Testing an Unusual Model of Professional Development: The Self-Directed Study Group

New Mexico Evaluators

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Course Agenda

March –May: Starting, Managing, & Maintaining a Network

June: Guest speaker from network 'Strive'

July – September: Measuring collaboration, Outcome mapping, Shared measurement, Social network analysis software

October – November: Put together presentation

Evaluation Questions

1. Was the course successful?

2. What factors seemed to impact learning?
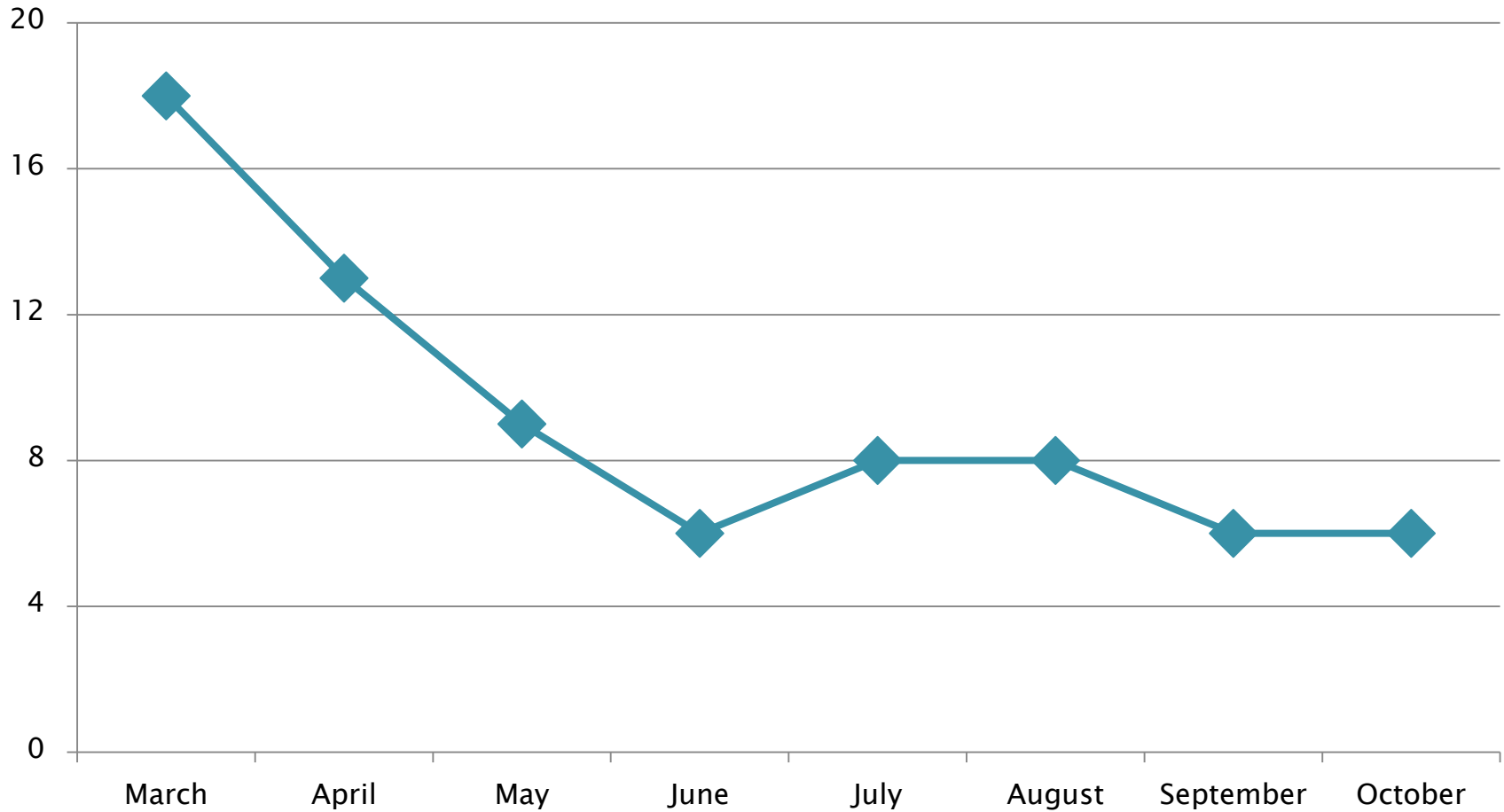
3. Were there unanticipated outcomes?
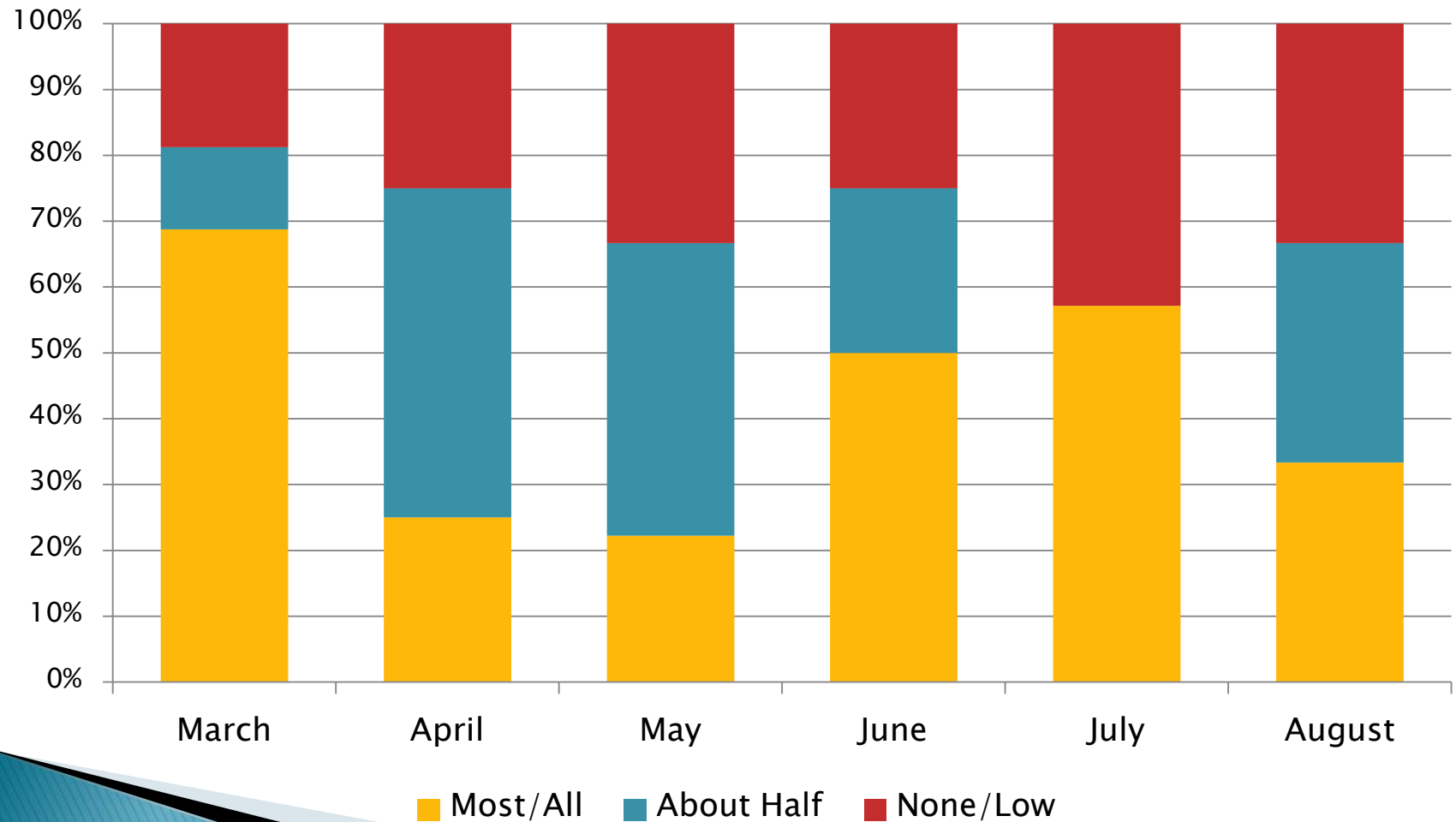
Success: Participation – Voting with your feet

