The VREDE Phase Model

**Guiding questions for the facilitation of
group decision-making processes**

The VREDE Phase Model

Introduction

In the VREDE research project, a team from research and consulting institutions as well as software companies is developing a digital tool to intuitively support group or team decisions. A central feature is the use of resistance-based evaluation methods for decision-making.

Research did not find a suitable, comprehensive model of shared decision-making. So the VREDE phase model was developed. The main strand of the model initially describes the steps of complex group decisions in a linear way. A cyclic-iterative and also fractal application of the VREDE phase model is also possible.

Requirements for the digital tool will be derived from the model. In addition to the main strand for supporting decision-making processes, this will also contain some extra usable tools for facilitators. Information will be published at www.vrede.at.

These guiding questions on facilitating group decision-making processes are intended to help structure and plan group decision-making processes.

DI. Dorothea Erharter and Mag. Elmar Türk
June 2022

Innovation and Diversity

In view of the global threats currently facing humanity, there is perhaps nothing more important than learning to make good decisions together. Challenges such as climate change, pandemics, environmental degradation and species extinction are the result of an excessive and unrestrained use of nature (WBGU 2019). Innovations are needed to solve these problems.

Companies are also currently facing many new challenges and have a need for innovation. However, the ability to innovate is directly dependent on the diversity of the team that is brought in. The more diverse the group, the more different the life experiences and personalities, the more innovative the solutions found (cf. Harlfinger, 2006).
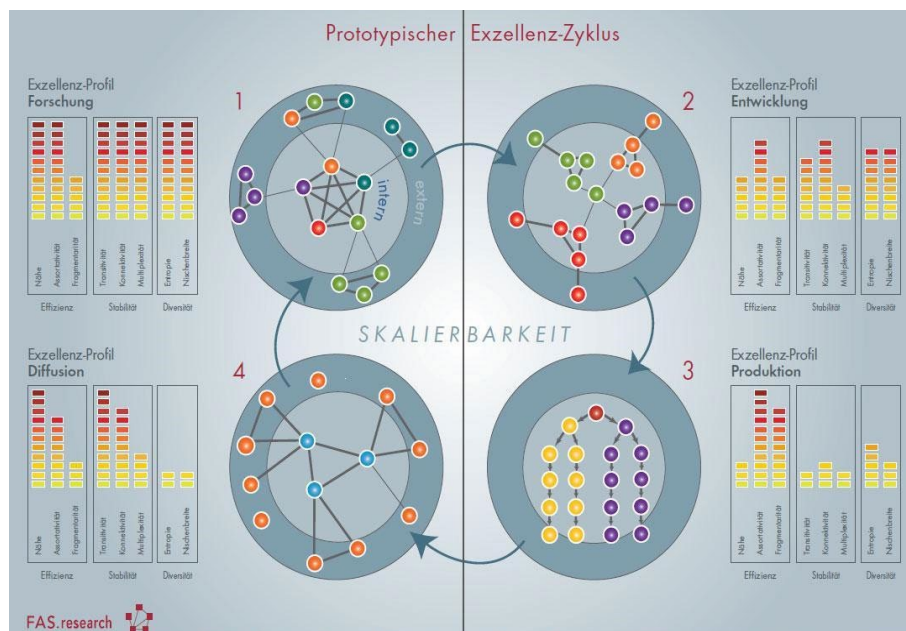
Figure 1: On the relationship between innovation and diversity. Source: Harlfinger, 2006:30/31[1]

But the composition of the groups alone is not enough. In order to really use the innovative capacity of diverse groups, they must be well managed. The group processes must be designed or moderated in such a way that everyone can contribute equally.

Designing meetings and group processes in such a way that the creativity of all participants can flow in and the innovation potential is used - this is not a matter of course and can be a great challenge. The reward in organisations is satisfied employees who contribute and feel connected to the company. In society as a whole, the reward is a sustainable world in which it is worth living.

Well-managed group decision-making is therefore an important diversity management tool and a worthwhile investment for the future. However, very few facilitation models and IT tools currently address the preparation and making of shared decisions. Major decision-making models consider only the person as the decision-maker, i.e. they take an individual, psychological perspective. Joint decisions, on the other hand, require explicit consideration of other perspectives: Content, relationship, but also structural aspects such as power become important here. Thus, every joint decision is made in the context of culture(s) - and at the same time has a culture-building effect.

