Decision Making: Style and Clarity
Resource Section

Nothing is more difficult, and therefore more precious, than to be able to decide.
Napoleon Bonaparte

Purpose

To explore the factors to consider in determining how decisions should be made and who should be involved, to analyze the decision-making style of the congregation and explore its consequences, and to look at the impact of culture on decision-making styles.

Theological Understanding

Scripture is full of stories involving individuals and groups facing decisions. God has blessed us with reason and free will, but it is up to us to use that freedom wisely and prayerfully. Ultimately we are charged by God to "choose life."

Special Instructions

This module contains case studies and an exercise for demonstrating the power of consensus, as well as some resource handouts for the session. The answers to the case studies are found in the handout section, on the page prior to the case studies.

For Handout 2, ask participants to read the story and for each of the statements that follow, circle the answer they think is correct. When everyone has finished, divide them into pairs or small groups and ask them to come up with a consensus agreement on the correct answer to each.

Statement 3 is false and Statement 6 is true. For all others there is not enough information to know. Ask for a show of hands for how many _individuals_ got all 11 answers correct. If none, find out how many got 10, 9, 8, etc. answers correct. Then do the same for the _groups_. Usually groups do better than individuals, proving the old adage that two heads are better than one and the power of reaching consensus.

Related Modules

Church Size & Its Implications
History-sharing and Understanding

Bibliography

Dudley, Carl S., and Ammerman, Nancy; Congregations in Transition: A Guide for Analyzing, Assessing, and Adapting in Changing Communities; San Francisco, CA; Jossey-Bass, 2002 – outlines how to do an analysis of congregational decision-making style, including a sample diagram and questions for reflection (pp. 79-84).

Fisher, Roger; Ury, William; and Patton, Bruce; Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In, 2nd Edition; New York, New York, Penguin Books, 1991 – the classic work on consensus from the co-founders of the Harvard Negotiation Project.

Frykholm, Amy Johnson. "Out of Silence;" Christian Century, April 3, 2007; pp. 34-38 – an article on the importance of consensus decision making as part of discernment.

Hofstede, Geert and Hofstede, Gert Jan. Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind, 2nd Edition. New York City, New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005 – Hofstede's dimensions of culture are so classic that they are almost universally used in any discussion of cultural diversity; this book is very research oriented. For a summary of his theory, go to one of his websites (www.geert-hofstede.com or www.geerthofstede.nl).

Ury, William; Getting Past No: Negotiating Your Way from Confrontation to Cooperation; New York, Bantam Books, 1993 – the follow up to Getting to Yes, with an emphasis on reaching agreement in difficult situations.

_____; The Power of a Positive No: How to Say NO and Still Get to Yes; New York, New York, Bantam Dell, 2007 – how to say "no" and stay in relationship.

General Outline of Session

1. Opening prayer and meditation (suggested reading Acts 15:1-29)

2. Check-in

3. Overview of the content and putting decision making in context of prayer (Power Point 1-2; talking points)

4. Case studies and discussion (see Resource Section)

5. Overview of decision-making styles (Power Point 3-9; Talking Points)

6. Consensus decision making (PowerPoint 10; Talking Points; Handout 1)

7. Consensus exercise and challenges of consensus (PowerPoint 11; Talking Points; Handouts 2 and 3)

8. Impact of congregational culture (PowerPoint 12; Talking Points; Handout 4)

9. Impact of multi-culturalism (PowerPoint 13; Talking Points)

10. Summary (PowerPoint 14; Talking Points; Handout 5)

11. Sharing of up-coming decisions and wrap up (PowerPoint 15; Talking Points)

Case Study Instructions

Ask participants to read each case study in turn and decide on the appropriate response. Let the discussion flow and the various points about who has authority, whether the problem requires cooperation and acceptance by others, and the problem's importance emerge to pave the way for the overview of decision-making styles that will follow. Here's what to listen for in each case.

Case Study A: The underlying premise is that the new rector does not have enough information to make this decision wisely, so she needs some consultation with those who have experience with the various contractors. Getting the parish administrator and chair of Buildings and Grounds together to discuss options is probably the best approach (Option C). However, a good case can be made for going ahead on her own (it's just a copier) OR talking to the two with experience individually if it is too difficult to get them together OR turning the decision over (if there is no serious concern about the budget and no problems between the parish administrator and chair of B&G).