Success: Participation – Those who stopped coming

- Lack of time/conflicts with work schedule

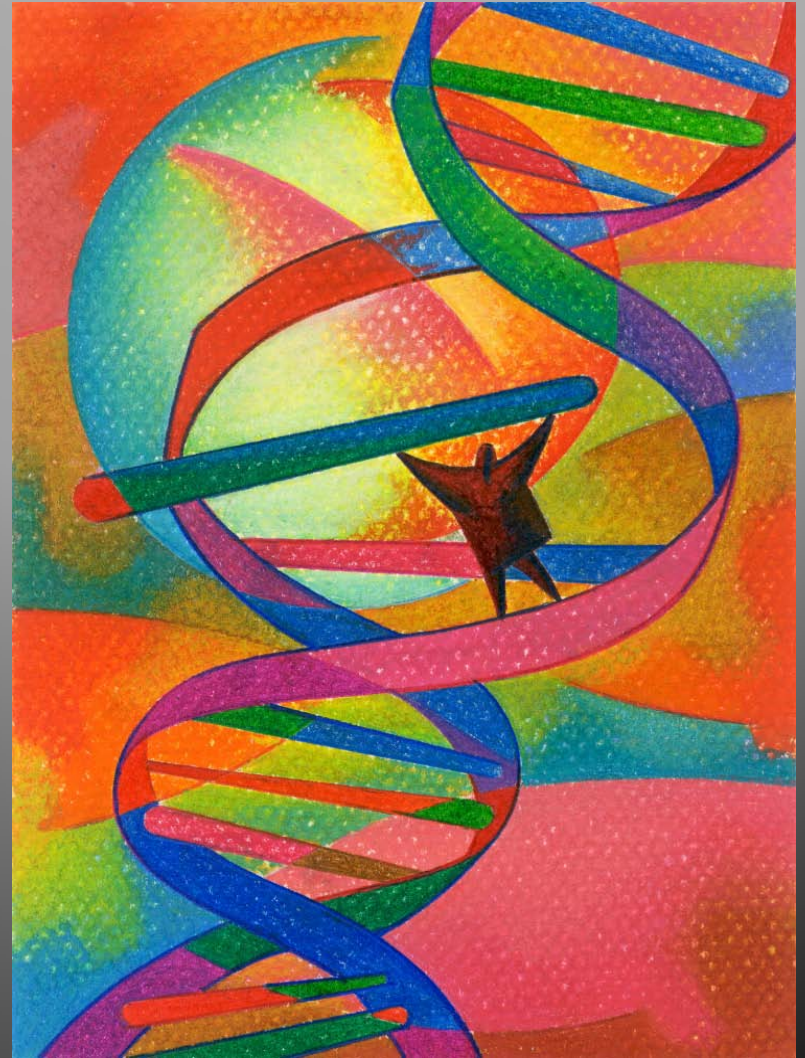- Missed