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CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN DECISION-MAKING

Leaders play important roles in managing decision-making processes and achieving successful outcomes, including fostering understanding, trust, respect, cohesion and high-quality, sustainable decisions. The following guidelines aim to help leaders approach decision-making in ways that prevent and manage conflict effectively. To implement these ideas with your particular group, consider consulting with the Ombuds Office.
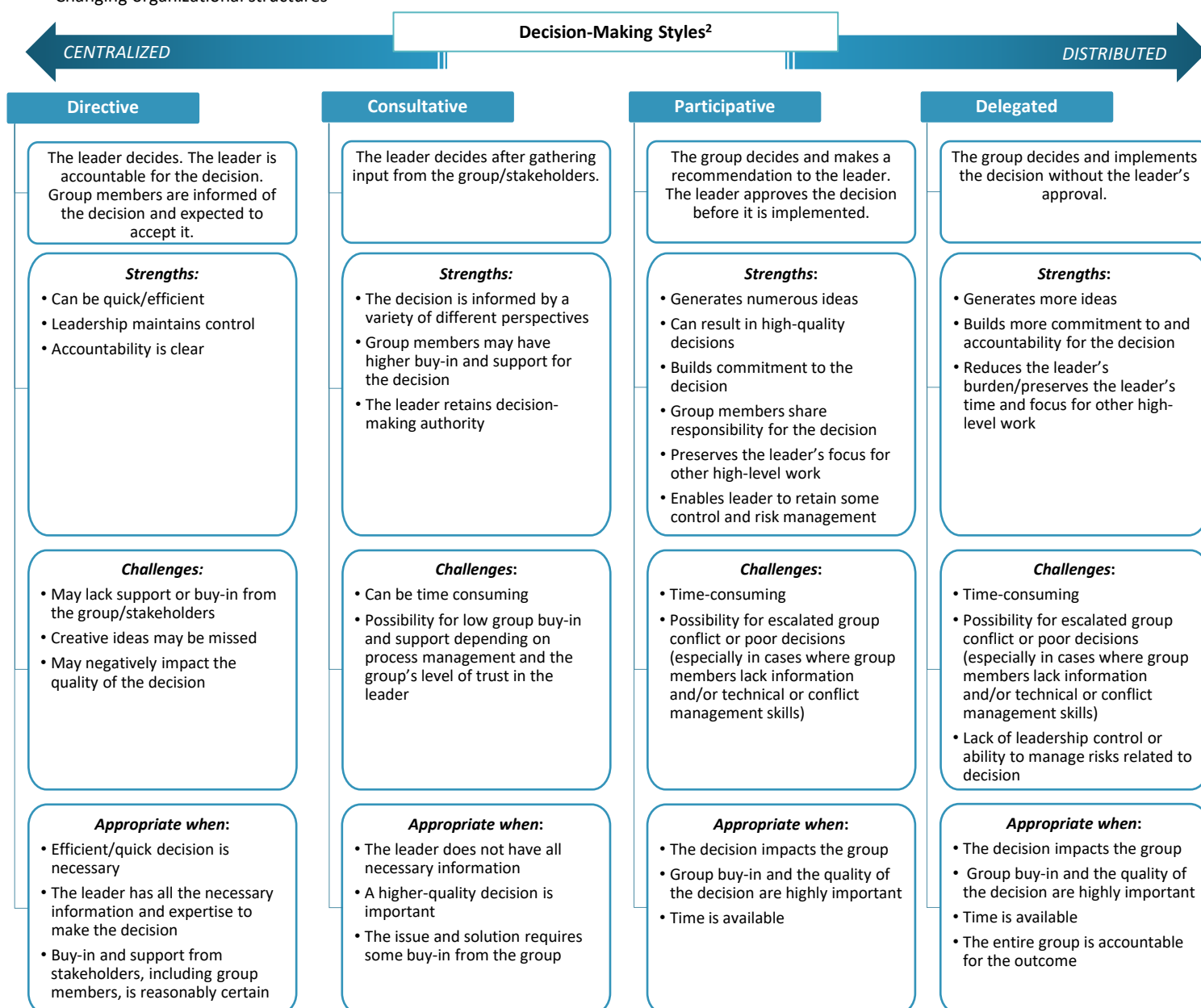
Identify the Central Issue

Clearly identify the issue that needs to be addressed and decided upon, breaking down complex issues into smaller, more manageable decision points. Here are some common workplace issues:

- Development of new programs, projects, courses, or services;
- Changing business processes;
- Changing organizational structures

Select an Appropriate Decision-Making Process

Select the decision-making process that best addresses the factors in each specific situation, considering the broad styles described in the model below. When identifying whether to use a more centralized or distributed decision-making process, consider situational factors such as *available time*, *issue importance*, and *stakeholder support*. More distributed or collaborative processes can be effective whenever a decision requires commitment or buy-in from group members and time allows for such a process.

