



Fist of Five

What is it?

A method used to test for the level of consensus. It can be used alone or in conjunction with any other approach in this chapter.

Consensus is the only type of decision in which an individual does not have decision-making responsibility. Instead, the full group reaches agreement about a course of action or a choice.

Since consensus requires that each group member be willing to support the choice, a consensus process can take significantly longer to reach a decision.



Because it can be time consuming and difficult to achieve consensus, this decision type should not be used too frequently. Consensus decisions are made when facing a major decision, or when the commitment of all group members is critical to success.

How do I use it?

- 1 Clarify [decision rights](#) and allow as long as it takes to complete the process. (True consensus can take time.)

- 2 State the proposal being considered concisely and clearly to make sure everyone understands what is being considered for consensus. For example:



“The proposal is that we enter into a 30-day trial with Vendor A for products X, Y, Z, and at the end of 30 days, reconvene to review and make our next decision.”

- 3 Ask participants to indicate their level of agreement with the proposal by showing from 0-5 fingers using the scale below:

“Fist of Five” To Test for Consensus



5. I love it, will advocate and lead it



4. I like it and will fully support it



3. It may not be what I'd have done, but I will publicly support it

Threshold for Consensus



2. I dislike it and we need to talk further before I can support it



1. I hate it and will oppose it



0. Over my dead body!

- ④ The threshold for consensus is three (3) or more fingers, i.e., you are telling the group you will support the decision outside the room.

Some refer to consensus as any decision where everyone agrees with the choice enough that they can “pass the water cooler test.”



The question is what will happen if someone approaches you at the water cooler and asks "Why did your group make that decision?" If you voted with three or more fingers, you are agreeing that you will:

- ◆ Support it and explain why the decision was made.
- ◆ Not "bad mouth" the group or the decision.

If you can't do this, don't vote three or more fingers.

- ⑤ After a Fist of Five vote, individuals voting with less than three fingers should be given a chance to voice their concerns.

 HINT: It does no good for those who already agree with the proposal (three or more fingers) to continue discussing it.

The group should listen to the concerns of those with less than three fingers and attempt to either:

- ◆ Change their mind, or
- ◆ Change the proposal to alleviate their concerns.

To reach consensus, continue:

- ◆ Listening to those showing less than three fingers,
- ◆ Modifying the proposal or trying to change the minds of those who voted less than three fingers, and
- ◆ Re-voting until consensus is reached.