



COMMON GROUND ECOVILLAGE GOVERNANCE HANDBOOK April, 2021

Compiled by the Governance & Training Circle

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COOPERATIVE CULTURE ELEMENTS

- Work based on common values
- Commitment to balance rights and responsibilities
- *HOW* matters as much as *WHAT*
- Primacy of relationships (others, self, life)
- Boundaries between private and public shifts towards public
- Willingness to speak your truth
- Willingness to listen to others' truths
- Commitment to seek solutions that balance all truths
- Openness to emotional input
- Agreement to work constructively with conflict

We learn the ways of cooperative culture (i.e., the ways in which cooperation moves and gets stuck in a group) by *being* in it—not by reading about it. Still, we feel your pain. You want to know what we are talking about! So here's another brief writing by one of our mentors, Laird Schaub, to hopefully guide you but mainly, poke your curiosity and hunger for more.

When am I Cooperative Enough?

Blog entry from Thursday, March 28, 2019

<https://communityandconsensus.blogspot.com/search/label/cooperative%20skills>

This past week I was in Durham NC doing a bunch of teaching, when a curious student posed a question I'd never fielded before.

I had just finished making the case for why people who want to create and sustain cooperative culture need to do personal work to unlearn competitive conditioning if they want to avoid being drained by an endless swirl of combative dynamics when people disagree. Persuaded by my thinking, this woman was (reasonably) wondering how much work did she need to do before putting her oar in the water.

What a good question! In some ways it's just another version of an age-old dilemma about when do you have enough information to take action. After all, you never know everything. When does the value of waiting to gather additional data drop below the cost of delaying a response? Sometimes this is clear cut; other times it can be excruciatingly obscure.

Still, on the question of being "cooperative enough," I think it's useful to identify some markers. Here are some things to think about. Progress against these markers are positive signs. To the extent you struggle with these skills, it means you have more work to do.

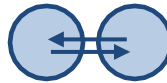
- In cooperative culture, *how* things are done matters as much as *what* gets done. Thus, being cooperatively sensitive implies a consciousness and facility with process. You should know that this matters and have a pretty clear sense of how to do things well.
- The ability to consistently think in terms of what's best for the group, distinguishing that from personal preference.
- The ability to see an issue through another's eyes (rather than only through your own)
- A solid understanding of what it means to be a productive, disciplined, and courageous meeting participant (I'll give you a hint: meetings are not open mic). This means a lot of things, including, knowing what the topic is at any given moment, having done your homework on the topic, knowing what kind of contribution is called for at any given moment, supporting the facilitator if some participants are misbehaving, looking for ways to bridge between people who are struggling to hear each other, owning your stuff if you're having a reaction, reining in any impulse to be aggressive and attacking, and speaking your truth—even when you doubt it will be a viewpoint that will be popular.
- Developing emotional literacy—the ability to articulate clearly what you're feeling and to hear accurately what other's are reporting about their feelings. A deeper nuance here is the ability to function well in the presence of another's distress.
- Being open to hearing critical feedback about your statements and actions as a member of the group. Can you do this with minimal armoring or defensiveness?
- How open are you to the perception that you are oblivious to your privilege?

SOCIOCRACY

Values: Effectiveness, Equivalence, Transparency

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

- *Organize projects and tasks by groups of people (circles) sharing a specific purpose (aim). Some circles have more general aims, others have more specific aims.*
- *Double-links (\leftrightarrow) between more general and more specific circles provide for two-way flow of information (proposals, policies, reports, feedback).*



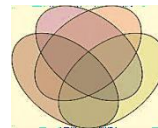
FEEDBACK LOOPS: Plan-Implement-Evaluate Cycle

- *Policies have time frames and measurement and evaluation criteria built into them.*
- *A circle member can request evaluation sooner than the consented time frame if necessary or useful.*



CONSENT DECISION- MAKING

- *Decisions are made by consent. Consent exists when there are no remaining objections to a proposal.*
- *Objections are valuable information (feedback) used to improve a proposal. They must relate to accomplishing the circle's aim.*

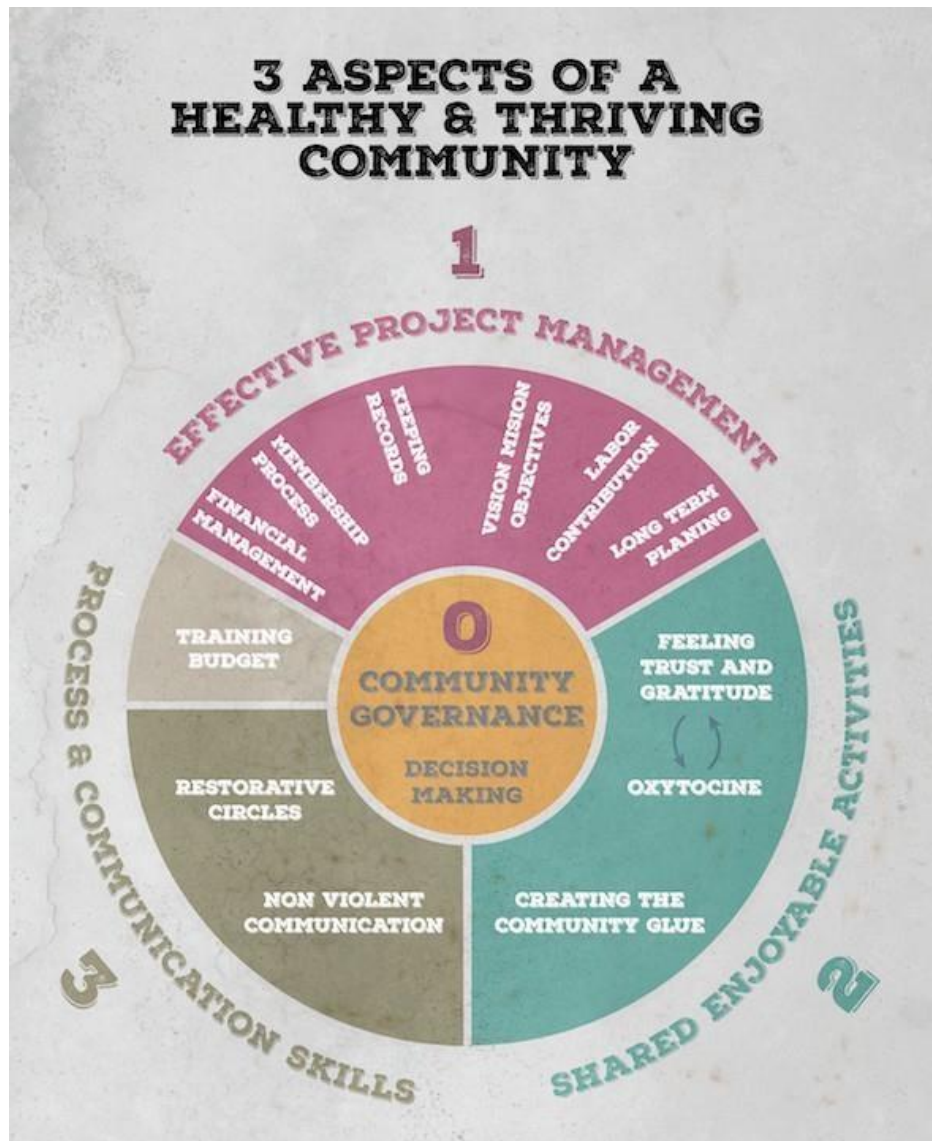


Thanks to Jerry Koch-Gonzalez, Diana Leafe Christian, Sheella Mierson, and John Schinnerer (SociocracyConsulting.com) for this scheme.



2014, The Sociocracy Consulting Group, SociocracyConsulting.com, 800-870-2092

Three Aspects of a Healthy, Thriving Community



I believe three crucial, mutually reinforcing aspects help intentional communities (and other organizations) become healthy and thriving.

One I call **Community Glue** — taking time to do shared enjoyable activities that tend to generate feelings of gratitude and trust, and which also tend to create the “pleasure hormone” oxytocin. Research shows that oxytocin in the bloodstream generates feelings of trust and gratitude towards the people one is with, although it may be experienced simply as “feeling good.” And these feelings cause a person to secrete oxytocin into the bloodstream, keeping the “feeling good” going throughout the enjoyable shared activity.

Thus, community meals, shared work tasks, singing, dancing, drumming, playing music,

playing games or sports, group meditation, storytelling evenings, describing emotionally meaningful aspects of one's life to friends and colleagues, making decisions together smoothly and effectively, accomplishing community goals — all tend to produce these feelings in the group. And this — the good will, the sense of “us” or “community spirit” — is like having good credit or a “community immune system” of trust and good will. The more trust and good will a community has, the more effectively its members can respond to and resolve conflict when it comes up. When a community draws on abundant community glue, it may be easier to just talk to each other simply and figure out how to resolve things.

A second aspect of a healthy, thriving community, in my opinion, is ***Good Process and Communication Skills***. While this is obvious to most experienced communitarians, the need for these skills becomes obvious sooner or later in newer communities too. By “communication skills,” I mean the ways people talk with each other, both in groups and meetings and one on one. By “process skills,” I mean the ways members gather together specifically to get to know each other better, consider ideas, understand each others' emotions or upsets, or discuss and resolve conflicts.

Nowadays I recommend what I believe are the two most effective communication and process methods for communities: Nonviolent Communication, a way in which people speak to each other that tends to create a sense of connection and reduces conflict, and Restorative Circles, a conflict-resolution method similar in some ways to Nonviolent Communication.

The third aspect, ***Effective Project Management***, is obvious to founders of successful communities and cohousing professionals but often less obvious (or even invisible) to more idealistic or countercultural folks. It's comprised of the ways a community creates and maintains its legal entity(s); the ways it finances, purchases, and physically develops its property (including, for example, hiring any outside professional for design or construction work, bookkeeping, website design, or other work); organizes and tracks its internal community finances and member labor requirements; attracts, processes, and orients new members; and maintains the community's documents, policies, and decisions. These are all actions that well-organized businesses or nonprofits use too. Sooner or later members of new communities learn that clear, thorough, well-organized management is necessary not only to found their new community but also to successfully maintain it.

I believe these three aspects of community mutually reinforce each other. If a group has abundant community glue, for example, people will tend to feel connected enough and harmonious enough so that most of the time they'll get along well and not need to speak so carefully, and will probably need less conflict resolution as well. But if a group's reserve of community glue is low — perhaps because they don't yet realize how important it is or don't

have enough time to schedule enjoyable group activities often enough — they may have to choose their words more carefully, and may need to resolve conflicts more formally and more frequently.

Similarly, if a group has effective project management, the sense of accomplishment they'll feel when people experience the community moving towards its goals can create more community glue — increasing their feelings of trust and gratitude and thus reducing their need for super-careful ways of speaking and more frequent conflict resolution sessions. But if a community is managed poorly — for example, if they miss important opportunities; experience unexpected or un-prepared-for legal problems, bookkeeping snafus, or financial shortfalls; lose documents or records of meeting decisions — this can create anger, resentment, blame, shame, and demoralization, which of course *erodes* the group's sense of trust and connection. A group in this situation will, once again, need to speak to one another more carefully and will probably need to resolve conflicts more often too.

I advise groups to go for all three, of course.

How Effective Governance Helps a Community Thrive

Community governance, in my opinion, is at the center of all three aspects of healthy community — and effective governance benefits and enhances all three.

By “governance” I mean how the group organizes its time and work tasks, manages its money, and shares its information — along with its decision-making method for deciding these things.

When I ask groups what their method of governance is and they reply “consensus,” I assume they're confusing “how” they make decisions with “what” they make them about. Solely decision-making methods such as consensus-with-unanimity, the N Street Consensus Method, majority-rule voting, supermajority voting, etc. don't specify how the group might organize and manage itself or which decisions they might make about this.

A community accomplishes its project management *through* its governance process. Its governance is the *way* it effectively organizes its legalities, finances, building and construction, membership process, work-contribution policy, how it collects and manages its documents, policies, and decisions, and so on. In my opinion, effective governance is at the heart of a healthy community.

This is why I believe using a governance method like Sociocracy absolutely contributes to the three aspects of a healthy, successful community. Using Sociocracy for community can, in my opinion, not only eliminate some of the unintended consequences of using consensus (as it's practiced in most intentional communities), but also can help a community thrive.

Sociocracy – “Effective, Efficient, and Fun”

A-7

“Sociocracy,” a governance and decision-making method, means “governance by peers or colleagues.” It is essentially a system for organizing work and making decisions to guide that work, and it is increasingly popular in ecovillages, cohousing communities, and other kinds of intentional communities worldwide. It is not a modification of consensus. Sociocracy is based on the values of transparency, equivalency, and effectiveness. When a community uses it (and uses it correctly), the group tends to get more done and enjoy more high-energy, effective meetings. In the US it is sometimes called “Dynamic Governance.”

“We’ve made more decisions in the past two months than we have in the past two years!” —Davis Hawkowl, Pioneer Valley Cohousing, Amherst, Massachusetts

“A visitor said she’d never seen a community meeting be so effective, efficient, and fun!” —Hope Horton, Hart’s Mill Ecovillage, Chapel Hill, North Carolina

“I would never have joined the community if we didn’t use Sociocracy! It’s our saving grace.” —Kreel Hutchison, Baja BioSana Ecovillage, La Paz, Mexico

“We have better follow-up to our decisions, and information flows better. Our meetings are faster and lighter and have a rhythm that feels satisfying. And at the end of our last meeting, we started dancing for joy!”

—Anamaria Aristizabal, Aldeafeliz Ecovillage, Colombia

Pioneer Valley Cohousing Assesses Sociocracy after 18 Months. This survey was conducted to see if Pioneer Valley members liked Sociocracy and wanted to keep it. Before they used Sociocracy, the same relatively few members did almost all the administrative work. But after implementing Sociocracy far more members contributed labor and became involved in community governance. More people took on leadership roles, including newer members who had not participated in community governance before. An overwhelming majority reported in the survey that they were “highly satisfied” with Sociocracy.

