

Creating Consensus

Consensus may be a new practice for many people seeking to establish greater relationship horizontality to their organizations.

Consensus is neither majority rules, nor does it entail making unanimous decisions: it is about arriving at the best decision for everyone involved.

There are four aspects to practicing effective consensus decision-making:

1. Cooperation
2. Disagreement
3. Voice
4. Responsibility

Cooperation

The best way to understand consensus is to realise it as a means of collective problem solving.

Everyone invested in the matter contributes to finding the ideal solution.

In consensus, many perspectives enhance the knowledge of the 'hive mind' and make the collective contributors stronger.

Together, groups coming to consensus bring a greater breadth of insights and experiences to issues that a lone individual would have difficulty accessing.

Enhanced team involvement grows with commitment to follow up on shared decisions.

Disagreement

A photograph of two cormorants on a weathered wooden post. One cormorant is perched higher on the post, leaning forward with its long, hooked beak open. The other cormorant is lower down, also with its beak open, looking up at the first bird. The background is a body of water with gentle ripples.

In the process of developing consensus, we understand disagreement is a positive force that helps us find stronger solutions and strive for more creative results.

We appreciate this might lead to longer discussions, and maybe even a bit of tension, but as long as we remember respectful communication, then disagreement can be highly constructive.

Voice

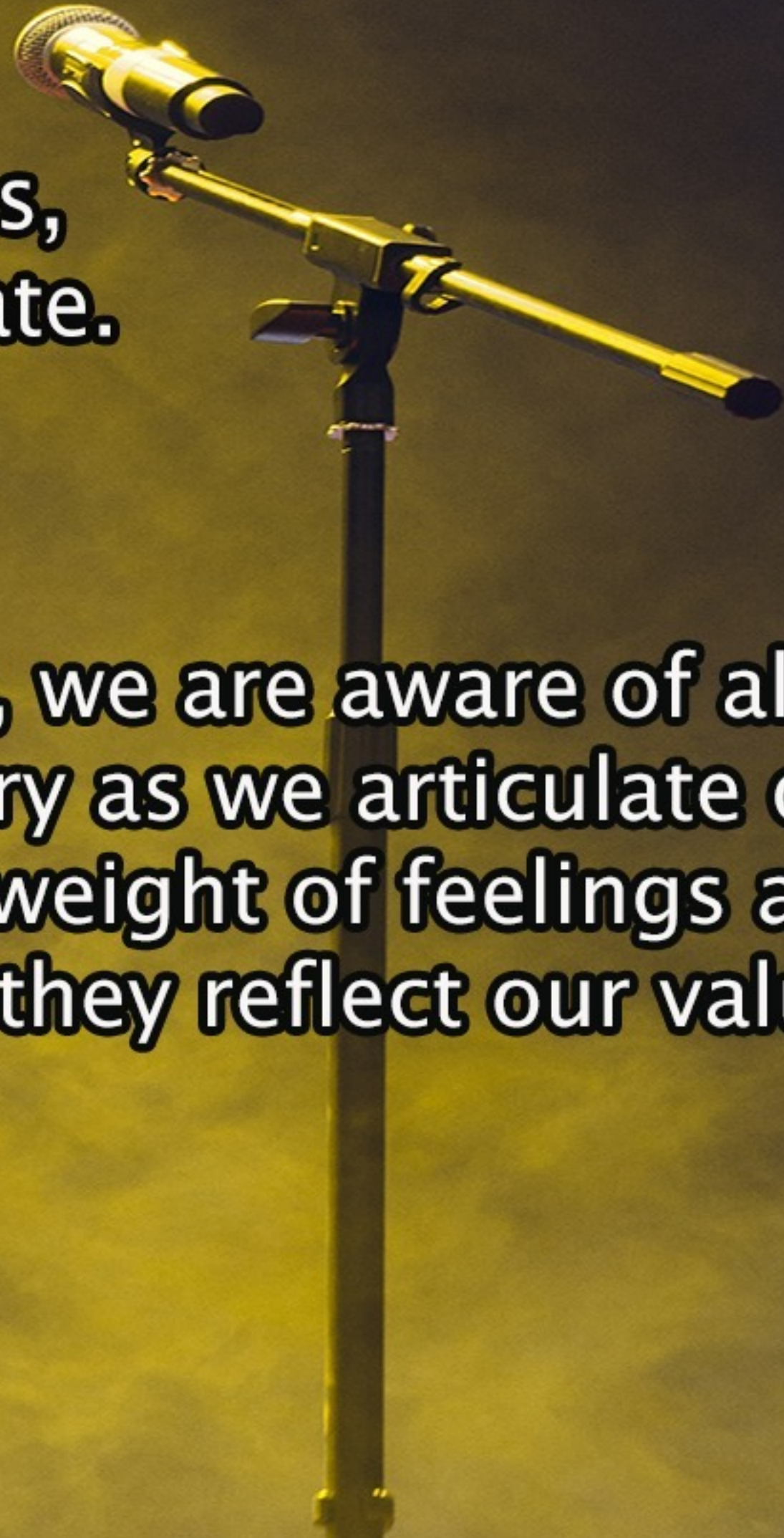
Every voice matters in the consensus decision making process.

This is how we balance power; we strive to foster group dynamics in which every voice has an equal say.

All questions, concerns, and ideas are legitimate.

In speaking with voice, we are aware of all the responsibilities we carry as we articulate our resolve, including the weight of feelings and experiences, and how they reflect our values.

We cultivate empathy.



Responsibility

In consensus decision making, we agree to put personal interests aside to support the best interests, values, and goals of the group.

Of course, individual perspectives feed into the discussion, but the final result should ideally be a decision that serves the best interests of the collective.

We are each responsible for our part in making a shared decision, and as such, we are not only accountable for the end results, but we are also responsible for the ongoing means by which we arrive at decisions, namely, for each other, and for our relationships.

This takes comittment to the process.

Blocking

What is blocking a decision?

In many groups, some or all members may have the right to 'block' a decision. This means a person may unequivocally say 'no' to the matter being discussed because they cannot live with the results.

Blocking a decision is a responsibility that should never be taken lightly, but as a measure to follow only after all attempts to compromise have been made.

In other words, if someone engages in 'veto abuse' and regularly blocks decisions in bad faith, then it might be time to question their commitment to meaningful participation.

Agree to Disagree?



YES

It is possible to disagree with a decision and still support it because:

1. Effort was made to address all concerns
2. The decision serves the group's purpose & values
3. The decision is one the individual can live with
4. In such instances one may 'abstain' from contributing



NO

WILLEM BUUS 1977

Consensus

With practice, patience, and a little trust, consensus may become a new mode of decision making in groups that want to establish greater equality between their members.

Take a chance to evolve the shared creativity you may have in your organization!

Recommended Reading:

Dressler, L., (2006). *Consensus through conversation: How to achieve high commitment decisions*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.