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ويمنع منعاً باتاً نسخها في نسخ متعددة أو إرسالها بالبريد الإلكتروني إلى قائمة تعميم بدون الحصول على إذن مسبق من صاحب الحق القانوني للملكية الفكرية لكن يمكن للمستفيد أن يطبع أو يحفظ نسخة منها لاستخدام الشخصي لأغراض التعلم والبحث العلمي فقط.



GLOBAL
EDITION

Human Relations

Interpersonal Job-Oriented Skills

TWELFTH EDITION

Andrew J. DuBrin

ALWAYS LEARNING

PEARSON

Group Problem Solving and Decision Making

Jim Graf has his sights set on a target 100 million miles away. Sometimes it's closer. Sometimes it's farther. Mars. The target is moving. So is he. Each morning he leads a team of several managers in a standup meeting in his office at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory on the top floor of a sprawling, four-story building tucked into the foothills above Pasadena, California. Sitting is not allowed. All the meeting's participants are constantly in motion, changing positions with respect to one another, even as their target changes position with respect to earth.

"We have a daily standup so we can talk about things," said Graf. "We physically stand up here. I want everybody a little uncomfortable so they get right to the point." Usually these meetings last about 15 minutes. Some mornings, they go longer.



LEARNING Objectives

After reading and studying this chapter and doing the exercises, you should be able to

1. Understand the difference between rational and political decision making.
2. Use the general approach to problem-solving groups.
3. Use brainstorming effectively.
4. Use of the nominal group technique effectively.
5. Understand how to increase the efficiency of group problem solving through e-mail and groupware.
6. Pinpoint several suggestions for being an effective meeting participant.
7. Explain how national culture and organizational culture might influence the acceptance of group decision making.

"It's important to communicate," said Graf. "You wouldn't think a team member working on one thing would need to know about another team working on another thing, until suddenly you hear someone say, 'Wow, that impacts me!' The standup meetings are essential to our success."⁽¹⁾

Standup meetings are but one way in which groups solve many key problems. Part of having high-level interpersonal skills is the ability to work closely with others in solving problems and making decisions. This chapter will enhance your group problem-solving and decision-making skills. You will receive guidelines for applying several major group problem-solving methods, along with suggestions for being an effective contributor at meetings. As a starting point in studying these techniques, first think through your present level of receptiveness toward group problem solving by doing Self-Assessment Quiz 7-1.

RATIONAL VERSUS POLITICAL DECISION MAKING IN GROUPS

Group decision making is the process of reaching a judgment based on feedback from more than one individual. Most people involved in group problem solving may share the same purpose in agreeing on a solution and making a decision. Nevertheless, they may have different agendas and use different methods. Two such different approaches to group decision making are the rational model and the political model.

The rational decision-making model is the traditional, logical approach to decision making, based on the scientific method. It is grounded in establishing goals, establishing alternatives, examining consequences, and hoping for optimum results. The search for optimum results is based on an economic view of decision making—the idea that people hope to maximize gain and minimize loss when making a decision. For example, a team would choose the lowest cost, highest quality supplier even though the team leader may be a good friend of the sales representative of a competitor.

The rational model also assumes that each alternative is evaluated in terms of how well it contributes to reaching the goals involved in making the decision. For example, if one of the goals in relocating a factory was to reduce energy costs and taxes, each alternative would be carefully examined in terms of its tax and energy consequences. A team member might say, "Setting up a factory in the Phoenix area sounds great. It's true that taxes are low, the labor market is wonderful, and we won't lose any days to snow emergencies. But did you know that the energy costs are very high because of the amount of air conditioning required?"

LEARNING OBJECTIVE 1

group decision making

The process of reaching a judgment based on feedback from more than one individual.

rational decision-making model

The traditional, logical approach to decision making based on the scientific method.

My Problem-Solving Tendencies

Directions: Describe how well you agree with the following statements, using the following scale: disagree strongly (DS); disagree (D); neutral (N); agree (A); agree strongly (AS). Circle the number in the appropriate column.

	DS	D	N	A	AS
1. Before reaching a final decision on a matter of significance, I like to discuss it with one or more other people.	1	2	3	4	5
2. If I'm facing a major decision, I like to get away from others to think it through.	5	4	3	2	1
3. I get lonely working by myself.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Two heads are better than one.	1	2	3	4	5
5. A wide range of people should be consulted before an executive makes a major decision.	1	2	3	4	5
6. To arrive at a creative solution to a problem, it is best to rely on a group.	1	2	3	4	5
7. From what I've seen so far, group decision making is a waste of time.	5	4	3	2	1
8. Most great ideas stem from the solitary effort of great thinkers.	5	4	3	2	1
9. Important legal cases should be decided by a jury rather than by a judge.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Individuals are better suited than groups to solve technical problems.	5	4	3	2	1
Total Score _____					

Scoring and Interpretation: Add the numbers you circled to obtain your total score.

46–50 You have strong positive attitudes toward group problem solving and decision making. You will therefore adapt well to the decision-making techniques widely used in organizations. Be careful, however, not to neglect your individual problem-solving skills.

30–45 You have neutral attitudes toward group problem solving and decision making. You may need to remind yourself that group problem solving is well accepted in business.

10–29 You refer individual to group decision making. Retain your pride in your ability to think independently, but do not overlook the contribution of group problem solving and decision making. You may need to develop more patience for group problem solving and decision making.

political decision-making model

The assumption about decision making that people bring preconceived notions and biases into the decision-making situation.

blind spots

Areas of unawareness about our attitudes, thinking, and behaviors that contribute to poor decisions.

The political decision-making model assumes that people bring preconceived notions and biases into the decision-making situation. Because the decision makers are politically motivated (a focus on satisfying one's own interests), the individuals often do not make the most rational choice. The growing field of behavioral economics is based on the idea that many decisions are irrational or politically based. Revenge and cheating are among the irrational behaviors that underlie the behavior of many employees and customers.^[2] Most computer hackers make their decision to create a virus or destroy computer records based on revenge, cheating, or a sadistic delight in creating misfortune for others.

People who use the political model may operate on the basis of incomplete information. Facts and figures that conflict with personal biases and preferences might get blocked out of memory or rationalized away. A team member might say, "Those air conditioning costs are exaggerated. I have heard that if you use thermal pumps in a factory, the cooling costs go way down."

Another unintentional contributor to political decision making is blind spots—areas of unawareness about our attitudes, thinking, and behaviors that contribute to poor decisions. Shawn O. Utsey, a psychology professor at Virginia Commonwealth University, says that blind spots prevent us from making sound decisions by distorting vision, impairing judgment, and impairing personal and professional growth. An example of a frequent blind spot would be not stopping to think, particularly when under pressure.^[3] For example, a person might purchase a luxury SUV on the spot that will wind up creating a monthly negative cash flow.

