

---

## Four Decision-Making Styles and When to Use Them

by Jesse Lyn Stoner | 11 comments

◀◀ [How the Benefits of Team Vision Can Revitalize Your Team](#)

[Radical Resiliency: An Interview with Eileen McDargh @Macdarling #Podcast](#) ▶▶

Sometimes leaders make bad decisions or harm team morale by making autocratic decisions without involving others. And other times they waste their team's time by unnecessarily involving them.

How do you know when and how much to involve your team in decisions? Sometimes the answer is pretty obvious.

You don't need to call a team meeting to decide to order pencils for your office. On the other hand, if one of your direct reports has the authority to make decisions about office supplies, your taking over might not be appreciated.

# Decision-Making Styles

Jesse Lyn Stoner



## Four Decision-Making Styles

You have four choices on how to make decisions and when to involve others.

### 1 Autocratic

**(Independent):** You make the decision on your own without input from your team.

**2 Consultative:** You ask your team for information that would be helpful and

for their opinions, either individually or as a group, but you make the final decision.

**3 Team:** You pull your team together to discuss the situation and decide as a team. You facilitate their reaching consensus, where everyone agrees to support the decision. As a member of the group, you must be willing to support the decision as well.

**4 Delegating:** You are not part of the decision-making process. You might ask to be informed of the decision (or not), but you will not change the decision.

## Communicate Which of the Decision-Making Styles Will Be Used

Outline a clear decision-making process, such as [CRISP Decision-Making](#) and be clear with your team about which decision-making style is being used. If people are going to be involved in a decision, make sure they know which of the decision-making styles you will be using – whether they are being asked to consult or if they have a real vote. When asked for an opinion, people often assume they have a vote and can feel misled if they discover later that is not the case.

When people know ahead of time what their role is in the decision-making process, they are less likely to resent or undermine a decision that doesn't go the way they wanted.

You might start out with one style and then decide to change styles. For example, you might want to make a team decision but discover there is too much conflict to achieve consensus. If you change the decision-making style, it is important to inform your team.

## **Four Questions to Know Which of the Decision-Making Styles to Use**

### **1. Is this your decision to make?**

Whose responsibility it is to make this decision? Does one of your direct reports or someone on a different team have authority to make this decision? If this is not your decision to make: Use a ***Delegating Style***.

If you believe the person or team responsible for this decision is not capable of making a quality decision without your involvement, discuss it with them and determine what decision-making style is appropriate. If a decision is required and you don't have time to contact them or they are unavailable, you should get to them as soon as possible to explain why you went around them. [Avoid taking back decision-making authority.](#) If you do this on a regular basis, you will be viewed as a micro-manager and resentment will build.

### **2. Do you have access to the needed relevant information?**

Do you know everything you need to know to make an intelligent decision? Do you have the necessary expertise?

If so, and if support for the decision is not needed or is guaranteed, use an ***Autocratic Style***. It's not necessary to gather your team to discuss where to hang a picture in your office.

The danger is that sometimes we don't know what we don't know. If this is a mission-critical decision, it's worth using a *Consultative Style* to make sure you're not missing any important information that would affect the quality of your decision. (See question #4)

### **3. To what extent is acceptance necessary for successful implementation?**

If successful implementation depends on the understanding and acceptance of others, it is to your advantage to involve them in the decision early on and use

a **Team Style**, even if you believe you already know the best decision.

Otherwise, you might save time during the decision-making process, but will pay the price during implementation. The more others are affected by the decision, the more they should be involved.

A good consensus process, where team members set their egos and personal needs aside and focus on the mission, will result in a higher quality decision. And as a result of the process, team members will develop a deeper understanding of the issues and great commitment to the decision, ensuring smoother and faster implementation.

#### **4. How great is the impact of the decision on accomplishing the team's mission?**

What is the complexity and scale of the impact of the decision? As complexity increases, the likelihood that you know everything needed to make a quality decision decreases. Use a **Consultative Style**. As the scale increases, the likelihood that acceptance of others is needed increases. Use a high-involvement style – *Team* if possible, and if not *Consultative*, with broad and deep input.

