

DECISION MAKING IN GROUPS

Module G

Decision making is the *action* taken toward some specific *change*. Whenever there are options or choices that can be picked, it also usually means that a decision is necessary. A decision usually implies that there is some *agreement among group members* to do something. Groups are always making decisions: about when to meet, what to discuss, how to accomplish goals (best course of action). Different methods of decision making are used in different circumstances. This module is concerned with why and how decisions are made and what circumstances help or hinder decisions.

Questions

Why are decisions made?

How are decisions made?
Making a Machine (p. G-5)

Consensus (p. G-7)

(p. G-13)

What things can influence decisions?
18)

G-20)

Concepts

Reaching Goals
Problem Solving
Action and Implementation

Leaders

Voting
Consensus

Power

Cooperation

Competition

Activities

G-I: Leader Decisions –

G-II: Voting (p. G-6)
G-III: NASA: Seeking

G-IV: Consensus Building

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WHY ARE DECISIONS MADE?

Decisions are made:

- When goals need to be accomplished.
- During the problem solving process.
- When action is implemented.

Goals

Decisions are made to accomplish goals or tasks. Goals can usually be accomplished in many different ways. Decisions need to be made when a choice exists between two or more actions or choices that will achieve your goal. When you have missed the bus for school, a decision needs to be made on what action you will now take. Will you wait for the next bus, call home for a ride, or take a cab?

Goal: To get to school.

Choices:

1. Next bus
2. Call home
3. Take a cab

A Step in Problem Solving

When a problem exists for you and your group there are certain steps the group takes to find proper solutions to that problem. Decisions need to be made throughout this process.

- What is the problem?
- What are the alternatives for solving it?
- Which alternative is the best course of action?

Action

In order for action to be taken a decision must come before it. Whether it is made by the leader or the group, no action can be implemented without a decision. Let's take the example of a group of four people who are all very hungry. They have *decided* that they want to go to a restaurant to eat. Before getting into the car to go they must decide on where to eat, who will drive, and how long it will take. These decisions must be made in order for any action to be taken.

Discuss with the group the difference between the three reasons why decisions are made. Ask for examples.

HOW ARE DECISIONS MADE?

There are two ways decisions can be made. They can be made *individually* or *in a group*. Group decisions can be made using a *variety of methods*. Each method has its advantages and disadvantages. Certain methods work better in some situations; others work better in different situations. It is important for groups to understand *the methods* well enough *to choose the decision-making method that is best*. The three major methods are:

- The leader making the decision
- Voting
- Reaching agreement through consensus

The Leader Making the Decision

The advantages to this type of decision method is that it saves time. If the leader makes the decision without listening to group discussion, the accuracy of that decision will be very limited. Even if the leader is a good listener, the effectiveness will be improved but may still be limited because the group's ideas will not be adequately considered. Competition may arise between members who want their ideas considered over another's ideas.

The exercise G-I will explore two types of leader decisions.

Voting

Majority rule is a very accepted method in our democratic society. This method is used quite often but still has some disadvantages for groups. It often causes an alienated minority, which can affect the implementation of the decision. Often the resources of the group are not used to the fullest advantage. This method should be used when the decision is not very important or when time is lacking.

The exercise G-II will help demonstrate the decision process of voting.

Agreement Through Consensus

Although this method takes a great deal of time, energy, and group participation, it produces the most effective group decision. It attempts to get all members of the group to support the decision. When each member of the group accepts the same alternative, the group has achieved consensus. This method produces a high quality and creative decision that has support from all group members. This support aids in implementation and commitment toward a set plan of action.

Points to consider when using the consensus method of group decisions

When your group reaches the point where each person can say, "Well, even though it may not be exactly what I want, at least I can live with the idea and support it," then the group has reached consensus. This doesn't mean that all of the group must completely agree. But all of the group must at least minimally agree.

Consequently, any one member can block a decision. This is why consensus decisions may be both more difficult and more effective than other group decision methods, such as voting. It forces the group to consider all aspects of the problem and objections to possible courses of action.

