

## Teamwork Training

### The Decision Making Process

Many groups meet to solve problems or make decisions. Read to learn more about how groups can effectively accomplish their task objectives and then complete the interactive exercise at the end of the discussion.

#### Reflective Thinking

Reflective thinking involves a careful, systematic approach to a problem. Groups who use reflective thinking to make their decisions use of a six-step guide called the standard agenda.

1. Problem identification. What is the problem? What is wrong with the current situation?
2. Problem analysis. View the current situation as a balance between restraining forces and helping forces. What are the forces in play in your group's situation?
3. Criteria selection. What are the goals of the final decision?
4. Solution generation. Generate as many solutions as possible. Avoid groupthink by listing many solutions.
5. Solution evaluation and selection. Measure each solution against the criteria from step three.
6. Solution implementation. Enact the chosen solution.

#### Brainstorming

Another option for decision-making is brainstorming. When brainstorming, group members are encouraged to generate as many ideas about a particular topic as they can. For instance, group members may use brainstorming to generate as many solutions as they can in step four of the standard agenda. Group members should be encouraged to say anything that comes to mind when brainstorming. Every idea is written down and judgments about ideas are saved until later, when the group returns to all of the ideas and selects those that are most useful.

#### Class Activity

Brainstorm any and all problems that you think there are on campus

#### Nominal Group Technique

Nominal group technique is a group decision-making tool used when the group must rank order a set of options. In order to use the nominal group technique, group members work individually to list all alternatives to a problem or issue. Sometimes, nominal group technique is used after a brainstorming session is held. Then, the group facilitator asks each group member to individually rank all of the options from lowest to highest priority. Finally, the facilitator computes an average score for each idea. the lowest score is the highest priority for the group. Nominal group technique is a good way to have all of the group members voice their opinions and discussion is not dominated by a few vocal group members.

## Teamwork Training

### Class Activity

Rank those activities from the brainstorming session and compute the average score

### Making a Final Decision

There are many ways that a group can make a final decision, decide on a solution, or come to agreement. Some of the most popular ways of making the decision include:

**Consensus:** The group members all agree on the final decision through discussion and debate.

**Compromise:** Through discussion and readjustment of the final plan, group members come to agreement by giving up some of their demands.

**Majority Vote:** The decision is based on the opinion of the majority of its members.

**Decision by Leader:** The group gives the final decision to its leader.

**Arbitration:** An external body or person makes a decision for the group.

### Class Activity

Use your experience of the meetings and team activities to answer the following questions:

What is the most common method your group used to reach a final decision?

In the future do you think you might use a different way? If so what?

### Problem Solving/Brainstorming

Some people solve problems; others create problems. Here are some tips for each of the personality types to use their traits to improve the problem solving process. However, remember the importance of balance. Don't go too far in pushing your personality traits. For example, feelers can help ensure that the personal consequences of every alternative are weighed, but getting too emotional and personal will reduce your credibility.

- Extraverts: Stop, look, and listen

Just as in conflict resolution, Es need to make an effort to listen. They should avoid the temptation to jump in every time there is a pause in the discussion.

- Introverts: Don't think, speak

## Teamwork Training

Is need to avoid their natural tendency to filter everything they say. Sometimes problem solving requires brainstorming and spontaneity.

- **Sensors: Push for clarity**  
Ss have the natural ability to express the problem to be solved in tangible, simple terms. They also have a tendency to supply facts and figures that can be extremely helpful in problem solving.
- **Intuitives: Make lemonade**  
When everyone else in the group sees only gloom and doom, Ns have the ability to find creative solutions to turn something bad into something good. Ins should point out the alternatives and make sure each is thoroughly examined.
- **Thinkers: Help keep things in perspective**  
Ts can help the group see if it has become too attached to a problem. Ts can help keep things in perspective, including the cold, hard consequences of each alternative.
- **Feelers: Keep it personal**  
Fs can ensure that the personal consequences of every alternative are clearly defined. They also can go a long way in ensuring group harmony during the problem solving process, by ensuring everyone has a chance to express their ideas.
- **Judgers: Keep the group focused**  
Js can help keep the group oriented on the ultimate goal: solving the problem. Js can also ensure that whatever solution is reached can be implemented in a timely and efficient manner.
- **Perceivers: Keep the group's options open**  
Problem solving offers Ps the opportunity to be the devil's advocate. A few pointed questions can lead to better solutions.

