Typical Methods of Group Decision Making

There are a variety of decision-making methods. Each comes with advantages and disadvantages. Below are some of the more common methods.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decision-Making Method</th>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Coin toss                    | • Quick  
• Can result in decisions when no other approach will work  
• Suitable for simple, unimportant decisions                                                                                                           | • Makes no use of group resources  
• Gains no benefits from group interaction  
• Builds no commitment to implementation                                                                   |
| Decision by authority without consultation | • Good for simple, routine decisions  
• Good when little time available--for example, in crisis situations  
• Good when group expects decision maker to use this method  
• Good when members lack resources to do otherwise  
• Good when authority has all relevant information  
• Good when authority has trust of all group members  
• Good when decision affects only the decision maker                                                                 | • One person is not always a good resource  
• No group interaction  
• Group resources poorly used  
• Little commitment  
• May cause resentment                                      |
| Decision by expert            | • Good when expert has the necessary information  
• Good when little is to be gained from group interaction  
• Good when commitment to implementation is not a concern                                                                                           | • Expertise is often hard to determine  
• Advantages of group interaction are lost  
• Little commitment  
• May cause resentment                                         |
| Decision by authority after consultation | • Uses some resources of group  
• Gains benefits of group discussion  
• Can build some commitment to implementation                                                                              | • Authority may not get unbiased information  
• May not build enough commitment to implementation  
• May not resolve conflicts                                      |
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| Average of group member opinion | - Good for simple, routine decisions  
                             - Useful when it is hard to promote interaction  
                             - Useful when time is short  
                             - Good when group lacks skills and information needed to do otherwise | - Benefits of group interaction are lost  
                             - May not resolve conflicts  
                             - Little commitment to implementation is built |
| Minority decision          | - Useful when delegation to a smaller group is necessary  
                             - Can be used when not everyone can meet  
                             - Good when time is short  
                             - Good when rest of group lacks skills and information needed to make decision  
                             - Good when commitment to decision is not necessary  
                             - Good for simple, routine decisions  
                             - Good when subgroup has necessary information | - Does not take advantages of the resources of most group members  
                             - Does not gain the benefits of group interaction  
                             - Does not build widespread commitment  
                             - May not resolve conflicts |
| Majority decision          | - Good when there is not time to build consensus  
                             - Closes off discussion on matters not important to the group as a whole  
                             - Seen as a very legitimate method in a democracy  
                             - Good when commitment to decision by everyone is not necessary  
                             - Good when members of the group are equally informed  
                             - Good when majority can handle implementation without minority involvement | - Full benefit of group interaction not gained  
                             - May not make best use of relevant group resources  
                             - May not result in full commitment to decision  
                             - Can leave a disgruntled minority; there should be a plan for handling such a situation |
<table>
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<th>Consensus</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Can produce a high quality decision</td>
<td>• Takes a great deal of time and energy</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Can produce strong commitment to implementation</td>
<td>• Time pressure must be minimal</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Makes best use of group resources</td>
<td>• Places major demands on group members’ skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Gains full benefits of group interaction</td>
<td>• Requires rich exchange of ideas and information; the group needs to be informed prior to reaching the decision</td>
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<td>• Future problem-solving ability of group is enhanced</td>
<td>• Hard to use in large groups</td>
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<td>• Useful for serious, important, complex decisions that affect a lot of people</td>
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Adapted principally from: