

# Decision making in groups: advantages and disadvantages

[Business](#), [Management](#)



Decision making environs a complex situation having integrated field of knowledge and expertise involved. Often the progress of organizations depend of certain critical decisions that when erroneously taken can invite future threats. The decision maker holds a crucial responsibility. Because of such immense importance of a decision maker's work, the future of any organization cannot be left at the shoulder of a single individual. Therefore, the important task of decision making is usually divided among a number of people who together work as a group to come up to the right decision.

The very reasoning has led to the idea of decision making in groups, a strategy rapidly followed by the contemporary organizations of all kinds. Advantages of Decision Making in Groups Many instances from diverse fields ascertain the success of involving groups for reaching better decisions. Shared Decision Making Project introduced in U. S. schools is one of the many successful programs based on the concept of grouped decision making (Margaret J. Johnson, 1996). Such an impact of participative decision making is because of its features reflecting positive implications in organizations.

Some of these features that serve as major advantages of decision making in groups are as follows, Group Deliberation and Judgment The most important advantage of group decision making is the availability of group deliberation and judgment through it. The concept is based on the philosophy that ' no single individual have all the information necessary to solve the problem'(Smith, 1989, p. 358) . As the organizations flourish and enter into new realms, their problems and challenges also become multifaceted. Such problems require people with different expertise.

Therefore the judgment of a single individual cannot be depended on as it lacks the complete competency to carry out the decision making process (Wehrich & Koontz, 2004, p. 516). For instance, different lawsuits involve more than one judge to pass the decision. This is because different judges are specialized in different areas of legal studies. Increasing Collegiality According to Bernard-Powers et al. , “ Adults are learners just as are children, and that everyone learns best when there are ongoing opportunities to develop questions, investigate, reflect, apply and share knowledge in real-life contexts” (NCREL: 2003).

Collegiality or Collegial Interaction is a phenomenon whereby the members in a group get a chance of interacting with their colleagues for active professional learning through decision making events which may include conventions, meeting, seminars, visitations, conferences and workshops etc. To elucidate the concept, an example of educational organizations can be analyzed. During the collegial interaction process in schools and colleges, the teachers learn from the experienced teachers and apply collaborative skills.

In this concern, organizations like Australian College of Education and the General Teaching Council for England have already taken active measures to encourage teachers’ collegial interactions (Leonard & Leonard, 2003). Conflicts Resolution Tendency In the process of grouped decision making, conflicts often arise. These conflicts when managed effectively can not only achieve the immediate goal of the group but would also lead to a profound

understanding between the individuals. The understanding assists further decision making in a better environment.

This advantage of decision making in groups is particularly applicable to the teams in working organizations. A latest study by Remigia Kushner delves into a different approach of tackling with the conflicts. According to this approach the employers need to realize that a conflict free environment is impossible and the conflicts often help the employers in facilitating a transformational process. It is because often the conflicts helps in identifying the loopholes, clarifying the values and strengthening the status (1996, p. 104 & 105) Individual Performance

Often misinterpreted as an impediment in the individual performance of the group members, group problem solving provides greater chances of honing and performing better. Studies done by Bunzel, Goldman, Pape and Miller identify that there is more scope of individual cognitive learning in group decision making exercises with increased reasoning and problem solving (Smith, 1989, p. 359). It is because in group decision making, every member holds his own perspective. This gives rise to understanding of multidimensional facets of the same situation thereby increasing the capacity of relating more dimensions to a single problem.

Such an exercise increases the analytical abilities at an individual level. Transformation in a prevailing system can be brought more efficiently through decision making in groups because many representatives of the concerned organization become a part of the decision making group. These members act as the transformation agents in the system and help

bring the transformation at a rapid pace. In this instance, Judith Huddleston, Margaret Claspell and Joellen Killion discuss the participation of teachers in decision making of the school.

This participation does not only create a sense of commitment and ownership among the teachers, but also harness a positive attitude towards the pupils that on a holistic ground brings an over all transformation in institutions like any other organizations (1991, p. 81). Accuracy Not all the decisions require a definite solution. However, every decision making exercise has better and worse solutions possible to it. According to the experimental studies of Piper carried out around 1974, the decisions made by group collaborations yielded more accurate and better results as compared to those made individually (NASSP Bulletin, 1977, p.

108). Organizational Success In case of decision making in organizations, group exercise is proven to be conducive in not just attaining the right decision at hand, but also in achieving an overall success of the organization. This is a corollary of various features of group decision making. According to Jon Miller from Southern California University, it is because of causal relationships among various features endowed by the participation in group decision making. At an immediate level, participating in group decision making increases the personal efficacy.

This increased morale becomes a basis of being more committed to work and a willingness to work harder than before. As a final result of increased commitment, the productivity of the organization elevates (Miller, 1980, p. 56). Participative Equity Human nature varies from person to person. Some

are dominant whereas the others are shy and silent. For those belonging to the latter category, it is usually difficult to make their unique perspectives heard to a larger group of people.

