

TOOL BOX

DECISION-MAKING METHODS

Method	Advantages	Disadvantages	When to Use
Individual	Speed Simplicity Clarity	May waste group intelligence Invites resistance Lowers motivation for participation Creates messes	When one person's content expertise far exceed that of others When speed is of paramount importance When group is conflicted and time is short When a decision contrary to members' interests must be made
Consultative	Allows for input of others without taking undue time Most cost- and time-effective of all decision methods Guards against "group think" Allows for quick action and high levels of action	May cause resentment in those whose advice is spurned Loses quality gain that comes from "give and take" and integration of differing proposals	When leader is highly expert When leadership is clear and unquestioned When leader wants to take advantage of different ideas but does not want to invest the time required to work through to consensus When leader wants to retain control When speed is critical
Consultative Consensus	Avoids deadlock in decisions Enables leader to lead, retaining sense of personal control, while still building consensus in group Group members in some cases may be more likely to support implementation	Time to attempt consensus "Murkiness" of mixing two decision methods requires considerable skill if not to be perceived as manipulative	When one person is either highly expert or has a high degree of responsibility for the implementation of the decision When there is a desire to be collaborative and maintain a participative ethic When facilitation skills are high in leader or available through neutral facilitator
Modified Consensus	Supports a more democratic, participative culture Forces dealing with all significant conflicting views and opinions in the group People have belief that it fosters more commitment	Time-consuming to work through all concerns Compromises necessary; often does not improve quality; Often tedious to work through the process No hard data that MC produces more intelligent results	When group agreement is considered critical When a participative ethic is highly valued When all group members are willing to invest the time on critical decisions that require high levels of agreement When those who will implement are in the group When a neutral facilitator is available
Absolute Consensus	Produces most intelligent decisions of highest quality Support for decision is unequivocal	Groups fail to achieve decision 2 out of 3 times AC is attempted May take a very long time; often emotionally difficult, stressful	When the cost of making less than the most intelligent decision is exceptionally high For strategic, safety, or survival decisions When the quality of the decision matters more than anything else When enough time is available
Voting	Speed – when handled properly Perceived fairness Avoids impasses Anyone can lead May be only means possible when differences are irreconcilable Can help build a consensus if used as a process tool	Creates sides, factions; divides the group Encourages debate rather than dialogue Detracts from cohesion of group Entrenches people rather than expanding group IQ	When stakes are low; when almost any decision will work When little discussion or debate is required and any choice will probably work When consensus cannot be achieved and no leader is available as a fallback decision maker When you want to "poll" the group about several alternatives and then proceed with alternative selection

Justice and Jamieson, The Facilitator's Fieldbook

BUILDING CONSENSUS USING FIST - TO - FIVE CONSENSUS



FIST-TO-FIVE

When a group comes to consensus on a matter, it means that everyone in the group can support the decision; they don't all have to think it's the best decision, but they all agree they can live with it. Whenever a group is discussing a possible solution or coming to a decision on any matter, Fist-to-Five, developed by the American Youth Foundation, is a good tool to determine what each person's opinion is at any given time.

To use this technique the Team Leader restates a decision the group may make and asks everyone to show his or her level of support. Each person responds by showing a fist or a number of fingers that corresponds to their opinion.



Fist

A no vote - a way to block consensus. I need to talk more on the proposal and require changes for it to pass.



1 Finger

I still need to discuss certain issues and suggest changes that should be made.



2 Fingers

I am more comfortable with the proposal but would like to discuss some minor issues.



3 Fingers

I'm not in total agreement but feel comfortable to let this decision or a proposal pass without further discussion.



4 Fingers

I think it's a good idea/decision and will work for it.



5 Fingers

It's a great idea and I will be one of the leaders in implementing it.

If anyone holds up fewer than three fingers, they should be given the opportunity to state their objections and the team should address their concerns. Teams continue the Fist-to-Five process until they achieve consensus (a minimum of three fingers or higher) or determine they must move on to the next issue.

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