

CONSENSUS EDUCATION PACKET

A publication of
Resources for Organizing and Social Change
161 Stovepipe Alley
Monroe, ME 04951
(207) 525-7776
invert@acadia.net.

(Written in 1978, republished and slightly updated in 2005)

Table of Contents

PREFACE	3
I. WHAT IS CONSENSUS?	4
Description and set of rules.....	4
The Consensus Process in Use.....	5
The Roots of Consensus.....	7
II. OBJECTIONS	10
Blocking consensus--the power to object explained.....	10
Meeting objections.....	12
The Attitude of Consensus -- Thinking loosely, clearly and concretely,.....	14
III. MACRO-CONSENSUS	18
Macro-consensus--explanation of how it works.....	18
A Model For Macro-Consensus Processes.....	20
The art of public spoking - representation in a macro-structure.....	22
IV. HOW TO USE THE PROCESS	26
Dynamics of consensus--some suggestions for using the process.....	26
Quick decision-making--using the process under pressure.....	28
V. AFFINITY: CHOOSING TO WORK TOGETHER	31
VI. GROUP PROCESS	33
Group process--general information.....	33
Consensus and majority rule.....	34
Fall-backs: an alternative to degeneration.....	36
VII. MEMBERSHIP	40
VIII. IDEALS OF NON-VIOLENCE	42
IX. COMMON PROCESS PROBLEMS	43
Things commonly done that shouldn't be done.....	43
Things not done much which should be done more often :.....	44
X. RECOMMENDED READING	45

Preface

The Consensus Education Packet was written in 1978 as a way to help anti-nuclear groups work together and make decisions more effectively. It was an outgrowth of the Clamshell Alliance, but it is useful for any small group. It was originally published in mimeograph form and scanned onto a computer file in 2005. If you find any typos, please let us know.

The author of this packet does not use a name, but can be reached at novaland10@hotmail.com. The Consensus Education Packet is not copyrighted. People are free to reprint any and all sections (either the complete text of a section, or an abridged version), and they are free to make stylistic alterations for purposes of clarity if they desire, but they should not alter the content (i.e. significantly change the meaning of the passages they are reprinting) without checking first and getting permission. If you would like to reprint any part, you are free to do so; please attribute it to ***Resources for Organizing and Social Change***, 161 Stovepipe Alley, Monroe, ME 04951, (207) 525-7776, invert@acadia.net.

I. What is Consensus?

Consensus evolved from the meeting process of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). It is an attempt to relate as a group in a non-violent way. Successful use of a consensus process depends on people understanding the idea and wanting to use it.

Although this booklet is an attempt to set down some of the ideas of consensus in concrete terms, consensus has always been more an attitude than a set of rules. There are many possible ways to run meetings in accordance with these ideals and attitude, just as there are many different possible majority rule processes. However, it is not very practical to operate by more than one set of rules at a time.

The consensus process differs from most other group processes in that it is a group effort to determine truth rather than a contest between opposing sides. It is marked by its problem-solving nature--the constant aim when differences arise to find a "third way" that all parties find genuinely uniting. This is appropriate, because the consensus process itself grew as a "third way" out of the dilemma of how to work as a group without surrendering either to authoritarian control or to individualistic anarchy.

The two ideals that form the cornerstones of consensus are:

- (1) that each person has a capacity for understanding truth directly rather than having other people tell them or decide for them; and
- (2) that truth is not fixed, but constantly emerging and evolving, and that truth is not the sole property of any single individual or group.

From these two central ideals, a number of other important ideals flow, including: non-violence; community; equality; simplicity (which includes dedication to truth); and realism. These are dealt with more under Roots of Consensus below.

Under consensus, the group takes no action that is not consented to by all members. Members speak for themselves, out of their own experience. Each member also recognizes that acts affecting others or involving others are a group rather than individual responsibility, and shares those decisions with the others involved.

A fundamental right of consensus is for all persons to be able to express themselves in their own words and of their own will; a fundamental responsibility of consensus is to assure others of their right to speak and be heard.

Description and set of rules

1. A concern may be raised by any member. The problem/situation is discussed, and the group seeks together for clearness about what the issues involved are, what the needs of group members are, and what needs to be done. Part of this discussion should be to bring out the present position or course of action of the group relating to this.
2. From this discussion, it is hoped that some unifying theme or sense of the meeting will begin to emerge. Any member can express what they think they hear coming out of the discussion (including that they hear no basic agreement coming out yet.) This takes the place of formal motions or proposals.
3. There is no voting. After adequate discussion, if a sense of the meeting is emerging, someone can attempt to put it into words. If there are no strong objections to what the person has said, it can be

formally adopted by restating it clearly and writing it down. (If this is done after the meeting, the wording should be checked at the start of the next meeting to make sure the way it is recorded is acceptable.)

4. The group respects the needs and feelings of all members. If any person has strong objection to a suggested sense of the meeting, then it is not a sense of the meeting and therefore not recognized as such. (There are ways of expressing disagreement that will not block the group--a person may feel that something is a mistake, or that they do not personally want to take part, or that something is unnecessary, without blocking others from going ahead if they wish to.)
5. All strong objections to an idea must be met before that idea can be a sense of the meeting. If the objection is met, and there are no other objections, then a new sense of the meeting has been found. If all objections are not met, then the group continues in accordance with its last consensus relating to this matter. Where the group has not previously agreed to do something, the consensus is to take no action as a group until a consensus decision to do so can be reached.
6. If someone is not present and has not communicated any interest in the meeting, it may be assumed that they have no strong feelings. If it is known that someone not present does have strong feelings, no action contrary to those feelings should be agreed until an attempt has been made to reconcile those feelings.
7. Whenever there is doubt about what to do, or the meeting is unable to discuss a topic in the spirit of consensus, judgment should be postponed and no new action taken.

The Consensus Process in Use

The following is taken from "The Quaker Method of Reaching Decisions" by Elton Trueblood, from the book *Beyond Dilemmas*. Four elements are listed as basic to the successful use of a consensus process:

- (1) *group solidarity;*
 - (2) *the expectation of corporate guidance ("corporate" here refers to working together as a group rather than as individuals; it has nothing to do with big business);*
 - (3) *all present may share in the deliberation of the group; and*
 - (4) *the "sense of the meeting" is the basis of decision.*
- (1) *Group solidarity is assumed in the use of the Quaker method. The group is not of any specified number, though normally it is small enough so that it does not seem like a "mass meeting". Perhaps the average number is forty or fifty. It is expected that these persons who make up the group shall already have many experiences and convictions in common. They are bound together by affection for each other and by adherence to a common faith. Frequently, many of them are neighbors in a single community. Ideally the fellowship is intimate, so that the various members really care about each other. There are many Quaker groups in which this is lacking, and when it is conspicuously lacking, the entire method breaks down.*
 - (2) *The expectation of corporate guidance is central to the mood of the Quaker gathering. Friends have a strong conviction, when differences arise, that there is a right way and that this may well be shown to them if they are sufficiently sensitive. This is why decision is often postponed when there is a marked division in the group. If there is a live possibility of finding a way which will convince the entire group of its rightness, we are foolish to be satisfied with makeshifts or compromises. The very unwillingness to accept low standards is an important factor in any consensus and the spirit of expectancy is itself creative of what is expected.*

In view of these considerations we can see how similar the mood of the Quaker discussion is to that of worship and how alien to the debating mood. The debater seeks to win, but the worshiper seeks to listen and to share.

Though the problems faced are often those having to do with the practical aspects of life, they are approached in the spirit of prayer and devotion. Secular matters are to be decided in a spiritual atmosphere, or, what is much the same, we are to renounce the secular conception entirely.

It is perfectly consistent with the Quaker consensus method for someone to vocalize prayer in the midst of ordinary deliberations. Often, when a problem is particularly difficult, especially when there are strong sympathies on opposite sides, someone will rise and suggest that the entire assembly give up speaking or arguing and join in a time of quiet waiting on God. It has often been true that this has brought unity. Sometimes a new idea comes out of the quiet waiting that is different from both ideas for which there has been contention, an idea to which both parties can agree.

Ideally the group decisions should deal with all kinds of problems in practical life. Among Friends they have long dealt with marriage. The persons wishing to marry present their intentions to their group and seek the approbation of the group. If the approbation is forthcoming the group finally witnesses to the vows of the couple and the marriage is an accomplished fact.

- (3) *All present may share in the deliberation of the group, regardless of age, sex, or education. In many gatherings for discussion participation is based upon the holding of office or being elected as a delegate, but Friends, from the beginning, have adopted a platform of radical democracy. It is true that representatives to Quarterly and Yearly Meetings of Friends are appointed, but the representatives have no superior status and the appointment is made merely to ensure adequate attendance. It is not expected that there will be any onlookers at a meeting of this kind, but that all will be participators, either actual or potential.*

This general participation, on the part of ordinary persons, raises the average interest and thus makes a situation in which exceptional genius is likely to occur. A body made up of the rank and file is strikingly different from one made up of delegates or of those whose religion is in any sense professional. In the words of Barclay, none is to be excluded, "whether married, or a tradesman, or a servant." Thus there may be a note of reality which is quite lacking in assemblies made up of those who have had ordination or belong to a special succession. Sometimes the unlearned have valuable insights which great learning tends to hinder.

- (4) *The "sense of the meeting" is the basis of decision, rather than a division into majority and minority. This sense of the meeting is practical unanimity, and failure to arrive at it is usually the occasion for postponement. Each group has a "clerk," a person appointed to fill the double office of chair and secretary. The clerk is appointed, not to guide the discussion, but to make a faithful record of what the real convictions of the group are. The clerk's main qualification is sensitive-ness to what others think.*

When the group is already in the mood akin to worship, which is described above, a subject is presented for consideration, often by means of some written communication which has come to the clerk's desk. No one is prodded to speak and all wait quietly until someone rises and makes a suggestion regarding the problem at hand. This will be the occasion for a contribution from some other person. It might be supposed that, with such freedom, there would be several trying to speak at once. Actually, however, the general note of high seriousness is a more effective check on such tendencies than any external rule could be, and the note of reality is strengthened by the absence of the barren formality of parliamentary rules of order.

Often, as various persons speak freely, it becomes evident that there is a marked division in the group. If this continues, the clerk makes no minute, but often suggests that the group might well turn to another matter. Normally, however, the very freedom and sobriety of the discussion lead each participator to some new position which is genuinely uniting. Then the clerk, when the clerk thinks the time has come, makes a minute, stating what the clerk conceives the group conviction to be. The clerk sometimes makes errors of judgment, but remarkably seldom is any criticism of this kind made. The whole setting helps the clerk to rise above ordinary capacity. This interpretation of the sense of the meeting, made without hurry at the clerk's desk, often receives some verbal modification from voluntary suggestions made when it is read, and sometimes the substance is modified, but ordinarily the judgment of the clerk is accepted as a valid statement of the situation. It is understood that the clerk has considered the spiritual experience of those who have spoken, but has not counted heads nor judged by official positions held. Above all, it is understood that the clerk is recording the judgment of the group as a group and not the judgment of isolated individuals. It is known that decisions are reached jointly which never could have been reached separately. Clerks cannot get the sense of the meeting by calling members on the telephone and asking their opinions, as is sometimes done in committee work. Friends expect a creative development of thought as men and women search together.

The experience of an early stage of the discussion in which the differences are overcome by a deeper understanding occurs so often that Friends expect it. The point is that they wait for this culmination. If a vote were taken in the early stages there might be a fairly large minority which would henceforth look upon itself as the defeated party, with attendant hard feelings. The Quaker method is calculated to discourage the development of party spirit within the group. Then the discussion is not devoted to the winning of a party victory, but to the ascertainment of the truth.

This method of decision thus described is closely allied to pacifism as a method of life. Pacifism is more than mere refusal to participate in war, and is a method by which people can live in all circumstances including the circumstance of group decision. Pacifism means the use of love and persuasion as against force and violence. The overpowering of a minority by calling for a vote is a kind of force, and breeds the resentment which keeps the method of force from achieving ultimate success with persons. "You have not converted a man", wrote John Morley, "because you have silenced him."

The Roots of Consensus

The consensus process evolved from the early Quaker method for reaching a "sense of the meeting". Like other concepts, original meanings have become obscured and distorted in the passing of time. There is nothing sacred or binding about origins. On the other hand, there is a certain value in knowing what one is talking about; and understanding the history and evolution of the consensus process is part of the way one can learn about consensus. Certainly, no amount of reading can ever replace personal experience in leading to understanding; but the arrogance of experience needs to be tempered sometimes by the humility of knowing what others have gone through.

