MEETINGS THAT ROCK!

By North Star Facilitators

Facilitating Decisions & Actions©

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Introduction to
This Competency
Produce Effective Results

What will we cover?

Facilitating decisions and actions actually covers a wide range of things. This is why the International association of facilitators chose the following wording for the competency **"Guide Group to Appropriate and Useful Outcomes"**. This is one of the six main competencies they expect from people who show up to be certified as "certified Professional Facilitator and wear the CPF designation.

The sub-points to this competency include (from www.iaf-world.org):

1. Guide the group with clear methods and processes

  a. Establish clear context for the session
  b. Actively listen, question and summarize to elicit the sense of the group
  c. Recognize tangents and redirect to the task
  d. Manage small and large group process

2. Facilitate group self-awareness about its task

  a. Vary the pace of activities according to needs of group
  b. Identify information the group needs, and draw out data and insight from the group
  c. Help the group synthesize patterns, trends, root causes, frameworks for action
  d. Assist the group in reflection on its experience

3. Guide the group to consensus and desired outcomes

  a. Use a variety of approaches to achieve group consensus
  b. Use a variety of approaches to meet group objectives
  c. Adapt processes to changing situations and needs of the group
  d. Assess and communicate group progress
  e. Foster task completion

In this module we will particularly focus on the items highlighted in blue - i.e., 1b, 2c, 2 d, 3b, and 3e. Many of the previous handouts also covered some of the other sub-points above.

What is Your Style
of Decision–Making?

One thing I have found helpful in my own practice is to be aware of how I personally make decisions. I had a bit of a shock when I discovered the steps I go through to make decisions. I typically weigh up the situation, get a gut feeling, sometimes check it out with one or two other people, and then make the decision quite quickly. I do not use much logic in my decision making. If you have a chance to review the free webinar Meetings that Rock 3, you might recall that Bob Wiele of One Smart World says that there are three decision making styles:

1. Critical Decision Making
2. Values Driven Decision making
3. Trust Your Heart Decision Making

Based on this, I typically default to the values driven style. I think a lot about how my decision will affect others and whether it meets my strong value of honoring others. Ok, you say – pretty good criteria from which to make your decisions. However, it often gets me in trouble in these ways: I don't think about what I want as much; I get disappointed because I have not really met my needs; and, it rarely has much research to back it up!! Then my decisions often may not take the best information into account. I have learned to make up for this which I won't go into here.

Fill out Exercise 1 for building self-awareness.

Exercise 1

Think about a recent important decision you had to make at home or at work. What were the steps you took to come to a decision?

List them here:

Now answer this quiz – which describes your pattern of decision–making in most situations? (I added the last one to make you smile – unfortunately some of you may check it and that could be a problem for the meetings you facilitate (note: I am partly teasing you!)

- ☐ Like to have lots of information before I decide.
- ☐ Trust my instincts about choice(s) to make.
- ☐ Make my decision if it will positively impact others.
- ☐ Typically consider what is important to me before deciding.
- ☐ Systematically chart the pros/cons of all options.
- ☐ Use any of above based on circumstances.
- ☐ Never make a decision if I can help it.

What Does Producing
Effective Results Encompass?

> *"If we can find short-term incentives that are consistent with our long-term objectives, it is much easier to make the right decisions in the moment."*
>
> **— Tom Rath, *Wellbeing: The Five Essential Elements***

> *"You have to start with the truth. The truth is the only way that we can get anywhere. Because any decision-making that is based upon lies or ignorance can't lead to a good conclusion."*
>
> **— Julian Assange**

"Producing effective results" could include simply getting the group to summarize a conversation. It typically includes a list of actions that different people in the meeting will undertake after the meeting and before the next meeting. It might be more complex like arriving at a difficult decision which has many component parts. In each case, however, you are looking to bring effective closure to each part of your meeting. And, at the end of the meeting, you want to be leaving the participants with a clear sense of what was accomplished and that they had a part in it.

 Remember most people want every meeting to contain both ways to connect with each other and support one another (the experiential aspects of the meeting) and a sense of accomplishment (the rational parts of the meeting). This is what many say would make a meeting worthwhile. I would typically include the following techniques for bringing closure to meeting items starting with simple and moving to more complex:

1. Summarizing the key elements of discussion
2. The last level of thinking in dialogue frameworks
3. Five finger consensus
4. Action chart of accountabilities
5. Gradients of Agreement Scale
6. Multi or dot voting
7. Decision grid with criteria ranking (could include the converge technique of brainstorming)
8. Prioritizing tool
9. ToP Consensus Workshop Method
10. Consensus decision making
11. Strategic and action/project planning
12. Add yours here…

Although we will briefly mention some additional points around items 1, 2, 3, 9, and 10 (seen in other handouts) we will focus more on decision – making theory and techniques in this handout.

Types of Decision-Making:
Ladder of Involvement

A very common decision making chart is known as the decision ladder. It shows how involved you want your group to be in the decision making process. It can range from you are telling them what the decision is and you expect them to abide by it to the group has full involvement for choosing the decision and implementing it. The graphic below depicts the typical range.

Here are six possible levels of involvement in decision making ranging from giving information to having full responsibility for all aspects of creating and implementing the decision. This can be a helpful guide for your group in knowing what level of decision- making involvement is required from them when discussing any issue.

Level of Involvement

Fallback

6. Full Responsibility: Delegate with constraints

5. Decision-making Authority: Consensus

4. Team Input: Gather input from team and decide

3. Individual Input: Gather input from individuals & decide

2. Persuasion/ Education: Decide & help others understand

1. Information: Decide & announce

Time
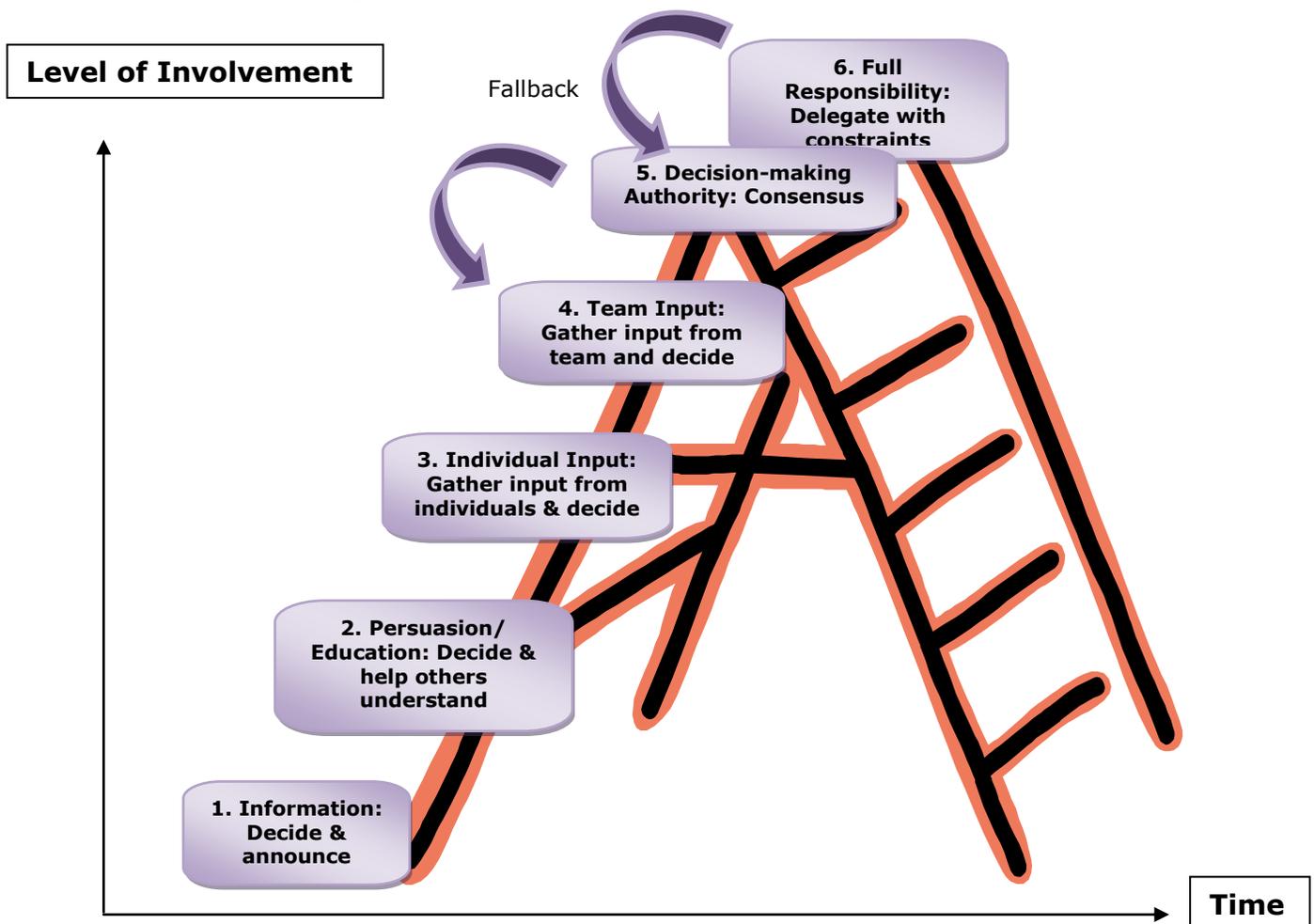
Source: Adapted from Canadian Institute of Cultural Affairs and Interaction Associates Inc. Adapted by Barbra MacKay and Carol Turner, colleague and owner of Leadership for action: www.carolfturner.com