too many sessions to be able to catch up
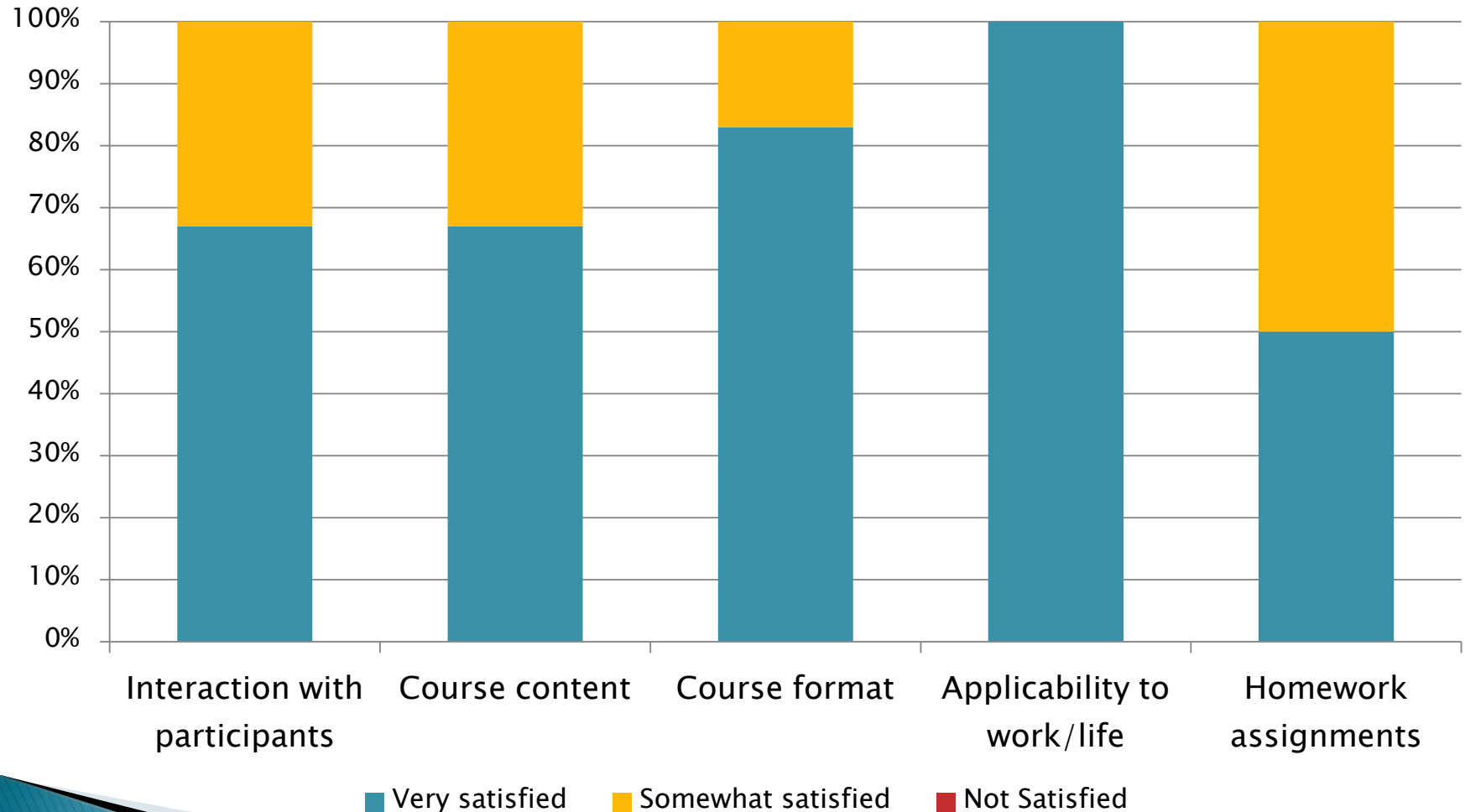
Success: Participation – Homework Completion

