

Additional Information and Techniques to Support the Planning Process, and to Enhance PET Region Governance and Operations

Regarding Consensus-Building (Source: AXIS Performance, Portland, OR)

Five Steps to Building Consensus: For those situations where consensus is appropriate, adopt a process that assures efficiency without sacrificing effectiveness. Our experience has taught us that there are five critical steps in a consensus building process. Feel free to modify each step to suit your team's circumstances, but beware of skipping any steps. It will only come back to haunt you in the end.

1. **Determine the deadline and boundaries:** Begin by clarifying the parameters or constraints of your decision. When does reason (or outside pressures) tell you the decision **MUST** be made? What are your deadlines? How much time do you need to allow a thorough process and how will you schedule your time so that you reach a satisfying outcome? What are the non-negotiable boundaries or conditions within which the decision must be made? Are there budget constraints, contractual obligations, legal requirements, etc., that must be honored?
2. **Determine stakeholder needs:** Next identify all those who will be impacted by the decision and determine what each party needs out of the decision. What are the needs of your customers, your organization as well as the individual members of your team? What **MUST** be satisfied in order to achieve a successful decision?
3. **Gather data:** Become as educated as necessary about the issue to assure the best outcome. What information do you need before you can make an informed decision? Have the needs of all stakeholders been presented? Are there some assumptions that you need to test before you proceed?
4. **Identify the options:** Only now should you begin discussing the alternatives. Most teams make the mistake of starting with this step and end up in endless haggling or with erroneous conclusions. Consider your full range of options (beyond the favored ones you came in with). How well does each option meet the full set of needs generated in the previous conversation?
5. **Plan for action:** The work doesn't end with the decision. Be sure to plan your follow through. How will you implement your decision? Who else needs to know about it? Do you need a fall back position? How will you know your decision was a good one? Do you need to revisit the decision? If so, when and under what circumstances?

Primary tactic for drilling down... The 5 Whys

Too often groups begin their decision process by debating various solution options. The energy in this approach is focused on trying to convince, sell and change minds. Sometimes it works, but more often it creates win/lose situations or complete deadlock. Begin instead by asking people to explain the need that they are trying to meet. Discourage them from rationalizing their solution idea by asking them "why" they hold the position they do. What need does their idea meet or what problem does it solve for them? Sometimes you must ask why several times to get at the heart of the need. (The Japanese believe it takes asking why at least five times before the core of an issue is uncovered.) Do the same for the team as a whole. Ask what common purpose the decision must serve.