

TOOLKIT

STRENGTHENING OUR DECISION-MAKING CONVERSATIONS

WEAKNESSES IN DELIBERATIVE GROUPS	HOW TO FIX THEM
Homogeneous group may come to decisions too quickly, settle early on one most-likely scenario & not bother questioning their assumptions, quite sure they are right because everyone agrees.	Try to get as much diversity into your group as possible. Diverse groups more likely to come to the right conclusion but are often less sure about it.
Tendency to fall into conversational ruts. People tend to discuss the information they have in common.	Look for the special, outsider point of view, the hidden expertise in the room; Assign roles as experts (how might we do this at church?)
Attacking every problem from the same perspective, using the same lens (libertarianism, global warming, communism, , guilt, etc.). Leads people to feel certain when they're being stupid.	Draw on a variety of analytical tools – whatever fits; gather information from different kinds of sources; be a Jack of All Trades – makes you less certain, but more likely to find the truth.
Everyone together in one room. Open discussion gives too much weight to those who speak early and assertively, causing others to line up behind them. Alternative views fade away.	Ask for written answers <u>before</u> discussion. OR, start by gathering opinions around the circle one by one. OR, divide people into small groups where each group has different expertise.
Groups feel a gravitational pull toward the initial framing of the decision. Some leaders use careful framing to cut off exploration or dissent.	Ask a “How” question that has many possible answers rather than a “THIS THING, yes or no” question.
“Whether or not” decisions (having only one proposed option) may lead to lingering doubts.	Imagine a world in which that path is roadblocked. Opens mind to other solutions.
Rejection of extremist positions. Most significant social change first looks like an extremist position (example: woman suffrage)	Brainstorming rules – don't allow negative responses when trying to imagine new options; Use “Yes, AND”
People worried about their own status – these folks immediately criticize other people's ideas in an effort to show they are smarter than everyone else.	When a new idea is proposed, explore it for at least 5 minutes before negatives are permitted, except for “Yes, AND” to offer an improvement to the proposal on the table.
Confirmation bias – tendency to focus on the evidence that confirms your own plan or expectations.	Do a “Pre-Mortem.” That means imagine a future in which “the patient has died” (i.e., your plan failed). Then explain what led to that outcome.
Paying too little attention to the knowable unknowns: People underestimate variables they know are there but don't understand very well.	When you realize there's something you don't know, you have identified what to explore and test; it may be the key to a different solution.
Unknowns that you can't research (classic example is enemy plans in war)	“War games”/role playing/devil's advocate - one or two people imagine being in adversary's shoes and play against you, saying what they would do
Fallacy of extrapolation – that an identified trend will always continue in the same manner	List factors, however unlikely, that could interrupt the trend. Read N. Taleb's <i>Black Swan</i>
Failure to imagine the down-stream consequences of your decision.	Create three scenarios: one where things get better, one where they get worse, one where they get weird.