---

[1] Harlfinger, J. (2005). Networks of Excellence. Council for Research and Technology Development, FAS.research (ed.).

The VREDE Phase Model

In the VREDE project, a phase model was therefore developed that describes group decisions in their complexity as a linear process including cyclical loops as comprehensively as possible and thus enables a structured procedure for the implementation and observation of group decisions. From this, we derive requirements for the development of a digital tool with which complex decisions can be made with a high level of participation of the group members with visual support.

Even without IT implementation, this model supports advisors in moderating difficult decision-making processes in a more qualitative way: The VREDE phase model contains goal formulations for all phases as well as a collection of important questions. It starts with the question: "Is this even a topic for a group decision?". It contains guidance and a collection of tools recommended for specific phases. It supports in the phase of arriving and synchronising the people involved, describes the interaction of the creative phase, information gathering and proposal development, and leads to the group's decision after the evaluation and presentation of the evaluation result. It is also used to communicate the decision internally and externally as well as for process and result reflection.

In creating the phase model, we were guided by our many years of experience as consultants and facilitators, which have also made us see many well-intentioned approaches to joint decisions fail. Often it turns out that one issue can only be decided after another issue has been clarified first. These phenomena naturally lead to a high degree of complexity. The VREDE phase model strives for intuitive support and a balance between complexity and practicality.

The VREDE phase model comprises five main phases.

- Synchronise: In this phase, all participants in the decision-making process find themselves in a common framework.
- Creative phase: The participants work on the topic together, develop understanding for each other and develop assessable proposals.
- Decide: A joint decision is made.
- Present: The decision and the decision-making process are presented in a target group-specific way with the consent of the participants.
- Reflect: The decision-making process and outcome are used for learning and evaluated.

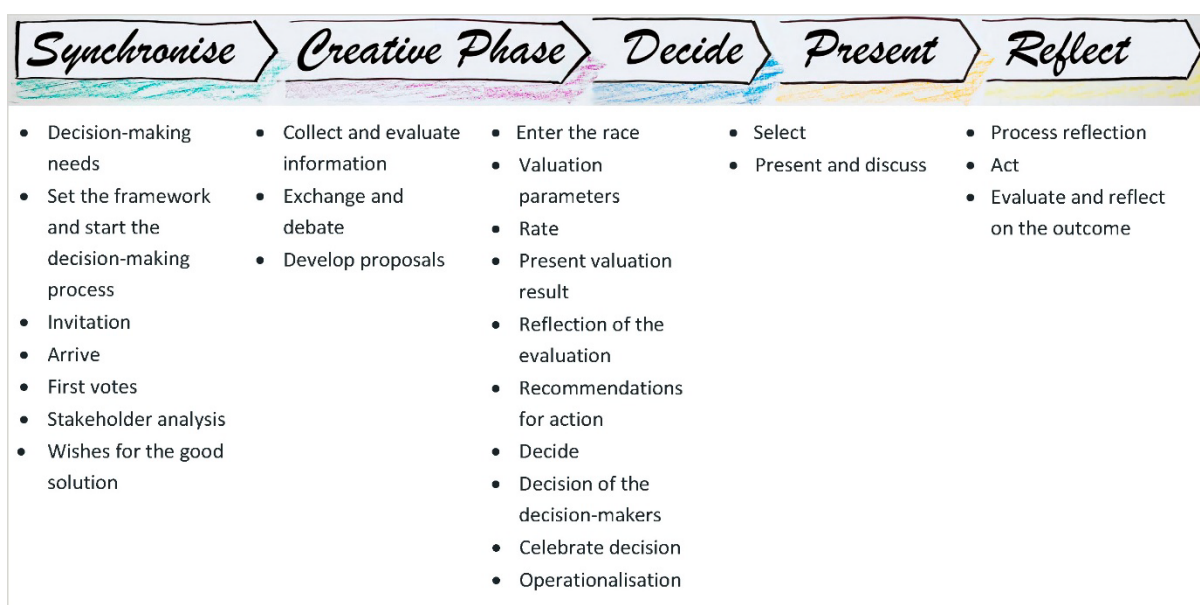| Synchronise	Creative Phase	Decide	Present	Reflect
• Decision-making needs • Set the framework and start the decision-making process • Invitation • Arrive • First votes • Stakeholder analysis • Wishes for the good solution	• Collect and evaluate information • Exchange and debate • Develop proposals	• Enter the race • Valuation parameters • Rate • Present valuation result • Reflection of the evaluation • Recommendations for action • Decide • Decision of the decision-makers • Celebrate decision • Operationalisation	• Select • Present and discuss	• Process reflection • Act • Evaluate and reflect on the outcome

Figure 2: The VREDE phase model. Source: own illustration.

