Meeting Tools and Strategies

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1. Levels of consensus *Consensus*

"Consensus" is defined by Webster's as "group solidarity in sentiment and belief; general agreement." In practice, consensus building is a collaborative process that is supported through open and honest communication. Most decisions have a number of alternatives and go through many stages as information and opinions develop and are explored. Consensus building requires skill in moving interim thinking through an evolutionary process to decision-making.

- *Define problem*

 What are we talking about? What needs to be decided?

- *Discussion*

What are all the viewpoints; options?

- *A proposal is made*

What action will the group take?

- *Incorporate all viewpoints, options*

- *Discuss proposal*

clarifying questions, concerns state supporting rationale

- *Friendly amendments*

proposal may be amended or withdrawn

- *Test for consensus (restate proposal)*

probe for strong concerns or objections to the proposal call for

     objections within consensus

"Let's see if we're in agreement - what should our position on the

     proposal be?"

- *Consensus reached*

In order to reach the final decision-making point, the following

     questions need to be asked: Do you feel that you have all the

     data to start a decision process? Have you considered all the

     different points of view? Are the assumptions behind our

     viewpoints correct?

- *Decision implemented*

Who does what?

Levels of Consensus

Here is a tool that shortens the time needed to reach consensus but still gives everyone a voice. After discussion of an issue before the board, the chairperson asks each member to hold up fingers showing where each is on the scale below. If a quick scan of the room indicates all 1's or 2's, the group can see that consensus has been reached. If most numbers fall below that, further discussion is needed. Often when a decision is non-critical, it is workable to have a few people at 3 or 4.

Levels of Consensus

1. I can say an unqualified "yes" to the decision. I am satisfied that the decision is an expression of the wisdom of the group.
2. I find the decision perfectly acceptable.
3. I can live with the decision; I'm not especially enthusiastic about it.
4. I do not fully agree with the decision and need to register my view about it. However, I do not choose to block the decision. I am willing to support the decision because I trust the wisdom of the group.
5. I do not agree with the decision and feel the need to stand in the way of this decision being accepted.
6. I feel that we have no clear sense of unity in the group. We need to do more work before consensus can be reached.

2. Eight Steps to Problem Solving

1. **Approach the problem confidently and positively.** Have the attitude that a solution can be found.

2. **Change your language from negative to positive.** Use the neutral word "situation." Look for opportunities in the situation.

3. **Define the situation clearly.** Try to state the situation in a couple of different ways. Stating the situation clearly will resolve about 50% of problem decisions. Ask yourself what part of the situation is out of your control.

4. **Identify all possible causes.** Identifying the right causes will allow you to deal effectively with 25% of situations.

5. **Identify all possible solutions.** Developing several possible solutions in some detail usually leads to a better decision.

6. **Make a clear decision.**

7. **Assign specific responsibility for carrying out the decision and set a deadline for completion and review.**

8. **Initiate action.** Compare actual results with expected results and generate new solutions.

3.   15 Valuable Meeting Practices

1. Open the meeting with a statement of what you expect the meeting to achieve.

2. Unite with the group — be friendly, focus on uniting group members, encourage the participants to focus on ideas not personalities

3.   Summarize the content of the discussion as it proceeds

4. Make observations about the process as well as the content

5. Draw out the resources and contributions of the participants

6. Confront participants if necessary

7. Be on the lookout for emotional buildups

8. Divide problems into sub problems if necessary

9. Keep the meeting moving

10.   Protect the weak

11.   Let people know their contributions are recognized

12.   Seek proposals of action

13.   Make proposals of action if necessary

14.   When decisions are made, state the conclusion before you go on

15.   End the meeting on a positive note