



The Leadership Team: Decision Making

It is crucial that each team member actively engages in the decision making process. To do so, the facilitator needs to ensure that team members understand the distinction between *dialogue* and *discussion* and that both are a part of the decision making process.

◆ **Dialogue** is an initial conversation that takes place between team members during the meeting. In a dialogue, there is a free flow of communication as people exchange their ideas and respond to others' thoughts. During a dialogue, there is not advocacy for one idea or theory over another between team members. During this part of the process, team members should be open to the ideas of others.

◆ **Discussion** is quite different from a dialogue. Discussions are decision based. Unlike participants in dialogue, people in discussion want the group to accept their views. During this part of the decision making process, the flow of ideas is often disrupted as people attempt to present and advocate for their opinion or recommendation.

Knowing where the group is in the decision making process, (whether in dialogue or discussion), is an essential distinction regarding their level of advocacy. It is the difference between seeking to understand and seeking to be understood.

On those occasions when team members do not agree, the facilitator is responsible for making certain that all ideas, opinions, and concerns are considered during the discussion period of the decision making process. The team may want to explore and agree on a team decision model in advance. Although not all team members will get what they want, the team can move forward when team members agree that they can live with the final decision.

How to achieve group consensus more reliably:

- ◆ Seek input from all team members
- ◆ Listen to others
- ◆ Identify areas in which compromise is needed
- ◆ Ask questions to achieve clarity and promote understanding of perspectives
- ◆ Brainstorm possible solutions
- ◆ List the most viable solutions and discuss the pros and cons of each
- ◆ Select one or more solutions that the entire team can support

Adapted from: O'Hara, N., Munk, T.E., Reynolds, H., and Collins, T. (2021, August). *Success Gaps Toolkit: Addressing Equity, Inclusion, and Opportunity*. IDEA Data Center. Rockville, MD: Westat.