

Accelerating decision-making with dynamic group processes and state-of-the-art systems.

Case Study

Church merger

Prism’s Sean Brady recently assisted two churches that are merging. The parish councils had made excellent progress joining governance and human resource functions. But after two years they remained at stubborn if polite impasse regarding which site to close. This would be a great test to see whether or not [Prism’s group decision support system](#) could make an intractable decision tractable!

From two-year impasse to agreement—in three nights

We spent the first night agreeing to and weighting ten decision criteria. This collegial activity exposed that parking was not the most important criterion—despite its having dominated much of the two-year long debate.

In fact, it ranked only seventh in relative importance. (See graph.)

The second night, combined site teams made evidenced-based presentations demonstrating how each site contributed to

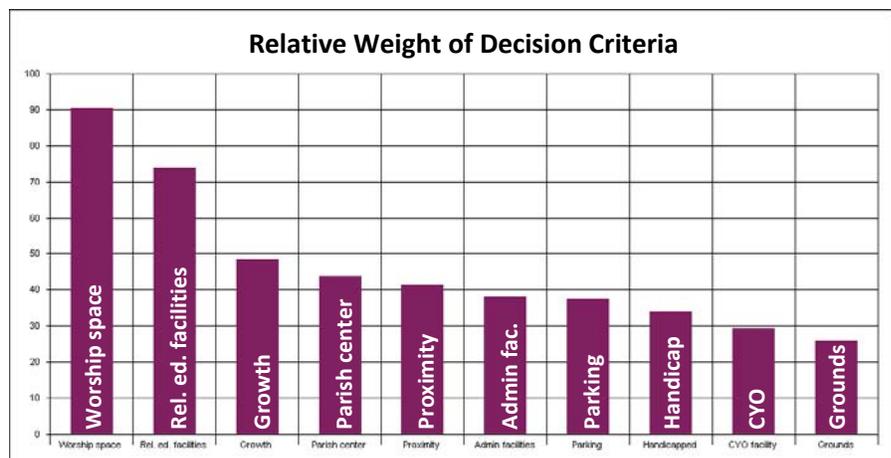
each weighted criterion. In effect, they created the equivalent of a side-by-side product comparison such as you might use when purchasing a car.

The third night, the group used Prism’s decision support system to complete a weighted criteria matrix and cost-benefit analysis.

Voting the matrix



For each criterion, subgroups reviewed the evidence and used a 1 to 9 scale to score the two sites on a worksheet. They then discussed their scores and began to converge on reasonable, evidence-based scoring. Each person then used a keypad to vote. After voting each cell, we looked at and discussed the bar graph of results, and revoted if necessary to narrow the range. Participants voted with considerable integrity, so we only needed to revote a few cells.



Total weighted score

Once the vote was complete, the decision matrix displayed the average scores for each cell (Table 1). The matrix also multiplied these average scores by the criterion weight to calculate the total weighted score (Benefit) for each site (Table 2). Site A outscored Site B—4006 to 3501. So we had a decision, right?

Analyzing costs *and* benefits

Wrong. Site A had greater benefit than Site B, but its five-year total operating costs were higher (Table 2). We now needed to complete the cost-benefit analysis. The matrix allows us to do this by normalizing the numbers in both the “Benefit” and “Cost” columns so that we can subtract cost from benefit to calculate relative value.

Site A scored a positive (+3) meaning that in relative terms it is worth more than it costs while Site B scored a negative (-3) meaning that it costs more than it is worth (Table 3). So we had a decision, right?

Weighted criteria & cost-benefit analysis

Table 1:

Average raw scores (N = 20):

	Handi-capped	Worship space	Proximity	Parking	Grounds	CYO facility	Parish center	Rel. ed. facilities	Admin facilities	Growth
Church A	8.5	9	8.7	7.7	7	9	9	9	9	8.5
Church B	8.6	7.1	9	9	9	0	7.6	8	7.6	8.6
Criterion Weight	34	91	41	37	26	29	44	74	38	48

Table 2:

Weighted scores with costs:

	Handi-capped	Worship space	Proximity	Parking	Grounds	CYO facility	Parish center	Rel. ed. facilities	Admin facilities	Growth	Benefit	Cost
Church A	288	815	360	288	182	263	393	664	342	410	4,006	\$ 3,055,818
Church B	292	643	370	335	233	0	334	587	291	417	3,501	\$ 2,827,424

Table 3:

Benefit and cost normalized:

	Handi-capped	Worship space	Proximity	Parking	Grounds	CYO facility	Parish center	Rel. ed. facilities	Admin facilities	Growth	Benefit	Cost	Value
Church A	288	815	360	288	182	263	393	664	342	410	107	104	3
Church B	292	643	370	335	233	0	334	587	291	417	93	96	-3

Weighing all the trade-offs

Not yet. Even though Site A scored better on the weighted criteria and cost-benefit analyses, there still was not a consensus to close Site B. So the group began to review the specific trade-offs of choosing one site over the other. While Site B was superior regarding parking, proximity and grounds, Site A was superior regarding worship space, parish center, and CYO, religious education, and administrative facilities (Table 1: purple cells).

Reaching consensus

Examining the comprehensive set of trade-offs created the breakthrough to consensus. The group agreed that too much would be lost if Site A were closed. They reached consensus. Site A will host the new, combined parish; Site B will close.

“Prism’s presence, expertise and decision support tools contributed powerfully to our decision making and our ability to achieve consensus,” said Rev. Tim Taugher.