## Teamwork Training

### Critical thinking in small groups

#### What is Critical Thinking?

When group members apply critical thinking skills in problem solving and decision-making, they carefully analyze, critique, and evaluate information so the conclusions they reach are well founded. By using effective critical-decision making skills and processes, group members draw valid inferences based on accurate evidence and well-supported reasoning. They avoid the common pitfalls often associated with poor reasoning, such as drawing inferences based on insufficient or faulty information.

#### What is Reasoning?

Reasoning involves evaluating claims and drawing conclusions based on those claims. Arguments are the primary tool we use in reasoning. Arguments always have a premise (or reason) and a conclusion (supported by the premise or reason). For example, consider:

**Premise:** Critical thinking skills are essential for effective participation in a democratic society.

**Conclusion:** All college students should complete a course in critical thinking.

In this example, the reason why college students should take a course in critical thinking is because such skills are necessary to participate in a democratic society. Words that often signal a statement is a premise include: since, because, assuming that. Words that often signal a conclusion statement include: therefore, thus, consequently.

Explanations that contain arguments are another tool used in reasoning. As with all arguments, explanations used in reasoning must include at least one premise that supports a conclusion. For example, consider:

**First Premise:** Payap is the international university of choice in Northern Thailand.

**Second Premise:** Northern Thailand is well known for its tourist attractions.

**Third Premise:** Intensive Academic Thai language courses have never been tried before.

**Conclusion:** The FLAT and FLIT courses demonstrate the university's commitment to innovation and language teaching

In this example, the second and third premises would likely be unstated. Still, we can see this as an argument (with premises and a conclusion) embedded in an explanation (why Payap pursued these non-degree type courses).

#### Types of Reasoning

There are two broad categories of reasoning:

**inductive reasoning** -reasoning from the specific to the general

## Teamwork Training

**deductive reasoning** -reasoning from the general to the specific.

An example of inductive reasoning is:

**First Premise:** Jean did not attend our second group meeting, but called to say that she had car trouble.

**Second Premise:** Jean did not attend our third or fourth group meetings, saying that she forgot about them, even though I called to remind her.

**Conclusion:** We cannot depend on Jean to attend group meetings.

With inductive reasoning, we search for patterns and draw conclusions based on those patterns. We cite specific instances or observations that form the foundation for inferences or conclusions.

In deductive reasoning, we draw specific conclusions based on a general premise we assume is true. For example:

**First Premise:** Bodies of water, such as lakes and oceans, moderate adjoining land temperatures.

**Second Premise:** Bangkok borders a body of water, the Gulf of Thailand.

**Conclusion:** Bangkok has less fluctuation of temperatures than, for example Chiangmai.

Note that the conclusion depends on the accuracy of the premises. If bodies of water do not moderate adjacent land temperatures, then the conclusion is false. If Bangkok is not located by the Gulf of Thailand, then the conclusion is false.

### Developing Critical Thinking Skills

There are four areas to work on:

#### 1. Asking relevant questions

Asking meaningful, relevant questions is fundamental to critical thinking. Consider the following exchange in a small group discussion:

Sam: I think California needs to spend more money on education and less on prisons. Did you know that California ranks in the bottom third of spending per student among all U.S. states?

Angie: I agree with you, Sam, that we need to put more resources toward education. I think that would keep more people out of prison. However, I don't know that simply spending more money is the answer.

## Teamwork Training

Jamie: Where did you all go to high school? Was it in California?

