

BLOCKING:

I simply won't support this decision?



The Challenge

- Blocking occurs when folks say “yeah-but” as soon as an idea is put forward even before they hear all the details.
- Someone declares that they will absolutely not support an idea, often just after a final decision has been made.
- Blockers are good at identifying why something won't work, but may not have a lot of ideas to contribute.

What's Really Going On

- Conscious blocking may be a power play by an individual to gain control or to get his or her way.
- Blocking may be an attention-getting tactic by a member who feels excluded or rejected by the group.
- Blockers may be playing a bargaining game in which they eventually agree to support the group's idea in exchange for people endorsing one of their ideas.
- Blocking is sometimes an unconscious behavior in habitually negative individuals.



Facilitator Pitfalls

- Allowing blocking to derail a meeting without making an intervention.
- Failing to understand that blocking may be a sign of low trust and lack group cohesion.
 - Failing to offer helpful feedback to the chronic blocker.
- Failing to be alert to patterns of blocking, especially in groups that have difficulty coming to closure.

Intervention Strategies

- Help the group create norms that specifically address blocking before it happens by asking:
 - What can we do at today's meeting to ensure that all ideas are given a fair hearing?
 - If someone wants to oppose an idea, how do you want them to do that?
- If the group fails to set norms to deal with blocking, it may be necessary to offer a set of norms for members to ratify: To avoid blocking we will:
 - Monitor ourselves to notice if we start to say no to an idea without really hearing the details or giving it a chance to be considered.
 - Encourage each other to listen and be open to alternative suggestions and new ideas.
- Offer immediate feedback when blocking takes place using the three-part intervention model:
 - I'm **noticing** that the past three ideas have been dismissed without much discussion.
 - I'm **concerned** that you may be missing some good ideas.
 - **Please** listen carefully to ideas and explore them before discarding them.
- Challenge blockers to substantiate why they're rejecting an idea and to provide the group with alternatives.
- Use a Force Field Analysis to engage the blocker in looking at the pros in addition to the cons of an idea.
- Meet one-on-one with blockers to provide feedback and support them in considering a different pattern of behavior.
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TIP: Blockers need to know that you are aware of their tactic and that you won't hesitate to name it and press for more productive behaviors.

