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The present study investigated relationships between individual decision-making styles, procedural talk, and emergent group decision rules. Individual participants in 57 decision-making groups reported their preferences for each of five individual decision-making styles. These preferences were weighted by the amount of each member's procedural talk to estimate communicative attempts to influence the group's emergent decision rule. Significant positive correlations were found between the percentage of group members perceiving the establishment of a consensus decision rule and group members' weighted preferences for rational and dependent individual decision-making styles. The authors conclude by suggesting the theoretical and practical significance of these findings.

KEY CONCEPTS Consensus, small group decision making, procedural talk, individual decision-making style, decision rule

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There is a growing body of research devoted to delineating and measuring individual decision-making styles (Coscarelli, Burk, & Cotter, 1995). Small group researchers also have identified and characterized a variety of emergent group decision rules (Johnson & Johnson, 1997). The discovery of relationships between individual decision-making styles and group decision rules could have important implications for organizations, especially those that rely on work groups to make important decisions. Uncovering such relationships could provide supervisors
with guiding principles that would aid them in their efforts to assemble optimal decision-making groups.

One particular group decision rule—consensus—is often viewed by work groups as an ideal way to make decisions. Although group members may strive to establish a consensus decision rule, they may fall short of this goal and have only a subgroup of members working under consensus procedures. Most writings on group decision rules describe them as clear, formal procedures (e.g., Falk, 1982; Gastil, 1993), but groups without pre-defined policies might arrive at only a partial consensus on whether they are, in fact, using consensus. After all, the establishment of procedures for many groups is itself an accomplishment, which requires ongoing negotiation and may never result in complete intersubjectivity (Schwartzman, 1989).

This study investigates relationships between group members’ individual decision-making styles and the extent to which they perceive their group as making decisions by consensus. To provide a theoretical backdrop for the present study, we review relevant research on individual and group decision making, beginning with Scott and Bruce’s (1995) work on individual decision-making styles. One particularly germane line of research is by Beatty (1986, 1989), which relates individual decision rule orientations to group decision making. Next, we examine individual preferences for various group decision rules (Schweiger & Jago, 1982), as well as the expectations that individuals hold about the use of these rules (Nielsen & Miller, 1992). In an effort to clarify the distinctions among the numerous group decision rules mentioned in the literature, we present a detailed taxonomy of rules by Johnson and Johnson (1997). This review concludes with a review of Putnam’s (1979) work on group members’ preferences for different degrees of procedural order during group discussion and the impact of such preferences on the quality of group communication. Putnam’s (1979) research is especially relevant to the present study, because procedural messages are presumed to influence the decision rule that emerges during the group decision-making process.

PAST RESEARCH AND THEORY

Individual Decision-Making Styles

Researchers have identified a wide array of individual decision-making styles and have developed instruments for their assessment (Coscarelli et al., 1995). For example, Scott and Bruce (1995) set out to construct and validate an instrument to measure individual decision-making styles. They defined decision-making style as “the learned, habitual response pattern exhibited by an individual when confronted with a decision situation” (p. 820).

Scott and Bruce initially identified four individual decision-making styles: rational, intuitive, dependent, and avoidant. They defined these styles in terms of behaviors:

(a) [a] rational decision-making style is characterized by a thorough search for and logical evaluation of alternatives, (b) [an] intuitive decision-making style is characterized by a reliance on hunches and feelings, (c) [a] dependent decision-making style is characterized by a search for advice and direction from others, and (d) [an] avoidant decision-making style is characterized by attempts to avoid decision making. (p. 820)
After developing a number of items to measure these four styles and administering them in questionnaire form to participants, Scott and Bruce performed a series of factor analyses to create four distinct individual decision-making style scales. In the process, a fifth individual decision-making style, "spontaneous," emerged. A spontaneous decision-making style reflects "a sense of immediacy and a desire to get through the decision-making process as soon as possible" (p. 823). The end product of Scott and Bruce's research effort was the General Decision-Making Style (GDMS) instrument, which includes five statements per scale.

