

How's My Leading?

Engaging Others in Collaborative Problem Solving and Decision Making

Advantages of Group Problem Solving and Decision Making

1. Groups often possess a wider range of knowledge and experience than any one person – this is helpful in defining the problem, generating possible solutions, and critically evaluating them
2. Acceptance of the solution is usually higher when people participate in problem solving – people feel more committed and a sense of ownership of the problem and the solution
3. Both the problem and the solution are usually understood better by people who participate in solving the problem

Disadvantages of Group Problem Solving and Decision Making

1. There may be social pressure for people to conform – people may go along with a bad solution in order to be accepted – groups may close the problem solving process too soon
2. Accountability is more diffused - groups may make more risky decisions than individuals
3. Group problem solving is more time consuming and more costly (at least in the short term)

Factors to Consider

1. Does the problem or task require knowledge and skills of different people?
2. How important is acceptance of the solution for people to carry it out?
3. Is one solution as good as any other, or are there costs associated with making a poor decision?
4. Does the group have the right mix of knowledge, skills, and abilities?
5. Are potential group members cooperative or competitive?
6. Is there sufficient time to make a group decision?

Principles for Effective Collaborative Problem Solving and Decision Making

1. Avoid arguing blindly for your position – present your position as clearly and logically as possible, but listen to other members' reactions and consider them carefully before you press your point.
2. Avoid changing your mind just to reach agreement and avoid conflict – support only solutions with which you are able to agree to at least some degree – yield only to positions that have logically sound reasoning.
3. Avoid conflict-reducing procedures such as majority voting, tossing a coin, averaging, and bargaining.
4. Seek out differences of opinion – discuss underlying assumptions – listen carefully to one another – try to involve everyone in the process – disagreements can improve the group's decision because a wide range of information and opinions improves the group's chances of finding a better solution.
5. Don't assume that someone must win and someone must lose when discussion reaches a stalemate – instead, look for the next most acceptable alternative for all members.