

# LONE RANGER DECISION MAKING VERSUS CONSENSUS DECISION MAKING: DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

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## **Abstract**

Consensus decision making, concerns group members make decisions together with the requirement of reaching a consensus that is all members abiding by the decision outcome. Lone ranging worked for sometime in an autocratic environment. Researchers are now pointing to consensus decision-making in organizations bringing dividend to many organizations. This article used a descriptive analysis to compare the goodness of consensus decision making and making lone ranging decision management. This article explored the models, roles, tools and methods of consensus decision making. The results were that consensus decision making brings people together and cements the relationship among employees. The lone ranger's decision is only consented to by staff but inwardly disagreeable resulting in short term benefits but long term collapse of organizations.

**Key Words:** Decision Making, Lone Ranger's Decisions, Consensus Decisions

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## **1. Introduction**

Some leaders turn themselves into martyrs. They think if they want something done they might as well do it themselves (Taylor, 1998). They take pride in making all the decisions, coming up with all the ideas, and doing all the 'big jobs' personally rather than delegate them. These lone ranger leaders believe that because they carry such a load they are indispensable and have great value. Just the opposite is true. Lone ranger leaders are typically micromanagers and oftentimes they will grow their company - to a point - because micromanagement does produce success, but it is limited and only in the short term. However, because they fail to grow others, they ultimately limit their team, their organization and themselves. They fail to grow and plateau and so do the people and organization they lead. It takes a strong leader to push power down the ladder instead of hoarding it at the top. It takes an unselfish leader to invest time, money and resources in the development of others. Leaders who make all the decisions, come up with all the ideas and carry the load themselves are the weakest of leaders and here's why:

- One reason a leader would assume a lone ranger mentality is if he or she had not taken the time to teach others to think for themselves, empower them to act and decide, train and mentor them to grow personally. But these tasks are the highest callings of leadership and leaders that shirk them are selfish, limited and weak.

- The second reason a leader becomes a 'one man show' is because the people around him or her aren't competent and unworthy of empowering to act, make decisions and share the load. This too is a sign or severe leadership weakness and solely the leader's fault since he or she is responsible for building the team, training them, creating an environment where they can succeed, setting expectations and motivating them to become more and do more.

It's time for weak leaders to stop believing that the measure of their success is how much they do how far they go and how much they get. A much truer measure of a leader is how many people he or she takes with them on the journey. This article is going to explore the models, roles, tools and methods of consensus decision making.

## **2. Research Methodology: Descriptive research methodology**

For the purpose of this study a descriptive research methodology has been adopted, because it is restricted to factual registration and that there is no quest for an explanation why reality is showing itself this way (Tsang, 1997). In principle, descriptive research is not aiming at forming hypotheses or development of a theory (Creswell, 2002). Through document analysis descriptive research is about describing how reality is in the natural ecosystem. With descriptive research in its purest form explaining and evaluating is left to the reader or to other disciplines (Kratwohl, 1993).

Hanson et al., (2005) argued that documents are unobtrusive and can be used without imposing on participants; they can be checked and re-checked for reliability. This methodology emphasizes an integrated view of speech/texts and their specific contexts. Texts in documentary analysis can be defined broadly as books, book chapters, essays, interviews, discussions, newspaper headlines and articles, historical documents, speeches, conversations, advertising, theater, informal conversation, or really any occurrence of communicative language (Robson, 2002).

### 3. Consensus decision-making as collective intelligence

Consensus decision-making is a group decision-making process that seeks the consent of all participants (Bressen, 2007). Consensus may be defined professionally as an acceptable resolution, one that can be supported, even if not the "favorite" of each individual. Consensus is defined by Merriam-Webster as, first, general agreement, and second, group solidarity of belief or sentiment. It has its origin in the Latin word *cōnsēnsus* (agreement), which is from *cōnsentiō* meaning literally *feel together* (Merriam-Webster 2004)

It is used to describe both the decision and the process of reaching a decision. Consensus decision-making is thus concerned with the process of deliberating and finalizing a decision, and the social and political effects of using this process.

Aims of consensus decision-making in organizations against lone ranger decision (Michaelsen, & Black, 1989)

- Agreement Seeking: A consensus decision making process attempts to help everyone get what they need
- Collaborative: Participants contribute to a shared proposal and shape it into a decision that meets the concerns of all group members as much as possible
- Cooperative: Participants in an effective consensus process should strive to reach the best possible decision for the group and all of its members, rather than competing for personal preferences.
- Egalitarian: All members of a consensus decision-making body should be afforded, as much as possible, equal input into the process. All members have the opportunity to present, and amend proposals
- Inclusive: As many stakeholders as possible should be involved in the consensus decision-making process.
- Participatory: The consensus process should actively solicit the input and participation of all decision-makers.

