

Teamwork: Group Dynamics

Developing consensus and building your team
in decision-making meetings.

An Introduction by Mark Nelson

Anyone who has participated in a team meeting understands the challenge of reaching consensus. As decisions become more complex or more sensitive gaining consensus becomes more difficult.

This reading assignment will explore the small-group dynamics that create roadblocks to consensus. Understanding this material is the foundation to understanding the group process methods and decision making tools which will be introduced during the “Teamwork” sessions of Field Preparation Seminar.

Your assignment is to read this material and complete the Open-Book Test before attending the “Teamwork: Group Dynamics” session. Please come to the session prepared to discuss your questions and comments about this material.

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The Relevance of Effective Group Decision Making

No single individual decides to launch a space shuttle. Some parts of the decision to launch are made by individuals, and groups make some parts. Even when an individual is vested with the power to make a decision - such as the power to declare war - wise decision makers rely on effective groups to help make their decision. Important decisions should be made with the best wisdom available.

Project teams can get stuck on procedural issues. Government agencies can become deadlocked over how to allocate their budget. Parents can marginalize their children by failing to include them in important decisions.

All groups have to make decisions. When people who belong to a group are not properly included in the decision making, they are emotionally distanced from the group. Over time this results in a breakdown of cohesiveness, which reduces the group's effectiveness and may ultimately destroy the group.

A police department agreed that new technology made it necessary to replace their bulletproof vests. Their research identified two different models that were suitable. The different characteristics of the vests generated a lot of controversy among the officers. The final decision of which vest to purchase had been postponed several times over the past year. Morale was at an all-time low and absenteeism at an all-time high.

Unresolved issues, such as this one, breed frustration and interpersonal conflict.

Everyone wrestles with important decisions and sensitive issues in their churches, on their fields and in their families. The more sensitive the issue or the higher the stakes, the more difficult group decision making becomes. If this part of our group life is not well managed, our groups will not reach their full potential.

Certainly the Lord's work is as important as any of the business and political affairs with which certain groups deal. As stewards of His work, each of us has an ethical responsibility to employ the wisdom that is available in a "multitude of counselors".

The Nature of Group Decision Making

“Groups will outperform individuals only to the extent that productive conflict arises among the members and such conflict is resolved through balanced debate and careful intelligence gathering.”

Every day we must choose among personal preferences and opportunities. We have issues to resolve or we must allocate our limited resources. Our decisions are personal, driven by our values and relying heavily on our intuition.

When we work with others who have different values and experiences, making decisions can become more difficult because our group decision must incorporate a broader spectrum of thought.

It is the individuals in a group who can be the greatest asset in decision making. They represent different perspectives, bringing a broader base of experience and knowledge to bear on any given situation.

However, it is also the individuals in a group who can be the greatest weakness in decision making. If the group process is not managed effectively, the conflict that naturally results from differing perspectives, values, needs, goals, and experiences can become destructive.

In spite of this danger, it is generally agreed that the absence of conflict may be more problematic than its presence. Some signs or conditions that there may be a problematic absence of conflict include:

- Too high an emphasis on cohesiveness or harmony becomes too important
- Not getting outside feedback
- High stress created by complexity, deadlines, extreme importance
- Directive leadership
- Self-censorship

It is important to note, however, that not all decisions are group decisions; some decisions are individual in nature and call for individual responsibility and accountability. Individually we decide on a career, how to educate children, what house to buy, or how to spend extra money.

Two main considerations when determining which decisions should be made by a group are the character of the question, and the character of the group.

Questions that should be referred to an appropriate group include those:

- characterized by a great deal of complexity
- with uncertain outcomes
- likely to result in conflict
- which have high stakes (whether it be financial, reputation, status or other)
- which require people to work together
- which need the acceptance and commitment of the group
- with significant - but not immediate - deadline pressure

An appropriate group should decide how to distribute limited funds to research and development projects, or the future site of a manufacturing plant. A church needs to be involved in building project decisions. A family needs to choose their vacation destination.

Group characteristics should include members:

- with relevant skill and knowledge
- whose workload is not already too great
- who have reasonable expectations about being involved
- with ability to manage conflict

If these characteristics are missing from the group it may be necessary to compensate for them by changing the group membership, including outside experts in the decision process, delaying the decision, or finding a third party to help work through the decision.

No decision has only positive results. The goal of all decision making, whether a personal or group decision, is to maximize the positive results of the decision and minimize the negative results.

Obstacles to Effective Group Decision Making

A. PERSONAL DECISION RULES (FACTORS)

A decision factor is a feature that guides a decision. More simply, they are the why's - why we choose one option over another.

