ITU**WTSA-20**
GENEVA**2022**
1– 9 March 2022
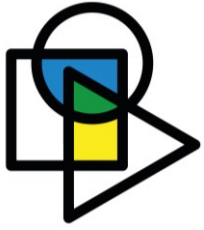Geneva, Switzerland

The Art of Reaching Consensus
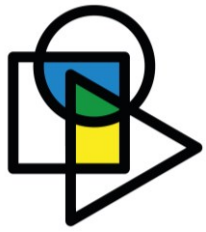
Reinhard.Scholl@itu.int
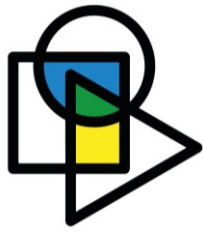Telecommunication Standardization Bureau
10 March 2022

Outline

1. **Consensus: What is it?**
2. The Art of Reaching Consensus
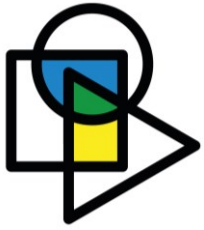3. Your Role as a Chair(man)/Leader

ITU makes many decisions by consensus – but not all

- Some decisions require:
  - 70% majority
  - Simple majority (=50%)
  - One Member State to oppose stops TAP
  - Two Member States to oppose stops AAP
  - Unopposed agreement

ITU does not define consensus

- "Collection of the basic texts adopted by the Plenipotentiary Conference":
  - A dozen references to "consensus" but no definition
  - Example: "ITU-R and ITU-T recommendations are the result of the collective efforts of all those taking part in the standardization process within ITU and are adopted by consensus by the members of the Union;" (Decision 12, PP-18)

What is "consensus"?

- My favorite: "There is consensus that there is no consensus on what consensus is" (former ITU-T Study Group Chairman)
- I think Merriam-Webster got it wrong:

"general agreement" is ok, but it's not "unanimity"

consensus noun, often attributive

Save Word

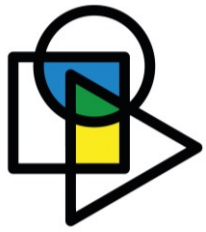con·sen·sus | \ kən-ˈsen(t)-səs \

Definition of *consensus*

1 **a** : general agreement : UNANIMITY
// the *consensus* of their opinion, based on reports ... from the border
— John Hersey

  b : the judgment arrived at by most of those concerned
// the *consensus* was to go ahead

2   : group solidarity in sentiment and belief
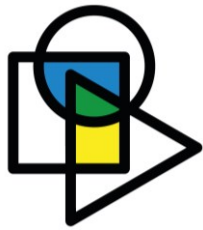
ITU-R (!) has a footnote defining "consensus"

- "4 Consistent with the United Nations practice, consensus is understood to mean the practice of adopting decisions by general agreement in the absence of any formal objection and without a vote."

  - Source: resolution ITU-R 1-8 "Working methods for the Radiocommunication Assembly, the Radiocommunication Study Groups, the Radiocommunication Advisory Group and other groups of the Radiocommunication Sector (1993-1995-1997-2000-2003-2007-2012-2015-2019)"
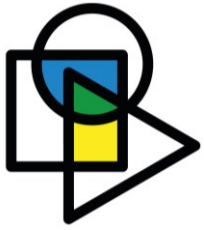
ISO/IEC definition of "Consensus"

- ISO/IEC Guide 2 definition (most often cited in ITU-T context):

"General agreement, characterized by the absence of sustained opposition to substantial issues by any important part of the concerned interests and by a process that involves seeking to take into account the views of all parties concerned and to reconcile any conflicting arguments.

Note : Consensus need not imply unanimity."

