HARMONIC GOVERNANCE - CIRCLES OF HOPE

BLUEPRINT FOR A NEW WORLD AGE

HARMONIC GOVERNANCE

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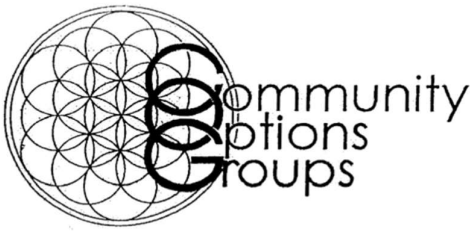

HARMONIC GOVERNANCE - CIRCLES OF HOPE

INTRODUCTION -A Blueprint for social change

A fatal flaw in our debt-money system has evolved into a top-down pyramid of financial power that has manifested in global debt at every level, poverty amidst plenty, social stress, manipulated bureaucracies, total media control, corruption of the political and judicial processes, globalised corporate monopolies, the financing of genetic and social engineering, environmental destruction in pursuit of profit, constant wars, the increasing curtailment of personal freedom and, ultimately, the power to dominate global agendas.

COGs seek solutions, not scapegoats but we will not be lured off-track by the false trails laid by a controlled media that would have us blame our global ills on everything from 'corporations' to malignant extra-terrestrials. If you haven't traced our planet's material problems back to Money, you haven't yet joined up all the dots.

The flaw referred to in our opening paragraph has allowed a relatively few international financiers to 'achieve the impossible'; to place every nation in the world in debt at the same time — and then use their media networks to convince the public that everything is OK because we 'owe it all to ourselves'. If that were truly the case we would be rich indeed from all the interest charges on more than $3 quadrillion.

As nation after nation crumbles under the sheer weight of their unnecessary debt-loads, Big Money gets 'bailed out' with trillions of taxpayers' dollars, international banks like Goldman, Sachs makes billions and the key players walk off with bonuses and dividends worth millions. The answer for the '99%' is crippling austerity programs, higher taxes, cut backs in education and medical care and government fire-sales of our hard-earned public assets, gold reserves and natural resources. We are told that the only solution is to 'borrow ourselves out of debt'!

Billion-dollar Economic Summits have produced no workable alternatives because economic "experts", senior politicians and bureaucrats fear to step

'outside the box'. Such people are wellrewarded by the current system and, quite understandably, see no benefit in changing the status quo. We would be foolhardy to believe that corrective action is going to happen from the top down. In fact, events around the world have shown that it is not our elected representatives that control our nations' political and economic affairs but a highly centralised and self-regulated banking system. The political process is now a total farce, as any telecast of parliamentary proceedings or pre-election circuses will confirm. We are, in fact, controlled by what has developed into a fraudulent pyramidal Ponzi scheme involving quadrillions of dollars, the manipulators of which now consider themselves above the law.

Fortunately, the flaw is one that can be easily repaired, as we demonstrate elsewhere on this site, but to achieve this in a peaceful and constructive manner we must first change our current political, bureaucratic and corporate models and recognise them for what they are; archaic and dysfunctional. It's time to replace them... and that, too, is not as difficult as it may first appear.

'A problem cannot be solved from the level of the problem', but as the old systems implode under their own weight, human consciousness is changing. The seeds of a new beginning are already sprouting. A new awareness is unfolding in the affairs of Humankind.

As we look back on the old millennium and the first decade of the new, we can see the devastating effect of dispersed and divided families, the frantic stresses of urbanised life, the perverted, coarse immorality of our 'entertainment' industry and our increasing separation from the healing forces of nature in its incredible diversity. We can also see how millions of people world-wide are beginning to wake up together and seek a new paradigm. We are being called out of isolation to become part of fully-functioning families, businesses, and communities. Pyramids of power are giving way to circles of hope.

BUILDING THE NEW — Circles of Hope from the grass roots up.

One of the struggles in building effective organizations that offer ethical governance is finding an efficient and reliable method of making good and timely decisions.

In democratic organizations, majority vote is the accepted standard. Majority rule, however, automatically creates a minority. This encourages factions and divisiveness rather than harmony. Majority rule encourages people to build alliances, to trade favours, and think politically rather than in terms of the best direction for the organization.

In business, decisions are generally made autocratically by the owner or manager or by a Board on behalf of investors. This can lead to poor decisions because those who execute them may not be free to express their views and thus critical information is not available in the decisionmaking process. Autocratic decision-making also discourages leadership. As with majority rule, those who are not included in the decision making may also feel less committed and thus will not enthusiastically support the organisation.

