

# GROUP DECISIONS

## VOCABULARY

affirm

assign

empower

extent

implementation

majority

minority

resistance

sustainable

### 1) Discuss the questions below:

- a) Talk about a time when you had to make a tough decision. Why was it difficult?
- b) If you could go back in time and change one decision in your life, would you? If yes, what would you change, and why would you change it?
- c) How do people in your family decide:
  - What to have for dinner?
  - What brand of toilet paper to buy?
  - Where to go for holidays?
- d) Think of some decisions (big and small) that you made in your group. Make a list.

### 2) Read the first part of the article about various group-decision making methods and do the activity below.

Sometimes, who decides in a group is pre-determined by a statute or law. However, there may be opportunities to expand the involvement of who decides. By engaging the public or increasing the level of participation in decision-making, groups can make more informed decisions that address public concerns. As a group, it is important to have a conversation about who will make the decisions, and how.

To help your group select a decision-making method, you can ask yourselves these questions:

- 1) To what extent do the group members feel the need to be understood and influential in the decisions that are made?
- 2) To what extent are members committed to the decision and responsible for its implementation?
- 3) To what extent are members satisfied with their own participation and the group atmosphere?

**Activity: Think about some of the decisions you made with your group/family. Answer the three questions about these decisions.**

### 2) Read the next part of the article. Match descriptions with summaries of the strengths, weaknesses of each decision-making method.

#### 1. Decision by authority

This method can be described as "one person decides." This might mean assigning the decision to the most expert person or to a person who decides after listening to the group discuss the problem. Often, the person making the decision is a positional leader.

#### 2. Minority control (small group decides)

This method uses the skills and resources of a small number of group members. Usually, the small group is made up of experts on the issue or a delegated subgroup that has the necessary information to make a decision.

#### 3. Majority control (voting)

Often mandated by rules or laws, voting allows all members to vote for or against an issue. Groups using this method typically adopt the idea that wins a majority of votes.

#### **4. Systemic consensing**

It allows making sustainable decisions in groups of any size. Consensing aims at the consideration of all voices of a group, including those of the reserved or silent group members.

The group members first develop as many suggestions as possible. After that, resistance for each proposal is measured. The proposals are sorted according to the resistance measurements. Consensing does not require agreement, affirmation or even preference. Consent is reached by choosing the proposal with the least resistance. The resistance indicates the conflict potential.

#### **5. Consensus (all decide)**

Consensus strives for the full empowerment and involvement of all group members when making a decision.

Consensus is generally understood to mean that everyone involved has had a chance to participate, understand the decision, and is prepared to support it.

#### **Strengths:**

- A) This method is useful if the whole group cannot meet, if only a few members have information on or interest in the decision, or for routine types of decisions. This decision-making method may be appropriate when overall commitment to the decision is not necessary.
- B) It can produce a high-quality decision that has strong commitment to implementation. The future ability of the group to solve problems is enhanced. It is useful for serious, important, complex decisions that affect a lot of people.
- C) This method is useful when the group lacks knowledge or skills and has little time to make a decision. It works well when decisions are "routine" or when commitment to implementation is not a concern.
- D) This may seem like the fairest method, and it is seen as a legitimate method in a democracy. It is effective when there is little time. This is a good method to use when members of the group are equally informed.
- E) There are no winners and losers in this method. It is time efficient. Produces results with little or no dissatisfaction in the group. Generates the least conflict potential. Allows all group members to show their perspective.

#### **Weaknesses:**

- A) Most people are not familiar with this method which may cause some resistance in application.
- B) Someone wins and someone loses. This can result in a disgruntled minority in a group or can cause opposing factions to mobilize. It also cuts out the option of finding a compromise solution.
- C) This method probably won't work well with more complex decisions because it doesn't use all available help or support from group members. As a result, the group might not support the final decision and group resentment may develop.
- D) This method does not use the resources of most of the group and doesn't build group support for the decision. Nor does it yield the benefits of group interaction.
- E) This method takes a great deal of time and energy. It is hard to achieve in a large group and requires a rich exchange of ideas and information.

#### **Experiment: Try to use these methods to decide as a group on these issues:**

- 1) Where should we go for lunch?
- 2) What color should we paint this room?
- 3) What should we do after this activity?