

## **The Value of 5/25 RoundTables in a Workplace**

### **THE VALUE OF 5/25 ROUNDTABLES IN A WORKPLACE: TOWARD A TOOL FOR WORKPLACE RENEWAL**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

Previous research on the use of RoundTables in both classroom and professional group settings (Gabriele, 2002, 2011, 2014, 2015) has demonstrated a positive impact on the creation of healthy learning communities, positive identity development, and respectful behavior. More specifically, the use of a RoundTable design fosters sustainable, inclusive, and emancipatory learning environments. RoundTables are designed with a strict format in which a Facilitator reads a script allowing five minutes of reading and twenty-five minutes of equal-turn comments among participants. The proposed research seeks to explore whether implementation of a monthly 5/25 RoundTable, conducted via Zoom, are generalizable in a workplace and to what extent employees perceive the use of a RoundTable format as fostering a 1.) sustainable, 2.) inclusive, and 3.) emancipatory learning environment. Additionally, this study seeks to determine whether employees demonstrate an increased desire for individual workplace learning after implementation of six, monthly 5/25 RoundTables. Use of participant surveys, observer mapping, and time-and-task analysis of RoundTable Guides and recorded sessions will be used as study data. In organizations where workplace and individual learning is not a priority, use of the monthly 5/25 RoundTable format may demonstrate positive results, not only in workplace culture, fostering positive identity and respectful behavior but will also affect an increased desire for individual learning and knowledge sharing among employees.

**Keywords:** roundtable

#### **BACKGROUND**

The concept of systemic renewal is not new. Beginning with the publication of Boulding's General Systems Theory, (1956), in which facilitation of communication between disparate fields within the sciences – formal, phenomenological, and normative - was sought to provide a common language to discuss systemic problems, there has been an increasing interest in applying systemic renewal in physical, living, cognitive, social, and technological systems. Those interested in general systems theory within cognitive and social systems such as education, psychology, organizational development, and industrial organizational psychology seek, not only to understand the complex interaction among and within systems, but to design systems and interventions that assist in renewal from global and national levels to the individual level. (Hieronymi, 2013)

Renewal of education has long been the battle cry of law makers on state and national

levels and within individual districts, schools, and classrooms. Indeed, a new consciousness is emerging with whole school communities seeking a more emancipatory solution using a general systems theory approach. **Previous research on the use of RoundTables in both classroom and professional group settings (Gabriele, 2002, 2011, 2014, 2015) has demonstrated a positive impact on the creation of healthy learning communities, positive identity development, and respectful behavior. More specifically, the use of a RoundTable fosters sustainable, inclusive, and emancipatory learning environments.**

Systems thinkers seek systemic renewal, defined as awakening new energy in people and social systems (Gabriele, 2014), implementing tools in systemic redesign using inclusivity, sustainability, and emancipatory factors hoping to attain outcomes in which these factors remain guiding principles within the system. However, Gabriele (2011, 2014) states, in many organizations and systems, engaging whole communities in authentic collaboration and renewal is often not feasible and, if it were, there still exists unequal distribution of power leaving disadvantaged members no voice. The use of RoundTables in classrooms and school systems has shown positive results in addressing the imbalance of power by focusing on three important features: an equal turn format (inclusivity), small implementation size (continuing), and user-selected topics (emancipatory).

### RoundTable Description

Implementation of a RoundTable consists of individuals gathered, each with a *RoundTable Guide* consisting of five short paragraphs clarifying how the RoundTable works. Key principles of the RoundTable are that each participant has equal turns and only one response, "Thank you", is allowed. The Facilitator Guide cues participants to take turns reading aloud a script and/or the Facilitator-selected article or topic for the day. In a 5/25 RoundTable, five minutes are devoted to reading the script with the remaining 25 minutes divided equally for participant comment (Gabriele, 2014).

The format may, over time, evolve to suit the needs of the group. While some participants may initially view use of the script as not necessary, there are surprising benefits to its use. The format allows participants to revisit principles, give brief comments on a relevant article, and hear authentic viewpoints of peers. It allows individuals time for reflection. Rotation of Facilitators allows for peer leadership. The script is unintrusive allowing all participants to direct attention to the content of the RoundTable. It is time-saving and easy to co-design and improve. Group-designed evolving scripts may secure, preserve, and distribute expertise among group

members. More importantly, it may facilitate conscious self-guided evolution (Gabriele, 2014). While this evolution has been demonstrated at the group level in previous studies, these findings give rise to the question of whether the RoundTable format sparks learning beyond the allotted 5/25 (30 minute) period and whether participants are more likely to seek self-directed learning activities and knowledge sharing as a result of the RoundTable experience.