1. The seven parts of Sociocracy. Gerard Endenburg, a Dutch engineer, inventor, and cybernetics expert, designed Sociocracy in the 1970s to help his company, Endenburg Elektrotechniek, function more harmoniously. It was so effective that other businesses and nonprofit organizations in The Netherlands began using it too, and later it spread to organizations in Europe and internationally.

Sociocracy has many parts, but in my opinion, the following seven parts are the minimum needed to provide checks and balances against any potential abuses of power. These seven parts work together synergistically, each mutually benefitting the others: (1) “double-linked” circles, (2) clear aims (ongoing objectives) for each circle, (3) feedback loops built into every proposal — and four meeting processes — (4) consent decision-making, (5) proposal-forming, (6) selecting people for roles (elections,) and (7) role- improvement feedback.

(1) **Double-linked circles.** Semi-autonomous, self-organized “circles” (like committees, teams), organize all work tasks, including administrative tasks and physical labor tasks. Each circle provides a specific, concrete function for the community; for example, through a Membership Circle, Finance Circle, Land Use Circle, and so on. Most circles are relatively small, with perhaps four to eight members.

A central circle like a steering committee (called a “General Circle”) creates all the other circles determining their areas of responsibility, aims, and budgets. The General Circle also provides longer-term planning for the whole community — coordinating and overseeing the work of the other, more specifically focused circles.

“Double links” are two people who are each members of two different circles, and who convey information between the two circles. This ensures a direct, two-way flow of

information circles, and helps all the various work areas of the community function smoothly and synergistically in relation with one another.

(2) **Domain and aims.** Aims (ongoing objectives) are what the circle produces and provides for the community. The aims of a Finance Circle, for example, with the domain of financial management for the community, would be to provide financial services, including, the work of paying the community's taxes, utility bills, insurance premiums, and so on, and invoicing and collecting dues and fees from members. The aims of a community's Promotions Circle, with the domain of community promotions and advertising, would be to provide the services of promotions and advertising in order to inform and inspire potential visitors, neighbors, and the general public about its mission and activities, and its specific work could be creating and managing the community's website, blog, online newsletter, brochures, tours for visitors, and other tasks. Again, Sociocracy is about organizing work, and for intentional communities, this means providing a clear, effective system for doing this — and with clear domains and aims, everyone knows what each circle is doing and why they're doing it.

Aims are not goals, which have a beginning and end. Rather, aims are ongoing and continuous. Aims are crucial because when circle members make proposals, object to proposals, and resolve objections to proposals they do so based on how the proposal may or may not support the specific aims of their circle.

(3) **Feedback Loops.** Engineers and inventors use the three steps of feedback loops to create and test their ideas. First they create a design or plan. Next they implement their design by creating a prototype in order to try out the design. And lastly they measure and evaluate the prototype in order to learn how it works in real-life circumstances. Then they may revise their design, based on what they learned in their measurements and evaluation, and create a new prototype.

Feedback loops are built into Sociocracy too, because the wording of every proposal includes criteria for how it will later be measured and evaluated for effectiveness after it is implemented, and dates of upcoming meetings in which these evaluations will occur. Criteria for measuring proposals can include "how much" and "how many" questions. Criteria for evaluation are more subjective, and might include questions such as "Do we like it?" "Is it working well?" "What do community members say about it?" and so on.

After each evaluation circle members can keep the implemented proposal as it is or change it as needed or even dismantle it (if possible). So when circle members are creating or considering a proposal, they know that, depending on the proposal, they may later be able to keep it, change it, or throw it out. Thus no proposal or decision has to be perfect, but only "good enough for now" and "safe enough to try." This flexibility reduces the fear of making a mistake or of failing to create a "perfect" proposal where they've thought of everything. Because using feedback loops takes the pressure off circle members to "get it right," meetings tend to be much more relaxed than when using consensus, since in consensus it is difficult to change a decision once it's finally been decided.

(4) **Consent decision-making.** This meeting process includes checking in with each person in the circle, called a "round." After a round to answer clarifying questions and a round hear quick reactions, there's a round to hear whether each circle member consent to the proposal or objects to it. Objections indicate the proposal needs more work. Circle members resolve objections by modifying the proposal and then doing another consent round. These two steps — consent rounds and modifying any objections — are alternated until there are no more objections — which means the circle has consented to the latest modification of the proposal.

When consent decision-making is practiced correctly, no member of a circle can stop their circle from approving a proposal because the proposal violates the person's own personal values or lifestyle choices. Objections to proposals are a necessary and desirable part of consent decision-making and are not blocks or vetoes. As noted above, the checks and balances provided by the seven parts of Sociocracy — including that when a circle has clear aims no one can object for personal reasons, which helps prevent power abuses in decision-making. Thus in Sociocracy there is no "personal blocking" or implied or actual "threats to block."

Each of Sociocracy's other three meeting processes are based on the principles of consent decision-making.

(5) In **proposal-forming**, circle members draft one or more proposals about an issue that relates to the circle's area of responsibility and aims.

(6) In **selecting people for roles (elections)**, circle members choose people for specific roles in their circle, and their choices are based on the specific responsibilities and qualifications for each role rather than on whether or not they like the person or other personal reasons.

(7) In **role-improvement feedback**, circle members give feedback — what's working well, what may need improvement — to other circle members relative to how they are fulfilling the specific responsibilities of the role.

2. Sociocracy's Three Values:

* **Equivalence** — circle members have an equivalent voice in decisions in their circle.

* **Transparency** — policy decisions are known to everyone through the double-links.

* **Effectiveness** — when practiced properly, Sociocracy tends to take less time and help people accomplish their goals more easily than with other methods.

3. How Sociocracy is best learned and implemented successfully.

Sociocracy tends to *not* to work well in a community or member-led group when

(1) people understand it only partially, (2) some members understand it and others don't, or (3) the group uses some but not all of its seven parts. Or — the worst — if the community misunderstands Sociocracy by viewing it through the lens of consensus, and inadvertently creates a Sociocracy-consensus hybrid. This doesn't work as well as either Sociocracy or consensus and tends to generate confusion and frustration.

The positive responses to using Sociocracy in communities and member-led groups seem to occur only under the following circumstances:

(1) The group understands the need for ongoing training or periodic reviews, such as with an ongoing Sociocracy study group and/or an in-house coach. Or they have in-person or online consultations with a Sociocracy trainer. They use an outside Sociocracy facilitator when they can.

(2) The group makes sure all members learn Sociocracy — especially new incoming people. The community doesn't assume new folks will just "pick it up" by attending meetings; rather, training in Sociocracy is provided for new members before they have full decision rights in meetings. Without training people tend to misinterpret Sociocracy through the lens of whatever decision-making method they are most familiar with, often consensus.

(3) Group members who do not or will not learn Sociocracy for whatever reason *nevertheless agree to support the group in using it*, perhaps by signing a written agreement saying this and saying they promise to learn Sociocracy as soon as they can. And they agree *not* to interrupt or undermine the facilitator's work of leading circle members through Sociocracy's various meeting processes.

(4) Since the seven main parts of Sociocracy work together synergistically to provide efficient governance and effective meetings, the group uses all seven parts.

What's in a word?

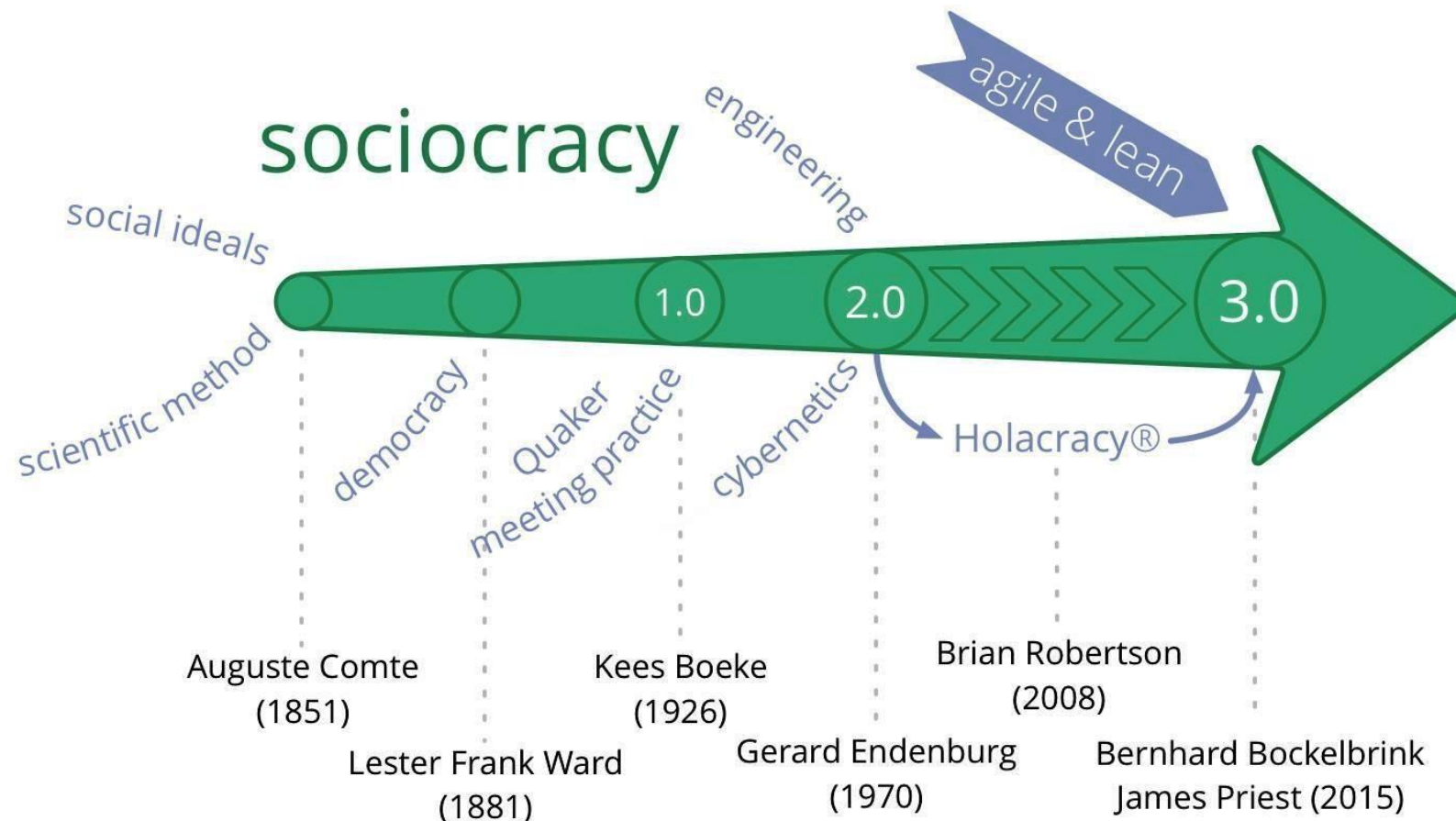
<https://sociocracy30.org/the-details/history/>

socio – from Latin socius - companion, friend

-cracy – from Ancient Greek κράτος (krátos, “power, rule”)

(different to the rule of the *demos*, i.e. the general mass of people with voting privileges)

A Brief History of Sociocracy from 1851 to Today



History of sociocracy, cont.

- 1851 - Auguste Comte: scientific method applied to society; sociocracy is “*the social order of the future*” - not yet achievable but inevitable
- 1881 - Lester Frank Ward: redefined the term Sociocracy to describe the rule of the people with relationships with each other
- 1926 -1954 - Kees Boeke: established the first sociocracy in his residential school (based on Quaker consensus principles); wrote a book “*Sociocracy: Democracy as it might be*” (1945)
- 1970's - Gerard Endenburg: student in Kees Boeke's school; integrated principles from Engineering and Cybernetics; in his company Endenburg Electrotechniek he evolved “*The Sociocratic Circle-Organization Method*” (later becoming “*The Sociocratic Method*”)
- 1978 - Sociocratisch Centrum Utrecht: created to promote “*The Sociocratic Method*”
- 1994 - new law in the Netherlands: Sociocratic organizations are no longer required to have a worker's council
- 2000 - emergence of a now wide-spread grassroots movement
- 2007 - *We the People*: John Buck / Sharon Villines make Sociocracy accessible to the English-speaking world

Sources of information and training about sociocracy (added by CGEV):

- **Diana Leafe Christian** <http://dianaleafechristian.org>: Adapted sociocracy for communities; presented 2-day training to Common Ground Ecovillage in 2015; teaches internationally; writes avidly (many of her articles are in our Handbook)
- **Sociocracy for All (SoFA)** www.sociocracyforall.org: Dedicated to the spread of a vibrant and connected sociocracy network worldwide; offers online web training; excellent source of articles and videos and an excellent 2018 book, *Many Voices, One Song*.
- **Sociocracy Consulting Group** <http://sociocracyconsulting.com/>: Offers consulting and training; excellent facilitator training
- **www.sociocracy.info**: an excellent source of thoughtful articles and resources
- **Sociocracy 3.0** <https://sociocracy30.org>: authors of this history article; promote “7 principles of sociocracy”

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COMMON GROUND ECOVILLAGE

Vision, Mission, and Aims

May 12, 2018

VISION

Defines the desired external world; the future as the Circle desires it to be

We envision a world in which people live in justice and harmony with each other and the land.

MISSION

What we will do, big picture, to bring about this vision

To actualize Common Ground Ecovillage as an agrarian intentional community that is regenerative, collaborative, creative, and celebratory in all that we do.