Examples of decision factors might include the option that:

- can be implemented most quickly
- can be implemented most inexpensively
- will yield the quickest results
- will yield the best long-term results
- will result in the highest quality
- will result in the right level of quality
- will have the least negative consequences
- will have no negative consequences
- best serves the highest priority goals
- best serves all goals

Sometimes more than one factor is important to a particular decision. Some factors are culturally derived and sometimes the factors that will guide a decision conflict with each other. For example, when buying a car you may want to consider low cost and high quality at the same time.

The following decision factors are internalized norms that often operate intuitively in unmanaged group decision making situations.

1 - The Extensive Decision Rule

Every person gets one vote. In a group deciding where to go out for a meal, a vote may be called and 5 people want to go to McDonald's and 2 want to go to Wendy's. So it's likely we will go to McDonald's.

2 - The Intensive Decision Rule

This takes into account someone in the group who feels more intensely about the subject. One member of the group may say "But I'm a vegetarian," which may cause the group to overrule going to McDonald's.

3 - The Involvement Rule

This takes into account the people who will be involved in implementing the decision. The owner of the car driving our group to the restaurant may vote against McDonald's, and this may sway the group to change.

4 - The Expert Rule

Someone in the group may have expert knowledge on the decision that others may not have. Perhaps a person who lives near McDonald's may speak up and say that the road to McDonald's is under construction and it will be difficult to get there.

5 - The Power Rule

This rule takes into account what powerful people in the group want. Perhaps the boss is with us and he wants to go to Wendy's. In this case, people may be intimidated and defer to the boss.

6 - The Negative Decision Rule

It takes considerable emotional and intellectual energy to get a group to move. This gives a negative person considerable power in a group. A negative voice carries the power of social inertia. In our restaurant example, someone may speak up and say "Let's forget the whole idea; I want to go home." At which point the group may disband and go home.

Controlling Personal Decision Factors

When making decisions as a group, it is helpful to identify which factors will guide the decision. If more than one factor is important the group will need to determine the relative weights for each factor.

B. PERSONAL FRAMES

“Frames” are mental structures people build to help organize the world. It is impossible for anyone to know about, understand, or even care about all the factors that might bear on a decision. In order to deal with life, everyone frames information. We subconsciously include certain factors in our thinking and exclude others.

When purchasing a computer, no one could possibly consider all the attributes of every component. We consciously or subconsciously pick certain items on which to focus attention.

Each member of a group organizes the world and thinks about the issues facing him/her through a different frame. Group members need to recognize that their personal frame is limiting and suppresses factors that other team members may not suppress.

Frames sometimes lead people into decision traps like overconfidence, shortsighted shortcuts, shooting from the hip, and fooling themselves about feedback.

Capitalizing on Personal Frames

Building on the strengths of different frames is one of the things that can make a group greater than the sum of the individual participants.

C. PERSONAL VALUES

Personal values or preferences are the foundation upon which decision making is based. Values also affect the way people build their mental frames. Differences in personal values among group members will create conflict when decisions need to be made.

Researchers tell us that, in any culture, relatively few values govern the way people examine and decide issues. Accordingly, decision making teams which include more than one culture will have more conflict related to these basic values.

The following six pairs of values are those predominant in the American culture.

1 - Multipurpose vs. Unipurpose

Some people approach decisions with a single purpose in mind. Others look at a range of goals that may be accomplished. A single purpose point of view may lead to premature action, and a multipurpose view may lead to stalling because the large numbers of purposes render us unable to act.

2 - Pragmatism vs. Excellence

The pragmatist needs to get something done, and is not overly concerned about all the possible entanglements. The excellent wants to be sure that whatever is done represents the highest possible quality. The pragmatist can act prematurely, while the excellent is inactive because quality can always be improved a little more before starting the project.

3 - Status vs. Class

The status point of view emphasizes personal gains, while the class point of view emphasizes group gains. For example, when allocating limited resources, the class view wants the group to benefit, and the status view wants gains made by individual according to some sort of criteria.

4 - Personal vs. Organizational Purpose

This is similar to Status vs. Class but the focus is on purposes rather than gains. Will the results of a decision follow my personal purposes or will they follow the organization's purposes?

5 - Intuitive vs. "By the Numbers" Decision Making

The problem with the "by the numbers" approach is that the numbers rarely tell the whole story, or we lack the right numbers, or they're not on time. The problem with the intuitive approach is that reasoning is hard to verify, and it is hard to defend if something goes wrong. Good decisions represent a blend of intuition and "by the numbers".

6 - Disposable vs. Intimate Concern for Labor

Most decisions affect people. The disposable labor point of view sees people as a part of the situation to be dealt with as the situation demands. The intimate view of labor sees people as central. People will be a dominant factor in any decision.

