

# Consensus decision-making explanation

[Sociology](#), [Communication](#)



Consensus decision-making is a group decision making process that seeks the consent of all participants. Consensus may be defined professionally as an acceptable resolution, one that can be supported, even if not the " favourite" of each individual. Consensus is defined by Merriam-Webster as, first, general agreement, and second, group solidarity of belief or sentiment. It has its origin in the Latin word consensus (agreement), which is from consentio meaning literally feel together. It is used to describe both the decision and the process of reaching a decision.

Consensus decision-making is thus concerned with the process of deliberating and finalizing a decision, and the social and political effects of using this process. Consensus decision making is an alternative to commonly practiced adversarial decision making processes. Robert's Rules of Order, for instance, is a process used by many organizations. The goal of Robert's Rules is to structure the debate and passage of proposals that win approval through majority vote. This process does not emphasize the goal of full agreement.

Critics of Robert's Rules believe that the process can involve adversarial debate and the formation of competing factions. These dynamics may harm group member relationships and undermine the ability of a group to cooperatively implement a contentious decision. Consensus decision making is also an alternative to " top-down" decision making, commonly practiced in hierarchical groups. Top-down decision making occurs when leaders of a group make decisions in a way that does not include the participation of all interested stakeholders.

The leaders may (or may not) gather input, but they do not open the deliberation process to the whole group. Proposals are not collaboratively developed, and full agreement is not a primary objective. Critics of top-down decision making believe the process fosters incidence of either complacency or rebellion among disempowered group members. Additionally, the resulting decisions may overlook important concerns of those directly affected. Poor group relationship dynamics and decision implementation problems may result. Consensus decision making attempts to address the problems of both Robert's Rules of Order and top-down models.

The Consensus-Oriented Decision-Making model offers a detailed step-wise description of consensus process. It can be used with any type of decision rule. It outlines the process of how proposals can be collaboratively built with full participation of all stakeholders. This model allows groups to be flexible enough to make decisions when they need to, while still following a format that is based on the primary values of consensus decision making.

Not all decision-making bodies use all of these roles, although the facilitator position is almost always filled, and some groups use supplementary roles, such as a Devil's advocate or greeter. Some decision-making bodies opt to rotate these roles through the group members in order to build the experience and skills of the participants, and prevent any perceived concentration of power. The common roles in a consensus meeting are:  
Facilitator: As the name implies, the role of the facilitator is to help make the process of reaching a consensus decision easier.

Facilitators accept responsibility for moving through the agenda on time; ensuring the group adheres to the mutually agreed-upon mechanics of the

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consensus process; and, if necessary, suggesting alternate or additional discussion or decision-making techniques, such as go-arounds, break-out groups or role-playing. Some consensus groups use two co-facilitators. Shared facilitation is often adopted to diffuse the perceived power of the facilitator and create a system whereby a co-facilitator can pass off facilitation duties if he or she becomes more personally engaged in a debate.

**Timekeeper:** The purpose of the timekeeper is to ensure the decision-making body keeps to the schedule set in the agenda. Effective timekeepers use a variety of techniques to ensure the meeting runs on time including: giving frequent time updates, ample warning of short time, and keeping individual speakers from taking an excessive amount of time. **Empath or 'Vibe Watch':** The empath, or 'vibe watch' as the position is sometimes called, is charged with monitoring the 'emotional climate' of the meeting, taking note of the body language and other non-verbal cues of the participants.

Defusing potential emotional conflicts, maintaining a climate free of intimidation and being aware of potentially destructive power dynamics, such as sexism or racism within the decision-making body, are the primary responsibilities of the empath. [32] **Note taker:** The role of the notes taker or secretary is to document the decisions, discussion and action points of the decision-making body.