



Inter-Generational Decision Making

Four ways to get amazing results from your team

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Making decisions can be difficult enough when you're working with a group of likeminded peers. But when multiple generations are involved, the process can become even more challenging.

The good news is that inter-generational groups can elevate your team's effectiveness with innovative ideas that often extend far beyond the obvious options and solutions initially considered. They will not only bond more effectively and can learn from each other, they will typically find unexpected approaches that link possibilities in powerful ways, creating amazing results.

So how can you strengthen your inter-generational teams to get better results? Bringing out their best requires some new strategies. Here are four effective approaches to ensure your

decision-making involvement stays on track and is focused on moving toward an outcome that matters.

1. Don't Make Assumptions

Frequently, the assumption is made that everyone at the table has enough insight and information to participate effectively in the process. All too often, they don't.

To get the most from your team, provide them with an outline that summarizes the critical elements of the issue and why a decision needs to be made. Make sure everyone has enough information so they can be more mindful in evaluating the options. Explain how the decision relates to your organizational business strategies and why this is an area of concern. Don't assume they understand

this. Consider this an educational opportunity.

Make it a point to prepare everyone for active participation. Could your team benefit from some advance reading material, such as an article about the critical issue you are going to address? To make sure everyone is on the same page, it's crucial to set the stage at the first decision-making meeting.

▶ 2. Clarify the Parameters

Keeping an inter-generation group focused is key, so it's important to establish a framework of what must be considered and the boundaries for how far they can go with the decision options. Set limits. If there are budget or staffing limitations, say so. Be sure to clarify the boundaries of the group's role in the decision-making process too. Is the team functioning as the decision maker or serving in an advisory function to others who will decide? Put this in writing so everyone is working within the same parameters.

Often times, established professionals have a black or white point of view that makes them hold fast to historical assessments of potential options. And it's natural for younger participants to have a limited viewpoint about possible options and consequences simply because they lack experience to engage in a more nuanced deliberation. If you have some eager young professionals on your team, the last thing you want to do is dampen their enthusiasm.

Have interim checkpoints and redirect the discussion as needed. Be aware that at times, younger team members may defer to older professionals out of respect for their experience. The downside is that seasoned professionals often fall into the trap of only considering historical options that limit consideration of new approaches to solving problems. You need the insight of all generations at

“ Explain how the decision relates to your organizational business strategies... ”

the table. But it has to be effectively channeled.

▶ 3. Guide the Discussion

While you don't want to oversee every workgroup conversation, you still want to manage the overall discussion. Encourage candid dialog. Clarify the stakes for everyone involved, the resources of information you need and begin discussing the decision parameters. Have them walk through the potential outcomes of the options under consideration and address the pros and cons of each one. Encourage them to ask each other questions and challenge them to try combining elements of one option with another to come up with the strongest one possible.

Depending on the dynamics of your team, you may need to carefully manage how the group communicates so those with strong voices do not drown out innovative ideas from more introverted participants who may lack confidence to speak up in a group. If you get each of your participants deeply involved in the discussion, they will develop mutual respect and learn from each other. This enhances inter-generational communication and encourages a more collaborative decision dialog.

▶ 4. Manage Expectations

With inter-generational teams, managing expectations is a must. Let them know how much influence they will ultimately have on the decision-making process. Will they get a vote in the decision? Or will they be influencing how you decide? Carefully managing their expectations at the front-end will help manage angst at

the back end if you are the final decider and go a different way than they recommend.

Be sure to develop feedback loops and mechanisms for follow-up. You may lose the enthusiasm of some of your younger team members if they don't get periodic follow-up on the decision outcome. If possible, continue to involve the decision team in reviewing the progress of the decision implementation. That way, they can help you adjust and adapt your decision strategy based on the evolving outcomes.

Final Thoughts

If you can effectively manage your inter-generational decision-making efforts, you will create a team dynamic that is powerfully focused on resolving issues. At the same time, they will be building critical thinking skills and learning how to work together for future decision-making. 🌟



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