



Decisions by Consensus Enhances Employee Commitment

By Jim Stewart

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In a recent article I discussed that *how* company owners or managers execute the fundamental principles of management can have a significant effect on organizational effectiveness. These principles included: leadership, communication, influence, decision making, goal setting, control processes and motivation.

Savvy owners/managers realize that the extent to which decision-making rests within the reach of many impacts positive outcomes. For maximum results, decisions made through group participation require the effective use of consensus decision-making skills

Consensus is defined as “an agreement reached despite differences.” The consensus decision-making process makes full use of available resources and resolves differences creatively. A decision by consensus may require more time and be more difficult than taking a vote or having a leader decide. Complete agreement may not be possible, but each individual should be able to accept a group decision on the basis of logic and feasibility from a personal standpoint, and should be able to recognize the effect on the group they work with. When a decision has been reached that is acceptable to all group members on this basis, a consensus has been achieved. Also in a “consensus” environment, a single person is allowed to block or delay a decision if they believe a better decision is possible—and they usually accomplish this by putting forward more or better information.

To achieve consensus, the following steps should be adhered to,

- Avoid arguing only for your own solutions. Present your position as clearly and logically as possible, but listen to the other members’ reactions, and consider them carefully before you persist in your own point of view.
- Do not assume that someone must win and someone must lose in a stalemate. Instead, look for new and creative alternatives to the next-to-most-acceptable alternative for all parties. “Win-win” solutions increase group commitment.
- Do not change your mind simply to avoid conflict and to reach agreement and harmony. Be sure each person accepts the solution for basically similar or complimentary reasons. Accept agreement only when it has objective and logically sound foundations.
- Avoid conflict-reducing, time-saving techniques such as majority votes, averages, coin flips, and bargaining. Do not take turns giving in on points of view.
- Differences of opinion are natural and expected since we all have different information at our disposal. Seek out differences and try to involve each group member in the decision process. Differences can improve the group’s decision. The wider the range of information and opinions, the greater the chance that the group will develop more adequate solutions.

The bottom line: in effective organizations, people feel they are on a winning team and believe they’re doing something important. They are proud of the organization they work for and feel they are making a contribution to something that’s important to themselves. Using consensus as part of the decision-making process can help to make these desired outcomes become a reality.