

Skills 360 – Leading a Group Decision (Part 1)

Discussion Questions

1. How are most group decisions made in your workplace or work team?
2. What do you think a good meeting facilitator should be able to do well?
3. How can quiet people be encouraged to participate in discussion?

Vocabulary

To push for: to try hard to get something or to demand something; “The union is really pushing hard for a better benefits package and increased pay.”

To call a vote: to officially say that there will be a vote; “Well, since we can’t all agree on the right person, then I think we should call a vote on who to hire.”

To buy into: to believe in and support an idea or plan; “A good leader knows how to get people to buy into a broad vision for the company.”

Rationale: the reasons behind a decision, plan, or idea; “I know we need to cut costs, but I still don’t see the rationale behind closing our busiest location.”

To set the stage for: to make preparations for or create conditions for something to happen; “A smile, a firm handshake, and confident body language helps to set the stage for a successful interview.”

Unanimous: when everyone in a group agrees or supports an decision, plan, or idea, the decision is “unanimous;” “Well, since nobody disagrees, then I guess we’re unanimous in selecting Ruslan as our next head designer.”

To strive for: to try very hard to do or achieve something; “My entire career I’ve been striving for an executive job, but I haven’t made it there yet.”

Consensus: general agreement; “There’s general consensus on the Board of Directors that the CEO needs to change, but they don’t agree on a replacement.”

To put something to a vote: to say that a decision should be decided by a vote; "If we can't all agree on this, then are you okay if we put it to a vote?"

Heated discussion: a discussion where people are excited or angry; "You missed quite a meeting Gordon... there was a real heated discussion about the sudden schedule changes."

To run through: to read, discuss, or explain quickly; "Before we begin, I'd just like to run through the decisions we made in our last meeting."

To brainstorm: to think of or discuss many different ideas; "Let's start by getting the marketing team together and brainstorming some new advertising ideas."

To evaluate: to think carefully about something to judge its quality or performance; "Let's try the free version of this online platform for three months then evaluate it and figure out if we'll buy the full version."

Defensive: angry or upset because you think someone is criticizing you; "Come on Henry, you don't need to get defensive just because not everybody likes your design."

To bounce around: to jump from topic to topic or place to place; "I provide tech support for a lot of different companies, so I bounce around throughout the day."

To neglect to do something: to not do something that you should do; "It looks like Nathan neglected to back up all the files and now... well, they're lost."

Rough: not detailed or exact; "We have a rough plan for the year, but we need to meet and figure out exactly what each team member will do."

To facilitate: to make something happen more easily; to "facilitate" a meeting means to design and run a successful meeting; "I think if we bring in someone from the outside to facilitate our session we'll be able to stay on track."

Validated: considered valuable, worthwhile, or listened to; "We've surveyed staff, and it sounds like a lot of people don't feel validated or heard by management."

To jump into: to interrupt or join in the middle of something; "Don't worry about being late Josh, just jump into the discussion any time."

To articulate: to express an idea, thought, or feeling clearly in words; "You need to be able to articulate your business idea in a really short, clear speech."

To stall: to stop making progress; "Construction on the new condo complex has stalled because of rain."

To emerge: to appear, come out, or become known; "There are a ton of interesting new tech companies emerging from Finland these days."

Attuned to: aware of or familiar with something and therefore sensitive to it; "A good manager stays closely attuned to his staff's overall happiness and energy levels."

Perceptive: able to see or understand quickly or easily; "Wow Ian, you sure are perceptive. I certainly didn't notice the machine had slowed down a bit."

Gesture: a movement, especially of the hand or face, that means something; "At our intercultural communication seminar, we learned how many gestures have different meanings in different countries."

To check back: to go back to a place or person to get more information or make sure you understood something; "I'll give you a while to play with this new software and check back this afternoon to see if you have any questions."

On board: agreeing and supporting something; "My colleagues think the idea is great. Now I just have to get my supervisor on board with it."

To think something through: to consider something carefully; "I got two great job offers and told both companies I'd need the weekend to think it through."

To play the devil's advocate: to pretend to disagree, or to argue against an idea, in order to test how solid or true it is; "Okay, just playing the devil's advocate here, but what if the board doesn't support this plan?"

Shepherd: a person whose job it is to take care of and organize a flock of sheep; "I can't meet today Manny... I've got to shepherd all our new hires on a tour of the factory."

Upfront: completely honestly or at the beginning; "All right everyone, let me be super upfront here and just start with some background to this problem."

Transcript

Hello and welcome back to the Skills 360 podcast. I'm your host, Tim Simmons, and today I want to look at how you can lead a group to a decision.

In fact, it might be better to say we're talking about how to lead groups to *good* decisions. After all, any meeting chairperson can **push for** a quick decision, or **call a vote** before matters have been fully discussed. But that's not the kind of leadership I'm talking about. And that doesn't necessarily produce *good* decisions. A good decision is one that people **buy into**, and one that has a strong **rationale** behind it. Achieving these two things can't be done quickly, or forcefully.

So how can we go about leading a group to a decision? Well, right at the start of the meeting, you need to **set the stage** for a good discussion, and a good decision.

Setting the stage involves a couple of important things. Firstly, you need to be very clear about the purpose. If you're meeting to make a decision, make sure everyone knows it. Also make sure they're clear on the decision-making process. Does it have to be **unanimous**? Are you **striving for consensus**? Will you **put it to a vote**? These are not issues to be left to the middle of a **heated discussion**.

