This is "Groups and Problem-Solving", chapter 11 from the book An Introduction to Group Communication (index.html) (v. 0.0).

Chapter 11

Groups and Problem-Solving

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

INTRODUCTORY EXERCISES

1. Contact two people who work in different parts of your college or university and ask them what problems they consider to be most significant in their immediate office or work area. What similarities and differences do you see between the two groups of problems?
2. Ask a family member to describe a problem he or she has solved recently. Describe the steps the person took in reaching the solution and identify the one(s) that you feel were most important in contributing to the solution. Which of the steps would you be most likely to take in a similar situation?
3. Identify two or three aspects of a course you're taking or have recently taken that you feel could be improved (e.g., grading, course policies, nature of reading materials, etc.). Describe the steps you might take with a group of fellow students to respond to those elements of the course.
4. What decision have you made in the last 2–3 years that you're proudest of? What lessons or advice do you think someone else could draw from the way you reached that decision?

11.1 Group Problem-Solving

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

1. Identify and describe how to implement seven steps for group problem-solving.

No matter who you are or where you live, problems are an inevitable part of life. This is true for groups as well as for individuals. Some groups—especially work teams—are formed specifically to solve problems. Other groups encounter problems for a wide variety of reasons. Within a family group, a problem might be that a daughter or son wants to get married and the parents do not approve of the marriage partner. In a work group, a problem might be that some workers are putting in more effort than others, yet achieving poorer results. Regardless of the problem, having the resources of a group can be an advantage, as different people can contribute different ideas for how to reach a satisfactory solution.

Once a group encounters a problem, the questions that come up range from "Where do we start?" to "How do we solve it?" While there are many ways to approach a problem, the American educational philosopher John Dewey's reflective thinking sequence has stood the test of time. This seven step processAdler, R. (1996). *Communicating at work: principles and practices for business and the professions.* Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill. has produced positive results and serves as a handy organizational structure. If you are member of a group that needs to solve a problem and don't know where to start, consider these seven simple stepsMcLean, S. (2005). *The basics of interpersonal communication.* Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.:

1. Define the problem.
2. Analyze the problem.
3. Establish criteria.
4. Consider possible solutions.
5. Decide on a solution.
6. Implement the solution.
7. Follow up on the solution.

Let's discuss each step in detail.

Define the Problem

If you don't know what the problem is, how can you know you've solved it? Defining the problem allows the group to set boundaries of what the problem is and what it is not; and begin to formalize a description or definition of the scope, size, or extent of the challenge the group will address. A problem that is too broadly defined can overwhelm the group. If the problem is too narrowly defined, important information will be missed or ignored.

In the following example, we have a web-based company called Favorites which needs to increase its customer base and ultimately sales. A problem-solving group has been formed, and they start by formulating a working definition of the problem.

- **Too Broad:** "Sales are off, our numbers are down, and we need more customers."
- **More Precise:** "Sales have been slipping incrementally for 6 of the past 9 months and are significantly lower than a seasonally adjusted comparison to last year. Overall this loss represents a 4.5% reduction in sales from the same time last year. However, when we break it down by product category, sales of our non-edible products have seen a modest but steady increase, while sales of edibles account for the drop off and we need to halt the decline."

Analyze the Problem

Now the group analyzes the problem, trying to gather information and learn more. The problem is complex and requires more than one area of expertise. Why do non-edible products continue selling well? What is it about the edibles that is turning customers off? Let's meet our problem-solvers at Favorites.

Kevin is responsible for customer resource management. He is involved with the customer from the point of initial contact through purchase and delivery. Most of the interface is automated in the form of an online "basket model," where photographs and product descriptions are accompanied by "Buy It" buttons. He is available during normal working business hours for live chat and voice interface if needed, and customers are invited to request additional information. Most Favorites customers do not access this service, but Kevin is kept quite busy, as he also handles returns and complaints. Because Kevin believes that superior service retains customers while attracting new ones, he is always interested in better ways

to serve the customer. Looking at edibles and non-edibles, he will study the cycle of customer service and see if there are any common points, from the main webpage through the catalog to the purchase process to returns, at which customers abandon the sale. He has existing customer feedback loops with end-of-sale surveys, but most customers decline to take the survey and there is currently no incentive to participate.

Mariah is responsible for products and purchasing. She wants to offer the best products at the lowest price, and to offer new products that are unusual, rare, or exotic. She regularly adds new products to the Favorites catalog and culls underperformers. Right now she has the data on every product and its sales history, but it is a challenge to represent it. She will analyze current sales data and produce a report that specifically identifies how each product, edible and non-edible, is performing. She wants to highlight "winners" and "losers" but also recognizes that today's "losers" may be the hit of tomorrow. It is hard to predict constantly changing tastes and preferences, but that is part of her job. It's not all science, and it's not all art. She has to have an eye for what will catch on tomorrow while continuing to provide what is hot today.

Suri is responsible for data management at Favorites. She gathers, analyzes, and presents information gathered from the supply chain, sales, and marketing. She works with vendors to make sure products are available when needed, makes sales predictions based on past sales history, and assesses the effectiveness of marketing campaigns.

The problem-solving group members already have certain information on hand. They know that customer retention is one contributing factor. Attracting new customers is a constant goal, but they are aware of the well-known principle that it takes more effort to attract new customers than to keep existing ones. Thus, it is important to insure a quality customer service experience for existing customers and encourage them to refer friends. The group needs to determine how to promote this favorable customer behavior.

Another contributing factor seems to be that customers often abandon the shopping cart before completing a purchase, especially when purchasing edibles. The group members need to learn more about why this is happening.

Establish Criteria

Establishing the criteria for a solution is the next step. At this point, information is coming in from diverse perspectives, and each group member has contributed

information from their perspective, even though there may be several points of overlap.

> **Kevin:** Customers who complete the post-sale survey indicate that they want to know 1) what is the estimated time of delivery, 2) why a specific item was not in stock and when it will be, and 3) why their order sometimes arrives with less than a complete order, with some items back-ordered, without prior notification.

He notes that a very small percentage of customers complete the post-sale survey, and the results are far from scientific. He also notes that it appears the interface is not capable of cross-checking inventory to provide immediate information concerning back orders, so that the customer "buys it" only to learn several days later that it was not in stock. This seems to be especially problematic for edible products, because people may tend to order them for special occasions like birthdays and anniversaries. But we don't really know this for sure because of the low participation in the post-sale survey.

> **Mariah:** There are four edible products that frequently sell out. So far, we haven't been able to boost the appeal of other edibles so that people would order them as a second choice when these sales leaders aren't available. We also have several rare, exotic products that are slow movers. They have potential, but currently are underperformers.

> **Suri:** We know from a zip code analysis that most of our customers are from a few specific geographic areas associated with above-average incomes. We have very few credit cards declined, and the average sale is over $100. Shipping costs represent on average 8% of the total sales cost. We do not have sufficient information to produce a customer profile. There is no specific point in the purchase process where basket abandonment tends to happen; it happens fairly uniformly at all steps.

Consider Possible Solutions to the Problem

The group has listened to each other and now starts to brainstorm ways to address the challenges they have addressed while focusing resources on those solutions that are more likely to produce results.

