TEAMWORK AND COMMUNICATION ACTION SERIES

Improving Patient Outcomes through Effective Teamwork and Communication

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BC PATIENT SAFETY & QUALITY COUNCIL

Working Together. Accelerating Improvement.

Introduction

While technical skills are a vital part of health care delivery, a growing body of evidence highlights the importance of non-technical skills in influencing the outcomes for patient care and improving safety behaviour in the workplace.[1-4] Non-technical skills include such elements as leadership, decision-making, situation awareness, communication and teamwork - elements of the team culture.[1,3]

Positive shifts in team culture are linked to improved clinical outcomes and patient satisfaction. Effective teamwork and communication in health care delivery can have an immediate and positive impact on patient safety and quality of care.[1,2] These shifts also have tangible benefits for health care providers, teams and organizations by reducing work-related conflict and stress, fostering team communication to reduce harassment and bullying, and improving job satisfaction and perceptions of working conditions.[3,4]

In response to this evidence as well as system demand, the BC Patient Safety & Quality Council (the Council) launched a free, 12-week Action Series in February 2017 with the aim of improving teamwork and communication within the BC health care system. The Teamwork and Communication Action Series sought to respond to these challenges by providing an interactive educational opportunity meant to introduce the behaviours required for effective teamwork, the key elements of effective communication and common tools that support successful communication within a team.

A call to action was disseminated in late February and received an overwhelming response. Fifty teams from across the province signed up to take part in the Action Series, which consisted of four, one-hour learning webinars complemented by action period guides and activities designed to reinforce webinar learning. Unable to meet system demand for the first series, there are 26 teams on the waitlist for subsequent ones.

This report summarizes the experiences of participating teams and the evaluation results.

Purpose of Evaluation Report

The purpose of this evaluation is to examine participant feedback and pre-post outcomes of the first Teamwork and Communication Action Series offered by the Council, as well as to understand key lesson.

Ultimately, this evaluation seeks to answer the following questions:

- Did the content and delivery of the Action Series provide value to participants?
- What immediate impact did the Action Series have on the way they work together, communicate, navigate conflict, and trust each other?
- What improvements could be made to the structure of the Action Series which could be utilized for future Action Series?

Data Sources

Data in this report were provided from the following sources:

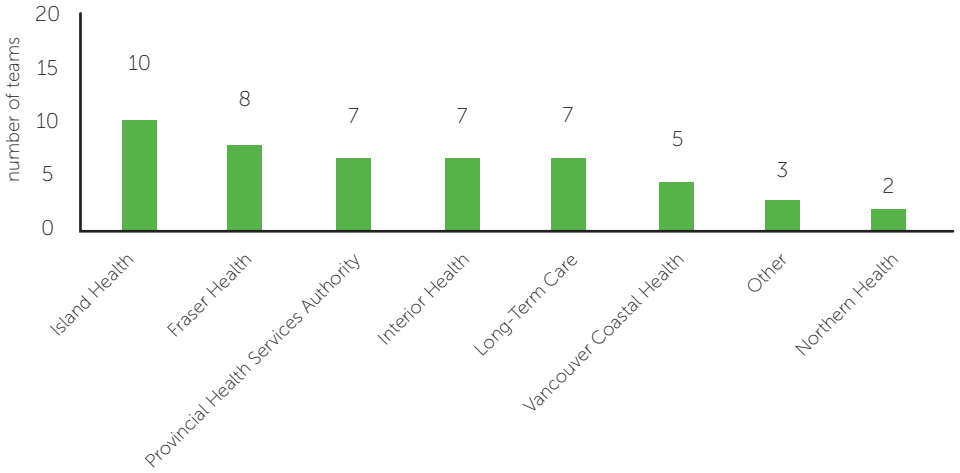
1. **Needs assessment:** completed when a team signed up for the Action Series;
2. **Webinar evaluation surveys:** sent to participants at the end of every webinar and Action Period;
3. **Follow-up evaluation survey:** sent after the Action Series was over; and
4. **Follow-up interviews:** with selected individuals.

The data used for this evaluation provide rich feedback from the first Teamwork and Communication Action Series; however, there are some limitations to the conclusions that can be drawn from this data. One challenge was obtaining post-evaluation feedback from busy point-of-care clinicians. A low response rate lends to a strong possibility of selection bias. That is, teams that were more engaged in the Action Series were more likely to complete the survey. In the future, increasing accountability to complete Action Series evaluations will be important. One such accountability could be to require the post-series evaluations to be completed prior to issuing team certificates of participation.

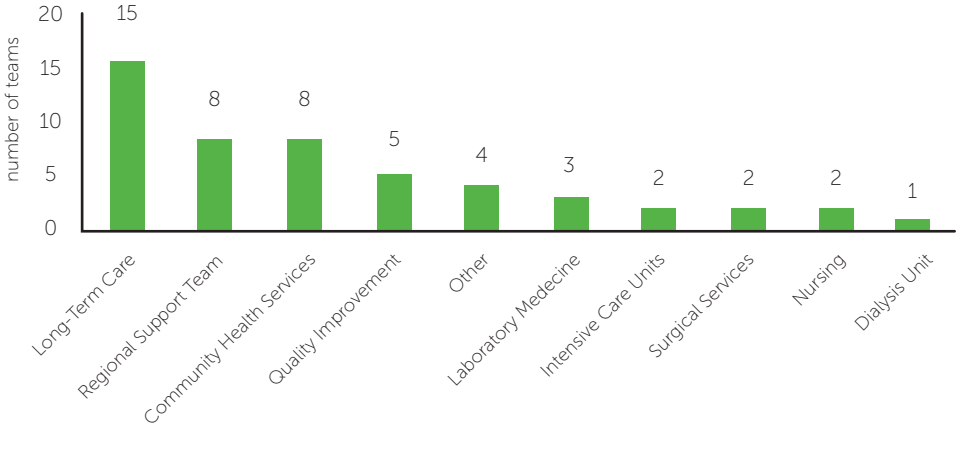
In addition, we also know that improved teamwork and communication are part of a larger shift in workplace culture.[5,6] Sustained shifts in culture take time to fully integrate and produce positive transformation within teams.[6] Culture is developed, transmitted and reinforced through a system of rituals, beliefs and values. These facets of an organization are deep-rooted, and therefore take time to change. They are also difficult to measure. To truly assess the impact of the Action Series, moving forward we would require longitudinal data at defined points post-completion, using a validated or well-accepted measurement tool. This data would no doubt provide a deeper understanding of how and to what degree participants were able to improve communication and teamwork after taking part in the Action Series.

Participant Demographics

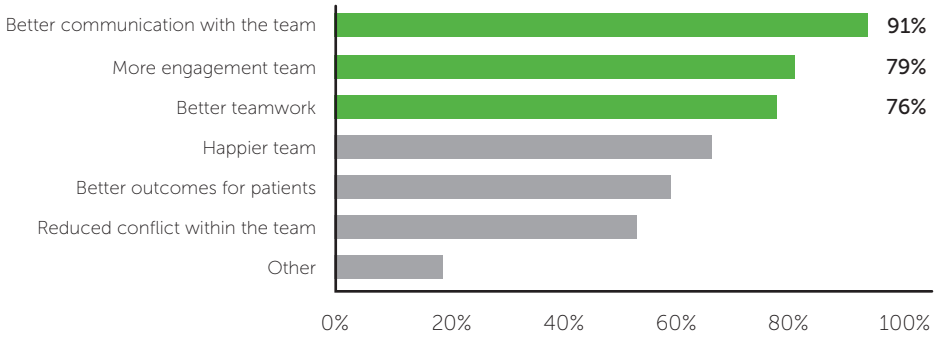
When factoring in team members for all 50 teams, 287 people participated in the Action Series from across the province. There was representation from almost all health authorities as well as from private/public long-term care homes and other publicly-funded organizations.



