**Gradients of Agreement**

Explore the eight degrees of separation between “yes” and “no” as your team collaborates to make decisions.

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| Type | Meeting |
| Purpose | Planning and strategy |
| Topics | Goal alignment, prioritization, decision-making, collaboration, consensus building |
| Audience | General |

## **About this activity**

In a business environment where the pace of change is accelerating, where diverse perspectives are essential, and where complex challenges require agile and inclusive solutions, the art of decision-making has never been more critical. It's no longer enough to rely solely on traditional top-down decision-making models. Instead, successful companies are embracing a more participatory and transparent approach. This is supported by research from Gallup, which indicates that employees who feel that their opinions and input matter are 4.6 times more likely to be engaged at work.

Gradients of Agreement is a participatory decision-making activity that uses the Gradients of Agreement scale developed by Sam Kaner and Duane Berger to move beyond simple “yes” or “no” thinking. Participants have the opportunity to express a range of opinions about a proposed decision as they either work to achieve consensus when making a group decision or advise a person who will be making the final decision.

This decision-making framework is conducive to decisions:

* That do not have one correct answer.
* That mark a change in overall strategy.
* That benefit from participant input or consensus.
* That present a high element of risk or reward.

This activity is designed for a general audience and works well with groups of 6-8 participants in an in-person, hybrid, or remote setting.

#### Important details

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| Best for groups of | 6-8, up to 72 total participants |
| Preparation time | 10 minutes |
| Duration | 1.5 - 2 hours |
| Required materials | * Pen * Gradients of Agreement Handout * Gradients of Agreement Polling Results Worksheet * Decision Definition Worksheet (1 for each decision) * Timer * Access to meeting platform, if hybrid or remote |
| Required location | * Indoors or outdoors * Access to Internet for virtual groups |
| Noise level | Medium |

## **How it works**

#### Instructions

Before conducting the activity (15 minutes):

The facilitator will collaborate with the meeting organizer to determine what decisions need to be made during the session. It is recommended that each group work on 2-3 important decisions.

The facilitator will make copies of the Gradients of Agreement Handout, the Gradients of Agreement Polling Results Worksheet, and the Decision Definition (1 for each group decision). For virtual groups, the worksheets should be emailed ahead of the session.

The facilitator will decide how to divide into small groups before the session and ensure that in cases of consent decision-making, the decision maker is included in the group. Virtual participants should be assigned to breakout rooms.

Conducting the activity:

Introduction (5 minutes):

The facilitator will inform participants that they will be working together to make strategic decisions on specific topics (whatever is identified as a focus by the meeting organizer). The decisions will fall into two types:

* Consent, in which participants will offer their input, suggestions, and advice to the person who will be making the decision.
* Consensus, in which participants will make the decision that everyone in the group can support, even if they don’t necessarily love it.

Discussion and debate (60 minutes):

The facilitator will divide participants into groups and each group will select a scribe to take notes, record polling results, and write down the decision definition and next action steps. Once the scribe is selected, the group will walk through the following questions related to each problem to be solved:

* What are the facts of the decision?
* What data should we consider when making this decision?
* What does success look like?
* What would failure look like?
* Is there any information we are missing?
* Can we approach this decision differently to achieve better options?
* Do we understand this decision well enough to vote on it? (If not, continue discussing until the answer is yes).

Once the group has defined or refined the criteria of the decision, group members should be polled by a show of hands or individually using the Gradients of Agreement scale to indicate their position.

If the decision is being made by consent, the decision maker will consider the group’s position and either move forward with the decision or ask for more time and/or further clarification from the dissenting group until they are comfortable with making the decision. This timeframe may extend beyond the session.

If the decision is being made by consensus, the decision will be finalized if everyone agrees on a rating of 4 or lower, meaning that they can support the decision even if they have reservations. If the rating is higher, more discussion should occur around the need for information or dissension until the group is comfortable that the issues have been addressed. At that point, the group should poll again.

Once consent or consensus is reached, the group should move on to the next decision using the same process. If after 30 minutes, consent or consensus is not reached on a decision, the group should table the discussion and come back to the issue after all other decisions have been made.

The facilitator should circulate through the groups and monitor them to ensure that groups remain respectful of each other when debating decisions. Virtual groups should be instructed to send a chat to the facilitator if moderation assistance is needed in their breakout room. The facilitator should periodically check in with each group to monitor progress and to guide them to the next stage of completing the Decision Definition Worksheet.

Writing out the final decision and documenting the next steps (15-30 minutes):

Once all decisions have been addressed, the facilitator will instruct the decision maker in cases of consent, or the scribe of the group in cases of consensus, to write out the final decisions on the worksheet provided. This ensures that everyone has clarity on the decision terms and avoids later arguments about what was actually decided.

The group should work together to answer the following questions and the scribe should record the answers on their Decision Definition Worksheet:

1. Who needs to be informed of the decision?
2. What are the next steps to implementing the decision?
3. Who is responsible for each step and what is the timeline for completion?
4. How will those affected get updates about the decision?

Final Results Sharing and Wrap-Up (10 minutes):

The facilitator should ask if there were any surprises in the decision-making process and allow participants to share their observations. The facilitator should remind participants that the Gradients of Agreement scale is a useful tool at work or home when making decisions.

Rules

Every participant should be given an opportunity to participate in the discussion and to express their position using the Gradients of Agreement scale.

While each participant is entitled to strong opinions, the debate must remain respectful.

#### Example

Not applicable

## **Materials**

#### For facilitator

Timer

Access to meeting platform, if hybrid or remote

#### For attendee

Pen

Gradients of Agreement Handout

Gradients of Agreement Polling Results Worksheet

Decision Definition Worksheet (1 for each decision)