AIMS

Concrete, specific activities, products, or services that we exchange with ourselves and others that describe the intended result; are tangible (can be delivered/received), and are yardsticks for measuring success; things we produce or provide for the people we serve (members and visitors)

- To create and maintain a physical infrastructure such as homes, structures, a community house, roads, pathways, utilities, and studios/workspaces
- To produce food, fiber, and energy for our community
- To provide governance, financial and legal stewardship, membership services, land-use management, community-strengthening and educational offerings
- To encourage the establishment of land-based enterprises
- To share what we have learned, serve as a model, and foster collaborative exchanges through teaching, learning, and participating in social change.

Common Ground Ecovillage, May 12, 2018

Common Ground Ecovillage Statement of Principles and Intentions

Rev. November, 2019

A Statement of Principles and Intentions was first posted on Common Ground Ecovillage's website in February 2013, after extensive discussion among the then-members based on a set of "Agreements" drafted by a predecessor eco-village planning group. They have been our guiding lights and inspiration ever since. We have made several revisions since then, to make explicit our commitment to work for racial equity and for social and economic justice and to clarify intentions with regard to farm animals. The present version was consented by General Circle on 11/6/19.

1. **Common Ground Ecovillage is an intentional community.** We are a group of people drawn and held together by common interests and values and an abiding commitment to each others' and the land's well-being. We affirm that this commitment entails both joy and sometimes sacrifice.
2. **We are abidingly loyal to the land.** We are committed to living closely and attentively with each other and the land, embracing the larger web of life as the original form of community itself. Graced in particular by a prime and generations old family tract of land, we are committed to long-term restoration and stewardship of that land and to protecting it from exploitation or speculation. Major portions of the larger land under our stewardship will be established in watershed and farmland conservation trusts. Eco-village land will be held in common.
3. **We seek relative self-reliance, especially in food and energy.** We intend to provide for many – ideally and in the long run, most – of our own needs for food and electricity, both by producing our own and by limiting demands that markedly increase our dependency and footprint (e.g., limiting our demands for imported foods; limiting our use of energy-intensive designs or technologies). We are also exploring relative financial self-reliance: financing ourselves internally as much as possible, in place of reliance on banks, and creating our own currency for internal exchanges.
4. **We seek a vigorous and diverse membership.** Affirming diversity as a key to the richness of life as well as community resiliency and social sustainability, we actively solicit members of the full range of ages, specifically including families with young children, persons from ethnic and socio-economic groups historically poorly represented in the intentional communities movement, and with a range of spiritual beliefs, educational backgrounds, and sexual orientations.
5. **We value cooperation and efficiency at the appropriate scale for sustainability.** We envision a world where people have returned to personal involvement in food production and other practicalities of life, and have a voice in small cooperative groups at the community scale. Our hope is that Common Ground Ecovillage may become one model for such a way of life.
6. **We seek a skilled membership.** We seek members willing and able to defer to the greater good and to respond to the needs of others as well as self – functional contributors to the work at hand. A range of practical skills are necessary to the community, from animal care to child-care, wordsmithing to blacksmithing. We will develop and detail a transparent membership process to address these constraints and needs in a separate document.
7. **We affirm the value and expectation of community work.** We will develop a system of work requirements and a tracking system for same. We affirm that money will not in general substitute for work on community tasks, though we also affirm that our system will need to allow for a variety of different abilities and ways of contributing, as well as take account of significant variability in the demands of outside work within member families. We are committed to putting a clear, simple, and transparent system into place from the first, building upon current best practices; to sustain it seriously and consistently; to specify consequences for unmet requirements while avoiding further unstated expectations.
8. **We seek to integrate individual and household economic independence within cooperative structures.** Households in our community will have independent finances, though some households' income, or

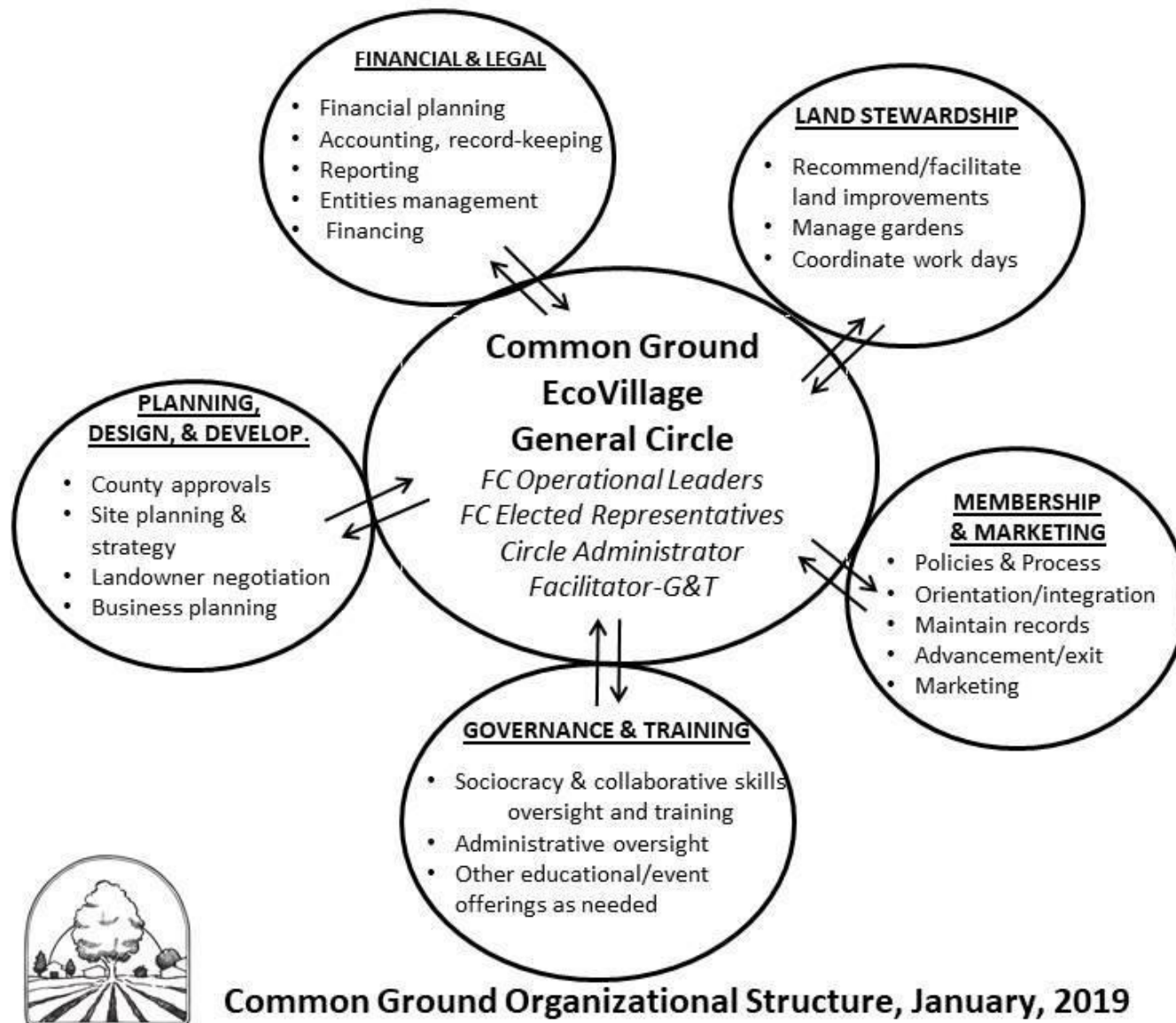
major parts of it, may be from within the community. Disclosure of private finances is expected only when the financial (or other) health of the community may be affected.

9. **Our ownership model is cooperative.** We seek an ownership model that allows members to remove their equity, facilitating and supporting members' decisions to leave the community when desired or needed for life changes, while also acknowledging that the economic value of a share in the community is a function of both individual and community contributions, and accordingly ought to accrue to both. The economic and other interests of the community as well as the individual owner(s) must always be considered when property is transferred.
10. **Community decision-making will be wholly transparent and inclusive of all voices.** Consent is foundational. The specific forms of consultation, representation, and feedback are negotiable in the interests of the most effective and appropriately empowering methods.
11. **Buildings and infrastructure will be designed to integrate harmoniously with each other and with the land.** While recognizing that members' ideas of what in fact is harmonious or beautiful may be quite varied, we nonetheless commit to community attentiveness to overall aesthetics and establishing a process for decision-making on aesthetic matters.
12. **Buildings and infrastructure will be designed for minimal or positive impact and maximal livability.** We prioritize clean and healthy water and air (indoor and out), water catchment and recycling on-site (including full-scale "waste" composting), soil restoration and enrichment, and careful preservation and enhancement of viewscape. Any toxic substances/chemicals proposed for use in the community will be evaluated by a best-practices committee for impact on the community and the environment. We seek to absolutely minimize unsustainable impacts and, where they may be necessary, to more than compensate them with positive impacts as well.
13. **Buildings and infrastructure will be designed to allow for variety and both accessibility and privacy.** We will keep as much land as possible open both for farming and for wild area. In the built areas, intelligent and cooperative design layout will accommodate varying needs for privacy, quiet, security and clustering, and carefully balance and enable both regular outside visitation for educational purposes and the privacy and other needs of members.
14. **We will take care for our daily impacts upon each other.** Living closely with each other will inevitably lead to unexpected irritations. We commit ourselves to proactively attending to such potential irritants and to raising such issues with fellow members and addressing them creatively and constructively. We expect that sometimes the most troublesome impacts may be from seemingly little things such as noise and clutter: we pledge to take all concerns seriously as they arise.
15. **We affirm the value and expectation of community celebration.** Recognizing celebratory interaction as one key to deepening connections with one another and with the land, we commit ourselves to creating and sharing regular celebratory opportunities, such as very regular shared meals, parties, play-reading and musical groups, dances, and others as members wish. These will in no way be mandatory, but ideally will be irresistible!
16. **We expect to maintain individual dietary orientations in the context of appropriate consideration of others'.** We recognize that all dietary orientations have both benefits and costs (to other creatures, to the land, to others and to ourselves) that can be balanced in different ways. Accordingly, we affirm the legitimacy of a variety of dietary orientations and commit ourselves to appropriately sensitive consideration to others' sensibilities around food. Policies for shared meals and kitchens will be worked out carefully. Pursuant to Principle & Intention #23 below, the community will also set guidelines for the raising of animals for use as food, if any animals are so raised, as an individual or small-group initiative and responsibility.
17. **We will live among other animals with appreciation and care.** We will welcome members' companion animals such as dogs and cats into the community, for mutual enjoyment as well as mutual benefit, and expect and desire to share the land with farm animals such as chickens, bees, goats and sheep in the same spirit. All animals will be treated with respect and consideration for the natural health and quality of life of each particular species, while also recognizing that they may need special limits or arrangements for the sake of other members' or the community's needs, as well as ecological considerations.

18. **We walk individual spiritual paths in the context of open-ended expressions of agreed-upon ideals and values.** We look forward to supporting and celebrating shared values in various ways in our interactions with each other. At the same time, we do not wish for them to harden into any kind of orthodoxy. We commit ourselves to keeping our spiritual and ethical relations open, exploratory, and non-exclusive, with mutual influence to take place only through modeling, cooperation, inspiration, education, and other supportive structures.
19. **We affirm a variety of family needs.** We recognize that a community of people of the full range of ages, with family connections both within and beyond Common Ground Ecovillage, will have a variety of needs and potential dependencies and dependents. We affirm that meeting these needs is a demanding and laudable task. We will design systems that support the needs of children, parents, the elderly, and their care-givers.
20. **We promote healthy living.** We encourage practices such as regular exercise, good nutrition, and healthy expression of emotion. Individuals are expected to try to keep themselves healthy enough, both mentally and physically, to be able to contribute to the community in the normally expected ways for their age and capacities – recognizing at the same time that health, injury and illness are often matters outside of our control. We will seek to make life and work in the community as healthy as possible for all members, as well as to support each other in whatever states of disability, struggle, and recovery we may find ourselves.
21. **Drugs, alcohol, and smoking are carefully controlled.** Illegal drugs are not allowed. We expect alcohol to be used – if at all – only in ways that enhance or at least do not threaten or diminish the community. Smoking is not allowed in any community common areas – outdoor or indoor.
22. **We will share our struggles and seek community support in situations where the community is affected, and we will support each other in such need.** We fully expect to falter – mentally, emotionally, physically, spiritually, financially – from time to time. Within the context of independence (agreement #20), how much of our need we bring to the community will normally be up to each individual. However, when our faltering may affect cooperative group functioning and growth, we affirm the need to bring it forward for community interaction, concern, and care, and we commit ourselves to offering the same interaction, concern, and care to others who come forward in turn.
23. **On some key issues we expect to embrace a pluralistic practice.** We fully expect that there will be diverse preferences and orientations that fall beyond the principles specified in this document. Out of respect for each other and our commitment to build a sustainable and inclusive community, we will not necessarily specify a single community practice on such issues. Instead, the community may set guidelines within which a range of different practices can be undertaken at the initiative and as the responsibility of individual members or groups of like-minded members.
24. **We will proactively address the possibility of serious conflicts within the community.** We will establish and regularly practice conflict-resolution processes for conflicts large and small, affirming that what is at stake in community familiarity with such processes is not only the conflict at hand but the health of the community as a whole. Recognizing also that certain conflicts may become serious, we affirm the need for flexibility and change in dealing with them. Recognizing that certain conflicts may nonetheless become irresolvable, we will provide for situations in which a member must be asked to leave the community, setting out clear mechanisms for “separation” and writing the necessary conditions into leases, share agreements, and any other legally-binding commitments we make with one another.
25. **We are committed to careful economic planning.** We must keep the land and community buildings and infrastructure secure from loss, foreclosure, and seizure, both for the sake of our individual stakes in the survival and relative economic well-being of the community as well as to sustain the community itself as a long-term social and economic alternative in the society at large.
26. **We aim for socially and economically just relations within the community.** We commit to considering the full economic and social impact of our actions upon each other; to reducing or eliminating economic barriers to community membership and other economic and social inequalities; to valuing the full range of talents, time, and treasure that members bring to the community and to working out fair tradeoffs between them (P&I #7) as circumstances may require. We affirm again, however, that community self-preservation must come first (P&I #25).

