

Decision Making

A key activity for any team is decision making. The decisions made can have an important impact on team effectiveness. How decisions are made will have an important impact on team dynamics. Teams use many alternative ways to make decisions as members communicate and work together on various tasks. The best groups don't limit themselves to just one decision-making method. Instead, they change methods to best fit the situation at hand. Different decision making processes have different strengths and weaknesses. Teams also need to know they can change their decision making process at anytime during a session. The following model can guide you in the appropriateness of your decision making style:

Authority Rule/Autocratic Decisions

A single leader at the top making the decision usually without consulting with others. This style is favored in military, or in patriarchal organizations. Well suited to emergencies.

Consultative Decisions

A commitment from the decision makers to utilize input from others and to take suggestions under advisement.

Majority

50% plus 1 majority carries the decision and it is usually without regard for the 49%. Used in companies among Shareholders and Directors, and in politics.

Unanimous Vote

Requires all who participate to agree with the proposal and any dissent results in a deadlock. Used in major decisions like disposal of family assets, partnerships, etc.

Participative Decisions

All those involved or impacted by the decision participate in the decision making process.

Consensus Decisions

- most of the participants agree to the proposal
- each person dissenting is asked to speak to their dissent
- a sincere attempt to reconcile the dissent with the majority is made.
(Key elements are listening and serious consideration of the minority's dissent.)
- proposal carries only after all dissent has been heard. (This allows for the wisdom of the experience of the dissent to inform and modify the decision for the benefit of all.)



How Decisions Are Made*

From “Plop” to Consensus

The following is a classification of methods of decision making in teams. This classification shows a number of ways of making a decision and the amount of public and private agreement with the decision that is likely to be associated with each.

“Plop” - Any single member can decide to attempt to influence others without support from others. He lays a “plop,” for both publicly and privately, all are aware of the failure to accept his decision. Sharing of ideas and feelings has been at a minimum.

Self-Authorization - A member fails to sense or is indifferent to the matter of support from others and authorizes himself to decide for the team. Only the member has accepted the decision. He ceases his self-authorization only when he becomes aware that the rest of the team has not accepted his decision.

Decision by Authority - An individual with formal authority takes it on himself to make the decision with little or no involvement of the other members of the team. This often results in team members not being aware of the decision and resenting it. Due to lack of member input these decisions can quite easily be made on an inadequate information base.

Hand-Clasping - a single member is able to gain a hand-clasping support from one other member. This may be perceived as general support for a decision by the whole team, but this is often a misconception. A team cannot build and grow if such decisions are made frequently.

Minority Decision - More overt conflict and pressure become apparent when a minority decides for the team. The difference between public and private acceptance becomes greater. The minority publicly accept the decision. Some of the majority go along publicly but not privately. Although there may be a fair amount of sharing of resources and needs among the minority, the majority remains non-participating and, generally uncommitted. Apathy usually appears when the decision is to be carried out.

Majority Decision - There is more use of resources and more commitment when a majority decides. Many or all of the minority may go along publicly, but their satisfaction and private agreement with the decision are low.

Consensus - Consensus has been found to yield maximum commitment from all in the team. Issues are thrashed out until all feelings have been seriously considered before a decision is reached. Yet such consensus may be false if it is gained by announcing that “silence means consent” and when members refuse to reveal their true opinions about matters. Similarly, when members are forced to reveal their true opinions about matters, true consensus still has not been achieved. Only when everyone in the team freely offers his opinions and a decision is hammered out based on the public examination of all ideas is true consensus likely to be attained.



Consensus Decision Making

Consensus is decision-making that takes all members' personal opinions into account and results in a decision that all members can live with. All members may not be totally happy with the outcome, but they agree that they can abide by it, and they feel their opinions were listened to and taken seriously. In contrast with other decision making patterns, consensus seeking encourages appraisal of more information and provides a broader range of potential solutions. As a result, a group is more likely to choose the best alternative and have a greater confidence in the decision it has made.

