

GUIDE

DECISION MAKING

People:	Ideally everyone in your group
Time:	1 hour
Resources:	This guide and a place to meet

How can this help us?

It is great when a group runs smoothly and everyone understands how it operates, which is why it is so important to decide how your group makes decisions. Doing this early on means that confusion and conflict can be minimised as everyone understands how decisions are made and feels included in that process.

When making decisions consider:

- Is this the right decision making process to fit the situation.
- Is this the right time to make a decision, if it is a big decision that will affect the whole group then it is good for as many people from the group to be present as possible.
- People will be far more supportive of a decision they have been involved in, even if they don't agree with it, than a decision they were not involved in.
- Decision making is not only useful in deciding what to do but more in depth processes like consent can really help your group to develop strong proposals using the combined intelligence of your group.

The guide:

The different forms of decision making

Different cultures have different forms of decision making. It is important to use the right decision making process for the type of decision you are making, for example you probably don't want to use consent decision making to set the date of the next meeting, when spontaneous agreement will achieve that fine, alternatively wouldn't want to use spontaneous agreement for major decisions affecting your group.

Who makes the decision?

Sometimes it can be more important to consider who makes the decision rather than the decision making process.

- If you have a person in the group who has a lot of knowledge around the subject of the decision then it may be better to ask them to come up with a proposal to the group, or give them the power to make the decision.
- Sub groups can also be set up to decide on issues around a specific topic. There is an element of trust to this process.
- Some groups have a rule that major decisions can only be made if a certain amount of people are present.

Cont..

Types of decision making

There are lots of ways to make decisions and these are the ones that we know Transition groups have used effectively. We hope they can help your group to function well, feel free to use other forms of decision making if they are more appropriate.

Spontaneous Agreement

This is a quick way of getting minor decisions made and it is something that we all regularly use without even thinking about it. It is where a solution is favoured by everyone and agreement seems to happen automatically.

Good for: Small issues such as deciding when to have a break in the meeting, setting meeting dates and so on. It is not a good decision making process if a discussion is needed.

- Strengths:
 - It's fast and easy
 - Everyone is happy
 - It unites the group
- Weaknesses:
 - May be too fast
 - The issue may actually need discussion
 - People staying quiet may not mean agreement

Majority Voting

One or more proposals are put to the meeting, with time for questions and discussion. Voting is a simple process where people vote for the option they most prefer, or vote for or against (or abstain). This can be a show of hands or secret ballot.

Good for: When there are two distinct options and one or the other must be chosen, when a decision must be made quickly. Can also be used if consensus cannot make a decision. It's not good if those who "lost" the vote will be genuinely badly affected by the outcome, if this is the case then it may be better to carry out a consensus or consent decision making process.

- Strengths:
 - It is a fast process
 - Everyone has an equal say in the process
 - Can get good results if a good discussion precedes the vote
- Weaknesses:
 - It can be too fast, people can vote without knowing the full implications particularly if there has been no discussion before the vote
 - Some people will not get what they want, can cause a split in the group
 - The show of hands method may put pressure on people to conform

A variation: Majority vote on a range of options

A variation of this where you have lots of options to choose from is to allocate people a set amount of votes, say three each that they then allocate to the different options. The votes are then added up for each option. Again it is good to precede this with discussion of the options.

Consent decision making

A lot of groups use consensus decision making, but Transition Network and the National hubs prefer to use Consent decision making that was developed through the model of Sociocracy. If you would prefer to use consensus instead then check out the seeds for change guide here <http://seedsforchange.org.uk/shortconsensus>.

Good for: Making decisions that will impact the entire team and when it is really important that people are supportive of the decision, especially when their effort will be needed to make that decision happen. As it can be a lengthy process, it should be used for major decisions that justify it.

Consent aims to make a proposal acceptable to the whole group by emphasising the proposal itself and using the collective wisdom of the group to shape and develop it. Ideally you have a facilitator who understands the process well and it can help to practice it as a group so everyone understands it.

- Strengths:

- It is a collaborative process that focuses on the proposal itself

- The collective intelligence of the group is used to shape proposals and make decisions

- Decisions are made by the group which means that they are likely to be followed through

- Weaknesses:

- It can be a long process

- It requires people to accept decisions they may not want

There are a few terms and roles you need to understand to carry out consent effectively.

- Facilitator: The person who is running the consent process, ideally they would be neutral in regards of the proposal being put forward

- Proposal: This is the action that the person is proposing that the group agrees to and acts on, e.g. We should setup a food growing group?