#### **What About Urgency?**

What if you don't have time for involvement? Shouldn't that be a consideration? Indeed, if the building is on fire and smoke is coming under the door, it doesn't make sense to call a group together to discuss options. However, most situations are not as urgent as they seem.

We have all had the experience of being in a hurry and making a decision we later regret. The same thing can happen with teams. It's important to be aware of the potential for bad decisions when under an intense deadline, and consider the short-term benefit of a quick decision vs. the long-term consequences of poor implementation and needing to redo work.

Photo credit: Jesse Lyn Stoner | [Four Decision-Making Styles and When to Use Them](#)

**Subscribe To Jesse Lyn Stoner's Blog**

It's Free! Enter your email and this weekly blog will arrive in your email box. Rest assured your email will never be shared. You can unsubscribe anytime.

Submit

I agree to have my personal information transferred to MailChimp ( [more information](#) )

It's free and I will never give away, trade or sell your email address. You can unsubscribe at any time.

## 11 Comments



**John P** on May 16, 2017 at 9:36 am

Our team meetings waste so much time because our team leader thinks all decisions need to be made by consensus. Thank you for this model. Will share it with my team.

Reply



**Jesse Lyn Stoner** on May 16, 2017 at 9:48 am

Misuse of the Team Style can be as bad as misuse of Autocratic Style. Both lead to poor decisions and lack of team commitment. Hope this helps your team develop a greater range and better use of decision-making styles.

Reply



**John Bennett** on May 17, 2017 at 7:52 am

Decision process selection is, as with every situation faced, is a "problem to be solved." As such, information gathering, organizing, and understanding is key. The four questions you suggest are great for getting that information. Also, as you say, keeping everyone informed regardless, together with your reasoning, will avoid a lot of problems! Like the 'four-quadrant' visual. I was thinking about Covey's extensive use of it. He always arranged it such that Quadrant 2 (upper right) was the always his preferred choice. But of course in this case, any of the four might be best for any particular decision to be made. Your visual does emphasize the level of involvement of both the leader and the team. Finally, so important, as you note, that delegating can and sometime should involve non-team member(s).

Reply



**Jesse Lyn Stoner** on May 17, 2017 at 9:08 am

As you point out, there is no best quadrant. This is why autocratic leaders get into trouble. They make quick decisions that are expedient, but are often

ill-considered. And then a lot of people have to clean up the mess they have made. Thanks for your many good thoughts, John

Reply



**James Paderman** on May 17, 2017 at 10:19 am

I worked for an autocratic leader who made a lot of big decisions without consulting anyone, and we were the ones who had to clean it up and we were the ones who looked bad!

Reply



**Jesse Lyn Stoner** on May 17, 2017 at 11:14 am

Unfortunately when a leader inappropriately uses an autocratic style, it's usually the direct reports that feel the effect. Not directly feeling the consequences, these leaders are not motivated to change their style.

Reply



**Eileen McDargh, CSP, CPAE** on May 17, 2017 at 12:59 pm

This so matches Situational Leadership II at a decision making level. Depending upon the task at hand, and the competency and commitment of the individual, one can see how this is a perfect overlay.

Thanks, Jesse

Reply



**Jesse Lyn Stoner** on May 17, 2017 at 5:48 pm

Astute observation, Eileen. The model is adapted from [Victor Vroom's decision tree](#). But it's the same premise as SLII – there's no one best style. It depends on the situation.

Reply



**Richard Bernato** on May 18, 2017 at 3:23 pm

You might like my book, Futures Based Change Leadership to support your ideas. [https://www.amazon.com/Futures-Based-Change-Leadership-Sustained/dp/1475822669/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1494963627&sr=8-1&keywords=bernato](https://www.amazon.com/Futures-Based-Change-Leadership-Sustained/dp/1475822669/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1494963627&sr=8-1&keywords=bernato)

Any organizational or personal decision approach is grounded in futuring the possible probable, and preferable outcomes the actual choices are meant to bring about.

In order for an organization to have the capacity to change in alignment to its preferable future it must have; healthy systems in place, and a culture of collaborative leadership practices that knows how to generate its true purpose.