**Individual Decision Rule Orientations**

The individual decision-making process can also be understood in terms of the decision rules that govern the choices individuals make. Beatty (1986) suggests that most individuals tend to apply a particular rule when making decisions under a variety of circumstances. In his research, Beatty explored college students' use of the following three decision rules: maximum expected utility (MEU), "maximax," and "maximin." According to Beatty, the MEU decision rule holds that "the alternative that provides the highest average payoff across all future conditions should be selected" (p. 125). Beatty defines the maximax and maximin decision rules in the following way:

The maximax decision-rule demands that the alternative that provides a chance of obtaining the largest payoff should be selected. Accordingly, the choice-maker examines the best case scenario for each alternative and selects the option providing the largest payoff. In contrast, the maximin decision-rule dictates that the alternative that produces the best payoff if the worst condition occurred should be selected. In other words, the choice-maker inspects the worst case scenario for each alternative and selects the option yielding the largest payoff. (p. 125)

Beatty set out to determine whether college students tend to employ these decision rules in a random manner from one situation to the next, or whether they consistently use the same decision rule in different situations. Beatty had participants read six different scenarios that described decision-making situations in a variety of contexts (e.g., a military decision and an investment decision). Each scenario included "three alternatives (one representing each decision-rule), three future conditions and utility values for each alternative given each future condition" (p. 126).

Beatty found that "a little over one-third of the subjects demonstrated high levels of consistency in decision-rule use" (p. 126). These participants chose alternatives reflecting the same underlying decision rule for at least five of the six scenarios. Moreover, approximately one-third of the participants chose alternatives that were consistent with the same decision rule for four out of the six scenarios. Only about one-third of the participants chose alternatives reflecting random use of the three decision rules. In light of these results, Beatty concluded that when faced with making decisions under a variety of circumstances, the majority of college students have a tendency to choose alternatives that reflect particular decision rules, even though they have not received any formal training in the use of such rules.
Individual Orientations and Consensus Outcomes

If individuals vary in individual decision-making styles and habits, do these differences influence group decision making? A later study by Beatty (1989) suggests that there may be such a connection between individual and group styles of decision making. Beatty investigated the relationship between group members' achievement of consensus and their individual decision rule orientations (i.e., MEU, maximax, and maximin). Beatty made the following assertion regarding a group's potential for achieving consensus on the basis of such individual orientations: Group members who share the same decision rule orientation are likely to agree about the characteristics of acceptable and unacceptable choices, whereas those who have different orientations are likely to disagree about such characteristics. From this line of reasoning, he hypothesized that groups composed of individuals who share the same decision rule orientation should be more likely to achieve consensus than those whose members have varied orientations.

Beatty (1989) classified his undergraduate students as to their decision rule orientation using a categorization method similar to that employed in his 1986 study. Next, he systematically assigned participants either to matched groups (i.e., all group members had the same decision rule orientation) or mixed groups (i.e., group members had different decision rule orientations). The groups then had to choose among several courses of action for solving the financial problems of a hypothetical oil company. The various courses of action available to each group included choices that were consistent with the MEU, maximax, and maximin decision rule orientations.

Beatty found that the groups whose members matched on decision rule orientation were significantly more likely to achieve consensus than those groups whose members had different decision rule orientations. In addition, all of the "matched-interacting groups advocated strategies which were congruent with the group's decision rule orientation (i.e., maximax groups advocated maximax strategies, etc.)" (p. 289). These results led Beatty to conclude, "When rule orientations are identical, interacting groups seem to move toward solutions that are consistent with their orientation. Mixed orientations seem to present a substantial barrier to agreement" (p. 291).

