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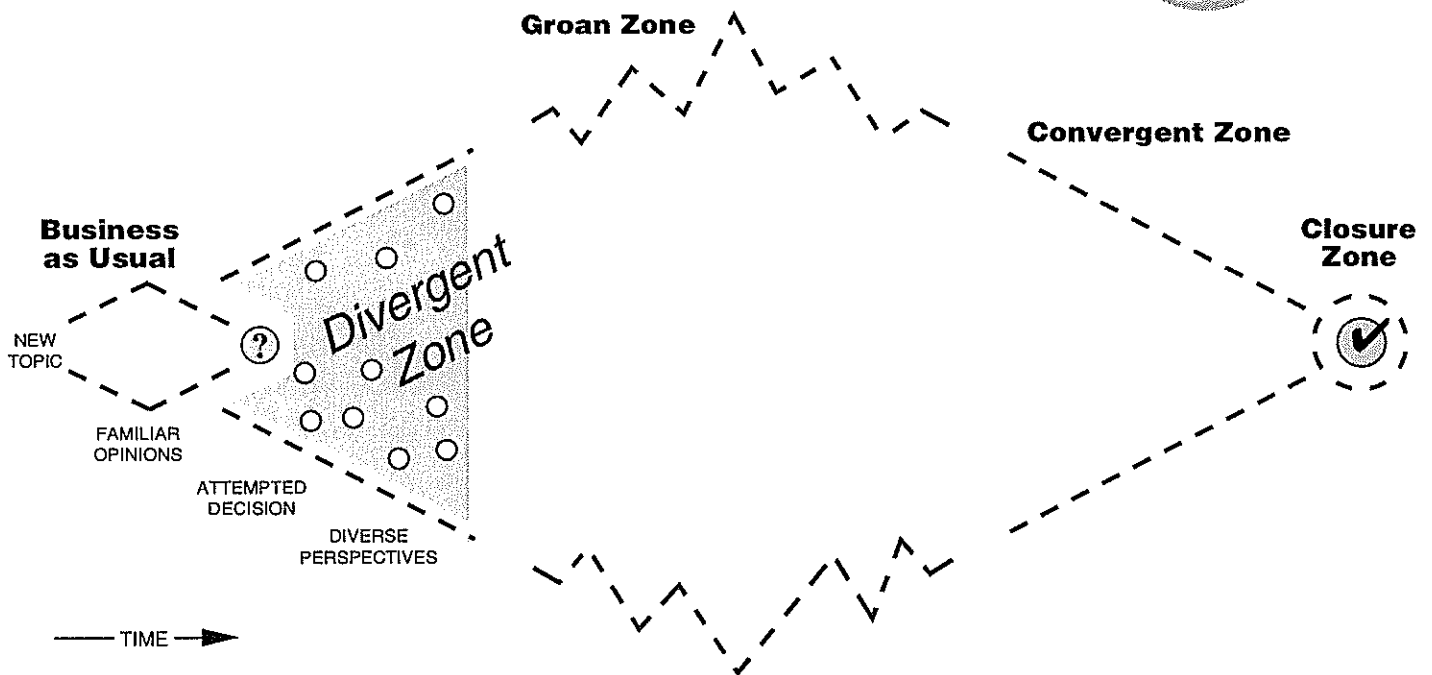
GATHERING DIVERSE POINTS OF VIEW

PRINCIPLES AND TOOLS THAT
PROMOTE FREE EXPRESSION

- ◆ Introduction to the Divergent Zone
- ◆ Six Tools for Surveying the Territory
- ◆ Six Tools for Generating Alternatives
- ◆ Three Tools for Raising Difficult Issues
- ◆ Summary

GATHERING DIVERSE POINTS OF VIEW

INTRODUCTION



The facilitator's main task in the Divergent Zone is to create opportunities for everyone to express their views on the topic at hand. At this phase of the discussion, the facilitator does not even try to resolve disagreements. S/he honors everything everyone says and refrains from asking anyone to revise or reconsider their opinions.

Structured thinking activities like the ones presented in this chapter can be very helpful in the Divergent Zone. Structure serves as a container – it can allow members to express a wide range of opinions without fearing that their diversity will overwhelm the group's resources. People sense this, and they feel relief at the thought that the process is "under control." For this reason, many groups are pleased to be given an opportunity to do structured thinking in the Divergent Zone. Facilitators can offer their suggestions with confidence that they will usually be well received.

GATHERING DIVERSE POINTS OF VIEW

THREE TYPES OF THINKING IN THE DIVERGENT ZONE

Whenever a group is engaged in divergent thinking, the members are *increasing the diversity* of the material they can work with. Divergent thinking expands the range of the ideas that can be discussed further. This principle holds true whether group members are engaged in a boisterous round of brainstorming or whether they are nervously sharing their individual reactions to a painful controversy. In either case, their activity will result in the emergence of a greater diversity of perspectives. This is the defining property of the Divergent Zone.

Nonetheless, not all divergent thinking is the same. There are different *types* of divergent thinking, and each has its own characteristics. The three most common types are: *Surveying The Territory*; *Searching For Alternatives*; and *Raising Difficult Issues*.

Type 1: Surveying the Territory

Surveying the Territory involves identifying the components of the problem under discussion. For example, suppose a group is facing a contentious dispute. If every group member takes a turn stating his or her position, everyone will get an initial impression of the complexity of the conflict. The essence of this type of divergent thinking is *collecting perspectives*.

Type 2: Searching for Alternatives

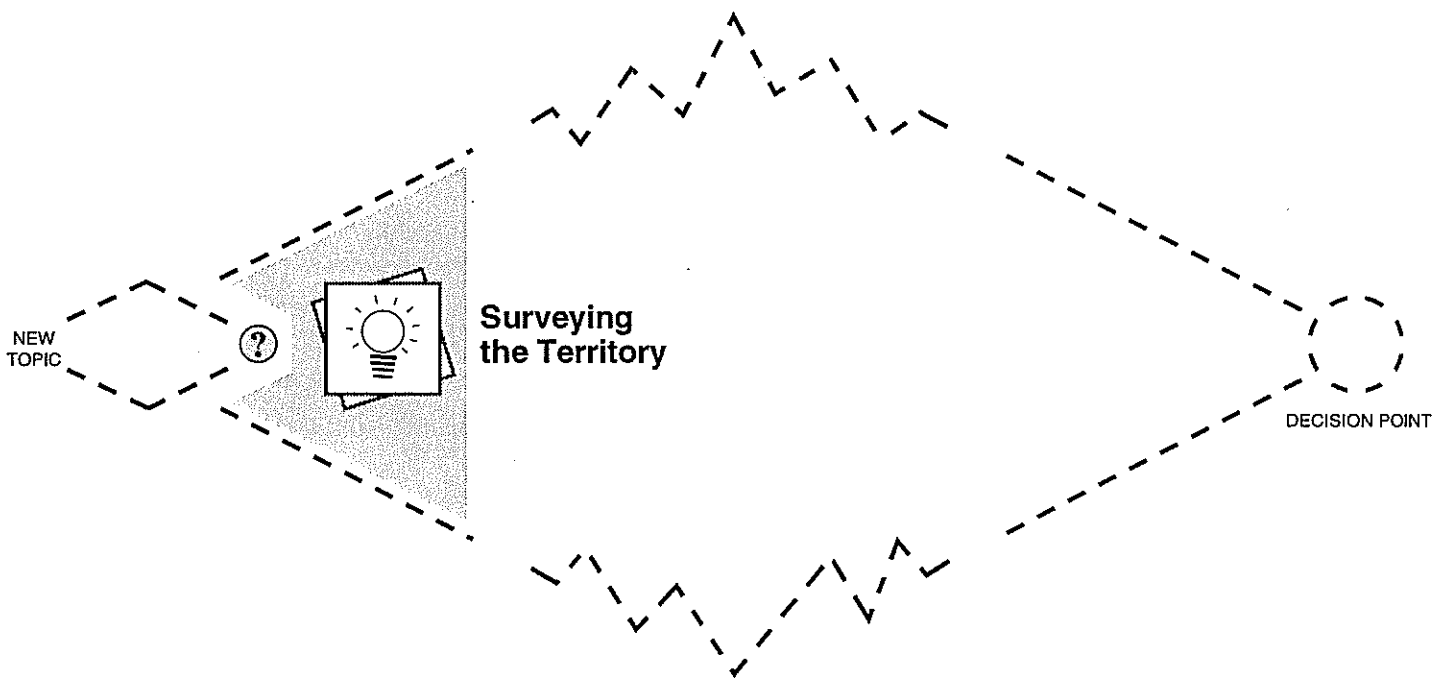
Searching for Alternatives refers to the creative activity of listing unusual, innovative ideas. Some ideas on the list will prove to be realistic, many will not. The essence of this type of divergent thinking is *generating*.

Type 3: Raising Difficult Issues

Raising Difficult Issues involves the discussion of a troubling – often threatening – subject. Some groups treat the members who raise difficult issues as troublemakers; deviations from the party line are squelched. But other groups make an effort to respond to someone who raises a difficult issue by sharing the risk and encouraging everyone to disclose his/her own individual perspective. The ensuing discussion usually turns out to be quite meaningful. The essence of this type of divergent thinking is *speaking freely*.

SURVEYING THE TERRITORY

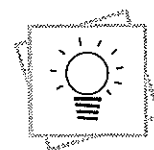
DIVERGENT ZONE THINKING ACTIVITY TYPE 1



Surveying the Territory involves identifying the components of the problem under discussion. The basic question on people's minds is something like, "How complex *is* this problem?" or "What are we dealing with here?"

The simplest way to help a group survey the territory is by suggesting a go-around. This gives people a chance to hear every member's perspective. While the go-around is in progress, many members will subconsciously be asking themselves questions like these: "Is there a majority view on the issue or is the group splintered into many different factions? Does the person-in-charge (if there is one) have much support for his/her position?" By the time the go-around ends, group members have acquired a reasonably good picture of the scope of the problem they're dealing with.

Sometimes a simple go-around will not provide the group with enough direction. For example, one group might need to find out whether there are different goals in the room; another group might need to find out whether the right people are in the room. This is a perfect opportunity for you, as facilitator, to suggest a structured thinking activity.



SURVEYING THE TERRITORY

**SPEAK FROM
YOUR OWN PERSPECTIVE****WHY**

This is a basic, straightforward activity which encourages participants to offer their own points of view on the topic at hand.

The purpose of this activity is to enable members to quickly gain a picture of the breadth of the group's thinking. By seeing all the parts, the group gains a sense of the whole.

Another purpose of the activity is to legitimize and validate every perspective. By allowing the group to hear each person's contribution, this activity sends the message, "everyone has something to offer."

HOW

1. Pose an open-ended question such as:
 - How would you describe what's going on?
 - How does this problem impact you?
 - What is your position on this matter?
 - Why, in your opinion, is this happening?
2. Ask each person to answer the question without commenting on each other's ideas.
3. Close the activity by asking participants for their reactions, general comments and learnings.
4. Optional Step:
When everyone has had a chance to express their views, ask,
"Is there anyone absent today who might have a significantly different perspective? What might that person tell us?"

SURVEYING THE TERRITORY

SPECIFYING REQUIREMENTS**WHY**

When tackling a difficult problem, different stakeholders bring different requirements to the table. To be sustainable, the eventual solution must take into account every stakeholder's requirements. For example, an appliance manufacturing company held a product-design meeting to discuss the development of a new, low energy light bulb. The purchasing department wanted the bulb to be built from parts and materials that were readily available. The marketing department insisted that the shape of the bulb had to fit in standardized packaging. The engineering department wanted precise timetables from research and development so they would know how to schedule their staff. And the company president wanted assurance that the new product would be a saleable commodity.

For groups like these, the challenge is to take stock of *all* requirements before getting bogged down in specifics. This activity helps a group to gain a preliminary understanding of everyone's condition for success.

HOW

1. Hang two sheets of chart paper, titled "Requirements and Necessary Conditions" and "Topics for Further Discussion."
2. Break the group into pairs. Ask each member to describe his/her own requirements and necessary conditions.
3. Reconvene the large group. Give each person three minutes to state his/her requirements and five minutes to answer questions. Record each requirement on the chart paper. Questions that would require further discussion are also recorded.
4. After repeating Step 3 for each person, have the group examine the lists and decide how to organize the subsequent discussion.

SURVEYING THE TERRITORY

WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE AND HOW?**WHY**

When solving problems in groups, people come to the table with *very different questions* based on their individual perspectives. Since everyone wants their own questions answered, they often have trouble recognizing that many, many questions – not just their own – need to be answered. This element of divergent thinking is one of the most difficult aspects of group decision-making.

At a recent meeting, for example, one person who was mystified by the budgeting process requested clarifications and explanations repeatedly. Another asked several questions about the reasons why certain people had been invited to the meeting while others had not. A third person appeared to understand everything but one little detail, about which he kept asking questions. Each could barely see that others were struggling with completely different questions.

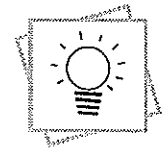
This activity supports a group to get *all the questions out* so people can see the whole range before they get hooked on any single question.

