



## **Consensus Decision-Making: The Formula**

### **1. Introduce the issue or proposal:**

- state what is to be decided
- provide any necessary definitions
- provide background information

### **2. Discussion:**

- Answer questions and provide necessary information
- Everyone contributes, even if it is just to agree with a point, ask for clarification, or indicate ambivalence'

### **3. Summarize and Clarify:**

- Facilitator keeps discussion on track
- periodically summarizes and clarifies

### **4. Test:**

- Is beginning to repeat itself; facilitator states the conclusion that seems to have been reached and asks if anyone objects
- Do a round; silence can only be taken to mean agreement if that is stated as a ground rule
- The decision must be one that all group members are able to live with; if serious objections exist, the decision is not made

### **5. Confirm:**

- Restate the decision



## **Consensus Decision-Making**

### **Definition of Consensus**

Consensus has been achieved when everyone in the meeting can honestly say the following four statements to every other person:

1. I believe you understand my point of view.
2. I believe I understand your point of view.
3. I believe the decision has been made in an open and fair manner.
4. I am willing to support the group's decision, whether or not it is my preference.

### **Steps in Reaching Consensus**

1. Rounds will be done for each key decision.
2. In the event a decision cannot be reached by consensus, the AEC will decide to:
  - a. continue the discussion in the current meeting and push back other items.
  - b. table the item for further discussion in future meetings and identify any further information people will need to facilitate that discussion.
  - c. refer the item to committee or staff for further discussion and formulation of recommendations, or other arena for resolution; or
  - d. declare that there is no consensus and decide to:
    - continue with a modified goal or objective



- disband
- seek assistance to reach a resolution.

## Levels of consensus

During a round, each person indicates where they are with respect to the decision being proposed:

1. Fully support
2. Support with reservations
3. Acceptable
4. Will not block it, can live with it
5. Need more information or more discussion. (Identify what information is needed, how it will be obtained, and when)
6. No, cannot accept it

Any response at #4 or above constitutes consensus. #5 indicates that with more information or discussion, consensus may be possible. #6 indicates a fundamental disagreement.

*Excerpt from The Alliance Executive Committee (AEC)  
Orientation Workbook*

*Adapted from B.C. Labour Force Development Board*



## **Building the Ability to Work by Consensus**

### **Choose Option 1 OR Option 2**

#### **Option 1 - Learning More About Each Other's Perspectives Why**

- ask questions to promote mutual understanding
- sometimes people hesitate to ask questions about each other's perspective because questioning can be seen as criticism
- help people understand that questions are not always intended as attacks
- build patience and trust
- the goal of this activity is to promote understanding, not to resolve differences.

**Note:** It may seem time-consuming to have extended discussions in which we share our perspectives, but the alternative is trying to proceed without understanding each other, which:

- ends up taking longer
- produces worse results.

#### **What to do**

1. Ask for a volunteer to be the "focal person."
2. Focal person begins by saying "Here's the point I want to make..."  
Example: "Here's the point I want to make. All developments related to bargaining should be kept confidential." They then express their point of view on that subject. They have 3 minutes to talk.



3. When focal person is done, group members ask questions to better understand the focal person's perspective like: "What do you mean by...?" "Can you explain why ...?"
4. The focal person answers the first question. After answering, they ask the questioner: "Is it clear to you now?"
5. If the questioner says yes, move to next step.
6. If questioner says no, ask questioner what they believe the focal person said and what they still find unclear.  
For example: someone might say "I hear them saying that we should not share bargaining news publicly. "But I still don't understand why they feel so strongly about it" or "I still don't understand what the benefits of doing that might be."
7. When both the questioner and the focal person feel understood, another group member becomes the focal person.

**Variation:** Focal person remains the same and responds to more than one question. After three or four people have had the chance to ask questions, ask for another person to volunteer to be the new focal person.

## **Option 2 – If I Were You**

### **Why**

- promote mutual understanding by looking at the world through each other's eyes
- practice suspending your own point of view by exploring another person's perspective



- gain insights that you may not acquire through conventional discussions
- support everyone to feel understood and “seen”
- allow people to correct any misperceptions.

## What to do

1. Each group member must take the perspective of a local officer role occupied by another group member. It must be a role they themselves DO NOT occupy:
  - i.e., a President would choose either Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, Chief Steward, etc. A Treasurer would choose President, Vice-President, Secretary, or Chief Steward, and so forth.
2. Choose a statement to work with, such as: “If I were you, a main concern of mine would be...” OR “If I were you, one of my goals would be...”
3. Everyone takes a turn being the central person and hearing others who do not occupy their role describing it:
  - One or two group members take turns saying to central person: “If I were you...”
4. After listening to both people, the central person may respond to what others have said about their role.
5. When everyone has had a turn, reflect on the activity, and share any new insights you have gained.

*Activities adapted from: Sam Kaner with Lenny Lind, Catherine Toldi, Sarah Fisk and Duane Berger, Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making, second edition, San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2007.*