

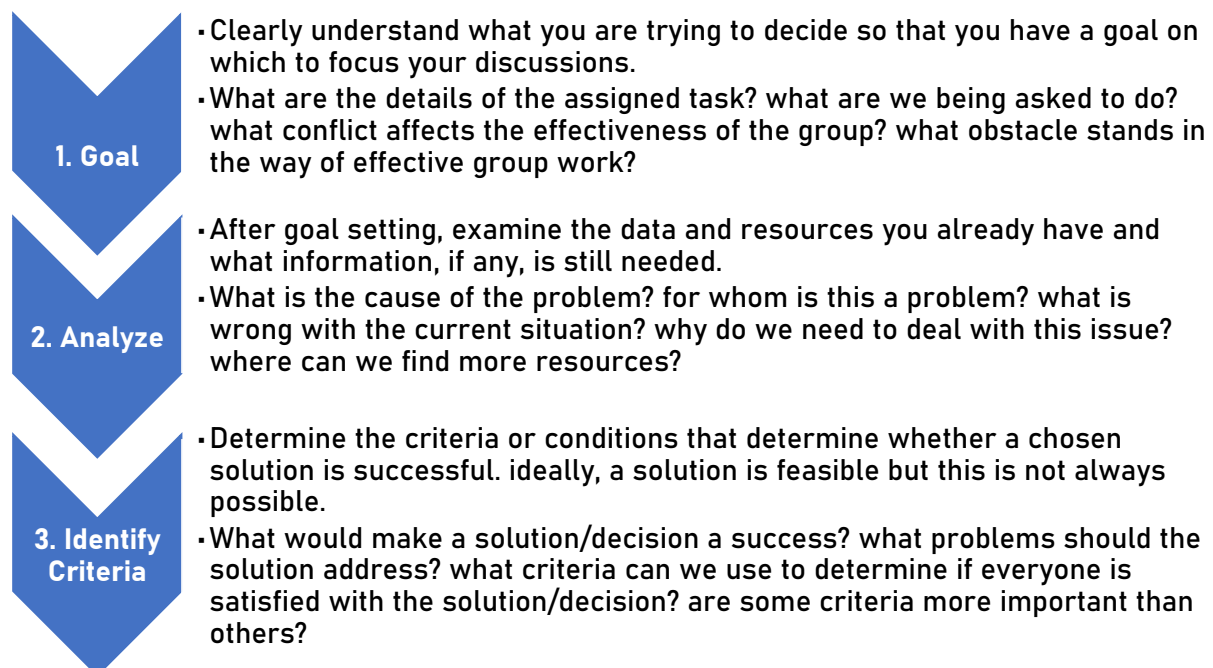
Group decision-making

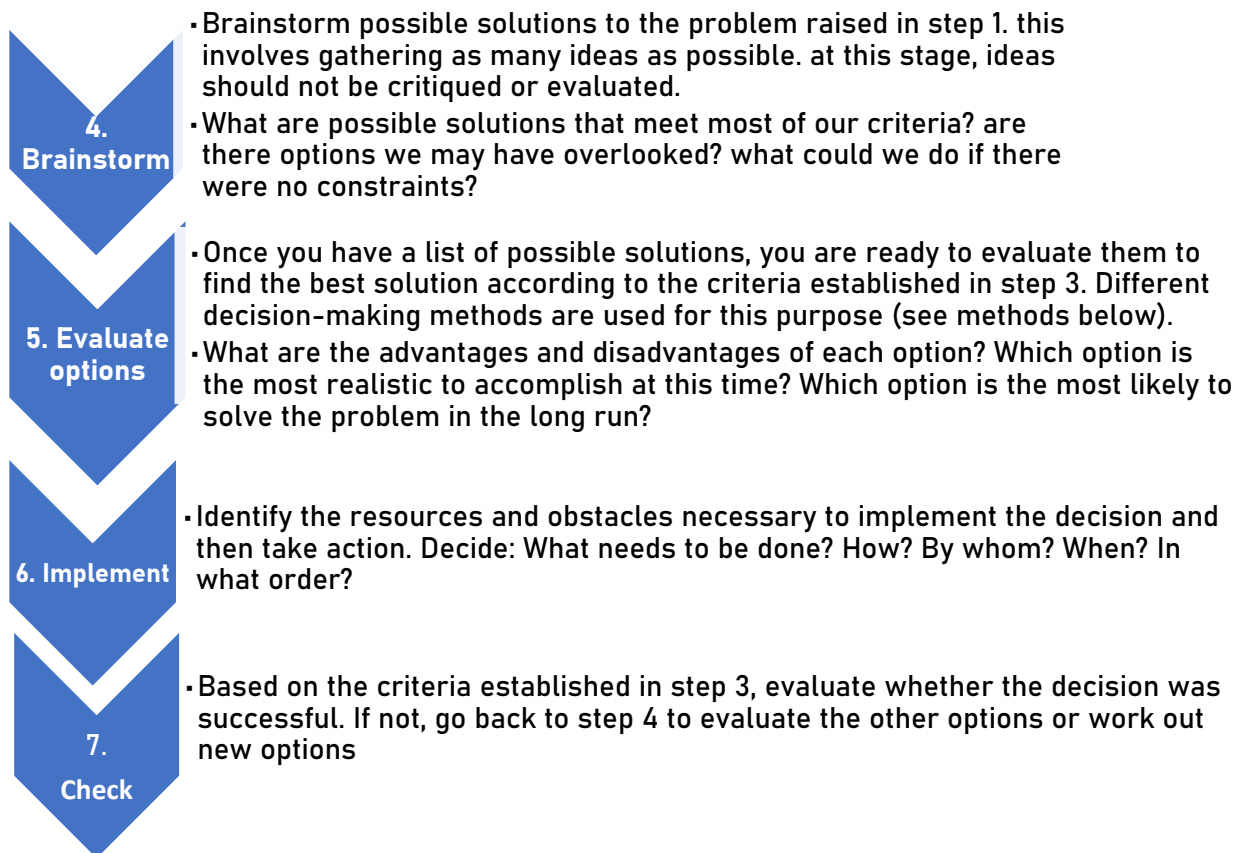


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Introduction

There are several ways to make decisions as a group. The seven-step decision-making model, as described here, provides an effective structure for choosing an appropriate course of action for a particular task or project. In addition, it can also be an effective method for dealing with a problem or interpersonal conflict that arises within your group.





Decision-making methods

Moving from brainstorming possible solutions to a problem (step 4) to evaluating and selecting the best solution (step 5) requires group members to make decisions. There are several decision-making methods that the group can use. Some of them are briefly described below:

1. Decision by authority

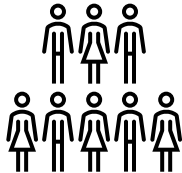
The group generates ideas and holds open discussions, but the final decision is made by one person.



<i>Advantages:</i>	<i>Disadvantages:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Suitable when there is a clear expert in the topic at hand → Very quick 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Does not maximize the strengths of the individuals in the group → The group may not be committed to implementing a decision made by one person

2. Decision by majority:

The group holds a vote on an issue after a period of discussion. The majority wins.



<i>Advantages:</i>	<i>Disadvantages:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Uses democratic participation in the process. → Fast 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → The tyranny of the majority often overwhelms minority views, perhaps creating factions within the group.

3. Decision by negative minority

The group votes on the least popular idea and deletes it. They repeat this process until only one idea remains.



<i>Advantages:</i>	<i>Disadvantages:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Democratic → Useful when there are many ideas and few voters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Group members may be outraged that their ideas have been labeled unpopular → Slow

4. Decision by ranking

Group members individually write down the 5 (or fewer) ideas they think are best, then rank each idea from 1 to 5, with 5 being best. The votes are noted on the board and added up. The idea with the highest total is chosen.



<i>Advantages:</i>	<i>Disadvantages:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → This decision-making procedure includes a voting session. It thus gives the impression that everyone's opinion is included in the decision. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Not suitable for problems → Takes a while → The numbers game can lead to a decision that no one fully supports

5. Decision by unanimity

All group members must agree that the decision is the best one.



