Consensus-Democratic Working in Film Projects.

Methods and Decision-Making Procedures from the Workshop with Uwe Lübbermann on 11 July 2026

Foreword

Film productions rely on the collaboration of people with a wide range of experiences, expertise and perspectives. At the same time, they are shaped by tight deadlines, creative decisions and clear responsibilities. This creates the challenge of combining efficient workflows with genuine participation by those involved.

As part of the short film project **Konsens-Filmproduktion (working title: "Unsichtbar")** by producer and writer Ugur Sofu, which is being developed with the participation of Filmhaus Frankfurt (LINKLINK to the project page), the project explores how consensus-democratic ways of working can be practically implemented in a film production. The aim is to integrate participation, transparency and shared responsibility more strongly into the production process and to gain experience with alternative forms of collaboration.

To support this initiative, a workshop with coach Uwe Lübbermann took place in July 2026. Drawing on his many years of experience with consensus-democratic forms of organization, he introduced various decision-making procedures and ways of working and discussed with the participants which methods are suitable for the different questions that arise in a film production.

It became clear that consensus-democratic working encompasses much more than collective voting. Depending on the type of decision, different procedures may be appropriate – ranging from consensus and consultative leadership to delegation or autonomous decision-making within individual departments. The workshop therefore provided important impulses for making decision-making processes more deliberate in general in the future and specifically, for further developing the way the Konsens-Filmproduktion works.

This guide is not a verbatim documentation of the workshop. It brings together the most important methods, considerations and practical examples by topic and is intended as a reference for anyone interested in making decision-making processes in film projects or other collaborative working contexts more deliberate.

1. Basic Principles

Making Decisions Deliberately

Film productions involve a wide variety of decisions. Some affect the entire project, while others concern only individual areas of work or short-term organizational matters. Nevertheless, decisions are often made according to the same pattern – regardless of their impact or who is affected by them.

However, it is important to note: Not every decision requires the same form of decision-making. Instead, the first step should be to consider **what type of decision is involved**. Only then can it be determined which procedure is appropriate.

Consensus-democratic working therefore does not mean making as many decisions as possible by consensus. Rather, the aim is to select the appropriate procedure (in advance) and use it deliberately.

Participation and Responsibility

Another key concern is to meaningfully connect participation with responsibility.

Participation does not mean that everyone decides everything. Nor does responsibility mean making decisions alone as a matter of principle.

Rather, the aim is to make the best possible use of expertise and experience, clearly define responsibilities, and involve those who are affected by a decision or can make an important contribution.

Decisions Remain Open to Further Development

Decisions provide orientation and commitment. At the same time, projects change over time. New information emerges, conditions change, and experience leads to new insights.

Decisions should therefore not be regarded as final. They remain valid as long as they make sense, but can be revisited if essential conditions change or new approaches to a solution emerge.

2. Decision-Making Procedures

There is no single decision-making procedure that is universally suitable for all situations. Different questions require different methods. The aim is therefore not to make as many decisions as possible by consensus, but to select the appropriate procedure for each situation.

Before deciding on the procedure, some basic questions should be clarified:

- Who is responsible for implementation?
- Who is affected by the decision, and what impact will it have?
- Who has the necessary expertise?
- Can it be easily changed later?
- How important is broad agreement?
- How much time is available to make the decision?

Consensus

Objective

To develop a decision that can be supported by everyone involved.

Suitable for

- Fundamental decisions
- Decisions with long-term implications
- Questions affecting many people involved
- Decisions whose implementation requires a high level of shared commitment

Less suitable for

- Short-term operational decisions
- Detailed questions relating to individual areas of work
- Situations involving significant time pressure

Advantages

- Creates a high level of acceptance
- Takes different perspectives into account
- Strengthens shared responsibility for implementation

Points to consider

Consensus takes time. This procedure should therefore be used deliberately for decisions where the additional effort is worthwhile.

Consent

Objective

To make a decision that is considered “good enough for now and safe enough to try”, provided there is no serious objection.

Suitable for

- Quick, practical decisions
- Self-organized teams
- Situations in which the ability to act is important
- Decisions where not everyone involved needs to be fully convinced

Less suitable for

- Decisions with very far-reaching consequences and a high need for commitment
- Situations in which shared support for the decision is particularly important
- Decisions where serious objections cannot be assessed unambiguously

Advantages

- Enables faster decisions than full consensus
- Takes objections and risks into account

- Arguments count rather than majorities

Points to consider

Objections should be justified and relate to a specific risk, for example regarding safety, costs or legal requirements. It should be clarified in advance what constitutes a serious objection.

Systemic Consensus

Objective

To select, from several proposed solutions, the option that encounters the least resistance within the group.