Managing Value Differences

- **The different values represented by a decision making group are another source of strength or weakness. Each person needs to express his position in order to have his values represented in the final group decision.**
- **Focusing on the situation at hand and limiting value implications to this specific instance can minimize value conflicts.**
- **When decisions are being made on behalf of an organization, the organization's values must guide the decision making.**

D. PRIDE AND COMPETITIVENESS IN GROUPS

It is noteworthy that the following passage on personal transformation and love for others addresses the problem of pride three times.

Rom 12:1-18 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: **Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought**, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. **Honor one another above yourselves**. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. **Do not be proud**, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

When people get together, our nature is to compare ourselves to others. These interpersonal comparisons combined with our natural aspiration to higher status, results in a competitive inclination where each person elevates his own ideas and minimizes others'. Christians are not immune to this experience. Total sanctification has not yet occurred and sin is still part of our daily struggle.

One way the tendency to compete affects meetings is for people to be unwilling to release ownership of their ideas after they have offered them to the group. This can develop into competitive debate.

Another way this tendency affects a group decision is in acceptance after a decision is reached. This tendency is evidenced by people who will not accept a group's decision but continue to lobby for their own ideas evidence it. These people are not only a destructive influence on implementing the decision, but they also reduce group cohesiveness. However, a poorly managed decision process may also contribute to people's unwillingness to accept a group decision.

Controlling Pride

Every member of a group must humble themselves enough to respect and appreciate the frames, values, and decision rules of the others in a decision making group. This is the "body life" described in Romans 12.

E. VALENCE OF IDEAS IN GROUPS

Valence refers to the emotional force that is attached to every idea. Richard Hoffman has developed the concept of valence in his book "The Group Problem Solving Process".

Whenever an idea is offered in a group setting, it has a positive or negative level of acceptability to the group. This level of acceptability creates an emotional force attached to the idea. This emotional force makes an idea seem greater or smaller than its objective merit.

The valence of an idea is created by:

- non-verbal communication in the group
- the group's previous experience with similar ideas
- the threat associated with the idea
- the educational background of the person offering it
- the power of the person offering it
- the enthusiasm of the person introducing it
- the persuasiveness of the person introducing it
- the talkativeness of the person introducing it

The danger of valence is that sometimes an idea of low merit is promoted above an idea of greater merit because of the emotional force.

Controlling Valence in Meetings

In order for groups to be good decision makers, they need to adopt meeting methods that minimize the emotional content of ideas and protect minority ideas. Experience has proven these simple techniques to be effective:

- 1. Always use a chalkboard or easel pad to visibly record the ideas.**
- 2. When discussing ideas, senior or powerful individuals should speak last.**
- 3. The Nominal Group Process.**

Overcoming the Obstacles

A. GROUP MATURITY

Group maturity is a term used to describe an effectively functioning group. Maturity is an important factor in group decision making performance.

Groups pass through several stages as they develop. And, while developing, groups can fall into several traps that keep them from maturing.

The first trap is associated with the way the group organizes. When a group first forms - even if it is an informal group - the members are initially uncertain about how much they want to commit to the group. They want to clarify the group's purpose and their roles in it. Someone (formally or informally) needs to provide guidance and direction so that the group's power and authority structures can be established.

Once these relationships are initially established, there is often a period when group members rebel (either overtly or covertly) against whoever provided the initial leadership.

Groups that successfully work out a power and authority structure become cohesive. Those that fail get stuck in infighting, foot dragging, and other types of rebellion.

A second trap is associated with how members accept each other, or how willing they are to reveal and accept one another's differences. At first these differences are either not revealed or glossed over. As time goes on, some members want more intimacy than others. Sub-groups develop as members become disillusioned about other members' expectations.

Successful groups manage to dissolve sub-groups and form relationships, recognizing the uniqueness and contributions of each member. Some groups do not get past this trap.

These traps may re-emerge when new members are added to the group.

Some groups finally reach maturity. A mature group is characterized by openness and realism. It is able to use all its resources because people do not withhold talent and abilities out of fear, spite, or neglect. The efforts of the group are expended on working toward the goal, rather than on resolving internal strife.

Characteristics of a Mature Group

- 1. Members are accepted without being labeled good or bad.**
- 2. Conflict is over real issues that are relevant to the group's task rather than over emotional issues, such as group structure or process.**
- 3. Decisions are made by the group but are not forced. Dissent is encouraged without pressure to agree.**
- 4. The members are aware of the group's process and how they are personally involved in it.**

Probably everyone has been a member of a group that was stuck in one of the traps. Research indicates the following actions help the group get unstuck.

1. First and most important is to refocus attention on the “Task” of the group.
2. Revisit the basics (group purpose, organization, meeting management, etc.)
3. Get outside help in the form of facilitators and trainers to infuse new information, techniques and ideas to help work through issues.
4. Revise the group membership.