27. **We expect to work both within the community and the larger society.** We expect that some members will primarily work within the physical community, while others will work outside the physical community, traveling to outside jobs. Recognizing the resource costs in the latter, but also affirming both the necessity and the value in engagement with larger communities and tasks, we will seek the most socially and ecologically sustainable ways to do both.
28. **We are committed to working for racial equity and for social and environmental justice.** We acknowledge racism in ourselves and in our society, and seek to overcome its harmful legacy in our relationships, our country, and on the land. Aspiring to create a racially inclusive community, we recognize that we can only achieve this goal by addressing our own racism and by working for racial justice. Aspiring to create a sustainable community, we recognize that true sustainability requires achieving harmony and justice – making ourselves a “beloved community” – both ecologically and socially.
29. **We will engage energetically with our neighbors.** Our community will deal fairly and generously with all others (individuals, workers, state and other governments, etc.), and seek ways to be supportive within our local area in particular, as well as to honor and learn from our neighbors. This may include offering community work groups in times of need, holding open potlucks and other meetings with local communities, and searching for other ways to engage with neighbors to facilitate sustainable relationships, growth, and trust all around.
30. **We hope to make ourselves an instrument for cultural change.** Our hope is that in building Common Ground Ecovillage we will not only secure a far better life for ourselves than we’d be able to live separately, but also that we may contribute to a society-wide “Great Turning” – ecological, social, and spiritual. We commit ourselves to social justice as well, and to seeking out the avenues of engagement that will enable us to promote it, such as reducing local and international hunger, support for those fleeing violence, and the like.
31. **Education is a key part of our mission.** We expect to welcome short- and medium-term visitors and live-in students and interns, as well as to establish summer camps, afterschool programs and other ways of partnering with schools, college & training programs, workshops, and the like, in order to teach by example and experience. By inviting the presence and activity of young people in many forms, we also hope to attract the membership of families with children.
32. **Enabling the creation and sustenance of other eco-villages is a key part of our mission.** We hope to foster the development of similar communities on other parcels. One step in this direction is the establishment at Harts Mill Eco-Village of a Carolinas-oriented subsidiary of the School of Living umbrella organization for overseeing community land trusts.
33. **We commit ourselves to rethinking the contemporary culture of consumerism and convenience.** We are willing to accept certain inconveniences to make greater self-sufficiency possible, and commit ourselves to transmuting them into positive opportunities: the joys of skill and craft, for example.
34. **We recognize that our aspirations must be tempered by practicality.** These principles are not absolutes: we recognize the possible need for compromise both with each other and with the unwelcome demands of zoning laws, health requirements, and the like. Change is an ongoing process.
35. **We will continuously reassess our values, vision, and mission.** Common Ground Ecovillage is a work in progress. We acknowledge and intend to build upon the extensive experience of past and existing intentional communities and ecovillages, but also recognize that neither they nor we have all the answers. We embrace the need for constant re-examination and re-adjustment. Recognizing that we may settle into less-than-optimal patterns for a variety of reasons, and that both times and conditions are constantly changing, we commit ourselves to establishing and maintaining formal and informal mechanisms for regular self-reassessment, including reassessment of this very set of agreements.

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Common Ground Organizational Structure, January, 2019

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ROLE OF GENERAL CIRCLE

November 20, 2019

Membership: Operational Leaders (OLs), Elected Representatives (ERs) of the Functional Circles (FCs), Circle Administrator, Facilitator, Treasurer (these last three roles may or may not be held by an OL or ER of an FC).

DOMAIN: The GC represents and serves the collective community. GC members are responsible for ensuring that the community's mission and aims are carried out. Functional Circle (FC) leaders are called to wear two hats: one that speaks for, and to, their Circle, and one that considers the broader community matrix, offering support, wisdom, and feedback to cultivate the well being of the whole.

AIMS

- Supports long term planning and visioning for the community and guides the community development process
- Apportions policy making and operational work to FCs through consenting to FC's domains and aims*
- Facilitates the flow of information among the FC leaders so that they may inform, coordinate with, and support each Circle's work
- Provides perspectives and feedback and gives consented-to requests to FCs
- Makes policies and decisions in any areas not otherwise delegated to FCs including decisions that involve multiple Circles.
- Approves annual FC budgets and expenses that lie outside of FC budgets
- Establishes and disbands FCs and elects their Operational Leaders
- Arranges meetings and agendas of the whole community (when applicable) and maintains community records
- Ensures that all policies are kept updated and periodically reviewed
- Coordinates as needed with the Common Ground Ecovillage, LLC

** While FCs are empowered to make policy and carry out operations within their domains and aims, sociocracy is designed to work best when Circles seek input from outside their Circle before decisions are made. Since GC members serve the whole community (akin to a council of elders), it is recommended that FCs regularly request input from the GC so that their decisions take account of the richest information available.*

COMMON GROUND ECOVILLAGE FUNCTIONAL CIRCLES

January-December, 2020

FINANCIAL & LEGAL CIRCLE

DOMAIN

Provide oversight, management, and guidance of financial and legal affairs to protect the viability and prosperity of the Common Ground Ecovillage community.

AIMS

- Manage accounting activities in accordance with generally accepted practices. Prepare and file tax returns. Comply with all applicable government reporting requirements. Ensure appropriate general liability insurance for the community.
- Prepare and distribute updated financial reports on a regular basis.
- Maintain permanent records of key legal and financial documents.
- Prepare, obtain consent for, and administer the community's operating budget; coordinate and oversee functional circle operating budgets.
- Develop a draft business plan in anticipation of approaching lenders for construction loan and permanent financing.
- Review and approve all contracts for HM LLC prior to execution; ensure ongoing compliance with terms of contracts and LLC Operating Agreement.
- Finalize our decisions regarding ownership plan and financing options.
- Evaluate the need for a development consultant and/or project manager. If considered necessary, commence the process of seeking funding and GC approval to move forward with interviewing and hiring.

LAND STEWARDSHIP CIRCLE

DOMAIN

Attend to, advocate for, and manage the integrity and health of the living land in harmony with the Common Ground Ecovillage community's activities.

AIMS

- Oversee land-related activities, such as regular workdays, with the restoration and long-term vitality of the land foremost in mind
- Monitor the health and vitality of the land, practicing open attentiveness to its condition and initiating and maintaining ecological surveys, soil testing, etc. as needed
- Organize and oversee necessary maintenance and long-term restoration of the CGEV soil, wood lots, pond and creek
- Plan and oversee construction and maintenance of trails and other land improvements, and farm- and land-related buildings, in coordination with PDD as necessary
- Identify and prioritize needs relating to land projects and prepare annual budget to submit to the Finance and Legal Circle

- Coordinate land-related activities with attentiveness to the needs of our immediate neighbors
- Oversee and monitor visitors' activities on the land.

MEMBERSHIP & MARKETING CIRCLE

DOMAIN

Conceptualize, codify, and coordinate the membership structure and process, and work to create and sustain a welcoming, connected, and well-functioning community

AIMS

- Define, codify, and evaluate membership materials, processes, and policies
- Define, codify, and evaluate rights and responsibilities of members, including financial, work, and participation expectations
- Attract and cultivate a diverse membership with respect to race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, social class, religion, and also skill sets.
- Orient new members to CG values, agreements, culture, and governance, coordinating with Governance & Training as needed
- Provide encouragement, guidance, feedback, and discernment to members throughout the full cycle of the membership process
- Manage and maintain membership platforms, lists and records, including entry and application dates, skills available, etc., and set up new members in *OnlyOffice* and the RiseUp ListServ
- Support and guide recruitment activities and outreach to those potentially interested in Common Ground, identifying appropriate avenues, methods, and events for promoting Common Ground and recruiting participation among the membership to assist with implementation.
- Oversee website updating, development and upkeep

PLANNING, DESIGN, & DEVELOPMENT CIRCLE

DOMAIN

Lead the process of conceptualizing, planning, designing, engineering, developing, and constructing an integrated built and natural environment according to Common Ground Ecovillage's Principles and Intentions.

AIMS

- Lead the architectural and site design process for the village and farm
- Manage relationships and processes for County/State approvals for site and buildings
- Facilitate community involvement in the design and planning process
- Manage the construction process
- Coordinate with Land Stewardship and other circles as needed in the ongoing evaluation and coordination of farm and land-based enterprises.

GOVERNANCE & TRAINING CIRCLE

DOMAIN

Provide oversight, coordination, and training for Common Ground Ecovillage's governance, collaborative culture, general administration and community event needs, monitor application and practice at all levels of community governance, and consult with members/circles as needed.

AIMS

- Develop and schedule introductory and ongoing training and materials for new and prospective members
- Support through training, reflection, and evaluation governance and collaborative skills practices that are clear, skillful, and consistent across all levels
- Offer training and experiences to encourage and inspire simpler living at CGEV
- Identify and address gaps in our governance process, such as monitoring decision logs, ensuring proposal renewals, tracking term limits, nominations, and role improvement feedback.
- Develop processes, capacity, and trust with which to address community relations and/or conflict
- Serve as a resource/coach for members on the practice of sociocracy and collaborative skills at various levels and functions of the community
- Identify and address gaps in our governance process, such as ensuring plan-implement-evaluate feedback loops, term limits, and role improvement feedback where appropriate
- Identify and communicate consistent policies and procedures for organizing, record-keeping, and tracking the administrative work of circles in Hart's Mill community
- Advise/train circles on miscellaneous Only Office features, such as the calendar and project management tools
- Set up filing systems, protocols, and standards for hard copy and online management tools
- Develop, implement, and maintain a monthly events calendar and newsletter for members



COMMON GROUND ECOVILLAGE OPERATING GUIDELINES FOR FUNCTIONAL CIRCLES

C-6

Circle Meeting Functions:

- **Policy Decisions:** Set aims, standards, limits, allocate resources (including people), clarify values, specify general procedures, establish plans
- **Operational Decisions:** The day-to-day carrying out of Policy Decisions, work tasks and projects

Responsibilities:

- Hold meetings as often as is necessary to make decisions, track progress, and get work done (a regular meeting schedule may best facilitate process over time).
- Take minutes of all meetings.
- Post agenda/minutes/decisions promptly in OnlyOffice
- Keep files as a record of activities, decisions, expenditures, etc. in hard copy and/or in OnlyOffice as appropriate
- Bring proposals, issues, and concerns to the General Circle that would benefit from broader input or that extend beyond the agreed-upon domain.

Leadership:

- Operational Leaders (OL) determine agenda (with facilitator and member input) and distribute to members in advance; or create an agenda at the beginning of a meeting.
- Elected Representatives (ER) assist the OL in meeting planning and reporting
- Circles may choose to select a Facilitator to ensure that items are covered, focus is maintained, and all members' voices are included.
- Circles may choose to select a Circle Administrator to assist with tasks such as agendas, minutes, space planning, and OnlyOffice posting.
- The Facilitator and Circle Administrator can have other roles in the Circle such as OL or ER and can be done by the same person.
- In **policy meetings**, sociocracy favors equivalence and transparency as much as efficiency. Consequently, leaders/facilitators are encouraged to employ rounds and consent decision-making processes as appropriate.
- In **operational meetings** where the focus is on accomplishing tasks, the OL may lead in the manner most fitting the situation

Authority:

- The General Circle (GC) will determine budgets for each Functional Circle. If funds are not adequate for operating expenses, the Op. Leader will bring concerns/requests to the GC
- Functional Circle activities will remain within the consented-to Domain and Aims.
- If the Domain needs to change, then the General Circle will be involved in any re-definitions.

Common Ground Ecovillage, July 15, 2016

Circles & Double Links in Community

Excerpted from an article by Diana Leafe Christian

The organizational structure of Sociocracy consists of a group of “circles.” Circles are semi-autonomous, self-organized groups of people with a specific area of authority and responsibility, whose members are tasked to accomplish a specific “aim” relative to their area of authority and responsibility. Circles are similar to what in intentional communities are called committees or teams, and in businesses are called departments.

Members of a circle make policy decisions for their circle; measure, evaluate, and perhaps modify their already-implemented decisions; keep records of their decisions and other circle business; and plan their own ongoing learning and development related to their area of responsibility. Typically there is a “General Circle” with several smaller circles linked to it. Members of the General Circle discuss and decide more abstract, longer-term community issues: strategic plans, the annual budget, and large or far-reaching opportunities or challenges. The General Circle also creates each smaller circle and gives each one its specific area of authority and responsibility (called a “domain” in Sociocracy), and allocates money for its budget. General Circles are similar in focus and scope to whole-group plenary meetings in communities. However, they are not large groups comprised of all community members, but are comprised only of each smaller circle’s Representative and Operational Leader.

Smaller circles focus on more concrete, specific, and shorter-term issues for the organization. A community’s General Circle might create, for example, a Finance Circle, Promotions and Marketing Circle, Membership Circle, Land Use/Site Planning Circle, Repair and Maintenance Circle.

“Larger and Smaller,” “Higher and Lower,” “Mother and Daughter” Circles

In Sociocratic literature the terms “higher” and “lower” circles are used to describe what I’m calling larger and smaller circles. (One group calls them “mother” and “daughter” circles, because the “daughter” circles emerge from the “mother circle.”)

“Higher” and “lower” do not mean “superior to” and “inferior to.” Rather these terms indicate the level of abstraction the circle is responsible for — larger, longer-term issues or more concrete, shorter-term issues. But saying “more abstract, big-picture, longer-term circles” and “more concrete, specific, shorter-term circles” is time-consuming and awkward. To reduce awkwardness and connotations of “better” and “worse” I use the terms “larger” and “smaller.” (But this is misleading too, since a “smaller” circle can have more members and thus be larger in population than the community’s General Circle.)