The process of decision making in groups allows the chance of equal participation to such people. The participation of such introverts often brings out creative and innovative solutions to the problems. Encouragement Bunzel, Goldman, Pape and Miller are of the opinion that group decision making provides increased level of motivation to the members (Smith, 1989, p. 359). This is because when working in a group, every individual is acknowledged for positive performance. On the other hand, the individual opinions are not directly exposed to public criticism.

This increases the motivation of members to come up with innovative and unconventional ideas without a fear of being censured or rejected. In the same way, if the group is unable to come up to a right decision, the responsibility does not lie on a single person, but is distributed among all the members. As a result, no group member is discouraged or prevented from actively participating in later decision making exercises. Social Relationships Decision making in groups is responsible for changing the relationships between the members (Smith, 1989, 359).

Working together in groups provides a fair chance of understanding the points of views of others which is subsequently conducive in understanding the group members. Stated differently, by working with different people the social skills of the individuals are honed. Disadvantages of Decision Making in Groups With many advantages, the concept of grouped decision making is

not bereft of its negative corollaries. Some of the major disadvantages of decision making in groups are as follows, Group Think Conflicts arises in all types of groups and environments.

A decision making group which is free of conflicts appears most successful. However, the absence of conflict may be due to the presence of group think. Group think may be defined as “ the tendency for groups to put such a high premium on agreement that they or indirectly punish dissent”(Locker, 2003, p. 322). Such an absence of conflict restricts the individual opinions that diverts from a pre-decided decision. Sharedness Bias Prior to entering the decision making exercise, the members of group have shared beliefs and knowledge about the problem at hand.

Group members are often biased towards the shared knowledge (Klocke , 2007, p. 440). This sharedness bias is because of the reason that in an attempt to create consensus, the members accentuate more on the shared information. This leaves the unshared information ignored thereby leaving many better alternatives to the problem unexplored. Influence of Interpersonal Relationships It is a datum of experience that in the scene of human existence, the society plays a crucial role and manifests itself in the lives of individuals through human relationships.

In case of decision making where the members are associated or related to one another, the undue interpersonal relationships often guide the direction of the decision (Heimovics & Zemelman, 1978, p. 61). Authority Centred Groups Andrew E. Schwartz while discussing the types of group decisions brings into notice the group decisions that are governed by the authority.

Such decisions occur in groups where the boundaries of members are very starkly marked. As a result, one member of the group enjoys a far greater say in the decision because of his status or influence (1994).

For instance, a business meeting might end up with a decision of the chief executive officer in contrast to the majority's opinion. Democracy Based Groups In order to reach at a consensus, group decision making often involves the principle of democracy where the solution is decided on the basis of majority (Andrew E. Schwartz 1994). The majority's decision is not always a reflection of the right decision as the opinions of majority greatly depend on the individual capacities of the members. In case the group has lesser number of competent people, the decision of majority can lead to a failing situation. Time Constraints

Compared to the decision making by individuals, the process of reaching a decision in groups requires longer periods of time coupled with practice (Garcia, 1986, p. 50). It is because unlike individual decision making, the group decision making requires a number of stages before reaching to the solution. These involve orientation when the members introduce one another, formation when the group assigns different roles to its members, coordination when members indulge in discussion surrounding the core topic and formalization when the group reaches consensus for a single decision (Locker, 2003, pp: 318& 319)

Interpersonal Incompatibility Not all the decisions made in groups lead to a successful solution. Stated differently, it is the feature of harmony and interpersonal compatibility that turns the process of group decision making



to a positive direction. According to the studies of Steiner, the productivity of groups heavily depends on its task demands and individual resources. The former element can only be attained after a satisfactory amount of compatibility is achieved by the members (Heimovics & Zemelman, 1978, p. 61).

However, groups do not share interpersonal compatibility many times. It happens particularly in situations where the members are very different from one another and had not known each other prior to entering the decision making exercise. Conclusion In the contemporary world where a wrong decision can shift the fortune of organizations, group participation has become a promising strategy in the organizational decision making. Although decision making in groups also has some negative implications, its positive corollaries outshine any shortcomings attached to the concept.

Considering the above mentioned advantages, it is evident that participative decision making is not just a better alternative of decision making but the only lucrative course of action in the lives of organizations. References Garcia, A. (1986) Consensus Decision Making Promotes Involvement, Ownership, Satisfaction. NASSP Bulletin [Internet], 70(493) pp. 50-52. Available from: < <http://bul.sagepub.com/cgi/content/refs/70/493/50> > [Accessed 19 March 2009]. Heimovics, R. D. & Zemelman, D. (1978) The Influence of Interpersonal Relationships on Group Decision Making. Educational Administration Quarterly [Internet], 14(3) pp. 61-73.

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