

Team Building Strategies

Team Building Strategies provide continuity for how a Team goes about planning, evaluating its progress, and developing new goals. Team Building Strategies include processes for engaging in Team discussions, building consensus for moving forward, and resolving conflict. Using a few of these tools, processes and strategies, everyone can become a skilled facilitator of effective meetings. A good meeting not only helps the team get work done in the context of their plan, but also makes use of the pooled talents of the group, empowers team members and creates a sense community and connection with each other.

Brainstorming

Description

A technique where all ideas for a specific problem or situation are welcome and none are criticized. More ideas are better; the objective is quantity, not quality. Ideas are offered in a rapid-fire manner; no ideas are discussed, clarified or evaluated. People will build on each other's ideas. Wild, out-of-the-box and implausible ideas are encouraged. Such ideas often lead to a novel and workable solution or resolution.

After the time allotted for Brainstorming ends, review the list of ideas. Choose a few for further study or consideration as goals/strategies for your plan. Save others to add or use later.

Brainstorming empowers all members of the group to contribute to the planning. In choosing items to move forward with, be mindful of the impact criticism or rejection of ideas could have on the person who suggested it.

Facilitator Role

Prepare for the meeting. A room with comfortable seating and a clear sight line to a notetaker is ideal.

Set the tone. A few rules are necessary, but set a comfortable, creative, safe tone for the meeting. Have fun with it. Inspire creativity.

Assign a notetaker - records ideas on flip charts, white boards, computer & projector without comment or criticism. Legible, quick handwriting is a must.

Clearly state the problem to be discussed. Post it at the top of the flip chart. Ensure everyone can see it clearly. Some discussion here may be necessary so everyone understands the problem in the same way.

Set a time limit. A short time limit is most effective, 5 – 10 minutes

Review the rules for Brainstorming (described to the left)

Keep the discussion moving quickly from person to person

Remind people of the 'no discussion/no criticism' rule. A chance to do that comes after the time limit by reviewing the list to choose a few items.

Consensus Building

Description

Fist-to-Five is a quick, visual way to gauge each team member's level of support for a specific idea or proposal. It makes it much easier for people to be honest regarding their degree of support for an initiative than a 'yes' 'no' vote. People may be on the fence or need more information to make a firm decision.

Once everyone indicates their level of support, any team members holding up fewer than three fingers, is given the opportunity to state objections, ask questions, etc. and the team responds. The facilitator continues the fist to five process until the team achieves consensus (everyone holds up three or more fingers) or agrees to move on to the next issue.

Sometimes it is necessary to return to the issue at another time after further study or more information is gathered to address concerns or questions. Then check for consensus repeating fist-to-five.

Facilitator Role

To use the technique, the team facilitator restates an action the group may take and asks the team to show their level of support. Facilitator explains (or provides a visual) how to use a fist or number of fingers to indicate their level of support. Each team member responds by holding up a closed fist or the number of fingers that corresponds to the level of support.

	<i>Fist</i>	No support, will work to block implementation
	<i>1 Finger</i>	I have major concerns I would like to discuss
	<i>2 Fingers</i>	I would like to discuss minor issues for clarification
	<i>3 Fingers</i>	I am neutral and comfortable enough to let it move forward
	<i>4 Fingers</i>	I solidly support this and want to assist in working on it
	<i>5 Fingers</i>	I think this is a great idea and would like to lead implementing it

Conflict Resolution

Description

People have different viewpoints and, under the right set of circumstances, those differences escalate to conflict. How you handle that conflict determines whether it works to the team's advantage, or contributes to its demise. Conflict has to be dealt with, but the question is how to do so effectively.

Conflict isn't necessarily negative. Healthy and constructive conflict is a component of high-functioning teams, passionate about what they do. Conflict arises from differences between people; the same differences that often make diverse teams more effective than those made up of people with similar experience. When people with varying viewpoints, experiences, skills, and opinions are tasked with becoming a team, the combined effort can far surpass what any group of similar individuals could achieve. Be open to these differences but do not let them rise into full-blown disputes.

Understanding and appreciating the various viewpoints involved in conflict are key factors in its resolution. These are key skills for all team members to develop. The important thing is to maintain a healthy balance of constructive difference of opinion, and avoid negative conflict that's destructive and disruptive.

Getting to, and maintaining, that balance requires well-developed team skills, particularly the ability to resolve conflict when it does happen, and the ability to keep it healthy and avoid conflict in the day-to-day course of team working.

When a team oversteps the mark of healthy difference of opinion, resolving conflict requires respect and patience. The human experience of conflict involves our emotions, perceptions, and actions; we experience it on all three levels, and we need to address all three levels to resolve it. We must replace the negative experiences with positive ones.

Facilitator Role

Step 1: Acknowledge the Conflict

Conflict must be acknowledged before it can be managed and resolved. Don't ignore the first signs of conflict – it will only fester. Once the team recognizes the issue, steps to resolve it can start.

Discuss the impact – As a team, discuss the impact the conflict is having on team dynamics and performance.

Agree to a cooperative process – Everyone involved must agree to put the team first, which may mean setting aside your opinion or ideas. Team members must want to resolve conflict more than any individual wants to win.

Agree to communicate – Throughout the resolution process, keep communications open. Allow people to talk about the issue and discuss their strong feelings. Active listening is essential to really understand where the other person's position and concerns.

Step 2: Understand the Situation

The next stage is to understand the situation, and each team member's point of view. Take time to make sure that each person's position is heard and understood. Strong emotions are likely present and essential to work through in order to reveal the true nature of the conflict. Do the following:

Clarify positions – It's important to clarify people's positions in the conflict. Whether there are obvious factions for support of a particular option, approach or idea, or each team member holds their own unique view, each position needs to be clearly identified and articulated by those involved.

This step alone can go a long way to resolve the conflict, as it helps the team see the facts more objectively and with less emotion, similar to 'root cause'

List facts, assumptions and beliefs underlying each position – What does each person believe? What do they value? What information is used as a basis for the beliefs? What decision-making criteria and processes have they employed?

Analyze in smaller groups – Break into smaller groups, separating people who are in alliance. When alliances are separated, the fire of conflict can burn out quickly, the issue and facts are laid bare. Smaller groups can analyze the associated facts, assumptions and beliefs to get to root cause. By considering the facts, assumptions, beliefs the group will gain a better understanding. This can reveal new areas of agreement, new ideas and solutions that take into account the best of each position and perspective.

Questions for Small Groups - Which facts and assumptions are true? Which are the more important to the outcome? Is there additional, objective data to bring into the discussion to clarify points of uncertainty or contention?

Facilitator remains neutral - Take care to remain open, rather than criticize or judge the perceptions and assumptions of other people. Listen to all solutions and ideas presented by the various sides of the conflict. Everyone needs to feel heard and acknowledged if a workable solution is to be reached.

Step 3: Reach Agreement

After the group dialogue, each side is likely to be much closer to reaching agreement. The process of uncovering facts and assumptions allows people to step away from their emotional attachments and see the issue more objectively.

Decide a course of action - Now that all parties understand the others' positions, the team must decide what decision or course of action to take. With the facts and assumptions considered, it's easier to see the best of action and reach agreement .

Document next steps - If further analysis and evaluation is required, agree what needs to be done, by when and by whom, and so plan to reach agreement within a particular timeline. If appropriate, define which decision making and evaluation tools are to be employed.

Consensus to move forwards – Check for consensus with the next steps as detailed above. Make sure the team is committed to work with the outcome of the proposed analysis and evaluation, course of action, responsibility and timeline.