Listing and describing Quaker beliefs is a difficult task, for many of the same reasons that describing consensus is. There are certain general principles, called Testimonies, that most Friends are in general agreement on. One of the underlying beliefs, though, is that each person must determine their beliefs for themselves, and that the reality of these beliefs is more important than appearances. Therefore, there is no dogma, no official checklist of beliefs that a person can go down and say, okay, I accept this, so now I'm one of you. There is no official book of doctrine, although each meeting has a copy of Faith and Practice put out by its Yearly Meeting which contains some thoughts on the various Testimonies which can be used as guides for people seeking internal understanding.

The organization pattern for the Religious Society of Friends was written down by George Fox in 1668. The basic unit is the meeting for worship--a group of people who choose to worship together on a regular basis. Business is conducted through the process we have come to call consensus at a series of levels. The first level is a group called the Monthly Meeting. This is a gathering (usually monthly) of the local Meeting(s) to discuss business. Only at this level does individual membership apply. The different Monthly Meetings in a region form a Quarterly Meeting; and the Quarterly Meetings in turn work together through a Yearly Meeting. Through this process, Friends seek to reach consensus (a state of unity) as individual meetings and as a larger body.

The consensus process was created as an ingenious way out of a long-standing dilemma. At the time the movement started, England was in a state of religious turmoil. There were many sects springing up in opposition to the traditional authoritarian churches. The early Quakers believed that each person should be in control of their own life and determine their own truth; but they were afraid of the individualistic anarchy of groups like the Ranters, which made individual will supreme, and allowed no curb on individual fanaticism. Neither external control, nor unbridled individualism, were what they were looking for. They wanted some way to move from individual Truth, which had to be the basis of their process but which was dangerously fallible, to a recognition of the underlying larger Truth.

To put the dilemma simply: our actions must be based on individual "openings" (perceptions of Truth); but how are we to distinguish genuine truth from errors that creep in due to our imperfections, when two "truths" come into conflict?

The answer was a careful balance of group and individual. "The novel feature of all these meetings", penned Rufus Jones (Quakers in the American Colonies, P. 140), "from lowest to highest, was the group-spirit which prevailed in them. Each individual believed in divine illumination and spiritual guidance...the light within was the beginning and end of faith. But it was plain to them all that individuals sometimes erred and missed the Guide, or, as an ancient minute says, "ran out of their measure and brought death instead of life!" It would not do...to call people to follow their inward light, and then to treat them as atoms and leave them to go their individual way according to the suggestion of inward impulse, which might be from above and might also be from below. They went to work with fine insight and with wise instinct to mass their guidance and to make their spiritual wisdom a corporate affair. Every religious meeting they held was supposed to be held in the Light...and the exercises of it were supposed to move in response to the will of the spirit, and each member found their own particular part and place by being organic with the whole. So, too, with the business of Monthly, Quarterly, and Yearly Meetings. Each decision was reached by taking the 'sense' of judgment of the whole meeting, and each such conclusion was supposed to be under divine guidance, and was arrived at only in the unity of the body. "From the first to last the group was the unit, and the individual found life and leading in the Life and Light of the formative spiritual group."

Above all there is a belief in something good, or right--variously called Truth, the Light, God; Christ, or by many other names, depending on the person.

There are two central convictions (listed by Elton Trueblood as towering above all others):

- (1) religion is centered in first-hand experience, rather than in "notions" (intellectual formulations) or in external forms and practices, and
- (2) revelation is an ongoing process; relating to the present. It is not confined to one place, people, or period of time.

These two points are sometimes combined into the idea, variously expressed, of "that of God in every person." Some implications of this belief for consensus:

- (a) Since every person contains something good, we must respect each other and not trample anyone in our pursuit of a group decision.
- (b) Every person has something good in them which will respond to truth and reason. We must try to address that, rather than manipulate others through appealing to their baser side.
- (c) Since each person is capable of knowing truth, we should hear all people out.
- (d) Each person should try to experience truth directly rather than through an intermediary such as a group leader. People must be responsible for themselves
- (e) There is a unity of truth, since it flows from the same source. The consensus process tries to bring out that unity by each person being true to their own light, and trying to see it more clearly.
- (f) This direct experience of truth is the basis for authority and our actions.

There are many implications which follow from that basic belief of something good in every person. Several of these are given more emphasis, in the form of "Testimonies." Four of the Testimonies are:

1. Nonviolence. "Pacifism might be called creative peaceableness. Spontaneous pacifism should arise in the meeting for worship for there is no authoritarian leadership coercing the meetings to follow a prearranged program, no hymns are sung to constrain an individual to express beliefs which are not experienced, and no written creed exists to impress belief. In the meeting for business there is theoretically no coercion of a minority by a majority, nor the reverse, Peaceableness exists as a positive power by which an inner appeal is made to the best that is in us, rather than as an external pressure by forces from outside us. This must include that kind of love and understanding which integrates separate and conflicting elements into a higher unity." (H. Brinton, Quaker Education in Theory & Practice, page 26)
2. Community, "Community is present in the attempt of the meeting to become a unified, closely integrated group of persons which is not just a collection of separate individuals, but a living whole." (Brinton, p. 26)
3. Equality. "Equality is present in the meeting in the equal opportunity for all to take part in the workshop or business regardless of age, sex, or official position." (Brinton, p. 27)
4. Simplicity. "Simplicity has had various meanings at different times in Quaker history. In general it means the absence of superfluity. It has often had the broader connotations of sincerity, integrity, and practicality and consistency. Simplicity of speech meant the use of simple, direct statements unadorned with elaborate figures of rhetoric or strained attempts at eloquence. Judicial oaths, implying two standards of truth-telling, were not in accordance with the Simplicity of Truth...As one fixed price for an article of merchandise was more direct than haggling over the price, Quaker merchants initiated the one-price system. (Brinton, p. 27 and 30)

There is one more feature that should be mentioned. It is not a belief so much as an attitude or spirit in which the other beliefs are to be treated. This is the idea--call it realism or way of life--that there should be no separation of ideals from daily life. Truth should be based upon direct experience; and life should be a living testimony of one's beliefs, even at the cost of great suffering. "The meeting both creates and exemplifies the kind of behavior which ought to prevail everywhere. It is therefore both a laboratory and a training ground for the desired social order. It may even become the germ cell for the new society of tomorrow." Howard Brinton. Quaker Education in Theory and Practice, page 24-25.

II. Objections

Blocking consensus--the power to object explained

1. Our starting point must be an understanding of what consensus means. Consensus is a way for people to relate to each other as a group. Under consensus, the group takes no action that has not been consented to by all members. Just as people must make their own decisions, the group must make its own decisions; and the group consists of all its members. A decision made by 90% of a group's members speaks for that 90%, not for the group. Consensus is an attempt to recognize that reality.
2. The above is an expression of abstract principle--meaningless without actual provisions to guarantee that the principle is carried out.
3. The mechanism in the process to assure that the group will take no group action that has not been consented to is the power to object and block consensus. To modify or weaken that power, then, is to destroy the consensus process.
4. Ironically, one of the major ways that the power to object is often undermined in the practice of consensus is by people trying to make it stronger than it really is, or trying to apply it where it does not apply. If the consensus process is to be preserved in more than name, we need to clarify what this "power" is and how it works.
5. The power to object, as noted above, stems from the principle that we take no group action that has not been consented to. "Objections," then, can only apply (at least in the sense of blocking consensus) to proposals for some new course of group action.
 - (a) There is no power to object (block consensus) on agreements already consented to by the group. People objecting to decisions that have already been made should put forward proposals to change the group's policy,
 - (b) There is no power to "object" to the group's decision not to adopt a proposal. (People wanting a proposal to be adopted should be working to meet all the objections to the proposal).
 - (c) There is no power to object to an objection to a proposal,
6. While it is possible to have opposing strong feelings, it is not possible to have "opposing objections." All objections on a proposal have the same effect--to block the new course of action from being agreed upon by the group. (It is important to distinguish strong feelings from objections. Objections are a special kind of strong feeling. Objections are part of the consensus process--the rules we make decisions by. Strong feelings in general are part of the consensus dynamic--the way we relate to each other. Strong feelings do not dictate what the decision on a proposal will be once the proposal is put forward, but they should influence which proposals are put forward.)
7. Because the "power to object" only applies to proposals to take some new course of actions, it is important before attempting to decide on a proposal--indeed, before putting any proposals forward--for the group to be clear on what course of action it is already committed to.

If the group has already agreed on group policy for an issue, then objections can only be used to block changes in that policy--not to cause them. If the group has not agreed on a group policy for an issue, then every member of the group is committed, by the concept of consensus, to taking no group action on this issue until an agreement can be reached to do so. When there is any strong disagreement as to whether or not there is already a group policy, the group must be willing to

agree there is not one, and act accordingly--take no group action on the issue until an agreement can be reached to do so. This is a hard rule to live with but a necessary one. (Ideally, any group decision should be written down when it is made. If this is a rule of the process, then the presence or absence of the written decision settles the question. There may be occasional disputes on interpretation of the decision, but this is a problem for any process--including majority rule.)

8. There is a second question that must be answered before a proposal can be put forward: is the action being discussed a "group action"? This needs to be clear, since all members are committed to taking no group action that has not been consented to. In general, a group action is any action that is done in the group's name, that uses group resources, or that reflects significantly on the group. Group action does not necessarily mean an action the whole group is involved in physically--one person passing out leaflets saying "Our group feels..." is a group action calling for group consent. Nor does "group action" necessarily involve a physical action--repealing or discontinuing a standing policy is a new group action. As with the previous question; it is important that the group be clear about what it will do when there is disagreement over whether an action is a group action or not. To be consistent with the concept of consensus, it is necessary that when there is strong disagreement on how to label an action, the action will be considered a group action. (A group can set up a "Bill of Rights" to assure that certain actions/decisions are always the individual's).
9. Before proposals are put forward, there should be discussion to clarify the issues under consideration and to present any strong feelings on the issues. This discussion of the issues and feelings is part of the consensus dynamic--a tool for helping us to save time and reach better resolutions of our problems.
10. After adequate discussion, a suggested "sense of the meeting" can be put forward. All expressed feelings should be taken into account in framing this statement--it is counter-productive to put forward a proposal that does not try to meet all expressed needs. (Continually offering that kind of proposal is obstructionistic.)
11. When a proposal has been put forward, the only proper responses are expressions of objection, or a recognition that there are no strong objections. This does not prevent further clarification of the proposal. People feeling that there has not been adequate discussion should not unilaterally decide to continue the discussion by simply ignoring the proposal. Rather, they should respond by objecting to the proposal on the ground they do not feel sufficiently clear about it to give consent. (This serves the added function of bringing out what areas still need to be discussed, and helps keep the discussion focused,)
12. When a proposal has been made, one of three things can happen:
 - (a) No strong objections are voiced--the proposal is adopted,
 - (b) Objections are voiced in a way that does not block consensus (reservations, non-support, "standing aside," withdrawal from the group)--the proposal can be adopted, although the group should first try to meet the concern expressed.
 - (c) Strong objection is voiced--the proposal is not adopted.
13. When a strong objection has been expressed, the group can be seen as consisting of two groupings: those who share that objection, and those who do not share that particular objection, These two groupings should not be seen as competitors, or even as having opposing interests; people should be working to find what is best for the group (all its members) rather than thinking in terms of pushing through or defeating the proposal.
14. There are rights and responsibilities incumbent on both groupings:

- (a) Person(s) sharing an objection. The power to block consensus should be used sparingly and responsibly. Only serious, principled objections should be used to block the group; other objections should be expressed in ways that do not block consensus. Everyone should work together to find ways to meet the objection.
 - (b) Person(s) not sharing that objection. There is responsibility on all people in the group to accept the consensus process. This means that all members, whether they agree with an objection or not, must respect that objection until it is satisfied or withdrawn. People not agreeing with an objection have a right that is as strong as the power to object: they have the right to try to meet the objection.
15. There are 3 choices the group can make in trying to deal with an objection:
- (a) If it appears the objection can be met, the group can try to do so.
 - (b) If it appears the objection will not be easily met, the person making the proposal may withdraw the proposal; the group can then try to find another one,
 - (c) If the group is unable to come up with an acceptable proposal, the group should accept the fact that no new course of action can be agreed on at this time, and move on to the next agenda item,
16. In a very real sense, there is no "power" to object. Under consensus, we are looking to see if we (the group) are in substantial agreement on something. "Proposals" are attempts to express the sense of the meeting. "Expressing an objection" is simply pointing out that what has been put forward does not accurately express the feelings of the group; "accepting an objection" is simply recognizing that reality. If people are using the process properly, then there is no individual "power" to block the group--only an individual responsibility to express feelings honestly. The power comes not from some artificial set of rules, but from our respect for each other and our ability to accept reality.

