

A Research-Based Way to Approach Group Decision Making

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One of the primary responsibilities groups are tasked with is to make a decision. There is good reason for this, as evidence supports that groups always make better decisions than individuals do when the group process is working effectively. The composition and process of a group can determine your group's success.

How can you make sure your groups make the best decisions possible? First, research has shown that there is a phenomenon known as *Collective Intelligence*. Collective intelligence has nothing to do with the average intelligence of a group nor the highest IQ of the any group member. Rather, a group's collective intelligence can be predicted by three factors. The first factor is the number of women in the group. Groups with more women outperform groups with more men. The second factor, which is closely related to the first, is that of social sensitivity. Social sensitivity is a portion of social or emotional intelligence in that one senses the inner state of others. Research suggests that overall, women are more socially sensitive than men; however, men can be trained to be socially sensitive. The third factor is balanced participation. The more equally each individual contributes, the more information the group can consider. What happens if you have no control over the group's composition? Then it's equally important to look at the group's process.

The Functional Perspective of Group Decision Making has identified, through much field research, that groups that discuss four factors outperform groups that do not consider all four factors. The four factors are as follows:

1. Problem Analysis - Analyzing the problem includes recognizing potential threats even if things are going well.
2. Goal Setting - Identifying criteria by which to judge a good decision
3. Identification of Alternatives – The group needs to find as many options as reasonably possible
4. Evaluation of Positive and Negative Consequences - Groups might have a positive bias and lean towards finding the good, or a negative bias and lean towards finding the bad. Subsequent research has confirmed that identifying negative consequences for each option is even more important than identifying the positive consequences.

Want to learn more about group decision making and processes or help train your groups and teams to be better decision makers? Contact Laura Janusik today!

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