A community’s General Circle not only gives each smaller circle its area of authority and responsibility (domain) and its budget, but also its aim.

Creating Smaller Circles as Needed

A smaller circle can create one or more even smaller circles which have an even more specific focus and handle even more specific kinds of tasks. (Like a “mother” circle gives birth to “daughter” circles.) A Promotions Circle, for example, might create two smaller circles, a Website and Newsletter Circle, with the aim to write and produce these communication services, and a Visitor Circle, with the aim to welcome visitors and conduct community tours.

The two-way flow of information

Each circle has four roles: a Facilitator, a Meeting Manager, an Operational Leader, and a Representative. The Operational Leader and Representative form the “double link” between a larger and smaller circle, which creates a smooth, easy, and transparent flow of information, suggestions, and requests from every part of the community to every other part.

The Operational Leader of a circle *also* conveys the news from other smaller circles to their own smaller circle, because he or she hears the reports from Representatives of other smaller circles in General Circle meetings. (Although presumably most people in the community read the posted minutes of each circle too.) Double-linking helps create even more transparency in the community.

When a smaller circle creates one or more of its own smaller circles, it selects the Operational Leader for its lower circle. If the Promotions Circle created a Visitors Circle with the aim to organize and coordinate community tours, it would select someone to be the Operational Leader for the Visitors Circle (whose members might be the community’s tour guides). Similarly, the Community Tours Circle would choose one of its own members to be the Representative to the Promotions Circle. This way every circle is directly or indirectly double-linked to every other circle.

Why not just one link? Gerard Endenburg and the employees of his company, Endenburg Elektrotechniek measured and evaluated each modification of every aspect of Sociocratic governance back in the early 1970s. They found that using two people to double link worked a lot better than having one person do both roles. Thus double-linking was “field-tested” by all these people in the organization where Sociocracy was invented and first applied.

It can be difficult for one person to do two different kinds of tasks effectively. The Representative of a smaller circle needs to tell the General Circle exactly what it wants and needs. The Operational Leader needs to tell the smaller circle the General Circle’s big-picture plans and goals for the whole community. When one person tries to do both roles it can be challenging to do either role effectively. Endenburg cites engineering feedback loops to say that these two roles must operate separately and simultaneously. Electric power can’t flow in two directions at the same time in one wire. Oxygenated and unoxygenated blood each flow in two directions in two different sets of “pipes.”

ROLES WITHIN A CIRCLE

Adapted to Common Ground Ecovillage

OPERATIONAL LEADER (OL) ROLE, May 2018

The OL must be an Associate Member or higher

- Oversee the work of the Functional Circle (FC) in Circle (policy) and Operations meetings
 - Communicate the interests and decisions of the General Circle (GC) to the FC (the “down” link between Circles)
1. Chosen by the General Circle (GC) to lead the Functional Circle (FC) in furthering its own mission and vision by accomplishing the specific aims of the FC (FC must consent to the person elected by the GC)
 2. Participates fully in the GC and the FC
 3. May fulfill any role in the Circle except Elected Representative
 4. Holds the container of the history, knowledge, and goals of the Circle; pays attention to the whole of the FC, keeping track of what needs to be done next, how Circle members are functioning, what opportunities and problems are arising, how things can run more smoothly
 5. Drafts agendas for FC Circle meetings (with assistance from Elected Representative and Facilitator)
 6. Works with the GC for input and feedback on the work of the FC
 7. Brings information from the GC to FC meetings and participates fully in those meetings
 8. Helps circle members learn more about the purpose and tasks of their circle
 9. Makes time-sensitive decisions in Operations meetings within the policy framework established by the Circle

*In Circle (policy) meetings, each [member] is equivalent and has the power to consent or object to proposed actions that affect their responsibility in the organization. But not every meeting is a Circle meeting. On a daily basis, Circle activities are directed by an Operational Leader (OL) without discussion or reevaluation of decisions. This produces efficiency and forward movement. If there is disagreement, the OL makes the decision in the moment. The issue is discussed in the next circle meeting, and a policy is established to govern such decisions in the future. (from Buck & Villines, *We the People, Consenting to a Deeper Democracy*)*

ELECTED REPRESENTATIVE ROLE, May 2018

D-2

The ER must be an Associate Member or higher

- Works closely with the Operational Leader (OL) and functions as the OL's "right hand"
 - Communicates the interests and decisions of the FC to the General Circle (GC) (the "up" link between Circles)
1. Elected by the FC to represent the Circle in the meetings of the GC (GC must consent to the person elected by the FC)
 2. Participates fully in the FC and GC with consent rights in both Circles
 3. May fulfill any role in the Circle except Operational Leader
 4. Assists the OL and Facilitator in the drafting of the agendas.
 5. Listens to and learns his/her own circle's policies, plans, requests, news, etc. in order to report these to the GC
 6. Develops his or her own knowledge and skill in dealing with the topics addressed in the GC

*The representative is...one who participates fully, in both Circles, using his or her best judgment in making decisions, rather than functioning at the direction of an electorate, as delegates do. A representative must be able to understand and communicate the [FC's] interests and also be able to participate in decisions at the higher level of abstraction [of GC]. (From Buck & Villines, *We the People: Consenting to a Deeper Democracy*)*

FACILITATOR ROLE, May 2018

- The facilitator runs Circle meetings
 - The facilitator will prepare the meeting agenda with the OL/ER and guide the circle through all the steps of consent building
1. Elected by the Circle to run Circle meetings
 2. Skilled in facilitating all sociocratic meeting processes
 3. May employ a variety of facilitation methods to advance agenda items and attend to group well being
 4. Adept at steering discussions, moving decisions forward, and keeping everyone focused on the agenda of the meeting as well as the aim of the Circle
 5. Collaborates with the OL/ER on the design and preparation of the Circle meeting agenda
 6. Prepares for Circle meetings by reading previous meeting minutes, becoming familiar with the background of each agenda item, talking with the originators of agenda items, and determining the goals and process(es) that will be used to accomplish each item
 7. Ensures that all items on the agenda are addressed in some manner
 8. Participates in rounds as an equivalent voice with everyone else in the Circle

CIRCLE ADMINISTRATOR ROLE, June 2020

- The Circle Administrator tracks and documents the work of the Circle
1. Elected by the Circle
 2. Adept with electronic media including OnlyOffice, our online documents portal
 3. Inputs meeting decisions into the Decision Log
 4. Ensures that Circle OnlyOffice records are complete and up-to-date
 5. Researches before each meeting to see if any decisions are scheduled for review or roles up for re-election and communicates with OL and/or Facilitator
 6. Receive agenda items from Circles
 7. Collaborates with leaders / facilitator / presenters to prepare agenda
 8. Sends agenda to Circle members and confirms that key people/invited guests will be present
 9. Helps to prepare the meeting room
 10. Takes minutes or arranges for them to be taken
 11. Within 48 hours after meeting after the meeting, distributes minutes and other documents per Circle practice

TREASURER ROLE, July 2018

- **Elected by the GC** – member of the Financial & Legal (F&L) Circle and the GC
- **Must be a member of the Common Ground Ecovillage, LLC**
- **Financial policies** – Serve on the F&L Circle, overseeing the development and implementation of the organization's financial policies.
- **Financial account maintenance** – Manage relationships with any and all financial institutions selected by the F&L Circle, sign checks for authorized disbursements, monitor and balance account statements, and order supplies.
- **Financial transaction oversight** – Maintain control over access to the organization's funds, secure appropriate authorization for disbursements, pay all bills or debts owed and collect all receivables in a timely fashion, and develop systems for managing cash flow.
- **Membership dues** – Collect and deposit dues and other fees from members, and maintain records of each member's payments.
- **Budget** – Monitor the actual revenues and expenses incurred against the annual budget adopted by the F&L Circle and report to the General Circle.
- **Monthly cash flow report** – Issue report to General Circle showing all current financial transactions, actual vs. budget, and membership dues status.
- **Document management** – Maintain files with originals of all hard copy documents including, but not necessarily limited to: bills, invoices, statements, notices, tax filings, receipts, policies, and directives. Scan all new hard copy documents at least quarterly and copy those files, along with similar documents received in electronic format, to the organization's designated repository
- **Bookkeeping** – Ensure that all financial transactions are properly recorded in a bookkeeping software program (such as Quickbooks) in accordance with generally accepted accounting practices.
- **Financial statements** – Prepare and distribute quarterly financial statements to all Common Ground Ecovillage, LLC (CGEV) members. Present and discuss financial statements at General Circle meetings.. Prepare annual personal equity account statements for CGEV members, and as may be requested by members from time to time
- **Corporate and tax compliance**— Coordinate with the CPA selected by the F&L Circle to ensure compliance with general accepted accounting practices and all Federal, State and local tax requirements. Comply with all other government corporate and financial reporting requirements in a timely manner, including filing the CGEV annual report with the NC Secretary of State.
- **Oversight** – Delegate specific tasks related the Treasurer's role to other members of the F&L Circle or outside vendors as deemed necessary and appropriate, while maintaining responsibility for monitoring the performance of those tasks.

Roles in Two Kinds of Sociocracy Meetings

Policy Meetings <i>Making policies about circle's work tasks (physical labor or clerical work) goals, methods, strategies, membership, etc.</i>	Operations/work Meetings <i>Doing work tasks, coordinating work tasks (physical labor or clerical work.)</i>
1. Operations Leader: (1) Reports to his or her own circle the policies, plans, requests, news, etc. of the next-higher circle. (2) Participates as a member of his or her own circle, with full consent rights in its proposals. <i>As a member of the next-higher circle, when participating in its policy meetings:</i> (3) Listens to and learns that circle's policies, plans, requests, news, etc. in order to report these to his or her own circle. (4) Participates with full consent rights in the higher circle's proposals.	1. Operations Leader: When circle members do work tasks (operations), Ops Leader is responsible that everything gets done. S/he is the "buck stops here" person. Decisions in Operations/work Meetings can be made various ways: (a) Solely by Ops Leader ("the boss") because it's the most efficient way to coordinate work tasks & make sure everything gets done. S/he facilitates. (b) Or by all circle members, using any method they like — which can be inefficient — just talking with each other; consensus, majority-rule voting, super-majority voting, etc. IF they use consent decision-making, please don't let anyone confuse the Ops meeting with a Policy Meeting. In businesses & non-profits: The default position is the Operations Leader solely decides. In Intentional Communities: Operations Leader <i>may</i> function as the sole decision-maker (the default position) or if all circle members decide things — the Operations Leader is just another worker with no special role or duties in Operations/work Meetings
2. Representative: (1) Listens to and learns his or her own circle's policies, plans, requests, news, etc. in order to report these to the next-higher circle. (2) Participates as a member of his or her own circle with full consent rights in proposals. <i>As a member of the next-higher circle, when participating in its policy meetings:</i> (3) Reports to the next-higher circle the policies, plans, requests, news, etc. of his or her own circle. (4) Participates with full consent rights in the higher circle's proposals.	2. Representative: <i>Just another worker in the circle; no special role or duties in Operations/work Meetings.</i>
3. Circle Administrator: Makes sure: (1) Agenda items are gathered; agendas prepared beforehand, (2) Minutes are taken at meeting, (3) Logbook of circle is kept up to date.	3. Circle Administrator: <i>Just another worker in the circle; no special role or duties in Ops/work Meetings. People want to make ops/work decisions they want to record and keep, any circle member can do this.</i>
4. Facilitator: Facilitates Policy Meetings.	4. Facilitator: <i>Just another worker; no special role or duties in Ops/work Meetings. (IF circle members use a decision-making method that requires a facilitator, usually the Ops Leader facilitates.)</i>

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Common Ground Ecovillage Ground Rules for Circle Meetings

Respect the group process

- Effective meetings are everyone's responsibility
- Come prepared, and come with an open heart and mind
- Keep to task, topic, and agenda
- Be concise
- Decide together, based on HM Vision, Mission, and Principles
- Decisions must be "good enough for now, safe enough to try"
- Facilitator is here to serve the group and may interrupt or redirect to keep us on track

Respect yourself

- All Circle members have the right to speak and the responsibility to listen
- Speak only for yourself (make "I statements")
- If confused about what's happening, ask
- Do not withhold relevant information (feelings as well as perceptions and thoughts) -the group has a right to an informed decision

Respect others

- Respect differences of opinion: dissent and disagreement are welcome
- Value the diversity of group members
- No personal attacks, blaming, or aggression
- When there's conflict or emotional distress, we practice our conflict transformation skills and agreements

Guidelines for Circle Membership

January 6, 2016, rev. 7-18-18

Background: Common Ground Ecovillage presently operates with five Functional Circles and a General Circle. Working groups form and dissolve as needed. Joining a circle is a serious commitment. These guidelines are intended to inform members how to 1) join a Circle; 2) participate effectively; and 3) leave a Circle.

Drivers: It is vital for new members to participate in Functional Circles for these reasons:

- They learn about Common Ground Ecovillage and how we operate
- We need more skilled and energetic people to get our work done
- We get to know each other well
- Participation in Functional Circles is a requirement for membership advancement
- Since new members may wish to become involved in more than one Circle, we need a clear and consistent way to include them.

JOINING A CIRCLE

- Visiting members are welcome to observe Circle meetings.
- Circle membership is open to Exploratory Members and above.

Process:

The Operational Leader of each Functional Circle may exercise some flexibility and discretion concerning these requirements.

