

# Decision Tracking

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**Co-operative  
Solutions**  
ideas into practice

Derived from “the Democracy Audit” - **The Manual** for Practitioners

What is a “Democracy Audit”?

Well, first and foremost, what it is **not**, is a “democratic audit”. It is not an audit that is democratically controlled.

It is an independent audit by contracted outside observers intended to “measure”, objectively, the state of an organisation’s internal democracy.

Many democratic organisations such as voluntary bodies, trade unions, and co-operative societies may be democratic in the sense that this was always the intention and is still the assumed norm.

However, a scratch at the surface may illustrate that all is not quite as it should be from a democratic perspective. Organisations often lapse into customs and practice which may save time or appear simpler but in fact slowly diverge from the democratic intent of founders or standards of independent reviewers.

Assessing democracy - performing a “democracy audit” - is not practised in the UK. Occasionally organisations may revisit their principles and their constitutions in order to update them in line with current thinking or modern practices. However, rarely do they set out to qualitatively assess the extent to which they may or may not be functioning in objectively observed democratic ways or in ways consistent with the organisation’s own constitution.

Common examples of the gradual erosion of democracy are the perfunctoriness of annual general meetings or the pre-determination of decisions made in committee. These in themselves may not necessarily be “bad” things, but they illustrate the beginnings of a divergence from founding principles.

In some cases the solution may be to alter the practices; in others it may be to revisit and modify the principles. Either way, a democracy audit endeavours to show what divergence is taking place and suggest a course or courses of action to bring practice and principle more closely together again.

Another area of interest for such an audit is the “efficiency” of meetings and other decision-making processes. How much time is spent in meetings and with what outcomes? Can outcomes per unit of meeting time be increased? And how well is internal communications handled?

The full Democracy Audit document outlines various methodologies. Further documentation is available to illustrate the methodology at work and provide sample outcomes.

Please feel free to enquire further.

This document focuses exclusively on the “Decision Tracking” methodology.

## **Decision Tracking**

Assessing democracy - performing a “democracy audit” – utilises the following procedure to assess the “value” of decisions made in an organisational committees.

## **INDICATORS**

In this instance, the specific elements under review are the number and outcome of decisions made and the ratio of such decisions to the numbers of people involved.

In terms of the full Democracy Audit procedure, **this paper focuses exclusively on Decision Tracking** (for a full list of all areas of interest in a full Audit see “**CS Democracy Audit – Manual**”).

Comparisons of statistical outcomes should be made with similar groups involved in similar areas of activity. Clearly, there is not a lot of comparative data about at this point in time, but with the increasing use of "democracy audits", national, regional, or sectoral norms can be determined.

## 1. From DOCUMENTATION

### 1.1. The Minute Book

#### 1.1.1. Decisions taken and translated into Actions

Over a period, how many decisions for action are taken? Of these, how many are successfully actioned and within what period of time? What proportion of Membership able to take action do so? In particular, how much action is carried out which requires action from non-supporters of the Decision.

##### **METHODOLOGY:**

This involves trawling through all Minutes kept throughout the Period of Review (**PoR**) and identifying Decisions for Decision Tracking purposes.

All Decisions identified are tagged with the date of the meeting as follows: **YYMMDD**, followed by **a, b, c, etc.**

Starting with the earliest, the first few sets of Minutes should be reviewed with the Executive Committee to assist in the "grading" or "classification" of Decisions.

Decisions are classified as: Routine (R), Major Policy (Ma), Minor Policy (Mi), Supplementary (S), and Carried Forward (CF).

Assistance from the EC would be particularly valuable in determining the difference between Ma and Mi Decisions.

Having identified and tagged Decisions, further research should "Track" those Decisions forward to see what became of them. Did direct action arise? Was there a report back? Were there a multiplicity of CF and S Decisions associated?

And finally, all identified and tagged Decisions are entered into the Coefficient of Decision-Making (CDM) matrix. This simply divides the number of Decisions taken at a meeting by the number of person hours (number of attendees times hours of meeting) and numerical Coefficients are generated. For example, 10 people making 5 decisions in 1 hour = 0.500; 10 people making 10 decisions in 1 hour = 1.00; 20 people making 10 decisions in 1 hour = 0.500; etc.

#### 1.1.2. Quality of Minutes

How concise are the Minutes? Is there too much or too little detail? Are decisions clearly noted? Are decisions requiring actions consistently carried over into following Minutes? Are Minute items systematically numbered? Are Minutes signed and filed properly.

##### **METHODOLOGY:**

Again, trawling through all Minutes kept throughout the Period of Review (PoR) should answer these questions. Naturally judgements and assessments will be subjective to the Auditors but will be mitigated through discussion and past experience.

#### 1.1.3. Reporting back

How thorough is Reporting Back on actions taken? Is the bulk of it taken up with verbose descriptions of other meetings or is it more clearly related to actual tasks undertaken and progressed or completed?

##### **METHODOLOGY:**

As touched upon above, the Minutes will reveal the extent and usefulness of Reporting Back, particularly when coupled with Interviews of participants.

#### 1.1.4. Ratio of Attenders to Non-attenders (also voting turnout)

What proportion of those eligible actually attend with any regularity? What is the turnout for any voting which may determine who sits on the body in question?

##### **METHODOLOGY:**

The Minutes should show who has attended and other records and testimony will show who should have been attending.

NOTE: We are currently reviewing how we run the DT aspect of the Audit and may, in future, build in more Member participation on DT from the outset.

We would imagine that these coefficients would fluctuate with other variables as well – for example, trade sector and/or geographical location and/or internet dependency.

We also distinguish between ICDM (Individual Coefficient of Decision Making) which are Decisions per person/hour and CCDM (Collective Coefficient of Decision Making) which are Decisions per meeting/hour. It remains to be seen whether one or other of these proves more useful in terms of measuring “efficiency”.

As this is entirely virgin territory, there are as yet no really useful comparators. These will only come with time and popular take-up of the Audit process itself. But the data will always be there and can be a very useful reference point for each organisation's own purposes should Members wish to assess how far from this initial bench mark they may have moved at various points in the future.

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