COGs recognise that social change must be combined with personal change and are deliberately designed to support and facilitate both. In the process we surrender to being part of a greater whole; we begin to participate in our own evolutionary development..

By meeting weekly or bi-monthly, friendship and support become available to us on an ongoing basis. Circles provide a space for us in which to focus on creating joy, acceptance and clarity in a rapidly transforming world.

Circles introduce us to others of like mind with whom to build a harmonious community. We experience more deeply that we are not alone. We can help create more sustainable communities and find new ways to be together, to do business, grow food, raise children, be artistic, to retire fulfillingly, to work and play together. In good times Circles can help us thrive together; in difficult times they can help us survive together. None of us is as wise as all of us!

HISTORY OF CIRCLE ORGANISATION (See Appendix I)

Circles predate pyramids. First Nations people employed them widely; and still do. Most folk dances from old civilisations reflect their influence. Peoples as diversified as the Polynesians, the Aboriginals of Australia, the early Greek culture and the ancient Brits reflected the Cosmos in their circle dances and religious structures.

Dating as far back as the 17th century, the challenge of creating strong resilient communities produced a variety of self-governance models, each building on those preceding them.

Common to all those that succeeded are the four fundamental principles of Circle Organisation that follow; and the use of Consent for decision making.

Circle Organisation using consent-based decision making is a system of governance among equivalent individuals and employs an organizational

structure based on cybernetic principles. It can also be regarded as a fractal, self-replicating I structure. That is why, once the basics are understood, the procedures at the highest level are as clear as the procedures at the grassroots level. It also doesn't require very many levels to include a great number of people.

VISION, MISSION AND AIMS (See Appendix II)

Any group planning to utilize the Circle Organisation method as their system of governance is adjured to first create a clear Vision, Mission and Aim(s) statement, in order to provide clarity to their purpose, focus to their goals- and to keep them on track. (See 'About Us' on our home page)

COG's FOUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES (For more details see Appendix III)

Four guiding principles form the foundation on which atl COG's Circles are built. They are:

1. Consent governs policy decision-making. (See Appendix IV)

The consent principle requires that a decision only be made when none of the Circle members present has a reasoned, substantial objection to making the decision.

2. Circle Organization (See Appendix V)

Circles are the primary governance unit and the up-dated format developed by COGs is formally known as Harmonic Governance. Circles are semi-autonomous and self-organizing. A circle should be of particular size; big enough for personal matters to give way to an objective approach to the subject under discussion, but small enough not to be unwieldy, so that the quiet atmosphere needed can be secured.

Each circle has its own aim(s) and formulates its own "mission statement", while holding a common vision. The element common to all COG Circles is a commitment to monetary reform, electoral/political reform and to personal growth in terms of speaking our truth and living lives of integrity. We recognise the need to concentrate on positive alternatives rather than dissipating time, energy and money on fighting the System. We use the System creatively where it provides us with a legitimate and effective voice in public affairs — and when it serves our aim of achieving solutions peacefully. Otherwise we are

governed by the realisation that this is not a battle that can be won ᵗon their turf, using their rules'

With that criteria established, COG's individual circles may be focused on as broad a spectrum as affordable housing, student debt forgiveness, eliminating our many tax burdens, building community gardens, evolving a Restorative Justice system, influencing city council on budgetary matters, protecting local water quality and control, opposing hospital cut-backs, introducing a home-composting program, supporting Farmers Markets or local potters and artists, or creating soup kitchens for the dispossessed. In other words, they are limited only by our imagination.

In rural communities the process of community-empowerment can begin with something as simple as collectively building root cellars or teaching and practicing wild-crafting, while in urban settings the focus might be on roof and verandah gardens or Emergency preparedness.

Increasingly, as we seek common sense alternatives to much of today's madness, we find ourselves opposed by ridiculous rules and tangled legislation. As individuals or small groups our voices are seldom heard. As a strong and committed community group we can make things happen for the common good and initiate the process of self-empowerment that begins with the realisation that we are all inter-connected —we are all One.

3. Linking (See Appendix III)

COGs chose seven members as being the perfect size for their purpose of harmonising and harnessing community skills, creativity and wisdom at a convenient neighbourhood level. It meets Circle Organisation criteria and allows us to meet in members' homes, providing us with a common voice with the minimum cost and inconvenience.