HOW

1. Hang five sheets of paper titled respectively, "Who?", "What?", "When?", "Where?", and "How?"
2. Start by naming the general topic. For example, "We're now going to work on the planning for the annual staff retreat."
3. On the "Who?" page, brainstorm a list of questions that begin with "Who?" For example, "Who will set the agenda?" "Who knows someone who can rent us a conference room?" "Who should be invited?" "Who said we can't spend more than \$500?"
4. Repeat Step 3 for each of the other sheets.
5. When all five lists are complete, identify the easy questions and answer them. Then make a plan to answer the rest.

This tool was inspired by an exercise called "Five W's and H", in *Techniques of Structured Problem Solving*, 2nd ed., A. B. VanGundy, Jr., New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1988, p. 46.

SURVEYING THE TERRITORY

FACTS AND OPINIONS**WHY**

This activity enables a group to trade a lot of information without getting bogged down in a discussion of who is right or what is true.

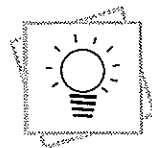
For example, suppose a group needed to begin thinking about next year's budget. The Facts and Opinions tool would help them to generate numerical statistics ("last year we spent \$4,000 on legal fees") and speculation ("we might want to initiate two new lawsuits next year") both within a short period of time.

Note that in this example, Facts and Opinions postpones the debate over the budget. Instead, the thrust of the exercise is to gather a lot of material on many different subjects. Once group members see the big picture, they can decide which topics to discuss and in what order.

HOW

1. To prepare for this activity, hang two large pieces of paper on a wall. Title one "Facts" and the other "Opinions." Also, make available sticky-notes in two colors, with enough for every member to receive at least ten of each color.
2. Ask the group members, "What do you know about this topic?" Have each group member write his/her answers on the sticky-notes, using one color for "Facts" and the other color for "Opinions." Note: When someone asks, "How do we know whether something is a fact or an opinion?" answer, "You decide for yourself. If you're not sure, write it both ways."
3. When a person is finished writing, s/he should post his/her sticky-notes on the wall. After reading what others have written, s/he will probably want to add more items. If so, great!
4. After all data has been collected, ask the group for their observations and reflections.

SURVEYING THE TERRITORY

STARTING POSITIONS**WHY**

This activity is perfect for helping people deal with a contentious issue – especially when their conflict is fueled by a wide range of opposing perspectives.

When people are brought together to resolve a dispute, many participants arrive with strong opinions and well-rehearsed arguments. They need to be given a chance to express their opinions fully, so they can let everyone else see where they stand.

When people aren't able to speak without being interrupted or discounted, it is predictable that they will insert their positions into the discussion at every opportunity. Conversely, when people *are* supported to state their positions fully, they frequently become more able to listen to one another. This often leads to better mutual understanding, which is a precondition for finding creative solutions to difficult problems.

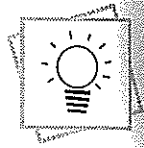
HOW

1. Introduce the activity by indicating that there may be several diverse perspectives in the room. Encourage everyone to give each other the time and the attention to express their views.
2. Using a go-around format, ask each speaker to take a turn answering the following questions from his/her individual perspective:
 - a) What is the problem and what solution is s/he advocating?
 - b) What are his/her reasons for taking this particular position?

Note: This step is often done by having each speaker come up to the front of the room and present his/her ideas standing up.

3. When each person has had a turn, ask the group for observations and reflections.

SURVEYING THE TERRITORY

UNREPRESENTED PERSPECTIVES**WHY**

People in a group often share so many assumptions in common that they may not recognize their own blind spots. For example, urban-based environmentalists in the 1980s were notorious for developing rural conservation plans that were not supported locally by the loggers or miners whose livelihoods were being threatened. Such plans almost invariably proved to be unworkable because they had been designed without adequate understanding of the needs and goals of the working people in the affected communities.

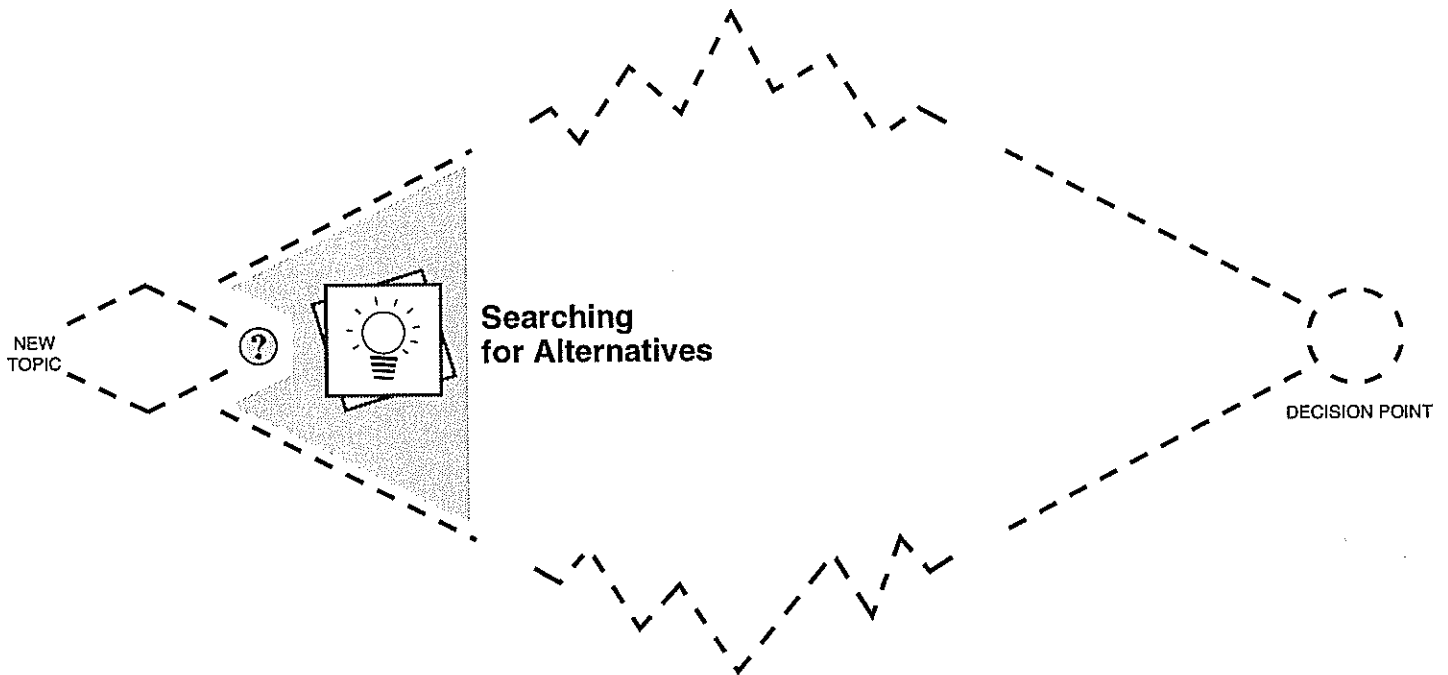
This activity assists a group to determine whether there are any stakeholders whose perspective should be represented more effectively at future meetings.

HOW

1. List every group of stakeholders that might be affected by this problem. Don't forget to include less-than-obvious stakeholders. For example, does your issue affect trainees? Suppliers? Neighbors? The families of your employees?
2. One by one, go down the list considering each group in the following way: "How does the situation at hand affect this stakeholder group?" Example: "How does our project expansion for next year affect our trainees?"
3. When the list is complete ask, "Has anyone spotted a problem that wasn't previously identified?" and "Is there someone missing from these meetings who should be included from now on?"

SEARCHING FOR ALTERNATIVES

DIVERGENT ZONE THINKING ACTIVITY TYPE 2

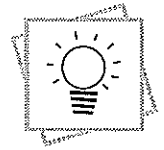


Searching for Alternatives involves generating lists of creative ideas for the purpose of discovering new ways of approaching the problem at hand.

The most straightforward way to help a group search for alternatives is by leading them through a brainstorming session. To do this, begin by asking the group to state the question they want their brainstorm to answer. Write that question at the top of a flipchart page, then review the ground rules of brainstorming, and begin. Have someone else do the chartwriting if possible. Then you can focus on using your facilitative listening skills – *mirroring*, *paraphrasing* and *gathering ideas*.

Often a brainstorming session will produce exactly what is needed: some new rough ideas that are worth further discussion. But there are times when people are so stuck in their fixed positions, that not even brainstorming can help them break free of their rigid mental models. Many structured creative-thinking activities are available to help you deal effectively with this exact situation. Using a structured thinking activity may provide the group with the added stimulation or provocation it needs. A sampling of these activities are presented on the next pages.

SEARCHING FOR ALTERNATIVES

BRAINSTORMING VARIATIONS**THE TRIGGER METHOD**

1. Have the group formulate a statement of the problem.
2. Have everyone silently write their questions and/or solutions on sheets of paper for five minutes.
3. Ask someone to read his/her ideas to the group.
4. Have the group discuss these ideas for ten minutes, with the goal of generating variations or totally new ideas. Suspend judgment for this ten-minute period.
5. Repeat steps 3 and 4 for each member.
6. When everyone has had a turn, have the group select the most promising ideas for further analysis.

Source: *Techniques of Structured Problem Solving*, A.B. VanGundy, New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1988.

BRAINWRITING

1. Seat members around a table.
2. Have someone state the problem to be solved.
3. Ask each person to silently write down four ideas for solving the problem on one sheet of paper.
4. Explain to group members that as soon as anyone has listed four ideas, s/he should exchange that page with someone else.
5. When someone has obtained a new sheet of paper, s/he should add one or two more ideas to it. Then trade this page for another.
6. Repeat for fifteen minutes, or until most people run out of ideas.
7. Compare notes and discuss.

Source: *Brainwriting Pool*, in *Chemical Engineering*, H. Geschka, G.R. Schaude, and H. Schlicksupp, August 1973.

SEARCHING FOR ALTERNATIVES

CREATIVE THINKING ACTIVITIES**ROLESTORMING**

1. Have everyone select a character. It can be a great leader, a fictional character, a typical customer – anyone who is not in the room.
2. Review the ground rules for brainstorming.
3. Begin brainstorming solutions to the problem at hand. Half the members should participate from the perspective of their imaginary character, while the other half participate as themselves.
4. After a few minutes, switch roles. Thus, the former role-players are now themselves, and vice versa.
5. Debrief. Discuss any insights obtained.

Source: *A Storm of Ideas, in Training*, 22:56, R.E. Griggs, December, 1985.

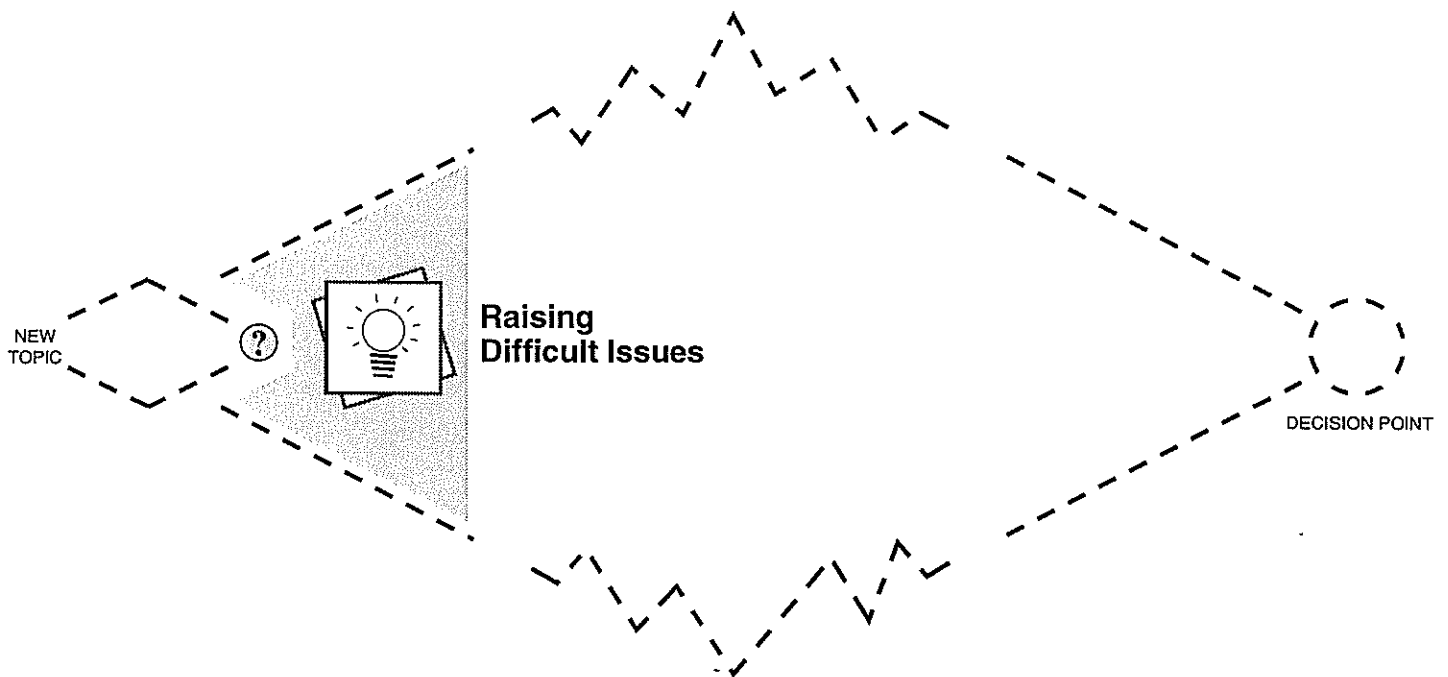
ANALOGIES

1. Have the group generate a list of situations, or actions which are unrelated to the problem at hand, but which are analogous in some way. Example: suppose a group's goal is to increase its funding. The group may generate a list of *other types of growth* – plant growth, growth of a city, etc.
2. Instruct participants to forget the original problem for now. Instead, have them select one of the analogies and describe it in detail. List functions, parts, uses. *Focus on action phrases.*
3. Now encourage the group to consider each analogy in light of the original problem. Example: are any new ideas for fundraising suggested by thinking about a plant's seasonal cycles? Its root structure? Its reproduction by seeds?

