

# On the Nature of Human Assembly

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**Abstract:** When people gather together, a group naturally forms. In many cases, it is desirable to have these natural groups persist in time and have their existence be sustainable over the long term. However, given the highly dynamic nature of interpersonal communications and the variety of life events, developing the right infrastructure for long term group success is far from easy. This essay presents a model and pattern for one such infrastructure.

### Introduction

In any grouping of people, there needs to be some sort of organizational principle, even if it is very informal or implicit, that allows each person, each member, to more effectively coordinate their own individual actions with respect to the intents of the group as a whole. As groups get larger, the need for an explicit internal structure increases. For very large groups this need for formal complexity becomes significant.

Yet, despite the many examples of large governments, institutions, industries, etc, that currently exist, the organizational principles necessary for them to be sustainable are far from obvious. In many cases, it is not even obvious that they are sustainable at all -- sometimes even large bodies fail without a single identifiable cause. Attempting to found a new group or institution on the basis of an existing one can often result in transparently, unconsciously, and implicitly inheriting the weaknesses of the existing system. Without an awareness of the principles of group formation, there can be little hope of real group longevity in the face of significant environmental or situational changes.

However, rather than attempting to deal with the complexity of large scale groups directly, it is considered that sustainable group systems can be identified by 1) resolving a minimal abstract set of organizational concepts (one which would span the total space of all organizational systems) and 2) using those concepts to define the minimum possible structure necessary to create a sustainable group. Once the basic principles of long term group stability have been identified in their simplest 'ideal' form, the way is opened for the practical application of these ideals to real groups.

In effect, it is considered that if any group can be made sustainable, that the dynamics of that group can be treated as a 'cell' and composed into larger groups which will also be sustainable (using the same techniques as that internal to the prototypical cell group itself). Therefore, the issues associated with group scale can be factored out. This allows the consideration of sustainability to be applied to small groups (with minimum complexity) as if they are representative of all groups. Of primary interest then is what sort of minimal organizational dynamics would enable any small group to be sustainable.

## **Coherency assumptions particular to small groups**

For the purposes of this essay, some assumptions have been made about the motivations of the individuals who choose to gather themselves into an intentional group. Particularly, it is assumed that each member is motivated and enabled to achieve the benefits of combining their efforts with others in as positive and as natural a manner as possible. By "enabled" it is meant that each member is sufficiently knowledgeable about themselves and each other to achieve the necessary alignment of personal intent in group action. This is particularly apparent in situations where the group may be required to respond quickly and decisively to external situations. For example, the members of a local fire department will need to trust one another and one another's real and embodied skills to effectively respond to the rapidly changing situation of a fire. The strength of an emergency response group a group is largely dependent on the health of the members and such groups will particularly require strong interpersonal bonds and mutual trust between all members. Although not all groups may need to be this obviously and rapidly responsive, the internal general structure of a generic group must have the capacity to support these capabilities (should need arise). This need for capability sets a requirement on what group organization principles will ultimately be considered viable (more on this below).

Also, it is assumed that the activities of the group are intended to be of mutual benefit to the membership, community, and larger world (ie, a criterion of sustainability). Achieving these conditions is a precursor to group formation. The means by which individuals can attain the sufficient level of personal health is beyond the scope of this essay. However, insofar as the continued and sustained health of each member is especially important to the continuance and sustainability of the group itself, the ideas of an organizational principle of a group must itself be considered in terms of nurturing strength. In particular, the best overall effectiveness of the group will occur when the relationships between members, and the feelings of each member about the group as a whole, are each nurturing of strength. The degree to which the health and strength of the group is maintained is therefore also a basis for considering the effectiveness of a potential group organizational principle. This can be thought of as also consistent with a notion of ethics which asserts a connection of the means by which something is achieved and the nature of the ends which are realized. For small groups just starting out, the focus of activity and intent for the group must therefore be on establishing and maintaining the emotional, intellectual, and communicative health of each member and of member interactions prior to the group having an overall externally coherent action or intent as a whole. Small groups are therefore first defined in terms of inner growth before they can be self defined in terms of outer action and intent.

