

Strategies for Resolving Disagreement

(Adapted from *Consensus Building: Strategies for Resolving Disagreement* by Michael Wilkinson, in The IAF Handbook of Group Facilitation: Best Practices from the Leading Organization in Facilitation edited by Sandy Schuman)

Why People Disagree?

Level 1: Lack of Shared Information

Level 2: Different Values or Expectations

Level 3: Outside Factors (personality, past history, or something not related to the issue)

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Level of Disagreement	Description	Actions
<p>Level 1: Lack of Shared Information</p>	<p>Often a result of assumed understanding of what other person is saying or meaning. They are often referred to as disagreements based on facts.</p> <p>Parties not really in disagreement, but just not hearing each other accurately, misunderstanding each other, or had not shared relevant information</p>	<p>Must slow down the conversation to encourage careful listening, explicit sharing of information and explanations, testing for shared meaning.</p> <p>Make sure everyone has the same information and then make sure everyone has the same understanding of that information.</p> <p>Delineation:</p> <p>Step 1: Start with agreement Step 2: Confirm the source of disagreement Step 3: Identify the alternatives under discussion and create new ones Step 4: Ask specific delineating questions to each party Step 5: Summarize the information Step 6: Take a consensus check</p> <p>Test Strengths and Weaknesses</p> <p>Step 1: Identify the strengths of each alternative Step 2: Identify the weaknesses of each alternative Step 3: Take a consensus check</p>

Level of Disagreement	Description	Actions
<p>Level 2: Different Values or Expectations</p>	<p>Parties hold differing expectations or values that lead to preferring one alternative to another (examples are political parties and marriages)</p>	<p>Key to solving is to isolate the underlying values and create alternatives that combine the values. The real issue is not the differing positions, but the interests and reasons.</p> <p>To identify underlying values ask: Why is that important to you? What benefit do you get from doing this?</p> <p>Working with the answers we can identify solutions that provide key benefits to and satisfy the interests of all.</p> <p>Welch suggests we think of decisions as <u>investments</u> and offers nine steps:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify your objective. 2. Do a preliminary survey of your options. 3. Identify the implicated values. 4. Assess the importance of the decision. 5. Budget your time and energy. 6. Choose a decision-making strategy. 7. Identify your options. 8. Evaluate your options. 9. Make a choice.

Level of Disagreement	Description	Actions
<p>Level 3: Outside Factors (personality, past history, or something not related to the issue)</p>	<p>This type of disagreement often appears irrational as the arguments do not seem to make rationale or logical sense.</p> <p>These types of disagreements may seem irrational. The arguments do not make logical sense and one or more of the parties may show little interest in resolving the dispute, considering alternatives, or convincing the other side</p>	<p>A disagreement based on personality or past history often calls for a deeper intervention and cannot be resolved within a typical session.</p> <p>Consider taking a break with a facilitator meeting with all sides separately. Perhaps s/he will glean insights through such conversations.</p> <p>You may wish to provide an opportunity for the following steps:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. An opportunity for each party individually to identify and speak about the various issues, concerns, past actions, and existing situations that have had a negative impact on working together. 2. Agreement that all parties want a better working relationship. 3. Identification of the benefits of a better working relationship to each party individually and all parties concerned. 4. Agreement by all parties that all important issues, concerns, past actions, and existing agreements have been identified. 5. Interactive discussion of best practices for working together (this step brings outside insights on partnerships into the room)

		<p>6. Development of a set of strategies and partnering principles that will govern how all parties will interact to address past issues, prevent future issues, and resolve issues should they occur.</p> <p>7. A method for monitoring and intentionally making adjustments along the way.</p>
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Scenarios

As you read each of the following simple scenarios, identify the level of disagreement and discuss what action the group might take to address the disagreement.

Scenario A

Mr. Olson: “After thinking about the choices, I believe the first alternative will work best. It will involve everyone on the staff and address our goal.”

Mr. Smith: “I think it is a bad idea.”

Mr. Olson: “Why?”

Mr. Smith: “It just is.”

Scenario B

Mr. Olson: “After thinking about the choices, I believe the first alternative will work best. It will involve everyone on the staff and address our goal.”

Mr. Smith: “I think it is a bad idea.”

Mr. Olson: “Why?”

Mr. Smith: “It doesn’t fit within the parameters of the law.”

Mr. Olson: “In what way?”

Mr. Smith: “The law says that a district must do ‘such and such’ and this action is not ‘such and such’.”

Scenario C

Mr. Olson: “After thinking about the choices, I believe the first alternative will work best. It will involve everyone on the staff and address our goal.”

Mr. Smith: “I think it is a bad idea.”

Mr. Olson: “Why?”

Mr. Smith: “I don’t think it will work. Most people would not take it seriously”

Mr. Olson: “Why not?”

Mr. Smith: “Our students have so many other challenges facing them and this will not help them address those. Many of our students don’t have much support from their parents and without that, this will not work”

Mr. Olson: “If we focus on this professional development, then students will be able to read better and be more successful in all of their studies.”

Mr. Smith: “So many of our students do not believe they can succeed and rather than fail, they do not try. This will not solve that”

Consensus Process

Five-Finger Consensus

This technique can help a group quickly determine if it has consensus or how close it is.

The facilitator explains that on the count of three, each person should hold up between one and five fingers indicating the level of support for the recommendation being considered.

5 fingers = Strongly agree

4 fingers = Agree

3 fingers = Can see pluses and minuses, but willing to accept

2 fingers = Disagree

1 finger = Strongly disagree and can't support

If everyone shows a 5, 4, or 3, consensus has been reached and the group moves ahead.

If there are any 1s or 2s, there is further discussion, and the originator of the recommendation has the option of making adjustments to it. Then the facilitator tests five-finger consensus again. If everyone shows a 5, 4, or 3, consensus has been reached and the group moves ahead. If there are any 1s, there is further discussion, and the originator of the recommendation has the option of making adjustments to it. In the final review, majority rules and the decision is based on the will of the majority.