

Acknowledgements

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Through grants, workshops, and information, the OCP seeks to support these centers as they experiment with organizational changes aimed at increasing their effectiveness in conducting natural resources management research, working with a broader spectrum of partner and client organizations, and harnessing the full potential of their diverse staff. The expectation is that lessons learned from the experiments and workshops carried out through the OCP will be diffused and benefit the CGI AR System as a whole.

Starting and Maintaining Effective Teams: A Guidebook for the CGIAR



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Table of Contents

Starting and Maintaining Effective Teams.....	1
Understanding Teams.....	2
Getting Teams Started.....	5
Steps in the Team Start-up Process.....	7
What Can You Expect to Have at the End of the Team Start-up?.....	9
Tips for Team Start-up.....	10
Tip #1: Begin by Assessing Your Team.....	11
Tip #2: Create a Shared Common Purpose.....	13
Tip #3: Clarify What Team Leaders Really Do.....	15
Tip #4: Assess Your Leadership Capabilities.....	19
Tip #5: Clarify Team Roles and Expectations.....	21
Tip #6: Create Agreements for Working Together	23
Tip #7 Build a Team Work Plan.....	25
Tip #8 Give Team Performance Feedback.....	27
Tip #9:Facilitate Effective Team Meetings.....	39
Tip #10: Assess Your Meetings for Effectiveness.....	41
Tip #11: Deal with Challenging Behaviors and Situations in Meetings.....	44
Tip #12: Use Flipcharts Effectively	48
Tip #13: Use Effective and Appropriate Decision-Making.....	54
Building Consensus.....	58

Starting and Maintaining Effective Teams

Effective multidisciplinary teams are essential to the CG Centers' research. Creating and leading such teams, however is not an easy task. Often, CG teams are geographically dispersed with members scattered across several time zones and many cultures. Some teams have members who come in and out of the team's work over time, and are on multiple teams. Given the nature of CG teams it seems important to help team leaders and members start and maintain effective working norms and practices for the teams.

This Guidebook is intended to offer simple tips and tools you can use, with minimal time investment, to establish or fine-tune your team's performance. If you are a team leader, this guide can serve as a starter kit to get your team off on the right foot as well as a map to keep your team on track. For team members, it can provide concrete ideas on how to most effectively participate in and contribute to the overall effectiveness of your team.

In service of that goal, this Guidebook follows the path of a team's life cycle. It begins with a working definition of "team" and highlights the elements that are critical to forming a team. The Guidebook then focuses on what it takes to get a team started and provides suggestions on how to maintain effective team performance.

From worksheets to meeting ideas to work plan formats, this Guidebook provides CG staff with handy and easy-to-implement suggestions for supporting team effectiveness.

We hope you find the material helpful and that you enjoy creating your own high performing team.



Understanding Teams

In working with teams, we have found it most useful to begin with a common understanding of what is meant by “team” and how teams best function.

A team is a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, goal, and interdependent approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable.¹

Here are the key elements in this definition that deserve more attention:

- ◆ **Small Number of People** - Most successful teams are small in size ranging between two and twenty but usually six to ten.
- ◆ **Complementary Skills** - A team’s complementary skills are reflected in the combination of knowledge, ability, and experience required to perform effectively. A winning formula includes:
 - **Technical expertise:** The know-how related to technical aspects of the assignment
 - **Decision making and problem-solving skills:** The ability to solve problems and make decisions with others, and
 - **Interpersonal skills:** The ability to communicate effectively and build trusting, respectful relationships.
- ◆ **Common Purpose** - This is the team’s task or reason for existing, which is shared by all team members, and in some way motivates and/or inspires each person. Often, high performance teams develop direction, momentum, and commitment by having a shared purpose that is meaningful to each of their members. Most teams are either given a purpose or shape their purpose in response to a challenge placed in their path, usually by management. Through an open discussion of what the team is called to do and why, team members can align their needs and expectations with those of the organization, as well as with those of each other.

¹ Katzenbach, J. and D. Smith; *The Wisdom of Teams*; Harvard Business School Press; Boston, MA; 1993

- ◆ **Specific Goals** - The desired results the team agrees to produce are reflected in their specific goals – goals that define success. Without clear measures of success, team efforts remain unfocused and unstable. Well-conceived yet challenging performance goals generate a sense of urgency and lay the foundation for team communication and planning. They enable the team to recognize and celebrate milestones along the pathway to success, and to make appropriate interventions when their progress is delayed.
- ◆ **Interdependent Approach** - This approach includes a coordinated plan for reaching the goal and shared methods for performing team tasks. To implement this approach, teams must agree on:
 - who will do particular jobs, including who will lead,
 - how schedules will be set and adhered to,
 - how team members will help one another,
 - what skills need to be added or developed,
 - how the team will make decisions,
 - how new members will be added, and
 - how and when modifications of an approach to the job will take place.

Agreeing on an approach to the specifics of the work and how people are integrated lies at the heart of building an effective team plan.

Likewise, team interdependence should breed a group synergy that makes it possible for all team members to function as highly as possible and give maximum contributions. In order for that synergy to thrive, team leaders need to ensure active participation from all members by supporting open communication while honoring respect for differences between members, enhancing members' self-esteem, and mediating constructive conflict resolution.

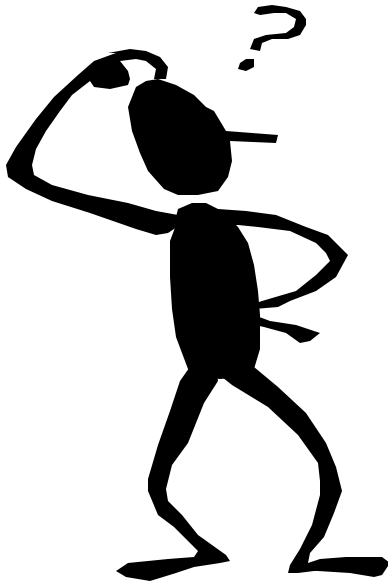
- ◆ **Hold Themselves Mutually Accountable** - Given the interdependency of the work, team members must develop a sense of mutual accountability, a feeling that they succeed or fail together, not as individuals. At its core, team accountability is about trust – trust that members can rely on one another to do what they say they will do and not to do things that intentionally hurt other members or the team as a whole. This trust tends to grow as a natural counterpart to the development of the team purpose, performance goals, and approach. When people work together toward a common objective, trust and

commitment, the very cornerstones of accountability, naturally evolve.

With a clear understanding of what a team actually is and what it takes to support team success, we can now identify what can be done to get your team started on the right foot.

Getting Teams Started

There are a number of questions that need to be addressed as a team is formed and begins its operations.



- ◆ What is our purpose?
- ◆ What are we supposed to do?
- ◆ Who will do what?
- ◆ What is each team member's specific role?
- ◆ What is the role of the team leader?
- ◆ How will we work together?
- ◆ What do we mean by mutual accountability?

Team leaders need to ensure these questions are answered clearly and completely through a collaborative process involving all the team's members.

This can be accomplished by having a couple of meetings or one longer meeting designed to produce outcomes that the group agrees with over the life of the team.

By the end of the team's start-up phase, we suggest the following be achieved:

1. Review the team's mandate. Discuss and agree upon the purpose of the team

The intent of this discussion is for team members to review the mandate and develop a common understanding of the purpose of the team and how it fits into the broader picture of the entire organization. If team members already share a common understanding of their purpose, then this discussion will only take a few minutes; however, if there are differences, the discussion will last longer.

2. Clarify and agree upon the role and responsibilities of each team member, including the team leader

The purpose of this discussion is to help the team members develop a common understanding of individual team member roles and responsibilities, including those of the team leader/manager.

3. Create team operating guidelines which describe clearly how the team will work together

This effort's sole purpose is to work out the agreements or norms that the team wants to use in working together. These agreements will drive the day-to-day operations of the team. Operating guidelines are agreements on how work will be done and how the team will work together.

4. Develop specific team goals for an agreed upon time frame and a work plan for how the team will meet those goals

The aim here is to have the team focus on the results or outputs for which it is accountable over the next several months.

Steps in the Team Start-up Process



The easiest way to get started is to hold a one to two day team meeting. Your start-up event could be split up and spread out over several days; however, one consecutive time frame will be more effective. This is a critical time and we have found that the time spent in this start-up saves time for the team later. This is an investment that jump-starts your team's effectiveness and should not be short changed.

It is best to have someone facilitate the team discussions and help the team reach the desired outcomes. This facilitator would:

- ◆ Conduct interactive discussions without dominating them,
- ◆ Ask questions that force the group to think in more depth and act more intentionally,
- ◆ Focus discussions on the issue at hand so that the meeting objectives are successfully met,
- ◆ Use an interactive style of facilitation that promotes communication (listening, equal participation, support for one another's ideas, etc.),
- ◆ Keep the group focusing on how it works together and how it can continue to improve,
- ◆ Confront people and issues positively and manage conflict and disagreements comfortably, and
- ◆ Record the team's work on a flipchart.

Obviously, a professional facilitator is recommended. If that is not possible, however, others could perform this function. It could be the team leader or a team member. The difficulties for a team leader or member to serve as facilitator is that they are not perceived as neutral and have a hard time staying out of the content discussions. It might be easier for someone from within your organization who is not serving on the team. This person would be familiar with the team's context, and yet be neutral, thus not inclined to enter into the content of the discussions. This would

enable all the team members and the team leader to freely engage in the start-up discussion.

