



Group Decision Tip

E-mailed every two weeks to help groups make good decisions

Outside issues

In principle, disagreements among people are generally because of: misunderstandings, differing values, or outside issues. Misunderstandings and differing values can generally be resolved within the group in ways that everyone wins. When a disagreement is caused by an outside issue that has nothing to do with the issue at hand, then it must be dealt with outside the group or someone might end up losing, and that might be okay.

An "outside issue" is a disagreement because of, for example, some incident between the parties that happened years ago and has never been dealt with, or because of a mental disorder such as an addiction which is warping someone's judgment or behavior. Or perhaps it's because of a misconception closely-held since childhood, or an unreasonable fear. Outside issues are usually personal and often completely unrelated to the group's immediate business.

If an outside issue is in the way, agreement will only come about if the issue is dealt with. If it's not dealt with and the disagreeing parties are unable to let go, then the group is at risk of being paralyzed, held hostage by an issue that they have no ability to fix.

Practical Tip: Once we recognize that an outside issue is the cause of a disagreement we encourage the parties to deal with it outside the group. Perhaps therapy is called for, or mediation. If they are unwilling or unable, we take a vote or hire an arbitrator or somehow otherwise resolve the issue even over objection. But losing is not always bad. Sometimes it's the only thing that will allow some people move forward. It is better that one or two people lose a single issue than the group as a whole gets bogged down and unable to make progress.

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