8.12: Managing Group Decision Making

Learning Outcomes

• Identify the advantages of group decision making.
• Identify the disadvantages of group decision making.
• Describe techniques managers can use to guide and reach consensus in groups.

Advantages of Group Decision Making

Disadvantages of Group Decision Making

groupthink. This is the tendency of group members to conform to and support a proposed group position. Perhaps an outspoken individual strongly favors a decision, and other group members allow themselves to be persuaded simply because of his forcefulness. Alternatively, perhaps a segment of the group shares a common perspective and common biases. Together, they propose a course of action, and because multiple voices are already supporting the decision it makes it easy for the rest of the group to fall in line. This negates the whole purpose of group involvement, which is to bring a variety of perspectives and ideas to the decision-making process.
Ways to Facilitate Group Decision Making

**Brainstorming** is an idea-generating process that specifically encourages all alternatives while withholding any criticism of those alternatives. Therefore, this technique can help build a group’s cohesiveness because all members are encouraged to contribute and participate in the process without fear of judgment. In a typical brainstorming session, a small group of people respond to questions or problems posed by a facilitator. All responses are recorded and there is no discussion or analysis at this point. After a set amount of time, the group then selects the ideas or alternatives it would like to explore, but there is no pressure to commit to selecting a solution during brainstorming.

[1] When people are generating ideas in a group, many people are talking at once, which distracts the thought process and impedes the sharing of ideas.

**nominal group technique** is similar to brainstorming, in that it encourages all members to contribute their ideas. However, it is different from brainstorming in that it limits discussion during the decision-making process. Group members are all present but members operate independently and use the following four-step process in idea generating:

1. Members independently write down ideas on a given problem.
2. Each member presents one idea to the group. Each member takes a turn, presenting a single idea, until all ideas have been shared.
3. The group engages in discussion on the ideas for clarity and evaluation.
4. Each member independently rank-orders the ideas. The idea with the highest aggregate ranking determines the final decision.

**e-brainstorming**, where people respond to issues via their computers in real time. The responses and rankings are all anonymous and displayed for everyone to view and to add further comments. The advantages of e-brainstorming are the possibility of lots of generated ideas, anonymity, honesty, and speed. The major disadvantage is the reduction in group cohesiveness.

**devil’s advocacy decision-making technique** is where an individual or a group is selected to become the critic in the proposed decision. The biggest strength to using the devil’s advocate technique is the ability to prevent groupthink.[2] The devil’s advocate technique allows for in-depth dialogue on a range of ideas and can help bridge seemingly irreconcilable opposites.[3] This process can help the group refine its thinking and produce high-quality ideas. Any leader using this technique must be aware that it is designed to generate conflict and will require the leader to actively manage the meetings.

**facilitator** or **referee** can be used to separate participant and leadership roles or groups with opposing ideas. The facilitator manages group processes and dynamics and calls for a high degree of neutrality about content issues and a focus on group needs. The facilitator is focused on what needs to be accomplished and appropriate levels of
participation, all in an effort to ensure quality decisions are made. The advantage to a facilitated technique is that it can produce innovative, creative and high-quality decisions.[4] The facilitated model does require a skilled facilitator and a significant amount of time.

**Delphi technique** (named after the Oracle at Delphi), experts respond to questionnaires in a number of rounds. Questions narrow in on a specific topic as the rounds progress. The first questionnaire consists of open-ended questions and aims to identify broad issues related to the issue at hand. The responses are analyzed qualitatively by sorting, categorizing, and searching for common themes. These responses are then used to construct the second questionnaire, which is more specific and aims to rate or rank the items in terms of their significance. Subsequent questionnaires can narrow down responses further. As the facilitator feeds back results from the previous rounds, there tends to be convergence to a consensus of opinion. The Delphi technique is useful if convening the participants face-to-face is not practical. The disadvantage is that it takes days to complete and it requires a large amount of work by the leader.

**Affective conflict** is when the dialogue becomes "personal" and people become more aggressive or start to disengage. The mindset moves from "we have a problem" to "you are the problem." Opposition is seen as something to be thwarted rather than explored. The goal becomes winning for its own sake rather than the best possible solution.[5]**Cognitive conflict** is where people focus on the tasks or issues and debate and thrash these out and come to a creative solution. The parties might argue and exchange views vigorously, yet there is two-way communication and an openness to hearing each other. The goal is to find the best possible solution rather than to win the argument. Alternative perspectives are seen as valuable rather than threatening.

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**The Final Decision**

**democratic method** is when all group members are given equal authority in a formal voting system. Even then, there are choices. A decision might be accepted by a simple majority or unanimity might be required. The most favored method currently is through **consensus**. Each one of the decision-making processes detailed here is predicated on the involvement of everyone in the group. The consensus process enables the discussion of current and potential obstacles, already known to participants, resulting in work-arounds to be built into a decision in advance. Defining that process from the start will help everyone know what to expect.

**Practice Question**

[https://assessments.lumenlearning.co...essments/12199](https://assessments.lumenlearning.co...essments/12199)

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**Strengths and Weaknesses of Group Decision-Making Techniques**
## Evaluating Group Decision-Making Techniques

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effectiveness Criteria</th>
<th>Brainstorming</th>
<th>Nominal</th>
<th>e-Brainstorming</th>
<th>Delphi</th>
<th>Devil’s Advocate</th>
<th>Referee/Facilitator</th>
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<tr>
<td>Number of ideas</td>
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<td>Quality of ideas</td>
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<td>Moderate</td>
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</table>


4. Thomas L. Wheelen and J. David Hunger, Concepts in Strategic Management and Business Policy. [↩](#)


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