

IAF Applied Research:

THINK TANK

The

ART and SCIENCE

of

Consensus

Session Report

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Art and Science of Consensus Think Tank

Report

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A. Research AGENDA

Background Question

Research Question

How are current models, methods theories and applications of consensus-based decision-making paving the way for a new era in effective public discourse and collaborative engagement?

Research Description

Governing Magazine recently featured an article on the “Consensus Industry” and cited the rapid increase in facilitated discourse, the proliferation of mediation centers in the U.S.A. and the growth of the consensus-related consulting industry around the world.

Is consensus-decision-making a momentary societal fad or a new foundation? How are consensual approaches being used to create binding public agreements? What are the leading definitions, models and methods of consensus-building? How do traditional and contemporary theories articulate what we know and year to know about how and why consensus works?

This interactive think tank session will raise those and other questions about the art and science of consensus, as experienced by the consensus practitioners and philosophers around the table and around the world. The discussion will overview current applications, definitions and descriptions of consensus-building as well as theoretical framework about consensus-based discourse.

The key focus of the think tank’s work will be on the necessary elements and crucial dimensions that need to be in evidence in a group’s life in order for that group to move into consensus generation. The presupposition here is that consensus is not just an alternative way to make decisions. It represents a significant move into another realm of group consciousness. Because of that, simple recipes or even complex procedures for building consensus don’t always work in any group or situation.

The conclusion of this session will identify the questions that need to be explored further and build a research blueprint for ongoing ways to access, analyze, understand and share the best wisdom about the art and science of consensus with facilitators worldwide.

Think Tank Context

The THINK TANK is a (vehicle for a) collaborative (vs. didactic) interactive, ongoing discovery (vs. instructional) process (vs. event) designed to break new ground in edge areas of knowledge related to the art and practice of facilitation.

Think Tank Ground Rules

- Initiate and sustain ongoing dialogue between participants
- Focus on central research question
- Provide briefings but no presentations
- Operate on assumptions that anyone who “shows up” has the knowledge, information, expertise to contribute valuably
- Leadership serves as a process facilitator vs. content expert
- Group self facilitates and creates products

Think Tank Agenda

- | | | |
|------|----------------------------|---|
| 8:15 | OPENING | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What do we <u>know</u>?• What do we <u>want to know</u>? |
| | RESEARCH <u>ASSESSMENT</u> | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Think Tank Context• Consensus Theories and Practices |
| | RESEARCH <u>ANALYSIS</u> | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pillars of Consensus Process |
| | RESEARCH <u>ACTION</u> | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Research Needs and Goals• Future Steps |
| 1:45 | CLOSING | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What did <u>we learn</u>? |

Participant Reflections

Pre Meeting:

KNOW: *What do you already understand and know about consensus?*

- It is dynamic and under ongoing work
- The facilitator and people bring their passion, background, experience into creating consensus
- Recursive hierarchies (?)
- Deals with many levels of complexity
- A prior consensus changes with new discovery
- Impatience is not good for its development
- Requires a creative climate

WANT TO KNOW: *What learning do you seek or want to know?*

- Experience of dialogue with other practitioners
- Deep open ended learning
- How are others using consensus based processes
- How are others framing the activity
- Discuss questions of how to honor disagreement
- Unity we value; our consensus about consensus
- Why we see this as an important research area

Post Meeting:

LEARNED: *What did we gain in the session today?*

- I came by default and was confused but my curiosity was enhanced and I gained tremendous insights from everyone
- We went deep in a short time
- We discovered we have only touched the surface
- We accomplished the session intents and experienced the power and possibility of collective research
- We began identifying areas for action research projects

Consensus Images

One diagram for “framing” the consensus process includes four essential ingredients... as a warm-up, what are some words, images, or concepts you associate with the four components?

A. Collaborative Teams

- Identity
- Trust
- Skill/support
- Respect
- Joy
- Diversity
- Mixed learning perception
- Convergence

B. Purposeful Vision

- You can live
- Desired stuff
- Convergence
- Purpose
- Future purpose
- Insight
- Focus

C. Participative Processes

- Integrity
- Peace
- Passion
- Ownership
- Follow through
- Release of attachment
- Creation
- Alignment
- Reflection
- Movement

D. Individual Commitment

- Ownership
- Listening
- Inclusive
- Dialogue
- Belonging
- Safety
- Membership

B. Research ASSESSMENT

Question: *What are existing and ongoing efforts and conversations regarding “consensus” that we need to pay attention to, note and/or include in the dialogue?*

The Work of Practitioners:

- Experiences
- Applications
- Initiatives
- Projects

- How do we agree to disagree
- Reconciliation process and movement
- Dual track diplomacy
- Roberta’s Rules initiative
- Repatriation training of facilitators - Susan Fertig-Dykes, Bosnia
- Mandated negotiated rule-making for legislative action - Nebraska
- More than 50 Ways to Build Team Consensus - Bruce Williams
- Action, agreements, awareness; Three parts to consensus - Mirja Hanson
- Conciliation process - ICA Canada
- “The consensus industry” - in Governing Magazine and other articles in Periodicals
- Large community summits
- Forces/influence: current political institutions, current legal institutions, cultural
- Art of the Long View - Peter Schwartz
- Land Care Project - Australia
- A search for common ground - Grass-roots Canadian unity initiatives
- The value, “protection” of the tribal head making decisions - The tribal structure in Middle East
- Large group technologies
- Diverse cultural models
- CNN
- “Is democracy appropriate?” - Atlantic Monthly recent cover article
- Task/process consciousness within groups - Learning Teams, Taiwan
- Role of unconscious in this process; integration and fragmentation; fusion vs. merger
- Dealing with the past - Book on Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a comparative study
- Managing public disputes: advocates consensus as appropriate dispute mediation process and provides, ground rules for consensus - Susan Carpenter
- Integrative structural modeling
- Mapping the diversity instrument
- Examples from Saturn Corporation, Harley-Davidson, Volvo
- Sitting in the Fire, large group conflict, dealing with diversity in large groups - Arnold Mindell
- League of Women Voters
- Use of language: hidden assumptions and how it sets the tone
- Open Books Management
- Community indicators movement
- Facilitator’s Guide to Participative Decision Making (gradients of agreement) - Sam Kaner Community at Work
- Negotiations - Getting to Yes; etc.
- Quality of self personhood of facilitator - CTN
- Level of self awareness of participant - CTN
- Shared power mechanisms: forums, courts, arenas - Humphrey Institute for Public Affairs, Minnesota
- Resisting factors: no trust; manipulation hooked to consensus; “dirty name” consensus as facade for other agenda; co-opting the terms and intent; lip service little reality to what’s required; preconceptions; world views and pictures that resist change
- Cyber-facilitation - Michael Doyle conversation

The Work of Philosophers:

- Researchers
- Theories
- Literature
- Groups

- Shared Vision, Personal Mastery, System Thinking - Peter Senge
- Depth of Consensus: Sense of willingness to live with profound sense of the “we” as it is; Ralph Stacey, Bohm, Bion, Scott Peck
- “Aha effect” of consensus; sense of we and I; tension is based on premise of scarcity - Simon Hamond
- World is waiting to be born, pseudo community, chaos, community, emptiness - Scott Peck
- First things first, Seven habits - Stephen Covey
- Work building community - Scott Peck
- “Living company” - Angeles Arrien
- Great law of peace 5-600 years
- Learning to plan. Planning to learn
- Town meeting
- Intrapersonal research and theory to clearly identify the individual - Winnecotl, D.R.; Bion, W.R.; Jaques, Elliot; Jung, Carl
- Relationship is everything - Meg Wheatley
- Argyris - shared meaning
- “Public and its problems”, Art and Experience, etc. - John Dewey
- Socratic dialogue
- Anthroposophy, intuitive thinking as a spiritual path - Rudolf Steiner
- Institute for conflict analysis and resolution
- Shared decision-making literature
- Occam’s razor concept
- Historical wisdom - Jesuits, Iriquois Confederation
- Quaker-based process: spiritual underpinnings, history

D. Research ACTION

What needs to be our research agenda?

WHAT IS AT STAKE: *What is the need and urgency? What audiences are interested?*

- Ring is being formed. We need to get in
- Survival; process is important for planetary and species survival
- Education of general public
- Profession needs more insights on this core subject
- Need to address real tools for change agents
- Shift to participation is creating gaps in knowing and doing
- Growth of cyber facilitation provides a new challenge and opportunity

WHAT WILL WE MAKE: *What are research goals? What outcomes should we target?*

- Clarify how it is perceived by non-facilitators
- Develop replicable strategies that don't depend on personality, or facilitator
- Probe procedural foundations
- Broaden our understanding and get stretched by other fields
- Locate resource people in different areas and disciplines
- Explore the marketability of the process
- Explain its consequences and benefits to all users

WHAT WILL IT TAKE: *What are priorities for 1998? Who will help conduct next steps?*

- Determine the form of communication to best achieve this research
- Identify and prioritize what most want to know
- Start the foundational procedures clearing house; develop criteria for information desirability, reliability, validity, etc.
- Collect stories, categories and explanations
- Refine pillars created today
- Draw implications for facilitators
- Start a best practices registry

E. Research TEAM

Session Participants:

Linda Alton
JW Ballard
Tracy Burke
Deb Burnight
Kenn Burrows
Dennis Cheesebrow
Caroline Estes
John Ford
Martha Gadberry
Don Haythorne
Ann Idzik
Karen Jensen
Mike Kaplan
Karen Keenan
Mike Kirkwood
Anna Linzer
Richard Linzer
Guila Muir
Laurence Philbrook
Jeanne Telaak
Lyall Vanatta
Sal Varela

1998 Research Volunteers:

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Guila Muir
Larry Philbrook
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