Of the seven members, one is elected by consent to facilitate meetings and Circles are encouraged to rotate this position every six months among willing members. The six remaining members, while supporting each other, are divided into two sets of three. The first three, together with the facilitator, give their sole attention to their own Circle, to achieve whatever the Circle's agenda calls for. The other three, while still primarily focused upon their own Circle are elected by consent to carry out a secondary role; that of acting as a link to three other Circles as they develop. They give their energy and experience to new Circles, when called for, but do not have a right to vote in them.

Those wishing to join COGs are invited to a meeting of an existing Circle and then encouraged, with the support of at least two friends, to launch their own Circle with the assistance of a 'link'

4. Elections by consent (See Appendix VII)

People are elected to functions and tasks by consent after open discussion.

Additional agreements:

To supplement the four main principles and to help maintain equivalence between participating members, the following agreements are followed:

- Everyone has a right to be part of a decision that affects them.
- Every decision may be re-examined at any time.
- No secrets may be kept.
- Everything is open to discussion, without exception.

APPENDIX I - THE HISTORY OF CIRCLE ORGANISATION

ORIGINS – The Quakers

Since the mid-1600s, the Quakers have used a method of self-government that has stood the test of time and proved highly successful. They rejected majority voting; group action being possible only when unanimity has been reached.

The Quakers, a religious group, are also known historically for founding and operating a number of large global corporations and financial institutions such as Lloyds of London, Barclay's Bank and Cadbury-Fry, these were all run under Quaker principles and funded much of the Quakers' work around the world.

Since understanding the Quaker experience yields great value, let's look at the process followed during a Quaker business meeting.

The group comes together in silence. In front sits the Clerk, the facilitator for the meeting. Beside him sits the Assistant Clerk; who writes down what is agreed upon. The Clerk reads out each subject in tum, after which all members present, both men and women, old and young, may speak to the subject, if they choose. They address themselves to the meeting and not to the facilitator, each one making a contribution to the developing train of thought.

It is the Clerk's duty, when he or she thinks the right moment has come, to read aloud a draft minute reflecting the feeling of the meeting. It's a job that calls for both experience and tact. Members, however, can — and often do — contribute to redrafting the minutes after 'first reading' to help cooperatively formulate the sense of the meeting in a way that is acceptable to all.

It sometimes happens that the Clerk feels the need for a time of quiet. Then the whole gathering will remain silent for a while, and often out of the silence will come a new thought, a reconciling solution, acceptable to everyone.

Three fundamental rules underpin the Quaker system:

1. The opinions of all members must be considered, the individual primarily considerate of the interests of the whole.
2. Solutions must be sought that everyone can accept: otherwise no action can be taken.
3. All members must be ready to act according to these decisions when unanimously made.

The spirit which underlies the first rule is altruism — a concern for others as a principal of action - and where this exists, where there is sympathy for other people's interests; where love is, there will be a spirit in which real harmony is possible.

The second point must be considered in more detail. If a particular group is unable to decide upon a plan of action acceptable to every member, it is usually condemned to inactivity; it can do nothing. This quite often happens where the majority is so small that efficient action is not possible. But in the case of a Quaker-based system there is a way out, since such a situation stimulates its members to seek a solution that everyone can accept; perhaps ending in a new proposal, which had not occurred to anyone before.

While under the party system disagreement accentuates the differences and the division becomes sharper than ever, under the above system, so long as it is realised that agreement must be reached, it activates a common search that brings the whole group closer together.

Similarly, in situations where no agreement seems possible, then under most systems this usually means that the impasse will continue for some time. Conservatism and reaction reign and no progress is possible. Experience has shown that with a system based upon Quaker principles, the contrary is true. The mutual trust that is accepted as the basis of the organisation — and which is noticeably greater when all go forward together with something to which everyone has agreed — leads inevitably to progress.

The third principle means that when agreement is reached the decision is binding on all who have made it.

SOCIOCRACY - Lester Frank Ward

The word Sociocracy is derived from the Latin and Greek words *socius* (companion) and *kratein* (to govern) and was used by the U.S. sociologist Lester Frank Ward in a paper he wrote for the Penn Monthly in 1881.

Sociocracy means rule by the "*socios*," people who have a social relationship with each other as opposed to democracy: rule by the "demos," the general mass of people.

Ward later expanded on the concept in his book *Dynamic Sociology* (1883) although rarely studied today, was very influential in his time and he developed a world-wide reputation as a ground-breaking sociologist. **He believed that a**

highly educated public was essential if a country was to be governed effectively, and he foresaw a time when the emotional and partisan nature of politics would yield to a much more effective, dispassionate and scientifically-based discussion of issues and problems. Democracy would thus, he believed, eventually evolve into a more advanced form of government, Sociocracy.

