing between and among us.

## Dialogue and Decision-making

Two themes emerged from the analysis of data: practice and values.

Practice means both setting aside the time to practice and then repeating the process with enough frequency to be comfortable with it. Values refers to what is important to participants. Importance is demonstrated by actions. It was in the fourth team meeting that we became aware of the experience of dialogue leading to decision-making. Dialogue focused on two unresolved business issues.

Referring back to Isaac's model, there was creativity in the container that resulted in two collaborative decisions. In her journal entry after our fourth team meeting on October 16, Jane wrote,

The one observation that really stands out for me today after our dialogue is that I felt, and still feel 45 minutes after finishing, energized! This is amazing to me because, as we mentioned, it was a highly stressful week.

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Logically, I should be just about totally drained at this moment. But there was a tangible energy created through our dialogue today. It's a great feeling! It seemed like the pace was faster today, especially during our decision-making dialogue. Because of that I felt more aware of my need to listen without thinking about what I wanted to say while the other person was speaking. At the same time, it's become easier for me to set those thoughts aside which indicates to me that I'm learning to truly dialogue. I really appreciate the sheet, 'Dialogue Is' with the questions. I tried to use questions today to help me better understand something someone else was saying, and it does really help. I'm honestly looking forward to sitting down with my sisters next week and using your model to help facilitate some more of our decision-making. All along I have felt like I've been learning, but today felt somewhat like a breakthrough. Sort of like, hey this stuff really works!

During the previous team meeting we identified business issues that the group members wanted to use as the focus of dialogue in future sessions. After the fourth team meeting Ann wrote this in her journal:

What a great meeting we had today! We began a little at a time with a review of our past meetings. Linda gave us a selection of topics we had expressed an interest in dialoguing about previously. We chose to dialogue on the much needed person in the office and what his/her responsibilities would be. Mary and Jane had their set ideas and I had mine. By bringing out all of the responsibilities this

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person would have we decided to examine the responsibilities we each had. All of a sudden we 'saw the light.' We could reorganize some of our duties . . . there were many ideas flowing through out the session. We felt good about the direction we went. We moved to a new level, a positive level. We were using the skills of dialogue in a natural flow. Linda was very observant. She brought to us a powerful question. "What do each of us see the new employee as? What type of person? What type of skills?" That's what got the ideas flowing! . . . . By the time the session ended I felt we were all really able to participate in the art of dialogue in a natural way!

**My own field notes from the fourth team meeting reflect on a similar perception:**

I did very little facilitating today once we got started. It was fun to watch, yet I didn't feel like an observer; I felt like a participant ready to enter the dialogue and truly present with the others and the dialogue. After the meeting ended and the tape recorder was off Jane talked about the 'high' she experienced from our dialogue. We talked about writing an article in a journal sharing our collaborative learning experience. She went on talking about the experience she referred to as 'hitting the wall' and how through dialogue today in our meeting they broke through the wall. She talked about how Mary said she felt lighter, and how she and Ann agreed. Jane referred to dialogue and the creativity in making decisions as a great stress reliever. It was very satisfying to me to watch and be present while having

Facilitating dialogue and decision-making the others more than ever before co-facilitate, initiate the inquiry etc. It made me aware of the importance of 'space' between our meetings for learning to be integrated.

Individual interviews with team members further revealed dialogue and decision-making at work and outside of work. These interviews were completed in conjunction with our team meeting on October 16, 1998. I posed this task to each person: Describe a recent experience when you were engaged in decision-making. Ann related a marketing decision to determine which Weeks & Leo products should be made available on the Internet. She described a dialogue and decision-making process with her sisters and then reaching a collaborative decision:

I thought about a big decision we made as a group, a business decision recently. And what came to my mind was that we had just recently opened an account with the Internet and a big decision was which products to make available to this group because it will go internationally and one of our big decisions to make was should we include our products that can be made into methamphetamine. And there's a big problem right now throughout the country of companies that are all of a sudden getting these huge orders for OTC's that have the ingredient that you can make methamphetamine with. And the government is really getting involved in a big way. So we, our process between Joe, Mary, Jane and me was to



