

Tool 3



Reaching Consensus

A consensus is a good, general agreement with a reasonable amount of disagreement among individual team members. Here are some ways to help your group reach consensus.

1. Accept the idea that there is more than one way to reach an objective.
2. List the “musts.” What must be satisfied to ensure a good decision.
3. Recognize that this is not brainstorming. Brainstorming is freewheeling. Use your list of “musts” to place boundaries on the discussion.
4. Weed out opinions and assumptions from the facts. Test opinions and assumptions with your “musts.”
5. Ensure that everyone’s ideas are heard. Encourage people to build on each other’s ideas.
6. Summarize and pull together the direction of the discussion. Check this summary with the team: “Are we all in agreement at this point that ... ?” “Am I right to say that so far we have said ... ?”
7. Do not allow the group to be railroaded by one or two people. Avoid heated arguments in favour of one person’s position. Present all positions clearly and logically for the participants’ response.
8. Don’t encourage people to change their minds in an attempt to dodge disagreement. This creates an artificial state of harmony. Constructive disagreements lead to stronger decisions and better plans.
9. Beware of agreement that comes too quickly or too easily. Explore the reasons that the team is in agreement. Did team members come to the same position for the same reasons? Is there an underlying misunderstanding? Has the team leader signalled one position so strongly no one is willing to disagree?
10. Avoid the easy way out—majority vote, averaging, coin-flipping. These will leave the team members with strong differences of opinion that will be carried out to the parking lot. This is not consensus. Never hesitate to check one more time how people feel about the issue.
11. Try for win-win situations. Everyone feels “reasonably” comfortable with what is going to happen. This is consensus.

Any questions or comments? Please contact the Elders’ Institute for information.

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