<i>Advantages:</i>	<i>Disadvantages:</i>
→ Everyone will agree on the decision and the resulting action	→ Unanimous agreement may be impossible to achieve (long deliberation).

6. Decision by consensus.

The decision is discussed and negotiated until everyone in the group, understands and agrees on what will be done. Consensus in decision making means that all members truly agree that the decision is acceptable. After a group has determined what decision to make, each member is asked what they think of the proposed decision by choosing one of the following answers:

1. I can say "yes" to the decision without reservation.
2. I find the decision acceptable.
3. I can live with the decision, but I am not particularly enthusiastic about it.
4. I do not fully agree with the decision, but I do not choose to block it.
5. I disagree with the decision, and I think we should explore other options.

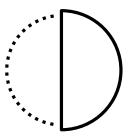
If all group members' answers are 1, 2, 3, or 4, there is consensus, and the group can move forward.



<i>Advantages:</i>	<i>Disadvantages:</i>
→ All members feel they had an equal opportunity to influence the decision and will continue to support the group	→ Can be difficult to reach consensus
→ Best way to make decisions if you have the time	→ Can be very time-consuming

7. Combining ideas

Instead of dropping one idea in favor of another, the group looks for ways to implement or combine both ideas into one solution.



<i>Advantages:</i>	<i>Disadvantages:</i>
→ Polarizing (black-and-white) decisions are avoided	→ May take longer because more than one idea is considered
	→ Combining can sometimes be worse than one of the original solutions

Appendix 1: Example

1. Determine what decision needs to be made

When should our group meetings be scheduled?

2. Analyze the issues discussed.

Determine each member's schedule with prior commitments (e.g., classes, activities). Are weekends and nights a possibility? How much time do we need for each meeting? How often should meetings be scheduled?

3. Establish criteria.

The ideal meeting time would meet these criteria, in order of importance:

- a) *No conflict with a member's school or extracurricular schedule.*
- b) *At a time optimal for group productivity (i.e., when energy is highest and members are best prepared to participate).*
- c) *To take place during the day during working hours.*

4. Brainstorm potential solutions.

These are the times when all group members are free from prior commitments:

- a) *Monday from 12:00 p.m. to 1:30 p.m.*
- b) *Wednesday 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.*
- c) *Friday 9:00 to 10:30.*

5. Evaluate options and choose.

Monday from 12 to 13:30

Advantages:	Disadvantages:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Would complete the meeting early in the week. → Have the weekend immediately prior to the meeting to prepare for the meeting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Since it falls during lunch break, group members would have to eat during the meeting.

Wednesday from 18 to 19:30

Advantages:	Disadvantages:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → After dinner, group members are refreshed from their dinner break. → By holding the meeting in the middle of the week, there is extra time before or after Wednesday to complete any "last minute" project tasks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → One group member must attend a tutoring session at 7:30 p.m., so he may have to leave the meeting a few minutes early.

Friday from 9 to 10.30

Advantages:	Disadvantages:
→ None of the group members have classes or activities scheduled until 11 a.m. on Friday, so there would be enough time to conduct the meeting.	→ If social events are scheduled on Thursday night, some group members are not in favor of meeting early the next morning.

Best solution:

Wednesday from 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. was found to be the most convenient time and chosen as the meeting time based on the criteria. The group decided - by consensus - that this would be the time when they would be most productive because they had just finished their dinner break. This time is not consistent with the third criterion (the ideal meeting would be during the day), but this was considered the least important, so a compromise was made.

6. Implement the solution.

Assign group members to tasks:

- a) Reserve the meeting room
- b) Confirm time/location with all group members
- c) Appoint group roles for each member for meetings (see document optimizing group performance)

7. Monitor and evaluate the outcome.

The conditions for success, based on the criteria listed:

- a) Regular attendance of all group members.
- b) All group members are active participants during the meetings.
- c) If unforeseen scheduling conflicts arise, the group will need to repeat Step 4 to determine a more appropriate time for the meeting.



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Group Decision Making. Centre for Teaching Excellence, University of Waterloo. This text is translated and adapted in some details to suit the VU Amsterdam situation.