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decide which products to make available. Well this came up quickly through Mary, she was against putting any products that might potentially be a big problem for us with the government as well as being harmful to customers if it wasn't in the right hands. Joe right away wanted to give them the full lot because he was thinking money and Mary was thinking FDA problems and so anyway that was how the subject came up. So then I was thinking about how we formed the Container as far as discussing this. . . for the atmosphere, all of the things that play into the container as far as when we were going to discuss it because it was a big decision. . . . I thought that wasn't much because we were talking quickly and then we would be interrupted and we're all thinking about this subject but we haven't dialogued on it. So one day finally, Joe was not involved but Mary, Jane and I decided to sit down in the lunch room and talk about it and it was very interesting because we all brought our preconceived notions on methamphetamine and our products. And it was interesting because we did set up a table so we still had our barrier, the table. But we started really talking about it and it was really interesting; the ideas started flowing. Jane brought in a set of actual knowledge . . . Mary was bringing in her ideas because she deals with the FDA regulations and rules on a day to day basis and really feels extremely responsible, for just one little violation of the rule can shut our business down. So she carries that weight with her and I always, I just bring my thoughts on what I read in the newspaper and

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hear on the news because I really haven't had any experience with it. So as we sat and talked, it flowed and flowed and talked and talked . . . we came up with the decision not to include those products in our selection for the Internet. I guess we did reach a decision which doesn't always happen in dialogue but it wasn't really a forced decision I was like I thought how it was supposed to be: it was flowing of ideas where we ended up at a point and no one was trying to convince the other we were just sharing ideas to get there. Joe agreed with us. When we told him of our conversations Joe agreed with what we came up with.

In her interview, Jane talked about her experience with a recent decision regarding a long-standing employee problem. Jane referred to previous attempts at decision-making without using dialogue as it related to this problem. However, there was no satisfactory resolution until our fourth meeting, when the team engaged in dialogue and reached a collaborative decision. Jane said:

I felt like yesterday. . . we really made a decision using dialogue. We truly, it felt like it was right finally and the decisions I could think of that we've made lately . . . I think we didn't use it and that's part of the reason we were so stuck.

Using the action research cycle to evaluate team decisions was introduced at the fourth team meeting. However, participants were still experimenting with it when our data collection ended. This excerpt from Mary's journal after our fifth

Facilitating dialogue and decision-making team meeting refers to two decisions the team made collaboratively. She refers to the use of an action research cycle:

Since our last meeting in October, our decisions of outsourcing the color brochure and hiring another [additional] person to work in the office were implemented and evaluated. Now our decisions have changed and so have our plans.

Jane also refers to an action research cycle in her journal at the end of the fifth team meeting:

I think we need to make an effort to remember the critical and self-critical evaluation of our decisions. We haven't incorporated that enough yet into our decision-making cycle.

Dialogue has led to decision-making in our group. An action research cycle was applied to two collaborative decisions with each decision having only one cycle. Practice with applying an action research cycle to decisions is in progress.

### Time

The theme of time permeated all data sets across and through the entire study. Time was referred to in various ways. The theme referred to time for learning and change, time for meeting and practice, and time with a facilitator, and time without one.

During our sixth meeting, Ann spoke about how she had changed. In the

Facilitating dialogue and decision-making beginning she was apprehensive about our meetings and saw them as a source of internal conflict. It was difficult for her to hear the phones and not answer them, to sit in our meetings when there was so much that needed done. Her sisters referred to her as one who is highly organized and always aware of the time, often breaking up meetings because the clock indicated to her it was time to go back to work. Over time Ann experienced a transformation. She expressed it this way:

But you know quite honestly that's how I started out. And I've changed. I really look forward to these sessions. So I really changed. . . . And it used to bother me to hear the phone ring and I can now. Well yeah. But now I've really changed. I have. . . . I needed to change.

During the analysis of data I found that my role as facilitator changed with time. When our meetings first began I initiated conversation, questions, and all activities. Initially participants' conversation was directed at me. With each group meeting that followed I did less and less initiating and encouraged participants to address each other, so that I was no longer the focal point in the group and the participants would learn with one another. Later in the series of meetings, I observed that group members were taking increasing responsibility for the group and at times individual participants facilitated their dialogue. Participants noticed this change in their behaviors. Jane wrote this comment in her journal entry after the fourth meeting:

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I think we're doing better at addressing our conversation to each other and not acknowledging Linda as the center of the dialogue like we were the first few times.

Mary spoke of a change that referred to co-facilitating in her journal entry after the fifth meeting:

There was more interaction between Jane, Ann and I than the last time, which is our goal. We need to practice, because, when we do, I feel we do it well.

At the end of the fourth team meeting I said to the participants, I felt like I was facilitating much less today because you all were facilitating yourselves.

