Debriefing the PACT℠ Processes
Analysis and Design Meetings

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Open

Debriefing the Analysis or Design Team after their key meetings is critical to the process. Debriefings are important for the process and for you. They offer reinforcing encouragement or corrective warning shots across your bow.

Debriefing the teams after key meetings in the PACT Processes for T&D is a critical skill for the practitioner that may or may not come easy. It all depends on your natural or learned facilitation techniques and style, but it can be learned by most.

This article will cover my thoughts and typical process steps. I fully appreciate that there are more excellent ways to do this than presented here. These just have worked very well for me over the last 18 years of my real-world applications.

There are five debriefing points. They focus on

1. How complete and accurate of a job did we do regarding everything?
2. How complete and accurate of a job did we do regarding critical items?
3. How good are our outputs?
4. How did you like the process?
5. What are the issues going forward?

Exactly how you do this as a facilitator is somewhat open. PACT debriefings can tolerate some variation. But, as always, it depends. Situational assessment and specific reactions are tough to spell out in detail and are beyond the intent or scope of this article.

PACT Process Meetings Debriefings

As I forewarned the team in the meeting kick-off, I always conclude my analysis and design efforts with a group debrief. It's always there in the meeting agenda near the end. Very near the end—just before, "Thanks and have a safe trip home y'all."

Debriefings bring closure. They are the final *process check*. I value them because they are my final clue and cue whether or not we collectively did a good job. Otherwise I have no clue. Yes, I read the clues and cues as I facilitated the team through the process appropriate to the

meeting charter. So I have incremental feedback about the various piece-parts produced as we did them.

But now, at the end, I'd like the team members to sit back and take a collective breath (it's a big sigh of relief for those who comprehend that we are really wrapping up with this step) and then take stock of what we've done and reflect on that verbally.

And if any of the team members just happen to start this debriefing prematurely before we are really finished with the meeting, I attempt to divert them back to the task at hand. I will then remind the group at that point that we will do a formal debriefing once we are finished and have accomplished our charter mission.

That mission is to produce either

- A Performance Model and Knowledge/Skill Matrix for a job, or job family, or a department/function, or for all of the jobs working one or more particular processes

or

- A Curriculum Architecture Design, or a Modular Curriculum Design, or the designs and development of a set of Instructional Activities instructions and materials

The debriefing is focused around five questions.

1. What percent of everything under the "sun and moon" did we capture in terms of our coverage of the outputs, tasks, and enabling knowledge and skills within our project's scope?

2. What percent of *everything critical*, and not *just necessary*, did we capture in terms of our coverage of the outputs, tasks, and enabling knowledge and skills within our project's scope?

3. What did you personally think of the product we produced? The *content* of both the Performance Model *charts* and the Knowledge/Skill Matrix *charts*?

4. What did you think of the *process* we employed to produce the Performance Model *charts* and the Knowledge/Skill Matrix *charts*?

5. What do you see as the *key issues going forward* for our Project Steering Team to address?

All good facilitators have their own personal version of the above, and there are many versions and variations on those themes that may be apropos in a particular situation. You as a facilitator have to always be able to figure that out for yourself, on the fly, live. And you need to know how to recover in case you bark up the wrong tree by using the wrong phrasing for your question and sent a member of the team into a state of agitation. "It's not just semantics," an old colleague used to say, "It's always semantics."

We've all heard that it's good to start work with a group by

1. Telling them what you're going to tell them
2. Telling them
3. Telling them what you've told them

The PACT Processes' spin on that is to

1. Tell them what I'm going to facilitate them to do
2. Then do that
3. Then have them tell us how well we did

To paraphrase or even perhaps quote Thiagi, "All the learning happens in the debriefing."

Debriefing brings closure for everyone, regardless of his or her role. If done well, it allows everyone to have his or her final say.

If you had a good team of master performers and real subject matter experts, you most likely had a team of strong egos. They usually have something to say. This is their outlet. And if done correctly, they can still discover more and more about what it is that we did and can discuss the value (or lack of value) that it promises for our intended use in downstream efforts.

Let them know at the beginning that the debriefing is coming at the end of the meeting, and then remind them throughout the meeting that this is one of the final steps in the meeting agenda.

Beware: if it seems important and timely to the team to have a side discussion on the process or the content, early or not, they will try. And then you'll have to decide whether to attempt to intervene or not, and then perhaps how to intervene.