The new member will

- Acquire foundational training in sociocracy and cooperative skills through reviewing the sociocracy handbook, listening to the posted training audios, attending training sessions, and observing meetings
- Learn about the Circle(s) by reading Domains/Aims/Priorities, past meeting minutes, and reviewing documents posted on OnlyOffice
- Observe 1-3 meetings, writing down questions and asking them at the end or after the meeting closes
- Contact the Operational Leader (OL) and/or the Elected Representative (ER) of a Circle to indicate interest to join (Exploratory members and above)
- Submit a short statement to the OL and/or ER outlining their reasons and qualifications for joining, and what they feel they can contribute
- Come to a Circle meeting where Circle members may ask questions of candidate; candidate may ask questions of circle members
- Circle members decide through a consent round

Member Term: We have no specified terms for Circle members. All circles evaluate leadership once-a-year in May, but members can request to join (or leave) any time.

PARTICIPATING IN A CIRCLE

E-3

- Attend all Circle meetings and inform the Operational Leader in advance if you are unable to come
- Follow Ground Rules for behaving in a meeting (see below)
- Read the article by Laird Schaub on being a good meeting participant (see below)
- Prepare for meetings by doing your homework -- read documents, educate yourself about the issues being discussed, and bring your thoughts/feelings/resources to the discussion
- Read the Governance Handbook and receive continuing training in governance and cooperative skills
- Contribute to the work of the Circle by taking on project assignments that require time between meetings, and follow through on your commitments
- Take on leadership positions as you are able, such as Circle Administrator and Facilitator; Operational Leader and Elected Representative position are open to Associate Members and above and include membership in the General Circle

LEAVING A CIRCLE

Joining a circle or working group is a serious commitment, and it is expected that members in a circle will attend, participate, and complete the work to which they commit themselves. Although we all have different levels of time and skill available, we do not suggest that everyone needs to contribute equal amounts; we all do what we can. Additionally, we all need to miss occasional meetings and sometimes planned absences for longer periods of time are necessary. However, sudden disappearances and a habit of absenteeism can hamper the work of a circle. Returning members need to be brought up to date and rationales for previous decisions need to be explained; thus, meetings and the work of the group are slowed by this process. Second, committing to do work which is not completed very much hobbles the progress of a circle. Thus, it is important to have an approach that clarifies what to do when members disappear or fail to complete work consistently, and it is also important to distinguish these events from occasional lapses in our work or from a planned leave of absence.

Voluntarily: Members may elect to leave Circles voluntarily for many reasons. It is most respectful to the Circle if a member brings up issues well in advance that may lead to leaving a Circle. (This is particularly critical for people in leadership positions or who are holding significant task responsibility.) There may be strategies that lead to continued participation and growth for both the member and the Circle. Or, it may simply be time to move on to other roles.

Leave of absence: This may be requested by a Circle Member. If the leave of absence is consented to by the Circle members, these members then return to their circles after the leave as observers for a length of time commensurate with what is expected of new members; and following having read the interim minutes, proposals, and reports.

By request: If a Circle member is not abiding by the guidelines for effective Circle participation, then this must be brought to the attention of the member in some way. Creative problem-solving may lead to the continued participation of the member. However, if Circle membership conditions are not being upheld and solutions have not been found, the Circle may consent to ask a member to leave the Circle.

The secret to make it work

Unfortunately, though, Sociocracy is not a magic spell that, when cast upon a group, makes governance easy and effortless. In order for Sociocracy to work, participants must understand and embody the foundational rules of this game that we call cooperative decision-making.

Laird Schaub- On Being a Good Meeting Participant
communityandconsensus.blogspot.com

A lot of my blog is focused on consensus meeting dynamics. For the most part I look at the leverage possible through skilled facilitation (which I have been describing at length for more than 10 years in this blog, and been teaching since 2003). However, good meetings are *everyone's* responsibility, and I want to shine the spotlight today on meeting participants—the other side of the equation. There is a lot of leverage there, too, and many groups, to their detriment, never delineate what's wanted. Following are my thoughts about that.

- **Meetings are Structured Space**

Meetings are not informal social time. As such there are behavior expectations, which need to be spelled out, perhaps in Ground Rules, which lay out specifics (such as not repeating oneself, speaking on topic, assuming good intent).

Another way to see this: meetings are not open mic, where you get to say whatever you want at any time. They require participants to be self-disciplined.

- **Strategy Choices for Getting to What's Best for the Group**

Even if you agree that the ultimate objective is getting to what is best for the group (and you should), there are two significantly different ways to approach this:

a) Everyone stating their personal preference, and then having the group collectively decide what is the best way to extract a balance out of that stew.

b) Everyone screening what they say for what is good for the group (leaving aside personal preferences), so that the group need only balance ideas that have already passed that test.

The second approach works *much* better. In saying this I understand that not everyone is equally good at discerning the difference between personal preference and group concern, and thus the group may need to help them with that on occasion. Nobody's perfect.

Nonetheless, it can be incredibly irritating if some members are operating from paradigm b) while others are operating from a). In that case the choir is not singing from the same hymnal and the voices will not be melodic. If your group is not clear about this, talk about it and try to get on the same page.

• Participant's Mantra

Here is my distillation of an internal screen that all participants could adopt in an attempt to use good judgment about when to add input. Remember: it's not about how good you look; it's about the group getting to the best decision.

What does the group need to hear from me about this topic at this time?

If you read this closely there are five chances for participants to hesitate before speaking:

a) "group"

Is this input appropriate for everyone to hear?

b) "need"

Is this input necessary (not tangential) for the conversation at hand?

c) "from me"

Has this input already been given by others? If so, why do you need to say it also?

d) "about this topic"

Is this comment germane to where we are in the conversation? (Warning: if you're free associating that's a bad sign—unless it's a brainstorm.)

e) "at this time"

Are we at the point in the consideration of this topic where your comment belongs?

• Doing Your Homework

If there are handouts for topics (perhaps background material or a draft proposal) it is your responsibility to read them and think about them ahead of time. There is a large difference between coming to the meeting with an open mind (good) and an empty mind (not good). If you ask questions in plenary that were addressed in handouts that you didn't read, you are abusing the group.

Your right to have your opinion heard is tied at the hip to your responsibility to inform yourself adequately ahead of time. They go together. If you neglect the latter you are at risk of forfeiting the former.

• Communication Skills

Living in cooperative culture takes personal work (because it requires unlearning deep conditioning in competitive ways). Here are what I believe are the essential questions, pinpointing the skills needed to function well in cooperative culture:

- * How well can you articulate what you're thinking?
- * How well can you articulate what you're feeling?
- * How comfortable are you sharing emotionally with others?
- * How well do you function well in the presence of emotional upset?
- * Can you see the good intent underneath strident statements by others?
- * Can you distinguish between a person's behavior being out of line and that person being "bad."
- * How accurately do you hear what others say?
- * How easily can you shift perspectives to see issues from other viewpoints?
- * How easily can you see ways to bridge different positions?
- * Are you able to show others that you "get" them *to their satisfaction*?
- * Can you own your own "stuff"?
- * Can you reach out to others before you have been reached out to yourself?
- * How well can you read non-verbal cues?
- * Can you readily distinguish between process comments and content comments?
- * In a meeting, how easily can you track where we are in the conversation?
- * How adept are you at approaching people in ways that put them at ease?
- * How well do you understand the distribution of power in cooperative groups?
- * Do you have a healthy model of leadership in a cooperative group?
- * How open are you to receiving critical feedback (with minimal defensiveness)?
- * Can you distinguish between projection and what's actually happening in the moment?
- * How well do you understand your own blind spots and emotional triggers?
- * Are you as interested in understanding others as in being understood?
- * How aware are you of your privilege?
- * How interested are you in getting better at the above?

Looked at the other way around, if you are not interested in doing this work you are likely to be experienced as a sea anchor by the rest of the group. If you didn't know that before, know it now.

• **Respecting Process Agreements**

If there are Ground Rules established for how the meeting will run (there should be), honor them. Among other things, if you start operating outside the Ground Rules and are called on it, accept the redirection; don't fight it.

Facilitators are given authority to guide the meeting productively. They are not your enemy; they are the group's servant. Support their work. This does not mean that you cannot object to what they are doing if you believe they are making a poor decision, but exercise this right judiciously. Things will tend to go much better if you give them the benefit of the doubt, and talk about your concerns later (perhaps during meeting evaluation, or privately).

• **Understanding the Bargain You've Made**

By moving into an intentional community you have purposefully chosen to live more closely with

others. That entails a commitment to sharing more things with neighbors, not just within your household. The benefit of this is greater relationship (the lifeblood of community) and less need to own everything yourself. The challenge is needing to work out agreements in areas where you formerly used to be able to decide things unilaterally.

For this to work well (get more of the benefits and less of the challenges) you need to understand the bargain you've made and work to make it pay off. It won't happen by accident (and grumbling won't help).

• **Why You Should Always Be Paying Attention**

On any given topic, you are either a stakeholder or you aren't. If you are, then it's obvious why you should be engaged: you care about the outcome and want to have your views taken into account. It matters on the content level.

More subtly, if you aren't a stakeholder, you are perfectly positioned to protect the quality of the conversation. You can be an invaluable asset in protecting how the group does its work, helping people get past misunderstandings, and articulating bridges between positions that strong stakeholders may miss—all because you don't particularly care about the outcome. You just want resolution that works for everyone. It matters on the process level.

It is a hallmark of cooperative culture that the *how* matters just as much as the *what*. So both roles are equally valuable.

My point is that once you've accepted the draft agenda, don't zone out. Stay engaged and help the group function well.

• **Caution: Group Norms Are Subject to Individual Interpretation**

It is relatively easy for groups to agree on certain norms, such as being respectful and honest in group communications (who in their right mind would advocate for being dishonest or disrespectful?). But those two values don't always play well together. For some, being direct is absolutely in line with being honest and respectful. For others blunt honesty can come across as a weapon and highly disrespectful. Now what?

One person thinks they've acted wholly in alignment with group norms, while another views the same behavior as an egregious violation *of the same norms*. What a mess!

The lesson here is not to abandon an attempt to articulate group norms as hopeless, but to understand better the limits of what that gives you. It does not eliminate ambiguity, but it does provide a solid basis for what you need to discuss when things go south. Be gentle with other.

10 Most Common Mistakes in Consensus* Process and What to do Instead

by Tree Bressen, [Fellowship for Intentional Communities](#)

**In sociocracy: substitute “Consent” for “Consensus”*

Inappropriate Blocks Tip: Establish a clear procedure regarding how the validity of potential blocks is assessed and what happens when one arises. Create a robust response to inappropriate blocks. *(In sociocracy: substitute “objections” for “blocks”)*

Enabling Bad Behavior

Poorly Planned Agendas Tip: Put the most important items early so they don’t get squeezed by less important items.

Having the Same Person Facilitate and Present Topics

Starting from a Proposal instead of an Issue

Too Many Details

Rushing the Process Tip: Allow plenty of time for discussion. Take the space to really listen to people’s diverse viewpoints and concerns. Trust the wisdom of the whole.

Spending All Your Meeting Time in Open Discussion Tip: Change formats (planned in advance or on the spot): break into pairs or small groups (three to five people), line up to show the spectrum of opinion, etc. See treegroup.info/topics/handout-formats.pdf for a bunch more ideas.

Attaching Proposals to People

Fuzzy Minutes Tip: Make sure the decision and reasons for it are written clearly for the records. Record any stand asides* (names and reasons), and tasks for implementation (who will do what, by when). *(*not applicable in sociocracy)*

Why Work in Rounds?

- Rounds form a group. When people sit in circle, speak in turn, and listen carefully to others, a group wisdom and coherence can arise that greater than the sum of the parts.
- Rounds promote **equivalence** because everyone has a chance to speak. More vocal members do not dominate. People can gain a sense of security and trust that their voice will be heard.
- Rounds promote **transparency** because each person's input is valued and listening is emphasized.
- Rounds promote **effectiveness** because rounds tend to be more focused, faster, and satisfying than open discussions and they tend to build energy. More information can be gathered more efficiently.
- Rounds enable information to be filtered so that decisions can be made with more clarity and ease as the questions, reactions, and comments have an opportunity to surface and be processed in due course.

When rounds work well, they are deceptively simple. Most groups are not used to operating this way. Group members will tend to return to more familiar ways of operating, such as talking out of turn or cross-talking, especially when confused or when strong thoughts and feelings arise.

In the beginning, the facilitator may need to use a heavier hand to train a group to operate with rounds. Once the group catches on, people tend to self-monitor and/or ask for help from the facilitator if the discussion goes off track.

How to Do Rounds

The following information came from sociocracy.info, with liberal input from my experience.

1. State the focus of the round. Make sure it is clear what the round is about. Are you asking for clarifying questions? Quick reactions? Suggestions or ideas? Make sure people understand the purpose of the round before you start.
2. Give each person the opportunity to speak in a predictable order so no one is keeping a queue or thinking about whether to ask to speak. The facilitator participates as a member of the circle. Rounds keep the focus on group members rather than the facilitator, as the facilitator is enabling rather than directing the flow of the conversation.
3. Encourage people to speak only if they have something to add to the conversation. Sometimes it can feel obligatory to say something, and this can waste time and energy. Assure members that no one will think less of them if they don't speak!

4. Start in a different place in the circle and go in opposite directions in each round so one person, or persons, is not always speaking first or last. Be sure to keep your place; particularly with a large group it's easy to forget whom you started with.
5. The facilitator ensures that the round moves along with a nod to indicate the next speaker if necessary, particularly if people are not sitting in a circle. This is less necessary in experienced groups.
6. The focus is on listening. Participants question or try to clarify statements only at the end of the round. Sometimes it is helpful to write down questions and comments so that people can see that their input has been received and will be dealt with when others have had a chance to speak as well. After one round is complete, the appropriate person can speak to the comments.
7. Each person speaks from their own heart and mind, not in reaction to others or to argue with others. If this starts to happen, return to the focus question and ask people to speak directly to that, rather than responding to others' thoughts. Suggest that people make a note of what they want to say. Then do another round to capture more information from the group, and so on until everyone is ready to move on.
8. People may pass. The facilitator can come back to them at the end of the round to see if they have something to say, particularly if they needed additional time to gather their thoughts.