## ISSUE

National Inspection Testing and Certification, Corporation (NITC) is a third-party certification and examination administrator for the plumbing, piping, and construction industries. Employees work in one of three locations: Los Angeles, California (five employees), Metairie, Louisiana (two employees), and Joliet, Illinois (one employee). Four of NITC's examinations are accredited by ANAB, the American National Standards Institute National Accrediting Body, to the ISO/IEC 17024:2012 Conformity Assessment – General Requirements For Bodies Operating Certification Of Persons. As a result, their Quality Management System is certified to ISO 9001: 2015 International Standards. Employees are required to adhere these standards while administering services, allowing for little variation in work processes. Meeting accreditation and certification standards also means that any change in one process may require change in other process with significant documentation for verification. These changes are assessed by ANAB and ISO auditors annually. Organizational learning and innovative problem solving, while not discouraged, are also not a high priority and may well be a byproduct of a system that rewards absence of variation.

For the past three years, annual review of employees and their work processes and individual goals revealed employees frequently felt there was a lack of communication related to organizational and process changes. Employees did not have learning goals for the next year and were not inclined to take classes outside of work. There were no longer monthly staff meetings due to time taken for meetings. With transition to remote work within the last year, employees saw less of each other in each of the two offices. As a result, there was an increased desire to connect by way of a monthly meeting. Despite this, no employee organized a meeting.

## RESOLUTION

A school classroom can also be seen as a busy workplace. Results of previous

RoundTable research within school systems (Gabrielle, 2011, 2015) demonstrated positive impacts toward systemic renewal showing exceptional results for inclusivity and sustainability with emancipatory conditions **suggested**. This study seeks to replicate Gabriele's 2011 and 2015 research findings among a group of adults, at different work locations, as opposed to a classroom of fourth graders, by introducing the RoundTable format in a workplace.

As time was the greatest concern among employees, having been seen as the "cause" for not continuing previous, on-going, staff meetings, the author proposed implementation of six, monthly, 5/25 RoundTable meetings, via Zoom, for all three locations.

Permission for participation in this study was obtained by all employees through email correspondence. Two RoundTable sessions, conducted and recorded via Zoom, have already taken place. The author acted as Facilitator for the first two sessions in which employees were invited to comment on topics. The first set of questions used for the RoundTable topic were selected by the author (Appendix A). The second set of questions used for the RoundTable topic were elicited from employees, via email (Appendix B).

## Evaluation Design

Data will include time-and-task analysis of RoundTable Guides and how they change. Follow-up emails, debriefing and interviews with RoundTable Facilitators, and participant views, via email, will be collected.

At the end of six months, a self-reported, multiple-choice, questionnaire (Gabrielle, 2015) will be administered to measure participant experience of inclusivity, sustainability, and emancipatory domains of the 5/25 RoundTable. Inclusivity is defined as meeting the criteria of being democratically participatory. Sustainability is defined as meeting the criteria of being consistent, used monthly, with no deviation from the format. Emancipatory is defined as meeting the criteria of experiencing unanticipated positive learning (Gabrielle, 2011, 2015). Additional questions, related to individual, self-directed, learning and knowledge sharing occurring outside of the 5/25 RoundTable, will be asked as part of the multiple-choice questionnaire (Appendix C).

## CONSEQUENCES

### Unanticipated Consequences

Questioning the use of the script format has already occurred. “I don’t see the point of reading the actual format itself unless your goal is to get us used to not speaking unless called upon and intent listening? I personally would rather use that time to hear from everyone... but I think we get the gist of the format.” However, all employees agreed to wait a total of six meetings before adjusting the script.

As of this writing, one employee volunteered to facilitate the next RoundTable. The Facilitator is exploring whether reading an article or watching a video for five minutes may be worth pursuing as part of the format. This individual is actively searching for articles with content relevant to topics discussed in the last RoundTable. All participants have agreed to extend the meeting time from thirty to forty-five minutes for the next RoundTable. Employees have expressed how much they like “seeing” one another in this venue.

### Anticipated Consequences

It is expected that participants will continue the 5/25 RoundTable beyond six months. It is anticipated that results from previous research in school settings will be replicated in the workplace with participants reporting the RoundTable experience as being inclusive, sustainable, and emancipatory. It is expected that, with the rotation of Facilitator, shared reading of articles, and discussion of topics, employees will experience increased learning and knowledge sharing outside of the 5/25 RoundTable meetings.