Jane responded:

I felt that too, today. I noticed myself I wasn't looking at you quite as much as I usually do especially when we were into decision-making. I noticed a lot of eye contact between the three of us and you were just sitting over there. We didn't reach any slow points though. It was flowing. And sometimes you'll step in when we reach a stopping point but we didn't give you a chance today because things were moving. I'm honestly looking forward to sitting down with my sisters next week and using your model to help facilitate some more of our decision-making.

Participants frequently mentioned the need to set aside time for dialogue-based decision making. In her journal after the fourth team meeting Ann shared

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her frustrations with not having sufficient time for dialogue:

I am going to suggest to Jane and Mary that we formally set up dates to practice our dialogue without a facilitator. Many of the issues that arise can be worked on more effectively if we practice at least once a week. We do try to meet daily at lunch which is 1:45. By the time we get into issues, Mary or Jane will get phone calls, employees will interrupt with questions, the break bell rings etc. . . Time and again I feel we just get started and then we have to disband for some reason. We really do have to be more disciplined on meeting and not being interrupted.

Ann gave me this feedback during her interview just prior to our fourth team meeting:

I feel one of the biggest problems in dialogue in our situation as a family business is just finding time. I think you as a facilitator, I guess, it would be wonderful if you could find a way to have your groups think about that first and foremost, find a time and make yourselves do it. Because I remember everything we discussed and once we get into our discussions, our conversations or dialogue it is so relaxing, but with the phone and everyday decisions, and family and just the nature of the business world it is so hard to find even a half hour. So to me that is one of the most critical things as far as effective dialogue is having the atmosphere and time.

During her interview, the morning after our fourth team meeting, Jane said, I just think it's important to, I know everybody's always saying find the

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time, find the time, find the time, but it is important to find the time because if that little piece of time can make you take some of the stress off, make you feel like you're really, there's some connection, true connection between the people that you're trying to manage or work with and be a creative time then it is so well worth it. It's too bad we always feel like we can't find the time for things like that because it's there. It's scheduling it in. Creativity is another part of dialogue. Well it's one other time where it seems like we're always, there's lot of emphasis placed on relieving your stress at work and a lot of it is outside of work, you know. Go to the gym, or take a vacation or relax and read a book, I mean all this stuff that you read about how to relieve stress, the stress busters. But that was, that was a relief of stress right there and it's right in the center of work so it's another thing to look at and you feel like you're accomplishing your goals of making decisions together and being creative and relieving some of the tension. It doesn't have to be outside of work . . . because if you don't work on that stuff it's still going to be there when you get back from your vacation.

For these participants dialogue involved a commitment of time before positive effects were realized.

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### Summary

In this chapter I reviewed the findings of my nine-month study conducted with members of a family business, Weeks & Leo. I reported themes related to dialogue, facilitation, and decision-making. I supported the themes with first-hand accounts by the participants and from my field notes. I discuss my findings in the following chapter.



DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

Introduction

My study examined dialogue and decision-making in a family business to find answers to the following research questions:

- 1) How does the process of engaging in dialogue influence decision-making in a family business?
- 2) How can I facilitate dialogue in a family business?

Six meetings were conducted with three managers of Weeks & Leo Co. over a nine-month period. In these meetings we learned to dialogue and later engaged in decision-making. Participants recorded their experiences in journals and I recorded field notes over the period of the study. I also conducted individual interviews with team members about their experience with decision-making.

I conducted a thematic analysis on transcriptions of meetings, interviews, journals entries and my own field notes. The analysis yielded themes for dialogue, decision-making, and facilitation. Three themes emerged for dialogue: environment, listening, and learning. For decision-making, values and practice were consistently emphasized. The theme that emerged for facilitation was the role and responsibilities of the facilitator. Time was a theme that ran across all

Facilitating dialogue and decision-making data sets, including time for learning and change, time for meeting and practice, time with a facilitator present, and time without one.

## Discussion

In this section I discuss the themes and sub-themes as they relate to my research questions. My first question: How does the process of engaging in dialogue influence decision-making in a family business?

### Dialogue

Dialogue is “sustained collective inquiry into the processes, assumptions and certainties that compose everyday experience [that may be understood as] the experience of the meaning embodied in a community of people” (Isaacs, 1993, p. 25).