Greed and gluttony are major contributors to irrational (or political) decision making. During the mid-2000s, an astounding number of financial managers decided to invest in subprime mortgage loans and then convert these loans into equity investments. Eventually, many holders of these high-risk mortgages were unable or unwilling to make their payments.^[4] As the securities collapsed in value, an enormous stock market crisis took place. The securities were based on complex mathematic models, yet were believed in because the investment bankers were looking for ways to capture millions of dollars in bonuses for themselves.

In the relocation example at hand, two of the members may say "Thumbs up to Phoenix" for reasons that satisfy their own needs. One team member might be fascinated with the American Indian culture so prevalent in Arizona and therefore want to move to Phoenix. Another member might have retired parents living in Phoenix and be interested in living near them.

In practice, it is sometimes difficult to determine whether a decision maker is being rational or political. Have you ever noticed that hotels almost never have a 13th floor? The reason is both rational and political. The hotel manager might say rationally, "Many people are superstitious about the number 13, so they will refuse to take a room on the 13th floor. So if we want to maximize room use, the rational decision for us is to label the 13th floor as 14. In this way we will avoid the irrational [political] thinking of guests."

Although the examples about political and irrational decision making have been related mostly to individuals, the same problems may surface in group decision making. This is true because a group decision is still based on what takes place in the brains of its members.

GUIDELINES FOR USING GENERAL PROBLEM-SOLVING GROUPS

Solving problems effectively in groups requires skill. The effort is often worthwhile because participation in group decision making frequently leads to better acceptance of the decision, and stronger commitment to the implications of the decision. For example, a group involved in making decisions about cost cutting might be more willing to carry through with the suggestions than if participants had not made the decision. Group decision making can also lead to higher quality decisions and innovations because the group collectively has more information than might individuals.^[5] Similarly, the group might come up with better suggestions for cost cutting because of group members sharing information.

Here we examine three aspects of group problem solving useful in making more effective decisions: working through the group problem-solving steps, managing disagreement about the decision, and aiming for inquiry rather than advocacy.

Working through the Group Problem-Solving Steps

When team members get together to solve a problem, they typically hold a discussion rather than rely on formal problem-solving techniques. Several team members might attempt to clarify the true nature of the problem, and a search then begins for an acceptable solution. Although this technique can be effective, the probability of solving the problem well (and therefore making the right decision) increases when the team follows a systematic procedure.

The Problem-Solving Steps. The following guidelines represent a time-tested way of solving problems and making decisions within a group.^[6] You may recognize these steps as having much in common with the scientific method. The same steps are therefore ideal for following the rational decision-making model. Two other aspects of group decision making will be described here: managing disagreement and inquiry versus advocacy.

Assume that you are a team member of a small business that distributes food supplies to hospitals, nursing homes, and schools. Your business volume is adequate, but you have a cash-flow problem because some of your customers take

LEARNING OBJECTIVE 2



over 30 days to pay their bills. Here is how problem solving would proceed following the steps for effective group problem solving and decision making:

Step One. *Identify the problem.* Describe specifically what the problem is and how it manifests itself. The surface problem is that some customers are paying their bills late. Your company's ultimate problem is that it does not have enough cash on hand to pay expenses.

Step Two. *Clarify the problem.* If group members do not see the problem the same way, they will offer divergent solutions to their own individual perceptions of the problem. To some team members, late payments may simply mean the company has less cash in the bank. As a result, the company earns a few dollars less in interest. Someone else on the team might perceive the problem as mostly an annoyance and inconvenience. Another person may perceive late payers as being immoral and therefore want to penalize them. The various perceptions of the problem solvers contribute to their exercising a political model of decision making. It is important for the group to reach consensus that the ultimate problem is not enough cash on hand to run the business, as explained in Step 1.

Step Three. *Analyze the cause.* To convert what exists into what they want, the group must understand the cause of the specific problems and find ways to overcome the causes. Late payment of bills (over 30 days) can be caused by several factors. The customers may have cash-flow problems of their own, they may have slow-moving bureaucratic procedures, or they may be understaffed. Another possibility is that the slow-paying customers are dissatisfied with the service and are holding back on payments in retaliation. Research, including interviewing customers, may be needed to analyze the cause or causes.

Step Four. *Search for alternative solutions.* Remember that multiple alternative solutions can be found to most problems. The alternative solutions you choose will depend on your analysis of the causes. Assume that you did not find customers to be dissatisfied with your service, but that they were slow in paying bills for a variety of reasons. Your team then gets into a creative mode by developing a number of alternatives. Among them are offering bigger discounts for quick payment, dropping slow-paying customers, sending out your own bills more promptly, and using follow-up e-mail messages and phone calls to bring in money. For regular customers, you might try for automatic withdrawals from their checking account. Another possibility would be to set up a line of credit that would enable your firm to make short-term loans to cover expenses until your bills were paid.

Step Five. *Select alternatives.* Identify the criteria that solutions should meet; then, discuss the pros and cons of the proposed alternatives. No solution should be laughed at or scorned. Specifying the criteria that proposed solutions should meet requires you to think deeply about your goals. For example, your team might establish the following criteria for solutions: that they (a) improve cash flow, (b) do not lose customers, (c) do not cost much to implement, and (d) do not make the company appear desperate. The pros and cons of each proposed alternative can be placed on a flip chart, board, or computer screen.

For many complex problems, it is best to select an alternative solution that is based on a variety of options. The blended options solutions will often be stronger because it contains several useful ideas.^[7] At the same time, several group members will be satisfied that at least part of their suggestion was incorporated in the final solution. For example, if the problem under group discussion was choosing a theme for decorating a new office, several ideas might be selected. An advertising agency used group decision making to arrive at a dual theme for decorating the office—cool, yet affluent at the same time.

Step Six. *Plan for implementation.* Decide what actions are necessary to carry out the chosen solution to the problem. Suppose your group decides that establishing a bank line of credit is the most feasible alternative. The company president or the chief financial officer might then meet with a couple of local banks to apply for

a line of credit at the most favorable rate. Your group also chooses to initiate a program of friendly follow-up telephone calls to encourage more rapid payment.

Step Seven. Clarify the contract. The contract is a restatement of what group members have agreed to do and deadlines for accomplishment. In your situation, several team members are involved in establishing a line of credit and initiating a system of follow-up phone calls.

Step Eight. Develop an action plan. Specify who does what and when to carry out the contract. Each person involved in implementing alternatives develops an action plan in detail that stems logically from the previous steps.

Step Nine. Provide for evaluation and accountability. After the plan is implemented, reconvene to discuss progress and to hold people accountable for results that have not been achieved. In the situation at hand, progress will be measured in at least two objective ways. You can evaluate by accounting measures whether the cash-flow problem has improved and whether the average cycle time on accounts receivable has decreased.

When to Apply the Problem-Solving Steps. The steps for effective group problem solving are best applied to complex problems. Straightforward problems of minor consequence (such as deciding on holiday decorations for the office) do not require all the steps. Nevertheless, remember that virtually every problem has more than one feasible alternative. A classic example of searching for the best alternative to a problem is as follows:

At one time complaints of late room service were plaguing a Ritz-Carlton hotel, a chain known for its superior service. To solve the problem, president Horst Schulze dispatched a team composed of a room-service order taker, a waiter, and a cook. Everything seemed fine except that the service elevator took a long time. Next, the group consulted with the engineers in charge of the elevator. Neither the engineers nor the elevator company representative could find a technical problem with the elevator.