Individual Problem-Solving Style and Group Process

Beatty's research suggests that individual orientations can shape consensus outcomes, but it remains unclear whether they influence the development of a consensus method. Schweiger and Jago (1982) also studied individual preferences and group behavior, but they focused on individuals' preferences for various group decision-making methods. To assess subjects' problem-solving styles, they used scales from the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator that measured tendencies toward sensing versus intuition and thinking versus feeling. To determine preferences for the various group decision-making methods, Schweiger and Jago administered the Vroom/Yetton Problem Set and scored preferences on a continuum ranging from autocratic to participative.

Schweiger and Jago "hypothesized that sensing types and feeling types are more participative than intuitive types and thinking types" (p. 1312). To test this hypothesis, they had participants read a variety of scenarios described in the Vroom/Yetton Problem Set. Each scenario detailed a hypothetical situation involving subordinates that required a group decision, with a choice to be made from among five group decision-making methods that varied along an autocratic-participative continuum.
Schweiger and Jago found partial support for their hypothesis. Sensing types exhibited a greater preference for participative decision-making methods than did intuitive types. They explained this link in the following way:

Sensing types, concerned with seeking out the details of a situation and with focusing on being accurate and precise in their work, are more willing to rely on the resources of others, especially in complex situations where their knowledge may be limited. Intuitive types, on the other hand, prefer quick, autocratic decisions even if such action produced decisions of lower quality. (p. 1312)

Expectations of Group Decision Rules
In contrast to Schweiger and Jago’s investigation of individual preferences for various group decision rules, Nielsen and Miller (1992) examined the expectations that individuals hold about the use of six group decision rules. Three of these decision rules—authority, expert, and seniority—can be grouped as autocratic decision rules. In contrast, the other three group decision rules—consensus, majority rule, and rank ordering—can be considered egalitarian.

Nielsen and Miller examined whether expectations regarding the use of these six group decision rules tended to vary on the basis of sex and the type of decision-making task. They distinguished between performance tasks and judgmental tasks. “[P]erformance tasks . . . involve disagreements about what constitutes a correct answer or how best to accomplish some goal,” whereas “judgmental tasks . . . involve conflicts of interest about what is morally, ethically, or aesthetically right, or what represents a legitimate course of action” (p. 46). Nielsen and Miller had participants rate the six group decision rules on 17 semantic differential items (e.g., effective-ineffective).

A factor analysis of these ratings revealed three dimensions: confidence, climate, and convenience. Participants had the most confidence in the majority rule and consensus decision rules, a moderate level of confidence in the expert and rank ordering decision rules, and the least confidence in the authority and seniority decision rules. In addition, Nielsen and Miller discovered that females tended to place more confidence than males in the egalitarian decision rules, whereas males tended to place more confidence than females in the non-egalitarian decision rules.

With regard to climate, Nielsen and Miller noted that all of the participants tended to have more positive expectations of group climate (e.g., expectations of pleasant, friendly, and cooperative interaction among group members) when the six decision rules were to be applied to performance tasks than when they were to be applied to judgmental tasks. Moreover, “the more egalitarian rules—majority [rule] especially, but also consensus and rank ordering—were expected to have more desirable climates, whereas the variants of dictatorial rule—authority, seniority, and decision by expert—were expected to have less desirable climates” (p. 50).

Finally, Nielsen and Miller (1992) determined that average expected convenience ratings for each of the six group decision rules, from most to least convenient, were as follows: seniority, expert, majority rule, authority, rank ordering, and consensus. In short, compared to participants’ expectations of the autocratic group decision rules, they expressed more confidence in the egalitarian rules, which they viewed as less convenient but more conducive to a positive group climate.

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Categorizing Group Decision Rules

The preceding studies suggest that individuals distinguish among different group decision-making methods. At this point, it is necessary to clarify the range of decision rules that emerge in small decision-making groups. Johnson and Johnson (1997) provide a detailed description of the range of group decision rules, falling along a continuum on the basis of the percentage of individuals actually responsible for a group’s decision. Decision by expert and decision by authority fall at the low end of the continuum, decision by minority or majority in the middle, and decision by consensus at the high end of the spectrum.

