

Agile Applied: Decision Making

Lesson: Decision Making

Who and how we make decisions is at the heart of power and action; yet, the process and protocol is remarkably unclear most of the time. In this module we will consider decision protocols and how to match approach with the type of decision. Many of us learned consensus as the default or preferred decision approach. Research and experience make clear that consensus take an incredible amount of time and can be costly if done well. Further, groups often lack competent facilitation and push for agreement before surfacing the breadth and depth of diverse views. This can stifle innovation and disempower participants. For these reasons, we introduce the advice and consent processes as alternatives. We'll explore the benefits of consent to accelerate experimentation and empowerment.

Read, Watch, Listen

Before the Tuesday evening meetup with Alanna Irving on February 28th please read this brief [blog](#) on Full Circle Leadership.

After viewing the video embedded above, please review the following resources.

- Read Blog [Consent decision making](#) (Ted Rau) and wander the many resources on website [Sociocracy for All](#)
- Read Blog [What is Agile Decision Making?](#) ImagineNation
- Review 3 decisions tools: [Loomio](#), [Murmur](#), and [Cloverpop](#)
- [Many Voices One Song: Shared Power with Sociocracy](#), by Ted J Rau and Jerry Kock-Gonzalez (2018)
- Chapter 7: Decision Making, from [Going Horizontal](#), by Samantha Slade, (2018)
- Essay Eight: Out beyond consensus there's a field: I'll meet you there, from [Better Work Together](#), by [Richard D. Bartlett](#) (2018)
- Chapter 4: Governance, from [Holacracy](#), by Brian J. Robertson, (2015)

- [The Decision Maker](#), by Dennis Bakke (2013)

5.1 Exercise: Consent Decision Making

After reviewing the lesson materials shared in the [Week 5 Kick-Off Announcement](#), introduce a pilot consent decision to your work/matter of concern. Identify an issue that is a good fit to try consent. Clarify that the team making the decision has authority. Consider the advice process as a way to gain input/intelligence to develop a strong proposal. Invite team members to learn the consent method (produce a brief training session, including why consent is a valuable approach. Test making a consent decision. Publish the result!

Write or make a video in response to the prompts below to reflect on your learning. If recording a video, I recommend uploading the video to your Google Drive and sharing the link to this assignment. Be sure to update the share settings so I have viewing access.

Journal Prompts

- What were the positives and challenges of introducing the concept of consent?
- Were you able to identify a meaningful issue to address?
- Did the advice process help craft a strong proposal?
- How did the training go?
- How did the pilot decision making go?
- What did you learn as a leader about introducing new and possibly unconventional practices to a system?

Response

Thursday, March 2, 2023

Link: [CSI Makerspace Consent Making Decision Model Pilot](#)

Disclaimer: This part of the course/ program is most Exciting!

I recruited 5 student guinea pigs and a faculty member to test my pilot proposal system. We couldn't find a common time for all to meet so they responded via google chat. Somewhat as expected, all participants seemed very receptive, positive and genuinely curious. No negative Nancy's. They pointed out some of the gaps, and helped refine the agreement. College students are still spongy and used to new challenges and ideas. I feel like I'm playing on cheat mode with my fellow Mackerel classmates.

This process of consent is super applicable to our space and I/we can take AMB's small is all to heart while implementing. This is try one. We'll try it again with tweaks and keep on cycling. It felt a bit too easy this go around so I'll observe and monitor how this agreement plays out in action. The strength of the proposal will become evident over time and could, and probably will, shift and change as needed. Challenges that I can foresee (not so much in the consent process, but in the agreement itself) will be during crunch time. When projects need to get done and patience is short. Hopefully, I'll approach those situations with patience and understanding. The late project splurge is part of our cycle.

Our school is going through substantial changes all around. New president and VP, addition of Deans (added layer of hierarchical bureaucracy), new HR management system (workday), talk of going to a 4x4 semester (somewhat at the expense of the STEM departments), switch to Canvas, new IT department., etc. It seems like everything around us is changing and adding bureaucracy and people are freaking out. Setting a small community of consent and advice as an example to see and feel is more important than ever for our broader community.

I will roll out my first capstone workshop the first week or two after spring break and I'm fairly certain it will follow the consent facilitation format of this pilot. I really like how Loomio changes the time dynamic of the practice to be spread to an individual's pace rather than a set meeting time frame. I for one take time to process and reflect before committing to feedback. Hard for me to do in the typical facilitation or meeting time frame. We probably won't use the Loomio platform yet and rely more on the google sweet, slack, discord or other free platforms to broaden the visibility and time needed to cycle through the consent process. Thank you MJ for sharing this process with us and thank you for introducing us to Alana Stapelton. She's goofy, passionate, has a fantastic energy and curiosity. She seems very unafraid to observe and try, which can be super difficult as we become adults and settled. Very inspiring!

