Chairing with consensus

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Up front

• These are my opinions, not IETF dictum (as if we ever have that). But:
  • RFC 7282 did get some good vetting and agreement.
  • These things have been successful.

• This is part of a bigger picture on how to manage WGs.
  • Most of us are engineers, not managers.
  • Managing volunteers isn’t corporate management.
  • More future sessions on WG management to come.
Why consensus?

- Consensus is a means to an end.
  - We’re doing technical work. Some choices are actually worse than others.
  - Making sure all voices are heard because just one person might be right.
  - We want to minimize politicking (packing votes, bad compromises, etc.).

- Rough consensus is to deal with actual engineering compromises.
  - Full consensus can go on forever
    - Engineering needs finite time.
  - Engineering is never perfect.
    - There’s a lot of risk/reward management.
  - Eventually we need to say, “Yeah, we get it, but we’re taking the risk anyway.”
Rough consensus means chair responsibility

A chair has to be able to:

• Decide that somebody is in the rough.
• Notice vote-packing and reject it.
• Put own opinion aside.
  • That includes the ability to declare yourself in the rough.
• Use good technical judgment.
  • No, that doesn’t conflict with the previous point.
• Be willing to take the heat if important people disagree.
  • There’s nothing wrong with getting appealed.
• Follow the discussion and do “active listening”.

“Active listening”: Move discussion to conclusion

• As discussion goes along, say what you think you know
  • “Sounds like the only objection is A” or “I believe X is in the rough”
  • If you’re wrong, you’ll hear it, and that’s good
  • If you don’t say where you are, arguments will repeat

• If you’re not sure what someone means, ask
  • Encouraging active discussion gets outcomes faster

• If you haven’t heard a response to a point, ask
  • The point isn’t to let people shout into the void

• Don’t ask questions you already know the answer to
  • Moves the discussion away from conclusion
  • This includes hums with choices that you know have support
Can we talk about hums?

- Remember, we’re avoiding votes
  - One person might have the showstopper, or obvious solution
  - Some hums are just anonymous votes
- If you need a multi-option hum, you probably need more discussion
  - What happens if you get a few quiet hums for choices 2 and 63?
- Don’t do “feel-good” hums
  - Trains people to think that majority can bully the minority
“Calling”

• A chair “calling for” consensus – Blech
  • The whole discussion is to achieve consensus
  • Makes it sound like a vote
  • Still OK to confirm, but asking for objections better

• A chair “calling” consensus at the end (or better, during) is good
  • Brings finality to the discussion
  • If you blew it, it gets fixed now
More Discussion