Meeting objections

Under consensus, the group takes no positive course of action that is not consented to by all group members. This is usually done through the mechanism of checking for strong objections, and not adopting any course of action that there is strong objection to until the objection is met or withdrawn. This means that meeting objections is a very important part of a working consensus process. Most decision-making processes concentrate on choosing among alternatives; consensus is marked by its problem-solving nature, which is frequently used to create new alternatives. This new alternative is sometimes referred to as a "third way." Douglas Steere writes of the unshakable faith in consensus which "would defy all fears and bring into the tense process of arriving at this joint decision a kind of patience and a quiet confidence which believes, not that there is no other way, but that there is a 'third alternative' which will annihilate neither party. This 'third alternative' can and must be found--it alone is practicable; it will draw out what is soundest in each position and bring it into vital relation with the other; and all parties must work until it is discovered." (From the introduction to *Beyond Dilemmas*, p. 19)

The consensus process is as much an attitude toward dealing with problems as it is a set of rules. (There has always been a great deal of hesitation to put the process into rules for fear that people would then misuse the rules as a club against other people, rather than applying them properly as a guide to their own behavior.) Here are some of the elements of the problem-solving attitude:

1. Flexibility. Be open to new ideas, rather than committed to one view.

2. Willingness to suspend judgment. You can not force something new to come out. Be willing to recognize when nothing acceptable has come out, and wait patiently.
3. Expectancy. Faith that there is a third way, and that the group will be led to it if they remain patient enough and work together, is a vital factor in finding the third way. Expecting to fail increases the likelihood of failure.
4. Sensitivity. Showing genuine respect for other people and their feelings can go a long way to helping find new solutions, as well as forestalling problems. (If you know someone has a strong objection to something, you should not be looking in the objectionable direction in the first place. You will have far fewer objections to meet if you try to find starting points that people don't strongly object to.)

Howard Brinton, in "Theory of Worship," summarizes the points of this attitude and how it works: "The power to create... depends on a living synthesis of diverse elements. A meeting controlled by an individual or by a program seldom produces what is not already there in that individual or program. If, however, many individuals, each sensitive to the Light of Truth, bring together their diversity of tendencies and possibilities, something new may emerge more inclusive and hence more 'true' than any one point of view. This is brought about, not by a mechanical juxtaposition of different opinions but by a real fusion. One may mix oxygen and hydrogen and obtain nothing new. But apply a flame and the new substance, water, is created."

Here are those attitudes expressed as a step-by-step process:

1. Discuss the issues in the spirit of consensus: calm, friendly gathering of friends to determine truth, rather than a tense contest to see which side can prevail.
2. When the meeting becomes tense, or when people are not saying new things, wait in silence.
3. If nothing comes out, or if the atmosphere is getting unfriendly and pressured, suspend judgment--agree to discuss the matter again when the group can do so in a more meaningful way.
4. Take no positive action on the matter as a group until it has been satisfactorily resolved for all members of the group.
5. Be willing to repeat this process patiently as often and as long as it takes to find that mutually acceptable solution.

Dealing with specific objections: There are 3 general methods for trying to meet an objection. A method that is appropriate in one instance may be inappropriate in another; so if trying to meet an objection one way turns out to be futile, try another method. These three methods are:

- (1) Try to get at the root of the objection. The objection gives the "what;" often bringing out the "why" will lead to a way to meet the objection.

Examples:

John objects to meetings being held in Farofftown. In bringing out the roots, it develops that the objection is not to Faroffplace itself, but to the long drive. Further probing turns up that it is not the time spent that is unacceptable but the driving itself. Sally, who lives near John, is agreeable to driving John to and from meetings. The objection has been met.

Harmony objects to inviting a local politician to speak at a public meeting. Her reason is that she

wants speakers at the meeting to be people who have committed themselves to the policy being discussed (animal liberation). Upon learning that this is why she opposes this speaker, evidence is found that the politician has been actively involved for 10 years in working for animal liberation, although she has received little publicity for her efforts. Harmony, who had not known this, withdraws her objection now that it has been satisfactorily dealt with.

Pat, in another group, objects to inviting a local politician to speak at a rally. Her reason is that this person has made several anti-gay stands and is working for repeal of gay rights statutes. Many of the other people in the group, when they learn this, come to agree with Pat's objection. (Some people in the group would still like to have the person speak, but they now understand Pat's objection well enough to see that it will not be withdrawn, so they are willing to find some other speaker.)

CAUTION: this method of meeting objections, trying to get at the root, often turns into a cross-examination of the person stating the objection. When this begins to happen, or if it seems likely to happen, try one of the other methods for meeting objections. While it is satisfying to know more about why people say what they say, it is very unsatisfying to get bogged down in arguments over whether or not the point is "right" or not. An objection can still be respected and dealt with even when the person is too shy or too awkward with words to explain it to the group clearly.

- (2) Try to modify the idea under consideration to incorporate the objection.

Examples:

A suggestion is made that rather than the whole group working on getting speakers for a rally, a committee of interested people work on arrangements. Susan places an objection. It turns out she is concerned because this is the arrangement that has been used in the last 4 rallies, and all the speakers have been men. Susan personally does not have the time to be part of the committee, but wants some assurance there will be more women speakers this time. The committee agrees to make a conscious effort to avoid sexism. Sojourner, who strongly shares Susan's concerns, agrees to work with the committee if they have trouble finding suitable speakers. Susan is satisfied with these additions to the original idea, and consensus is reached.

Nora objects to loyalty oaths and pledges of allegiance, on grounds of principle. Other people in the group strongly want to institute some kind of pledge to defend the ideals and charter of the group. Agreement is reached that Nora and others are free to add to the pledge a qualifying clause, "as much as my conscience will permit."

- (3) Find an entirely new direction. This is the best way to meet some objections but it is the most difficult way, calling for the most patience and ingenuity.

Examples:

A city has limited funds to spend. A coalition of homeowners wants to use the money to improve the fire station, to attract matching federal funds for housing. A coalition of women's groups wants to use the money for day care centers. There is not enough for both, and a half-assed job on both priorities will satisfy no one. Solution: a small portion of the funds was used to convert the existing fire stations into day care centers; which attracted state and federal funds to pay for the rest of its operations. The majority of the city funds were thus freed to build three new fire stations for the region, which served better than the old five, earned the higher insurance rating needed to attract federal funds for housing, and left all happy.

Conscience Bay Meeting had their meeting place vandalized in 1967 after they made a strong stand against the Vietnam war. Anti-communist slogans were painted all over the walls. There was heated discussion over whether to make a large fuss and draw attention to the vandalistic nature of war supporters, or whether not to respond in that spirit of anger. After much effort, one of the people opposing publicity came up with the idea of holding a public paint-in and inviting people to help them restore the meetinghouse. This not only satisfied all the people in the meeting but had many positive effects outside the meeting as well. Press coverage was good, and many people called up to say, "I disagree with your stand on the war, but I would like to help you repaint the meetinghouse."

The Attitude of Consensus -- Thinking loosely, clearly and concretely,

Consensus, as noted before, is in large part an attitude with which one approaches problems. It is important to understand the ideals of that attitude: nonviolence, community, equality, simplicity, truthfulness, trust, etc. But it is also important to understand the more concrete aspects of the attitude--the ways these ideals translate into daily usage.

Thinking Loosely

These are some of the values built into the consensus system:

1. Continuing revelation and emergence of truth. Truth is not rigid, or fixed for all time. We are not bound by what was true yesterday; it may be completely false for today. We need to be continually listening to the small voice inside to see what is right for the present.
2. Many paths to truth. There are at any time many possibilities facing us. There is no single choice which is absolutely "right"; there are always alternatives.
3. The important thing when choosing among alternatives is not whether one is the "best" (i.e. trying to find the one "right" option) but which ones are acceptable. If something is acceptable, large amounts of time should not be spent arguing over whether something else is better.
4. Patience, and "waiting on the Light". When the group is unable to sense clearly what to do, it is best to do nothing as a group in relation to the matter until a sense of clearness can be reached.

"These men and women who gathered in silence discovered, even when no voice was raised to, declare it or urge it, that differences which became greater when argued about faded to the point of insignificance in the spiritual fellowship where each individual was primarily trying to be sensitive to some Divine and inner urge. For instance, these people who were getting together that they might go forth had many conceptions of truth and many kinds of ideas about ways and means of activity. In the silence they waited until behind all their thinking and deeper than all their various feelings, came again and again the intimation of a Diviner truth and a Diviner urge into which the individual opinions melted. This one great spiritual concern united and commissioned the group as a whole.

All the historic divisions among Quakers can be traced to situations wherein those concerned did not humbly wait. They were in too much of a hurry to win the human debate in which partisanship ran like a turbulent torrent, dashing over boulders of human opposition. It made much foam, but it brought no peace."

John Woolman, Quakers Find A Way p. 115

Thinking Clearly

Since the consensus process revolves around the idea of truth--trying to bring it out and recognize it--it is important for each participant to have some skill in the recognition of truth or reality. Here are 5 steps used in conjunction with the consensus process to help individuals get in touch with their own truth.

- (1) Wait in silence. Look inside yourself for your own truth. This can be especially rewarding when in a room with other people, with whom you share certain ideals, or other forms of affinity, who are also seeking inside themselves.
- (2) Be sure before sharing. Just because a thought comes into your mind does not mean you must, or even should, share it with the group. There should ideally be an inward urge which wells up until you almost have to share your message. (It would be nice sometimes if there were also an inward urge which almost forces people to remain seated and silent!)
- (3) Think it through. What does it mean, in clear meaningful images? "Truth" should consist of things you can clearly understand, not of abstractions which melt away into inconsistencies or into meaningless foam when examined.
- (4) Put it simply, into plain language free of elaborate rhetoric. Your truth should stand on its own, without a sales pitch.
- (5) Throughout, ask yourself: "Does this idea feel right?" Your perceptions, based on your inner and outer senses, are the equipment you have to test truth. Learn to use them; develop them to the point where you are able to trust them.

Thinking Concretely

"Quakerism is thus essentially an experiential religion as distinguished from those in which speculative doctrines or historical facts are regarded as a fundamental or necessary part. The basis of Quaker conviction of truth or duty must therefore be experience rather than speculation or history. The only essential truth is that which can be put to the test of life; and the only authoritative belief is that which has been verified in personal experience or in the experience of a... group of which the individual is a part."

Elbert Russell, "the Basis of Authority in Religion"

"You will say, Christ saith this and the apostles say that; but what canst thou say?" George Fox

Properly used, consensus is a very practical and reality or experience-based process. Here are 5 general guidelines:

- (1) Speak for yourself, out of your own experience.
- (2) Base what you say on what you will be doing, are doing, or have done. You should have a concrete picture of what is being said and what role you play in it.
- (3) Speak only for yourself and people you meet, work, or are otherwise closely connected with on a regular basis. Don't speak of what groups of other people should do or make plans based more on what others should do than on what you (and others speaking out) are committing themselves to.
- (4) Do not give consent to anything until you understand it well enough to do so. Agreements reached

should not be abstract: they should be the outcome of determining the truth of a situation. (Plans for future action can be seen as determining the truth about who will be doing what at that future time.)

- (5) Don't be afraid to admit ignorance or confusion. No consensus has been reached in fact while these conditions remain.

Applying these attitudes

When to object:

1. When something is being put forward that will commit you to doing something you do not wish to do or do not intend to do, say so. (Example: a suggestion is made that everyone contribute \$5 to a specific cause. If the intention is that everyone must do so, and you do not wish to, say so; the suggestion could be changed to say that those wishing to give \$5 can do so.)
2. If something is being put forward that will commit the group to doing something as a group that you do not want to be done, say so. (Example: not paying federal taxes for warmaking)
3. If an individual or group asks for consent to do something on their own as part of the large groups actions or in a way that will reflect on the large group, and you do not want this done, say so. (They are still free to do it on their own in a way that does not involve the large group.) (Example: people wanting to carry a sign you find offensive as part of a group vigil. They can come back some other day on their own to carry the sign, if they feel a need to do so.)

When not to object:

- (1) If you prefer something else (think it is better) state your preference.
- (2) If you think something is a mistake, express that thought.
- (3) If you think something is unnecessary, express that.

None of these three have the effect of blocking consensus unless you also feel that what has been suggested is unacceptable for some reason.

Work to meet objections. Don't get hung up pushing for one course of action or point of view--try to get at roots, not only of objections but also of the original concern. (What root need is the idea being suggested designed to meet?)

