

Managing People and Groups

Six Decision-Making Options

Choosing the most appropriate method before each decision-making session is an important part of the PROCESS.

1. Spontaneous Agreement

Occasionally, one solution is favored by everyone. These types of decisions are fairly rare and often occur with simple issues.

Pros: It's fast and easy. It unites the group, and there is no conflict.

Cons: It may be too fast; the issue may actually need discussion.

Uses: When issues are trivial and discussion isn't vital. When issues are simple and an in depth discussion isn't required.

2. One Person (or Sub-committee) Decides

The group decides to defer to one person who will make the decision on behalf of the group. Teams should recognize that every decision doesn't need to be made by the group; a one person decision is often a faster and more efficient way to get resolution. The decision maker can-and should-get advice and input from other group members before deciding.

Pros: It's fast, and accountability is clear.

Cons: It can divide the group if the person doesn't get group buy-in (either by not consulting the members or by making a decision that others can't live with, or don't understand).

Uses: When the issue is unimportant or small. When there's a clear expert in the group. When only one person has access to the information needed to make the decision. When one person is solely accountable for the outcome.

3. Compromise

A middle position is created (or negotiated) by incorporating ideas from both sides-either by finding a compromise when members are strongly polarized on opposite sides of a single option or by blending different ideas together when multiple options exist. Because every side wins some points and loses others, the end result is one that no one is totally satisfied with.

Pros: It generates lots of discussion and creates a solution.

Cons: It tends to become adversarial when people have a favored point of view. Everyone wins AND everyone loses.

Uses: When neither of two opposing solutions are acceptable to everyone. When the group is highly polarized.

4. Multi-voting

This is a priority setting tool that is useful when a lengthy set of options exists. This allows the options to be ranked based on a set of criteria, so that the "best" options can be identified.

Pros: It's systematic, objective, democratic, noncompetitive, and participative. It minimizes feelings of loss. It is a fast way to sort through a complex set of options.

Cons: It's often associated with limited discussion and, therefore, limited understanding of

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options. It may force people to choose an unsatisfactory option, because it only looked like the best there was at the time (that is, all issues may not have been raised during the limited discussion).

Uses: When there's a long list of alternatives or items from which to choose. When you're choosing a set of criteria to identify the best course of action.

5. Majority Voting

Once clear choices have been identified, people must choose the option they favor. Detailed discussion and analysis of the options prior to voting always enhances the quality of the vote.

Pros: It's fast, and high-quality decisions may result if the vote occurs after a thorough discussion.

Cons: It can be too fast; if there isn't a thorough discussion, the quality of the decision may be low. It can create winners and losers. Asking for a "show of hands" may put pressure on people to conform.

Uses: When there are two distinct options and one or the other must be chosen. When decisions are needed quickly and division in the group is acceptable. When consensus cannot be reached.

6. Consensus

Everyone has a clear understanding of the issue and has analyzed all of the relevant facts together-before jointly developing solutions that represent the whole group's best thinking about the optimal decision. A consensus decision is reached when everyone says, "I can live with this decision, and I will support its implementation." A collaborative process should be designed to get to this point-even if the consensus is that the group agrees to use one of the other decision-making methods to reach the final agreement.

Pros: It's an inclusive effort that unites the group, and it demands high involvement. It is systematic, objective, and fact-driven. It builds buy-in and commitment to the outcome.

Cons: It's time-consuming. It can produce low-quality decisions, if it is done without proper detailed information collection or if members have poor interpersonal skills.

Uses: When the decision will impact the entire group. When buy-in is essential. When the importance of the decision is worth the time it will take to complete the collaborative process properly.