

Needfinding - Nip in the Bud

Abstract

This report outlines several key needs based on feedback from people who were interviewed. These needs include improving the efficiency of decision-making processes, ensuring everyone is involved and their voices are heard, finding ways to build consensus that everyone can agree with, and providing support for personal organization. Addressing these areas will not only enhance group dynamics but also help individuals feel more engaged and organized, leading to a more productive and harmonious environment and will hopefully reduce mental workload.

1 Needs

Good decision-making and coordination are important for any group to succeed. As groups get bigger, they often find it hard to manage their time, and make sure everyone gets a chance to speak and agree on things. People in these groups may also find it difficult to balance their responsibilities with the needs of the group. To help with this, it is important to identify what is needed to make things easier, encourage people to work together and get better results. The following paragraphs try to outline the problems that might occur in such a process and justify points brought up. The following table gives an overview over the different topics and by which interview the topic was brought up.

1.1 Making decisions more time-efficient

While democratic decision-making is often praised for being fair and inclusive, it can also be slow. In a democracy, everyone has the opportunity to express their opinion, which fosters a sense of involvement and ensures decisions reflect collective preferences. However, this process can be time-consuming, especially in large groups or when communication is spread across different platforms. As Jemison pointed out:

| *Then there was a long process.* (Jemison)

While people appreciate being part of the process, they can become frustrated by how slow it can be. For example, Hodgkin expressed:

| *It makes me quite impatient when too many messages go back and forth.* (Hodgkin)

This frustration can arise when discussions feel drawn out or irrelevant. Noether captured this sentiment:

| *When we keep talking about something that for me is not very relevant and it keeps being dragged out, I feel like the discussion is very much pointless.* (Noether)

Bernoulli echoed this, saying:

| *Definitely. I don't like the constant discussion about it. It's a waste of time.* (Bernoulli)

To streamline the process, some participants try to introduce shortcuts, like offering options from the outset. As Hodgkin mentioned:

| *I always try to streamline it by starting a poll at some point. It makes me quite impatient when too many messages go back and forth.* (Hodgkin)

Alternatively, if many options are available, eliminating options can also increase efficiency.

| *I usually think about which options are the worst and I eliminate them first.* (Noether)

For some, the slow pace can even dampen their motivation to invest more time in the decision-making process. Jemison admitted:

| *I like to plan but I find it time-consuming.* (Jemison)

When it comes to decisions related to food, in particular, the lengthy process can increase tension and dissatisfaction. Klein explained:

| *Yeah, it's taking too long, so I'm relieved that we can finally just go eat something. It's been too long. I don't care; I'm hungry and want to eat something.* (Klein)

If a decision still hasn't been made after a while, some interviewees noted that the responsibility often falls to the person who initiated the process. As Agnesi observed:

| *There's always someone who initiates it and they usually make the decision [...] The person who organizes it also makes the decision. He has to take the initiative because he has to come to a result.* (Agnesi)

1.2 Making decisions more inclusive

Participants emphasized the importance of ensuring that everyone in the group has a say in decision-making. Allowing all members to voice their opinions reinforces the value placed on inclusivity. Polls or voting systems are often used to facilitate this process. As Hodgkin mentioned,

| *People could suggest topics, and then we voted. Everyone had two or three votes.* (Hodgkin)

This method empowers individuals to engage actively in discussions, giving them a meaningful role in shaping the outcome.

Democratic processes are a favored method for making group decisions. For example, Ibuka explained:

| *First step is just like the majority. Like if we're 10 people, for example, and seven people are fine with cooking one thing, and three say, yeah, I don't care. I'm fine with everything. Then I think it's obvious that choice wins.* (Ibuka)

Similarly, Jemison said:

| *Then we discussed it between the groups. In the end, it was a majority decision. It was democratic.* (Jemison)

However, even when the overall process seems inclusive, certain phases may not be equally so. For instance, while the responsibility for making decisions can be shared, the task of initiating discussions or proposing options often falls on one person. This can create stress, as Ibuka noted:

| *But sometimes I'd appreciate if they would also suggest something instead of just asking what I would suggest.* (Ibuka)

Minority preferences and specific needs, such as dietary restrictions, can also be overlooked in this process. McClintock highlighted this issue:

It's a bit unfair. Most of the time, the majority says they're craving burgers, and the others have to go to a different place. They just end up going to Coop to grab bread. (McClintock)

Smaller subgroups within the larger group may further marginalize minority voices. As Jemison reflected,

There were kind of subgroups that talked among themselves and came to a consensus. (Jemison)

Due to these challenges, some interviewees chose alternatives to pure democratic decision-making. Jemison, for instance, prefers a turn-taking approach:

If I'm in a small group or just with one other person, it's usually that we take turns deciding. One person suggests something, and the other person says yes or no. (Jemison)

Others, like Hodgkin, streamline the process by jumping directly to a vote:

I always try to streamline it by starting a poll at some point. (Hodgkin)

Another alternative is to completely disregard a decision progress altogether, as Agnesi showcases.

certain things you've done before and you don't have to think about them too much, you do them the same way as last time (Agnesi)

In some cases, participants felt that a purely democratic decision wasn't always ideal. Ibuka emphasized the importance of compromise:

I think it's very important that you don't only listen to majorities, especially in friend groups, but also try to always find a compromise that works for everybody, so that everybody's happy with the outcome. (Ibuka)

1.3 Ensuring all parties agree with the decisions

While democratic decision-making allows everyone to voice their opinions, the final decision may not make everyone happy.

Jemison noted,

One person suggests something, and the other person says yes. It is usually a yes. (Jemison)

This highlights how agreement can sometimes feel automatic or superficial, more a way to move things forward than a sign of genuine satisfaction. The challenge lies in balancing collective decisions with ensuring that all voices are truly heard. When people feel dissatisfied with the decision, it can affect the group's overall mood, particularly among those involved in the decision-making. As one interviewee explained:

If I ask for feedback, there is no feedback or there's very little feedback, and then I make a decision based on that. And then the other person that didn't give feedback disapproves—that kind of annoys me. (Ibuka)

This frustration often stems from the assumption that silence implies agreement. As Ibuka further mentioned,

| *If I propose something and maybe half of the people respond, I assume the other half is fine with whatever decision we make.* (Ibuka)

However, this lack of response can lead to misunderstandings, where people later express dissatisfaction after the decision has been made.

Importantly, a majority decision isn't always the best solution, as Ibuka emphasized:

| *I think it's very important that you don't only listen to majorities, especially in friend groups, but also try to always find a compromise that works for everybody, so that everybody's happy with it.* (Ibuka)

This highlights the need for finding compromises that ensure a broader sense of agreement and satisfaction, rather than relying solely on majority rule.

1.4 How to plan and structure

Some people found it challenging to plan their days. Although they enjoyed their tasks, they often felt overwhelmed by the lack of structure in their daily routines.

Jemison expressed this struggle:

| *How I can structure my day, whether it is meal planning or when I do my laundry [...] It's all over the place.* (Jemison)

This highlights the absence of a routine. Many others shared similar experiences, with Jemison also admitting,

| *I've never been able to create a good routine.* (Jemison)

This reflects the difficulty of not only creating but also maintaining a daily structure.

Some interviewees found ways to cope by relying on tools like planners. Hodgkin mentioned,

| *I consult my weekly planner, with existing appointments, for example. Then I really decide according to how I feel. From my gut.* (Hodgkin)

This approach allows for flexibility while still maintaining some level of organisation.

In some cases, planning activities well in advance provided a more positive experience. Hodgkin shared,

| *Once a year, we have a gathering where we set the program for the year. The dates and activities are more or less fixed. We do this once a year, always in November.* (Hodgkin)

This long-term planning helps bring structure and reduces the pressure of making frequent decisions.

However, planning itself can be a source of stress, as Jemison pointed out:

| *I think what occupies me the most is how I can structure my day, whether it's meal planning or when I do my laundry and things like that [...] I've never been able to put a good structure in place. It's kind of all over the place.* (Jemison)

This emphasizes how the effort of planning can become mentally overwhelming, especially without a consistent routine.

1.5 How to code simple, efficient and clean

Deciding which design patterns to apply, how to structure code logically, and choosing minimalistic yet descriptive names are all critical to the readability and scalability of code. These factors form the foundation of well-organized, maintainable software. As Cantor noted:

When I'm programming something, I have to make decisions all the time about how exactly to implement something.
(Cantor)

This highlights how challenging it can be to make the right implementation choices, as larger projects are built upon these foundational decisions.

