OnCreate

Evaluation Method

Decision Making

Decision Making

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Description of factor

The quality of the decision making in creative processes is a crucial factor for successful collaboration. Bad decision making processes can divide the team, demotivate members, create winners and losers or cause unambitious or unrealistic decisions. While a good ideation process is an open, inspiring and uplifting experience, decision making inevitably has to let go of a lot of beloved ideas. It is the moment of truth, where we see if the team is able to stay on the same page and unite behind a goal.

Decision making processes provide structure for the teamwork, and help the team to make important decisions regarding the collaboration and during their projects. Joint decision making is needed since creative works are judged by a lot of different criteria, and decision-making is complex.

One frequent problem is that teams are not aware that there is a multitude of decision modes apart from hierarchical ruling and majority votes. It is important to consciously choose appropriate modes of decision for different matters that arise during the project.

Examples of decision modes

Majority vote: This is what most people think about when it comes to decision making in team. It gives you a fairly quick result, but might leave behind a disappointed or even opposing minority, which can be a liability for the rest of the project.

Consensus vote: All team members have to agree to the decision. This kind of decision making takes longer, but boosts team spirit, as nobody

is forced to work on an objective he/she does not want to. In theory, one opposing person could block project process infinitely. But in practice, if somebody tries to sabotage the project in this way, your problem is not on the decision making level, but you have to work on basic mutual trust in your team (or, in the extreme case, kick that individual off the team).

Systemic consensing: Like a consensus vote, but instead of looking at what each team does NOT want to do. The aim is to find a decision that can expect the lowest opposition from the team members. This makes sense when no topic finds positive consensus and there is no way to look for further alternatives.

Expert vote: If a team member has a specific expertise that is recognitioned by the team members, they may delegate a related decision fully to this member, trusting her/his expertise.

Leader decision: The team leader decides - the quickest way to make a decision, but also that with the most conflict potential. The basic requirement is that the leader is accepted by the team. And a good leader knows for which decisions he has to rely on one of the other modes mentioned above.

Description of method

We provide a semantic differential listing a number of attributes that can be applied to characteristics of the creative decision making process. In the questionnaire they are assessed using a 7-part likert scale.

Additionally, the questionnaire contains four more questions:

All in all, the decision making processes in our group were ...
Please rate your overall satisfaction with the decision making processes in your group.
Rationale: It is not immediately evident from the result of the differential whether the decision making process was appropriate or not. The result of this question gives you a frame for interpretation of the results in a

certain project context. You will be able to make at least assumptions about which attributes make a satisfying decision process.

All in all, the creative output of our group was ...
Please give your subjective impression of the creative output your team created during the project or course.
Rationale: You are probably interested in learning over the time which are the characteristics that make a successful decision making process in a creative process in terms of supporting the best possible creative result. The answer to this question again gives you a context for assumptions or even rigorous analysis, provided there is a big enough sample of similar projects.

Open attributes
Please add any attribute that you would use to describe your decision making process that was not mentioned above.
The attributes were collected and selected by a group of experts in creative online collaboration, but that does not mean they are exhaustive. Here you may gain ideas for new relevant attribute pairs to extend or improve the questionnaire. Maybe you are even deep into statistics and have the means and numbers to do factorial analysis to come up with a validated set of orthogonal and exhaustive attribute pairs.

Name of your group
If you like to see a peer group evaluation, you can enter a group name here. You do not have to give your actual team name in the course, just agree on the same keyword with your group members so we can provide you an anonymous peer group assessment.
If you like to reflect the process with your group of learners, you can ask them to give you team codes, so that you can provide personalized summaries.

Why and when to use

This questionnaire is a great tool to spark discussions on the quality of creative decision making and to create awareness for the necessity to design them diligently. In many attributes, there is no clear polarization for many attribute pairs, as the ideal decision making process depends on matter and context.

We recommend the following modes of use:

- **As a reflection tool:** Draw the evaluation as a curve, so people can discuss where their feelings go with the majority and where they deviate.
- **As a controlling tool:** Ask the students to model their "ideal" decision making process for the project they want to do, then use the questionnaire to compare it with reality of their project.
- **As a teaching tool:** Have experts model the "ideal" process for a certain context and give it as reference to the students. Let students compare their process to the "ideal" and discuss it with them.
- **As a research tool:** Help us to improve the questionnaire by adding more rigorous research as outlined earlier. Find out about correlations between satisfaction, success and characteristics of the creative process.