One hundred and thirty years later his pronouncement seems prophetic as, aided by modem communication technologies, his ideas begin taking root among the disenfranchised and despairing masses around the globe. Faced by poverty while inhabiting a bountiful planet and disenchanted by the false promises of both capitalism and communism, people are seeking genuine de-centralisation, recovery of personal freedoms and the humanising of our social order.

FURTHER DEVELOPMENT - Kees Boeke and 'Sociocracy'

Just before WW Il, the Dutch pacifist, educator, and peace worker, Kees Boeke, updated and greatly expanded Ward's ideas by implementing the first sociocratic organizational structure in a school in Bilthoven, Holland. It quickly became a community of 400 students and teachers — and is still in existence.

Boeke saw Sociocracy as a form of governance or management that presumes equality of individuals and is based on consensus. This equality is not expressed with the 'one man, one vote' law of democracy but rather by a group of individuals reasoning together until a decision is reached that is satisfactory to each one of them.

To make sociocratic ideals operational, Boeke used a system of circles to organise decisionmaking within a large organisation. Members of each circle were responsible for decisions within their domain. Rather than using ever larger circles to make decisions affecting more than one domain, each circle elected two representatives to a "linked" circle. It was found that such linkage maintained the efficiency of a hierarchy while maintaining basic equivalence of the members of the organization.

In May of 1945, after further extensive research into the Quaker method of governance and several years' practical experience, Boeke wrote a book entitled 'Sociocracy - Democracy as it might be'. In it he wrote, "l found by trying out this method in my school and other organizations that it really does work, provided there is recognition that the interests of others are as real and as important as one's own. If we start with this fundamental idea, a spirit of

goodwill is engendered which can bind together people from all levels of society and with the most varied points of view'.

Many may be sceptical of this possibility. They are so accustomed to a social order in which decisions are made by the majority or by a single person that they do not realise that, if a group provides its own leadership and everyone knows that only when common agreement is reached can any action be taken, quite a different atmosphere is created from that arising from majority rule.

The fact is that we have taken the present political and electoral systems for granted for so long that many people do not realise that the party system and majority rule are not an essential part of democracy. If we really wish to see the whole population united, like a big family, in which the members care for each other's welfare as much as for their own, we must set aside the quantitative principle of the right of the greatest number (sometimes as little as 50% plus 1) and find another way of organising ourselves. This solution must be truly democratic in the sense that it must enable each one of us to share in organising the community, whether local or international. But this kind of democracy will not depend on power, not even the power of the majority. It will have to be a real community-democracy, an organisation of the community by the community itself.

Before describing how the system could be made to work, we must first see what the problem really is. We want a group of persons to establish a common arrangement of their affairs which all will respect and obey. There will be no executive committee chosen by the majority, having the power to command the individual. The group itself must reach a decision and enter into an agreement on the understanding that every individual in the group will act on this decision and honour this agreement. This is referred to as the 'self-discipline of the group'. It can be compared to the self-discipline of the individual who has learned to set certain demands for himself which he obeys.

Kees Boeke added, "Ultimately, however, everything depends on a new spirit breaking through among men. May it be that, after the many centuries of fear, suspicion and hate, more and more a spirit of reconciliation and mutual trust will spread abroad. The constant practice of the art of Sociocracy and of the education necessary for it seems to be the best way in which to further this spirit, upon which the real solution of all world problems depends".

REFINING SOCIOCRACY - Gerard Endenburg

Kees Boeke had focused his attention on governance within educational institutions but under the name of Circular Organizing his system has also been

developed as a new tool for governance of many different kinds of organizations including public, private, non-profit and community organizations as well as professional associations.

In the 1960s, Boeke challenged Gerard Endenburg, a long-time student and friend, to try applying Sociocracy in Gerard's firm, Endenburg Electric, a small manufacturing company in the Netherlands. Out of that practical experience came several refinements:

As an engineer, Endenburg had teamed that in nature and in machines, if a part cannot function, it stops. It objects. Thinking by analogy, he realized that in human systems, the analogous mechanism was "consent." A person could consent to a decision that affected their ability to function. Or object.

By changing the premise from "agreement" to "no objections," Endenburg made inclusive decision-making more effective. Like parts in other systems, individuals give consent. The boiler doesn't consult with the thermostat about whether they are in "agreement" or not. The boiler works or doesn't work. By using the word "consent" he emphasized the process of resolving individual objections and avoided any religious or emotional connotations.