Rounds Form and Re-Form

Each time the group meets, whether a policy setting circle, a team, or a committee, each member will be a different person. They will have had more and different experiences. Knowing what is foremost at the moment brings individuals together and prepares them for collaborative planning and decision-making.

To make decisions as a group, individuals must form a group. If the group has been working together for a long time, doing rounds will be faster and more focused. The group will be skilled in establishing harmony quickly. While it may take time to reach this stage, harmony will allow the group work in collaboration and fulfill their purpose. Harmony requires understanding.

Focusing Rounds

If rounds are too impersonal or unfocused, attention can wander and the purpose of the round lost. Before beginning a round, state the purpose. You might remind people to

- offer what is uppermost in their minds in relation to the meeting,
- speak in terms of what they are anticipating or need from the meeting. and
- speak personally, not give speeches or announcements, or respond to what others have said.

Avoid stating the focus of the round too restrictively. If people are unsure if what they want to say is the right thing, it will inhibit speaking. Sometimes people have had a major event in their

lives and need to speak longer or off-topic. This will probably be of concern to the group, and sharing it will enable the person to participate in the rest of the meeting more attentively.

Listening

Listening is half the round. Speaking brings out information, but it means nothing if others are not listening. The facilitator should be modeling listening, not leading the round by calling on people and trying to explain or interpret what they have said.

The facilitator is not the focus of a round. Unless the round is being conducted specifically to identify issues to be added to a written list, the facilitator should disappear as much as possible, just giving a nod if it is unclear who should speak next.

Not listening, assuming you know what someone is going to say, is probably the number one reason for boredom and impatience when doing rounds.

Possible Problems with Rounds

1. Facilitator Interrupts the Round

Facilitators who are used to being responsible for producing a decision may be too active in trying to explain what a person is trying to say or immediately correcting misinformation. This breaks the focus on listening and places it on the facilitator. A facilitator may take a more active part when soliciting objections to a proposal and writing them down but this is usually not done in a round, although each person may be given an opportunity to state an objection. The focus in collecting objections often becomes the white board on which the objections are recorded. The facilitator shouldn't interrupt, try to clarify someone's statements, or otherwise control the room unless clearly necessary. If someone is interrupting or pontificating, the facilitator may quietly remind them of the aim of the round. Clarifications can be done at the end of the round.

2. Addressing Another Person's Comments

Each person should address the aim of the round and their own responses to aim, not to the responses of other people. Some groups describe this as addressing "sacred space" referring to the spirit of being in a chapel along with one's conscience. While the religious connotations are not appropriate in all organizations or in all forms of rounds, this concept conveys the intention of clarifying and addressing one's own response.

3. Time Limits on Rounds

While time limits may seem necessary, they are antithetical to listening and sharing. It is contradictory to say that you truly want to hear what someone is thinking and feeling but only as much as they can say it 30 seconds. The focus becomes the time limit rather than listening and sharing. Everyone becomes a time keeper, consciously or unconsciously. With experience people will intuitively know how long they can speak, and how long others can listen. A simple statement that this is a "quick round" or "we have 15 minutes left on this proposal" is usually

sufficient. Setting a time limit can also imply that the facilitator is in charge of the round, not the individual members.

4. Believing the Circle Is Too Large to Do Rounds

Creating and re-creating equivalence is even more necessary in a large circle than in a small circle. If the aims of individual members are too varied and thus regularly produce too many reactions to be sorted out in the time available, it may be desirable for the circle to form new circles. In some instances, like rounds to gather objections, the round may be done by inviting only those interested in speaking to speak using popcorn or a quick round with many passing.

5. Allowing People to Pass for the Wrong Reasons

The strength of the circle is that it benefits from the insights, needs, and experiences of all the members. That is why consent is fundamental to creating a strong organization. Each person's participation is necessary. If people are passing because they are disaffected, withholding important information, or not taking responsibility for improving the proposal when possible, the facilitator and other members of the circle should be aware and at the end of the round try to determine why.

As you have probably discovered, doing rounds is a very important activity. Doing rounds ensures that everyone is able to function as an equal, has an opportunity to state any concerns or objections, and to contribute information. Rounds also focus members on their purpose as a group, on their shared vision, mission, and aim.

A Round of 300 People

Size is not necessarily the cause of inattention and impatience in rounds. Rounds can certainly be too long if they are unfocused and not achieving their purpose. Or the room is too hot or no one can hear. Or the group is so large it doesn't share a common purpose.

If the purpose of the round is clear and compelling, the size unless obviously physically impractical, can be quite large.

I once read an account of a community meeting conducted on a highly contentious subject. The neighborhood had been in serious conflict for a long time with no resolution in sight. A mediator was called in to seek a resolution and an open meeting was arranged. The first thing the mediator said was that each person in the meeting would have a chance to speak. The conditions were that

- each person had to listen to all the others, and
- no one could leave until everyone had spoken.

There were 300 people in the room. Everyone who wanted to speak, spoke. Everyone listened quietly without interruptions. No one left. It took hours. In the end, because everyone had been listened to and had listened to others, resolution was possible. They had come together as a group in a shared experience.

Policy Meetings

F-1

1. Opening Round

- * Check-In, transition into meeting

2. Administrative Matters

- * **A**ttendance (All members here? All roles filled?)
- * **D**uration (How long is this meeting?)
- * **M**inutes (Consent to the minutes of the last meeting)
- * **I**nformation (Announcements: non-circle related)
- * **N**ext Meeting Date

- * Consent to agenda

3. Matters of Content

- * Consider proposals
- * Evaluate implemented proposals
- * Use proposal-forming process for issues that need a proposal
- * Select people for roles
- * Role-improvement feedback for circle members in roles
- * Accept reports from lower circles

4. Meeting Evaluation

- * Evaluate facilitation, group effectiveness:
 “What went well? What can we improve?”

KEEPING MEETINGS SHORT

By Ted J. Rau, Sociocracy for All

<https://medium.com/manager-mint/keeping-meetings-short-fb704cc82c8f>

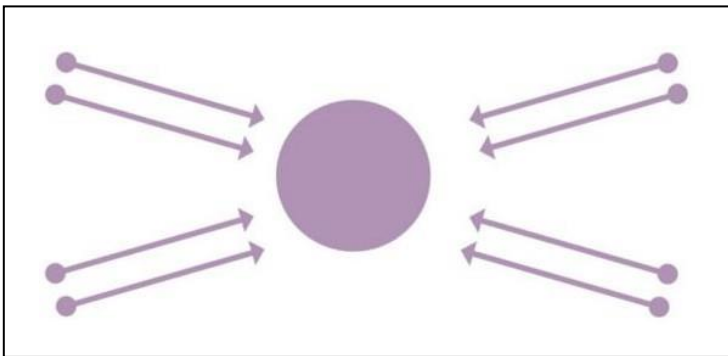
Long meetings are a pain. Let's make them shorter. Here are the tools that sociocracy has to offer.

Avoid large groups

We avoid large groups. Hearing from everyone takes too long, and we cannot deliberate — which is the goal of getting together as a team.

How can one achieve good decisions for the whole while having small groups? How can we make sure all gets done? How can we make sure we're not in silos? How can we make sure we hear all the input?

- **Distributed power and clear domains:** for every group, we need to define *what* they can decide. The authority to make decisions now lies in small, nimble groups. No need to show up for every meeting. Only attend the one that's relevant to you.



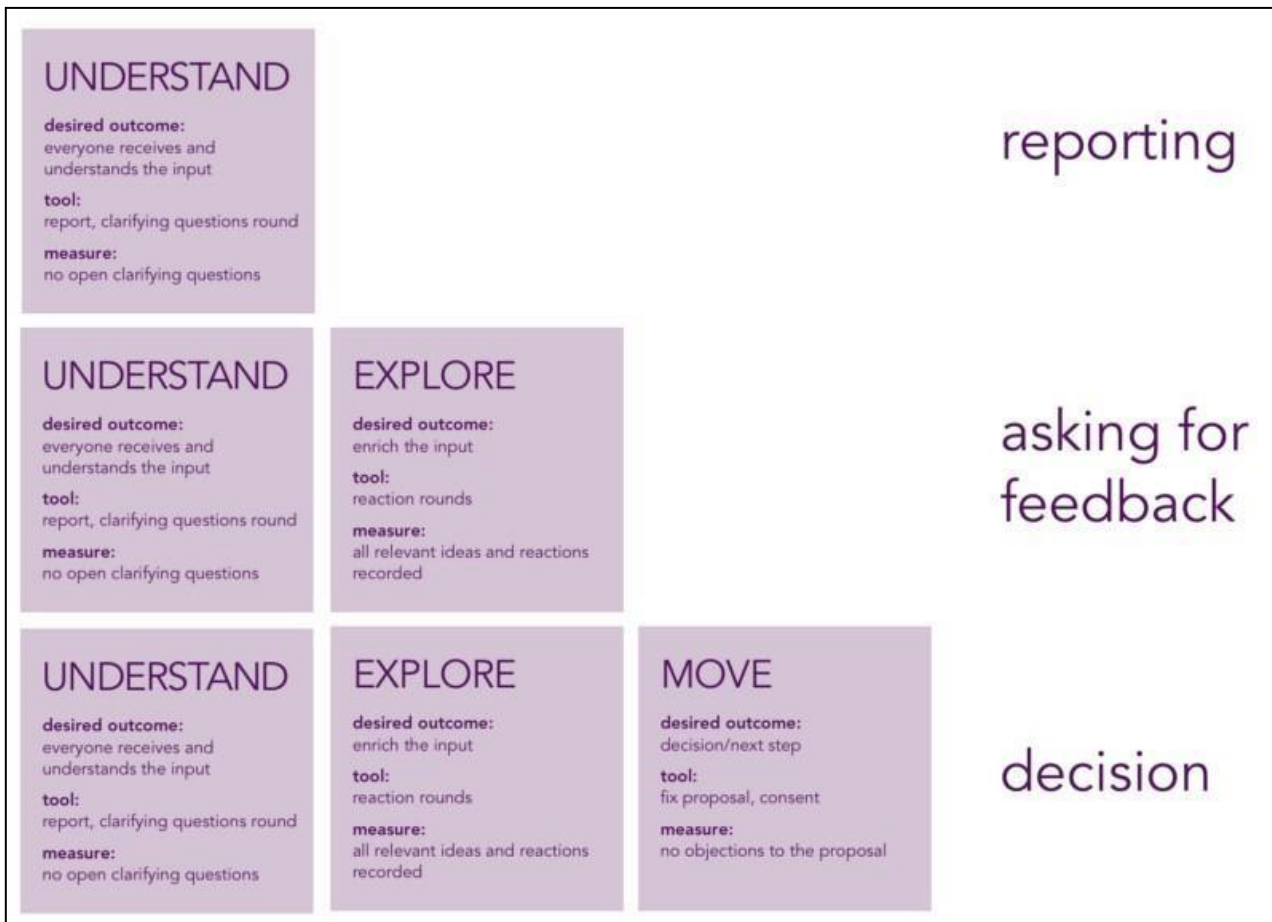
- **Linking.** Instead of involving every member of a sub-group, just include 2. Hearing two people is typically sufficient to hear the sub-circle's input without overloading people with meeting time. With two people you can be sure one of them will remember to carry information back as well to create good communication both ways. You can easily hear from 4 entire groups while only having 8 people in the room.
- **More attention to feedback loops.** Before every decision, the circle will ask themselves: *who has important input to give on this that we'd like to hear?* And after the decision: *how can we hear people's input on our decision so we know what to change the next time we review?* The better our feedback lines, the more trust you will build and the less you will have a need to decide everything together.

Just doing *some* of that should reduce the number of people in the room and also reduce the number of agenda items (because not everyone has to talk about everything anymore).

Define the desired outcome

No agenda items without defining the desired outcome! (Even if you decide to change after talking about it.) If the desired outcome is clear, you can channel people's attention to goal.

I have thought about this quite a bit and have come to the conclusion that there are really only 3 different kinds of outcomes, and they build on each other: reporting is also included in asking for feedback which are both included in decision-making.



- **Reports:** if it is a report of a decision made or action taken elsewhere and the people in the room don't have a say on the topic anyway, then there is no need for hearing reactions. People should be allowed to ask information questions but not everyone needs to hear how they feel about the decision. Tell everyone who they can give feedback to if they have something to say but that needs to happen outside of the meeting.
- **Request for feedback:** if the desired outcome is to receive feedback, clarify questions first and then hear reactions. There is no need for those reactions to converge, so one or two go-arounds for everyone to say a few sentences are typically enough. The feedback is taken back to the group or individual that was requesting the feedback. It is *not* being discussed until there is consensus on any decision.
- **Decisions:** if something can only be decided in the large group, it might take time. There are rarely decisions that need to be made by a large group if we distribute power well. If it does happen, it will likely take time. You can still use the hacks from the next section to make it as bearable as possible. Never try to *generate* a proposal in a large group. The proposal needs to be outsourced and prepared before the meeting. During the actual meeting, you only go through questions, reactions and consent/objections. Boiling it down to dealing with objections sifts through all the things to say and reduces it to what is necessary to come to a decision. [Here](#) is an article that walks you through the sociocratic decision-making process.

The regular hacks...

There are a few facilitation-related hacks that make meetings shorter.

