Good Group Handout
by Craig Freshley

Group Decision Methods

from Dictatorship to Consensus

There are three fundamental ways that groups make decisions. A dictatorship is at one end of the spectrum, consensus at the other end, and majority-rule in the middle.

In a pure dictatorship, one person makes decisions that the others live by. In a group of 100 people, the dictator and perhaps an accomplice or two make decisions that 98 or 99 of the other people simply go along with. The dictator and his friends make and enforce the rules with no wider input.

In pure majority rule, a majority of those who choose to vote decide the policy. In a group of 100 voters, 51 of them can make a decision that all 100 must live by. Participation in decision-making is moderately encouraged.

In pure consensus, all those who participate in decision-making come to shared understanding and agreement. In a group of 100 participants, 98 or 99 of them understand and agree to go along with the decision. Full participation in decision-making is strongly encouraged.

There are no pure forms in the world of any of these three models. Each group's actual way of making decisions is a unique hybrid of these general types. And each of these types is used at different times in almost every group.

Generally, consensus-type decision-making is better suited to longer time horizons and dictatorship-type decisions are better suited to short time horizons. Consensus-type decision-making is better suited to planning. Dictator-type decision-making is better suited to implementing.

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