What Can You Expect to Have at the End of the Team Start-up?

During the team start-up meeting, your team will be making lots of decisions and reaching agreements on a variety of issues. It is best to have these decisions and agreements recorded during the meeting and then summarized for all members after the meeting. Circulating these agreements ensures that what is written accurately captures what was agreed upon by the group and that the team can refer back to the agreements for guidance and feedback. Some of the key outcomes include:

- ◆ Written statement of purpose for the group,
- ◆ Lists of roles/responsibilities for each team member, including the team leader,
- ◆ Team agreements for working together, and
- ◆ Team work plan.

With these end products in hand, the team leader will have a clear sense of how the team should be working together, progressing towards the goal, and achieving the overall purpose of the team. Team members will have clear agreements on who is doing what, what is clearly expected of them, and how they all plan to reach their goal together.



Tips for Team Start-up

We have identified a variety of resources aimed at helping you achieve the aforementioned objectives of the team start-up process, as well as support for you keeping your team on track and living by the group agreements reached during the team start-up. The remainder of the Guidebook contains useful ideas for what to do when a team meets to begin working together, including questions that can be asked, tasks that can be suggested, or ideas for facilitated events when a team meets. As mentioned earlier, we recommend that the answers to these questions and the outcomes of the tasks be recorded during the discussion so that each team member can see and contribute to what is being produced. The final results should then be recorded and disseminated to all interested parties, both on the team and outside the team, as soon as possible.

Tips for Team Start-up

1. Begin by Assessing Your Team
2. Create a Shared Common Purpose
3. Clarify What Team Leaders Really Do
4. Assess Your Leadership Capabilities
5. Clarify Team Roles & Expectations
6. Create Agreements for Working Together
7. Build a Team Work Plan
8. Give Team Performance Feedback
9. Facilitate Effective Team Meetings
10. Assess Meeting Effectiveness
11. Deal with Challenging Behaviors & Situations in Meetings
12. Use Flipcharts Effectively
13. Use Effective & Appropriate Decision-Making Approaches

Tip #1: Begin by Assessing Your Team

It is often helpful to assess where you are starting your journey from in order to realistically plot your path to your end destination. The following **Team Assessment** provides questions that indicate the extent to which your team exhibits critical attributes that define a team -- complementary skills, a common purpose, shared specific goals, an interdependent approach, a sense of mutual accountability, and a commitment to each other. Answer the questions by marking the number on the scale that matches how much you believe each indicator is present on the team. After completing the tool, you should have a team profile that highlights team strengths and potential areas of weakness.

Attribute	Indicators	Scale
<p>Complementary Skills</p> <p><i>The combination of knowledge, ability, and experience required to perform effectively.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Does the experience and skill needed to do the job exist on the team? ◆ Does the team incorporate the variety of skills and perspectives of all its team members? ◆ Does the team draw on outside resources when its own capabilities are insufficient to complete the task? 	<p>No Somewhat Yes N/A</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5 0</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5 0</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5 0</p>
<p>Common Purpose</p> <p><i>The team's task or reason for existing, which is shared by all team members, and in some ways motivates and/or inspires each person.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Do all team members have the same understanding of why the team exists? ◆ Is the team's purpose aligned with the strategic objectives of the organization? ◆ In general, do team member behaviors reflect a strong commitment to the team's purpose? 	<p>1 2 3 4 5 0</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5 0</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5 0</p>

Attribute	Indicators	Scale
<p>Specific Goals</p> <p><i>The desired results that the team agrees to produce.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Do all members buy in to the collective goals of the team? ◆ Are the team's collective performance goals specific enough to measure results? ◆ Do the team's goals reflect the needs/expectations of the key stakeholders? 	<p>1 2 3 4 5 0</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5 0</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5 0</p>
<p>Interdependent Approach</p> <p><i>A coordinated plan for reaching the goal and shared methods for performing team tasks.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Do all team members understand and buy into the work plan? Are they clear about specific roles and responsibilities? ◆ Do team members agree on how key decisions will be made by the team? ◆ Do team members agree on how and when they will communicate with each other outside of team meetings? ◆ When working apart from each other, do team members coordinate their activities? 	<p>1 2 3 4 5 0</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5 0</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5 0</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5 0</p>
<p>Mutually Accountable</p> <p><i>Promises are made and kept to achieve results.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Do team members do what they say they will do? ◆ Do team members trust each other? ◆ Do team members measure progress against specific goals? ◆ Do all team members feel responsible for the team's results? 	<p>1 2 3 4 5 0</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5 0</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5 0</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5 0</p>
<p>Committed to Each Other</p> <p><i>Team members are committed to one another's professional development and success.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Are team members willing to help each other learn and develop new skills? ◆ Does the team feel responsible for ensuring that all members achieve success? ◆ Do team members share the recognition of success? 	<p>1 2 3 4 5 0</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5 0</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5 0</p>

Tip #2: Create a Shared Common Purpose

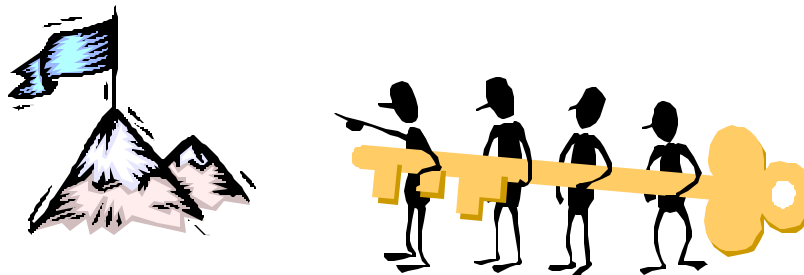
A team's purpose makes clear:

- ◆ why the team exists,
- ◆ what it is accountable for,
- ◆ the boundaries within which it operates, and
- ◆ its principal role and responsibilities within the larger context.

Initially, you will want to see what agreement or differences there are within the team regarding the team's purpose. Using the questions below, collaboratively develop a shared common purpose for the team in order to ensure that there is a shared perception.

You initial team discussion should focus on getting each member of the team to articulate their ideas, understand others' ideas, and reach common agreement on the following. You might be surprised at how different team members' views are regarding the team purpose.

- ◆ Why was the team formed? In response to what needs?
- ◆ What are specific results for which members feel the team is accountable?
- ◆ What are the boundaries with other teams – possible areas of overlap or areas where cooperation is needed to achieve a result?



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Tip #3: Clarify What Team Leaders Really Do

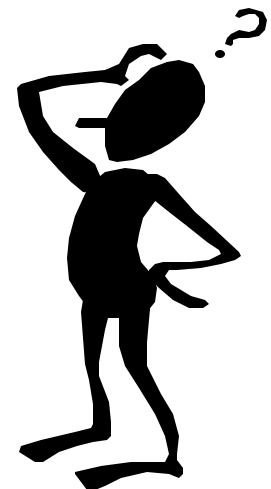
Obviously, the team leader's role is one that needs to be clearly defined and understood by the entire team. If the team leader is unsure of her/his responsibilities or dominates the team inappropriately, the entire agenda of the team can be derailed. On the other hand, a team leader who clearly understands her/his role and works to facilitate the smooth working of the team can ensure overall team success. So read on and find out What Team Leaders Do and Don't Do.²

1. Team Leaders keep the purpose, goals, and approach relevant and meaningful.

All teams must shape their own common purpose, performance goals, and approach. While a leader must be a full working member of the team who can and should contribute to these, she/he also stands apart from the team by virtue of his or her selection as the leader. Teams expect their leaders to use distance and vantage point as leader to help the teams clarify and commit to their mission, goals, and approach.

Teams usually do not want leaders to go beyond this. As one of the regular members of the team, of course, a leader can make any and all specific suggestions. But when she/he wears the "leader's mantle", comments intended as suggestions may be interpreted as mandates. This is especially likely to happen in business contexts where most people are conditioned to hear "orders" when their managers speak. But if leaders specify too much about purpose, goals, and approach, they will, in effect, have used their distance from the team in a normal hierarchical

**Team Leader:
Primary
Responsibilities**



² Katzenbach, J. and D. Smith; *The Wisdom of Teams*; Harvard Business School Press; Boston, MA; 1993

fashion as opposed to team fashion. By doing so, they may gain compliance to their personal purpose. But they are likely to lose commitment to a team purpose. This is especially true at the beginning of a potential team's efforts when all eyes and ears are so keenly tuned to how the leader will use authority to build a team.

2. Team Leaders build commitment and confidence.

Team leaders should work to build the commitment and confidence of each individual as well as the team as a whole. There is an important difference between individual commitment and accountability versus mutual accountability. Both are needed for any group to become a real team.

Thus, the leader must keep both the individual and the team in mind as she/he tries to provide positive, constructive reinforcement while avoiding intimidation.

Unfortunately, it is all too easy to coerce people in organizational settings, including small groups. People over time will lose their enthusiasm and initiative when dealing with an intimidating leader. Certainly, they do not coalesce into a team. Either they never take the risks needed to build mutual trust and interdependence, or, if they do, they are not rewarded for it. Executives who rely on intimidation can get things done better in a hierarchy than in teams. Positive and constructive reinforcement fuels the mutual accountability and confidence so critical to team performance

3. Team Leaders strengthen the mix and level of skills.

Effective team leaders are vigilant about skills. Their goal is clear: ultimately, the most flexible and top-performing teams consist of people with all the technical, functional, problem-solving, decision-making, interpersonal, and teamwork skills the team needs to perform. To get there, team leaders encourage people to take the risks needed for growth and development. They also continually challenge team members by shifting assignment and role patterns. This effort can involve tough choices. No team reaches its goal with a chronic skill gap relative to its performance objective.

