

Consensus-Oriented Decision-Making (CODM)

Or

How to Run a Good Group Discussion

1) Frame the topic

- Have a discussion topic (problem, idea, or task) clearly determined before you start. Stay on topic. Flag other topics that come up for later.
- Have an agenda with an idea of how much time a topic should take
- Make sure people agree on the topic

2) Open discussion

- Identify different ways of seeing the problem, topic, idea, etc. You can use brainstorming. You can do a round robin (each person takes a turn). You can just have a chat.
- Don't yuck any yums. You are not yet judging ideas, so ask questions of others rather than make statements whenever possible.

3) Identify underlying concerns

- Paraphrase the main concerns you heard that people have in common, or that individuals had. What are the root concerns or issues of what people were saying? What is behind them?
- This is not the section for judging, so ask questions rather than make statements in response.
- Identify everyone who might be affected by the topics and how.

4) Collaborative proposal development

- Once you have a list of all the needs and concerns identified, try to come up with solutions that address all needs, even if they aren't yours. These solutions are called proposals. There is likely to be more than one. That is perfect at this stage.
- Give each and every proposal a go-around where the entire group tries to make it as good as possible, even if it isn't yours, and even if you don't like it. Try to make the proposal meet as many of the needs and underlying concerns as possible.
- Continue until you've exhausted your creativity. You should now have several workable proposals.

5) Choose a direction

- Compare the pros and cons of each proposal.
- Then, and only then, as a group, indicate your preference for each proposal. Use a gradient- yes, so-so, no, for example. Or rate them from 1-5. This helps determine if there is a clear choice, and/or any ambivalence in a way that a yes/no vote cannot.
- People can clarify the reasons for their votes.
- As a group, choose which proposal you will go with.

6) Final proposal

- As a group, create a final proposal now that you have chosen a direction.
- This will likely involve tweaking the proposal so any so-so or low agreement votes from the earlier stage are addressed. These are called “friendly amendments” (for real. In a business meeting, you might hear someone say, “I’d like to make a friendly amendment.”). Old ideas from earlier, or entirely new ideas might come up.
- Agree on a final proposal with a yes-so-so-no vote. If there are no’s or too many so-so’s, keep going around until everyone is a yes, or the so-so is a “it doesn’t really matter” type of so-so rather than an “I have some reservations” kind.
- After the vote, make sure to be empathetic to any emotions that people are having either about the decision or the process. Empathy can help bring people together to share the will of the larger group.
- You can now figure out the specific wording of your proposal, topic, etc, if needed, and figure out how to do the labour to carry it out (who does what, by when, etc).