

Consensus Decision Making

Consensus is a style of decision making in which participants are able to arrive at a decision through discussion where:

- All participants' viewpoints are considered
- The final decisions agreeable to all involved
- No formal vote is taken, the approval is unanimous

It is important to keep the following key points in mind before beginning a consensus decision making process:

1. Each participant must honestly state his or her opinion in a complete manner.
2. The focus on each opinion is to make sure it is clearly understood by other participants.
3. This is not a win/lose situation; the goal is to come to an agreement which incorporates all individual viewpoints.
4. Participants must listen carefully and remain respectful of all the viewpoints of others.
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6. The group should not pressure individuals to agree with the decision to speed up the process or to avoid conflict.

Process

1. All participants state their opinion, usually using a round-robin technique where one person starts and each member to left (or right) takes a turn.
2. Participants ask questions to clarify statements by other members.
3. Discussion of ideas continues until someone thinks consensus has been achieved.
4. A trial decision is stated and all members check to see if this incorporates their opinion.
5. If it does not, go back to step 2.
6. If all members find the decision agreeable, consensus is complete.

Consensus is valuable because it increases creativity and involves all members of the group. Since all members support the final decision, there is a low chance of sabotage or lack of follow-through by group members. Consensus takes more time up front, but in the long run, probably is more efficient because of the support it engenders.

Guidelines for Decision Making

1. Avoid arguing for your own views. Present your position as lucidly and logically as possible, but listen to other reactions and consider them carefully before you press your point.
2. Do not assume that someone must win and someone must lose when a discussion reaches a stalemate. Instead, look for the next most acceptable alternative for all parties.
3. Do not change your mind simply to avoid conflict and to reach agreement and harmony. When agreement seems to come too quickly and easily, be suspicious. Explore the reasons and be sure everyone accepts the solution for basically similar or complementary reasons. Yield only to positions that have objective and logically sound foundations.
4. Differences of opinion are natural and expected. Seek them out and try to involve everyone in the decision process. Disagreements can help the groups decision because with a wide range of information and opinions, there is a greater chance that the group will hit upon more adequate solutions.