Teams that participated in the Action Series came from a diverse range of backgrounds, with the largest proportion of participating teams working in long-term care, followed by regional support teams and community health service teams (see Appendix A).



When asked why teams wanted to participate in the Action Series, 91.2 % were hoping to achieve better communication within their teams. Building a more engaged team and improving teamwork followed closely for second and third place, respectively.

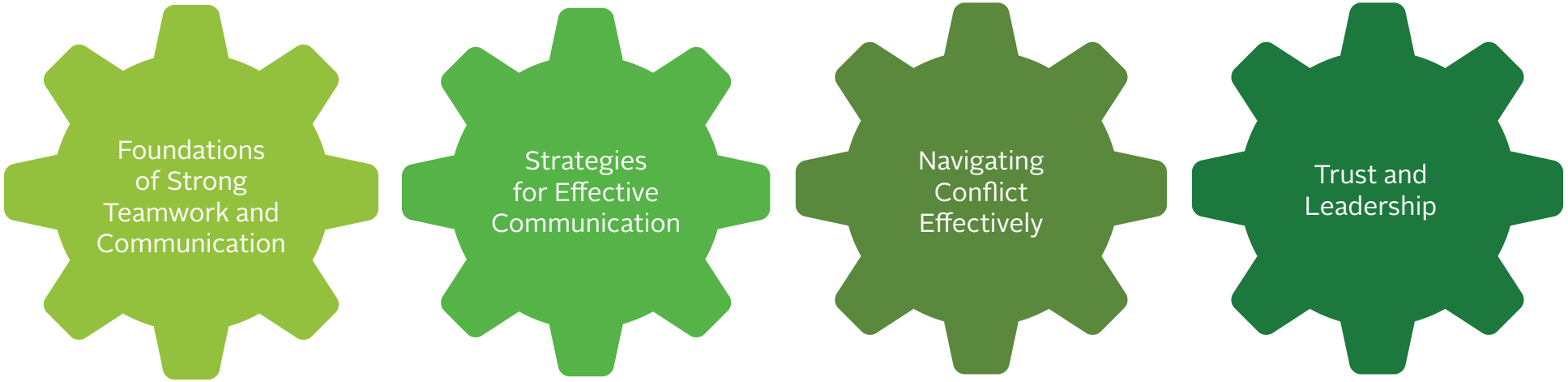


Participant Demographics Key Takeaways:

- There was a well-represented spread of skill sets and professional backgrounds participating in the Teamwork and Communication Action Series.
- The majority of participants signed up for the Teamwork and Communication Action Series looking to improve communication within their teams, have a more engaged team and achieve overall better teamwork.

Formal Webinars

Four interactive webinars were held over the course of the Action Series using WebEx as the communication platform. Each webinar taught new skills and techniques for participants to employ in improving teamwork and communication. The four webinar sessions involved the following topics:



Underlined the importance of team culture and non-technical skills, and identified elements that contribute to successful communication such as mitigated speech, power distance index and psychological safety.

Covered both unstructured (sense-making, direct, triangulation) and structured (SBAR, huddles, three Ws) communication.

Reviewed the causes and costs of conflict in teams, personal conflict styles and how they influence engagement in conflict. Explored tools and strategies to help navigate conflict effectively.

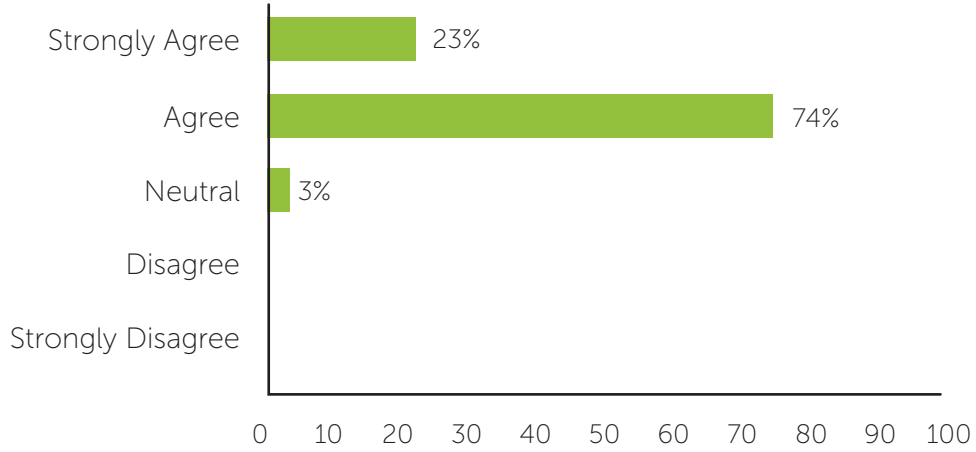
Highlighted the importance of team trust, ways to build trust, leading with authenticity, the power of distributed leaders and fostering informal leadership.

WEBINAR 1:

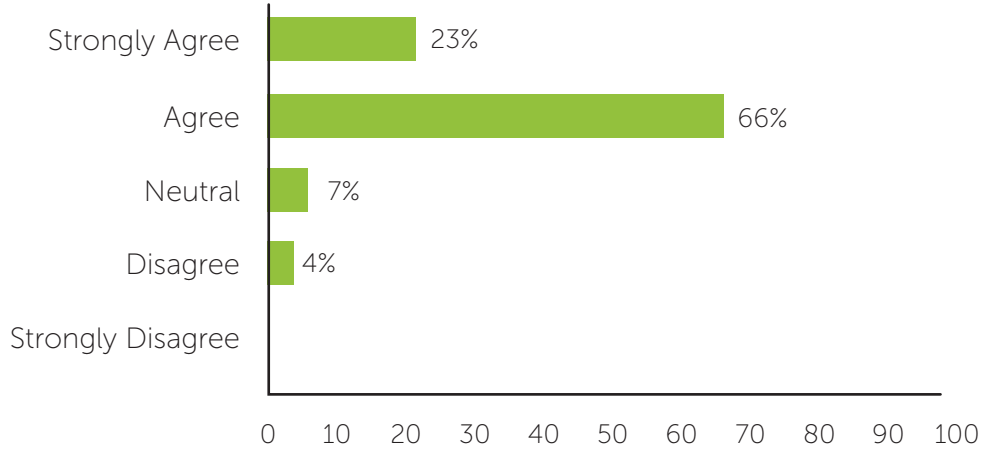
FOUNDATIONS OF STRONG TEAMWORK AND COMMUNICATION

The charts and graphs that follow summarize the participant feedback after completing Webinar 1.

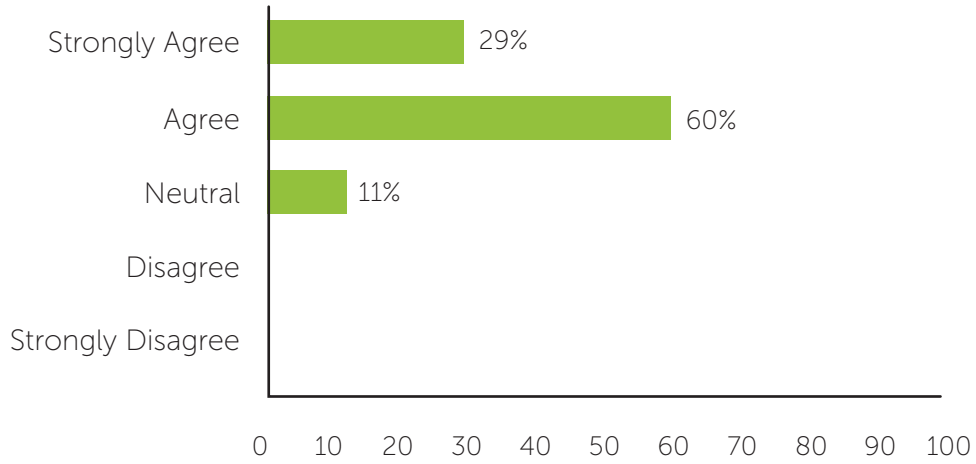
I learned something new at this session.