Adapted from The Creative Planning Process, IC Possibilities & Associates, Victoria B.C.

Guidelines for Consensus Decisions

1. All members commit to reaching a consensus decision.
2. Members prepare their own position with knowledge that is currently available.
This is done prior to the meeting if possible.
3. Present your position logically
 - Avoid arguing
 - State all the facts
4. Support the reasons for your position emphasizing the need, not your position.
5. Ask for clarification when needed.
6. Listen to everyone's opinion. Members then apply logic and understanding to these to modify their own opinion.
7. Avoid thinking in terms of win-lose situations and don't give in merely to avoid conflict.
8. Look for the most acceptable alternative.
9. Avoid using stress-reducing techniques, such as voting or simply giving in to save time. Realize that differences in opinion are helpful to reach a quality decision and that consensus takes more time.

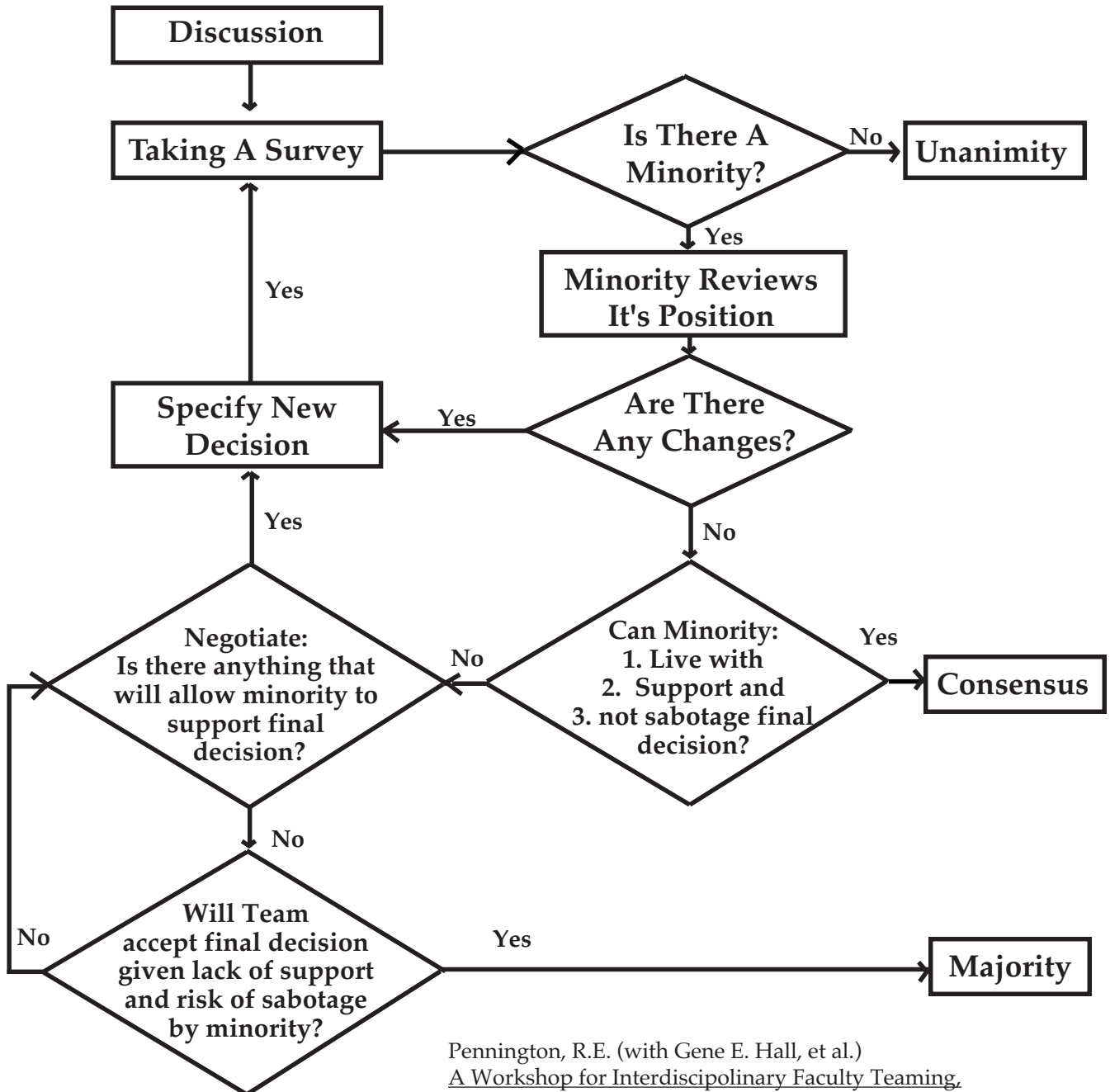
Group Conditions That Support Consensus Decisions