Further, these objections were vital to the functioning of the whole system. If one part of a system doesn't express its objections as soon as it experiences discomfort, the whole system could suddenly collapse and be irreparable.

Consider the example of the body's organs working in "consent." If one does not object as soon as it begins to fail, like the heart, the whole body will die. Thus objections had to be taken seriously.

Objections, Endenburg realized, not agreements, were the needed and necessary corrections that allowed a group to make good decisions and maintain energetic and harmonious functioning.

We should bear in mind that within the sociocratjc structure a group can decide, by consent, to use any other basis for decision-making, for some decisions.

Endenburg's aim was the introduction of inclusive decision-making because it had proven to be more effective. When people are included in decision-making, they are more committed to the decisions, and equally important, perhaps even more important; the decisions include their information about the course of action that is being decided. Decisions are thus based on all available knowledge and seek to establish harmonious and productive organizations through good decision-making.

The difference between asking for "agreement" and asking for "objections" is profound. Consensus facilitators are more likely to be searching for agreement or to start the discussion by emphasizing agreement. The mindset is to bring people together by emphasizing shared values the value of being in accord with each other.

Sociocratic facilitators specifically look for objections because asking for agreement affects the perception of participants, often adversely. It influences the kinds of solutions they will propose or accept because they fear being viewed as anti-community or uncollegial.

Sociocratic groups understand that to hone a good decision, it must be examined critically and questioned. Objections must be examined carefully in order to make a decision that can resolve all the issues that prompted the need for a decision in the first place.

COG's HARMONIC GOVERNANCE -A modern variant

Historically, Circle Organisations have been introduced into existing structures; usually those seeking an alternative, non-pyramidal form of governance that offers an ethical, efficient and reliable method of making good and timely decisions.

In the case of COGs, we shared that vision but were looking to build a Circle Organisation from scratch. We saw triple-linking as a perfect way to harness community groups into a cohesive whole and the new communication technologies as the perfect way to facilitate this. To avoid organisational paralysis due to a breakdown of electronic-based communication, emphasis was placed on the localising of individual groups and their linked Circles.

We recognise that the implosion of the old financial, economic, political and social orders provide 'the 99%' with opportunities to forge changes earlier generations could barely imagine possible.

Evolving from the original Quaker and sociocratic models, the COG's system of Harmonic Governance allows us to give and receive effective leadership while remaining peers. It is a system of government in which the interests of all members are served equally; a full governance system that offers unique organizational, decision-making and election processes. It is a fractal and holographic system that remains constant at every level, moving energy upwards from local community to global governance. And it's a system that can grow very rapidly.

A closing note: We are not trying to establish a global COGs International Inc. — a community umbrella with Copyright protection and Registered Trademarks. That is far from our intention. Rather, this idea, if the time is right, will take on a life of its own. We simply release it to the Universe and wish it 'God Speed'.

APPENDIXI II- VISION, MISSION AND AIMS

Vision — describes a desirable future. For organizations, it provides guiding principles and helps members of an organization identify with them.

Mission — describes how the vision will be realized. It describes what the organization offers to its relevant environment. It is a statement of your identity in the environment.

For organizations, a mission statement helps members show commitment to the organization.

Aim(s) — describes how the mission will be accomplished. It describes a desired result in an exchange with its relevant environment. A clear aim provides a firm foundation for leadership and decision-making.

For organizations, an aim states the members' common interest(s) and helps them align their activities with each other. An aim:

- States the concrete product or service being exchanged
- Indicates what distinguishes the product or service from other products or services
- Is stated in a way that the customer (exchange partner) can easily understand.

A common aim is the circles' reason for existence. Circles should set their aims by consent and review them every year or so to be sure they are leading to the desired results.

A well-formulated aim meets the following criteria:

The desired result is clearly stated. The specific quality which distinguishes it from other aims is included. The customer (people who have a need) must be able to recognize and understand the formulation. In other words, the aim must be clear through the eyes of the average person.

Well formulated aims:

- Are the bases for measurement of the production process and for assessing consent arguments.
- Reduce interpersonal conflict.
- Make it easier to lead effectively.

Cautions:

- Don't make aims too broad so that they have everything or nothing in them.
- Aims should not express contrasts or conflict relationships such as social versus economic, labor versus capital, and so forth.
- Don’t divide aims, but distinguish. Aims are never isolated. Each is related to the next step or the next level of abstraction.

APPENDIX Ill - COG's GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The four guiding principles introduced by Gerard Endenburg form the foundation on which all Circle Organisations are built.

COGs honour these fundamentals and have amended them only where necessary to reflect the fact that we are using the system largely to build a self-governing model from scratch, rather than re-structuring an existing organisation. We also recognize that communication technology has improved dramatically since 1945 and embody that fact into our process. We de-centralise Circles as much as possible and emphasise the importance of drawing from the neighbourhood for membership. We suggest using the 'foot-rule' principle; i.e., 'can I get there by foot?'

1. Consent governs policy decision-making.

Consent means there are no paramount and reasoned objections to a proposed decision.

The consent principle ensures that a decision can only be made when none of the circle members present has a reasoned, substantial objection to making the decision.

2. Circle Organization structure

Circles are the primary governance unit. Circles are semi-autonomous and self-organizing. Every circle formulates its own vision, "mission statement" and aim (which must fit in with the vision, mission and aims of the organization as a whole.

Within their domain, they make policy decisions; set aims; delegate the functions of leading, doing, and measuring to their own members; and maintain their own memory system and program of ongoing development.

Using rules borrowed from Cybernetics, it is possible to design structures for dynamic processes. Whenever activities threaten to ignore someone, the concerned group or individual can make a correction. The circle process seeks the optimum by identifying limits that we can live with and operate within.

Gerard Endenburg used the example of a bike weaving down a bike lane. The limits are the curb and the car lane. The bike doesn't travel in an exact straight line — nor do we aim to make the bike go in a straight line. That straight line is

the optimum, which we as the biker seek, but we don't need to stay on it. We weave back and forth near it, correcting our path based on the circumstances that we find ourselves in at the time.

When detailed decisions have to be made, a small committee of three to five people may be needed. This kind of committee is not new. If we were to look at the countless committees in existence, we would probably find that those which are doing the best work do so without voting. If voting became necessary in such a small group, it would usually mean that the atmosphere is wrong.

Final acceptance of any committee's decision is still based on common consent by the Circle(s) involved.

3. Linking

Each COG Circle is connected by a link to an earlier-formed circle. The 'linking member' is one of three members elected by an experienced Circle to assist in the formation of new circles.

When a Circle reaches its optimum of 7 members, new applicants are invited to form a Circle of their own friends and associates who share a common mission.

As an example, the common Mission and Aims in a rural setting may be development of the community's economy using food as the principal focus. The primary aims of such linked Circles may be as varied as Community Supported Agriculture, Permaculture, Community Gardens, Linking Land and Future Farmers (LLAFF), Home Composting, Bee Safe and Seed Saving, but when public action is called for, they will speak with one voice — as a Community Options Group - and with a power that cannot be denied.

The principal reasons for non-action by governments and the bureaucracy are invariably fuelled either by 'lack of funding' or a perceived 'lack of sufficient public interest'.

The first argument is a strong one while governments, the bureaucracy and academia remain inside the box of conventional thinking. Using COG's material we can, however, overcome this argument with legal documentation that there is no shortage of money — it's just in the wrong place. As for the second reason, we can overcome it by uniting COG's efforts around the issue and turning out in large numbers to support each other.

4. Elections by consent

People are elected to functions and tasks by consent after open discussion. Choosing people for functions and/or responsibilities is done by consent after an open discussion. The discussion is very important because it uncovers pertinent information about the members of the circle.

Additional Agreements. Besides the four main principles, Endenburg introduced some agreements that help maintain equivalence between participating members:

- Everyone has a right to be part of a decision that affects them.
- Every decision may be re-examined at any time.
- No secrets may be kept.
- Everything is open to discussion, without exception.

SUBSIDIARITY

It's not a very elegant word, but 'subsidiarity' describes a form of governance that recognises the need to have decisions made by that level of government closest to the issue. It implies the minimum involvement by senior governments in the community and personal lives of the people. It is a principle which COGs strongly support.

APPENDIX IV - CONSENT, CONSENSUS AND REASONED PARAMOUNT OBJECTIONS

Making decisions by Consent.

"Consent" rather than "consensus" is the basis of COG's decision-making. The difference is simple but profound. Consensus looks for agreement, while consent looks for disagreement and uses the reasons for objection to come up with an amended proposal that is within everyone's limits.

Consent is an efficient and effective decision-making method because it builds trust and understanding. The process educates the participants about the needs of the other members in doing their work effectively as well as their psychological and social needs as human beings. In addition to reducing friction, the well-defined, information-based, and highly disciplined process helps the group stay focused and move swiftly through examining an issue and actual decisionmaking.

