Compass Points II: Do Opposites Attract?

By Michele Mattoon for NSRF®, Spring 2014

Facilitation Difficulty: ✭✭✭✭✭

Purpose — Similar to the Myers-Briggs Personality Inventory, this activity uses a set of preferences which relate not to the individual but to group behaviors, helping us understand how preferences affect our group work. This allows participants to be more effective when interacting with others and understanding any biases they may hold towards other “directions.”

Time — About an hour

Group size — Can be used with larger or medium-sized groups

Preparation — Install two sheets of chart paper (or large paper and tape) with two colored markers on each of four walls of the room. Prepare copies of the Compass Points II: Opposites Worksheet for all participants (or at least one per wall).

Options — Compass Points and Compass Points III.

Steps:

1. Setup — Instruct participants to review Figure 1 on the Compass Points II: Opposites Worksheet as you briefly explain the characteristics of each point. Then invite everyone to think of their most common (or most troublesome) work situation and pick which of the four directions or compass points they most likely resemble in that scenario. (5 min.)

2. “Direction” group work — Direct all participants to take their copy of the worksheet and meet at “their” compass point in the room where chart paper and two markers await. Each group chooses a scribe, labels one sheet of chart paper with the group’s compass point, then charts the answers to the prompts from Figure 2 (Strengths, Limitations, Requests, Friction). (10 min.)

Figure 1

North: The direction of Action — “Just do it!”
Motivates and challenges others to get work started or keep it moving, tries new things.

West: The direction of Detail — wants to know the who, what, when, where, and why before acting. Reliable to get things done, organized.

East: The direction of the Big Picture — wants to speculate about many possibilities before taking action. Connects individual work with the purpose of organization.

South: The direction of Caring — wants everyone’s feelings to be considered and their voices heard before acting. Communicator, facilitator, negotiator.
3. Exchange — Each group exchanges its completed chart paper with the group opposite them on the compass and then returns to their original compass point gathering spaces. This means that North and South will exchange sheets, as East and West do the same.

4. Suggestions for working together — Now each group should imagine that their “opposite” compass point will be their teammates on a future project. Their job is to now look at the opposite group’s perspectives on their Strengths/Limitations/Requests/Frictions and make suggestions about how both directions can work together as effectively as possible. To do this, they must answer the questions in Figure 3 on the other sheet of chart paper. (10 min.)

5. Exchange and discuss — Groups again exchange both sheets of chart paper with the group on the opposite side of the room, then return to their original compass point. After examining the “How will we interact” sheet completed by their opposites, the groups each discuss their answers to these questions:

- Did our opposite group understand us?

---

**Figure 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Compass Points II: Do Opposites Attract? page 2 of 3</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Our compass point</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengths: Our contributions to a group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations: What we all should watch out for</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requests: What we need to do our best work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friction: Others annoy us when they ...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>As teammates or managers of people from the other compass point ...</strong></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How will we interact?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How will we give feedback?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How will we include their contributions?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What will be most challenging?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- Do we agree with what they said about working with us?
- What do we disagree with?

As each group answers these questions, they should edit and/or make notes on the “How will we interact” chart paper with a marker of contrasting ink color. (10 minutes)

6. Meet opposites — For the first time, the Coach instructs the opposite compass points to meet, so their new “opposite team groups” can take turns sharing their notes from step 5 and giving tips about how they can most effectively work together. (15 min.)

7. Debrief — Return everyone to a single, whole group to debrief using these and other similar questions. (10 min.)

- Did the opposite group understand your compass point? If so, in what areas? What about misunderstandings?
- How did “direction” biases show up? What assumptions were made about opposite directions that may have led to misunderstandings?
- What did you think of this activity? How might you use Compass Points II: Do Opposites Attract? in your work?

Please take a few minutes to write down notes and reflections about this activity.
**Figure 1**

North: The direction of Action — “Just do it!”
Motivates and challenges others to get work started or keep it moving, tries new things.

West: The direction of Detail — wants to know the who, what, when, where, and why before acting. Reliable to get things done, organized.

East: The direction of the Big Picture — wants to speculate about many possibilities before taking action. Connects individual work with the purpose of organization.

South: The direction of Caring — wants everyone’s feelings to be considered and their voices heard before acting. Communicator, facilitator, negotiator.

**Figure 2**

Our compass point

Strengths: Our contributions to a group

Limitations: What we all should watch out for

Requests: What we need to do our best work

Friction: Others annoy us when they ...

**Figure 3**

As teammates or managers of people from the other compass point …

How will we interact?

How will we give feedback?

How will we include their contributions?

What will be most challenging?