- Proposer: This is the person who is presenting the proposal to the group, often they have created the proposal or have been involved in its creation. They need to have knowledge of the proposal and be able to respond to questions on it

- Rounds: A round is where the facilitator offers everyone in the group an opportunity to respond. People do not have to respond as they may have nothing to contribute, the key thing is that they are given the opportunity. It helps if people sit in a circle, or at least where everyone can see each other, to enable this to happen well

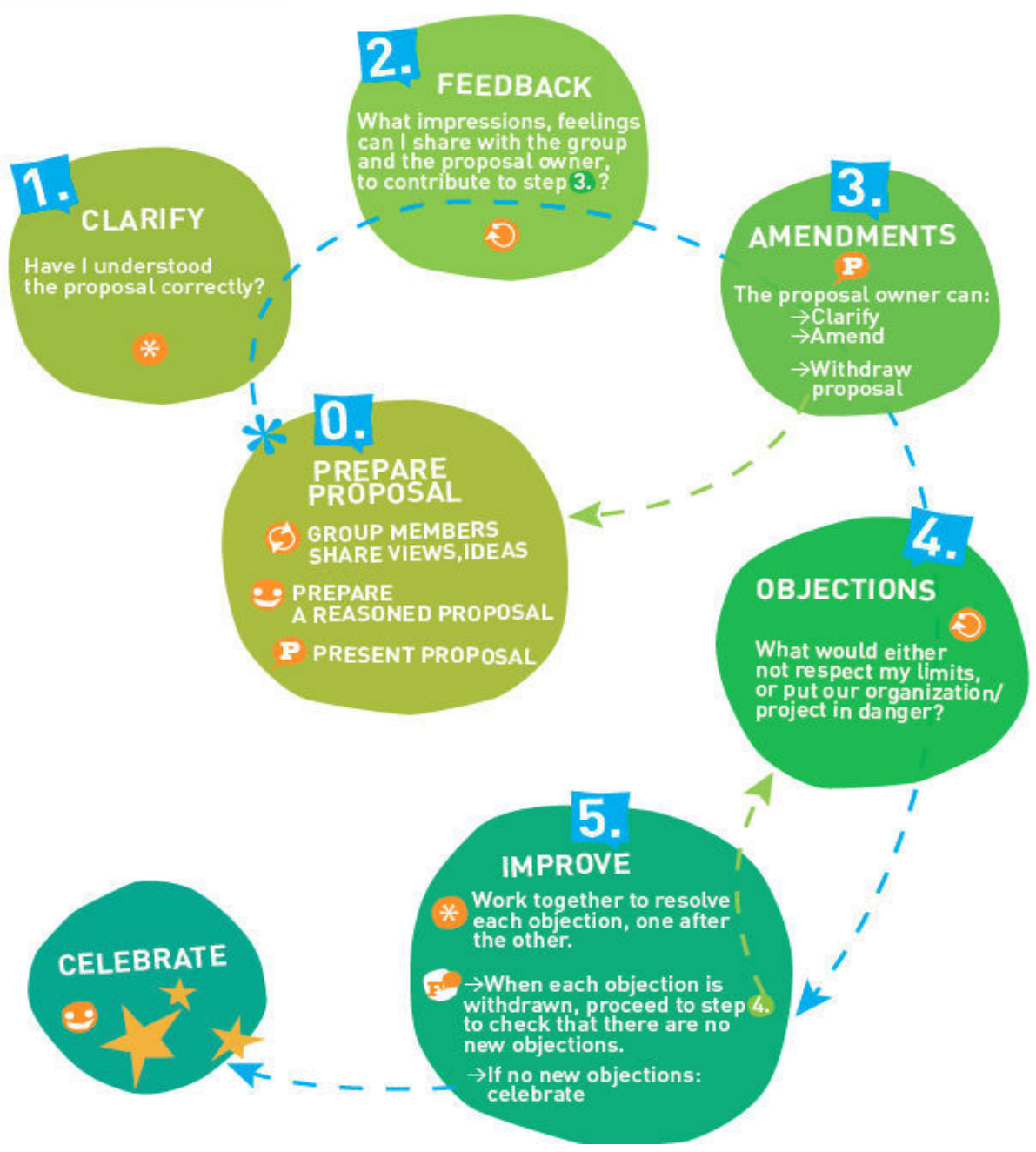
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The following from Universite du nous <http://universite-du-nous.org/> outlines the process of consent decision making:



-  I  PROPOSAL OWNER  FACILITATOR
-  Speak in turn (circle)  Speak in turn (open)
-  X rounds speaking in turn

PROCESS CONSENT DECISION MAKING





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PATHWAY

PROCESS
DECISION BY
CONSENT

0. GETTING TO A PROPOSAL

Listening to the centre

Everybody is invited to share views, values, thoughts, etc.. about the topic. This is a space for back and forth discussion and collaborative process to help crafting a proposal.

Crafting a proposal

Drawing up a topic

It is advisable to make a very simple proposal to begin with. It will evolve with collective intelligence through the decision by consent process.

After listening to the centre, the facilitator ask for someone to formulate a proposal. Alternatively, he/she can ask the circle members to set up an improvement group to work on a written proposal.

Bringing forward a proposal

A circle member makes a proposal as a proposer.

Only one proposal is dealt with at a time.

Criteria for a valid proposal

- it takes into account points shared when speaking and listening to the centre
- it is clear and understandable by each circle member
- all circle members agree to start with it as a basis for further work
- do not belong anymore to the proposer once it has been brought forward and clarified

1. CLARIFYING QUESTIONS

Is it clear enough ? Do I fully understand ?

