

Inclusive & Participatory

In a consensus process all group members are included and encouraged to participate. Further, the needs of all stakeholders affected by a decision are included in the deliberations.

Agreement Seeking

Consensus decision-making is a process that seeks widespread or full agreement. Groups using this process commit themselves to the goal of generating as much agreement as possible. Different groups may have different decision rules (standards for how much agreement is necessary to finalize a decision). Regardless of the ultimate decision rule, however, all groups using a consensus process strive for the full agreement of all participants.

Process Oriented

Consensus decision-making highlights the process of making decisions, not just the result. In a consensus process all participants are respected and their contributions are welcome. Power leveraging, adversarial positioning, and other group manipulation tactics are specifically discouraged by the facilitator or by the structure of the discussion. The way in which the decision is made is as important as the resulting decision.

Collaborative

Consensus decision-making is a collaborative process. All members of the group contribute to a shared proposal and shape it into a decision that meets all the concerns of group members as much as possible. Consensus is distinctly different from an adversarial process wherein participants compete for the group's support, and the concerns of the losing parties are not addressed by the winning proposal.

Relationship Building

Consensus decision-making has an over-arching goal of building group relationships through discussion. The effort to gain widespread agreement and include all perspectives is intended to support positive relationships between consensus participants. The resulting shared ownership of decisions and increased group cohesion can make implementation of decisions and future consensus discussions proceed in an atmosphere of trust and cooperation.

Whole Group Thinking

Consensus decision-making places value on individuals thinking about the good of the whole group. Participants are encouraged to voice their personal perspectives fully so that the group benefits from hearing all points of view. But consensus participants are also expected to pay attention to the needs of the whole group. Ultimately, in consensus, personal preferences are less important than a broader understanding of how to work together to help the group succeed.