I will be able to apply this learning to my work.



I would recommend this session to a colleague.



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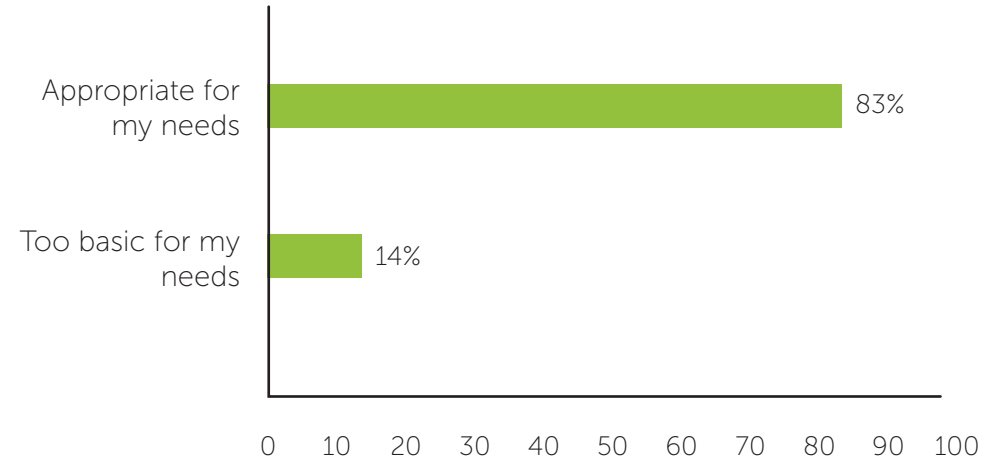


What did you like best about the session?

- 9 — Content covered in the session was useful / interesting
- 2 — Session provided a good introduction / overview of the topic
- 1 — Information was accessible (e.g., easy to understand)

- 5 — Information was effectively delivered (e.g., clearly presented, well-paced, good facilitation)
- 5 — Enjoyed the interaction and engagement
- 3 — Good use of materials (e.g., literature, practical examples, technology)

- 2 — Sparked interest in subject (e.g., looking forward to learning more)
- 5 — Promoted interpersonal awareness (e.g. teamwork, insight into others' perspectives)
- 6 — Other responses
- 11 — None / no response

OTHER RESPONSES

"Considering it is just an introduction, it's a good start. I can see where feedback may state there could be more content, but I'm happy with the level of ideas/ introduction/information provided today."

"I feel it addressed things I am already aware of, but gave a name to them. I look forward to developing strategies that will help improve workplace communication and relationships."

"Knowing that we are not alone. Most facilities/work environments face the same difficulties, and there is hope for a positive change."

"Multidisciplinary and with representation from across the province."

"It brought together the whole team to listen to the same words and put forth input that is not filtered through another discipline. Interactive, which made it more engaging. The information was useful, I can already think of a particular power differential where other staff do not feel comfortable speaking out around one individual – who is NOT a supervisor. It is helpful to have a different lens on this situation."

What could have made this session better?

NEED FOR ADDITIONAL MATERIALS
(number of pariticipants)

- 4 — Provide better / more examples
- 2 — Example of teamwork agreement
- 1 — Supply pre-readings

TECHNOLOGY-RELATED ISSUES
(number of pariticipants)

- 5 — WebEx poll-related issues
- 4 — Information and support required (e.g., login, no phone, poor recording)

MISC.
(number of pariticipants)

- 2 — More interactive components
- 2 — No changes
- 5 — Other responses
- 14 — None / no response

OTHER RESPONSES

"I listened to the recording. The quality was fair, it had a lot of pauses like someone was turning off and on a mic, yet it was mid-sentence so I'm thinking it's a recording glitch rather than user error. It made it tough to listen, as it was annoyingly present throughout."

"Since I felt the information provided was too basic, my suggestion is to shorten the time for this session."

"Many of the examples given were related to nursing. There are many disciplines taking part that are not nurses and have challenging team working environments. Sometimes it was hard to apply the learning to our experiences."

"I did not have a lot of time to be prepared for the session."

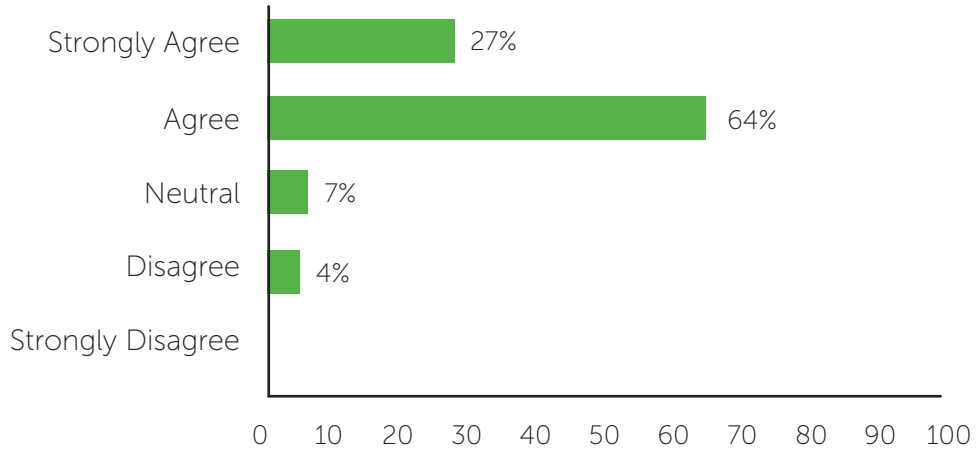
"Could perhaps have the questions testing if the tech worked to be focused more on the content and us vs. the lighter questions – that might have drawn me in more. For example – why are you here, or what challenge do you find impacts your experience/ performance in the workplace the most. We realized that not all of us completed the needs assessment, so perhaps a reminder right before the session could help you have this information next go around?"

WEBINAR 2:

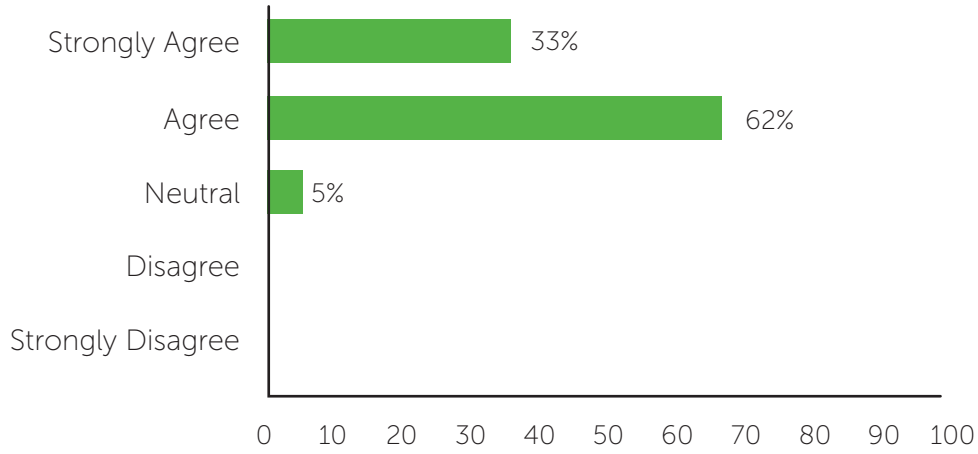
STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

The charts and graphs that follow summarize the participant feedback after completing Webinar 2.