There are many levels and styles of decision-making. Different organizations have preferences that mirror the organizational culture. The following list, adapted from the work of Thomas Justice, provides a helpful guide to the various ways decisions are made. Refer to the Facilitator's Fieldbook for more information on these methods.

1. **Information**: the leader of the group decides and informs others. If you are facilitating this type of decision, you are designing a conversation around what is the decision and how it impacts them and how to implement it.
   o Plus: Removes ambiguity on who makes the decision.
   o Minus: Group support is difficult to get since people appreciate being a part of the decision-making process.

2. **Persuasion/Education**: The leader of the group makes the decision and helps others understand it.
   o Plus: Removes ambiguity on who makes the decision.
   o Minus: Group support is difficult to get since people appreciate being a part of the decision-making process.

3. **Individual input:** The leader makes the decision after listening to all group members in a group meeting or by consulting different key individuals who have relevant expertise.
   o Plus: Members of the group are involved and assist the leader in making informed decisions.
   o Minus: Other affected staff may not give full support to the results or decision.

4. **Team input** or Consultative Consensus: The leader consults with other group members, seeking consensus yet still clearly retaining control of the decision.
   o Plus: Makes implementation of the decision or results easier since people generally support the results of a collaborative effort where they had made a contribution.
   o Minus: This will require time along with good, neutral facilitation. This tends to have less than total support from the group since they do not fully own the decision.

5. **Modified Consensus**: The group members each agree upon a decision that all can support or at least "live with".
   o Plus: This works in an organization that values active participation and results.
   o Minus: This may require even more time along with good, neutral facilitation.

5a. **Absolute Consensus:** All group members are in absolute agreement that the decision is superior to what exists as the status quo.
   o Plus: Participants will own and support the results and decisions they made.
   o Minus: This may take more time and definitely neutral facilitation.

6. **Full Responsibility:** the group is fully empowered to make the decision and then implement it.
   - o Plus: This would be a feature of a learning organization. It is very empowering for the group and can energize them.
   - o Minus: participants may delay making a decision because they feel accountable for the outcome. If it is not truly a learning organization culture, being given this level of responsibility may feel intimidating. (See also module: Mapping Organization Development from North Star site)

Source: Adapted from Thomas Justice & David W. Jamieson, The Facilitators Fieldbook: Step-by-Step Procedures, AMACOM: NY, 1999

Note: Not noted on this ladder is the following common way of making decisions: voting.

Voting: Group members vote on alternative proposals and the alternative receiving the required number of votes (majority, 2/3, etc.) becomes the group decision.
   - o Plus: This is often the speediest way to make a decision
   - o Minus: It "divides the house" and there are "winners" and "losers" making implementation difficult. Choose as a last resort or when the stakes are low. Typically in organizations or teams trying to be more participatory, voting is discouraged.

The Decision Making Framework

Whatever decision-making techniques one uses, one must facilitate bringing divergent views into convergent views (Kaner, page 152). In decision-making processes, inevitably the group will go through what Kaner calls 1) a divergent zone (people's ideas are different and often opposing) 2) a "groan zone" (people struggle with their apparent differences) and 3) a convergent zone (people come into alignment around their ideas). Thus, we need to use dialogue techniques to facilitate a group through these three zones. For example, in the first zone, the discussion might include brainstorming options, pros and cons of each option, ways to reduce barriers to certain options, etc. In the second groan zone, the discussion focuses on hearing and understanding others' perspectives. In the third convergent zone, discussion might include sharing reactions, responses, assumptions, and/or how to communicate to those affected by the decision, etc. See also module entitled "Consensus and Decisions".
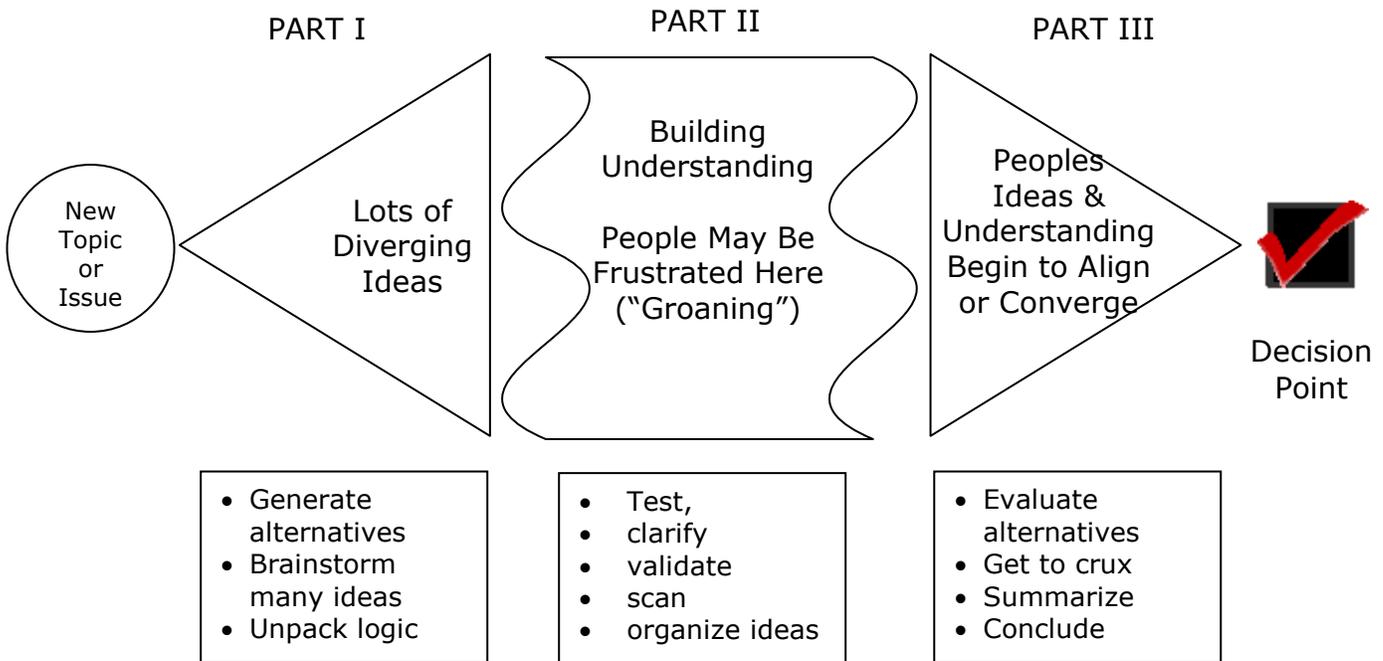
Every decision essentially has three parts to it based on the authors noted above. In part one, there are differing points of view and the facilitator's job is to flush out these points of view using brainstorming and other innovative techniques to show the range of options. Kaner calls this part one the divergent zone (see Figure 1). The second zone is where people need to understand the diverse points of view and find underlying levels of agreement in the data. Typically this requires much sharing and defining what one means by one's ideas. Bob Wiele of OneSmartWorld calls this the "building understanding zone". Kaner calls this the groan zone. In this phase, people struggle with their apparent differences. Finally and hopefully, people can come to a decision where all group members come into alignment around their ideas. Kaner calls this part three, a convergent zone. For example, in the first zone, the discussion might include brainstorming options, pros and cons of each option, ways to reduce barriers to certain options, etc. In the groan zone, the discussion focuses on hearing and understanding others' perspectives. In the convergent zone, discussion might include sharing reactions, responses, assumptions, and/or how to communicate to those.

