

Reaching Consensus

“You think you understand the situation, but what you don’t understand is that the situation just changed.” Putman Investments advertisement

Regional leaders meet as a management team and decisions are made through consensus. Consensus often is easier to define than to put into practice, and for many, consensus is a new decision-making process. Although reaching consensus may require a longer discussion period, the outcome is usually positive for participants.

What Consensus Is:

- Consensus is an agreement among team members to support each other for the common good. It can be experienced only when everyone has participated in the decision-making process and can support the final decision. Consensus means that even those who do not fully agree can at least support the group decision, if only for a trial period.
- Consensus is flexible. The process of reaching consensus often uncovers thoughts and ideas that otherwise might not surface. Through discussion, a more creative or different solution is often reached rather than the one originally targeted. Often groups find routes to agreements that no one recognized when discussion first began.
- Consensus accommodates varying points of view. Consensus also means that you have a voice and can block decisions that you cannot accept. However, you must then be prepared to present a viable alternative, not just reject the ideas of others. One value of a diverse team is hearing many points of view, which can lead to better ideas. Decisions made by consensus brings people together rather than polarizing them, as voting often does.

What Consensus Is Not:

- Consensus does not mean that team members are 100 percent sold on every course of action. Not only will different points of view be expressed, but more than one “right” solution may exist. In fact, total agreement on a complex issue is rare. To successfully implement any significant change, team members should be at least 70 percent comfortable with an action. Be aware that the process of reaching consensus can delay a decision.
- Consensus does not mean saying “yes” when you really mean “no.” It is important that team members be honest and forthright in stating opinions. Giving your “real” opinion after the meeting, to friends over lunch or in the parking lot, defeats the team’s purpose. Lack of commitment and follow-through are almost always the result when the “no’s” are not expressed and fully discussed during team meetings.
- Consensus is not majority rule. When the minority is forced to go along with the majority, subtle and overt resistance may occur. Consensus decisions require a degree of discussion and interchange that doesn’t occur in voting.

PROFILE OF A TEAM

Works toward a common goal
Develops its members skills
Uses its time efficiently
Embraces the diversity of its members
Is committed to continuous improvement
Builds morale internally
Performs effectively and produces results
Accepts praise and criticism
Cooperates rather than competes
Sincerely listens to new ideas
Stays on task
Uses resources wisely
Communicates openly
Teaches and learns from one another
Resolves conflicts effectively
Welcomes challenges
Shares pride in its accomplishments
Celebrates successes!!!

Team Management Benefits & Challenges

Benefits:

- Allows for a combination of elected and appointed positions
- The chorus director is part of the team - he/she has better understanding of chorus' administrative issues
- Music and administration work hand-in-hand - administrators have a better understanding of chorus' musical issues
- Develops strong responsibility for key areas of chorus management
- People feel like they "direct" their own area
- Enhances / builds management skills
- Builds a new understanding for what truly constitutes "consensus"
- Helps people step up / take responsibility without blaming "the group"
- Team feels good about what they are accomplishing
- In combination with strategic planning, the chorus has a good sense of where it is headed and what it will take to get it there
- Chorus feels good about its leadership

Challenges:

- It is hard to find people to run for management positions on the team
- It is a large responsibility to take on a whole area and assume full responsibility for it / managing the "workers/chairs" is a must
- Must fight tendency to "dump-off" on the management team decisions/recommendations that should be made by the managers or within the individual areas

Allow yourselves the time and opportunity:

- to work through the process, to "tweak" and improve
- to build on the strengths & primary tasks of each manager
- to encourage, help, and support one another
- to think about the Secretary being an "off-team" member of the IMT

TEAM

Teams are purpose-centered. Members are committed to the purpose, know and understand the purpose, and focus their energy to share both responsibilities and rewards. The whole is greater than the sum of the parts!

Participatory Decision-Making Core Values

- Full participation – all members encouraged to speak-up and say what's on their minds. This strengthens a group in several ways.
 1. Members become more courageous in raising difficult issues.
 2. Members learn how to share "out-of-the-box" ideas.
 3. Members become more adept at discovering and acknowledging the diversity of opinions and backgrounds inherent in their group.
- Mutual understanding – to reach a sustainable agreement, the members need to understand and accept the legitimacy of one another's needs and goals. This basic sense of acceptance and understanding is what allows people to develop innovative ideas that incorporate everyone's point of view.
- Inclusive solutions – are wise solutions.
 1. Wisdom emerges from the integration of everybody's perspectives.
 2. Range and vision is expanded to take advantage of the truth held not only by the quick and most articulate, but also of the truth held by the slower thinkers and the shy.
- Shared responsibility – members feel a strong sense of responsibility for creating and developing sustainable agreements.
 1. All are heard, and they make every effort to give and receive as much input as is necessary before final decisions are made.
 2. They recognize that they must be willing and able to implement the proposals, programs, and plans they endorse.