Case Study B: Being clear about what your issues are and asking the ministry team leaders to come up with a new policy that addresses these concerns is the best way to gain commitment and acceptance of the new policy (Option C). However a good case can be made for Option D if you feel that the teams are intransigent and not open to new ideas. Options A and B are probably the nuclear options as they may cause a break in the relationship. Option E is too time consuming, though someone may offer an alternative of getting all the team members instead of just the team leaders into the room for a discussion.

Case Study C: Building the capacity of the new Christian Education director and her committee is important, so outlining your expectations and providing resources so either she (Option D) or the committee (Option E) can decide are the best responses. Option B does not give you the opportunity to make your boundaries of what is acceptable to you clear. Option A may lead to non-acceptance of the decision or problems in implementation.

Case Study D: Majority vote will create winners and losers. The Vestry needs Committee Chairs to accept the decision gracefully, and the Committee Chairs need to see the overall budget picture and not just deal with their piece of the budget pie. Option C is the best option. While the Vestry may be required by the by-laws to vote on the budget, it would be best to try and reach consensus before calling for the vote for the record.

How Would You Decide?
Case Study A

You are the new rector. The budget, passed before you were elected, contains a line item for "office administration," which you control.

Recently the office photocopier has been acting up, not collating properly and sometimes misfeeding the legal-size sheets used to create the Sunday order of service. This usually happens on Friday afternoon when the photocopying volume is high.

Three repair firms have come to inspect the machine and give estimates. The estimates vary considerably. Moreover, the machine's manufacturer has offered to repair <u>and</u> maintain the machine for a year for a flat fee that is only 15% higher than the highest of the other estimates. Accepting this bid, however, would put a strain on the office administration budget.

The parish administrator and the chair of the Buildings and Grounds Committee both have some experience with the firms who have submitted bids. You decide to:

A. Analyze the bids you have received. Based on your understanding of what needs to be done, the budget constraints, and the proposals, you will make a decision as to which bid to accept.

B. Talk to the parish administrator and chair of the Buildings and Grounds Committee individually to get as much information as you can about the firms before making your final decision.

C. Meet with the parish administrator and the chair of the Buildings and Grounds Committee together to hear what they have to say about their experience with the firms and what they would recommend, then decide.

D. Turn the decision over to the parish administrator and the chair of the Buildings and Grounds Committee.

How Would You Decide?
Case B

The parish has a long-standing tradition of lay ministry teams who assume responsibility for covering all the lay roles during Sunday worship (e.g., ushers, lectors, chalicer). Lately problems with attendance have left you scrambling to find fill-ins at the last minute. And when there are substitutes, things never seem to go smoothly. You are aware that the teams have been together for a long time and resent having their groups broken up. You feel strongly that a new policy to deal with the absenteeism needs to be developed. You decide to:

A. Draft and institute a new policy immediately.

B. Draft a policy and circulate it among the ministry team leaders for comment before deciding what to do.

C. Meet with the ministry team leaders, describe the issue from your point of view, and ask them to come up with a new policy that addresses your concerns.

D. Meet with the ministry team leaders, describe the issue from your point of view, and ask them to make recommendations before you draft the new policy.

E. Speak to every member of each ministry team to elicit his/her thoughts and suggestions, then decide.

How Would You Decide?
Case C

The new chair of Christian Education is enthusiastic and dedicated, however she knows nothing about Christian education curriculum. You feel strongly that the current curriculum is out-dated and needs to be replaced. She agrees, but doesn't know where to start. You decide to:

A. Research current Christian education material, make a decision, and hand off implementation to her.

B. Provide the Christian Education chair with resources on current curriculum and let her decide.

C. Outline your expectations for Christian education and the kinds of curriculum you think would be appropriate, give the Christian Education chair a list of potential resources, and ask her to research them and come in with recommendations after which you will decide.

D. Outline your expectations for Christian education and the kinds of curriculum you think would be appropriate, give the Christian Education chair a list of potential resources, and ask her to involve her entire Committee in researching potential resources and coming up with a recommendation, over which you could exercise a veto.

E. Outline your expectations for Christian education and the kinds of curriculum you think would be appropriate, provide a list of resources, and turn the decision over to the Christian Education committee as a whole.

How Would You Decide?
Case D

There was a shortfall in the Every Member Canvass, and the proposed budget for next year must be reduced to take into account the lower levels of anticipated income. To meet the shortfall each committee has been asked to prepare recommended cut-backs to present to the Vestry. The Personnel Committee has recommended that salary increases for the next year be limited to 25% of the recommended diocesan cost-of-living increase. The staff is upset with this recommendation. Outreach has proposed cutting out two popular grantee programs. Buildings and Grounds would delay scheduled installation of a new air conditioning system, but has warned that the current system may not last the summer. Of all the committee proposals, only these three or some combinations of them would result in sufficient savings to meet the budget targets. You have called a special meeting of the Vestry to decide what to do. The Vestry decides to:

    A. Make a decision by majority vote after a brief discussion of the three proposals.

    B. Request that the three committee chairs attend the special Vestry meeting to provide additional background information, including the opportunities and challenges they present, then the Vestry will decide by majority vote.

