



An Introduction to the science of working better together

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Our aim in this session

- ... is to give you enough of a feel both for the logic and practice of ProSocial that you can decide if you would like to learn more about using it in your context.

I intend to do this by What we intend to do in this session

1. A didactic presentation regarding the three big ideas from economics, evolutionary theory and psychology informing PROSOCIAL.
2. Experientially lead you through some components of PROSOCIAL
 1. The individual ACT matrix.
 2. Brief mention of the group matrix
 3. The 8 core design principles of PROSOCIAL

How does that sound?

Our aims in building PROSOCIAL

- Primarily we are about enhancing cooperative, nurturing behaviour in groups.
- We want to go beyond self-interest to...
- ALTRUISTIC BEHAVIOUR = "Intentional action ultimately for the welfare of others that entails at least the possibility of either no benefit or a loss to the actor." (Sloan-Wilson, 2015, p. 1)

Big Idea #1: We are inherently rational and self-interested (thank you economics!)

Traditional Economics rests on the theory of rational choice

- Rationality assumption – humans will choose the action that is most likely to get them what they want.
- Value assumption – what humans want is to maximise benefits to the self.

“Love Actually”



Our view of human nature matters

- We get what we expect. Imagine if we could reframe our refugee debate from:
 - “How can we keep out people who might threaten our self-interest as Australians?”
- TO
- “How could we express our natural capacity to care for others while still caring for ourselves?”
 - Evidence from literally thousands of studies of child development show that, when we believe we live in a harsh, self-interested world, we are more likely to act in a harsh, self-interested manner.

Actually this is part of a bigger misunderstanding

I exist separately to you!

Consider this experiment (Muir et al., 2010) as a metaphor for typical organisational practice:

- Nine hens per cage
- Select for egg productivity in two different ways.
 - Select the best *individual* egg-layer within each group to reproduce.
 - Select the best *groups(cages)* of egg-layers to reproduce.

Then go out six generations...

Who is producing more eggs?

This is what happens when chickens that optimise their own outcomes are selected for



And this is what happens when we select for cooperation



- “In a real sense all life is inter-related. All men are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be... This is the inter-related structure of reality.”

— [Martin Luther King Jr., Letter from Birmingham Jail](#)

PROSOCIAL is the coming together of two big ideas:
Evolutionary theory and psychology

Big Idea #2: Group Selection

Evolutionary theory is particularly important because this is where the crazy idea that we are all self-interested came from in the first place!

- Survival of the fittest: In a competitive war between individual organisms, the aim of existence is to maximise the chances that I will produce living offspring.
- BUT evolutionary theory has moved on. We now recognise that selection can occur at both group and individual levels.

Why would we ever cooperate?

Individual-level adaptations are *locally advantageous*: Sharper teeth, Thicker fur, More cryptic coloration, More aggression

Social adaptations (such as altruism) tend to be *locally disadvantageous*.



Why would we ever cooperate?

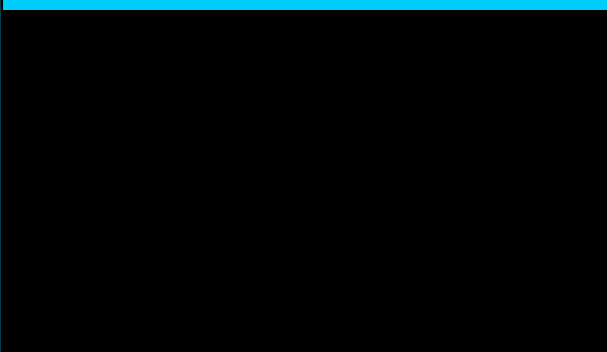


- Because “for the good of the group” traits are advantageous at a larger scale under certain conditions (but not all conditions, and never completely)
- Groups whose members behave “for the good of the group” survive and reproduce better than groups whose members are self-serving.

