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Group Decision Making

The decision-making process can be stressful for both the employee and the organization. Group decision-making is even more complicated. Some employees see it as a form of power struggle, others cannot bear the idea of losing and still others simply do not like to make decisions.

There are several types of group decisions:

1. **Unilateral.** Decisions made by one person, often the nominal leader, without consultation with other group members, are unilateral decisions. At times, these can be appropriate (for example, a minor decision that needs to be made right away). If it is repeated and inappropriate, this type of decision can result in very low group commitment.
2. **Handclasp.** These are decisions made by two members. One member makes a suggestion, and the other endorses it and carries it through without adequate discussion or group consideration. This type has high commitment for the two who made it, but generally not for the others.
3. **Clique.** This type is similar to the Handclasp, but with more people involved. This type usually occurs when a close-knit subgroup decides what is good for the rest of the group. Repeated clique decisions cause splintering of the group and low commitment.
4. **Baiting.** This is a technique that reduces discussions about decisions. A person will say, "Now we have all agreed, right?," and only the very brave will speak up. This usually suppresses obvious dissent and lowers group commitment.
5. **Majority Rule.** Majority rule is a popular way of making decisions. However, if the outcome of a secret ballot vote produces surprises, it is not always a good time to make majority rule decisions. This results in a sizeable segment of the group feeling devalued and decreases their commitment to the decisions in which they "lose" to the majority vote.
6. **Consensus.** This is similar to majority rule, yet nothing is a surprise. Each member is acquainted with the facts of the case. There is mutual agreement that, under circumstances, which may not be ideal, the decision made is fair and workable. This elicits maximum support.

Any type may prove effective under a given set of circumstances. However, it is obvious that the first five approaches are likely to reinforce power levels within the group and create tension. Morale and membership commitment can be lowered. Since members possess the essential ingredients for the solutions to all problems, group decisions should be based on input from all the members. Certainly, if the decisions are made by only a few people, it may not be necessary to involve an entire group.



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Though consensus is one of the best decision-making models, certain advantages and disadvantages of consensus decisions must be considered.

Advantages of Group Consensus Approach:

- Greater sum total of knowledge and information
- Greater number of approaches to a problem
- Participation in problem solving increases acceptance
- Better comprehension of the decision
- Greater commitment of the members to the decision

Disadvantages of Group Consensus Approach:

- **Social Pressure.** Minority opinions in groups can have little influence on the solution, even when these opinions are correct. Reaching an agreement in a group is often confused with finding the "right" answer.
- **Individual Domination.** Skilled manipulators or dominant individuals can emerge and capture more than their share of influence on the outcome.
- **Conflicting Secondary Goal.** People may aim to win the argument at the cost of finding the best answer.
- **Risk Taking.** The risk of getting in the way can prevent people from fully participating in the discussion.
- **Time.** Listening and considering all points of view in order to arrive at the best solution takes time.

Factors That Serve As Advantages or Disadvantages

- Disagreement can serve either to create hard feelings among members or lead to a resolution of conflict and hence to innovative solutions
- Conflicting individual interests vs. mutual interests
- More time may be needed to reach consensus
- One who has the greatest influence and can willingly change opinions can reinforce the existing power structure and stifle future member input and cooperation

Group Consensus Guidelines

DO:

- Listen not only to the words, but also to the rationale being offered
- Pursue your point and be persistent if you have good information
- Manage your time effectively relative to the number of decisions that are being made



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- Involve all team members to ensure the use of their knowledge and experience
- Strive for the best answer. Think in cause-and-effect terms and avoid dealing only with symptoms

DON'T:

- Argue for the sake of arguing or winning your point.
- Give up on your convictions simply to avoid conflict - let objective reasoning or sound information prevail
- Allow the group to get stuck on a specific item - move on and come back later
- Compete by assuming that some win and some lose - look for the best alternative