

ieee-usa
TODAY'S

engineer

Online

 [Back](#)

November 2002

short circuits

- > **engineering history:**
[Carrier's 100 Year Anniversary](#)
- > **world bytes:**
[The European Union at 50 Years](#)

Making Team Decisions Wisely

by **Larry Richman**

During the course of a project, many decisions get made that ultimately affect the project for better or worse. Some are small decisions that have relatively little impact, while others may have a major impact on the progress or outcome.

viewpoints

- > [ieee-usa president's column \(May 2007\)](#)
- > [reader feedback](#)

Project managers make some decisions with little or no input from the team. Other more important decisions sometimes require project managers to get more information or support from their team. In these cases, they may call for the entire team to make a group decision.

The Ideal Decision-making Team

Follow this adage to ensure your decision-making team has the diversity necessary to add value to the process:

archives

- > [career articles](#)
- > [policy articles](#)
- > [March 2007](#)
- > [Jan-Feb 2007](#)
- > [December 2006](#)
- > [November 2006](#)
- > [October 2006](#)
- > [September 2006](#)
- > [August 2006](#)
- > [all articles](#)

Someone old: the person brings wisdom from having been around a long time

Go It Alone or Ask for Help?

When should you bring others into the decision-making process? Generally, it is good — even necessary — to involve other members of the team in making decisions when you need their commitment, and when you don't have the expertise necessary to make the decision by yourself. Sometimes, though, involving others is either unnecessary or can create problems. In most situations, it's not a good idea to involve others in making a decision when:

Someone new: this person will bring new ideas to the table

Someone borrowed: this person will provide the "outsider's perspective" as a user or requestor group representative

Someone blue: this person is a "devil's advocate" and will ask the tough questions

- The decision relates to a trivial issue.

keyword search

(e.g., author name, title)

resources

- > [IEEE-USA](#)

career resources

- > [career navigator](#)
- > [ieee-usa salary service](#)
- > [ieee job site](#)

> [ieee spectrum careers](#)

public policy resources

> [IEEE-USA Policy Forum](#)

> [Legislative Action Center](#)

- The decision involves a personnel issue.
- You are unwilling or unable to negotiate or compromise.
- The need for speed is greater than the need for commitment — you need to make a decision quickly and have the expertise necessary to do so.

The Pros and Cons of Team Decisionmaking

Involving other people in making decisions has both advantages and disadvantages. Among the advantages, team decisions tend to:

- Provide a broader perspective
- Benefit from more experience and ideas
- Secure the commitment of others in the decision

Of course, team decisionmaking has a downside. Among the disadvantages, project managers must:

- Be willing to negotiate
- Understand that the process may get bogged down by the size of the team
- Be able to maintain control of the team
- Know that they won't be able to please everyone — they may alienate some team members and must be prepared to handle such a situation, if it arises
- Be able to separate the wheat from the chaff — not everyone will have helpful insight or expertise

Ensuring a Productive Process and a Successful Outcome

When you decide to make a decision as a team, consider these rules of thumb:

- The leader sets the agenda.
- All team members take an active role.
- Each person listens with respect.
- Each person expresses his or her point of view.

- The team focuses on what is best for the organization.
- The team makes the final decision.
- The team must agree on appropriate assignments, follow-up and evaluation.

Knowing when to involve others in making decisions, what to expect from the team effort, and how to conduct a team decision-making activity will lead to better decisions that will benefit you, your team and your organization.

 [Back](#)

Larry Richman, Ph.D., PMP, has more than 20 years of experience as a project manager. He has developed computer-assisted project management systems and has taught project management for more than 10 years. He is the author of the new book, Project Management Step-by-Step. He can be reached at larry.richman@usa.com

© Copyright 2003, The Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, Inc.