Success: What did people hope to get from study group?

- Connect with others interested in organizational networks

- Learn theory of networks

- Learn how to evaluate a network

Success: Connection and Other Measures of Satisfaction

Success: Learning

- Theory
  - More sophisticated than expected
  - Offers recommendations for how to start & maintain an organizational network
- Evaluation
  - Not just SNA – need to consider evaluation questions
  - Various techniques/tools may apply
- Immediate applicability for some
  - Shared terminology with colleagues
  - Behavior as member of organizational network
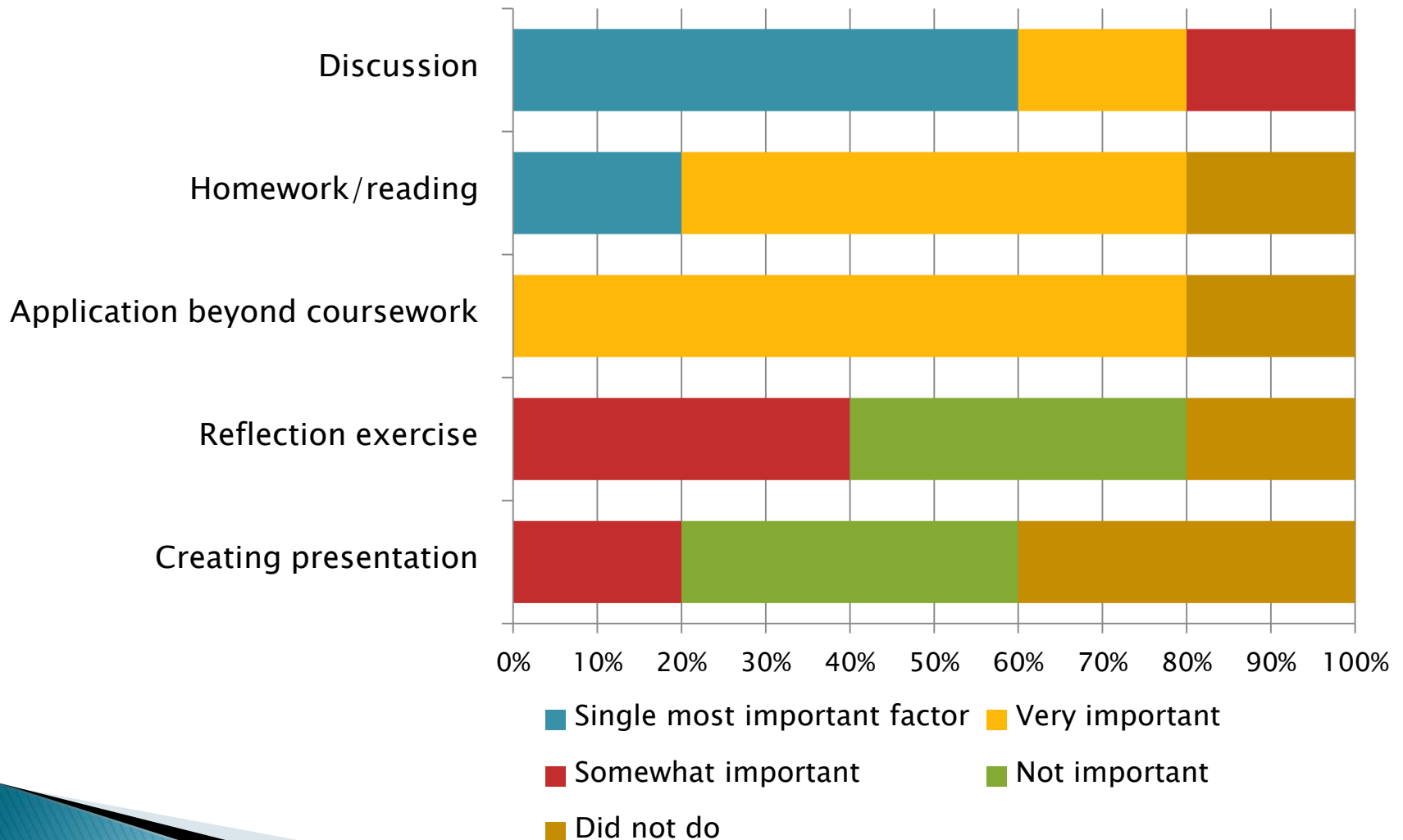 - Grant and evaluation proposals

Success: Learning

"I have a better understanding of the field of social and organizational networks and the various ways of applying the concepts. I also learned that it will take a lot more than a study group and self-study to feel confident about using SNA in my evaluation practice. I hope to continue learning about social/organizational networks and their evaluation, perhaps through a University of Kansas summer institute."

Success: Learning – Content of presentation

1. History of partnerships & need for new model
2. Theory: types, roles, effects, structures
3. Local examples of networks (good, emerging)
4. Challenges of organizational networks
5. Theory of change model for networks
6. Evaluation best practices
7. When to use specific evaluation techniques
8. Challenges in measurement & evaluation

Factors Impacting Learning

Factors Impacting Learning: Mix of professions

▸ "It helped each group learn more about the perspectives and activities of the other group. It also meant that each group had to learn more about organizational network issues relevant to the other group, which probably helped each group gain a more well-rounded/comprehensive understanding of organization networking and its evaluation."