4. Team Leaders manage relationships with outsiders, including removing obstacles.

Team leaders are expected, by people outside as well as inside the team, to manage much of the team's contacts and relationships with the rest of the organization. This calls on team leaders to communicate effectively the team's purpose, goals, and approach to anyone who might help or hinder it. They also must have the courage to intercede on the team's behalf when obstacles that might cripple or demoralize the team get placed in their way. Almost always the mutual trust so critical to a team begins with the leader who must show that the team can depend on him or her to promote team performance.

5. Team Leaders create opportunities for others.

Team performance is not possible if the leader grabs all the best opportunities, assignments, and credit for himself or herself. Indeed, the crux of the leader's challenge is to provide performance opportunities to the team and the people on it.

6. Team Leaders do real work.

Everyone on a real team, including the leader, does real work in roughly equivalent amounts. Team leaders do have a certain distance from the team by virtue of their position, but they do not use that distance "just to sit back and make decisions." Team leaders must contribute in whatever way the team needs, just like any other member. Moreover, team leaders do not delegate the nasty jobs to others. Where personal risks are high or "dirty work" is required, the team leader should step forward.

There are, however, two critical things real team leaders never do: they do not blame or allow specific individuals to fail, and they never excuse away shortfalls in team performance. This, again, is behavior that most of us admire and can practice. But organizations built on individual instead of mutual accountability often foster the reverse. Too often, when expected results do not materialize, individuals get singled out for blame, or outside forces like the economy, the government, or the weather get identified as the cause. By contrast, real team leaders honestly believe that success or failure is a team event. No outside obstacle is an excuse for team failure, and no individuals fail. Only the team can fail. The leader assumes that the team's task includes overcoming whatever obstacles get in its way.

Tip #4: Assess Your Leadership Capabilities

Often, it is helpful for leaders to take a critical look at their own leadership capabilities in order to focus on how best to serve the team. The following **Team Leadership Assessment** serves as an opportunity for you to assess how you are doing in leading your team. Think about your work as a team leader. If you have not yet been a team leader, then imagine how you might be in that role. Keeping the definition in mind, please assess how you are performing. If you are currently a team leader, it might be helpful to think about how your team members might complete this assessment form, or better yet ask them to complete it and give you specific feedback.

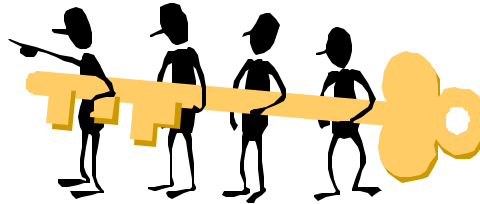
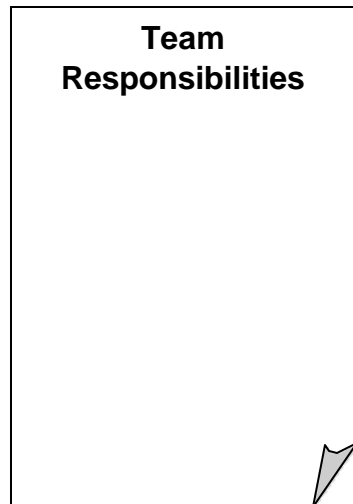
*1-2...not effective 3-4...somewhat effective 5-6...moderately effective
7-8...very effective 9-10...highly effective*

How effective are you at...

1. Creating a commonly-understood and agreed-upon team purpose and work plan?	1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
2. Making certain that individual team members are clear about and in agreement with their roles and responsibilities?	1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
3. Helping set team and individual performance goals or outputs?	1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
4. Holding the team and yourself mutually accountable for performance?	1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
5. Helping the team monitor the quality and progress of the team's work against the work plan?	1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
6. Demonstrating a positive attitude and keeping people moving in the right direction despite resource constraints and uncertainty?	1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
7. Acknowledging and showing appreciation for others' contributions and accomplishments?	1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
8. Articulating the team's work to others in interesting and compelling ways; being creative and energetic about finding opportunities to tell the team's story?	1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
9. Identifying and resolving conflicts among team members or across teams?	1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
10. Giving timely and specific feedback, positive or corrective, when appropriate?	1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
11. Creating a work environment where people trust each other and	1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10

share information openly?	
12. Conducting meetings where participants feel that their ideas are being considered?	1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10

Tip #5: Clarify Team Roles and Expectations



Obviously, for the team to function effectively, each member must be sure of her/his responsibilities and understand fully the part she/he is expected to play. Clarifying each team member's role, including the team leader, is an essential ingredient to success. We suggest having open discussions that define team leader and members' roles and responsibilities.

Using the previous article on **What Team Leaders Do and Don't Do** as background, you might have team members think about and record on paper what they expect and request from the team leader. Likewise, the team leader should think about and record on paper what she/he feels she/he can offer and can be expected to do for the team. Openly discuss these thoughts during the team start-up meetings and reach an agreement on what can be expected of the team leader.

After the expectations of the team leader have been discussed and agreed upon, have each team member prepare, using a flipchart, a list of how they see their role and responsibilities as part of the team.

Then review each team member's list, one at a time, and ask others to respond. Check for agreement. When there are differences of opinion, talk about it.

The purpose is to have a common understanding of what each member does and how the team can depend on members.

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Tip #6: Create Agreements for Working Together

Operating guidelines are agreements on how work will be done and how the team will work together. These guidelines should cover issues such as:

- ◆ how decisions will be made,
- ◆ how work assignments are determined,
- ◆ what the team means by mutual accountability,
- ◆ how differences or conflicts will be resolved,
- ◆ attendance at meetings, and
- ◆ how to deal with disappointing performance from a team member.

The team needs to have a collective understanding of the group's agreements in order to work most effectively. **Key Questions to Establish Team Agreements and Guidelines** can be asked when a team meets to develop operating guidelines or norms. One way to structure this activity is to have team members write down the answer to each of these questions individually, and then discuss each point as a team and reach agreement on it. Ask a couple of team members to write up these agreements. It will be important to review them every 4 to 6 months to see how you are doing and to see if there are additions or changes that should be made.

Think about how you would like the team to operate on a daily basis and please respond to the questions below individually. In a few minutes you will have a chance to share your answers with other team members.

1. What is the best way to keep each other informed on:
 - ◆ what our individual work program is?
 - ◆ changes in team environment or policy?
 - ◆ announcements?



2. What do I expect in regard to how quickly team members will reply to my emails?
3. How shall we monitor how we are working together and following these guidelines?
4. How will we encourage different contributions and demonstrate respect for difference and diversity?
5. What would I need to feel included and able to support team decisions made in my absence? How do we want to make these decisions? What will be the role of the team leader?
6. What is most important to me about dealing with team conflicts? How will we resolve conflicts among the team members -- with other teams?
7. How will we give each other feedback?
8. What do I need from others on the team in order to fulfill my commitments to the team?
9. What do I need from the team leader?

Tip #7 Build a Team Work Plan

When creating your team's work plan, you may need to take into consideration team members' individual work plans as well as Center work plans, depending on the composition of your team. These various plans should be examined and considered to see where they are complementary or where they can be combined into the team's plan. Remember, by creating a team work plan and laying the ground work for the team to monitor progress against this plan, you are building the foundation for teamwork and full team accountability to deliver the products, outputs, or commitments the team has promised.

1. Identify the major tasks that need to get done by the entire team within the time frame you have chosen. Remember it is a team work plan, not a work plan for each individual on the team.
2. Next, if applicable, ask team members to examine their own individual work plans and Center work plans to identify areas of overlap and complementarity. Work for group agreement on at least 1 or 2 top priorities.
3. Clarify who will be working on each of these major tasks.
4. You may want to do some specific planning for how each major task will be accomplished. Conversely, you may want team members working on these tasks to develop a work plan and bring it back to a team meeting.
5. Decide when you want to set milestones or completion dates.

Write up the plans. Be brief - this is just a record of your agreed upon plan. You can refer back to it as you monitor progress.

Plan how and when you will monitor progress.

Schedule the first progress review meeting.

Clarify the role and responsibility of the team leader in this monitoring and tracking process.

Also, ask all applicable team members to modify their individual work plans accordingly.



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Tip #8 Give Team Performance Feedback

The single most important tool in team development is the establishment of a group agreement and norms to give feedback. Once that agreement is in place, it becomes the responsibility of everyone on the team to set the tone of giving and receiving constructive feedback. Initially, the team needs to understand precisely what feedback is.

Feedback is: Giving someone information about their behavior and its impact on you -- both positive and negative.

A complete feedback message has three parts:

1. Describe action or behavior -- what the person did

"When you ignored the points I made at the meeting..."

2. Tell the impact on you -- how it made you feel

"...I felt unheard..."

3. Say what the result or consequence of the behavior and its impact was/is

"...and now I am less interested in sharing my ideas and thoughts."

All team members need to be aware that they will be expected to participate in the feedback process. Likewise, each team member should be familiar with the rules of giving and receiving feedback and agree to abide by them during the course of the team's work together.