In this example, Angie relates her comments to Sam's original statement. In contrast, Jamie's questions have little relevance to the topic under discussion. To more critically examine the issue, Jamie might have asked Sam, "What is the relationship between spending and student achievement?" or might have asked Angie, "What resources, other than money, do you think would improve education in California?"

### **2. Finding relevant information**

Finding relevant information is the basis of critical decision making and problem solving in small groups. Lack of quantity and/or quality of information leads to faulty decision making in small groups. Asking relevant questions often leads to uncovering relevant information and challenging incomplete or poor quality information.

Not only do you need to find relevant information, but you also need to figure out how much information is enough.

If Sam, Angie and Jamie were charged with assessing the state of K-12 education in California, they would need to conduct research and locate relevant information in order to determine (1) if problems exist and (2) how to address those problems.

### **3. Interpreting and evaluating information**

Although we all share commonalities with others in how we interpret and evaluate information based on our cultural and societal backgrounds, each person brings to every situation a different "lens" for interpreting the world. Thus, our own experiences, biases, beliefs, and values will influence our interpretations.

For example, suppose each of the members of our small group attended very different high schools: Sam went to a private boarding school on the east coast, Angie attended school in an exclusive Bay Area neighborhood, and Jamie went to a large public high school in Los Angeles. These experiences alone will influence how they interpret the information the group gathers about the topic.

Group members must also evaluate information, including examining the source, the context in which the information is presented, and the date of the information. For example, Sam would need to evaluate his source for the statement that, "California ranks in the bottom third of spending per student among all U.S. states."

In evaluating information, you want to check the source of the information (is it credible? unbiased?), check the context in which the information was acquired (under what circumstances did the source get the information?), and check the context in which the information was presented (was the information presented to a particular audience? on a television talk show?).

### **4. Drawing and evaluating inferences**

Inferences are conclusions we draw based on observations. In evaluating inferences, you

## Teamwork Training

want to examine the basis for the inference. Could other inferences be drawn? Is more information needed to draw an inference? Are you fully informed?

Often we are hasty in developing inferences, basing them on insufficient or faulty evidence. For example, let's assume that Sam earns a failing grade on the first test in his small group communication class. Knowing that Sam attended a private boarding school, Angie concludes that such schools do not prepare students for college. Although the premise is true, we don't know if the conclusion is true or false. Without a great deal more information, such as Sam's academic record, his motivations (Did he study for the exam?), how other students from similar schools perform in college, we cannot draw the conclusion that private boarding schools don't prepare their graduates for college.

### Elements of Critical Thinking

The elements of critical thinking are closely related to the critical thinking skills.

#### 1. Questioning skills

As noted earlier, asking relevant questions is fundamental to critical thinking. Here are some questions the critical listener or reader can ask:

What conclusions does the author or speaker want me to draw?

What support or evidence does the author or speaker give for these conclusions?

How relevant, reliable, and adequate is the evidence presented?

What are the assumptions underlying the author's or speaker's arguments?

What are other alternatives to the conclusions drawn by the author or speaker?

#### 2. Observation skills

As speakers and writers, we gather evidence to support our arguments. As listeners and readers, we compare the facts presented by speakers and writers to our own observations. Let's examine observations and inferences more closely.

Observation

1. Observation is contact with the world through the use of the senses.
2. Observation equips us with the material for thought, reflection and judgment.
3. Observers exposed to the same sense impressions do not necessarily see, hear, feel, taste or smell the same things.
4. Observation is influenced by experience, knowledge and emotion.
5. Attention plays an important part in observation.
6. People can be trained to be a more effective observers.

## Teamwork Training

### Inference

1. We draw inferences on the basis of observations, or on conclusions drawn from previous observations.
2. Inference is the interpretation of facts. (A statement of fact is an observation statement that can be verified by the use of the senses.)
3. Valid inferences are based on sufficient and relevant evidence.
4. Inferences express probability, not certainty.
5. Our training and background provide a basis for our inferences.
6. Inferences enable us to assess and evaluate conditions and make predictions.

