

## Help groups make decisions

Group decision-making is an effective management practice that involves a group of people making a decision collectively. A major benefit is that the process increases the participants' ownership of and commitment to the decision. Helping groups reach those decisions, therefore, is a key management function that requires a working knowledge of the most effective decision-making tools.

### 1. Ensure the group knows when a decision is made

There are five ways in which a group can make a decision. Agree early on which approach is to be adopted:

1. Decision by unanimous agreement: With no dissenters.
2. Decision by consensus: The decision has the support of the whole group and, while some may not agree with the decision, they have had their say and are happy to accept the will of the group.
3. Decision by majority: The proposal attracting most votes is carried.
4. Decision by minority: People agree, following their input, to allow those with greatest expertise or power, make the final decision.
5. Decision by chairperson: Following input from the whole group.

The approach adopted by the group usually depends on the situation or the significance of the decision. The following techniques will assist in working towards a decision based on agreement by the majority or by consensus – an ideal group result.

### 2. Avoid the traps of group decisions

Busy managers can sometimes push too hard for decisions and, in the process, create additional problems. Avoid the following hazards:

- Interpreting silence as consent: making a decision by default.
- Settling for majority rules: believing that a win/lose result is better than no result.
- Letting minorities decide: "trust us, we know what others want".
- Believing that those who make the most noise are the most knowledgeable.
- Accepting opinions as facts.

### 3. Select the best tool for your situation

When decision-making involves having to determine the relative importance of several different issues or priorities under discussion, a choice of techniques is available:

#### Brainstorming or brainwriting

Decisions can only be based on ideas and information. Brainstorming or its alternative, brainwriting, is often the first step in group decision-making. It is able to equalise involvement, generate excitement, and result in a range of ideas or items for addressing the problem in focus.



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### 3 for and 3 against

This ensures that all sides of an issue are heard. When an issue is being discussed, the group is asked to give three reasons why the issue should be supported and then three reasons why it shouldn't.

### Spend a dollar

For prioritising a set of 5 to 15 issues, you need enough slips of paper for each participant to have one slip per issue. Distribute slips and have them write an issue on each slip. They have \$1 to spend on the issues according to their relative importance. They must spend and record a minimum of 5 cents on each item. All spendings are recorded from the slips to a wall chart, and the totals, percentages and rankings can be calculated.

### Multivoting

Number each item in the set which requires prioritising, and then follow this procedure:

1. Choose one-third of the items on the list and discuss them.
2. After discussion, members vote by show of hands (or secret ballot) as each item is called out.
3. After voting, reduce this list by removing some items with fewest votes.
4. Repeat steps 1 to 3 on the remaining items and continue until only the most voted for items are left. If no clear favourites emerge, repeat the process.

### Merging priorities

The group breaks into pairs. Each pair discusses the set of items and agrees on the top two priorities. The pairs then join to form groups of four, which discuss the four priorities (although there could be overlap), and reduce the four items to two. The fours join to make eights, and again agree on the top two priorities out of the accumulating set. Continue the process until you merge into one whole group.

### Nominal group technique

This is a simple procedure designed to involve all group members. The following instructions are issued to group participants:

1. Each person must think carefully about the set of items or issues requiring prioritisation.
2. From the set, each person must select the five most important items, and write them as a list on a sheet of paper. Items are ranked in accordance to level of priority (ie 1 for highest priority, 5 for lowest priority).
3. Collect the sheets and tally the scores against a list of items on the master chart.
4. The group considers those items with the highest scores to be the most important.





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## Force field analysis

This technique helps groups to make decisions about change. It assumes that the current situation is the result of counteracting forces:

1. One set is pushing the situation towards a more desired state (helping forces) and a second set is acting to restrain movement in the desired direction (hindering forces). Brainstorm to create separate lists of these forces.
2. Examine each complete list and delete, add to and integrate as required. Identify and underline those forces that are most important and most able to be influenced.
3. For each underlined hindering force, think of a list of action steps that will reduce or eliminate the effect of the other force.
4. Repeat for the helpful forces.
5. Develop a plan for action.

## Further information

The following fact sheets provide further information on these issues:

- Become a better decision-maker
- Business planning
- Business vision - introduction
- Effective work teams
- Manage an effective work team
- Set achievable goals
- Verbal communication

