Meeting Together to Succeed Together

Prepared and Presented by

Mary A. Wenska

Wenska Communication*Works*, LLC

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Introduction

- Welcome
- Agenda and Timetable
- Something About Mary

Topics

- Small Group Decision-Making Techniques
- The Case for Consensus
- Conflict: Listen, Learn, and Leverage

Goals

- Have fun!
- Provide an overview of decision-making techniques
- Make the case for using consensus in group decision-making
- Demonstrate communication techniques to transform and transcend conflict in small group meetings

Exercise 1

As a group, you have 10 minutes to answer two questions:

Question 1: What frustrates you about small group meetings?

Question 2: What do you hope to gain from this course?

Be prepared to report back to class with one “best” answer for each question.

Group Decision-Making: Three Options

- Dictator
- Benevolent Dictator
- Majority Rule

Group Decision-Making: Dictator

- Group leader makes decision
- Effective, fast; good for simple decision
- Can cause resentment; undemocratic, no buy-in
- Example: deciding where to have lunch

Group Decision-Making: Benevolent Dictator

- Leader obtains input from group
- Better informed; decisions more competent
- Takes time; conflicts unresolved; no buy-in; yes-people
- Lunch example

Group Decision-Making: Majority Rule

- Vote is taken to determine majority opinion
- Most people like it; seems “fair”
- Encourages competition; win/lose
- Lunch example

A Fourth Option: Consensus

- Every member consents to decision. *Notice this is not the same as everyone getting their first choice.*
- Well-balanced decisions; maximum participation; maximum buy-in; values of group reflected; trust increased
- Requires effort; takes time; can be more difficult; can be unnecessary (lunch example)

Dimensions of Consensus

Consensus

"I love it"

"I can live with it"

"I can't live with it"

"I hate it"

Conflict

Authoritarian vs. Consensus Decision Making

Authoritarian Decision Making

I_____I_____I

Decision Successful Implementation

Consensus Decision Making

I_____I_____I

Decision Successful Implementation

<u>Note</u>: Decision time is shorter with authoritarian decision-making; successful implementation is longer; the opposite is true for consensus

What is Consensus?

Consensus is a psychological state that might be described as follows:

I understand what most of you would like to do. It's not my first choice, but I feel you understand what my alternative would be. I have had sufficient opportunity to sway you to my point of view, but clearly have not been able to do so. Therefore, I can live with and support what I consider to be an acceptable solution.

Why Consensus?

- Makes it possible for group to develop first-best solutions – win/win
- Maximizes choices and leverages skills of entire group
- Provides incentives to identify alternate views or encourages commitment to decision
- No “unhappy minority” to worry about

Consensus-Building Process

- Presentation
- Discussion
- Decision

Consensus-Building Process: 1. Presentation

- Group defines topic
- Group seeks information
- Group delegates tasks to gather data
- Group shares information gathered
- Individuals identify *interests/needs*
- Individuals don’t leap to conclusions

Consensus-Building Process: 2. Discussion

- Exchange all ideas
- Express *interests, not positions*
- Don’t criticize ideas--*use active listening skills*
- Discuss pros and cons
- Use problem solving techniques
- Curtail veto activity

Consensus-Building Process: 3. Decision

- Test for consensus:
  - Thumbs up, down, sideways
  - *Unless <u>all</u> thumbs are up or sideways, no consensus*
- Implement decision

When is Consensus Reached?

A group agrees on a single alternative AND each group member can honestly say to every other member three things:

1. *I believe you understand my point of view.*
2. *I believe I understand your point of view.*
3. *Whether or not I prefer this decision, I will support it because it was reached in an open and fair manner.*

Exercise 2: Three Wishes

A Genie has granted you three wishes
that must be selected from the list you have been given.

The wishes will be granted
only on the condition that
all members in your group agree upon the
same three items.

Work with your group
to come up with three wishes for your group.

10-Minute Break ☺

Stumbling Blocks to Consensus

- Inadequate understanding
- Refusal to give up ideas
- Teams move too quickly; not all ideas explored
- Self-authorized decision on part of one or more people
- Personality or style clashes
- Poor listening

Attitude and Actions That Help

- Be open
- Manage your internal judging voice
- Seek to understand
- *Learn to listen*

Listening Stances

- Being aware of yourself
- Putting yourself in their shoes
- Becoming an observer

Typical Thoughts While Listening

- Judging
- Preparing our response
- Daydreaming

Active Listening Skills

Paraphrase

Restate what you heard the other person say without necessarily agreeing

Inquire

Test your understanding by asking open-ended questions

Acknowledge

Listen for the underlying feelings of the other person and reflect them back

Active Listening Stance

Listening with the intent to understand another's point of view . . .

. . . rather than focusing on what we intend to say next.

Exercise 3:
Active Listening--Step 1

Pair up with someone.

Exercise 3:
Active Listening--Step 2

Designate one person the “Listener” and the other the “Speaker.”

Exercise 3:
Active Listening--Step 3

Listener: Think of a widely-known public issue about which you have a strong opinion (for example, Iraq, presidential politics, gun control, abortion, etc.).

Listener: **Share with the speaker what your issue is and your viewpoint about it.**

Exercise 3:
Active Listening--Step 4

Speaker: You are now going to begin a conversation where you adopt the *opposite viewpoint of the Listener*.

Listener: In this conversation, *you can only do one thing—listen actively.*

That means you can only

paraphrase, acknowledge, or inquire.

Exercise 3:
Active Listening--Step 5

Speaker: Give feedback/coaching to the *Listener.*

What did the *Listener* do that made you feel heard?

What did the *Listener* do that made you feel less heard or annoyed?

Exercise 3:
Active Listening – Step 6

1. Switch Listener and Speaker roles.
2. Listener: Think of an issue and share your view.
3. Speaker: State opposite view.

   Listener: Paraphrase, acknowledge, inquire.
4. Speaker: Give feedback. How well did the listener listen?

Applying Active Listening in Small Group Meetings

- *Listen* to group members' perspectives with *active listening skills; avoid judging right or wrong*
- Check understanding to establish clarity, find common ground, and strengthen group cohesion and cooperation.
- Summarize and gain agreement on similarities and differences.
- Move to problem-solving, if appropriate.

Active Listening Tips

Remember to use

- *“Could you tell me what you heard me say”*

Listen

- Before stating your own position, summarize what you heard, including meaning and feeling, until the speaker is satisfied you understand.

Active Listening Benefits – Individual

- Allows you to get what you want for reasons you will not regret later.
- Pushes you to make conscious choices about how you will respond, whether you get what you want or not.

Active Listening Benefits – Group

- Promotes buy-in and group involvement.
- Improves post-meeting participation.
- Encourages maximum flow of information.

In short, active listening makes it possible for a group to achieve genuine consensus.

Summary

- Review course topics and goals
- Identify ways to apply training
- Gather course evaluation/feedback

For More Information

- Lawrence Susskind and Jeffrey Cruikshank, *Breaking Robert's Rules* (2006).
- Program on Negotiation, Harvard Law School, *Negotiation Skills for Senior Executives* (2003).
- Marshall Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication* (2nd Edition, 2003).
- *Handbook for Facilitators,* The University of Texas at Austin Quality Center (1998).
- Roger Fisher, William Ury, and Bruce Patten, *Getting to Yes, Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In* (2nd ed., 1991).