

## Decision Making

Though decision making can seem intimidating, it can be positive and productive provided you are aware of the methods and process of decision making. Decision-making should properly utilize group resources and abilities while at the same time fostering positive group dynamics. This information on decision making is intended to help student organizations make decisions as groups, but can also be used in individual decision making.

### **Methods of Decision Making:**

*Authority without discussion:* The leader makes decisions without consultation, input, or feedback from group members.

Advantages: This approach is most useful for routine administrative decisions when little time is available.

Disadvantages: It provides little group ownership; lack of input may lead to hasty or poorly thought-out decisions.

*Decisions by an expert member:* The individual in the group who has the most expertise in a given area decides what the group shall do.

Advantages: This approach is appropriate when an individual's expertise is clearly superior to that of other members.

Disadvantages: It is often difficult to identify the expert.

*Averaging of members' opinions:* This is also referred to as a polling approach. Each member is asked for an opinion, and the results are averaged.

Advantages- This approach is applicable when it is difficult to get group members together and/or a decision needs to be made before a meeting can be organized.

Disadvantages- Members do no benefit from group discussion and may not understand issues; innovative approaches are seldom chosen.

*Decision by authority with discussion:* The group discusses the issue and ideas together, and the leader then takes the alternatives under advisement and makes the decision.

Advantages: This is a relatively quick method, which utilizes members' ideas. This method gains some benefit from the discussion, which may bring forth information or ideas, which the leader had not previously considered.

Disadvantages: It does not provide ownership of the decision by the group. Competition rather than cooperation is fostered to impress the leader.

*Minority control:* The decision is delegated to a subgroup, most typically a specialized committee.

Advantages: This approach is useful when the committee has special expertise or when time prohibits the large group from making the decision.

Disadvantages: This method does not utilize the resources of the whole group.

*Majority control:* Ideas and issues are discussed then a vote is taken. The choice, which receives the most votes, is the group's decision.

Advantages: Majority control involves all members in the process; it allows for input and idea exchange among the whole group.

Disadvantages: This approach may create a resistant, disgruntled minority.

*Consensus:* Ideally it involves everyone in the process and results in a decision, which is agreed upon by all participants. It can be achieved when there is ample time for all positions to be stated, communication is open, the climate is cooperative and supportive, and the decision is clearly understood by everyone. An important aspect of consensus is that members are allowed to express themselves fully without interruption.

Advantages: In this approach group members take ownership of decision and positive morale is maintained; the group fully explores options, ideas, and resources.

Disadvantages: Reaching consensus is time consuming and sometimes difficult to achieve.

## **The Decision-Making Process**

No matter which decision-making method is chosen, a standard process should be followed.

**Step 1: Identify the Decision to be Made:** Specifically define the problem or decision and ensure that all those involved in the decision-making process understand and agree upon the decision to be made.

**Step 2: Gather Information:** Consult as many sources as possible to collect all the relevant information regarding the decision to be made.

**Step 3: Identify Alternatives:** List many possible ideas, solutions, or courses of action, which will specifically address the decision.

**Step 4: Weigh Evidence-** Take into account all the information you have gathered, including resources, strengths, and weaknesses of both yourself and your group; project the outcome of each alternative; prioritize the alternatives based on the values and needs of the group.

**Step 5: Select the Best Alternative:** Review the various options and choose an option based on what is best for your organization at this time.

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**Step 6: Take Action:** Develop an action plan for implementing the decision; structure the plan to include time frame, who is responsible, how to communicate to those responsible the objective and their roles, how to obtain any resources needed, how to measure progress, and how to evaluate the decision.

**Step 7: Review Decision and Consequences-** Review the results of your decision to see if it successfully dealt with the issue you identified; you may need to make adjustments to your plan or choose another alternative at this time.

Throughout the decision-making process, participants should be encouraged to consider all viewpoints and to state their own positions freely. Explore controversies and search for areas of agreement. Constructive debate can often yield the best decisions.

### **Ethical Decision Making**

To ensure that your decision is ethical, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Is it legal? Will I be violating civil law or college policy?

Legality also refers to policies and procedures of student code, buildings, organization constitution and bylaws, etc. Every group member is responsible for both the integrity and consequences of his or her own actions. No one should take part in any activity, which would harm the organization's reputation and image.

2. Is it balanced? Does it promote win-win relationships? Is the decision going to be fair, or will it heavily favor one part over another in the long or short term? Will there be a "big winner" or "big loser?"

3. How will it make me feel about myself? Will it make me feel proud? Would I feel good if my decision were published in the newspaper? Would I feel good if my family knew about it?

From the book *The Power of Ethical Management* by Kenneth Blanchard and Norman Vincent Peale.