Differences of opinion can be treated as a way of (1) gathering additional information, (2) clarifying issues, and (3) forcing the group to seek better alternatives. If conflicts arise, they should be dealt with immediately so that they don't continue to hinder the group. Group

members' willingness to take the risk and deal with personal conflicts can mean the difference between success or failure for the entire group.

To help your group reach consensus, consider these suggestions. As a group member:

- *Listen carefully to the views of others.* Consider the other person's viewpoint before insisting on yours.

- *Look for a most acceptable solution.* The idea of consensus is that everyone comes out a winner – there are no losers.

- *Give everyone a chance to be heard.* Explore as many views as possible so that you can choose the best alternative.

- *Look at disagreement from a positive view.* Not everyone will argue at first.

Disagreements can test group commitments, determine how good an idea is, explore possibilities with a greater chance that the group will hit upon a mutual solution.

Consensus is not always easy to accomplish, since just one person can keep your group from making a decision.

G-I: LEADER DECISIONS – MAKING A MACHINE

Purpose:

To compare how group tasks are accomplished using different methods of decision making.

Setting:

Any place with room for two equal groups

Materials:

Role Cards

Task Procedure Cards

Time:

20–30 minutes

Procedure:

1. Form two groups and choose a leader from each. Each leader is given a Role Card (A or B) and a Task Procedure Card.
2. Leaders facilitate the task on the procedure card for 20 to 30 minutes using their designated role.
3. Process the exercise.

Processing:

1. Ask members of each group to share their feelings about this exercise.
2. Some questions that can be raised are:
 - Which group completed machine first?
 - How did group members feel when they could not participate?
 - What type of pressure did the leaders feel in accomplishing the task?
 - What types of behavior did the leaders use to get the group moving? (*communication skills, directing, ordering and so on*)

Role Card A

The leader should make all the decisions related to achieving the group task. No input should be received from group members.

Role Card B

The leader should explain the task to the group and allow the group to comment and give input about how the task can be achieved after a short discussion period. Leader should direct the group toward achieving the group task.

Task Procedure Card

1. The group leader should explain to the group that any machine is made up of a variety of moving parts, some of which even make noise. The group will make a machine of their own by each person becoming one of the moving parts.
2. One person starts by going to the center of the circle and making some sort of movement with his or her hands, legs or body. The person may also make any noise that seems appropriate. A second group member then enters the center of the circle and adds a

movement of his or her choice; the movement should be a consequence of the first person's movement (as when one gear moves another). One by one, the other members of the group add on to the machine in any way that they wish until all group members are a part of the machine. The group leader may then give the machine directions to slow down, speed up, and so on.

G-II: VOTING

Purpose:

To demonstrate a common method of decision making.

Setting:

Participants situated so that facilitator can see everyone. Any number of people.

Time:

20 minutes

Materials:

Paper and pencil for facilitator

Procedure:

1. Present an issue to the group that needs to be decided. Include options with the issue. (Sample issues: curfew, time to eat meals, break the session, and so on.)
2. Have participants vote "yes" or "no" on the option they choose.
3. Tally the votes and announce the result.
4. Majority wins.

Processing:

Ask the following questions:

- Do those who voted against the option that wasn't chosen feel that the voting was fair?
- Do they feel that their interests were represented?
- What are the reasons why people voted the way they did? Were these reasons all out of self-interest or were they out of concern for the group as a whole?
- With majority rule, were the loser's interests considered?
- Why should certain people's interests count over other people's interests?
- Does the size of the group voting affect whose interests will be considered?
- How effective is voting as a decision-making tool?

G-III: NASA EXERCISE: SEEKING CONSENSUS

Purpose:

- To compare the results of individual decision making with the results of group decision making.
- To diagnose the level of development in a task-oriented group.

Setting:

Between 6 and 12 participants. Several groups may be directed simultaneously. Participants should be seated around a square or round table. The dynamics of a group seated at a rectangular table are such that it gives too much control to persons seated at the ends.