Next, team members took turns riding the elevators at all hours for a week. Finally, one of them observed that every time the elevator made its trip from the first floor to the twenty-fourth, it stopped four or five times. At each stop, housemen (who assisted the housekeepers) got on the elevators to different floors. The housemen were taking towels from other floors to bring them to housekeepers on their own floors who were short of towels. Foraging for towels was slowing down the elevators.

The team discovered that the Ritz-Carlton didn't really have a room-service problem or an elevator problem; it had a towel shortage. As the hotel bought more towels, room-service complaints dropped 50 percent.^[8]

The Importance of Collective Efficacy. How well a given group solves a problem depends on many of the characteristics of an effective work group outlined in Figure 6-1 (the previous chapter). Of particular relevance is the group's level of confidence that it can solve the problem at hand. Collective efficacy is a group's belief that it can handle certain tasks. Collective efficacy influences a group to initiate action, how much effort it will apply to the task, and how long the group's effort will be sustained.^[9] If the group members say spontaneously, "We can do it, let's go," they will usually be successful in solving the problem, assuming they have the necessary knowledge and talent.

For practice in using the problem steps described above, do Skill-Building Exercise 7-1. Skill-Building Exercise 7-2 gives you an opportunity to solve a few more of the perplexing type of problems that the Ritz-Carlton faced.

Managing Disagreement about Group Decision Making

A major reason that group decision making does not proceed mechanically is that disagreement may surface. Such disagreement is not necessarily harmful to the final outcome of the decision because those who disagree may have valid points and help prevent groupthink. For committees and other groups to work well, they should be composed of people with

SKILL-BUILDING EXERCISE 7-1

A General Problem-Solving Group

The class is divided into groups of about six people. Each group takes the same complicated problem through the nine steps for effective group decision making. Several of the steps will be hypothetical because this is a simulated experience. Pretend that you are a task force composed of people from different departments in the company. Choose one of the following possibilities:

Scenario 1: Your company wants your task force to decide whether to purchase a corporate jet for members of senior management or require them to continue flying on commercial airlines.

Scenario 2: You are employed by Hewlett-Packard Corp., an information technology giant that specializes in computers and printers. Data supplied by the marketing research department indicates that the consumption of HP inkjet cartridges by consumers worldwide is declining more rapidly than anticipated. At the same time private label refill cartridges are selling at a pace much faster than forecasted. Your task force is asked to recommend a plan for increasing the consumption of inkjet cartridges.

different perspectives and experiences who are not hesitant to speak their minds, says psychologist Richard Larrick at the Fuqua School of Business, Duke University.^[10]

The idea is to manage disagreement so that the decision-making process does not break down, and the dissenters are not squelched. Conflicts about decisions were studied among 43 cross-functional teams engaged in new product development. Disagreeing about major issues led to positive outcomes for team performance (as measured by ratings made by managers) under two conditions.^[11]

First, the dissenters have to feel they have the freedom to express doubt. To measure such freedom, participants in the study responded to such statements as "I sometimes get the feeling that others are not speaking up although they harbor serious doubts about the direction being taken." (Strongly disagreeing with this statement would suggest that group members had the freedom to express doubt.)

Second, doubts must be expressed collaboratively (trying to work together) rather than contentiously (in a quarrelsome way). An example of collaborative communication would be having used the following statement during decision making: "We will be working together for a while. It's important that we both [all] feel comfortable with a solution to this problem." An example of contentious communication would be high agreement with the statement, "You're being difficult and rigid."

More recent research lends strength to the idea that teams are more likely to make optimal decisions when they take the time to debate the issues and thoughtfully discuss alternative solutions. A study about hiring pilots for long-distance flights found that when

Solving a Few Unusual Problems

Use group problem solving to find a solution to the three problems described next. Each problem is designed to capitalize on the group's ability to search for creative alternatives and think flexibly. Answers to the three problems are found at the end of the references for Chapter 7 toward the end of the book.

Problem 1: Seven Tennis Balls in a Tube

Seven tennis balls are located at the bottom of a 6-foot vertical pipe with a diameter of 4 inches, bolted securely to the floor. Your job is to remove the balls without destroying the pipe.

Problem 2: The Too-Low Truck

A couple has rented a large truck to move their belongings to a new house in the country. As they are driving down a country road, they encounter an overhead bridge that appears to be somewhat low. Before barreling through the bridge, the couple climbs up on the hood to discover that indeed the bridge is 1.5 inches too high

for the truck. Ten minutes later, the couple drives right under the bridge. What solution did they find to the problem of their rented truck being too tall?

Problem 3: The Aging Members of HOG

A few years ago, managers at Harley-Davidson recognized that they were losing a lot of their members of HOG (Harley Owner's Group) because many Harley drivers had reached the age whereby they perceived driving a traditional motorcycle to be too dangerous. A problem-solving group was formed, and they arrived at a solution that prevented a lot of older HOG members from slipping away, especially in Florida. Some of those HOG members are now as happy as a pig dipped in mud. What product do you think the Harley-Davidson problem-solving group developed?

Source: The seven-ball problem is from Dodge Fernald, *Psychology* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1997), p. 288.

groups disagreed over who to hire, there was more information sharing. Also, the strong disagreement led to more intense discussions that prompted participants to repeat their reasoning in front of other group members. A debate over which candidate to hire encourages team members to focus on information that may be inconsistent with how they formed their original opinion.^[12]

Conflict-resolution techniques, as described in Chapter 9, are another potentially useful approach to managing disagreement about decision making.

Aiming for Inquiry versus Advocacy in Group Decision Making

Another useful perspective on group decision making is to compare the difference between group members involved in *inquiry* (looking for the best alternative) versus *advocacy* (or fighting for one position). Inquiry is an open process designed to generate multiple alternatives, encourage the exchange of ideas, and produce a well-reasoned solution. Decision makers who care more about the good of the firm than personal gain are the most likely to engage in inquiry. According to David A. Garvin and Michael A. Roberto, this open-minded approach doesn't come easily to most people.^[13]

Instead, most groups charged with making a decision tend to slip into the opposite mode, called advocacy. The two approaches look similar because under either mode the group members are busily immersed in work and appear to be searching for the best alternative. Yet, the results from the two modes are quite different. Using an advocacy approach, participants approach decision making as a contest with the intent of selecting the winning alternative. One member of the group might be trying to gain the largest share of the budget, and become so passionate about winning budget share that he loses objectivity. Advocates might even withhold important information from the group, such as not revealing that their budget is big enough considering their decreased activity.

With an advocacy approach, the disagreements that arise tend to separate the group, and are antagonistic. Personality conflicts come into play, and one person might accuse the other side of not being able to see the big picture. In contrast, an inquiry-focused group carefully considers a variety of alternatives and collaborates to discover the best solution.

