THE EXTRAORDINARY TEAM

*Tips and techniques to improve
the way your teams work.*

Building a Consensus *By Kristin Arnold*

Your team has narrowed a brainstormed list down to five important items. In some cases, an obvious option leaps out and the team comes to a quick decision. Most of the time, however, the team is faced with a choice among many options.

If the team is interested and has the time, they can combine, create and synergize the items into a better idea. The team *builds* a consensus - striving to reach a decision that best reflects the thinking of *all* team members. Consensus means more than "I can live with it." It means that each team member can live with and support the decision upon implementation.

To build a consensus, explain what consensus means and why it is important for the team to reach consensus. Ensure that all team members understand the issue and the most important items. To prevent confusion, take the time to define the specific meaning of the words being used. Clearly outline any constraints (e.g. time or money). Remind each member to participate fully in the discussion and that they have the same formal power to support or block any proposals. Finally, identify a "fallback" if consensus can't be reached within a specified time (majority vote or command decision).

Take the most important items from your brainstormed list, and ask a few probing questions:

"All of these items are possible. Do we have to choose only one?"

"Is there any way we can use the best features of each item?"

"What would happen if we took added/deleted features of several options. Would that get us closer to what we want?"

"Could we try out several options in parallel before we commit to just one?"

Team energy increases as new ideas and possibilities surface. This trial and error approach appears chaotic; however, the team builds a new, synergistic alternative based on the best of the best.

Discovering Common Ground *By Jeff Anthony*

If traditional approaches to planning and managing change have just not lived up to your expectations, you may want to consider an alternative called the Future Search Conference. This remarkable planning meeting makes possible consensus planning among people with diverse interests. Developed by Sandra Janoff and Marvin Weisbord, and outlined in their book *Future Search, Discovering Common Ground,* its unique design makes it possible to meet two goals at the same time:

- Helping large, diverse groups discover values, purposes, and projects they hold in common.
- Enabling people to create a desired future together and   act upon it right away.

In the last decade, hundreds of organizations and   communities world

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Team Activities: Rainbow Connections

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From the Bookshelf: The Goal: A Process of Ongoing Improvement

Icebreakers

An icebreaker or "warm-up" is a wonderful technique to kick-off a meeting. If done properly, these team activities create an energizing environment, enhance the team's work, get people talking and to know each other.

Make it quick. Especially the first few times you do a team activity, make sure it lasts no more than 5 minutes.

Involve everyone. This means no wallflowers - everyone has something to do or is expected to contribute.

Make it okay to pass if they don't want to participate.

Tie it to the team. Introduce the icebreaker, why you chose that activity, and what the benefits are.

Be prepared. Bring instructions, handouts or supplies with you.

Keep it lively & enjoy yourself!

"When you listen to somebody else, whether you like it or not, what they say becomes a part of you...the common pool is created, where people begin suspending their own opinions and begin listening to other peoples'. At some point people begin recognizing that this common pool is more important than their separate pools."

David Bohm

Congratulations!

Monarch Marking Systems
for receiving the first
Workforce Excellence Award
from the
National Association of Manufacturers

"...assigned to come up with a more efficient assembly process for a hand-held bar-code reader... the thinking came with startling ease. They knew it was ridiculous to build a two-pound product on a mechanical conveyor belt, for instance. By eliminating it they could face each other around a large workstation and simply pass around the product by hand. Anyone could easily talk to anyone, and anyone who got ahead could help anyone who fell behind. By the time it was over, they had reduced the square footage of their assembly area 70%, cut work-in-progress inventory by $127,000 and slashed past-due shipments 90% - in addition to doubling productivity."

Thomas Petzinger, Jr. *Wall St. Journal,*
October 17, 1997

Common Ground *(cont'd)*

-wide have used it to work on ambiguous "problems without boundaries," making social, technical and economic breakthroughs that cannot happen in traditional meetings and planning sessions.

By applying a few basic principles, participants can do in 16 scheduled hours (over 2 1/2 days) what once took months, years, or was simply unthinkable. These principles enable stakeholders in a community, organization or issue to plan effectively even with no prior contact or when a history of conflict and frustration exists. Outputs include ideal futures, short and long range plans, mission statements, new programs, increased funding, partnerships, coalitions, innovative solutions, new leadership, patterns,and especially, high commitment to action.

