

CONSENSUS DECISION-MAKING 101

by Tim Hartnett, PhD

<https://www.consensusdecisionmaking.org/>

For participants who want to be involved in consensus decision-making, not to teach facilitators

We can learn how to be a good participant

Values underlying the use of consensus (consensus vs adversarial debate)

A. **INCLUSIVENESS**

- builds group cohesiveness because it helps people feel they belong

B. **PARTICIPATION**

- a safe and efficient process helps people become more willing to participate
- just because everyone is invited and included does not mean everyone is going to participate
- the process needs to highlight and encourage ALL to participate
- a Safe and Efficient process helps people become more willing to participate
- some “extroverts” will participate in any situation. Other people are more reserved and need to be sure that the ground-rules (etc) are safe enough for participation

Problem → If everyone is invited and participating in making a decision but then the decision is over-ruled and not implemented, people will not want to participate again

Problem → If the decision-making process is long and protracted, participants will lose interest and not come again

C. **COLLABORATION**

- in a collaborative process, no one owns the proposal. All proposals are group-built
- the proposal needs to come from the richness of the different perspectives within the group
- Example of **non-collaborative** process: one person brings an idea, the group says, “OK that sounds good” and they adopt the idea. That is NOT collaborative since only one person owns the idea

D. **EQUALITY**

- all participants have an equal voice, feel equally empowered, share equal levels of participation
- all voices are respected and heard
- Process-Oriented: we care HOW we make decisions, not just focus on getting a decision done, not goal-oriented. We want the process to be good for our relationships within the group

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E. RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

- at the end of the decision-making process people feel better about each other, more connected, more cooperative with each other

Problem → undermining each other's ideas in an adversarial debate can damage relationships with resentments and lower group moral

F. FULL AGREEMENT SEEKING

- not just the majority get the vote and those people in the minority are ignored
- ALL are in agreement

G. **Most important** = WHOLE GROUP THINKING

- consensus decision-making process only works if we think about the welfare of the **whole group** versus each person arguing for their own interests and for what they think is best for themselves
- "whole group thinking" is a consciousness wherein you identify yourself not solely as an individual, but as a part of something bigger---the group

Roles in Consensus Decision-Making

1. **Facilitator**: Facilitators serve the group by guiding the process, so the group members can focus on the content of the discussion
 - they guide the process of the meeting
 - they are not a decision-maker
 - they maximize participation by helping some people to step up and some people to step back
 - facilitators can be rotated so several people have the opportunity to facilitate. Or they can be rotated if people sense that a facilitator has extra "power" and they want the power to be shared equally
2. **Minute-Taker**: Minute-takers document the outcome of the meeting
Minutes include:
 - date and who is attending
 - agenda
 - key discussion points
 - decisions made
 - action items and who is responsible
 - topics for next meeting

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3. **Time Keeper**

- keeps an eye on the clock so that any agreements on time for agenda items or the meeting as a whole are kept track of

4. **The Stacker**

- keeps a list of who wants to speak next (you raise your hand and get on the list)
- the sacker calls you when it's your turn

5. **Vibes Watcher / Peacekeeper**

- keeps an eye on the emotions in the room and will speak up when the intensity of emotions reaches a level where it affects people's comfort levels.
- can call attention to this, maybe ask a "time-out" or pause
- can work with the facilitator on what might the group do to address the emotional intensity in the room

6. **Scribe**: writes the ideas up on a board for all to see

7. **Host**

- Makes sure the environment is conducive to a good meeting
- The host is someone who watches out for the physical needs of the group (seating, water, bathrooms, food, etc)

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8. **The Key Role** → **Participants**

- speak with their own voice and their own opinion
- practice whole-group thinking: "what is best for everyone?"