The following article "**How to Use Feedback to Improve Performance and Enhance Motivation**" is a resource that further expands upon the idea of giving and receiving feedback in order to increase team development and success.

How to Use Feedback to Improve Performance and Enhance Motivation³

"You know, you have to take the bones with the gravy," said the manager.

"Ah, I'm not sure ... ah ... the bones with the gravy?" stammered the assistant in this simulated feedback situation, during a management training workshop.

"Oh yes," said the manager with finality, "You just have to take the bones with the gravy."

The assistant, with furrowed brow and puzzled look, said "Ah, okay."

The scene above is from a management training workshop facilitated by the author. At first, when asked what the feedback meant, workshop participants watching the role play said that if this were a real situation, the "assistant" would have "gotten the message." When pressed, however, they couldn't define the meaning of the feedback and decided that maybe it wasn't that effective after all. The "assistant" admitted he had no idea what action to take as a result of the conversation.

Although the words were interesting because of their somewhat mystical tone, the "feedback" had little practical value. Our experience working with managers in our workshops and in their workplace suggests that this is not an unusual situation. We find managers are often not very effective at telling their people on a continuing basis how well or poorly they are doing.

This paucity of effective feedback has serious negative results. People often don't know how others in their organization regard their work. People unknowingly perform their tasks in ways that colleagues regard as "bad." Staff development suffers, positive performance and negative habits are not identified, and the motivational power of positive feedback is lost.

³The "giving feedback" guidelines were adapted from some of those published by National Training Lab many years ago. Because the original NTL feedback guidelines were developed for use in personal growth groups or in other non-organizational settings, some changes and additions were made so they fit organizational contexts.

When feedback is provided, it's often done under stress, in a crisis, or after a mistake, and sometimes delivered in abrasive and less than helpful ways. In a worst case scenario, an employee is demoted or even fired for something that no one has ever seriously discussed.

And she/he quite legitimately asks, "Why wasn't I ever told this before." These are important results that affect every corner of organizational life. They seriously inhibit production, and they have a powerful — if sometimes indirect — impact on morale and turnover.

Defining Feedback

Before looking in depth at feedback as a management tool, we need to be clear about the way we use the term **feedback** in this article. **Feedback means letting someone know on a timely and ongoing basis how they are performing**, and it includes both positive and corrective observations. This feedback is meant to be given independent of any formal performance review process.

A manager who limits feedback to performance appraisal time is seriously under-utilizing this management tool. The premise of this article is that managers should be skillful enough to make feedback a normal, natural, non-threatening part of everyday organizational life. And the climate should be such that the feedback isn't just between managers and subordinates, but between peers on a work team, or between people who must work together even though they work for different divisions.

Feedback -- An Unnatural Act

When managers are asked about the lack of feedback effectiveness, they provide certain typical responses: there's not enough time to do it right; the organization's culture doesn't support people using feedback as a management tool; good people know how they're doing, they don't need to be told by others; and positive feedback "will be seen as insincere."

Comments like these are interesting, but they don't fully explain why many managers choose not to give feedback. We think there are two general reasons for this tendency. First, giving feedback feels awkward. Second, related closely to the first, most people lack the skills to give feedback effectively.

Feedback is unnatural because (at least in the U.S.) our culture teaches us some rather ineffective ways to give feedback. When people don't perform up to our expectations, we learn to either yell at them or scold them, or we learn to suffer in silence and complain behind their backs to others. When someone does something good, we often don't tell them because "they might get a big head," or because it would embarrass them. These cultural patterns, learned in childhood, stick with us as adults, and form the basis for ineffective feedback patterns in organizations.

As a corollary to this "unnaturalness," most people don't have the skills to give feedback to others effectively. Effective feedback skills aren't learned in college or business school, and although many management training events include some feedback training, it appears to be insufficient to change behavior.

It's also clear that most people aren't good at receiving feedback. They'll get defensive and try to "explain away" their behavior by stating the reasons behind their actions; they don't listen well; or they attack the messenger. All of these responses are likely to result in the giver being less willing to give them feedback in the future.

This situation can be changed by modifying the company's cultural climate around feedback. We have adapted and developed some guidelines for giving and receiving feedback which are simple and practical, and what's more, they work.

Guidelines For Giving Feedback

1. Make specific statements; support general statements with specific examples.

Precise and specific statements are valuable to the receiver for both positive behavior ("Exactly what did I do right?" or "What should I be sure to continue doing?") and negative behavior ("What precisely should I change?"). To be told that "you did well on that project" may be satisfying to both parties, but it's not nearly as effective as saying "you came in on time and under budget on that project." The latter clearly describes exactly what the feedback giver sees as positive in the receiver's performance. To be told that "you dominate meetings" won't be useful unless it's followed up by specifics: "For example, in yesterday's meeting,

you talked so much I stopped listening; you may have said some good things toward the end, but I didn't hear them."

2. Use descriptive rather than judgmental language.

By avoiding judgmental language, you reduce the need for a defensive response. For example, regardless of merit, saying that some action was "terrible" or "stupid" or "utterly inappropriate" generally evokes anger, return accusations or passive-aggressive behavior in the listener. The feedback message rarely gets through this kind of verbal clutter. On the other hand, describing the impact of the receiver's behavior on the performance of another makes it easier for the receiver to understand the meaning and importance of the feedback. Also, it tends to focus the discussion on behavior and not personal characteristics.

People are more open to listening about the results of their behavior than they are about the worth of their person. An example is the following: "When you get angry and use abrasive language, I'm afraid to tell you the truth — so I just tell you what I think you want to hear." In this example, the results of the person's behavior are made clear.

3. Be direct, clear and to the point.

No matter how well motivated one might be, certain actions ("beating around the bush," using lots of modifiers, talking in general terms in hopes that the person will "get the message") create misunderstanding and discomfort. The objective is to communicate directly, not to leave someone guessing.

4. Direct feedback toward behavior that the receiver can control.

Frustration is only increased when a person is reminded of shortcomings over which she/he has no control.

5. Encourage others to solicit feedback, rather than imposing it on them.

Feedback is most useful when the receiver has asked for it. If someone's performance is having a negative impact, others are responsible for providing that person with feedback. The ideal is for an organization to create an environment where people solicit feedback, since that clearly increases its effectiveness.

6. Consider the timing of feedback.

In general, feedback is most useful when communicated at the earliest opportunity after the given behavior (depending, of course, on the person's readiness to hear it, the support available from others, etc.). We are talking here about reasonable time periods -- the same day, a day later, within a week, maybe even within a month.

However, when it goes longer than a month, people generally end up arguing about history and what really happened. Moreover, badly-timed feedback also lends itself to the comment, "Well, if that was so important, then why did you wait all this time to tell me?"

Feedback that's given in small pieces, in a timely manner, is much easier and more effective than saving things up for the "right time." The more natural and ongoing the process, the better it will be for all.

7. Make sure feedback takes into account the needs of both the receiver and giver.

Feedback can be destructive when it serves only one's own needs and fails to consider the needs of the person on the receiving end. This is especially true when the giver is angry and wants to "unload" on the receiver. There may be a certain psychological satisfaction for one of the parties in this instance, but it generally results in ineffective feedback and a strained relationship.

8. Make sure feedback is well planned.

It takes time to plan for a feedback conference. What to say, in what order, how much — all these need careful thought. If, however, feedback is given on a more regular basis, then feedback conferences will grow to be much easier.

Helping Others Give You Feedback

Feedback from another person is important information about how your actions are affecting others. Even if you disagree with the feedback, it's important to hear it clearly and understand it.

Feedback tells you how another person sees your actions and gives you the choice of trying to change behavior. People act on their perceptions of your actions; you may be coming across in unintended ways and not know it — there is probably nothing worse than being ineffective in ways that are clear to others but not clear or apparent to you. Feedback gives you information about your impact on others. Such knowledge is invaluable for individual performance in organizations. People who are interested in enhancing their performance should do everything possible to make it easier for others to give them feedback.

Getting the feedback is sometimes difficult; it's especially difficult if you are trying to get feedback from a subordinate. The following guidelines make it easier for others to give you useful feedback. Keep in mind that these guidelines are meant to be used for both positive and negative feedback. It's often as hard (or harder) for people to hear positive feedback as it is for them to hear negative feedback.

Guidelines for Receiving Feedback

1. Solicit feedback in clear and specific areas.

It's always easier to give feedback if one is asked. It's made even easier when a specific question is asked — "Could you let me know what you think of my current speed and quality of turning out widgets?"

2. Make it a point to understand the feedback; paraphrase major points; ask clarifying questions.

Active listening helps insure that real understanding has happened. Ask clarifying questions in order to understand the feedback. Doing so helps the giver know that you are indeed interested and trying hard to understand.

3. Help the giver use the criteria for giving useful feedback.

For example, if the feedback is too general, ask "Could you give me a specific example of what you mean?"

4. Avoid making it more difficult for the giver of feedback than it already is.

Reacting defensively or angrily, or arguing with negative feedback, or saying, "Oh it was nothing, anyone could have done as well," in response to positive feedback are all ways of turning off the feedback spigot.

