Collaborative decisions

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Preparing an important decision

Associations are always faced with important decisions that need to be well prepared and considered. Different methods of collaborative decision-making are explained below. The essential preparations are always the same:

− Clarify which group or body must make the decision (executive committee, department, working group, general meeting)

− Gather information and do research

− If possible, work out several possible solutions (do not commit to one solution)

− Discuss matters in groups (executive committee, working groups, general meeting, etc.)

− Visualise arguments for and against (flip chart, brown paper, reports, etc.)

− Engage stakeholders (members, community, donors, supporters)

Types of collaborative decisions

Majority decision

A vote is taken to determine "for", "against" and "abstentions". The proposal with the most votes wins. Voting is a quick way of making decisions, especially in larger groups, but it creates winners and losers. In a smaller group, such as an executive committee, department, etc., majority decisions should therefore only be applied if no one explicitly opposes one of the proposed solutions.

In principle, there are different possibilities of obtaining a majority for majority decisions: A simple majority is reached when a proposal receives more votes in favour than votes against. An absolute majority is reached when a proposal receives more votes in favour than half of the valid votes cast (i.e. abstentions and votes against also count). A qualified majority, which tends to be used for important decisions, requires more than just a majority, e.g. two-thirds or three-quarters of the valid votes cast. (See also www.vitaminb-e.ch/keywords/majorities)

Consensus-based decision

Consensus means that there is unanimity in favour of a proposal or solution, without covert or overt opposition. In other words, there are no losers. However, consensus is more likely to be found on non-controversial issues. Complex, controversial issues require long discussions and, therefore, often a lot of time. A time-saving variant is *systematic consensus-building.*

How the process works:

− *What is it actually about?* Identify the issue for the problem that has arisen.

− *Creative phase*: Collect suggestions for solutions, e.g. through brainstorming.

− *Assessment phase*: Each proposed solution is assessed by each group member on the basis of so-called "resistance points". Zero points means "no resistance" or "I can support this solution". The highest score to be awarded is ten and indicates "strong opposition" or "I strongly oppose this proposal". The assessment is recorded in a matrix.

− *Evaluation*: The points awarded for each suggested solution are added up. The solution with the lowest score has the least resistance and is therefore closest to a consensus. However, the assessments of the individual participants should be discussed, especially if there are significant discrepancies

− The first round of systematic consensus-building may result in a reduction of the number of possible solutions. In a second round, the solutions still up for discussion can then be re-assessed.

Decision by consent

In the case of decisions by consent, a proposal is deemed to be adopted if no serious or reasoned objections are raised: not "Yes, I agree!", but rather "I have no serious, reasoned objection to it". This means that the aim is not to maximise active consent, but to minimise concerns. In other words, one relies on decisions that are "good enough" so that things can move forward swiftly. This is also called *five-to-fold decision-making* (source: mindshaker).

How the process works:

A moderator (facilitator) is chosen who will guide the whole process.

1. *Open questions:* Sufficient time is scheduled to find out about the content of the upcoming decision and to address any unanswered questions.

2. *Hopes and concerns:* Participants are invited to express and discuss their hopes and concerns regarding the proposed resolution. The proposal may be amended or modified in this way.

3. *Vote:* Once all open questions have been clarified, the moderator explains the meaning of the six voting options. Then, the proposals to be voted on are read out again. A brief pause helps to reconsider one's own voting behaviour. Only then does the moderator ask all participants to make the finger signs at the same time.

   − *5 fingers*: I fully support the proposal and accept leadership responsibility for its implementation.

   − *4 fingers*: I am fully convinced, support the proposal and accept leadership responsibility for its implementation.

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- *3 fingers*: I accept the proposal and support its implementation if necessary.

- *2 fingers*: I have slight reservations, but nevertheless support the proposal.

- *1 finger*: I have serious reservations but will not block a group decision.

- *Fist*: I am clearly against this, but I am prepared to work on developing an alternative. (Veto)

4. *Result evaluation:* The result is recorded.

If no one holds up a fist, the decision is carried. One- and two-fingered voters are given an opportunity to voice their concerns. These are documented to be taken into account in the further work process.

The decision is defeated if someone has held up a fist. Those who have blocked the decision in this way are asked to explain their reasons.

This procedure requires and generates a high degree of shared responsibility for the outcome on the part of all those involved. Since an individual can block a decision, it must be made clear beforehand that this includes the responsibility to participate in the search for alternative solutions.

Additional documentation
www.mindshaker.de/2021/03/13/neu-videos-von-mindshaker
www.vitaminb-e.ch/keywords/majorities