

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