5. Don't give explanations.

This particular guideline is perhaps the most important, yet it's the one that most people have trouble with. It's natural to want an explanation for the immediate feedback you're receiving. Unfortunately, in almost all cases, explanations can seem defensive and often end up in an argument. As a result, the giver backs off, thinking, "Hey, this is simply not worth the trouble," and is discouraged from giving effective feedback in the future. The giver isn't discouraged from seeing negative behavior or assessing your performance; the person simply becomes unwilling to provide the feedback. Focus instead on understanding the behavior and its impact.

6. Show appreciation for the person's effort to give you feedback.

Saying "thank you" or "I'm grateful for the effort you took to tell me" is a clear message that you appreciate receiving feedback, whether or not agreement is reached. This action invites feedback in the future. In some ways, feedback is like a gift, because one has to care enough to give it; if the signals are wrong, one simply will not give the "gift."

7. In response to key points in the feedback, you should say what you intend to do as a result.

A response may be "Thanks, I need to think about it" or "Let me check it out with others" or "That makes sense, I'll try in the future to..." If you just listen — even politely — and walk away, it may give a message that you don't take what the giver said very seriously (of course, that may be the case in some instances!).

8. Remember that feedback is one person's perceptions of another's actions, not universal truth.

Keeping this in mind helps one be less defensive about feedback. Check it out with others to determine the presence of patterns of behavior. If two or three people provide similar feedback, there may be a pattern reflected which needs to be considered.

These guidelines for giving and receiving feedback work. If all people in a particular work setting understand and use the guidelines, the feedback will be extremely useful and become an integral part of everyday activities. The more people who are skilled in giving feedback the better. This, of course, is why we recommend that the guidelines be "installed" on a system-wide basis. If, however, even one person in a feedback situation uses the guidelines, the effectiveness of the feedback will still be very high.

It's vital for general managers to understand that increasing the level of feedback skills within organizations enhances performance and produces better results. We aren't stressing the importance of feedback because it's "nice to do," or because it will make the workplace more humane -- although it may indeed have those effects.

Getting people to talk routinely about performance in a more acceptable, clear and precise way simply increases work output.

If people learn how they are doing from different sources (including themselves), they will work to correct their deficiencies and capitalize on their strengths. Everyone will reduce the amount of unproductive time they spend complaining to others about the performance of a third party. Individuals will feel that managers

value high-quality performance and communicate about it in ways that give everyone a chance to perform at their optimum levels. Everyone wins.

This, of course, sounds easier than it is. Practically speaking, how can you as a manager increase feedback skills within your office?

Making Feedback a More Effective Tool in Your Organization

There are several specific actions that you can take:

- ◆ You can publish the feedback guidelines throughout your organization or office at *all levels* so that everyone is aware of the "rules of the game." This will also indicate that feedback is a two-way process, and that everybody bears responsibility for the success or failure of the feedback process. It establishes standards for everyday talk about performance to which all have access.
- ◆ You can run (or arrange for) focused training sessions so people can get practice at both giving and receiving feedback. Everyone should be included in the sessions. They can be short (2 or 3 hours) and be totally skill-focused. A trainer or skilled manager can explain the guidelines and perhaps model an effective feedback conversation. Then, people can be divided into groups of three to practice giving *and* receiving feedback given typical situations that might exist in your work context. The third person is an observer, and gives feedback about how well the guidelines are followed.
- ◆ Once everyone is reasonably clear about the guidelines, you should then reinforce the act of giving feedback. People should be encouraged to try, even if they feel they will not get it "exactly right." After all, if the feedback process isn't exactly correct, the receiver can ask questions which will get the conversation back on target.
- ◆ If you're a manager, you're very visible. You can serve as a role model for using feedback effectively by showing you understand and use the guidelines.
- ◆ Take some time to give unsolicited, "no-strings-attached," clear, specific, positive feedback. This will have a powerful impact on people. It will also help set a clear and well-listened to example of how to give feedback.
- ◆ In terms of receiving feedback, you can make a visible contribution by asking for it, and expressing appreciation when it's received.

Each one of these suggestions for action is seemingly small; yet they will create incremental -- but significant -- change. This will have the effect of changing the norms about feedback in your organization. Since everybody "knows the rules," they can help one another be effective with feedback.

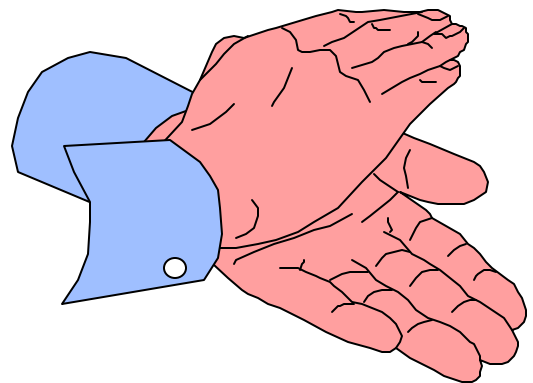
This will make feedback more a part of everyday life. As was mentioned earlier, the impact of *feedback is optimized when it is a normal, routine part of the work environment*. If it's rarely given, or only given at performance appraisal time, feedback becomes strained and imbued with a sense of trauma that makes it almost impossible to do well. When given in small, "chewable chunks" in a timely fashion, it's much easier to do and much more effective.

Motivating Power of Authentic Positive Feedback

There is one aspect of feedback that deserves a special note. Positive feedback by itself, when authentic, is a superb tool to motivate people. And it's a tool that is grossly under-used. People don't provide sufficient positive feedback; it's often used to soften the blow of negative feedback, as a way to pave the way for the "bad news." Organizational life has conditioned us to see positive feedback that way. Yet, when no-strings-attached positive feedback is given, the results are immediately clear.

There's much that goes on every day that's positive. We all should make it a point to give one or two people some positive feedback each day -- without any negative feedback attached to it. That's not to say we should ignore the negative; rather it's to point out that a great number of positive things often get no verbal notice.

In an age when we're trying to locate the magic formula for motivation, the power that communicating positive feedback has for motivating people is manifest. It's simple to do, and it doesn't cost anything. It's a waste not to use it.

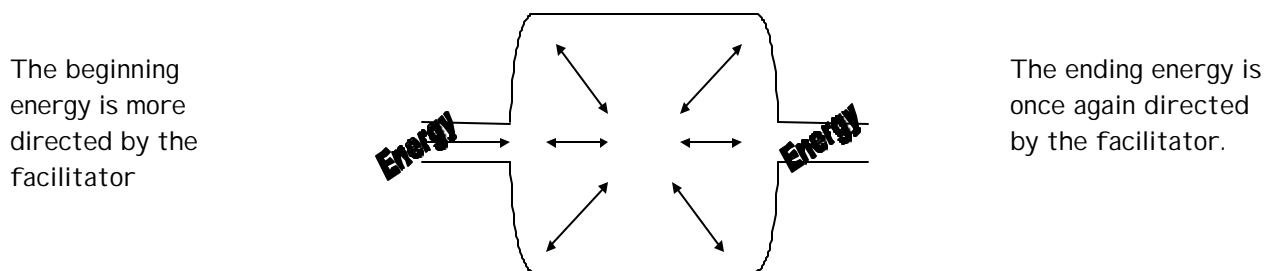


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Tip #9: Facilitate Effective Team Meetings

In the role of team leader, you will need to see that the team meets regularly to ensure the forward progress of the team's purpose. Obviously, those meetings should be both efficient and effective. Whether you are facilitating the meeting yourself or are securing a facilitator for the meeting, it is helpful to assess regularly how your meetings are going and be familiar with various strategies that can further maximize meeting efficiency.

Meetings have a natural flow of energy that needs to be managed from beginning to end to keep the group focused, on track and producing desired outcomes. This diagram helps illustrate that energy as well as what a team leader specifically can do in order to utilize that energy to facilitate a productive meeting.



The discussion energy is more between members and alternates between expansive ideas generation and summary statements

Meeting Beginning *The Facilitator Can:*

- X clarify purpose & agenda
- X use introduction statements and closed questions
- X direct the energy
- X ensure all are working from same assumptions about purpose

Meeting Middle *The Facilitator Can:*

- X solicit contributions and participation
- X move between discussions and decisions
- X use open-ended questions, paraphrasing, and encourage non-verbals to keep discussions moving
- X use flipchart to record key points
- X track key points, test for consensus, and ensure all points are considered and understood

Meeting Ending *The Facilitator Can:*

- X seek agreements, decisions, and closure
- X use summarizing and closed questions
- X review outcomes & identify follow-up actions and people's responsibilities
- X keep group focused on decisions reached and next steps

Team leader can increase the likelihood that meetings will run smoothly if they utilize the following checklist.

Prior to the meeting remember to check:

- ✓ The meeting is necessary (reduce unnecessary meetings whenever possible).
- ✓ The appropriate people are coming.
- ✓ The agenda is completed and involves others appropriately (e.g. circulate the draft agenda beforehand, and track it).
- ✓ That agenda items are prioritized.

Once the meeting begins, remember to check:

- ✓ That the meeting starts by quickly sharing the desired outcomes and agenda and allowing for input regarding the agenda.
- ✓ That the meeting runs in order of priority agenda items - unless there is a compelling reason to start with a less important item.
- ✓ That the meeting time is a specified length: monitor the time, keep moving, begin and end on time - unless you work out new agreements with the group.
- ✓ That you lead the group appropriately between creative, expansive efforts and focused discussions and decisions.
- ✓ That there is a summary of decisions and outcomes at points during the meeting when they are reached; and a running record of decisions and outcomes is kept, either in your notes or on a flipchart where everyone can see.
- ✓ At the end of the meeting, you review decisions, outcomes and agreements, designate time frames and identify people who will be responsible for specific actions, if appropriate.
- ✓ That everyone thought the meeting was productive. If not, check to see what could be done to improve the meeting next time.