> *"Though right or wrong, you're bound to find relief in making up your mind."*
>
> **—Thornton Burgess**

> *"The act or process of deciding. A determination arrived at after consideration. Promptness and firmness in deciding."*
>
> **—Webster, 1995**

PART I   PART II   PART III

New Topic or Issue

Lots of Diverging Ideas

Building Understanding

People May Be Frustrated Here ("Groaning")

Peoples Ideas & Understanding Begin to Align or Converge

Decision Point

- Generate alternatives
- Brainstorm many ideas
- Unpack logic

- Test,
- clarify
- validate
- scan
- organize ideas

- Evaluate alternatives
- Get to crux
- Summarize
- Conclude

Adapted from Sam Kaner, IAF Handbook Chapter 8, page 122 & 124 and OneSmartWorld 4Di System.

Below, we outline ways to help a group move through the three parts of decision-making. We have used a case-study to illustrate how you might design a two hour decision-making process.
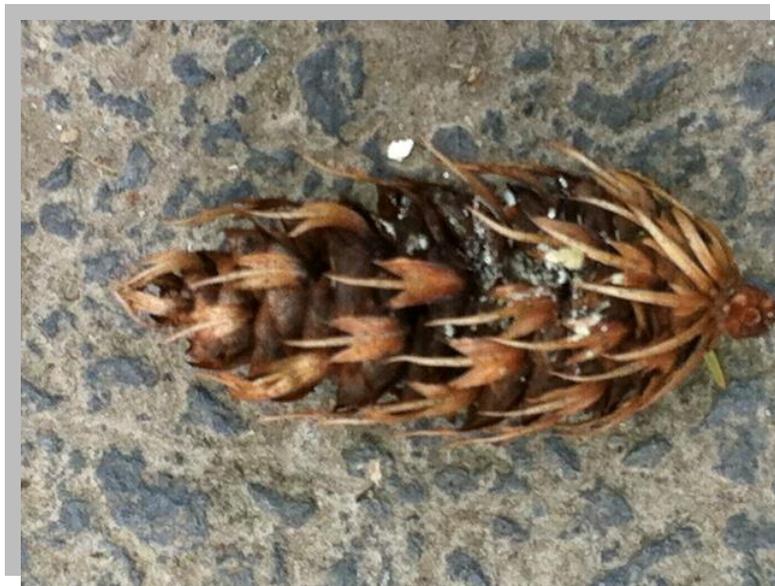
Case Study
Part I of Decision-Making

Divergent or Creative Zone

In part I of decision-making, a group comes together and each person has a range of ideas about what needs to be done, and what actions or outcomes they want to see happening. Imagine the scenario is a Board of Directors and several staff members of a children's museum. They are trying to decide if they might accept a donation of a December holiday display from a large retail store in their community. They have already had a presentation on the cost of the project and what would be involved if they accepted the display. In this part of a session, it is important for the facilitator to set the context for the group and help draw out all the ideas that the group might have about whether this is a good idea or not. Imagine the range of ideas that might exist about this potential "project". Several people think this is a good idea and want to accept it without hesitation. Others are saying, "Is this really within our mission to have this kind of item for our children's museum?" Some members are brand new and want to know more about the implications. They are wondering, "Where would the display be placed? What state of repair is it in? What age ranges are attracted to this kind of display?" Still others are worried that this kind of display is not inclusive of all sorts of cultures.

In the context setting, the facilitator would clearly set out the plan for decision-making. He or she would likely introduce the concept of the decision-making framework set out in Figure 1. He or she would tell the group how much time might be allotted for each part of the process – e.g., 30 minutes for part I, 60 minutes for part II and 30 minutes for part III. It would be good to check your assumptions about process and timing with the group but not allow too much time for this or the group will be frustrated.

To draw out ideas from the group, you the facilitator, might draw out the group as follows:

Brainstorming pluses, minuses and interesting: This is a Dr. de Bono technique that he calls PMI – plus, minus and interesting**.** Have each person brainstorm a list of five possible reasons why the project (i.e, the donation) should proceed (pluses), five reasons why it should not proceed (minuses), and 2-3 reasons why this project and its possibilities might be "interesting" (interesting). If the group is less than 15, you can simply create three flipcharts and have each pair offer one plus, one minus and one interesting aspect of the project. Then ask the group if there are any different ideas which have not been listed. Complete the brainstorming. If the group is larger than 15, create small groups of 3-4. Have them individually brainstorm as above. Then in their small

groups, have them share their top three reasons in each category with each other. Ask them to eliminate any duplicate ideas and submit up to two different ideas for each category on large cards (5.5" X 7" or 12.5 cm by 15.5 cm) or half sheet of papers, one concept per half page for the whole group to see. These ideas can be posted on a wall where all can see. You are aiming for no more than 15-20 ideas per category. For more details on this technique, see also café handout called *"Effective Consensus Building".*

Case Study
Part II of the Decision-Making

Building Understanding or Groan Zone

As the facilitator, you now have to help the group explore these ideas, and broaden their understanding of each others' perspectives by asking lots of questions and encouraging them to listen to each other with an 'open mind' stance. It might also involve some drawing out of previous experiences, gathering some more data and so on. To do this, you could proceed in the following way:

- Remind the group they have entered the "groan zone" and it will be important for them to listen non-judgmentally. At this point, all perspectives are valid and need equal and careful consideration by the whole group. Read out all the plus ideas and ask the following questions: What strikes you about this list? For which plus ideas would you like more of an explanation? Which reasons seem especially attractive? Why?

- Follow the same process for the minus and interesting ideas and adapt your questions accordingly.

- Then you might ask also the following questions: Who has a similar experience with accepting donations of this nature? What are some of the things learned on those projects? What information is missing to help us make a decision? Where would we get this information? Who is someone not in the room who might have a different perspective? What changes when you add this perspective?

- It is often helpful at this point in the process to go back into pairs or triads and have people share their thinking confidentially with each other. This allows every person to have a voice in a safe setting and clarify their own thinking before having to make a decision in a larger group. It

is helpful to give each person in this small group an equal amount of time (say 2-3 minutes each) to voice whatever they are thinking or feeling about the project. Impress upon members that whatever is said in this small group is not to be referred to in the large group or with each other after this sharing time.