> **Kevin:** Is it possible for our programmers to create a cross-index feature, linking the product desired with a report of how many are in stock? I'd like the customer to know right away whether it is in stock, or how long they may have to wait. As another idea, is it possible to add incentives to the purchase cycle that won't negatively impact our overall profit? I'm thinking a small volume discount on multiple items, or perhaps free shipping over a specific dollar amount.

> **Mariah:** I recommend we hold a focus group where customers can sample our edible products and tell us what they like best and why. When the best sellers are sold out, could we offer a discount on related products to provide an instant alternative? We might also cull the underperforming products with a liquidation sale to generate interest.

> **Suri:** If we want to know more about our customers, we need to give them an incentive to complete the post-sale survey. How about a five percent off coupon code for the next purchase, to get them to return and to help us better identify our customer base? We may also want to build in a customer referral rewards program, but it all takes better data in to get results out. We should also explore the supply side of the business and see if we can get a more reliable supply of the leading products, and try to get more advantageous discounts from our suppliers, especially in the edible category.

Decide on a Solution

Kevin, Mariah, and Suri may want to implement all of the solution strategies, but they do not have the resources to do them all. They'll complete a **cost/benefit analysis**[1], which ranks each solution according to its probable impact. The analysis is shown in Table 11.1 "Cost/Benefit Analysis".

Table 11.1 Cost/Benefit Analysis

Source	Proposed Solution	Cost	Benefit	Comment
Kevin	Integrate the cross-index feature	High	High	Many of our competitors already have this feature
Kevin	Volume discount	Low	Medium	May increase sales slightly
Kevin	Free shipping	Low	Low	This has a downside in making customers more aware of shipping costs if their order doesn't qualify for free shipping
Mariah	Hold a focus group to taste edible products	High	Medium	Difficult to select participants representative of our customer base
Mariah	Search for alternative products to high performers	Medium	Medium	We can't know for sure which products customers will like best
Mariah	Liquidate underperformers	Low	Low	Might create a "bargain basement" impression inconsistent with our brand

1. Method of ranking each possible solution according to its probable impact.

Source	Proposed Solution	Cost	Benefit	Comment
Suri	Incentive for post-sale survey completion	Low	Medium	Make sure the incentive process is easy for the customer
Suri	Incentive for customer referrals	Low	Medium	People may feel uncomfortable referring friends if it is seen as putting them in a marketing role
Suri	Find a more reliable supply of top-selling edibles	Medium	High	We already know customers want these products
Suri	Negotiate better discounts from vendors	Low	High	If we can do this without alienating our best vendors, it will be a win-win

Now that the options have been presented with their costs and benefits, it is easier for the group to decide which courses of action are likely to yield the best outcomes. The analysis helps the group members to see beyond the immediate cost of implementing a given solution. For example, Kevin's suggestion of offering free shipping won't cost Favorites much money, but it also may not pay off in customer goodwill. And even though Mariah's suggestion of having a focus group might sound like a good idea, it will be expensive and its benefits are questionable.

A careful reading of the analysis indicates that Kevin's best suggestion is to integrate the cross-index feature in the ordering process so that customers can know immediately whether an item is in stock or on back order. Of Mariah's suggestions, searching for alternative products is probably the most likely to benefit Favorites. And Suri's two supply-side suggestions are likely to result in positive outcomes.

Implement the Solution

Kevin is faced with the challenge of designing the computer interface without incurring unacceptable costs. He strongly believes that the interface will pay for itself within the first year—or, to put if more bluntly, that Favorites' declining sales will get worse if the website does not soon have this feature. He asks to meet with top management to get budget approval and secures their agreement, on one condition: He must negotiate a compensation schedule with the Information Technology consultants that includes delayed compensation in the form of bonuses after the feature has been up and running successfully for six months.

Mariah knows that searching for alternative products is a never-ending process, but it takes time and the company needs results. She decides to invest time evaluating products that competing companies currently offer, especially in the edible category, on the theory that customers who find their desired items sold out on the Favorites website may have been buying alternative products elsewhere instead of choosing an alternative from Favorites's product lines.

Suri decides to approach the vendors of the four frequently sold-out products and ask point blank: "What would it take to get you to produce these items more reliably in greater quantities?" By opening the channel of communication with these vendors, she is able to motivate them to make modifications that will improve the reliability and quantity. She also approaches the vendors of the less popular products with a request for better discounts in return for cooperation in developing and test-marketing new products.

Follow up on the Solution

Kevin: After several beta tests, the cross-index feature was implemented and has been in place for 30 days. Now customers see either "In stock" or "Available [mo/da/yr]" in the shopping basket. As expected, Kevin notes a decrease in the number of chat and phone inquiries to the effect of, "Will this item arrive before my wife's birthday?" However, he notes an increase in inquiries asking "Why isn't this item in stock?" It is difficult to tell whether customer satisfaction is higher overall.
Mariah: In exploring the merchandise available from competing merchants, she got several ideas for modifying Favorites' product line to offer more flavors and other variations on popular edibles. Working with vendors, she found that these modifications cost very little. Within the first 30 days of adding these items to the product line, sales are up. Mariah believes these additions also serve to enhance the Favorites brand identity, but she has no data to back this up.
Suri: So far, the vendors supplying the four top-selling edibles have fulfilled their promise of increasing quantity and reliability. However, three of the four items have still sold out, raising the question of whether Favorites needs to bring in one or more additional vendors to produce these items. Of the vendors with which Favorites asked to negotiate better discounts, some refused, and two of these were "stolen" by a competing merchant so that they no longer sell to Favorites. In addition, one of the vendors that agreed to give a better discount was unexpectedly forced to cease operations for several weeks because of a fire.

This scenario allows us to see the problem may have many dimensions, and may have several solutions, but resources can be limited and not every solution is successful. Even though the problem is not immediately resolved, the group

problem-solving pattern serves as a useful guide through the problem-solving process.

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KEY TAKEAWAY

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- Group problem-solving can be an orderly process when it is broken down into seven specific stages.

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EXERCISES

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1. Think of a problem encountered in the past by a group of which you are a member. How did the group solve the problem? How satisfactory was the solution? Discuss your results with your classmates.
2. Consider again the problem you described in Exercise #1. In view of the seven-step framework, which steps did the group utilize? Would following the full seven-step framework have been helpful? Discuss your opinion with a classmate.
3. Research one business that you would like to know more about and see if you can learn about how they communicate in groups and teams Compare your results with those of classmates.
4. Think of a decision you will be making some time in the near future. Apply the cost/benefit analysis framework to your decision. Do you find this method helpful? Discuss your results with classmates.

11.2 Group Decision-Making

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

Life is the sum of all your choices.

 - Albert Camus

Simply put, **decision-making**[2] is the process of choosing among options and arriving at a position, judgment, or action. It usually answers a "wh-" question—i.e., what, who, where, or when?—or perhaps a "how" question.

A group may, of course, make a decision in order to solve a problem. For instance, a group of students might discover halfway through a project that some of its members are failing to contribute to the required work. They might then decide to develop a written timeline and a set of deadlines for itself if it believes that action will lead them out of their difficulty.

Not every group decision, however, will be in response to a problem. Many decisions relate to routine **logistical**[3] matters such as when and where to schedule an event or how to reach someone who wasn't able to make it to a meeting. Thus, decision-making differs from problem-solving.