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### APPENDIX A

#### 5/25 RoundTable Guideline for Meetings (Level 1)

FACILITATOR GUIDE (Different Facilitator Each Session)	ROUNDTABLE GUIDELINES (Level 1 Basics)
<p>(Don't read words in parentheses)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Welcome, everyone. We are exploring a new meeting format: the 5/25 RoundTable. Let's suspend judgment and experience it without stopping for 30 minutes today and for a few months. Later, we'll talk and consider its potential. For our reflection today, I'll suggest the topic _____.</li> <li>2. I'll ask for 5 volunteers to read the Basic Readings/RoundTable Guidelines. Our Format?... Thank you, _____. Our Purposes?... Thank you, _____. Guidelines for Listening?... Thank you, _____. Guidelines for Responding?... Thank you, _____. Guidelines for Speaking?... Thank you, _____.</li> <li>3. Again, today's suggested topic for our reflection is: _____. We would like to hear everyone's thoughts about this topic, or anything else that is on your mind. With today's</li> </ol>	<p><b><i>Our Format:</i></b> In the 5/25 RoundTable, we allot 5 minutes to readings, and 25 minutes to individual comments, time distributed equally among all present.</p> <p><b><i>Our Purposes:</i></b> We use readings as overviews – a Facilitator Guide and Basic Readings - for four main benefits: (1) We cover a great deal of information in a very short time. (2) This leaves maximum time for each of us to present our ideas. The result is we hear everyone's views and still develop the agenda. (3) We rotate the facilitator role for a new experience of shared leadership. (4) With our evolving purposes, we can create new Basic Readings.</p> <p><b><i>Guidelines for Listening:</i></b> Listening to the 5 minutes of readings allows us the opportunity to quiet our minds and silently reflect on what we hear and our inner thoughts. Listening to each other's comments, we experience and appreciate a great variety of viewpoints.</p> <p><b><i>Guidelines for Responding:</i></b> The facilitator will say "thank you" after you</p>

<p>attendance, let's each take about _____ minutes. (We may use a timer to help us.) Please speak so that everyone can hear. What you say is important to us. Let's go around the circle starting on my left. Time permitting, we may go around several times.</p> <p>4. Is there anyone who hasn't spoken who is ready to speak now?... Anyone else?...</p> <p>5. It's time to close the RoundTable. Thank you for your comments. If you have something more you want to say, please speak to someone about it later.</p>	<p>speak. Please save all other responses to each other until after the RoundTable. We don't want to divert each other or ourselves from our own individual learning. If someone says something you'd like to build on, you may want to make a note of it so you can do so during your turn.</p> <p><b><i>Guidelines for Speaking:</i></b> Let's each take only one turn to speak and speak about _____ minutes, so we can offer everyone a turn. Or you may just listen today. At your turn, please say something about the topic or agenda or anything else that is on your mind. Try to end your comments on a positive note.</p>
<p>TOPIC FOR TODAY (Suggestions and Options) Facilitator Choice and/or...</p> <p><b>1<sup>st</sup> Session:</b> 1. What projects/situations did you leave behind to come here today? What could happen that would be helpful/valuable in our life at work? What do you enjoy most in your work life?</p> <p><b>Continuing:</b> 2. What did you experience this month that was interesting or important learning for you? In what way was it important?</p>	

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APPENDIX B

5/25 RoundTable Guideline for Meetings (Level 1)