Selfishness beats altruism within groups. Altruistic groups beat selfish groups. (E.O. Wilson)



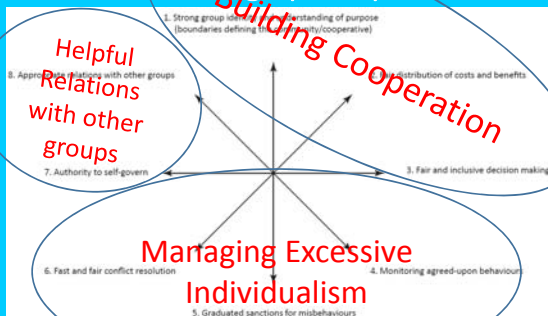
A video introduction – www.prosocialgroups.org



“The design principles follow from the evolutionary dynamics of cooperation in all species and the evolutionary history of our own species... ”
(Wilson, Ostrom & Cox 2013)



The 8 core design principles



A summary so far

- Evolutionary theory was used to justify ‘rational choice theory’ that argues humans are inherently self-interested
- This has had a profound and, I would argue, largely negative impact upon society.
- The development of multi-level selection theory gives us a new language to discuss evolutionary forces that allows for the possibility of acting in the collective interest being adaptive.
- So – all fixed OK! We can now go on and create a better world!

When unpleasant thoughts and feelings control behaviour, group members may:

- not speak up about issues with which they disagree because they fear angry arguments.
- take on too much work because they are afraid of the social disapproval of others if they say no to new tasks.
- refuse to take on challenging tasks because they are afraid of failing and being criticised, or they doubt their abilities.
- give up in disappointment after their repeated attempts to make contributions have been ignored.
- storm out in anger rather than find ways of staying constructively engaged with the group.

Big Idea #3: We need perspective taking and psychological flexibility to implement the principles effectively

So how can we enact the principles taking what we know about psychology into account?

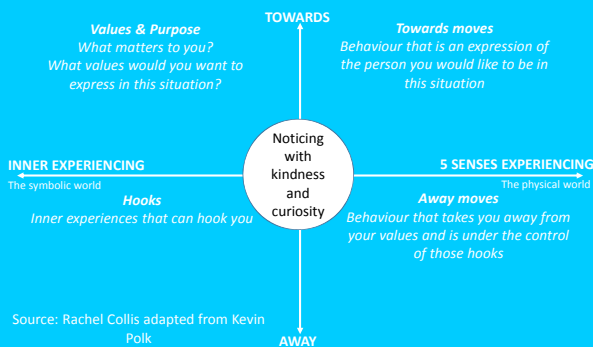
- To cooperate effectively through difficult times, we need to build:
 - **Cognitive perspective taking** – being able to imagine the thoughts and reasoning of the other
 - **Affective perspective taking** – accurately inferring the feelings of the other
 - **Psychological safety and trust** – to enable...
 - **Care for and valuing of others and empathic concern** for their wellbeing
 - Self-regulatory skills (i.e. **psychological flexibility**) to cope with difficult experiences and still move in the direction of co-operation.

Stage 1: The ACT Matrix

The ACT MATRIX can help you live in line with your values, even when you are in the grip of painful thoughts and feelings.

This is PSYCHOLOGICAL FLEXIBILITY

Pausing, Noticing, Choosing



I read to my daughter

INNER EXPERIENCING
The symbolic world

I begin to think of preparing for a talk tomorrow
I resent having to put her to bed - 'why can't my wife do it?'
I hardly notice what I am doing

5 SENSES EXPERIENCING
The physical world

I decide to prepare a talk. I commence work on the slides.

INNER EXPERIENCING
The symbolic world

I recall times when talks did not go well
I wonder about my own capabilities
I start imagining possible futures where it all goes wrong

5 SENSES EXPERIENCING
The physical world

And so I take all day, endlessly reding colours and editing specific words.

TOWARDS

Am I living my values? Is my behaviour aligned with my overall purpose?

AWAY

... or not?

