



Flow of Consensus Decision Making Process

a Tools for Change Handout



Background (present)

What decision needs to be made.

Motivation. (why).

History

What are the aims?

What is at stake

What are the known options

→ **Discussion**

Exploration of the issues, different approaches and opinions.

Synthesize the spirit of the discussion.

→ **Proposal**

A participant incorporates views into a concise recommendation for action.

→ **Discussion of Proposal**

Take up questions to clarify.

Express and explore issues about the proposal.

→ **Make Friendly Amendments**

Proposal can be modified or withdrawn (with the consent of the one who put it forward).

→ **Test for Consensus**

Restate proposal including any amendments. Then call for readiness to move forward. If there are concerns then ask if there are:

A. Strong concerns / non-support (“I don’t see the need for this but can live with it.”)

B. Reservations / objections with-in consensus

(“I think this might be a mistake but I can live with it.”)

C. Standing aside (“I can’t do this but I won’t stand in the way of others doing it.”) If there are a significant number of any of the above, then there is unreadiness in the group. You need to decide for your group what that number is.

D. Blocks. People should *only* block when the proposal violates their moral and/or ethical convictions and they think it will harm the group or community.

If the proposal gets blocked, ask the ones who are blocking for their objections and possible solutions. Try to incorporate solutions or suggestions from others into a revised or new proposal.

If there is still unreadiness it may be good for the one who is blocking to work with the presenter of the proposal outside of the meeting (along with other interested parties) to see if they can come up with a workable alternative or compromise proposal to bring back to the group.

→ **Consensus Reached**

Show agreement with voice or gesture. Again repeat the decision that has been reached. It should be written down along with any concern, reservation, or stand aside.

→ **Decision Implemented**

Establish who will do what when and if particular support is needed. Then write it down.



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Consensus means that all members of the group agree that the decision is the best one for the group as a whole at that time. Consensus does not mean that all individuals share the same opinion. It often takes longer but the time is worth spending because it is a synthesis of everyone's perspectives and intelligence. The decision that emerges out of consensus represents the whole and everyone takes responsibility to carry it out.

It takes:

Collective Spirit Consensus works when you put the interests of the group above your own, understanding that what is good for the group as a whole benefits everyone.

Self-Discipline Do not dominate airtime nor sit back without voicing your ideas. Never assume that your ideas are not as important or be invested in your idea as the only possible outcome.

Respect Assume everyone is trying their best, has good reason for holding the perspective that s/he does and that together everyone will come up with a workable way to move forward.

Good Listening Trust that every concern raised will result in a better conclusion. Listen with a spirit of learning, curiosity, and finding what is true. Be open to discovering that another approach is better.

Cooperation Look for ways that differences can compliment each other or at least coexist. Avoid an either/or mentality that says only one approach is possible.

Struggle Explore the impact of different approaches. Make decisions that empower the group without disempowering any individual. Avoid trivializing and putting down other perspectives. Remember you can disagree and respect one another. Don't agree for the sake "harmony," "efficiency" or peer pressure. Agree when you agree.

Being Principled Blocking consensus should only be done for principled reasons. You believe the decision is fundamentally counter to the principles the group stands for i.e. harmful to the group and/or community. Be to the point; do not make speeches and openly participate in finding alternative approaches.

Patience It is important to exercise patience. Consensus takes time because each person's concerns and ideas are important. Time spent is time saved in not having to resolve conflicts that would arise later.

Responsibility Each person needs to be responsible to voice their opinion, participate in the discussion and actively carry out the decision.

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