Under the decision by expert rule, the group member with the most expertise makes the decision for the group. Johnson and Johnson provide the following description of what takes place in a group using this rule:

The procedure for this method is to select the expert, let him or her consider the issues, and then have that person tell the group what the decision is. The group does not discuss the issue, but rather lets the expert decide on his or her own. (pp. 246-247)

The assumption underlying the decision by authority rule is that a group has some sort of authority structure in place that delineates which group member will ultimately make the decision for the group. In zero-history groups, however, the decision by authority method involves the emergence of an authoritative group member. Johnson and Johnson report that under this rule, such an individual “presents the issues, listens to the discussion until he is sure of what he thinks the decision should be, and then announces his decision to the group” (p. 248).

According to Johnson and Johnson, the most frequently used group decision rule in the United States is majority vote (i.e., majority rule). Under this decision-making method, group members “discuss an issue only as long as it takes at least 51% of the members to decide on a course of action” (p. 249). In this way, only a majority of group members is required for an alternative to be adopted by the group as a whole (Gastil, 1993).

Consensus refers to group members’ unanimous agreement regarding the group’s decision (Johnson & Johnson, 1997). Thus, use of this decision rule involves trying to identify an alternative that all group members find acceptable (Gastil, 1993). Johnson and Johnson (1997, p. 250) provide the following description of what typically takes place when a group makes a decision via consensus:

When a decision is made by consensus, all members understand the decision and are prepared to support it. That means that all members can rephrase the decision to show that they understand it, that all members have had a chance to tell the group how they feel about the decision, and that those members who continue to disagree or have doubts will nevertheless say publicly that they are willing to give the decision a try for a period of time.

The Role of Communication in Linking Individuals and Groups

Finally, it is important to consider what process might link group decision rules to individual decision-making styles. When different decision-making methods emerge in small groups, they presumably flow from individual decision-making preferences.
and expectations that are communicated during discussion. During the course of group decision making, group members exchange procedural messages, which Putnam (1979) defines as "those member behaviors which constitute a group's modus operandi for working on a task or the messages associated with planning and organizing a group's task endeavor" (p. 194). In her 1979 study, Putnam set out to design an instrument to measure group members' individual preferences for what Bormann (1975) calls "procedural order." This instrument is known as the Group Procedural Order Questionnaire (GPOQ).

The various items on the GPOQ include procedural messages that reflect a high and low degree of procedural order. According to Putnam, a high degree of procedural order (HPO) is characterized by "the use of planned sequential patterns for organizing task activities" (p. 195), a "concern for time management," (p. 196), "an emphasis on regular, predictable procedures" (p. 196), and "an emphasis on clarifying group procedures and reminding members to adhere to the task" (p. 196). In contrast, Putnam asserts that a low degree of procedural order (LPO) is characterized by the "use of a chain-association or a cyclical procedural pattern" (p. 196), "flexibility in establishing and changing plans" (p. 196), being "oblivious to time constraints" (p. 196), and "a tendency to vacillate between task and socio-emotional needs of the group" (p. 197).

Putnam hypothesized that, prior to joining groups, members have predispositions for various levels of procedural order. She assumed that such a predisposition reflects one's cognitive map for procedural order. According to Putnam, cognitive maps consist of expectations that guide a group member's perception and enactment of behaviors pertaining to procedural order during small group discussion. Consistent with this view, Putnam ascertained that groups composed of HPO members differ from LPO groups. For example, the message patterns of HPO groups included more goal-related statements, summaries, and procedural clarification. In contrast, the message patterns of LPO groups included more vacillation between task and socio-emotional group needs and topic shifts through a chain-association pattern. The significance of this result for the present study is that procedural messages appear to be the critical link between individual decision-making styles and emergent group procedures, including decision rules.

HYPOTHESES

Drawing on the findings of the research reviewed above, the present study tested five hypotheses. These hypotheses address relationships between the percentage of members within each group who report that their group made its decisions by consensus and each group's average scores on measures that weight members' preferences for each of five individual decision-making styles by their amount of procedural talk. The product of a group member's procedural talk score and his or her score on a particular individual decision-making style scale (e.g., rational) represents an estimate of the communicative influence attributable to that style preference. Group members' procedural influence attempts are presumed to be one determinant of the decision rule that emerges in the group.