Cantor further elaborated on the complexity of this process:

For me, it's like this: when I rewrite a program, if you have an idea, you have to implement it somehow. And that means there are lots of different ways to realize it. There are nicer ways, there are more efficient ways, there are other ways. And then you actually have to be good at having a clear picture of exactly what you want.
(Cantor)

This underscores the importance of clarity in decision-making, as each choice can significantly impact the code's performance, readability, and future scalability.

1.6 Deciding food with dietary restriction

When dining with a group, there is often someone with specific dietary requirements, which can make decisions about where to eat or what to order more complicated. Cantor shared an experience that illustrates this challenge:

I have a colleague who has digestion problems. [...] That means he eats practically nothing else other than rice. [...] Most of the time, you either adapt to him or he says he'll take something by himself. And if he takes something himself, then it's usually just something that he can eat, and then we simply follow his decision.
(Cantor)

For other members of the group, this situation can also become an opportunity to shift responsibility toward the person with dietary restrictions. Klein explained:

Everyone says, 'You decide,' because nobody wants to deal with it. They cater to the people with the most dietary restrictions.
(Klein)

This approach allows the group to avoid the complexity of accommodating various needs while ensuring that the person with restrictions is comfortable with the choice.

1.7 Make decision-making process easier

Messengers like WhatsApp often offer a poll feature, allowing users to present multiple options for group decisions. Hodgkin pointed out that polls can help streamline decision-making:

| *I always try to streamline it by starting a poll at some point.* (Hodgkin)

However, while polls can be efficient, some find them too tedious, particularly when specifying numerous options, like potential dates for a meeting.

Cantor shared an experience where the effort of creating a detailed poll became too much:

| *I also thought about whether I should do a survey like this on WhatsApp [...]. So it was like, too much, too much effort. [...] I would have had to specify 14 possible dates or something.* (Cantor)

This highlights how, the process of setting them up can sometimes feel overly complicated, especially for more complex decisions.

1.8 Being more confident in new groups

In a new group, people are often hesitant to share their opinions and ideas, largely due to the fear of being judged. This apprehension is reflected in the experiences of Cantor, Fermat, and Jemison. Jemison expressed uncertainty about social acceptance in unfamiliar settings:

| *I can't read the body language yet, and I sometimes don't know if they like me or not. Am I welcome here or not?* (Jemison)

Similarly, Fermat admitted,

| *I'm usually too reserved at the beginning.* (Fermat)

A key factor contributing to this hesitation is the difficulty in reading the room, which only increases feelings of insecurity. As Jemison noted,

| *But if it's people I don't know well, I sometimes feel insecure. I can't really read what the others are thinking.* (Jemison)

Cantor also pointed out how navigating social dynamics in a new group requires considerable mental effort:

| *It takes so much [...] mental collaboration [...] to comply with all the sayings and come in at the right moment when you want to say something. That just doesn't happen when you know people.* (Cantor)

This shows how unfamiliarity with the group can make it more challenging to engage confidently, which often leads to holding back.

1.9 Leviating anxiety on decisions

Several interviewees expressed that decision-making can feel burdensome, particularly when it involves significant responsibilities. The extent to which decisions induce stress varied among participants, with some finding it overwhelming while others were more comfortable with the process.

Stress from decision-making can arise in various forms. For example, decisions with long-term implications or high stakes can be particularly anxiety-inducing. As Ibuka explained:

For me there is always a big question of, hey, what do I want to do with my life? What do I want to do in the future?
(Ibuka)

This uncertainty can create stress, as Ibuka further noted:

It makes me somewhat anxious sometimes since I feel like I could choose so many things that aren't the perfect fit for me or that are wrong maybe.
(Ibuka)

However, this stress isn't limited to major life choices. Noether pointed out that smaller decisions, often made on short notice, can be just as overwhelming:

Small [decisions] ironically can always be a bit more overwhelming because they need to be made on short term.
(Noether)

The level of responsibility in other areas of life can also impact how stressful decision-making feels. Hodgkin shared their experience of leading in professional settings:

In my professional life, I had to take the lead. I really enjoy not having to do that in my personal life.
(Hodgkin)

This illustrates how decision fatigue can develop, especially when individuals are already managing significant responsibilities elsewhere.