## **Structural archetypes for group organization**

In considering the many and various organizational models and principles that have been previously used to coordinate all sorts of groups, a categorical analysis of the primary forms and structures will identify three basic and fundamental types of decision making process. For the purposes of this essay, these three primary forms of decision making will be referred to as 'the democracy', 'the meritocracy', and 'the consensus'. (Note: These categories are known to be conceptually orthogonal insofar as other and more complex types of organization can be shown to be a scalar or linear superposition of these three basic types).

The three notions of an organizing principle can be briefly described (in a characteristically simplified form) as follows:

In a **democracy**, a range of possible options is reviewed, discussion and persuasion (rhetoric) is followed by a vote, and the majority decision applies to the whole.

In a **meritocracy**, some process (it does not matter which), is used to select a focus of decision making (a single person or smaller group), which then (perhaps after listening to the considered council of others) will make a decision which is applied to the whole. It is assumed that the whole will always and implicitly trust the part to make decisions 'correctly' (whatever that notion is taken to mean for the whole group).

In **consensus**, all members sit in council together and discuss potential decisions together until a complete and total agreement is reached among all members (however long it takes) which then becomes the decision of the group.

Of these three basic types of organizing principle, smaller groups will generally be best organized using the method of consensus. When first forming, consensus methods are the inherent default starting point for any group dynamic (at least insofar as each member is freely able to determine for themselves if they actually belong to the group). Consensus decision making has significant advantages in regards to unity, integrity, and strength. Consensus, as a method of making group decisions, contributes to good feelings, clear intents, and insight on the part of each member. In consensus, each person has the freedom of complete contribution and may participate fully in the total agreement. It is important that each member has good feelings about the resulting decisions and a willingness to participate fully in the action of the whole, particularly since this has the effect of increasing the depth and the overall effectiveness of the group in any action actually performed. The more whole and integral the group, and the better that each member feels about the others, the the stronger the group and the stronger and more generally beneficial the results. The sustainability of the outcome is in proportion to the strength and unity of the group. Thus, to a first approximation, consensus is seen to contribute directly to group effectiveness.

However, on deeper consideration it becomes apparent that each of these three organizing principles has some real disadvantages, and consensus is not excepted. Consensus, although it usually achieves very high quality decisions, also takes the most time to implement. Consensus requires frequent, continued, and sustained interaction of the whole group. Not all members may be as constantly and fully available for the necessary and ongoing interaction and communication that necessary for consensus decision making. Even in the best of circumstances, it is often difficult to find and coordinate the necessary long meeting times inherent in the consensus process. Furthermore, in situations requiring immediate decisive action, (such as within the context of unexpected events and/or emergency), consensus is completely unable to mediate fast, vital, and necessary choice. As such, consensus, although it is very strong in quality, is also the very weakest in the sense of being the least powerful (in quantity) of the three decision making methods summarized above. While the group is microscopically coherent, it is in some cases macroscopically ineffective.

In contrast to consensus, systems of meritocracy, such as those having a single person or small unit of people in some sort of hierarchical structure, are the most powerful. Meritocratic organizations, particularly in a fast changing environment, are the most able to deal with situations requiring immediate and decisive action (for example, any situation involving emergency or danger). Such organizations are generally flexible and are usually the most effective in implementing powerful action with the highest levels of effectiveness, due to their coordinated quality and their focused and singular purity of intent. Both strength and flexibility are necessary for a group as a whole for it to remain sustainable.

Unfortunately, as is well known, meritocratic systems, no matter how well intended, are also the most susceptible to unconstrained abuse (although powerful, meritocratic systems are infrequently also strong). For a group to last in a changing environment (where the rate of change can sometimes be high) some element of meritocratic or executive organization is desirable and useful in any real group. Yet, due to the potentiality for abuse the meritocratic method of organization is the also the most likely to develop seriously disabling aspects and painful effects for the group members. Any occurrence of the negative aspects in a meritocratic organization can quickly diminish the overall effectiveness, health, and sustainability of a group due to less than committed component actions on the part of the members. While the macroscopic aspects of the group are maintained, the microscopic aspects suffer. Over time, these small scale instabilities can magnify into larger concerns that destabilize the group (coup events or other cancerous instabilities).

