
Reaching Consensus: A Collaborative Decision-Making Process

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One simple and effective way to reach consensus is to vote using the 5, 3, 1 finger consensus process.

- Start by developing a list of potential options.
- Next, each team member votes on each option.



5 Fingers = I strongly agree



3 Fingers = I can live with it



1 Finger = I strongly disagree

- If everyone shows a 5 or 3 on the first vote, congratulations! Your team has reached consensus and can move ahead.
- If there are any 1s, give those team members the chance to explain why, and to discuss how to change the solution to make it acceptable to them. If a change is made to the proposed solution, then the team takes a new vote.
- If the team decides no change is necessary, a second vote is still taken to make sure there is consensus. On the second vote, if everyone shows a 5 or 3, the decision is made, and the team can move ahead.
- Alternatively, if on the second vote that are still some 1s, ask if individuals are willing to be “neutral”. They may not agree with the decision, but they also do not feel that it is wrong, so they may be willing to have the decision go forward.
- A third possibility is to have a sub-set of members study the issue some more and come back to the team with recommendations at the next meeting.

The 5, 3, 1-finger consensus process encourages team members to listen carefully when there is disagreement. It provides a way for all members to have a voice—the essence of effective collaborative decision making.

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