Any decision-making in a group, even about routine topics, is significant. Why? Because decision-making, like problem-solving, results in a change in a group's

2. The process of choosing among options and arriving at a position, judgment, or action.

3. Routine in nature (applicable to fundamental elements and considerations of how an organization or process works).

status, posture, or stature. Such change, in turn, requires energy and attention on the part of a group in order for the group to progress easily into a new reality. Things will be different in the group once a problem has been solved or a decision has been reached, and group members will need to adjust.

Methods of Reaching Decisions

Research does indicate that groups generate more ideas and make more accurate decisions on matters for which a known preferred solution exists, but they also operate more slowly than individuals.Hoy, W.K., & Miskel, C.G. (1982). *Educational administration: Theory, research, and practice* (2nd ed.). New York: Random House. Under time pressure and other constraints, some group leaders exercise their power to make a decision **unilaterally**[4]—alone—because they're willing to sacrifice a degree of accuracy for the sake of speed. Sometimes this behavior turns out to be wise; sometimes it doesn't.

Assuming that a group determines that it must reach a decision together on some matter, rather than deferring to the will of a single person, it can proceed according to several methods. Parker and HoffmanParker, G., & Hoffman, R. (2006). *Meeting excellence: 33 tools to lead meetings that get results.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass., along with Hartley and DawsonHartley, P., & Dawson, M. (2010). *Success in groupwork.* New York: St. Martin's Press., place decision-making procedures in several categories. Here is a synthesis of their views of how decision-making can take place:

1. "A plop."

   A group may conduct a discussion in which members express views and identify alternatives but then reach no decision and take no action. When people go their own ways after such a "**plop**[5]," things sometimes take care of themselves, and the lack of a decision causes no difficulties. On the other hand, if a group ignores or postpones a decision which really needs attention, its members may confront tougher decisions later—some of which may deal with problems brought about by not addressing a topic when it was at an early stage.

2. Delegation to an expert.

   A group may not be ready to make a decision at a given time, either because it lacks sufficient information or is experiencing unresolved conflict among members with differing views. In such a situation, the group may not want to simply drop the matter and move on. Instead, it may turn to one of its members who everyone feels has the expertise to choose wisely among the alternatives that the group is considering.

4. Determined or executed by one person alone.

5. A discussion in which members of a group express views and identify alternative but reach no decision and take no action.

The group can either ask the expert to come back later with a final proposal or simply allow the person to make the decision alone after having gathered whatever further information he or she feels is necessary.

3. Averaging.

Group members may shift their individual stances regarding a question by "splitting the difference" to reach a "middle ground." This technique tends to work most easily if numbers are involved. For instance, a group trying to decide how much money to spend on a gift for a departing member might ask everyone for a preferred amount and agree to spend whatever is computed by averaging those amounts.

4. Voting.

If you need to be quick and definitive in making a decision, voting is probably the best method. Everyone in mainstream American society is familiar with the process, for one thing, and its outcome is inherently clear and obvious. A **majority vote**[6] requires that more than half of a group's members vote for a proposal, whereas a proposal subject to a **two-thirds vote**[7] will not pass unless twice as many members show support as those who oppose it.

Voting is essentially a win/lose activity. You can probably remember a time when you or someone else in a group composed part of a strong and passionate minority whose desires were thwarted because of the results of a vote. How much commitment did you feel to support the results of that vote?

Voting does offer a quick and simple way to reach decisions, but it works better in some situations than in others. If the members of a group see no other way to overcome a deadlock, for instance, voting may make sense. Likewise, very large groups and those facing serious time constraints may see advantages to voting. Finally, the efficiency of voting is appealing when it comes to making routine or noncontroversial decisions that need only to be officially approved.

6. A process of making a decision whereby the vote of more than half a group's members are considered to be decisive.

7. A process of making a decision whereby twice as many voters have to approve of a proposal than oppose it in order for the proposal to be accepted.

Source: http://www.flickr.com/photos/sashakimel/6244465144/

5. Consensus.

   In consensus decision-making, group members reach a resolution which all of the members can support as being acceptable as a means of accomplishing some mutual goal even though it may not be the preferred choice for everyone. In common use, "consensus" can range in meaning from unanimity to a simple majority vote. In public policy facilitation and multilateral international negotiations, however, the term refers to a general agreement reached after discussions and consultations, usually without voting."consensus". (2002). In *Dictionary of Conflict Resolution, Wiley*. Retrieved from http://www.credoreference.com/entry/wileyconfres/consensus

   Consensus should not be confused with **unanimity**[8], which means only that no one has explicitly stated objections to a proposal or decision. Although unanimity can certainly convey an accurate perspective of a group's views at times, groupthink also often leads to unanimous decisions. Therefore, it's probably wise to be cautious when a group of diverse people seems to have formed a totally unified bloc with respect to choices among controversial alternatives.

8. A condition in which no one in a group has explicitly stated objections to a proposal or decision.

When a consensus decision is reached through full interchange of views and is then adopted **in good faith**[9] by all parties to a discussion, it can energize and motivate a group. Besides avoiding the win/lose elements intrinsic to voting, it converts each member's investment in a decision into a stake in preserving and promoting the decision after it has been agreed upon.

Guidelines for Seeking Consensus

How can a group actually go about working toward consensus? Here are some guidelines for the process:

First, be sure everyone knows the definition of consensus and is comfortable with observing them. For many group members, this may mean suspending judgment and trying something they've never done before. Remind people that consensus requires a joint dedication to moving forward toward improvement in and by the group.

Second, endeavor to solicit participation by every member of the group. Even the naturally quietest person should be actively "polled" from time to time for his or her perspectives. In fact, it's a good idea to take special pains to ask for varied viewpoints when discussion seems to be stalled or contentious.

Third, listen honestly and openly to each group member's viewpoints. Attempt to seek and gather information from others. Do your best to subdue your emotions and your tendency to judge and evaluate.

Fourth, be patient. To reach consensus often takes much more time than voting would. A premature "agreement" reached because people give in to speed things up or avoid conflict is likely later to weaken or fall apart.

Fifth, always look for mutually acceptable ways to make it through challenging circumstances. Don't resort to chance mechanisms like flipping a coin, and don't trade decisions arbitrarily just so that things come out equally for people who remain committed to opposing views.

Sixth, resolve gridlock earnestly. Stop and ask, "Have we really identified every possible feasible way that our group might act?" If members of a group simply can't agree on one alternative, see if they can all find and accept a next-best option. Then

9. Seriously and honestly, as in a decision-making or conflict situation.

be sure to request an explicit statement from them that they are prepared to genuinely commit themselves to that option.

One variation on consensus decision-making calls upon a group's leader to ask its members, before initiating a discussion, to agree to a deadline and a "safety valve." The deadline would be a time by which everyone in the group feels they need to have reached a decision. The "safety valve" would be a statement that any member can veto the will of the rest of the group to act in a certain way, but only if he or she takes responsibility for moving the group forward in some other positive direction.

Although consensus entails full participation and assent within a group, it usually can't be reached without guidance from a leader. One college president we knew was a master at escorting his executive team to consensus. Without coercing or rushing them, he would regularly involve them all in discussions and lead their conversations to a point at which everyone was nodding in agreement, or at least conveying acceptance of a decision. Rather than leaving things at that point, however, the president would generally say, "We seem to have reached a decision to do XYZ. Is there anyone who objects?" Once people had this last opportunity to add further comments of their own, the group could move forward with a sense that it had a common vision in mind.