There are many ways to express your feelings. Do so in whichever way expresses your actual feelings most clearly. Don't get hung up over whether to call it a blocking objection or not. Express it honestly, and work as a group to determine what it means for the group.

III. Macro-consensus

Macro-consensus--explanation of how it works

Macro-consensus is consensus where the members are groups rather than individuals. To understand group consensus, we must first understand individual consensus. (The term "macro-consensus" is new; the concept goes back to the organizational pattern outlined by George Fox in the 1600's of local (Monthly), regional (Quarterly) and groupwide (Yearly) meetings.)

I. INDIVIDUAL CONSENSUS

- A) Small group consensus. (Example: an affinity group).
How does consensus work in a small group? A proposal is put forward and it is asked if there are any objections to the proposal. There are 4 possible responses:
- (a) a strong objection is stated, blocking consensus to adopt the proposal.
 - (b) strong objections are put forward but in way that do not block consensus.
 - (c) other types of objections are put forward--these do not block consensus.
 - (d) no objections are put forward.

If there are no objections, then the proposal can be adopted. If there are objections then an attempt is made to meet them. If there is a strong objection, then the proposal is not adopted until the objection is either satisfied or withdrawn.

For practical purposes, then, the 4 categories of response can be boiled down to two: (1) strong objection blocking consensus on the proposal; (2) no strong objection blocking consensus on the proposal.

Objections are to consensus what the vote is to majority rule. No stigma should be attached to raising an objection to a proposal. It is important, however, that all participants understand that the point of raising and hearing objections is to try to meet them so the group can find its sense. "Meeting an objection" is very different from arguing about an objection. "Meeting an objection" means: accepting the objection and moving on; or getting at the root of the objection; or finding an acceptable way to modify the proposal; or finding an entirely new proposal that covers the objection and the original needs.

It should be noted that very rarely will a person be 100% for or 100% against a proposal; and that we should not be looking at a proposal in those terms. The question is not whether we are for or against a proposal; it is not whether or not we are mostly for something or mostly against it. The question is simply, "Is there any strong objection to the proposal?" Majority rule prepares us to look for what we like when voting (voting expresses our first preference); consensus is sometimes confusing because instead of voting for our first choice we are rejecting objectionable choices.

The power to object should be used carefully and responsibly; but we should not be afraid to use it. If a person has strong objection to part of a proposal, but likes all the rest of the proposal, that person should express their objection. It is through the raising and meeting of objections that progress is made with the consensus process. It is harmful for people to raise a "strong" objection for trivial reasons; but it is equally harmful for people to shy away from raising objections when they do have strong feelings against a proposal; or for people to hesitate from putting forward non-blocking objections; or to put forward only objections they feel can't be met. Putting forward objections and helping to meet them should be seen as a positive rather than negative action.

B) Large group consensus (Example: a Congress).

Large group consensus is also an example of consensus among individuals. The rules of the consensus process are the same for large groups as for small; the rules do not distinguish between a group of 4 and a group of 400. But the dynamics are clearly different. Four people can talk together and get to know each other. The chances of there being a strong objection to a proposal in a group of 4 are smaller than for a group of 400; and the chances that some way to work objections out can be found is greater for the small group. Unless a large group has a great deal of unity, a large group using a consensus process will reject almost every proposal put before it.

For large group consensus to be worthwhile, the group should be able to do more together than simply reject proposals. Large group consensus can be worthwhile under the following conditions:

- (a) there is a great deal of unity binding the group--a common basis, shared ideals, shared vocabulary, shared experiences, etc.
- (b) there is a clear shared understanding of what the group is and how it works.
- (c) there is clear shared understanding of what proposals being made mean.

There are 2 others things that are almost always needed for large group consensus:

1. The use of small groups for discussion. This may include at different times the use of small like-minded groups to give support and help put ideas into words or onto paper; the use of small random groups to generate ideas; and the use of small groups of people with differing opinions, to work through objections.
2. An understanding that when an objection is raised in the large group against a proposal, that the objection should not be argued--if no way of meeting it quickly can be seen, then the objection should be accepted and the group should move on to the next proposal or the next agenda item.

II MACRO-CONSENSUS

Macro-consensus is a consensus process where the members are groups rather than individuals (example: a Coordinating Committee). Macro-consensus is in general a better way for large groups to relate than through large group consensus. Historically, in the Religious Society of Friends, where the consensus process originated, the small groups met together through a structure of macro-groups called Quarterly Meetings and Yearly Meetings.

When using consensus among individuals (whether for large or small group) there were 2 possible responses each member could make to a proposal: strong objection, or no strong objection. But when the members are groups, there may be confusion about how many choices are open and what each choice means.

- (a) The entire group shares a strong objection.
- (b) Some members have strong objections; the rest of the group has no strong feeling.
- (c) Some members have strong objections; the rest of the group has strong feeling in favor of the proposal.
- (d) Some members have strong objections; others have strong feelings in favor or the proposal; and the rest have no strong feelings on the proposal.
- (e) Some members are strongly in favor of the proposal; the rest have no strong feelings.
- (f) The entire group is strongly in favor of the proposal.

(g) The entire group is indifferent--has no strong feelings on the proposal.

(If we start counting numbers--using half, most, and a few, instead of the more general term some--then these 7 categories can be more than doubled. And we have not even attempted to include in these categories mention of non-blocking objections.) How do we relate these categories to the original 2? In other words, how do we apply the rules of individual consensus to group consensus?

One way is to picture the group as being an individual. As noted before, an individual will rarely be of "one mind" about a proposal; usually a proposal will arouse mixed feelings. But even if a proposal evokes 10 responses, and 9 of these are favorable, there is still an obligation to state the 10th response if that is a strong objection. (If the person is really inclined toward the proposal, then there is a strong incentive to find ways to meet one's own objection.)

Similarly, a group that is part of a macro-consensus group may be of a "mixed mind" but if one member holds a strong objection that has not been met, then the whole group has a responsibility to send this objection on to the larger group. (For this reason, it is important to all the groups in a macro-consensus group that all groups are made of people who know each other, get along, and are able to work things out together.)

Of the 7 listed categories, then, the first four (a, b, c, and d) should be treated as "strong objection blocking consensus" and the last three (e, f, and g) should be treated as "no strong objection."

This may seem like a surprising result, or a difficult one to work with. But it is a logical result and a necessary one. Macro-consensus is different from large group consensus only in structure (dynamic). It should never be possible to gerrymander consensus--that is, it should never be possible to manipulate the outcome of consensus decision-making simply by regrouping people. There are advantages to macro-consensus over large group consensus, but these occur because of the dynamic, which encourages cooperation, understanding, and creative solutions.

A consensus process, whether for a large group or a small one, must embody the concept of consensus, which is that no group action is taken that has not been consented to by all members of the group. That is the test we must apply to whatever process we find ourselves using, to see if it is consensus in more than name.

A Model For Macro-Consensus Processes

Macro-consensus refers to any consensus process where the members are groups rather than individuals. A group made up of other groups is called a macro-group. The members of a macro-group are called member groups. Regional groups made up of local groups are macro-groups; regional groups are often member groups in larger macro-groups made up of many regions.

1. Each member group should be made up of people who meet, work, or communicate with each other on a regular basis--in other words, people who have chosen to act together.
2. Similarly, the member groups of a macro-group must choose to work together through the macro-group. While it is not necessary for every person in every member group to be familiar with all the members of all the other member groups, there do need to be some underlying basis of trust and respect. Groups that are unable to work together should not try to join together in the same macro-structure.
3. Each participant in the macro-group should speak only for people s/he meets, works, or communicates with on a regular basis.

4. Ideally, every person in a member group should be able to participate in the macro-group on a rotation basis, rather than have permanent representatives for member groups. Continuity between macro-group meetings, then, relies heavily on full sharing by the participants with the other people in their member group.
 - 4a. One way to improve continuity is for each member group to send at least 2 participants to all macro-group meetings. One of these people will then return to the next meeting, accompanied by at least one new person; and that new person will return to the meeting after that, accompanied by...etc.
5. There are 3 distinct functions that groups can perform: (a) acting together; (b) making decisions together; and (c) sharing information and coordinating activities. There is a tendency to confuse the 3, and to over-emphasize decision-making. In a decentralized system, action and decision-making should occur primarily at the local group level; the higher up the macro-scale a group is, the more it should concentrate on sharing information about what member groups are doing and trying to coordinate these activities. (As groups learn to cooperate together, agreement to act together on a larger scale and coordination of these larger actions will naturally flow from this sharing of information and coordination of activities and resources.)
6. In order for member groups to be able to work together, it is very important that there is good communication (a) within each member group; and (b) among the member groups.
 - (a) There should be active sharing within each member group so that every person in the member group knows what is going on, and so that every person in the member group has substantially the same understanding of what is going on. (If two persons from the same member group attend a macro-group meeting, they should be able to present one report of how their group stands, and it should not take longer to do this than if only one person had come to the macro-group meeting.)
 - (b) There should be active sharing among member groups, so that ideas can be discussed among those interested before they are taken to the large group, and so that suggestions, proposals, and requests can be dealt with quickly. (If a few people are deadlocked and unable to reach consensus, it is a waste of the large group's time to bring the issue up at the macro-group for a decision until the people work through some of their differences--although if people are willing to spend the time and work together in the proper spirit, the large group may be able to come up with ingenious new resolutions to the problem which the individuals would not have found alone.)
7. Each person from a member group planning to attend a macro-group meeting should prepare carefully. (See "The Fine Art of Public Spoking").
8. Setting the agenda correctly is important. Know where each item of business should go. There are 6 basic kinds of agenda items for macro-groups:
 - (a) LOCAL REPORTS--statements of activities a member group is doing or planning to do. One or two sentences per item should be enough; if it takes more, that should be done as a separate agenda item.
 - (b) ANNOUNCEMENTS--short items of interest but not directly related to the business.
 - (c) REPORTS OF ACTIVITIES--concise summaries of actions by member groups/committees, etc. An action rates a separate report instead of (or in addition to) mention in a local report or announcement, if it is a continuing action, if it is likely to be repeated some time soon, or if things learned from it may be helpful in future planning.

- (d) OTHER REPORTS--summaries of information requested at the last meeting, etc.
- (e) SUGGESTIONS--ideas that member groups are going to do and could use help on, or that member groups would like to do if there is enough support from other groups. These should be aired thoroughly before macro-meetings, not introduced there. The idea should be stated plainly but briefly, since people should already be somewhat familiar with it. After some discussion of the idea and alternatives (depending on how much time there is and how productive the discussion is) people should move on to going around and expressing the feelings of their member group. From this a list of people/groups interested in working on the idea can be compiled, and arrangements made so they can get together some time after the meeting.
- (f) REQUESTS--things a member group would like the macro-group to do (give money, endorse something, organize a joint action). These should be made and explained in advance of when a decision is wanted, since a group that does not understand or has not adequately discussed a request should not approve that request.

(Note that REQUESTS involve decision-making but SUGGESTIONS do not.)

9. Some things should be done within/among member groups instead of or before being brought up at the macro-meetings. These include general discussion of issues and most decision-making.
10. The macro-group is a place for member groups to share plans and intentions, and try to coordinate these plans and intentions. The main emphasis should be on information-sharing and coordination, rather than on decision-making. Groups should be sharing what they are doing rather than making plans for what other groups should do. However, there will be times when a decision does need to be made at the macro-level. It is important that each group understands: (a) how consensus works for itself; and (b) how consensus works at the macro-group. Here is an outline for macro-consensus:
 - A) Brief discussion of the topic on which a decision is needed.
 - i. If this has not been done yet in member groups, then this should be to clarify what member groups need to discuss--no attempt to decide at macro-level yet.
 - ii. If member groups have talked about the issues, then the discussion should be to bring out strong needs and feelings--not to argue the issues. (Debate should occur instead as part of the communication called for in point 6 above.) Participants should try to communicate fully the feelings of their group, and try not to hamper this communication by others.
 - B) After the needs and feelings of all the member groups have been adequately brought out and clarified, proposals can be made that attempt to meet all expressed needs. (No proposal should be made that consciously ignores an expressed strong need.)
 - C) When a suggestion has been made, the question facing the group is, "Are there any strong objections to the proposal as stated?" Only when there are no strong objections to the statement is it accepted as the sense of the meeting.
 - D) If no person in a member group has strong objections, then the group can say to the macro-group that it has no strong objections. If any person in a member group does have a strong objection to something, the objection must be worked out before the member group can give the macro-group consent on that item. Three ways to meet objections are:
 - i. try to get to the root of the objection.
 - ii. try to modify the idea being objected to.

iii. try to find an entirely new idea to meet the needs.

