

Forward Progress: The Consolidation Technique ¹

Jeff Oltmann

Recently I described Dr. Katrina Foxton's experience with [team learning](#). Let's drop in on her again as she runs her weekly staff meeting at MicroBiomics. The meeting has ventured into deep overtime, as her exhausted team goes in circles, rehashing ideas about faster ways to investigate the genetic diversity of the gut microbiome. Whenever Dr. Foxton thinks the topic is finally finished, someone circles back to reopen it, like a dog returning to gnaw on a favorite bone. And it's not just today – this happens at many MicroBiomics meetings. It constantly wastes time and saps the stamina of her busy team.

How can she upgrade her facilitation skills, helping her team close the topic and move the discussion forward to other important things? She should use a simple facilitation technique called *Consolidation*.

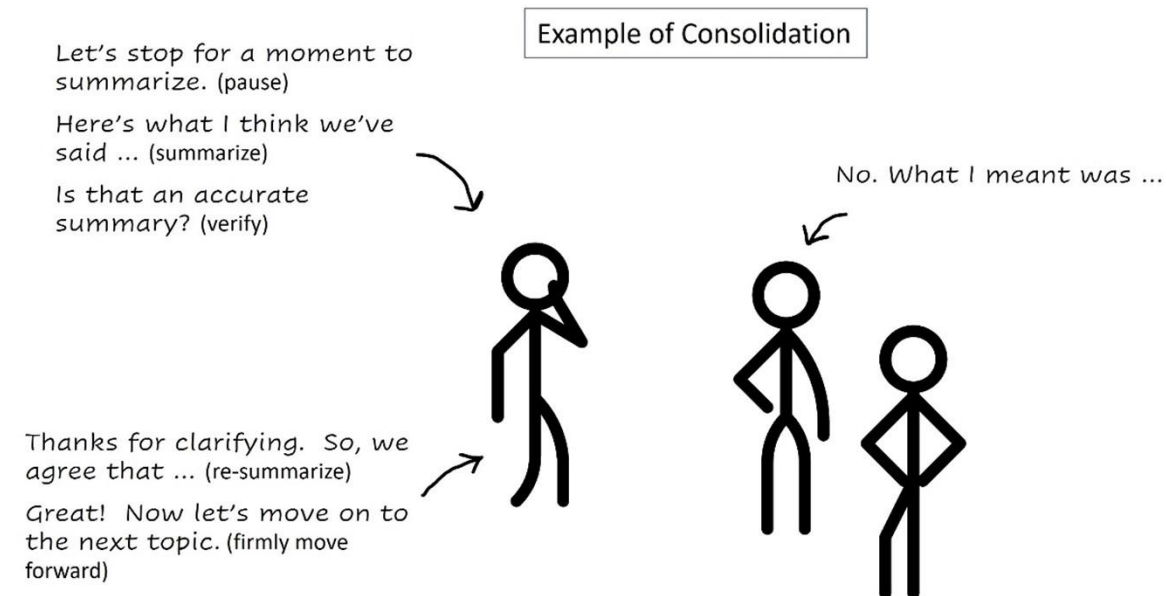
The *Consolidation* Technique

Consolidation has five quick steps. Whenever the discussion reaches tentative clarity or agreement, immediately use these steps to grab a small victory.

1. Insert a verbal pause into the discussion
2. Summarize important ideas or points of agreement
3. Verify correctness
4. Re-summarize
5. Firmly move discussion to the next topic

Here's an example of consolidation in action.

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Why Consolidation Works

Consolidation works because it intentionally builds up a series of small agreements, like a bricklayer laying a sturdy foundation brick by brick and layer by layer. As you mortar in each small agreement, you are creating a strong layer of assent, minimizing the need to backtrack to repair a weak spot. By the end of the meeting, the series of small agreements adds up to a solid foundation.

Consolidation may be a simple facilitation concept, but it takes practice to make it second nature. Try it the next time you lead a discussion or meeting. As you get better at it, you'll notice that the group spends more time on productive problem-solving and less time circling back to old topics.

Like Dr. Foxton, the next time you want a discussion to be more productive, try consolidation. What's your favorite technique to keep things moving forward?

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About the Author



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Jeff Oltmann is a seasoned leader with over 30 years of experience advising clients, managing successful technology programs, and developing new products. His specialties include strategy deployment, operational and project excellence, and project portfolio management. As principal consultant at Synergy Professional Services, Jeff advises leaders and teams in diverse sectors including healthcare, research, bioscience, and technology product development.

Jeff is the founder of the Portfolio and Project Leaders Forum. He is also on the graduate faculty of the Division of Management at Oregon Health and Science University and was previously on executive staff at IBM. He teaches portfolio, program, and project management and is a certified Project Management Professional (PMP®).

Jeff welcomes your questions and ideas. You can contact him at jeff@spspro.com or read previous articles at www.spspro.com/article-library.