Source: *Lateral Thinking*, E. de Bono, New York: Harper and Row, 1970.

RAISING DIFFICULT ISSUES

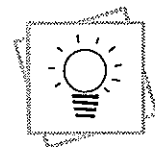
DIVERGENT ZONE THINKING ACTIVITY TYPE 3



Raising Difficult Issues refers to the discussion of risky subjects – issues that are hard to raise. They are seldom placed on an agenda per se; rather, they surface in the cracks of a related discussion. Someone might say, “Can we talk about what is *really* causing this problem?” Then s/he names the unspeakable issue – the ongoing feud between key parties, the poor decision that no one wants to revisit, or whatever. When this happens, other members *might* participate in exploring this observation – but often they do no such thing! People frequently become anxious and change the subject or withdraw. This places the person who *did* speak up in a tough position – as though s/he were the only one who felt his/her points were relevant.

The following activities provide an alternative. Rather than treat this situation as a dilemma that occurs *after* one person takes a risk, each activity offers participants the opportunity to share the load of *surfacing* difficult issues. Each activity offers a structured, low-pressure forum in which members can speak more freely and explore the difficult topics that might be on their minds.

RAISING DIFFICULT ISSUES

**IS THERE ANYTHING I'M NOT SAYING?****WHY**

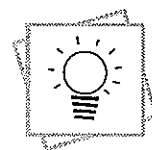
People refrain from saying what they're really thinking for a wide variety of reasons. Sometimes they hold back because the risk is too great. But people also keep quiet because they aren't sure whether their ideas are worth saying; or because they can't turn the kernels of their ideas into fully formed presentations. In other words, there are many occasions when group members – if they were given a little support, a little permission, a little nudge – might go ahead and say what's on their mind. Yet without that support, they often stay quiet.

This activity helps group members take a look at the thoughts they've been having (but not speaking) during a discussion. It also gives members an opportunity to reflect on whether or not the group would be served if they opened up and shared their perspectives.

HOW

1. Describe this activity. Explain why people can benefit from structured activities that give them permission to speak up. Obtain agreement from the group to proceed.
2. Have the group break into pairs. Ask each partner to answer this question: "During this discussion have I had any thoughts I haven't said aloud?" Assure people that no one is required to say anything they don't want to say.
3. Next ask everyone (still in pairs) to answer this question: "Would the group benefit from hearing your partner's thinking?"
4. Return to the large group. Ask for volunteers to share any of their own thoughts that might be useful for others to hear.

RAISING DIFFICULT ISSUES

HOW HAS THIS AFFECTED ME?**WHY**

This activity supports people to react to a problem on a personal level by giving people permission to express their fears, confusions, hurts or resentments openly. The activity helps people become more aware of what they're feeling so they can discuss the situation in more depth.

Also, this activity enables people to step back from their own individual perspective and see a bigger picture. It is frequently surprising and highly informative for them to hear what other people are feeling.

HOW

1. Ask people to reflect on the following questions:
 - a) "How do I feel about this situation?"
 - b) "How has it affected me so far?"
2. Ask each person to take a turn sharing his/her reflections and feelings with the whole group. A go-around format works best for this activity because it discourages back-and-forth discussion.
3. When everyone has spoken, ask the whole group, "Now that you have heard from everyone else, what reactions are you having?"
4. If responses indicate that this activity has surfaced a lot of emotion, encourage the group to do a second go-around. Say something like, "Use this time to let the rest of us know whatever is on your mind."
5. End by summarizing the main themes. Validating everyone's self-disclosure helps provide people with a temporary sense of completion, even when the source-problems remain obviously unresolved.

RAISING DIFFICULT ISSUES

THREE COMPLAINTS**WHY**

Giving people the opportunity to complain about their situation has two powerful results. When people have a chance to say things that are normally not acceptable, often very useful information is revealed about a situation that would otherwise remain hidden.

Also, when people have a chance to vent their negative feelings instead of stewing in them, they are more able to move forward on a task.

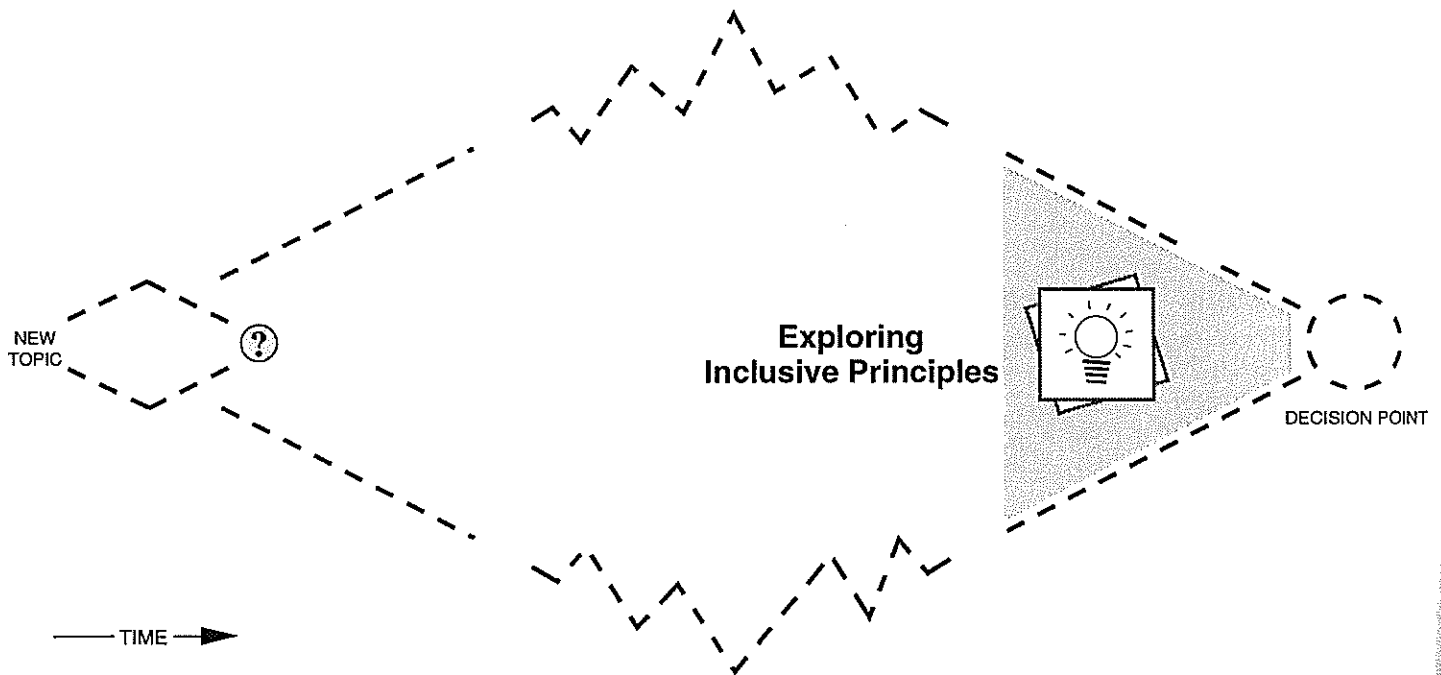
After an activity like Three Complaints, it is common for people to make significant progress on the topic under discussion.

HOW

1. Give the group an overview of the upcoming steps. Then have each individual write on a separate slip of paper three complaints about the situation under discussion.
2. Have everyone throw the slips of paper into a hat.
3. Pull out one note, read it aloud, and ask for comments. The author may or may not wish to identify him/herself.
4. After three or four comments, pull out another complaint and repeat the process.
5. After ten or fifteen minutes, ask the group how much longer they would like this activity to continue.
6. When time runs out, ask people to close by saying what the experience was like for them.

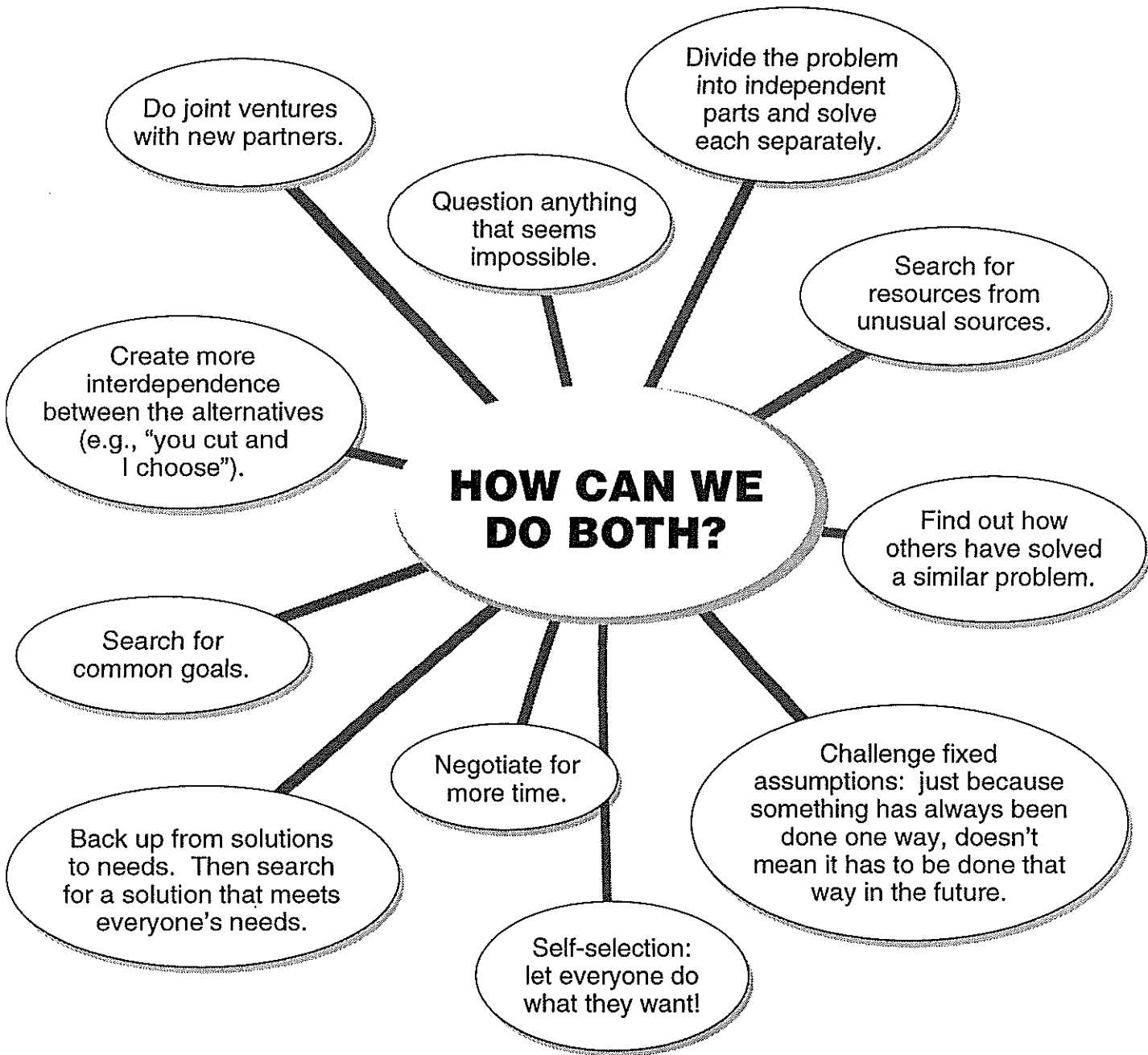
EXPLORING INCLUSIVE PRINCIPLES

CONVERGENT ZONE THINKING ACTIVITY TYPE 1



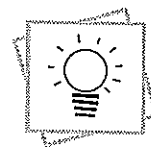
Inclusive, nonadversarial, problem solving principles – like those listed on the next page – are often at the heart of sustainable agreements. For example, consider the case of the Mendocino County timber tax committee (see Chapter 12). After years of disagreement over the rate of logging, they found an inclusive solution when they realized that a change in the tax code would benefit everyone. Thus they switched from taxing *standing trees* – a method they had used for forty years – to taxing *cut trees*. Underlying this change was a creative problem solving principle: *challenge fixed assumptions – just because something has always been done one way doesn't mean it has to be done that way in the future.*

A facilitator can encourage group members to identify and discuss inclusive principles that might apply to their current situation. This will foster creative thinking. For example, you might show a group the Mendocino case, discuss it and then ask, “What are *our* group's fixed assumptions? Are there any *we* can challenge?” As this example shows, real-life cases are an excellent vehicle for helping groups explore inclusive principles. Several more case studies are presented in the following pages.



