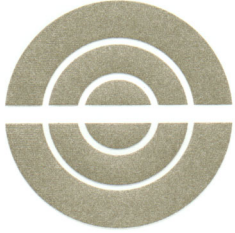


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# Decision Making for Group Action

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Deciding How To Decide

## Introduction

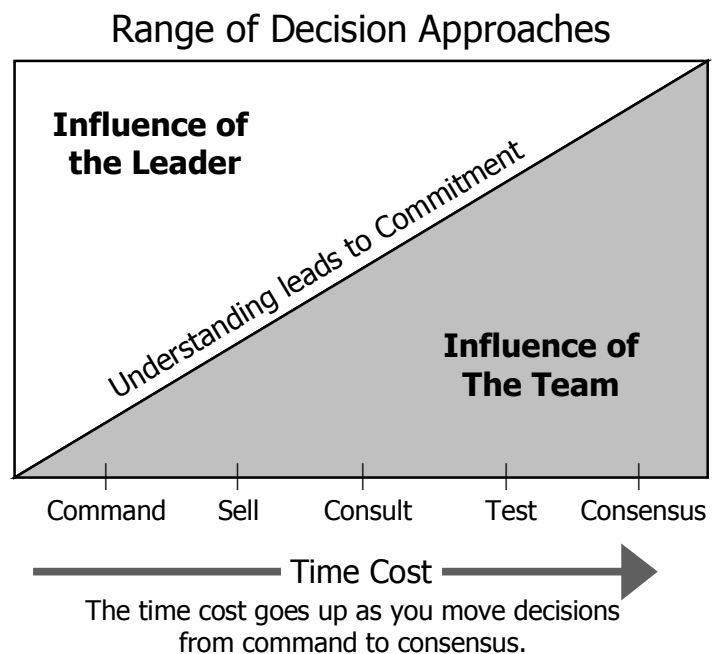
Team members need to be involved in the decisions that affect them for multiple reasons; to extract the best decision, to better educate them about their choices, to gain support and commitment to carry out the decision, the list goes on and on. Today's managers realize the usefulness of involving employees in decisions. Studies (Walton, From Control to Commitment, Harvard Business Review, March 1985) verify that better managed companies, regardless of industry, are moving away from the old control mechanisms, toward high commitment, team based decisions as a way to gain greater shared commitment. More recently, the research of Surowiecki (Wisdom of Crowds) suggests that including diverse opinions in decision making increases the quality of that decision.

The trend towards involving others is not without its costs. Today's managers and the involved employees face a very difficult and challenging dilemma, the need to involve and inform people, which is in conflict with the pressing need to conserve time. So what are we to do? Is there not an answer to the people-development versus time-management dilemma?

This is an attempt to inform managers and facilitators about progressive ways of deciding how to decide. This document will initially focus on "group" decision-making as opposed to those decisions made singularly by the team's leader, or those made by committees. Then, I will describe how some organization structures dramatically affect the nature of team functioning, and thus the way decisions are made. In the third segment, I describe a series of decision-making alternatives with hints about when to use each approach. The fourth segment is an attempt to pull together various role sets in the decision-making puzzle by describing a list of criteria to use when determining how to integrate this information.

The range of decision making approaches, as displayed here, outlines the differences among five traditional ways of making decisions:

- Command – boss makes decision with little input from the group
- Sell – team leader decides, involves the group in how to implement
- Consult – team leader presents a problem, gains input and suggestions prior to making the decision
- Test – the group decides, gives it a provisional implementation
- Consensus – all members agree to support the decision



## A “Team”

What is a “team”? Is it the same thing as a committee? Can a group of 30 ever become a team? Must a team have a leader? These questions are typical of those raised when a group looks at the meaning of team. Let’s look first at the definition of team.

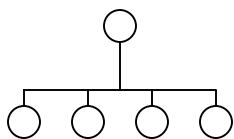
One easy way to define team is to differentiate it from a committee. In a team, three conditions must be present:

1. Common Accountability: All team members must have more reasons to cooperate within their group than they do with other persons or groups from outside. This means they are within a defined boundary, and all work for a common person or unit.
2. Common Goals: The group has a common goal and purpose, work to be done, a convening activity.
3. Required Interdependence: There must be a convening task that requires some kinds of interdependent action in its attainment, no one person can operate autonomously.

