

Decision-Making Styles Guide

To increase the competence, confidence and commitment of teams and leaders

The chart below describes the following common decision-making styles:

- Unilateral or directive
- Democratic
- Consultative testing
- Consensus
- Consultative input
- Delegation

Leaders often find it helpful to be consciously choose a particular decision-making style that will fit the context of the situation and that will create the needed level of support and commitment.

Decision-making Style	
Unilateral or directive: You make and announce the decision.	Use when: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- This situation has urgent time pressure, such as for an emergency.- You are the one with all the relevant information and responsibility. Ways to strengthen use of this style: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Explain why the decision was made and what people should do if they have questions or concerns. You may need to “sell” the idea to stakeholders.- Be willing to learn from the feedback you receive and to adjust or change your decisions when it makes sense.- If making decisions in an emergency situation, hold a review of the situation to capture lessons learned about what was effective or ineffective. I- If you anticipate resistance, you may want to announce the decision in person and provide an opportunity for questions and concerns to be discussed.
Consultative testing: You make a tentative decision, then invite feedback and reactions prior to making the final decision.	Use when: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- You are fairly confident of your decision but will find value in checking for reactions and feedback prior to implementing- You have primary responsibility for action and most of the relevant information Ways to strengthen use of this style: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Identify your decision as “tentative” so that employees don’t act on it as fact too quickly- Provide some structure to the type of feedback you are looking for, don’t just say “tell me what you think.” For example, you might have 3 separate questions:<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What positive impacts do you see in this decision?2. What negative impacts do you see in this decision?3. How will this affect our customers?- Confirm and communicate the final decision to the group.

<p>Consultative input gathering:</p> <p>You ask for and receive input from the group but make the final decision yourself.</p>	<p>Use when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - You need others’ expertise to make a quality decision for which you are ultimately responsible for - You need some level of commitment - You don’t have the time to negotiate consensus - The group values both clear-cut authority for decisions and high levels of participation <p>Ways to strengthen use of this style:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Be clear and up front that the final decision rests with you. - Confirm and communicate the final decision to the group. - Let the group know how their input impacted the decision; or, if you went against the group, explain your reasoning. - Follow tips in the August 2009 article about gathering employee input.
<p>Democratic - majority vote:</p> <p>You relinquish the ultimate decision-making authority and have an equal vote in a group decision where the majority wins.</p>	<p>Use when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - You are okay with all of the options available, even if your vote doesn’t win - You need to involve large numbers of people in on a decision at minimal cost - You don’t anticipate major resistance from those who “lose” the vote. - When you need to narrow down the field of alternatives for consideration. <p>Ways to strengthen use of this style:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure that enough information is shared to help participants make an informed decision. - Create an opportunity for discussion on the pros and cons of each choice, and make sure that multiple perspectives are heard. - When greater than 51% commitment is needed, consider using a different majority vote, such as two-thirds. - Use this method as a way to do a quick check on how close you are to consensus. - Get group member agreement that they will comply with the voting decision whether they like it or not.
<p>Consensus:</p> <p>All participants agree and support the decision.</p>	<p>Use when: You want high quality input and commitment, with follow-through, from a group.</p> <p>Ways to strengthen use of this style:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use a structured discussion process that allows enough time to fully explore options, thoughts and feelings related to the decision. - If the topic is complex or potentially “hot”, engage a neutral facilitator to lead the discussion and decision-making. - Know that consensus doesn’t mean that everyone has to love the decision, but they do need to be willing to support the decision once it’s made. - Have a back-up decision-making style chosen in case consensus turns out to not be possible or realistic.

Delegation:

You assign full decision-making authority to another individual or a group.

Use when:

- You want to increase efficiency and maximize the contribution of every team member
- You trust others to make the decision (maybe they're more knowledgeable about the topic than you are or it is within their sphere of responsibility)
- You just shouldn't be spending your time on that level of decision

Ways to strengthen use of this style:

- Make sure the person (or persons) you're delegating to has the required authority, autonomy and skills to make the decision. Don't confuse "delegate" with "dump!"
- Be clear about any boundaries or criteria that the person must keep in mind in making the decision; e.g. – within a certain budget, scope of impact, how or how to communicate, etc.
- Be willing to support the final decision. If you would have decided differently, have a learning conversation with the decision-maker(s) on how and why they came to the decision; what you would have done differently and why; and what this conversation might mean for future decisions.

Related resources to support you on this topic:

- Article, "[To Decide or Not-to-Decide, That is the Question](#)," Edge-Leadership E-Zine, September 2009 issue
- Article "[Gathering Employee Input Successfully](#)," Edge-Leadership E-Zine, August 2009 issue
- Contact Edge-Leadership at denise@edge-leadership.com to:
 - o Sign up for an EQ-in-Action assessment, which can help you understand the underlying strategies you use in relationships with others (which influences your decision-making styles)
 - o Schedule a presentation or training for your leadership team on decision-making styles