For each of these phases and sub-phases, we have developed objectives and guiding questions that can help facilitators and leaders plan and guide group decision-making processes. The guiding questions can be used "as a whole", or a selection can be made for the specific situation.

Synchronise

- Decision-making needs
- Set the framework and start the decision-making process
- Invitation
- Arrive
- First votes
- Stakeholder analysis
- Wishes for the good solution

Aim

All those involved in this process to reach a jointly supported decision or decision preparation have found themselves in a common framework.

Synchronise

Goal: All participants in the process have found themselves in a common framework.

Decision-making needs

Goal: The decision has been made whether to conduct a group decision-making process.

Questions

- Should the decision under consideration be taken jointly?
- Does the decision under consideration have to be taken jointly?
- How big is the risk if the decision is not shared?
  - Financial
  - Conflicts
  - Quality loss
- Is the joint decision an evasion of an individual decision?
- Is the desired decision even possible?
- Is the issue fundamentally decidable? (Problem versus polarity/tension field)
- What happens if this decision is not taken?
- Who has the decision-making power?
- Who is sufficiently competent to make a meaningful decision?
- How big is the risk of a jointly supported decision?
- What are the good decision-making habits to develop?

VREDE square

The VREDE square uses four important parameters to help assess how sensible it is to make a group decision.

- How much time is available?
- How important is the acceptance of those affected?
- How much willingness to participate (in the decision-making process) is there?
- How high is the innovation requirement of the solution?

Grint model

The Grint model helps to assess problems based on the level of uncertainty and cooperation required.

- How great is the degree of uncertainty?
- How much cooperation is needed to solve the problem?

Impact vs decision effort

What are presumed impacts/consequences/risks associated with the issue?

What is the maximum loss?

How high is the presumed decision-making effort?

Is the planned decision-making effort in proportion to the effects, consequences, risks?

Set the framework and start the decision-making process

Goal: The decision-making task is defined.

Questions

- What is my role in the process?
    - Moderator:in
    - Secretary:in
    - Initiator:in (Owner) for the decision-making need "I initiate the decision-making project because I have a decision-making need".
- What other roles are there/are there needed in the process? Possibilities:
- Source, Decision Maker, Expert, User, Affected Person, Implementer, Idea Generator ...
- Topic: What is it about? Please provide a brief description of the issue and the goal to be achieved through the VREDE process.

- Name/Title: What should the VREDE process be called?
  - "To name is to frame." A meaningful name helps the invitees to understand what it is about and the participants to orient themselves. The title should be short. Short W-questions have proven to be favourable.

- Passive solution: What happens if no decision is made?
- What is the goal of this decision-making process?
  - Decision
  - Mood - Info: The group decides how to proceed after the evaluation.
  - Decision preparation - Info: Another group or individual makes the decision after the evaluation (within the framework of the evaluated proposals).
  - Info to leadership(steam) - Info: The leadership decides how to proceed after the assessment.

- If decision preparation/info to leadership (team): Who makes the decision?
- Is consensus needed for this decision? - Info: Consensus is not about the greatest acceptance, but about the agreement of all. This is necessary, for example, if existing agreements of a contractual nature are to be changed.
- How is the evaluation of the developed proposals done? - Info: e.g. through resistance evaluation, ambivalence evaluation ...
- Is there a source for the topic in whose field the decision is to be made? - Info: By "source" we mean the initiator:in or the person who took the risky first step. This person has a different relation to the topic than all the others (and it is always only one). In the VREDE tool, the evaluation by the source can be displayed in the evaluation result.
- If so, who is the source?
- Who all should participate in the decision?
- Are there different tasks/authorisations/responsibilities?
- If yes: Who should participate in the development of proposals?
  - All participants
  - Only part of it - Info: It may make sense for a larger group to develop proposals and then evaluate only part of them; in most cases, however, it will make sense to ask for everyone's evaluations even if the decision itself is then made by a smaller group (e.g. leadership team).

- If yes: Who is allowed to evaluate the proposals?
  - All participants
  - Only part of it - Info: It may make sense for a larger group to develop proposals and then evaluate only part of them; in most cases, however, it will make sense to ask for everyone's evaluations even if the decision itself is then made by a smaller group (e.g. leadership team).
  - A larger group - Info: After developing proposals, other people are invited for the evaluation. So one group prepares proposals for a larger group.