Tip #10: Assess Your Meetings for Effectiveness

Again, assessment is an excellent way of checking the success of your meetings. By using the following Meeting Assessment, you can target areas where your meetings could be more productive. Think about the meetings for which you have responsibility as a team leader. Please read the statements below, and write the number that best describes your effectiveness. Use the following scale:

1. not effective 2. somewhat effective 3. moderately effective 4. very effective
5. highly effective

How effective am I at the following:

- _____ 1. Inviting the right people to meetings.
- _____ 2. Communicating clearly the purpose and specific meeting outcomes to participants.
- _____ 3. Making the agenda clear to everyone at the beginning of the meeting.
- _____ 4. Using the agenda to guide the meeting.
- _____ 5. Starting and ending on time.
- _____ 6. Being clear about the intention of what you are doing in the meeting (e.g., information sharing, problem solving, decision making).
- _____ 7. Involving everyone appropriately during the meeting.
- _____ 8. Keeping track of agreements and decisions during the meeting.
- _____ 9. Avoiding having one person dominate the meeting.
- _____ 10. Leading the team in both creative activity and focused analysis/ decision making.
- _____ 11. Summarizing decisions and agreements at the end of the meeting.
- _____ 12. Assigning responsibility for action items at the end of the meeting.
- _____ 13. Creating meetings that people see as energetic, productive, and fun.
- _____ 14. Occasionally seeking feedback on how to improve the meeting.



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Tip #11: Deal with Challenging Behaviors and Situations in Meetings⁴

Sometimes, even the most thoroughly planned meetings can be derailed by the **challenging behaviors** of group members. As a team leader and facilitator, it is helpful to have a variety of strategies to help manage potentially **problematic situations** to a positive resolution.

“Oops, I’m sorry I’m late...”

People who arrive late often miss the critical data given at the beginning of a meeting that makes the foundation for good decision making. If a team member has a pattern of tardiness, wait until after the meeting and inquire why she/he is frequently late. Ask what can be done to make the meetings more meaningful so that she/he will make an effort to be on time. As a last resort, ask the latecomer to perform some important tasks at the beginning of the next meeting.

“I’m sorry, but I have to leave...”

Again, team members who consistently leave the meeting before it is finished are losing an opportunity to fully participate in the process of decision making and staying abreast of team information. It is worthwhile to privately ask him or her, “Are the meetings too long? Too boring? Not conducted properly? What would make these meetings better and more engaging for you?” At the beginning of the meeting, check to see if everyone can stay until the end. If all the participants commit themselves to staying, a potential early leaver is less likely to exit.

“I’m just going to say this one more time...”

Some team members will bring up the same point repeatedly. Use the group memory to acknowledge that the point is important to the individual. Demonstrate that it has



⁴ from Doyle, Michael and David Straus; *How to Make Meetings Work!*; Berkley Books; New York; 1993

been heard and recorded several times. If the individual is emotional over the issue and looks as if she/he needs an opportunity to talk it out, you could suggest, "Why don't we take three minutes now to hear what you have to say. We want you hear your points so that you can move along with us through the rest of the meeting."

"I'm not sure about that..."

While it's healthy to have a skeptic in any group, sometimes your team may have someone who exhibits overt negativity. Get the group to agree not to evaluate any ideas until all of the evidence has been heard. When a team member interrupts with a negative objection, call him or her on it as a violation of the agreements established by the group.

"Who me? No, I'm not bored..."

Occasionally, some team members will evidence many non-verbal traits that connote boredom – traits like yawning, shaking the head, and checking the watch. However, this team member may be totally unaware of the perception she/he is creating. In such cases, try a gentle remonstrance, asking if she/he is disturbed with the process. If that does not create a positive impact on the behavior, use escalating levels of intervention.

"I'm sorry, what did you say? I wasn't listening..."

An even more negative behavior is when a team member engages in activities that are completely unrelated to the meeting or the task at hand, such as doodling, reading the newspaper, or working on other work. Ask a question on a difficult point of current debate and allow some time to elapse by turning to someone else before asking the unengaged participant.

"Could you say that a little louder, please?"

Team members will often want to share an idea with a close colleague before sharing it with the entire group, usually by commenting in a low voice or whisper. While this is a very natural reaction, it can be distracting to the rest of the team and the meeting. Try walking up close to the whisperers. Often this low-key intervention will work. If there is a lot of whispering going on, you can say, looking around the room, "Hey, let's keep a single focus here!" A very subtle technique is to find a way to get chronic whisperers to sit apart from each other.

“...and another thing...”

More often than not, teams will have at least one team member who is very comfortable sharing ideas, opinions, and thoughts verbally all the time. Sometimes the talker is the senior person or decision maker in a meeting, a fact that makes dealing with the talker more difficult for the team leader. However, it is critical to try and find a way for the talker to share without dominating the meeting as you will lose other valuable team input from members unwilling to compete for air time. The subtlest technique for coping with talkers involves your physical position in relation to them. Try moving closer and closer to them while they are talking and maintain eye contact until you are standing right in front of them. Your physical presence—you standing, them sitting—will often make them aware of their behavior and they will stop talking.

“Now, I don't mean this personally, but...”

Occasionally, team members couch criticism in a personal vein, eschewing the facts and the logic. The trick is to redirect the attack away from the person and towards the subject. The gentle reminder that the meeting is not the place for personal attacks may get some results. The worst that can happen is for someone to respond in kind—the meeting can only deteriorate from there. The best response is no response at all.

“I think what she means to say is...”

These are the self-appointed translators who are trying to “help.” While their intention is positive, asking the original speaker whether the interpretation was correct or not may stop self-appointed translators.

“I heard from him that he heard from her the most awful thing...”

As with all close-knit groups, teams are a spawning ground for gossip. When something gets presented in a meeting that may or may not be true, the only remedy is to stop the meeting and verify the information immediately. After a few checks prove the information to be wrong or only half right or not applicable at all, there will be a halt to this tactic.

“I’ve been with this organization since the dawn of time and I can tell you one thing...”

These team members use credentials, age, length of service, or professional status to argue a point. Acknowledge her/his experience at once, but emphasize why the group is considering this issue. “Yes, we recognize and respect your experience in this area, but the decision has to be made by the group as a whole after weighing the alternatives.”

“I don’t think you did that right...”

As the leader of the group, you should request process suggestions from the group and generally follow them. When a team member starts finding fault with your facilitation, ask him or her to suggest a procedure and then check it out with the rest of the group. If the rest of the group members concur, act on the suggestion immediately. If the group disagrees, the fault finder’s argument will be with the other group members, not with you.

“I’m sorry, I just have to take this call...”

Meetings can stop and start depending on team members ducking in and out of the meeting, constantly receiving messages or rushing out to take a phone call and handle a crisis. It is almost impossible to deal with a team member engaging in this behavior during a meeting. You can recommend that the meeting be recessed or adjourned until she/he can attend without interruptions. The best time to deal with this behavior is before the meeting. Point out how disruptive the behavior is and see if you can get him or her to agree to hold calls, etc. for the duration of the meeting.

“Excuse me for interrupting, but...”

In the heat of an impassioned discussion, a team member may start talking before others are finished. Often, she/he doesn’t mean to be rude, but becomes impatient and over-excited. You should deal with someone who interrupts immediately. Remember, one of your functions is to be an objective arbiter and ensure everyone has a chance to be heard fully. This may be one of the first tests of your leadership and service to the group. People will be watching you to see if you will really protect them and their ideas.

Tip #12: Use Flipcharts Effectively

As a team leader, it is always helpful to make sure that group perceptions, brainstorming sessions, team planning, and agreements are recorded for future reference and implementation. One way to do that is through the effective use of flipcharts in team meetings and discussions. Flipcharts can allow small groups or the team as a whole to illustrate and articulate collective thoughts, vision, and plans for the future.

Why Use the Flipchart?

The flipchart is an important facilitator tool, not only for making presentations, but also for recording relevant information as it is generated. The most important advantage that flipcharts have over chalkboards and overhead projectors is that flipcharts facilitate *group memory*.

The concept of *group memory* involves two elements:

1. **Retention and Reference:** When participants are able to see a presentation's key points listed on a flipchart, and then have visual access to these flipcharts throughout the meeting or discussion, the repeated exposure ensures greater retention of the information.

Taping flipcharts to the walls allows participants to refer back to key points - reinforcing these points with their own examples, and building them with new ideas. Participants become more engaged, and there is greater group synergy and interaction.

2. **Visual Record of Outcomes:** When the facilitator records ideas and suggestions on a flipchart as they are generated, participants have a visual "memory" of key points as the session progresses. Communication is clearer, because of the visual record that the flipcharts provide. And, at the meeting's conclusion, participants have a collective memory of agreements and outcomes, whether these are decisions, next steps, or new ideas.

Chalkboards, overhead projectors, and even the new electronic recording books with photocopy capability cannot match the flipchart for generating group memory. You can leave flipcharts hanging on the walls *for days*, allowing participants a chance to stay after a session - or to return early the next day - to review them. Chalkboards, on the other hand, are erased as the session continues, and overheads flashed onto the wall quickly disappear into the darkness.