- You might then get the group to formulate their own criteria to help them make the decision. Typical criteria might include: cost to install the project; level of effort to install; attractiveness to the key clients; revenue generating potential; level of alignment with the mission, etc. For more details on this criteria making technique see also café handout called *"Group Decision-Making"*.
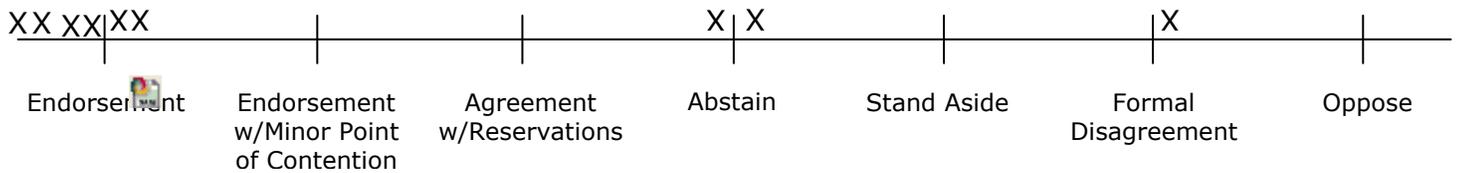
Case Study
Part III of Decision-Making
Getting to Agreement Zone
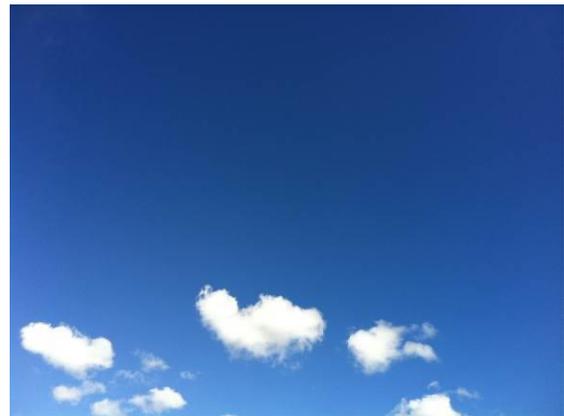
The group may or may not be ready to make a decision. It could be that a crucial piece of information is not available and they need to meet again to go further. However, we'll assume the group is likely ready to begin part three of the decision-making framework. Here people need to really attain buy-in, feel the decision-making process has been fair and every person has a chance to "weigh in" or "vote" on the decision. You, as facilitator might proceed as follows:

- If you have created a list of criteria, ask the group to work through the list and ask which criteria must be met (i.e., are not negotiable).

- Have the group rate the project on each criterion. If some criteria are not met, you might ask the group if there are any partial options to the project (such as taking on part of the display; delaying installment by storing the display, etc.) which would allow more criteria to be met.

- Once the group has had some time to explore and rate the project against the criteria, ask the group if they are ready to decide. If not, explore areas of contention further or decide what the next steps are.

- If yes, use the gradients of agreement scale.

- Have people mark on a piece of paper which replicates the scale below where they sit on this proposal to accept or not accept the holiday display for use at the children's museum. Then you or some trusted neutral party can mark the "votes" on a larger scale grid for all to see. Imagine it might look like this:

XX XX XX | | X | X | X |

Endorsement	Endorsement w/Minor Point of Contention	Agreement w/Reservations	Abstain	Stand Aside	Formal Disagreement	Oppose

In this situation, you might ask if those who put dots in the middle and on the right side of the scale are comfortable identifying themselves and explaining their position. Make sure everyone in the group listens carefully. Ask what would be needed to make them feel more comfortable with a decision of the majority of the group. If people are not willing to self-identify, ask a member or two of the group to state how they might mitigate for the fact that three people did not seem comfortable with the decision. This is critical for the long range success of your decision.

Exercise 2

Think about a recent meeting. Write out a table of what was discussed and what your action chart might have looked like if you or the meeting leader had been vigilant about getting this completely filled out. Resolve to do this next time. Offer to make this chart if you are not in charge of the meeting.

Decision Making Techniques

Summarizing

Summarizing the key elements of what a person just said or summarizing the key points of the discussion is an art which requires careful listening.   You might start with the phrase "I think I heard you say…" Ideally you get the meeting participants to do this. This keeps them involved and saves you from having to think too much!

The last level of thinking in dialogue frameworks

Generally however, I tend to approach most decision-making in groups as part of a larger dialogue process. For example, in module 3, we learned about the using sequenced dialogue technique developed by ICA (www.ica-usa.org), the model has the group systematically move from facts to associations to analysis and then decision. Also, we learned about De Bono's Six Hats technique, where one moves through a series of "metaphoric colored hats" from facts to pros and cons to strategies to summary, gut reaction or decision. Often great discussions using the above noted dialogue models, lead a group to easily made, great decisions or help a group come to workable conclusion. The more formal decision-making techniques described in this module may be needed when there is a lot of tension or contrasting views around a decision, or the decision had high stakes because it will be published and made known to a wide audience. You are simply ensuring you use this level through accurate questions and phrases to help people bring closure to their thinking, Tip: just do it!!

Five finger consensus - see handout #4 – remember that there are steps that

come before the "voting". You need to ensure everyone understands what they are "voting" on.

Action chart of accountabilities

At every meeting consider having on whiteboard, PPT or flipchart a chart with the following columns and rows. Fill it out at the end of every topic and make sure people agree to their assignments. You might say at the end of a topic: ok – let's review what we are doing on this

topic: what did we decide was the action item or items? Put that under "what". Who will do which items? Write that under "who". When will you let the team know about its progress? Write that under "when". What will you do it if gets stalled?   (Write under last column). Let them know ok to ask for help. Ask who will support this person to get this done?

Agenda Item	What	Who	When	If stalled….
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				

Gradients of Agreement Scale

Use in CONSENSUS GROUP DECISION MAKING

Overtime, most groups have used a traditional form of decision-making, majority vote, to guide group decision-making. This approach, while valuable, can feel unsatisfactory and lead to divisions between a group if members are forced to take firm "Yes" or "No" positions on issues that come before the group.
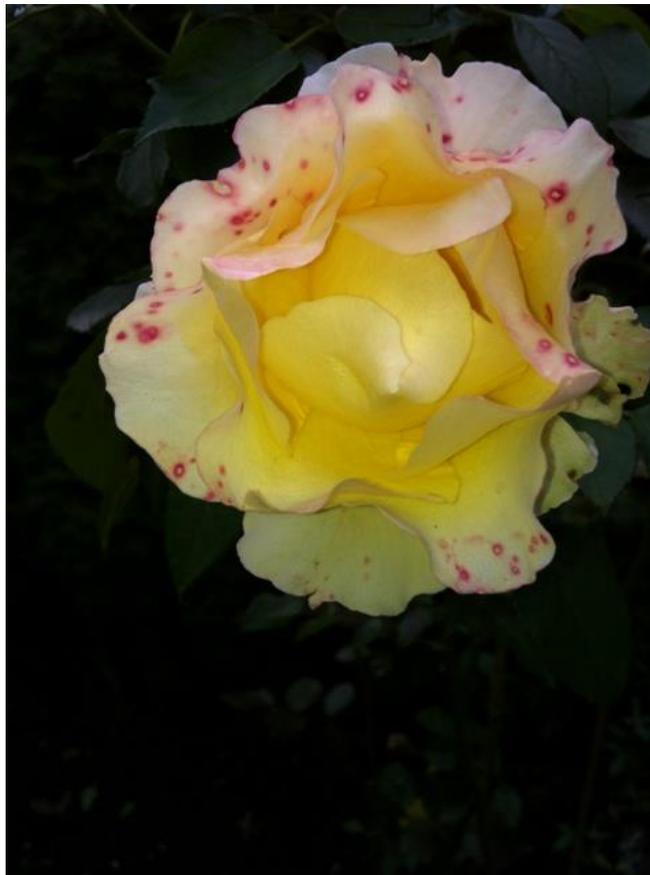
Another alternative is to have each group member indicate where they sit in range of yes and no answers. This allows everyone to indicate how they "feel" about a decision and allow the groups to take certain actions if the decision is not for example a unanimous yes or no. In the case of everyone falling to the left side of the page, the group might feel comfortable proceeding but would first investigate a few minor points of concern. If most indicated they lean toward the right side of the scale below, undoubtedly the group would agree to stall a decision until some concrete actions had been taken. This is closer to consensus decision-making, not where everyone is in

complete agreement but allows expressions of types of agreement/disagreement. In consensus decision-making, groups can agree on the range of options or gradients of agreement that they will use in their decision-making process.