- unity of purpose
- equal access to power
- autonomy of group from external hierarchical structures
- time
- willingness in the group to attend to process
- willingness in the group to attend to attitude
- willingness in the group to learn and practice skills



The Consensus Decisionmaking Flowchart

How Consensus Is Reached



Pennington, R.E. (with Gene E. Hall, et al.)
A Workshop for Interdisciplinary Faculty Teaming,
 Research and Development Center for Teacher Education,
 The University of Texas at Austin, 1974.



Taking A Survey

Purposes

1. Getting a reading on where the team stands on an issue
2. Testing for consensus of opinion
3. Involving all team members actively

Activity

1. The requesting member calls for a survey and states what he wants to know from the total team.
2. Other members paraphrase until all are clear about what they are being asked.
3. Each person, in turn, briefly states his current position.

Theory

The essential technique for obtaining a consensus is a survey. In the techniques the chairman or someone poses the decision. One or two people clarify it by restating it. Then everyone in turn states his reaction to the proposal. Each person should be as brief as he can, but he need not restrict himself to yes or no. He can say that he is uncertain, that he is confused and wants to hear more, that he is experiencing some pain one way or the other or he can simply say that he does not want to talk about it.

A team using the technique of the survey, however, cannot allow the individual merely to remain silent. If he wants to say nothing, he must say explicitly that he wants to say nothing. A consensus is the only safe method for a decision where non-support or sabotage by one member would ruin the undertaking. It is a slower and more painful method, however, than other decision making methods that have been described. Consequently, it is usually less efficient than those other methods in situations where they will suffice.

*Schmuck, R.A., Runkel, P.J., Saturen, S.L., Martell, R.T., & C.B. Handbook of organization development in schools. Oregon: National Press Books, 1972.



Five Fist Exercise

This exercise can reveal where group members stand on a proposal without taking a formal vote.

- 5 fingers:** I am for it and will work hard for it.
- 4 fingers:** I am for it and will work hard for it and have small reservations.
- 3 fingers:** I have serious reservations, but will go along with it.
- 2 fingers:** I don't like it! Won't work for it, but will not work against it.
- 1 finger:** I don't like it, probably won't work against it. Not sure.
- Fist:** I will actively work against it—will sabotage it as it stands.

Behaviors that Support Dialogue & Consensus Building

Listening and speaking with judgment suspended—When we listen and suspend judgment we open the door to understanding.

Respect for differences—Our respect is grounded in the belief that everyone has an essential contribution to make and is to be honored for the perspective which only they can bring.

Role and status suspension—Again, in dialogue, all participants and their contributions are absolutely essential to developing an integrated whole view. No one perspective is more important than any other.

Balancing inquiry and advocacy—In dialogue, we inquire to discover and understand others perspectives and ideas and we advocate to offer our own for consideration.

Focus on learning—Out intention is to learn from each other, to expand our view and understanding, versus evaluate and determine who has the “best” view.