### 3.1 Consensus Process

There are multiple stepwise models of how to make decisions by consensus. They vary in the amount of detail the steps describe. They also vary depending on how decisions are finalized. The basic model involves:

- collaboratively generating a proposal,
- identifying unsatisfied concerns, and then
- Modifying the proposal to generate as much agreement as possible.

After a concerted attempt at generating full agreement, the group can then apply its final decision rule to determine if the existing level of agreement is sufficient to finalize a decision.

### 3.2 Models of consensus decision making

Muo & Oghojafor, (2012) identified the following models of decision-making.

#### Quaker-Based model

Quaker-based consensus is effective because it puts in place a simple, time-tested structure that moves a group towards unity. The Quaker model has been employed in a variety of secular settings. The process allows hearing individual voices while providing a mechanism for dealing with disagreements. The following aspects of the Quaker model can be effectively applied in any consensus decision-making process.

- Multiple concerns and information are shared until the sense of the group is clear.
- Discussion involves active listening and sharing information.
- Norms limit number of times one asks to speak to ensure that each speaker is fully heard.
- Ideas and solutions belong to the group; no names are recorded. Differences are resolved by discussion. The facilitator ("clerk" or "convenor" in the Quaker model)
- Identifies areas of agreement and names disagreements to push discussion deeper.
- The facilitator articulates the sense of the discussion, asks if there are other concerns, and proposes a "minute" of the decision.
- The group as a whole is responsible for the decision and the decision belongs to the group.
- The facilitator can discern if one who is not uniting with the decision is acting without concern for the group or in selfish interest.
- Dissenters' perspectives are embraced.

Key components of Quaker-based consensus include a belief in a common humanity and the ability to decide together. The goal is "unity, not unanimity." Ensuring that group members speak only once until others are heard encourages a diversity of thought (Muo & Oghojafor, 2012)

### **CODM Model**

Hartnett, (2011) propounded the Consensus-oriented decision-making (CODM Model). The model offers a detailed step-wise description of consensus process. It can be used with any type of decision rule. It outlines the process of how proposals can be collaboratively built with full participation of all stakeholders. This model lets groups be flexible enough to make decisions when they need to, while still following a format based on the primary values of consensus decision-making. The CODM steps include:

- Framing the topic
- Open Discussion
- Identifying Underlying Concerns
- Collaborative Proposal Building
- Choosing a Direction
- Synthesizing a Final Proposal
- Closure

### **4. Roles in consensus decision making**

The consensus decision-making process often has several roles designed to make the process run more effectively. Although the name and nature of these roles varies from group to group, the most common are the facilitator, a timekeeper, an empathy and a secretary or notes taker. Not all decision-making bodies use all of these roles, although the facilitator position is almost always filled, and some groups use supplementary roles, such as a Devil's advocate or greeter. Some decision-making bodies opt to rotate these roles through the group members in order to build the experience and skills of the participants, and prevent any perceived concentration of power (Mohammed, & Ringseis, 2001)

The common roles in a consensus meeting are:

- **Facilitator:** As the name implies, the role of the facilitator is to help make the process of reaching a consensus decision easier. Facilitators accept responsibility for moving through the agenda on time; ensuring the group adheres to the mutually agreed-upon mechanics of the consensus process; and, if necessary, suggesting alternate or additional discussion or decision-making techniques, such as go-arounds, break-out groups or role-playing. Some consensus groups use two co-facilitators. Shared facilitation is often adopted to diffuse the perceived power of the facilitator and create a system whereby a co-facilitator can pass off facilitation duties if he or she becomes more personally engaged in a debate.
- **Timekeeper:** The purpose of the timekeeper is to ensure the decision-making body keeps to the schedule set in the agenda. Effective timekeepers use a variety of techniques to ensure the meeting runs on time including: giving frequent time updates, ample warning of

short time, and keeping individual speakers from taking an excessive amount of time.

- **Empathy or 'Vibe Watch':** The empathy, or 'vibe watch' as the position is sometimes called, is charged with monitoring the 'emotional climate' of the meeting, taking note of the body language and other non-verbal cues of the participants (Verma, 2009).. Defusing potential emotional conflicts, maintaining a climate free of intimidation and being aware of potentially destructive power dynamics, such as sexism or racism within the decision-making body, are the primary responsibilities of the empathy.
- **Note taker:** The role of the notes taker or secretary is to document the decisions, discussion and action points of the decision-making body

