
Gathering

A process for decision making

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Gathering is a highly effective and surprisingly efficient method of decision making. It works in any group whose members are prepared to take responsibility for some of the group process. In other words it works in peer facilitated groups and it can also work in hierarchically facilitated groups as long as the members can exercise some of their power.

The process goes like this: At any stage anyone who thinks it is appropriate can start a gather. What they do is to summarise the situation. The aim of the summary is to incorporate all the different opinions and needs being expressed.

If anyone disagrees with the gather, i.e. they think it is not a complete summary or it is inaccurate in some way, then they can re-gather. The rule is, though, that the re-gather must be a complete summary. In other words the re-gatherer is not allowed to just disagree with some part of the gather. If anyone disagrees with the re-gather then they can re-gather in the same way. The process continues until everyone is content with the latest gather.

This way a summary is arrived at which incorporates all shades of opinion, need and fact. This means that the group validates all points of view, minority views are as important as majority views.

The gather may effectively be a decision. It could, for instance, be along the lines that a majority want to do A, a minority would prefer to do B, which is incompatible with A, but do not object to A, another minority want to do C which can be done in addition to A, another minority is opposed to A and most people think that it is acceptable for A to be done despite this latter minority's objections.

If there is a sense that that the situation outlined in the gather is not a satisfactory basis upon which to proceed then the discussion will continue until someone starts another gather.

Although the process can sound a bit complicated, in practice it is usually surprisingly easy. Often it can circumvent the need for unnecessary discussion. Thus, in an ongoing group dealing with an ongoing issue someone can start off with a gather that summarises the current situation. If everyone is happy with that and there is nothing more that needs doing currently then the group can get straight on with the next business.

The discipline of the process encourages everyone to give good attention to all points of view. That means that people are and feel heard and understood. This can avoid a lot of repetitive argument as people struggle to be heard.

The process also encourages a creative problem solving approach to decision making. In other words the group looks for solutions that can honour all the different needs and opinions rather than arguing over the merits of existing proposals.
