

Preface

A dramatic change has occurred in today's workplace. Many people are being called on to manage through teams. To work through teams, we need tools and strategies to facilitate consensus as never before. There are no easy, clear-cut models to move an organization from top-down, hierarchical decision making to team decisions based on consensus. Consensus tools are needed so that organizations can move into this uncharted territory with confidence.

When these tools and strategies are used to create a purposeful vision, encourage participative processes, enhance individual commitment, and build a collaborative team, consensus can begin to grow. Shortchange any one of these components, and the consensus is lopsided or incomplete. Without a vision, there is no focus to a consensus and no reason for one. Without participative processes, there is no road map for the group to follow through the intricacies of building consensus meeting after meeting. Without individual commitment, there is no drive or energy to carry consensus through to completion. Finally, without a unified team, the task of consensus is overwhelming and burdensome. People burn out before consensus is reached.

Building consensus is not an overnight task. It is a process that takes years and can be refined year after year. Nevertheless, you can begin today with your team to set the stage for consensus to grow and to establish an environment that fosters consensus. As you mix tools and strategies from each section of this book, you will create a unique blend of approaches that will move your group toward trust and deep consensus.

Anyone interested in consensus may take this book and read it from cover to cover to gain a full grasp of the consensus process and a multitude of ways to generate consensus in a team. It is also possible to thumb through to an activity whose title seems interesting and just jump in and use it.

You may also choose strategies at simple, intermediate, or challenging levels. If your group has just come together for the first time or if your team is newly constituted, it might be helpful to delve into the strategies called Simple Things to Do. If your team has already worked together for several months and performs well, with perhaps just a few snags, see whether some of the medium-level strategies (Things That Take Effort) fit your situation. Teams that have been functioning well for quite a while may find that some of the more demanding strategies (For the Committed) help them build on their strengths.

This book is also organized into the four components of full consensus: Purposeful Vision, Participative Processes, Individual Commitment, and Collaborative Teams. Perhaps your team is manifesting signs that it needs some of the strategies associated with only one of the four major parts of this book. If your team is mired in the day-to-day, plodding tasks of implementation, some of the strategies of Purposeful Vision may help reinstate the team's awareness of the big picture and revive some of the energy shown in the team's early days.

If your team is argumentative and full of hassling, some of the strategies in Participative Processes may help channel and focus some of your team's energies. Furthermore, if one or two people are dominating your meetings, this section might be particularly useful.

When you find signs that your team or many individuals on your team are refusing responsibility or allowing only one or two people to do all the work, then your team might be assisted greatly by some of the strategies in Individual Commitment.

Last, if your team has strong-willed, competent individuals all pouring much energy into the task but rarely working together, explore the strategies in Collaborative Teams. Our

culture has long encouraged strong individual action, often to the neglect of teamwork.

For a review of the theory and research behind some of the concepts represented in this book, please read the introductions to each part. These introductions summarize what other experts and practitioners are saying about consensus. The quotations at the beginning of each activity reinforce themes of the whole section.

Needless to say, if an activity does not appear to make any sense for your team at this time, go on to the next one and keep going until you find one that clicks with you and your team. Or if a strategy makes great sense to you but does not go over with the team, go on to another activity until you find one that works for all of you. Some of the activities are ones you do directly with your group. Others help you both before and after your meetings.

You might find it helpful, after you try something, to spend time thinking about what went well, exactly how people felt about what you did, why you think it went well, and how you might improve it the next time you use it. This kind of review and debriefing of yourself can strengthen your capacity and confidence as a facilitator.

After you try something suggested in this book, I would be delighted to hear how it worked for you. As you use these strategies, you may be building teams in places where very few teams have operated before. You are laying tracks for a whole new way of working. Let me know what worked, how well it worked, whether it flopped, and how you have improved activities.