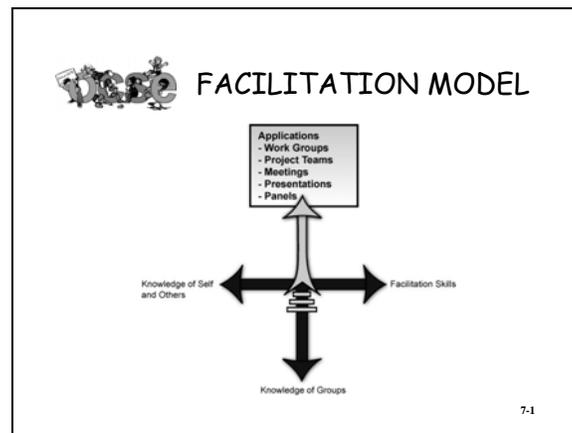


# **MODULE 7**

## **Facilitating Problem-Solving and Decision-Making**



## MODULE 7: FACILITATING PROBLEM-SOLVING AND DECISION-MAKING



### Learning Goal

The learning goal is to identify the tools and techniques that encourage creativity and help groups to achieve problem-solving and decision-making outcomes. You will use these tools and techniques along with your facilitation skills to work with groups which are charged with solving problems and making decisions.

The slide, titled "MODULE 7 OBJECTIVES", features a small icon of people in the top left corner. It lists three bullet points: "Examine a set of problem-solving tools and techniques", "Identify three methods for making decisions", and "Apply guidelines to choose the appropriate decision-making method". To the right of the text are three small photographs of children. The number "7-2" is in the bottom right corner.

### Learning Objectives

- Through demonstrations, you will examine a set of problem-solving tools and techniques.
- After a brief lecture, you will identify the three methods for making decisions.
- Through a small group activity, you will apply guidelines to choose the appropriate decision-making method.

## MODULE 7: FACILITATING PROBLEM-SOLVING AND DECISION-MAKING, CONTINUED



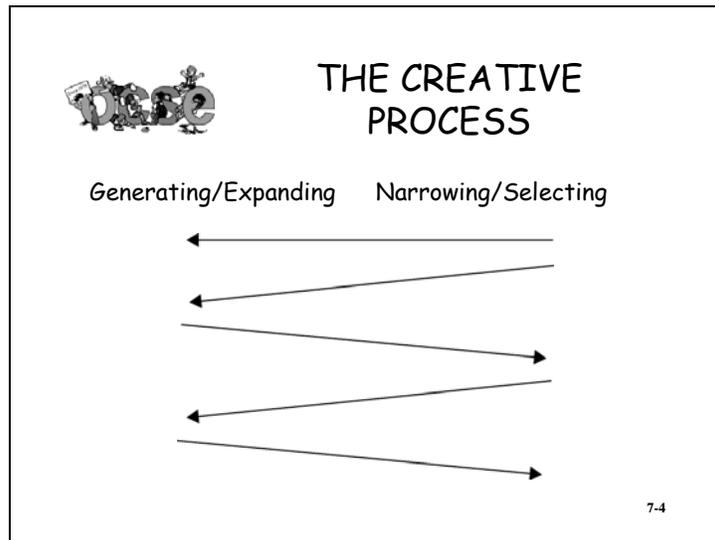
### EINSTEIN QUOTE

"The significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them."

—Albert Einstein

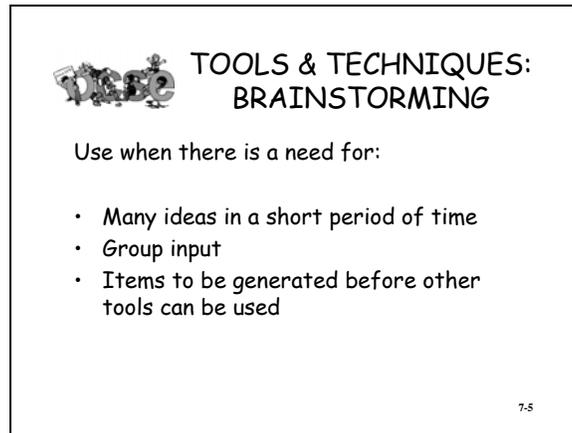
7-3

## THE CREATIVE PROCESS



The creative process involves alternating between two types of thinking: generating/expanding and narrowing/selecting.

## TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES: BRAINSTORMING



The key to successful brainstorming is to create a nonjudgmental environment where all ideas are valued. Successful brainstorming involves the following steps:

1. Explain the purpose of the brainstorming session. Identify the issue to be addressed or the problem to be discussed.
2. Use a flipchart and, if possible, ask another person to be the recorder. If you anticipate a lot of ideas/data will be generated, consider setting up several flipcharts and having several recorders.
3. Write the issue or problem on a flipchart page or white board so that everyone can see it.
4. Review the ground rules for brainstorming:
  - Specify how much time will be allotted for brainstorming.
  - The goal is to go for quantity, not quality, of ideas at this stage.
  - Let the ideas flow; don't hold back. Sometimes the crazier the ideas sound, the better.
  - Do not evaluate, make judgments about, or criticize what someone says.
  - It's okay to ask questions to clarify, but not to debate, the idea.
5. Conduct the brainstorming session by having each person offer one idea at a time. Any person who is out of ideas may pass.
6. Record the idea using the person's words. As each flipchart page is filled up, post it so that all pages are visible.
7. When the time limit has been reached, stop brainstorming.
8. Review the flipchart and combine ideas that are similar.

## TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES: THE NOMINAL GROUP TECHNIQUE



### TOOLS & TECHNIQUES: NOMINAL GROUP TECHNIQUE

Use when you want to:

- Ensure everyone's involvement
- Set expectation for equal participation

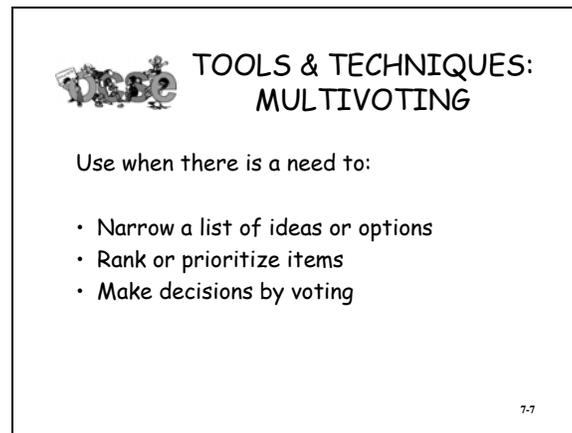
7-6

The nominal group technique is related to brainstorming. This method ensures involvement from all of the members of a group or team, especially if they are reluctant or uncomfortable about expressing themselves. The technique is an effective way to get people thinking about a situation and communicates the expectation that everyone will participate. It also prevents everyone from talking at the same time. The technique involves the following steps:

1. Identify the topic, issue, or problem to be addressed.
2. Have participants write down their ideas about the topic without consulting other participants. You can direct them either to write down a specific number of ideas or to list as many as they can think of at a time.
3. Go around the room in order and ask each participant to give one idea.
4. Each person must share an idea unless someone else has already given it. In that case, the participant would pass.
5. Record the ideas on the flipchart as they are given.
6. Allow no discussion or debate of the ideas at this point.
7. Continue in a round-robin manner until all ideas have been given.
8. Once all the participants have given their ideas, either stop the process (if no more information is needed) or open it up for more discussion by using brainstorming.

A variation of this technique is to have participants write ideas on Post-It™ notes, place them on the flipchart, and explain their ideas to the rest of the group. This encourages participant movement and the facilitator does not need to act as a recorder.

## TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES: MULTIVOTING

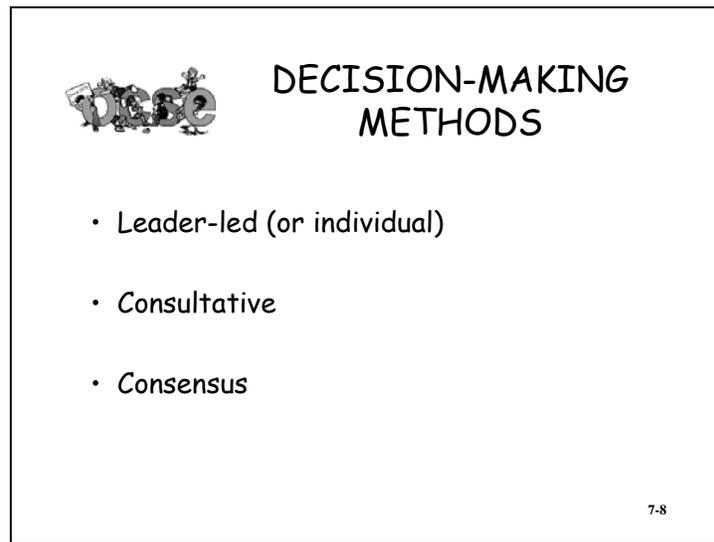


1. Start with the list of brainstormed ideas that the group has generated. If need be, clarify each item and eliminate duplicates.
2. Have the group decide on the number of points to be allocated to one or more of the ideas. For example, if the list is very long, you might want to use a 7-point system. If the list is shorter, a 5-point system may be sufficient.
3. Have each person allocate his/her points to one or more of the ideas or items. A person can give all his/her points to a single item or split them up.
4. Have each person call out his/her vote (points) and record the votes on the flipchart next to the item(s).
5. Tally the votes (points) for each item.
6. Circle the items with the most votes.

