



Group Decision Tip

E-mailed every two weeks to help groups make good decisions

Flat for Planning, Stacked for Doing

In principle, different ways of deciding should be applied to different types of decisions.

Deciding how things should be—planning—is well-suited to a flat decision-making structure; that is, where several decision makers are equal and all fully participate. Some call this consensus decision making. As a rule, the longer and wider the reach of the plan, the broader and flatter the planning structure should be.

Deciding how to implement plans—doing—is better suited to hierarchical decision-making structure; that is, roles and responsibilities are stacked upon each other. There is a chain of command and accountability up and down the ladder. As a rule, the more expeditious and short-lived a decision is, the better it is to delegate it to an individual within a hierarchy.

Practical Tip: For each decision, first decide the type of decision: Is it more of a planning decision or more of an implementation-type decision? Will it have long-term, broad impact or short-term, local impact? Apply a decision-making method appropriate to the nature of the decision. Every group member need not decide small, implementation details. Long-term planning and high-level policy should not be in the hands of just a powerful few.

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