In recognizing the marked disadvantages of the meritocracy, and as an attempt at moderating the demands for time and communication required by consensus, one might consider the method of democracy to be the best overall alternative. In a democratic system, everyone gets 1) a chance to think about the issues, 2) the option to make their choice known (as selected from a fixed and finite set of options), and 3) a chance to convince others of the correctness of their viewpoints. In this system, less in person and in council time and communication are required than that needed for consensus. Democratic methods often appear simpler to define (in the short term at least), and the decisions made by the group are usually (seemingly) unambiguous (and therefore simpler to implement). There is additionally a feeling of security and freedom to choose with ones heart when anonymity is used as part of the voting process. Also, the democratic system overall tends to be much more resistant to overt abuse than a meritocracy. Such a system, furthermore, is well suited to groups that cannot often meet or communicate directly, and which therefore must use some form of messaging. Any group communication based primarily on messaging would be too cumbersome to use for consensus decision making, and too slow and dis-empowering for everyone when used as part of a meritocratic system.

As such, the democratic system of organization seems initially to be a better balance of consensus, which makes decisions well (i.e., good quality of choice), and authority, which makes decisions fast (i.e., good quantity of choice). Unfortunately, the democratic method of organization has significant flaws as well, particularly when applied to groups having a more familiar or tribal character.

The process of voting requires that the issues be clear cut and partitionable into a finite set of specific options which can be voted on. Unfortunately in life, most such issues are rarely so clear cut. Real issues of value are often associated with various feelings, personal emotions, and subjective intuitions. Further, insofar as creative decision making is about opening new potentialities and working with the unknown and unknowable, the attempt to reduce a problem to a finite set of specific options is very problematic. The reduction of a hard and subtle value problem into such a finite specificity as required for a vote must be regarded as being nearly antithetical to any possibility of success.

Moreover, the process of choosing which options will be in the total set of available options to be voted on is an often neglected form of power which is frequently, but invisibly, abused in itself. The context of the choice to be made, and the context in which the choice is made, are themselves rarely the object of a democratic process (it is a problem of regress which can be diminished, but never completely and finitely resolved). This covert shifting of context can be seen, for example, in the efforts of a used car salesman to enact the reality of one's primary choice as being between buying the red car or the blue one, whereas the real choice is whether or not to buy a vehicle at all. Often, it is only in the action of shifting the context of choice that a real solution can be found. The practice of democracy encourages a form of covert abuse in making it always necessary to choose from a finite set of options, whereas in real life, the number of options available is always infinite.

To make matters worse, the action of the vote itself does little to create group cohesiveness, necessary to the long term sustainability of the group. Majority rule, particularly if that majority is very slight (51%), is oppressive to the minority necessarily left remaining. The action of voting encourages a polarization, a schism of opinion, between two factions. Even though the schism incurred by the voting process is very obvious, the democratic method does not provide a means to heal that division; it is an unavoidable divisiveness created by the method itself.

Meritocracy and consensus both tend to heal such schisms of opinion either through insight (the creation of a third additional option) or through negotiation. Divisiveness is an especially problematic element of democratic process in that it diminishes the unity of feeling in a group. The larger and lasting benefit of group action is in geometric (or stronger) proportion a total coherency of group consciousness operating as one together. Two members working together can be much stronger than having both work alone, yet the democratic method nearly always splits a group into at least two disagreeing fractions, those for and those against. By encouraging a false simplicity, much clarity and depth of action is lost (creativity, spirituality, and awareness are best enabled by clarity).

