



# Kantor 4-Player Model

Prepared for: Agile Coach Camp 2010

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March 19, 2010



# Kantor 4-Player Model and leadership

## Kantor 4-Player Model: Intervening Systematically

In this context, we call Kantor's Four- Player Model the Four Team Roles (for more detail on this model, see "Dialogic Leadership" by William N. Isaacs in V10N1). According to this model, every sequence of interactions can be described as the interplay of people filling four roles:

The model asserts that four core acts are the essential building blocks of both dysfunctional and healthy team behavior. They are:

Mover: This action establishes a direction and sets the team in motion.

Example: "Let's build Product X. Product X is the best idea out there."

Follower: The follower action provides support for the move and serves the function of completion.

Example: "I agree with the arguments you've made. Product X is the way to go."

Opposer: The opposer action questions the move that has been initiated.

Example: "The data don't support your claims. We'll be in real trouble if we go with Product X."

Bystander: Bystanding provides perspective and invites the team to be more reflective. A bystander might bring in data from another team, an historic perspective, or some insight about the operations of the team itself.

Example: "We tried some of these same ideas two years ago and they didn't work. What do we think has changed?"

These four acts provide "direction and energy; momentum and connection; correction and elaboration; and perspective taking, reflection, and openness to the workings of teams." In the appropriate sequences, these acts enable team members to consider a wide range of alternatives, examine each alternative in some depth, refine and elaborate the alternatives with ideas from inside and outside the team, choose an alternative, and act.

## Balancing acts

What determines the health of the team, one that is effective and "successful," is whether or not these core acts are performed appropriately and in the proper sequence. Any of the acts can at one point dominate, creating imbalance and damaging team health. Any of the four can also be so weakly displayed, or actively suppressed, as to create a void.

For example, a team with a weak or disabled mover cannot find direction or take a step. A team with a weak follower is stymied because the move cannot be completed. An opposer should raise legitimate concerns, but an ineffective or stuck opposer simply challenges everything, creating strife. And while the bystander's role is to bring the team information and observations, an unbalanced bystander act can flood the system with data, sowing confusion.

It's also critical for a team to be able to distinguish between the intentions of the actor and the impact actors have on the situation. An opposer is often viewed as attacking even when the intent is to protect the team from error. A bystander who seeks to offer perspective may be viewed as judgmental or disengaged. A healthy team system needs to match intention and impact, or notice and correct mismatches that occur.



Fundamentally, the four-player model is structural, not personal. All four acts could be played out by two people or even, conceivably, within the mind of one. Team members must be free to carry out the acts that seem appropriate to them at the moment.

It is the sequence and dynamics across acts that determine whether a team is effective or not. When the sequences are ritualized and limited (ie. move, oppose, move, oppose), the intelligence of the group is also limited. Thus, while each individual act can cause balance or imbalance, balance is also exhibited at the team level.

### Healthy teams

Ancona and Isaacs suggest that applying the four-player model to the field of positive relationships in organizations provides a way to produce healthier teams. First, all acts must be enabled and balanced. Second, the bystand and oppose acts must be supported and reinforced, because the absence or imbalance of these acts are major contributors to dysfunction. And third, flexibility must be maintained across acts and sequences of acts.

#### **The benefits of a balanced team include:**

Inclusiveness: no single point of view is allowed to dominate

Repair: the team can recover from imbalances introduced by, for example, a recalcitrant opposer

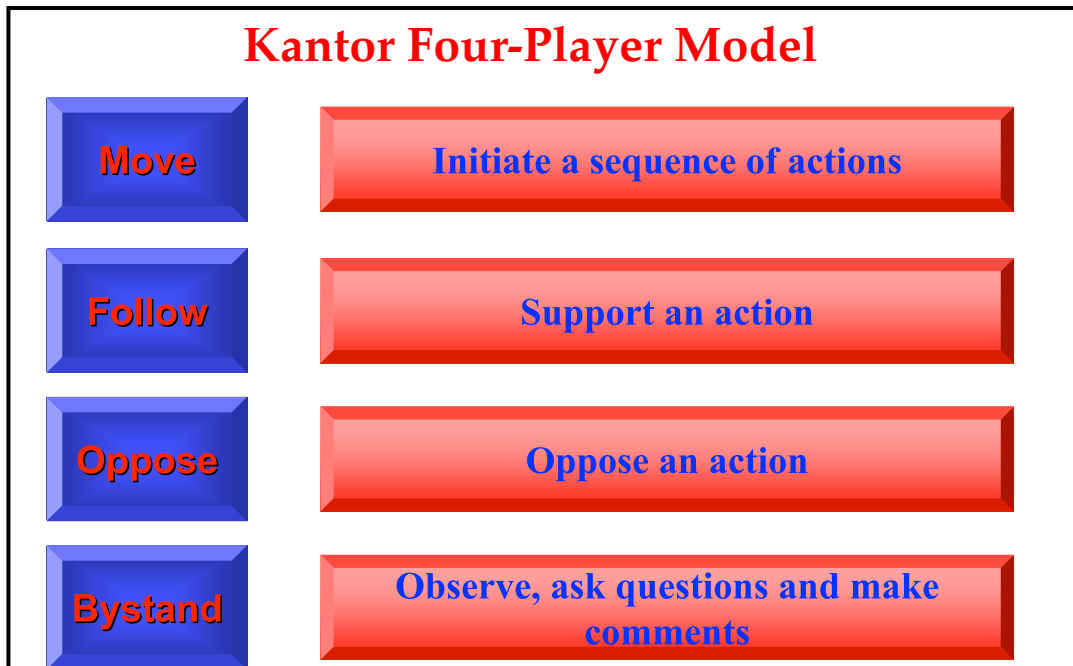
Adaptation: team members can respond to change without becoming rigid or defensive

Differentiation: each individual has the opportunity to make his or her unique contribution

Defining the structure that produces health and the ability to enlarge vision and the capacity to act—is just a beginning. Suggested directions for further research include: How does this new structural approach inform the existing literature on team behavior? How do organizational teams differ from the family systems that inspired the model? And, under what conditions do positive structural patterns emerge?

Shifting the focus of analysis to the structural level gets to the heart of team function or dysfunction, providing a route for effecting positive change. The four-player model gives researchers a framework for learning how to analyze team behavior, identify variables in causal loop diagrams, and in short, how to build healthy teams.

Please the leadership examples in the four quadrants!



Great teams participate in the entire model:

