


Efficient group decisions using the 7 levels of decision making – an agile coach must have

 ontheagilepath.net/2015/05/efficient-group-decisions-using-the-7-levels-of-decision-making-an-agile-coach-must-have.html

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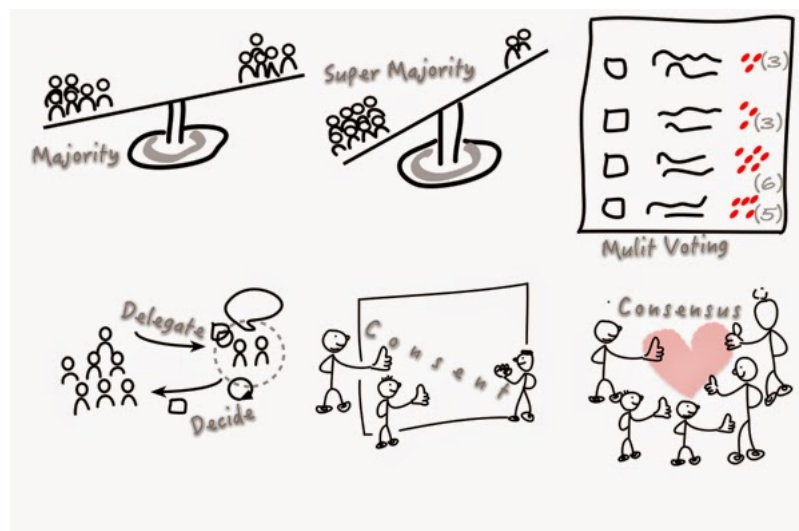
A key success factor for efficient team work is to be able to make decisions (and in an efficient way).

Best fully supported by every team member.

Learning how to best facilitate decision making is an important skill for an Agile Coach/ScrumMaster.

In this post I explain several ways to enable (better) decision making.

7 Levels of Decision Making



Read on to learn more about the 7 levels – MAJORITY, DELEGATION, SUPER MAJORITY, MULTIVOTING, CONSENT and CONSENSUS – to make decisions.

Majority



The most often used method for group decisions. If more than 50% of the group supports a proposal

the group decides to go with it. If less – the proposal gets rejected.

It's the fastest way to decide but with the major drawback of potentially losing team members engagement or the more subtle way to actively work against a solution.

Invisible yellow cards collected by team members and shown on various other places to show that their opinion has not been valued properly.

Delegation

You delegate decision finding to a smaller group (can be considered as homework for the group). It should be clear how the team afterwards will be included in the final decision.



It can be a commitment by the whole team to accept the decision by the smaller group without further discussions (in the small group you can apply your decision making rules).

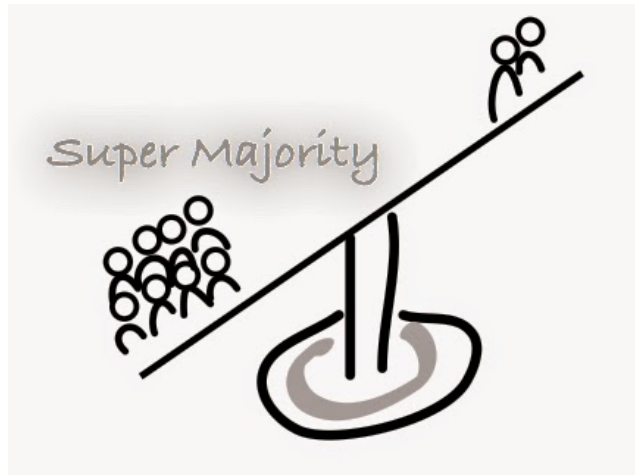
Or you conclude that after the groups preparation the whole team ratifies or revokes the suggested decision.

It helps the team to move on quickly with other topics.

It's especially useful with experts on a topic, who can best make the decision without having the whole team involved.

