How Groups/Communities Make Decisions

Authority decides. One variation is that the leader(s) announce a decision. Another variation is that the leader(s) use other group members as sources of information, but make the final decision independently and does not explain to group members why s/he (they) required that information.

Compromise. The decision itself is discussed and continually changed until everyone is happy with the new outcome.

Consensus. Involves accepting a decision provided no-one objects. The leader leads an informal discussion with “straw” votes until a majority approve a given course of action and the others agree to go along with the course of action.

Delegation An individual, subgroup or external party makes the decision on behalf of the group. For instance, a subcommittee is asked to discuss and then recommend a course of action to the main group. Usually the main group accepts the recommendation of the sub-group.

Delphi method. This approach is based on the principle that forecasts from a structured group of individuals are more accurate than those from unstructured groups. Group members nominate ideas over two or more rounds. After each round, a facilitator provides a summary of the members forecasts from the previous round as well as the reasons they provided for their judgments. In the next round, members are encouraged to revise their earlier answers in light of the replies of other members of their panel. During this process the range of the answers will decrease and the group will converge towards the "correct" answer. Finally, the process is stopped after a predefined stop criterion (e.g., number of rounds, achievement of consensus, stability of results), and the mean or median scores of the final rounds determine the results.
Nominal Group (NGT). This group process involving problem identification, solution generation, and decision making. It can be used in groups of many sizes, who want to make their decision quickly, as by a vote, but want everyone's opinions taken into account. Initially every member of the group gives their view of the solution, with a short explanation. Similar solutions are eliminated from the list of all solutions, and the members proceed to rank the solutions, 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and so on.

Next, following discussion of reasons for the choices made by each group member, new summary ideas are listed from the common ground, and multiple similar ideas offered.

Another ranking occurs; the numbers each solution receives are totaled, and the solution with the highest ranking is selected as the final decision.

Majority decision. Everyone votes and the majority wins. Anything over 50% = majority.

Unanimous decision. Everyone has to agree on a given solution/proposition. When the unanimous decision does not come quickly, groups face the dilemma of having to dedicate more time than they hoped to make the decision or to have to change the decision making process. The 2nd option can lead to conflict and dissatisfaction, especially if only a small number of people in the group were “against” the majority.

Adapted from many sources

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