

Consensus Decision Making

Consensus decision-making can be defined as “a process used by teams seeking to generate high levels of participation, agreement and unity as they make impactful decisions.”

Biblically, we can see a consensus-like process in Acts 15. This story details how numerous leaders from Jesus’ new movement gathered to discover God’s best on a point of significant conflict. By my reading, the exchange was passionate and spanned multiple days, but in the end, those gathered were united and had found common, Kingdom ground. “*It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and us*” (Acts 15:28).

Based on my experience, this type of decision-making tool is ideal for Jesus’ houses because it is consistent with His values like humility, transparency and honesty. It also accelerates unity within the community as all participants are charged to publicly own the process’ outcome.

Though there are multiple styles of consensus, each affirms a handful of behavioral boundaries such as:

- Participatory: All stakeholders involved in the process are allowed a chance to contribute to their perspective;
- Collaborative: The process encourages group construction of new proposals through input from multiple participants. Any individual authorship of an idea or solution is subsumed as the group modifies it to include the concerns of all group members.
- Unifying: The goal is to generate the needed agreement to move forward with complete ownership of the outcome by each stakeholder. (It should be noted that there are varying levels of agreement needed and ideally, the standard is articulated as the process begins. See more details below.) One of the great benefits of consensus is that it encourages a thorough consideration of the possible options and minimizes those who are disgruntled because they were not heard.
- Cooperative: Participants are encouraged to keep the good of the whole group in mind. Each individual’s preferences should be voiced so that the group can incorporate all concerns into an emerging proposal. Individual preferences should not, however, obstructively impede the progress of the group.

Ground Rules for a Kingdom-based Consensus Process

- A mindset of godly worship and mutual submission prevails.
- All ideas are welcome.
- All participants' input is valued equally.
- Input from everyone is encouraged.
 - silence means agreement
 - everyone has the responsibility to speak up
 - everyone has the responsibility to encourage others to speak up / participate
- Decisions are made by consensus using the 4 levels detailed below.
- Once consensus is achieved as defined by the group*, participants equally support the outcome and all endorse it publicly.

* Special Note: At a minimum, consensus is achieved when all stakeholders are ones, twos or threes. However, there are instances where a higher level of agreement may be needed and the group does not settle on a decision until all are ones or twos.

Levels of Consensus

1. I strongly agree – *"I love it"*
2. I don't agree with everything, but like it – *"I like it"*
3. I don't agree, but I see most do agree and I can live with it and will publicly endorse it – *"I can live with it"*
4. I don't agree and I can't live with it, but I have an alternative option -- *"I have a new option I'd like to share"*