

Common types of decision-making processes

Note: some decision-making may need to combine a number of the processes described below.

Majority decision-making process

A majority decision is the one that most people support. The majority is often identified by voting or a show of hands.

Common issues in majority decision-making:

- the majority is not always right
- people may feel they have to follow others including family members if voting is public (eg by a show of hands)
- the result can depend on who's in the room –meetings can be stacked
- it can be hard to tell people in front of others they may not have a right to vote: PBC members or native title holders, for example
- families with the biggest numbers can be advantaged
- work may not be done in trying to reach the agreement of all
- the process can be adversarial and argumentative
- it can give rise to competing factions and split the group
- decisions can be made quickly but they probably won't last
- those who don't agree may be unhappy and work against the decision causing disputes
- the process has limited use when people can't agree – but people may agree to use it as a last resort

Hierarchical decision-making

Hierarchical decision-making is 'Top Down'. For example, a Boss, Elder or group of Elders may make the decision. They can gather ideas from others but the decision is up to them.

Common issues in hierarchical decision-making:

- may disempower the rest of the group and leave people thinking they have no right to voice their opinion and say what they think
- may not take all issues into account and overlook concerns
- may not work to build group strength and relationships
- its usefulness depends on the type of decision to be made: decisions about ceremonies made by Elders can strengthen cultural practices by recognising their authority
- may ignore the interests of younger people
- Elders don't always agree so another process might need to be found
- there may be disputes over who is an Elder
- people who don't like the decision may be upset, particularly if they think it is a poor decision
- people may feel they have no way of changing a poor decision
- some people may never get to be decision-makers
- the Elder or Elders making the decision can become the target for the unhappiness of others

Proportional decision-making

Proportional decision-making is where a person or a group has a greater say than others about issues over particular areas. They may have stronger connections than others with the area and be more affected by a decision (e.g. families or clans rather than whole language groups).

Common issues in proportional decision-making:

- native title rights and interests are often not the same across all members of a group - proportional decision-making can take this into account
- those most affected have a greater say (principle of subsidiarity)
- the interests of smaller families with greater interests can be accounted for
- those with a smaller say may argue that they are just as affected
- if one group or individual has a greater say, this may have an influence on the solidarity of the broader group -it may lead to splintering of the whole group

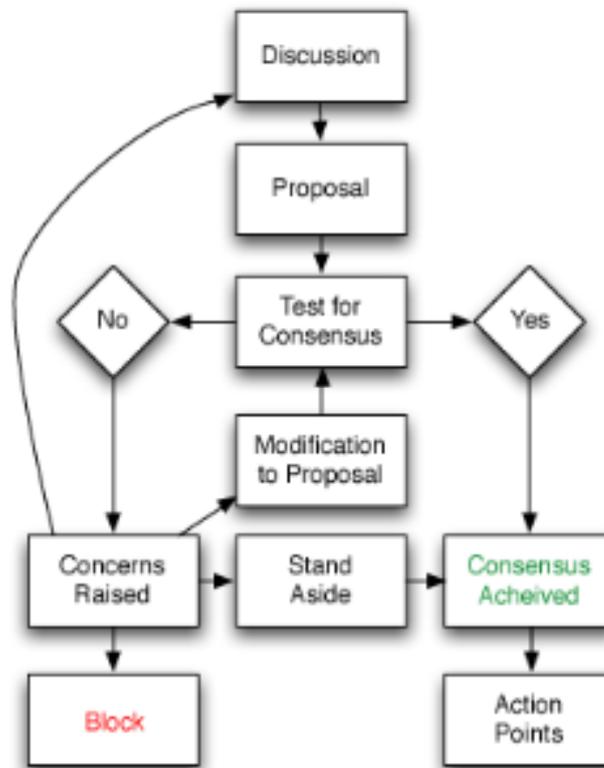
Consensus decision-making

Consensus decision-making is where a decision is reached by the group as a whole. Everybody agrees in the end. The process tries to help everyone get what they need.

Features of consensus decisions are:

- decision-making 'rules' are agreed in the first place
- the process of reaching the decision is just as important as the outcome
- the process requires working together and really talking to each other about all the issues
- as many people who have interests in the decision as possible are involved
- people have to work together and contribute ideas and solutions
- all those involved have an equal chance to suggest and change proposals and participate in the decision-making process
- decisions try to meet the concerns of all group members as much as possible
- underlying issues as well as issues that everyone can see are dealt with
- everyone agrees that the group's needs are seen as more important than those of any single person
- decisions won't always be everyone's first choice but come as close as possible to meeting everyone's needs
- decisions may involve compromise on all sides
- people agree they can live with the outcome
- people own the decision because they have a hand in it and therefore decisions are more likely to last
- processes are best managed by an independent facilitator
- processes can be time intensive but much more likely to be sustainable

Consensus Decision-Making Flow Chart



http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Consensus_decision-making