



# **BART: A Tool to Help Your New Team Get on the Same Page, OR Help Your Problem Team Get Back on Track**

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# Is your team operating at an optimal level?

Or does it sometimes seem as though you are working at cross purposes, with conflicts simmering beneath the surface? Does it seem like certain people are either causing the problems or making things worse?

When things aren't working well, or when there are conflicts, it can be tempting to be easy to blame individual members or sub-groups for the team's problems. But problems that seem to be interpersonal or behavioral are most likely actually structural ones. Here's a very simple (though not necessarily easy!) tool I use with my consulting

clients to help them discover those structural issues and start productive dialogue.

The tool is called BART, and it's an acronym that comes from Group Relations Work. BART stands for Boundaries, Authority, Role, and Task. I'll briefly define each of these elements and then suggest some questions to facilitate a discussion in your teams.



I personally like to focus first on the "T": Task. The Primary Task of any group or organization refers to its mission or purpose -- why the group or organizations exists. For example, the primary purpose of a university is to educate students. But within any given organization, there are typically multiple primary tasks, which often compete against each other. In the university example, the institution may also have a primary task of producing knowledge from research.



These different primary tasks may compete with each other and lead to conflict. In another example, a hospital doctor focused on the health of patients may view their primary task as different from someone in the finance department focused on the hospital's fiscal health.



The “R” in BART refers to Role. Role is the part one plays in the overall primary task of the organization. One’s formal role is akin to their job description, though individuals will take up their formal roles according to their own personalities, preferences and experiences. So, one’s role is at the intersection between the self and the system.



Authority, the “A”, may be formal or informal, and may come from above, below or within. Formal

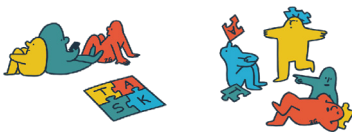
authority derives from a body or a group, such as a board of directors or a corporation. It may also come from a job title or be assigned by supervisor. This formal authority is often regarded as “legitimate” authority. Formal authority can also come from cultural norms: such as that given to teachers, parents, community elders, etc. Informal authority comes from within, and may be influenced by personality, upbringing, social identity, life experiences and personal sense of expertise.



Boundaries (“B”) separate what is inside a system from what is outside (such as boundaries around the primary task). They can also serve to define roles within a system and the level of authority one has in the system



All of these elements (Task, Role, Authority, Boundaries) must be clear and agreed upon by everyone in the organization. When these elements are not aligned and agreed upon, some very strange things may begin to happen that interfere with a group's optimal functioning. For example, If members of a work group each interpret their primary task differently, they may find themselves working at cross-purposes. If role boundaries have not been adequately clarified, then members of a team may get into turf battles. When boundaries are taken as guidelines, rather than as clear parameters, organizations can become chaotic: meetings don't start on time, tasks are forgotten or people have different understandings of deadlines or deliverables.



When this happens, consider engaging the group in an active dialogue around the following questions:

1. How do each of us understand the group's primary task? Where are we in alignment, and where do we disagree?
2. How do each of us understand our own roles and each others' roles?
3. Where do we agree or disagree on our task and role boundaries?
4. How do we manage those boundaries?
5. How is authority delegated? Do we fully authorize each other in our roles? Where might we undermine each other or ourselves?
6. How are group members authorized to do the work of the group?
7. BART can also be a tool for new groups to use when thinking about how to proceed.

# About Tracy

I believe that leadership can come from anywhere in an organization. As a leadership advisor, educator, and facilitator, I work with leaders at all levels to build ethical workplaces where all members find meaning and purpose.

My initial draw to group relations (many years ago!) was as a way to learn more about myself as well as to understand group dynamics for my clinical practice. Since then, I've applied the methods in different ways: to facilitate conversations between groups, to engage communities in dialogue, and in teaching self and systems awareness in organizations.



The capacity to reflect on oneself and one's organizational context is a basic building block for organizational learning and transformation.

I work with clients to uncover, understand, and manage the unseen dynamics that influence how they take up leadership and authority. By taking up their own authority, leaders at all levels help their teams face organizational challenges.

I am particularly interested in working with individuals, groups and organizations engaged in social justice and equity issues.



# Contact Tracy



Do you want to develop your leadership capacity, challenge the status quo, start a revolution, fix your system, figure out what the bleep is wrong with your organization, make sense of a crazy system, or just create an amazing workplace for your team?

[Then we need to talk!](#)

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contact me  
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to schedule a call

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For a more in-depth discussion of BART, please watch:

<https://youtube.com/watch?v=vX-IQch0x8Ew>

References:

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