

PARTICIPATORY VALUES

HOW FULL PARTICIPATION STRENGTHENS
INDIVIDUALS, DEVELOPS GROUPS, AND
FOSTERS SUSTAINABLE AGREEMENTS

- ◆ **The Four Participatory Values**
- ◆ **How Participatory Values Affect
People and Their Work**
- ◆ **Full Participation**
- ◆ **Mutual Understanding**
- ◆ **Inclusive Solutions**
- ◆ **Shared Responsibility**
- ◆ **Benefits of Participatory Values**

PARTICIPATORY DECISION-MAKING CORE VALUES

FULL PARTICIPATION

In a participatory group, all members are encouraged to speak up and say what's on their minds. This strengthens a group in several ways. Members become more courageous in raising difficult issues. They learn how to share their "first-draft" ideas. And they become more adept at discovering and acknowledging the diversity of opinions and backgrounds inherent in any group.

MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING

For a group to reach a sustainable agreement, members have to understand and accept the legitimacy of one another's needs and goals. This basic recognition is what allows people to think from each other's point of view. And thinking from each other's point of view is the catalyst for innovative ideas that serve the interests of all parties.

INCLUSIVE SOLUTIONS

Inclusive solutions are wise solutions. Their wisdom emerges from the integration of everybody's perspectives and needs. These are solutions whose range and vision are expanded to take advantage of the truth held not only by the quick, the articulate, the influential, and the powerful, but also the truth held by those who are disenfranchised or shy or who think at a slower pace. As veteran facilitator Caroline Estes puts it, "Everyone has a piece of the truth." *

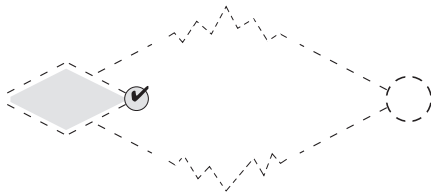
SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

In participatory groups, members recognize that they must be willing and able to implement the proposals they endorse, so they make every effort to give and receive input before final decisions are made. They also assume responsibility for designing and managing the thinking process that will result in a good decision. This contrasts sharply with the conventional assumption that everyone will be held accountable for the consequences of thinking done by a few key people.

* Caroline Estes, *Everyone Has a Piece of the Truth*.
U.S. Cohousing Association, <http://www.cohousing.org/cm/article/truth>

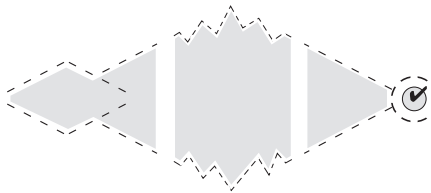
HOW PARTICIPATORY VALUES CAN AFFECT GROUP DECISION-MAKING

**FULL
PARTICIPATION**



QUANTITY AND QUALITY OF PARTICIPATION DURING A BUSINESS-AS-USUAL DISCUSSION

In a typical business-as-usual discussion, self-expression is highly constrained. People tend to keep risky opinions to themselves. The most highly regarded comments are those that seem the clearest, the smartest, the most well polished. In business-as-usual discussions, thinking out loud is treated with impatience; people get annoyed if the speaker's remarks are vague or poorly stated. This induces self-censorship, and reduces the quantity and quality of participation overall. A few people end up doing almost all the talking – and in many groups, those few people just keep repeating themselves and repeating themselves.

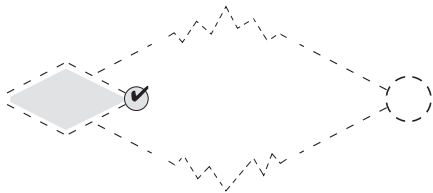


FULL PARTICIPATION DURING A PARTICIPATORY DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

Participatory decision-making groups go through a business-as-usual phase too. If familiar opinions lead to a workable solution, then the group can reach a decision quickly. But when a business-as-usual discussion does *not* produce a workable solution, a participatory group will open up the process and encourage more divergent thinking. What does this look like in action? It looks like people permitting themselves to state half-formed thoughts that express unconventional – but perhaps valuable – perspectives. It looks like people taking risks to surface controversial issues. It looks like people making suggestions “from left field” that stimulate their peers to think new thoughts. And it also looks like a roomful of people *encouraging each other* to do all these things.

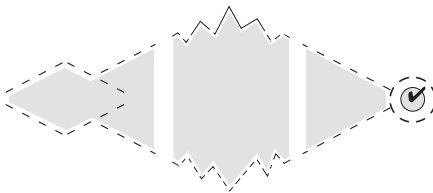
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MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING



EXTENT OF MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING DURING A BUSINESS-AS-USUAL DISCUSSION

In a business-as-usual discussion, persuasion is much more common than dialogue. The views of “the other side” are dissected point by point for the purpose of refuting them. Little effort, if any, is put into discovering the deeper reasons people believe what they do. Even when it appears unlikely that persuasion will change anyone’s mind, participants continue to press home their points – making it appear as though the pleasures of rhetoric were the true purpose of continuing the discussion. Most participants tend to stop listening to each other, except to prepare for a rebuttal.

