Some points on Decision-making –

**”How do we discuss things and make decisions that are in the spirit of Sangha*?“***

***notes from a talk given by Vajragupta at the ECA Jan 2014***

**“Consensus and decision-making” are among the problematic points that crop up again and again.**

**10 points:**

**1.**       **‘Decision-making is a spiritual practice and arises out of spiritual principles and both supports and creates spiritual community’**

Two main principles involved:

**A: individual freedom and action**: the Order is an association of free individuals; you can only practice if you are free. The dharma only works from a position of freedom to engage or not.

B: autonomous is not the same as independent, and although we are **individuals we are aiming to go beyond self-clinging** and to recognize our interdependence. Out of that arises the fact of KM and that we are trying to co-operate; because we want to go beyond individual preference and serve the Three Jewels. So we respect the needs of the Individual as well as the needs to co-operate and be receptive to a bigger perspective than us.

**2.**       **Consensus does not mean everyone has to agree.**

The ideal of full agreement is not always possible. we are not necessarily asking to agree but to consent – “it might not be *my* preference but I can see that it is in the best interests of the project”. Or even – “I don’t think it is in the best interests of the project but I can’t convince others so I will just consent”

it is crucial to go into any decision-making process with a willingness to have my perspective changed. Need to hold opinions and preferences lightly so we can let them go if that seems best.

**3.**       **Consensus doesn’t mean everybody is involved in every decision**

(see also Ratnagosha “Another look at Right Livelihood”

It is just a view that “everyone should discuss everything” – but you cannot manage a BUSINESS OR Buddhist centre like that, it is disastrous – you HAVE to delegate, and let go, and need to be able to be innovative and stay creative. And some people are better taking certain responsibilities than others.

**4.**        **Decision-making in the sangha is not non-hierarchical**

It allows for and requires leadership. Leadership allows consensus to happen. Essential to listen to all views – but also to speak one’s own mind.

“*Leadership are those members of a community who can understand what is going on in a culture and articulate that in a way that helps others deepen their understanding and see a way forward”*

They tend to have a bigger perspective; they listen and sense what is going on and they are in touch with the principles.

In our Movement – are we a bit afraid of leadership? Shouldn’t be apologetic about it. Do we take into account the vertical dimension?

**5.**       **Decision-making or ‘consensus’ is not one particular style**

Do we identify our term ‘consensus’ with one particular style or culture of decision-making? What we call consensus is in fact NOT how the term is used in the wider world.

Decision-making can involve three broad styles:

**A**: Individual, strong leadership ‘***autocracy’***

by one or more people,

through drive or by experience,

involves hierarchy, top-down decisions.

**B:** collective discussion **‘*democracy’***

wanting to get everyone together, discussing it and seeking a solution together.

Value placed on harmony and inclusion, everyone has a voice.

Danger: more and more meetings, everything takes AGES, you can’t respond quickly, so people drop out because they get fed up – you end up with people who like meetings.

**C:** culture of delegation **‘*adhoc -cracy’***

this involves as much as possible farming things out to individuals and small groups where the energy is; they just want to do their thing!

this values initiative

Danger: no overall coherence and people just end up doing their own thing

Partly this is a process a lot of organisations go through: they start with a leader – then people react and have to discuss everything with everybody -  then this gets too unwieldy and it’s obvious there is a need to delegate.

Partly it is a matter of temperament: some people value one style above another.

***all have their strengths, all have their danger – perhaps the idea is somewhere in the middle***

But it could be that we tend to identify ‘consensus‘ with number 2 – but that is NOT what it is. Good decision-making is more in the middle of the three styles – and sometimes one of them might be more appropriate than another.

**6.**       **the job of the chair is to balance and adjust**

So if at any discussion one or two people say – “I wish they’d just decide”, and one or two people say “I want to discuss more” – it probably means we have got the balance right! And note that some voices are louder than others. Or are ALL voices on ONE side?

**7.**       **Sometimes your job is to DECIDE and sometimes your job is to CONSULT (i.e. as a chair, or as a body of Council members)**

You CONSULT with people who are affected by the decision but the final decision is by the Council

on the other hand if you e.g. want to completely change the way you teach at a Centre you have to have the whole Order on your side; similarly with choosing a chair etc.

**8.**       **There are different ways to consult**

**A:  co-creation**: you put it out and everyone decides together – e.g. how the ECA chooses strategic priorities. Everyone is involved and can see where the energy is.

**B: open consultation**: you put it out and you are open to suggestions – but you make it clear that you then take it away and make a decision

**C: consulting on a proposal:**there is a basic proposal (e.g. to create an International Council) and I’d like to hear your view. Then the person with the proposal goes and works it out. This is less open to new possibilities as the basic idea is fixed.

**D: proposal:**  there is a specific proposal, i.e. something quite specific is put forward. it CAN be changed but a lot of work and thought has already gone into it.

  Be clear which one of these you are doing so you don’t create unhelpful expectations! So if you are just consulting make it clear.

  Remind people where they are at in the process

  Find areas of agreement – and find areas that need more discussion

**9.**       **create a culture of honest exchange**

See “freedom in the Order”. Subhuti says he wants to be free to speak out without being labelled as pushy.

“Honest collision is better than dishonest collusion”. Not speaking out is a kind of dishonesty and leads to frustration. Have we got a culture where we can speak our mind? Freedom to speak liberates energy!

**10.**   **it only works if you have got kalyana mitrata**

Harmonious decision making only works if you’ve got a culture of friendship and spiritual practice – without that, it will be tricky. If you HAVE got friendship you will find your way through even if it takes time!