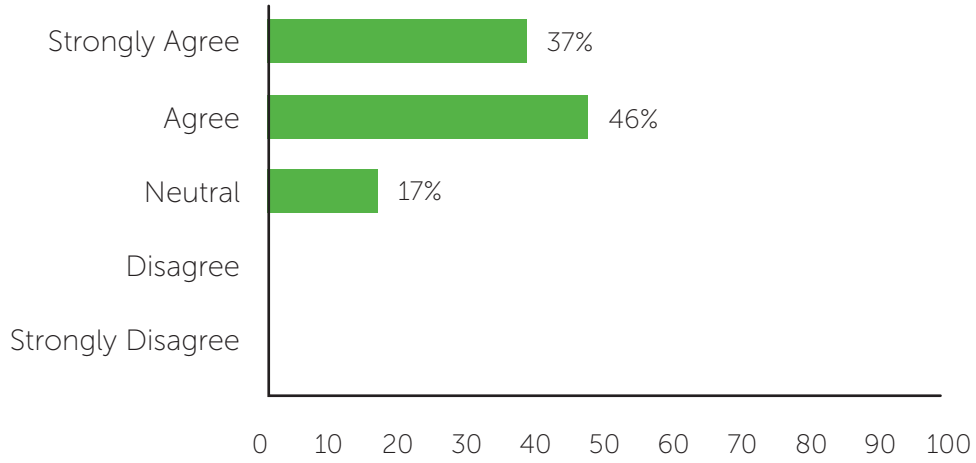
I learned something new at this session.



I will be able to apply this learning to my work.



I would recommend this session to a colleague.



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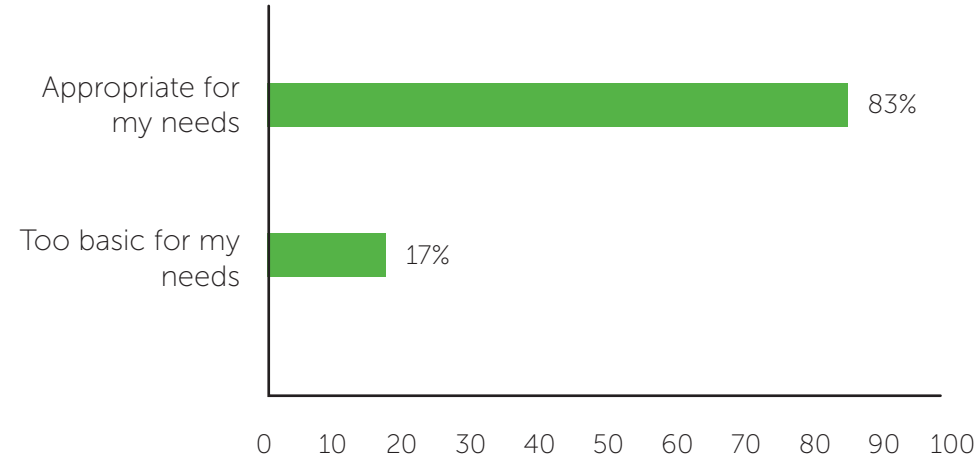


What did you like best about the session?

CONTENT
(number of pariticipants)

- 18 — Content covered in the session was useful / interesting (e.g., communication style, personality styles, sense making, huddles, simple rules)
- 4 — Session provided a good introduction / overview of the topic
- 4 — The examples provided were useful
- 2 — Information was accessible (e.g. easy to understand)

DELIVERY
(number of pariticipants)

- 8 — Good use of technology (e.g., polling tool, slides, chat box)
- 7 — Enjoyed the interaction and engagement

MISC.
(number of pariticipants)

- 1 — Other responses
- 17 — None / no response

OTHER RESPONSES

"Expectations to do "homework." The experience of doing homework as a team after the first session was a very good experience."

What could have made this session better?

CONTENT
(number of pariticipants)

- 6 — Use relevant examples
- 4 — Additional resources and materials (e.g., readings, copy of PowerPoint slides)
- 3 — More complex topics / greater depth into certain topics

DELIVERY
(number of pariticipants)

- 9 — More interaction / group participation
- 8 — Timing issues (e.g., session not long enough for note-taking and /or discussion)

MISC.
(number of pariticipants)

- 11 — None / no response

SELECTED RESPONSES

"Unsure – 1 hour is not enough time to delve deeper into communication strategies unless a single method was chosen to highlight (with perhaps links to other methods/ videos)."

"Maybe send out the presentations slides before the start of the session."

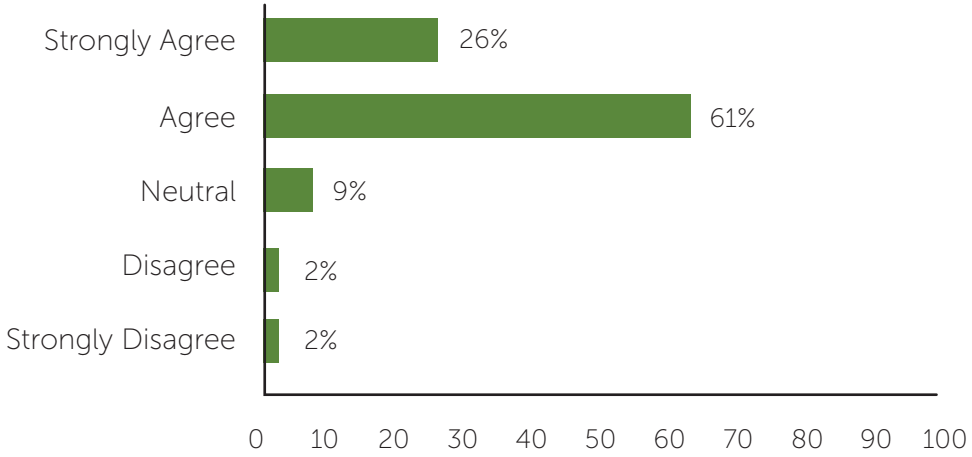
"I would like to go more in depth into certain topics, like when a technique we could incorporate is discussed [provide] further examples of how to use it."

WEBINAR 3:

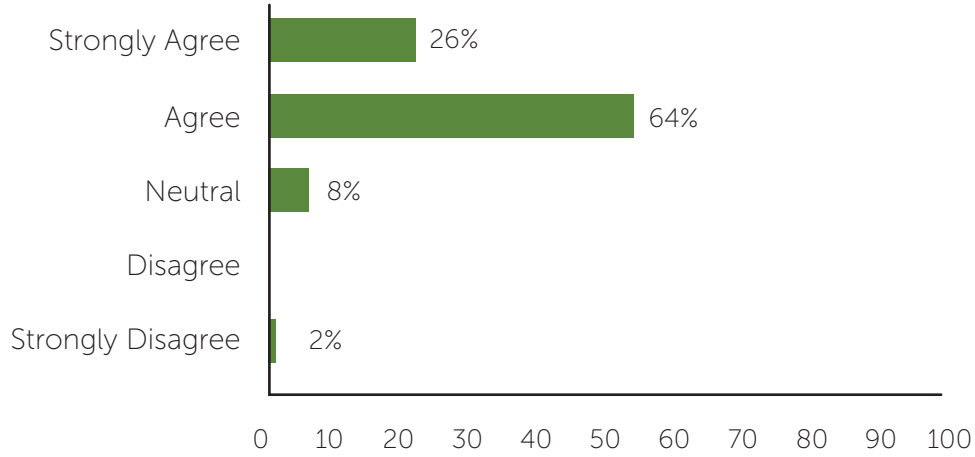
NAVIGATING CONFLICT EFFECTIVELY

The charts and graphs that follow summarize the participant feedback after completing Webinar 3.