- E) If no proposal can be found that is acceptable to all member groups, then the macro-group takes no group action on the issue at hand. (This does not necessarily prevent one or more groups from acting in their own names on the issue, as long as they are not acting in the name of the macro-group or in a way that will reflect on the macro-group.)

(The term "macro-consensus" is new; the concept goes back to the organizational pattern outlined by George Fox in the 1600's of local (Monthly), regional (Quarterly), and groupwide (Yearly) meetings.)

The art of public speaking - representation in a macro-structure

"Although a formal hierarchy of meetings was found to be necessary for....survival and development..., the freedom of every acknowledged member of the Society to attend meetings at any level of the hierarchy was self-consciously preserved.... The practice developed of designating representatives from among those most active in the meeting as official delegates to the meeting at the next highest level, although all members of the Society remained free to attend as well, and being an official delegate was not a necessary qualification for appointment to any of the committees set up at the Quarterly and Yearly Meetings." Richard Bauman, For The Reputation of Truth, p. 65

"Friends were nominated by local meetings for worship to attend the monthly meeting, and again by the monthly meeting to attend quarterly meetings; but the critical point is that these appointments were not designed to limit, but rather to augment the business meetings..." Richard Vann, Social Development of English Quakerism, p. 109

Representation in a system based on consensus is somewhat different from representation in most other systems. Because the task in meetings is to try to determine the truth of a situation, rather than to make arbitrary decisions, many of the usual dilemmas connected with the question of representation are avoided. There is no problem with the under-representation of minorities--every opinion held is heard, and numbers are not counted. Nor is there the classic problem of whether a representative should strictly represent the views of the constituency, or vote their own conscience--in consensus, the representative is trying to pass on what is coming out of their group so that the larger group can put the individual truths together and try to reach a larger truth (i.e. the representative is supposed to pass along any strong feelings, objections, concerns, ideas, etc. coming out of the group). And since, if consensus is being used properly, everyone in the representative's group should be clear about what the group has been able to agree to on the various topics being carried to the larger group, then anyone else from the group would also be able to function as a representative of the group; and if two people from the same group show up at the same meeting, they should be presenting basically the same report from their group.

That, at least, is how it should work in theory. For this to work in practice means that all members of the group should have a certain minimum proficiency in consensus: being able to hear what is coming out in their group, being able to express this sense of the meeting in words the other group members accept as a valid expression of the sense of the meeting, and being able to convey this to other people outside their group.

The role of representing the feelings of one's group, and carrying back to the group news from other groups and from the macro-group, has recently acquired the label of "spoke" (as in spokesperson, or in a spoke in a wheel.) Everyone should be prepared and able to act as a spoke if the need arises, although a group may prefer to have one person generally act as their spoke.

In order to convey the feelings of the group, the spoke must know them. If a poor job is done discussing issues and building consensus, the spoke will either have to run back and forth for clarification, make

decisions for other people, or climb a wall.

When discussing an issue, cover it thoroughly. Even if there is a proposal being considered rather than a general concern, don't just send back a yes or no.

- (1) Can you live with what is being suggested? (If not, what specifically do you object to? What is the root of this objection? How could the objection be met? Are there ways the proposal could be changed to make it acceptable? Is there something else entirely that could be done that would meet your needs and the concerns that the original proposal was designed to meet as well?)
- (2) Whether or not you like the proposal, how do you feel about the proposal not being accepted? (You cannot force the larger group to adopt something that there are objections to; but if you strongly feel that the proposal should be adopted, your spoke should know this so s/he can ask the group to spend more time trying to make the proposal workable and trying to meet objections.)
- (3) Are there changes or improvements you would like incorporated? How strongly do you want these changes made? (Enough to block consensus if these changes, or some changes like them, are not made?)
- (4) What do you understand to be the fall-back for this subject? (i.e., What are you and other groups supposed to do if no new agreement is reached?) Will you actually be able to live up to the fall-back? Will you have any special problems with it that other groups should know about?
- (5) Do you have any suggestions that might help resolve conflict between other groups (if, for example, one group strongly feels something on the order of the proposal must be done now, while another feels just as strongly that they cannot live with this proposal)?
- (6) After covering these 5 areas, check to see if there are any other issues likely to come up in connection with this discussion. Anticipating this will enable your spoke to give your thoughts on other matters without running back and forth. The discussion of these related matters might also help to clarify your group's position on the original topic, or open up some new ground that will lead to the breaking of a deadlock if no agreement could be reached before on the original topic.

The key to keep in mind for discussing the issues that the spoke needs input on is anticipation. If a group merely reacts--looks at the question and says "we feel this way about that"--then your spoke will have a great deal of trouble at the macro-meeting (and cause trouble for the other people there). Your group may be willing to live with something--but what happens then when another group is not? Experience will teach you which questions to ask yourselves; practice will enable you to bring out your own true feelings on issues in ways that others in the group can understand well enough to carry on to other groups for you.

Having a thorough discussion is necessary for being able to send your feelings on to other groups; but it is not enough.

1. Merely having a good discussion does not mean that the ideas will be remembered correctly, or that the spoke will be able to put the ideas into words. After the discussion of each topic, the spoke should repeat back what s/he thinks the group has said on the topic. (Besides giving the group a chance to check what will be passed on, this also makes sure people really were in agreement and did understand each other; it also helps the spoke be prepared for the macro-meeting, thus saving time and energy for the other people who attend,) IMPORTANT: when saying what you think you heard, be specific. Don't say vague things like, "I'll tell the other groups we feel like Janie just put it;" put into your own words what you think Janie said.

2. Ideas, however good, do not go to meetings on their own; Someone must carry them. Make sure that someone will be conveying the feelings of your group to any gathering you wish to have input in. (Even if one person generally acts as a spoke for your group, it is a good idea to have alternate or back-up people, in case the spoke is unable to attend, and to check clearly before any macro-meeting you have concerns to be shared at, to ascertain if anyone really is planning to attend.)

The spoke's job does not end when the feelings of your group have been conveyed to the macro-group. Here are two more parts of the job that need to be done:

- (a) The spoke must bring back to the group what other groups participating in the macro-group have said. This means striving for equal clarity at the macro-meeting. Communicating information is harder than it sounds. We are trained to make decisions for other people more than we are trained to give them information so they can make their own decisions. Be sure you are not sitting on information. You may find sharing information can be a very demanding and draining job. (This is one reason why it is good to share this responsibility of acting as spoke. Others will then have a better idea of what the spoke is talking about, and will have a better idea of what information they need to get from the spoke.)
- (b) The spoke should also fill the group in on news from the macro-group meeting itself (which is not the same as news from other member groups.)

Two final notes of caution, to help you be a good spoke:

1. Remember that your first priority should be to bringing out and recognizing truth rather than making one view prevail over another. Don't edit or alter what is there. If you know someone feels a strong objection, you are obligated to recognize the existence of that feeling and pass it along, whether you agree with it or not.
2. You can only function effectively as a spoke if you are an active part of your own group. If you find yourself more involved in the life of the spokes' group than in the life of your own affinity group, it is time to share the job and get back to your group.

IV. How to use the process

Dynamics of consensus--some suggestions for using the process

Dynamics refers to how we use our consensus process--the attitudes we bring to meetings as well as the actual ways we use to carry out the process. Some attitudes we are encouraged to bring to consensus processes are trust, respect, responsibility, creativity, cooperation, openness, honesty, and community spirit; some attitudes we are encouraged to leave at home are competition, aggression, distrust, domination, intolerance, deceit, and manipulation.- It is easy to say: "Don't dominate or manipulate others" -- but it is hard to unlearn these majority rule habits and patterns that have been ingrained on us since childhood. Realizing these attitudes are present, that these attitudes are bad for consensus, and wanting to be free of these attitudes is a good start, but it is not enough to free us from these attitudes. That requires work and concentration, not just the expression of ideals. Similarly, it is easy to say: "Trust and respect the other group members"--but actually building these attitudes requires effort and commitment, It is like building a house; it is good to understand what you want to build, to draw blueprints, and to have a commitment to doing the job--but at some point you have to actually get out the tools and do the work.

There are many possible suggestions for building good group dynamics. Rules and suggestions that are right for one group may be wrong for another. It is important that each group try to set up a dynamic that is right for those people at that time. It is also very important that the group understand what it is attempting to do and that there is genuine consent to whichever way is chosen.

The following set of 7 rules are from an article "About the Thursday Night Listening Focusing Group" by Dan Massad (Rough Times, Sept.-Oct., 1973).

...What I want people to read about are the ways we've come up with for making our discussions serve better each person's learning and serve the topic....

First of all, it's not as if we place a structure over that which isn't already structured. What we found (and began to pay attention to) when we came together to talk were the already highly structured shapes our interaction as a group took. Unsatisfying but familiar shapes. Most of the lessons we'd learned in classrooms and in our families we'd learned well. Each person, for instance, knew how to form his or her own ideas while talk was going on, to react quickly, to argue an issue without even an awareness of a personal stake in it, not to ask questions out of confusion or to stop what was going on to make it clear just for oneself, not to actively listen to the experience of another person and to expect not to be listened to. That's some of what we brought into the room.

It was as if the main thing there--even without the presence of a teacher or parent or visible grades--was for each person to present his or her own brilliance and to shield what (s)he didn't know. A lot of energy spent doing that left us all tired, apart, and not carried anywhere in our learning.

So what we did after months of that, was come up with and agree upon some ground rules for discussing in a group.... These rules are awkward at first. We don't stick to them the whole time, but the more we practice them, the more they are at hand for us to use when the going along together gets rough.

1. *Going slow. It's like this: we're all bright and competitive and it feels like there isn't much time; so what can follow out of that is an accelerating, ongoing group, speed rap.... At first, everybody got to talk in a hasty manner and nobody got listened to. Listening takes time, So there was not thoroughness or completion and not much getting across. And until there was a group sense that going more slowly was productive, we couldn't follow any other parts of our time consuming rules.*

2. Listening response. (Responding to what somebody says after they say it. Always have that available as a possibility for each person to do and to ask for--a listening response to what she hears or to what she says.. (..Part of what can happen is that the person talking in the group gets to hear how his or her words were actually received by somebody in that line of faces. And when it's a long and complex something they want to deliver over, it really comes in handy to get with them on each part of what they say...))
3. Stopping. When any person in the group is confused or lost or troubled in some way about what is being said or the way the interaction is going, he can say so and be heard. The other people will stop what they are doing and turn toward this person's trouble. (What we found happening before was a kind of backing away from the group by anyone who began not to understand the complicated descriptions of experiences going on there, or began to feel uneasy with the way the talking moved--too fast, too jumpy, too much like a rising argument. And instead of saying that, it seemed to be everybody's natural bent to conceal the trouble and stay in the group "spaced out", disconnected, eventually irritated or sad or feeling stupid. And it also seemed usual for anybody talking to assume that that kind of trouble should not be shown--that there would be little if any feedback--and on account of that become disconnected in another way from the people receiving his idea. Stopping is a kind of rescue, it keeps the discussion owned by everybody in the room.
4. Tagging. Before you enter your thing into the discussion--your reaction, or similar experience~ or whatever--try, if it's at all possible, to introduce in a sentence what your words aim to do... Part of what happens on account of this is that the movement of the talk becomes clear to everybody. What each person is doing with speech--comparing, disagreeing, connecting, trying to get less confused--can more easily be followed. And the person speaking, in order to tag what she's saying, has to look inside and see where she is in relation to the discussion--with it, against it, her own experience and ideas excited by it, adrift, or whatever. So there is a heightened and shared awareness of what's going on.

Also, it gives space for people who need it to object to a new turn in the talking. Maybe Jane, for instance, wants to put an experience she had alongside what has just been described by Linda. Jane first says what she wants to do. If Jim, however, is still trying to understand the first description, he can say, "Wait, before you do your thing I want to hear more from Linda", and Jane can wait and store the new turn in the talking until everybody is ready for it.

5. Checking Language. In the process of laying out and comparing descriptions of experience in listening and focusing (and especially at the beginning), it is often helpful to check with the person speaking on the central or over-used words--weighty attractive words that can carry an assortment of meanings. The idea is to learn what experience the person is pointing to with his words before assuming that they're using words in the way you use them in your frame of reference. We keep finding that many words and phrases... are easy to use among us and recognize on some level. But often, when each person gets a chance to unfold what he means by one of these words, it becomes clear that we need further differentiation in order to disclose the various complex parts of what there is. This connects to what most of the people in the group want to be doing--the development of a common language we can use (at least among ourselves) that to some degree adequately pictures and communicates these complex not yet

formulated processes that so far go by the name "listening and focusing."