Environment is an important aspect of achieving dialogue and refers to the interaction inside a group. Bohm (1996) describes contrasting environments in a group when he compares groups where members are engaged in dialogue as to groups opposed to discussion. He describes human interaction in discussion as much like an environment of colliding electrons. The more intensely people feel about a topic, the more they separate themselves from one another. In contrast, engaging in dialogue seems to have a way of “cooling” the environment that enables human thinking and interaction to connect and build rather than separate

Facilitating dialogue and decision-making and collide. Conditions such as safety, trust, openness and respect also help to connect and build thinking and interaction. Safety in a group means that it is okay to be vulnerable without fear of negative consequences. Similarly, trust means it is safe for group members to take risks by expressing personal thoughts and experiences. It is through members sharing such stories and experiences that trust is built. Trust is also built in a group when members express ideas even while the ideas are developing, as in "thinking out loud" (Armstrong, 1999 p. 10).

Openness includes being honest and unguarded about one's ideas as well as being open to the ideas of others. It is characterized by a willingness to let others examine one's assumptions and to influence one's thinking. Openness also entails suspending personal assumptions while engaged in dialogue.

Respect is a way of acting toward another, a way of being that allows dialogue. It means honoring the other by listening and seeking to understand the other. Buber (1957) describes an I-Thou relationship which is characterized by safety, trust, openness and respect. According to Buber, an I-Thou relationship exists when a deep realness in one meets a deep realness in another. Although I was an outsider, trust as well as the other aspects of the environment were established quickly between members of the family and me.

Environments are physical as well as emotional and psychological. The first three meetings our environment was in the company's lunch room where we sat

Facilitating dialogue and decision-making around a six-foot table. The lunchroom had tall ceilings which made the space seem very large and the four of us very insignificant. We moved to a smaller room that we found more intimate for our dialogue. I noticed it was easier to hear each other. Participants talked about the new arrangement being more open to sharing feelings and more conducive to staying focused. Although we did not remove the table, participants recognized it as unnecessary and possibly a barrier to dialogue. We learned that what goes on inside the group as well as the space in which the group is located both influence dialogue.

Listening refers to hearing another by using multiple senses. This is often referred to as active listening, because the whole body is engaged in the process. Covey (1990) calls it empathetic listening, which means listening for understanding rather than listening for responding. Covey likens empathetic listening to giving another psychological air. This is listening to understand the meaning behind their words. Participants became more aware of listening as each shared personal stories in the group. Participants started practicing this skill at work and at home and brought to our meetings positive feedback of ways others were responding to their new awareness and skills of listening.

Learning refers to learning about each other and learning from practice. We assume family members know about each other. After all, what could family members who grew up together and work together expect to learn about each

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other? When we started our group, these sisters held the belief that they could learn about dialogue and decision-making, but probably not more about each other. Yet each expressed learning about the others from the critical incidents. According to Brookfield (1990), "critical incident responses stand alone as primary data sources giving insights into learners' assumptive worlds in expressions that are indisputably the learners' own" (p. 188). When Mary shared her critical incident and the group asked questions, Ann learned how her sister had reached the decision to return from California to Des Moines to run the family firm. Further, she came to understand her sister's motivation for leadership and desire to run the family business.

Learning about each other also was learning about value differences. Participants expressed values that were different from those of their father. They particularly referred to differences that stood out for them while they worked under his leadership in the family business. Through dialogue they learned more about their own values and the differences in values between themselves and others on the team. Jane learned it is important for her sisters to validate her competence when she deals with employee conflict. Ann learned how much her sisters value her presence, persistence and the fresh ideas that she brings to the company.

Ward (1989) says growing up in the same family does not mean values are

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the same. The family members, participating in the study learned that various perspectives are valuable to an organization. They are also learned, through dialogue, that their brother, Joe, brought yet another perspective. Although Joe is a part of the management team he was not involved in our study. They became aware of the change in tempo when Joe was in the corporate offices. Moving quickly from one meeting to another and in the frenzy of activity left little time for dialogue to take place between themselves and Joe as they conducted business.

In addition to learning about each other and themselves, participants learned how to engage in dialogue and decision-making and they learned the steps of an action research cycle. As Ann mentioned in one of her journal entries, life is about learning and our meetings required a great deal of learning, practicing dialogue, listening, and reading the articles.

There was a progression in their learning over the course of nine months from no dialogue to self-conscious dialogue to natural dialogue or dialogue without having to think about it. It became a way of being, at least when we were together as a group.