Conflict-resolution methods can be useful in helping the decision makers overcome the advocacy approach. As part of resolving the conflict, the group leader must make sure that everyone knows that his or her viewpoint is being carefully considered.

GUIDELINES FOR BRAINSTORMING

In many work situations, groups are expected to produce creative and imaginative solutions to problems. When the organization is seeking a large number of alternatives for solving the problems, **brainstorming** is often the technique of choice. Brainstorming is a group problem-solving technique that promotes creativity by encouraging idea generation through noncritical discussion. Alex Osborn, who developed the practice of brainstorming, believed that one of the main blocks to organizational creativity was the premature evaluation of ideas.^[14] The basic technique is to encourage unrestrained and spontaneous participation by group members. The term *brainstorm* has become so widely known that it is often used as a synonym for a clever idea.

Brainstorming is used both as a method of finding alternatives to real-life problems and as a creativity-training program. In the usual form of brainstorming, group members spontaneously call out alternative solutions to a problem facing them. Any member is free to enhance or "hitchhike" upon the contribution of another person. At the end of the session, somebody sorts out the ideas and edits the more unrefined ones.

Brainstorming is widely used to develop new ideas for products, find names for products, develop advertising slogans, and solve customer problems. For instance, the design firm Ideo uses brainstorming as standard practice, such as thinking of new high-tech gadgets for children. Brainstorming has also been used to develop a new organizational structure in a government agency, and it is now widely used in developing software.

Adhering to a few simple rules or guidelines helps ensure that creative alternative solutions to problems will be forthcoming. The brainstorming process usually falls into

LEARNING OBJECTIVE 3

brainstorming

A group problem-solving technique that promotes creativity by encouraging idea generation through noncritical discussion.

place without frequent reminders about guidelines. Nevertheless, here are nine rules to improve the chances of having a good session. Unless many of these rules are followed, brainstorming becomes a free-for-all, and is not brainstorming in its original intent.

1. **Group size should be about five to seven people.** If there are too few people, not enough suggestions are generated; if there are too many people, the session becomes uncontrolled. However, brainstorming can be conducted with as few as three people.
2. **Everybody is given the chance to suggest alternative solutions.** Members spontaneously call out alternatives to the problem facing the group. (Another approach is for people to speak in sequence.)
3. **No criticism is allowed.** All suggestions should be welcome; it is particularly important not to use derisive laughter.
4. **Freewheeling is encouraged.** Outlandish ideas often prove quite useful. It's easier to tame a wild idea than to originate one.
5. **Quantity and variety are very important.** The greater the number of ideas put forth, the greater the likelihood of a breakthrough idea.
6. **Combinations and improvements are encouraged.** Building upon the ideas of others, including combining them, is very productive. Hitchhiking or piggybacking is an essential part of brainstorming.
7. **Notes must be taken during the session by a person who serves as the recording secretary.** The session can also be taped, but this requires substantial time to retrieve ideas.
8. **Invite outsiders to the brainstorming session.** Inviting an outsider to the brainstorming session can add a new perspective the "insiders" might not think of themselves. (Such is the argument for having a diverse problem-solving group.)
9. **Do not overstructure by following any of the above eight ideas too rigidly.** Brainstorming is a spontaneous group process.

A widely accepted suggestion for brainstorming effectiveness is to have diverse group members. Diversity includes differences in age, sex, race, experience levels, and educational background, as well as functional background (e.g., marketing and information technology).^[15] The diversity contributes to different perspectives that facilitate a variety of ideas surfacing during the brainstorming session.

According to one observer, the most productive brainstorming sessions take place in physically stimulating environments as opposed to a drab conference room. Natural light may stimulate thinking, so work in a room with windows or outside if weather permits. Changing from a seated position to walking around from time to time can be mentally stimulating. Food and drink also contribute to an enhanced environment for brainstorming.^[16]

Another useful perspective on brainstorming is that the process really involves establishing and attaining a series of goals. The rules for brainstorming can be interpreted as goals, as with the following examples:

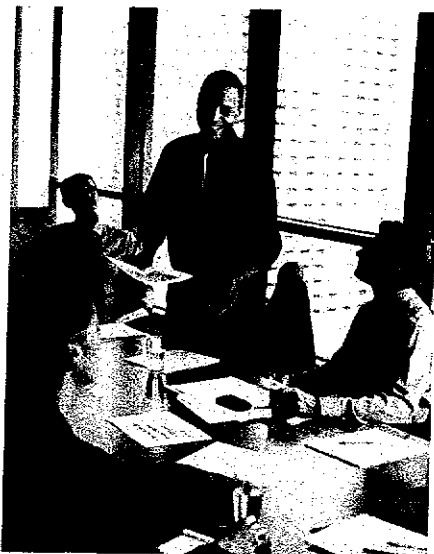
- Establish the quantity goal of establishing as many ideas as possible.
- Establish the goal of avoiding criticism.
- Establish the goal of attempting to combine ideas and build on them.^[17]

Brainstorming is an effective technique for finding a large number of alternatives to problems, particularly when the list of alternatives is subsequently refined and edited. Brainstorming in groups is also valuable because it contributes to job satisfaction for many people. Skill-Building Exercise 7-3 gives you an opportunity to practice a commercially useful application of brainstorming.

A curious feature of brainstorming is that individuals working alone typically produce more useful ideas than those placed in a group. Brainstorming by individuals working alone is referred to as **brainwriting**. Skill-Building Exercise 7-4 gives you a chance to compare brainstorming with brainwriting.

brainwriting

Brainstorming by individuals working alone.



SKILL-BUILDING EXERCISE 7-3

Stretch Your Imagination

A global contest was organized by Stanford University through its Technology Ventures Program. Anyone in the world was permitted to enter. The assignment was to take ordinary rubber bands and "add value" to them. Entries were submitted by video, posting them on YouTube. Entrants included people from many different occupations, including computer scientist. The winner received the Genius Award.

Here is where you fit in. Through brainstorming, come up with at least six ways of adding value (making more useful) a rubber band, or a bunch of rubber bands. You must stretch your imagination to

be successful. After the brainstorming sessions have been completed, perhaps taking 10 minutes of class time, a representative of each group might share results with the class. Students might then assign a Genius Award to the entry that seems the most useful. Or, the instructor might be the judge.

Source: The facts about the contest stem from Lee Gomes, "Our Columnist Judges a Brainstorming Bee, and Meets a Genius," *The Wall Street Journal*, March 5, 2008, p. B1.

SKILL-BUILDING EXERCISE 7-4

Brainstorming versus Brainwriting

Half the class is organized into brainstorming groups of about six people. The rest of the class works by themselves. Groups and individuals then work on the same problems for 10 minutes. The brainstorming groups follow the aforementioned guidelines. Individuals generate as many alternatives as come to mind without interacting with other people. After the problem-solving sessions are completed, compare the alternatives developed by the groups and individuals. Groups and individuals choose one of the following problems so that solutions can be compared to the same problems:

1. How might we reduce the carbon dioxide emissions in our community?
2. How can we earn extra money, aside from holding a regular job?
3. How can we find new people to date?
4. How can we save money on food costs?
5. How can we use Twitter and Facebook to make money?