Consensus decision-making is easiest within groups whose members know and respect each other, whose authority is more or less evenly distributed, and whose basic values are shared. Some charitable and religious groups meet these conditions and have long been able to use consensus decision-making as a matter of principle. The Religious Society of Friends, or Quakers, began using consensus as early as the 17th century. Its affiliated international service agency, the American Friends Service Committee, employs the same approach. The Mennonite Church has also long made use of consensus decision-making.

Decision-Making by Leaders

People in the business world often need to make decisions in groups composed of their associates and employees. Take the case of a hypothetical businessperson, Kerry Cash.

Kerry owns and manages Wenatcheese, a shop which sells gourmet local and imported cheese. Since opening five years ago, the business has overcome the challenge of establishing itself and has built a solid clientele. Sales have tripled. Two full-time and four part-time employees—all productive, reliable, and customer-friendly—have made the store run efficiently and bolstered its reputation.

Now, with Christmas and the New Year coming, Kerry wants to decide, "Shall I open another shop in the spring?" Because the year-end rush is on, there's not a lot of time to weigh pros and cons.

Source: http://www.flickr.com/photos/richardnorth/7696781276/

As the diagram indicates, many managers in Kerry's situation employ two means to make decisions like this: intuition and analysis. They'll feel their gut instinct, analyze appropriate financial facts, or do a little bit of both.

Unfortunately, this kind of dualistic decision-making approach restricts an individual leader's options. It doesn't do justice to the complexity of the group environment. It also fails to fully exploit the power and relevance of other people's knowledge.

Figure 11.1 *Intuition-Analysis*

10. An overload of information beyond what is needed, leading to an inability to make a decision.

Too much feeling may produce arbitrary outcomes. And, as the management theorist Peter Drucker observed, too much fact can create stagnation and "**analysis paralysis**[10]": "(A)n overload of information, that is, anything much beyond what is truly needed, leads to information blackout. It does not enrich, but

impoverishes."Drucker, P.F. (1993). *The effective executive.* New York: Harperbusiness.

Fortunately, a couple of authorities wrote an article in 1973 which can help members of groups assess and strengthen the quality of their decision-makingTannenbaum, R., & Schmidt, W. (1973, May-June). How to choose a leadership pattern. *Harvard Business Review*, 3–11.. Robert Tannenbaum and Warren Schmidt were those authorities. Their article so appealed to American readers that more than one million reprints eventually sold.

The Tannnenbaum-Schmidt Continuum

Kerry Cash, wondering whether to open another Wenatcheese outlet, can refer to the Tannenbaum-Schmidt model in <u>Table 11.2 "Tannenbaum-Schmidt Continuum"</u> to identify a spectrum of ways to resolve the question:

Table 11.2 Tannenbaum-Schmidt Continuum

Autocratic			Democratic			Participative
Manager makes decision and announces it	Manager sells decision	Manager presents ideas and invites questions	Manager presents tentative decisions subject to change	Manager presents problem, gets suggestions, and makes decision	Manager defines limits asks group to make decision	Manager permits subordinates to function within limits defined by superior

Let's take a look at the components of this continuum, from left to right. First, we have two autocratic options:

- **OPTION ONE: Pure announcement.** "All right, folks, I've decided we're going to open a new shop in Dryden over Memorial Day weekend."
- **OPTION TWO: "Selling".** "I'd like us to open a new shop in Dryden. I have five reasons. Here they are..."

Next, three democratic options are available:

- **OPTION THREE: Presentation with questions.** "I've decided we'll open a new shop in Dryden. What would you like to know about the plan?"
- **OPTION FOUR: Tentative decision.** "I want to open a new shop in Dryden. Do you have any observations or questions about this possibility?"
- **OPTION FIVE: Soliciting suggestions.** "I think we're in a position to open a new shop. Dryden seems like the best location, but I'd also consider Cashmere or Leavenworth or Okanogan. I'll decide which way to go after you give me your thoughts."

Finally, two participative kinds of approaches present themselves:

- **OPTION SIX: Limited group autonomy.** "I want to open a new shop in either Dryden, Cashmere, or Leavenworth sometime between Easter and Independence Day. Talk it over and let me know what we should do."
- **OPTION SEVEN: Full group autonomy.** "I'm willing to establish a new shop if you'd like. Let me know by two weeks from now whether you want to do that, and if so, where and when."

Of course, many decisions embody more complications and include more details than Kerry Cash's. Some are related to people: Shall we bring more people into the group? If we do, how many should be full-fledged and how many should be temporary or provisional? Or do we need to reduce our number of members?

Other decisions depend on financial variables and constraints: Can we trust the economy enough to invest in new equipment? Do we have time to develop and promote any new ideas?

The Tannenbaum-Schmidt model doesn't tell us how to choose between its own options. Tannenbaum and Schmidt, however, did offer some advice on this score. These are some topics they suggested that leaders address as they decide where to position themselves on the continuum:

- **THE ORGANIZATION.** What kind is it? Is it a new, or is it relatively solid and secure?
- **THE PEOPLE.** How mature are they? How experienced? How motivated?
- **THE PROBLEM OR DECISION.** How intricate is it? What kind of expertise is required to solve it?

- **TIME.** What deadlines, if any, do we face? Is there enough time to involve as many people as we'd like?

"Am I to understand that my proposal is greeted with some skepticism?"

Robert Tannenbaum died in 2003 after more than 50 years as a consultant, an academic, and a writer for businesses and organizations. Warren Schmidt lives on as an emeritus professor in the School of Policy, Planning, and Development at the University of Southern California.

Intel Corporation actually identifies in advance of its meetings the kind of decision-making that will be associated with each question or topicMatson, E. (1996, April-May). The seven sins of deadly meetings. *Fast company*, 122.. The four categories it uses resemble some of the components of the Tannenbaum/Schmidt model, as follows:

- Authoritative (the leader takes full responsibility).
- Consultative (the leader makes a decision after weighing views from the group).
- Voting.
- Consensus.

"OK, say we experience a total meltdown and 200,000 people die. That leaves us approximately 100,000 customers. We triple their rates and we're back on our feet again."

Once you've reached a decision, take a few steps back. Ask yourself, "Is it truly consistent with our group's values, or was it perhaps simply a **technocratic**[11] outcome: i.e., procedurally proper but devoid of empathy and human understanding? Throughout history, many a group's decision reached "by the book" later caused dissension, disappointment, or even dissolution of the group itself.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Groups may choose among several methods of decision-making, including consensus, depending on their circumstances and the characteristics of their leaders and members. Making decisions which are consistent with the group's values is of paramount importance.

11. Based primarily or exclusively on scientific data and technical information rather than on human considerations.

EXERCISES

1. Think of major decisions made in the last couple of years by two groups you're a part of. Which method from this section did the groups use in each case? Which of the decisions are you more satisfied with now? Why? To what degree do you feel the decision-making methods the groups used fit the circumstances and the characteristics of the groups themselves?

2. Tell a classmate about a decision that a group you're part of needs to make shortly. Ask the classmate for his/her advice on which decision-making method the group should employ.

3. A major hesitation raised by some people with respect to consensus decision-making is that it requires much more time than voting or other direct methods. In what kind of situation would you be, or have you been, willing to invest "as much time as it takes" to reach consensus in a group?

4. If you were compelled to make every decision either totally by intuition or totally by analysis, which would you choose? On the basis of what experience or value do you feel this way? If you could choose to have every group leader around you make decisions by only one of the two methods, which would you prefer, and why?

