CONSENSUS

"The group's ability to reach decisions in which everyone participated and which everyone can support."

Consensus is *not*:

Voting - In voting, participation in discussions may be cut short, affecting the quality of the decision, and all members may not support the outcome, since some may have' lost.'

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Trading off - "You can have your idea on the list if I can have one of mine." This kind of compromise may seem efficient, but all members may not support the outcome.

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Steamrolling - The 600# gorilla approach to decision making. It may work, but discussion is suppressed and people seldom support an outcome reached this way.

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Withdrawing - It may help keep the peace, but good ideas don't get a hearing, some don't hold themselves accountable, and full participation doesn't occur.

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Perfect Agreement - Consensus decisions represent what each member of the group has contributed to, can live with, and can support. That is not the same as perfect agreement.

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Easy or Fast - Consensus is difficult and takes time (front-loaded time, that is!), but it is worth the effort when quality, commitment and public support of a decision are important.

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What Helps Consensus Work:

Group members express their ideas as well as the logic behind them. Often the group may agree with the reasoning (interests) but not the suggested action. Reaching understanding about underlying interests often leads to acceptable alternatives.

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Group members listen to and are open to the logic of others.

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Group members explore ideas rather than debate them; they actively seek agreement. Consensus is not a competitive process, it is a collaborative search for ideas the whole group can support.

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Group members don't hold out for the 'perfect' decision. Sometimes the 'perfect' is the enemy of the 'good.' Teams need to be ready to recognize and support the best available decision that they can make at (and in) the current time.

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