The following two studies are included to further emphasize group maturity. They are founded on the premise that group work is primarily conversation. One person’s thoughts and feelings are expressed through spoken words. These words produce thoughts and feelings in the people who hear them. Thus, the group conversation can be a window into the group dynamic, as well as a producer of it.

Beyond being descriptive, the following charts can be used as models to modify group behavior. If group members consciously modify their behavior to the model, the group will become more mature.

Competitive or Cooperative

These two terms which describe group decision making styles emerge directly from the maturity level of a group. A cooperative group works from the perspective that “the exact solution is unknown and we are all searching for it.” A competitive group works from the perspective that “there are several solutions available and I must persuade the others to accept mine.” Mature groups operate in a cooperative style. Here are some comparisons of the two decision-making styles of groups:

Group Decision Making Styles	
Cooperative	Competitive
The solution is unknown and is being sought	Several solutions exist and members debate to persuade others
Searching	Stating opinions already formed
Trying out ideas on each other	Defending a position
Listening to understand rather than to refute	Either not listening, or listening to refute
Making relatively short speeches	Talk dominated by a few members
Reacting to differences as stimulating	Unfavorable reaction to disagreement
General pattern of complete participation, involvement, interest	Lack of involvement by some members
Common ownership of ideas	Individual ownership of ideas
Interacting with group as a whole	Series of interpersonal interactions
Caring about others	Limited interest in others
Difficult to know who is credited with an idea - it just developed	

Team Talk

Anne Donnellon developed the concept of Team talk in a study by the same name. A summary of this idea is that the language used in meetings may detect the maturity and cooperative nature of a group. The following chart is a summary of the language used during meetings by mature teams compared to the language used by competitive teams.

Language in Meetings	
Talk of Mature, Cooperative Teams	Talk of Competitive, "Stuck" Teams
"We", "Us", "Our"	"You", "They"
Acknowledging mutual interest	Assertions of individual intent
Soliciting others' views and needs	Not responding to questions
Explicit reference to interdependence	Explicit reference to independence
Apologies	Dominating the floor
Disclaimers	Interruptions
"I wonder.." "What if.."	Demands and directives
Indirect questions and requests	Speaking with excessive certainty
Non-threatening tones in debate	Challenging someone's competence
Informal speech	Asking leading questions
Politeness	Excessive or asymmetrical politeness
Slang	Formal language
Nicknames	Impersonal address
Analyzing implications and consequences	Calling for a vote to end debate

Anne Donnellon's study is organized around the following six areas which describe the attributes of mature, cooperative teams.

1. Identification

Members should identify at least as much with the group as with their functional departments, as evidenced by their use of "we", "us", "our". "You" and "they" are not appropriate.

1. Interdependence

Members express interdependence by acknowledging mutual interest, expressing their needs in the context of expressed mutual interest, soliciting others' views and needs, making proposals of joint action, and making explicit reference to interdependence.

The opposite, independence, is evidenced by assertions of individual intent (not including statements of how I fit into the group plan), failure to respond to questions, and explicit reference to independence.

2. Differentiation of Power

Good teams employ forms of talk that minimize differences of power among the team members such as apologies, disclaimers, hedges, indirect questions and requests (making them from the team rather than personal), stating one's debt to another, and politeness.

Good teams avoid forms of talk that emphasize differences of power, including: dominating the floor, interrupting, questioning, demands and directives, topic changes and challenges, speaking with excessive certainty, being overly direct, challenging someone's competence, asking leading questions, verbal aggression, excessive or asymmetrical politeness. They are especially recognizable when used consistently by the same people.

3. Social Distance

In good teams, power is minimized and therefore members must influence each other socially. Social closeness facilitates this. Signals of social closeness include informal style of speech, slang, nicknames, claiming common group membership or common views, displaying knowledge of and concern for others' wants, empathy, expressions of liking, or admiration of other team members.

Signals of problems in social closeness would include formal language, formal address of other team members, excessive politeness, or impersonal address.

4. Conflict Management

Teams with diversity and interdependence will naturally result in some conflict (the absence of conflict may be more problematic than its presence); therefore, the method of managing conflict is critical.

Common Tactics for Managing Conflict

1. Avoidance - common but disastrous because it is counterproductive to the reason for having a team.
2. Accommodation - creates team weakness by minimizing individual perspective or expertise.
3. Forcing - creates similar negative effects.
4. Compromise - is quicker than collaboration but less desirable because something is always being given up.

5. **Collaboration - surfacing differences, discovering overlapping interests, and integrating all parties achieves the optimum results.**

Avoidance, accommodation, and forcing are evidenced much the same way as differentiating of power: directives, threats, calling for a vote.

Collaborating is evidenced through expressions of interest, problem and need, questions seeking others' needs, trying to synthesize interests, non-threatening tones in debate, restating dissenting views, analyzing implications and consequences.