Below are seven levels of agreement. It works well also to use five levels of agreement - i.e., two on either side of "abstain".

Ways to use this scale:

1. Introduce the scale to participants and make sure they understand each gradient shown (5-7 levels, whichever is more appropriate). Have each person place a sticky dot or check mark somewhere along a commonly viewed scale when the group has had enough discussion on the issue or proposal of action being decided.

PARTICIPANTS' GRADIENTS OF AGREEMENT

Endorsement	Endorsement w/Minor Point of Contention	Agreement w/Reservations	Abstain	Stand Aside	Formal Disagreement*	Oppose*
"I like it!"	*"Basically, I like it."*	*"I can live with it."*	*"I have no opinion."*	*"I don't like this but I don't want to hold up the group."*	*"I want my disagreement noted in writing, but I'll support the decision."*	*"I formally oppose this proposal & will not support its implementation."*

Source: Adapted from Shelley Stump of Coyote Moon Consulting *and Facilitators Guide to Participatory Decision-Making*, Sam Kaner et al, Community At Work (1996), p. 212.

Decision Grid

Why Use This Technique?

I have experienced the following benefits when using these techniques with groups:

- Helps everyone feel they have contributed
- Gives a great visual picture of what are best options
- Diffuses conflict; reduces debate
- Can create a sense of fairness
- Brings objectivity and thoroughness to the decision-making process

What Supplies Are Needed?

⇒ Flipchart paper and chart stand to document discussion and brainstorm draft criteria (could also use ICA consensus workshop technique to develop criteria – involving cards, putty, or sticky wall)

⇒ Overhead transparency or paper to create and depict grid

⇒ Transparency or felt markers of several colors to write data

⇒ Laptop computer for someone to document data on site or digital camera

**How to Lead the Technique?**

(Average Time is Allotted per Step)

1. **Introduction to the technique.** The group has already generated a list of options, ideas or projects. They cannot decide which option best serves their needs. Tell participants they are about to generate a list of criteria. Give an example of criteria they have used in their personal lives that everyone can relate to: e.g. When they are seeking a place to live, ask them what do they consider: e.g., safety statistics, noise levels, proximity to stores, schools, and parks, aesthetic pleasantness of inside and outside space etc. once everyone understands the concept of criteria, give them this question to answer *"what criteria or factors shall we consider in choosing the best option(s)"* (5 minutes)

2. **Individual and then small group brainstorming –** Each person jots down whatever they can think for criteria to judge options or projects. After five minutes, break into small groups of three to four persons. Small group members share their data sets with each other and choose which criteria to write out on cards (no duplicates). Remind them to write no more than 5 words in large block letters on each card. You likely want no more than 20-25 draft criteria – so

limit the number of cards per group accordingly (e.g., four groups – each generates five to six criteria). Or, after an individual brainstorm time, you can have each person share one criteria, jot on flipchart until everyone has shared one and keep adding until you have 15-20 ideas. See also the module entitled: "Effective Consensus Techniques".   (20 minutes)

3. **Place the cards in batches on the wall according to similar intent or criteria. Post 10-12 cards** Read out exactly what is written on each card as you post it in a neutral tone of voice. Ask which ones might go together because they represent similar factors or criteria. Once most cards are grouped, post the next time ten to 12 cards. If you are using the flipchart technique, you can put a similar code next to ideas which might group together. (20-30 minutes)

4. **Naming the criteria –** Ask the group to name each group of cards (or phrases if flip charted) with a phrase beginning with a verb such as creates safety for young people; builds community spirit; generates new funds. Post an example for them before you start the naming process. Encourage the group to settle on three to nine criteria. (15-25 minutes)

5. **Break time.** This allows you or a group member time to **create a grid.** The criteria are written along the top of the page/acetate and the options are listed vertically at the left side of the page. Draw lines so that each option can be checked against each criterion. See example on next page.

6. **Evaluate each option.** The group rates each option together. The group may wish to weight the criteria by giving more important criteria a higher multiplier factor. To rate each option use a scale of 0 -3 (0= does not meet criteria; 1= somewhat meets criteria; 2= good; 3=excellent. You can also simply check if it meets the criterion reasonably well. (10-30 minutes)

7. **Add up scores** to determine which solution(s) come out the highest. (5 minutes)

8. **Next steps.** Discuss what they will do with the data (e.g., create an action plan; presentation to management, etc.) and how will they document and distribute. (5 – 60 minutes depending on whether they do an action plan now or later)
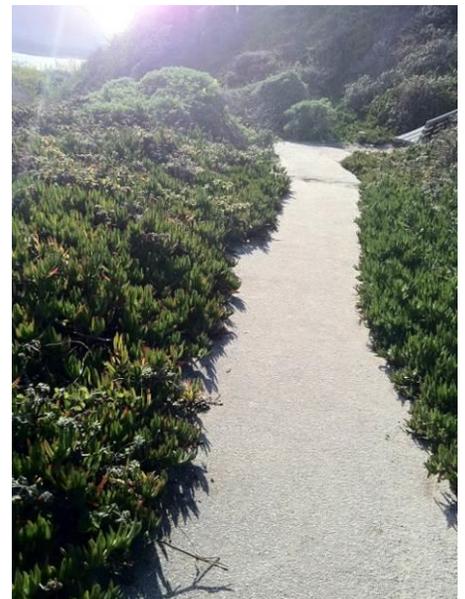
On the next two pages are other typical criteria you might provide to the group to rank options. The first is a sample of criteria for moving office spaces. The second is a generic list you can modify to your situation when the group is trying to weigh the pros and cons of different projects or options and narrow the choices down to the top 1-3 choices for execution.

Example table for ranking options to improve and expand office space for organization XYZ

CRITERIA	Improves productivity	Costs less than $50,000 this year	Supports better teamwork	Will get manage-ment support	Minimal disruption to operations	We all have enthusiasm for doing it	
Multiplier factor	**(x 2)**	**(x3)**	**(x1)**	**(x2)**	**(x1)**	**(x1)**	**e.g., Here criteria 1,2 and 4 are more important to group**
OPTIONS							**Scores**
Cosmetic changes to offices only							
Divide two larger offices to create new space							
Find a new building							
Move administration downstairs							
Move storage to another location – use as office space							
Downsize staff by two							
Some staff work part-time at home							

Example Criteria for Rating Projects	Projects we wish to consider beginning or completing in next year						
	Project A	Project B	Project C	Project D	Project E	Project F	Project G
Within mission of organization?							
Moves forward most aspects of the vision?							
Deals significantly with obstacles?							
Easy to implement? (1= no! 10=yes!)							
Enthusiasm for project by majority of staff and board? (1=low; 10=high)							
Moves strategic directions forward simultaneously?							
Financially possible to implement?							
People resources/skills and energy available to implement (1=no!10=yes!)*							
Has the potential to create a ripple effect – other projects move forward with little effort?							
On the upswing of a trend (cutting edge)?							
Improves financial stability/profitability?							
In summary, our rating of this project on a scale of 1=poor 10=great*							
Rank order of all projects							

Prioritizing Tool

Use these six steps to think about how to prioritize projects and tasks, etc.

How to use this as a tool: When you are trying to decide what is the top priority task, project, action, program, etc. on any given day, week or year, follow the six steps by choosing a few questions to answer from each box.

Ask your group: What questions do we need to ask ourselves or the team to be more confident about (or evaluate) our chosen priorities?

STEP 1 Defining the current state. ANALYZING AND UNDERSTANDING PRIORITIES & IDENTIFYING WHO IS MOST IMPACTED	Step 2 Imagining a different future desired state. SEEING A CLEAR PATH TO CHOOSING PRIORITIES
What is the priority? Why is this a priority? What are the criteria to identify priorities? What do I know or need to know about the present situation that affects the priorities? What is going well related to any of these priorities? What is not going so well? How much time do we have to solve this problem? Who does this priority benefit? Or, Who is this going to effect? Who are the stakeholders affected? How will others be impacted? What external variables drive the priority? What are the external influences? What priorities are no longer relevant?	What is the best possible outcome? What do we really want to see happening in the future around these priorities? What would we see, hear, and feel if everything was going well related to the priorities? What is our ideal solution? Who do we ideally want / need to impact? Who are the best people to be involved in developing priorities? What is the best possible timing?

