Making Team Projects Work

Tools to Help Your Team Reach Consensus_Blog Post #40

"Let's do an analysis of the marketing efforts of a car dealership. My uncle has a place in town and I'm sure he'll let us have access to his information."
"Yeah, that sounds okay."
"Okay, I'm in."
"Me too."

When we walk around the classroom and listen to our student teams make decisions, such as the decision on what to do for their class project, we find very often that the first one to speak up with an idea gets everyone in the group to agree. It's hard to figure out if the rest of the group thinks the car dealership is a good idea, if no one else has any other ideas, if no one really cares, or if they just go along with the first idea.

In an earlier post, we described the various ways that teams can make decisions, and noted that experts believe consensus is often the best. But in the example above, did the group above achieve true consensus? Probably not. In this, our final post about Tools for Team Projects, we examine tools to help your team to reach consensus.

Consensus occurs when all team members agree to the decision. While it's nice when this happens initially, it rarely happens this way in a team whose members are truly engaged. And once teams decide on a project topic, they need to make many other decisions along the way, including who will lead the team, how will they coordinate the work, what research will they need, what form will their project take, and so many more. If consensus is the best way, how do teams make it happen?

Consider these 4 Guidelines for Reaching Consensus – team members must:

1. <u>Commit to the consensus process.</u> Consensus takes longer than other decision-making tools (such as majority rule, for example). So team members must agree to a process that will take more time. This commitment fosters a spirit of unity toward the team and the organization.

2. <u>Recognize the importance of maintaining the team relationships</u> while working on resolving the differences of opinion that they have. We've discussed conflict in other posts, but keeping any disagreements focused on the topic rather than personal attacks will foster improved teamwork and lead to a better decision.

3. <u>Be flexible</u> in their approach to the decisions that must be made. "You can't always get what you want," but the members need to approach decision-making by carefully considering the responsibility of the team to successfully complete the project. The good of the group must take precedence over any individual ego.

4. <u>Listen carefully to all sides</u> of an issue before settling on a decision. This is important because, in general, consensus decisions are better. But, groups that have reached consensus are also more likely to stick with a bad decision longer rather than abandoning it when a better decision is clear. So don't hurry to a final decision, and make sure all options have been considered.

Reaching consensus takes time, and may not be appropriate for every group in every situation. However, reaching consensus generally produces better outcomes both in terms of accomplishing the task and building relationships among team members.

Next week, we wrap up this series on Team Tools.

Portions of this post appeared in an earlier post, "Help your teams reach consensus: a guide to team decision-making," published on March 2, 2021. The series on team tools is available on our website:
https://teambuildingprocess.com/making-team-projects-work/

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https://teambuildingprocess.com/making-team-projects-work/

CHECK OUT OUR OTHER POSTS ON TEAM TOOLS

- June 1: Tools for Teams_Intoduction
- June 8: Tools for Team Decision-Making
- June 15: Tools for Team Problem-Solving (intro)
- June 22: Tools for Team Problem-Solving (specific)
- June 29: Tools for Team Creativity
- July 6: Tools to Reach Team Consensus

Check out these posts and other resources on our website.

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