5. Negotiating

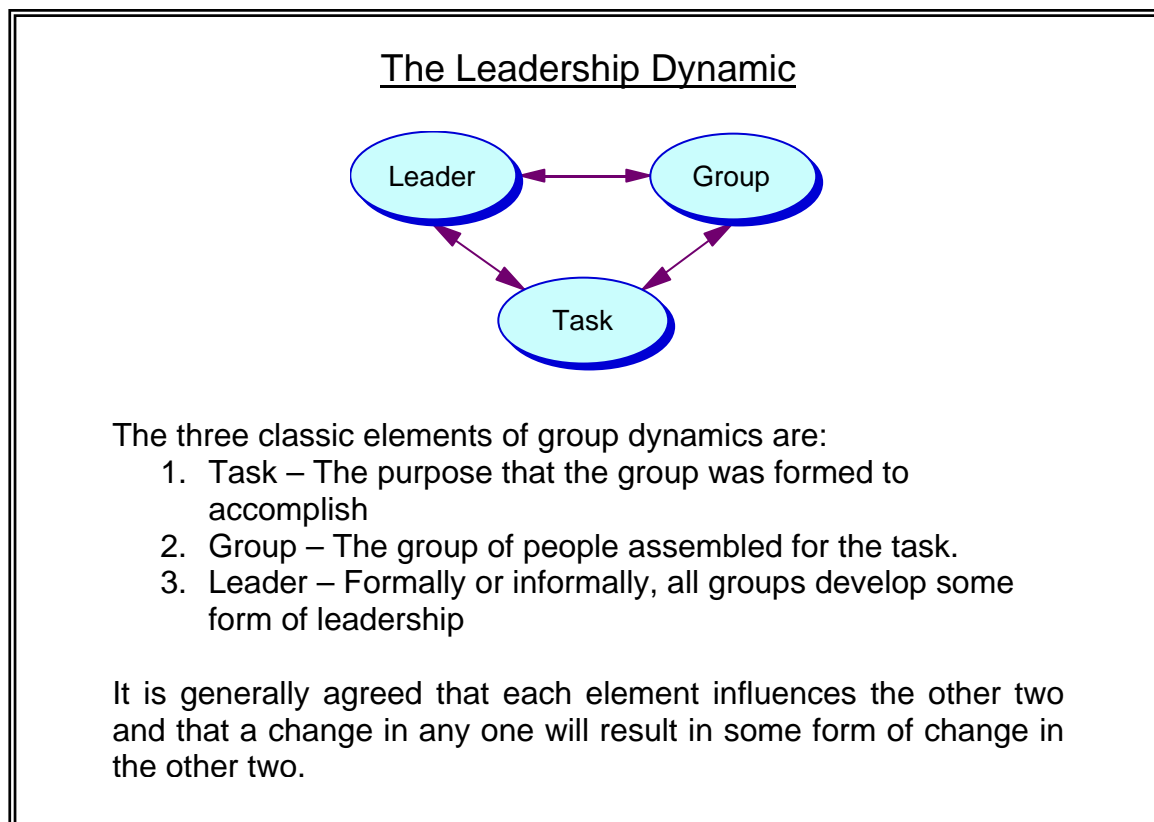
Good teams negotiate to resolve differences from a win-win orientation. This is evidenced by team members reframing or reinterpreting their positions in light of others' ideas, always exploring implications of all ideas, a lot of "what if" questions, and using objective criteria for resolution.

B. GROUP LEADERS

The leader of a group serves an important function in group decision making. He receives information and facilitates communication, but does not promote or reject ideas according to his own needs or agenda. A directive style of leadership is counter-productive in group decision making situations.

The leader needs to stimulate exploratory behavior and protect minority points of view which can easily be overcome before they are properly considered.

The leader summarizes the group's work, keeps everyone on track, and helps the group move through steps in the decision-making process.



A Group Leader's Roles

Task Roles	Relationship Roles
Guide the decision-making process	Remain impartial
Clarify the question	Stimulate exploratory behavior
Discourage evaluation until idea generating is finished	Protect minority points of view
Summarize the group's work	Encourage listening
Keep the discussion on track	Cultivate complete participation
Separate facts from value judgments	Keep group interaction from becoming personal
Move to conclusion	Prompt the clarification of ideas
Be sure plan of implementation is in place	

In certain situations the leader may be an expert, and he may have the best solution. In this case, he should provide information that will bear on the solution, but should not provide his solution. He should promote a cooperative group effort by taking the position that the best solution is unknown and being sought. If his solution is the best, the group should be able to discover it for themselves. Or perhaps the group will bring to light some points the leader had not considered which would strengthen the final decision.

