

Dealing with Difficult Group Dynamics

The best way to deal effectively with difficult group dynamics is anticipate situations where they might arise and be prepared.

One way to mitigate conflicts is to develop clear meeting objectives and an agenda (see meeting Tips) and to develop **guidelines for participation, process and decision-making**.

For example:

- › We will be conscious of the space we take up with our talking
- › We can disagree with each other but will remain respectful
- › We will use a consensus-decision making model whenever possible.

Problem-solving

Despite best efforts to create a respectful and productive environment, conflicts are likely to surface. People have different communication styles, needs and perspectives. Periods of misunderstanding and frustration are normal when a group is dealing with difficult issues in what can sometimes be a tense environment.

It is important in a group setting that the meeting facilitator and/or participants take responsibility for identifying a group dynamic problem when it takes place. This means a shift in focus from the issue at hand, to looking at the process for dealing with the issue.

Before choosing “what to do”, the group should analyze the situation then fit their solution to the specifics of the situation. The following questions may help.

1. Why is this conflict happening?

(What do the signals indicate?)

2. Is this a group or individual issue?

3. Who or what needs our attention?

4. What are our options?

- › Deal with it now!
- › Deal with it a little later... maybe?
- › What option might we choose (and why)
- › What option will we not choose (and why)
- › How can we promote group responsibility for naming and addressing this problem?
- › Prevention (for next time)

