

Participatory & Conventional Groups

The lists below outline participatory and conventional ways groups work. A shift towards participatory values from conventional group-working values requires a committed effort on the part of the group and its members to swim against the tide of prevailing values and assumptions about how groups work. Groups committed to improving their participatory ways of working can use the list to discuss about how the group usually functions, or would like to function, or what they do well, and could be done better.

Participatory Groups	Conventional Groups
Everyone participates, not just the vocal few.	The fastest thinkers and most articulate speakers get more air time.
People give each other room to think and get their thoughts all the way out.	People interrupt each other on a regular basis.
Opposing viewpoints are allowed to co-exist within the group.	Differences of opinion are viewed as conflicts that must be either stifled or solved.
People draw each other out with supportive questions, e.g., <i>'Is this what you mean ... ?'</i>	Questions are often viewed as challenges, as if the person being questioned has done something wrong or has faulty thinking.
Each person makes the effort to pay attention to the person speaking.	Unless the speaker captivates their attention, people space out, doodle and check the clock.
People are able to listen to each other's ideas because they know that their own ideas will also be heard.	People have difficulty listening to each other's ideas because they're busy rehearsing what they want to say.
Each member speaks up on matters of controversy. Everyone knows where everyone stands.	Some members remain quiet on controversial matters. No one really knows where everyone stands.
Members can accurately represent each other's viewpoints, even when they don't agree with them.	Members rarely give accurate representations of the opinions and reasoning of those with whom they don't see eye-to-eye.
People refrain from talking behind each other's backs. Issues are discussed within the group.	Because they don't feel permission/safe to be direct during the meeting, people talk behind each other's backs outside of the meeting.
Even in the face of opposition from the person-in-charge or majority of the group, people are encouraged to stand up for their beliefs.	People with discordant, minority perspectives are commonly discouraged from speaking out.
A problem is not considered solved until everyone who will be affected by the solution understands the reasoning.	A problem is considered solved as soon as the fastest thinkers have reached an answer. Everyone else is expected to 'get on board' regardless of whether s/he understands the logic of the decision.
When people make an agreement, it is assumed that the decision still reflects a wide range of perspectives.	When people make an agreement, it is assumed that they are all thinking the exact same thing.

Adapted from *Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-making* by Sam Kaner, et al.