GUIDELINES FOR THE NOMINAL GROUP TECHNIQUE

A team leader or other manager who must make a decision about an important issue sometimes needs to know what alternatives are available and how people will react to them. In such cases, group input may be helpful. Spoken brainstorming is not advisable because the problem is still in the exploration phase and requires more than a list of alternative solutions.

A problem-solving technique called the **nominal group technique (NGT)** was developed to fit the situation. The NGT is a group problem-solving technique that calls people together in a structured meeting with limited interaction. The group is called nominal (in name only) because people first present their ideas without interacting with each other, as they would in a real group. However, group discussion does take place at a later stage in the process. Figure 7-1 outlines the nominal group technique.

A problem that is an appropriate candidate for NGT is a decision about which suppliers or vendors should be eliminated. Many companies are shrinking their number of suppliers because they believe that working with a smaller number of suppliers can lead to higher quality components. It is easier to train a small number of suppliers, and it is also possible to build better working relationships when fewer people are involved. Also, with fewer suppliers there are fewer transactions to bother with.

A decision of this type can lead to hurt feelings and breaking up of old friendships. Suppose Pedro, the team leader, is empowered to make this decision about reducing the number of suppliers. The NGT involves a six-step decision process:

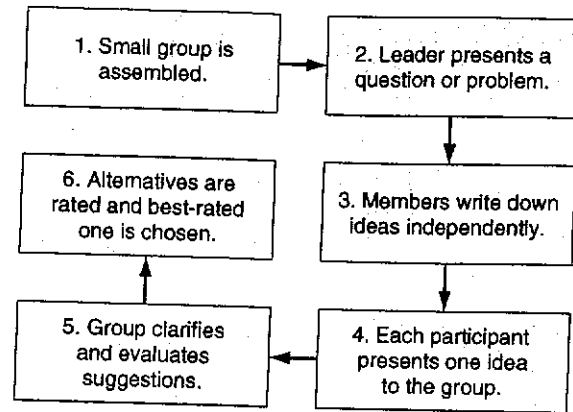
1. Work-team members are assembled because they will all participate in the decision to reduce the number of companies that serve as suppliers to the team. All team members are told in advance of the meeting and the agenda. The meeting is called, and an office assistant is invited to help take care of the administrative details of the meeting.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE 4

nominal group technique (NGT)

A group problem-solving technique that calls people together in a structured meeting with limited interaction.

FIGURE 7-1 The Nominal Group Technique



2. The team leader presents a specific question. Pedro tells the group, "Top management says we have to reduce our number of suppliers by two-thirds. It's too difficult to keep track of all these different suppliers and train them to meet our quality specs. I dislike terminating a supplier as much as anybody, but I can understand the logic of top management. Right now our team is doing business with 12 suppliers, and we should shrink that number to 4. Your assignment is to develop criteria for choosing which suppliers to eliminate. I also need to know how you feel about the decision you make on supplier reduction and how it might affect the operations of our team."
3. Individual team members write down their ideas independently, without speaking to other members. Using notepads, e-mail, or word processors, the five team members write down their ideas about reducing the number of suppliers by two-thirds.
4. Each team member in turn presents one idea to the group. Sometimes these ideas are presented to the group by the team leader without identifying which person contributed the idea. In this way, ideas are submitted anonymously. The group does not discuss the ideas. The office assistant summarizes each idea by writing it on a flip chart. Here are the ideas submitted by each team member:
 - Alternative A.** We'll carefully study the prices offered by all 12 suppliers. The eight suppliers with the highest average prices for comparable goods are given the boot. I like this idea because our team will save the company a bundle of money.
 - Alternative B.** Let's keep the four suppliers who have the best quality record. We'll ask each supplier if it has won a quality award. If a supplier has won a quality award, the company is put on the retained list. We'll include awards from their customers or outside standards such as ISO 9000. If we find more than four suppliers have won awards, we'll retain those with the most impressive awards.
 - Alternative C.** I say we reward good service. We keep the 4 suppliers among the 12 who have been the most prompt with deliveries. We'll also take into account how good the suppliers have been about accepting returns of damaged or defective merchandise.
 - Alternative D.** Here's an opportunity to get in good with top management. Stop kidding each other. We know that the plant's general manager [Jake] has his favorite suppliers. Some of them are his fishing and golfing buddies. The suppliers who are friends with Jake get our vote. In this way, Jake will think our team shows really good judgment.
 - Alternative E.** Let's reward the suppliers who have served us best. We'll rate each supplier on a 1 to 10 scale on three dimensions: the quality of goods they have provided us, price, and service in terms of prompt delivery and returns policy. We could do the ratings in less than one hour.
5. After each team member has presented his or her idea, the group clarifies and evaluates the suggestions. The length of the discussion for each of the ideas varies

SKILL-BUILDING EXERCISE 7-5

The Nominal Group Technique

With a clear understanding of the mechanics of the NGT as described in the text, the technique can be demonstrated in about 30 minutes. The class is divided into groups of about seven. One person plays the role of the team leader, who can also assume the responsibility of the office assistant (recording information on flip charts or a computer).

You are the key member of a motion picture and television film production company. You have a contract to produce a

series of four films. The problem you face is which North American (United States, Canadian, or Mexican) city to choose as the film site. The president has ruled out Hollywood because expenses are too high. Solve this problem using the NGT, and make a decision about which city to choose for your film site.

substantially. For example, the idea about rating suppliers on three criteria might precipitate a 30-minute discussion. The discussion about retaining the plant manager's political connections might last only five minutes.

6. The meeting ends with a silent, independent rating of the alternatives. The final group decision is the pooled outcome of the individual votes. The team members are instructed to rate each alternative on a 1 to 10 scale, with 10 being the most favorable rating. The ratings that follow are the pooled ratings (the sum of the individual ratings) received for each alternative. The maximum score is 50 (10 points \times 5 raters).

Alternative A, price alone: 35

Alternative B, quality-award record: 30

Alternative C, good service: 39

Alternative D, plant manager's favorites: 14

Alternative E, combination of quality, price, and service: 44

Team leader Pedro agrees with the group's preference for choosing the four suppliers with the best combination of quality, price, and service. He schedules a meeting to decide which suppliers meet these standards. Pedro brings the team's recommendations to the plant manager, and they are accepted. Although the team is empowered to make the decision, it is still brought to management for final approval. To practice the nominal group technique, do Skill-Building Exercise 7-5.

USING STANDUP MEETINGS TO FACILITATE PROBLEM SOLVING

Problem solving and decision making can sometimes be improved by conducting meetings while standing up instead of sitting down. The general idea is that participants standing up in the problem-solving group are likely to be more alert and will come to a decision more quickly. Some people solve problems better when standing because they literally "think well on their feet." Few people would be willing to stand for several hours, so they reach a decision quickly.

