



Quick Tips: Decision Making

Each decision-making method has its strengths and is appropriate under certain circumstances. Each also has particular consequences for the group's future operation. An effective group understands each method of decision making well enough to choose the method that is best for:

- The history of the group**
- The type of decision to be made**
- The nature of the task being worked on**
- The amount of time and resources available**
- The kind of climate the group wishes to establish**
- The type of setting in which the group is working**

There are both positive and negative aspects of all types of decision making! While no method is perfect, you should choose the one that best fits your group and situation.

Decision by Authority Without Group Discussion – *The President calls an unscheduled emergency meeting.*

- + useful for simple, routine decisions
- + good if very little time is available
- + helpful if group members lack the skills and information to make the decision any other way
- advantages of group interaction are lost
- one person is not always a good resource
- no commitment to implementing the decision
- resentment and disagreement may result in sabotage and deterioration of group effectiveness

Decision by Expert – *The treasurer creates the organization's budget.*

- + useful when the expertise of one person is superior and little is gained from group discussion
- + takes less time than group discussion
- difficult to determine who the expert is
- no commitment to implementing the decision

Decision by Averaging Individuals' Opinions – *The Vice President calls members of the executive board and asks "What's a good weekend to have our retreat?"*

- + useful when it is difficult to get group members together to talk
- + can be useful for simple, routine decisions
- not enough interaction between members to gain the benefits of group discussion
- no commitment to implement the decision
- unresolved conflict and controversy may damage group effectiveness in the future

Decision by Authority After Group Discussion – *Membership Chairperson solicits input on potential recruitment efforts, however, he/she makes the final decision on what events to hold.*

- + uses the resources of group members more than some other methods
- + gains some benefits of group discussion
- does not develop a commitment to implement the decision
- does not resolve the controversies and conflicts among group members
- members compete to impress the designated leader or tell the leader what they think the leader wants to hear

Decision by Minority – *Fundraising Committee decides to send letters to alumni members soliciting donations.*

- + can be used when not everyone can meet to make a decision
- + helpful when only a few members have relevant resources
- + useful when board member's commitment is not needed to implement the decision

- does not utilize the resources of group members
- does not establish wide spread commitment to implement the decision
 - full benefit of group interaction is not obtained

Decision by Majority Vote – *Organization holds an election for new officers.*

- + can be used when there is insufficient time to decide by consensus
- + can be used when complete member commitment is not necessary for implementation
- + closes discussion on issues that are not highly important to the group
- usually leaves an alienated minority
- encourages either/or thinking
- full commitment to implement the decision is absent
- full benefit of group interaction is not obtained

Decision by Consensus – *Organization establishes goals for the coming year.*

- + produces an innovative, creative and high-quality decision
- + elicits commitment by all members to implement the decision
- + uses the resources of all members
- + useful in making serious, important and complex decisions in which all members are committed
- takes a great deal of time, psychological energy and high level member skill
- time pressure must be minimal and there must be no emergency in progress

Making Consensus Decisions

The basic guidelines for consensual decision making are as follows:

1. Avoid arguing blindly for your own opinions. Present your position as clearly and logically as possible, but listen to other members' reactions and consider them carefully before you press your point.
2. Avoid changing your mind only to reach agreement and avoid conflict. Support only solutions with which you are at least somewhat able to agree. Yield only to positions that have objective and logically sound foundations.
3. Do not assume that someone must win and someone must lose when discussion reaches a stalemate. Instead, look for the next more acceptable alternative for all members.
4. Discuss underlying assumptions, listen carefully to one another, and encourage the participation of all members.
5. Avoid conflict reducing procedures such as majority voting, tossing a coin, averaging and bargaining.
6. Seek out differences of opinion. They are natural and expected. Try to involve everyone in the decision process. Disagreements can improve the group's decision because they present a wide range of information and opinions, thereby creating a better chance for the group to hit upon more adequate solutions.

Perfect consensus means that everyone agrees what the decision should be. Unanimity, however, is often impossible to achieve. There are degrees of consensus, all of which bring about a higher quality decision than majority vote or other method of decision making.

Adapted from Johnson and Johnson, Joining Together: Group Theory and Group Skills