FIELD GUIDE / 001

THE RULES *of the* ROOM.

An independent working guide to the three quiet forces in collective decisions: participation, decision procedure, and institutional memory.

THE CLAIM OF THIS GUIDE

When people disagree about a decision, part of the disagreement may concern the rules under which the decision is made. Make those rules explicit before treating the result as inevitable.

WEB EXPERIENCE

https://sahiltayal.com/rules-of-the-room/

01 / THE THREE-LEVER FRAMEWORK

WHAT A MEETING *IS MADE OF.*

A useful starting point is to ask three different questions about a group decision. Each concerns a rule that can be designed, observed and revised.

01 INVITATION / WHO CAN CONTRIBUTE?

A speaking rule changes which observations can enter the discussion. Open floor, round robin and written-first input make different things easier or harder. Watch for: repeated speakers, missing perspectives and the difference between speaking time and influence.

02 DECISION / WHAT COUNTS AS AGREEMENT?

A plurality, consent check and reversible pilot answer different questions. One chooses a most-supported option, another checks for blocking objections, and another limits the cost of being wrong. Watch for: speed, explicit trade-offs and who carries risk.

03 MEMORY / WHAT DOES THE RECORD RETAIN?

A decision note can name only an outcome, or also record reasons, unanswered objections, ownership and triggers for review. Watch for: whether someone can reconstruct why a choice was made after the participants leave.

Important distinction

These are editorial categories, not a validated scale or a claim that three variables fully explain group behaviour.

02 / ONE CASE, THREE PROTOCOLS

SAME TEAM. *DIFFERENT TABLE.*

Fictional case: four colleagues must decide whether to switch a customer-support handoff on Monday. Ari sees simplification potential, Bea worries about peak-hour coverage, Cy sees a confusing first-time-user form, and Dev sees no rollback plan.

A OPEN FLOOR + QUICK PLURALITY

RULE Ari, Bea, Ari, Dev speak; fictional votes are 2 launch / 1 pilot / 1 pause.

SEEN Launch wins by plurality, although not by majority.

RISK Cy's input is not aired. Fast closure is not comprehensive consent.

B ROUND ROBIN + CONSENT

RULE Ari, Bea, Cy, Dev each receive a first turn; objections are checked.

SEEN All four concerns appear; rollback is unresolved, so revision is requested.

RISK A turn does not guarantee equal weight; urgency may remain.

C WRITE FIRST + REVERSIBLE PILOT

RULE Four notes are gathered; a narrow pilot has a stop condition.

SEEN A possible learning path is made explicit without permanent commitment.

RISK A pilot still has costs, and its stop criteria must be usable.

03 / A 20-MINUTE FACILITATION EXERCISE

TRY IT WITHOUT *THE SOFTWARE.*

Use this with a low-stakes, fictional decision before applying any variant in a real meeting. No roles are assigned by personality; the purpose is to compare procedures, not people.

01

00-03 FRAME

State one specific decision, a deadline, and whether it can be reversed. Ask who is affected but not present.

02

03-06 COLLECT

Invite each person to write one observation, one uncertainty and one possible cost of being wrong.

03

06-11 ROTATE

Take one uninterrupted turn per person. Then permit dialogue. Notice which concerns had not surfaced spontaneously.

04

11-16 CHOOSE

Compare a plurality decision with a consent check or limited pilot. State in advance what each rule actually means.

05

16-20 RECORD

Write the choice, dissent, owner, checkpoint and reversal trigger. Ask who will revisit the decision.

Debrief: Which piece of information entered later than expected? Did the procedure change the decision, the reasons given, or only the record? What new costs did the process create?

04 / THE DECISION RECORD

MAKE THE *REASONS VISIBLE.*

Use one sheet per important choice. A useful record can help future colleagues inspect or revise a decision without needing to reconstruct an entire meeting.

DECISION UNDER CONSIDERATION

What question are we actually answering?

WHO HAD A VOICE / WHO WAS MISSING

Name perspectives, not personality types.

DECISION RULE USED

Plurality, majority, delegation, consent, pilot, or another explicit procedure.

ALTERNATIVES AND REASONS

What was considered? Which reasons mattered?

UNRESOLVED DISSENT

Record the concern accurately, including what evidence might change it.

OWNER / CHECKPOINT / REVERSAL TRIGGER

Who will revisit this, when, and under which condition?

Keep this record factual. Separate what was observed from what participants inferred.

05 / WHAT THIS GUIDE KNOWS - AND DOES NOT

USEFUL, *NOT UNIVERSAL.*

Fact / research context. Elinor Ostrom examined how varied institutional arrangements govern collective resources; her 2009 Nobel lecture emphasises the importance of fitting rules to context. Amy Edmondson's 1999 study links team psychological safety with learning behaviour. Neither source tests the three-option interface in this project.

Interpretation. Distinguishing invitation, decision and memory is a practical way to structure inquiry into coordination. It is a synthesis for this field guide, not an established three-factor taxonomy.

Illustration. The names, speaking orders, votes and outcomes in the website are explicitly fictional and deterministic. Changing a rule changes an authored example; it does not predict how a real team will act.

Limitations. Rules interact with incentives, hierarchy, personality, cultural context, resources, time pressure and trust. The exercise has no normative score, effect-size estimate or clinical implication. These are prompts for reflection and testing with real people, not universal prescriptions.

READINGS & WORKING LINKS

Ostrom - 2009 Nobel Prize lecture

Edmondson - 1999 team learning article

Open the interactive room

Return to the Sahilverse

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