

CONSENSUS DECISION-MAKING

Although consensus is commonly used to mean complete or unanimous agreement, its precise meaning is general agreement.

Consensus is reached, therefore, when all members of a group are willing to accept a decision:

- Even though a decision may not necessarily be an individual's first choice
- He or she considers it a workable approach and in the best interest of the group
- Consensus is reached when each member of the group feels at least 70% comfortable with the group's decision, and
- Each member of the group is willing to support the decision 100%
- The group must agree to work together until they find a solution that doesn't compromise strong convictions or needs.

CONSENSUS GUIDELINES

LISTEN

Pay attention to others. This is the secret of most successful teams. You can't learn anything while you are talking.

ENCOURAGE PARTICIPATION

But don't embarrass anyone. Do not put anyone on the spot, especially the quieter folks, by forcing them to participate.

SHARE INFORMATION

If you withhold information from the group, the resulting decision will be less accurate and effective.

AVOID CHANGING YOUR MIND TO KEEP HARMONY

Don't agree too quickly. Ask questions. Do not change your mind simply to reach agreement or maintain harmony. Yield to reason, but not pressure. Explore reasons and be sure that everyone accepts the solution for basically similar or complimentary reasons.

DON'T TRADE SUPPORT OR BARGAIN

Horse-trading and compromising for support on other issues is not conducive to finding the best possible solution to a problem. When a dissenting member finally agrees, don't feel that he or she needs to be rewarded by having their way at some later date.

DON'T VOTE

Don't vote, use coin flips averaging, or other conflict-reducing techniques. Your objective at this stage is to attempt to create the best solution, and some conflict may be unavoidable.

TREAT DIFFERENCES AS A STRENGTH

Differences of opinion are natural and expected. Differences can become venues to gather information, clarify issues and seek better choices.

CREATE A SOLUTION THAT CAN BE SUPPORTED

The group should feel that the solution is the best possible course of action at the time. Each group member should agree to support the solution as if it were his or her first choice.

AVOID ARGUING FOR YOUR OWN VIEWS

Present your position as clearly and logically as possible, but listen to others' reactions and consider them carefully before you press your point. Anyone blocking consensus has the obligation to present new views.

AIM FOR A GAIN/GAIN SOLUTION

Do not assume that someone must win and someone must lose when the discussion reaches a stalemate. Instead, look for the next most acceptable alternative for the group.