



Center for Leadership & Educational Equity

Compass Points: North, South, East, and West An Exercise in Understanding Preferences in Group Work

Developed in the field by educators.

Purpose

With this activity, we have a chance to become aware of our own and others' most dominant modes/styles of working in groups. This awareness helps us appreciate and consciously draw on different contributions that we each make for a group to function at its best.

Set Up for Success

Similar to many other inventories, but this exercise relates more to group behavior and how our preferences affect group functioning.

There will often be individuals who resist making a choice. Emphasize that we all fit into many — pick one that is most comfortable for you or that you find most uncomfortable if not happening. Assure students they are not 'stuck' in whatever choice they make. Keep it light.

You can offer an option of moving if in first five minutes you realize you want to change your choice (but only move once and only within first 2-3 minutes). Notice the dynamics of the different groups and the effect when people to gather with others like them and talk about themselves.

It is important to acknowledge the strength of each style as well as to own the potential downsides of each one when taken too far. Provide a strong caution to avoid negative comments or jokes about the style preferences of others. When participants make comments, even in jest, about where their colleagues place themselves, it brings a negative flavor to the exercise rather than the collaborative spirit it is intended to develop.

Time

45-60 minutes

Materials

- Chart Paper
- Markers
- Signs for each direction

Roles

Facilitator
to guide the
sequence and
keep time

Preparation:

Post signs that identify:

1. North: Action
2. South: Relationships;
3. West: details/structure;
4. East: Big Picture/Vision

- Post Chart Paper at each wall with markers (or you can have students pick that up for themselves.
- Post questions for discussion and reporting.
- Provide markers for each group.

Steps:

Introduce the activity:

Further description for each direction:

North: you want to dive in, impatient to get started

South: concerned that everyone is included, has a chance to speak, feels okay

West: organized, who what when where why

East: wants to know purpose — why are we doing this? has a vision, goals, imagines

In a minute, I will ask you to choose your preferred/dominant style and then move to that direction and as a group, answer these questions--record on chart paper for sharing with whole group.

Read the four questions

- What are the strengths of your style?
 - What are the challenges?
 - What do you want others to know about you?
 - What do you need in order to do your best work collaboratively (eg which ground rules or agreements)?
 - Motto, mascot.....
5. Direct participants to choose and go to that sign. Identify a recorder and a reporter. Discuss and answer the questions.
 6. Report back to whole group with highlights from your discussion. Each group volunteers to take their turn. Take a moment to appreciate each group's insights with applause.
 7. Debrief: What did you notice? What did you realize about yourself? What did you realize about group work? How was the process for you?



Center for Leadership & Educational Equity

Compass Points: North, South, East, and West

An Exercise in Understanding Preferences in Group Work

Developed in the field by educators.

Purpose

We each have most comfortable ways of working and contributing though we often don't think about it. With this activity, we have a chance to learn about our own preferred style and the different ways that people work at their best in groups.

Steps

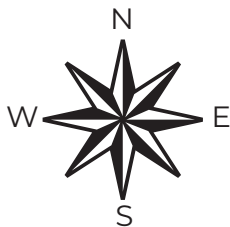
1. Decide which of the four styles most describes your style. We are all a mix yet have one that is most important to us.

North

Acting — get moving, try and see what happens

West

Structure — pays attention to detail and organization; likes to know the who, what, when, where and why



South

Relationships — makes sure everyone's voice is heard and feeling okay

Time

45-60 minutes

Materials

- Chart Paper
- Markers
- Signs for each direction

Roles

Facilitator to guide the sequence and keep time

East

Vision — imagine possibilities, see the big picture

2. Move to the style that you chose.
3. Identify a recorder to write your answers on chart paper and a reporter for sharing your thoughts with whole group.
4. Discuss your answers to the questions.
5. When you are finished, let the facilitator know.
6. Groups report out in a voluntary sequence. Show appreciation at end of each group's report out (for instance, with applause).

Debrief

What did you notice? What did you realize about yourself? What did you realize about group work?

Look at the distribution in the four groups and ask how this will affect the functioning of the whole group. If distribution is lopsided, ask what that might mean for the group and for individuals who are not supported by others like them.

What did you like about the activity? What would you change?