These problem-solving principles help people synthesize seemingly opposing alternatives into an integrated solution. Note that none of these require group members to use adversarial methods to resolve their differences; *they all lead to solutions that work for everyone.*

EXPLORING INCLUSIVE PRINCIPLES

USING CASE STUDIES**WHY**

The next six pages present capsule summaries of inclusive solutions to difficult real-life problems. Each case demonstrates the use of an *inclusive principle* – that is, a problem solving principle that enables participants to develop a creative solution that takes everyone's interests into account.

Left to their own inclinations, few groups make the effort to keep looking for fresh ideas. Thus the facilitator has a key role in motivating people to search for inclusive solutions. But this creates a challenge. Some facilitators offer their groups potential solutions, but many groups don't respond well to facilitators who attempt to "join the group." There is a surprisingly high likelihood that a group will reject a facilitator's solution without even considering its merits.

Fortunately, there are alternatives. One particularly useful method is to present real-life examples of inclusive solutions to difficult problems, and encourage discussion. For many people, discussing a case study is more effective than listening to a lecture. This approach preserves the facilitator's neutrality even as it inspires group members to keep working toward sustainable agreements. Accordingly, the following examples have been designed to be used as tools that can stimulate discussion.

HOW

1. Photocopy and distribute some or all of the following case studies.
2. Ask everyone to read one or two cases.
3. Have everyone find a partner and discuss their case studies. Ask, "What reactions are you having to what you just read?"
4. After five minutes, reconvene the large group and ask, "Has anyone found a principle that might shed new light on *our* situation?" Allow ample time for discussion.



EXPLORING INCLUSIVE PRINCIPLES

**CASE STUDY:
BREAKING WITH TRADITION****PROBLEM**

At San Jose National Bank, many of the employees were women. One year, ten percent of the staff became pregnant. A high rate of maternity leave would clearly have caused a serious drop in productivity. Management pondered the options. Should maternity leave be limited? Should some of the employees be laid off? The expectant mothers recognized that the bank could suffer, but they also felt it was important to be with their babies during their first months of life. Each group understood the other's point of view, but no one felt able to change positions.

SOLUTION

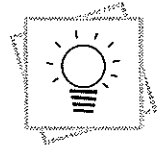
Mothers were allowed to bring their infants to the office and keep them by their desks. They stayed at work the whole day and tended to their infants' needs as necessary. Their pay was slightly reduced to reflect the actual hours they worked. When the infants became toddlers, they were placed at a nearby day care center sponsored by the bank.

APPLICATION

The solution to this problem was to break with the tradition that parents must choose between working and being with their children. Here, the bank's needs (getting the work done) and the mothers' needs (staying with their infants) were combined. In your situation, is there a tradition that locks you into an either/or position? What are the needs of each "side"? Is there a solution that incorporates all those needs?

Source: *West Magazine*, San Jose Mercury News, March 6, 1994.

EXPLORING INCLUSIVE PRINCIPLES

**CASE STUDY: YOU CUT AND I CHOOSE****PROBLEM**

Representatives from many nations met to develop international policies regarding the mining of oceanic resources. One problem they addressed was how to best allocate underwater mining sites. The Enterprise, a U.N. organization representing poorer countries, charged that rich countries had an unfair advantage. They feared that private companies from wealthy countries could identify the superior mining sites because they had better radar and mining equipment and superior expertise. With this knowledge, the rich countries could propose an unequal allocation of mining resources, and the poorer countries would have no way to evaluate the fairness of the allocation.

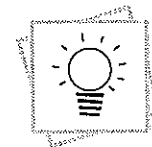
SOLUTION

The representatives decided to ask a private company to identify two mining sites of equal value, using its sophisticated equipment and expertise. The Enterprise would then choose one of the sites for the poorer countries to mine. The private company would get the other one. In this way, the private companies would have an incentive to identify two sites of equal value, thus giving poorer nations the benefit of their expertise.

APPLICATION

Does your situation involve competition for a fixed resource? If so, how might you create more interdependence among the competitors? In other words, what could be done to tie the success of the more powerful party to the success of the less powerful party? What incentives might induce the more powerful party to participate?

Source: *Getting to Yes*, R. Fisher and W. Ury, New York: Penguin Books, 1983. p. 58.



EXPLORING INCLUSIVE PRINCIPLES

**CASE STUDY:
DISCOVERING COMMON GROUND****PROBLEM**

A suburb of a large city was becoming more and more racially diverse. Residents formed a community council to preserve the neighborhood's character while simultaneously promoting racial integration. The council suspected that financial institutions were cutting back on their investment in the neighborhood because of the demographic changes. After investigating several local lending institutions, the council found evidence that lenders were indeed using discriminatory tactics. The council demanded more investment in its neighborhood, and it threatened to boycott the lenders. The lenders denied the charges and refused to cooperate with further monitoring.

SOLUTION

At first the two sides locked horns and argued over who was to blame for the disinvestment. Their breakthrough came when they realized they all shared a common concern: preserving the neighborhood. Together they founded a local development corporation that promoted commercial revitalization, and they created a foreclosure rehabilitation program for which the lenders raised funds.

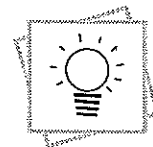
APPLICATION

Focusing on shared concerns and developing a shared vision helped these groups move from blaming each other for the current situation to taking effective action.

In your situation, are you affixing blame rather than recognizing mutual interest? Perhaps you can identify a shared problem, a shared goal or another source of common ground.

Source: *Collaborating*, B. Gray, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1989. p. 95.

EXPLORING INCLUSIVE PRINCIPLES

**CASE STUDY: INCLUDING THE
"TROUBLEMAKERS" IN THE SOLUTION****PROBLEM**

A community had a problem with its high school youth, whose public behavior was becoming increasingly unruly, especially at night. The city administration decided to increase police patrols and impose a curfew upon the youth in the neighborhood. Community members rejected this decision. They felt that the curfew would restrict everyone's freedom, and the increased police presence would probably *increase* violence in the neighborhood.

SOLUTION

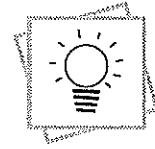
Neighborhood residents met and discussed ideas for solving this problem. They decided that a midnight basketball program would provide the youths with an alternative to hanging out and getting in trouble. The community members saw this as a way to improve neighborhood safety without requiring outside intervention. The city administrators were pleased because the program would help keep youth off the streets at night.

APPLICATION

The neighborhood residents' solution supported the youthful tendency to release energy instead of repressing it. In your situation, is there a specific group of "trouble makers" who appear to be causing the problem? Suppose that you disqualify all repressive solutions. What supportive possibilities arise?

Source: Marshall Rosenberg's workshop on *Compassionate Communication*, February 1995, as related by Liz Dittrich to Sam Kaner's *Group Facilitation Skills* class, June 1995.

EXPLORING INCLUSIVE PRINCIPLES

**CASE STUDY: UNUSUAL PARTNERSHIP****PROBLEM**

A small Western city had a multi-million dollar budget surplus. Two groups immediately began vying for the funds. On one side a coalition of women's groups wished to use the money to expand the city's inadequate day-care facilities. On the other side homeowners and the city's fire fighters wanted to upgrade their antiquated fire fighting equipment to protect homes and lower insurance costs.

SOLUTION

A small portion of the money was used to convert the city's old fire stations into day care centers. The new centers were used to attract state and federal matching funds to operate them. The majority of the money was then used to build three new fire stations. The new stations raised the city's "fire rating" from AA to AAA, thus lowering insurance rates and raising property values.

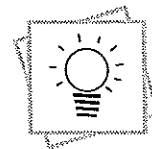
APPLICATION

Initially the two groups were competing for limited resources. When they worked together as partners they were able to identify additional resources.

In your current situation, can your group partner with its competitors? Are there other unusual alliances you could imagine making?

Source: *How to Make Meetings Work*, M. Doyle and D. Straus, New York: Jove Press, 1982, p. 56.

EXPLORING INCLUSIVE PRINCIPLES

**CASE STUDY: LOCATING RESOURCES
TO SUPPORT LONG-TERM STABILITY****PROBLEM**

In a rainforest in New Guinea, the indigenous people were approached by a large lumber corporation. The company offered to pay a lump sum for the right to clear-cut the forest and extract the hardwood trees. The deal sounded fantastic to many members of the impoverished forest tribe; they wanted to sell their only marketable commodity in exchange for money, which they could use to buy things they could not produce themselves. Local environmentalists, however, were alarmed; the forests would be completely and irreplaceably destroyed.

SOLUTION

Environmentalists helped the indigenous people start their own lumber company with a small portable saw mill that could process trees one at a time. The cut lumber was worth significantly more than the company had offered for the trees, so the people did not feel pressured to log more than was appropriate for the health of the forest. The logging company purchased the lumber, which it then resold at a profit overseas.

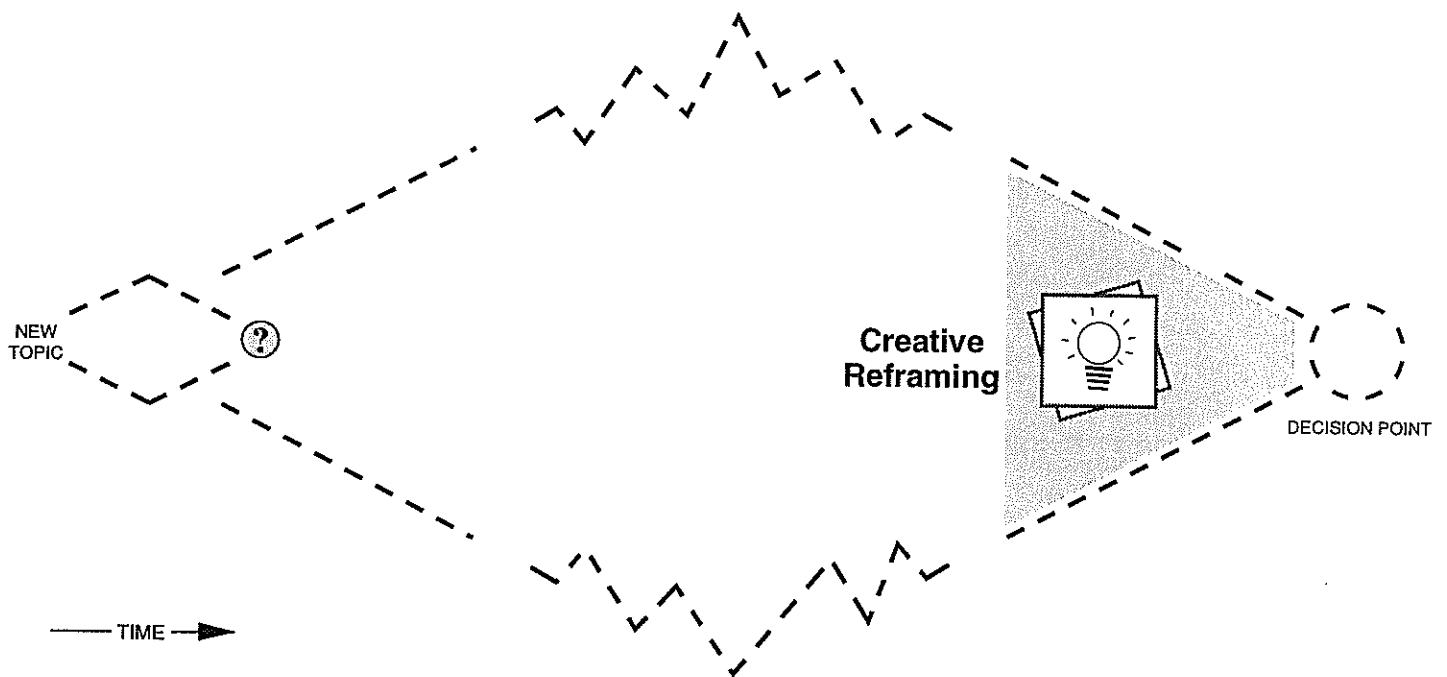
APPLICATION

Once the indigenous people acquired a mill, they were able to look out for their long-term interests. In your situation are you attempting to solve a problem with a one-shot-deal solution? If so, what additional resources might allow you to find a solution that takes into account your needs over time? Where might you obtain those resources?