### Variations of Multivoting

- **Avery Dots.** Use colored Avery Dots™. These are circular, self-adhesive stickers that can be purchased in most office supply stores. Each dot represents a point or vote. For example, if you decide on a 5-point allocation, each person would receive five Avery Dots. Each person places the representative number of dots next to the item(s) on the flipchart. Continue with Step 5.
- **N/3.** Take the total number of items on the flipchart and divide by three. Each person then has that number of votes to spend on the items he or she thinks are most important. This process can be repeated until the list is reduced to an appropriate number of items.

## DECISION-MAKING METHODS



DECISION-MAKING METHODS

- Leader-led (or individual)
- Consultative
- Consensus

7-8

In a group or team environment, there are several different options for making decisions. Three common methods are:

- Leader-led (or individual);
- Consultative; and
- Consensus.

While team decisions can be of higher quality than individual decisions, competent decisions do not always require the efforts of an entire team. Also, each method has its share of advantages and disadvantages.

## **DECISION-MAKING METHODS: LEADER-LED**

### **Advantages**

- Is fast and efficient
- Doesn't need to spend time involving others

### **Disadvantages**

- Doesn't tap group knowledge, experience, and creativity
- Doesn't build acceptance or "buy-in"
- May create resentment, low morale, or reduced team effectiveness
- May result in poor, relatively "uninformed" decisions

### **Appropriate Situations**

- Minor or routine decisions
- Emergency situations
- When a leader has all the necessary information and "buy-in" is not a concern

## DECISION-MAKING METHODS: CONSULTATIVE

A leader gets input from individuals or the group before making a decision. This can come in the form of information, suggestions, or advice. It is important to remember that even though the leader is collecting information from other individuals, he or she ***retains the responsibility*** for making the final decision.

### Advantages

- Taps others' knowledge, experience, and creativity
- Gains some of the benefits of team discussion
- May result in better, more informed decisions

### Disadvantages

- Requires more time and resources than the leader-led method
- May not build acceptance or “buy-in” for implementing a decision
- Does not allow for the resolution of conflict or controversies among team members
- May result in power struggles among subordinates or group members as they vie to influence the leader

## DECISION-MAKING METHODS: CONSENSUS

This is purely a group (or team) decision-making method. It typically involves three features:

- Each group member participates in discussing the issue
- The group mutually decides what to do
- The final decision must be one that everyone can accept and support; every member must consent before the decision is adopted.

### Advantages

- Synergy—tapping into others' knowledge, experience, and creativity, which results in higher quality decisions
- Maximized interaction
- Discussion and challenge of all ideas
- Less emphasis on assumptions and more emphasis on fact
- Opportunity to resolve conflicts
- Strong acceptance and support for decisions, which promote commitment to implement
- Enhancement of future decision-making ability of the team
- Opportunity to build and strengthen the team; trust

### Disadvantages

- Time consuming
- May require a great deal of skill and psychological energy
- Sometimes impossible to get everyone to agree
- Leader may lack communication and facilitation skills needed to steer the group toward consensus

## CHOOSING THE BEST DECISION-MAKING METHOD



### CHOOSING THE BEST DECISION-MAKING METHOD

- How important is the decision?
- Is there enough information?
- What information is needed and do you know where to get it?
- How much time is available?
- Will group/organization accept decision?
- How likely is conflict over solutions?

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## CHOOSING THE BEST DECISION-MAKING METHOD

FACTOR	QUESTION TO ASK	METHOD TO CONSIDER
Importance of decision	Is a high quality decision essential?	Y: consensus N: leader-led, consultative
Leader's information and expertise	Does the leader have enough information to make a high quality decision?	Y: leader-led N: consultative, consensus
Information needed	Is it clear what information is needed and where to get it?	Y: leader-led, consultative N: consensus
Time constraints	Is enough time available?	Y: consensus, consultative N: leader-led
Importance of acceptance by people in group or organization	Is acceptance by all members of the group or organization critical?	Y: consensus, consultative N: leader-led
Likelihood the group will accept leader's decision enthusiastically	If leader makes the decision, are other groups members likely to accept it enthusiastically?	Y: leader-led N: consensus, consultative
Likelihood of conflict	Are group members likely to favor conflicting solutions?	Y: consensus N: leader-led, consultative

**EXERCISE: HOW WOULD YOU MAKE THE DECISION?**Instructions:

1. Silently read your assigned case. Read the other cases so that you are familiar with them.
2. Circle the choice you think represents the best way to make the decision for the situation described in your assigned case.
3. Share your choice with your group. Then decide as a group which method is the preferred one and why. Refer to “Choosing the Best Decision-Making Method” on page 7-12 to help you reach a decision.
4. Choose a spokesperson to report out the group’s selection and rationale.