Furthermore, the minority must always feel unhappy with the 'group' decision, the outcome of the vote when they are forced to accept the 'will of the whole'. Members losing the vote must necessarily override their own feelings and opinions. Democracy encourages a suppression of feeling; an action for the 'right' to have a vote, a fleeting voice, in the decision at all (a voice, moreover, that is often reduced to insignificance and meaninglessness in even moderately large groups). Choice (and significance) is inherent in consciousness, at all levels of being. It is not 'licensed' from the whole to the part, or even from the part to the whole. To make choice seem to be a temporary and possibly revocable 'right' (for which one must barter their unconditional acceptance of the unconscious tyranny of the majority, as the democratic system must make it seem), is to act in a manner contrary to fundamental truths of life itself: the true ownership of one's own choices, the significance and meaningfulness of all choosing, and the cooperative process by which all choice IS made. In its worst forms, democracy becomes a process antithetical to the dynamics of life, having more the nature of a cancer than of a living being working as a unity (and there are yet deeper layers of symbolism in this, for those who have the eyes to see it!). To have an action or a process be contrary to life is to go directly against the interests of the group itself.

Worse still, the dialog that precedes the vote is itself subtly flawed and distorted. In that a vote is an event, the timing of which is always finite and near, it encourages the action of speaking rather than of listening, expressing rather than accepting. In fixing the time of a vote, communication becomes rushed and is soon replaced by lecture and campaign. Busy activity replaces the reflective space necessary for insight, creativity, and the more inward forms of communication inherent in the process of attaining truly effective decisions.

Also, in being only about expression, the dialog presented before the vote (ideally) would consist of (or have the form of, or at least appear to be) reasonable arguments which are impersonal, objective, and based only on logic and facts. Yet such dialog must always have the implicit objective, form, and purpose of convincing others to vote in the same manner as oneself. In that such expression must therefore hide one's own personal subjective values and natural desires (which ultimately can have no logical or reasonable basis) within arguments which are designed to appear to be based on impersonal objectivity and reason, the ideal dialog before the vote is inherently deceptive. In this, artfully constructed fictions replace actual fact; reactions to images, symbols, and flags are used to replace feelings of inner truth with emotions of fear and pride. The ideal of democracy becomes only an expression of rhetoric before the vote, a means of manipulation which justified in the terms of the end of having others vote (or act) in some limited manner. Rhetoric cannot be trusted, even and especially when it appears to be trustworthy. In that a group is inherently based on mutual regard and trust, a transparent, considered, and conscious communication is necessary for effectiveness.

To use rhetoric to encourage others to replace their thoughts with those of the speaker, is in effect, to treat them as a machine, to inherently regard them less intelligent and significant than oneself. In this, concerns about the outcome of the vote override all concerns for the people participating. As a result, everyone (including the "winners") feel like they have lost something important, some element of truth and honor has been neglected. Inwardly everyone knows intuitively that the means used (deception and control of the vote) cannot ever be justified in the terms of the ends, no matter how well intentioned ("for the good of all"). One cannot value people and their lives (life) by attempting to treat them (and all of nature) in the manner of an ignorant and discardable machine. Insofar as the group values sustainability and life, these intents values must also be reflected as an aspect of its practice, its realization, and its identity.

As such, the practice of democracy, and the politics it implies, is by its very nature very disabling to the sustainability of a small group. The methods of democracy strongly discourage participants from ever considering matters of personal feeling and intuition in a natural manner. The process of campaign is an invasive intrusion into one's own inner dynamics of creativity; an evolution which is very necessary when choosing with an alignment with the inner nature of life. While an authoritarian meritocracy has features that lend themselves to an easy and overt abuse, a democracy is not much better in that it lends itself to a covert abuse. Yet, as has been described, neither consensus nor merit, as potential methods for organizing a group, are ideal either. All three methods when practiced by themselves are inherently flawed when considered in terms of the requirements of sustainable group process.

Therefore, it is necessary to develop some other, alternate method for organizing a groups which somehow combine the good effects of the values of consensus decision making with power and decisiveness of meritocratic methods. Ideally, the alternative must not introduce the known disabling effects associated with democracy, merit, or consensus. What is needed is a method for combining into a new hybrid the high quality aspects of consensus decision making with the high quantity of decision available from a meritocracy, without introducing new disadvantages and potentials for abuse inherent in each of these other forms. In answer to this, this essay will therefore consider an alternate method of combination these forms to create a hybrid small group organization principle.