6. *Finishing, This has 2 sides, If you are talking and someone interrupts or responds to only the first part of what you were going to say more about, you claim space and get your idea finished. And if you are listening and it looks to you as if someone talking got interrupted or is still holding on to more of what she wanted to say, invite that person to complete it.*
7. *Calling attention to how the ground rules aren't being honored. (This has to do with how we haven't thoroughly learned these rules yet, so we have to be attentive to how we are faring with them. Not a stern judgmental attention, but an easygoing regard for what we are up to and a chance to see if the rules we made continue to serve us.)*

Quick decision-making--using the process under pressure

There is no magical "quick decision process." Some processes are theoretically capable of working more quickly than others, but any process is capable of misuse in ways which will make it bog down. To be able to make decisions quickly, a group must do the necessary work. It would be nice if there were some super-process which would do all, our work for us, but there isn't.

Where does the time go? The two major sources of time-eating are:

1. Misuse of the process--time lost on process problems.
2. Persuasion--time used trying to get others to go along with something some people want agreed.

Making decisions more quickly, then, requires working on these areas.

Consensus, slow or fast? Consensus is sometimes considered as a "slow" process, and majority rule is sometimes thought of as "quick". There are several inaccuracies in these views.

1. Less is more, slow is fast. In the long run the slow sure patience of the consensus comes to better decisions more quickly than hastier processes. This is in part because when consensus is reached people understand and mean what they have agreed to. In other systems, where a quick victory is won through out-maneuvering the other side, gains may be washed away the next day, and more time is spent in the long run see-sawing back and forth.
2. There is a built-in value of patience and willingness to wait in the consensus process, but this is in relation to the development of policies rather than in relation to the actual time it takes to make a decision. The consensus mechanism is in fact quicker than the majority rule mechanism. It is much faster to test for objections than to take a vote, (The item under consideration is more likely to be rejected using consensus but that is a matter of content, not of time spent making decisions--and as pointed out above, consensus is a more positive process in the long run.)

How to use consensus quickly: As noted above, the two major ways time gets consumed are through misuse of the process and through using a lot of meeting time on efforts at persuasion. To reduce time lost on process misuse:

- (1) Everyone in the group should be familiar with what the process is and how it works. This should include understanding of the ideals underlying the process.

- (2) People in the group should practice and build the skills needed for using the process effectively.
- (3) People in the group should work together to break bad habits acquired from using other processes.

To reduce the amount of time lost on persuasion:

1. Work on good communication. This won't happen in the meeting unless it is built up outside the meeting as well, (And meetings are shorter when people have done a lot of communication and preparation before the meeting.)
2. Build a sense of unity. This is what consensus is all about. And it can't be forced, which is why it is important for people to choose to work together. Doing things together is a good way to increase the degree of unity present.
3. Learn to enjoy working together rather than individually. This is very difficult; we have been trained for most of our lives to be unable to work this way. Building cooperative skills, and becoming a group rather than a set of individuals, will go a very long way toward saving time when you get the hang of it.
4. Establish common grounds. At a minimum, build up a common vocabulary--learn what the other people in the group mean by the way they use words; help them become familiar with what you are saying. Wanting to work together is not enough; people need to be able to physically do so.
5. Share the responsibility for the group. Everyone taking part must care about how the group functions and share in seeing that the group functions well. It is especially important when one person is appointed to be responsible for making sure certain things are taken care of (like a facilitator) that the rest of the group understands it is not relieved of responsibility, and that all share an awareness of basics like time, priorities, and the need for good process.

How to use consensus quickly under pressure:

- (1) The group needs to share a sense of urgency on the matter at hand: there must be a general consensus that time is pressing and a general consensus on priorities. This is not something that can be decided, or even (if the word is used as a euphemism for "decided") simply "agreed"--there must be a consensus, i.e. a genuine understanding and state of unity on this. This state of unity comes from people understanding what is going on and from knowing each other well enough to sense and respect other peoples priorities. This is built by working together--which is why it is vital to gain some experience with consensus while there is not pressure on for quick decisions.
- (2) When possible the group should anticipate problems and discuss the matter before the meeting rather than during the meeting, working together informally in small groups and on a 1-to-1 basis. Sometimes this can be done during the large group meeting, but this depends on how much time is available. If a decision is needed almost immediately there will be no time to break up into small groups, so reliance on these methods should not distract us from the job of being prepared.
- (3) When people are gathered together, start with a presentation of strong needs and feelings relating to the issue. If a decision is needed quickly, then people should express these important needs and feelings without going into long defenses or criticisms. Either these feelings have been clarified already, or the group must choose between spending time clarifying rather than deciding. The important thing here is to bring these feelings out and recognize that they exist, rather than argue over whether they are "right".

- (4) When all the strong needs and feelings have been brought out, someone should attempt to express, quickly and concisely, a sense of the meeting which takes into account all expressed needs.
- (5) Test for strong objections. If there are no strong objections your group has done very well, and you have a sense of the meeting. This ends the matter quickly and happily (although you may need to spend some time working out specifics). This happy ending is more likely to occur if: (a) the statement of the sense of the meeting is a good one which has successfully taken into account the expressed needs; and (b) people in the group are able to distinguish needs from preferences, strong objections from other forms of disagreement. It takes practice to be able to do this, which is why again it is urged that people not take short-cuts during times of lower pressure.
- (6) If there are strong objections to the proposed sense of the meeting, or if no one is able to come up with a statement in the first place that reconciles the different needs, then no new course of action has been agreed on. If time is short and there is not enough time to try to meet the objections, then you have your decision: take no new positive action on this matter. (You have reached the same point as if you used some other process and had rejected all proposals made for new action.)
- (7) The above is an outline for using the consensus process quickly under pressure. It yields results that are superior to those obtained by most other processes, in the long run. However, reassurances about the long run are often not very satisfying for people in the present. There may be people present who feel very strongly that a certain course of action should be adopted right away, and do not want to accept the objections.

Trying to meet objections under time pressure: If the group is willing to continue meeting a little longer to try to meet the objections, here are some ways to increase the chances of being successful:

- a) Don't waste time arguing the merits of the objection, cross-examining the person making the objection, antagonizing that person, or trying to pressure that person into withdrawing the objection.
- b) Don't waste time on rhetoric.
- c) Don't waste time pointing out how little time there is, or blaming the person making the objection for taking up the group's time. (It is the person trying to remove the objection who is asking the group to spend extra time.)
- d) Accept as much as you can of other people's positions.
- e) Try to get to the root of what people are saying.
- f) Don't try pushing things that have been objected to. Try incorporating the objection into any proposal. If a proposal cannot easily be modified to include the objection, drop it and try to find something different that can.

V. AFFINITY: choosing to work together

The word consensus means a state of unity or harmony. It is also used to name a type of group process that is based on finding or building that state.

The consensus process we use today evolved from the meeting process of the early Quakers. Used properly, it is an attempt to work together cooperatively in a friendly group to seek truth. Unlike most group processes, which emphasize working separately (usually competitively), the consensus process places a large value on the group and on working together as a group.

"Friends at the beginning were faced with a dilemma: either they must accept the validity of external authority (whether Romanist or Protestant), or they had no check on the spirit of libertines and Ranters. The deep Quaker conviction was that these two horns of the dilemma did not exhaust the possibilities. They felt there should be a better way, and their very expectancy helped them to formulate it. The fundamental solution included the setting aside of times for group judgment upon matters affecting both individuals and the group, the decision to be rendered not by a vote at the conclusion of a parliamentary debate, but by a joint decision of the entire group as the result of approaching each problem in the mood of reverent search for God's will."
Elton Trueblood, "Quaker Method of Reaching Decisions"

The key to enabling a group to successfully reach consensus, then, is its desire and its ability to work together as a group. Here are some elements of affinity:

1. The group is physically able to gather together. Perhaps they live together or near each other; perhaps some of them work together; or perhaps they have some other means that allows them to be near each other on a regular basis.
2. The group takes part in some sort of regular sharing. (Sharing in this context means some shared activity, preferably involving physical presence.) For the Quakers this sharing was the meeting for worship--business meetings are made up of people who go to meeting together. For political groups, this sharing could be local actions or some other regular activity the group does together other than business meetings.
3. The members of the group are able to communicate with each other. This means more than speaking the same language and knowing each others addresses and phone numbers. At a minimum this calls for a common vocabulary and some shared concepts.
4. The members of the group must desire to work together as a group, and as that particular group. There needs to be a conscious sense of choosing to work together.
5. The group members should have a common goal--some direction that they are all seeking in together. The goals need not be identical as long as they are compatible.
6. There should be a clear common understanding of what the group is and how the people in the group relate to one another. It is meaningless to say the group works by consensus if the members do not understand what that means, or if they do not agree on what it means.
7. There should be some shared values among the group members.

There are different views on how much sharing of values is needed to make it easy for a group to work together with a consensus process. Some believe that there must be a great deal of commonality before people can find meaningful positions of unity; others feel that any group that really wants to can reconcile seemingly irreconcilable views. However, there are some values that must be shared for a different reason. These are the values that underlie the consensus process itself. These values include: placing value on the group, and on working together as a group; placing value on the individual; respecting each person and seeing something good in each person; having responsibility to the group, and to each other individually; having patience, and being willing to wait and seek truth together; belief in the existence of an underlying truth; and belief that truth can be found through creative peaceableness.

Working together as a group, rather than as a collection of individuals, can be difficult (and frightening) at first. It calls for conscious effort, and a willingness to share with others. It is easier to talk of affinity than to realize it; but it is worth the effort.

VI. Group Process

Group process--general information

"Group process" is a simple phrase for a complex (and often troublesome) topic. Group process refers to how members of a group relate to each other, as individuals and as a group. Group process covers relations for working together, socializing together, and making decisions together (and probably other relations as well). The visible tip of the iceberg is the group's decision-making process--the set of rules by which meetings are conducted and business taken care of. Process, of course, involves more than just decision-making; but decision-making is a good aspect to grab hold of and focus on.

There are many categories of decision-making processes. Some of these are: random, dictatorial, and democratic. Consensus and majority rule, while radically different from each other in many ways, are both branches of democratic process.

Here are some general features of group processes.

1. There are many different decision-making processes (possible sets of rules) in each category. To say "we work by consensus" or "we work by majority rule" is meaningless except as an expression of ideal. Since a group cannot realistically operate with many conflicting sets of rules all at once, each group needs to settle on a single set of rules to use.
2. The process (set of rules) needs to be well-defined. This has nothing to do with how nicely worded the rules are. Rather, it refers to completeness (the rules must determine what the outcome is for all circumstances the process allows) and uniqueness (the process should not permit two contradictory outcomes to be determined by the same set of circumstances.) A process that is not well-defined is vulnerable to process breakdown--the inability to agree on what decision results from given circumstances.
3. While within the framework of both types of process members try to make decisions based on what is right/reasonable, the final determination is independent of such factors. Under majority rule, numbers determine the outcome; under consensus, the sense of the meeting, as determined by the presence or absence of objections, gives the outcome.
4. All members are expected to respect the process and abide by the process until/unless the process is changed. ("My process, right or wrong. When right to be kept right; when wrong to be made right.")
5. All members are expected to abide by properly reached decisions. For majority rule, this means that even those who lose on a vote agree to accept the result. For consensus, this means that even those not sharing an objection agree to respect that objection, and to take no group action that has been objected to until/unless the objection can be met.
6. Processes are inherently conservative, being slanted in favor of those who oppose change. The burden is always on those who propose change. Under majority rule, the members proposing a change must win a majority of the votes. Under consensus, the members proposing a change must meet all strong objections.
7. Every process has a dynamic. The process is the set of rules for determining decisions; the dynamic is how the rules are used (or abused). Under majority rule process, a proposal that does not receive enough votes is defeated; part of the dynamic is that if a lot of proposals are put forward that the

majority disagrees with, the group will take a long time to get nowhere. Under consensus, a proposal that does not meet all strong objections is defeated; part of the dynamic is that if a lot of proposals are put forward that some members strongly object to, the group will take a long time to get nowhere.

Every process is vulnerable to breakdowns in dynamic--the inability to work together comfortably to reach good decisions. (Majority rule is as vulnerable to this as consensus. There are many majority rule systems that take a long time to do very little, such as the U.S. Congress.) Note that when the dynamic is poor or breaks down, the process has not broken down. There is no inability to make decisions; the problem is that the content is unsatisfactory, or that it takes too long. The problem will not go away by changing the process; the next process may not work any better unless the group learns to work with instead of against the process.

