

Group Decision-Making

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WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about the advantages and disadvantages of group decision-making. You will also learn techniques a manager can use to improve the quality of group decision-making.

Specifically, this lesson will cover:



BEFORE YOU START

What are the advantages and disadvantages of group decision-making, and how can a manager improve the quality of group decision-making? Involving more people in the decision-making process can greatly improve the quality of a manager's decisions and outcomes. However, involving more people can also increase conflict and generate other challenges. We turn now to the advantages and disadvantages of group decision-making.

1. Advantages of Group Decisions

An advantage to involving groups in decision-making is that you can incorporate different perspectives and ideas. For this advantage to be realized, however, you need a diverse group. In a diverse group, the different group members will each tend to have different preferences, opinions, biases, and stereotypes. Because a variety of viewpoints must be negotiated and worked through, group decision-making creates additional work for a manager, but (provided the group members reflect different perspectives) it also tends to reduce the effects of bias on the outcome. For example, a hiring committee made up of all men might end up hiring a larger proportion of male applicants (simply because they tend to prefer people who are more similar to themselves). But with a hiring committee made up of an equal number of men and women, the bias should be canceled out, resulting in more applicants being hired based on their qualifications rather than their physical attributes.

Having more people involved in decision-making is also beneficial because each individual brings unique information or knowledge to the group, as well as different perspectives on the problem. Additionally, having the participation of multiple people will often lead to more options being generated and to greater intellectual stimulation as group members discuss the available options. **Brainstorming** is a process of generating as many solutions or options as possible and is a popular technique associated with group decision-making.

All of these factors can lead to superior outcomes when groups are involved in decision-making. Furthermore, involving people who will be affected by a decision in the decision-making process will allow those individuals to have a greater understanding of the issues or problems and a greater commitment to the solutions.



TERM TO KNOW

Brainstorming

A process of generating as many solutions or options as possible, a popular technique associated with group decision-making.

2. Disadvantages of Group Decisions

Group decision-making is not without challenges. Some groups get bogged down by conflict, while others go to the opposite extreme and push for agreement at the expense of quality discussions. **Groupthink** occurs when group members choose not to voice their concerns or objections because they would rather keep the peace and not annoy or antagonize others. Sometimes groupthink occurs because the group has a positive team spirit and camaraderie, and individual group members don't want that to change by introducing conflict. It can also occur because past successes have made the team complacent.

Often, one individual in the group has more power or exerts more influence than others and discourages those with differing opinions from speaking up (**suppression of dissent**) to ensure that only their own ideas are implemented. If members of the group are not really contributing their ideas and perspectives, however, then the group is not getting the benefits of group decision-making.



TERMS TO KNOW

Groupthink

Group members choose not to voice their concerns or objections because they would rather keep the peace and not annoy or antagonize others.

Suppression of Dissent

One individual in the group has more power or exerts more influence than others and discourages those with differing opinions from speaking up to ensure that only their own ideas are implemented.

3. How to Form a Quality Group

Effective managers will try to ensure quality group decision-making by forming groups with diverse members so that a variety of perspectives will contribute to the process. They will also encourage everyone to speak up and voice their opinions and thoughts prior to the group reaching a decision. Sometimes groups will also assign a member to play the devil's advocate in order to reduce groupthink. The **devil's advocate** intentionally takes on the role of critic. Their job is to point out flawed logic, to challenge the group's evaluations of various alternatives, and to identify weaknesses in proposed solutions. This pushes the other group members to think more deeply about the advantages and disadvantages of proposed solutions before reaching a decision and implementing it.

The methods we've just described can all help ensure that groups reach good decisions, but what can a manager do when there is too much conflict within a group? In this situation, managers need to help group members reduce conflict by finding some common ground—areas in which they can agree, such as common interests, values, beliefs, experiences, or goals. Keeping a group focused on a common goal can be a very worthwhile tactic to keep group members working with rather than against one another. The following table summarizes the techniques to improve group decision-making.

Type of	Technique	Benefit
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Decision		
Group decisions	Have diverse members in the group.	Improves quality: generates more options, reduces bias
	Assign a devil's advocate.	Improves quality: reduces groupthink
	Encourage everyone to speak up and contribute.	Improves quality: generates more options, prevents suppression of dissent
	Help group members find common ground.	Improves quality: reduces personality conflict



TERM TO KNOW

Devil's Advocate

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4. Decision-Making Conclusions

Decision-making is a crucial daily activity for managers. Decisions range from small and simple, with straightforward answers, to big and complex, with little clarity about what the best choice will be. Being an effective manager requires learning how to successfully navigate all kinds of decisions. Expertise, which develops gradually through learning and experience, generally improves managerial decision-making, but managers rarely rely solely on their own expertise. They also conduct research and collect information from others, pay attention to their own biases and to ethical implications, and think critically about the information that they have received to make decisions that will benefit the organization and its stakeholders.



REFLECT

1. Explain why group decision-making can be more effective than individual decision-making.
2. What are some things that can prevent groups from making good decisions?
3. As a manager, what can you do to enhance the quality of group decision-making?



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about the **advantages and disadvantages of group decision-making**. You also learned techniques a manager can use to improve the quality of group decision-making. Involving groups in decision-making allows a manager to incorporate different perspectives and ideas (dependent upon having a diverse group), reduce the effects of bias on the outcome, and generate more options through brainstorming. On the other hand, challenges encountered with group decision-making include groupthink and suppression of dissent. You explored **how to form a quality group**, by having diverse members, assigning a devil's advocate, encouraging everyone to contribute, and reducing conflict by helping members find common ground. Lastly, you summarized key **decision-making conclusions** about the characteristics of an effective manager.

Best of luck in your learning!



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