The "consent" principle is different from "consensus" and "veto." With consensus the participants must be "for" the decision. With consent decision-making they must be not against it. With consensus a veto blocks the decision without an argument. With consent decision-making, opposition must always be supported with a reasoned argument.

Reasoned Paramount Objections

Reasoned, paramount objections are vital to the functioning of the whole system. If one part of any system doesn't express its objections as soon as it experiences discomfort, the entire system is compromised and could suddenly and irreparably collapse.

Gerard Endenburg put two critically important conditions on objections. Firstly, the objections had to be paramount, meaning they had to be serious enough to prevent the person from supporting the aims of the group. And secondly, they had to be reasoned. The person had to express their objections sufficiently clearly that the rest of the group could understand and resolve them.

If a decision would interfere with a person's ability to be enthusiastic and energetic in working toward the aims of the group, that person has an obligation to object.

Objections are made in the context of the aim statement. Can I help the group achieve this aim if this decision is made? Will this decision interfere with my work? Will it help me do my work? Will it allow me to thrive as a member of this group?

When you amend a proposal based on everyone's input, you can come up with something that no one has an objection to. The members of the circle decide if an objection fits the 'sufficiently reasoned' criteria or not. Usually the matter can be cleared up by the facilitator asking how the objector would amend the proposal.

Every decision doesn't require consent, but consent must exist concerning an agreement to make decisions regularly through another method. Thus, many decisions are not made by consent. Rather, with consent, persons or groups are given the authority to make independent decisions.

APPENDIX V - CIRCLE PROCEDURE

The facilitator needs to prepare the agenda and each person should be familiar with the proposals that will be raised This may involve talking to circle members outside of meeting time. During discussions, it's the facilitators responsibility to diplomatically regulate the strongest voices and encourage the less dominant. This maintains equivalence and promotes self-organization.

The facilitator is the time keeper and the following guidelines apply:

- *People appreciate meetings that begin and end on time. This means that the agenda has to be realistic. It's recommended that specific hang out time is scheduled for after the meeting, for those who choose to stay on.*
- *Make sure there's a note-taker, timer/clock, pens, paper for notes and ballots.*

The term 'round' or 'go-round', means that each person speaks in tum. No one answers anyone else. This is key to the process of consent.

When the word 'discuss' is used, it means that people answer each other and the facilitator may "stack" people when they raise their hand.

- *Be aware that not everyone processes information at the same rate.*
- *Remember, you can always revisit a decision.*
- *Once a meeting starts, think about how comfortable the room is and how to start cooling it down before it gets too hot.*

Moment of Silence

Opening round

- Each person introduces themselves, if needed. One minute is a fair amount of time.

Administrative matters

- Approve prior minutes
- Agenda - ask for any additions or changes; Decide on times for items, breaks and when to begin evaluation round

Present the proposal

- Ask one person to present the proposal requiring a policy decision
- Others may ask clarifying questions

React to the proposal

- React in a go-round
- 30 seconds per person is a good amount of time
- This is not the time to propose amendments
- The facilitator may go for a no-objection round (and should attempt one whenever It appears acceptable and possible).

Amend and reformulate the proposal when necessary

- The proposer amends or reformulates the proposed decision

Formulate objections

- Do a go-around asking for any objections and the associated arguments
- Every objection must be supported by a reason drawn from personal concern.
- The proposal cannot be passed if anyone objects.

Use any objections to improve the proposal

- Discuss how to improve, eliminate parts of, or include precautions in the proposed decision.

Verify that there are no more objections.

- Do a final go-around asking if there are any objections.
- As needed, discuss action items flowing from the decision.
- The note taker records the decision and any action items.

If time doesn't permit crafting an acceptable proposal, a new proposal that everyone will consent to must be made. This could be, "Let's send it back to committee," "I retract the proposal," "Let's research it some more.”

Schedule the next meeting

Evaluation round

This needs to begin before the scheduled ending time of the meeting
Each person evaluates how well the facilitator managed time and how well the meeting used the consent process, and other relevant comments concerning the conduct of the meeting.

Moment of Silence

Encourage

- proposals
- feedback on the meeting process
- questions that probe objections
- brainstorming
- objections backed by arguments drawn from personal concern or interest
- laughter

Discourage

- majority thinking
- competitive challenges
- striving for agreement
- arguments for absolutes
- manipulation or factionalism or ignoring ideas
- objections not founded in personal experience

Tension can be your friend and so can silence

Ask the circle for help and feedback

Your aim is to produce decisions.