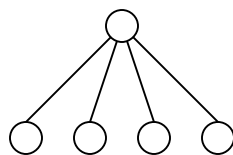
When these conditions are met, you have a team. However, I’ll push the word committee to an extreme to further clarify the meaning of team. Let’s say, for purposes of discussion, that a committee is a group of individuals whose primary pursuit is the betterment of their own needs over those of the group. In such cases, the group meets to barter and trade, using such techniques as feigning ignorance, withholding your true needs, overstating and lying, and generally doing whatever is necessary to gain the weight of the group to your side.

Incidentally, the process called “Robert’s Rules of Orders” was designed to help committees eventually get their work done. Voting is not one of the options offered as a way to involve people because it fits committees, not teams.

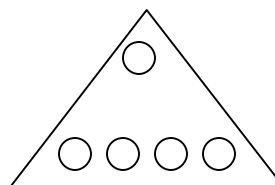
In summary, a “team” by this definition means three or more people operating together to accomplish shared goals, who are willing to seek the good of the group over one’s own personal interests.



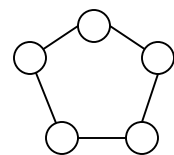
Committee



Committee



Team



Team

Group leaders bear much of the burden for determining the best approach to involving and generating participation. Their job is to design procedures that produce effective decisions in a way that generates commitment and support for the team's choices.

Not all teams look the same. This is especially obvious in the world of sports, as a skating or gymnastics team is widely different from a football team. Even the size, physical makeup, and teamness required varies greatly.

So true it is in the world of work. We, too, have teams of unique focus, size and shape. As you'll see, one very important criteria in determining a "best" team decision making approach is rooted in the type of team you have.

The typology of teams, a model that displays various kinds of athletic teams is a useful way to start the process of determining the "best" decision making approach. Athletic teams can be contrasted along the dimensions of "co-acting" teams, like a swimming team, and "interacting" like a baseball team. To make the transition from contrasting athletic groups to your own work group, I have developed the Team Typology Matrix. Adapted from the athletic team dimensions, I have designed the team typology matrix to contrast organization sub-teams.

The vertical and horizontal dimensions are "differentiation" and "integration", and are displayed in the Team Typology Matrix.

### Team Typology Matrix

<b>TASK DIFFERENTIATION</b>	Hi	TRACK	FOOTBALL
	Lo	GOLF	VOLLEYBALL
		Lo	Hi
		<b>TASK INTEGRATION</b>	

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Let's look at the dimensions of differentiation and integration in the world of work by using their counterpart athletic teams.

**GOLF:** A golf team is made up of people with similar physical and emotional characteristics, all performing the same identical task. This group is not scored as a team. Individuals are scored. The analogy in the world of work is a company of route salesmen, each with their own geographic location. They perform identical tasks and the score of one has virtually no effect on the others.

**VOLLEYBALL:** A useful comparison with a volleyball team exists in the medical setting, where a group of registered nurses on a nursing unit are virtually interchangeable. Their licensing is designed to create uniformity and the hand off cross shifts is smooth, since they are commonly skilled individuals. Like volleyball, all do the same basic functions and are moved about so everyone can play in all the floor positions.

**TRACK:** If you were to investigate a track team, you might look to a university, where many different specialties are located. A faculty of scientists, engineers, physicists, and economists are not a "team" in the traditional sense since they are "scored" (rated by the administration) individually. The same is true for a track team. The group is made up of a host of specialists whose "score" is not interdependent upon the scores of other individuals. The pole-vaulter may or may not reach his goals, but this doesn't effect the distance runner's time. They are independently scored and evaluated. They have little or no need for consensus group decisions. But if this same group were charged with coming up with a common decision, as in how to configure a track field, they would begin acting like a highly differentiated yet, highly integrated team.

**FOOTBALL:** This sport is very complex, made up of some half dozen sub-teams, specialty, kicking, receiving, offense, and defensive teams to mention a few. Football requires a highly differentiated, yet highly integrated team to manage the complexity.

