Four-Box Synectics
Information Processing: Activating and Engaging

PROCESS

• On chart paper, draw a 2 × 2 box. Post.
• A recorder at each table draws a similar box to collect the group’s thinking.
• Elicit recommendations for an object or a concept to place in each of the boxes. Suggest each time that the next recommendation be as different as possible from the previous recommendation (examples: lamppost, sailboat, hammer, daisy).
• Instruct table groups to brainstorm three or four responses for each box to the prompt you provide. (Example: Professional communities are like a lamppost because ____________. Professional communities are like a sailboat because _____________.)
• Give groups 2 minutes to select their best items and a spokesperson.
• Elicit responses from the groups using a full statement such as “A professional community is like a lamppost because ____________.”

cont.
ALTERNATIVES

• People synectics. Provide each table group with three to five postcards that have images of famous people on them. Ensure that the postcards represent diversity.
• Direct the groups to talk about what they know about each person on the cards.
• Have the groups select one card and complete the phrase: [Name the person] is like [the topic you are working on] because_________
• Complete the phrase: [Name the person] is not like [the topic you are working on] because__________.

TIPS

• Explain that synectics is derived from two Greek roots: syn (bringing together) and ectics (diverse elements). This activity draws from the metaphoric brain, which hold information holistically.
• There is a whole-model of teaching on synectics developed by the Cambridge Synectics Group.
• Select topics that relate to your work, the environment, or the group.