



## FIST-FIVE: A DECISION-MAKING PROCESS



Most teams do not have an explicit process for how they make decisions; sometimes the decision is based on status; sometimes on majority rule; and sometimes on an assumption that. If no one voices objections, then there is agreement.

There is clearly great danger in equating a lack of objections with agreement, because experience shows that people do not voice objections for a variety of different reasons:

- 📦 they are still thinking;
- 📦 they haven't fully understood the proposal;
- 📦 they don't want to appear foolish by asking a question
- 📦 they want to see if others have objections before they state theirs;
- 📦 there is a certain intimidation because of the person who made the suggestion (it can be a strong leader, an authority, a friend, a strong advocator, someone they don't want get into conflict with, etc.);
- 📦 they don't think a decision is actually being made;
- 📦 they don't think that have are expected to agree or give their opinion;
- 📦 they believe the decision is the responsibility of others;
- 📦 they have doubts but don't feel comfortable raising them;
- 📦 they need clarification before giving an opinion;
- 📦 they feel they missed an explanation so they refrain from participating;
- 📦 they have already expressed their thoughts in that meeting, or they did it before and do not consider their views were taken into account.

All these reasons may lie behind the silence, a silence with potentially dangerous impact on the implementation of decisions reached. The danger lies in the fact that those who failed to express their views at the time of decision will express them later during the implementation of the decision. This might end up postponing implementation, blocking it, or reducing the motivation of the silent ones to execute the decision.



## WHAT IS THE FIST-FIVE?

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The Fist-Five is a Decision-Making process based on consensus, where everybody is able to express his/her thoughts around a decision in a simultaneous voting process.

*Note: A comparative analysis of consensus and majority rule has been done within the context of voluntary groups who are responsible for implementing decisions they have made. See it at the end of this tool.*

## WHY IS THE FIST-FIVE A GOOD DECISION-MAKING PROCESS?

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Fist-Five is based on consensus, and we recommend consensus as the best means of making decisions for most teams.

The Fist-Five provides positive ownership for decisions; it encourages a healthy dialogue and it allows issues to surface and to be aired. Because it is announced, people become aware that a decision is about to be made and this forces those involved in the decision to express clearly what the proposal is, and what they are voting on.

Team members are then given time to reflect, which helps them really ponder the pros and cons of the decision, and, because the vote is simultaneous, the vote of senior members does not affect the decision of others. Further, the voting system provides a full range of acceptance (higher-lower) thus allowing people to voice smaller objections that might otherwise not be heard at the time of the decision-making, but that might be raised later, and might negatively impact implementation of the decision.

As people are asked to express what is behind their vote, new information is brought into the room to be considered and discussed.

Finally, no decision is made until the objections are resolved, and the issue is ready for implementation.

## HOW DOES IT WORK?

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The person who has a proposal to be decided on, spells out the suggestion in a way that only allows a “Yes-or-No” answer.



Example:







- 🏠 We should hire a new PR advisor.

Example of a question that is **NOT** correctly phrased:

- 🏠 Should we, or should we not, hire a new PR advisor?

He/she gives the team half a minute to reflect if necessary and then asks them to vote using their fingers on the count of three.

The scale is as follows:

	<b>FIST</b>	I can't live with the decision; I will block it or leave the group.
	<b>ONE Finger</b>	I don't like it but I <b>won't block it</b> ; Don't count on me for a lot of energy.
	<b>TWO Fingers</b>	I'm not excited by the decision; it's <b>okay</b> ; but I will do some work to support it.
	<b>THREE Fingers</b>	I think the decision is <b>good</b> ; I will get involved.
	<b>FOUR Fingers</b>	I think the decision is <b>great</b> ; I will work hard to support it.
	<b>FIVE Fingers</b>	I think the decision is <b>fantastic</b> ; I may leave the group if it is not made.

By using this method to visually test the potential for consensus, everyone can see where everyone else is on the decision continuum.



The next step is for the ‘owner’ of the suggestion to ask the people on opposite ends (those who gave it a fist, a one, two or a five) to express what is behind their thinking. This will uncover and bring in new information that should be included in the process.

For example, one member may have voted with a 2 because he already had hired a PR person in the past with poor results. The rest of the team may not be aware of this history. So then the team can explore why the former experience was unsatisfying, in order to learn from it and avoid making the same mistakes twice.

Sometimes a person is opposed to a decision and does not know exactly why; that is, he/she cannot give a good rationale, and for example says, “I just don’t think this is the right decision”. A way to help the person explore his/her thoughts, which may even be unconscious for him/her, is to ask, “What has to be true for you to accept this decision?” In this way, the person can think and contribute some more information.

This process may be more time-consuming than a simple majority vote, but it enriches the decision and ultimately makes the implementation easier. The team will come to a new consensus or make a different and better decision.

## **SO WHAT?**

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As an ARL Team Coach, be on the lookout for a good opportunity to introduce this tool to the team you are coaching. As the team members discuss their work there will be issues where members have different opinions, so select an issue that is hindering progress, and tell them that you have a most helpful process you want to share with them. Then, having demonstrated the tool, you can engage the team in a discussion of how the tool is different from their typical decision-making process.

Further, encourage the team members to use the tool on their own, without waiting for you to suggest they use it.

(a comparative analysis follows)



## COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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### RULES

#### Consensus

- 🏠 Participants must speak one at a time.
- 🏠 Seek alternatives. Encourage creativity.
- 🏠 Make everyone responsible for the process.
- 🏠 A decision is made when everyone can "live with" it; no-one is blocking it

#### Majority Rule

- 🏠 Limit discussion.
- 🏠 Vote/Majority Wins!

### CHARACTERISTICS

#### Consensus

- 🏠 Guarantees "win-win" decisions.
- 🏠 Builds power and commitment for action.
- 🏠 Increases ownership and involvement.
- 🏠 Encourages open communication.
- 🏠 Avoids arguments and defensiveness.
- 🏠 Allows for diversity and disagreement.
- 🏠 Requires that everyone can "live with" the decision.
- 🏠 Ensures action.
- 🏠 Promotes better decisions.
- 🏠 Can be time-consuming during a meeting.
- 🏠 Can demoralize the group if continual blockers are not skillfully confronted.

#### Majority Rule

- 🏠 Promotes "win-lose" (majority-minority decisions).
- 🏠 Drives passive members further to the sidelines.
- 🏠 Decreases ownership for the "losers".
- 🏠 Decreases sensitivity; interferes with listening and empathy.
- 🏠 Creates deadlocks and defensiveness.
- 🏠 Obstructs exploration of other alternatives.
- 🏠 Causes members to drop out or resign; divides or destroys the group.
- 🏠 Slows or stops action.
- 🏠 Results in poorer decisions.
- 🏠 Requires more time and energy for implementation.
- 🏠 Causes Stress and Low Morale. Arouses anger that disrupts meetings.