11.3 Effective Strategies for Group Creativity

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Define and explain "bisociation."
2. Describe brainstorming and identify criteria for its effective use.
3. Differentiate between neophiles and neophobes.
4. Distinguish between the creative styles of "brooders" and "spawners."
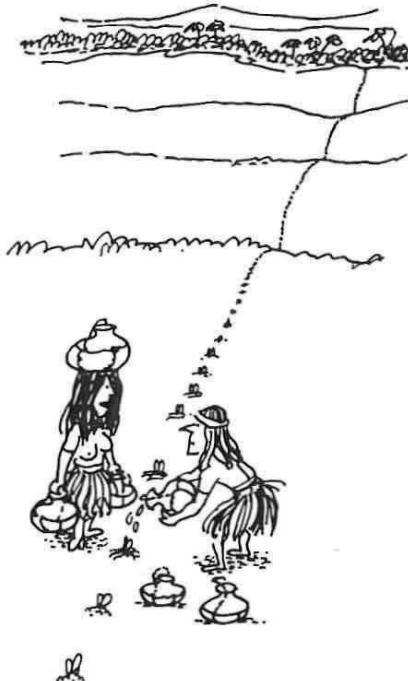
"I know this sounds crazy, but couldn't we
plant a lot of short rows, side by side?"

Sisters, brothers, mothers, fathers, teachers—everybody starts to douse your imagination and creativity. At a young age it starts, and then all of a sudden you're

like a trunk going through an airport, covered in stickers. I think I have spent most of my life pulling off stickers.

- Kim Basinger

Very few people do anything creative after the age of thirty-five. The reason is that very few people do anything creative before the age of thirty-five.

- Joel Hildebrand

You can't wait for inspiration. You have to go after it with a club.

- Jack London

Human beings are naturally creative from an early age. Think of any four- or five-year-old child you've ever met, and you can verify this for yourself. Here are some examples from journals kept by one of the authors concerning his children's development before age six:

I was reading *Animal Farm* the other day and mentioned that one of the "Seven Commandments" of the animals had to do with the beliefs that the beasts liked anything with four legs or wings. Amelia said, "Oh—then they like airplanes!"

Last night at dinner, Claire looked at the roll-top wooden bread storage compartment over the counter top in our kitchen and said, "That's a garage door where food parks."

When I was explaining that there are only four tastes which human tongues can detect—salty, sweet, sour, and bitter—Claire asked, "What about 'yucky'?"

Last night on the way to folk-dancing, we started talking about vocabulary. For some reason, Amelia created a new word: "trampede." According to her, a "trampede" is a centipede on a trampoline.

Solving problems and making decisions both work best if people in a group are creative; i.e., if they entertain new perspectives and generate new ideas. Can this be a simple matter of having the group's leader tell people "Be creative," though? Probably not. It's like saying, "Don't think of an elephant": it's apt to produce just

the opposite effect of the command itself. Still, tools and techniques for encouraging creativity in a group do exist.

CARL WAS CONCERNED WHEN he felt a SHARP PAIN SHOOT THROUGH HIS HEAD... ...UNTIL He REALIZED He HAD JUST eXPeRieNceD aN IDeA.
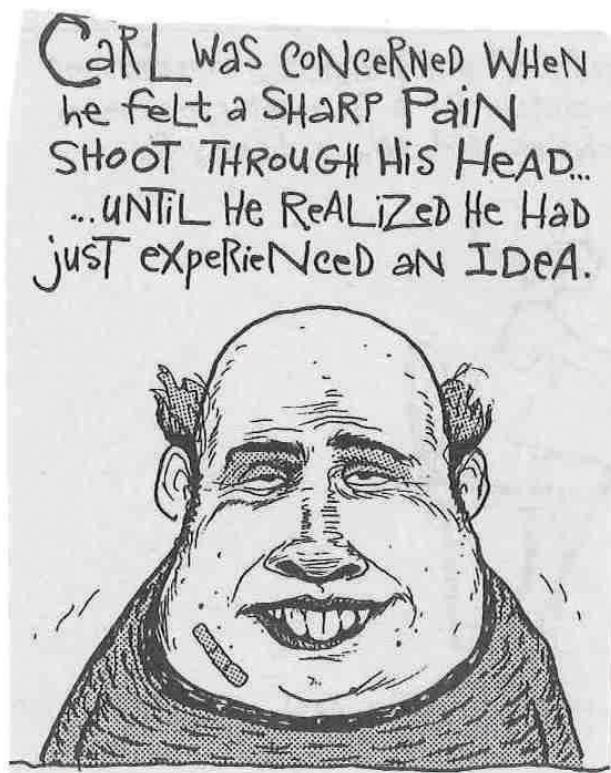
A Theory of Creativity

Arthur Koestler, a major intellectual and political force in Europe and the United States throughout most of the 20th century, contended that all creativity comprises a process he called "**bisociation**[12]."Koestler, A. (1964). *The act of creation.* New York: Macmillan. Koestler's seminal book on this topic, titled *The Act of Creation*, put forth a theory that he believed accounted for people's "Aha" reaction of scientific discovery, their "Ha-ha" reaction to jokes, and their "Ah" reaction of mystical or religious insight.

Above all, creativity creates new things—things that weren't there before the creative act took place. In every kind of creative situation, according to Koestler, the result is produced by a meeting of lines of thought that bring together hitherto unconnected ideas and fuse them into something new. If the lines of thought concern devotional matters, mystical insight emerges, and when they concern more mundane matters the result is apt to be a joke. If they are scientific, the result is a scientific discovery.

12. According to Arthur Koestler, the essence of the creative process, whereby previously unconnected ideas fuse into something new.

The expression "to think outside the box" is often used to refer to creativity. Koestler's view seems to be that creativity consists, instead, of linking existing but separate "boxes" together. One implication of his theory is that, to be creative, a person not only needs to depart from the **status quo**[13] but also needs to be familiar and comfortable with a range of alternatives from a wide variety of fields. Koestler's perspective would seem to be consistent with the association we often make between creativity on the one hand and intelligence and breadth of knowledge on the other.

Overcoming Inertia

At every crossroads on the path that leads to the future, tradition has placed 10,000 men to guard the past.

- Maurice Maeterlinck

When you cannot make up your mind which of two evenly balanced courses of action you should take, choose the bolder.

- William Joseph Slim

Groups generally comprise a mixture of people when it comes to openness to change. A small fraction of the members may position themselves at one end of the openness continuum or the other. Some of these people, called **neophiles**[14], will eagerly embrace almost anything novel. Others, known as **neophobes**[15], will invariably shun what's new and prefer the security of what they know and have done in the past. The majority of people, however, probably don't fit neatly into either of these categories. Instead, they may prefer to produce or experiment with new things under certain circumstances and resist them under others.

It's rarely possible to provoke creativity on the part of an entire group all at once. You needn't agree with Thomas Fuller's aphorism that "a conservative believes nothing should be done for the first time" to realize that some people in groups will hold onto what they're familiar with all the more stubbornly as others begin to waver and experiment with something new.

Brainstorming

In regard to every problem that arises, there are counselors who say, "Do nothing" [and] other counselors who say, "Do everything"...I say to you: "Do something"; and

13. (Latin) things as they are at a given time; existing conditions.