5.2 Reflection Decentralizing Decision Making

As a leader, do you support decentralizing decision making as much as possible? What are the benefits and possible risks? In your experience and context, what other organizational changes are needed to evolve toward more empowered decision making?

Response

Spring break is on the horizon and students here are in mid semester crunch mode. As they creep closer to D day their rate of frazzledness increases along with their stressed musky eau de naturelle. Perfect time to fuck with'em, so I've run a few through the consent cycle to see what would happen. They appear to have survived and reports indicate maintained functioning of mental capacities. Phew. They tell me that being a part of the decision making process, and not having to always ask permission, frees them to act and relieves some of the stress in their pressure vessel lives. And, they also see the value of having an expert or another set of eyes and opinions when stuck or at a critical juncture. Since they've yet to run me out of town, we will continue to experiment with the process and adjust to fit our community.

The idea of a leader has always puzzled me. Currently I feel like I am and I am not. The ying and the yang. I can see how the consent and advice decision making processes provide an opportunity for anyone to ying into a leadership role when called forth. One of the best woodworkers, and kind humans, I've come across is a small man from Nuevo Laredo named Manuel Molina. (I guarantee he's a better woodworker than any you've encountered too). Growing up his mom helmed a mobile flower and candy cart at the infamous Boystown brothel district. Their route extended beyond the Johns reach and out past a local woodwork shop that displayed their trade through a retail style window store front. Everyday Manuel felt the divine touch of inspiration on display. Body and soul aligned, at age 12 he began his woodwork journey. His first primary task was turning columns and railings on a lathe 7 days a week for 12 hour shifts. He turned for seven years. To this day he's like a programmable robot on the lathe, and requires immense bribing to demonstrate. Tired of round things, he left that shop, started his own shop in his garage and then migrated to San Antonio in 1980 with his wife and newborn for better opportunities. His first and only job for the next 40 years was at my fathers architectural woodwork business.

They were small then, maybe 5. All white dudes that spoke English only. My father determined that the best role for Manuel was janitor/ helper. Three years into Manuel's tenure, the group fretted over how to fabricate a spiral staircase handrail section. While they are strategizing, Manuel sets up a shaper (a very powerful, scary, and advanced piece of machinery) runs the part and sets it on the drafting table. Blew their minds. They viewed Manuel as the help, replaceable and of little value. They never knew of his intensionality with regards to working in that shop for the opportunity to continue his

craft. Quiet, unassuming Manuel became a stout leader in our organization and brought patience and creativity to our group. He held onto his powerful creative and imaginative self despite being cast aside. Sometimes I wonder how many people just get tamped down and submit to our systems. Systems of others' visions, assumptions, generalizations, and directions. Systems with a 'unique' leader that can solve and navigate problems their way. How often does that lead to the shrug and meh reaction 'It's your show bro'. I feel like decentralized management has the potential to convert the Meh to Hmm and Ooh, and Ah.

Change is no fun. It bucks our routine and interrupts flow, and it happens whether we want it to or not. With patience and an open mind we can shape, direct, and flow with it like water. Or we can be a stubborn rock eroding away. My current environment, a college campus, is a bit like playing on cheat mode. Students are spongy and malleable. They are used to digesting large amounts of new regularly, and haven't experienced as much of the working world doldrums. They are like water. We, seasoned professionals, at times, are the rock. We hold our ground and push back on newness. Our initial conjecture is along the lines of 'that's cool, but nah, it won't work here'. What's the generic tag line for obstinate kids? 'Not with that attitude you won't'. Flat processes are new and will require experiencing before understanding. I don't think we can acquire the essence without attempts, failures and shifts. I think the biggest challenge outside of creating a culture of trust is that each flat institution will most likely look and feel unique. The play book and structure from company A will probably not work in company B. And that's what makes it creative, resilient and powerful. The flat company is a reflection of its community, their unique challenges, and ways of doing and being. Not a prescribed MBA derived formula of proven success. What does it look like? Tell me how it works. I don't know, but let's play with it and find out.

The Loomio platform is particularly well suited for our environment. It's flexible in approach (consent, advice, and consensus) and in time. A facilitation style meeting of involved parties is challenging with our array of schedules and a set meeting places pressure on the group to comprehend proposals and resolve by meetings end. The asynchronous nature of Loomio can allow our participants to engage when they have the energy. Plus we can make the platform open, visible, and transparent for all of our community to see and comment on. I'm sure we will experience problems and confusion. And I'm confident that through patience, persistence and flexibility we can learn from these issues and adapt and mold the general process to fit our ways of being.