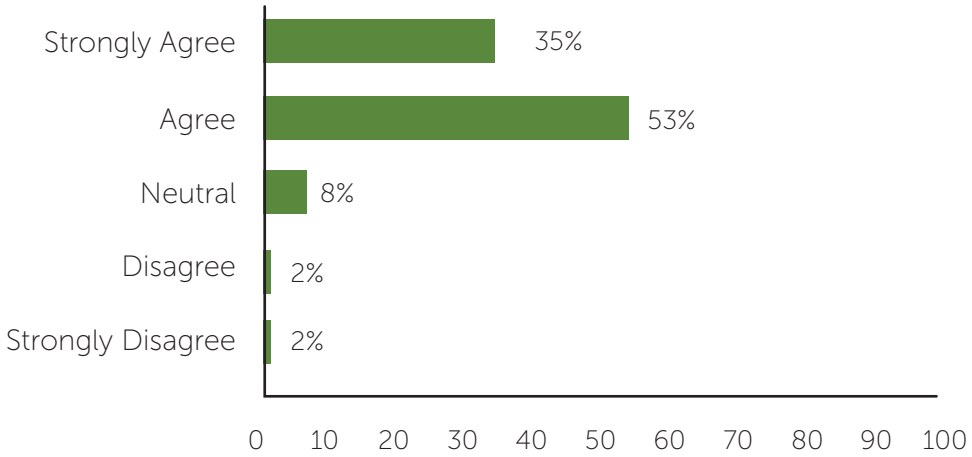
I learned something new at this session.



I will be able to apply this learning to my work.



I would recommend this session to a colleague.



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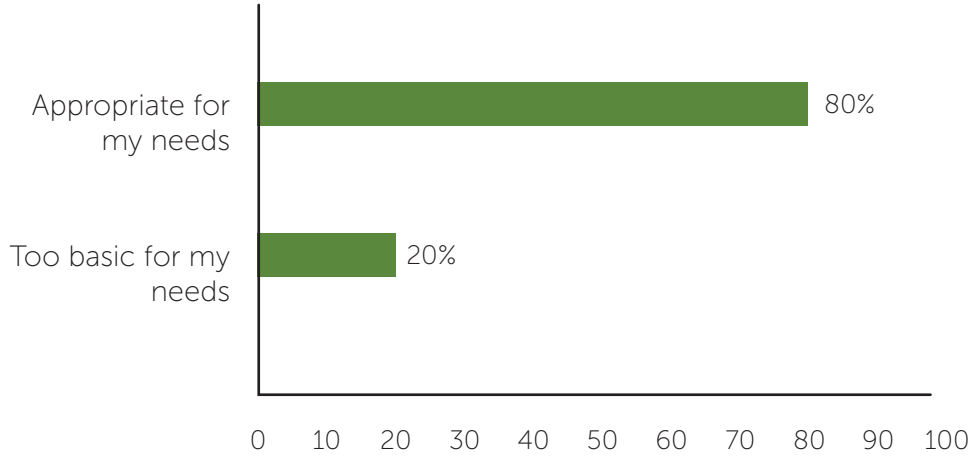


What did you like best about the session?

- 33 — The concepts and examples provided were useful / relevant
- 23 — The tools and graphics provided were useful
- 4 — The information was accessible and easy to understand (e.g., appropriate complexity)
- 3 — Enjoyed the group interaction / engagement

- 8 — Enjoyed the presenters
- 3 — Presentation format was appropriate (e.g., length, timing)

- 2 — Other responses
- 31 — None / no response

OTHER RESPONSES

"Presentation as a whole was very good."

"I liked learning about the personal conflict styles and using the diagram to depict where those styles fit with assertiveness and cooperativeness in the model provided. I also like how easy the quiz was to complete."

What could have made this session better?

9 — Use additional relevant examples

7 — Greater depth and detail into certain topics

2 — More opportunities for group interaction / engagement

51 — Presentation format could be improved (e.g., timing, logistics, use of technology)

6 — Other responses

5 — None / no response

SELECTED RESPONSES

"I always prefer handouts and reading ahead of time. I make more links with the content presented that way."

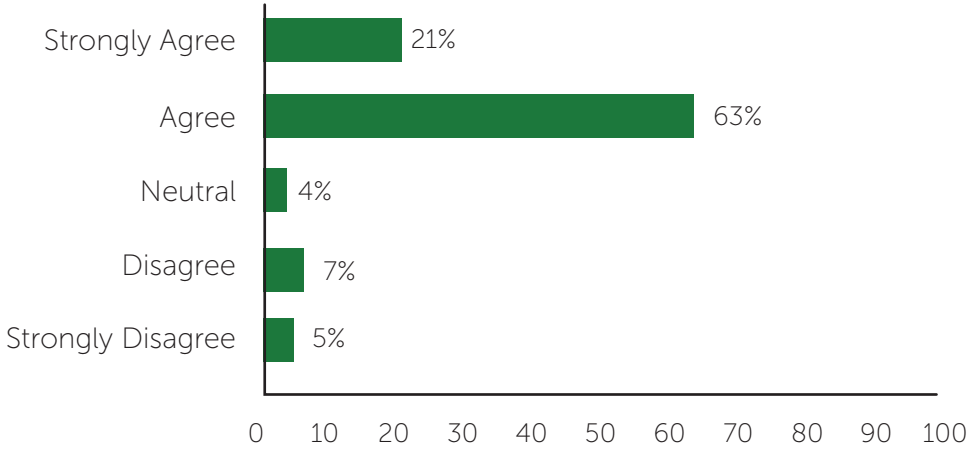
"This was a bit dry for me because I have heard this content before."

WEBINAR 4:

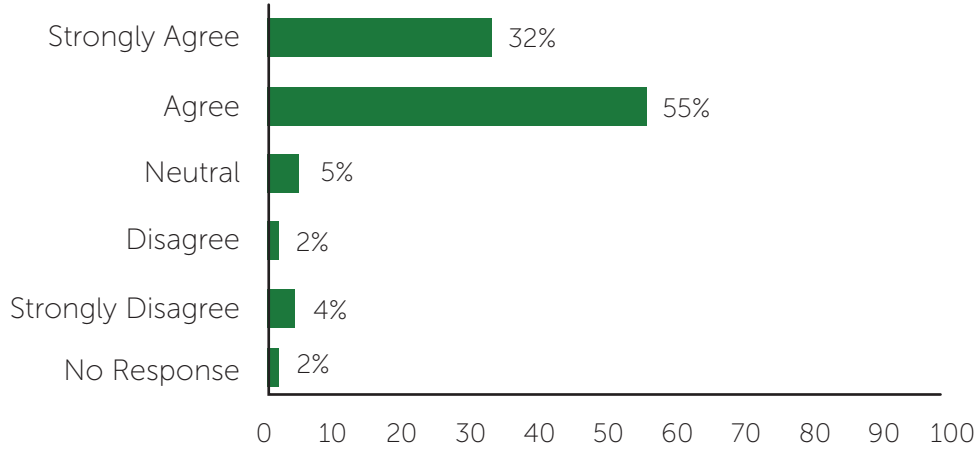
TRUST AND LEADERSHIP

The charts and graphs that follow summarize the participant feedback after completing Webinar 4.