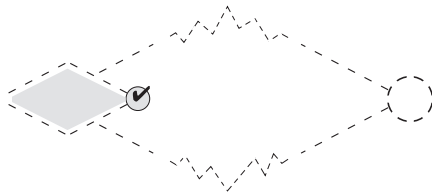


EXTENT OF MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING DURING A PARTICIPATORY DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

Building a shared framework of understanding means taking the time to understand everyone’s perspective in order to find the best idea. To build that framework, participants spend time and effort questioning each other, getting to know one another – learning from each other. *Participants put themselves in each other’s shoes.* The process is laced with intermittent discomfort: some periods are tense, some are stifling. But participants keep plugging away. Over time, many people gain insight into their own positions. They might discover that their own thinking is out-of-date or misinformed or driven by inaccurate stereotypes. And by struggling to acquire such insights, members might also discover something else about one another: that they all truly do care about achieving a mutual goal.

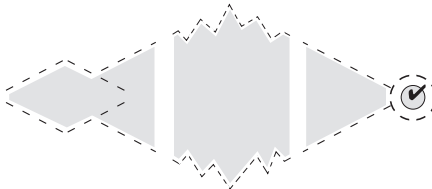
HOW PARTICIPATORY VALUES CAN AFFECT GROUP DECISION-MAKING

**INCLUSIVE
SOLUTIONS**



SOLUTIONS RESULTING FROM A BUSINESS-AS-USUAL DISCUSSION

Business-as-usual discussions seldom result in inclusive solutions. More commonly, people quickly form opinions and take sides. Everyone expects that one side will get what they want and the other side won't. Disputes, they assume, will be resolved by the person who has the most authority. Some groups settle their differences by majority vote, but the effect is the same. Expediency rather than innovation or sustainability is the driver of such solutions. When the implementation is easy, or when the stakes are low, expedient solutions are perfectly good – but not when the stakes are high, or creativity is required, or broad-based commitment is needed.

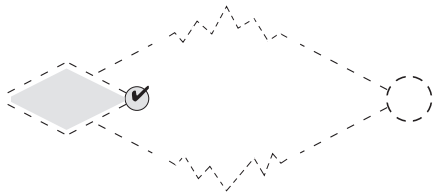


SOLUTIONS RESULTING FROM A PARTICIPATORY DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

Inclusive solutions are not compromises; they work for everyone who holds a stake in the outcome. Typically, an inclusive solution involves the discovery of an entirely new option. For instance, an unexpected partnership might be forged between former competitors. Or a group may invent a nontraditional alternative to a procedure that had previously “always been done that way.” Several real-life case examples of inclusive solutions are presented in Chapter 16. Inclusive solutions are usually not obvious – they *emerge* in the course of the group's persistence. As participants learn more about each other's perspectives, they become progressively more able to integrate their own goals and needs with those of the other participants. This leads to innovative, original thinking.

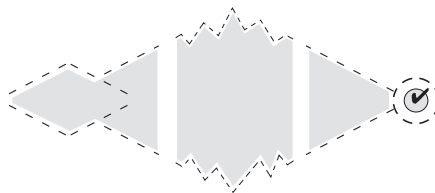
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SHARED RESPONSIBILITY



THE ENACTMENT OF RESPONSIBILITY DURING A BUSINESS-AS-USUAL DISCUSSION

In business-as-usual discussions, groups rely on the authority of their leaders and their experts. The person-in-charge assumes responsibility for defining goals, setting priorities, defining problems, establishing success criteria, and arriving at conclusions. Participants with the most expertise are expected to distill relevant data, provide analysis, and make recommendations. Furthermore, the person-in-charge is expected to run the meeting, monitor the progress of each topic, enforce time boundaries, referee disputes, and generally take responsibility for all aspects of process management.



SHARED RESPONSIBILITY DURING A PARTICIPATORY DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

In order for an agreement to be sustainable, it needs everyone's support. Understanding this principle leads everyone to take personal responsibility for making sure they are satisfied with the proposed course of action. Thus, people raise whatever issues they consider to be important. And everyone is expected to voice concerns if they have them, even when doing so could delay the group from reaching a decision. Furthermore, *shared responsibility* applies to the process of a meeting, not just to the content. Group members are willing to discuss and co-create the procedures they will follow; they share in designing their meeting agendas; they are ready to take on roles – facilitator, recorder, time-keeper, mediator, data-keeper, and so on. Overall, in a participatory process everyone is an owner of the outcome; participants acknowledge this as a core value and they act accordingly.

THE BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATORY VALUES

Full Participation
Mutual Understanding
Inclusive Solutions
Shared Responsibility

The participatory values discussed in this chapter provide the members of a group with a set of grounding principles for conducting their meetings. Adherence to these values produces significant results: stronger individuals, stronger groups, and stronger agreements.

Stronger Individuals

- Improved leadership skills
- Stronger powers of reasoning
- More confidence
- More commitment
- Better communication skills
- Greater ability to assume broader and more difficult responsibilities

Stronger Groups

- Greater ability to utilize multiple talents
- Access to more types of information
- Development of a respectful, supportive atmosphere
- Clear procedures for handling group dynamics
- Increased capacity for tackling difficult problems

Stronger Agreements

- More ideas
- Higher-quality ideas
- Better integration of diverse goals
- Wiser decisions
- More reliable follow-through

