

Group work 2: Making group decisions

Introduction

Making decisions in a group can sometimes be difficult, especially when there are different approaches to decision making. This can lead to conflict in a group or poorly considered decisions. There are many techniques to support effective decision making in groups. Here are three options:

1. Six Thinking Hats

This technique was developed by Edward De Bono to help groups reach a decision by considering a problem or issue from six different perspectives. Each group member has to consider a decision from a different angle, visualised by wearing six different hats. Alternatively one hat can be allocated to each group member. It can be particularly useful if a group member who holds a particular strong view wears a hat that represents an opposite perspective.

White hat: the information hat. Look at the data and facts you have and consider past experiences. Make your decision based on what has previously happened in similar situations.

Red hat: the intuitive hat. What is your instinctive response? Make the decision based on your hunches and emotional responses to the issue. Note that this may differ between group members.

Black hat: the pessimistic hat. Think about all the bad points and everything that could possibly go wrong. Challenge all aspects of the issue and make your decision based on the least bad scenario.

Yellow hat: the optimistic hat. Look at all the benefits of taking a particular decision. This can help the group to keep going when everything looks gloomy and difficult.

Green hat: the creative hat. Consider every conceivable response no matter how ridiculous it may seem and explore the possibilities.

Blue hat: the big picture hat. The wearer of this hat is a referee, who should ensure that every other hat has been worn and the decision-making process has fully explored all angles. Use the blue hat to make sure the final decision is made after the other five hats have spoken.

2. Nominal Decision-making Technique

This technique can be useful if time is short and if there are a range of options to be considered and the best one chosen by group decision.

With this technique, each option should be listed and each individual in the group should rank order the options with 1 being the highest priority and 3 being the lowest. Each member shares their ranking and the average ranking order is then calculated. Consensus should be reached fairly quickly.

3. Balance Sheet Approach

This is another useful technique for when one option needs to be chosen. There are two stages to the process.

First, as a group, you list the options and for each one, note down the advantages and disadvantages using a table like the one on the next page.

Once this process is completed, you go back over the 'fors' and 'againsts' and weight each item with a score out of 10 according to the importance the group assigns to it. Then add up the total scores for and against each option. In the case of an equal score, the group can vote on the options.

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Option 1

For:	Against:
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Option 2

For:	Against:
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Option 3

For:	Against:
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