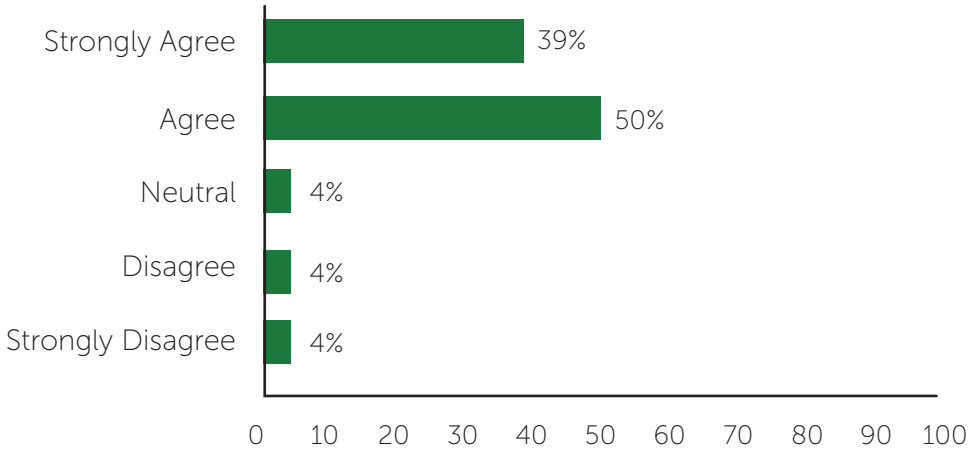
I learned something new at this session.



I will be able to apply this learning to my work.



I would recommend this session to a colleague.



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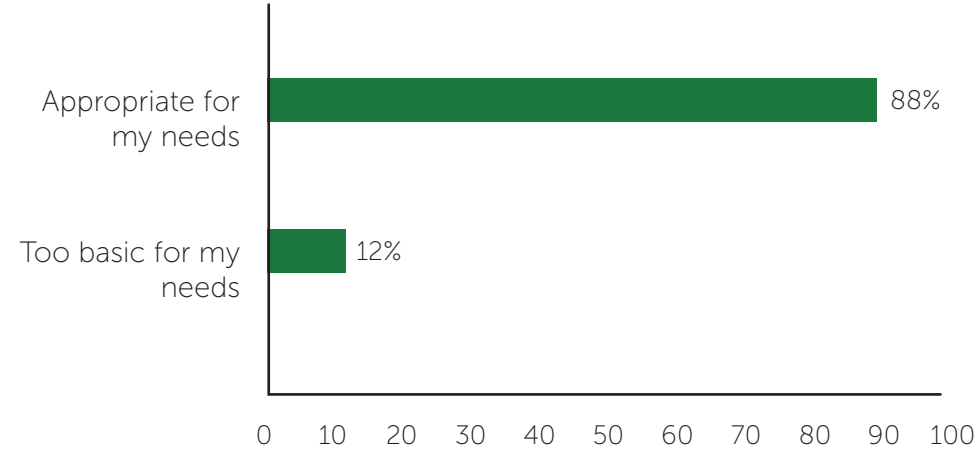


What did you like best about the session?

CONTENT
(number of pariticipants)

- 19 — The information and resources presented were useful / interesting
- 4 — Information presented was accessible and easy to understand

DELIVERY
(number of pariticipants)

- 11 — Enjoyed the group interaction / engagement
- 6 — Appreciated the use of technology (e.g., interactive slides, whiteboard tool)
- 2 — Enjoyed the presenters

MISC.
(number of pariticipants)

- 2 — Other responses
- 24 — None / no response

OTHER RESPONSES

"Made me more self-aware. Forced the team to self-reflect and work together."

"I enjoyed this webinar most of the four. It was [relevant] to [my] everyday workplace and the session content [is] applicable for daily use."

What could have made this session better?

9 — Use additional relevant examples

7 — Greater depth and detail into certain topics

2 — More opportunities for group interaction / engagement

51 — Presentation format could be improved (e.g., timing, logistics, use of technology)

6 — Other responses

5 — None / no response

SELECTED RESPONSES

"Handouts with a notes section."

"More concise."

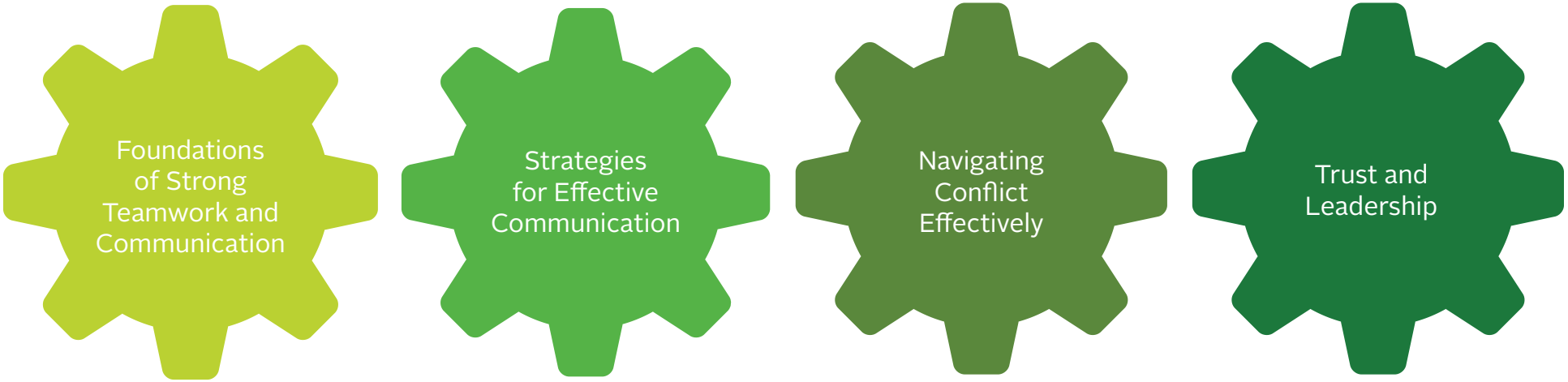
"Nothing comes to mind. For your information, for some reason I had a challenging time opening up the webinar. [I] dialled in on the phone with no issues, so at least I could hear what was being said – though missed the presentation, visually, for the first half."

"When we use the arrows on the whiteboard it includes our names, which is ok most of the time, but sometimes I would prefer my last name not be shown, depending on how personal the question."

"If more of my colleagues had attended! (Totally not your fault!)"

Formal Webinar Key Takeaways:

- The majority of participants felt the webinars offered new content that met their needs and that they had not previously learned elsewhere.
- Most participants felt the content provided was something they could translate into practical use in the workplace.

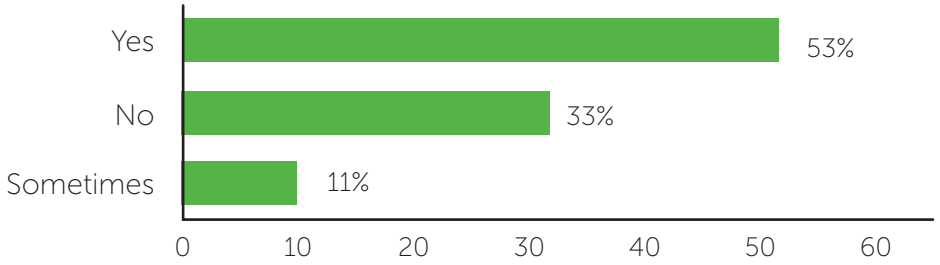


Action Period Work

The Action Period was designed to build on, and apply, the learning from each webinar. Teams received the assignments via e-mail following each webinar. In addition, the Action Period guide and associated resources were housed on the Council website. The format of the Action Period was consistent throughout the series and included a personal reflection section and four team activities, from which teams chose two.

