

Consensus-Building

*A few best practices of
collaboration and
Conflict resolution*

Desired Outcomes of this session



1. Understand several ways to get to a decision including a pragmatic definition of consensus.
2. Learn tools for setting up meetings for success.
3. Understand how you can impact a meeting from anywhere in the meeting.

Consensus is built through participation and skilled facilitation



Achieving consensus is comprised of skills, knowledge and process or facilitation wisdom.

Without these, building consensus can seem like a perfect storm approaching

Process VS. Content



Content: The what we are discussing like facts, topics, ideas, proposals...

Process: How we are going to discuss the content-like brainstorming, lists, +&-, N/3

Demonstration of the power of Process

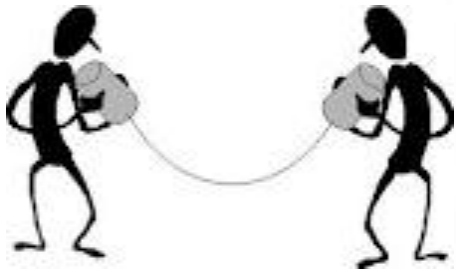
Small Group Exercise:

Brainstorm with two others near you:
What works and what does not work
with our meetings?

2' on each list

Share list with two other people near
you

Rank the top five in order of
importance



Key #1 to Building Consensus

- An agreement can make it easier to create participation, safety and engagement for all

Make Process Agreements up front-first meeting.

Examples:

- One person talk at a time.
- **Listen** carefully and seek to understand.
- Speak from first person not about others.
- Look for small wins

Consensus is built within meetings



Key #2-Effective Meetings start with the agenda

- A meeting must have an agenda.
- The agenda coupled to a desired outcome for every agenda item.
- Roles like “chair”, facilitator, recorder and timekeeper are critical to success.
- Linking process tools like brainstorming to the agenda item hastens progress

Listening builds consensus

Scaling the mountain of consensus is done by handholds of small agreement built by careful listening and looking for agreement



Members can influence the meeting anytime by



1. Asking for desired outcomes for each agenda item.
2. Clarifying the tool that is used to address the agenda item-
discuss/list/brainstorm/
present.
3. Keeping track of time so that you don't run out.

3 Steps in Consensus Building

- Opening the conversation
- Narrowing the choices
- Closing the conversation using the decision method agreed upon.

Key #3 Open with the right tool

Opening is the phase when we expand and look for the possibilities for solutions.

Tools for Opening

- Listing
- Criteria generation
- Brainstorming
- Proposing
- Tentative hypothesis

Key #4 Know how to narrow down choices

Narrowing is the phase when we constrain the choices by criteria, facts, probabilities and looking for the participants trending towards consensus.

Tools for narrowing

Advocacy

Nominal Group Process

T-Accounts

Key #5 Know which Decision Making method you are using

- Get agreement on the decision method.
- Define what the finish line is for that decision method.
- Remind group when off course.
- Use the decision method as an incentive.

Some standard ways to decide

- Unanimous agreement
- Unanimity minus one or two
- Super majority thresholds (set at 90, 80, 70 or 60%)
- Executive Committee gathers input and then decides.
- Person-in-charge decides

A working definition of consensus

- A decision that everyone has been engaged in coming to collaboratively.
- A choice that you can live with-not the best, not the most perfect.
- A decision that you are willing to implement.
- The sense of the group's acceptance

Key #6 Consensus is a series of small agreements

Closing is the phase when we are going for a decision by using tools.

Listening for the themes and trends

Tools for Closing

Make a proposal

Match possible solutions with objective criteria

Ask: “What can you live with?”

Work of leader during consensus building

- Encouraging effective representation and participation of key stakeholders.
- Listening carefully and inquiring frequently
- Helping group meet its goals via well constructed agendas and management of the meeting.
- Identifying resource needs-consultation, SME's, training.
- Helping group with process of joint fact finding.

Work of leader during consensus building #2

- Helping group with negotiation, facilitation and conflict resolution including consideration of core interests.
- Creating options and proposals on specific issues.
- Crafting final decisions in light of agreed upon criteria and goals.

In summary



- Consensus is bridge building.
- It takes facilitation to achieve consensus.
- Bad process leads to no consensus or years of hard work.
- Listen for the trend toward consensus.
- Every group has conflict but some groups are more creative in resolving it.



What would it take for you to
experiment with one idea?