Source: Told to Sarah Fisk by John Seed, environmentalist and author.

CREATIVE REFRAMING

CONVERGENT ZONE THINKING ACTIVITY TYPE 2



Creative Reframing activities – like those presented on the pages ahead – invite group members to break out of their normal categories of analysis and re-examine their beliefs and assumptions. These activities require participants to make deliberate mental shifts in order to look at a problem from a completely different angle. Making these shifts can lead group members to see choices to which they were blind, just moments before.

Because it is counterintuitive and “unnatural,” creative reframing is a type of thinking that rarely happens spontaneously. Nonetheless a facilitator can also use informal techniques to help participants shift their thinking. For example, you could ask questions like, “Is that the only way to do such-and-such?” or “Suppose such-and-such had never happened; would that change your choice of action?” These are simple questions that can be proposed with relatively little forethought. By comparison the structured thinking activities that follow are more elaborate. Either method works.

TWO WAYS OF LOOKING AT THE SAME PROBLEM

PRESENTING PROBLEM	REFRAMED PROBLEM
It's them.	It's all of us.
It's a problem.	It's an opportunity.
Our goal is unachievable.	We don't have our goal broken into realistic steps.
Our product won't sell.	We're trying to sell our product to the wrong people.
We don't have enough resources.	We are wasting the resources we do have.
We need to gather more input.	We need to pay more attention to the input we're already getting.
Our employees are incompetent.	Our employees don't have enough time to do a quality job.
We don't have enough money.	We haven't figured out how to find new sources of money.
We can't get along with each other.	We haven't made the commitment to work through our feelings toward one another.
We don't have any power in this system.	We haven't found our leverage points in this system.
We don't have enough time to do all of these things.	We have to decide what to do now, and what to do later.

CREATIVE REFRAMING



INTRODUCING REFRAMING TO A GROUP

WHY

Once someone perceives a problem in a particular way s/he may find it difficult to see that problem in any other way. Our minds tend to lock into a pattern of thought. For example, many job recruiters routinely decline to hire a talented applicant because of the applicant's dress or appearance; yet this habit persists even when recruiting for technical positions, when appearance would have no impact on performance.

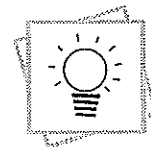
When tackling difficult problems, most people reach conclusions quickly. They believe they have explored every option for a solution and that it would be pointless to waste more time. The idea that it might be possible to reframe a problem – that is, to dramatically alter their understanding of the nature of the problem – is, for most people, a paradigm shift.

Thus, when a facilitator decides to encourage a group to undertake a creative reframing process, s/he often finds that the main challenge is to motivate people to invest the time. This tool is designed to help facilitators overcome that initial wall of resistance.

HOW

1. Hand out copies of the facing page, *Two Ways Of Looking At A Problem*.
2. Ask people to discuss the differences between a presenting problem and a reframed problem. Remember that many people will be thinking about this concept for the first time ever; as part of digesting a new idea they may say things that sound rigid or naive. Expect remarks like, "As far as I'm concerned, this whole idea is ridiculous." Remember to honor all points of view and remain supportive throughout the discussion.
3. After several minutes say, "Now let's apply this theory to our own situation. Could someone please state *our* presenting problem?" Write the presenting problem on a flipchart. Then ask the group to brainstorm a list of *reframes* of the problem. Record all answers on flipcharts.
4. After the brainstorm, encourage members to discuss the implications of their new ideas. Say, "As you look over the list, what are your reactions?"

CREATIVE REFRAMING

**WHAT'S UNCHANGEABLE ABOUT THIS PROBLEM?****WHY**

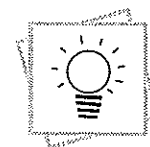
Habits of thought are as hard to break as habits of any other kind. Suppose, for example, that someone thinks his/her boss is afraid of confrontation. That person may find it very difficult to change his/her opinion – even if the boss has actually changed.

Entire groups fall into these habits of thought, too. For example, a management team had to refill a specific staff position five times in less than a year. Yet every time they lost another person, the managers simply recruited someone else for the job and crossed their fingers. Not till the end of the year did they consider re-organizing the department and doing away with that job altogether.

“What’s Unchangeable About This Problem” allows a group to explore hidden assumptions and biases in the way they have defined a problem. Once a group has identified a self-limiting assumption, they often discover a new line of thought that leads to a creative, innovative solution to their problem.

HOW

1. At the top of a flipchart, write “What’s unchangeable about our problem?”
2. List everyone’s answers.
3. Ask the group to look over the list and identify any hidden assumptions biases. Encourage open discussion.
4. Based on these insights, list any aspects of the problem that may be changeable after all.



CREATIVE REFRAMING

KEY WORDS**WHY**

Everyone makes assumptions. People often take it for granted that everyone else is making the same assumptions about such things as the meanings of words, the likelihood that an event will occur, and the motives behind a person's actions – to name just a few. When members are unaware of differences in their assumptions, they may find it very difficult to understand each other's thinking and behavior.

For example, the director of a city agency asked her staff for input on a proposed reorganization. A few people took her request seriously, but many others treated it lightly. This caused turmoil at staff meetings until the explanation was found. Several people had heard a rumor that the director was leaving; they doubted the reorganization would ever occur. The few who worked hard to give input were those who had not heard the rumor. These differences in assumptions were never mentioned, but they influenced everyone's commitment to the task.

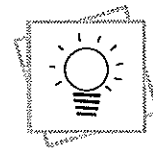
Key Words helps people explore the meaning of the statements they make to one another. By discussing the meanings of key words, people can identify unspoken assumptions that are causing miscommunication.

HOW

1. Have the group compose a problem statement. For example, "New computers are too expensive to purchase." Write it on a flipchart.
2. Ask group members to identify the key words in the statement. Underline all key words. For example "New computers are too expensive to purchase."
3. Have the group identify which word to focus on first. Then ask, "What questions does this word raise?" Record all responses. Then ask, "Does this word suggest any assumptions that can be challenged? For example, is 'purchase' the only way to obtain new computers?"
4. Repeat Step 3 for each key word. Note: Encourage open discussions throughout this activity.

This tool was inspired by an exercise called "Lasso" in *How To Make Meetings Work*, M. Doyle and D. Straus, New York: Jove Books, 1982.

CREATIVE REFRAMING

**TWO REFRAMING ACTIVITIES****REVERSING ASSUMPTIONS**

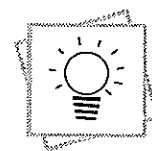
1. Hang a sheet of chart paper titled, "Assumptions About This Problem."
2. Have the group list its beliefs about
 - the causes of the problem
 - the connections between different aspects of the problem.
3. Ask someone to select an item from the list, and reverse it. For example, consider an item like "We are losing our best employees." Reverse this to "We're *keeping* our best employees."
4. Ask, "How could we bring about this new, opposite state of affairs?" Encourage a brainstorm of answers.
5. Choose another assumption and repeat steps 3 and 4. When done, discuss ideas that seem promising.

A version of this activity appears in *ThinkerToys*, M. Michalko, Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press, 1992, p. 45.

REMOVING CONSTRAINTS

1. Have the group generate constraints by asking, "What is keeping us from developing the best solution to this problem?"
2. Upon completing the list, consider each item one at a time, asking, "What if *this* were not a problem? For example, "What if we had plenty of funds available? How would we solve our problem in *that* case?"
3. Treat all answers as a brainstorm. Suspend judgment and discourage discussion at this point.
4. When finished with all items on the list, encourage the group to identify ideas that seem worthy of further discussion.

CREATIVE REFRAMING

TWO MORE REFRAMING ACTIVITIES**RECENTERING THE CAUSE**

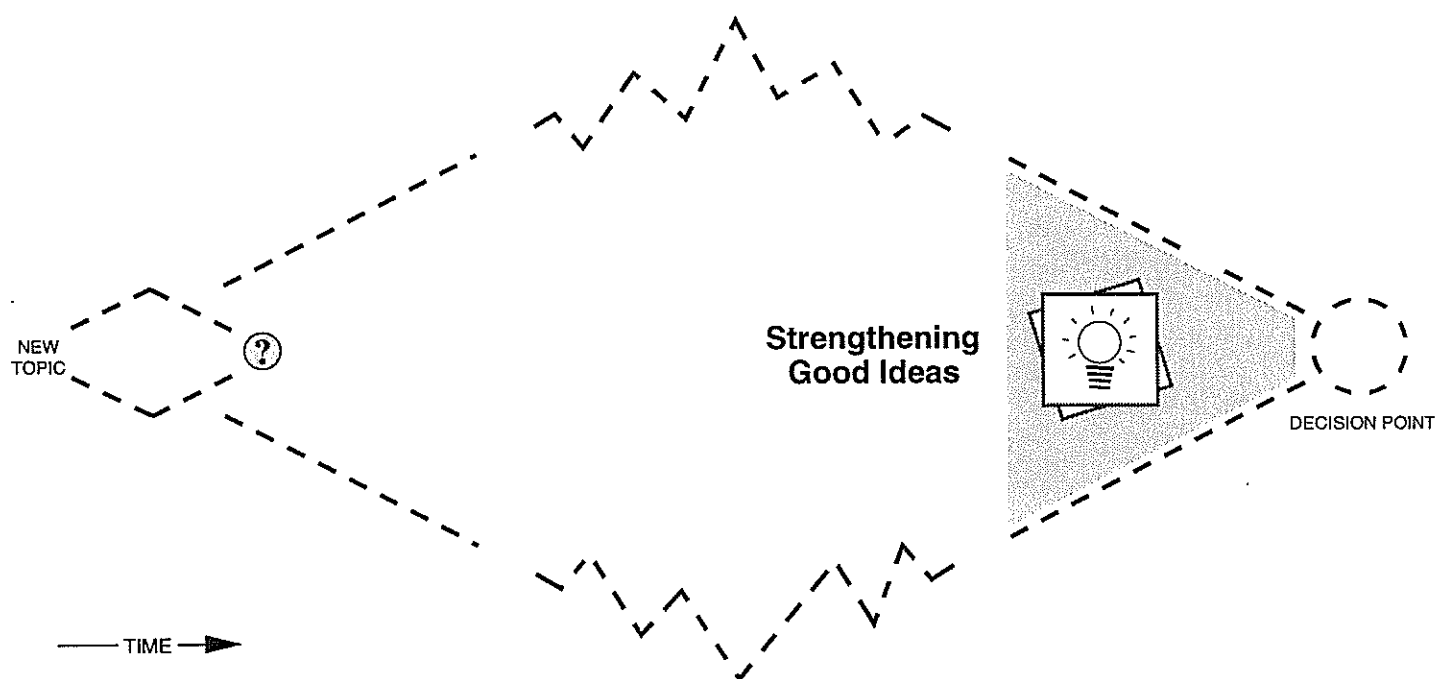
1. Ask the group to break the problem into its major components. For example, consider the problem of keeping public libraries open. This might divide into such components as "funding," "usage," "staffing," "civic priorities" etc.
2. Ask a volunteer to select any component. For example, suppose someone picks "staffing".
3. Treat that selection as the central cause of the problem. Ask, "How might this affect our view of the problem?" For example, suppose "staffing" is viewed as the central cause of the problem. Someone might now suggest a new approach to the problem: perhaps volunteers could help staff the library during busy hours, enabling the library to remain open with less funding.

CATASTROPHIZING**(WE'RE DOOMED NO MATTER WHAT WE DO.)**

1. Ask everyone to think about the problem from their own perspective, imagining anything and everything that could go wrong.
2. Have each person in turn state his/her worst-case scenario.
3. Encourage each new speaker to build on the previous ideas, until the situation seems doomed. Note that complaining and whining are perfectly acceptable now.
4. When the humor has subsided, have the group identify obstacles that merit further discussion.
5. Go down the list of obstacles one at a time, asking "Is *this* one capable of producing a catastrophe?" If so, ask, "What could be done to reduce its potential impact?"

STRENGTHENING GOOD IDEAS

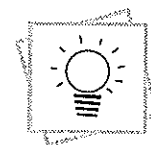
CONVERGENT ZONE THINKING ACTIVITY TYPE 3



Strengthening Good Ideas is a type of thinking that encompasses such questions as, "What resources will we need to make this work? Do we have them?" and "Who else should take a look at this idea? What would *they* say?" and "If we actually decide to move forward, who will do what by when?" During this period of critical thinking, the facilitator's job is to help group members analyze potential problems with their game plan. Are there flaws in the reasoning? Are there other options that have not been adequately explored? Does the idea really meet the group's stated criteria for success? The more questions like these a group can discuss, the better will be the quality of the group's eventual decisions. And that translates into sustainability.

But bringing these questions to the group's awareness is quite a challenge for most facilitators. The role of facilitator, after all, is neutral and non-judgmental. As a rule, groups who have built a shared framework of understanding can evaluate and refine their ideas without formal structure – and without much facilitation, either. But occasionally – especially when the stakes are high – a group may want to ensure the caliber of its work by using structured thinking activities.