Consensus and majority rule

"Consensus" is an attempt at nonviolent group process. It is more than a decision-making process (technique), although, as with other aspects of nonviolence, it can be seen as both a technique and a principle. When viewed as a technique, consensus frequently degenerates into a re-labeled majority rule.

Consensus, like majority rule, is the name of a broad category of processes. Consensus processes are based on the idea that the group takes no action that has not been consented to by all members. Majority rule processes are based on the idea that the group takes no action that has not been affirmed by a set fraction of the members (more than half). Consensus processes are radically different in theory, practice, and underlying principles from majority rule processes (including unanimous majority rule, to which consensus bears a superficial resemblance.)

A few of the contrasts:

MAJORITY RULE	CONSENSUS
is a competitive search for a decision	is a cooperative search for truth
has winners and losers	is not based on sides--all win or lose together
is based on affirmation, usually through the mechanism of the vote	is based on consent, usually by the mechanism of objections
works best when members put forward proposals based on what members are drawn to	works best when members put forward proposals that avoid what members object to.
"greatest good for the greatest number"	"basic rights for all"
members agree to give up some of their own freedom of choice in exchange for the right to a chance to coerce others	all members must consent to group decisions; the outcome should never be coercive
decisions often come before people	people should come before decisions.

The above list is stacked in favor of consensus, and should not be taken as saying "consensus is good, majority rule is bad", or "consensus is better than majority rule." Both have their own advantages and disadvantages. Majority rule is a useful process for choosing among a number of options which are all similar in acceptability and an arbitrary choice is needed, although it is not so useful for choosing between unequal choices or making a choice when all alternatives put forward are unacceptable; while consensus is useful for creating new alternatives, but is perhaps less suited to the making of arbitrary choices.

The point is not that one is good and the other bad, but rather that the two are basically different and incompatible. Fasting, and eating citrus fruit, can both be healthful practices; but trying to do both at once leads to certain contradictions.

Many, if not most, of our problems in consensus dynamics are caused by members bringing majority rule attitudes to the consensus process. This sabotages consensus as surely as imposing consensus attitudes on majority rule would sabotage majority rule. (Consider the problems of majority rule, where the minority consistently refuses to accept the outcome of votes because they have objections; or where the minority constantly demands votes on proposals which they know will not get enough votes to pass, and then demand the process be changed because their proposals are not being passed!)

There are many ways in which the dynamics of majority rule and consensus are incompatible:

1. Majority rule makes us think in terms of numbers. Thinking in these terms makes us less sensitive to the needs and feelings of each of our other group members.
2. Majority rule makes us think in terms of limited options, two sides, win-lose. It can create polarity where none needs to exist. Even "straw votes" polarize the group by making people who could feel comfortable either adopting or not adopting a proposal choose sides.
3. The consensus dynamic works by people working to find proposals that meet all objections--creative conflict. If people think instead in terms of majorities and minorities, proposals are put forward that are not designed to meet all objections. This is a major distraction from the search for creative alternatives.
4. Because consensus assures us that no action will be taken by the group until all consent to it, we are able to listen without fear to everyone who wants to speak. The more certain we are of that guarantee, the more we are able to work together in a slow, relaxed, cooperative manner that encourages everyone to participate. But when that assurance is removed, people who oppose an idea that may now be adopted despite their strong objection will have a strong temptation to suppress or out-manuever that proposal--perhaps by trying to have people convinced of their own ideas, or by trying to force adoption of some other alternative first, or by squeezing some people and their ideas out of the discussion. This leads to in-fighting, and a competition of ideas (majority rule dynamic) rather than a cooperative search (consensus dynamic).
5. As this kind of competitive majority rule dynamic begins to take hold, the first victims are the quieter members. The group becomes dominated by the confident and self-assured types who thrive in conventional decision-making processes. Since these people begin to do more and more of the talking at the meetings, a separate class of leaders begins to emerge.
6. Consensus works because all people in the group share the urgency to move forward, and therefore the need to listen to each other and work out new solutions. Knowing that majority rule will be used if consensus "fails" takes that sense of urgency away from the majority. (Indeed, it creates a strong temptation not to reach consensus, since then the majority will can be imposed.)
7. The line between emergency and non-emergency decisions quickly tends to erode. Any decision can be seen as important; every important decision "has to be made." If it is blocked, this can be seen as an emergency to be settled by majority vote. This again removes the shared urgency and leads to a situation where only trivia is actually decided by consensus.
8. Genuine consent is vital to consensus. It is also very hard to obtain, since many people are often

afraid to voice their feelings. Consensus builds trust and encourages people to open up. This only occurs if strong objections are respected; putting negative connotations on "holding up the majority" encourages people to shut up instead. This leads to decisions that were not really consented, to--weak decisions that will fall apart in crisis situations because the respect built into genuine consensus is not there.

9. Using majority rule undermines our ability to use a consensus process. The cooperative skills needed for consensus are very different from the competitive ones used in majority rule situations. Every time we resort to majority rule we make it that much harder to break the old bad habits.

Besides the incompatibility of their dynamics, as listed above, there are 2 more reasons why mixing majority rule and consensus is not a good idea.

- (1) Consensus should not be modified by majority rule because *the* result is not consensus in anything more than name and rituals. Under consensus the group should take no action as a group that has not been consented to by all group members. As with carrying out the death penalty, it is better to err on the side of inaction, than to err in the other direction. Majority rule is usually added to consensus solely for the purpose of overriding strong objections--forcing consent. This is not consensus in any true sense; and calling it by that name degrades all other attempts at using consensus. It would be better to be honest and say, "We are going to use informal majority rule" if that is the case.
- (2) The attempt to change consensus to majority rule when there are problems in the group's dynamic is an attempt at push-button thinking. But majority rule is not some scientific miracle. Majority rule is just as vulnerable to process breakdown and dynamic breakdowns; it is just as open to being abused, manipulated, and obstructed. The same underlying problems that cause trouble with consensus will manifest themselves in the new process unless steps are taken to get at their roots. Anything that distracts us from solving our problems is an opiate, not a medicine.

Fall-backs: an alternative to degeneration

What are fall-backs? Simply put, they are a set of starting agreements. These should ideally be written down when a group is forming. They say to a new person, "This is what our group is, what we believe, what we are doing, what we require of each other. If you can accept this, you are welcome to join us." Fall-backs are our bottom lines, our principles of unity; our foundation to build upon--whatever the current cliché is. They are our guarantee that we will be able to act together even when we cannot reach a new consensus.

Fall-backs are not a new idea, although the term is new. Virtually every workable process is based on a fall-back understanding. This understanding is frequently taken for granted. Sometimes the fall-backs are explicit (a written constitution, such as in the US); sometimes the fall-backs are implicit (an unwritten constitution, such as in England). But the understanding of fall-backs--that we do not start from a vacuum--must be there or chaos will eventually result.

Majority rule is not a cure for this chaos. Indeed, majority rule without fall-backs is equally chaotic.

For example:

A group of 10 people requires a 2/3 vote to adopt a proposal. 6 members are in favor of fence-cutting and 4 are opposed. A proposal not to cut fences will lose; but so will a proposal to allow fence-cutting. It is impossible to pass a proposal either way, without some understanding of which side needs to get the 2/3 vote,

the requirement of a 2/3 vote is meaningless.

Even a simple majority vote, without a fall-back understanding, is unworkable: A group of 15 people use simple majority vote. It is May and one occupation has just ended; there are 3 basic positions within the group regarding a future occupation. Jane, Jean, Jill, James, and Jean want a fall occupation (they insist on some occupation, and spring is too far off.) Betty, Bernice, Bob, Beatrice, and Beauregard want a spring occupation (they agree there must be another occupation, but fall is too soon). Ruthanne, Roberta, Ray, Rick, and someone else feel that something other than an occupation should be tried (they oppose either a spring or fall occupation.)

A proposal for a spring occupation is defeated 10-5; a proposal for a fall occupation is defeated 10-5; and a proposal for no occupation is defeated 10-5.

Majority rule is not a magic solution to all our process problems. But because it is sometimes viewed as quicker and easier than consensus, there is a frequent tendency to want to fall back on majority rule in emergency situations. There are several problems with this:

1. The result is not consensus. To override strong objections on a consistent basis, or to maintain a threat of overriding strong objections, is to destroy the heart of consensus.
2. The use of majority rule does not solve our problems, as seen above.
3. The use of majority rule undermines our ability to use consensus effectively.
4. The use of majority rule sabotages the consensus dynamic, creating new problems.

The desire to use majority rule comes from a (mistaken) feeling that consensus will leave us high and dry in an emergency, needing to do something but unable to make a decision. The error is in thinking that in this case we don't have a consensus and so have to make a non-consensus decision, or else keep at it until people get tired enough to hammer something out.

Consensus does not start from a vacuum. As with any workable process, there must be some initial agreements before further agreements/decisions can be reached. It is sometimes said that under consensus we do not make a decision unless there is complete agreement (or at least no strong objections). This is not entirely correct. Rather, we do not decide to take any new action, or change our present course of action/inaction, until agreement is reached to do so. There is always a consensus--i.e. the last position or course of action agreed on for this issue. (This is not the same as "what we are doing" or "what we did last time.") There is only a problem if:

- (a) the group is unable to agree on what its last position of agreement (fall-back) is or should be; or
- (b) some of the group refuse to abide by that previous consensus.

To meet these problems, a group should:

1. establish its fall-backs as soon as possible.
2. try to cover in the fall-backs all major areas where disagreements are likely.
3. take the fall-backs seriously. (This means that people in the group need to understand what the fall-backs say and must be willing to abide by the fall-backs until a new consensus is reached.)

Two possible objections to fall-backs:

- (1) You can't cover all contingencies. Not true. It is very easy to cover all contingencies. The problem is covering all contingencies well, one way to cover all contingencies is to set up all the fall-backs one can anticipate needing and specifying that where there are no specific fall-backs the group has as a fall-back that it will take no new positive action until a consensus is reached to do so. The fall-back for a matter that has never come up or has not been thought of before, then, is to continue the present course (i.e. taking no action in regard to the matter.)
- (2) You can't cover all contingencies well. True. But this is a strength, not a weakness. Fall-backs are intended as starting points from which we can grow and evolve; they are not intended as final positions. The act of working together cooperatively is in itself a desirable end, separate from whatever good we accomplish by acting together as a group. The existence of fall-backs should not undermine our need to work together. By their imperfection they add to our shared sense of urgency to reach a better group consensus, since we are committed to abiding by the old consensus until a new one is reached. Consensus is often difficult to understand, and this is one of the harder points to grasp.

Below is an example of how imperfect fall-backs aid in reaching consensus:

A group of hungry people are trying to decide on food to buy and share for lunch. They have \$5 to spend. Cheese is \$2 a pound with a special rate of \$5 for 5 pounds. Bread is 40 cents a loaf in quantities of 10 or more; otherwise it is 80 cents a loaf. (Bread and cheese are the only foods the group is considering, for reasons that do not concern us.)

Part of the group (11 people) want to spend all the money for cheese; some others (5 people, 3 of whom do not eat cheese) prefer using as much money as possible for bread; the remaining group members (4 people) are willing to accept any amount of cheese and bread as long as some food is obtained quickly. The obvious compromise between the extremes of all cheese or all bread would be to buy some of both. This is not a popular idea, since buying any bread will reduce the amount of cheese that can be bought by more than half (see chart).

CHART OF VARIOUS OPTIONS

loaves of bread	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	10	11	12
pounds of cheese	5	2.1	1.7	1.3	0.9	0.5	0.1	0.5	0.3	0.1

Because everyone is hungry, there is shared urgency for reaching a quick decision.

- (a) If it is argued that a decision must be reached, and if consensus can't be reached and so therefore the group should decide by simple majority vote, then the group will vote to get 5 pounds of cheese (since 11 of the 20 favor this). Three people who do not eat cheese will therefore get no food to eat, which may cause resentment.
- (b) If people just try to seek out "common ground" (a lowest common denominator) they will find that they all agree that something should be bought and shared, and that this should be done as soon as possible. A resolution to this effect can be passed. (if the resolution is written down, the paper can be torn into 20 parts and eaten.)
- (c) If consensus is used with an understanding of fall-backs, the fall-back is to take no group action until a new consensus is reached. This means no food will be bought with the group's money until

the group members resolve their problem and reach consensus on how the money should be spent. Note that this does not happen to be the preference of anyone present, but that all 20 members are committed to following this course until a new consensus is reached. This increases the shared urgency to reach a decision.

