Skill Building – Group Decision Making

Introduction

Group decision making is a participatory process in which multiple individuals acting collectively, analyze problems or situations, consider and evaluate alternative courses of action, and select from among the alternatives a solution or solutions. The number of people involved in group decision-making varies. Decision-making groups may be relatively informal in nature, or formally designated and charged with a specific goal. The process used to arrive at decisions may be unstructured or structured. The nature and composition of groups, their size, demographic makeup, structure, and purpose, all affect their functioning to some degree.

Effective club leadership encourages group decision-making.

The "WHY"

While group decision-making can be a slow process and may delay action, it takes advantage of the diverse strengths and expertise of its members. By tapping the unique qualities of group members, it is possible that the group can generate a greater number of alternatives that are of higher quality than the individual. If a greater number of higher quality alternatives are generated, then it is likely that the group will eventually reach a superior problem solution than the individual.

Group decision-making may also lead to a greater collective understanding of the eventual course of action chosen, since it is possible that many affected by the decision implementation actually had input into the decision. This may promote a sense of "ownership" of the decision, which is likely to contribute to a greater acceptance of the course of action selected and greater commitment on the part of the affected individuals to make the course of action successful.

GROUP DECISION MAKING METHODS

There are many methods or procedures that can be used by groups. Each is designed to improve the decision-making process in some way. Some of the more common group decision-making methods are brainstorming, dialetical inquiry, nominal group technique, and the delphi technique.

BRAINSTORMING

Brainstorming involves group members verbally suggesting ideas or alternative courses of action. The "brainstorming session" is usually relatively unstructured. The situation at hand is described in as much detail as necessary so that group members have a complete understanding of the issue or problem. The group leader or facilitator then solicits ideas from all members of the group. Usually, the group leader or facilitator will record the ideas

presented on a flip chart or marker board.

Once the ideas of the group members have been exhausted, the group members then begin the process of evaluating the different suggestions presented. Brainstorming is a useful means by which to generate alternatives, but does not offer much in the way of process for the evaluation of alternatives or the selection of a proposed course of action.

One of the difficulties with brainstorming is that some individuals are hesitant to propose ideas because they fear the judgment or ridicule of other group members. In recent years, some clubs have utilized electronic brainstorming, which allows group members to propose alternatives forums, google documents or tools like Stormboard. Members could conceivably offer their ideas anonymously, which should increase the likelihood that individuals will offer unique and creative ideas without fear of the harsh judgment of others.

DIALETICAL INQUIRY

Dialetical inquiry is a group decision-making technique that focuses on ensuring full consideration of alternatives. Essentially, it involves dividing the group into opposing sides, which debate the advantages and disadvantages of proposed solutions or decisions. Devil's advocacy, requires that one member of the group highlight the potential problems with a proposed decision. Both of these techniques are designed to try and make sure that the group considers all possible ramifications of its decision.

NOMINAL GROUP TECHNIQUE

The nominal group technique is a structured decision making process in which group members are required to compose a comprehensive list of their ideas or proposed alternatives in writing. The group members usually record their ideas privately. Once finished, each group member is asked, in turn, to provide one item from their list until all ideas or alternatives have been publicly recorded on a flip chart or marker board. Once all proposals are listed publicly, the group discusses of the list and ranks items in order of preference.

Research conducted on group decision-making offers some evidence that the nominal group technique succeeds in identify a greater number of high quality ideas.

DELPHI TECHNIQUE

The Delphi technique is used when the individuals are in different physical locations. The technique was developed at the Rand Corporation. The individuals asked to propose ideas are selected because of the specific knowledge or expertise of the problem they possess. Those selected are asked to independently provide ideas, input, and/or alternative solutions to the decision problem in successive stages. These inputs may be provided in a variety of ways, such as e-mail, messages, or online in a discussion room. After each stage in the process, other group members ask questions and alternatives are ranked or rated in some fashion.

Diversity in decision-making

      A considerable amount of research has focused on diversity's effect on the effectiveness of group decision-making. In general, this research suggests that demographic diversity can sometimes have positive or negative effects, depending on the specific situation. Demographically diverse groups often have to over-come social barriers and difficulties before brainstorming can be effective. However, some research indicates that diverse groups, if effectively lead, tend to generate a wider variety and higher quality of decision alternatives than demographically homogeneous groups.