Professional Development Activity on Decision Making

This activity helps teams practice consensus building and speaking with a unified voice regarding an issue or proposed decision. It allows teams to practice situations in which a decision is not unanimous, but a unified response is still required.

Time Frame

This activity takes thirty to sixty minutes to complete.

Materials

The team will need a facilitator, flip chart paper and markers, and a copy of the *fist to five* strategy (see figure 5.1). A good facilitator is integral to this activity. The facilitator should be artful in identifying common areas of agreement and summarizing statements for the group.

Process

The team should do the following.

1. As a team, decide on an issue or proposed decision that may have divided opinions among team members. Post the issue or proposed decision on flip chart paper.

2. Discuss the *fist to five* strategy (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, Many, & Mattos, 2016) using the chart in figure 5.1 (available online at **go.SolutionTree.com/leadership**). Have this visual available during the activity. Note: If team members would prefer to not use the *fist to five* gestures, the facilitator can simply call out the number or response (for example, Who would *never* support this issue or decision? Who *absolutely* supports this issue or decision?) and record the responses.

3. The facilitator now presents the issue or decision, and team members use the hand configurations to express their decision on the issue.

4. The facilitator records individual team member responses.

5. The facilitator now asks those members making a fist or holding one or two fingers to discuss why they rated the issue or decision at these levels. As they discuss those reasons, the facilitator writes the explanation or explanations on flip chart paper. If another member has a similar reason, the facilitator draws a check mark by the first reason.

6. This process is now repeated for members offering a rating of three, four, and five. Again, responses are recorded on flip chart paper and check marks used for repeated reasons.

7. The facilitator now asks team members responding with a fist or one or two fingers if they would be more comfortable supporting the issue or proposed decision if it was rewritten to include their concerns.

8. If these team members respond "yes," a rewritten issue statement or proposed decision is drafted, and the process is repeated for the new draft. The facilitator offers additional drafts if necessary to address concerns until the team members reach consensus.

While this activity was designed for a positive outcome, there will be times when a unanimous decision is not possible. In those cases, consider the following strategies.

- **Table the issue or proposed decision:** Reschedule the vote after allowing ample time to reconsider all sides of the issue or proposed decision. In some cases, alliances may form within the team during this down time and facilitate agreement.

- **Assess the level of trust among team members:** Oftentimes, lack of trust underscores the failure to reach agreement. It may be that the issue or proposed decision is set aside while the team addresses issues of trust. Specifically, team members must trust that the collective team's wisdom is greater than any one individual's.

- **Assess whether there are any hidden or unresolved issues:** A team member may have hidden or unresolved issues preventing him or her from supporting the proposal. If so, stop consensus building and address them.

- **Assign the latest draft of the issue or proposed decision to a smaller group within the team:** Have the smaller group bring a modified version back to the team for consideration.

- **Assess the tone of the consensus meeting:** Are members good listeners, solution centered, patient, nonjudgmental, and humble? If not, address these issues before consensus building moves forward.

- **Respect individual members' wishes:** It may be that a team member simply cannot support the proposed decision because it is counter to his or her beliefs or values. In this case, the team could respect the individual member's beliefs or values and support his or her voting "no" or abstaining from the vote.

Results

After participating in this activity, boards should emerge with a greater understanding of the differing moralities and decision-making styles within the group and the ways to counter these in the future.