# Unanimity vs unopposed agreement vs consensus

- **Definitions/explanations:**
  - Unanimity: everyone is of the same opinion
  - Unopposed agreement: one single voice against a proposal stops it
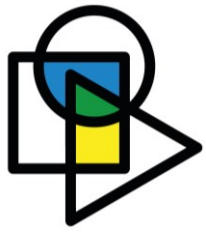 - Consensus: see previous slide

- **Examples:**
  - 1 in favor, 99 don't care:
    - **Unanimity: no**
    - **Unopposed agreement: yes**
    - **Consensus: yes**

  - 99 in favor, 1 against:
    - **Unanimity: no**
    - **Unopposed agreement: no**
    - **Consensus: Chairman can declare consensus**
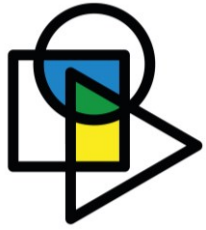
The basis for ITU's consensus principle

- Best practice
- Past practice
- Culture:
  - no losers, only winners
  - Everyone equally unhappy
  - Everyone equally happy

Consensus is the chairman's judgement call

- Chairman must make every effort to reach consensus
- But at the end of the day it is the **chairman who decides whether consensus has been reached or not**
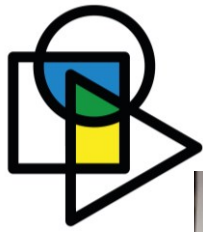 - Use gavel to indicate that decision has been taken
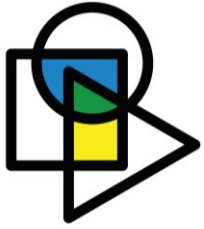
Case study: TSAG creates ITU-T SG20

- TSAG meeting 2-5 June 2015:
  - In favor of creating ITU-T SG20: 22 (I believe it was) Member States and Sector Members
  - Against: 6 Member States

  Chair declared consensus

Case study: WTSA-20 vote (9 March 2022)

ITU WTSA-20
GENEVA 2022
1–9 March 2022
Geneva, Switzerland

TELLERS' REPORT
(Voting by Secret Ballot)

Ballot papers deposited (A): 100

Invalid ballot papers (B): 0

Abstentions (C): 28

Delegations present and voting: (D = A – (B + C)): 72

Announcement of Results by Chair:
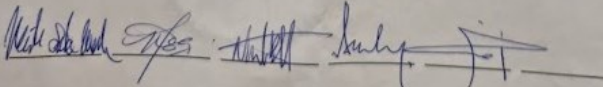
Required majority (E = 50%+1 of D) : 37
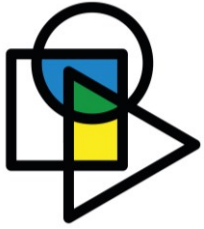
For (F): 53

Against (G): 19

Abstentions (C): 28

Adopted (if F > E)
Otherwise rejected. If tie, also rejected (GR 117)

Defer to a subsequent meeting if C> (F+G+C) +2

Tellers' signatures:
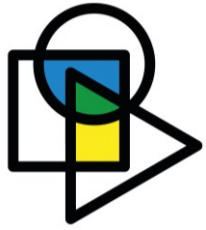
- Chair declared consensus
- Subsequent vote:
  - In favor: 53
  - Against: 19
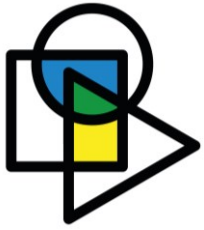 - Abstentions: 28

Outline

1. Consensus: What is it?
2. **The Art of Reaching Consensus**
3. Your Role as a Chair(man)/Leader

#1: Understand the endgame

- A Recommendation will fail to be approved if

  - 1 Member State (TAP), or
  - 2 Member States (AAP)

  are opposed

- So best not to waste time if opposition is strong

#2: Summarize

- Ensure all parties understand clearly the proposal to be decided on
- Summarizing can be tough – but don't do without
- A lot is gained if parties agree where they disagree