Jeff Anthony, of Anthony Consulting, often hangs out at www.aconsult.org.

Building Consensus *(cont'd)*

When it appears the team has coalesced and agreed to a new alternative, take a "straw poll" - a pulse check to see how close or how far apart the team is from reaching a consensus. Remind the team that this poll is not a final vote - it simply tells them how much work needs to be done to build consensus. Try these sentence starters:

"It sounds like we are making progress. Let's check that out with a quick straw poll to see how close we are to a consensus. We'll go right around the table: Sally?"

"Let's see if everyone either can agree with, or can agree to support, the most popular alternative. Let's start with Sally and go around the room. Sally?"

Record the responses and summarize the results. If everyone can live with and support the alternative, then you have a consensus. Chances are that there will be some opposition, so find out what it would take to gain support. Try these sentence starters:

"There seems to be alot of support for this alternative. What would it take for the rest to support this?"

"What is getting in the way of some team members to support this alternative? What could we do to meet their needs?"

Continue to build agreement for the decision until you have a consensus, or time runs out and your team falls back to another decision-making method. By building a consensus, your team has a greater chance of producing a better quality decision, a more cohesive team and smoother implementation of the decision.

THE EXTRAORDINARY
TEAM

What's New at QPC Inc.

Thank you for all your support in moving into "The Arnold Building." The Grand Opening was terrific, and we have finally moved in EVERYTHING - including the computer - as this issue goes to press. It's been an eventful year and we are looking forward to bringing the Antoinette Room (named after my grandmother) fully on-line with a Sharp multimedia projector, VHS, CD, stereo system with lavaliere microphone.

A big thanks to Rich McNamara with API in Newport News with the installation and training on system. We are still working out the bugs and waiting for our tables, but then we're ready for business!

And for the local folks, my husband, Rich and I are thinking about having a "Friday Night at the Movies at the Arnold Building." Take a first-run video renowned for it's special effects, cinematography or sound - and you have

a match made in heaven with the 80-inch screen!

Several of my clients have asked about another public seminar on facilitation skills and advanced facilitation skills...if you're interested, please let me know and stay tuned for more details! I think it is "smarter" to have a public seminar when several clients ask for it, then just to build it, and pray someone comes.

We have also added an instructional and performance technologist to the staff. We now have the capability to develop multimedia presentations - or provide you with the training so you can develop your own. He is also the technology guru for the building.

Hope your fall is glorious and hope to keep in touch.   Kristin

Thanksgiving Ideas

Thanksgiving creates a great opportunity for your teams to celebrate their accomplishments and success. Try one of these simple team activities:

Bring in a bottle of non-alcoholic champagne and glasses (plastic will do, but it's alot more fun with glass!). Start the toast with "I am thankful this team is....." Clink glasses, take a sip and encourage others to continue the toast!

Take a moment for each team member to share what they are planning to do or the traditions they have on Thanksgiving Day.

Have each team member share what their most memorable "team moment" is.

Have a potluck Thanksgiving lunch and encourage team members to stay and mingle rather than run back to their office!

Have each team member share what they think is the team's most significant accomplishment and what contributed to their success

Talk and agree on how the team might volunteer at a soup kitchen, homeless shelter or other group that is less fortunate than they are.

Share what each individual does to celebrate success (go out to dinner) and then agree on how the team will celebrate their next success.

Imagine if you were one of the early settlers at Jamestown, share what you your role in the community would be.

Sit in a circle and take a big ball of yarn and wrap one end around your finger. Throw the ball to another team member and thank them for a specific contribution or accomplishment. That team member then wraps a bit of yarn around their finger and continues the process. You can even send it back to the same person too! Watch the interconnected web the team weaves....

Happy Turkey Day!

Team Activity: Rainbow Connections

Rainbow Connections
An icebreaker that demonstrates how much we have in common.
Time - 15 minutes
Nr. of Participants: 6 min, 24 max
Materials Required:
- Many different colors of 9 foot

Pair up with a person you don't know very well or don't work with regularly.

