

PREVIEW GUIDE



The Abilene Paradox

2nd Edition

Materials Included with *The Abilene Paradox, 2nd Edition*

The workshop designed to accompany the video-based program is a flexible, yet comprehensive ½-day training design. The workshop kit includes all the materials you'll need to run the program:

- ◆ The **DVD** of *The Abilene Paradox, 2nd Edition*, narrated by Dr. Jerry Harvey, provide the theory and examples to illustrate the workshop topics. Choose a VHS or a DVD for your facilitation convenience; both are closed-captioned. Also, we've included *The Abilene Paradox, 1st Edition* on your DVD, as an added bonus.
- ◆ The **Leader's Guide** provides step-by-step instructions for introducing activities, leading discussions, and making transitions between the video, group discussions, and exercises. It includes directions for presenting the workshop materials, along with suggestions for preparation, timing, and follow-up activities.
- ◆ The **Participant Workbook** contains the worksheets for the suggested exercises in the Leader's Guide. Also, it includes a glossary of terms used in the video program, and hints to help participants continue their use of effective decision-making techniques. 10 Workbooks are included with each kit.
- ◆ A **CD-ROM with PowerPoint® slides**. The PowerPoint® presentation can be used to highlight key discussion points and activity instructions during the training session.
- ◆ **Reminder Cards** provide hints for ways to "Skip the Trip" to Abilene, and are distributed to participants at the workshop's conclusion for their use following the session. 10 Reminder Cards are included with each kit.

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SAMPLE PAGES FROM LEADER'S GUIDE

The inability to manage agreement, not internal conflict, is the most pressing issue facing modern organizations.

— Jerry Harvey, Ph.D.

INTRODUCTION

The Abilene Paradox is a recognized milestone in training videos. Originally based upon the article of the same name by Dr. Jerry Harvey, it examines one of the core dynamics of group decision-making, and helps managers and their work teams recognize the downside of mis-managed agreement.

This fast-paced workshop will help managers, supervisors, and staff find positive ways to come to effective agreements between individuals and groups, and avoid the trap of moving in directions that are counter-productive to the group's overall purpose.

Individuality, equal opportunity, centralized organizational structure — these have been the hallmarks of traditional American management. But times have changed. For more than three decades, managers worldwide have been engaged in fierce competition with global competitors in a rapidly expanding international marketplace.

To meet this competition, companies have modified their approach to management, with an increasing emphasis on quality, customer service, teamwork, and decentralized, participative management.

Change comes slowly to large organizations. It happens bit-by-bit, and decision-by-decision. CRM's Abilene Paradox Workshop provides the tools to help your company address a key dynamic in group decision-making and participative management, and to take a more pragmatic and honest approach to group consensus.

HOW THIS WORKSHOP BUILDS UNDERSTANDING

The Abilene Paradox is a fast-paced and entertaining video that clearly demonstrates the paradox of mismanaged agreement and the way it can influence decision-making within a work unit or an organization, often to the detriment of the group's goals.

The workshop's exercises focus, first, on **the possible consequences** of passively accepting a decision without communicating our true feelings about it. Organizational psychologists believe that we hesitate to speak up to avoid being ostracized from the group or seen as a loner. Our personal fears of being seen as different, more so than actual pressure from the group, cause this response. Unfortunately, the "don't rock the boat" approach to decision management often stifles honest opinions and valid concerns. When silence contributes to poor decisions, what often results are precisely those conditions that prompted the silence in

EXERCISE #3: A CURRENT DECISION

1. Briefly describe a current decision in which you are a participant or that you are in a position to influence: _____

2. What would you really like to say about the pros and cons of this issue? If the decision were solely up to you, what would you do? _____

3. What might keep you from speaking up? _____

4. Write a brief response in each of the cells below related to the decision and what will happen if you speak up or withhold your honest opinion.

	If you choose to SPEAK UP	If you choose NOT TO SPEAK UP
What is the BEST thing that could happen?		
What is the WORST thing that could happen?		
Is the BEST OR WORST THING MOST LIKELY to happen?		
What is the RISK?		
Can you AFFORD the risk?		

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

- For Jerry Harvey's foursome, honest opinions were not forthcoming until a frustration level peaked following the trip.
- On Project X and for Sue and George, the situations moved to the brink of disaster before someone finally spoke up.

POINT OUT that in both scenarios, characters were on the brink of disaster before coming to their senses. In general, this is not the preferred strategy.