### **4.1 Tools and methods used in consensus decision making**

Non-verbal means of expression can also reduce contention or keep issues from spreading out in time across an entire meeting. Various methods of agenda control exist, mostly relying on an explicit chairperson with the power to interrupt off-topic or rambling discourse. This gets more difficult if there is no such chair and accordingly the attitude of the entire group must be assessed by each speaker. Verbal interruptions inevitably become common, possibly in the form of grumbling, muttering, and eventually sharp words, if there is no effective means of cutting off persons making false factual statements or rambling off a topic. The Levi Hand Signal Technique (LHST) employed by Otesha (<http://otesha.ca/content/meetingfacilitation>) "allows meeting participants to register their intent to make two distinct kinds of comments: those that are directly in response to someone else's comment ('reactive comments') and those that are separate thoughts ('unique comments'). Intent to register a reactive comment is signaled by a different hand signal than is intent to register a unique comment. An index finger is used for the former and a full hand for the latter. This clears direct responses to a contentious comment faster—and makes it harder to insert it in a long speakers' list and count on a long delay between the utterance and the challenge to create the appearance of agreement. "Twinkling fingers", similarly, is a nonverbal way of expressing strong agreement, similar to applause but without the interruption and possibly less intimidation of disagreement than applause or cheers can create.

### **4.2 Colored cards**

Some consensus decision-making bodies use a system of colored cards to speed up and ease the consensus process. Most often, each member is given a set of three colored cards: red, yellow and green. The cards

can be raised during the process to indicate the member's input. Cards can be used during the discussion phase as well as during a call for consensus. The cards have different meanings depending on the phase in which they are used. The meanings of the colors are:

- Red: During discussion, a red card is used to indicate a point of process or a breach of the agreed upon procedures. Identifying off topic discussions, speakers going over allowed time limits or other breaks in the process are uses for the red card. During a call for consensus, the red card indicates the member's opposition (usually a "principled objection") to the proposal at hand. When a member, or members, use a red card, it becomes their responsibility to work with the proposing committee to come up with a solution that works for everyone.
- Yellow: In the discussion phase, the yellow card is used to indicate a member's ability to clarify a point being discussed or answer a question being posed. Yellow is used during a call for consensus to register a stand aside to the proposal or to formally state any reservations.
- Green: A group member can use a green card during discussion to be added to the speakers list. During a call for consensus, the green card indicates consent.

#### **4.3 Hand signals**

Hand signals are often used by consensus decision-making bodies as a way for group members to nonverbally indicate their opinions or positions. They have been found useful in facilitating groups of 6 to 250 people. They are particularly useful when the group is multi-lingual (Saint, & Lawson, 1994). The nature and meaning of individual gestures varies from group to group. Nonetheless, there is a widely adopted core set of hand signals. These include: wiggling of the fingers on both hands, a gesture sometimes referred to as "twinkling", to indicate agreement; raising a fist or crossing both forearms with hands in fists to indicate a block or strong disagreement; and making a "T" shape with both hands, the "time out" gesture, to call attention to a point of process or order. One common set of hand signals is called the "Fist to-Five" or "Fist-of-Five". In this method each member of the group can hold up a fist to indicate blocking consensus, one finger to suggest changes, two fingers to discuss minor issues, three fingers to indicate willingness to let issue pass without further discussion, four fingers to affirm the decision as a good idea, and five fingers to volunteer to take a lead in implementing the decision. A similar set of hand signals are used by the Occupy Wall Street protesters in their group negotiations (Saint, & Lawson, 1994). Another common set of hand signals

used is the "Thumbs" method, where Thumbs Up = agreement; Thumbs Sideways = have concerns but won't block consensus; and Thumbs Down = I don't agree and I won't accept this proposal. This method is also useful for "straw polls" to take a quick reading of the group's overall sentiment for the active proposal. A slightly more detailed variation on the thumbs proposal can be used to indicate a 5-point range: (1) Thumb-up = strongly agree, (2) Palm-up = mostly agree, (3) Thumb Sideways = "on the fence" or divided feelings, (4) Palm down = mostly disagree, and (5) Thumb down = strongly disagree.

#### **4.4 Consensus is not Groupthink**

Consensus seeks to improve solidarity in the long run. Accordingly it should not be confused with unanimity in the immediate situation, which is often a symptom of groupthink. Studies of effective consensus process usually indicate a shunning of unanimity or "illusion of unanimity" that does not hold up as a group comes under real world pressure (when dissent reappears). Cory Doctorow, Ralph Nader and other proponents of deliberative democracy or judicial-like methods view the explicit dissent as a symbol of strength (Merton, 2012). Lawrence Lessig considers it a major strength of working projects like public wikis (Lessig, 2006)

#### **5. Conclusion and recommendation**

Business performance in the knowledge economy is no longer just about producing and interpreting facts, but also about mobilizing the tacit knowledge through the consensus decision-making. Gone are the times when lone rangers like Jack Welch used to do it alone. Like collective intelligence of bees, people in an organization need to work together, to think together. A shared vision is likely to be followed by everybody in the organization unlike the one imposed on people. In this case the role of a manager and of a leader is to consult, facilitate and serve each individual in the workgroup. This means to never be a lone ranger or a traditional boss, never be one to hoard information, and never be one to make all the decisions. Even God consulted the angels when He Said, "Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us".

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