But be aware not to lose important team opinions (that later on will hinder decision making or even worse indirect missing decision support)

Super Majority



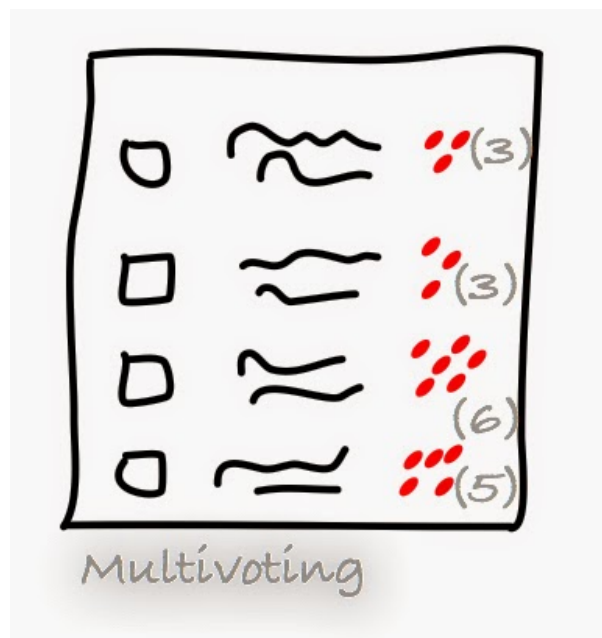
The team defines a threshold e.g. 60%,70% or 80% of all team members that have to agree with a proposal.

You ensure higher support in your team.

It is faster than a whole team agreement but implies the risk of potentially losing team members (like in the majority).

This time it's maybe even more frustrating for the single team member who's opinion got "overruled". It can create a many vs. one feeling.

Multivoting



It's the same as the majority voting but applied to a list of topics to prioritize. Also called dot voting.

Let's take for example a list of 8 topics to discuss next (in a retrospective) and you need to figure out what the most important topic to start with.

Everyone gets 4 dots (some use the number of dots to be 50% of the items to vote on, some say 30%) and can select her most important items.

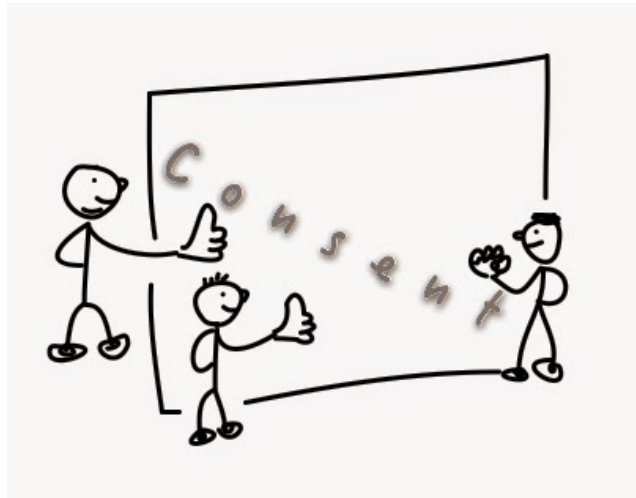
She can even put more dots on one item showing a strong interest in a topic. (How many you can put on one it's up to your definition).

Voting is best done in parallel to avoid too much influence by the opinion of others.

It's a fast way to get the groups idea where to move on next. Implies the same drawbacks as majority decision making.

Consent

Every team member can live with that decision and supports it.



In project team decision-making, acquiescence or agreement to a course of action commonly characterized by comfort with the general direction though not necessarily with all the specific details.

In project decision-making, consent is considered a more practical approach than consensus.

It's the first level, where the whole team has to support a decision. It ensures a commitment and very likely high engagement by the team. No one get's lost.

It's slower than all previously shown methods but using the right methods of facilitation the speed difference will not have that high impact (read on to get an overview of possible methods 😊)

Consensus



Every team member fully agrees with that decision and fully supports it.

In project team decision-making, full agreement within the group of a course of action including all its details.

This approach requires negotiation within the group of all the precise details.

While leading to a higher level of “buy-in”, the result tends to be equivalent to the “lowest common denominator”.