STEP 3	Step 4
Broadening your understanding of the environment. (SWOT)	**Articulating the underlying obstacles.**
ASSESSING BENEFITS AND RISKS	**DEFINING THE OBSTACLES**

ASSESSING BENEFITS AND RISKS

Present Strengths: What is the current positive impact of any the priorities?

What is going well related to any of these priorities?

What resources do we know we can apply to ensure our success?

Present Weaknesses: What are the gaps in our current business that impact deliverables?

What is the current negative impact of any the priorities?

What resources or skills might not yet be in place to deliver any of these priorities?

What are the time constraints?

Future Threats: What are the consequences of not addressing the issue?

What happens if we don't meet this priority?

What are the consequences of delaying this priority (on our mandate and other projects)?

Future Benefits:

Who will benefit from our choices?

What opportunities might become if we do this?

How will we be better as a result of this choice?

DEFINING THE OBSTACLES

What are the likely obstacles that would hinder successful implementation of any of the priorities?

What keeps getting in our way?

What seems to be preventing us from making a decision about priorities?

What policies, systems, attitudes, or beliefs might be contributing to this current (problematic) state?

Why are we having this issue?

STEP 5	STEP 6
Brainstorming strategic priorities / options.	*Developing tactics that fall within realm of one of strategic priorities.*
DEVELOPING THE FRAMEWORK & CHANGE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES	**DETERMINING THE WHO, WHAT AND WHEN**
What are all the different ways I could downsize obstacles & maximize success?	What are my timelines?
What are new ways to implement the priorities?	What is our timeframe?
How can we better evaluate / assess competing priorities?	How does it affect priorities?
Can the priorities be structured?	What priorities can be implemented quickly?
What have I tried before that has worked?	Who could best help implementing this priority?
How do we integrate our current state with the priority?	Who should lead the project? Why?
How does it meet our current needs?	
How does it meet the core priorities of Government?	What are the "baby steps" we could take to begin this priority?
How can we manage the change in priority?	What are specific actions that would align with my proposed strategies?
If priorities conflict, how do we adjust them?	What actions would be catalytic and have the "biggest bang for our buck"?
How have others overcome a similar situation?	What actions would be easy for us to do?
What might be all the ways to solve the problem?	What actions do we already have support and resources for?

Multi-Voting Using Dots

This technique is the one where a long list of ideas is narrowed down by having each group member take colored dots and place them beside ideas they favor. It is used a lot by beginner and experienced facilitators more than any other decision technique I know. It is so often done without the right kind of preparation, that it is ineffective. Please pay attention to the right technique below.

Why Use This Technique?
I have experienced the following benefits when using this technique with groups:
- Establishes a clear set of priorities
- Reveals emerging perspectives or leaning of group
- Is quick, democratic and participative
- Is visually effective and engages people kinesthetically

What Supplies are Needed?
⇒ Flipchart paper and chart stand or whiteboard to list options
⇒ Large sticky dots (can be different colors) of colored markers
⇒ Laptop computer for someone to document data on site or digital camera

How to Lead the Technique?
(Average Time is Allotted per Step)

1. Clarify items being prioritized. **Discuss each item to ensure everyone knows what it means or what it entails, its strengths and weaknesses**. Make sure all the options are listed.

2. Identify 3-6 criteria to guide the vote so everyone votes with same criteria in mind; e.g., lowest cost terms; easiest to complete; most important to staff; most important to customer; of most relevance, etc.

3. IMPORTANT. Distribute dots in either of the following ways: 1) Hand out a strip of 4-7 dots per person. Tell them they can use only ONE dot per option. **Use one third or slightly fewer dots than half the number of items to be sorted** to force people to make choices (e.g., give out – four to five dots to sort 12 items) OR, 2) give each person 10 or 100 points (dots) to distribute among items to be scored. Better to not allow anyone to put more than 50% of dots on one item. See Appendix on pages 37-38 for another way to do this.

Common Mistakes

1) Getting people to place dots with no prior discussion of items.
2) After the "vote", telling group it is obvious what the priorities are without asking them what they see and having them interpret the dot data.
3) Having no discussion of implications after the dot voting.
4) Giving too many dots for number of items.
5) Using dots so small that no one can see the count.
6) Having unclear options or similar options so vote gets split.
7) Giving no instructions about how many dots or % of dots allowed per option
8) Giving different number of dots to different people.
9) Giving different people different colors so everyone can tell who voted for what.
10) Counting dots before everyone has voted.
11) Having people wait in line to place dots. Post several pages of options to avoid this.

ToP Consensus Workshop Method

This is described in handout #4. In this technique, the group does not arrive at a decision. Rather, the group takes a number of ideas around a single topic and channels their thinking into options or strategies to consider. To bring this activity to decision, it is helpful to first prioritize the order of the options – which will come first, etc. and then build an action plan for each option.

Consensus Decision Making

This is described in handout #4. Here is a quick reminder of the difference between consensus and decisions.

Consensus
- ▪ Not all consensus processes reach a decision.
- ▪ The end point of consensus is often a set of directions or options.
- ▪ You can then use another process to prioritize options.

Decisions
- ▪ Not all decisions are consensus based (see Ladder of Involvement earlier in this handout)
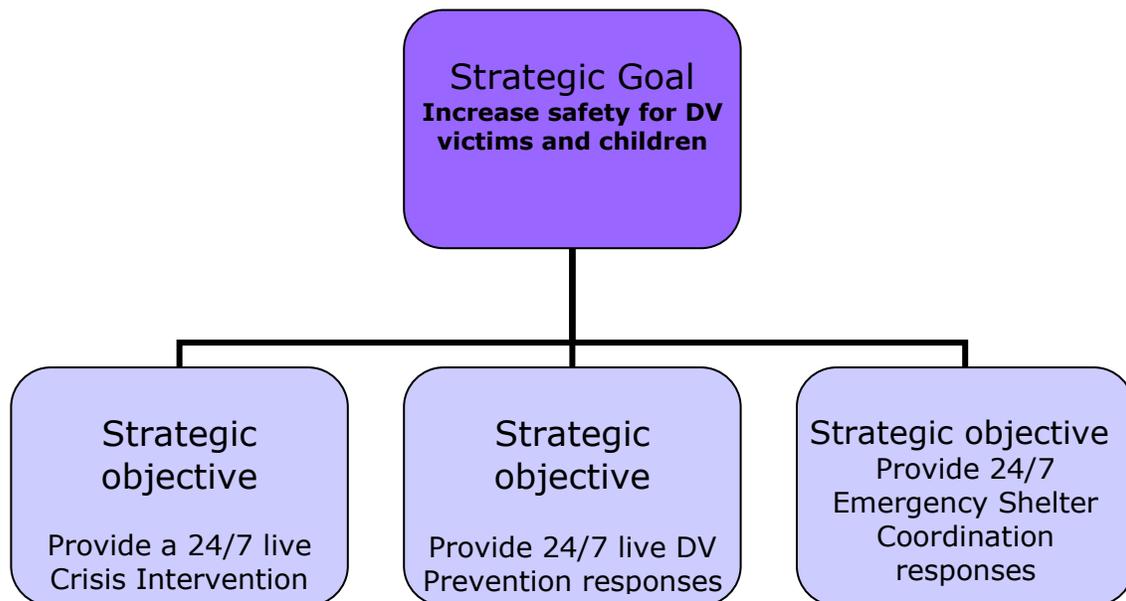- ▪ Consensus-based decisions require input from all and a solution that all can live with.