Unanticipated consequences

Positive

- Usefulness to non-attendees
- Immediate applicability for many
- Continuation of course for some

Negative

- High drop-out rate and low levels of homework
- Organizers expected to teach
- Organizers assumed most planning and logistical work
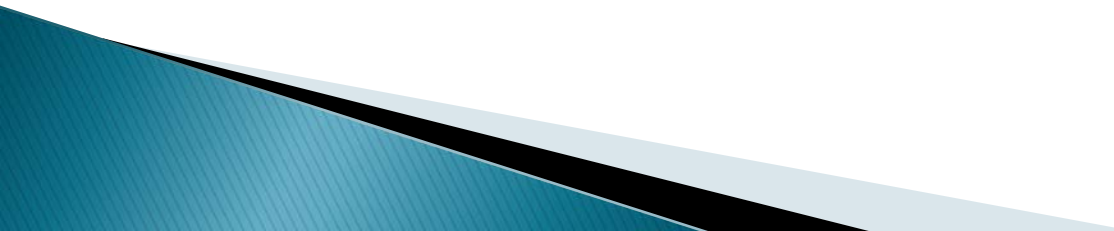
Attendees' suggestions

1. Incorporate project–based learning

2. Emphasize importance of homework

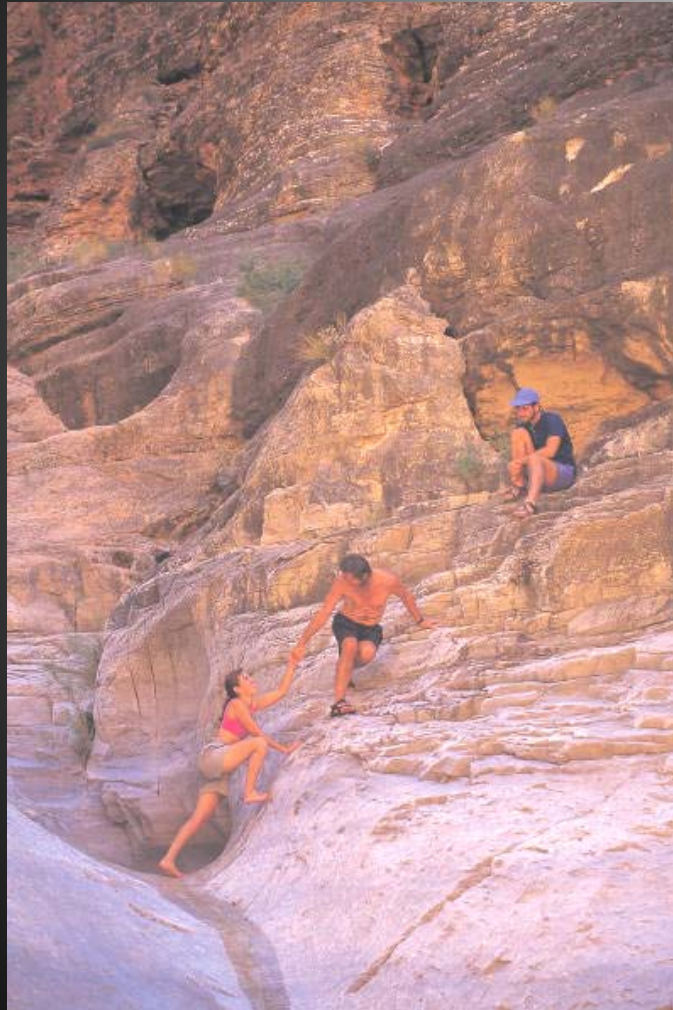3. More review/less review, fewer topics for deeper discussion

Summary: Are self-directed study groups worth doing?

Yes, but as organizers you should know:

- You may be seen as more expert than you are
- You may be disproportionately responsible for planning, logistics and content
- You may have difficulty controlling depth vs. breadth of material and gauging appropriate length of class
- You may need to revise your syllabus

Recommendations

1. Determine with group how much time to spend in review
2. Delegate *small* jobs, possibly in pairs or trios
3. Consider opening course to evaluators and program managers
4. *Consider* ways to prevent high drop-out rate.
5. Presentation *may* not be necessary for learning

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