Many meeting leaders who use standup meetings are pleased with the results in terms of reaching high-quality decisions rapidly. At United Parcel Service (UPS), every morning and several times a day, managers assemble workers for a required standup meeting that lasts precisely three minutes. Among the topics covered are local information, traffic conditions, or customer complaints. Each meeting ends with a safety tip. The 180-second limit helps enforce punctuality throughout UPS.^[18] Many problem-solving meetings at Google are held standing up. For example, details about a recent version of the Google results page were hammered out at a meeting of 10 people.^[19]

A team of researchers investigated the effectiveness of standup meetings.^[20] Study participants were 555 students in an introduction to management course who were offered extra credit for participating in the study. The students were randomly assigned to five-person groups, producing 111 groups. They were divided almost equally into standup and sit-down groups.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE 5

All groups were assigned the Lost on the Moon exercise, which presents a scenario involving a crash on the moon. Participants were asked to rank 15 pieces of equipment that survived the crash in terms of their importance for survival. Correct answers to the problem were the ranking of the equipment given by NASA astronauts and scientists. The major results of the experiment were as follows:

1. Sit-down meetings lasted about 34 percent longer than the standup meetings (788 seconds versus 589 seconds).
2. Sit-down and standup meetings made decisions of equal quality.
3. More suggestions about task accomplishment were used by groups in the sit-down meetings than in the standup meetings.
4. Participants in the sit-down meetings were more satisfied than participants in the standup meetings.

One implication for this study is that people make decisions more quickly when standing up, without sacrificing decision quality. However, people prefer to sit down. In general, if you think that a task can be performed in 30 minutes or less, a standup meeting is likely to be effective.

BACK TO THE OPENING CASE

Indeed, the rocket scientists and other workers at the Jet Propulsion Lab use standup meetings to make major decisions. At one standup meeting, Graf challenged the group to come up with an alternative method for covering the spacecraft deck so that they could avoid potential heat loss while operating the radar antenna. The current plan could cost the orbiter to lose 15 watts

of power as wasted heat, and every watt of power and every ounce of heat counts in space. So the group thrashed out a complicated solution to the problem of a minor heat loss.



USING E-MAIL AND GROUPWARE TO FACILITATE GROUP DECISION MAKING

The presence of so many teams in the workplace means that people must work collectively and that they must make decisions together. Collective effort usually translates into meetings. Without any meetings, people are working primarily alone and thus are not benefiting from working in teams. Yet with too many meetings, it is difficult to accomplish individual work, such as dealing with e-mail, making telephone calls, analyzing information, and preparing reports.

Appropriate use of e-mail and groupware can facilitate interaction among team members and group decision making, while at the same time minimizing the number of physical meetings. Such use of e-mail and other electronic tools makes possible the virtual teams described in the previous chapter.

Using E-Mail to Facilitate Meetings

By using e-mail, team members can feed important information to all other members of the team without the ritual of entering a meeting and passing around handouts.^[21] Using e-mail, many small details can be taken care of in advance of the meeting. During the meeting, major items can be tackled. The typical use of e-mail is to send brief memos to people on a distribution list. A more advanced use of e-mail is to distribute word processing documents as well as spreadsheets and graphics, including photographs, as attachments. If the subject of the meeting deals with uncomplicated issues, text messaging can be used instead of e-mail.

Think back to the decision reached by the team using the nominal group technique. As a follow-up to the meeting, the team was to get together to rate all 12 suppliers on quality, price, and service. Using e-mail, the group could cut down substantially on the amount of time they would have to spend in a group meeting. They might even be able

to eliminate a group meeting. Pedro might instruct the team members to send their ratings and explanations to each other within 10 working days.

Each team member would then rate all 12 suppliers on quality, service, and price. The ratings would then be sent to all other team members by e-mail. Pedro could tally the results and report the final tally to each team member by e-mail. Since all team members could have performed the same calculation themselves, there would be no claims of a biased decision. A team meeting could be called to discuss the final results if Pedro or the other team members thought it was necessary.

Pushing the use of e-mail too far can inhibit rather than enhance group decision making and teamwork. If people communicate with each other almost exclusively by e-mail, the warmth of human interaction and facial expressions is lost. Piggybacking of ideas is possible by reading each other's ideas on a computer monitor. Nevertheless, the wink of an eye, the shared laughter, and the encouraging smiles that take place in a traditional meeting make an important contribution to team effort, including group problem solving. Also, face-to-face interaction facilitates creativity as people exchange ideas.

Using Groupware to Facilitate Group Problem Solving

The application of e-mail just described can be considered part of groupware because e-mail was used to facilitate work in groups. Electronic brainstorming also relies on groupware because software is applied to facilitate group decision making. Using electronic brainstorming, as well as the other electronic approaches to group problem solving, participants are free to comment on, or suggest a modification of, the ideas of other contributors. Assume that Sara, a marketing assistant at a bicycle company, enters the following comment on her e-mail: "I say, let's push for selling more adult tricycles in Florida because of the many seniors down there." Engineering technician, Jason, then adds to Sara's comment, "I love Sara's idea. But why limit the marketing push to Florida? Let's follow the senior crowd right into Arizona and the Carolinas."

At its best, groupware offers certain advantages over single-user systems. Some of the most common reasons people use groupware are as follows:^[22]

- To facilitate communication by making it faster, clearer, and more persuasive
- To communicate when it would not otherwise be possible
- To enable telecommuting (working from home)
- To reduce travel costs
- To bring together multiple perspectives and expertise
- To assemble groups with common interests where it would not be possible to gather a sufficient number of people face-to-face
- To facilitate group problem solving

Another example of groupware is a *shared whiteboard* that allows two or more people to view and draw on a common drawing surface even when they are at a distance. The link to group decision making is that drawing sketches and diagrams might be an important part of the decision making. An example would be a sales team suggesting ways of dividing a geographic territory for selling. Yet another electronic approach to meetings is for all participants to post comments on a social networking site such as Facebook. In this way, all participants see the comments made by the other participants. Many companies have developed Web sites of their own modeled after Facebook.

An advantage of virtual problem solving is that it avoids the problem of a couple of people dominating the meeting, and some people making no contribution because they are timid. The extreme view is expressed by Ajay Finze, information systems professor of Arizona State University, who says: "The key to effective meetings is the ability to make them anonymous—an idea that runs against the conventional wisdom that it's better to meet face to face than via computer linkup."^[23] A more human relations oriented perspective is that in-person meetings are useful for a final discussion or vote because of the exchange of ideas possible.^[24] Another problem with anonymity in problem solving is that many workers want to receive credit for their good ideas.

Despite all these potential applications and benefits of groupware, the system will break down unless almost all the parties involved use the software successfully. For example, all members of the virtual team must be willing to get online at the same time to have a productive meeting.