Strategic and Action/Project Planning

One of the ways to help bring a group to closure is to formulate a strategic plan or an action plan. Here is a brief description of the difference between strategic planning and action planning. We also briefly give an example of how to turn ideas into measurable outcomes – i.e., goal and objective language. You can learn more about strategic planning by looking at our eLearning products on the North Star Facilitators site.

Strategic planning is a disciplined effort by a group of committed stakeholders to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization does and how it does it. It typically looks at every aspect of the organization or team. This might include the programs, facilities, people, finances, stakeholder relations, etc. It often includes the creation of a mission and vision. The end result of a strategic plan is often a set of strategic goals. For each strategic goal, there are also often associated measurable outcomes sometimes called strategic objectives. Below is an example from a ToP (Technology of Participation) colleague working on an overall project related to developing a plan to Operate County Wide Domestic Violence Hotline Center. In the diagram on the next page, you can see one goal with three strategic objectives. For

each objective, the groups completes an action plan stating – the steps needed to accomplish this objective, when, who, where and how much it will cost.

```
                    ┌─────────────────────┐
                    │   Strategic Goal    │
                    │ Increase safety for DV │
                    │  victims and children │
                    └──────────┬──────────┘
          ┌────────────────────┼────────────────────┐
┌─────────────────┐ ┌─────────────────┐ ┌─────────────────┐
│   Strategic     │ │   Strategic     │ │ Strategic objective│
│   objective     │ │   objective     │ │  Provide 24/7    │
│                 │ │                 │ │ Emergency Shelter │
│ Provide a 24/7 live│ │ Provide 24/7 live DV│ │  Coordination    │
│ Crisis Intervention│ │ Prevention responses│ │   responses     │
└─────────────────┘ └─────────────────┘ └─────────────────┘
```

Example of strategic goal and strategic objectives

An action plan is typically a plan that may only last 3-18 months – it is usually project based. It could be for a campaign, promoting a policy, setting up a new technology system, hiring new employees, etc.

Conclusion

Remember we said that meetings that have a sense of accomplishment will be meetings that matter and feel worth people's time. There are many ways to help bring a group to closure even when you have ongoing team meetings. Each topic should have some sense of closure. It may be as simple as "What are our next steps?"

Some of these techniques will need a lot of practice. Take the step by step instructions with you and make sure you have all the right supplies to go a good job. Once you have tried them, feel free to experiment, change up the way you do it, etc. Have fun helping your team or groups reach a decision and produce outstanding results.

Our Favorite "Best on the Market" Resources

(Other than those noted in this module)

"Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making", Sam Kaner, et al, 2007.

"Facilitating with Ease!", Bens, Ingrid. 2005.

Harvard Business Review On Decision Making. Harvard Business School Press. 2001.

Smart For Life – Powerful Techniques for Achieving Personal Success and High Performance. Weile, Bob. Fearless diamond Press,. 2003. www.onesmartworld.com

Visible Thinking. Unlocking Causal Mapping for Practical Business Results. Bryson, John, M et al. John Wiley and Sons Ltd. 2004.

The Practice of Making Strategy – a Step by Step Guide. Ackerman , Fran et al. Sage Publications. 2005.

The Procrastinator's Handbook.   Emmett, Rita. Walker & Co., 2000
Includes: Fear of Making Wrong Decisions, p. 85; Decision Making quiz, pp. 111-112

The Time Trap. Mackenzie, Alec. AMACOM, 1990.   Includes: Delegation information and quiz, pp. 104-109; Confused Responsibility or Authority, p. 163

Your Guide and Author of This Handout:
Barbara MacKay

Barbara MacKay, MS, CPF©, principal of North Star Facilitators, specializes in strategic planning, facilitation processes, training, and consulting.

Barbara is currently mentoring facilitators from all over the world and cares deeply about passing on the skills to others so the world becomes a just, peaceful and creative place.

Barbara's strong interpersonal communication skills and experience allow her to work skillfully with a wide variety of participant perspectives. Barbara specializes in helping groups participate, problem-solve, plan and make progress in challenging and complex situations. She has an energetic, respectful style and clear delivery. Barbara has worked with 100's of clients from all sectors with her own company since 1995. She provided social, economic and environmental consulting and facilitation services with many cultures throughout Canada from 1981 to 1995.

Barbara is a: Certified facilitator and USA trainer with the International Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA and Canada); Certified Professional Facilitator (CPF) and assessor of other facilitators world-wide with the International Association of Facilitators (IAF); Professional Development Strategic Initiative Coordinator for the IAF for four years; has been an Adjunct professor with University of Oregon (Eugene) (teaching the only required facilitation skills (4 credits) class of all Oregon universities at graduate level in Conflict and Dispute Resolution Studies); an adjunct professor teaching facilitation skills at Portland State University (Not for Profit Management Institute); certified OneSmartWorld™ trainer; trained in Disaster Crisis Intervention for facilitators; certified accelerated learning trainer; trained extensively in: Constructivist Listening and Cross Cultural Communication and Alliance Building; visioning processes; Mind Mapping™; Behavior styles model "Why Are You Like That?™"; and Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument (HBDI). She is also trained and teaches about Learning Organizations; Organizational Journey (ICA); conciliation; "shifting from positions to interests"; conflict resolution; negotiation skills; anger management; risk communication; training for trainers; and curriculum development.

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Appendix

Note: Some of my answers will simply refer back to what you covered in this handout and thus are short!

FAQ's

Q: How do you ensure people meet their assigned tasks between meetings?
A: *See action chart of accountabilities in this handout. It is helpful to make sure everyone who has a task can honestly answer if they have the time to do the task. Ask them how realistic is this timeframe for you? What help would you need to get it done? What will make it easier for you? Meet with them in private if they consistently miss deadlines.*

Q: What if the group is split 50/50 on choosing between two options?
A: *It is good to help the group   really understand each other. Design a discussion like: what do we know about each option?   Then do a PMI on each option. What are the pluses of each option? What are the minuses of each option? What   is interesting about each option? Then ask what is the least amount of change needed to option A to make it acceptable – to option B. Use gradients of agreement scale on each option and see what emerges from this activity. Ask: what does this discussion tell us about our choices. If still split, ask the group if they can revisit in a few days or assign a leader to make the decision.*

Q: Which technique would I use with a team of very negative people who do not really care about what is decided?
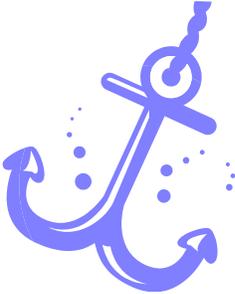A: *If this is the case, it sounds like people are feeling frustrated or discouraged about their ability to have power in this area. What can you do to help them see where they have power? Have an honest conversation about what is discouraging them. See the technique in handout #3 using Non-violent conversation method.*

Q: How do you involve a group who really has no say in how things are decided but they have to implement the decision?
A: *Similarly to the answer above. Help them to see where they do have power - i.e., in how it is implemented. Ask "where can we make a difference with this decision?" "Where can we not?" "What is one thing that we can do to   make our work valuable?"*

Short Self Assessment Quiz:

Source: OSU Leadership Center.

On a scale from 1 to 5, please rate how each question describes you.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Not at all   Hey, this is me

_____ 1. I don't want to miss an opportunity, so I have trouble saying "no."
_____ 2. Making decisions drives me crazy.
_____ 3. Without necessary authority, I am unable to make decisions.
_____ 4. To avoid being wrong, I will often delay making a decision.
_____ 5. Decisions create change; I hate change.

Sound familiar? Did you score high numbers on the quiz above? If so, you probably determined that you don't like making decisions!   Might be good to access some more resources on this and talk with others about how to change this reluctance to make decisions. Ask yourself what is the worst thing that can happen if I make this decision? Then, take steps to reduce what you perceive or know to be the possible negative consequences.

Quiz on the Pitfalls of Decision Making

Source: Harvard Business Review On Decision Making. Harvard Business School Press. 2001.

