

Three Forms of Democratic Choice-making

By Jim Rough*

	<u>Decision-making</u>	<u>Consensus-building</u>	<u>Choice-creating</u>
Description	Decision-making is a cognitive process, divorced from feelings, where one option is selected from many. Group decisions can be made through voting, a sum of individual decisions.	Proposals are presented and adapted until most everyone consents. It requires awareness of feelings, communication skills and relationship with others. Individuals can block the group.	With choice-creating people face a difficult issue collaboratively and creatively. Through shifts and breakthroughs they co-create a unanimous win/win perspective and build the spirit of "We."
The group conversation	Cognitive-seeming but tends to become a power struggle. Discussion, debate, dialog, and deliberation can be used to mitigate it.	Assumes respectful behaviors of people who are capable of holding to group objectives and discussing feelings. The facilitator helps people follow thinking steps..	Dynamic Facilitation can reliably evoke choice-creating in groups. Dialog, deliberation, problem solving, etc. are complementary.
Group conclusion	One option is selected from many.	A compromise evolves, which most everyone supports.	A unanimous choice is created, plus a new sense of the issue.
Strengths	The process is explicit, like Parliamentary Procedure. Group decisions can be reached quickly and openly, even among many people.	Decisions are characterized by thoughtfulness and caring. The process builds relationships and a spirit of community.	Can achieve breakthroughs on impossible-seeming issues. Works with diverse views, generates a unified perspective, and builds a spirit of "we."
Weaknesses	Can generate adversarial battles and a disaffected minority; people can use the rules as an obstacle to progress. The battling and procedures can deaden people's support.	Can only be used with small numbers; can take a long time; one person can hold the group hostage; and end results can be overly compromised. Requires skill and willingness from each person.	Dynamic Facilitation (DF) skills are needed. It requires authenticity so doesn't work well with representatives. Can feel chaotic until shifts happen. Participants can't track interim progress well.
The facilitator or moderator	Manages the steps. This requires knowledge of the process but not lots of training.	Has broad powers. Often follows a set procedure. Skills of participants can compensate for an unskilled facilitator.	Must be skilled in Dynamic Facilitation where each person's contribution is accessible to the whole.
The ideal participant ...	Is rational, articulate and knowledgeable about the topic and the procedures.	Diplomatically speaks his/her truth and adjusts his views for the good of the group.	Cares about the issue and speaks authentically from the heart, without self-censoring.
Feelings and conflicts are ...	Not addressed ...may be declared out of order.	Often pursued as a goal in themselves.	People are helped to speak with feeling. They are reframed into concerns or challenges.
Model of change	Trust in judgment, reason and logic. Independent judgments can be summed into a collective judgment.	Trust in the self-control of people to be respectful of one another and to give up something to help the whole.	Trust in the ability of the DF'er to create a thinking field of respect and creativity, where a new solution will emerge.
Role in democracy	This is how democracies currently work. But without full participation.	Not very usable for large systems.	Ideal thinking quality for democracy. May be used to spark "We the People."

*This chart benefitted from an article by Tom Atlee and Rosa Zubizarreta, *Comparison of Roberts Rules of Order, Consensus Process and Dynamic Facilitation*.