- Should vote delegation be possible in the evaluation?
- What are the non-negotiable framework conditions that must be taken into account in the decision-making process? - Info: Here the boundaries should be defined within which the question moves: time, costs, effort, project value, etc.
- By what date must the decision be made?
- How much (working) time should be devoted to the topic?
- Should a stakeholder analysis be made?

Invitation

Goal: The participants are informed about the decision-making process and have decided individually for or against their participation.

Questions

What are the relationship qualities between the participants? Are there any strains on the relationship level? What is the level of trust between the participants? Is honest sharing possible?

What information should/must potential participants receive?

- Title, description and deadline
- Goal (decision, mood ...)
- Passive solution
- What is likely to be done?
- Reason for the invitation
- Who else is in? Who decides?

Are there any questions for the facilitator about the process?

What basic rules do participants have to accept?

- Identification
- Rules of moderation (e.g.: no offensive remarks ...)

  - I accept the moderators.
  - I accept that the aim of this process is to find a solution that has as little resistance as possible from all the people involved.
  - I respect resistance as valuable information.
  - I contribute with all my knowledge and emotions and understand that devaluations of other people are not desired.
  - I accept that none of the participants has a veto right.
  - I accept the given deadlines or object to them in a timely manner.
  - I do not disclose any information from the VREDE process, especially personal information, to the outside world unless agreed.

What do people commit to by participating in the decision-making process? (e.g. make time resources available for five hours per week, confidentiality ...)

Arrive

Goal: Individual responses to the **process specifications** are considered. There is consensus and agreement on the framework of the decision-making process.

Questions

- How well do you understand why you were invited to this decision-making process?
- Do you need to discuss the framework conditions?
- Do you have any objections to the rules?
- What do you want to achieve with this VREDE process?
- What is your emotional approach to this topic?
- What do you want the others to know about you?
- How great is your need to get to know the others?
- What else do you need so that you can start working on the content?
- What do you need to fulfil your need for security in order to be able to contribute fully?

First votes

Goal: Individual reactions to the issue are taken into account. There is consensus and agreement on the content of the decision-making process.

Questions

- What is your response to the naming of this VREDE process?
- What is your response to the description of the theme?
- Which questions have to be decided in which order? (⮩ Topic baskets)
- What is your personal energy to participate?

Stakeholder analysis

Goal: The relevant stakeholders are identified and the participants' assessments of them are transparent. The participation strategy is fixed.

Questions

- Who are the relevant stakeholders?
    - How concerned or interested are they?
    - How big is their influence on the issue?

- Who beyond the participants will be involved, when, for what, and in what form?

Wishes for the good solution

Goal: The meta-criteria under which the participants consider a solution to be good are transparent.

Questions

- What are your wishes for a good solution? - Info: Meta level.

Creative Phase

- Collect and evaluate information
- Exchange and debate
- Develop proposals

Aim

The topic has been worked on together, understanding for each other and assessable proposals have been developed.

Creative phase

Goal: The topic has been worked on together, understanding for each other and assessable proposals have been developed.

Collect and evaluate information

Goal: Necessary information has been collected, researched and evaluated. Opinions have been formed and exchanged, arguments have been conducted.

Questions

- Which questions need to be clarified and in which order? 🗆 Topic baskets
- What information is available on the topic or the respective topic basket?
- Who procures which information?
- How much do the participants trust the information provided with regard to the ...
  - Correctness?
  - Importance?

- What are the opinions on the subject?
- Do subgroups need to prepare or research something?

Rethinking questions (Jan de Visch, Otto Laske) - thinking about the decision topic in a broader dialectical sense.

Exchange and debate

Goal: Necessary information has been collected, researched and evaluated. Opinions have been formed and exchanged, arguments have been conducted.

Questions

- Which questions need to be clarified and in which order? (☐ Topic baskets)
- What are the opinions on the subject?
- Do subgroups need to prepare or research something?

Rethinking questions (Jan de Visch, Otto Laske) - thinking about the decision topic in a broader dialectical sense.

Develop proposals

Goal: Evaluable proposals have been developed.

Questions

- What are the proposals?
  - o Do they build on or combine other proposals?