What You Should Chart

Flipcharts can serve as a useful tool in most situations, but not everything that goes on in a session must be charted. Outlined below are components that in most cases should be charted.

1. The Agenda

Whether the agenda is predetermined or developed at the beginning of a session, it should be recorded on a flipchart. Doing so encourages shared responsibility in achieving the agenda, as well as ongoing assessment of progress.

2. Key Presentation Points

Preparing flipcharts to accompany a presentation, as noted earlier, increases the likelihood that participants will retain more, and build on the information as a group. The flipcharts, which can be prepared in advance, should only highlight key points as clearly and succinctly as possible. In determining key points, the session leader should ask himself or herself, "What are the most important messages that I want people to grasp?"

3. Proposals/New Ideas

Record on the flipchart new ideas and proposals that are generated during brainstorming sessions or participant presentations. This visual record captures the ideas and proposals so that they are not lost, and it also lets people know that their ideas have been heard.

Meetings often end up stalled (or, worse yet, result in conflict) when participants repeat suggestions and proposals they think haven't been heard or accepted.

Recording ideas on flipcharts acknowledges them, without necessarily requiring any further action.

4. Alternate Issues

Issues often surface that are not part of the planned agenda. It is beneficial to capture these issues on the flipchart to acknowledge them (for the same reasons stated before), and, if appropriate, to develop strategies for resolving them.

5. Action Items/Next Steps

Although participants may leave sessions agreeing on what needs to be done, they often are not sure about who will do what, by when. Flipcharts help consolidate a group's agreement on next steps. It is also helpful to type all action items and next steps from the flipcharts and hand them out as a written reminder to participants.

Hints for Charting

Using flipcharts as an effective facilitation tool is not always as easy as it might seem. How you prepare flipcharts and how you record ideas and important points can have an impact upon effective communication. Listed below are some tips for producing flipcharts that enhance communication.

1. Words recorded on a flipchart should be large enough for all participants to read comfortably. Use the flat edge of the marker, as opposed to the tip, so that letters have some thickness to them.
2. Use words sparingly on a flipchart. Only record major points and key phrases. Ask yourself when preparing flipcharts, (What is essential for participants to remember?)

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3. When recording participant responses and ideas on a flipchart during a meeting, capture the essence of what the speaker is saying in as few words as possible. Use the speaker's own words if they are clear and appropriate. If not, paraphrase back what you believe the speaker intended to say, and, if you are correct, then record those phrases.
 4. After chatting, read information back to the group, and ask if any clarification is necessary. It is important that the words recorded on the flipchart reflect what the participants intended to say.
 5. When preparing flipcharts before a session, use different colored markers to write and highlight words (however, don't use more than three colors on any one flipchart). Flipcharts thus become more attractive visual aids. Color also helps draw attention to a particular keyword or phrase.
 6. Don't use light-colored markers (red, yellow, pink, etc.). Although these colors highlight words well, participants who are more than a few feet away will have difficulty reading words written on them.
 7. Be creative with your flipcharts. Box in key words, use arrows, and draw figures that illustrate important points.

The Flipchart and Facilitator Style

Finally, a few words should be mentioned about the flipchart and facilitator style. The flipchart is a facilitation tool, not a crutch. It's not intended to take the place of your lecture notes. The "talking points" on your flipchart serve to focus the group's attention, and assist you in keeping your thoughts organized. When referring to points on the flipchart, don't hide behind the flipchart stand. Move to the side or off to the front as you speak. Touch key words on the flipchart once in a while to give them emphasis.

One way to keep people from reading ahead and losing focus is to place a small strip of masking tape at the bottom center of the page, and bring the bottom of the page up to cover the flipchart to the point on which the current discussion is based.

Organize multiple flipcharts on a given topic from right to left on easels or across a wall. If you hang your flipcharts up on the wall prior to the session, keep them covered, and rehearse their location to avoid a frantic search in the middle of your presentation. For flipcharts layered on one easel, a small piece of masking tape makes a good tab.

Keep any task instructions displayed on a flipchart throughout the task so participants can refer to them as needed. If you are using flipcharts to help the group record its thoughts or actions, you can display the charts on the wall as they are developed.

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Tip #13: Use Effective and Appropriate Decision-Making

Clearly, a cornerstone of team success is the ability for the team leader to model and empower an effective decision-making strategy. If decisions are not made in a timely manner or without using the appropriate decision-making methodology, the team may not “buy in” to the leader’s choices or may not understand why the decision was made, which may sabotage the progress of the team. Therefore, it is critical that team leaders carefully consider how to make decisions and who to include in that process prior to the team’s work together.

Decision-Making Considerations

When you are facing a decision that will affect the team, it might be helpful to consider the following aspects of that decision. Once all the ramifications of the decision have been thought through, you can choose the best decision-making approach to use.

- ◆ **Team Member Buy-In:** How much do team members need to be involved so that they can confidently support implementation of the decision?
- ◆ **Time Available:** How much time can be spent on making the decision?
- ◆ **Importance of Decision:** How important (versus how inconsequential) is the issue to the team?
- ◆ **Information Needed:** Who has the information or expertise that can contribute to making a quality decision?
- ◆ **Capability:** How capable and experienced are people in operating as decision-makers or a decision-making team?
- ◆ **Building Teamwork:** What is the potential value of using this

opportunity to create a stronger team?

Decision-Making Approaches

Once you have carefully considered all aspects of a decision, you should feel better able to choose which decision-making approach to use. Decision-making spans a continuum from the leader independently deciding and communicating a decision to the team to the decision being made by the team through the consensus process. The following highlights the four most prominent approaches to decision-making.

Decide & Communicate - Team leader makes a decision and communicates.

<i>Possible Advantages</i>	<i>Possible Disadvantages</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decision can be made quickly. • Leader is in immediate control of the decision. • Implementation can begin immediately. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May not be the most well-informed decision. • Those assigned to carry out the decision may balk at implementation. • Those affected by the decision may harbor resentment about not having been asked their opinion.
<p>Rationale for using this option:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little time to make the decision without adverse impact. • Group is likely to support and implement the decision. 	

Gather Input from Individuals & Decide - Team leader gathers input from individuals, then makes the decision.

<i>Possible Advantages</i>	<i>Possible Disadvantages</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More information with which to make a decision. • Increased likelihood that decision will be carried out. • Doesn't require a meeting of all the team members. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some team members may feel arbitrarily excluded. • Some team members may undermine decision or be less likely to provide input the next time.

Rationale for using this option:

- Need expert opinion of a few people to make informed decisions.
- Team interests are represented by selected individuals.

Have the Leader Collect Team Input & Decide - Team leader calls a group meeting to collect input, then she/he uses the input to make the decision.

<i>Possible Advantages</i>	<i>Possible Disadvantages</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More creative thinking because of group synergy. • Increased likelihood of well-informed decision. • People feel included and may be more committed to implementation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Takes more time. • May surface issues or conflicts inappropriate for that meeting. • If resulting decision is in conflict with input, people may sabotage implementation.
Rationale for using this option: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very important decision to many people. • Synergy may provide good options. • Opportunity to build common understanding of situation and key groundwork for implementation. 	

Have the Group Decide by Consensus - Team leader and group reach a decision that everyone understands, can support, and is willing to implement. If this agreement cannot be reached within the time allowed, a fall back decision-making option is used. (The fall back must be clear at the outset.)

<i>Possible Advantages</i>	<i>Possible Disadvantages</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educates the team through active participation. • High level of support for decision. • Quicker implementation because more people already up and running on the issues at hand. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May take more time. • Team members may not have the collaborative skills needed to reach agreement. • People may interpret leader's choice of consensus approach as weakness.

Rationale for using this option:

- Change requires complete understanding and buy-in.
- Need expertise of entire team to design effective change.
- Team is experienced in consensus process

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Building Consensus

If, after consideration, you believe that a decision needs to be made by team consensus, a new challenge awaits you. While consensus decisions are often the decisions with the most team buy-in and support, the consensus process itself is time consuming and labor intensive. The following helps outline how to set up and facilitate a consensus process.

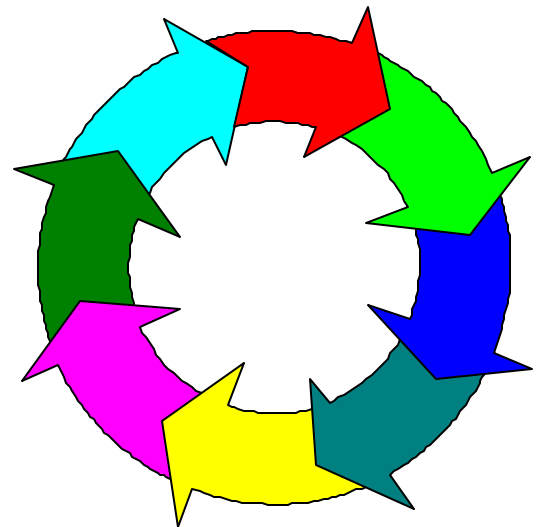
"Someone else has decided that something needs to be done -- I've received a 'mandate' that a particular requirement needs to be met by my team. How do we meet that mandate in the best possible way?"