Negotiations may be protracted and the final course not necessarily optimal and in the best interests of the project’s goals.

Consensus	Consent
• Best for nurturing a business enterprise	• Best for projects, especially when people want answers
• Is interactive, dynamic	• Uses established relationships
• Requires near-universal agreement	• Targets individual specialist opinions
• Is inherently slow	• Can convert or respond to a crisis quickly
• Also has more subtle impacts	• Has clearly defined impacts
• Must accommodate fringe elements	• Allows overriding of unreasonable adversaries
• Permits “voyage of discovery” and attitude cultivation	• Requires reliable information gathering and “homework”
• Satisfies mutual and self-interests	• Focuses on project objectives

Facilitate Consent (and Consensus) decision making

Thumbs voting

Thumb up = **Yes!** I actively **support** this decision!



Thumbs sideways = I need **more discussion** before I can support this decision



Fist = **I step aside**. I support the groups decision and don't need to be involved.



Thumb down = **Veto!** I understand the proposal but do not support it! *I can explain my concerns.* (It can be that slight adjustments will change my support level or I really strongly disagree).



The group cannot decide!

7 Levels Consent

(1) Whole hearted endorsement (full support)

I really like it. It's great and it works like a charm for me.

(2) Support with reservation (slight concerns)

I have some slight concerns but I can live with it. I'll support the group actively.

(3) Abstain (Step aside)

I step aside. I support the groups decision and don't need to be involved.

(4) Agreement with minor contention (severe concerns)

Not perfect but it's good enough. I disagree with a few points. But I'll support the group.

(5) Serious disagreement (Step Out)

Don't count on me. Disagreements are so serious that I'm not willing to support this decision actively. Group can still continue but without my involvement.

(6) More discussion needed

I don't understand the proposal and I need **more discussion** before I can support this decision

(7) Veto

I understand the proposal but do not support it! *I can explain my concerns*. (It can be that slight adjustments will change my support level or I really strongly disagree).

The group cannot decide!

Although the 7 steps consent method is a bit more complicated as it needs some practice to gain the advantages to the thumbs voting, it's my favorite approach. You get much more insight from the group and can differentiate better whether it really makes sense to continue the decision process.

As facilitator I recommend not to continue with a decision if your have votes starting with 5's (Step out) and above in your group. Often it's best to check the 4's too.

With only 1-3 voting – cool – you can go.

1-5 is a consent. 1-3 is a consensus 😊

How to apply it

Inform your team about the different levels for consent finding and clarify questions.


Introduce the proposal, so that a first overview is given.

Check the consent levels. If this already 1-3. DONE ... next one. If not – further explain the topic and address concerns. Start to negotiate and check for possible ways to resolve concerns.

Check the consent levels again. Still 4-7 ... decide if the proposal need more preparation or maybe has to get rejected at all.

Using a decision making workshop

Its a good start to clarify the decision making process in your team using a decision making workshop. You can explain the different decision making rules in detail and gather first major areas where decision often occur.

Rule	When applied
Majority	
Delegation	
Super Majority	
Multivoting	
Consent	<div style="display: flex; gap: 10px;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; background-color: #fff9c4;">Retro points</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; background-color: #fff9c4;">DOD</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; background-color: #fff9c4;">DOR</div> </div>
Consensus	

(based on great input from [unusual-concepts](#))

Reconsider decision making areas (e.g. in your retrospective) and adjust rules to use accordingly.

Further Readings

- [Consensus vs. Consent](#) explanation by Max Widemann
- [Crisp's DNA and their decision making process](#)
- [A ScrumMaster's practical toolbox](#) by [Iliia Pavlichenko](#), [Sergey Dmitriev](#), [Alexey Pikulev](#)
- [Consent Levels by the 3 Agile Guys](#)
- [Consensus gradient cards](#)
- [Team decision making – The gradients of agreement](#)

What ways to make decisions do you use in your environment? Please share your thoughts via your comment! Thanks 😊