### Decision-making

Two themes emerged from the analysis of data: practice and values. The theme of practice relates both to setting aside time to practice and then practicing dialogue with enough frequency to feel comfortable with it. Practice first related

Facilitating dialogue and decision-making to learning the process of engaging in dialogue. During the first three sessions, we focused on learning dialogue. Not until the fourth session did we combine our dialogue with decision-making. Practice then meant practicing dialogue while making decisions using an action research cycle. Learning to use an action research cycle was still in progress at the end of our series of meetings. However, the action research cycle required more time for practice in order for participants to utilize it comfortably in business settings.

By the last meeting there were references to dialogue and decision-making and "doing it [dialogue] well" when they do it. However, there were also comments like "I think it is easier to dialogue when a facilitator is present." This practice also meant practicing when the facilitator was not present.

Values refers to what participants determine important. They demonstrated what is important by their actions. Participants often reflected on "the way Dad did things," a relationship addressed by Ward (1987). Ward believes that value differences are the result of family members growing up in different generations. According to Ward, values are influenced by and sometimes change with maturity, age, and stages in life. Value differences were apparent with each of the decisions described by participants during their interviews on decision-making. Ann spoke of the differences in values as they approached the decision of which products to market over the Internet. As Ward (1987) said, "The underlying

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distinctions in values will prevent them [participants and Dad] from ever seeing eye to eye because it is difficult to agree on a course of action when opponents cannot even agree on the fundamentals that underscore it" (p. 71). What Ward says about opposing values is descriptive of opponents entering into negotiation when the most they hope for is compromise. The advantage of dialogue and decision-making in such circumstances is that there is a difference in attitude and approach to the others. One purpose of dialogue is to understand the other and another is to establish shared meaning. Isaacs (1993) states that "our emerging dialogue theory claims that tacit thought among a group comprises a field of 'meaning' and that such fields are the underlying constituent of human experience" (p 31). From shared meaning the group is able to enter into metalogue, where they labor together to create something more than what either party imagined. Covey (1990) calls this "Win-Win" or creating a third alternative. The third alternative is a decision that results in more than and other than what either party could have created alone.

We engaged in dialogue in terms of specific business issues at Weeks & Leo. It was our dialogue on the topic that led to inquiry into the problem, which led to greater understanding of the problem and in one case to metalogue. It was while in metalogue that team members created third alternatives. Our fourth session was very significant, as the group made two collaborative decisions on



Facilitating dialogue and decision-making existing problems. Previous attempts to make decisions regarding these issues had been unsuccessful. Participants expressed amazement and excitement at the end of our fourth session when they had not only reached consensus, but in one case had gone beyond consensus to creating a third alternative.

Kreps (1991) believes the answer to complex issues facing business is team decision-making. He thinks teams come up with more information about a problem and more ideas for solutions than individuals working from singular perspectives. Together team members are more synergistic and tend to come up with better solutions to problems. Kreps's beliefs about team efforts in decision-making describes our team during our fourth meeting. The issue of hiring an additional person was the focus of our dialogue. At first each participant concentrated on what the new employee should do to relieve some of her own workload. In other words, each was coming from her own perspective. Once the emphasis was shifted to the "kind of person" that they wanted rather than what jobs this person would perform, there was a shift in thinking from personal needs to the needs of the whole company. What kind of person did they want to work with and be associated with at Weeks & Leo?

After reaching agreement on a character profile, they started to examine their own roles in the company in terms of what each could "let go" of. Each one had held the assumption that she was the only one that could do certain things

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“right.” This paradigm shift in thinking opened the door for creative possibilities. The third alternative was created in which job responsibilities were realigned. After reaching the third alternative and the end of our meeting each participant expressed her feelings about the process and their accomplishment together. They talked about how it felt physically, expressing things like feeling a weight had been lifted and feeling energized even though it was late on Friday afternoon after a very stressful work week. They talked about how making decisions collaboratively relieved stress. One expressed it best when she said, “Hey, this stuff really works!”

My second research question was: How can I facilitate dialogue in a family business?

#### Facilitator role and responsibilities

There was one theme related to facilitation: the role and responsibilities of the facilitator. These responsibilities included creating and maintaining a comfortable environment, keeping the group on track, modeling questions, providing activities and materials for the group, and being flexible and sensitive to their needs.

As the facilitator I was initially responsible for the interaction within the environment. I felt responsible to create an environment that was safe. I modeled the characteristics of a safe environment that included treating participants with

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respect and treating them as trustworthy while working to earn their trust in return. Safe environments are also comfortable, accepting and open. Every person was encouraged to participate and her participation and contributions were valued by me and others in the group. Expectations of facilitation changed over time as group members gained experience in the process.