- Does anyone want to withdraw proposals or suggest that proposals be withdrawn?
- Should proposals be assigned to other thematic baskets? Is there a need for new thematic baskets?
- Are all proposals understood by everyone?
- Are there any questions about the proposals?
- What are the comments/opinions on the proposals?
  - o Comments
  - o Advantages and disadvantages
  - o Advantages and disadvantages, additional information

- Who pays a high price in the individual proposals? (Consideration of the stakeholders)
- How is the "sending into the race" done - by moderation or together?

Decide

- Enter the race
- Valuation parameters
- Rate
- Present valuation result
- Reflection of the evaluation
- Recommendations for action
- Decide
- Decision of the decision-makers
- Celebrate decision
- Operationalisation

Aim

A joint decision has been made.

Decide

Goal: A joint decision has been made.

Enter the race

Goal: Proposals are screened for various criteria and selected for evaluation.

Questions

To each proposal:

- Legitimacy: Is the group allowed to decide this?
- Legality: Is the proposal in conformity with the law?
- Responsibility
- Impossible? / unrealistic?
- General conditions adhered to?
- Implementation energy ("I want to send this proposal into the race!")
- Do you need any more suggestions? (then back)

Valuation parameters

Goal: The process parameters for the assessment are defined and transparent.

Questions

- Which scale(s) should be used for assessment?
- What is the evaluation question?
- From/until when should be evaluated?
- Should the result already be visible on an ongoing basis?
- In what form should the result be visible?
    - All proposals
    - All or the passive solution
    - Only the three best ranked proposals

Rate

Target: All eligible persons have evaluated all available proposals.

Questions

- What do you think of this proposal?
    - Depends on the scale.
    - ZB: How much opposition do you have to this proposal?
- Referring back to wishes - visualisation
- Do your evaluations fit together?

Present valuation result

Goal: The evaluation of the group including relevant parameters, justifications and comments is transparent.

Questions

- What is the evaluation of the group?
- Where is the source?
- How does my rating compare to the others?
- Are there clusters?
- What does the assessment look like by stakeholder?
- What are the justifications and comments?
- What are the statistics, how many have made proposals, evaluated, how many have we lost?

Reflection of the evaluation

Objective: The participants have interpreted the result for themselves and as a group.

Questions

Reflection questions

- What does the result mean for us?
- What can we learn from the resistances?
- How are we doing overall with our proposals?
- What are the resistance distributions for the individual proposals?
- What are the clusterings? (only when there is then: automatically recognise clusters within the TN).
- Can proposals be parallelised?

Fathom resistances

- Reasons: What is the wish behind this? --> this would then have to be added to the wishes.
- Advantages/Disadvantages?

Recommendations for action

Only if "automatic decision for the proposal with the highest acceptance" was not selected in preliminary decisions.

Goal: Agreement has been reached on how to deal with the result.

Questions

- How do we want to proceed with the result?
- What are the process proposals?
- How does the group evaluate these proposals?

Decide

Goal: All participants have made a decision from a state of congruence and inner clarity.

Questions

- How difficult is this decision for me?
- How much do I think this decision will hold?
- How clear am I about this decision?
- Can I decide?
    - Yes, I choose to do that and go along with it.
    - Yes, I decide to do that and I have the following addition:
    - No, I choose not to.
    - I can't decide that now.

Decision of the decision-makers

If it was decided at the beginning that the group should be involved in preparing the decision and not make the decision itself, then the group first decides what is to be presented to the leader or the leadership team. Then the decision-makers make a decision.

Goal: All decision-makers have made a decision from a state of congruence and inner clarity.

Questions

- **What do I or we decide?**
- How difficult is this decision for me?
- How much do I think this decision will hold?
- How clear am I about this decision?
- Can I decide?
    - Yes, I choose to do that and go along with it.
    - Yes, I decide to do that and I have the following addition:
    - No, I choose not to.
    - I can't decide that now.

Celebrate decision

Goal: The willingness and commitment of all participants are acknowledged. The emotional dimensions of having made the joint decision are taken into account.

Questions

- What am I grateful for?
- Who do I want to congratulate for what?
- How do I feel about the decision I have made?
- How should the decision (still) be celebrated?

Operationalisation

Goal: Resources and first implementation steps are known.

Questions

- What are the next steps?
- Who takes responsibility for what?
- Who meets with whom and when?
- Who what by when for whom (optional)`
- How high is my implementation energy?

- Select
- Present and discuss

Aim

The decision and the decision-making process are presented in a target group-specific way with the consent of the participants.