## **Group method hybridization; a proposal**

The basis of the hybridization is to have the decisions of whatever the group DOES be defined in the terms of an organization of what the group IS. In other words, the dynamics of the group can be considered in terms of two aspects in relation to one another: internal group process and external group interactions ("is" and "does", or intra-group and inter-group, respectively). In that the group internal process and the group external process are in relation to one another, this relation is also an identified category of group process (since the meta-dynamics 'is' and 'does' must also be in relation to one another). In effect, there needs to be a natural means for the group to transition from being to doing and then again transition back from doing to being. The organizational principle which applies to this transition dynamic is as necessary to the overall model as the organizational principles which are individually applied to the being and doing of the group.

The result of these considerations is to identify and use different decision making aspects at and for different parts of the overall group process. As such, the method of consensus is to be used for all organizational and planning aspects of the group (omniscient modal aspects), merit is to be used as the basis of operation during actual group action (executing a plan; immanent modal aspects), and democracy is to be used as a moderator on the transition from meritocracy back to consensus (transcendent modal aspects).

This simple method of combination provides for the working group to have the best advantages of each basic decision making process, while having few to none of the disadvantages implied by each. The basis of the necessary correspondences are identified by modeling the group in terms of identity and interaction theory (as intra-group and inter-group theory, respectively). Each of these aspects will be considered in its own paragraph below.

Intra-group process is an isomorph of the subjective, and therefore needs to have full coherency and (eventually clear) representation of the overall deep feelings and future dreams of the group. Consensus process is the best choice (optimal) when assigned to group internal dynamics, particularly insofar as coherency is much more important than rapidity when defining and identifying the group identity (the long term structure of the group). The key of this assignment is to recognize that with respect to **all** elements of the intra-group process, that consensus is the ultimate founding basis and therefore trumps all other defined internal structure. Where a previously selected group internal structure or formalization has been found to be disadvantageous to the group, consensus process is the ultimate solvent that allows for group restructuring without also implying the loss of group identity and integrity.

Inter-group process is an isomorph of the relation between the subjective and the objective, and represents/is the actual actions of the group (the exercise of group choice) in, on, upon, or within the larger world. Such action is (cannot not be) considered as within the 'here and how' and has a sense of immediacy, representing the real actions and consequence of the group existence. Insofar as the specifics of that interaction need to be immediate and real-time responsive, the optimal choice of organizational principle will be one of merit. As a confirming aspect, it is to be noted that the hierarchal flow down model associated with merit based systems of governance are also an isomorph of the process of adding specification detail when an abstract choice process becomes a concrete one.

The details of this hybridization can be clarified by considering ideal dynamics of the group in the terms of event planning. Consensus decision making is used for all decisions regarding the basic intentions of each group action and for the practical, pragmatic considerations involving the group itself. For example, decisions about membership (either adding or removing), in that it affects the being of the group, are made by consensus. When everyone agrees, and in open forum has been allowed to express their feelings, doubts, ideas, and intuitions, the group (with this sharing) has as a whole come to some deeper insight about the decision, then in that mutual agreement, the decision is made. It is essential to the process of consensus that everyone feels good about the final outcome, and that each participant feels willing and positive about participating. Within the process of external group action, it is important that the statement of intent be something that everyone can wholeheartedly support. In this respect, all group statements of intent are to be decided by consensus. Finally, consensus decision making is used to select one of their number, on the basis of their merit, to act as a focus for the duration of a specific group action, or as a chair for the next consensus meeting. Collectively, the process of having group choice and effort be made on the basis of total agreement reached by all members is referred to as a consensus process of decision making.

Within the context of a specific action, as chosen via consensus in the whole group, and as expressed in the group statement of intent, the person who was chosen, by consensus, as a focus is temporarily empowered to make the single executive decisions about the actual event execution. (Note; Having group choice and effort be made on the basis of temporary authority invested in a focus person is referred to as an "executive" decision making process). The focus person, perhaps choosing to listen to the counsel and advice of others (when there is time), acts as a basis of a meritocracy. The consensus selected focus person organizes the action and is the primary decision making agency during the event itself. In this respect, for the duration of the action, there is an organizing basis that can be responsive to the (occasional) unexpected situation.

