

Highlight: Decision-Making Approaches

Summary

Teams, team leaders, supervisors and managers often experience strife because of confusion regarding decision-making. A variety of decision-making approaches can be used in different situations. More importantly, teams need transparency in the decision-making process.

Value

Clarifying and communicating decision-making processes helps a team or its leader:

- Make effective decisions
- Commit to decisions made
- Focus their energies on the action required by the decision rather than on the decision-making process
- Maintain team morale

Description

The main decision-making approaches are described below.

Consensus

Consensus decisions are those in which all involved are willing to support the decision. Consensus does not mean that everyone fully agrees with the decision; it means that everyone, even if they disagree, will put their disagreement aside and wholly support the decision.

Consensus decisions should be used in all decisions that are very important to all and when time is available.

Majority Vote

Majority decisions are made by voting, then counting which side of the issue obtained more than 50% of the votes.

This can be a useful approach when pressed for time or for very minor concerns, but it rarely results in full commitment to the decision or feelings of involvement by the team.

Minority (Subcommittee)

Minority decisions are those made by a sub-group of the team, given authority by the team to make the decision. This method works when it is difficult to get everyone together, or when the subject matter for the decision is either very complex (only some team members have expertise) or simple (the decision is too routine to require the full team).

However, these decisions may weaken commitment to the decision because not all are involved.

Expert

Expert decisions are made by a designated internal or external subject matter expert who has been given the authority to make the decision. Expert decisions are useful in highly technical or complex decision-making processes. The problems with this approach are coming to agreement on the expert and potentially leaving team members feeling excluded.

Authority with Discussion

Decisions that are made by an individual in authority (the team leader, manager) after discussion by the team are used when the authority is primarily accountable for the decision, when the authority is privy to information not available to the rest of the team, or when a decision needs to be made very quickly. Problems arise with this approach when the authority is not decisive. Also, team members may feel their ideas are being solicited just to make them feel involved.

Authority without Discussion

These are decisions in which the team leader makes decisions without consulting the team. This is a useful method when decisions are simple, when the authority has specialized expertise or when a decision needs to be made very quickly. Because the team was not involved, there is risk of low commitment to the decision.

Process

The key to successful decision-making as a team is transparency. Individuals are encouraged to ensure that their teams choose a decision-making process *before* entering a discussion about a decision. Team members can accept all decision-making approaches if they know going into the decision that a particular approach will be used. Team members cannot typically accept the illusion of one approach (*e.g.*, consensus) followed by the reality of another approach (*e.g.*, decision by authority).

Implementation

Individuals are encouraged to work with their teams to:

Identify the types of decisions the team typically needs to make.

Choose a decision-making approach for each decision type.

Use the selected decision-making approaches on a routine basis for each decision type.

Agree to a decision-making approach *before* a decision is necessary on non-routine decisions.