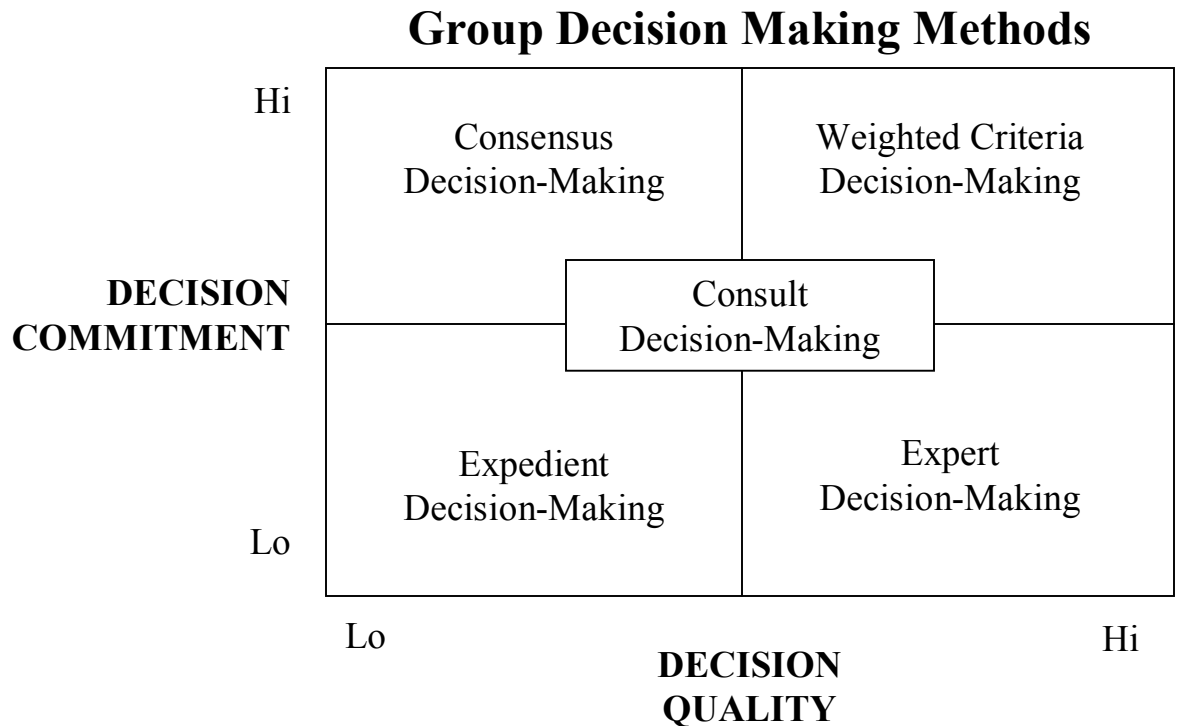
With athletic teams, member skill in co-acting and interacting with one another in order to score is crucial to its success. The need to create cohesion among highly interactive teams correlates with winning. The feelings of members about their peers, factors such as "morale", and "cohesion", even "momentum" have grave importance to "highly interdependent" teams.

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## Decision Methods

So the structure of the team, is it a “track” type or a “volleyball” type, makes all the difference in the world when it comes to choosing a decision making approach. I have never been invited to do team-building with golf or track teams. The managers of these units work one-on-one and make decisions depending upon individual need. However, the football and volleyball category teams are very interdependent and the performance of all of them as a unit is critical. High interdependent teams, whether in the field of athletics or in the world of work, take serious interest in commitment to decisions, no matter who makes them.

Norman F. Meier, in his book Problem-Solving and Creativity, suggests effective decisions are those that generate both high quality (best, smartest choice) in conjunction with commitment the personal desire to make the decision work. His formula,  $E = Q \times A$ , suggests effective decisions are a function of quality times acceptance. If you have a very high quality decision, but nobody buys it, the outcome will likely be negligible. Most of us can think of instances where one or the other elements were high and a few where both were maximized. The latter form effective decisions according to the Meier model.



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## Types of Decisions

The group decision making model provides a helpful way to view the different types of decision choices. The model displays five distinct types of decisions, each with its own strengths and weaknesses.

### 1. Expedient Decisions

When the decision to be made is not at all that critical, when there isn't a particularly costly downside if the choice goes any of several ways, then pick the most expedient, quickest route to making the decision. This might mean a "tell", a "sell" or you can simply delegate it.

Tell: the team leader announces the decision without much input from the group.

Sell: the team leader decides and then the group discusses how to implement it. The model implies some involvement but the question of reversing the decision is mute.

### 2. Expert Decisions

We all tend to seek the best advice available when we make costly decisions. We consult consumer guides before buying a car or talk with our accountant or planner before paying taxes. Experts are most useful when the prevailing issue is to make the very best, right decision.

Technical: the decision is made after a study of variables, and the decision is usually made by the person(s) most knowledgeable.

Test: the group discusses how they can test a decision, give it a provisional attempt, and a time when there is a reassessment. Then, the decision is to either fully implement or not.

### 3. Consult Decisions

My guess is that the great majority of decisions are made at this level, with the manager seeking input but retaining final authority. It has advantages in that control is clearly delineated and the timing can be managed. The down side is the team leader must involve people in a candid, genuine, challenging give-and-take discussion or it could seem like you were baited into a discussion that really didn't matter – the boss' mind was already made up.