<p>FACILITATOR GUIDE (Different Facilitator Each Session)</p>	<p>ROUNDTABLE GUIDELINES (Level 1 Basics)</p>
<p>(Don't read words in parentheses)</p> <p>6. Welcome, everyone. We are exploring a new meeting format: the 5/25 RoundTable. Let's suspend judgment and experience it without stopping for 30 minutes today and for a few months. Later, we'll talk and consider its potential. For our reflection today, I'll suggest the topic _____.</p> <p>7. I'll ask for 5 volunteers to read the Basic Readings/RoundTable Guidelines. Our Format?... Thank you, _____. Our Purposes?... Thank you, _____. Guidelines for Listening?... Thank you, _____. Guidelines for Responding?... Thank you, _____. Guidelines for Speaking?... Thank you, _____.</p> <p>8. Again, today's suggested topic for our reflection is: _____. We would like to hear everyone's thoughts about this topic, or anything else that is on your mind. With today's attendance, let's each take about _____ minutes. (We may use a timer to help us.) Please speak so that everyone can hear. What you say is important to us. Let's go around the circle starting on my left. Time permitting, we may go around several times.</p> <p>9. Is there anyone who hasn't spoken who is ready to speak now?... Anyone else?...</p> <p>10. It's time to close the RoundTable. Thank you for your comments. If you</p>	<p><b>Our Format:</b> In the 5/25 RoundTable, we allot 5 minutes to readings, and 25 minutes to individual comments, time distributed equally among all present.</p> <p><b>Our Purposes:</b> We use readings as overviews – a Facilitator Guide and Basic Readings - for four main benefits: (1) We cover a great deal of information in a very short time. (2) This leaves maximum time for each of us to present our ideas. The result is we hear everyone's views and still develop the agenda. (3) We rotate the facilitator role for a new experience of shared leadership. (4) With our evolving purposes, we can create new Basic Readings.</p> <p><b>Guidelines for Listening:</b> Listening to the 5 minutes of readings allows us the opportunity to quiet our minds and silently reflect on what we hear and our inner thoughts. Listening to each other's comments, we experience and appreciate a great variety of viewpoints.</p> <p><b>Guidelines for Responding:</b> The facilitator will say "thank you" after you speak. Please save all other responses to each other until after the RoundTable. We don't want to divert each other or ourselves from our own individual learning. If someone says something you'd like to build on, you may want to make a note of it so you can do so during your turn.</p> <p><b>Guidelines for Speaking:</b> Let's each take only one turn to speak and speak about _____ minutes, so we can offer everyone a turn. Or you may just listen today. At your turn, please say something about the topic or agenda or anything else that is on</p>



<p>have something more you want to say, please speak to someone about it later.</p>	<p>your mind. Try to end your comments on a positive note.</p>
<p>TOPIC FOR TODAY (Suggestions and Options) Facilitator Choice and/or...</p> <p><b>2nd Session:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What did you experience this month that was interesting or important learning for you? In what way was it important?</li> <li>2. What challenges or successes have you experienced with customer service, in the last month?</li> <li>3. During the last month, what communication issues have you encountered and how did you deal with them? In the future how would you like to deal with them? Or are you really pleased with how you handled them?</li> <li>4. What are you anticipating as things are opening up and people are returning to their offices?</li> </ol> <p><b>Continuing:</b></p>	

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## APPENDIX C

Answer these questions as best you can!		A ☺	B	C ☹	D	E ☺
		NO!!	no	?	yes	YES!!
1	In general, do you learn a lot in the RoundTable?					
2	In general, do you like what you do in the RoundTable?					
3	Do you see any good (positive) changes in yourself because of your participation in the RoundTable?					
4	Do you have more confidence?					
5	Do you express yourself better?					
6	Do you know more about or understand the subject matter better?					
7	Do you like yourself better?					
8	Do you like the people you work with better?					
9	Do you like work better?					
10	Are they important changes?					
11	How do you feel about those changes in yourself?					
12	Do you see any good (positive) changes in your fellow employees because of their participation in the RoundTable?					
13	Do you think fellow employees have more confidence?					
14	Do you think fellow employees understand the subject matter better?					
15	Do you think fellow employees treat one another better?					
16	Do you think fellow employees interact more?					
17	Are the changes you see in fellow employees big important changes?					
18	How do you feel about those changes in fellow employees?					
19	About RoundTable participation, does everyone get a fair turn reading?					
20	Does everyone get a fair turn speaking?					
21	Does everyone get a fair turn hearing everyone else's ideas?					
22	Does everyone get a fair turn being RoundTable Leader?					
23	Does everyone get a fair turn adding changes to the RoundTable Guide?					
24	Does everyone get a fair turn choosing activities or topics?					
25	How do you feel about that?					
26	Would you like to do more RoundTables at work, beyond the six months?					
27	Would you like to do more RoundTables at work, meeting more than once a month?					
28	Would you like to do RoundTables at home?					
29	Was it easy to learn how to do the RoundTable process?					
30	Was it easy to act as RoundTable Leader?					
(Gabriele, 2011)						
31	Did you learn anything of particular interest as a result of participating in the RoundTable?					
32	Did RoundTable participation spark workplace learning?					
33	Did you spend any extra time learning, outside of work, as a result of your RoundTable experience?					
34	Did you speak with fellow employees more, as a result of your RoundTable participation?					
<b>Is there anything else you'd like to say? Please write on the back!</b>		NO!! A ☺	no B	? ☹ C	yes D	YES!! E ☺