If group members tend to be avoidant in their individual decision making, then they will most likely leave the decision entirely up to one, or perhaps a minority, of the less avoidant members of their group. Consequently, it is unlikely that such group members will pursue a consensus process.
H1: There will be an inverse relationship between the percentage of members within a group who report that they made their decisions by consensus and the group’s average score on a measure that weights members’ preferences for the avoidant individual decision-making style by their amount of procedural talk.

Similarly, if group members tend to be intuitive in their individual decision making, then they will most likely rely on hunches and feelings rather than collective reasoning regarding what constitutes a group’s optimal course of action. Without such collective reasoning, the group’s decision will most likely be made by one group member or perhaps a minority of group members who happen to share the same hunch or feeling. Thus, groups whose members are highly intuitive in their individual decision making are not likely to use a consensus procedure.

H2: There will be an inverse relationship between the percentage of members within a group who report that they made their decisions by consensus and the group’s average score on a measure that weights members’ preferences for the intuitive individual decision-making style by their amount of procedural talk.

If group members tend to be spontaneous in their individual decision making, then they will most likely have “a sense of immediacy and a desire to get through the decision-making process as soon as possible” (Scott & Bruce, 1995, p. 823). Therefore, these group members will not be likely to invest the time necessary to go through a consensus process.

H3: There will be an inverse relationship between the percentage of members within a group who report that they made their decisions by consensus and the group’s average score on a measure that weights members’ preferences for the spontaneous individual decision-making style by their amount of procedural talk.

In contrast, if group members tend to be dependent in their individual decision making, then they will most likely commit themselves to the alternative chosen by one or perhaps a minority of relatively less dependent members. In this way, groups whose members are highly dependent in their individual decision making are more likely to engage in consensus decision making.

H4: There will be a direct relationship between the percentage of members within a group who report that they made their decisions by consensus and the group’s average score on a measure that weights members’ preferences for the dependent individual decision-making style by their amount of procedural talk.

Finally, if group members tend to be rational in their individual decision making, then they will most likely reason with one another regarding which alternative represents the most logical course of action and subsequently commit themselves to this course of action. Therefore, such group members will likely use consensus, which

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requires extended discussion.

H5: There will be a direct relationship between the percentage of members within a group who report that they made their decisions by consensus and the group’s average score on a measure that weights members’ preferences for the rational individual decision-making style by their amount of procedural talk.

METHODS

Participants

The sample for this study consisted of 250 undergraduate students (160 female) enrolled in undergraduate courses at a large state university located in the Pacific Northwest. The majority (72%) were White, non-Hispanic. Smaller percentages of participants fell into three other ethnic categories: Asian-American (21%), Hispanic (4%), and African-American (1%). Participants either received extra credit for taking part in the study or volunteered to participate without compensation.

Procedures

After consenting to take part in the study, participants completed a pre-discussion questionnaire. One section of this questionnaire included four items from each of the five scales of the GDMSS. These selected items had the highest loadings on each factor in Scott and Bruce’s (1995) study. Participants indicated on a seven-point scale in the Likert format the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with each item (see Table 1 for a list of these 20 items).

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Adapted from Scott and Bruce (1995), pp. 825-826.
Following completion of the pre-discussion questionnaire, participants were randomly divided into groups of three-to-six. A total of 57 groups participated in this study. In terms of the sex composition of these zero-history groups, 35 of the groups had a female majority, 9 had a male majority, and 13 had an even number of females and males.

Each group was escorted to its own room. In each room, chairs with small desktops attached to them were arranged in a circle. The group’s decision-making task was printed on a sheet of paper that was lying face-down on the floor in the center of the circle. Participants sat in the prearranged circle of chairs and had 60 minutes to complete the task. In addition, they were told that once they had completed the task, they should open the door to their room so that the investigator would know they were done. All group discussions were videotaped.