Also, the process of making consensus decision by itself is often significantly enhanced when there is someone to act as a facilitator of that consensus. The role of this person is to ensure that everyone gets a chance to speak their truth and to attempt to summarize the various ideas that have been presented so far. It is the responsibility of the consensus facilitator to try to ensure that the consensus process itself works by creating the orderly context in which everyone can speak.

As occasionally will happen, however, in the event that consensus is not being reached because of an emotional conflict between members, or in the event that the decisions of a selected focus person have "gone too far", the democratic process would be used to moderate or suspend either of these other two other forms of decision making. In effect, the democratic process can, via an unplanned spontaneous majority vote, 1) suspend and veto the decisions of a focus person, even to the point of suspending a current action, and thus effect an immediate transition back to a consensus method of making decisions, or in the event of standing disagreement in consensus (no motion), 2) act to temporarily suspend the consensus process until the situation has 'cooled down' a bit. As such then, the democratic process of majority vote, although it is not used to make any group choices in itself, is used to moderate or suspend the effects of the other two means used by the group to make decisions (consensus decision making and executive decision making). In this way, the democratic process can act as a 'check' on both the meritocratic process and the consensus process, to ensure the smooth operation of each.

In summary then, there are only three basic methods by which group decisions are made. Each of these methods can be used to make two different kinds of decisions, one particular to its own modality, and one to act as a check on (to moderate the effects of) each of the other two methods of decision making. Each decision making methodology has two primary responsibilities, and all three methods together account for all (six) basic aspects of group management. This overall arrangement can be restated more compactly and symmetrically as follows:

**Consensus process**, which is based on the total and heartfelt agreement of all members of the group, is used to make 1) all of the important decisions about the being, nature, and intent of the group and its actions, and 2) selecting single individuals to act as a coordinating and decision making focus each particular action, and the group member who will be responsible for facilitating the next consensus decision making meeting of the group (note different people may be chosen for each role).

**Executive process**, which is based only on the merit and authority of the selected focus person, is used to make decisions about 1) the implementation of a specific group external action, and 2) how to best enable the consensus decision making process during a group meeting.

**Democratic process**, which is based on a spontaneous majority vote of those present in any gathering of the group, is used to make only two kinds of decisions: 1) whether to immediately suspend the currently pending executive process (i.e., to indefinitely suspend the authority of the currently acting focus person) and return directly to a consensus decision making process, and/or 2) whether to immediately suspend the currently pending consensus decision making process, with respect to a particular stalled decision. (Note; In effect, the latter aspect is a transition to a type of executive process, usually to select a focus person who will ensure that the issue is taken up at some (other) future scheduled meeting, or suspended by vote again, if the situation warrants. It is important to let the stalled decision rest for the remainder of the current meeting, so that other issues can be discussed if needed).



Aside from its simplicity, this hybridization has numerous advantages for a small group. Consensus process is used to make all of the important decisions which affect the group as a whole. Consensus decision making serves as the foundation for all group activities and allows each of the group members to come to know one another more deeply. As such, consensus decision making allows the group as a whole to come to one mind about an issue. In sharing insights each person may more easily come to feel good about the decisions that are made. This enables the group to be whole, and acting as a whole, to be strong, and thus enabled to work in a healthy and sustainable manner. Overall, the consensus process provides the group with the ability to make high quality decisions in the places where high quality choices are most needed. By allowing for transition to executive process, the cumbersome aspects of consensus decision making are avoided. By allowing supercession by democratic process, a stuck or blocked consensus process can be prevented from halting or freezing the group, ensuring that the group as a whole will remain responsive, effective, and at peace with itself.