Imagining a context of cooperation (e.g. team, family). What do you want to DO more or less of? What do people you admire do more or less than you?

I want to own my convictions and speak up more often about what I see needs to be done
I want to help my team become a centre of excellence for compassionate care

INNER EXPERIENCING
The symbolic world

5 SENSES EXPERIENCING
The physical world

AWAY

Make sure

- It implicates you (from complaint to commitment).
- There is room for improvement
- Its framed in the positive.

BUT most critically:

- It's actually important TO YOU (and better still if it also matters to others your care about)

0 = Unimportant to me

10 = Extremely Important To Me

What values do you want to express in this situation? What qualities are characteristic of you at your best in your work, relations and life?

TOWARDS

I value BROADMINDEDNESS,
AUTHENTICITY - I want to be whole.
I value LEARNING - it would help to be connected.
My strengths are perspective taking, and caring deeply for others

I want to own my convictions and speak up more often about what I see needs to be done
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INNER EXPERIENCING
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AWAY

What are you doing or not doing that works against acting in line with the top two quadrants?

I value **BROADMINDEDNESS**, **AUTHENTICITY** - I want to be whole. I value **LEARNING** - it would help to be corrected.

My strengths are perspective taking, and caring deeply for others

INNER EXPERIENCING The symbolic world

TOWARDS

I want to own my convictions and speak up more often about what I see needs to be done
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5 SENSES EXPERIENCING The physical world

I sugar coat my words, I withhold what I really think, I say something once and if the person doesn't respond favourably I get angry or check out.
I let other things crowd my schedule. I don't make time for the important/non-urgent

AWAY

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What hooks (thoughts or feelings) make sense of these away behaviours? What shows up when you imagine fully engaging in towards moves?

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INNER EXPERIENCING The symbolic world

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5 SENSES EXPERIENCING The physical world

MEMORIES: making a mistake in public and feeling humiliated. **THOUGHTS:** "Maybe I am stupid or at least not competent", "If I speak up, people will think I am a trouble maker and will stop listening to me." **PEOPLE** will get angry at me or stop liking me. **FEELINGS:** Scared, anxious, jittery, heart racing

AWAY

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What hooks (thoughts or feelings) show up when you imagine fully engaging in towards moves? What hooks make your away moves make perfect sense?

I value **BROADMINDEDNESS**, **AUTHENTICITY** - I want to be whole. I value **LEARNING** - it would help to be corrected.

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So what can we do about all this?

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Every moment of every day is a choice point!

INNER EXPERIENCING Values & Purpose
What matters to you? What values would you want to express in this situation?

BEHAVIOUR Towards moves
Behaviour that is an expression of the person you would like to be in this situation

Noticing with kindness and curiosity

Hooks
Inner experiences that can hook you

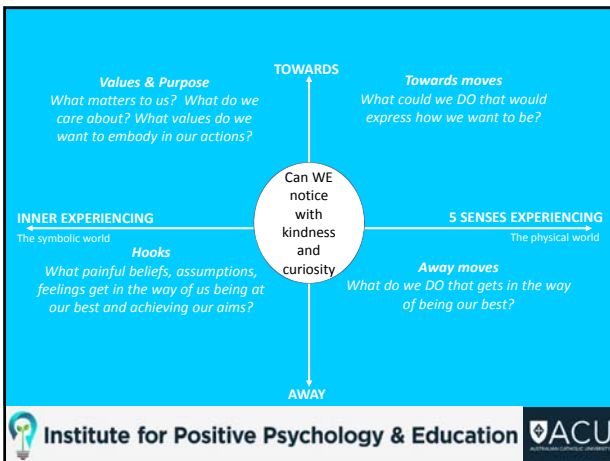
Away moves
Behaviour that takes you away from your values and is under the control of those hooks

Ciarrochi, J. V., Bailey, A., & Harris, R. (2014). *The Weight Escape: Penguin*.

