



# 4 Decision Methods

## For decentralised teams

### 1. Consensus

You're looking for what is **best for the group**, which may mean putting personal preferences aside. Include **as many stakeholders as possible** and give everyone an **equal voice** in the process. Aim to **understand concerns and objections** so you can modify and improve the proposal. You may not reach unanimous agreement, but everyone should be **satisfied this is the best decision** we could reach.

#### How to do it

In general, the objective of a consensus process is to open up a wide ranging conversation to explore the possibilities, and then eventually converge on the proposal that best fits the group.

1. Introduce and clarify the issue or opportunity
2. Explore possible ideas and solutions
3. Look for an emerging proposal
4. Discuss, clarify & amend the proposal
5. Test for agreement:
  - **Agree/Support:** I support this proposal
  - **Abstain/Stand Aside:** I will neither support nor object to this proposal
  - **Disagree/Reservation:** I think the proposal could be improved, but I do not object to the group moving ahead without my support
  - **Block/Veto:** I have a principled objection to the proposal and cannot let it proceed

You may need to define some specific details, like:

- **Decision threshold:** how many group members need to participate for a proposal to pass? How many “Abstain”s or “Disagree”s can a proposal have and still pass? Who has the power to Block?
- **Timeframe:** how much time can you allow for people to participate?
- **Facilitator:** who is responsible for the process?

See the [Seeds For Change website](#) for more guidance on Consensus.

## 2. Consent

Consent is a participatory process like consensus, but instead of seeking the best decision for the group, consent is the **absence of objections**. You're looking for a proposal that is "**good enough for now & safe enough to try**". Everyone has the right to make a "**principled objection**". A valid objection is like "I think there is a serious risk **this proposal could do harm**", not "I have a better idea" or "I don't like it".

### How to do it

1. **State the proposal**
2. **Question round**: the proposer answers clarifying questions so everyone understands what is being proposed
3. **Reaction round**: the proposer listens as everyone takes turns to give their reaction, e.g. "I love it" or "I don't think it is the best solution"
4. **Re-state proposal**: the proposer may modify or clarify the proposal
5. **Objections**: if anyone has a valid objection, the proposal needs to be modified
6. **Confirmation**: everyone visually confirms the proposal with a thumbs up, indicating "I can live with this decision"

See [this article by Samantha Slade](#) for more guidance on Consent.

## 3. Advice

**Anyone can make a decision**, if they first **listen to the advice** of people who will be affected, and people who have relevant expertise, and they take responsibility for the **outcome**.

As a decision-maker you own the decision. You **don't have to negotiate** to satisfy everyone, but must **genuinely listen to** and **understand** the advice.

### How to do it

1. **Announce** that you are seeking advice
2. **Consult** with people who will be affected, and people with relevant expertise
3. **Make your decision**
4. **Announce the outcome**: ensuring people know they were heard and understood, even if they disagree with your decision

See [this article by Manuel Küblböck](#) for more guidance on Advice & Consent.

## 4. Mandate

A mandate is a **limited authority to take decisions** for a specific set of issues with a defined process. The **limits should be clear**, e.g. “Mara can take any marketing decisions, so long as they spend less than \$1000, and stay within our agreed principles & objectives.”

A mandate can be for an **individual** or a **collective**, e.g. “The Brand Working Group decides what is an appropriate use for our logo.” It can be **autocratic** e.g. “you can make small purchasing decisions without seeking input from other people”, or **consultative** e.g. “the developers may choose what technology they use, if they first seek Advice”

### How to do it

- Mandates can be defined in an individual's **job description**.
- You can **give a mandate** to individuals or to subteams, e.g. a group of 10 people could decide by consensus to organise into 3 distinct working teams.
- Anyone can **seek a mandate** to be empowered by the group to explore a new opportunity.



# How they compare

## **Consensus**

Produces a strong buy-in and team unity, but can take a long time. Best used for decisions of high significance or high risk. Very effective for increasing shared understanding and creating strong bonds within a team.

## **Consent**

Prioritises speed over agreement, which can encourage action & experimentation, but can also reduce quality. If you're in a consensus-oriented group wanting to move faster, or a hierarchical group looking for more inclusion & power-sharing, the consent process can be an excellent option. Best for less significant or less risky decisions.

## **Advice**

Maximises autonomy, while still making use of collective intelligence. Works best if there is a strong alignment around purpose, and you have proactive measures to support healthy disagreement. Particularly suited to decisions with unpredictable outcomes, or where special expertise is required.

## **Mandate**

When teams mature and people understand each other's strengths, the majority of decisions can be delegated to individuals or subteams with a mandate. Best operated with transparency, so you can see what is being decided, even if you're not consulted.