- Two types of summaries of difficult issues in written reports:
  - 1 sentence: "after a long discussion it was decided to …"
  - Detailed: <x> said, <y> said, …
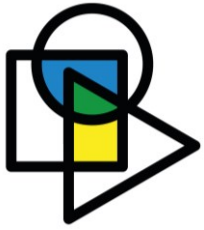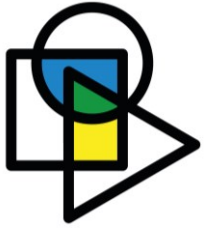
#3: How you ask a question matters

- "Is anyone objecting?"

vs

- "Is anyone supporting?"
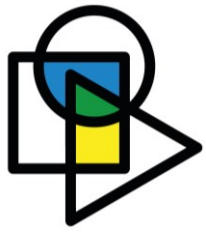
#4: Stating vs asking

- "Is anyone objecting?"

    vs

- "I see no objection"

- "Is anyone supporting?"

    vs

- "I see no support"
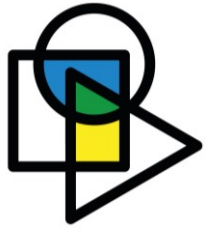
#5: Let's have a coffee break

- Useful when parties almost agree and where offline discussions help
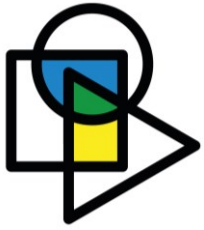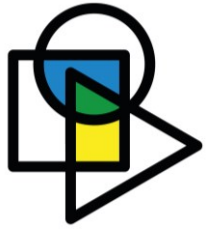
#6: Create an adhoc group

- Form antagonists into an adhoc group
  - <u>they</u> have to find a solution
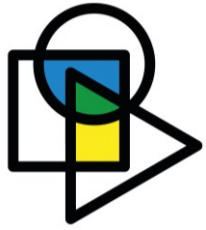- Useful if you feel that there is still some time needed to resolve differing views

#7: Chair proposes a solution

- The Chairman's proposal could be
  - a compromise
    - Note that a compromise might not necessarily be the best solution
  - something brand new
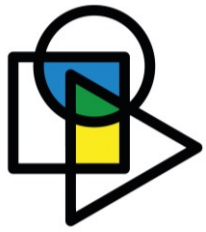 - close to one side of the issue

#8: Let's sleep on it

- It may be too early to resolve different views
- Encourage the different parties
  - to sleep on it and continue the discussion in the session the next day
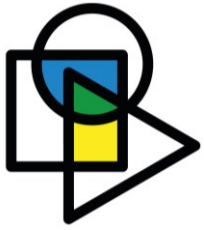 - to continue discussing the issue off-line, e.g. at a dinner in the restaurant

#9: Consensus by exhaustion

- Past midnight, people get tired ... and might agree
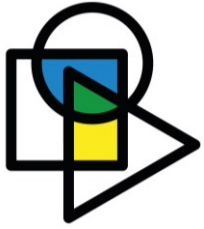
#10: If in doubt, leave it out

- Instead of trying to get agreement on controversial text, just delete it.

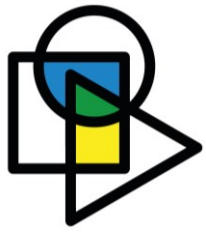# #11: Four-letter word: "vote" – don't say it but remember it

- ITU membership doesn't like to vote …
- … and hardly ever votes
- But the threat of vote is always in the room and can influence the discussion

#12: Magic words

- "normally"
- "as appropriate"

#13: Show of hands (tricky)

- Might look like voting
- Difficult to interpret
  - Not every participant carries the same weight
  - What is the conclusion if 70/30? Or 80/20?
- "Who is in favor" vs "Who is against" produces different results
- A show of hands can be useful if the Chairman is trying to make it visible to all that it's just 1 or 2 opponents against 150 people
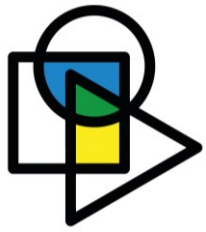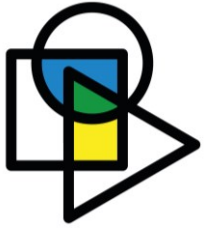
#14: Reopening an issue? Think twice about it

