



Exit Strategies

Reaching Consensus in a Group Situation

By Juliet Funt

Why are decisions so hard to make in groups? It's because competing motives collide.

A good cohesive work team has motivations that include the following:

- Getting great work done.
- Optimizing the team's time.
- Being efficient and decisive.

Additional goals might also include:

- Making everyone feel included.
- Being open-minded.
- Fostering camaraderie.
- Elevating less bold team members.
- Giving every idea a chance.
- Being nice to each other.

HYPER-COLLABORATION CHALLENGES

Due to these incompatible drivers, almost every company gets mired in the process of decision making. We call this problem Hyper-Collaboration, a type of quicksand that can create hours and hours of wasted time, not to mention hard feelings, regardless of how a matter finally resolves.

In addition to opposing forces, the following common tendencies in meetings often impede decision-making:

- Lacking an agenda to drive focus.
- Digital multitasking creating distractions.

- Too many slides dominating the flow.
- A strong personality eclipsing conversation.
- Fearing speaking the truth to the boss.
- Focusing on feelings instead of evidence.
- Getting lost in tangents.

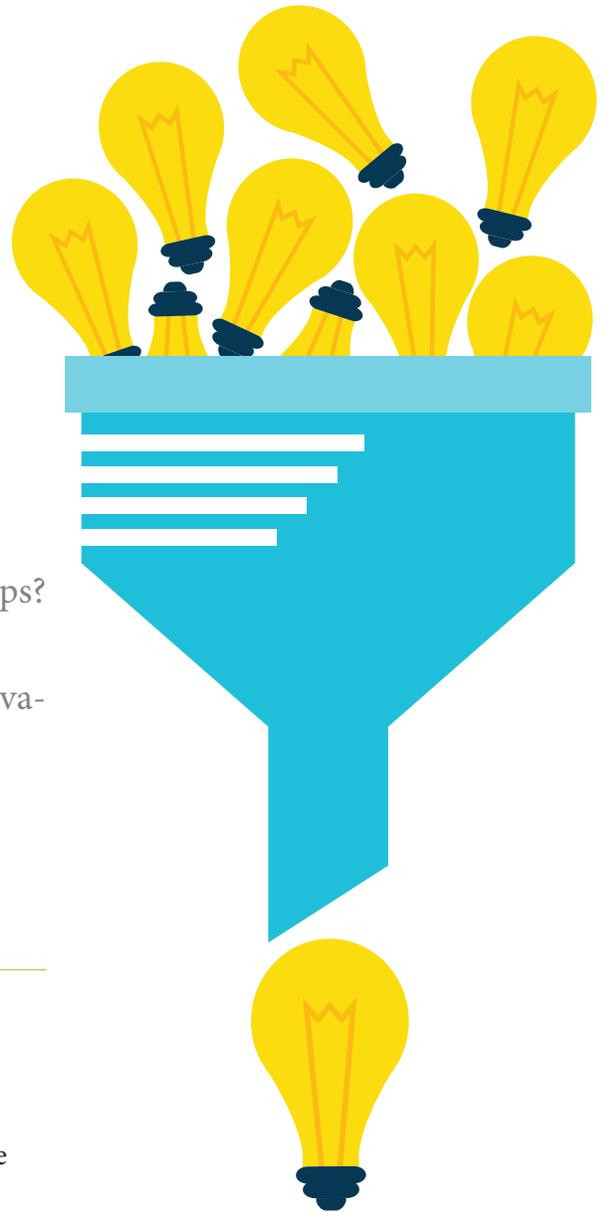
WHAT IS THE SOLUTION?

There is certainly some deep work to do to make decisions flow more easily in meetings, but one set of tools can jump-start you onto the right track. WhiteSpace Exit Strategies is a helpful and simple model that offers you three (and only three) choices when you need to make a group decision.

The critical step is to decide beforehand which one you'll use to guide you.

EXIT STRATEGIES

1. Leader Calls It: After a prescribed



amount of discussion time, the most senior person in the room will make the choice.

2. Assign a Chooser: A member of the group is preselected based on his or her knowledge base or unique experience with the topic. After a prescribed amount of discussion time, that person will make the choice.

3. Guaranteed Vote: After a prescribed amount of discussion time, a vote is taken that all agree to abide by. A tie can be broken by 15 minutes of dialogue and then a single revote.

APPLICATION TIPS

Here are some tips for making the process work.

- **Get Buy-in Early:** Do not utter the first sentence of a rich decision-making process before deciding which of the three exit strategies you will be using.
- **Allocate Enough Time:** With a prescribed period of time, you are going to be spared the endless whirlpool of true Hyper-Collaboration but choose that amount of time carefully. Make sure you have allotted enough for a thorough discussion.
- **Circle Back to the Quiet Ones:** In the last moments of debate before making a decision, create space for less verbal members of the team to chime in. Give them a loving push into the spotlight for the good of all.
- **Tune Up Your Antennae:** You will know if this is “working” only by sensing the unspoken communication of your team. Pay attention to body language and eye contact. Listen for dissatisfaction.

- **Be Tough with Tangents:** If people go off track, reel them back in firmly. Do this as many times as necessary to protect the goal of the discussion.

- **Can the Devices:** The people who appear to be taking notes on their laptops are probably not. Device multitasking can lower your team’s ability to execute by 17%. During the section of the meeting when the actual decision is being made, tighten the limits on digital play.

- **Table with a Deadline:** After your prescribed amount of discussion time, if a decision feels truly premature, you can pull out this option. Have the group convene again—no sooner than one week later—and once again attempt to make a choice using the Exit Strategy triad.



Hyper-Collaboration (is) a type of quicksand that can create hours and hours of wasted time, not to mention hard feelings, regardless of how a matter finally resolves.



Juliet Funt is the owner and founder of WhiteSpace at Work (www.whitespaceatwork.com/). It is her mission to unearth the potential of companies by unburdening their talent. Funt teaches a streamlined method for personal process improvement, leading to more creativity and engagement. She helps executives, managers and teams to answer the critical question, “What thoughts deserve my full attention today?” Funt has been a speaker at the ACUMA Conference. We received her permission to reprint this article in the Pipeline.