How to analyse

The questionnaire uses 7-part likert scales, which can be read like this:

fast						slow
+3	+2	+1	neutral	1	2	3

- Provide the questionnaire on paper or use google forms, surveymonkey, lime survey or a similar tool.
- Calculate arithmetic average or median (median is less prone to get influenced by outliers, but exactly this might be interesting in smaller groups).
- Polarize the attribute pairs, if you can determine a clear polarization (good attributes vs. bad attributes) for your context.

- Draw a diagramme, possibly with additional curves comparing groups or with expert recommendations.
- You may want to add max and min values for each attribute to show the range of answers (or other statistical measures).
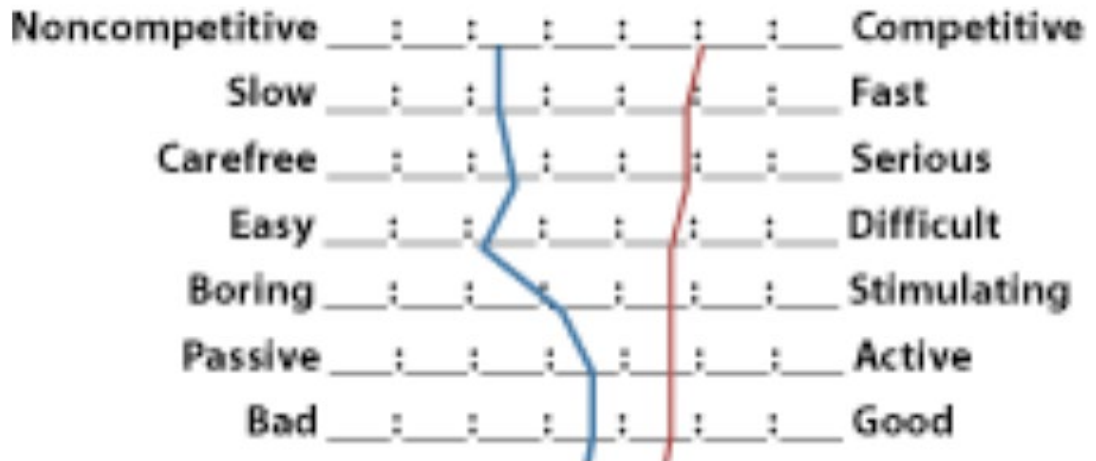
Discuss the results with your class. You can use it in a qualitative way by discussing it item by item. The table below helps you in judging the influence of the attributes on the context at hand. For any attribute it highlights both positive and negative influences it may have on the decision making process.

Attribute A / rationale		Attribute B / rationale	
quick		slow	
+	Teams usually enjoy quick decision processes. The process of decision making is a time of uncertainty that blocks people from actual creation.	+	There exist good reasons to rely on a slow process if it is well structured and the decision is sufficiently complex.
–	However, a fast discussion can as well feel rushed and unfounded, so the meaning of this wordpair depends on the context of your project.	–	However, a slow decision process can be painful and drain team motivation.

superficial		thorough	
+	The attribute "superficial" has a negative connotation in general, however there might be contexts and types of decisions where it just doesn't matter how a decision is reached, as long as it is reached	+	Thorough decision making balances the perspectives of the invidual, team and organisation needs with the interests of the project.
–	A superficial decision making process lacks depths and common understanding of the criteria behind the decision	–	A process that is too thorough can delay the project and can be considered tedious

well-founded		uniformed	
+	The team understands the deeper rationale of the decision and has access to exhaustive research results that found the basis of the decision.	+	Taking intuitive, even somewhat naive decisions open the opportunity for creative serendipity and unconventional solutions.
–	Decision making may be too difficult if myriads of research results add complexity to the process, which in turn may curb creativity.	–	Team members may feel insecure to take a decision at all and if a decision is taken, they might lack confidence to realize it.

structured		unstructured	
+	A process that includes separate methodical phases and steps ensures the whole team shares the same knowledge and everybody's point of view is considered	+	Team does not feel "fenced in" by the process and can react to updated developments and contextual conditions
–	An overstructured process might curb creativity and might put process before content. Changes in project goals or new insights might be difficult to integrate during the process.	–	Risk of dominance of certain team members, important arguments and considerations might get lost on the way.