    C. Request that all committee chairs attend the special Vestry meeting to engage in a discussion of the overall budget issues and brainstorm possible alternate solutions, attempting to reach a general consensus on what to do. The Vestry would then decide.

    D. Engage in a facilitated discussion about the budget to try and a reach consensus.

Decision Making: Style and Clarity
Handout 1

Consensus-Building Techniques

A. Steps in Consensus Decision-Making Process

1. Prepare for decision: The group must have a clear understanding of what is to be decided, have all necessary background information and facts needed to make an intelligent decision.

2. Establish ground rules: Ground rules should include requiring people to speak for themselves and not for groups, to maintain an appropriate level of confidentiality, to refrain from personal attacks on people with opposing views, to allow everyone to speak.

3. Put all ideas out on the table: The process can only work if all members have an open mind and attitude; there can be no withholding of information or agendas. A good way to get everyone to be heard is to do a round-robin of ideas at critical stages in the process.

4. Focus on interests, NOT positions: Interests are those things which are at the heart of a person's position – my position may be that I don't want the altar moved from the wall; my interest, however, is a feeling of loss in the tradition within which I have grown up.

5. Put forward all ideas without criticism: We as human beings are quick to criticize. All ideas, regardless of how far-fetched they seem, need to be placed on the table – the wildest schemes often provide the kernel of a solution.

6. Consider pros and cons: Once all ideas are out, then begin the discussion. It helps to start with seeing the strengths of each option before considering its challenges. Objections should be made carefully and responsible. While objectors can delay or sabotage the whole process, ideally participants can all register their thoughts and feelings without preventing progress in the process. Objectors can be helpful – they may offer creative alternatives or prevent the group from coming to too hasty a decision.

7. Prioritize options: If there are too many options, eliminate those that have the least support using a structured approach such as multi-voting or prioritizing (see below). It may be that there is consensus around some aspects of the decision, while there is disagreement about other areas.

Record the consensus and turn your attention – and energy – to on-going discussion of the remaining areas of disagreement.

8. Test for consensus: When it seems that the group is basically in agreement, test for consensus by saying something like "It seems as though we agree on …." A quick way to test for consensus is to ask people to give a "thumbs up" (I support), "thumbs down" (I disagree or I need more information), or "thumbs sideways" (I'm not crazy about the decision, but I can live with it).

9. Restate consensus and confirm decision: Once consensus is reached, restate the decision and confirm what the group has decided.

If the subject of the decision is highly charged, consider using a facilitator.

B. <u>Two Techniques to Move Toward Consensus</u>

1. Multi-voting
Multi-voting is a structured series of votes, and is considered the preferred method of prioritizing ideas because it tends to result in a higher level of group agreement. The steps in multi-voting are:

a. **First Vote:** Each member votes on as many items as desired but only once per item.

b. **Eliminate** items that get less than an agreed-upon minimum number of votes.

c. **Second and Subsequent Votes:** Each member can vote on one-half of the remaining items.

d. **Eliminate** items with less than a new agreed-upon minimum number of votes.

e. **Discontinue Multi-voting** when an acceptable number of items remain.

Multi-voting Guidelines

- The group decides after each round what the cutoff point will be for items to remain on the list. That is, how many votes must an item have in order to remain in consideration? By deciding **after** a round, members can see which items would be eliminated and voice concerns if their priorities are not being met. The cutoff point can, and probably should, be changed for each round of multi-voting.

- As with any prioritization technique, never multi-vote down to a single item.

- The group should decide how many items to leave for final consideration based on common sense. The question might be asked, "If we multi-vote down to x items, will we lose the support of one or more group members?" Or, "Can we expect to gather information on all items with reasonable effort and in a reasonable amount of time?"

2. Rule of Reduction

This is another way to reduce a large number of options down to a preferred few.

1. Each group member prioritizes a certain number of items on the list being considered. For example, if the list has fifty items, each member might rank his/her top five items. If the list has one hundred items, each member might pick ten items as most important. For a handful of items, all could be prioritized.

2. Each member rates his/her top priority items in descending order of importance (most important to least important). The highest priority item receives points equal to the total number of items on the member's list. For example, if you are selecting the top five items, give the most important one five points. Give the next most important item four points, and so on.