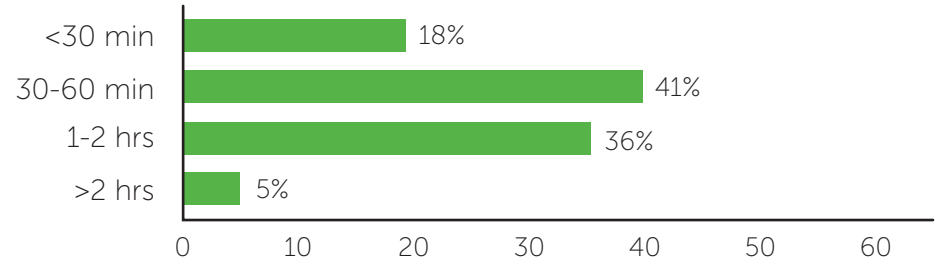
The follow-up evaluation survey revealed most teams met as a team all or some of the time to complete the Action Period work throughout the course of the series.

Percent of Respondents Who Met as a Team to Complete the Action Period Work Throughout the Course of the Series.



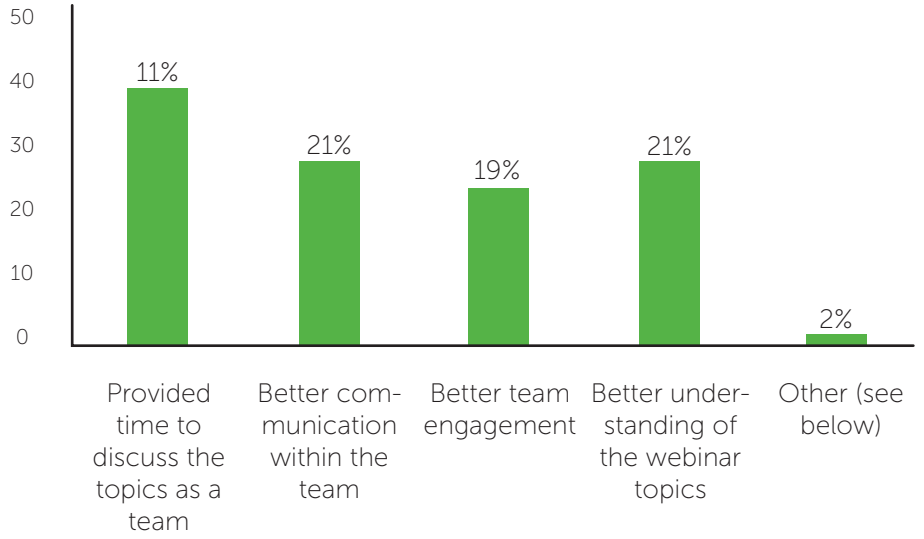
The evaluation sought to better understand the amount of time each team invested in the Action Series. The results of the survey revealed that while we asked teams to commit to one hour during each Action Period for assignments, there was variability in the amount of time dedicated. While some teams required less than an hour, others required an hour or more.

Average Time to Complete the Action Period Work



Teams identified multiple benefits of doing the Action Period work.

Outcomes of the Action Period Work



OTHER RESPONSES

"Better awareness of each other."

"Increased awareness of each other's conflict resolution style."

The post-Action Period evaluation also revealed what participants felt were some of the best parts about completing the Action Period work. Below are participants' responses grouped by theme.

- 11 — Getting together / collaborating with team members
- 9 — Improving team dynamics and processes (e.g., communication, relationships)
- 6 — Building self-awareness
- 3 — Applying the skills learned during the session in a practical setting
- 3 — Enjoyed the resources provided
- 0 — Misc.
- 4 — Other responses
- 28 — None / No

The survey asked participants what could have been improved in the Action Period. The most consistent theme was related to teams setting more time aside dedicated to completing the work and somehow increasing accountability to complete the work.

OTHER RESPONSES

"Dedicated time for self-reflection outside of usual work tasks."

"Learning new strategies and ideas!"

"Deeper exploration of the topic beyond webinar."

"We kept tweaking our team agreement after each session."

Action Period Work Key Takeaways:

- Teams appreciated the Action Period work and the activities associated with it.
- Need to encourage teams to set aside time to do the actual work and/or increase team accountability to complete Action.

Informal Webinars

Given it was the Council's first Teamwork and Communication Action Series, we were uncertain about the level of support that would be required by teams throughout the series. To maximize our reach to a large number of participating teams, we offered informal webinars to support teams in their learning. An organizational development consultant, along with the series facilitators, also hosted informal webinars in order to provide additional advice, expertise and coaching. Teams did bring forward very tricky teamwork and communication problems, and it was of great benefit to have someone with organizational development expertise available to support them through these challenges.

Overall, however, the informal webinars were poorly attended. One webinar had one person attend and another had zero. The highest number of attendees on any informal webinar was seven. When survey respondents were asked why they did not attend, 42% said they did not require any additional support, while 44% said they were not scheduled at a convenient time. This poor attendance is interesting, given the evaluation feedback previously suggests they wished the Action Series had gone deeper and offered more webinar time to put the learning into practice. The intention was for these informal webinars to provide that, but teams did not tend to take advantage of this opportunity. It would be valuable to explore how to increase uptake on the informal webinars, as they are an incredible opportunity to delve deeper into the issues that arise, and tap into the experience of an expert in the field.

Seven survey respondents did attend the informal webinars and, of these, 100% said they should be offered again. The reasons cited for attending included: having a teamwork and communication question or wanting to learn more from others.

When all survey respondents were asked what supports should be made available by the facilitators, the responses included*:

- Having the facilitators available to answer questions[2]
- Having a facilitator assigned to your team[2]
- Having an outline at the beginning of the webinar delineating what would be discussed and the Action Period work required
- Offering the informal webinars at different times

*Numbers in brackets refer to the number of times an answer was mentioned by survey respondents

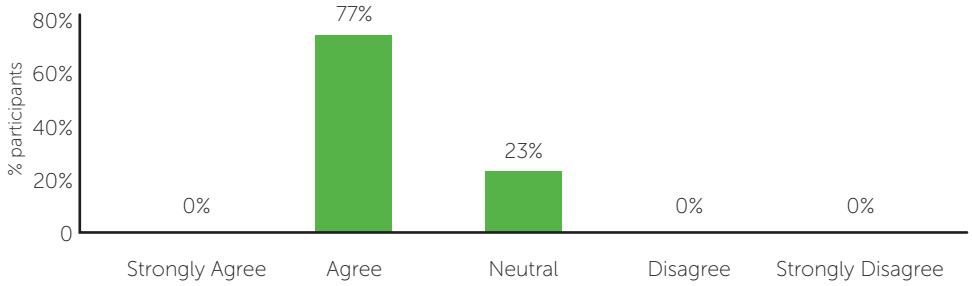
Informal Webinar Key Takeaways:

- Those that attended informal webinars found them very useful, but this was an exceptionally small number of people.
- Consider various methods to ensure Action Series participants are supported in their learning in between webinars.

