

Consensus (which does not mean unanimity)

Consensus means overwhelming agreement. And, it is important that consensus be the product of a good-faith effort to meet the interests of all stakeholders. The key indicator of whether or not a consensus has been reached is that everyone agrees they can live with the final proposal; that is, after every effort has been made to meet any outstanding interests. Thus, consensus requires that someone frame a proposal after listening carefully to everyone's interests. Interests, by the way, are not the same as positions or demands. Demands and positions are what people say they must have, but interests are the underlying needs or reasons that explain why they take the positions that they do.

Pillar-1: High Conceptual Level

I was surprised that critical deliberations were taking place with no preparation or follow-up planned . . . the Oval Office debate was a free-swinging affair, and the freest swinger of all was the President's Chief of Staff, John Sununu. . . . He cut people off in mid-sentence and pursued his pet tangents, a behaviour . . . that did not seem to bother the President. Bush listened, spoke little . . . repeated that the plotters had to express a clear intention to restore democracy . . . and then brought the meeting to a close (Powell 1995--418).

Pillar-2: Prudent Consensus Approach

After the inauguration, the Clinton national security team gathered . . . for the first time. The issue was Bosnia. . . . Tony Lake, the new National Security Advisor, sat in the chairman's seat, but did not drive the meeting. Warren Christopher, the Secretary of State, sat on one side of Lake, somewhat passively . . . lawyerlike, simply [waiting] for his client group to decide what position he was to defend. Les Aspin [Secretary of Defence] flanked Lake on the other side. He did not try to lead either, and when Aspin did speak, he usually took the discussion into tangents to skirt the immediate issue. Vice President Gore arrived after we had been talking for over an hour, and we had to shuffle around the table to find a chair for him. . . . The President showed up a little later. . . . At subsequent meetings, the discussions continued to meander like graduate-student bull sessions or the think-tank seminars. . . . Backbenchers sounded off with the authority of cabinet officers. I was shocked one day to hear one of Tony Lake's subordinates, who was there to take notes, argue with him in front of the rest of us (Powell, 1995).

Pillar-3: Vigilant decision management

Having suffered through endless, pointless, mindless time-wasters for years, I had evolved certain rules for holding meetings. First, everyone got a chance to recommend items for the agenda beforehand, but I controlled the final agenda, which I distributed before the meeting. Once a meeting started, no one was allowed to switch the agenda. Everyone knew that the meeting would last exactly one hour. The first five minutes and the last ten minutes belonged to me. In those first five minutes, I reviewed why we were meeting and what had to be decided by the end of the session. For the next twenty minutes, participants were allowed to present their positions, uninterrupted. . After that, we had a

free-for-all to strip away posturing, attack lame reasoning, gang up on outrageous views, and generally have some fun. Fifty minutes into the hour, I resumed control, and for five minutes summarized everyone's views as I understood them. Participants could take issue with my summation for one minute. In the last four to five minutes, I laid out the conclusions and decision to be presented as the consensus of the participants (Powell 1995).