Controversy with Civility – recognize that differences of viewpoint are inevitable and that such differences must be aired openly but with civility. Civility implies respect for others, a willingness to hear about each other’s viewpoints, and the exercise of restraint in criticizing the views and actions of others. Controversy can often lead to new, creative solutions to problems, especially when it occurs in an atmosphere of civility, collaboration, and common purpose.

**Two Approaches to Decision Making**


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Advocacy</th>
<th>Inquiry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concept of decision making</td>
<td>A contest</td>
<td>Collaborative problem solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of discussion</td>
<td>Persuasion and lobbying</td>
<td>Testing and evaluation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participants' role</td>
<td>Spokespeople</td>
<td>Critical thinkers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pattern of behavior</td>
<td>Strive to persuade others</td>
<td>Present balanced arguments</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Defend your position</td>
<td>Remain open to alternatives</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Downplay weaknesses</td>
<td>Accept constructive criticism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority views</td>
<td>Discouraged or dismissed</td>
<td>Cultivated and valued</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome</td>
<td>Winners and losers</td>
<td>Collective ownership</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**A Litmus Test (Gavin & Roberto)**

- Multiple Alternatives
- Assumption Testing
- Well-defined Criteria
- Dissent and Debate
- Perceived Fairness

## Constructive Controversy Procedure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Typical Phrase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prepare</td>
<td>Our Best Case Is...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present</td>
<td>The Answer Is...Because...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Discussion</td>
<td>Your Position is Inadequate Because...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>My Position is Better Because...</td>
</tr>
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<td>Our Best Reasoned Judgment Is...</td>
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</table>

## Constructive Controversy Topics?

- Make project certification, e.g. PMI-PMP, a part of the MOT program?
  - Yes
  - No
- Who makes the best project manager?
  - Generalist
  - Specialist
- **Brooks’ Law**: “adding resources to a late project makes it later”
  - Right on!
  - Way off!
- **Scope Creep**
  - Parkinson’s Law: Work expands to fill the time available for completion (manageable)
  - Progressive refinement rules! (unavoidable)
- **Peters**: “Tomorrow’s corporation is a collection of projects”
  - Accurate portrayal
  - Inaccurate portrayal
- The future work environment is remotely distributed
  - Future is already here (it’s just not evenly distributed) - Gibson
  - Fad
Have you learned lessons only of those who admired you, and were tender with you, and stood aside for you?

Have you not learned great lessons from those who braced themselves against you, and disputed the passage with you?

Walt Whitman, 1860
Promoting Controversy

1. Present Viewpoints.
2. Highlight Disagreements.
3. Be Impartial and Rational.
5. Assign Devil’s Advocate Role.
6. Use Advocacy Subgroups
7. Have “Second Chance” Meetings

Skilled Disagreement

1. Define Decision as a mutual problem, not as a win-lose situation.
2. Be critical of ideas, not people (Confirm others' competence while disagreeing with their positions).
3. Separate one's personal worth from others' reactions to one's ideas.
4. Differentiate before trying to integrate.
5. Take others' perspectives before refuting their ideas.
6. Give everyone a fair hearing.
7. Follow the canons of rational argument.
Rules for Constructive Controversy

1. I am critical of ideas, not people. I challenge and refute the ideas of the opposing group, but I do not indicate that I personally reject them.

2. I remember that we are all in this together, sink or swim. I focus on coming to the best decision possible, not on winning.

3. I encourage everyone to participate and to master all the relevant information.

4. I listen to everyone’s ideas, even if I don’t agree.

5. I restate what someone has said if it is not clear.

6. I first try to bring out all the ideas and facts supporting both sides, and then I try to put them together in a way that makes sense.

7. I try to understand all sides of the issue.

8. I change my mind when the evidence clearly indicates that I should do so.

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Preparing Positions

1. Summarize major points.
2. Ensure both members present.
3. Use more than one medium.
4. Present position strongly and sincerely whether you believe it or not.
5. Save a few points for the discussion.

Presenting Positions

Pair A presents its position as sincerely and thoroughly as it can.

Pair B listens carefully and takes notes.

Pairs reverse presenting/listening roles.
Discussing the Issue

• Present Arguments Forcefully and Persuasively
• Present Facts and Rationale
• Listen Critically
• Ask for Facts and Rationale
• Present Counter-Arguments and Rebuttals
• Understand Both (All) Sides

Perspective Reversal

• Present Opposite Position As If You Were They
• Be Forceful and Persuasive
• Add New Arguments, Facts, Rationale
• Correct Errors in Others’ Presentation of Your Position
Reaching A Decision

Drop Advocacy

Summarize and Synthesize Best Arguments

Reach a Consensus Supported by Facts (or summarize best arguments on all sides)

Team writes a Report & Posts it to Moodle

Second-Chance Meetings

Alfred Sloan, when he was the Chairman of General Motors, once concluded an executive meeting called to consider a major decision by saying,

“. . . I take it we are all in complete agreement on the decision here. . .Then I propose we postpone further discussion until our next meeting to give ourselves some time to develop disagreements and perhaps gain some understanding of what the decision is all about.”
Controversy References