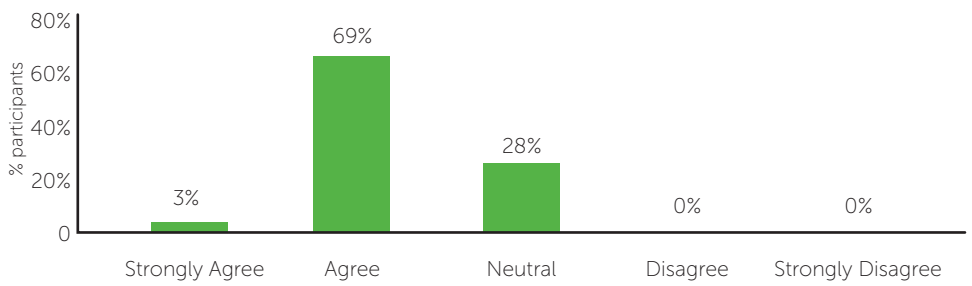
Post Action Series Changes

Culture change does not occur overnight, and to truly assess the impact of the Action Series a longitudinal study would likely be required.[5,6] With this limitation in mind, we did attempt to see if any change had occurred immediately after the series. The following is a summary of the improvements participants reported in their teams immediately following the Action Series:

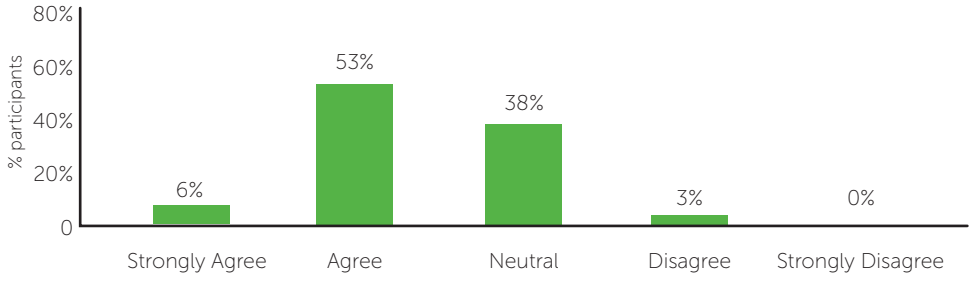
Working Together



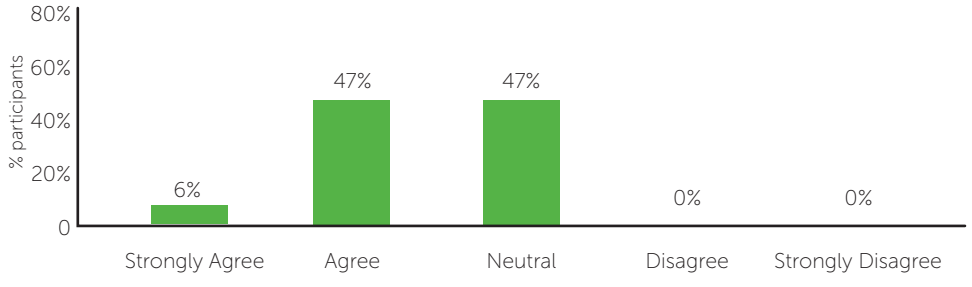
Team Communication



Navigating Conflict



Trust



Post Changes Key Takeaways:

- Participants reported improvements in the way they worked together, communicated, navigated conflict, and trusted each other after participating in the Action Series.
- Knowing that shifts in culture take time, it is worth considering a longitudinal assessment, with some or all Action Period teams, to measure the impact of the Action Series.

Key Lessons

Moving forward with additional Action Series, there are some key lessons that we can apply:

- *Enhance clarity of appropriate team composition for the Action Series:* Ensure participating teams work together on a day-to-day basis, so learning can be implemented and changes can take effect.

- *Emphasize the benefits of Action Period work to maximize learning:* The Action Period work is designed to reinforce learning and practical application of the theoretical concepts presented in the webinars. Participants will maximize their experience by completing the assigned Action Period work.

- *Increase incentives for teams to complete Action Period homework:* Because completion of the Action Period work is important for deeper learning, offer incentives to complete it. Ensure expectations around this are clearer from the outset.

- *Award certificates of completion:* This would be dependent on the completion of core work and the post-series evaluation, with the intention to help to formalize teams' participation in the Action Series and encourage them to complete all of the associated steps.

- *Increase awareness and participation in informal webinars:* These provide a valuable opportunity for participants to ask more complex or difficult questions and delve deeper into the material, with an industry expert on hand.

- *Offer five webinars instead of four:* Feedback from participants and moderators suggested webinar two covered a lot of important material that could make up two separate webinars. Consideration for diving deeper on the topic of communication by exploring structured communication in one webinar, and unstructured communication in a second webinar.

- *Explore potential longitudinal evaluation methods to determine the impact of the series:* Culture change takes time. To this end, a longitudinal evaluation would enable an understanding of the lasting impact(s) of participation in the Action Series.

Summary

In summary, the data indicate that the Action Series was well received. Participants expressed that they learned new material that could be applied towards making positive shifts in their teams' culture.

The evidence around the relationship between culture, teamwork and communication and patient outcomes, combined with the strong demand for the Action Series, suggests a need for further work in this area. In turn, the Council will offer another Action Series, starting in January 2018. In addition to the second offering of the Action Series, there are also plans to embed it in into the next wave of Clear, an initiative the Council runs to support long-term care homes to reduce use of antipsychotic medications. Additional evaluations will be conducted for both of these sessions, and used to inform future work.

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Appendix A: Teamwork and Communication Action Series Teams (Spring 2017)

Organization	Unit
Augustine House / Haven House RC	
BC Centre for Disease Control	STI Program
BC Children's Hospital	Surgical Services
BC College of Family Physicians	Program Managers
BC Emergency Health Services	Quality, Patient Safety, and Accreditation
BCCDC	TB/STI
Forensic Psychiatric Hospital	A3/A4
Fraser Health	Laboratory - Hematopathology
Fraser Health	None
Fraser Health	Laboratory medicine
Fraser Health	Weatherby Pavilion 2
Fraser Health	Lab/Clinical
Fraser Health	Home & Community Care
Fraser Health	Patient Care Quality Office
Fraser Health	Weatherby 2
Fraser Health	Positive Health Services
Golden Life Management	Rose Wood Village
H&H Total Care	The Hamlets at Westsyde
Haven Hill Care Centre	
HealthLink BC	
inSite Housing, Hospitality, Health Inc.	Program Managers
Interior Health	Hardy View Lodge
Interior Health	Residential Services Quality Review Coordinators
Interior Health	Nursing

continued...

Interior Health	Westview Place
Interior Health	Residential Services Clinical Practice Educators
Interior Health	Dr. Andrew Pavillion
Interior Health	Administration
Island Health	Public Health
Island Health	Harbourside/Oceanpoint
Island Health	Nursing Support Services
Island Health	Intensive Care Unit
Island Health	7AB Surgery
Island Health	Saanich Penninsula Community Health Services Team
Island Health	Regional
Island Health	Quality, Patient Safety, and Improvement
Island Health	Medical Affairs
Island Health	Comox Valley Geography 1
Northern Health	Dunrovin Park Lodge
Northern Health	Quality and Innovation
PHSA	BCEHS
PHSA	Corporate
Revera	Royal City Manor
Revera	Holyrood Manor
Rick Hansen Institute	
Vancouver Coastal Health	Professional Practice, Allied Health - Physiotherapy
Vancouver Coastal Health	Intensive Care Unit Richmond Hospital
Vancouver Coastal Health	Practice Support Program
Vancouver Coastal Health	Regional Primary Care
Vancouver General Hospital	Independent Dialysis Unit

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