Teams and Decisions

Key Concepts



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Objectives and Decisions

A team is a group of people entrusted with a goal to achieve. That goal is their reason for working together. It provides them with:

- **The vision** : where they want to go
- **The planning** : the allocation of activities and resources;
- **The motivation** : why and how members want to work with each other;
- **The focus for knowledge acquisition** : why members want to learn.



What is a Problem?
What is a Solution?

Teams exist within a given context : there is no team without an implicit or explicit goal.

There is no mission without a continuous process of decision;

Team decisions involve processes that are more complex than individual decisions;

While multicultural and interdisciplinary teams have more potential for problem solving, their decision processes present special difficulties, not least about defining what is a problem and what is a solution.

There exists several answers to the same question, there also exists several perspectives on the same problem and several solutions to it.

It is the broader context of the team's mission that determines what is perceived to be a 'problem' or a solution.

A **problem** is a difference between the existing state of affairs and its desired state.

A **solution** is any action meant to achieve the desired state of affairs.

What is a Decision?

A decision is the choice of a course of action among alternatives, based on the values, preferences and goals of the decision maker.



Decision making is a recursive process, moving back from one stage to the other.

The stages in the decision making process are

- Identifying the problem to be solved and/or formulating the question to be answered
- Identifying the alternative solutions and/or answers
- Exploring the implications of the alternatives
- Selecting the alternative to be acted upon

Team Decision Making

In team decision making no single team member is free to decide on their own, but each member must be able to live with the decision made.



There is no ideal decision-making strategy; there are various approaches, from which the team must choose the most adapted to the problem situation; A team is empowered to make decisions by their employing institution(s) but no team is totally free to make any decision they want.

The mission and the team's environment draw the framework conditions in which they make their decisions.

Multicultural Teams



- A multicultural team contains a diversity and a broad array of perspectives that are a rich potential of creativity.
- This diversity is also a source of conflict about a number of issues : what is ‘right’ and what is ‘wrong’ behaviour, what is ‘important’ to consider, what is ‘good’ leadership, etc.
- A multicultural team needs more time to learn to work together, cooperate and optimize its creativity in solving problems.

Interdisciplinary Teams

- An interdisciplinary team contains more diversity in specialized language, concepts, methods and fields of interest.
- This diversity gives the team a broader perspective on the same issue.
- The team will first need to develop the same understanding of the issue ; this is done by developing a common working procedure and methods that cut across discipline.
- The team fulfills its potential only if its members master their own disciplinary tools and do not try to cross boundaries into a discipline in which they have no expertise.



Models of Decision Making



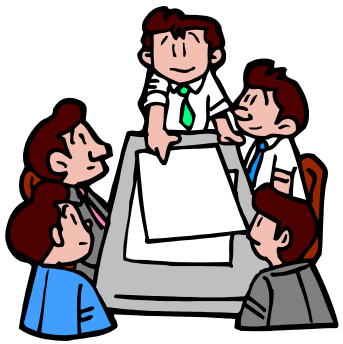
Decision making is the process by which problems are solved. The basic assumption is that the best solution is the outcome of judicious decisions. However, decision making processes are by no means neutral and objective.

These processes follow four basic models that have specific assumptions:

- **The political model**
- **The process model**
- **The garbage can model**
- **The rational model**

All the different models have advantages and disadvantages in given situations. The challenge for the team is to be aware of what model they are following, evaluate it and adapt to their own situation.

The Political Model



This model recognizes that the decision makers may have their own private agendas, with their own needs and perceptions, therefore the decision making process becomes:

- A cycle of bargaining and negotiation between decision makers;
- Based on information that is incomplete, distorted or withheld by decision makers in the pursuit of their own agenda .

The model is a good representation of the way the real world operates and may provide for the resolution of conflict between private interests over a problem. Its disadvantage is that the 'best' solution may not be chosen by the decision makers. Furthermore, it may simply delay conflicts. The process of negotiation can be messy, undue pressure may be exerted in the pursuit of private goals, individuals may realize later that the information provided was distorted intentionally. This can be detrimental to collective learning.

The Process Model



This model is structured around standard operating procedures in the form of guidelines formalized by the employing organisation. These guidelines are determined by :

- The experience of past and present events ;
- The anticipation of future events.

The decision makers conform to the standards laid out by the model if they are uncertain about the results of a decision. In turn, the results of a decision, if unpredicted, will be used to refine the standards for decision making. The foundation of the model resides in the unique experience of each organisation.

The Garbage Can Model



This model is one of ‘organized anarchy’. It is peculiar to organisational contexts in which the technologies and the choices to be made are not well defined, and participation by decision makers fluctuates in terms of time and effort.

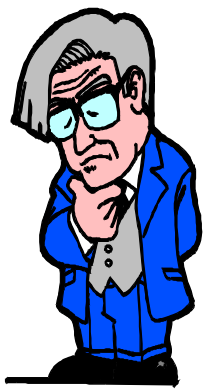
Decision making is assimilated to a ‘garbage can’ where decision makers have dumped questions, solutions and problems as they come ; these are not necessarily related to each other and wait to be dealt with. Thus solutions await relevant problems to emerge, questions await the right answers. It is the chance alignment of a question on an answer and a solution on a problem that offers the opportunity to make a decision. This alignment occurs at a given, unpredicted, time and decision makers seize the opportunity.

Decisions can be made inadvertently or by displacing a problem to fit a solution, but rarely through a planned and deliberate problem solving procedure.

The merit of this model is not to overestimate the rationality of decision makers. It can also be self defeating: within the given time constraint of a team’s mission, the chance alignment between solutions and problems may not occur.

The Rational Model

This model is underlined by an economic view.