3. Individual members' lists are then turned over to a recorder, or read back to the group so that the points can be charted (see example below). Total points are added together, and the items receiving the highest total points are selected for further consideration.

4. Any member's **top** priority which is **not** among the ones that would stay in consideration also gets added to the list.

5. If the list is still too long, another round may be initiated.

Example:

Member	Idea 1	Idea 2	Idea 3	Idea 4	Idea 5
A	5	1	3	2	4
B	5	4	2	3	1
C	1	5	4	2	3
D	3	5	2	4	1
E	4	3	2	1	5
Totals	18	18	13	12	14

In this example, Ideas 1 and 2 would stay on the list because of the points. There is a visible break in points after those first two. However Idea #5 would also continue to be considered since it is the first choice of Member E.

Decision Making: Style and Clarity
Handout 2

The Story

A clergyman had just turned off the lights in the parish hall when a man appeared and demanded money. The assistant opened the parish safe. The contents of the safe were scooped up, and the man sped away. A member of the police force was notified promptly.

Statements About The Story

1. A man appeared after the assistant turned off the parish hall lights. **T F ?**

2. The robber was a man. **T F ?**

3. The man did not demand money. **T F ?**

4. The man who opened the safe was the clergyman. **T F ?**

5. The clergyman scooped up the contents of the safe and ran away. **T F ?**

6. Someone opened a safe. **T F ?**

7. After the man who demanded the money scooped up the contents of the safe, he ran away. **T F ?**

8. While the safe contained money, the story does not say how much. **T F ?**

9. The robber demanded money of the clergyman. **T F ?**

10. The story concerns a series of events in which only three persons are referred to: the clergyman, a man who demanded money and a member of the police force. **T F ?**

11. The following events in the story are true: someone demanded money, a safe was opened, its contents were scooped up, and a man dashed out of the parish hall. **T F ?**

Decision Making Style and Clarity
Handout 3

Tips for Reaching Consensus in Difficult Situations

Sometimes consensus is difficult to achieve. Here are some ways to move toward consensus in these cases.

Work on problem, not the people: The members of the group need to view themselves as working side-by-side, attacking the problem, not each other. Be soft on people and hard on the problem – no name calling. Understanding a point of view is not the same as agreeing with it. However, better understanding **may** lead you to modify your own position. Use paraphrasing to check to be sure you understand someone else's point of view.

Focus on underlying concerns: The more you clarify and defend a position, the more you identify with it and the less likely you are to be able to hear alternatives. Arguing over positions is inefficient and produces unwise agreements, as well as endangering relationships. The more you pay attention to positions, the less attention you pay to underlying concerns or fears. Try to avoid getting people into a "bottom line" stance – look for the best solution, not the **only** solution. Explore interests and issues – try to find a solution that will effectively take care of the human needs that caused a member of the group to adopt a particular position.

Look for alternatives: Provide possible solutions that will advance shared interests and reconcile differing interests. Develop multiple options, all of which offer mutual gain.

Be objective in evaluating options: Reaching agreement is far easier when the group discusses objective standards or procedures for settling a problem than when they try to force others to change positions. Reason and be open to reason. Agree on something all group members consider a fair standard – and set those standards in advance of the decision (e.g., agree if cost factors will be more important than timeliness).

Decision Making: Style and Clarity
Handout 4

Using a decision from your congregation's past, do a flow chart below about how that decision was made. Place formal steps in boxes and informal steps (e.g., consultation with someone outside the formal process such as a key lay person) in circles. Connect formal steps or formal communications with solid lines and informal conversations with dotted lines, trying to capture all the people and events that were necessary to get to the decision.

What does this diagram tell you about the process of decision making in your congregation?

Decision Making: Style and Clarity
Handout 5

Choosing the Best Decision-Making Method

Factor	Questions to Ask	Method(s) to Consider
Importance of quality	Is a high quality decision essential?	Y: consensus N: other methods
Leader's information and expertise	Does the leader have enough information to make a high quality decision?	Y: unilateral N: other methods
Problem structure	Is the problem structured?	Y: unilateral or unilateral with input N: consensus or majority rule
Importance of acceptance	Is acceptance by all or a substantial number of members critical?	Y: consensus or unilateral with input N: unilateral or majority rule
Likelihood of acceptance	If leader makes the decision, are other members of the congregation likely to accept it enthusiastically?	Y: unilateral N: other methods
Likelihood of conflict	Are members likely to be in conflict over what the decision should be?	Y: consensus N: other methods