Anyone can ask clarifying questions to better understand the proposal. The proposer answers the questions and clarifies the intent of the proposal. The objective is to remove any doubt or possible misinterpretation about the proposal. The proposer does not answer questions starting with "Why". Reactions and opinions are not expressed during this round (but in phase 2).

2. REACTION ROUND

Does the proposal contribute to my needs, or the needs of the project through the organisation ?

Each participant shares reactions (impressions, feelings,...) about the proposal, one person at a time. It is a perfect phase for providing different perspectives and suggesting improvements to the proposal, so that the proposer can integrate those changes in phase 3 if he/she wants to.

The proposer tries to get a sense of what is emerging from the centre.

3. AMENDING

After the reaction round, the proposer is invited to either :

- **re-clarify** the proposal or the intent of the proposal,
- **make amendments** to the proposal : he/she can modify the proposal,
- **withdraw** the proposal, if it turns out to be not relevant.

If the proposal is withdrawn, go back to phase 0 with a new proposal.



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PROCESS
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4. OBJECTION ROUND

An objection is not a preference, nor another perspective / proposal. It is what I believe would either not respect my limits or jeopardise our organisation / project.

One at a time, the facilitator asks each participant if they have objections to adopting the proposal.

If there is no objection raised, the proposal is adopted. Go directly to the celebration phase.

If there is one or several objections raised, the facilitator addresses them one after the other.

The facilitator concentrates on the formulation of the objections. He/she writes them on a board along with the name of the objectors.

To raise an objection is like offering something personal and it benefits the group.

An objection is a real gift to the group. The group can then go further exploring other parts of the proposal not discussed so far.

TESTING THE OBJECTIONS

First, the facilitator discards an objection if it cancels out the proposal. If so, go back to phase 0.

The facilitator cannot decide if the objection is reasonable or not. He/she can only ask questions to help the objector to present reasonable arguments.

An objection is reasonable if :

- it leads to an improvement through collective intelligence within the circle
- it cancels out the proposal, making it irrelevant (we save time and start with a new proposal)
- it is clearly well-argued
- it does not hide, consciously or unconsciously, a preference or another proposal.

Questions the facilitator may ask :

- "What are the arguments ?"
- "Is it a preference ?"
- "What will prevent me from being efficient when applying the proposal ?"
- "If the proposal is adopted, will it jeopardise the group / the project ?"
- "Can I live with this proposal ?"

5. IMPROVEMENTS

The facilitator addresses objections one at a time. Objections stated to the centre belong now to the group. This is a space for back and forth discussion and collaborative process to help resolving the objection.

The facilitator checks now and then if the objection is resolved for the objector or not. If a discussed solution may resolve an objection, the person who raised it informs the group.

Once all objections are resolved, the facilitator moves back to the objection round to check for new objections.

When there is no objection left, the proposal is adopted by mutual consent.



CELEBRATION

To celebrate the decision by consent

To pat each other for this milestone reached together. The group chooses the best way to celebrate (applause, meal, party...)

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Behaviours that help decision making

- Being clear about how the proposal was created and by whom
- Listening to others' ideas politely, even when you don't agree
- Repeating the main points made by another person in your own words before you respond, especially if you're about to contradict their ideas
- Praising others' ideas & building on others' ideas
- Asking others to critique your ideas, and accepting the feedback
- Being open to accepting alternative courses of action
- Making a distinction between facts and feelings
- Staying calm and friendly

Behaviours that don't help decision making

- Interrupting people in mid-sentence
- Not acknowledging the ideas that others have put on the table
- Criticising other people's ideas, as opposed to giving them useful feedback
- Pushing your own ideas while ignoring other people's input
- Getting defensive when your ideas are assessed
- Sticking only to your ideas and blocking suggestions for alternatives
- Basing arguments on feelings not substantiated by evidence
- Getting overly emotional; showing hostility in the face of any disagreement
- Getting over rational, and refusing to acknowledge that an issue is charged

What if a meeting is finding it difficult to make a decision?

- Stop and have a break. Sitting in silence together and inviting everyone to pay attention to what's happening inside them, to see what they can let go of for the sake of moving forwards can help people out of reactivity.
- Remember what your shared purpose is, and think about the decision in relation to the core purpose of the group.
- Is there enough information to make a decision or do you need to postpone and find out more. Sometimes it's not possible to know what the right decision is - if not perhaps any solution will do.
- Separate out feelings and rational ideas. Sometimes un-expressed feelings can be the way of moving forward. For example, people need to express their sadness that something that's been done in the past won't continue before they can support a new idea.
- Are the right people here to make the decision? You may want to make sure the people most informed or most affected are present. But sometimes people can attempt to block decisions by not turning up to the meeting. Be clear about how many are needed to make decisions in your group, and that decisions can be made without everyone being present.

It can be useful to print out this guide to show new group members.

More support:

For more support on developing healthy groups go here:

<http://transitionnetwork.org/do-transition/starting-transition/7-essential-ingredients/healthy-groups/>

Check out the 7 essential ingredients of Transition here:

<http://transitionnetwork.org/do-transition/starting-transition/7-essential-ingredients/>

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End.