STRENGTHENING GOOD IDEAS



CLARIFYING EVALUATION CRITERIA

WHY

How should a group choose one proposal over another? One way is to agree on the criteria to use in evaluating each proposal. For example, suppose a group agreed that its most important criteria were "easy to do" and "inexpensive." These criteria could help them reject a proposal that would be expensive or difficult, even if the project seemed interesting.

This activity helps group members to discuss and reach agreement on a list of five or fewer criteria, by defining criteria *before* specific proposals are brought up for consideration.

HOW

1. Have the group brainstorm a list of answers to this question: "By doing this project (or, solving this problem, developing this plan, etc.), what are we trying to accomplish?"
2. Start a new chart titled "selection criteria." Facilitate the group to reword the items on the first list so that each item is now a statement of a possible selection criterion. For example, if an item from the brainstorm list is "We're trying to get two opposing factions to work together," the rewording might be, "It allows both factions to work together." Another rewording might be, "It appeals to both factions."
3. Explain that the list will soon be reduced to no more than five items. To prepare members to make that final judgment, have people break into small groups and discuss which criteria seem most important, and why.
4. Reconvene the large group. Have people select items from the list of criteria and ask them to advocate for retaining those items on a final list of five or fewer criteria.
5. Give everyone five votes. Tally the results and eliminate all but the top five vote-getters.

STRENGTHENING GOOD IDEAS

PAYOFFS AND RISKS**WHY**

This activity improves the viability of a proposal by reducing the costs and risks that are associated with it.

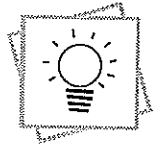
For example, the mayor of a large city recently received several million dollars to improve public transportation. The public favored a proposal to spend the money on new bus routes. But the mayor was *also* committed to upholding a hiring freeze. No new city employees were to be hired until the budget was balanced. On one hand, without new bus drivers, no more routes could be added. On the other hand, if new bus drivers were hired the other government agencies would lobby for exemptions for *their* programs.

Payoffs and Risks helped the mayor's planning staff explore in detail the risks they would face if they went ahead with a route expansion. Through the analysis, they discovered a way to reduce their risk. They enlisted the local newspapers in an editorial campaign to build political support for this exception to the hiring freeze. It was successful and they were able to add three new bus routes without opposition.

HOW

1. Hang three sheets of flipchart paper. Title the first page, "Payoffs" and the second page, "Risks." Leave the third page untitled.
2. On page one, list the payoffs associated with the proposal.
3. On page two, list the risks associated with the same proposal.
4. Now title page three, "Ways to reduce risk." For each risk listed on the "Risks" page, discuss options for reducing the costs and/or the extent of the risk. Record the discussion on page three.
5. After the costs are more fully understood, ask for new proposals that preserve the payoffs while incorporating some of the risk-reducing options.

STRENGTHENING GOOD IDEAS

**RESOURCE ANALYSIS:
CAN WE REALLY MAKE THIS WORK?****WHY**

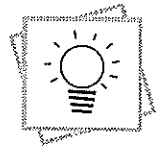
Sometimes groups agree to proposals that sound wonderful, but have not been thought through very well. This is usually not a problem, because most such agreements pertain to matters of small importance. But occasionally, a group will agree to a huge undertaking with absolutely no sense of what they're in for.

For example, a group of eight nurses once agreed to organize a large conference that would bring together representatives from hundreds of agencies in Los Angeles. The purpose of the conference was to build a coalition that could influence state and county funding policies. The organizers did not have the slightest grasp of the effort it would take them – yet they publicized the conference and kept taking on new responsibilities as they came up. Eventually one person lost her job and another got very sick. The conference itself was disorganized, poorly attended and, ultimately, insignificant. In retrospect the nurses said, "We should have been more realistic to begin with."

HOW

1. Ask the group to list the major tasks which must be achieved if the proposal under consideration is to be implemented.
2. Assign two or three people to think about each task. Have them choose a record-keeper and a spokesperson.
3. Give the small groups the following instruction. "For the next ten minutes, think about the steps necessary to complete your assigned task. Break the task into small, do-able action steps."
4. When time is up, reconvene the large group and ask the spokesperson from each group to report on his/her group's work.
5. After all committees have reported, ask everyone to discuss whether the overall proposal is adequate or whether it requires modification.

STRENGTHENING GOOD IDEAS

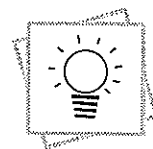
**WHO ELSE NEEDS
TO EVALUATE THIS PROPOSAL?****WHY**

Most decisions do not just affect the people who make them. Obviously, not everyone who will be affected can participate in making a decision and planning its implementation. Nonetheless, it can be very, very costly to overlook the perspectives of those who did not participate in developing the reasoning that led to the decision.

This activity helps a group to think proactively about the question, "Who else needs to be consulted?" *It usually takes a group two or three hours – sometimes longer – to go through all the steps.* Obviously this is a significant investment of group time. To decide whether or not to do this activity, ask, "How much time will we lose if we don't do this thinking?"

HOW

1. Have group members generate lists of people who:
 - will be directly effected by this decision;
 - have final sign-off authority;
 - have to implement the decision;
 - could sabotage the process.
2. Take a few moments to examine the list. Discuss the following questions: "What's the likelihood that any of these stakeholders would disagree with our ultimate decision? What would be the cost to our success?"
3. Next consider in turn each person or group on the list. Who needs to be consulted before the final decision is made?
4. For each person or group who will be consulted, decide on the best method for doing so. Some methods for including other stakeholders are interviews, focus groups, questionnaires and an invitation to a core group meeting.



STRENGTHENING GOOD IDEAS

WHO DOES WHAT BY WHEN?

WHY

A lot of people see group decision-making as an exercise in futility. They have learned the hard way that many agreements are never implemented. This activity can help a group improve its ability to follow through on the decisions it makes.

The odds of successful implementation increase when a group takes the time to spell out specifically what needs to be done, who will do it, by when, and with what resources. But often this step does not occur. Instead, people act as if they assumed that once an agreement has been reached, the follow-through will happen magically. "Someone else" will tend to the details later.

When a group stays fuzzy about the specifics of implementing an agreement, two or three people will probably wind up with all of the tasks – often without adequate resources. Alternatively, no one takes responsibility and nothing happens.

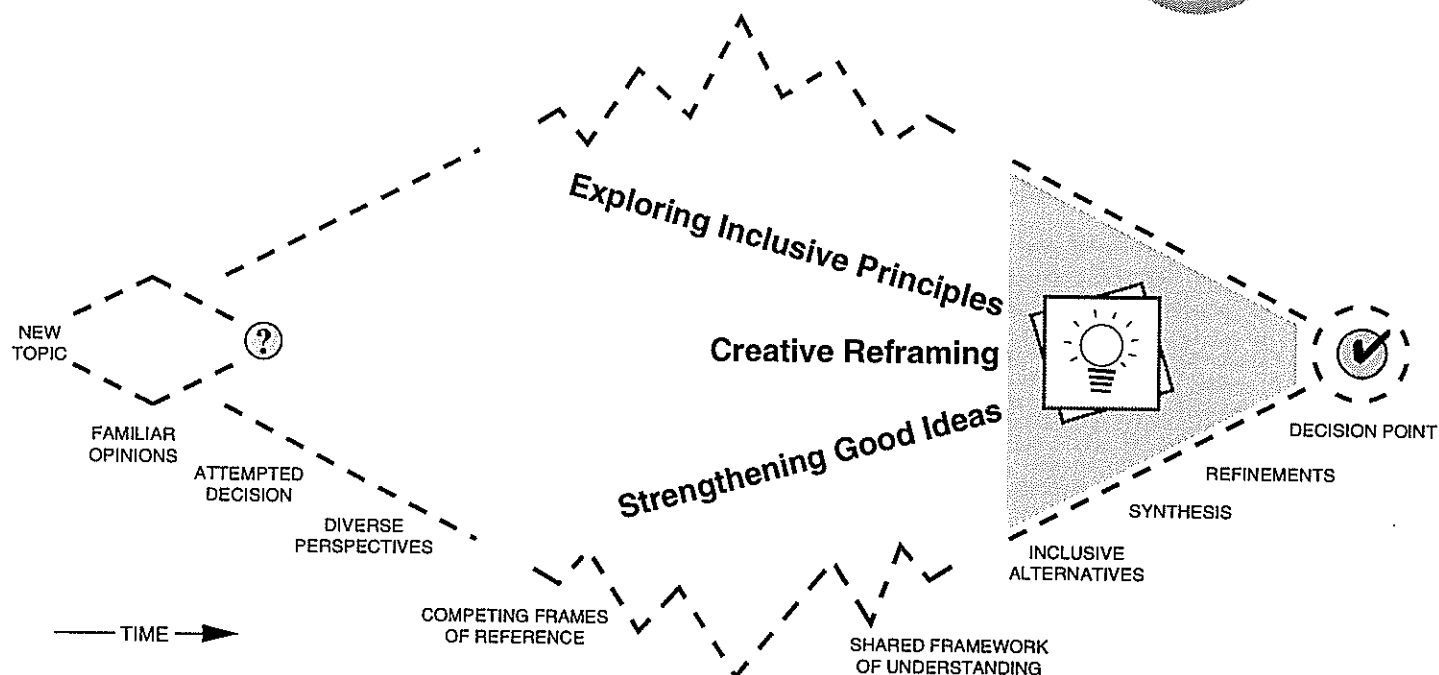
This activity supports group members to consider, in advance, the resources needed to undertake these efforts and to commit to well defined tasks by specific times. Moreover, the responsibilities often are distributed more evenly, because the issues are discussed openly when everyone is listening.

HOW

1. Draw a matrix with four vertical columns. Title the columns: "Task"; "Who"; "By When"; "Resources Needed."
2. Under the first heading, "Tasks," list all tasks that need to be done. If additional tasks are identified later, add them to the list.
3. For each task on the list, answer these three questions: "*Who will do this? By when? What resources are needed?*" Often this thinking is done in an open discussion format, in which group members flip back and forth from one question to another.
4. As specific agreements are made, write them on the chart.

DEVELOPING INCLUSIVE SOLUTIONS

SUMMARY



Three common types of convergent thinking are shown above. Each type can be supported by activities like those presented in this chapter. Some activities help a group gain insight into the principles underlying inclusive solutions. Others enable a group to manipulate their assumptions, in order to break out of fixed positions. Still others support participants to evaluate and refine the quality and the logic of their thinking.

Structured thinking activities are useful when a group appears to be trapped in an *Either/Or* mentality. Groups in this condition need inspiration and stimulation. Structured activities also support groups to do the nitty-gritty work of making sure their ideas can be implemented. But it would be misleading to suggest that groups in the Convergent Zone spend much time engaged in structured thinking. The truth is the opposite. Convergent Zone discussions are largely self-managing. For many facilitators, the hardest part is learning to sit down and get out of the group's way!

Sustainable agreements require well-thought-out ideas that incorporate everyone's needs and goals. If the struggle of the Groan Zone is the heart of a sustainable agreement, the ingenuity of the Convergent Zone is the brain.

16

STRIVING FOR UNANIMITY

WORKING WITH
GRADIENTS OF AGREEMENT

- ◆ **Unanimity and Consensus
Decision-Making**
- ◆ **Gradients of Agreement:
Yes, No, and Shades in Between**
- ◆ **The Continuum of Unanimity:
Enthusiastic Support
Lukewarm Support
Ambivalent Support
Meager Support**
- ◆ **Tools for Using
a Gradients of Agreement Scale**
- ◆ **Summary**

STRIVING FOR UNANIMITY

INTRODUCTION

THE POWER OF UNANIMOUS AGREEMENT

The word “unanimous” comes from two Latin words: *unus*, meaning “one;” and *animus*, meaning “spirit.” A group that reaches unanimous agreement is a group that acts from one spirit. By this understanding a unanimous agreement can be expected to contain wisdom and soundness of judgment, because it expresses an idea that is felt by each person to be true. As the Quakers say, the decision speaks for everyone.

To reach unanimity, everyone must agree. This means that everyone has an individual veto. Thus, anyone who perceives that his/her interests are *not* being taken into account can keep the discussion alive for as many hours or weeks or months as it takes, to find a solution that works for everyone. This veto-capacity is the crux of the power of unanimous agreement. When a group is committed to reaching unanimous agreement, they are in effect making a commitment to remain in discussion until they develop a solution that takes everyone's needs into account.

UNANIMITY AND CONSENSUS

“Consensus” also has Latin origins. Its root word is *consentire*, which is a combination of two Latin words: *con*, meaning “with” or “together with” and *sentire*, meaning “to think and feel.” *Consentire* thus translates as “to think and feel together.”

Consensus is *the process* – a participatory process by which a group thinks and feels together en route to their decision. Unanimity, by contrast, is the point at which the group *reaches closure*. Many groups that practice consensus decision-making use unanimity as their decision rule for reaching closure – but many groups *do not*. For example, the Seva Foundation uses “unanimity minus one.” So does the renowned collective, the Hog Farm. Some chapters of the Green Party use 80% as their acceptable level of agreement. Yet all such groups consider themselves to be sincere adherents of a consensus decision-making process.