14. Individuals who tend to accept, embrace, or seek new things.

15. Individuals who tend to avoid or oppose new things.

when you have done something, if it works, do it some more; and if it does not work, then do something else.

- Franklin Delano Roosevelt

One familiar technique that experts in the realm of creative thinking have long recommended is **brainstorming**[16]. Alex Osborn, an advertising executive, began using the term in the mid-1950s and described the method in detail in his book *Applied Imagination: Principles and Procedures of Creative Problem Solving*.Osborn, A.F. (1963) *Applied imagination: Principles and procedures of creative problem solving* (3rd revised ed.). New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

One criterion of proper brainstorming is that it must begin with an unrestricted search for quantity and creativity rather than quality. It should actually solicit and reward craziness and zaniness, in other words.

A second criterion for good brainstorming is that it should encourage and praise "piggybacking" on ideas which have already emerged. A third is that brainstormers should avoid making any judgments until they've generated an extensive list of ideas.

Robert Sutton, a respected organizational consultant, published a book in 2002 called *Weird Ideas That Work*.Sutton, R. (2002). *Weird ideas that work.* New York: Free Press. Among other things, Sutton's book paid tribute to brainstorming.

Source: http://www.flickr.com/photos/shizhao/3755850/
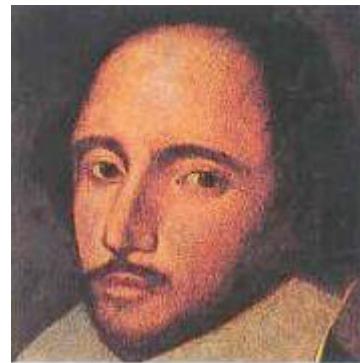
16. A group decision-making tool in which members generate as many creative ideas as possible before assessing them.

One of Sutton's central contentions was that excellence arises from "a range of differences"—precisely what brainstorming aims to generate. To illustrate, Sutton

declared that such prodigious geniuses as Shakespeare, Einstein, Mozart, Edison, and Picasso were first and foremost productive. In fact, he argued that these brilliant individuals didn't succeed at a higher rate than anyone else; they just did more.

Mozart, for instance, started composing when he was seven years old and wrote at least 20 pieces of music per year from then until his death at the age of 35. Several of his compositions were routine or even dull, but many were sublime and some are unquestioned masterpieces.

Closer to home, Sutton noted that today's toy business offers examples of the value of starting with lots of ideas and only then selecting quality ones. Skyline, an arm of California's IDEO Corporation, employed just 10 staff members in 1998 but generated 4,000 ideas in that year for new toys.

According to Sutton, those 4,000 ideas boiled down to 230 possibilities worth examining through careful drawings or working prototypes. Of the 230 concepts, 12 were ultimately sold. In other words, the "yield" of saleable products came to only 3/10 of one per cent of the original ideas. Sutton quoted Skyline's founder, Brendan Boyle, as saying, "You can't get any good new ideas without having a lot of dumb, lousy, and crazy ones."

The Ostrich and the Sea Urchin

Now let's take a look at what two animals have to do with ideas in general, and with varied ways of being creative about ideas in specific. The two animals are the ostrich and the sea urchin.

The ostrich's reproductive processes lies at one end of a continuum, the sea urchin's at the other. Like the 350-pound mother which lays it, an ostrich egg is large, imposing, and tough. For 42 days after it's laid, it grows until it weighs more than three pounds. It will then reliably crack open and release a baby ostrich. Unless something highly unexpected happens, its mother will tend it well, and that single baby ostrich will in turn grow up and become a mature ostrich.

A sea urchin differs in almost every respect from an ostrich. The whole animal takes up less space and weighs less than an ostrich egg, for one thing. It has no eyes. It hardly moves all its life. To propagate, an urchin spews a cloud of more than a million miniscule eggs into the ocean. The eggs disperse immediately into the tide pools and reef inlets populated by their spiny parents.

Source: http://www.flickr.com/photos/jennifurr-jinx/1387200062/

Some of the sea urchin eggs meet sea urchin sperm and combine to form tiny, transparent, free-floating embryos. Eggs remain viable for only 6–8 hours, however, so lots of them die before this happens. Of a one-million-egg cloud, those which are to have a chance of becoming embryos must do so within 48 hours. The odds aren't good.

Then things thin out even more. A Stanford University publication points out that "the young embryo is totally at the mercy of the sea. There are many organisms that will consume the young sea urchin embryo and later the young sea urchin."Brooders vs spawners. http://www.stanford.edu/group/Urchin/bvss.htm In other words, the overwhelming majority of sea urchin eggs die of loneliness or get eaten.

Biologists call animals like ostriches "brooders" because they create only a few offspring but take care of each one faithfully. Creatures such as sea urchins, which produce vast numbers of candidates for fertilization but don't take care of them and lose most of them to predators, are called "spawners." Brainstorming is clearly a "spawning" process rather than a "brooding" one.

Threats to the Effectiveness of Brainstorming

Although it is meant to generate large quantities of ideas on which to base sound decision-making, brainstorming entails some same challenges. One group of researchersStroebe, W., Diehl, M., & Abakoumkin, G. (1992). The illusion of group effectivity. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin 18* (5): 643–650. identified three potential weakening factors inherent within brainstorming:

1. **Blocking**[17]. Since only one person at a time in a group can speak, other members may lose the desire to contribute their own ideas or even forget those ideas in the midst of a lively brainstorming session.
2. **Social matching**[18].Brown, V., & Paulus, P. B. (1996). A simple dynamic model of social factors in group brainstorming. *Small Group Research, 27*, 91–114. People in a group tend to calibrate their own degree of contribution to its activities on the basis of what the other members do. If someone has lots of ideas but sees that the rest of the group is less productive, that person is apt to reduce his or her own creative production.
3. **Illusion of group productivity**[19]. Group members are apt to rate the level of their output as being higher than it actually is. For one thing, members describe their group as being above average in productivity with respect to other groups. They also overrate their individual contributions; people in one study, for instance, said that they had contributed 36% of their group's ideas when in fact they had offered only 25%.Paulus, P. B., Dzindolet, M. T., Poletes, G., & Camacho, L. M. (1993). Perception of performance in group brainstorming: The illusion of group productivity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 64* (4), 575–586.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Creativity, which can play a positive role in group decision-making, has been described as a process of combining two disparate elements. It can be stimulated through brainstorming.

17. An unintentional reduction in other group members' contributions to brainstorming caused by one member's use of time to express him/herself.

18. The tendency of members to contribute to a group's discussions at the same level as their fellow members.

19. The tendency of members to rate the quality of their groups' outputs as higher than they really are.

EXERCISES

1. Do you agree with Arthur Koestler that all creativity involves bringing disparate trains of thought together? Provide 2–3 examples which support your answer.
2. Do you consider yourself a "brooder" or a "spawner"? Explain your response to a fellow student, providing examples which support your answer.
3. When was the last time you showed exceptional creativity? What factors in your environment or within you at the time contributed most to that creativity?
4. Think of a neophile and a neophobe whom you've encountered in a group. Describe actions that each person took which illustrate his/her neophilia or neophobia.

11.4 Facilitating the Task-Oriented Group

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Define "group facilitation"
2. Identify five guidelines for facilitating a task-oriented group
3. Distinguish between collaboration and "coliberation"

Remember the story that Pope John XXIII told about himself. He admitted, "It often happens that I wake at night and begin to think about a serious problem and decide I must tell the Pope about it. Then I wake up completely and remember that I am the Pope."

