

## Decision-Making Styles Guide

The chart below describes the following common decision-making styles:

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| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unilateral or directive | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Democratic |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Consultative testing    | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Consensus  |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Consultative input      | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Delegation |

Leaders often find it helpful to be consciously choose a particular decision-making style that will fit the context of the situation and that will create the needed level of support and commitment.

Decision-making Style	
<p><b>Unilateral or directive:</b> You make and announce the decision.</p>	<p><b>Use when:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- This situation has urgent time pressure, such as for an emergency.</li> <li>- You are the one with all the relevant information and responsibility.</li> </ul> <p><b>Ways to strengthen use of this style:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Explain why the decision was made and what people should do if they have questions or concerns. You may need to “sell” the idea to stakeholders.</li> <li>- Be willing to learn from the feedback you receive and to adjust or change your decisions when it makes sense.</li> <li>- If making decisions in an emergency situation, hold a review of the situation to capture lessons learned about what was effective or ineffective. I</li> <li>- If you anticipate resistance, you may want to announce the decision in person and provide an opportunity for questions and concerns to be discussed.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Consultative testing:</b> You make a tentative decision, then invite feedback and reactions prior to making the final decision.</p>	<p><b>Use when:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- You are fairly confident of your decision but will find value in checking for reactions and feedback prior to implementing</li> <li>- You have primary responsibility for action and most of the relevant information</li> </ul> <p><b>Ways to strengthen use of this style:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identify your decision as “tentative” so that employees don’t act on it as fact too quickly</li> <li>- Provide some structure to the type of feedback you are looking for, don’t just say “tell me what you think.” For example, you might have 3 separate questions:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What positive impacts do you see in this decision?</li> <li>2. What negative impacts do you see in this decision?</li> <li>3. How will this affect our customers?</li> </ol> </li> <li>- Confirm and communicate the final decision to the group.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Consultative input gathering:</b></p> <p>You ask for and receive input from the group but make the final decision yourself.</p>	<p><b>Use when:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- You need others' expertise to make a quality decision for which you are ultimately responsible for</li> <li>- You need some level of commitment</li> <li>- You don't have the time to negotiate consensus</li> <li>- The group values both clear-cut authority for decisions and high levels of participation</li> </ul> <p><b>Ways to strengthen use of this style:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Be clear and up front that the final decision rests with you.</li> <li>- Confirm and communicate the final decision to the group.</li> <li>- Let the group know how their input impacted the decision; or, if you went against the group, explain your reasoning.</li> <li>- Follow tips in the August 2009 article about gathering employee input.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Democratic - majority vote:</b></p> <p>You relinquish the ultimate decision-making authority and have an equal vote in a group decision where the majority wins.</p>	<p><b>Use when:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- You are okay with all of the options available, even if your vote doesn't win</li> <li>- You need to involve large numbers of people in on a decision at minimal cost</li> <li>- You don't anticipate major resistance from those who "lose" the vote.</li> <li>- When you need to narrow down the field of alternatives for consideration.</li> </ul> <p><b>Ways to strengthen use of this style:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ensure that enough information is shared to help participants make an informed decision.</li> <li>- Create an opportunity for discussion on the pros and cons of each choice, and make sure that multiple perspectives are heard.</li> <li>- When greater than 51% commitment is needed, consider using a different majority vote, such as two-thirds.</li> <li>- Use this method as a way to do a quick check on how close you are to consensus.</li> <li>- Get group member agreement that they will comply with the voting decision whether they like it or not.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Consensus:</b></p> <p>All participants agree and support the decision.</p>	<p><b>Use when:</b> You want high quality input and commitment, with follow-through, from a group.</p> <p><b>Ways to strengthen use of this style:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Use a structured discussion process that allows enough time to fully explore options, thoughts and feelings related to the decision.</li> <li>- If the topic is complex or potentially "hot", engage a neutral facilitator to lead the discussion and decision-making.</li> <li>- Know that consensus doesn't mean that everyone has to love the decision, but they do need to be willing to support the decision once it's made.</li> <li>- Have a back-up decision-making style chosen in case consensus turns out to not be possible or realistic.</li> </ul>

<b>Delegation:</b> You assign full decision-making authority to another individual or a group.	<b>Use when:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- You want to increase efficiency and maximize the contribution of every team member</li><li>- You trust others to make the decision (maybe they're more knowledgeable about the topic than you are or it is within their sphere of responsibility)</li><li>- You just shouldn't be spending your time on that level of decision</li></ul> <b>Ways to strengthen use of this style:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Make sure the person (or persons) you're delegating to has the required authority, autonomy and skills to make the decision. Don't confuse "delegate" with "dump!"</li><li>- Be clear about any boundaries or criteria that the person must keep in mind in making the decision; e.g. – within a certain budget, scope of impact, how or how to communicate, etc.</li><li>- Be willing to support the final decision. If you would have decided differently, have a learning conversation with the decision-maker(s) on how and why they came to the decision; what you would have done differently and why; and what this conversation might mean for future decisions.</li></ul>
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Contact Holmes Street Leadership at [denise@holmesstreetleadership.com](mailto:denise@holmesstreetleadership.com) to:

- Sign up for an EQ-in-Action assessment, which can help you understand the underlying strategies you use in relationships with others (which influences your decision-making styles)
- Schedule a presentation or training for your leadership team on decision-making styles