In these cases, no single member has personal veto power. Nonetheless, individual voices wield significant influence – enough to ensure that the group will engage in a genuine process of thinking and feeling together.

STRIVING FOR UNANIMITY

IDEALISM
vs REALITY

Unanimous agreement may seem like a wonderful idea – but is it realistic? Most people answer this question with certainty: “No way!” And this includes many of those who have participated in groups that made an effort to strive for unanimity.

It has become increasingly common in recent years to hear a manager say to his or her staff, “I’d like everyone to agree on this issue.” Or, “I want to get everyone’s buy-in today.” Both of these statements mean, “I want us to reach a unanimous agreement.” Yet – as anyone knows who has attended one of those meetings – the ensuing discussion can produce some pretty mediocre results. All too often, a meeting ends with an agreement that never gets implemented. Just because someone declares that s/he wants everyone to agree, that doesn’t mean people *will* agree.

Suppose someone asks the members of a group, “Can everyone agree to this proposal?” Now suppose that everyone answers, “Yes.” At this point, the group has made a decision that, presumably, satisfies everyone. Since the agreement is unanimous, one would expect commitment from everyone to implement the decision, even under pressure. Yet it doesn’t always work this way. Why not? Why is it that so many groups’ attempts at seeking unanimous agreement produce such disappointing results?

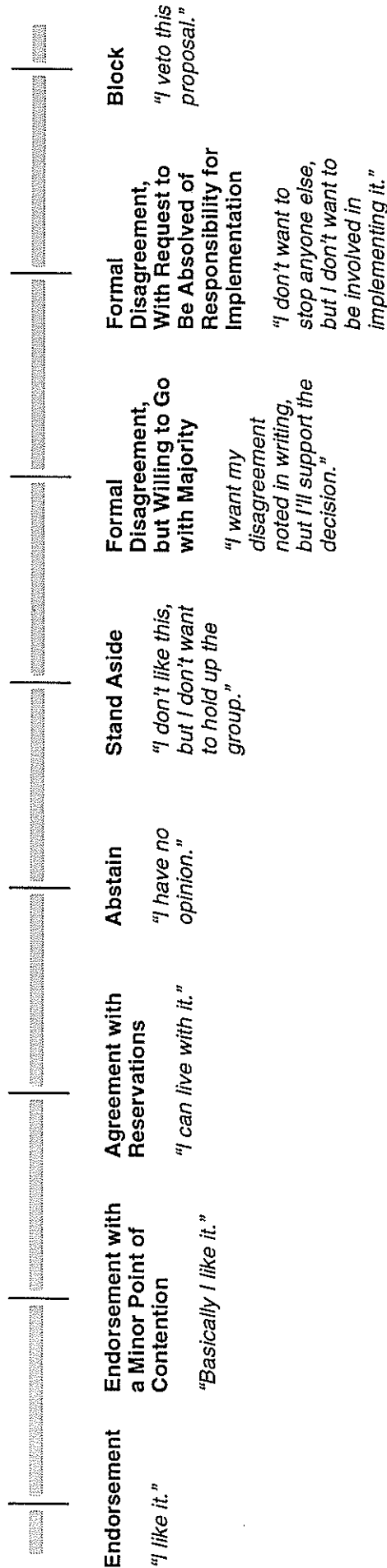
One major reason is that “yes” and “no” can have many different meanings. Someone who says “yes” might mean, “This is one of the best decisions we’ve ever made.” But they might also mean, “I’ll go along with this idea but it doesn’t thrill me.” Similarly, “no” can mean anything from “Hold on, I don’t understand this proposal yet,” to “This offends my deepest values.”

Using unanimity means that every person has veto over every decision. Thus, every time someone says “no” they are saying, “I require the group to spend more time on this discussion.” This causes some group members to be very hesitant to say “no.” They do not want to feel responsible for dragging out a discussion. In such cases, “yes” does not really mean “I agree.” It means, “I don’t really like this, but I don’t want to hold us back.”

On the other hand, many groups have members who will not say “yes” until every concern, big or small, has been thoroughly digested. They might say “No, I won’t agree,” when what they *mean* is “Wait, I have a question. There’s something I don’t understand.”

GRADIENTS OF AGREEMENT

BETTER VOCABULARY

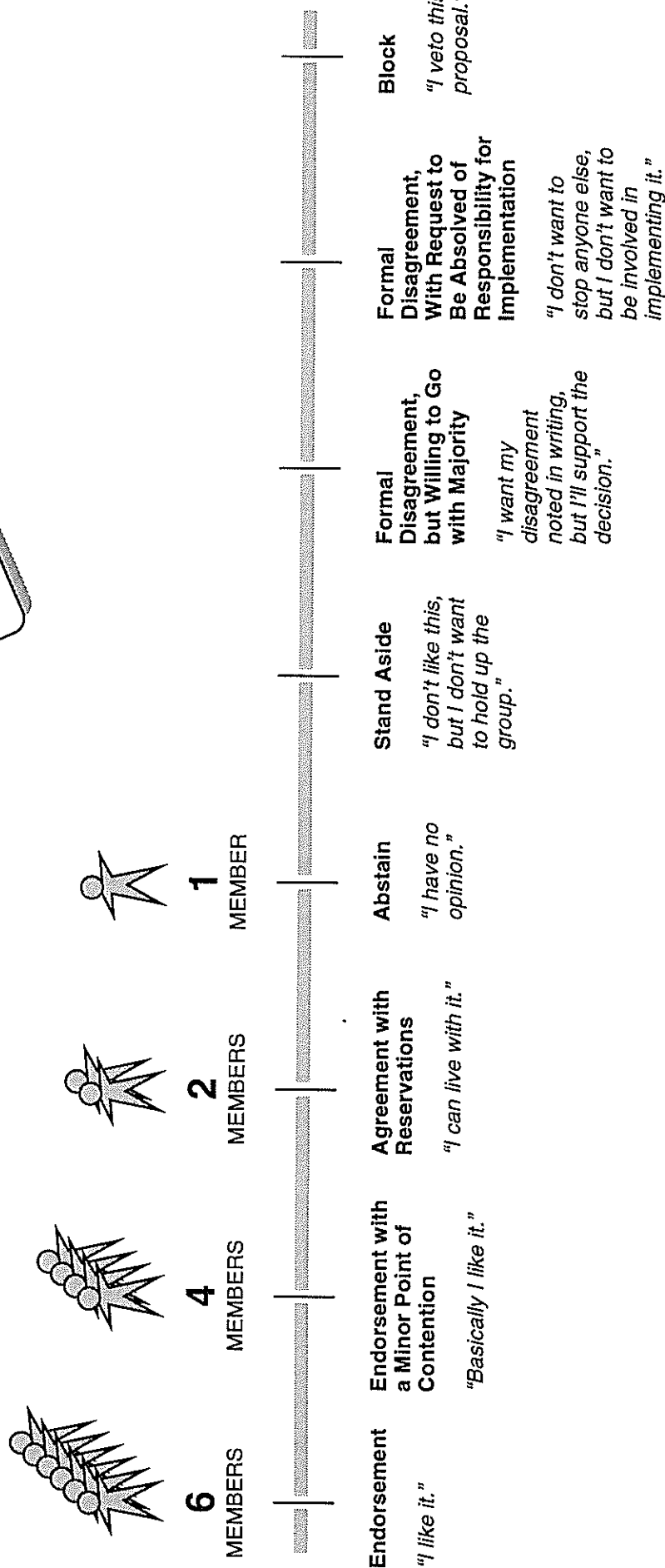


This is the Community At Work GRADIENTS OF AGREEMENT SCALE.

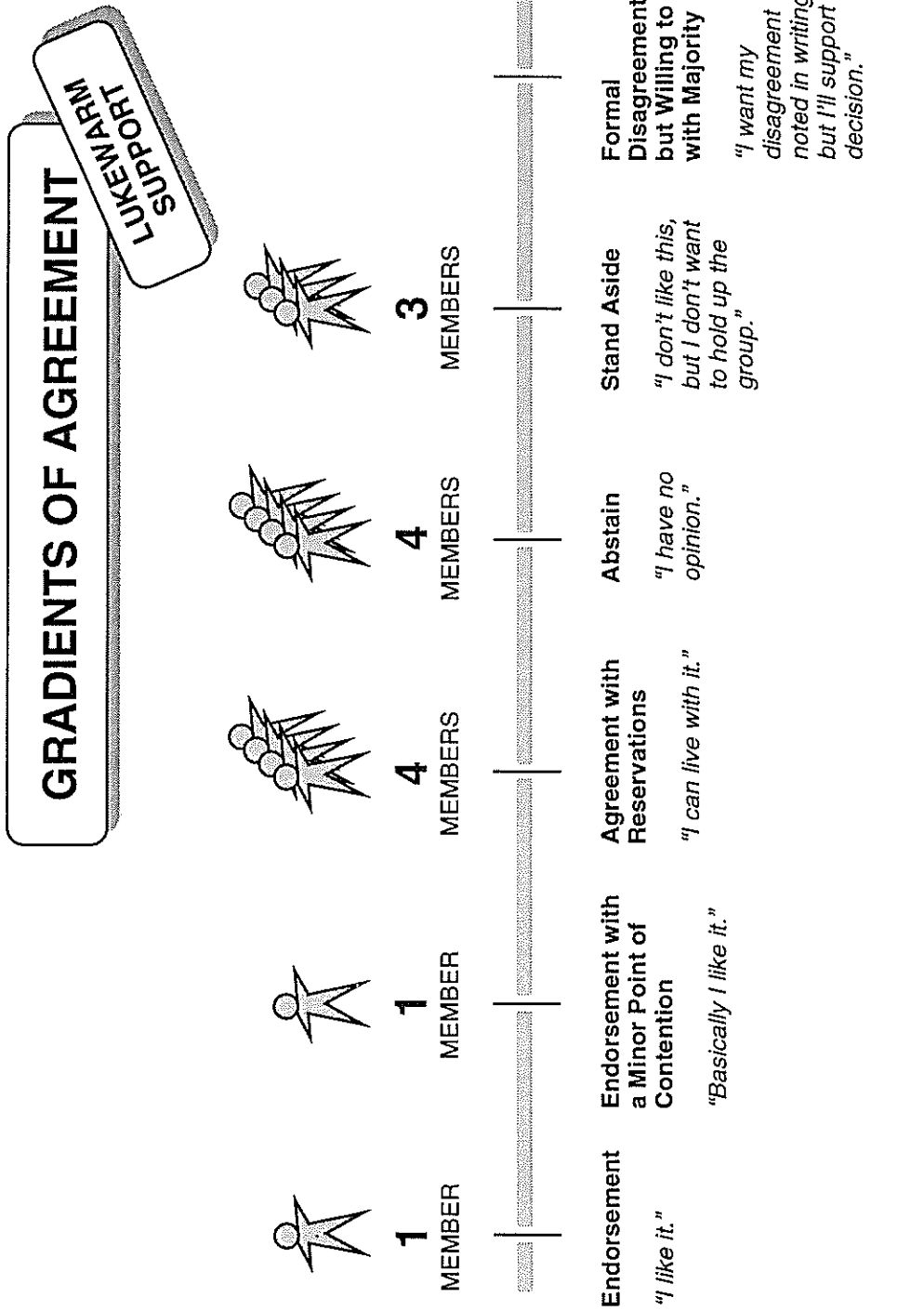
The scale makes it easier for participants to be honest. Using it, members can register less-than-whole-hearted support without fearing that their statement will be interpreted as a veto.