Effective Group Decision Making Leaders:

- **Model maturity**
- **Promote openness**
- **Help the group avoid isolation**
- **Encourage everyone to be a critical evaluator**
- **Are not directive**

C. DECISION MEETING RULES

The following general rules of conduct should be established at the beginning of a decision meeting. Enforcing these rules will help a group resist the obstacles to effective group decision making and will foster maturity.

Decision Meeting Rules

1. Present information as clearly and objectively as possible.
2. Keep a positive attitude about the group's ability to find a solution.
3. Address the board, not others across the table.
4. Offer your ideas to the group - don't own them.
5. Don't preach.
6. Address ideas, not people.
7. Listen to understand, not to debate.

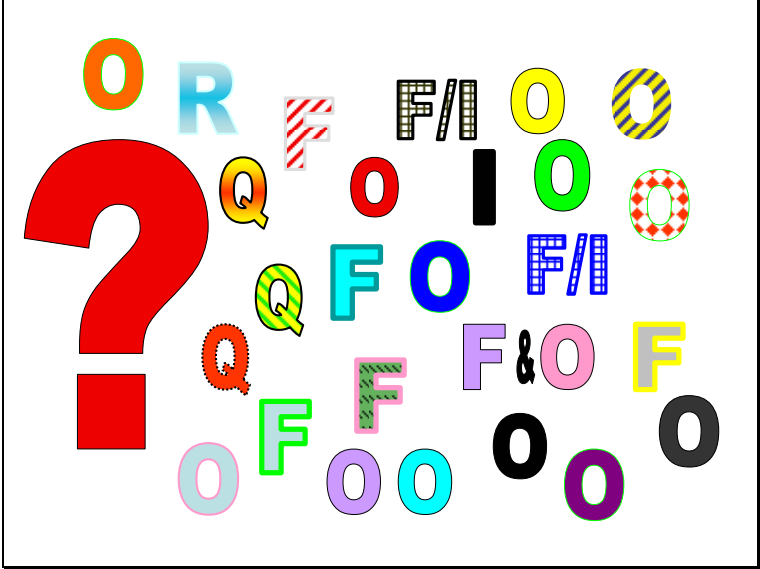
D. STRUCTURED DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

A structured process helps keep a group moving forward toward a good decision. The group leader may, from time to time, need to identify which step of the process they are working on in order to keep discussion from drifting off track. Sometimes it is necessary for a group to move backward in the process because it becomes apparent that something important was missed earlier. A common example of this is when, during the meeting, the wrong question is being addressed. Often this occurs when, during the discussion, it becomes apparent that a symptom is being addressed instead of its underlying problem. If this happens, the group needs to go back to step one and redefine the question.

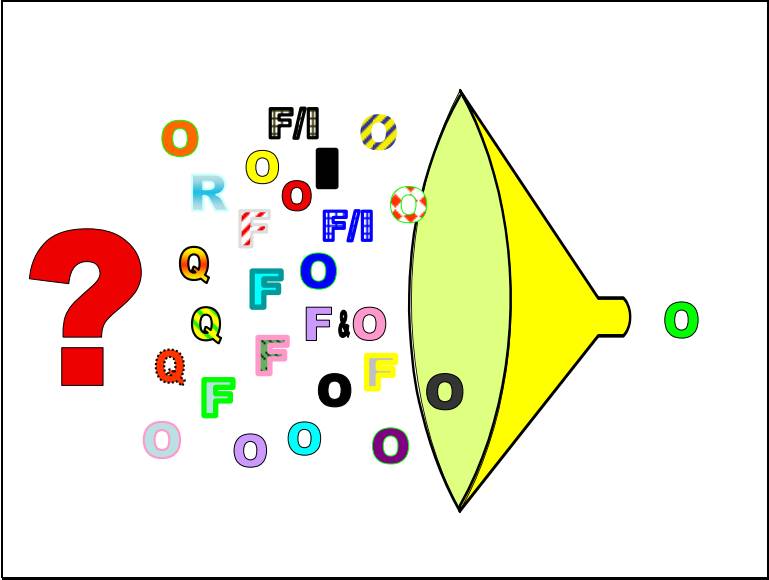
Important Principles for Group Decision Making

- The resources or effort invested in a particular decision must correspond to its importance.
- All the decision work does not need to be done by the same people or at the same time, but records need to be kept of the work that is done at each step.
- Not all complex decisions can be reduced to an objective process. An objective process will, however, help guide thinking and provide a way to more thoroughly investigate the factors related to a decision.
- Working through an objective process with a group helps give each member a similar knowledge base and an understanding of the ways members differ in their thinking.
- When generating lists in a group setting, it is critical to avoid the normal tendency to start evaluating them immediately. Wait until the idea generating is concluded. Researchers tell us that as soon as evaluation of an idea begins, idea generating declines. If we start evaluating prematurely, we risk losing some potentially good ideas.