Its assumptions are that decisions are made on the basis of:

- Well defined and accepted goals and objectives;
- An examination of alternatives, consequences and optimality;
- Complete information on the issue to be decided upon.
- The decision made maximizes utility by making the best use of information, selecting the best alternative to reach the goal.

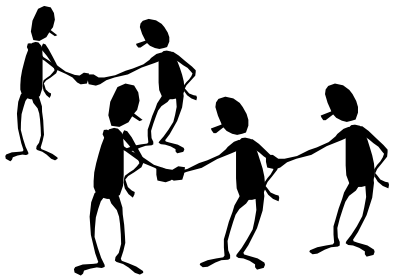
While the model is simple and intuitive, its assumptions are not always correct. There may be a diversity of individual goals and objectives ; information may be lacking or distorted.

Decision making Strategies

Different decision making strategies are possible, among which the team can choose the best suited to the issue:

- BY CONSENSUS
- BY MAJORITY
- BY DELEGATION
- BY THE EXPERT
- BY NOMINAL GROUP

Decisions by Consensus



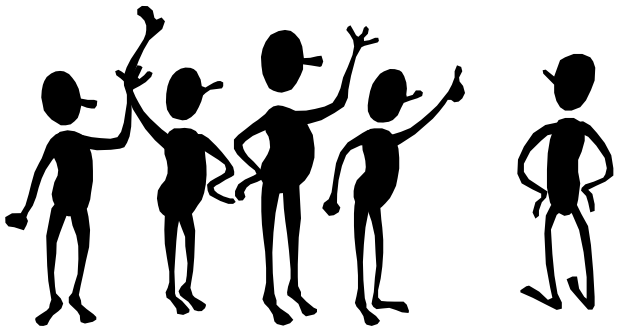
Team decision strategy

Consensus is the epitome of team decision-making. It is not 100% agreement; rather, it means everyone on the team can live with the decision and will support it. More specifically, my positions have been heard and it does not violate my values.

Guidelines

Consensus is recommended for most of the substantive issues decided by that team. It is especially important for decisions requiring support of the entire team. It is the most time-consuming, but most rewarding decision-strategy.

Decisions by Majority



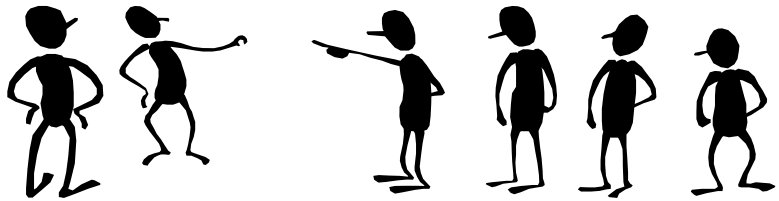
Team decision strategy

Majority rule means that a majority of team members agree with the decision, perhaps by voting.

Guidelines

Majority rule can be appropriate for non-substantive decisions, such as where to go for lunch after the team meeting. There can be problems if some team members do not agree with the decision when they may not support (or even sabotage) subsequent actions.

Delegated decisions



Team decision strategy

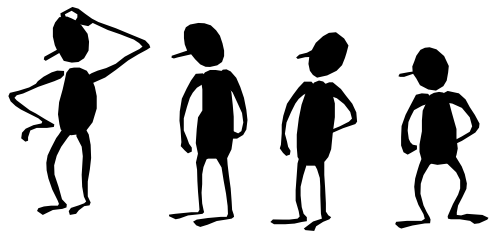
Delegated decision-making means that a subset of the team (an individual or a subteam) is given responsibility to make a decision on the team's behalf. Team members must agree up front to fully support the decisions delegated to someone else.

Guidelines

Delegated decisions are appropriate for less-important decisions, or for situations where there are many decisions to be made in a limited time. Be sure that team members are not "dumping" the responsibility by simply letting someone else do it -- this is not empowerment!

Decision by Expert





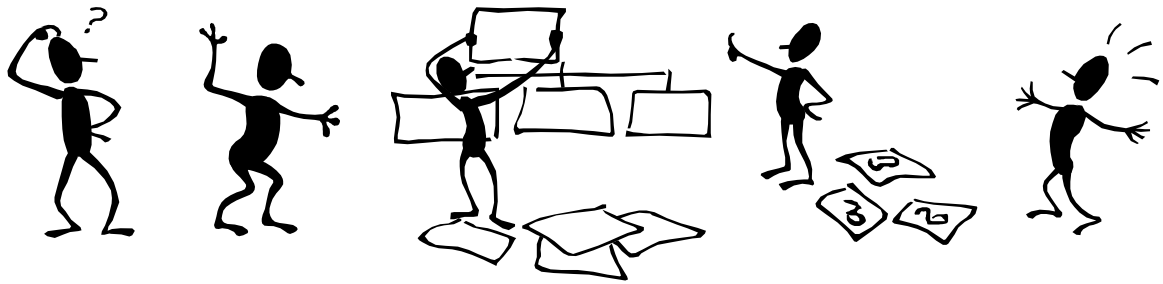
Team decision strategy

A variation on the strategy of delegation is when the group nominates or recognizes an individual who has specialized knowlege relevant to the decision being made.

Guidelines

In interdisciplinary groups, it is common to defer decisions to the relevant specialist. Problems occur if the other team members do not recognise the expertise, or do not have confidence in the expert.

Decisions by Nominal Group



Team decision strategy

The nominal group strategy is a quick way for team members to consolidate a lengthy list of items into a shorter or prioritised list. Also referred to as "triple ranking" (three votes per team member), "quadruple ranking" (four votes per team member), etc.

Guidelines

Post the long list of items on flip charts where everyone can see them. Each team member has a certain number of votes to reflect their preferences or priorities. Items with the most votes become the short list or prioritised list. Since this is not consensual decision-making, it should be reserved for less important decisions.

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