

HELPING GROUPS REACH CONSENSUS

This tool helps leaders reach consensus among a group of people. It gives the leader an easy way to gauge the level of support for a particular option or proposal, thus paving the way for consensus.

How the Tool Works

Consensus means that the entire group supports a given direction. After defining the proposal on the table, the leader asks each person to state aloud his or her position using the scale below. For example, if you are solidly in favor, you say: "I'm a 1." If you're able to live with the proposal, you say, "I'm a 2." If you are opposed, you say, "I'm a 3."

1	I fully support this proposal.
2	I can live with this proposal.
3	I am opposed to this proposal.

Once people declare where they stand, the leader can then probe the areas of opposition. For example, he can say: "Let's go back and find out why the '3s' feel the way they do." The leader can ask, "Is there any data or circumstance that would cause you to change your mind?" In almost all cases, if the person is still thinking reasonably, they can imagine data or circumstances that would alter their stance. By probing the source of their opposition, the leader can often discover that it is rooted in a need for more information.

A more difficult path to consensus involves making changes to the proposal. Assuming that the vast majority support it, then making changes to appease a small minority may erode the support. That said, it is worthwhile to understand what changes would cause the opponents to alter their stance – and to then ask supporters whether they can live with those changes.

Ultimately, the test of consensus is whether everyone is either a "1" or a "2." Even if most people declare themselves to be a "2," it is still consensus. However, to achieve a strong consensus, you want the vast majority (+80%) of the group to declare themselves a "1." Depending on the stakes, it may be worth taking the additional time to work with the group to get everyone to a "1."