If it appears that consensus will not be reached, then every person (except the three who do not eat cheese) is better off standing aside on all objections and accepting any of the 10 options listed in the chart. The 3 who do not eat cheese are no worse off by standing aside on their objection, since either way they do not get any food. Thus consensus properly used provides a built-in incentive for people to stand aside on all but strong principled objections; there is a disincentive for objecting to one thing simply because you would prefer something else.

If the members of this group understand the fall-back and take it seriously, then, there should be little trouble in reaching a decision that all members are willing to accept. The "imperfection" of this fall-back--the fact that the fall-back was a situation no one in the group wanted to prolong--is what provides the impetus to reach a consensus,

Which outcome will be chosen depends on the people in the group. It would be nice if they came up with an ingenious "third way" that would feed everyone happily. but even if this is not found, the fall-back gives people the incentive to reach a consensus in one of many ways. Three likely ways are:

1. The 11 who want all cheese and the 5 who want mostly bread agree to a mix of the two just so it doesn't look like one side is getting its way entirely.
2. The 11 who want all cheese stand aside, and consensus is reached to buy 12 loaves of bread. (The 11 are better off with bread than if they had not stood aside, in which case they would have gotten nothing.)
3. The 3 who want no cheese stand aside for the good of the others, and consensus is reached to buy 5 pounds of cheese. This means the 3 who do not eat cheese are voluntarily agreeing to go without lunch. They are no worse off than if they had not stood aside, and they have the satisfaction of putting the needs of others above their own.

The third outcome may appear similar to the outcome under simple majority rules the decision is to buy 5 pounds of cheese, but there is a difference. The difference is between people being forced to make a sacrifice for the good of others, and people choosing to do so on their own. The decision may be the same; but how the decision was made, and how people will feel about the decision, are quite different. These are differences worth preserving.

VII. Membership

"The informal and inward nature of Quakerism is well indicated by the fact that for nearly a century no systematic method was used for identifying members."

Henry J. Cadbury, *Character of a Quaker*, p. 103

"Let us make as little of membership as possible, and keep our society as an open-ended community, such as it was during its first 100 years, counting as Quakers all who journey with us."

Ormerod Greenwood, "The Nurture of The Society of Friends"

The question of membership is sometimes a ticklish one for consensual groups. The general principle is that anyone who believes in the same principles as the consensual group, is of the same nature--i.e, a member. But who determines if someone holds essentially the same views as a group which does not write down its standards?

The seeming dilemma stems from the idea in consensus that it is reality and not appearances that are to be judged. Thus, a consensus group does not arbitrarily set down a list of entrance requirements.

However, the dilemma between arbitrarily determining membership, and leaving the group open to anyone who wishes to declare themselves a member, whether they believe as the group does or not, is only a seeming dilemma. In reality, the solution is fairly simple (in theory, at least).

Even though a group has not written down a checklist of doctrines, the reality of those beliefs which make up the character of the group exists. Those who conform to those standards are the same as group members. And the truth of that membership is determined in the same way as other truth--by proper application of the consensus process by those concerned.

Here is a step-by-step description of the general process:

1. A person interested in the group attends meetings and gets to know the people in the group, as they get to know the new person.
2. If the person feels they are of similar mind and would like to be officially part of the group, they make this known.
3. The parties involved meet together and try to reach consensus--that is, seek to determine the truth of the matter--by combining their individual light and seeking group truth. If it is a sense of the meeting that the person is a member, then the person is a member. If the group is not able to come to that sense, then the group waits and talks further with the person. The person may still be welcome as an attender even though the group does not recognize the person as one of them.

In being a member, one is expected to accept to a large degree the beliefs of the group. However, beliefs vary from person to person. It is generally more important to accept that these are group truths than to accept them fully as individual truths--"We as a group believe this," ("Even though I personally am still striving to understand these beliefs more fully and live them.")

When a person is a member, one phrase for the relationship is "owning one another." This idea goes with the concept of affinity, being responsible one for another.

The other side of membership is disownment--being recognized as not being part of the group. This is a serious matter, and difficult to handle--it is not always done in the spirit of consensus that it should be done in.

Historically in the Religious Society of Friends the sequence of events ran roughly as follows: if someone in the group were "walking disorderly"--violating principles of the group--people in the meeting were supposed to talk with that person. If results of these conversations were not mutually satisfying, it was recommended to go together to others in the meeting for assistance in seeking truth. If this also failed the matter was brought to the whole meeting. The attitude at all times was to be one of flexibility and seeking, rather than a prejudging or rigid attitude. Care was to be taken not to create a polarized situation, but to genuinely seek out the truth of the matter. If the group came to a recognition of its reality, that this person was not someone they considered one of them, this was to be stated. The process ideally was to be one of "testifying against" wrongdoing rather than the "cutting off" of anyone; and if the person changed their behavior they would be once more a part of the group.

VIII. Ideals of non-violence

Non-violence is important to the attitude in which consensus is used. Here are some ideals of non-violence.

We take a broad view of violence, and seek to avoid emotional as well as physical violence. Our aim is to teach people, not to subdue them.

To practice non-violence, we must be non-violent. Therefore, we seek to work together in a spirit of sharing, cooperation, acceptance, openness, honesty, trust, respect, and caring.

We seek to resolve conflict by working to reach understanding and a shared truth.

All our actions should be free of the attempt to humiliate, injure, or subjugate.

We follow our consciences, and encourage others to follow theirs.

We try to refrain from activities that others around us find offensive or hurtful.

Our commitment is expressed by our willingness to sacrifice our own time and comfort.

We recognize that the ends are a product of our means. Therefore, we seek to overcome our own attitudes of aggressiveness, competitiveness, distrust, deceit, selfishness, prejudice, intolerance, exploitation, and domination.

We reject coercion--the ability to make someone else do something against their will. We realize the need for unity, and put this above our personal whims and ambitions.

IX. Common process problems.

Things commonly done that shouldn't be done

1. Not accepting objections.

Accepting objection means acknowledging that the person expressing it sincerely feels that way, and respecting that person and their feeling. You do not have to agree with their feeling to accept that the feeling exists--this is simply recognizing the truth of the situation.

Commitment to consensus means that we--as individuals, as a group--do not do things we know will hurt or offend others in the group. If we feel someone is mistaken in their feeling we can try to share other perspectives with them--but it is their feeling, and they must be the final determiner of whether or not they still retain that feeling. If we think someone is mistaken but we are not able to find words that will convince them, then we should accept their objection and suspend group judgment--that is, adopt no new policy as a group--until a later date when a more meaningful discussion occurs and people do reach some understanding.

Instead: pressure is put on people to withdraw objections; people with objections are made to feel separate from the group; people are sometimes cross-examined in a hostile fashion about their objection; time is wasted arguing on whether an objection is right, rather than focusing on what can be done to meet it.

2. Thinking in terms of resolutions and voting.

Trying to find the truth of a matter, rather than thinking in terms of sides, is an integral part of consensus; but the introduction of formal proposals in the discussion process has the effect of making people choose sides. Proposals should come out only through the discussion as attempts to put the sense of the meeting into words. S. B. Laughlin summarizes how the process is supposed to work in the preface of *Beyond Dilemmas*:

"In their meeting for business, where all members may take part, no motions are put and no votes taken. Any Friend having a concern on any question informally lays it before the meeting. Friends are then encouraged to discuss the concern without being hampered by any of the usual rules of debate. If the proposition meets with favor from a substantial part of the membership, the clerk draws up a minute embodying the consensus of the best ideas presented. If necessary this minute is revised until all objections are met. No positive action is taken in the face of any considerable opposition. The final result is not a compromise of conflicting views but a synthesis of the best thought of all...."

3. Representation misused to set some members above others, and to exclude participation rather than to ensure it.

This is an especially serious violation when people are unfamiliar with how to act as a representative in a consensual system; these people then try to make decisions for others or edit the views to be passed along; omitting strong objections or not passing them on in a way that blocks the adoption of the thing being objected to.

With the consensus process, a representative does not "decide" what to pass on and what not to pass on; they are obligated to pass on whatever has come out--in particular, to pass along any objection which has not been met. When only a few people are allowed to represent a region, then it is possible for objections not to be passed on even though they exist--effectively disenfranchising people, and making for bitter struggles over who will be the representatives.

4. Speaking abstractly for others rather than concretely for oneself.

It is very difficult to recognize a genuine group truth when people do not share their true feelings. Part of the

problem is people being pressured to suppress their feelings (see 1, above), but another part is people who try to speak for others rather than for themselves--people who consistently think and talk in terms of what others can/should do rather than in terms of what they will/will not do, have/have not done, can live with/cannot live with.

5. Treating consensus like a game or contest, to be won, rather than as a commitment to finding truth together.

Often people get into contest between competing sides; final outcomes depend on who can attend more meetings and outlast the other side, who gets ideas into writing first, who speaks more eloquently, etc.

The idea of consensus is to state one's sincere feelings as plainly and simply as possible, respecting the good sense of others rather than trying to manipulate them.

Winning by outmaneuvering or outlasting or out-whatevering other people is contrary to the idea of consensus. If it is not possible to reach a comfortable sense of the meeting regarding some issue in a given time or setting, then no decision should be made at that time. Everyone, no matter how strongly they might want some new course of action to be adopted, should be committed to affirming this principle.

6. Imposing time limits, deadlines, and other artificial constraints to induce pressured and "emergency" decisions.

Consensus works when participants remain open to new ideas, and will not give in to pressure to make unsatisfactory decisions. The theme of "suspending judgment"--of taking "no positive action....in the face of considerable opposition"--is repeated over and over in descriptions of the consensus process. "The very unwillingness to accept any low standards" and "the spirit of expectancy" of reaching an acceptable solution if the group waits patiently are themselves factors in being able to reach that acceptable solution.

7. Demanding "progress" and "decisions" be put ahead of building understanding.

There is a need to go slowly, make sure that we understand what is being said and what we are agreeing to. In the long run this is actually a faster way to reach good decisions. Good decisions grow out of good understanding.

Things not done much which should be done more often :

1. Assure that all people can feel comfortable as part of the group. This involves:
 - a) going slowly; leaving room for quieter people; avoiding fast-paced tension.
 - b) showing support for people; protecting them when they bring feelings out.
2. Taking time to make sure we understand what is going on.
3. Listening to others carefully; saying when we do not understand what they have said.
4. Building on what others say; synthesizing, rather than putting ideas in conflict.
5. Thinking creatively--breaking out of ruts, looking for new alternatives.
6. Spending time preparing for meetings--arranging thoughts coherently in advance.
7. Building understanding of, and skills in using, the consensus process.

X. Recommended reading

The richest source of information on the various aspects of consensus is the shelf on Quakers at a good library (289.6 Dewey Decimal CHECK THIS). Here are some useful books (in no particular order):

Beyond Dilemmas, edited by S. B. Laughlin, especially the chapter "Quaker Method of Reaching Decisions" by Elton Trueblood.

Faith and Practice of New England Yearly Meeting, 1966 edition.

Quaker Education in Theory and Practice by Howard Brinton

Friends for 300 Years by Howard Brinton

Quakers Find a Way--Discoveries in Practical Living by Charles Woolman,;

Approach to Quakerism by E. B. Castle

For the Reputation of Truth by Richard Bauman

The Quaker Contribution by Harold Loukes William Braithwaite

Beginnings of Quakerism by Geoffrey Hubbard

Quaker by Convincement by Geoffrey Hubbard

Character of a Quaker by Henry J. Cadbury

The Quiet Rebels by Margaret Bacon

Words and Testimonies by Thomas H. Silcock

Several of these books are actually Pendle Hill Pamphlets. Pendle Hill is a Quaker center in Wallingford, Pennsylvania--if interested, you could write them to see about getting pamphlets.

All the books listed above are good for information about the consensus process, origin of and ideals behind, etc.

For anyone interested in more ambitious or less religious reading, there are some interesting books on democratic theory. **The Calculus of Consent** by John Buchanan actually touches briefly (and favorably) on consensus. Most of these books are more concerned with majority rule processes, but the ideas, if you can get through the language, are worthwhile in a study of group process. Robert Dahl, **Preface to Democratic Theory**, touches on a lot of points. Robin Farquharson, **Theory of Voting**, is a readable little book on the paradox of voting. Kenneth J. Arrow's **Social Choice and Individual Values** is difficult, but contains the famous General (Im)possibility Theorem (which demonstrates that there is no possible democratic majority rule procedure). Luce and Raifa, **Games and Decisions** is another. You will find references for further reading in these books if you want.

Finally: **How to Make Meetings Work**, Doyle and Strauss, 1976, is a very useful guide to a modification of consensus called the Interaction Method.