Executive process allows for the group to have the necessary structured organization, responsiveness, and flexibility needed to cope with the vast number of details of rapidly changing conditions associated with the external environment (and the unexpected dynamics of life). Executive process also provides the context and facilitating basis for effective consensus decision making within a group. Overall, the executive process provides the group with the ability to make rapid and numerous decisions in the situations where immediacy and decisiveness is most needed. By allowing supercession by the democratic process, the executive process can be prevented from becoming dominating, or misused, ensuring that the group remains healthy.

Democratic process ensures that neither the consensus process nor the executive process ever becomes disabling. By ensuring that there is always a method for checking or relieving problematic situations (such as halted or overly contentious group meetings and possible abuses of focus authority), these other two forms of decision making are made more sure and secure and the problems of rhetoric and loss of essence associated with democratic process are avoided.

Overall, by maintaining a good balance and mixture of these three types of decision making processes, the membership of a group should be able to integrate in a healthy manner with the strength and flexibility necessary for high quality combined works. The particular disadvantages of each type of decision making process are offset by a balanced transition to the advantages of each of the other types. In this way, the best of all possible groups can be realized.

### **Ultra-brief summary of the Small Group Method:**

**Consensus process** is used for all intra-group decision making *and* to setup the basis for executive process decision making.

**Executive process** is used for all extra-group decision making.

**Democratic process** is used as a check on, and spontaneous transition from, executive process back to consensus process.

## Detailed Description of Small Group Method:

Consensus process decision making is used for:

- 1; selecting/electing the individual who will act as the facilitator and/or chair of the consensus process itself.
- 2; defining or redefining the membership, internal structure, named intent, values, objectives, dreams and aspirations, etc, of the group.
- 3; selecting/electing the individual who will act as a focus of responsibility and authority for a specific group external range of action.

Consensus methods are always used to define all decisions in relation to the being of the group itself, the basis of choice for its actions, and the focus of responsibility and authority to implement those actions.

Consensus methods are never used for decisions specific to implementing an external action of the group, nor are they used for suspending or withdrawing authority/responsibility from a previously selected focus. Consensus process methods also cannot be used to moderate the process of consensus itself.

Executive process (meritocratic) decision making is used for:

- 1; the implementation of a specific group external action.
- 2; how to best enable the consensus decision making process during a group meeting.

Executive process methods are always used to define all decisions in relation to the action, the doing of the group itself. Executive process, as mediated by a consensus selected focus person acting in accordance with consensus process resolved intents, is used to implement selected group activities externally and to facilitate the consensus process internally.

Executive process is never used to make any decision relating to the being of the group.

Democratic process, which is based on a spontaneous majority vote of those present in any majority gathering of the group, is used to make only two kinds of decisions:

- 1; whether to immediately suspend the currently pending executive process (i.e., to indefinitely suspend the authority of the currently acting focus person) and return directly to a consensus decision making process; this has the effect of transitioning the group from 'doing' back to 'being'.
- 2; whether to immediately suspend the currently pending consensus decision making process, with respect to a particular stalled decision, and elect a different consensus facilitator.

Democratic process is used as a check on both the consensus process and the executive process of the group and is used for no other purpose. Voting decisions are of exactly two kinds: 1) whether to have a vote, and 2) whether to dismiss the currently selected focus person. Both of these decisions are yes/no (boolean). Whenever a majority requests a vote, a vote is held. A vote can be requested by a gathered majority of the group at any time. A majority result on a vote can be used to immediately revoke the executive process authority of a previously selected focus person or consensus facilitator, (allowing for a new consensus facilitator to be elected by consensus, if needed).

## **Notes on the group action/identity distinction**

Insofar as the method of sustainable small group formation described above is characterized on a being/doing distinction (the identity of the group as contrasted with the action of the group), it is important to be able to clarify which group decisions (interaction events) are to be classified as belonging to which category (intra-group or extra-group interactions). The clarity of this resolution is essential as it defines which choices are within the scope of the consensus decision making process and which decisions are within the scope of the executive decision making process.

The basis for the distinction is found in the notion of observability. If the effects and consequences of a decision are concretely visible to people who are not members of the group, then the decision/choice is regarded as external and part of the action of the group (extra-group interactions). Otherwise, by default, all remaining decisions are considered to be internal (intra-group interactions).