Materials:

- Pencils
- Individual work sheets
- Group work sheets
- Answer sheets containing rationale for decisions
- Direction sheets for scoring

Procedure:

Each participant is given a copy of the individual work sheet and told that he or she has 15 minutes to complete the exercise.

One group work sheet is handed to each group. (the group directions)

1. Individuals are not to change any answers on their individual sheets as a result of group discussion.
2. A member of the group is to record group consensus on this sheet.
3. Participants will have 30 minutes in which to complete the group work sheet.
4. Each participant is given a copy of the direction sheet for scoring. This phase of the experience should take 7 to 10 minutes.
 - a. They are to score their individual work sheets.
 - b. They will then give their score to the recorder, who will compute the average of the individual scores.
 - c. The recorder will then score the group work sheet.
5. The group will compare the average score for individuals with the group scores and discuss the implications of the experience. This phase of the experience should take 7 to 10 minutes.

Processing:

Results are posted according to the chart that follows, and the facilitator directs a discussion of the outcomes of consensus seeking and the experience of negotiating agreement.

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Consensus Score			
Average Score			
Range of Individual Scores			

NASA EXERCISE INDIVIDUAL WORKSHEET

Instructions:

You are a member of a space crew originally scheduled to rendezvous with a mother ship on the lighted surface of the moon. Due to mechanical difficulties, however, your ship was forced to land at a spot some 200 miles from the rendezvous point. During landing, much of the equipment aboard was damaged, and since survival depends on reaching the mother ship, the most critical items available must be chosen for the 200-mile trip. The list that follows are the 15 items that were left intact and undamaged after landing. Your task is to rank order them in terms of their importance to your crew in allowing them to reach the rendezvous point.

Please the number 1 by the most important item, the number 2 by the second most important, and so on, through number 15, the least important. You have 15 minutes to complete this phase of the exercise.

- ___ Box of matches
- ___ Food concentrate
- ___ 50 feet of nylon rope
- ___ Parachute silk
- ___ Portable heating unit
- ___ Two .45 caliber pistols
- ___ One box of dehydrated milk
- ___ Two 100-pound tanks of oxygen
- ___ Stellar map (of the moon's constellation)
- ___ Life raft
- ___ Magnetic compass
- ___ 5 gallons of water
- ___ Signal flares
- ___ First-aid kit containing injection needles
- ___ Solar-powered FM receiver-transmitter

NASA EXERCISE GROUP WORKSHEET

Instructions:

This is an exercise in group decision making. Your group is to employ the method of group consensus in reaching its decision. This means that the ranking for each of the 15 survival items must be agreed on by each group member before it becomes a part of the group decision. Consensus is difficult to reach. Therefore, not every ranking will meet with everyone's complete approval. Try, as a group, to make each ranking one with which all group members can at least partially agree. Here are some guides to use in reaching consensus:

1. Avoid arguing for your own individual judgments. Approach the task on the basis of logic.
2. Avoid changing your mind only in order to reach agreement and to avoid conflict. Support only solutions with which you are able to agree somewhat, at least.
3. Avoid "conflict-reducing" techniques such as majority vote, averaging, or trading in reaching your decision.
4. View differences of opinion as helpful rather than as a hindrance in decision making.

___ Box of matches

___ Food concentrate

___ 50 feet of nylon rope

___ Parachute silk

___ Portable heating unit

___ Two .45 caliber pistols

___ One box of dehydrated milk

___ Two 100-pound tanks of oxygen

___ Stellar map (of the moon's constellation)

___ Life raft

___ Magnetic compass

___ 5 gallons of water

___ Signal flares

___ First-aid kit containing injection needles

___ Solar-powered FM receiver-transmitter

NASA EXERCISE ANSWER SHEET

RATIONALE

No oxygen

Can live for some time without food

For travel over rough terrain

Carrying

Lighted side of moon is hot

Some use for propulsion

Needs H₂O to work

No air on moon

Needed for navigation
(constellation)