SUGGESTIONS FOR BEING AN EFFECTIVE MEETING PARTICIPANT

LEARNING OBJECTIVE 6

“ So most meetings nowadays, you send me the material and I read them in advance. And I can come in and say: 'I've got the following four questions. Please don't present the deck.' That let's us go, whether it was organized that way or not, to the recommendation. And if I have questions about the long and winding road and the data and the supporting evidence, I can ask. But it gives us greater focus. (A deck, of course, is a group of PowerPoint slides.) ”

—Steven A. Ballmer, CEO of Microsoft Corp., Quoted in Adam Bryant, "Meetings, Version 2.0 at Microsoft," *The New York Times* (www.nytimes.com), May 17, 2009.

Except for virtual meetings such as those made possible by groupware, group problem solving takes place within the context of a face-to-face meeting. A major problem with most meetings is that they frustrate the participants, particularly those who are accomplishment-oriented. Steven G. Rogelberg and his associates conducted an online survey of 980 participants from the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom. The more meetings the accomplishment-oriented workers attended, the worse they felt about their job and the lower their feelings of well-being. The meetings appeared to have been perceived as an interruption to the tasks these ambitious people set out to accomplish.^[25] However, many workers do enjoy the social interaction involved in meetings, as well as a change of pace from individual work.

Meetings are not likely to be eliminated despite their unpopularity with accomplishment-oriented workers. A possible solution is for meeting participants to conduct themselves in a professional, task-oriented manner. In this way, meetings will most likely be shorter and more productive. A few key suggestions follow for being an effective meeting participant.^[26]

- Arrive at the meeting prepared, such as having studied the support material and agenda, thought through your potential contribution, and taken care of some details by e-mail beforehand.
- Arrive on time, and stay until the meeting is completed. The meeting leader will often wait for the last participant before getting down to business. Leaving early distracts other participants.
- Do not hog the meeting or sit silently. Meetings are much more effective when the participants make balanced contributions.
- Use constructive nonverbal communication rather than slouching, yawning, looking bored and frustrated, leaving the room frequently, chewing gum, checking your cell phone or laptop computer, or engaging in similar negative behaviors.
- Converse only with others in the meeting when someone else is not speaking. Some executives will oust from a meeting if they engage in *sidebar conversations*.
- Be prepared to offer compromise solutions when other meeting participants and the meeting leader are haggling about a conflict of opinion.
- When possible, have data ready to support your position, such as estimating from industry data how much money your suggestion will save the company.

From studying these suggestions, you will observe that conducting yourself productively and professionally in a meeting is yet another job-oriented, interpersonal skill.

CULTURAL FACTORS AND GROUP DECISION MAKING

Most aspects of human relations and interpersonal skills are affected by cultural factors, including both national and organizational cultures. Chapter 8 focuses on developing cross-cultural skills, and describes many national differences in culture. Here we present a couple of example of how cultural factors can influence the acceptance of group problem solving and decision making.

Whenever differences attributed to national cultures are mentioned, it must be recognized that these are sweeping generalizations that apply to average, or typical, behaviors. The same is true for generational and gender differences. Craig L. Pearce and his associates studied three sets of cultural differences in workplace attitudes and behaviors related to

how well workers are willing to share decision making. Highlights of the findings are as follows:^[27]

1. **Acceptance of unequal distribution of power in institutions and organizations.** Workers in societies where workers expect managers to have more power—and who accept this reality—are more hesitant to participate in group decision making. The same workers might be hesitant to contribute radical ideas to brainstorming because they think the manager is responsible for producing innovative ideas. Countries where workers believe in managers holding most of the power are Arab countries and France. Positive attitudes toward power sharing are more common in the United States and Canada.
2. **The degree to which a country is aggressive versus nurturing.** Aggressive societies are less prone to group decision making because aggressive people prefer to dominate. People in an aggressive society are oriented toward the achievement of goals at the expense of others. Managers from a nurturing society are more likely to believe in group decision making because the process helps workers to develop. On the list of aggressive societies are Ireland and the United States.
3. **The degree to which a society is individualistic or collectivistic.** Members of an individualistic society tend to be self-reliant and value independence, whereas members of a collectivistic society are oriented toward groups. Workers from an individualistic society might not enjoy working in teams and would not be so enthusiastic about group decision making. Workers from a collectivistic society take naturally to group decision making. People from Germany and the United States tend to value individualism. This stereotype exists despite the emphasis on teamwork in the United States.

The organizational culture, or values and behaviors of most members of the organization, exerts a strong influence on the preference for group decision making. When the organizational culture emphasizes collaboration, group problem solving and decision-making is prevalent and welcome. Procter & Gamble and Xerox are two examples of successful corporations that emphasize group decision making. The General Motors of old emphasized individual decision making.

Self-Assessment Quiz 7-1 provided an indication of your tendencies toward being interested in group problem solving, and is much like the quiz you took in the previous chapter in terms of attitude toward teamwork. You will most likely perform better in group decision making if you enjoy the activity. Learning about techniques of group problem solving will most likely be of more interest to you if you have a positive attitude toward the process.

Concept Review and Reinforcement

Key Terms

group decision making 139
rational decision-making model 139
political decision-making model 140

blind spots 140
brainstorming 145
brainwriting 146

nominal group technique
(NGT) 147

Summary

An important aspect of interpersonal relations in organizations is that groups solve many key problems. Group problem solvers and decision makers often use the rational model or the political model. The rational decision-making model is the traditional, logical approach to decision making based on the scientific method. The model assumes that each alternative is evaluated in terms of how well it contributes to reaching the goals involved in making the decision.

The political decision-making model assumes that people bring preconceived notions and biases into the decision-making situation. Because the decision makers are politically motivated, the individuals often do not make the most rational choice. Instead, the decision makers attempt to satisfy their own needs. Blind spots are an unintended contributor to political decision making, and so are greed and gluttony.

General problem-solving groups are likely to arrive at better decisions when they follow standard steps or guidelines for group problem solving. The steps are as follows: (1) Identify the problem, (2) clarify the problem, (3) analyze the cause, (4) search for alternative solutions, (5) select alternatives, (6) plan for implementation, (7) clarify the contract, (8) develop an action plan, and (9) provide for evaluation and accountability. The group's collective efficacy influences its ability to solve problems.

Disagreements about group decisions can be managed by giving dissenters the freedom to express doubt and by expressing doubts collaboratively rather than contentiously. Group decision making is more productive when group members are involved in inquiry, or looking for the best alternative. Advocacy, or fighting for one position, leads to poorer decisions. Research indicates that teams are more likely to make optimal decisions when they

take the time to debate the issues and thoughtfully discuss alternative solutions.

When the organization is seeking a large number of alternatives to problems, brainstorming is often the technique of choice. Brainstorming is used as a method of finding alternatives to real-life problems and as a creativity-training program. Using the technique, group members spontaneously call out alternative solutions to the problem. Members build on the ideas of each other, and ideas are not screened or evaluated until a later stage. Diversity within the group facilitates brainstorming, as does the right physical environment, such as sunlight. Brainstorming by working alone, or brainwriting, is also effective in generating alternative solutions.