Keeping the group on track also included leading the group. I introduced activities and any directions that might go along with an activity. I was expected to determine whether or not we were "on track" and to keep us "on track." There were times when others expressed the feeling that we were "off track." I was given feedback about how I was able to bring the group back "on track" without their realizing that is what I was doing or without pointing out to them that I felt we were drifting. When referring to individuals in an I-Thou relationship engaged in dialogue, Pollio, (1997) said, "participants do not know how it will progress and . . . they find themselves saying and experiencing things they had no idea they were going to do or say" (p. 139).

From the beginning there was a sense in the group that there were "right and wrong" ways to approach most everything. I felt that such an attitude was a result of backgrounds rich in experience of Type I teaching and learning (Peters & Armstrong, 1998). Even though we read articles about the equality of all participants in dialogue, early in the process participants entering into the

Facilitating dialogue and decision-making conversation would always look at me and address their conversation toward me. As the group proceeded through additional meetings, Type III learning was more prevalent. We frequently returned to Type I and Type II interaction throughout our time together, even though our goal was to engage in a Type III interaction. I believe that was due to our shared Type I backgrounds. Intellectually Type III was accepted from the beginning, but it proved more difficult in practice.

The dynamics of business are constantly changing. As the facilitator I needed to be sensitive to what was both urgent and important for Weeks & Leo. That meant I needed to be flexible and help facilitate ways to get their needs met even when I could not always anticipate their specific needs. I also had to be sensitive to individual as well as group needs.

### Time

Time emerged across all data sources as an important element for all aspects of my study. The theme included time for learning and change, time for meeting and practice, time with a facilitator, and time without one.

We had to set aside time for the team to meet and learn the process of engaging in dialogue. This was a new time commitment since the team regularly met during lunch time. The time commitment for our meetings was a significant commitment for them, two uninterrupted hours. The team found that they needed even more time for practice between sessions. Once our meetings

Facilitating dialogue and decision-making included decision-making and participants could see the potential that dialogue had for problem-solving and decision-making, the team began to express their need to schedule time to practice doing dialogue. They were seeing positive results and the potential for more.

Change occurred, both individually and for the group. Ann talked about her own transformation, and her sisters confirmed that she indeed had changed as a result of our meetings. She was able to let go of the outside distractions and actively listen and participate in dialogue in our meetings. She was less concerned about the clock and time passing. There was also change over time in the group's inquiry. I initiated less and less of the interaction, and the participants initiated more and more. They were also becoming more comfortable with the process. By the sixth meeting one of the participants commented that they were not having to think of the mechanics of dialogue, they were dialoguing more naturally, getting good at it.

Decision-making in our meetings was postponed until the team had experienced dialogue and could recognize when they were engaged in dialogue. The timing seemed right to introduce decision-making at our fourth meeting. The team's dialogue resulted in two business decisions. Their responses included excitement, amazement, feeling lighter, feeling energized, feeling stress relief in the work environment about work issues.

## Facilitating dialogue and decision-making

My role and responsibilities as facilitator also changed over time. As the group members started to inquire more, they depended on me less. As a result, my role and theirs changed to co-facilitators. Group members started to share the responsibility of initiating inquiry, of keeping the group on track and planning learning and dialogue for group meetings without a facilitator. I believe co-facilitation would have been more evident in the fifth and sixth meetings had we not also been learning to use an action research cycle. Introducing the action research cycle placed me in the role of teacher/expert and resulted in a re-introduction of Type I learning. As I mentioned we moved back and forth between Types I, II and III learning in our group. When we ended our sessions the team was still in the process of learning and implementing an action research cycle. It became obvious that the team needed more time to become comfortable with the action research cycle.

## Conclusions

My conclusion is that dialogue is a valuable process that can be learned by family members and can be used in conjunction with decision-making in their business. The key to success is understanding that it takes time to learn and then time to practice until what is learned becomes second nature or a way of being. Family members must trust the process and the facilitator until they have

## Facilitating dialogue and decision-making

experienced dialogue and can use it in decision-making.

Dialogue influences decision-making when team members can build on each other's experience and knowledge to create something different from and other than what any member could do alone. Hargrove (1998) foresees decision-making in the new millennium as being more complex than any one person can do alone. Team members bring multiple perspectives to problems and subsequent decisions. Knowledge construction can result from team members working and learning together, thus creating new knowledge. This new knowledge can result in the third alternative as described by Covey (1990).

