

Embodied Learning Module

Decision Making Roundtable

Aims

1. Provide a lived experience of decision making within each of the four main DM systems (autocratic, majority, unanimity and consent).
2. Provide a lived experience of the difference between being asked for agreement (unanimity) and being asked for objection (consent).
3. Demonstrate the impact of welcoming an objection as a gift to the group.

Environment

Seating in a circle for all participants, facilitator and assistant(s).

Materials

1. Two identical and easily identifiable small objects, such as keys or coins, to be used as "Type 1" markers.
2. Two identical and easily identifiable small objects, such as keys or coins, to be used as "Type 2" markers. These must be easily distinguishable from the Type 1 markers.
3. A larger number (enough for all the participants) of small objects, such as polished stones, to be used as "Type 3" markers. These must be easily distinguishable from both the Type 1 and Type 2 markers.
4. A basket, bowl or other open container for these objects.

Preparation

Place markers in the bowl or basket in these proportions:

1. Two Type 1 markers (for groups smaller than twelve, use one).
2. Two Type 2 markers (for groups smaller than twelve, use one).
3. A sufficient number of the Type 3 markers (stones) so the total number of all three types of markers equals the exact number of participants in the group.
Helpful hint: place two or three extra Type 3 markers in your pocket to make up for a short count.

Activity Description

1. Invite the participants to sit in a circle in the activity space while you introduce the activity. Show the group one example of each of the three markers in the basket or bowl. Introduce a descriptive term for each one, for example, "A polished river pebble, a brass key and a Euro coin." Check for shared understanding about what each one looks like and what you are going to call it.
2. Take the basket or bowl around the circle, asking each participant to remove one marker without looking and determine which type it is without showing it to anyone else. Check to see if everyone has a marker they would characterize as one of the three objects you passed out. Try to resolve any confusion now.

Embodied Learning Module

Decision Making Roundtable

3. Introduce a notional proposal that the group will be addressing using the four main DM systems. For example: "After this session, we will run 25 laps around the building." Invite the participants to suspend their own opinions and positions about this and respond whole-heartedly according to the type of marker they are holding, based on the position represented by their marker in each round.
4. Round 1: Autocratic
 - a. The decision is made by the leader (facilitator), so it does not matter what type of marker each participant is holding.
 - b. Inquire about the experience of being subject to an autocratic decision.
5. Round 2: Majority vote
 - a. For this round, Type 1 and Type 2 markers are both considered "no" votes and Type 3 markers are considered "yes" votes. Check that each participant understands which marker he or she is holding.
 - b. State the proposal and then say, "All in favor, raise your hands." Check that all but four (all but two in a small group) participants have raised their hands.
 - c. Say "all opposed, raise your hands." Check that there are four (two in a small group) hands raised.
 - d. Excitedly celebrate the decision and encourage the "yes" voting participants to do so.
 - e. Inquire about the experience of making a majority decision. Check with at least one person each from the minority and majority.
6. Round 3: Unanimity
 - a. For this round, the Type 1 markers indicate a "no" response and all other markers indicate a "yes" response. Check that each participant understands which marker he or she is holding.
 - b. State the proposal and then go around the circle, asking each person, "Do you agree?" Check that there are only two (one for a small group) "no" responses.
 - c. Upon encountering a "no" response, react authentically as if you heard "no" to a proposal you really support, and encourage those participants responding "yes" to respond in the same manner.
 - d. Inquire about the experience of not reaching a unanimous decision due to one or more people saying "no" when asked for agreement. Check with at least one person who said "yes" and one who said "no."

Embodied Learning Module

Decision Making Roundtable

7. Round 4: Consent

- a. For this round, Type 2 markers are considered “objection” and all other markers are considered “no objection.” Check that each participant understands which marker he or she is holding.
- b. State the proposal, and then go around the circle asking each person, “Do you have an objection?” Check that there are only two (one for a small group) objections.
- c. Upon encountering an objection, thank the participant bringing it and continue around the circle. *VARIATION: collect the Type 2 markers, which represent objections, when they are offered during the round. Once complete, celebrate that there are objections and profusely thank the people bringing them.*
- d. Gather the Type 2 markers, which represent objections, and place them in the bowl or basket in the center of the circle. Explain that the objections are gifts to the circle and now represent a shared dilemma for the group to resolve together.
- e. Ask the people bringing objections to briefly explain them.
- f. Inquire about the experience of greeting objections as gifts. Check with at least one person who brought an objection and one who did not.

Inquiry Framework

Use inquiry to harvest the experience of the participants. Use the main points listed below as a reference point for framing the responses to these questions.

1. What was the most impactful part of this activity for you?
2. What did you learn about how you experience different types of decision systems?
3. Did this activity impact your understanding about being asked for agreement vs. being asked for objections?
4. What insights do you take away from this activity?

Embodied Learning Module

Decision Making Roundtable

Main Points

1. Autocratic and majority vote decisions structurally permit the group to ignore the voice (objection) of at least one person.
2. Human beings are social animals and generally feel more comfortable saying “yes” to the group. Being asked for agreement, as in unanimity, creates tension in saying “no,” and may produce an unintended sense of coercion or social pressure to say “yes.” Being asked for objection, as in consent, invites a “yes,” which generally makes it easier to object.
3. Within a unanimity decision making system, the group may receive a “no” response as stopping progress and generate tension and resentment. Within a consent system, the objection is a gift that points out something about the proposal that might cause harm if not addressed, which generates gratitude and collaboration.
4. Genuinely welcoming an objection as a gift requires maturity in group process and trust in both the process and the other members of the group. It becomes easier and more authentic with experience.