

International Chairs Course – week 4 – *Chairing Council Meetings*

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These notes are rough only and intended to accompany the video of the session which you'll find on YouTube [here](#).

Chairing Council Meetings

last week *preparation* for council meetings

this week *chairing* council meetings

at Outer – Inner – Secret levels

Outer = identifying stages in the process of coming to consensus

specifically in the context of council meetings

You will need to customise according to your situation

Chairing – Outer Level

presentation (of the agenda item)

'If I had an hour to save the world I would spend 59 minutes defining the problem and one minute finding solutions'

Einstein

for each item -Start by defining problem / or outlining a vision

context

not necessarily done by you

outline the situation that needs to be addressed

give some background and history

remind people of what decisions they have made before

what decision needs to be made today? And why?

you might present it as a particular question

you can be clear about the question even if you're not clear about the answer

what spiritual principles need to be taken into consideration?

what is at stake?

what are the opportunities that are present?

now and not later

what threats are present?

lay out the facts

in as neutral a way as possible

so they can come to their own assessment

beware of presenting things according to the outcome you prefer

omission

esp. in financial presentations

'people will smell a rat'

4th Precept – truthfulness

are there other relevant facts that others might be able to add?

round out the picture

In sum you need to bring the topic to life

general discussion

open space for responses, questions & clarifications

ask people what they think

Already start looking for common ground

Looking for a '*coincidence of Perspective*'

proposal

it is important that the proposal stage *is a separate stage*

beware of going straight to a proposal

remember that your council probably won't have had the same amount of time to think about it as you will have had

they'll have a reasonable need time to catch up

get their head around the issue

their heart as well

the decision will then more likely to come from broader perspective and thereby be more creative

exception: if it is very simple and obvious

remember – it might be to you but not to others

2 options here:

1: you ask: *what do you think we should do?*

advantages: people tend to think more deeply

thereby engage more deeply

they'll be more on board with the decision

allows for proposals that you hadn't thought of yet

disadvantages: tends to be slower (in the short term)

you have less control over the outcome

2: you, or someone else, outlines a proposal

advantages: tends to be quicker (in the short term)

keeps things more focussed

disadvantages: people narrow in on your proposal

people can react to you personally

might be other better proposals that would emerge with more space

discussion about the proposal

it can be helpful to speak last

people can't get into a position in relation to your position

i.e. can't simply agree or disagree with you

particularly helpful if there is someone who habitually reacts to you by taking the opposite stance

e.g. whatever I say they say the opposite

or react by agreeing!

members need to take a position in relation to the issue itself

not to you personally

they need to think deeply about it

If you are making a proposal it's an opportunity to *test your thinking*

to make sure it's the best proposal

allow space for people to persuade each other

invite people to speak

(reminder from last week)

clarify people's position

the 'go round'

where everyone has a turn to speak to the issue at hand

this ensures everyone has a chance to speak to the matter

esp. when it's an important decision

no one is able to sit on the fence

test for consensus

clarify that you are moving from discussion of a proposal to decision on the proposal

signpost what stage you are at in the process

e.g. *'we've heard about the situation,*

we have discussed the proposal

(might need to restate the proposal with modifications from discussion)

now we need to decide

how do we all feel about this? do we want to go with it?

You often go backwards and forwards between discussion and proposal

Modify the proposal based on the discussion

Have to keep representing the current proposal that is being discussed / or decided on

the 'go round'

remember you are looking for the *consent* of all the members

there are degrees of agreement / disagreement

I have four – I've seen as many as 8 degrees of agreement delineated

i. *wholehearted agreement*

ii. *declare reservation*

= the softest form of disagreement.

The person wishes to be heard and put their case

if the meeting is not persuaded, they agree to allow the proposal to move forward, having been heard.

iii. *stand aside*

= someone has a serious disagreement with the proposal, but is willing to let the motion pass.

In standing aside, the individual is also agreeing to let the emotions and consequences pass, so there isn't a "grudge" or "disgruntlement."

in *declaring reservations & standing aside* the person agrees to support the decision by their actions, since the meeting has decided it is the path forward.

iv. *block*

= a participant is not willing to let the decision go forward

'over my dead body'

A block is a last resort, and has considerable weight and big effects

It should only be used when significant harm to the organisation or individuals is perceived

The blocker holds significant responsibility for creating understanding and solutions

ask the ones who are blocking for their objections and possible solutions

A guide is that an individual should only use three or four blocks in a lifetime

I've never been in a situation where this has happened

28 years in Triratna

Maybe I've lived a charmed life?

the proposal needs to be *good enough*, it will rarely be perfect

gauge what the mood of the meeting is

If there is a significant number of people with reservations, or standing aside, then there is not yet consensus.

voting last resort

indicative of high level of disagreement / disharmony

something has become intractable

you've gone round & round

very serious

if voting you need to consult more widely:

president

area council

experienced order members

you are part of a whole

what you do will spill out from the meeting into the Order & Movement

in Bhante's phrase our centres are '*autonomous but not independent*'

When decision is made state what has just happened

Again, signpost where you are in the process

(even if everyone knows!)