Implicit in this description is the assumption that all group internal processes (the internal communications of the group used to establish and consummate consensus process) are maintained in a manner NOT visible to non-members. The reason for this apparent secrecy associated with consensus process is associated with the need for the group identity to be internally (rather than externally) defined. External agencies with visibility to the group internal process would likely attempt to use this information to influence the internal dynamics of the group. Such influence would allow non-members to functionally act as if possessing the privileges of group membership, this weakening the significance of membership, and thus the identity, of the group itself. Insofar as the notion of membership is always, inherently, and explicitly defined as isomorphic with the being of the group, it is always an internal decision and should not be visible to group outsiders (even by indirection and inference). As such, **all** communications associated with group consensus process are considered to be private to the membership of the group itself.

## **Structural integration into larger group forms**

As outlined above, the hybrid dynamic of group organizational process using combined consensus, executive, and democratic decision making methods is only directly applicable to small groups. The reason for this limitation is twofold. 1) Insofar as consensus decision making implies and usually requires full communication between all members of a group, and where the number of inter-member messages rises geometrically in proportion to the number of members, the communicative bandwidth required of each member can quickly rise beyond the carrying capacity of that individual. 2) Where executive process requires an explicitly defined focus and range, the selection of that focus and its degree of asymmetry must be commensurate with the grain size of the group (ie, exactly one member). Where the level of focus asymmetry is too high, the demand stress on the selected individual can exceed the available capabilities of that person and/or require the formation of subgroup counsels; the added complexity of which does not translate very efficiently when considering the democratic process override on executive process.

Given these constraints, the hybrid process can only validly be applied directly to groups in the range of 6 to 30 members (extreme limits) with groups of 10 to 16 members being considered optimal. However, larger organizations can be composed of smaller ones by re-identifying the small group itself as a member cell in a larger meta-group similarly organized and constituted in aggregate as with each small group. This process can be continued for any number of levels of scale so as to be able to form coherent organizations of any number of individuals operating in aggregate. This composition method defines a specifically bottom-up topology for larger groups (grassroots organizations).

Insofar as the interactions between groups in forming a composition meta-group are effectively external to the groups themselves, the action of intergroup communications within the context of the meta-group need to be mediated via executive process. This has the implication that the individual cell groups must be internally healthy enough so as to select one of their internal members to act as a liaison in communications with other groups on behalf of the local membership. This in effect constitutes a form of local group representation, where the representative is effectively immediately answerable to the represented cell group by democratic override and consensus process.

Also, insofar as the communicative bandwidth limits identified above will apply to the representative individual, it is important that some composition constraints be observed:

- 1) The number of component cell groups in any meta-group must not exceed the communicative capacity limits of a representative individual, and therefore, each meta-level can consist of at most 20 or so component groups. It is preferred that different focus representatives be elected for each compositional level so as to not exceed the capabilities of any specific group member (Note; this is particularly relevant where meta-groups are themselves combined into meta-meta-groups).

- 2) The membership decision of a cell group within a meta-group, insofar as it is an aspect of the being/identity of both the cell group and the meta-group, must be made by positive consensus at both group levels. The choice of the cell group to belong to a meta-group, as determined by the cell group, is not the decision of the elected representative, but is the result of an achieved cell group consensus. From the perspective of the meta-group, the membership of the cell group is defined by the consensus of all of the participating cell groups as mediated through their elected representatives. Only where both conditions hold is cell membership in the meta-group established.

Finally, it is noted that in the same manner that a single individual can be a member of multiple groups (although this is not necessary nor desirable), so also can specific cell groups have membership in multiple meta-groups. In this manner networks of interchange can be created for arbitrarily complex structures. This has the distinct advantage that while the specific structure is everywhere clear, there is no concentration of organizational complexity (or points of failure) at any particular locus within the overall system.

***Dedication***

*For The Earth, to all Life and Nature*

**That All Shall Realize Greater Love in This World**

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