

GENERATIVE DECISION MAKING

Recognizing the right time.

Is the time right to make a decision on this? Do people have the right context? If not, could a conversation help the group move towards a decision?

Create a Proposal.

Anyone can start the process by describing a problem they see and proposing a solution, making them the proposal holder. If not already assigned, someone volunteers to facilitate the decision-making process and, ideally, removes themselves as an active contributor to the decision. The facilitator's main role is to keep the process moving and to help test objections for validity. More on objection testing shortly.

Asking clarifying questions.

Anyone can ask the proposal holder clarifying questions. The proposal holder provides an answer to each question or states that an answer has not yet been contemplated. No reaction or dialogue is permitted at this point. It's the role of the facilitator to ensure questions are for the purpose of clarifying the proposal and don't drift into sharing opinions and reactions.

Expressing reactions.

One-by-one, each person (except the proposal holder) has an opportunity to react to the proposal as they see fit. No additional discussion is permitted. During this phase, the proposal holder may want to keep notes about what they are hearing.

Amending and clarifying.

Once the reaction round is complete, the proposal holder can choose to clarify or amend the proposal based on what was heard in the last two steps but does not have to. Once again, no discussion is permitted.

Expressing objections.

The facilitator invites objections by asking each person in turn, "Do you see any reason why adopting this proposal would cause harm or move us backwards?" For an objection to be valid, it must meet the following criteria: (1) The proposal, if adopted, would move the team backward in its capacity to deliver on its purpose; (2) A problem that doesn't already exist will immediately be caused by this proposal; (3) A significant future problem is predicted based on this proposal and there will not be sufficient time to sense and respond.

Having a better idea or believing that the current proposal is unuseful are not valid objections. For these reasons, many objections tend to melt away during the objection round. If no valid objections surface, the proposal is adopted. Perhaps the most challenging and necessary part of the facilitator roles is assessing the validity of an objection and rejecting invalid objections.

Integrating objections.

If a valid objection is raised, the proposal holder is responsible for crafting a proposal free of valid objections while still addressing the proposer's problem. The proposal holder focuses on each objection, one at a time. Once all objections are integrated into a new proposal, another objection round is completed. This process continues until a solution is adopted.

Visual confirmation.

The final step in the process is a visual confirmation that everyone is ready to move forward with the final proposal. It's not until every participant in the decision process gives a thumbs up that the proposal is officially adopted. Even after all objections have been successfully integrated into the proposal, it's not unusual for a participant to resist final adoption. Surfacing and discussing these points of resistance are critical before moving on.

Applying generative decision making in your organization? Reach out for help at connect@humanfirstworks.com