Present

Goal: The decision and the decision-making process are presented in a target group-specific way with the consent of the participants.

Select

Goal: It is decided who should have access to what information and in what form.

Questions

- Who should be informed about the decision?
- Who should be represented?
  - To all who participated
  - the decision-makers/supervisors
  - the people concerned
  - Media, ... Third, Fourth ... e.g. press release; press view...
  - other individuals

- What is to be depicted?
  - Result or all proposals
  - Assessments? Evaluation results?
  - Participants:inside
  - Timeline, phases, map ...
  - Theme baskets
  - Proposal history
  - Wishes adgL
  - my reviews
  - Source
  - Individual evaluations

- Statistical data: Who was involved in the decision-making process, for how long, how often, how many people, how much time in total went into it, in which phases ... (put in relation to implementation. Correlation between duration of decision and implementation costs).
- Stakeholder map - Who was involved and how?
- Implementation plan (rough, see short term, medium term, long term, phase - see recommendations for action)

- In what form should this be presented in each case?
- Are there any objections from the participants to presenting the process and the outcome in this way?
  - If yes: Which ones?

Present and discuss

Goal: Affected people who were not involved in the decision-making process are sufficiently informed about the decision and the process and their feedback is obtained.

Questions

- How are the results presented to the respective group/individual and put up for discussion?
- What are the responses to the decision?
- What questions are there? (on content, process, implementation)

- Process reflection
- Act
- Evaluate and reflect on the outcome

Aim

The decision and the decision-making process are presented in a target group-specific way with the consent of the participants.

Reflect

Objective: The decision-making process and outcome were used for learning and evaluated.

Process reflection

Objective: The decision-making process was used for learning and evaluated.

Questions

- **What have I learned from this process?**

Efficiency
- How efficient did I find the process for us?
- Did we make the decision in a good way?

Effectiveness
- How results-oriented did I find the process?
- How well were we supported in our decision?
- Have we done the right thing? Did we make the right decision in terms of wants and needs?

Sufficiency
- How focused did I find the process?
- Was the decision-making effort proportionate?
    - Too elaborate?
    - Too reduced?

Degree of participation
- Do I feel that everyone in the team was able to contribute well? Was everyone in the team able to contribute well?
- Was I also able to introduce sensitive aspects and objections well?
- Do I feel that I have helped to shape the decision? Did I help shape the decision?

- For stakeholder analysis: Have the key stakeholders been taken into account?
- Was the level of involvement appropriate/proportional?
  - Too elaborate?
  - Too reduced?

- From my point of view, were the right people involved?
  - If no, who was absent? Why was the person/group absent?

Time

- Did I get bored in the process?
- Did I feel pushed in the process?
- I will say this:

Creativity

- Were creative innovative solutions developed through the process (that we would not have come up with otherwise)?
- Which elements have encouraged me in my creativity?
- What elements have hindered my creativity?

Team

- Has VREDE contributed to a better team culture?
- Has the sense of team spirit and togetherness been strengthened?
- Was the understanding for each other increased?
- Did the different team members complement each other well in the process?
- How has this process changed our team?

Implementation

- Do I have a good feeling that the implementation will succeed?
- Does the decision-making process contribute to good implementation?
- Do I think the decision will remain stable?
  - Total
  - In the team
  - Among the decision-makers
  - Among the stakeholders
  - Among those affected

- Has the decision-making process contributed to a more stable decision?
- Were implementation-relevant factors sufficiently taken into account in the decision?
- Do I feel well prepared for the implementation/next steps by the decision-making process so far?

Presentation of the result of these questions

Resonance?

Act

Goal: The implementation of the decision taken is planned and started.

Questions

- Should the result be evaluated in some time?
- If yes: Deadline?
- What is to be done now?
- What routines need to be changed as a result of this decision? (Speaking, meetings, team culture, behaviour patterns ...)
    - What does this decision change about that?
- Review ToDo list: Which implementation steps need to be planned?
- Should the implementation be accompanied by a tool?
    - If yes: which one?

Evaluate and reflect on the outcome

Goal: The result of the decision is evaluated. The outcome of the evaluation is transparent and discussed.

Questions

- Have we implemented the decision?
- How does it feel?
- Is there still a need? (Re-regulation, further issues ... what results from the implementation?)
- What have I learned from this process?
- What did the group learn from this process?
- How do we want to celebrate the result?