- Reopening an issue may be hard to avoid, but you have the choice to say "no"
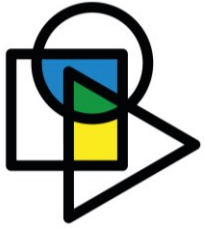
#15: Put objections in meeting report

- "<company/country> requested that the following statement be recorded in this meeting report: <statement> …"
  - Written record that <company/country> does not support the proposal but does not stand in the way of reaching consensus either

#16: Put objections in ITU-T Recommendation
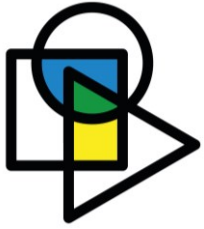
- Include a statement in the text of the Recommendation that <company/country> has expressed a reservation
- A rather extreme solution
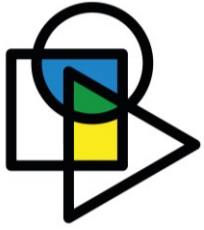
Outline

1. Consensus: What is it?

2. The Art of Reaching Consensus

3. **Your Role as a Chair(man)/Leader**

The term "Chair(man)" refers to anyone chairing a meeting, including a Study Group, a Question, an ad hoc group, an editing group, etc.

#17: Have integrity

- <u>Be</u> fair & impartial
- <u>Be seen</u> as fair & impartial
- Earn trust - a long process
- Wear only one hat – that of the Chairman
- View yourself as working for ITU, not for your company/government
- View the delegates as customers
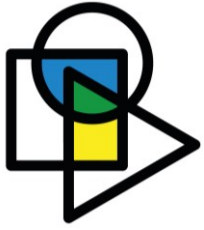
#18: Listen actively

- … to the delegates on both sides of an issue
- … to the SG Chairman, the WP Chairman, the Rapporteur, the SG management team, and get their advise
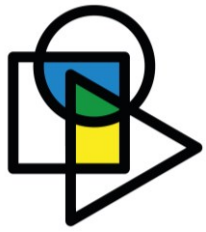- Consult with your TSB Counsellor
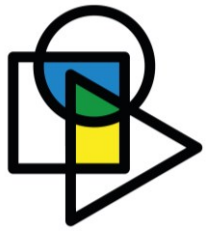
#19: Separate people from the problem

- focus on the underlying interests of both sides, rather than staking out firm positions
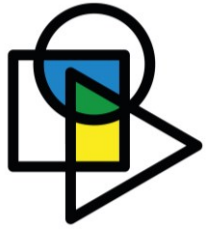- explore all possible options before making a decision
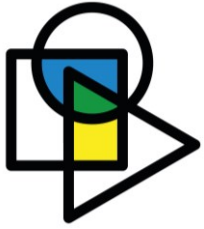
#20: Be visible

- Attend the relevant meetings including ad hoc meetings
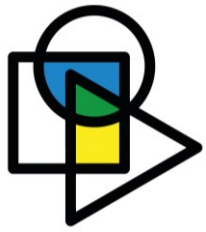- Don't hide in the office or behind a computer

#21: Build a rapport with everyone

- Shake hands, have dinner with delegates …
- Make sure that delegates of opposing sides do the same and check out each other

# #22: Be actively involved

- Be **actively** involved <u>before and during</u> the meeting period:
    - Understand the issues, the various perspectives, the strength of differing views, who holds them etc.
    - Identify potential opposition ahead of time, spend effort to understand their position, develop good relationship with them
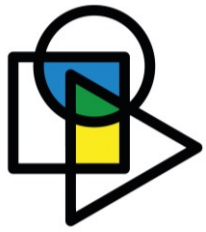
#23: Involve new delegates