Some interviewees expressed a desire to minimize decision-making altogether to reduce stress. Klein, for instance, stated:

I try to make as few decisions as possible because it takes brain power.
(Klein)

This reflects how the cognitive load of decision-making can become overwhelming, leading some to avoid making choices whenever possible.

1.10 Finding time to meet in the context of studies or work

Some individuals found it challenging to balance spending time with friends while managing their academic and professional responsibilities. Fermat, for instance, struggled to find time amidst his vocational training, related work, exams, and voluntary commitments:

...last year, for example, with the training. Like this. That I then had to sort of see, okay, I'll write [an exam], [...] on Tuesday or something, or on Friday. Of course, an exam is not class work, and you have to study for it, don't you? Oh, I still have to write a report, so I can't really meet up at the weekend, because I just hate writing reports and I know for sure that I'll put it off even longer and stuff.
(Fermat)

This illustrates how academic and work pressures can limit social time, making it difficult to maintain a balance.

This lack of time for social interaction can sometimes lead to feelings of frustration or resentment. As Jemison explained:

| *I realized I hadn't seen these people in a long time. I missed them.* (Jemison)

This underscores how the demands of studies and work can strain personal relationships, leaving individuals feeling disconnected from friends.

1.11 Implicit social obligations

Some people found it to be challenging to navigate implicit social obligations, such as birthday invitations. They appeared unsure which obligations they would have to fulfill.

| *If I get an invitation, whether I accept it or not.* (Germain)

1.12 Appearing intelligent to peers

Some individuals found it challenging and limiting to maintain the appearance of understanding during university lectures, often hesitating to ask questions for fear of appearing unintelligent. Germain highlighted this pressure:

| *So sometimes I'm a bit nervous if I'm afraid of saying something wrong. I think there's still a lot of pressure to appear intelligent and all that.* (Germain)

This reflects the anxiety some students experience, as they prioritize maintaining an image of competence over seeking clarity.

1.13 Balancing free, work, study, learning time

Balancing personal, professional, and academic responsibilities can be a significant challenge, with many participants reporting difficulties in managing their time effectively across these areas. For example, Fermat described the struggle of juggling vocational training, work-related tasks, exams, and voluntary commitments, making it hard to find time for social activities:

| *[...] I had to sort of see, okay I'll write [an exam] on Tuesday or something [...] I can't really meet up at the weekend, because I still have to write a report.* (Fermat)

Bernoulli also touched on this issue, sharing how everyday tasks can complicate time management:

| *School, hairdressing appointments, shopping, cooking, exercise, and trying not to oversleep* (Bernoulli)

. His experience illustrates how managing daily routines alongside academic and professional work requires constant adjustment, adding to the pressure.

1.14 Being aware of being scammed in restaurants

Especially when traveling to other countries and looking for a restaurant in tourist areas, it's easy to come across expensive options. However, some restaurants are not only pricey but can be outright deceptive. One participant shared an experience in Lisbon where he and a colleague chose a restaurant with a menu that looked appealing and reasonably priced. However, when the bill arrived, the prices had mysteriously doubled.

As Dirichlet described:

| *Okay, so in Lisbon, they sometimes have a bit of absolute scams going on. Yes. Where afterwards the menu was at least... Yes, that the menu is listed after the price and then the bill is somehow twice as expensive. Oh, yes. But you can't know that beforehand in that sense.* (Dirichlet)

This highlights the unfortunate reality that, in some tourist locations, dining out can sometimes involve hidden costs or misleading pricing.

1.15 Communication in big groups

Communicating in big groups can be difficult, when many people are speaking it can be hard to follow and also to find an opportunity to talk about your opinion. Cantor shares his experience.

| *it takes so much [...] mental collaboration (original language: 'mentale mitarbeit'), like, comply with all the sayings and come in after a right moment to come in when you want to say something or something.* (Cantor)

This can generally be perceived as frustrating, as Jemison pointed out:

| *Then there was a long process.* (Jemison)

Hodgkin adds to it:

| *It makes me quite impatient when too many messages go back and forth.* (Hodgkin)