Cases adapted from a series of decision-making case studies developed by Marshall Sashkin.

## EXERCISE: HOW WOULD YOU MAKE THE DECISION?, CONTINUED

### CASE 1

You are a director of a large child support enforcement agency. Your agency has done well under your leadership and your four managers hold you in high esteem. You appreciate that, but you know that your success is based mostly on simple hard work and a few good decisions. Lately, you feel that your managers are becoming increasingly dependent upon you and rely too much on your judgment.

Nine months from now, an additional site will be added to the already existing satellite offices so that the agency can better serve its clients. You are to determine the best location for the new site. Your managers will have to support the site in “concrete” ways, not just in attitude. The staff of this new site will come from among the staff of the existing units, and the existing units will provide technical assistance and support, at least for a little while.

You have asked each manager to develop a list of possible locations with information explaining why each location would be good and what problems might be present. To decide where to locate the new site, you will:

- A. Talk to each manager privately, reviewing in particular the locations common to the four lists to get enough information to make your final decision.
- B. Review the lists and reasons; then make a decision.
- C. Call the managers together as a group to review their lists and fully discuss the options before they, as a group, make a final decision.
- D. Go over the set of lists with each manager and get each manager’s best ideas and evaluations; then you will take these into account when making your final decision.
- E. Meet with the managers as a group to share information, review their lists, and get their ideas and suggestions as a group; then you will take this information into account when making your final decision.

## EXERCISE: HOW WOULD YOU MAKE THE DECISION?, CONTINUED

### CASE 2

You are the project manager of a group that provides technical support for the statewide-automated child support enforcement system. You are responsible for installing additional computers and related hardware to bring people “on line” in five of the agency’s largest units. It is important to have a clear and accurate schedule so that equipment will arrive when it is needed.

You have experience working on similar projects and have the technical and historical data needed to determine the earliest and latest times that the equipment will be needed. So it’s relatively simple to calculate the time at which the equipment needs to be delivered for each of the units.

In preparing the schedule you will:

- A. Use your knowledge and data to set up a plan that will ensure equipment is available when needed and will be there a bit early if, as hoped, the project continues to go a bit ahead of schedule.
- B. Meet with your staff and have them work out a schedule to encourage them to move the project ahead as fast as possible.
- C. Meet with each staff member individually to make sure your information and calculations are correct; then you will go ahead and set up the schedule.
- D. Call the staff together to review the information as a group and check out all the data; then you will go ahead and set up the schedule.
- E. Meet with each supervisor alone to share the problem of developing the schedule and to get their ideas; then you will prepare the final schedule yourself.

## EXERCISE: HOW WOULD YOU MAKE THE DECISION?, CONTINUED

### **CASE 3**

You have recently assumed the job of managing the technical training provided for those who use the region's automated child support enforcement system. Caseworkers are still experiencing difficulty using the system, and your first task is to oversee the development of a new training program that will increase their technical knowledge and skills. Your agency contracts out the training, and three vendors have submitted proposals for the work. Some of your staff have had experience with the vendors. You will therefore:

- A. Analyze the proposals you have received. Based on your understanding of what needs to be done, what each vendor is proposing, what you know about each vendor, and the proposed costs, you will decide which vendor to use.
- B. Talk to the staff members who have had experience with the vendors you are considering to get as much information as possible. Then you will use this information to make your decision.
- C. Ask each staff member individually for ideas or suggestions on which vendor to choose to develop the training. When you have talked with all of them, you will make your decision.
- D. Meet with the staff as a group to get their ideas and suggestions. Based on this information, you will make your decision.
- E. Meet with the staff as a group to discuss the problem and have the group decide which vendor to go with.

## MODULE 7 KEY POINTS



### MODULE 7 KEY POINTS

- A creative approach is needed to solve today's problems and make decisions
- There are tools and techniques that facilitate the creative process
- There are numerous factors to consider when choosing the best decision-making method

7-10

