

## 2 – Understanding Consensus Decision Making

### What is Consensus Decision Making?

*consensus* simply means = ‘a general agreement’

consensus decision making doesn't mean that everyone involved necessarily agrees but it does mean everyone *consents*

*consent* = ‘permission for something to happen, or agreement to do something’

no-one is forced to agree to something that they don't think is right

a decision is made when everyone in the decision-making body consents

→ when this happens, you have moved from *a coincidence of wills* to *a coincidence of strategy*

### Why do we use Consensus Decision Making in Triratna?

A spiritual community is aspiring to move from the ‘power mode’ to the ‘love mode’

what do we mean by ‘power’ in this context?

*In this context power means simply the capacity to use force, violence being the actual use of that capacity to negate the being of another person, whether wholly or in part.’*

from Sangharakshita *The Ten Pillars, the first precept*

decision making processes that are based on power are not appropriate

it means making someone else do something that they don't want to do

unskilful in a very fundamental way

*e.g. autocratic* decision making

*e.g. democratic* decision making

where majority rules

the majority get their way

the minority don't get their way

democratic processes are appropriate in wider society but they are still based on power

decision making is different in a Spiritual Community because all its members have a spiritual commitment

we are committed to surrendering any advantage gained from the power-mode

### **Consensus Decision Making facilitates the love mode**

Because no one is forced into an action that they wouldn't freely chose

It is based on *consent*

When Love-mode / Metta is made the basis of communication lot else follows that are important factors for fruitful Consensus Decision Making:

principally there is respect for, and appreciation of, the individual

This means that:

*people listen to each other*

*There is a willingness among council members to modify their perspective*

*no one is tries to manipulate the process to get their favoured outcome*

*there is a recognition that what certain people say will carry more weight because they have more understanding, more experience or a wider perspective.*

→ consensus decision making isn't non-hierarchical

### **Consensus Decision Making enables participants to take full responsibility for their decisions**

personal responsibility is fundamental to Dharma practice

we have to take personal responsibility for our *actions & decisions*

Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar - conversion speech 1956

*I do not want any blind followers. Those who come to the Buddhist religion should come with understanding; they should consciously accept that religion.*

In order to take responsibility council members need to make decisions *from their own conscience*

On the basis of their personal integrity

The decision-making process has to enable that

Council members have to be free to do disagree to be able to meaningfully agree

Council members need to be individually accountable for those actions and decisions

for this principle to come into operation each person on the decision making body / council has a say

### Some other considerations

The reality of power-based approaches to decision making, as well as being unskilful, is that in the long-term *they simply don't work*

they don't create Sangha

they sour the atmosphere

they sow the seeds of division

people mistrust and resent the person or people they perceive as being 'in charge'

the communication that should have happened in the council meeting happens elsewhere

'back channels'

it causes division

crucially Sangha members won't be able to get their energy behind the strategy

because they have unacknowledged, unexpressed reservations they won't participate

e.g. they won't come to the classes & retreats, etc

might be out and out opposition

the strategy won't be effective

Vajrayana - three centres:

head

throat

heart

throat centre is in the middle

between

head representing intellect

heart representing feeling & emotion

shares the nature of both

Speech gives expression both to the head and the heart

thoughts and emotions  
need to talk to bring the two together

discussion enable this

force for integration

*within* people – their own psyche

and *between* people

Trying to get to situation where the proposal / strategy is animated by *conviction!*

people need the space and time to talk things through to get to conviction

necessary for members to get behind any proposal / any strategy

### **Consensus Decision Making is a spiritual practice**

Triratna – Q. why do we have all these meetings?

→ because human beings have meetings

our views come in to contact with other people's views

Brings up deep forces within us

creatives forces, also destructive and unruly forces

in Triratna we acknowledge that if we want to achieve total transformation

for self and other

we need to engage directly with these energies

we include collective decision making in our conception of what the Dharmalife is

yes, its difficult – but also hugely transformative

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Questions:

Q. Is this your understanding of consensus?

Q. How well does your council employ consensus decision making?

Q. What could improve the culture of consensus decision making in your council?