Decision-Making Styles[2]

CENTRALIZED ←————————————————————————————→ *DISTRIBUTED*

Directive	Consultative	Participative	Delegated
The leader decides. The leader is accountable for the decision. Group members are informed of the decision and expected to accept it.	The leader decides after gathering input from the group/stakeholders.	The group decides and makes a recommendation to the leader. The leader approves the decision before it is implemented.	The group decides and implements the decision without the leader's approval.
Strengths: • Can be quick/efficient • Leadership maintains control • Accountability is clear	***Strengths:*** • The decision is informed by a variety of different perspectives • Group members may have higher buy-in and support for the decision • The leader retains decision-making authority	***Strengths***: • Generates numerous ideas • Can result in high-quality decisions • Builds commitment to the decision • Group members share responsibility for the decision • Preserves the leader's focus for other high-level work • Enables leader to retain some control and risk management	***Strengths***: • Generates more ideas • Builds more commitment to and accountability for the decision • Reduces the leader's burden/preserves the leader's time and focus for other high-level work
Challenges: • May lack support or buy-in from the group/stakeholders • Creative ideas may be missed • May negatively impact the quality of the decision	***Challenges:*** • Can be time consuming • Possibility for low group buy-in and support depending on process management and the group's level of trust in the leader	***Challenges***: • Time-consuming • Possibility for escalated group conflict or poor decisions (especially in cases where group members lack information and/or technical or conflict management skills)	***Challenges***: • Time-consuming • Possibility for escalated group conflict or poor decisions (especially in cases where group members lack information and/or technical or conflict management skills) • Lack of leadership control or ability to manage risks related to decision
Appropriate when: • Efficient/quick decision is necessary • The leader has all the necessary information and expertise to make the decision • Buy-in and support from stakeholders, including group members, is reasonably certain	***Appropriate when***: • The leader does not have all necessary information • A higher-quality decision is important • The issue and solution requires some buy-in from the group	***Appropriate when***: • The decision impacts the group • Group buy-in and the quality of the decision are highly important • Time is available	***Appropriate when***: • The decision impacts the group • Group buy-in and the quality of the decision are highly important • Time is available • The entire group is accountable for the outcome

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Determine the Individuals Involved and Their Roles

Well-defined roles are crucial in effective decision-making processes. Determine who will fulfill each role and ensure each person is aware of the scope of their role. One person may hold multiple roles. Consider using a framework like the one below.

DACI Framework[3]

Decider	Approver	Consulted	Informed
☐ Responsible for getting the decision made. ☐ Drives the decision-making process.	☐ Has ultimate authority over the decision. ☐ Approves or vetoes the decision.	☐ Provide expertise that adds value to the process.	☐ Impacted by, and must be aware of, the details of the decision made.

Use Direct, Transparent, and Collaborative Communication

Collaborative, direct and transparent communication throughout a decision-making process fosters: an open, trusting environment, important information-sharing, generation of creative ideas, opportunities to respond to and address concerns, support for the final decision.

Consider language like:

- *I'd like to consider offering a new program/service. I'll be gathering your ideas and feedback and then I will decide on how to move forward.*
- *I value your expertise and I welcome any ideas or thoughts you have about potential program/service offerings.*
- *It sounds like you're concerned about… [e.g. additional workload]. Is that right?*
- *Can you tell me more about…?*
- *I can understand your concern and I appreciate that you brought that up.*
- *I'm noticing there are some different views.*
- *What solutions do you see to the concerns raised?*
- *I've reached a decision about the issue and I'd like to share the decision with you as well as some key factors and rationale behind it so that you have as much information as possible. I'm happy to address any questions or concerns.*
- *While we need to move ahead with implementing the decision I/we've made, let's continue discussing issues like the ones you've raised so that we can develop solutions to address them.*

For best practices on facilitating an effective group discussion, see the Ombuds Office's *Tips for Facilitating Difficult Group Discussions*.

Decision-Making Checklist

- ☐ I have determined which decision-making process to use, delegating as much as appropriate.
- ☐ Each participant has a clearly defined role(s).
- ☐ I have communicated to participants the decision-making process being used, and I have checked to verify understanding of the process.
- ☐ I have explicitly communicated with each participant what their role(s) is/are.
- ☐ I have facilitated open and collaborative discussion, either to gather input or, if appropriate, to engage the group in a distributed type of decision-making.
- ☐ I have explicitly invited critical input.
- ☐ I have acknowledged and reflected back critical perspectives.
- ☐ I have communicated the final decision and rationale.
- ☐ I have acknowledged any concerns raised by stakeholders regarding the final decision.
- ☐ I have engaged in collaborative problem-solving to address any barriers to implementation.
- ☐ I have communicated on an ongoing basis to all participants willingness and openness to continue dialogue around any concerns that arise.

[1] https://www.pmi.org/learning/library/project-group-decision-making-process-6797

[2] Adapted from Bens, Ingrid. (2018). *Facilitating with Ease: Core Skills for Facilitators, Team Leaders and Members, Managers, Consultants, and Trainers.* New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

[3] https://medium.com/pm101/daci-framework-a-tool-for-group-decisions-665bd71585cf

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