"My team has considered a range of ideas and agreed on a larger vision. They are feeling very positive about this longer-term direction. The team needs to decide how we want to carry that vision out. How do we make that vision a reality?"

"There's an organizational problem which could be solved in a number of ways. What's the best solution to this problem? How do we make sure that people will be committed to carrying out necessary actions?"

Each of these situations are examples of where it may be important to build consensus among team members. Consensus building is a process that:

- ◆ results in true agreement about a plan, approach or steps to be taken,
- ◆ actively engages people in the process, and
- ◆ results in people saying "my view has been accurately heard" and "I will support the decision even though it may not be my first preference."



The ability to build group consensus is essential in situations when other people's active commitment is necessary to implement a decision or plan, when people have strong differences about an issue, or when you need a core of support for an approach or position you want to advocate to a larger group like the entire office or a community.

To help groups achieve consensus, you will need basic facilitation skills like paraphrasing, summarizing and question asking, and some more refined facilitation skills. We will describe these skills and discuss how you can prepare for and effectively use these skills to help build group consensus.

CONSIDERATIONS BEFORE THE GROUP MEETS

1. **Are the right people going to be at the meeting?** -- When preparing for a meeting where building consensus is important, one question to ask is "who should be involved in this discussion?" One way of answering this question is to examine the impact of the decisions to be made by the group, and to include in discussions participants who represent those affected by the decision, those implementing the decision and those whose support is necessary for implementation.
2. **Is everyone prepared to achieve the purpose of the meeting?** -- Everyone coming to the meeting should have a clear idea why this group is coming together. What are we trying to get done? This does not mean that the exact solutions or agreements are determined in advance, but it does mean that the person facilitating the discussion and other participants need to be clear about the issues the group is facing and the outcomes that you and the group want to achieve. Group members may need to prepare by thinking through the issues and preparing their own alternatives or suggestions based on available information.

During the meeting, a clear understanding of the issues will enable the person facilitating the meeting to check whether the group's discussion is generally on target or whether it is focused too much on less important issues. When you see something important, it is critical to push the group to make certain they have truly examined all aspects of the issue, and to test rigorously for agreement. When something is less important, you will need to help the group move on.

BUILDING CONSENSUS DURING THE MEETING

Follow a plan for how the discussion will be organized -- Typically discussions

that truly involve people, give them an opportunity to share their views, and build commitment to a particular approach include eight steps:

1. Be clear about "what it is we're trying to get done"

When working toward consensus, the first requirement is to keep the common purpose clearly in front of the group. Start the meeting by stating or reaffirming the purpose of the meeting. Give people a chance to ask questions so that they can be clear about it. Verify agreement that "this is what we are trying to get done." Give people an opportunity to share their perspective on the problem or issues and to ask questions like:

- ◆ What are the key elements of the mandate? Why do we need to take action?
- ◆ How did this vision come about? Who was involved? Does it reflect where people are today?
- ◆ What are the elements of the problem? Here's how I see it. How do others see it?

2. Ask for ideas about how the issue or problem could be addressed

Use open-ended questions to get ideas out. In some situations, people may have alternative proposals prepared before the meeting. Sometimes a single proposal will be the focus of discussion, but quite often ideas and thoughts building on earlier ideas come out quickly and spontaneously. It is very important to keep track of the different proposals. Use a flipchart or white board. Use summarizing skills to go over the different ideas.

3. Provide an opportunity for clarification

After there are a number of approaches in front of the group, give the group an opportunity to ask clarifying questions before "arguing" about any particular proposal. "Is there anything that anyone does not understand about any of the proposals?" This is not a time to debate, but to make sure that all are clear about what each person's ideas are. This is a good time for the facilitator to summarize each of the proposals and for all participants to use paraphrasing skills.

4. Check to see if there is agreement on any of the proposals

Review the purpose of the meeting and ask, "Are there any of the proposals we all

agree on?" If you all agree at this point, summarize the agreement and

5. Adjourn the meeting

Usually consensus will not come this easily and people will want to air their concerns about different proposals!

6. Identify and discuss concerns with proposals

Give the group an opportunity to discuss "Why I have trouble agreeing with or selecting this proposal as the one I'm willing to go with." As the person facilitating the discussion, you will need to actively summarize points, help clarify differences, and keep all of the proposals in front of the group. You may want to list concerns on a flipchart or whiteboard and focus discussion on each.

You will also need to make judgments about when to ask the group "Are we at a point where we can make a decision about this issue (or recommendation, or action item)?" If so, record a clear statement of that decision. If not, ask, "Keeping aware of our time limits, what do we have to do to arrive at a decision?"

7. Combine parts of proposals and/or develop new proposals to meet concerns

This can be the most creative part of the discussion. "Given our concerns, what combination of ideas will best achieve the outcome we're looking for?" "Are there changes in any of the proposals which will address your concerns?"

8. Test for agreement/work to resolve disagreements

As the discussion proceeds, look for places to test for agreement:

- ◆ Summarize what you see as the "evolving" decision. "Here is the decision I hear us moving towards. Correct me if I've misstated it or left something out." Ask the group members if they all agree with this decision. Look around to see if every person has nodded or said yes.

- ◆ When reaching consensus is getting a little tougher, take actions to help people move their position enough to achieve what might be called a "real world" consensus. Here are some examples of what you might say in these instances:
- ◆ "Do you agree that this is the best solution we can develop collectively?"
Or...
- ◆ "Based on this discussion and our need to take action, can you agree to this as a practical solution - perhaps one that is not ideal and not exactly what you want, but nonetheless achievable." Or...
- ◆ "Remembering that we all have to keep our common purposes in mind, do you agree that this is the best action we can jointly take?"

There will be times when you will need to work to resolve disagreements. If people simply disagree, what can you do? As a facilitator, you need to manage disagreement openly and positively. Out of disagreement will often emerge creative solutions, and agreements that people will carry out with energy. However, this cannot happen if disagreements are pushed under the table or if they get out of hand and dominate the group proceedings. Here are some things you can do to facilitate disagreements.

- Summarize major points of disagreement or key alternatives. Ask if everyone has been able to contribute his or her views and query the group to see if all major points have been discussed.
- Go around and ask each person to state what decision they would recommend if it were up to them alone. If five or eight people agree, address the three who did not agree and ask them questions like the following:
 - "What would it take to change your mind?"
 - "What are the areas of disagreement and are they resolvable?"
 - "Now that we have clearly heard each of our positions, what would it take to get consensus on this problem?"

Whatever questions you use, you may then need to facilitate a discussion to sort out the answer.

- Another approach is to ask people to consider the main reason that's keeping them from agreeing. Allow some discussion and then ask these participants what can be done. Then test for consensus again.
- At a certain point, you may decide to have the group vote. Ask how many people would vote for something, and how many would vote against it. If it is not a clear-cut vote, you can simply go with the majority, or you can table the issue and agree not to decide. As a facilitator, when do you decide to push for consensus as opposed to going with a simple (and quick) vote? This is a judgment call, and it is made based on three factors:
 - the importance of the issue,
 - the degree to which each person's or each unit's support is really needed for success, and
 - whether a decision has to be made about a particular issue during the meeting.

When making this kind of judgment, you are trying to strike a balance between pushing participants to make a decision by voting, which doesn't insure everyone's commitment to the action, and taking too much time to reach consensus, which risks developing a sense of wasted time, heightened disagreement, and failure to achieve results.

9. Make sure you summarize agreements

These steps will help the group achieve consensus. When you reach an agreement, acknowledge it, summarize key points, identify actions, record the results, and move on. In many cases, it is important that this agreement is written and distributed after the conclusion of the meeting.

As you go through these steps, keep discussion focused on the common purpose

--When you see the group drift off target, bring them back to the central purpose. (For example, say "What we are talking about now is [x] and our purpose here today is [y]; let's make sure [x] is related to [y], or move back to the main topic.") Relate key points and summaries to the purpose. (For example, you could say, "We have explored these two aspects of the problem. If we can agree on an approach to dealing with these aspects, we'll achieve one of the purposes here today - [x].") Restate the purpose to help two individuals who are having a prolonged disagreement. (For example, you could say, "Let me interrupt here for a second - we all need to remember that we are here to address [this purpose], which is affecting all of us.")

Gauge when the group has talked about something "just enough." -- Too much discussion causes the group to lose interest, and feel that they are not using their time productively. With too little, the solution may be inadequate, or the group may lack the necessary commitment to carry out the solution successfully.

Determining when a group has reached the "just enough" point is not an exact science. However, there are some signs that will indicate to you that it's time to push the group towards a decision.

- Points or arguments begin to get repeated without any new knowledge or ideas being developed. You get the sense that people are trying to convince each other by talking louder or being repetitive. Often summarizing points that have been made will help people realize that they have been heard and will allow the group to move on.
- Individuals in the groups have all had the opportunity to give a "reasonable" amount of input into the discussion. If you have any doubts, ask someone who has been silent if they have anything to add.
- While discussing an issue with good participation from all at the outset, you notice that only two or three people appear to be interested still in the point under discussion. The best way to find out what's happening is to ask, "Have we finished examining this issue?" Or, you could ask, "It seems like most of us are ready to move on. Does anyone have a concluding point before we do so?"

Any of the actions suggested above will work well, no matter what happens. If the group is ready to move on, they will breathe a sigh of relief and plunge ahead. If the group is not, they will recognize it, and make a conscious decision to continue deliberating about an issue.