Even if those conditions exist, the decision maker(S) needs to have a set of competencies and more importantly, of dispositions where she can use levels of futures forecasting strategies to narrow to what they really need and want and to take slash create ways to be able to make any decision style more effective.

The book explains each of these ideas above; identifies how decision making needs each; provides advice and models for 3 levels of futuring; shows how to develop long term educational scenario planning; and how to action-design towards their preferable choices. I guess the most unique section is that about futuring skills and dispositions which for sure is not a strong suit of most schooling organizations.

Regards

Rich Bernato Ed.D.

[Reply](#)



**Jesse Lyn Stoner** on May 20, 2017 at 9:38 pm

Thanks Rich. Congrats on your book.

[Reply](#)



**Rich Bernato** on May 21, 2017 at 3:10 am

Thank you!

## Follow Us

172.2k Follows



**Subscribe to Jesse's Blog. It's Free!**

---

## Free Gift



### The Change Checklist Seven "Must Haves" to Ensure Your Change Effort Succeeds

*A job-aid for leaders at all levels*

We do not share our list, and you can unsubscribe anytime.

Your Name

Email Address

Weekly Posts

Newsletter - A monthly collection of all posts.

---

## Most Recent Posts

- [Is Arrogance Killing Your Leadership Potential?](#)
- [The Importance of Truth-Telling for Your Organization's Success](#)
- [The Difference Between Mission Vision Purpose Strategy and Goals](#)
- [The Trust Feedback Loop](#)
- [Great Leaders Are Storytellers: How To Craft Great Stories](#)
- [8 Habits of Mentally Balanced Leaders](#)
- [Whitney Johnson on Building an A-Team](#)
- [How To Prepare Leaders for Remote Work Teams](#)

## Past Posts

Select Month

## Categories

Select Category

## Latest Tweets



**Jesse Lyn Stoner**  
@JesseLynStoner

From [@LollyDaskal](#) How to Answer the Dreaded "Got a Minute?" [lollydaskal.com/leadership/how...](https://lollydaskal.com/leadership/how...)

**How to Answer the Dreaded “Got a Minute?” - Lolly Daskal | Leadership**

“Got a minute?” It may be one of the most dreaded questions a leader can be asked, but you have to...  
lollydaskal.com

6h

Jesse Lyn Stoner Retweeted



**onang\_pribadi**

@onang\_pribadi

3 Tips for Career Conversations That Energize and Engage Employees [seapointcenter.com/career-conversations...](https://seapointcenter.com/career-conversations) via [@JesseLynStoner](https://twitter.com/JesseLynStoner)

**3 Tips for Career Conversations That Energize and Engage Employees | Jesse Ly...**

Are You Consciously (or Unconsciously) Values-Driven? The Process is as Important a...  
seapointcenter.com

Dec 2, 2018



**Jesse Lyn Stoner**

@JesseLynStoner

George H. W. Bush: A Leader's Life Of Service [forbes.com/sites/johnbaldoni...](https://forbes.com/sites/johnbaldoni) by [@JohnBaldoni](https://twitter.com/JohnBaldoni) via [@Forbes](https://twitter.com/Forbes)

**George H. W. Bush: A Leader's Life Of Service**

In our era of national incivility G.H.W. Bush, who died at age 94, stands as an exemplar of honesty a...  
forbes.com

22h



**Jesse Lyn Stoner**

@JesseLynStoner

From @KateNasser: Assertiveness Benefits Everyone No Guessing Required! | #PeopleSkills  
katenasser.com/assertiveness-...

**Assertiveness Benefits Everyone No Guessing Required! | #PeopleSkills - Kate N...**

Assertiveness benefits everyone by creating clarity & generous responsibility. It isn't jus...  
katenasser.com

22h

Jesse Lyn Stoner Retweeted



**onang\_pribadi**

@onang\_pribadi

Why People Don't Notice You've Changed [seapointcenter.com/why-people-don...](http://seapointcenter.com/why-people-don...) via @JesseLynStoner

**Why People Don't Notice You've Changed | Jesse Lyn Stoner**

Often in coaching, managers need to work on changing not only their behaviors, but als...  
seapointcenter.com

Dec 1, 2018



























Copyright ©2018 Jesse Stoner | All Rights Reserved | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Use](#)