Suitable for

- Situations with several possible solutions
- Questions where different forms of resistance should be made visible
- Decision-making processes in which a solution with as little conflict as possible is sought

Less suitable for

- Simple decisions with only a few possible options
- Situations in which evaluating the proposals would be too time-consuming or labor-intensive
- Decisions where levels of resistance cannot meaningfully be compared for other reasons

Advantages

- Also makes latent resistance visible
- Can help minimize the potential for conflict
- Encourages the development and comparison of several proposed solutions

Points to consider

Resistance to the different proposals is assessed, for example on a scale from 0 to 10. For sensitive topics, anonymous assessment may be appropriate. It should also be determined in advance what happens if none of the proposed solutions is to be implemented.

Producer Veto

Objective

To take into account the producer's personal financial, legal or liability-related responsibility when this responsibility cannot be fully transferred to the group.

Suitable for

- Decisions of particular financial significance

- Decisions involving significant personal financial risks
- Insurance matters
- Liability matters
- Situations in which the producer is personally legally or financially responsible

Less suitable for

- Everyday operational decisions
- Technical detail decisions within other departments
- Decisions where the producer has no particular personal responsibility

Advantages

- Takes actual legal and financial responsibility into account
- Creates a clear boundary for transferring shared decision-making responsibility
- Can limit risks for the production and the person responsible

Points to consider

The veto should remain an exception and should not become a general decision-making privilege. It should be as transparent as possible which types of decisions it applies to and under what conditions it can be used. In most cases, consultative leadership should be preferred to a veto.

Consultative Leadership

Objective

A person with responsibility makes the decision after gathering the experiences, assessments and concerns of those involved.

Responsibility for the decision remains clearly with the person making the decision.

Suitable for

- Areas with clear overall responsibility
- Creative leadership responsibilities
- Decisions where different perspectives improve the quality of the outcome

Less suitable for

- Decisions where everyone involved shares equal responsibility
- Routine operational decisions (example: The production assistant decides which supplier to order consumables from for the next day of shooting.)

Advantages

- Connects participation with clear responsibility

- Improves the quality of decisions
- Increases acceptance of the decision

Points to consider

Participation should be genuine. A person leading consultatively does not merely listen to opinions, but actively engages with them.

Decision-Making Within a Department

Objective

To make decisions where the necessary expertise is available.

Not every question needs to be decided by production management or the entire group. Many decisions can be made more quickly and on a stronger professional basis within the respective departments/areas of work.

Suitable for

- Technical detail questions
- Decisions within a department
- Operational workflows

Advantages

- Short decision-making paths
- Use of existing expertise
- Strengthening individual responsibility

Points to consider

Department decisions are made within the project's jointly agreed goals and framework conditions. Fundamental decisions remain unaffected by this.

Delegation

Objective

To deliberately transfer responsibility for clearly defined tasks.

Once the common framework has been established, not all subsequent decisions need to be made collectively again.

Suitable for

- Operational tasks
- Organizational processes
- Decisions with clearly defined criteria

Advantages

- Relieves the group
- Speeds up workflows
- Creates clear responsibilities

Points to consider

Delegation does not mean giving up responsibility. Responsibility is deliberately transferred to individuals or small groups whose area of responsibility is clearly defined.

Postponement

Objective

To deliberately postpone a decision until a later point in time.

Not every question needs to be answered immediately. If essential information is missing or the framework conditions are still unclear, postponement may be the most sensible decision.

Suitable for

- Situations with incomplete information
- Fundamental questions requiring further clarification
- Topics that go beyond the current state of the project

Advantages

- Prevents premature decisions
- Creates time to gather further information
- Enables better-informed decisions

Points to consider

Postponement is not a way of avoiding decisions. It should be accompanied by a clear agreement on when or under what conditions the topic will be revisited.

Overview: Decision-Making Procedures

The following overview summarizes the procedures presented.

Question	Suitable Procedure
Does the decision affect the entire project?	Consider Consensus
Is a quick decision necessary, where not everyone needs to agree as long as there is no serious objection?	Consider Consent

Question	Suitable Procedure
Are there several possible solutions from which one can be selected based on the group's level of resistance?	Consider Systemic Consensus
Does the producer face a particular personal financial, legal or liability-related risk in this decision?	Producer Veto
Does one person have overall responsibility?	Consultative Leadership
Is the necessary expertise clearly located within a department?	Department Decision
Is it an operational task?	Delegation
Is important information missing?	Postponement

Choosing the procedure is itself part of good decision-making. Not every decision requires the same form of participation. What matters is recognizing the characteristics of the particular question and selecting the procedure accordingly.

3. Prerequisites for Joint Decision-Making

Different decision-making procedures can only realize their strengths when collaboration is based on common foundations. Several prerequisites were identified that facilitate joint decision-making and promote constructive collaboration.