Consult: as team leaders bring a problem to the team and invite discussion and ideas without turning the decision over to the group, the team leader is "consulting" in the deliberation before making the final choice.

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#### 4. Consensus Decisions

Group consensus is the overriding method when commitment to the decision, particularly the commitment of those who must implement, is most important. If the overriding concern is commitment to a decision, then it is best to draw together those most affected to decide consensually. Hopefully, the overall pool of opinions that the group will draw a decision that exists within the group. This is the only caveat, “does the group have sufficient information within its grasp?”

Guidelines for Consensus:

- all members must participate – everyone has something to contribute
- no horse-trading, mathematical averaging, or voting
- seek the common opinion of the group
- the minority opinion tries to sway the majority
- all group members agree to commit to the decision, regardless of personal preference

#### 5. Weighted Criteria Decisions

When a critically important decision is being made, one that has a narrow margin for error, with a costly down-side, then this method is a viable candidate. The process invites participants to analyze the situation and expert input to determine the most viable alternatives. Secondly, the group determines the criteria by which they will be able to determine if the decision were a good one. Then, these two are contrasted, in a “decision making matrix”.

The best choice is fashioned when the alternatives are weighted, using #3 = fully meets the criteria, #2 = mostly meets the criteria, #1 = somewhat meets the criteria, and #0 = doesn't meet the criteria. The alternative with the greatest number of points will most likely fit the bill. The actual final choice is made consensually, but is in light of the data. The process is slower, more deliberate, and seeks high quality decisions that have the greatest commitment.

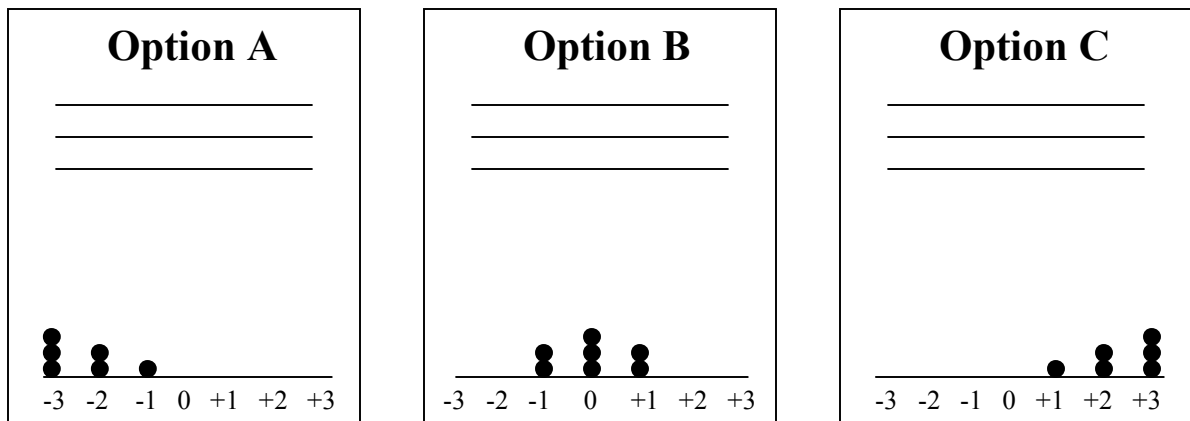
## Value-Weighted Decision Making

An alternative weighted criterion method is called Value Weighted Decision making. It is most useful when the group faces a series of possible discrete choices. Some group decisions are so critically important that a virtual solid support of all those involved is necessary. This method will assist the members of a group to clearly validate value congruence, or it may identify value discrepancies between members and their organization.

The process necessitates that the group narrow its choices to a series of discreet options through some of the more traditional means for gathering data, such as interviews, questionnaires, etc.

I have used this model to determine such things as whether or not a plant should go to rotating shifts or stay on continuous shifts. It was used to determine the support for moving to a four 10 hour day work schedule. In one case, we used it with just the supervisors to see if they wanted to rotate themselves, while their shift remained consistent. In another case, 35 top managers selected from a series of value statements those that were most critical to attain the company's strategic plan.

This method calls for the group members to generate a list of discrete alternatives and writing each of them on a large flip chart pad.



Write the numbers displayed below next to each of the discreet choices generated by the group.