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Stage 2: Now we can do the same thing at the group level

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How building perspective taking, empathy and psych flex helps us do the 8 principles well

- 1: Shared Identity and Common Purpose: vulnerability → trust/safety, recognition of commonalities, perspective taking, empathy
- 2: Equitable distribution of costs and benefits: different perceived costs and benefits, reduce pain of inequity perceptions, difference
- 3: Inclusive decision making: more easily sharing information, challenging ideas, less impulsivity, more long-term than short-term goals. Reduce stress of leading through decisions. Reduce egocentric decisions designed to impress rather than be effective




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4: monitoring agreed-upon behaviours – helps create a living map of what needs to be monitored to avoid defensiveness or when well-meaning but go off track.

5: graduated sanctions – navigating between coming down too hard to stop pain, and avoiding pain altogether. Not over-reacting to conflict. Use power more kindly – e.g. dismissing someone harshly or as a learning opportunity

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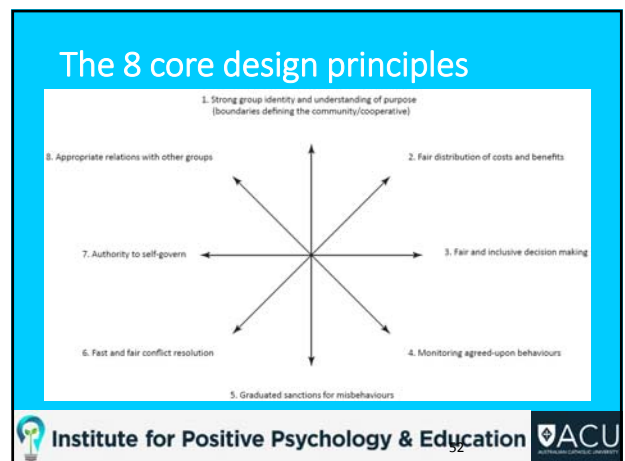
6: fast and fair conflict resolution. Taking the perspective of others, empathise with them and tolerate the pain of conflict, helps transform the meaning of conflict from something to be avoided into something to be used for learning and growth.

7: authority to self-govern and 8: appropriate relations with other groups. psychologically flexible environments - The system has to afford the possibility of choosing wisely rather than reacting defensively in the presence of difficulties

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Stage 3: Using the design principles to rate the group, the environment and how to improve

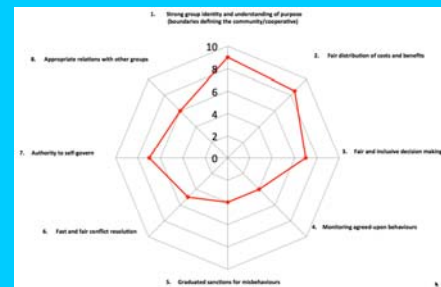
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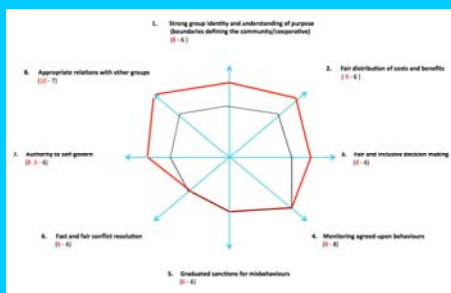
Now its time to get to work!

- Identify a group with which you are familiar (work, family, club, etc)
- Use the handout spoke diagram to map
- Rate your group on each of these principles (very poor = towards centre, very good = towards edge).
- Join the ratings to create a 'wheel'.

Marketing Dept: Map of their own performance



SALES DEPARTMENT AND THE WHOLE ORGANISATION



If you would like to take this forward with a group

- The approach is free to use, including an online course at www.prosocialgroups.org.
- We only ask that
 1. you acknowledge this is the PROSOCIAL approach (e.g. use the PROSOCIAL logo and/or cite www.prosocialgroups.org)
 2. you and your groups be willing to be involved in the research
- Contact paulw.atkins@acu.edu.au or 0412 922 482 for assistance in getting started.