You have moved from coincidence of will to coincidence of strategy

magic moment

No mean feat!

rejoice

Might single people out for rejoicing who have work on the item

minute the decision

ideally capture it there and then when it is fresh

recording devices can be helpful

have someone else taking minutes if at all possible

you can check afterwards

get them out as soon as you can

so the meeting is fresh in people's mind

make sure it's clear who is responsible for each action point

they might need reminding

it's a good idea to email the actioner separately with the minute and the action

not everyone will be taking notes

get on with *your* action points!

Don't leave them till a day before your next meeting!

Follow up

Might need to check in with council members who weren't present at the meeting

if it's an important decision might be wise to check with people who weren't present

recap:

- 1 presentation of the item
- 2 general discussion
- 3 proposal
- 4 discussion on the proposal
- 5 test for consensus

Consensus decision making doesn't mean that as chair you can't have a strong radical vision

actioning it might take a bit longer than you'd like!

Questions:

Q. Are any of the stages missing or neglected in your council's decision making process?

Q. Does your council sometimes get stuck in a particular stage?

Q. Is there any learning in this for you? Something you could do differently?

Inner level

awareness of your own character

how people hear you

how you come across to others

e.g. I come across much stronger than it feels to me

more bossy

'why is everyone reacting to me?'

I need to preface what I say with qualification e.g. 'just an idea'

awareness of other people's character

e.g. not everyone can think fast

'shouldn't confuse quickness of thought with soundness of thought'

some people need to think out loud

others don't

different tolerances for risk

risk is omnipresent

not allowing the risk averse to stymie consensus decision-making

e.g. freedom of Covid

you can't know how it's going to work out

Duke Ellington

Not just first trombone

Not generic person

A particular person

sometimes the conversation is not about what it's about

there is a subtext / undercurrent

e.g. my parents arguing vociferously about where the kitchen scissors should be kept!

listen very deeply

what's the real issue here?

e.g. it might be status

someone wants to be the top dog

interpersonal dynamics

how we relate to each other

brings up all sorts of forces

can become unworkable

name it as such when that is happening

not harmony *at all costs*

the cost might be to you personally!

temptation to take it on personally

overly manage people

to smooth things over

there is working *with*, and there is working *around*

only thing I regret in my time as chair – I did too much of that

don't want to enable or facilitate someone else's unskilfulness!

say: *are you okay?*

don't argue, discuss!

Hear from Bhante

Fifteen Points for Old and New Order Members – 1993

https://youtu.be/-zOd2bff_ko

you might need to referee!

the Power Mode can be Subtle

not necessarily out and out bullying or making threats

conquest through argument

we might be clever with words

nothing wrong with that

highly valuable skill

however, we can use that to unfair advantage

over someone who is less articulate but who may have a good point to make

or, a reasonable question to ask

emotional manipulation

council members will in most cases be our friends

they might even be our husband or wife!

withdrawal of affection

give someone the cold shoulder if they disagree with your ideas

talking in such a way they it's clear that you will be upset if someone disagrees with you

no one will want to wound you

'We don't want to upset him, so we better do what he wants!'

manipulation of the decision process itself

the chair is usually the one who oversees the decision-making process

e.g.

not allow sufficient time for proper conversations / discussion

one could arrange the council meeting at a time when the person who might object to our proposal won't be able to attend

ganging up on someone who disagrees with you

you can go into a meeting having already talked to other members of your council

isolate the person who disagrees with you

make it know that their point of view is not going to be heard

a habit that from comes from the democratic processes that we are familiar with

the more people you have on your side the more able you are to get your proposal through when it comes to a vote

majority rules

try to manoeuvre yourself into the majority position

conflict is inevitable

don't try and *keep it out or keep it down or keep it clean*

create a space where it can be aired

better out than in

there *will* be bust-ups and barneys from time to time!

Often the prelude to some new perspective or strategy emerging

The liberation of energy

the prelude to a deeper engagement with the Dharma life

follow up

check in with people afterwards

council meetings can be bruising sometimes

are you okay after that?

let people know that you care about them personally

make that explicit

might not be possible to communicate in the meeting itself

(you have to care about them personally in order to do this!)

rejoice in people

just wanted to let you know that I really appreciated your maturity and intelligence in the meeting just now

chairing as an act of friendship

Secret level

listen very deeply

stay in touch with what it is all really for!

feel where the energy and life (and inspiration and clarity) is

direct attention to that

might be from anyone in the room

the person themselves might not recognise the importance of their contribution

you might need to highlight it!

When done collaboratively it can be intensely creative & intensely enjoyable & intensely energising

something emerges that you could never have come up with on your own

third other of consciousness

spiral conditionality arising in a collective

superficial differences of perspective are of relatively little significance

when it is happening like this you don't want to be anywhere else!

in talking about strategy the coincidence of wills is intensified

The Dharma comes to life

Have to reestablish principles each time

Not merely principles & ideas

Liberative force

The principles & ideas are clarified & animated

experienced as a *flow of energy*

the dakinis dance