



Team Science Decision-Making Toolkit

A comparative guide to majority voting, compromise, multivoting, and consensus building

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Choosing a Decision-Making Method

Teams often struggle not because they simply disagree, but because they use the wrong decision method for the situation. No single approach is universally “best.” Effective teams choose decision methods deliberately, based on group size, stakes, time, trust, and the need for long-term commitment.

This guide compares four commonly used decision methods and clarifies when each is most appropriate. Read through our other individual explainers on these different decision-making methods and our 10 rules on scientific collaboration to improve your team.

❖ Majority Voting

- **What it is:**
A positional method in which individuals choose among options and the option with more than half the votes wins.
- **What it optimizes for:**
Speed and clarity.
- **What it costs:**
Majority voting produces winners and losers. Because it creates a winner-take-all outcome, it can divide groups and weaken trust, especially when decisions affect values, identity, or long-term collaboration (Janis, 1982).
- **Best used when:**
The group can afford to be divided, the decision is low-stakes or procedural, time is limited, and/or consensus is impractical due to group size.
- **Risk if misused:**
Lingering resentment, disengagement, and reduced commitment to implementation.

❖ Compromise

- **What it is:**
A positional method in which opposing sides settle on a middle-ground solution after each gives up part of what they want.
- **What it optimizes for:**
Movement when agreement seems blocked.
- **What it costs:**



Compromise often leads to outcomes that no one fully supports. When agreement reflects resignation rather than deliberate choice, teams may “agree to disagree,” which can quietly erode trust and team cohesion over time (Fisher and Ury, 2011).

- **Best used when:**

There are clearly defined, mutually exclusive options; collaborative integration is not possible, and the team explicitly acknowledges the trade-offs involved.

- **Risk if misused:**

Surface-level agreement with underlying dissatisfaction and weakened collaboration.

- ❖ **Multivoting**

- **What it is:**

A structured prioritization method in which individuals distribute multiple votes or points across a list of options to produce a ranked outcome.

- **What it optimizes for:**

Fair participation, neutrality, and clarity in complex decision spaces.

- **What it costs:**

Multivoting does not guarantee the emergence of an optimal or innovative solution, especially if votes are split across similar options. Open voting can also introduce subtle social influence unless anonymous voting options are used (Kahneman, 2011).

- **Best used when:**

Teams face a long list of priorities, resources are limited, disagreement is not deeply ideological, and/or narrowing options would help the group move forward.

- **Risk if misused:**

Treating rankings as final decisions rather than inputs into further discussion.

- ❖ **Consensus Building**

- **What it is:**

A collaborative, facilitated process through which a group works together to search for the best possible solution.

- **What it optimizes for:**

Shared ownership, legitimacy, and long-term commitment.

- **What it costs:**

Consensus building is time-consuming, emotionally demanding, difficult to scale, and highly dependent on trust and skilled facilitation.

- **Best used when:**

Decisions are high-stakes, central to the team’s mission or values, and require durable buy-in and follow-through.

- **Risk if misused:**

Frustration, burnout, or paralysis if the team lacks time, trust, or facilitation capacity.



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Quick Reference Table

Method	Primary Strength	Primary Risk	Best For
<i>Majority Voting</i>	Fast, clear decision	Division, winners/losers	Low-stakes or time-sensitive decisions
<i>Compromise</i>	Enables movement	Quiet dissatisfaction	Mutually exclusive options
<i>Multivoting</i>	Fair prioritization	Split votes, shallow resolution	Sorting complex priorities
<i>Consensus Building</i>	Strong commitment	Time and emotional cost	High-stakes, long-term decisions

Key Takeaway for Teams

Decision quality is not just about *what* is decided, but *how* it is decided. Teams that are intentional about their decision methods are more likely to sustain trust, collaboration, and effectiveness over time. It is important to remember that the most effective teams do not rely on a single method. As a result, teams and team leads should develop “decision-method literacy,” so they can match the correct decision tool to their discussion needs.

References

Fisher, R., & Ury, W. (2011). *Getting to Yes: Negotiating an agreement without giving in* (2nd ed.). Random House.

Janis, I. L. (1982). *Groupthink: Psychological studies of policy decisions and fiascoes* (2nd ed.). Cengage Learning.

Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking, fast and slow*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.