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2014-1-BE02-KA201-000432

Protocol Reference Number: 098

Developed by: Catholic Education Flanders

Title

The zones of comfort

A **comfort zone** is a psychological state in which things feel familiar to a person and they are at ease and in control of their environment, experiencing low levels of anxiety and stress. In this zone, a steady level of performance is possible (Alasdair, 2009)

Sources

This topic is generally known.

Examples:

Purpose of the protocol

To make people feel more comfortable in a given situation where they are challenged. To give them insight in their own and others' reactions in situations which are not always very familiar. To establish a wondering. To have a guideline for setting up rules for a professional learning group.

Each can determine his own zones. Communicating them is **a way to build trust among the group** members.

The protocol should be used in a compact way, i.e.

Materials

Hint: if graphics are needed, many shapes are available on the internet.

Time

15 - 20 MINUTES all together. If the goal is to establish a wondering or rules for the PLC, then more time is needed.

Roles

Facilitator, pairs, whole group

Facilitation:

There is an overall introduction of the protocol goals and steps. The facilitator also gives feedback at the very end of the protocol. The protocol should be used not too soon.

If the group of people know each other already (being colleagues for years already) then still it is a useful activity in view of building trust among the group members.

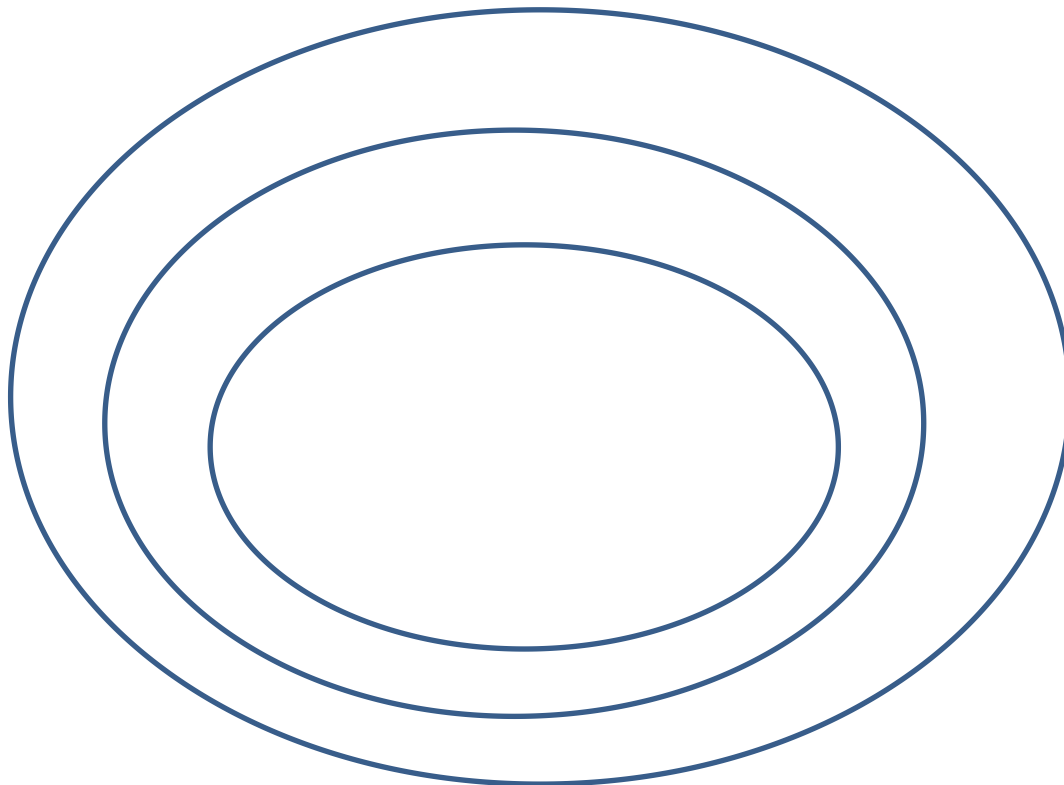
Whole group participates, group building activity. First phase is individual, after that sharing is done, and if the group is very large, some minor exchange is also needed. Do not force people in their Danger Zone!



Process

The facilitator asks the participants:

1. Draw a diagram of concentric circles in the following manner: (6 min)
 - a. The middle circle is comfort, the second is risk, and the third is danger.
 - b. Consider the various aspects of your work. Think about the aspects that feel really comfortable to you, those that feel like there is some risk involved, but generally positive, and those aspects that you know get your hackles up, make you feel defensive, cloud your judgment, or make you want to retreat.
 - c. Decide on the size of each zone based on your consideration. Do you work a lot in your comfort zone, your risk zone? Do you work only a little in your danger zone? Make the size of the zones reflect the quantity (%) of time you work there.
 - d. Working in a PLC, in what zone would you situate this? Why?
 - e. Carrying out a practitioners' inquiry, in what zone would you situate this? Why?



2. (3 min) Think about the tasks, people and places that make up your professional life. Write each of these into the zone that best represents your sense of relative comfort, risk or danger.
3. (3 min) Look at the tasks/people/places you put in the danger zone. Write a question for each of these beginning with, "How do I...?" These dilemmas can later be explored.
4. (5 min)Discuss among the group the answers each one of you gave.



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References

Alasdair A., K. White: *"From Comfort Zone to Performance Management"* [1]

<https://www.nsrffharmony.org/free-resources> , in particular
https://www.nsrffharmony.org/system/files/protocols/zones_of_comfort_0.pdf

Exemplification

For Linpilcare, it is essential to have a participants working in their zone of comfort in their PLC, while at the same time they understand that doing PI can lead them to their zone of risk.

It is advisable to use these terms on a regular base, it comforts people to express their state of mind themselves, which creates a safe environment.

The directions below include each participant drawing the zones on paper. Another variant to consider includes using yarn or masking tape to make large circles on the floor, big enough for the participants to step into the three zones.

The nsrf website has an elaborated version of the protocol. (see references)

Searching the internet learns that this protocol is well known, and that there are many applications.

Wim:

- Participants that used it were charmed by the simplicity of the idea
- At the same time it was very relevant

I used it in a group of teachers who were very stressed because of the upcoming meeting with me.

One can ask participants regularly, in case discussions are very animated, to indicate in which zone they feel they are.