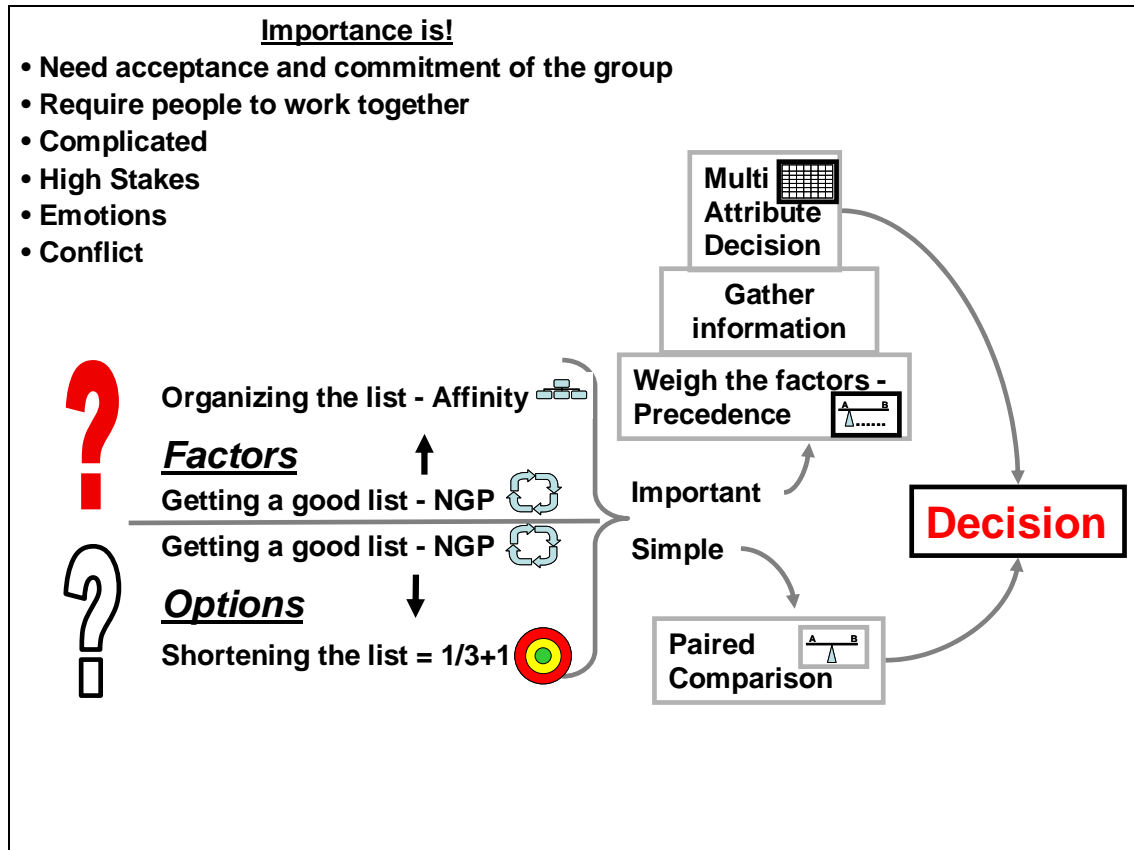
The unstructured process:



The unstructured challenge:



A structured process:



Procedures:

Step 1 – Clarify the question

Perhaps the most important point in wording a question is to avoid “Yes / No” questions. Using an open-ended question encourages creativity in developing and considering more than one option. Sometimes the group needs to spend time discussing the specifics of the question to be sure everyone understands the details and ramifications of what is being decided. Make sure the root problem is being considered, not merely symptoms. Frequently the question must be expanded to identify how it will contribute to the group’s purpose or goals, or include some parameters.

Step 2 – Develop a list of the factors

Factors are the reasons we might decide on a particular option, or why we would choose one option over another. Developing the decision factors helps the group to clarify its values. The factors, which will ultimately be used to choose an option, should represent the values of the entire group.

If the decision making group has the appropriate background and the necessary experience to make the decision being considered, the Nominal Group Process is a simple and effective tool to develop a good list of decision factors.

If the group lacks appropriate background, a survey of relevant literature or a panel of experts may be used. However, when using outside sources the outside sources must understand the group’s desired purpose or mission and values.

During the discussion about factors, any specifically limiting factors should be identified. For example, it must cost less than \$10., or it must have more than 6 rooms. These factors are sometimes referred to as the threshold for significance, and are only applicable to objective factors.

As in all list generating efforts, the more ideas that are generated, the better the resulting decision, and more ideas will be generated if discussion is held until idea generating is finished.