GRADIENTS OF AGREEMENT

ENTHUSIASTIC SUPPORT



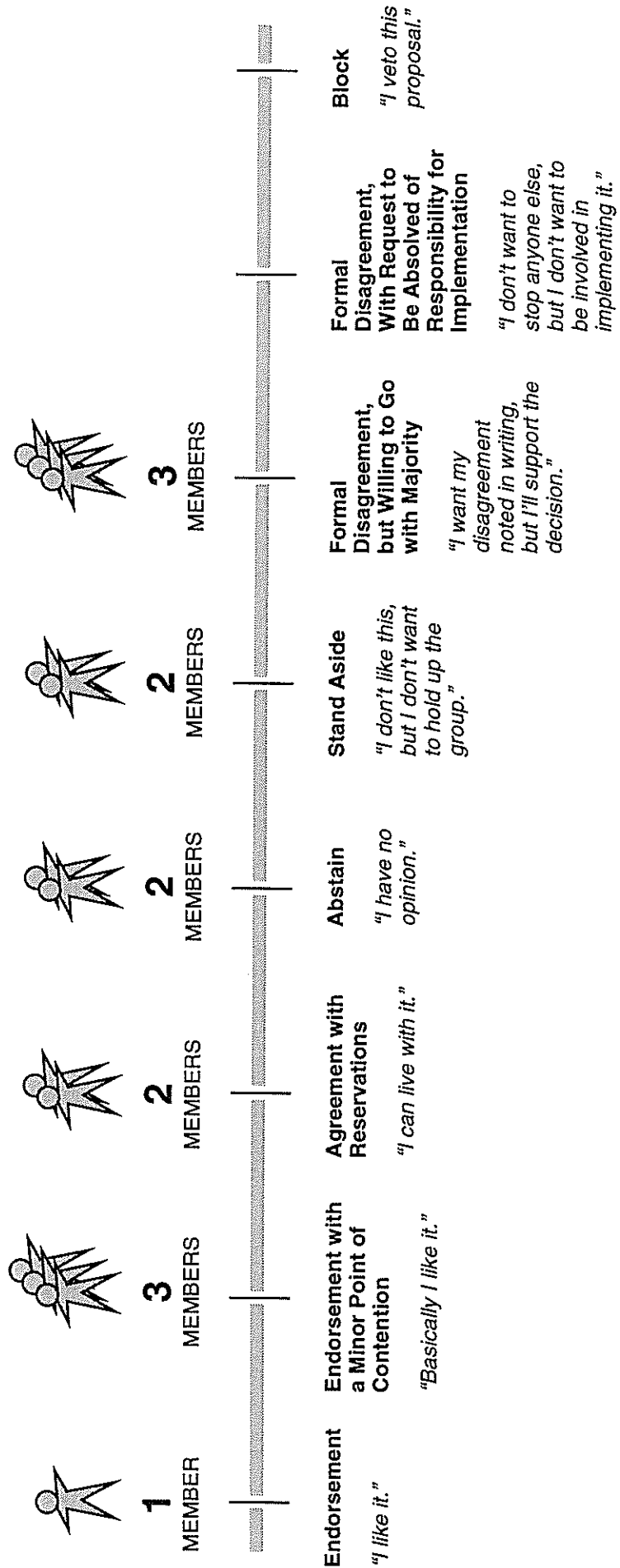
This diagram portrays the results of a hypothetical poll taken in a group of 13 members. It indicates a high level of enthusiastic support for the proposal. People often think that their group should always strive to attain this level of agreement. But few realize how much work it takes to find a line of thought that incorporates all points of view. More often than not, enthusiastic support is hard to obtain.



In this diagram, the results of the poll indicate a lower level of enthusiasm for the proposal. An agreement based on this poll would still be unanimous. The group would see, however, that their overall level of support for the proposal is lukewarm, not enthusiastic. In many cases lukewarm support is perfectly adequate – for example, when the decision only affects a few people or when the stakes are low.

GRADIENTS OF AGREEMENT

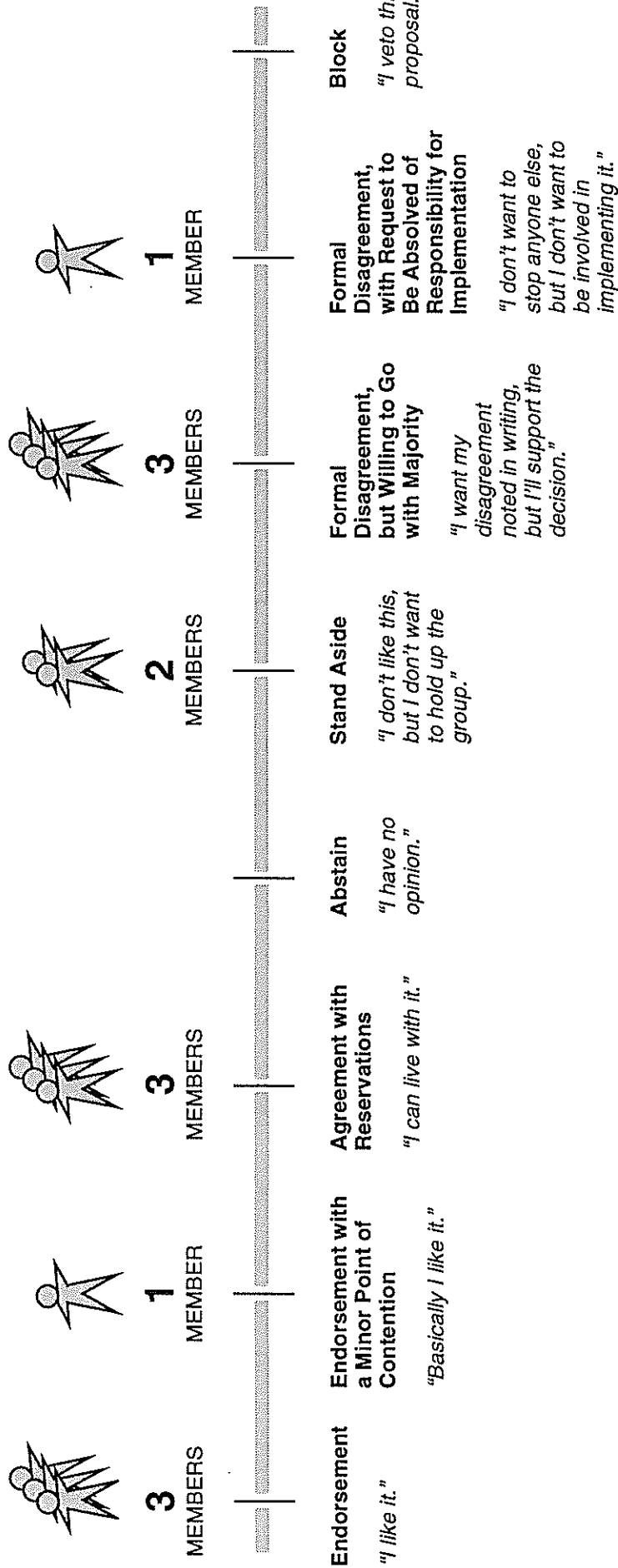
AMBIGUOUS SUPPORT



This diagram portrays a group of people who are all over the map in their response to the proposal. Ambiguous results frequently indicate that the original problem was poorly defined. As David Straus and Michael Doyle have often said, "You can't agree on the solution if you don't agree on the problem." This group would definitely benefit from more discussion. Yet many groups would treat this result as indicating unanimity, since no vetoes were exercised.

GRADIENTS OF AGREEMENT

SUPPORT
MEAGER



It would obviously be risky to implement a decision that was based on the meager support shown above. Yet sometimes the risk is justified – in an emergency, for example. Moreover, many situations are *inherently* risky. Entrepreneurs must make risky decisions all the time. Some work, others backfire. When a group is faced with meager support for a proposal, its challenge is to evaluate whether it is wiser to slow down and search for a better idea, or whether it is wiser to act quickly and take the risk.

WHEN TO SEEK ENTHUSIASTIC SUPPORT

When does a group need to seek enthusiastic support? And when is lukewarm or even ambivalent support sufficient? Here are some variables that help to answer this question:

**OVERALL
IMPORTANCE
OF THE RESULT**

Enthusiastic support is desirable whenever the stakes are so high that the consequences of failure would be severe. By contrast, when the stakes are lower, a group may not wish to invest the time and energy it takes to develop enthusiastic support.

**EXPECTED
LONGEVITY
OF THE RESULT**

Some decisions are not easily reversible – for example, the decision to relocate headquarters to a new city. Decisions like these are worth spending whatever time it takes to get them right. But others decisions – such as the question of how to staff a project during an employee's two-week vacation – have a short lifespan. To get such a decision perfectly right might take longer than the entire lifetime of the decision.

**DIFFICULTY
OF THE ISSUE
AT HAND**

The chief factors that make problems hard to solve are complexity, ambiguity and the severity of conflict.* The tougher the problem is, the more time and effort a group should expect to expend. Routine problems, by contrast, don't require long drawn-out discussions.

**NEED FOR
STAKEHOLDER
BUY-IN**

When many people have a stake in the outcome of the decision, it is more likely to be worth the effort to include everyone's thinking in the development of that decision. When the decision affects only a few people, the process need not be as inclusive.

**EMPOWERMENT
OF GROUP
MEMBERS**

The more likely it is that members will be expected to use their own judgment and creativity to implement a decision, the more they will need to understand the reasoning behind that decision. The process of seeking enthusiastic support pushes people to think through the logic of the issues at hand.

* Source: *Solving Tough Problems*, Paul C. Nutt, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1989

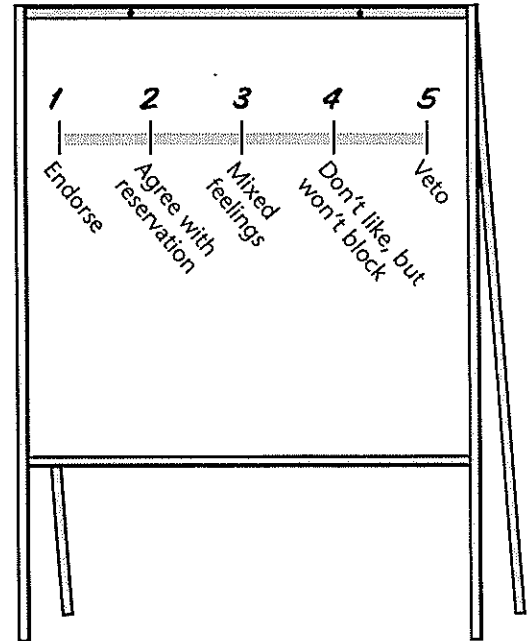
HOW TO USE THE GRADIENTS OF AGREEMENT SCALE

► Let each group create their own set of gradients

Show the group the handouts on gradients of agreement. Ask them to select which gradients *they* want to use. Many groups invent brand new gradients; for example, a typical adaptation is shown at right.

Write the group's gradients on a flipchart and hang it where everyone can see it.

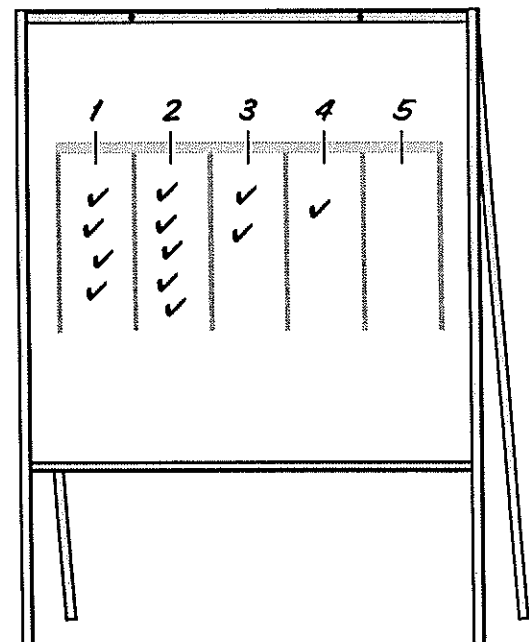
After a group has used their gradients a few times, they can use numbers to represent the different gradients. For example, a group might use numbers 1 through 5 instead of "Endorse" through "Veto."



► Record the results of the poll on a flipchart

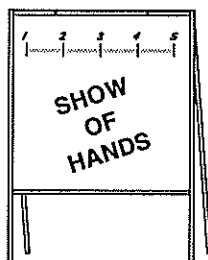
Draw a scorecard like the one shown at right. Use it to capture everyone's positions and tally the results.

The diagram at right shows the results of a poll of 12 participants using the gradients shown in the upper diagram. Four people said they endorsed the proposal. Five said they agreed with reservations. Two said they had mixed feelings. One said they didn't like it, but wouldn't block it. This type of graphic presentation gives everyone a quick, clear picture of the degree of collective support or nonsupport for any given proposal.



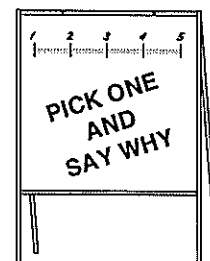
HOW TO USE THE GRADIENTS OF AGREEMENT SCALE

► Five ways to find out where people stand



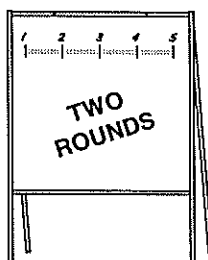
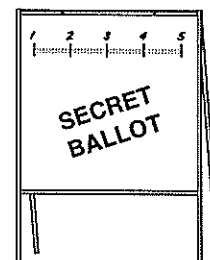
Say, "Please raise your hands if you endorse this proposal." Count the raised hands. Record the data on a flipchart. Now say, "Please raise your hands if you agree with minor reservations." Count hands and record. Repeat for all gradients.

Go around the room, one person at a time, and ask each person to state which gradient s/he prefers and why. No discussion is allowed. As everyone declares his/her preference, record the data.



Have each person write the gradient (word or number) of his/her preference in block letters on a large piece of paper. On cue, have everyone hold up his/her card. Record the data on the scorecard.

Have each person write his/her preference on a slip of paper. When everyone has finished, collect the ballots and tally the results.



Before beginning the poll, let people know that the first poll is a preliminary round and that it will be followed by a brief discussion and then a final poll. Next, gather the data in any of the ways listed above. After a brief, time-limited discussion, poll again. This method lets a person see where others stand before s/he registers a final preference.