Now, it's often a good idea to have a bit of a process to a decision-making meeting. And that process typically goes like this: start with information-sharing, then **run through** or **brainstorm** different options, then **evaluate** those options through discussion, and finally make a decision.

Notice that *generating* ideas and *evaluating* ideas are separate steps. That helps prevent people feeling criticized or getting **defensive**. Of course, people will **bounce around** a bit. You'll be evaluating options, and someone will bring up an important piece of information they **neglected to mention** earlier. That's fine, and unavoidable. But overall, it's a good idea to follow this **rough** process.

Within this process, leading group decisions is all about **facilitating** good discussion. And the magic of good facilitation is making everyone in the room feel listened to and emotionally **validated**. That can seem easy for the outgoing people who like to think out loud and are comfortable **jumping into** the middle of conversation. But the deep thinkers need more time to **articulate** their thoughts. For this reason, when you think discussion has **stalled** on a particular topic, just wait. You'll be surprised what **emerges** after a minute of uncomfortable silence.

Overall, you need to make sure that everyone has had a chance to speak and express themselves. Sometimes this means **calling on** people directly. Or it might simply mean staying **attuned to** how those weaker voices attempt to join the discussion. If you're **perceptive**, you'll be able to see when someone wants to say

something. Maybe they lean forward and open their mouth slightly. Or they make **gestures** with their hands. Your job is to help these voices be heard.

One thing you should be doing throughout the discussion is **checking back** with the participants for a variety of purposes. For one, you might confirm agreement by saying something like "Okay, is everyone **on board** with this plan?" Take your time with this. Don't ask just once. Let the deep thinkers **think it through**. You'll also check back for clarity by saying something like this, "So Tom, what you're saying is that the 4th Avenue location is *too* expensive?" You can do this when you don't understand someone, or when you know others don't understand an idea.

Another reason to check back is to test for *disagreement*. You might say something like: "All right, thanks for that. Now, does anyone see a good reason why this is *not* possible?" Don't be afraid to **play the devil's advocate** yourself. Disagreement is constructive. Finally, you might summarize the discussion at key points along the way. For example, you could say "It looks like there are two perspectives on this. Some of you are saying this is a good idea. While others seem to think it's not the best option."

In this way, you're kind of acting like a **shepherd** of ideas, helping organize thoughts and ensuring everyone feels like they're part of the group. By being clear about purpose **upfront**, following a basic decision-making process, and using your facilitation skills, you can come to a good decision.

And remember, a good decision is one that people buy into and that has good rationale. If you're lucky, you'll have a great group of focused people who get along. But chances are you'll face some obstacles on the road to a good decision, and in our next lesson we'll talk about overcoming those obstacles.

That's all for today. So long. And see you again soon.

Review Quiz

1. A decision is a "good" decision if... [Select all that apply]
 - A ... it has good reasons or explanation behind it.
 - B ... it is supported by leadership.
 - C ... people support it.
 - D ... it doesn't cost a lot of money.

2. Which of the following is NOT something you should do in the early stages of a meeting?
 - A Make sure everyone understands how a final decision will be made.
 - B Summarize the discussion.
 - C Make the purpose of the meeting clear.
 - D Share information.

3. What are the four basic stages in the process of decision-making, in order?
 - A Making a decision, generating ideas, evaluating ideas, communicating the decision.
 - B Generating ideas, making a decision, evaluating the decision, sharing information.
 - C Sharing information, generating ideas, evaluating ideas, making a decision.
 - D Discussing options, generating ideas, evaluating information, making a decision.

4. What are some ways of making sure that deep thinkers or quiet people have a chance to give their input? [Select all that apply]
 - A Call on them directly.
 - B Ask them to give written input after the meeting.
 - C Encourage them to be more outgoing.
 - D Try to notice when they want to say something.
 - E Ask one of them to run the meeting.

5. Which of the following are given as reasons to check back at different points throughout the discussion? [Select all that apply]
 - A To test for disagreement.
 - B To confirm agreement.
 - C To introduce the purpose of the meeting.
 - D To clarify ideas or statements.
 - E To avoid breaks in the conversation.

6. Which of the following should you NOT do when facilitating a decision-making meeting?
- A Bring up arguments against someone's idea.
 - B Evaluate each idea as it comes up.
 - C Give everyone a chance to express their ideas.
 - D Allow people to bring up new information.

Review Answers

1. A decision is a "good" decision if... [choose 2]
A ... it has good reasons or explanation behind it.
C ... people support it.
2. Which of the following is NOT something you should do in the early stages of a meeting?
B Summarize the discussion.
3. What are the four basic stages in the process of decision-making, in order?
C Sharing information, generating ideas, evaluating ideas, making a decision.
4. What are some ways of making sure that deep thinkers or quiet people have a chance to give their input? [choose all that apply]
A Call on them directly.
D Just wait when discussion stalls on a given topic before moving on.
5. Which of the following are given as reasons to check back at different points throughout the discussion? [choose all that apply]
A To test for disagreement.
B To confirm agreement.
D To clarify ideas or statements.
6. Which of the following should you NOT do when facilitating a decision-making meeting?
B Evaluate each idea as it comes up.