Affinity diagrams can be helpful to organize a list of factors if it gets too long or complicated

Step 3 – Develop a list of the options

The next step is to generate a list of possible alternatives that will answer the question. The process is exactly the same as when generating a list of factors. Once again, outside sources may be used but they must understand the mission or purpose of the group.

After the lists of factors and options are developed, each item needs to be discussed. Everyone needs to clearly understand each of the factors and how they apply to the options being considered. Everyone needs to clearly understand each of the options and how they relate to answering the original question. During the discussion some of the options or factors may be combined or eliminated.

One-third plus one voting is a tool to help reduce a long list of factors to a shorter list of the most favored options

Step 2 and Step 3 may be accomplished in a single Nominal Group Process exercise, or they may be accomplished by two sub-groups of the decision making body. Step 3 may be accomplished before Step 2 if that order makes more sense to the group. However, when dealing with sensitive or emotionally charged decisions, it is most effective to accomplish Step 2 (factors), hold discussion on the factors, and then proceeding to Step 3 (options).

Step 4 – Evaluate and conclude

This is the step that becomes more difficult as decisions become more complex. The complexity makes it harder for group members to keep track and evaluate the important information. Also, a complex decision generally emphasizes value differences between group members and thus the group dynamic becomes more difficult to manage.

Simpler decisions may be concluded with a paired comparisons exercise, more important decisions should be evaluated using an options evaluation process.





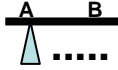
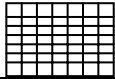
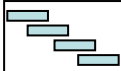
Step 5 – Implement

Reaching a decision is not the end of the work. The decision must be acted upon, or everyone has wasted their time. Do not underestimate the importance of good implementation. Poor decisions can be saved with good implementation, and good decisions can be ruined by poor implementation. It is the responsibility of the group and each member in it to contribute to good implementation.

A Bar Chart is a classic, simple tool for planning and providing accountability during implementation of decisions.

Decision Making Tools

Over the years, group decision making has been the focus of many research projects. This extensive research has yielded increasingly complex theory and methods for decision-making. At the same time, the following tools have proved to be simple yet effective methods to manage the decision process and the built-in group dynamics.

Decision Tool	Uses
A. Nominal Group Process 	Idea generating
B. One Third Plus One Voting 	Reducing a list
C. Paired Comparisons 	Rank ordering a list
D. Affinity Diagrams 	Organizing a list/Grouping ideas
E. Precedence Charts 	Determining relative weight or ranking
F. Multiple Attribute Decision Analysis (Subjective Linear Model) 	Analyzing multiple attribute decisions
G. Bar Charts 	Implementing decisions

Keys to Success

In a review of group decision-making literature, the following principals are consistently stressed. Groups that are able to employ them will enjoy the benefits of effective decision-making.

1 - Each group member needs to recognize and value the perspectives and information that other members bring to the decision.

Everyone must work from a cooperative, problem-solving perspective rather than from a competitive, persuading perspective.

2 - Social forces must be eliminated or minimized.

Many social forces influence the value of an idea when it is offered in a group setting. It is important to note that these forces may make an idea seem greater or lesser, but are not related to the true merit of the idea. Some of these forces are:

- 1 - The power of the person giving the idea.
- 2 - The enthusiasm with which the idea is given.
- 3 - The verbal skills of the person giving the idea.
- 4 - The talkativeness of the person giving the idea.
- 5 - The threat associated with the idea.
- 6 - Non-verbal cues from others in the group.
- 7 - How an individual in the group perceives his/her education and/or experience level compares with others in the group.
- 8 - Individuals' past experience with similar ideas.
- 9 - How the idea fits with group norms.

3 - The leader must be sure everyone's ideas and perspectives are included.

Methods should be used to ensure everyone's participation. Minority ideas need to be encouraged and protected. The only thing that will strengthen a minority idea is its merit. By contrast, many other forces influence popular ideas.

4 - The leader must be sure that evaluation of ideas does not start until the generation of new ideas is completed.

Moving from idea generating to idea evaluation too soon is dangerous. In a typical committee situation, after several ideas have been offered, some discussion of the ideas will start. This discussion builds strength for the ideas and draws thinking away from other possible solutions. If a certain amount of strength is generated for an early idea, it will usually be selected even if it is not the best solution.

5 - Be explicit.

No one should assume that everyone understands the issue as stated, or the alternatives, the same way as everyone else. Constantly clarify your own-as well as others'-understanding of ideas being presented. Be sure you know what phase of decision making the group is working in. When a conclusion is reached, be explicit about what the decision means and how it will be implemented.

6 - Use a structured decision-making process.

A structured process helps the decision makers organize ideas and work logically to understand how they apply to the question being considered. It helps articulate the decision rules that are being applied and finally it brings decision makers to a reasoned conclusion.

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