Timing is everything, as it is said. Great facilitators have a great sense of timing. If portions of the debriefing process have to be done early by the group because the team just really needs to talk something out—let them or help them. But get on with it. Don't get so bogged down by your process script that you can't deviate from it upon occasion—especially when the occasion seems to call for it.

The trouble is, it's a judgment call, and those are usually problematic because they are so situational.

We're not saying this is always easy. It isn't.

The Debriefing Steps

When it's time to debrief, debrief. Make sure the team has had a recent break. Offer them a five- or ten-minute break before starting the debrief. Let them know that the debriefing may take 20 to 40 minutes.

I go to the flip chart and on a blank page I frame my first two questions so that everyone can read my words rather than try to remember what I said. Remember . . . try to make it visible.

What % of "everything under the sun and moon" did we capture in terms of our coverage of the outputs, tasks, and enabling knowledge and skills within our project's scope?	What % of "*everything critical,*" and not *just necessary*, did we capture in terms of our coverage of the outputs, tasks, and enabling knowledge and skills within our project's scope?

I ask them to write their answers down on a piece of paper in front of them. Too often I have sensed that members who did not write down their answers changed them as we went around the table asking for their numbers.

Ah, group think/peer pressure at work. So now I ask everyone to write down their scores, and then I go around the room systematically and get each set of numbers. I write them as they call them out.

I also tell them in advance that no one will have to explain their numbers to anyone else in the group. In fact I'll cut off the discussion, because the point of this little exercise is to get the individual feelings of each group member out as to how well we did, not to arrive at consensus percentages.

Once I've gone around the room gathering each set of numbers, I thank them for their inputs and feedback and then try to move quickly on to the next three questions.

But often enough, someone will ask someone else to explain himself or herself regarding the numbers they gave. Even if I try to control this I can't always do so. And sometimes the one individual who is being challenged or questioned wants to tell everyone why they feel the way they do. I usually let them do so and let the dialogue go.

I also know that if I listen real closely to what is being said, I just might learn something germane to my assignment of facilitating the team to produce the proscribed outputs. It's never too late, even at the debriefing stage.

If this conversation will give me insights to what the team and I have produced, great! If this helps me figure out where the holes or burning issues are within the context of all of my organized data, great. I win for I can now get it fixed sooner rather than later.

The goal of the team debriefing is to get their feelings out on the table so that you, the facilitator, know where they stand on the completeness and accuracy of what you collectively have produced; otherwise, how would you know?

At the end of most of my analysis and design meetings, I almost never have a real good, personal feeling for the total, overall accuracy and completeness of the products of my process facilitation and the team's content contributions.

After all, I own the *process*, and they own the *content*. I need to ask them about the *content*. They would know. I shouldn't be expected to know.

Next, to get some words around those percentages, I write the next three questions on a flip chart page and post it for team reference as we conduct this next round.

- What did you personally think of the product we produced? The *content* of both the Performance Model *charts* and the Knowledge/Skill Matrix *charts*? Or the content of the design?

- What did you think of the *process* we employed to produce the Performance Model *charts* and the Knowledge/Skill Matrix *charts*? Or the content of the design?

- What do you see as the *key issues going forward* for our Project Steering Team to address?

I tell everyone that they can respond to all three questions, two, or one, or they may pass as they wish. I also tell the group that I intend to go around the room systematically to give everyone a chance to have their say, without being cut off or distracted by others' questions, challenges, agreements, etc.

And I tell them if they'd like to add or rephrase their captured quote, then they may do so after we've made the first round.

I'm always willing to take a second or third pass and give everyone a chance to add to their feedback. Usually it is not needed. But I am less willing to let go of process control because I have been *burned* and therefore *learned* the hard way that going in a nonsystematic, mixed order can result in

- Someone being unhappy because they were not adequately heard and represented by their captured comments

- Taking two or three times longer to process this last meeting agenda step than really necessary

- Missing the opportunity to gain some additional insights from the feedback from our team due to the time required overrunning the time allotted

In Summary

Debriefing in the PACT Processes is a twist of the old saw, "Tell them what you're going to tell them, tell them, and then tell them what you told them."

In a PACT analysis or design meeting, the debriefings are used to help those of us without extensive performance or content knowledge understand where we are in terms of our data or design's completeness, accuracy, and appropriateness.

Control what you can in the meeting. Learn what you can. And debrief in a flexible, yet structured manner so that you get what you are looking for, and not just what they happen to give you.

And be open for other debriefing means to these targeted ends.