

STUCK:

Are we still talking about that?



The Challenge

- The group is stuck on one topic and going in circles.
- Suggestions about closure fall on deaf ears.
- When asked to move on, members insist that they can't and call for more data or more discussion.
- Individuals keep repeating points over and over.
- At the end of the discussion, people are pretty much in the same place they were at the beginning.

What's Really Going On

- The group really may be missing data.
- Some groups are prone to endless data gathering and analysis paralysis.
- Group members may be stuck in entrenched thinking and unable to see outside the box.
- One or more individuals may be fixated on a solution that they're trying to push on the group.
- There may be a lack of willingness by individuals to compromise for the sake of progress.
- The group may need external input or fresh perspectives.
- The group may not want to make a decision or take on a new task.



Facilitator Pitfalls

- Allowing discussions to continue endlessly without setting time limits for closure or for parking unresolved items.
- Failure to recognize participants may use endless discussion as a power play or delaying tactic.
 - Failing to provide adequate structure for entrenched discussion.
 - Allowing individuals to dig deep trenches around their positions so that alternatives become impossible.

Intervention Strategies

- Offer the group feedback about their tendency to get stuck and engage them in setting targeted norms that prevent future spinning: “At the last meeting, you got stuck on one topic, which made it impossible to move forward or arrive at a decision. To ensure this doesn’t happen at today’s meeting, let’s talk about:
 - Why did we get stuck, and what can we do today to avoid these pitfalls?
 - What can anybody say or do if discussions get stuck at today’s meeting?
- Establish reasonable time limits for each discussion, and ask a group member to act as timekeeper.
- Help the group identify how much data is enough and encourage members to do their homework.
- Offer training about various decision-making tools. Decide which decisions need to be made using consensus, which ought to be delegated to individuals, and which to make by voting.
- If members are stuck in traditional thinking, introduce key steps from a creative problem-solving model to encourage members to think outside the box.
- If the group needs fresh ideas, encourage people to go outside the group to gather input or suggest inviting outsiders for specific discussions.
- If the topic keeps getting wider, introduce a process tool, like a “Criteria-Based Decision Grid” or “Multivoting” to help narrow the focus.
- Offer clear feedback each time the conversation gets stuck and engage members in identifying improvement strategies. “I notice you’ve been on this topic a while without making progress. What can we do to get unstuck?”

TIP: If a group has a tendency to get bogged down, engage them in developing strategies to move forward.