Dialogue should result in communication that leads to shared meaning within the family and the business. More effective communication can lead to positive relationships, characterized by more trust. Increased effectiveness in communication can also impact systems throughout the organization. According to Senge, (1990) there is a snowball effect. Decisions in one area affect most other decisions.

I learned several things from my experience with action research that promises to inform my future practice. First, I learned about the ethical nature of qualitative research. I found a dilemma in reporting my results. If I were absolutely fair to the study, I would have reported additional issues that would have helped the reader to better understand the study and my findings. However,

Facilitating dialogue and decision-making team members risked revealing deeply personal information in our meetings, and some of the information could not be divulged in a written document such as this.

I learned the value of time and commitment to a study such as this one. Learning dialogue takes a major investment of time on the part of those involved. I also learned that devoting adequate time between our meetings is a necessary aid to practice. When insufficient time is allotted for there is some remediation or relearning time needed.

I learned the value of trusting the process. We had three meetings in the span of five months before the participants experienced dialogue and decision-making. That took trust and blind faith on the part of participants. Yet, they expressed feelings of accomplishment and satisfaction from their progress in learning to dialogue.

I gained a new perspective on the relationship between theory and practice. Participants varied in terms of their responses to the materials I provided. Some liked reading theory more than others. Some preferred to get to the content very quickly and preferred short articles. Accommodating for these differences required some flexibility on my part.

I learned the importance of flexibility. Each day when I walked into the corporate office of Weeks & Leo I found it essential to tune into the important issues going on in the business and with participants individually, especially as



Facilitating dialogue and decision-making they related to the business. I needed to adapt to their agenda. As a researcher I could do that. Being sensitive to their needs seemed to make our meetings more productive.

I learned how much I am still learning about dialogue. Each time I inquire into the assumptions of others, I learn more about my own.

Finally, I learned that I have to let go of the outcomes. In dialogue the outcome is not predictable. As a facilitator of dialogue along with others, I protect the environment and keep it conducive to inquiry, make sure, with others, that we are demonstrating trust and respect for all involved and then "I let go."

There were also notable changes in the family business of Weeks & Leo. First, family members expressed overall better communication between and among themselves. There was a new awareness of communication patterns with the brother, who is another corporate officer but who was not involved in our study. The sisters expressed a strong desire to have him become involved in the dialogue process. In addition, communication with employees was changing, with more listening and learning taking place.

The participants recognized the need to set aside uninterrupted time on a regular basis to meet as a team for the purpose of dialogue and decision-making. They also recognized the need to focus on one or two decisions during dialogue and decision-making to make the most effective use of their meeting time.

## Facilitating dialogue and decision-making

Although the scope of my study was limited to the introduction of dialogue into one business setting, its results contribute to the small but growing literature base in the area of collaborative learning and the area of family business management. There is scant empirical evidence in the literature of a relationship between dialogue and decision-making in any organization. Although my study did not intend to identify a cause-effect relationship, it did strongly suggest that dialogue plays some constructive role in the decisions made by members of a particular business. Additional studies are needed to clarify the role of dialogue in decision-making. In the meantime, descriptive studies such as this one might be conducted in other organizational settings, in order to extend the literature base on which future empirical investigations might stand.

Action research refers to a variety of ways that practitioners inquire into their own practices. This study is an example of how such research can be done in a consultant-client environment. Other consultants are urged to examine this case in terms of its design and potential as a research tool for use in their own practice. To the extent that the conditions of this study are similar to their own practices, other consultants might find utility in the information that I provide about the facilitation of dialogue in a business setting.

Finally, there is room for interpretation in my findings, as they relate to the theoretical and conceptual literature in the areas of dialogue and collaborative

Facilitating dialogue and decision-making learning. I have provided a case of collaborative learning with an emphasis on the dialogue process. Such a case is now added to others that are cited in publications that speak to the general nature of dialogue and collaborative learning. Such cases have proven helpful to readers who are interested in understanding the complexities of these processes. I hope my own example will be as useful as those that precede it.