fair		unfair	
+	A fair decision making process ensures that all team members accept the results, improving team motivation during the following work.	+	If the project leader creates a competitive team atmosphere on purpose, a slight bit of perceived unfairness might be instrumentalized, though there might be devastating side effects.
−	It is hard to imagine the disadvantages of a fair process, although a certain element of friendly competition among the team members might be used consciously as an element to spark creativity. Also, processes that try to be 100% fair could tire people when they lead to tiresome discussions in the name of fairness.	−	Perceived unfairness can be disastrous for the team spirit and lead to inner emigration of team members.

hierarchical		equitable	
+	Hierarchical decision making usually leads to quick decisions and can bring progress where the team as a whole is undecided.	+	Equitable decision making takes into account the collective wisdom and competencies of the team and usually lead to well-informed and mutually accepted decisions.
−	Hierachies can be introduced formally, but positions also have to be earned by the leader to become affirmed over time. Hierarchy without trust in competence and ability to take decisions might lead to lower team motivation down to full revolts.	−	Not everybody in the team has the same expertise. Depending on the context, delegation of decisions to experts might lead to better decisions. Also, pretending a team to be equitable where it is clearly not the case can be perceived as a demotivating farce.

dividing		uniting	
+	It is not possible to avoid controversy at all times. If the divide appears only interim and not as final result of the process, it might be a sign of a intense, but healthy process.	+	An ideal decision making process unites them team behind the final idea, kicking of the idea implementation with the highest possible Team motivation.

−	A divide on issues is okay, but it should not be followed by a social and motivational divide in the team.	−	If unity is sought by avoiding conflict at all, the decision might not last in the long run, putting the project at jeopardy.

motivating		disencouraging	
+	A motivating process improves the endorsement of the decision by the team members, which is especially important in creative decision.	+	While disencouragement certainly is an effect that should be avoided, in moderate form it can be an indicator of a thorough process that confronted bold ideation with reality, leading to a balanced, feasible decision.
−	Exaggerated motivation can lead to both bold and unfeasible decisions. It is important not to let the team be "carried away", unless the very nature of the project affords it.	−	The causes of disencouragement may be manifold and can be either due to the process or the content of the decision. The first case should definitely be discussed and solved on team level, the latter might call for a reiteration, going back to the ideation process instead of continuing with a solution that feels second best at most.

passionate		dry	
+	It is not possible to avoid controversy at all times. If the divide appears only interim and not as final result of the process, it might be a sign of a intense, but healthy process.	+	An ideal decision making process unites them team behind the final idea, kicking of the idea implementation with the highest possible Team motivation.
−	Too much passion may lead to an exaggerated feeling of ownership of ideas and solutions, leading to team conflicts and divides. A passionate conflict is more likely to leave behind one or more emotional losers.	−	If not only the process of decision making, but also the final decision feels "dry", the team misses an opportunity for an emotional jumpstart into the implementation phase of the project.

surprising		predictable	
+	Positive surprises comprise serendipity, finding unexpected solutions. This can be a sign of an excellent and inspiring process.	+	Usually teams should aim for a converging decision making process, constantly filtering ideas until they agree on the final concept. The team members should be able to backtrack the course of decision if they wanted to.
–	On the negative side, surprises may mean that the decision was not at all predictable from the discourse that happened during the decision making process. This in turn means that no common base of knowledge and empathy had built up during the process.	–	If predictable means that the result of the process is obvious from the beginning, trust in the process erodes and it is rendered useless.

cooperative		confrontative	
+	In general, ideas should compete in a process of creative decision making, not people.	+	A confrontative style encourages people to find the best arguments to that support their ideas.
–	In some cases, a friendly competitive atmosphere can improve the quality of ideas. Also, cooperation means a higher complexity of the process.	–	Yet it tends to turn team members into advocates of their own ideas, curbing critical thinking. Also, it might discourage more introverted people, who have a disdain for "uncivilized" working culture.

transparent		intransparent	
+	It is clear when and how decisions are taken in the team and the process looks coherent in hindsight. This increases acceptance and trust in decisions.	+	It is hard to find a good argument for total intransparency, yet it could be a conscious decision to keep away some processes from the team so it can focus on the core issues of the project at hand.
–	The attempt to be overtly transparent can be tiresome and self-reflective.	–	Team members feel left out of the loop, lacking a possibility to contribute their ideas, curbing long time motivation and losing valuable opinions in critical thinking.

