

A GAME FOR TEACHING CONSENSUS PROCESS

Materials: Chart showing steps for consensus; chart showing meeting roles; 3 platters of snacks (fruit, chips, cookies) for reinforcement.

Time needed: 40 minutes

5 min. Trainer introduces consensus process and meeting roles.

Groups differ as to whether facilitators should be allowed to call on themselves.

Straw polls are optional. If the group is obviously close to consensus, skip that step.

There is no "stack-keeper." Stacks of more than 3 people are not allowed. It's the facilitator's job to manage stacks.

5 min. Trainer splits participants into affinity groups of approximately ten people, then explains rules of game.

Each group has five minutes to make a consensus decision on a problem posed by trainer. If the group is able to make a consensus decision within the five minutes, the members get a snack.

The group must follow the consensus chart, without skipping any steps. In addition, during each round, the group must use a meeting tool specified by trainer.

The group must have a facilitator, a time-keeper, a note-taker and a vibeswatcher. The roles must be changed each round.

In this game, your affinity group are people you know and trust. And you don't have time to play at being contrary or confused. So just be your naturally sweet and agreeable self.

Remember: consensus doesn't necessarily mean that everyone participates in the action, or participates in the same way.

2 min. Trainer give directions for round 1.

Problem: You are all sitting in the road, blockading. The police just announced that everyone who doesn't get up and move will be arrested for conspiracy to block the road, a felony. Should you stay or go?

Meeting Tool: go-around

5 min. Group makes decision. When time is up, trainer (in role of cop) demands that everyone move, and the group responds.

3 min. Group gets first snack and evaluates: what can be done better next round?

2 min. Trainer gives directions for round 2.

Problem: You are all occupying [a tree, an office...]. A TV crew from a major network is seen approaching in the distance. You decided earlier that if interviewed, you would say nothing except for one or two carefully worded sound bites. Since you may get only a few seconds of airtime, you don't want the reporter to be able to quote anything except exactly what you chose. What are your sound bite(s)?

Meeting Tool: brainstorm

5 min. Group makes decision. When time is up, trainer (in role of reporter) points camera at group and asks why they're there, and the group responds.

3 min. Group gets second snack and evaluates: what can be done better next round?

2 min. Trainer gives directions for round 3.

Problem: It's 8:00 a.m. and you're at the Convergence Center having a meeting with your affinity group. In fact, there are many, many affinity groups here - over 400 people are crammed into this medium-sized warehouse. Everyone is getting ready for the Big Action, which will take place tomorrow. A security person comes up and says, with controlled urgency, "There are approximately 75 cops, in riot gear with gas masks on, assembling near

the entrances to the Center. We anticipate a raid. We're asking all affinity groups to decide whether to stay and have the action now, or go and risk losing most of our supplies and equipment. There's going to be a spokes council in five minutes, to hear reports and seek a joint strategy." Remind each group to choose a spokesperson and to make their report concise - the police may make their move at any minute.

Meeting Tool: fishbowl (2 people in center to argue both sides of issue)

5 min. Group makes decision. When time is up, the trainer summons the spokesperson(s) to the council. [If there are multiple groups and enough time, the spokespeople report in and make a consensus decision.]

3 min. Group gets third snack and evaluates: what can be done better in future?

[By the end of the game, participants will have been conditioned to salivate each time they reach consensus.]

MEETING ROLES

Facilitator: move group through each stage of consensus process; call on people (no more than 3 in a stack); allow only one proposal at a time; repeat proposal frequently to keep people clear about its current wording; suggest meeting tools; help people participate equally.

Time Keeper: keep time; give warnings as each time limit approaches; force group to bargain for more time if it wants to go over time on any agenda item.

Note Taker: take notes; announce decisions made at previous meeting(s).

Vibes Watcher: point out emotional undercurrents in the group; intervene if people are getting tired or cranky; suggest meeting tools, breaks, games.

CONSENSUS

Define issue: what must be decided?

Discuss issue (use meeting tools)

State proposal

Offer clarifying questions and concerns

Suggest amendments to proposal

Seek consensus

concerns?

objections?

stand asides?

blocks?

consensus? (visual signal)