

## CONSENSUS

A feeling within a group that its conclusion represents a fair summary of the conclusions reached by the individual members of the group. Ernest Jay Hall (“Decisions, Decisions, Decisions,” *Psychology Today*, 5, November 1971, 51 seq.) views consensus as the decision-making process rather than the resulting feeling in the group. I draw heavily upon Hall’s description here. Consensus should make good use of the group’s resources, and it should provide for a fair resolution of conflicts within the group. Consensus is difficult to reach, so not every conclusion will meet with everyone’s approval. Complete unanimity is not the goal, and it is rarely achieved. However, each individual should be able to accept the group’s conclusions on the basis of logic and feasibility. When all group members feel this way, consensus has been reached. This means, in effect, that a single person can block the group if that person thinks it is necessary. Here are some guidelines to use in achieving consensus:

1. Avoid arguing for your own viewpoint. Present your position as lucidly and logically as possible, but then listen to the other members’ reactions and consider them carefully.
2. Do not assume that someone must win and someone must lose when the discussion reaches a stalemate. Instead, consider a restatement of the problem, or the next-most-acceptable alternative.
3. Do not change your mind simply to avoid conflict and to reach agreement. Be suspicious when agreement seems to come too quickly and easily. Explore the reasons, and be sure that everyone accepts the solution for similar or complementary reasons.
4. Avoid conflict-reducing techniques such as majority vote, averages, coin flips, and bargaining. When a dissenting member finally agrees, don’t feel that he or she must be rewarded by having his or her own way on some later point.
5. Differences of opinion are natural and expected. Seek them out and involve everyone in the decision process. Disagreement can improve the group’s decision because a wide range of opinions increases the chance that the group will hit upon better solutions.

From *Long-Range Forecasting*, by J. Scott Armstrong