

Styles of Decision Making

Voting

How It Works

- For a simple majority, the choice with the most votes wins.
- For a true majority, the winning choice must receive at least 50 percent of the votes plus one.

Advantages

- Voting is fast, is easy, requires no discussion, and works well with large numbers of people.

Disadvantages

- Group members may feel like winners or losers, and those who lost may not support the decision.

When It Should Be Used

- Voting should be used when time is short, when the decision does not require that everyone be happy with it, when the group is very large and discussion is impractical, and when it is necessary to narrow down choices before discussing options.

Consulting

How It Works

- For decision by authority, one person makes the choice for the group.
- For decision by authority with consultation, one person makes the choice after giving members of the group an opportunity to provide input.

Advantages

- Decision by authority is fast, is easy, and does not require discussion.
- Decision by authority with consultation allows input from group members and allows them to feel listened to, and gives the authority additional information to consider.

Disadvantages

- The group may not feel ownership for the decision and may not use their energies to act on it. They can resent the power of the authority.
- In decisions by authority with consultation, if the authority makes a different decision than that supported by the input of the group members, bad feelings and resentment can occur. Feelings of ownership among members is not guaranteed.

When It Should Be Used

- Consulting should be used when the authority has some expertise and information not shared by the members, for routine matters and decisions that will not need a strong ownership of group members, and when there is little time or opportunity to talk with group members.

Consensus

How It Works

- For consensus, everyone expresses their ideas and opinions; no one judges or asserts power over the group. People deal with the facts and information necessary to make a good decision, and stay away from opinions and personality conflicts. People do not give up their ideas to avoid conflict. In fact, they understand that conflict is inevitable and helpful for finding out new information and ideas. The group continues working until each member can support or at least live with the decision.
- For true consensus, everyone fully supports the idea.
- For limited consensus, everyone can live with the idea.

Advantages

- Consensus produces a decision that everyone is happy with and is usually very creative, results in a decision that group members are highly committed to, uses the resources of the whole group, and results in no losers.

Disadvantages

- A lot of time and energy is required, and the group members must be committed to reaching consensus or a false consensus can occur (in a false consensus, people pretend to agree with the decision but are not committed to it). The group members must have good listening and negotiating skills to reach a successful consensus.

When It Should Be Used

- Consensus should be used when the decision is worth the time and the energy, and ownership for the idea by everyone is important.