- Make an effort to get to know new participants in your group

- Consider having "newbie" sessions at e.g. the study group level or even at the Question level
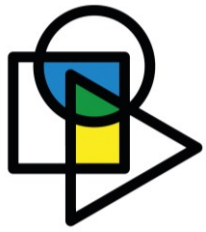
#24: Don't have "[unresolved issues]" be brought to plenary

- Rapporteur could say: I can't reach agreement in my Question, so I will forward the issue to the Working Party or to the Study Group plenary for decision
  - But: why should reaching agreement be any easier in a much larger WP or SG plenary?
- However, some participants may not want to compromise at the Question level because they may want to use their position as "negotiating mass" for other issues or want to escalate the debate to a higher level
- Nevertheless: Rapporteur should try hard to reach agreement in their Question
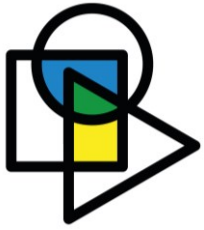
#25 Be responsive

- If a delegate asks you a question (e.g. via email), do respond
- If you need time to find an answer, do send a short acknowledgment that you received the question and that you will get back later
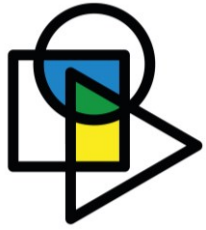
#26: Be sensitive to languages

