

3 – Stages in Consensus Decision Making

1 - presentation of the 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

give 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

are there any threats 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

You need to bring the topic to life

2 - general discussion

open space for responses, questions & clarifications

ask people what they think

start looking for common ground

3 - 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 and heart around the issue

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 obvious 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 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

4 - 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 without thinking – sheep!

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

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

5 - 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 re-presenting 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

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

preceptors / Kalyana mitras

other 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 a decision is made state what has just happened

Again, signpost where you are in the process

You have moved from coincidence of will to coincidence of strategy

magic moment

rejoice

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

6 - minute the decision

ideally capture it there and then when it is fresh

It is very demoralising if you've spent a lot of time discussing something and then there is disagreement about what was decided

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

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

and finally,

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!