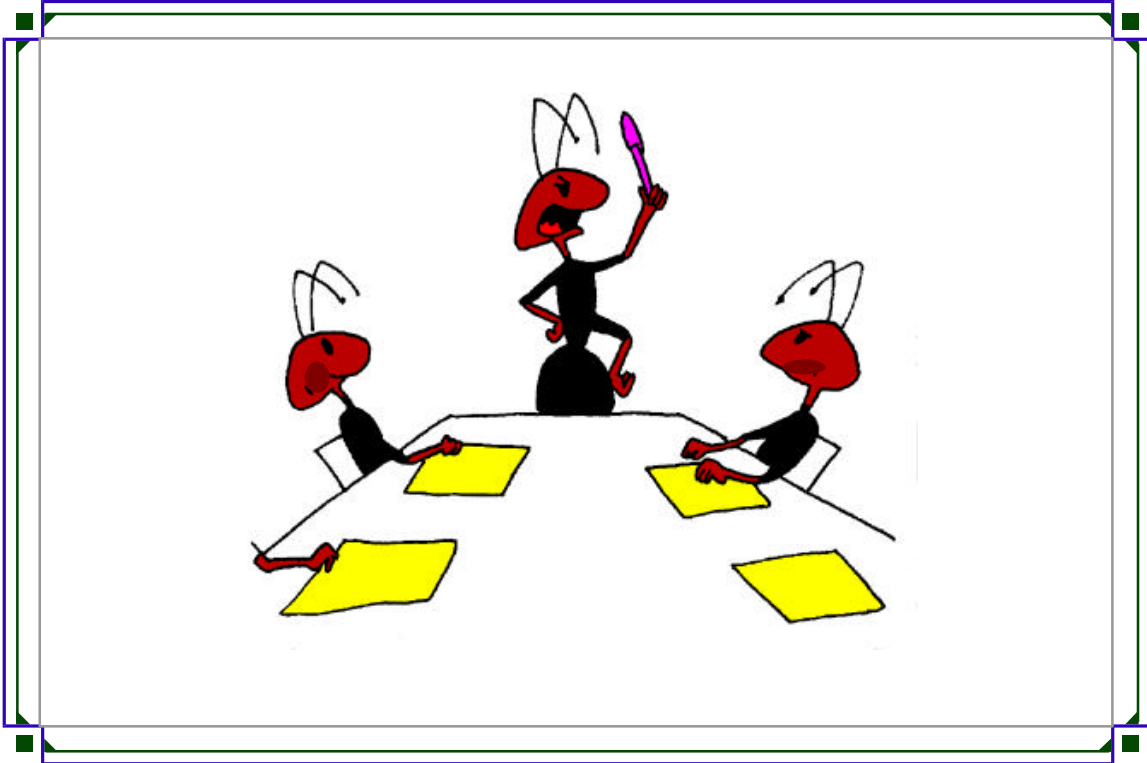


CONSENSUS BUILDING

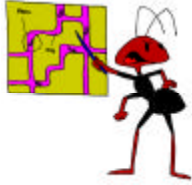


Purpose

Consensus Building is a highly interactive process utilized to develop high quality team decisions with a high level of team member commitment. It recognizes that all team members may not fully agree with a decision, but based on the best information available, can support the decision. It is not a unanimous vote that the decision in question is the best answer. It does represent a decision by all team members to be bound by the decision agreed to.

Consensus Building is a useful continuous process used throughout problem solving. It is most used when a quick, total agreement among members is needed. It should always be used when a group decision will have a major impact on the success of a process improvement.

In order for **Consensus Building** to be successful it requires, in addition to an open mind by team member, skills in communication, the active participation of all group members, and disciplined conflict resolution skills. **Consensus Building** may be the result of brainstorming, multivoting or nominal group techniques (all three are tools included in this toolbox).



Process

Since **Consensus Building** is a continuous process a step-by-step explanation of how to use it would be difficult. There are numerous contributors to Consensus Building, among them are:

1. Listen. Be sure that each team member has a full understanding of what other team members are saying.
2. Contribute. Share all relevant information even if it conflicts with personal interests.
3. Inclusion. Ensure that everyone is included in the decision making process.
4. Evaluate. Determine what points team members agree on and what points they disagree on. Spend time evaluating the differences.
5. Time. Don't waste time discussing those points that team members already agree on.
6. View. Conflict about ideas, solutions, predictions and other items should be viewed as helping rather than hindering consensus. These conflicts help ensure that all sides of an issue are explored to the satisfaction of all team members.
7. Look. Observation of both verbal and non-verbal signs from team members will help determine when consensus has occurred. In many cases a formal vote on an issue is not necessary.
8. Compromise. When used in **Consensus Building**, it doesn't mean that a team member will give up a position in exchange for support on another point. It does mean that the opinions of all team members are equally important, that each member will discuss an issue with an open mind, and is willing to fully support a decision made by the team.



Example

What Consensus Building is NOT:

It is not a unanimous vote; consensus may not represent everyone's first choice of solutions.

It is not a majority vote; in a majority vote, only the majority get what they want, people with the minority vote may get something they don't want at all.

It is not a way to obtain TOTAL agreement among team members.

It is not useful when very quick action is necessary. It may occur in quick action situations when all team members agree that there is not enough time for true consensus, but agree on an issue to expedite it.

Consensus Building is:

"I do not necessarily agree with the majority of the team, but have been convinced by the team members that this decision represents the BEST solution to the problem at hand given the available resources."

"I do not fully agree, but agree to be bound by and fully support the decision of the team on this issue."



Key Points

- Separate the things agree upon from the things not agreed upon. This helps the group to see that essentially there is agreement on most of the issues and further allows the team to focus on the points of disagreement one at a time.
- Determine each reason for disagreement. While the process is going on, it is useful to conduct analysis to crystallize the points of disagreement and open the team to new solutions and options.
- Determine as a team what to do about things not agreed on. Avoid bogging down or dividing members by identifying available options such as 1) set aside an issue and collect more data or opinions, 2) allow time for more reflection on the issues, 3) allow time for getting used to an idea, or 4) to allow creative solutions to emerge over time.
- Poll the group at appropriate times to determine if consensus is reached on the issue being discussed. Then, move on to the next issue.