- Many delegates don't have English as a native language
- Talk slowly, and have other people talk slowly
- Make sure everyone understands the issue at hand and where you are going
- Ensure that <u>written</u> proposals by non-native English speakers are not defeated through eloquent <u>verbal</u> interventions from fluent English speakers
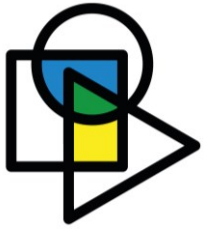
#27: Understand cultural differences
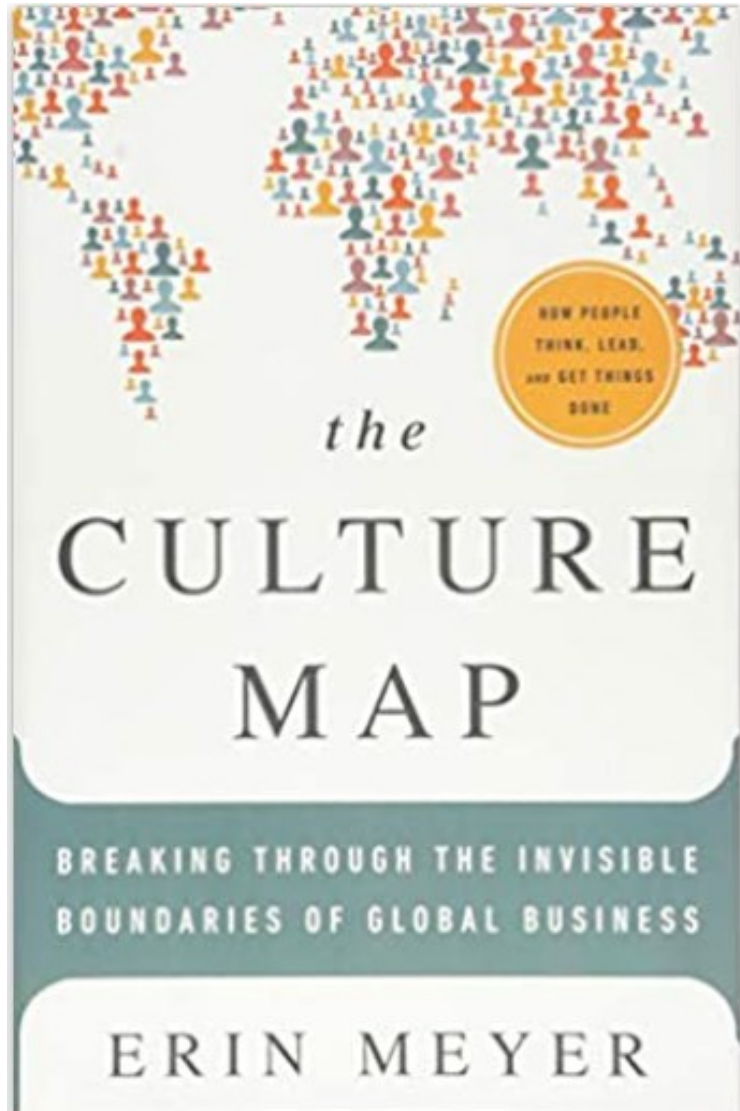
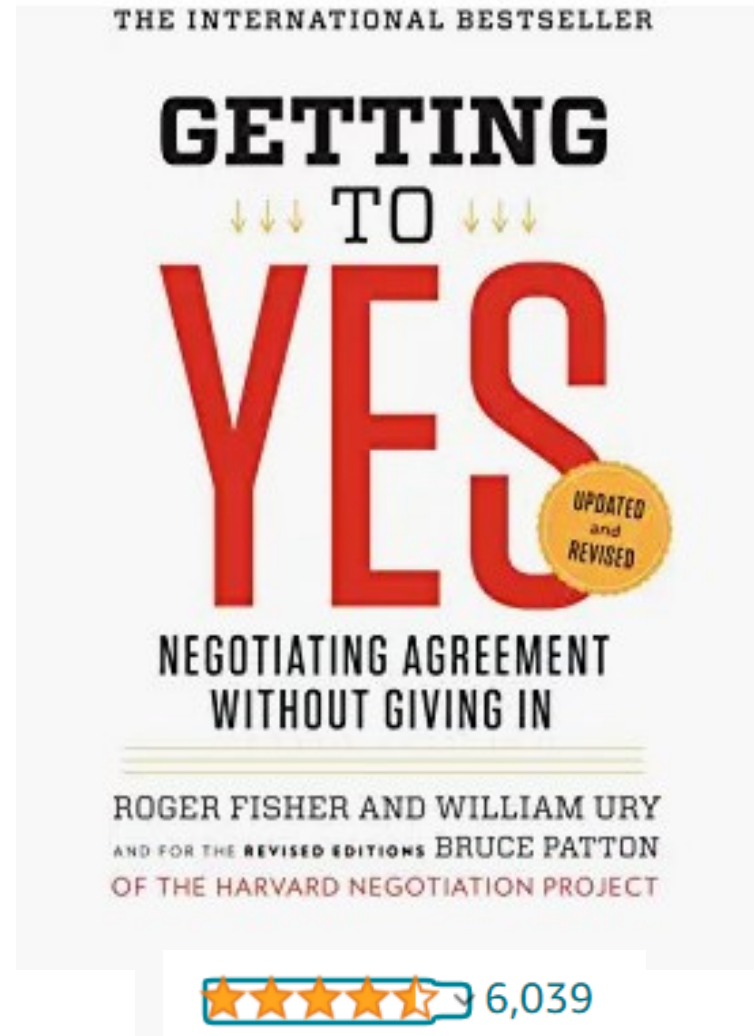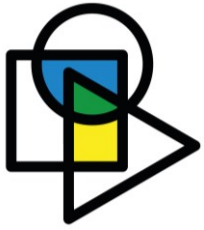- Brilliant book on (business) culture

#28: Always be polite

- In some cultures you can be rather direct of saying that you don't agree with something …
- … but in other cultures you don't easily voice different opinions openly

- In any case: always be polite
- Don't even criticize people behind their back

Getting to YES

THE INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLER

GETTING
↓↓↓ TO ↓↓↓
YES

UPDATED and REVISED

NEGOTIATING AGREEMENT
WITHOUT GIVING IN

ROGER FISHER AND WILLIAM URY
AND FOR THE **REVISED EDITIONS** BRUCE PATTON
OF THE HARVARD NEGOTIATION PROJECT

6,039

Have fun, and good luck!