Three different group decision-making tasks were randomly assigned. Participants were asked to discuss a national problem, come up with a solution to that problem, write down this solution, and estimate the percentage of Americans who would support their solution. The three decision-making tasks varied in terms of the national problem discussed (drug-related violent crime, environmental pollution, or the United States economy). Upon finishing the task, each participant completed a post-discussion questionnaire containing items regarding which decision rule the group had used to reach decisions, the amount of procedural talk exhibited by each group member, and demographic information.

**Measures**

*Individual decision-making styles.* The pre-discussion questionnaire administered to study participants included a large set of Likert-type items, which included a randomly-ordered set of individual decision-making style measures from Scott and Bruce’s (1995) GDMS instrument. Each of these items tapped one of the five individual decision-making styles: avoidant, dependent, intuitive, rational, and spontaneous. Each participant’s responses to the four items from each scale were averaged together, producing five individual decision-making style scores per group member.

Scott and Bruce (1995) assert that the GDMS instrument has adequate construct validity. They started with the assumption that locus of control and individual decision-making style are conceptually similar constructs. Then, they examined a number of correlations between scores on the GDMS scales and scores on several locus of control scales. They found significant correlations in the hypothesized directions between scores on these two measures.

The GDMS also appears to be a reliable instrument. When Scott and Bruce examined the internal consistency of the five GDMS scales, Cronbach’s alpha ranged from .68 to .94. In the present study, the results of a reliability analysis of group members’ responses to four-item versions of Scott and Bruce’s individual decision-making style scales revealed acceptable levels of internal consistency. Cronbach’s alpha was .84 for the avoidant scale, .69 for the dependent scale, .76 for the intuitive scale, .62 for the rational scale, and .86 for the spontaneous scale.

*Procedural talk.* To measure procedural talk, the post-discussion questionnaire asked each participant to rate the frequency of group members’ procedural messages. First, participants read the following definition of procedural talk: “During your group discussion, group members talked about many different things. Sometimes the group members made suggestions or statements about the procedures that your group used.
to make its decisions. For example, someone in your group might have suggested a way that your group could generate new ideas about the topic, or someone might have made a suggestion about how to use your time or how to vote." The questionnaire then instructed participants to "say whether each member of your group never, rarely, occasionally, often, or very often talked about your group’s procedures.” Answers were converted to a five-point scale from 1 ("never") to 5 ("very often"), and each group member’s self- and peer ratings were averaged to create average scores. For example, Person A’s estimated procedural talk frequency in a four-person group would be the average of her self-rating and three peer ratings.

*Communication influencing choice of decision rule.* As measures of the degree to which each group member’s preferences for the various individual decision-making styles had influenced his or her group’s choice of a decision rule through procedural talk, five products were calculated for each group member. These products consisted of each group member’s average procedural talk score multiplied by each of his or her five individual decision-making style scores. In addition, each group member’s scores on these five products were averaged with all other group members’ scores on the same five products to produce five average influence-through-procedural-talk scores per group (i.e., one group-level score associated with each of the five individual decision-making styles).

*Perceived decision rule.* Perceptions of the group’s decision rule were also measured on the post-discussion questionnaire. Participants reported whether they thought their groups had made decisions by expert, authority, majority rule, or consensus procedures. Using the following list, each participant selected the one rule that best described his or her group:

(1) My group made decisions by having the most knowledgeable group member make decisions for us. (2) My group made decisions by simply doing whatever the most powerful group member said we should do. (3) My group made decisions by “majority rule”; if a majority of group members agreed on a decision, it was final. (4) My group made decisions by “consensus”; every one of us had to agree on a decision before it was final.

Responses to this item were used to calculate the percentage of members within each group who perceived the use of a consensus decision rule.

