

# Exploring Group Decision-Making



## UNITY, not UNANIMITY

**The intention** is to maintain and deepen the sense of community through the group decision-making process. The question is how can our differences lead to better decisions for the group.

## CONSENSUS, not AGREEMENT

**The aim** is for consensus. Consensus means each person impacted can live with the proposal made. It does not necessarily mean everyone agrees with every aspect of the proposal.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DELIBERATION PROCESS

**Collaboration:** Participants contribute to a shared proposal and shape it into a decision that meets the concerns of all group members as much as possible

**Cooperation:** Participants strive to reach the best possible decision for the group and all of its members, rather than competing for personal preferences.

**Egalitarianism:** All members of the community are afforded the opportunity for direct and equal input into the process of decision-making.

EXPLORING GROUP DECISION MAKING  
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EXPLORING & CULTIVATING CERTAIN PERSONAL QUALITIES

For example

- Humility
- Curiosity
- Humor, Playfulness
- Perspective
- Authenticity, Integrity
- Self-Regulation
- Social Intelligence

**Brief Definitions:**

- *Humility: can admit one's lack of knowledge or certainty or being "wrong"*
- *Curiosity: interest in other people's motivations, opinions, and reasons*
- *Good will: the will to do good; the will that chooses and wants the good for self, others, and humanity.*
- *Perspective, wisdom: Able to see the big picture or larger patterns from which the issue has arisen. Can see the heart of important problems. Can bring rationality and feeling into decisions.*
- *Humor, playfulness: ability to take personal distance from a situation and embody a sense of lightness*
- *Self-regulation: Can honor one's own feelings, thoughts, and impulses and express them in a way that does not disrespect the others.*
- *Social intelligence: awareness of other people's unspoken feelings. Active listening.*
- *Authenticity, integrity: Can say what one believes is important to say in the moment that feels aligned with one's own truth.*

## STEPS OF THE GROUP DECISION-MAKING PROCESS [Based on the Quaker Model]

1. **Statement of Issue or question:** state the issue or question to be discussed and voted on
2. **Clarity of related information and perspectives:** share information and perspectives relevant to the issue or question *until* each person in the group is ready to move on to the next step.
3. **Formation of one or more proposals:** one or more persons present a proposal that addresses the issue or question.
4. **Merging of proposals:** Proposals presented are merged to create a single proposal. Anyone in the group can provide input on this process so that the merged proposal makes sense.
5. **Consensus voting:** each member of the group present can vote: (1) consent, (2) dissent: choose one of three options (see “Dissent Options” in the *Roles & Rules* section below).
6. **Adaptation of the single proposal:** If needed (due to the inputs of dissenters), the proposal will be modified in this step so the inputs of dissenters are addressed.
7. **Consensus voting continues until** consensus is reached.

## ROLES & RULES

1. **Limited number of times to speak** for each person: each person can only speak once until everyone else has had the chance to speak. Speaking is not mandatory.
2. **The facilitator’s role** is to:
  1. serve the group rather than being the person in charge.
  2. identify areas of agreement and names disagreements to push discussion deeper.
  3. facilitate for the adaptation of the proposal as to adequately address the perspectives of the dissenters.
  4. discern if one who is not uniting with the decision is acting without concern for the group or in selfish interest.
  5. note: members of the community can help the facilitator or point out areas of concern when he or she feels it is needed. Those who are present in the meeting should be the witness and judge if this help is sincere and useful.
3. **The notetaker’s role** is to take notes of the relevant points in the discussion which led to the decision, and more.
4. **All persons, regardless of age**, who understands and can demonstrate some skill in the facilitation of the process may facilitate. The same logic applies for the notetaker.

5. **Dissent options:** (1) declare reservation (willing to let a motion pass, but have concerns), (2) stand aside (willing to let a motion pass, but have serious personal disagreement with it). (3) block (not willing to pass the motion).
6. **Dissenters:** dissenters are asked to share their perspective, motivation, aims, reasoning, feelings, and intuitions related to their position. If a dissenter chooses the “block” the proposal, she must propose an *adapted* proposal that can be voted on by the group. Dissenter’s opinions, perspectives, and predictions are recorded so the group may learn from it.

## RESOURCES & NOTES

### **Wikipedia: Consensus Decision-Making**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Consensus\\_decision-making](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Consensus_decision-making)

**Formations aux outils pour auto-gestions** (à Wépion, la ferme de Vevy-Wéron) pour les projets d'Habitat Groupé, mai 2023

### **Holacracy**

*Holacracy in practice.pdf* drafted by Le Ciel foundation

GAIA Net - Self-Organization Basics & Mindset (2022): <https://vimeo.com/763450876>

**Liberating Structures:** training by GreaterThan Academy in May & June 2023.

### **Sociocracy**

[Peter Bergson; [peterames43@gmail.com](mailto:peterames43@gmail.com) ] the *sociocratic* process demonstrated in the Dutch schools in the film *School Circles*, which Richard Fransham presented in his March 16 zoom gathering, does seem to have built in to its structure the goal of win-win vs. majority rules.

See *Vimeo*: <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/schoolcircles>

Rent for 5 euros, or we can arrange a community documentary viewing session together.

### **Je'anna's River Valley School process:** [[jeanna.l.clements@gmail.com](mailto:jeanna.l.clements@gmail.com) ]

At RsV we have evolved a very simple process that we currently use - we discuss, someone proposes, someone seconds, there is a vote - For, Against, Abstain, Absent. 'Absent' is a category the kids came up with for people sitting waiting for other items who are not engaging, since if too many Abstain then that can prevent a motion passing. All who vote Against or Abstain are then invited to speak to their vote - this is optional, but if they do, they explain why they hesitate or choose not to vote For. The topic then goes back into discussion to see if there is any way to adapt the proposal to meet their need, in which case they can choose whether to change their vote. If not, the decision goes forward in spite of their vote, but most of the time the proposal gets adapted until all needs are met. No pressure for consensus, no blocking of a motion, no domination of the majority.

### **Thomas Tampol or Carol Nash, Alpha II, Quaker Model**

See attached document "Consensus decision-making including Quaker Model - Wikipedia" or this page: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Consensus\\_decision-making](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Consensus_decision-making)

### **Steve Hornstein "Fist to Five" & "Consensus Minus 2" [AERO mailing list]**

In my classes we have successfully used a combination of "Fist to Five", and "consensus minus 2." See Wikipedia for descriptions. I will add that to make consensus work in a genuinely respectful and democratic community, we need to still accommodate the dissenters.