Introduce Exercise 3

SAY:

The next activity will help us transfer what we've seen and discussed so far to a current group decision-making situation. You'll be using a checklist-matrix that will guide you through an exercise weighing risk and benefit.

Keep in mind that this doesn't necessarily have to be a work-related scenario, but it should be a decision that is meaningful to you. (More than, for example, "where do we go for lunch today?")



SHOW SLIDE #11: Exercise 3 Directions

Run the Activity

REFER the participants to Exercise #3: A Current Decision, on page 5 of the Participant Workbook.

Check for questions on the instructions.

ALLOW 8–10 minutes for the participants to complete the worksheet.

LEADER'S SCRIPT

WORKSHOP INTRODUCTION (5 MINUTES)

 SHOW SLIDE #1: Workshop Title

INTRODUCE yourself and make a brief comment about your own interest in this topic, as well as its importance to the overall success of the organization.

STATE the workshop's purpose to the group:

- *To better understand, through video demonstration and discussion, one form of group dynamics operating in a decision-making context.*
- *To develop personal and organizational strategies for managing agreement during group decision-making activities.*

Usually, we think that conflict is what needs to be managed in group meetings and decision-making, and certainly it does. But as this workshop will demonstrate, sometimes we find ourselves in trouble due to mismanaged agreement.

 SHOW SLIDE #2: Mismanaged Agreement

Mismanaged agreement is unchecked agreement—agreement that has not been validated by an honest and open consensus of those involved.

Mismanaged agreement happens more often than we realize, it can have negative consequences, and with attention, it can be avoided.

Place the workshop in the context of other current training, ongoing management development, or a recent experience at the company that suggested a need for this program.

Time Requirements

The workshop can be delivered as a half-day session (standard) or as a longer session, depending on the amount of time you have available and the importance of these issues to your organization.

The recommended workshop agenda runs 3.5-4 hours. We have provided three optional exercises that can be completed after Exercise 3 to extend the workshop. Use as many of these exercises as you like, depending on the time available.

Class Sequence and Timing

Training Session Activity	Time (min)	Time (min)
Welcome/Purpose for Workshop and Logistics	5	
Participant Introductions and Opening Exercise	20	
Workshop Objectives and Approach	5	
Exercise #1: A Look at the Past	15	
Video Presentation: Part One, Discussion	20	
Video Presentation: Part Two, Discussion	25	
Exercise #2: Fifteen Reasons	20	
Break	10	
Exercise #3: Current Decision-Making Case	20	
Optional Exercise A: Minimizing Risk		15
Optional Exercise B: Positive Confrontation		35
Optional Exercise C: Decision-Making at a Distance		20
Exercise #4: Ways to Skip the Trip	20	
Exercise #5: Executive Recommendations	40	
Wrap-Up and Follow-Through	20	
Total Running Time	3.5 - 4 hrs	4.5 - 5 hrs

the first place: failure and ultimate separation from the group.

Second, the activities in the workshop help participants **recognize the road signs** that can tell someone that the group has embarked on a trip to Abilene. Road signs can include ways of thinking that we notice in ourselves, or external signs such as blame, criticism of the boss, etc.

Third, the workshop activities **demonstrate general preventive measures** to turn the car around mid-route, bypass Abilene, or, even better, avoid embarking on the trip. Generating options, asking clarifying questions, and checking assumptions are strategies that bring useful information to the surface and encourage individual participants to share opinions that might seem contradictory to the group's apparent consensus.

Finally, the workshop facilitates discussion and group decisions about **specific ways for their own teams and groups** to "skip future trips" to Abilene, and make more honest decisions.

WORKSHOP GOALS

The activities in this workshop can help build a pragmatic and open approach to decision-making.

The overall goals of the workshop are:

1. To recognize the paradox of mismanaged agreement, and understand how it contributes to poor group decisions.
2. To explore the personal and psychological dynamics that affect each person's involvement in group discussions and agreement.
3. To initiate measures to help groups avoid making counter-productive decisions.

Specific workshop learning objectives can be found on page 22 of this Leader's Guide.

WHO SHOULD ATTEND?

CRM's Abilene Paradox Workshop is designed for managers, supervisors and line staff who, as part of their jobs, must meet in groups to make decisions.

This material should be presented in a group setting where the responses of others can be compared and shared. While independent study would have some value, it would lack the group dynamics dimension that lies at the heart of the content.

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