Psychological Safety

People only contribute their experiences, ideas or concerns when they feel safe. Asking questions, admitting mistakes or expressing criticism should therefore be possible without fear of personal disadvantages.

If people are unable or unwilling to speak for themselves, it should be clarified in advance whether personal representation is necessary (e.g. by a trusted person). It should also be ensured that participation does not depend on or become influenced by factors such as seniority, gender, rhetorical skills, language skills, etc.

Different perspectives in particular help improve decisions and make problems visible at an early stage.

Transparency

Joint decisions require goals, framework conditions and decision-making processes to be comprehensible.

Transparency does not mean sharing every piece of information with everyone involved. Rather, what matters is that the people who need information for their work or for a decision have access to it.

Clear Responsibilities

Consensus-democratic working does not mean that everyone is responsible for everything.

On the contrary: Clear responsibilities provide orientation and enable autonomous working. At the same time, it should be clear which decisions are made jointly and which fall within the responsibility of individual people or departments.

Freedom to Shape

People who can contribute their own ideas and actively shape their tasks are more likely to take responsibility for the shared outcome.

Freedom to shape strengthens motivation and individual responsibility, as long as the jointly agreed goals and framework conditions are respected.

Use Hierarchies Deliberately

Hierarchies should not be understood as inherently problematic. Even in a highly participatory way of working, clear responsibilities remain important and are therefore often part of contracts or written agreements.

The key is to use hierarchies where they are necessary while allowing as many decisions as possible to be made where expertise and responsibility come together.

Only when consensus-based decision-making ultimately fails to reach an agreement may it be necessary to refer to contractual agreements.

4. Responsibility and Decision-Making

Responsibility and decision-making authority should coincide as far as possible. Anyone responsible for an area of work should also be able to make the necessary decisions within that framework. Conversely, people should not make decisions about matters for whose implementation they do not take responsibility.

This connection creates clarity and strengthens the individual responsibility of everyone involved.

Make Decisions Where the Expertise Lies

Not every decision needs to be made by the director or production management. Many questions are best answered where the necessary expertise is available.

This shortens decision-making paths and strengthens responsibilities. At the same time, project management remains able to act and can focus on decisions relating to its overall responsibility.

Design Participation Meaningfully

Participation does not mean involving everyone in every decision.

Instead, it should be considered in each case:

- Who is directly affected?
- Who has relevant expertise?
- Who is responsible for implementation?
- Who should be informed?

Depending on the question, this results in a different group of people being involved.

Responsibility Strengthens Quality and Motivation

People who can take responsibility contribute their knowledge and experience more actively to a project. Decisions are made closer to the practical work and can therefore improve in quality.

At the same time, identification with the shared project grows. Individual responsibility means not only taking on additional tasks, but also having the opportunity to actively shape one's own area of work.

This gives project management more freedom to focus on its actual leadership responsibilities.

Application in Film Production

Film productions require both clear responsibilities and participation.

Fundamental decisions about the project's goals, direction or framework conditions should be developed jointly. Technical detail decisions, on the other hand, can often be made within the respective departments.

The challenge is to connect responsibilities and participation in such a way that both the quality of decisions and the production's ability to act are maintained.

5. Summary: Guidelines for Consensus-Democratic Working

The following guidelines summarize the key ideas. They are not intended as binding rules, but as guidance for shaping joint decision-making processes.

Making Decisions Deliberately

Not every decision requires the same procedure. First, it should be clarified what type of decision is involved and what requirements it entails.

Use Consensus Deliberately

Consensus is particularly suitable for fundamental decisions with far-reaching consequences. Other procedures are better suited to many everyday or technical decisions.

Connect Responsibility and Decision-Making

Anyone responsible for an area of work should also be able to make the necessary decisions within that framework.

Make Use of Expertise

Decisions improve in quality when they are made where the necessary knowledge and relevant experience are available.

Design Participation Meaningfully

Not everyone needs to be involved in every decision. What matters is involving those who are affected or can make an important contribution.

Make Decisions Transparent and Comprehensible

Clear responsibilities, transparent decision-making processes and comprehensible explanations create trust and orientation.

Allow Different Perspectives

Different experiences and perspectives enrich decision-making processes. A working culture in which questions, criticism and uncertainties can be expressed openly improves the quality of joint decisions.

Use Hierarchies Deliberately

Clear responsibilities remain important even in participatory forms of working. Hierarchical decisions make sense where they consolidate responsibility or enable quick decisions.

Continue to Develop Decisions

Decisions create commitment, but can be reconsidered when framework conditions change. This keeps projects capable of learning and adapting.

Choose the Appropriate Method

Consensus-democratic working does not mean making as many decisions as possible collectively. Rather, the aim is to select, for each question, the procedure that best combines responsibility, participation and the ability to act.

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