### 3. Effective listening skills

Effective listening skills are essential for critical thinking and communication competence. Listening is necessary in asking relevant questions, making accurate observations, finding and evaluating information, developing inferences, and evaluating those inferences. Of course, listening and questioning skills go hand in hand. You need to listen to what others have to say before you can ask them questions. But what are we usually doing when we're "listening"? We're usually thinking of what we want to say! Then we miss out on important things others are talking about.

There are four types of listening: empathic, content, appreciative and critical. In empathic listening, we are concerned with the feelings and emotions the speaker is conveying. When we listen for content, we are gathering information, focusing on the speaker's main ideas. In appreciative listening, we listen for enjoyment, such as when we watch a comedy on television. Finally, critical listening requires that we evaluate the speaker's message by considering the source's credibility, assessing the validity of a speaker's arguments, evaluating the evidence used to support those arguments, recognizing reasoning fallacies, and identifying emotional appeals.

### 4. Exploring written sources of information

The basis of effective critical decision making is sufficient and relevant information. Written sources of information include reference books (Encyclopaedia Britannica), magazines and pamphlets, atlases and gazetteers (National Geographic Atlas of the World), academic journals

(American Communication Journal), newspapers (the San José Mercury News), government publications (for which there are indexes, such as the American Statistical Index), dictionaries (English Oxford Dictionary) subject abstracts (Communication Abstracts) and indexes

## Teamwork Training

### 5. Reading skills

Effective reading skills are necessary for identifying and evaluating written sources of information. As with listening, there are different types of reading. Reading for content focuses on the content of the author's message. When reading for appreciation our goal is to enjoy the message, as with the comics in the newspaper. With empathic reading you are trying to identify the spirit of the message; the feelings and emotions underlying what the author has written. Finally, critical reading requires that we both understand and evaluate the message.

### 6. Identifying underlying assumptions

Underlying assumptions may be implicit (unstated) or explicit (stated). Most assumptions are implicit; that is, speakers and writers often don't say what their assumptions are.

What assumptions can you identify in this excerpt from a San José Mercury News editorial (January 14, 1999)? What is taken-for-granted? What factual assumptions are readers expected to share? For example, what do readers have to know about the "tribulations of President Bill" to understand the argument put forth?

The city council of Davis has stricken the name of the man whom first struck gold in California. . . .

The council took a pickaxe to the memory of John Sutter, after a local historian outed him as an 'immoral man, a sexual predator, a rapist and an enslaver of native Californians.' A biographer of Sutter called the charges blasphemous, but never mind. As fast as you can say quicksilver, Sutter Place will become known as Shasta Way.

The tribulations of President Bill and the indiscretions of Reps. Henry Hyde, Dan Burton, and the soon-departed Robert Livingston show how few reputations can stand up under intense scrutiny. Viewing historical conduct through a modern lens is an even surer source of mischief. It will surely end in distortion and misinterpretation. . . .

There's nothing sacrosanct about a name of a monument. Hitler, Stalin and other tyrants certainly deserved to have theirs torn down. But it's another matter to run people like Sutter through a sieve of modern virtues in order to screen out any impurities. And what's true in Davis would be true in San Jose. Once the revisionists start swinging their blade, there'd be no stopping the guillotine.

### 7. Identifying underlying values

Values are deeply held beliefs about what is right and wrong, good and bad, important and not important, etc. We typically prioritize values in a hierarchical fashion. That is, some values are more important to us than others. For example, I may think it is important that all dog owners go to obedience school with their dogs. I may also think that it is good for all members of a democratic society to take a course in critical thinking. Although I value both these things, the second one is higher on my value hierarchy than the first.

## **Teamwork Training**

As noted earlier, our values influence the observations we make and the inferences we draw based on those observations. Values also influence a speaker's or writer's choice of evidence presented and arguments made. For example, why did the Mercury News decide to run the editorial above? What values are implicit in the message?