fuzzy		clear	
+	At best, a fuzzy process encourages associative thoughts and instincts to work in favour of the creative process.	+	Comprehensible and agreed upon criteria for the process, with a clear picture of what has to be decided why and how.
−	At the same time, a fuzzy decision process can be perceived unfocused, with no clear aim and criteria.	−	Clarity might also be an attribute to processes that are too straight and "by the book", curbing creativity.

pleasant		uneasy	
+	A pleasant process creates can create affection between the team members, forging them into a harmonious team, united behind a common goal.	+	Could be a sign that the team members went out of the comfort zone, challenging their own ideas.
−	However, a pleasant process might also be a sign of conflict avoided that could backfire later in the process, as people rather were polite than agreeing deep in their heart.	−	If uneasiness can be related to the social context, this could point to a general problem in the team. Team members should not feel socially uneasy when discussing ideas.

simple		complex	
+	A simple process is unobtrusive and keeps the focus on the matter. It is important this attribute is more about how the process was perceived. A process that is perceived simple, although it seems complex to third persons, is usually a good process.	+	A complex decision making process can be thoroughly designed, holistic process that takes into account all contextual factors of the matter and the team.
−	If a process is too simple, one should look at what was sacrificed in order to achieve simplicity. It could come at the expense of equitability and similar values.	−	However, a perceived overtly complex process can indicate that the process was over-dimensioned for the respective decision matter or felt too artificial, too far away from the usual practice of working of the team members.

guided		open	
+	Team members accept and understand the process. They can concentrate on the content and issues, as the process is guided e.g. by an expert moderator or someone with a dedicated role in the team.	+	An open process allows all team members not only to contribute to the issue, but to the process as well. It allows them to integrate individual strengths and preferences in the way of creative working into the group process.
–	The downside of guidance is the possible feeling of being patronized and curbed.	–	An open process can also be arbitrary, with problems to focus people's attention. It also might extend the discourse infinitevely, drifting away from the original matter of the decision at hand.

Literature

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Video Resources

Decision Making in Design:

https://vimeo.com/worldviewstanford/review/95827194/3c6c71dcae

Story about Loomio Decision Making System:

http://www.mixprize.org/story/when-business-met-occupy-innovating-true-collaborative-decision-making-and-true-empowerment?challenge=1860

Online Decision Making Questionnaire

This questionnaire is developed by the OnCreate project in order to provide a diagnostic tool for problems related to decision making processes in online collaboration.

1. **Rating decision making processes with attribute pairs**

   You see a number of attribute pairs here. Please mark which attribute fits better to describe the decision making processes in your team. Try to answer spontaneously, rather following your feeling than using deep reflexion. Example: If you find the processes were by and large balanced between twingly and boompy, but sometimes had a small tendency to be twingly, you would check field 3 below. If you found the process absolutely boompy, then you would check 7.
   Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
twingly	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	boompy

2. **I personally found the decision making processes in our group ...** *
   Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
quick	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	slow

3. *
   Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
quick	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	slow

4. *
   Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
superficial	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	thorough

5. *
   Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
well-founded	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	uninformed

6. *

Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
structured	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	unstructured

7. *

Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
unfair	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	fair

8. *

Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
hierarchical	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	equitable

9. *

Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
dividing	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	uniting

10. *

Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
disencouraging	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	motivating

11. *

Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
passionate	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	dry

12. *

Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
emotional	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	rational

13. *

   Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
surprising	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	predictable

14. *

   Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
confrontative	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	cooperative

15. *

   Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
transparent	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	intransparent

16. *

   Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
clear	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	fuzzy

17. *

   Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
uneasy	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	pleasant

18. *

   Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
complex	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	simple

19. *

   Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
open	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	guided

20. **All in all, the decision making processes in our group were ...** *

Please rate your overall satisfaction with the decision making processes in your group.
Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
perfect	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	unbearable

21. **All in all, the creative output of our group was ...** *

Please give your subjective impression of the creative output your team created during the project or course.
Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
absolutely great	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	totally disappointing

22. **Open attributes**

Please add any attribute that you would use to describe your decision making process that was not mentioned above.

23. **Name of your group**

If you like to see a per-group evaluation, you can enter a group name here. You do not have to give your actual team name in the course, just agree on the same keyword with your group members so we can provide you an anonymous per-group assessment.