



CONSENSUS and DECISION-MAKING

Consensus...

1. Often used to indicate complete or unanimous agreement
2. Precise meaning is **general agreement**
3. Reached when all team members are willing to accept a decision even though the decision may not necessarily be each member's first choice
4. The team agrees to work together until a solution is found that does not compromise strong convictions or needs of member
5. All members agree the choice is a workable approach and in the best interest of the group
6. Each team member feels at least 70% comfortable with the group's decision and is willing to support the decision 100%

Consensus as a Decision-Making Process

1. **Agreement Seeking:** Consensus decision making attempts to help meet the needs of all team members
2. **Collaborative:** All team members contribute to a shared idea and shape it into a decision that meets the concerns of all members, as much as possible.
3. **Cooperative:** Team members strive to reach the best possible decision for the group and all of its members, rather than competing for personal preferences.
4. **Inclusive:** Input is solicited from all team members who provide equal input into the process, to the greatest extent possible.

Guidelines for Gaining Consensus

1. **Listen:** Quiet, focused attention to the input of others
2. **Encourage Participation:** Seek input and information from every team member
3. **Avoid Arguing Your View:** Each member presents his/her position as clearly and logically as possible, listens to others' reactions, and considers the responses carefully. Anyone blocking consensus has the obligation to present new views.
4. **Avoid Changing Your Mind:** Ask questions, seek clarification, and explore the rationale for the decision. Do not change your mind simply to reach agreement or maintain harmony. Yield to reason, but not pressure. Be sure everyone accepts the solution for similar or complimentary reasons.
5. **Do Not Trade Support or Bargain:** Compromising for support on other issues is not conducive to finding the best possible solution. When a descending member finally agrees, do not feel s/he needs to be rewarded by having her/his way at some later date.
6. **Do not Vote:** Do not vote, flip coins, average, or use other conflict-reducing techniques. The objective is to create the best solution, but some conflict may be unavoidable.

7. **Treat Differences as Strengths:** Differences can become venues to gather information, clarify issues and seek better choices.
8. **Create Supportable Solutions:** The team should feel the solution is the best possible course of action, at the time. 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. Each member should agree to support the solution as if it were his/her first choice.

CONSENSUS LADDER

This “ladder” may help teams reach consensus and understand what consensus really ‘sounds’ like. Rung 1 = The clearest statement of consensus; Rung 6 = The statement of most concern about the process.

1. “I agree wholeheartedly with the decision. I am satisfied that the entire group accepted this decision.”
2. “I find the decision to be acceptable.”
3. “I can live with the decision.”
4. “I do not totally agree, but I will not block the decision and will support it.”
5. “I do not agree with the decision and would like to block the decision being accepted.”
6. “I believe there is no unity in this group. We have not reached consensus.”