

# Project and Knowledge Management

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## Constructive Controversy & Decision Making Spring, 2012

**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.

Astin, H.S. and Astin, A.W. 1996. *A social change model of leadership development*. Los Angeles, CA: The Regents of The University of California.

## Two Approaches to Decision Making

Garvin & Roberto, 2001. *Harvard Business Review*, 79(8), 108-116.

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

## A Litmus Test (Gavin & Roberto)

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

Garvin, David A. and Roberto, Michael A. 2001. What you don't know about making decisions. **Harvard Business Review**, 79 (8), 108-116.

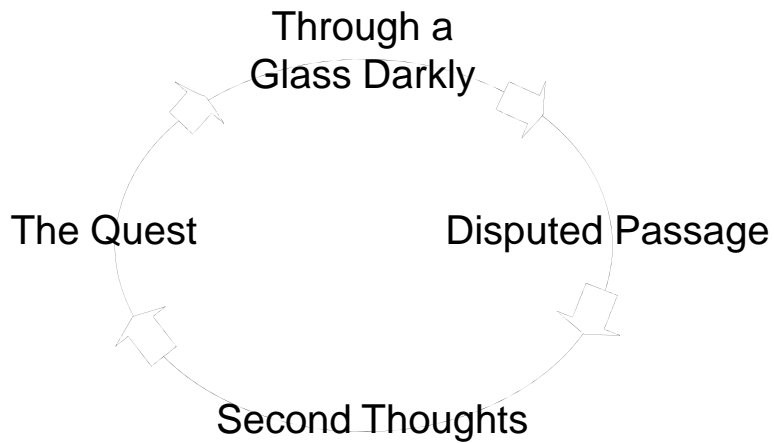
## Constructive Controversy Procedure

<u>Step</u>	<u>Typical Phrase</u>
Prepare	Our Best Case Is...
Present	The Answer Is...Because...
Open Discussion	Your Position is Inadequate Because... My Position is Better Because...
Perspective Reversal	Your Position Is...Because...
Synthesis	Our Best Reasoned Judgment Is...

## 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

## Controversy Process



*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.
4. Require Critical Evaluation.
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 an 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

Garvin, David A. and Roberto, Michael A. 2001. What you don't know about making decisions. **Harvard Business Review**, **79** (8), 108-116.

Johnson, David W., Johnson, Roger T., and Smith, Karl A. 1996. Enriching college instruction with constructive controversy. **ASHE-ERIC Reports on Higher Education**. Washington, DC: ERIC. [ASHE-ERIC, One Dupont Circle, Suite 630, Washington, DC 20036-1183]

Johnson, D.W., Johnson, R.T., and Smith, K.A. 2000. Constructive controversy: The power of intellectual conflict. **Change**, **32** (1), 28-37.

Smith, Karl A. 1984. Structured controversy. **Engineering Education**, **74**(5), 306-309.