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### Postscript

After our final meeting I received a letter from Jane along with an updated copy of the history of Weeks & Leo. Her letter summed up the effect of our efforts. Jane said,

"Here is an updated history . . . . All three of us worked on it Wednesday, it was truly a team effort. As the afternoon wore on, we got very silly and thought of all kinds of things we could put in to this. We did lots of giggling. It was great! When I went home Wednesday evening, my son asked me if I had a good day at work. I told him I had a FUN day at work. That stopped him in his tracks. I told him it was the most fun I'd had at work since . . . I don't know that I've ever had a whole day at work that was fun. We credit you and all you have taught us about dialogue for the happy and healthy communications that have become apart of our days around here. We don't know how we can ever thank you for all you've done!

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## Facilitating dialogue and decision-making

### APPENDICES

## Facilitating dialogue and decision-making

### APPENDIX A

#### HISTORY OF WEEKS & LEO COMPANY

Facilitating dialogue and decision-making  
History of Weeks & Leo Company

The "family" part of a family business adds a dimension to the history of a business that separate it from typical business enterprises. Therefore I felt the history of this family business was important to this study. The company, Weeks & Leo traces its history back to 1872 when Lowell Chamberlain started the first Iowa drug company. Weeks & Leo today still manufacture his original formula of Chamberlain Golden Touch Lotion. In 1920 Carl Week's Armand Face Powder bought the D. Weeks Co & the D. C. Leo Companies. The newly merged companies were called Weeks & Leo and the name remains the same today. Weeks & Leo were known for their private label drug and toiletry lines. Weeks & Leo was a survivor in the Des Moines area from what once known as a meca for cosmetic manufacturing. In 1963 Arthur D. Peters joined Weeks & Leo as Vice-President and General Manager. He remained with the company over the next thirty years and introduced a variety of personalized label styles while continuing to upgrade their product line. The Arthur D. Peters family purchased Weeks & Leo upon the retirement of Hud Weeks in 1986. All six of the Peters' children worked at various times at the company during high school and college. Arthur D. Peters became President and CEO of Weeks & Leo at the time of purchase.

In 1996, the deaths of Marylin and Arthur Peters brought changes to Weeks & Leo. The next generation of the Peters family were now in control. Joe Peters

Facilitating dialogue and decision-making became the President and CEO of Weeks & Leo. Four of the six siblings are employed and part of the management as well as ownership of Weeks & Leo.

Weeks & Leo have diversified their customer base and line of products to include an upscale line of Weeks & Leo brand herbals. They presently carry 130 products including over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, herbals and toiletries. The local Des Moines plant has 23 full time employees plus sales representatives covering all fifty of the United States. Weeks & Leo continue to be a vital competitor in the private label product market in the US.

The history included several prominent Iowa families who are responsible for some of Des Moines' notable landmarks. The Wesley Acres Retirement home, formerly known as the West Chester, the oldest Des Moines example of Tudor-Jacobethan 17<sup>th</sup> century English architecture was built as a residence for Lowell Chamberlain. The Salisbury House, a seventeenth century Tudor Manor house was a six year project built for the family of Carl Weeks. The home was completed in 1927 costing nearly two million dollars. Filled with French impressionist art, rare books, tapestries, rugs and furniture most from Europe, the home survives today as a museum.

APPENDIX B  
CONFIDENTIALITY FORM

Facilitating dialogue and decision-making  
Dialogue and Decision-making in a Family Business

Confidentiality Form

My signature indicates my understanding of the importance of confidentiality regarding the material I read about participants in this study. I will not reveal the contents of this data outside of this research group as a protection to the confidentiality of those who participated in the study.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_



## Facilitating dialogue and decision-making

VITA

## Facilitating dialogue and decision-making

### VITA

Linda Tisue was born and raised in Iowa. She received her B. A. Degree in Social Studies Education from Coe College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa in 1970. She received her M. A. Degree in Special Education from Truman University in Kirksville, Missouri in 1980. She received her Educational Specialist Degree in Educational Administration in 1995, from Drake University, Des Moines, Iowa.

From 1970 to 1989 she worked in public education in Cedar Rapids, Springville, Centerville, and Des Moines, Iowa and Bloomington, Minnesota. She taught in both regular and special education classrooms at the secondary level, then served as a special education consultant and work experience instructor, transition specialist, program coordinator and staff development instructor. Linda started Unlimited Performance in 1989. She continues to work as a business consultant and performance coach with a focus on family owned businesses. In 1996, she began her doctoral studies in the College of Education at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. She also worked as a Graduate Research Assistant and Graduate Teaching Associate at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

Currently, Linda lives in Des Moines, Iowa with her husband, Phil E. Tisue. She balances her professional life with her commitment to family and volunteerism.