



Abilene Paradox

A Lesson in Group Decision Making

About Me

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- Operations Superintendent for Road and Bridge
- Employed with Sumter County BOCC for 31 years

INTERESTS:

- Spending time with family
- Hunting, fishing, and camping



Training objectives

- Define Abilene Paradox
- Understand individual and group dynamics and how they contribute to poor group decision making (How Does It Happen?)
- Recognize warning signs of mismanaged agreement.
- Discuss negative consequences of Abilene Paradox.
- Strategies to minimize Abilene Paradox in the workplace.

Abilene Paradox

- Occurs when a group of people agree on a course of action that no one wants, often due to poor communication or fear of speaking up. (Cooks-Campbell, 2022)

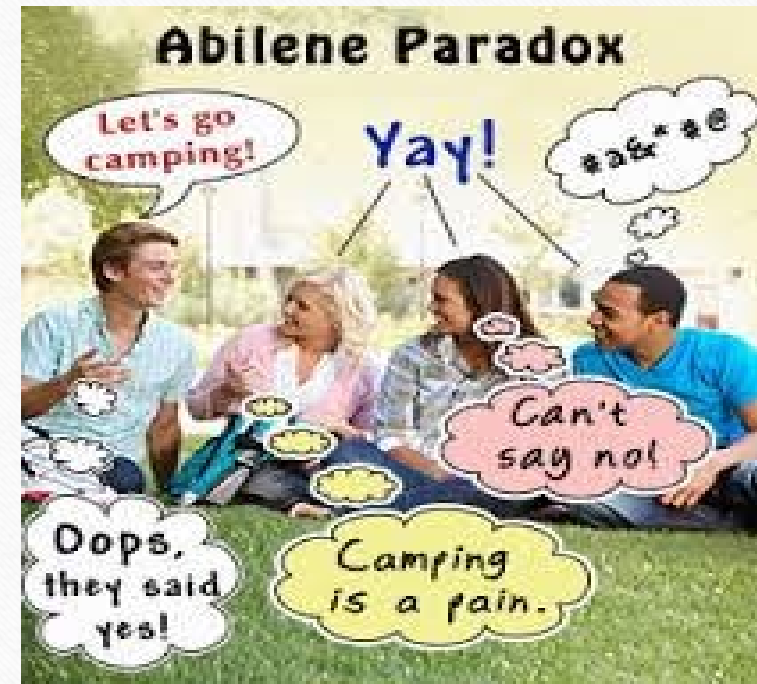


Road to Abilene



How Does It Happen?

- **Action Anxiety** - fear of speaking up.
- **Negative Fantasy** - going against group will cause harmful consequences.
- **Fear of Separation** - “not a team player”
- **Remaining Silent** - going along with the group.
- **Lack of open communication** - not comfortable sharing true thoughts/feelings
- **Over reliance on a single leader** – one person dominating group discussions



Warning Signs

- Group members express different opinions in PRIVATE
- Frustration or RESENTMENT toward management
- Group members avoid responsibility and point BLAME on others
- Lack of TRUST by group members
- Decisions require UNANIMOUS agreement
- Very little DISSENT expressed in group discussions
- Members feel PRESSURE to agree



Negative Consequences

- **Financial Loss**
- **Unsafe** workplace
- Employee **dissatisfaction**
- **Mistrust**
- **Destabalizes** the organization
- **Less creativity**, innovation, and risk taking
- **Poor** team **cohesion**
- **Decreased motivation**
- High **turnover**

Skip the Trip

(Strategies to avoid Abilene Paradox)

- **BEFORE** meeting - preventative measures
- **DURING** meeting – open communication
- **AFTER** meeting - reflection

Before Meeting

- Focus on PREVENTION
- Invite the RIGHT people
- Schedule ONE on ONE conversations
- Plan enough TIME for discussions
- ORGANIZE available data/information
- CLEARLY state decision to be made and results to be accomplished.
- Develop OPTIONS
- Create SUPPORTIVE work environment

During Meeting

- Set CLIMATE of openness and participation.
- Review RISKS and BENEFITS
- Review DATA
- Chances of SUCCESS?
- CHECK points
- Embrace DIVERSITY
- Develop CONFLICT resolution skills
- Don't require UNANIMOUS agreement



After Meeting

- Allow time for REFLECTION
- WEIGH risks (should a poor decision stand?)
- Don't CRITICIZE for changing their mind.

Final Thoughts



- The inability to manage agreement, not internal conflict, is the most pressing issue facing modern organizations.
- — Jerry Harvey, Ph.D

Questions/Comments



References

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