- |                               |   |
|-------------------------------|---|
| -3 = Value Conflict Dislike:  | This rating signifies such a strong dislike for this option that it violates their personal integrity                       |
| -2 = Strong Dislike:          | This rating signifies a very strong dislike for this option   |
| -1 = Dislike:                 | This rating signifies a dislike for this option   |
| 0 = Neutral:                  | This rating suggests no strong opinion one way or the other   |
| +1 = Like:                    | This rating signifies a liking for this option  |
| +2 = Strong Like:             | This rating signifies a very strong liking for this option  |
| +3 = Value Preference Liking: | This rating signifies that such a strong liking for this option that it violates personal integrity to not have this option |

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When introducing this activity, make sure it is done with a great amount of seriousness, so the participants have a clear understanding of the meaning of the task they are about to begin.

All of the options before the group will be rated using the weighting scale. In the example above, each participant was provided with colored dots and asked to place their colored dot over the scale -3 to +3 to indicate their preference.

Caveat: Announce that anyone wishing to select the rating of either a +3 or a -3 be willing to:

1. Speak publicly to the group, stating the reasons why you feel so strongly about your choice that it crosses the line for you with regard to your personal values, and
2. State what you feel so strongly that calls you to place your job, your present position on the line; it is a matter of personal integrity to you.

In the directions, suggest each individual in the group rate all the items. Count up the number of points, adding the pluses, subtracting the minuses, getting one total number. In order for the group to have made a decision, there must be positive points equal to the number of persons participating.

One group employed this method to determine the raging conflict among supervisors about rotating shifts. One guy put his points on a -3 when it came to not rotating shifts. He then told us why. His son had been released by a court to his dad, only if the dad could pick him up after school. That supervisor was provided a job with the same company, in a different plant across town. He did put his job on the line. Rating on the plus or minus three category does just that. Tell them to use it sparingly and that a "2" rating is all we need.

Another group was making the transition from a start-up mentality to a company with high quality, customer service orientation. The value shift was toughest on the original crew. The newer employees wanted the changes very much. Interestingly, it was the newer employees who surfaced a lack of corporate commitment to total quality when a group of them rated their total quality program a +3. The values they adopted are lived, espoused.

The Value Weighted Decision Making tool is a practical way to gain high commitment to a set of very complex and difficult trade-offs.

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## Criteria for Making Decisions

When choosing the “best” approach to making decisions, there are five criteria that should be considered when choosing how to decide:

1. Technical Precision – Some decisions may need a higher degree of “correctness” than others. The margin for error is slight.
2. Commitment – Some decisions will, quite logically and emotionally, fit with the understandable interests of the group, and their buy-in is critical to the overall outcome.
3. Time Urgency – Participatory decision making requires more time than autocratic decisions, and because time is a valuable, non-transferable, perishable and inelastic commodity, moving decisions to the lowest amount of time possible seems forever desirable.
4. Team Development – The opportunity for team members to participate in decisions is a reward and it develops team members. Because it gives subordinates a broader perspective of the organization’s situation, it allows them to wrestle with the dilemmas facing the organization. Both of these learning experiences have the potential for a very long payback. If group members better understand the situation, many of the decisions they will make throughout their career will be made in the light of day, knowing what’s going on. Also, by learning the methods for group decision making as a member of a team, they are better equipped to deal with similar problems in their own group.
5. Member Maturity – Somewhat different from development, this variable invites the decision maker to consider the present level of team member functioning, and to project the next step in their competence growth plan – to move the decision just a little out of reach, stretching them.

In a text co-authored with Japanese executive Dr. Michael Inoue, titled *Quality Circles*, we advocated a process for defining decision making based on maturity called *management-by-induction*, as in the process that occurs with an electric motor. As the current chases the motor, the magnet stays just out of reach, creating a pull. That difference is called induction. An effective manager is not someone who stays in sync with the troops, but is always just out of sync, just “ahead” of the group, rather, someone who constantly stretches the group to reach higher and farther.

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## Summary

In Summary, the task of choosing how to decide can best be described as very complex, and yet there are some indicators of which ones work better in given situations. There are five distinct elements that will spell success in finding the correct fit:

1. The type of team
2. The amount of member involvement needed for commitment
3. The degree of expert / technical data to minimize risk and ensure the best choice
4. Time available
5. Team readiness for developmental need

Companies constantly struggle to understand and respond to an ever complex and changing global environment. The world is getting more complex. Organizations are becoming more “differentiated”! At the same time, the need to bring together members of the company so everyone operates from the same understanding has never been greater. As the “differentiation” and complexity increases, so too does the need for “integration”. Group involvement and understanding is now required when decisions must be made.

It is through an examination of various choices, an enriched set of models and maps to clarify decision making that a manager, team leader, and facilitator can successfully decide how to decide.

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