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685. DECISIONS, DECISIONS: REACHING AGREEMENT IN A GROUP

Goals

- To demonstrate the ways in which groups make decisions.
 - To develop participants' awareness of their own decision-making preference(s).
 - To discover factors that influence group decisions.
 - To discover ways in which groups can make better decisions.
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Group Size

Any number of subgroups of five people.

Time Required

Forty-five to fifty minutes.

Materials

- A set of 3" x 5" or 5" x 7" Decisions, Decisions Excursion Cards with the names of cities, average travel time, minimum length of stay, and cost printed on them for each group. (See the Decisions, Decisions Sample Excursion Cards.)
- Maps of the same exotic vacation destinations covered on the Excursion Cards and/or travel brochures/guidebooks about those exotic destinations.
- A flip chart and felt-tipped markers.

Physical Setting

A room large enough so that each subgroup is able to sit together (either at a table or in a circle) and not disturb other subgroups.

Process

1. Before the session begins, select an exotic travel destination (for example, Italy) and create a set of Excursion Cards for the destination you choose similar to the samples given (which are for various possibilities for a trip to Italy). Place maps and travel brochures in a visible, central location before participants enter the room.
2. Begin by painting the picture of what it would be like for a group to travel to the exotic destination you have chosen. Break participants into subgroups of five and tell them that *everyone* in each subgroup must agree on the group's travel itinerary (that is, which cities they will visit and for how long) within the following constraints, written on the flip chart:
 - Your group has only ten days' total travel time.
 - Your group must arrive and depart from a central destination (for example, Rome).
 - Sightseeing/excursion possibilities are described in the travel brochures and maps, and costs and times are given on the Excursion Cards.
 - The total amount budgeted for travel and touring is \$5,000 per group.
 - Assume that the time and costs given on the cards are legitimate, rather than trying to add up amounts from the brochures.
3. Hand out a set of Excursion Cards to each subgroup. Point out that each card has the typical time (in days) required to travel to the location, the minimum time (in days) to be spent at the location, and the basic cost to visit that location. Caution the participants not to become hung up on the "reality" of the costs involved (for example, will it take more or less than \$500 to travel to Capri?). They are to use the information given on the cards and assume that it is correct.
4. Inform the group(s) that they have ten minutes to decide as a group how to spend their ten-day vacation.
5. Go around the room and observe how the various subgroups build consensus as they make their decisions. (Ten minutes.)

6. After ten minutes, ask each group, in turn, whether it was able to reach a consensus. If the answer is yes, ask what "consensus" means to that group and explore the meaning of consensus. If the answer is "no," ask which other decision-making option was used (for example, command decision, majority vote, loudest voice, unanimous) and discuss the advantages of each method briefly. Capture all the groups' answers on a flip chart. (Ten minutes.)
7. Ask each group to describe how it went about making its decisions. What worked well? What kept the group from moving forward? Capture the answers on a flip chart, discussing the following questions also:
 - Who spoke first? What was the rest of the group's reaction?
 - What were the first things you were able to agree on?
 - How did you work through any disagreements?
 - How did you build on individual experiences and knowledge?
 - What have you learned about your preferences for making decisions?
 - Did you think "out of the box" (for example, take more travel time by backpacking or agree to add time to your itinerary so that you could stay longer in a city)?
 - What factors influence group decision making?(Fifteen minutes.)
8. Conclude with some general observations and reminders about how groups can make better decisions in the future. List them on the flip chart. (Ten minutes.)

Submitted by Kristin J. Arnold.

Kristin J. Arnold, CPCM, specializes in facilitating leadership, management, and employee teams, particularly in the areas of strategic planning, process improvement, decision making, and collaborative problem solving. An accomplished author, national speaker, and featured columnist in The Daily Press, Ms. Arnold is regarded as an expert in team development. With building extraordinary teams as her signature service, she has provided process facilitation, training, and coaching support to both public and private sector initiatives.