**RESULTS**

Correlations were calculated to estimate linear relationships between the percentage of members within each group who reported using the consensus decision rule and each group’s five average influence-through-procedural-talk scores. Partial correlations were used to control for the effects of group size, gender composition (percent female), and discussion topic (measured by two dummy-coded variables).

Hypotheses 4 and 5 received support. There were significant positive correlations between the percentage of members within a group who reported that they had used a consensus procedure and the group’s average influence-through-procedural-talk scores for the dependent (r = .24, p < .05) and rational (r = .25, p < .05) styles. Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3, however, received no support. There were no significant correlations between the percentage of members within each group who reported consensus decision making and each group’s average influence-through-procedural-talk scores

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for the avoidant \((r = 0.12, p = ns)\), intuitive \((r = 0.16, p = ns)\), and spontaneous \((r = -0.04, p = 0.38)\) styles.

**DISCUSSION**

The present study investigated relationships between the percentage of members within 57 decision-making groups who reported using consensus procedures and the groups' average scores on measures that weighted members' preferences for each of five individual decision-making styles by the frequency of their procedural talk. Direct relationships were found between the percentage of group members who reported consensus decision making and groups' scores on the rational and dependent influence-through-procedural-talk measures.

The association of consensus group decision making with rational and dependent individual styles is consistent with the literature on consensus. Recall that Scott and Bruce (1995) defined rational individual decision making as "a thorough search for and logical evaluation of alternatives" (p. 820). Presumably, the preference for a rational process, such as Gouran and Hirokawa's (1996) functional group decision-making model, leads to a consensus decision rule; the alternatives—majority rule and executive decision—can end discussion before all group members have reached agreement. Writings on consensus in Quaker business meetings (Sheeran, 1983) and co-operative businesses (Gastil, 1993) show how lone dissenters can force groups to recognize and consider alternatives that might have never come into discussion had the group acted after reaching a simple majority.

The association between consensus group decision making and individuals' dependence on others for advice is equally plausible. Referring again to the Quaker archetype of consensus, Friends believe that an individual's own understanding of a problem is incomplete or, at the very least, unconfirmed without reference to the views of others. Significant policy changes within the Religious Society of Friends are only made when there is full agreement after careful discussion and consideration of all views (Sheeran, 1983). In more political terms, Barber (1984) defines consensus as "the identification of individuals and their interests with a symbolic collectivity and its interests" (p. 149). Thus, the spirit of consensus is one of total interdependence, compared to the autonomy of an executive authority or the confidence of a sufficiently large voting bloc under majority rule.

Moving a step beyond the data presented above, individuals are likely to recognize consensus as a rational, deliberative process. Those who have individual preferences for such decision making move the group toward a consensus decision rule because they believe that consensus will ensure mutual consultation and careful weighing of alternative choices. This is consistent with Nielsen and Miller's (1992) finding that consensus is perceived as inconvenient but productive. Future research could follow up on this line of inquiry by probing more deeply into individuals' understandings of consensus and majority rule methods.

A limitation of this study is that the decision rule that each group used to make its decisions was measured by group members' individual perceptions of the decision-making process, rather than by independent judges' perceptions of the group interaction. However, future research could include judges' analysis of coded transcripts of group discussion to check the correspondence between self-reported decision rules and observable group processes.

In conclusion, the findings reported herein should provide some guidance to

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organizations that employ group decision-making methods. If supervisors would like their groups to develop (and sustain) consensus group procedures, then it may prove helpful to select group members who tend to exhibit a high degree of procedural talk during group interaction and who score relatively high on either the dependent or rational GDMS scales. This study also suggests that non-profit, voluntary organizations will arrive at agreement on group procedures more readily when their members share similar individual decision-making styles. If cultural diversity becomes a hallmark of the twenty-first century, then organizations will have to devote greater attention to how variations in individual styles and expectations shape the rules and procedures that emerge in small decision-making groups. As groups become more varied in their members’ backgrounds, they will require greater negotiation before they arrive at consensus on consensus, or any other decision-making rule.

REFERENCES