Interview each other and discover three things you have in common.

Form a circle with the partners being approximately across from each other. Place a box or basket in the center containing an assortment of 9' long crepe paper streamers.

Take a streamer from the basket, hold one end and hand the other end to your partner. Introduce your partner to the

entire group, stating one of the commonalties that they share.

When anyone else hears a comment that they too can identify with, they should say "I can connect with you on that, too" and should grab onto the streamer. Several members of the group may "connect" at the same time, and all will share the streamer to make "connections."

Remind the team to be careful in avoid tearing the paper streamer!

Continue partner introductions and "connecting" until everyone has participated.

*Adapted with permission from **The HR Handbook**, Volume I, Elaine Biech and John E. Jones, Eds. Amherst, MA: HRD Press, 1996.*

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"If you think this is just someone else's management theory de jour, built around a novel way to present the material, just remind yourself of one thing ..... it's not really a story ..... everything comes from the author's actual consulting experiences with real companies"

Craig Peterson

From the Bookshelf
By Craig Peterson

Ever wonder why the best laid process improvement efforts failed to yield their expected results? In the book **The Goal: A Process of Ongoing Improvement**, Eliyahu M. Goldratt and Jeff Cox provide both an explanation as to why these efforts fail, and how *& where* to correctly focus one's improvement activities in the first place. Called the *Theory of Constraints* (TOC), the authors point out that all processes constitute an integrated system which has one, maybe two constraints at most. Improvement efforts need to be focused on the system constraint in order to achieve *dramatic* process improvements (i.e., reduced cycle times, less waste, more productivity, etc.). Changes elsewhere in the system (i.e., on non-constraints) result in essentially no improvement in the system's overall performance.

All systems have constraints. They can not be eliminated, only moved elsewhere in the system. Strangely, one of the most common constraint sources the author points out are the very policies/decisions that are put into place by an organization's management because they fail to consider their effects on the system constraint's performance.

This may seem obvious and "common sense", but the world is full of examples proving this to be typically a very "uncommon" way for most people to think and act. In **The Goal**, Goldratt & Cox show the primary force influencing people to do "wrong things right" *... measurement systems that focus one's attention primarily on localized improvements*.

Rooted in modern managerial accounting practices, managers are rewarded (evaluated) for local process improvements/attaining local goals, thereby shifting their focus away from organizational level goals to their own individual group's needs. While senior management's thinking is that an improvement anywhere adds up to an improvement for the whole system, this ignores the real integrated nature of the organization (they are not a series of independent entities). Like a chain, therefore, improvements anywhere but at the weakest link does nothing to improve the chain's overall strength.

One of the things that makes this book unique from others is it approach to educating the reader. Preferring the Socratic method of learning, the authors have structured their material into a story about a manufacturing company that needs to make immediate and dramatic improvements within a very short time frame. While making for one of the easiest "text books" to read, the reader has to be careful not to get caught up in the "story", as you will miss the underlying messages.

Each chapter is filled with useful knowledge and solutions that can be extracted and applied. (I continue to find "new" things each time I re-read it.) Some are subtle changes to long standing process related definitions, but now show how the application of the TOC principles would change one's decision making approach. How typical managerial accounting can lead one's decision making astray is one of the author's favorite "targets".

One of the most helpful sections describes a 5 step process to manage a system constraint before and during the improvement process:

Step 1: **IDENTIFY** the system's constraint(s). [Where is your process bottleneck. It might be outside of your organization!]

Step 2: Decide how to **EXPLOIT** the system's constraint(s). [Get the most from what you have .... eliminate work that the bottleneck is doing that does not relate to the *organization's* primary goal.]

Step 3: **SUBORDINATE** everything else to the above decision. [By definition, anything that is not a constraint has excess capacity .... don't let the others over produce inventory or other materials. At this point you are getting the most from your process with the least amount of waste.]

Step 4: **ELEVATE** the system's constraint(s). [Improve the capacity of the constraint.]

Step 5: If the constraint is broken from the above, go back to step 1, but do not allow **INERTIA** to cause a system's constraint. [Don't let corporate inertia hold you still.]