

WHY IS EVERYONE TRYING TO ACHIEVE CONSENSUS?

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“What’s the big deal about consensus, anyway? It takes too long and decisions are watered down through compromises. Look, democracy is the American way, and democracy means majority rules. Let’s just vote on it and be done with it!”

How many times have you heard those statements in working with groups? Too often? And how often have the quick and easy answers to life’s complex problems only created more problems? Too often. That’s why effective groups take the time to fully consider their actions and cherish the power of a consensus based decision.

Everywhere you go people ask if there is consensus on this issue or that decision. In fact most mediators and negotiators approach their work assuming that unanimous agreement is impossible, and that the very best they can hope for is consensus. (Please note that the word consensus is not synonymous with compromise.) Here’s why we search for consensus, and why we use a consensus-based model whenever possible:

The struggle for group consensus encourages deeper understanding.

- It creates understanding of the issues
- It assures that problems will be addressed in a rational, analytic way
- It instills a broader search for resolution and opens never-before-considered options
- It develops and blends the best aspects of various alternatives

The struggle for group consensus provides a level playing field.

- It provides equal opportunity to influence the outcome of a decision.
- It assures all people the same right to power and the potential to persuade the group

The struggle for group consensus assures participation.

- It fosters, encourages and allows “win-win” results rather than “win-lose” decisions
- It reinforces a collaborative climate within the group and the organization, and gives participants the ability to find common ground
- It reduces the tendency to resist decisions that are “imposed”
- It involves those who must implement
- It establishes a common commitment to a cause or course of action