  - Glenn van Ekeren

I'm extraordinarily patient provided I get my own way in the end.

  - Margaret Thatcher

You've probably experienced being part of groups that pleased and motivated you. One reason you experienced those positive feelings may have been that the groups planned and executed their tasks so smoothly that you were hardly aware the processes were taking place. In this section we'll examine ways in which leaders can contribute to such pleasant, easy experiences.

Just as "facile" in English and "fácil" in Spanish mean "easy," the word "facilitate" itself means "to make something easy" and "**group facilitation**[20]" consists in easing a group's growth and progress. Most student, community, and business groups are task-oriented, so we'll consider here how they can most easily be guided toward accomplishing the tasks they set for themselves. Another section of this book deals specifically with the details of leading meetings, so for now we'll consider broader questions and principles.

20. In groups, to make work easier or less difficult; to help bring about growth.

If you're in a position to facilitate a group, you need to take that position seriously. Just as Pope John XXIII realized with respect to his authority and responsibility in the Catholic Church, it's best to consider yourself the primary source of direction and the ultimate destination for questions in your group. With those concepts in mind, let's consider five major guidelines you should probably follow in order to facilitate a group whose purposes include achieving tasks.

1. Know the group's members. This means more than just identifying their names and recognizing their faces. If you hope to accomplish anything significant together, you need to be familiar with people's opinions, their needs, their desires, and their personalities.

   Perhaps one member of a group you're leading is particularly time-conscious, another likes to make jokes, and a third prefers to see concepts represented visually. If you take these propensities into account and respond to them as much as possible, you can draw the best cooperative effort from each of the people.

   You may want to keep track of who's done what favors for whom within the group, too. Like it or not, many people operate at least from time to time on the principle that "I'll scratch your back if you scratch mine."

2. Weigh task and relationship considerations. The word "**equilibristic**[21]" is sometimes applied to the actions of athletes and musicians. It refers to a capability to balance differing and sometimes conflicting forces so as to maintain continuous movement in a chosen direction.

   Although almost any group has some work to do, and all groups comprise people whose welfare needs to be tended to, the effective facilitator realizes that it's impossible to emphasize both those elements to the same degree all the time. If people are disgruntled or frustrated, they can't contribute well to accomplishing a task. Likewise, if people are always contented with one another and their group but can't focus on getting things done, the group will be unable to attain its objectives. To facilitate a group well, thus, requires that you be equilibristic.

3. Understand and anticipate prevalent features of human psychology. Keep in mind that everyone in a group will perceive what the facilitator does in light of his or her own circumstances and wishes.

   Recall also that everyone possesses diverse and numerous capacities for self-justification and self-support. In their book *Mistakes were made (but not by me)*, Carol Tavris and Ellion Aronson referred to studies of

21. Capable of balancing differing and sometimes conflicting forces so as to maintain continuous movement in a chosen direction.

married couples' behavior. They indicated that when husbands and wives are asked what proportion of the housework they perform, the totals always exceed 100 percent by a large margin.Tavris, C., & Aronson, E. (2007). *Mistakes were made (but not by me).* Orlando, FL: Harcourt Tavris and Aronson also described the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles, which presents visitors with interactive exhibits portraying categories of people about whom many of us harbor negative preconceptions—including ethnic and racial minorities, obese individuals, people with disabilities, and so on. A video attempts to persuade visitors that they possess prejudices, after which two doors are offered as an exit. One is marked "Prejudiced" and the other is labeled "Unprejudiced." The second door is locked, to make the point that all of us are indeed subject to prejudice.

Source: http://www.flickr.com/photos/jeffsand/1466204908/

4. Deal well with disruptions. The playwright Paddy Chayevsky wrote that "life is problems." An effective group facilitator needs to anticipate and skillfully cope with problems as a part of life, whether they're caused by other people's behavior or by physical and logistical factors.

If you're an adherent of **Theory Y**[22], you probably believe that people enjoy pursuing their goals energetically, in groups or individually. You also probably believe that people prefer to select times and places along the way to relax and recharge. Unfortunately, interruptions often arise in such a way as to make both these aims difficult to

22. In groups, an approach which assumes that members are generally honorable, industrious, trustworthy, and cooperative.

achieve. Think about all the unexpected academic, family, and work-related reasons why you and other students you know have found it challenging to "stay the course" toward your personal and collective goals.

A group's facilitator, thus, needs to make sure that interruptions and disruptions don't derail it. In fact, he or she might profit from actually celebrating these elements of life, as one Seattle office executive did. According to Dale Turner, the executive's office had a sign on the wall reading "Don't be irritated by interruptions. They are your reason for being." Turner went on to quote the executive as saying "Happily, I have learned how to sit loose in the saddle of life, and I'm not usually disturbed by interruptions. I have made it a habit through the years to leave a stretch factor in my daily schedule. I start early and have tried not to so crowd my day with appointments that I have no time for the unexpected. I have not seen interruptions as an intrusion."Turner, D. (1991, March 23). Slaves of habit—we lose when there's no room for interruptions in our lives. *Seattle Times*. Retrieved from ProQuest Database.

5. Keep returning to the task. You've probably been part of a group in which the leader or facilitator had what might be called a divergent, rather than a convergent, personality. Perhaps that person had lots of good ideas but seemed to jump around from topic to topic and chore to chore so much that your head spun and you couldn't keep track of what was going on. Maybe the person "missed the forest for the trees" because of dwelling excessively on minutia—small and insignificant details. Or perhaps each time you met with the group its facilitator led a discussion of something valuable and important, but every time it was a different thing.

Source: http://www.flickr.com/photos/36668473@N05/4133002232/
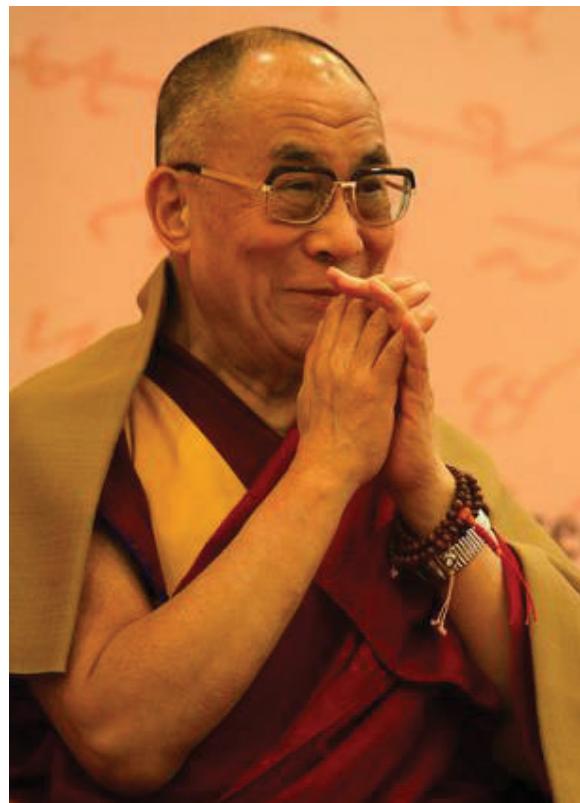
The organizational theorist Anthony Jay wrote that it's important for leaders to "look for problems through a telescope, not a microscope."Jay, A. (1967). *Management and Machiavelli: An inquiry into the politics of corporate life.* New York: Bantam Books. He also contended that, as far as a leader is concerned, "other people can cope with the waves, it's [the leader's] job to watch the tide." By these comments, Jay meant that the primary duty of a group facilitator is to maintain an unwavering focus on the group's central tasks, whatever they may be.