"Bad" decisions often occur because of the way they are made. Either there was not enough information, or the pluses and minuses were not weighed carefully enough, or the right people were not involved, and more. Below, in brief, authors Hammond, Keeney and Raiffa list the following pitfalls to avoid in decision-making. They say these pitfalls are particularly dangerous because they are "invisible" or hard-wired into our thinking. We are not being strategic when we succumb to any of these pitfalls or traps in our thinking.

Name of pitfall and your rating	Description of the pitfall	Ways to avoid the pitfall
Anchoring My own rating of how often I do this: _____	• The mind gives disproportionate weight to the first information it receives. Initial impressions, estimates or data tend to overly influence our decision. This can take the form of a colleague's comment, a statistic misused in the newspaper, stereotypes we make about people's dress, skin colour, etc, or reliance on a past event or trend.	• Try using different rating points and approaches rather than your first line of thought • Think about your decision on your own before consulting others • Seek ideas from a variety of different perspectives – not just your usual "suspects" • Don't tell people your own thinking before you hear their ideas • In negotiation, be sure of your own position first.
Status Quo My own rating of how often I do this:_____	• The mind prefers not to take action if it means changing something. Often people prefer to be given one alternative. If given more than two, they will tend to stick with what they have got. If you are given something, you tend to keep it, even if given an opportunity to change. If you merge organizations, you tend to stick with existing structures so people don't experience too much change	• Write out your objectives and ask how they will be served by the status quo • The status quo is not your only alternative. Remember that. • Ask – would I choose the status quo if starting from scratch? • Avoid exaggerating the cost of changing the status quo • Evaluate alternatives in terms of present and future • If several alternatives are better than status quo, force yourself to choose. • Don't choose not doing because it's too hard to choose.
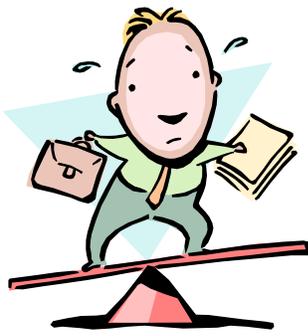
Name of pitfall and your rating	Description of the pitfall	Ways to avoid the pitfall
Sunk-Cost My own rating of how often I do this:_____	• This is when our biases influence us to make choices based on past choices. I will decide this because it worked in the past or I know how it will feel, etc. they are "sunk-costs" because they are old investments of time and money and resources. It is often hard to admit we might have made mistake in the past, so we live with it rather than admit it and change something. i.e., You hired someone who is not working out but you keep them to avoid admitting you made a poor judgement. Sometimes a good decision just goes bad beyond your control, but management punishes "mistakes" so you don't take action to "cut your losses".	• Choose advisors who were not involved in earlier decisions • Examine what makes it hard for you to admit to an earlier mistake • Don't let your colleagues or subordinates make sunk-cost decisions. Reassign responsibilities if needed. • Cultivate a mistake-tolerant culture, not a 'fear of failure' one. Reward people for the quality of decision–making not just the outcomes.
Confirming Evidence My own rating of how often I do this:_____	• We tend to seek out evidence that supports our existing instinct or point of view and avoid information that contradicts it. This tip tends to have us look for evidence to confirm our decision or interpret the evidence in favour of our decision. This factor tends to have us subconsciously decide what we want to do before we determine why we want to do it. Also we tend to be engaged more by what we like rather than what we do not like.	• Check to see whether you are examining all evidence with same rigor. • Get someone to play devil's advocate and argue against the decision you are thinking about taking. • Come up with counter arguments to your decision yourself. Here is where you really argue for the cons of making the decision if you are initially in favour of it. • Admit to your motives in making this decision. Ask are you gathering corroborating evidence or all evidence? • Avoid asking leading questions. Ask instead open-ended questions like "what would happen if we did this?" Don't surround yourself with "yes" people.

Name of pitfall and your rating	Description of the pitfall	Ways to avoid the pitfall
Framing My own rating of how often I do this:_____	• This is the framing question you make in thinking about your decision. The frame can highlight the status quo or introduce an anchor; it can highlight confirming evidence. People tend to be risk-adverse when a problem is posed in terms of gains, and risk-seeking when the problem is posed in terms of avoiding losses. Also we tend to accept the problem as presented to us rather than restating it in our own way. We also tend to be more conservative in our decision-making if we are given the thought of losing.	• Do not automatically accept the ways things are presented to you or the frame. Try to reframe it and look for distortions caused by how others are framing it. • State your difficulty in neutral, redundant ways. e.g., Would you accept a 50/50 chance of either losing $500 (resulting in a bank balance of $1500) or gaining $1000 (resulting in a bank balance of $3000)? • Throughout the decision-making process, keep thinking about framing the problem differently – if it would change your results or thinking. • Challenge how others frame the problem.
Estimating and Forecasting My own rating of how often I do this:_____	• Most of us are reasonably good at estimating and forecasting when the events are certain, but when the events are uncertain we tend to be overconfident about our accuracy. • On the opposite pole, we can be overly prudent and use "the worst case" scenario of conditions which are unlikely to ever happen in combination. This can lead to a serious shortage or over-supply if different divisions in an organization all forecast "to be on the safe side" this amplifies the "safety factor" by too much.	• Start with considering the extremes – i.e., the low and high ends of the possible range of values, then challenge your estimates of the extremes. Imagine the range falling below and above your extreme estimates and adjust accordingly. • Challenge your colleagues and subordinates' estimates in the same way. • Tell others how you arrived at your estimates and don't "pad" or "low ball" them. Ask those supplying estimates to tell you how they arrived at their numbers.

Name of pitfall and your rating	Description of the pitfall	Ways to avoid the pitfall
Estimating And Forecasting (continued)	• We are influenced by dramatic events as portrayed in the media or our own lives. Our ability to recall accurately is greatly influenced by recent traumatic events. This can negatively affect our ability to do accurate probability assessments.	• Test estimates over a reasonable range of conditions to assess impact. • Take a second look at sensitive estimates. • Examine all your assumptions to ensure you are not unduly influenced by recent events. • Get actual statistics when possible.

Multi or Dot Voting - How many dots to use?

I have not tried this but it might be worth trying….

Source: **Lisa Heft, lisaheft@PACBELL.NET,** Group Facilitation listserv

As an experiment several years ago I decided to use 5 dots per person, regardless of the number of issues that must emerge in the end. Participants can spend all dots on one item or spread them around. The only rules are: no tearing of dots into more pieces, no selling dots and no pushing on peoples' hands as they place their dots on the wall (!).

If a certain number of items must be found at the end (like 5 or 10), my 'team' counts the votes up and highlights the top 5 (or 10). But I have often found that there is a very clear (and small) number of 'top' items and that most clients are okay if it is 6 instead of 5, or so on (of course we have had this conversation about what might happen pre-event).

I have done this with groups of up to 150 people. In a single case where there were 455 items to vote on (!), we (the group and I) co-developed a consensus and discussion process where participants went to the main issue areas they were passionate about and grouped/ merged/clustered the items into fewer clusters for voting. (In this particular situation participants came up with nine final items -three in each of three general issue areas).

So far I have always seen the 'right' number of items to emerge after the dot vote. Very unscientific, but the 5-dot theory always works for me.

I agree that it is imperative to inform participants (and clients) that any 'vote' is only indicating a snapshot of where today/this-exact-moment's energy is on 'top' issues, and I underline the fact for participants (I actually never use the word 'vote' as I find that this furthers peoples' anxieties about losing support on their own issues) that the selection of items today does not mean that the work cannot continue in the hands of anyone who's passionate about the other issues.

And I have found that when going over 'why do you need to have a vote' with clients pre-event it often turns out that prioritization *for what* must be articulated (top items that can be done without added budget? Top items that go to existing committees? Top items for next 6 months and then we'll take another 'snapshot'?) rather than 'top items that this group feels should move forward' (or whatever). And sometimes in this conversation we find that there is actually no reason to take a vote / priority at all during this event but there may be other ways of naming and identifying.