SAMPLE PROTOCOLS
for Effective Problem-Solving & Decision-Making

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

→ **Values & Ethics:** Choose to be balanced, ethical and principle-based in all matters. The foundations for this could be reflected in your Value Statement, Mission Statement, Code of Ethics and/or similar expression of your purpose and your ethical standards. Your thought process may include:

- *Values* – Comprising beliefs, virtues and principles that will show up in all you do, defining who you are and how you act – as individuals and collectively.

- *Reciprocity* – Reflecting how you interact with others; look for mutual benefit and positive results for all who will be influenced by your actions; commit to fostering unity within your group and with others as a priority; a "Win-Win" approach is one way to capture this.

- *Criteria-Based Decision-Making* – What are your criteria for deciding? Are your values represented? Will it improve relationships with the parties involved? Does it reflect integrity, accountability and efficiency? Is it fair to yourself and all concerned? Is it a "win-win"? Will unity be preserved?

→ **Participation, Complexity & Accountability**: Be clear upfront regarding the scope of your problem-solving or decision-making task, including:

- *Accountability* – Does responsibility reside with you alone, or are there other stakeholders who have important input, have a role in implementation or are impacted by the decision? How do you share accountability, without abdicating your own? How can a culture of shared ownership help you in your leadership role? When do you have to "bite the bullet" and make the judgment call? When should it be referred "upstairs" for resolution?

- *Locus of Control* – What dimensions of the problem or issue lie within your span, or locus, of control? What can you take ownership of, and where can you share or delegate ownership for implementing a decision? To whom can you turn for referring a problem or getting assistance with a solution?

- *Participation* – To what extent, and at what levels, is participatory problem-solving and decision-making a preferred approach? Who needs to be included, and why? What is their relationship to the issue or to its resolution? How can inclusion build strength and sustainability into your solutions? How can consensus be achieved among diverse perspectives? How will participants be rewarded, or share other "consequences" – individually or collectively – based on the outcomes achieved?

- *Complexity & Timing* – In pursuing an approach or method, consider the requirements of the problem, for example: Is it complex enough to require a detailed process? Can existing rules, regs, budgets and plans be applied without undue complication? Is there time to do extra research or get others involved? Can you rely on what has been done before, or do you need to break new ground? Can you make it both short-term efficient and long-term effective?

→ **Encouragement *versus* Criticism**: Make your problem-solving and decision-making process serve as essential threads in weaving an organizational culture of *encouragement*, as opposed to the more common culture of *criticism*.

- *Building a Culture of Encouragement* – Consider decision-making processes that build an ethic of empowerment and cooperation; foster a spirit of openness, creativity, collaboration and shared ownership.

- *Abandoning the Culture of Criticism* – Consider how you can consciously step away from inherited models of criticism, control, power contests and competition; use mistakes and shortfalls by employees or colleagues as material for growth and improvement.

KEY PROCESSES

(1) <u>**Preparation**</u>

    a.   Establish a clear definition of the problem – which may then be modified or amended by others in your consultative process, benefiting from multiple viewpoints.

    b.   Clarify the timeline in which a decision will be made – either due to external requirements or based on your own priorities and standards.

    c.   Identify your priorities, principles and other criteria by which you will judge the options – again subject to amendment in the course of the process.

    d.   Gather the information needed, including the pertinent facts, to understand and act upon the problem.

    e.   Identify the scope, level and locus of the problem to clarify where accountability lies, who needs to be involved and what methods should be employed (including virtual and in-person meetings).

    f.   Identify the participants and/or stakeholders who must be involved in the problem-solving process, if any, and at what level and in what manner they should be involved. Where group consultation is needed, decide on a facilitator, either yourself or someone else (which would free up your own participation).

(2) <u>**Engagement**</u>

    a.   For "solo" response, where time or other factors don't permit or require consultation with others, utilize results from the above Preparation protocol to proceed to a solution.

        1.   *Options* – Generate a range of options that might be taken to resolve the problem.

        2.   *Solution* -- Rate and rank these options on a matrix against the criteria you have established. Your highest ranked solutions can then be further analyzed for timing, cost, ease of implementation, and best projected outcomes. Make a decision on the option chosen and the actions to be taken.

        3.   *Communication* – Clearly communicate your decision or action to those affected, and invite questions or feedback as appropriate to ensure unity and effectiveness in implementation.

    b.   For a process involving "group consultation" with others, consider the following additional steps in arriving at the most effective solution:

        1.   *Setting* – Invest time and thought in creating a conducive setting for group consultation. For virtual spaces, have materials ready to "Share" and a digital whiteboard ready to capture discussion. For in-person opportunities, consider: setting up an attractive, orderly and efficient space; limiting phone and other distractions; providing suitable refreshments; having flipcharts, whiteboard or interactive computer screen ready to capture input; and ensuring all parties have necessary issue summaries and other "pre-read" materials ahead of time.

        2.   *Overview* – Clearly introduce the problem and the purpose of the group consultation process, including your starting definition of the problem, desired outcomes, timeframe and potential roles of the participants. Provide a simple set of "ground rules" and invite discussion and agreement; for example, open and honest discussion balanced by civility and mutual respect (no "trash talk"); shared "air space" (don't dominate the discussion); tough on task/easy on people, etc.

        3.   *Problem Definition* – Present in as much detail as needed the facts and your definition of the problem at hand. Invite discussion, amend as appropriate, and seek consensus. At this point, the goal is to get a shared and detailed understanding of the problem, and not to jump to conclusions or solutions.

        4.   *Criteria* – Facilitate discussion and consensus around the values, principles and other factors that need to be applied to the problem and its resolution.

        5.   *Explore Options* – Encourage open, frank discussion of a range of options that might be applicable to the problem, weigh pro's and con's and move to consensus on the most favorable option.

        6.   *Decision* – Clearly communicate whether the group's results will constitute the "full action" or whether all will be taken "under advisement" for specific follow-through; be transparent about any issues that may remain outside the control of the group.

        7.   *Action Plan* – Lay out the essentials needed to implement the decision, including tasks, timelines, persons responsible and resources needed.