Some value for shelter or carrying

Moon's magnetic field is different from earth's

You can't live long without this

No oxygen

First-aid kit might be needed but needles are useless
needles

Communication

CORRECT NUMBER

_15__ Box of matches

_4__ Food concentrate

_6__ 50 feet of nylon rope

_8__ Parachute silk

_13__ Portable heating unit

_11__ Two .45 caliber pistols

_12__ One box of dehydrated milk

_1__ Two 100-pound tanks of oxygen

_3__ Stellar map (of the moon's

_9__ Life raft

_14__ Magnetic compass

_2__ 5 gallons of water

_10__ Signal flares

_7__ First-aid kit containing injection

_5__ Solar-powered FM receiver-transmitter

NASA EXERCISE DIRECTION SHEET FOR SCORING

The group recorder will assume the responsibility for directing the scoring. Individuals will:

1. Score the net difference between their answers and correct answers. For example, if a person answered 9 and the correct answer was 12, the net difference is 3. Three becomes the score for that particular item.
2. Total these scores for an individual score.
3. Next, total all individual scores and divide by the number of participants to arrive at an average individual score.
4. Score the net difference between group worksheet answers and the correct answers.
5. Total these scores for a group score.
6. Compare the average individual score with the group score.

Ratings:

- 0 to 20: Excellent
- 21 to 30: Good
- 31 to 40: Average
- 41 to 50: Fair
- Over 50: Poor

G-IV: CONSENSUS BUILDING

Purpose:

- To compare individual responses with others.
- To resolve differences of individual rankings to arrive at group consensus.
- To generate experiences in consensus building for group discussion.

Setting:

A least four groups of 8 to 12 people. Groups sit in small groups around the room.

Materials:

Pencils and worksheet for each participant plus one for each group

Time:

About 1 hour (up to 2 hours if variation is used)

Procedure:

1. Each group participant is given a copy of the worksheet and is told that he or she has 10 minutes to complete the task given on the sheet. Each person must work *independently*.
2. After 10 minutes, the group leader interrupts to announce that each group must arrive at a consensus on the top 10 teen needs. The ranking of each need must be agreed on by every member. (Averaging, majority voting, trade-offs, coin flips and other such tactics are not allowed.)
3. After 30 minutes, the task is stopped. The groups now discuss how well they reached consensus.

Processing:

Ask the following questions:

- Who led the discussion?
- What method (if at all) was used to reach a consensus?
- Were all opinions and ideas included?
- Is everyone *really* committed to the decisions reached?
- Did members withdraw from the discussion after having given up on a point?

Suggestion:

Sometimes it is difficult for groups to reach a consensus with the entire list. Therefore, you may want to limit consensus to the top five concerns.

Variation:

1. Have each group list their items on a sheet of poster paper from highest to lowest. Display the posters on the wall.
2. Announce that intergroup agreement must now be achieved.
3. Place a chair for each group in the middle of the groups.
4. Have each group select a representative to negotiate their priorities to achieve intergroup agreement. This means their priorities are at stake! Emphasize this.
5. To allow individual group members who are not representatives to argue for their group, place two empty chairs among the representatives' chairs. A person may enter into the

discussion if they occupy an open chair, but only to make a point. Then they must relinquish it for others wishing to be heard.

CONSENSUS WORKSHEET: WHAT TEENS NEED

Instructions:

Rank the following needs in order from the greatest need to the least desired need by numbering them from "1" through "15," with "1" being the most important.

- ___ A voice in community decisions
- ___ Churches more concerned with youth
- ___ Summer jobs
- ___ More tennis courts
- ___ Better schools
- ___ Bike paths
- ___ More teen activities
- ___ Own transportation
- ___ Drug counseling
- ___ Youth center – a place to go
- ___ Someone to talk to
- ___ Adult supervision
- ___ A sense of purpose
- ___ Teen dances
- ___ Better teachers
- ___ Other _____