APPENDIX VI - ELECTIONS BY CONSENT

1. Review the function/responsibilities that the person to be elected will have and how long the job will be for.

2. Write your own name on the ballot and the name of your candidate.

3. Give the ballot to the "election leader."

4. Lead a go-round by reading one at a time. Make sure that every participant gives the reasons for their choice during a "round" without discussion.

5. The election leader asks for any changes in the proposed candidates, possibly in a round.

6. Have open discussion, if needed.

7. The election leader asks consent (no objection) in a round for the most supported candidate.

8. The nominated candidate is asked last.

Look out for the following possible mistakes:

Don't ask beforehand who has an interest in the job.
Don't ask who is not interested.
Don't have discussion during the first round. .Don't election anyone for an unlimited time.

"Sociocratic elections are like nothing I've ever experienced before. During my first workshop weekend we did an election. It had to be something real so we chose someone to give a review in the evening.

Everyone votes on paper first putting their own name on it as well. The facilitator says, "Ted, you voted for Mabel. Why?" A reason is always given. "Because she already seems to understand this stuff and I think she 'd present the material clearly. "

You end up saying nice stuff about each other! People feel good and get positive feedback. The facilitator puts the votes in piles for each person and asks if anyone wants to change their vote.

Usually people do.

If there's not a clear majority for someone, the facilitator can choose any of the ones most voted for (or even not if they think they can get a 'no objection') and go for a 'no objection' round. The candidate asked about is asked last. Elections are interesting and fun, but most importantly nobody feels like they lost!"

APPENDIX VII - F.A.Qs

What changes have modern forms of Sociocracy taken — and why?

First, huge advances in communication technology allow us to establish common irrevocable aims and disseminate these not just locally, but globally. We no longer need to spend time physically on-the-road, 'travelling with the message. Second, it reduces the need for the offspring of small committees that in earlier models had a strong tendency to move power away from the grass-roots, back toward the archaic, hierarchical structures of the past, dominated by a few. Now, experts can be consulted, their views posted on the web and then voted on by consent. Third, new technology allows for triple-linking as an alternative to double linking and speeds growth without sacrificing integrity.

Could you give an example of the difference between consent and consensus?

Consensus looks for agreement. Consent looks for disagreement and uses the reasons for disagreeing to come up with an amended proposal that is within everyone's limits.

For example, if a group wanted to paint an outbuilding, consensus would require everyone agreeing on a colour. Consent would require everyone defining their limits and then allowing the choice to be made within those limits. The painter might end up with 5 colours that are within everyone's limits and then choose from those.

What is the downside of consensus?

To make consensus workable in highly diverse groups, particularly between people who do not have daily contact nor shared aims in the rest of their lives, various teachers of consensus and professional facilitators have come to put limits on consensus, for example, redefining "agreement" to mean "agree that this is in the best interests of the group even though it may not be my personal preference". People are allowed to "stand aside" so the group can still declare consensus. Some groups define consensus as "all but one" or "all but two."

Culturally, consensus has come to mean many things from an almost sacred union of minds to a negotiated supra-majority vote.

What if I don't think someone else's objection is reasoned and paramount?

The best way is to ask the person whose objection is questionable how they would change the proposal to accommodate their objection.

Can you provide links to other sources of similar information?

LINKS:

http://www.sociocracy.info/
http://worldteacher.faithweb.com/sociocracy.htm
http://www.twinoaks.org/clubs/sociocracy/index.html

Clarification on things in the document

'The 'consent' principle is different from "consensus" and "veto." With consensus the participants must be "for" the decision. With consent decision making they must be not against it. With consensus a veto blocks the decision without an argument. With consent decision-making, opposition must always be supported with a reasoned argument.'

Answer:

With consensus method to pass a proposal, everyone has to say yes or agree to the proposal as IT IS WRITTEN.

With this method it can't be amended if it needs to be.

So, if even one person says no to it, then the given proposal AS IT PROPOSED, is defeated.

This means anyone can block the passing of the proposal even on a whim.

With the consent method, a voter can state AN OBJECTION to the proposal which has to be significant, and they have to state WHAT THAT OBJECTION IS.

It has to be a problem or issue that will affect that voter/member PERSONALLY!

And so, if an objection or two is made, then an amendment process is started and then voted on.

That amendment has to meet the objective of the first proposal and solves the problem stated by the objector. That way the original proposal does not get abandoned.