The Dalai Lama has written, "Whether you are a spiritual leader or a leader in an organization, it is your job to inspire faith."His Holiness the Dalai Lama & Muyzenberg, L. (2009). *The leader's way: The art of making the right decisions in our careers, our companies, and the world at large.* New York: Broadway Books. Slogans, mottos, mission statements, quotations, logos, and written objectives can all contribute to a facilitator's ability to inspire faith by maintaining a group's focus and resolve to move in a common direction. Busy students and others in our society often need reminders like these to block out the competing stimuli surrounding them and focus their attention. Such mechanisms,

however, should not be merely gimmicks, nor should they be used to promote blind faith in the group's facilitator.

ATTILA THE HUN CHOOSES A LOGO
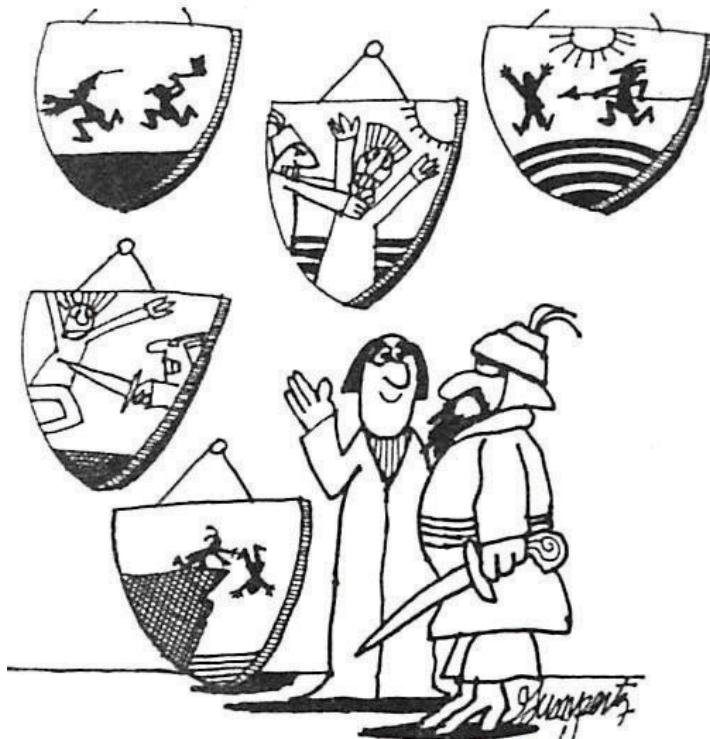
Another way to think of how a facilitator should keep bringing the group's attention back to its tasks relates to the process of meditation. Practitioners of meditation know that people's minds are naturally active and tend to move readily from subject to subject. When someone is meditating, they say, thoughts will naturally pop into his or her mind. The way to deal with this phenomenon is to regard the thoughts as clouds drifting across the sky. Rather than trying to banish them, the better approach is to allow them to pass by and dissipate, and then to return to serene contemplation.Rondon, N. (2006, Meditate. *Current Health 2* (32), 20–23. Retrieved from ProQuest Database

Coliberation

23. According to Bernard DeKoven, who coined the term, a process whereby group members free one another to work joyfully and creatively toward a common purpose.

Above all, a facilitator's responsibility is to enable members of a group to function together as easily and happily as possible as they pursue their goals. When this happens, the group will achieve a high level of collaboration. In fact, it may rise beyond collaboration to achieve what the author and computer game designer Bernard DeKoven called "**coliberation**[23]." In speaking about meetings, he had this

to say: "Good meetings aren't just about work. They're about fun—keeping people charged up. It's more than collaboration, it's 'coliberation'—people freeing each other up to think more creatively."Matson, E. (1996, April-May). The seven sins of deadly meetings. *Fast Company*, 122.

KEY TAKEAWAY

- To facilitate a task-oriented group requires several skills and behaviors and can lead to a state of "coliberation."

EXERCISES

1. Recall a time when you were in a group whose leader stressed either its task or relationship factors too much. How did the members of the group react? Did the leader eventually develop an equilibristic approach?
2. Do you agree with the business executive who said that interruptions are "your reason for being"? In your studies and family life, what measures do you take to ensure that interruptions are beneficial rather than destructive? What further steps do you feel you might take in this direction?
3. Think of someone who effectively facilitated a group you were part of. Did the person perform the job identified by the Dalai Lama—inspiring faith in the group? If so, how?
4. What, if anything, do you feel members of most groups need to be "coliberated" from?

11.5 Summary

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

In this chapter we have explored problem-solving in groups. We have identified steps which groups can use to attack and solve problems, as well as several methods of reaching decisions. We have considered the nature of group creativity and reviewed how brainstorming may contribute to creative problem-solving and decision-making. Finally, we have identified methods which can be used to facilitate the problem-solving and decision-making behavior or task-oriented groups. Following systematic, sequential processes can help groups communicate in ways which resolve problems and lead to appropriate decisions.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

Interpretive Questions

1. In what 2–3 ways has your view of problem-solving or decision-making changed as a result of reading this chapter?
2. Under what circumstances, or with what kinds of group members, do you feel brainstorming is most likely to produce better results than other methods of generating creative ideas?

Application Questions

1. Call the office of a state senator or representative. Ask the person who answers the phone to provide you with a list of five creative ideas the legislator has put forth to solve problems facing his or her constituency. If you wanted to expand on the list, who else would you consult, and what process would you use to generate more ideas?
2. Pick two historical figures who you believe made it easy for people they lived or worked with to achieve shared goals. Find two or three descriptions of episodes in which those figures took action demonstrating that capacity. Identify someone leading a group of which you're now a member and share the information about the historical figures with that person. What is the person's reaction? What do you feel might have made the leader's response more positive?
3. Look up the phrase "group decision support system" on line and locate 4–5 software programs meant to assist groups with decisions. List advantages and disadvantages of each and share your conclusions with your classmates.

Additional Resources

http://www.deepfun.com/coliberation/: Bernard "Bernie" De Koven's blog. A source of provocative ideas on why and how to indulge in creative fun as part of a group.

http://bit.ly/PV635method: A YouTube video describing the "6-3-5 method," which offers an alternative to traditional brainstorming that attempts to draw and expand upon more ideas from a group of six people.

http://bit.ly/URuMVG: An article in the *Minnesota Daily* describing how groups of students, faculty members, and community leaders envisioned problems facing higher education and developed pragmatic proposals for solving them.

http://www.co-intelligence.org/I-decisionmakingwithout.html ("How to Make a Decision Without Making a Decision"): An article describing how guided "non-decision-making" can be used by groups to discover what the author refers to as "big obvious truths."

http://www.tobe.net/: The website of Dynamic Facilitation Associates, a non-profit organization dedicated to teaching groups how to create choices through intentional facilitation. One of the site's pages, http://www.co-intelligence.org/dynamicfacilitationGT.html, describes "Co-Counseling" and compassionate communication as further facilitation tools.