

Decision-Making Methods¹

	Autocracy	Majority Rule	Consensus
Description	One person, usually the most powerful person in a hierarchy, has the power to make decisions for the group.	The decision is made by choosing a solution that is acceptable to more than half the entire group, with each person having equal power (one person, one vote). The power to decide lies with the group.	The goal of consensus is a decision that is consented to by all group members. Consensus stresses the cooperative development of a decision with group members working together rather than competing against each other.
Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decisions can be made quickly and consistently. • Effective in situations requiring strong, recognizable leadership (for example, an emergency), or in situations where the decision is so simple that one person can possess all the relevant information needed to make a decision. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decisions can usually be made fairly quickly (although this depends on the length of discussion). • The decision is more likely to be satisfactory to the group as a whole because everyone has a right to participate. • The quality of the decision can be high if the group promotes participation and discussion, considers many alternatives and works in cooperative fashion. • Effective in large group situations or in groups where members may not have a history of working together or of building shared vision and values. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When properly used, consensus is the most creative, sensitive and fair of all decision-making methods. • Decisions are often high quality since everyone's concerns and ideas are taken into account. • Decisions have a high level of support in implementation. • Consensus is fundamental to group building. It requires individuals and groups to adopt attitudes, values and processes that promote cooperation, equality and unity.

¹ Adapted from "Building United Judgement: A Handbook for Consensus Decision-Making," by the Center for Conflict Resolution, Madison, WI, 1981.

Disadvantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The quality of the decision may be poor, since it relies on one person's values, judgement and knowledge. • People may be less committed to implementing the decision. • There are few opportunities for leadership development among other members of the group. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Majority rule assumes competition. You "win" if you get the most people on your side; your opponent "loses." This win/lose approach encourages divisive arguing, each side trying to prove that they are right and the others are wrong. • Often there is an unspoken hierarchy of power because the opinions of leaders, experts or the most assertive individuals carry more weight. • The quality of the decision, and commitment to carry it out may be lower than ideal because everyone's ideas are not necessarily taken into account. • There is a tendency to expedite discussion by settling for the favored of the two most obvious alternatives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consensus generally involves more time. • Not everyone will be satisfied (but usually more people are satisfied than in other methods). • The process can easily be sabotaged or undermined if a few individuals are power-hungry, or the group is dominated by a few outspoken persons, or group members do not share basic goals and values.
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