

FIVE TYPES OF DECISIONS

This tool describes five types of decisions (and two levels within each type). Managers and leaders can use this tool to clarify the types of decisions that are made every day – and the respective roles that people play in making them. This is an invaluable tool for improving organizational communication and performance.

Overview

There are five types of decisions, with two levels within each type:

Autocratic-I	You make the decision by yourself using the information you have available.
Autocratic-II	You obtain information from another (or others) and decide by yourself.
Consultative-I	You involve others individually by sharing the issues and obtaining their ideas, suggestions or recommendations, and then you decide.
Consultative-II	You involve others as a group by sharing the issues and obtaining their ideas, suggestions or recommendations, and then you decide.
Consensus-I	You involve another individual by sharing the issues, and then you both generate and evaluate alternatives and reach a decision by consensus. (You both agree.)
Consensus-II	You involve others as a group by sharing the issues, and then you all generate and evaluate alternatives and reach a decision by group consensus. (The vast majority of the group agrees.)
Delegated-I	You determine that another individual has the data and judgment to make the decision, so you delegate it and accept/support the decision made. (You may ask to be consulted about the decision.)
Delegated-II	You determine that a group has the data and judgment to make the decision, so you delegate it and accept/support the decision they make. (You may ask to be consulted about the decision.)
Democratic-I	You are part of an appointed decision-making body in which decisions are made by a majority vote (or some other standard).
Democratic-II	You are part of an elected decision-making body in which decisions are made by a majority vote (or some other standard).

Leaders and managers can use this tool in various ways to improve organizational decision-making and communication. Among them:

- When making decisions, pay particular attention to your role as a *decision manager*. It is your job to clarify the overall decision process, along with the individual steps along the way. Take a look at an upcoming decision and communicate in writing to everyone what role they will play – and what the process will be. (See our related tool: Three Steps to Flawless Decision Making.)
- When managing decisions, pay close attention to the distinction between a consultative decision and a consensus decision. Many managers talk about “achieving consensus” because they believe it will make people feel better. But the result can be a loss of trust, especially if you talk about consensus and yet retain the right to make the decision yourself. People will feel better if you are honest and clear about their roles. There’s no place for *faux* consensus.
- Pay close attention as well to the meaning of a *delegated* decision. A decision is only delegated when you, the person making the delegation, are willing to go along with the result, even if it is not what you would have done. If you’ve held back a “trump card,” then it’s not truly delegated, but a consultative decision.
- If a decision is delegated to you, don’t assume you should make it on your own. You now become the decision manager and have to manage the process. Consulting with key individuals (including the person or team who delegated it to you) is a crucial step.
- Finally, remember that in a consultative decision, you should get people’s input if they are going to be significantly affected by the decision. And if people have relevant, special expertise, they also should be consulted.

Here are two other ways you can use this tool:

1. Review a past decision that didn’t go well to see where communication broke down and confusion set in. Ask people what systems of communication and ground rules need to be in place to make sure it doesn’t happen again.
2. Take a look at an upcoming decision that involves the entire organization – and develop communication strategies to ensure that everyone understands their role in that decision.