The nominal group technique (NGT) is recommended for a situation in which a leader needs to know what alternatives are available and how people will react to them. In the NGT, a small group of people contributes written solutions to the problem. Other members respond to their ideas later. Members rate each other's ideas numerically, and the final group decision is the sum of the pooled individual votes.

Problem solving and decision making can sometimes be improved by conducting meetings while standing up instead of sitting down. The general idea is that participants who are standing up are more likely to be alert and come to a decision quickly. An experiment with management students indicated that standup groups made decisions more quickly, but that decision makers who sat down were more satisfied.

Electronic mail can be used to facilitate group decision making because members can feed information to each other without having to meet as a group. Memos, spreadsheet analyses, and graphics can be distributed through the network. Too much emphasis on e-mail, however, results in losing the value of face-to-face human interaction.

Various types of groupware, including e-mail and electronic brainstorming, can facilitate group decision making. Also, a shared whiteboard allows two or more people to view and draw on a common drawing surface even when they are at a distance. Facebook, or a company Web site of the same type, can also be used for group decision making. Virtual problem solving helps avoid individual domination of decision making, but face-to-face discussion is important in making a final decision.

To help avoid the frustration of many accomplishment-oriented people in meetings, participants should conduct themselves in a professional, task-oriented manner. The suggestions presented here include: arrive prepared, arrive on time and stay for the full meeting, do not hog the meeting or sit silently, use constructive non-verbal communication, avoid sidebar conversations, offer compromise solutions to conflicts, and use data to support your position.

Questions for Discussion and Review

1. In this age of advanced communication technology, why bother having face-to-face problem-solving groups?
2. Which personality characteristics described in Chapter 2 do you think would help a person be naturally effective in group problem solving?
3. Give an example of how knowledge of the team member roles presented in Chapter 6 could help you be a better contributor to group problem solving.
4. Identify several problems on or off the job for which you think brainstorming would be effective.
5. What is your opinion of the importance of the physical setting (such as sunlight and refreshments) for stimulating creative thinking during brainstorming?
6. Identify two work-related problems for which the nominal group technique is particularly well suited.
7. In what way do athletic teams, such as those for football and basketball, make use of standup meetings?
8. How can a team leader apply groupware to help the group become more productive?
9. What annoys you the most about how some people conduct themselves in problem-solving meetings of any type? What changes in their behavior would you recommend?
10. Which group decision-making technique described in this chapter do you think members of a professional sports team are the most likely to use? Why?

The Web Corner

<http://www.mindtools.com/>

(Techniques for group and individual problem solving, and creativity.)

<http://www.nova-mind.com/>

(Mind mapping for group and individual problem solving. See the demonstration.)

Internet Skill Builder: Where Did I Put that Great Idea I Had?

Many people involved in group brainstorming hit upon useful ideas when away from the brainstorming session,

then forget the idea by the time they get to the session. So during the session, the person fails to make an outstanding contribution. Search the Internet for some cool ideas for recording your ideas. An example would be sending yourself an e-mail or voicemail message if you come upon a useful idea while hiking. You are encouraged to look widely for a couple of concrete suggestions for filing your creative ideas right on the spot. Remember that fresh ideas are the building block for all types of group, as well as individual problem solving.

Developing Your Human Relations Skills

Interpersonal Relations Case 7.1

Pet Groomers on Wheels Get into a Huddle

Ted and Erin, a married couple, both loved pets and both craved becoming small-business owners. So several years ago while still holding down corporate positions, they launched a new business, Pet Groomers on Wheels. The basic model of the business is to make house calls to groom pets at the pet owner's home.

The key services for dogs are shampoos, haircuts, nail clips, teeth polishing, and ear cleaning. Except for the shampoos, the services are similar for cats. Ted and Erin travel in a van fully equipped with their supplies, and the pet grooming is conducted in the van rather than bringing all the equipment into the customer's home. Ted and Erin started the operation part-time by making their calls at night and on weekends. Soon it appeared the business was ready to become a full-time business, so the couple both quit their corporate positions.

Operating in the prosperous North Virginia geographic area, Pet Groomers on Wheels has far exceeded the sales volume and profits projected by Ted and Erin. To successfully manage all the client demands, the couple hired two close relatives, Tanya and Nick, to make some of the calls. To help keep Tanya and Nick motivated—as well as not going into competition with Pet Care on Wheels—Ted and Erin made them part owners of the business.

After three years of operation, Pet Groomers on Wheels has generated \$85,000 in profits beyond paying Ted, Erin,

Tanya, and Nick salaries of an average of \$65,000 each. In the process of preparing the income tax for Pet Groomers, Erin decided that the company was not managing its money effectively by leaving the profits in a checking account. After chatting about the situation with Ted, they both agreed that the company should manage its money more professionally. Ted said jokingly, "I guess we could run to Vegas and pay the money into a fortune. Or, we could take a comparable risk and invest in the stock market."

Erin replied, "I have a better idea. Let's get together with Tanya and Nick, and really thrash out what to do with Pet Groomers profits. We can all have dinner together, followed by a no-holds-barred problem-solving session."

Case Questions

1. Does the problem facing the owners of Pet Groomers on Wheels seem suited for going through the steps for group problem solving? Or, what other problem-solving technique would you recommend?
2. Take the problem of what to do with Pet Groomers profits through the group problem-solving steps, even if you have to make assumptions about some of the data for the steps.
3. Compare the conclusion you reach in response to question 2 with the conclusion reached by other individuals or groups within the class.

Interpersonal Relations Case 7.2

The Torpedoed Submarine Rolls

Chad is the sales manager at Guarino's Bakery, a supplier of bread products, cakes, and pastries to local restaurants and stores. He enjoys the challenge of his job and welcomes the opportunity to practice the skills and techniques of a professional manager. Chad has acquired some of these techniques through experience and many others through reading business books and through course work.

During the last three months, five accounts have stopped ordering the Italian bread from Guarino's that they use for submarine sandwiches. The president and owner, Angelo Guarino, told Chad, "Our submarine bread sales are being torpedoed. Our reputation is getting so bad that we'll soon be out of business. Find out by next week what has gone wrong with our line of bread. Max (the head baker) swears the bread hasn't changed."

"Angelo, I've been trying hard to find the answer," responded Chad. "So far, the only clue I have is that our submarine rolls just don't taste right. Something is wrong, but our customers don't know what it is. Several of them have complained that their customers say the bread is just not as good as in the past."

Angelo retorted, "Then go back and investigate some more. We've got to know what's wrong."

Chad said to himself, "Now is the time for action. But I'm not sure which action. Should I take a survey of dissatisfied customers? Should I increase the advertising budget?"

Case Questions

1. How might the problem facing Guarino's bakery be resolved through group decision making?
2. Which technique should Chad use to solve the problem of customer resistance to the submarine rolls?
3. What is the underlying, or true, problem facing Guarino's Bakery?