



Managing Group Dynamics

MEETING ENGAGEMENT TOOL

Description

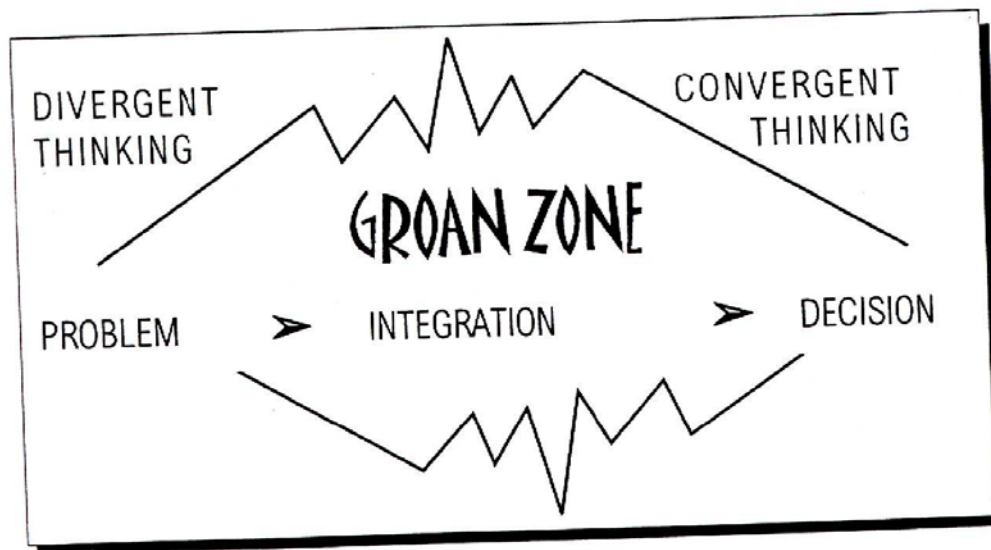
A group of people working together to solve an issue may be unsuccessful if group dynamics are not understood and managed. A skilled facilitator can help the team remain functional and productive by guiding the group through the phases of problem solving.

Participants

Three to ten people working over several meetings to solve a problem.

Process

1. Understand the conceptual phases of problem solving.
2. Facilitate the team through the integration of perspectives to reach a decision.



Conceptual Phases of Problem Solving

Divergent Thinking. During this phase, a number of different activities take place, which broaden the perspectives and thinking of each participant.

Integrating Perspectives, Issues, and Possible Solutions. Before divergent thinking can become convergent thinking, participants must understand and integrate the new perspectives and the possible solutions they have discovered or created. Because this phase can be uncomfortable, it is sometimes referred to as the “groan zone.” (See diagram above.) This phase is uncomfortable because new perspectives and shifts in thinking are occurring. The facilitator must actively manage the conversation to ensure that it focuses on the issues, and doesn’t become personal.

Convergent Thinking: Evaluating Alternative Solutions and Seeking Agreement. During this phase, participants begin to narrow the range of possible solutions through evaluation or combination.

Benefits

- This approach helps team members better understand others’ perspectives, which they can consider when making decisions.
- A solution that meets the needs of the team is more likely to succeed than a solution that meets the needs of only some team members. This approach improves understanding of the perspectives each team member brings to the discussion.

Considerations

- Not This approach to problem solving takes much longer than a directive approach, but it also increases buy-in from those involved in the discussions.
- Asking questions throughout the problem-solving process to ensure understanding of all perspectives is one key to the success of this method. Examples:
 1. Please tell us your understanding of another participant’s perspective.
 2. What portion of that perspective do you agree with?
 3. Is there a portion of the perspective that makes you uncomfortable? Why?

Resources Needed

- A problem in need of a solution.
- A group of people well versed in all aspects of the problem.
- A skilled facilitator that understands group dynamics.

References

- *The Facilitators Guide to Participatory Decision-Making* by S. Kaner and others, New Society Publishers, Gabriola Island, British Columbia, Canada.
- The Effective Facilitator at leadstrat.com/courses/the-effective-facilitator-our-flagship-course.
- “Success in the Development Stages of Six Sigma Teams” at sixsigma.com/implementation/teams/success-development-stages-six-sigma-teams.
- The Facilitation Tutor at facilitationtutor.com/ingrid-bens.
- *Facilitating with Ease!* by Ingrid Bens, 2005, John Wiley and Sons, San Francisco.