- Separate steps:** Separate your steps well so people have an easier time being on point. The most obvious one is to separate clarifying questions from reactions, and reactions from the decision. Give people clear prompts on what you want to hear. (That takes some practice and some people have a *really* hard time learning that!) I often give fill-in-the-blanks like *“What I need to know so I understand the proposal is _____”* to force people not to give me reactions when that is not the right time for it. That way, every contribution will be more ordered, and everyone will be operating on the same plane which makes it easier to get to a place of convergence and shared reality. (If you dare, do it the sociocratic way: call what we call a *round* where everyone speaks for every step. In the long run, moving forward as a group, like a school of fish, saves you time. Read an article on rounds [here](#).)
- Out-sourcing:** Ask yourself: *what can we do today so we’re in a better place next time?* Often, the answer is out-sourcing. If you don’t have the right information or person in the room right now, stop talking about the agenda item right when you notice! Move the discussion along to the question of *how* exactly you will get to a better place next time. *“We don’t have this piece of information? Let’s stop talking about this topic and instead make a plan on how to get the information so we’re in a better place next time”*. Find someone to write up something, assign someone to get the information, talk to that person, find a group to make a mindmap — in short, delegate any prep task to a small group outside of a meeting whenever you can.
- Role model good use of meeting time:** As people notice they can be heard (which they are in sociocratic organizations), they stop repeating themselves and they might even start passing. I encourage role modeling for this one. *“Everything I wanted to say has been said so I’ll pass”* takes a lot of courage to say for some people, especially for those in power. You cannot make other people pass but they might like that you do it. (And chances are, your passing makes the meeting much shorter already.) Another strategy is timing yourself. Since, again, this goes against culture in some organization, role modeling helps. If those in power decide to time themselves, it will set the tone. *“Would someone be willing to time me and let me know when 2 minutes are over? I have a lot of thoughts but I also want to make sure we have time to hear others and time passes so quickly for me when I talk.”*



Policy Meetings & Operations Meetings

1. A Circle's Work — "Operations"

"Operations" is the term used in many businesses for "work."

A circle, like say, a group's Finance Circle, has a domain — the group's finances. And it has aims — the things within its domain that it produces or provides the group it serves, which in this case would be to provide ongoing management of the group's finances. The aims of a functional circle are ongoing, and can only change if the General Circle changes them, but the details or specific goals or tasks that express these aims can change or end, depending on circumstances. (For example specific tasks or goals of the aims of a Finance Circle to provide financial management could include proposing annual budgets, paying bills, sending invoices, collecting money, doing bookkeeping, managing bank accounts, and providing reports about the group's assets and cash flow to the General Circle and/or to whole-group meetings.)

When circle members perform these services they're doing the circle's work — operations. In businesses and nonprofit organizations, in the Finance Circle each employee would usually perform these services — working — at the same time and in the same office of the company or nonprofit.

But in an intentional community Finance Circle members would probably perform these services at different times in their own homes. They would still do the work, but not at the same time or in the same location.

However, consider a circle like a community's Grounds and Landscaping Circle, with a domain of management of the group's exterior grounds, and the aims to provide the services of designing, installing, and maintaining trees, shrubs, groundcovers, and other plants, as well as walkways, paths, trellises, benches, etc.

When circle members perform these landscaping services they're doing work/operations just like the Finance Circle. In an intentional community they might very well do the installation and maintenance services all at the same time in a work party (and perhaps with other community members invited to participate) and in the same physical locations in the community's grounds.

No matter when and where circle members perform their circles tasks — that is, do their work — "operations."

Circles have two kinds of meetings — Policy Meetings & Operations Meetings.

2. Policy Meetings

These are meetings in which circle members make decisions to guide the work (operations) of their circle. One could think of these as governance meetings.

In a Policy Meeting circle members might do one or more of Sociocracy's five meeting processes:

- (1) Create proposals about policies or projects. (Proposal Forming)
- (2) Use consent decision-making to consent to their circle's projects, policies and procedures about work tasks and accomplishing the aims of their circle.
- (3) Elect people for roles in the circle, including the four roles in a Policy Meeting (Facilitator, Circle Administrator [called "secretary" in the book *We the People*], Representative, and Operations Leader.)
- (4) Conduct the Role-Improvement Feedback process for people in the above circle roles.
- (5) Propose and consent to each member of their circle. And when or if necessary, propose and consent to remove someone from their circle.

And related to valuate their circle's previously implemented proposals:

- (6) Consider ways to measure and evaluate their circle's previously implemented proposals.

And activities related to the circle's administration:

- (7) Hear reports.
- (8) Approve minutes of previous Policy Meetings.

Policy meetings have four parts:

1. Opening Round: * Check-In, transition into meeting

2. Administrative Matters: * Requests for changing agenda items * Announcements, if any * Consent to minutes of previous meeting * Confirm next meeting (date, time, etc.)

3. Matters of Content (any or more of the following): * Proposal-forming * Consider proposals with consent decision-making * Evaluate implemented proposals * Select people for roles (elections) * Role-improvement feedback for circle members in roles * Consent to proposed new circle members. (Consent to removing a circle member) * Accept reports from lower circles

4. Closing Round: * Evaluate facilitation, group effectiveness - "What went well? What can we improve?"

Decisions in Policy Meetings are made by consent decision-making. The meeting is facilitated by the person in the role of facilitator.

3. Operations Meetings

In Operations Meetings circle members simply organize and coordinate the details of their specific work tasks. These could also simply be called "Work Meetings." A building and maintenance circle, for example, could have a brief work-coordination Operations Meeting before the start of a work party.

The specific *details* of how policies or projects are implemented and which circle member does which specific tasks and coordinating these tasks and arranging the logistics for them are decided in Operations Meetings. If the circle wants to do coordinate work or decide the details of how it gets done, it's an Operations Meeting.

In this case, the Operations Leader usually facilitates the meeting.

4. Difference between Operations and Policy Meetings

Sociocracy trainer John Schinnerer describes the difference like this:

(1) *In Policy Meetings policies about work tasks are decided by consent among people with equivalence.*

(2) *In Operations Meetings, previously consented-to decisions are implemented.*

Policy Meetings take longer and might occur once a month. Operations Meetings are quicker and might occur more frequently or whenever needed. They are separate meetings. However, it is possible to schedule an Operations Meeting at the end of a Policy Meeting, with a break in-between, or some way to indicate they have completely different functions.

5. Sociocracy's default decision-making method in Operations Meetings

In the Operations Meetings of businesses and nonprofits using Sociocracy *decisions are usually made unilaterally by the Operations Leader.*

That is, the Operations Leader decides the details of how policies are implemented, which circle member does which tasks, and how these tasks are coordinated. (This is why the phrase "Operations Leader" has the word "leader.") If the circle discovers they haven't created a policy for something that comes up, the Operations Leader simply decides in the moment how to handle it — a temporary solution — and the person in the role of circle administrator puts the issue on the agenda of a future Policy Meeting so the group can create a policy for it.

John Schinnerer suggests that it's easy enough for the Operations Leader to make unilateral decisions about coordinating these work activities — that is, implementing the circle's policies — since each person in the circle proposed and consented to these policies in the first place.

This is what we could call Sociocracy's "*default method*", because it is more efficient and effective than using consent decision-making to decide these details.

6. However, in an Operations Meeting a circle can use any kind of decision-making

Yet unilateral decisions by the Operations Leader in Operations Meetings is only one option. Circle members have a choice, and can make decisions any way they like in Operations Meetings. They need only propose a decision-making method for Operations Meetings and consent to it. (They would do this in a Policy Meeting).

For example they could use consent decision-making, classic consensus or one of its modifications, majority-rule or super-majority voting, or everyone just talking about how they'll organize and do their work without any particular method.

Bottom line: in Policy Meetings decisions are made only by Consent Decision-Making. In Operations Meetings people choose whatever method they want.

However, please keep in mind that the Operations Leader deciding the work-coordination details is easier and faster. It can be a relief to know that in terms of just getting the work done, decisions don't have to be made by consent decision-making.

6 Steps of Consensus

Disclaimer: Sociocracy has its own proposal forming process . At Common Ground Ecovillage, we have not seen this particular process work very well and have instead informally followed the 6 Steps of Consensus as taught by Laird Schaub:

1. Initial presentation
2. Questions
 - 2a. Clear the Air
3. Discussion
 - brainstorming
 - vetting
 - prioritizing
4. Proposal
5. Decision
6. Implementation details

If you are interested in understanding this process, please let us know and we'll guide you to local resources. Here is a cheatsheet to get you started:

- The group must be commitment to create and sustain a culture of cooperation
- Members must educate themselves about how to function in such culture –instead of depending in a handful of facilitators to do this for them
- Members must come to meetings expecting constructive results
- Members must come to meetings with an open mind
- The group must see the changing of a person's opinion as constructive
- Don't start with proposals (observe how it's Step 4 –not 1)

<p>With appreciation to Laird Schaub for decades of teaching us how to make our communities succeed laird@ic.org</p>
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**COMMON GROUND ECOVILLAGE
PROPOSAL TEMPLATE**

Title:

Author(s):

Deciding Circle:

Discussion Date(s):

The Issue

Outline the opportunity/problem

Related Circle Aims, Principles & Intentions

How does this proposal help us to carry out our mission, aims, and tasks

The Proposal

*Describe the ideas/solutions including cost, location, procedures, and timeline as applicable
(attaching documents if appropriate)*

Costs

Itemize any costs, over what period of time, and where the money is coming from

Completion date(s)

Evaluation criteria

How will we know if it's working?

Re-evaluation date(s):

Decision outcome and date:

Consent Decision-Making

1. Present Proposal

2. Clarifying Questions

"Do you understand the proposal?"

"No questions." Or, "Yes. What about. . . ?" (*In a round or popcorn-style*)

3. Quick Reaction Round

"What do you think of it?" (*Brief!*)

4. Consent Round

"Do you have any reasoned objections to this proposal?"

"No objection." Or, "Objection." "What is your objection?"

Six Reasons to Object:

1. One or more aspects of proposal conflict with circle's aim.
2. One or more obvious flaws, or important aspects left out, re circle's aim.
3. There are no criteria or dates for later evaluating implemented proposal.
4. Potential unintended consequences of implementing proposal, re circle's aim.
5. One or more aspects are not well thought out, or expressed in confusing way.
6. One or more aspects would not allow you to carry out your tasks, re circle's aim.

5. Resolving Objections:

1. Add concern as new criterion for evaluation, and/or make first evaluation date sooner.
2. Facilitator amends it.
3. Proposal originator amends it.
4. Person(s) objecting, one or more others, or everyone in circle amends it.
5. Round: "How would you resolve this?"
6. "Fishbowl" of two-three people in middle.
7. Refer to Research Team. Or . . . 8. Refer to Resolution Team.
9. Refer to higher or lower circle.

6. Announce Decision and Celebrate.

Common Ground Ecovillage, May 1, 2017

Step One — Present the Proposal:

A circle member presents the proposal.

Step Two — Clarifying Questions: Each person around The circle in turn, the facilitator included, says if they have any questions about the proposal. This round is designed to find out only whether each circle member *understands* the proposal, not whether they like it. A person can ask the presenter, “Does the proposal mean X?” Sometimes, though, people try to express a reaction in this step. They may start out with a question that becomes a reaction or comment disguised as a question. (The facilitator reminds them they’ll have a chance to express their reactions in the next step.) Because the facilitator is a circle member too, he or she participates in this and all subsequent steps.

Step Three — Quick Reaction Round: The facilitator asks if there are any quick reactions to the proposal, and each person responds. The purpose of this step is for people to express a quick general response — “I like it,” “I don’t like it,” “I think it might be OK if we change some things,” etc. The Quick reaction Round is also designed to screen the proposal before the next Consent Round in order to make any obvious adjustments; it saves time when a proposal has significant problems that should be addressed before continuing. For example, circle members might see that the proposal doesn’t include what a project will cost or an estimate of how long it will take, that the proposal is not fleshed out enough yet and thus not ready for a decision. Such comments are valuable feedback for the presenter, who might modify the proposal accordingly and bring it back to the next meeting. Or the circle could modify the proposal on the spot. The Quick Reaction Round also reveals when the proposal is fine as is.

Step Four — Consent Round: The facilitator asks each person around the circle whether he or she has a “reasoned objection” to the proposal. This is literally a call for a decision. It occurs early in the process because it’s possible the proposal may pass *right then* if there are no objections. Each person says either “No objection” or “Objection.”

- “No objection” — *“The proposal seems ‘good enough for now’ — I consent to try it.”*
- “Objection” — *“Hold on, I see something. I’m not ready to consent to it yet.”*

Five legitimate reasons to object:

- (1) Aspects of the proposal conflict with circle’s Aims.
- (2) One or more obvious flaws in the proposal or important aspects that were left out, relative to Circle’s Aims.
- (3) Potential unintended consequences of implementing the proposal, relative to circle’s Aims.
- (4) One or more aspects of the proposal may not be well-thought out or are expressed in a confusing way.

(5) One or more aspects of the proposal would not allow you personally to carry out your assigned tasks relative to your circle's Aims.

Step Five — Resolve Objections: Circle members listen in turn to the arguments each objecting member

gives for his or her objection in the Consent Round. If the group is new to Consent Decision-Making, someone could briefly note each argument on a flip chart or whiteboard visible to everyone. Having the arguments written and visible can help people still learning Sociocracy to more easily create an amended proposal. The circle then modifies the proposal, based on these arguments, and considers the modified proposal in the next Consent Round. They can modify the proposal in a number of ways, combining the concerns revealed by the arguments with the original purpose of the proposal. *Repeat and alternate Consent Round and Resolve Objections Round.* If proposal is modified, the facilitator conducts another Consent Round with the modified proposal. If there are objections to the modified proposal, the circle repeats the Resolving Objections round. The circle alternate these two steps until proposal has been modified well enough that no one has a further objection. A proposal passes when there are no more objections to it.

Nine ways to resolve objections:

- (1) Circle members could include specific concerns raised in the arguments in the criteria for measuring and evaluating the proposal after it is later implemented. And/or they could move up the date for measuring and evaluating the implemented proposal so it will occur sooner.
- (2) The facilitator could suggest an amendment to the proposal.
- (3) The originator of the proposal could suggest an amendment to it.
- (4) The person(s) objecting, one or more others in the circle, or everyone in the circle could suggest amendments.
- (5) The facilitator could ask each person in the circle, "How would you resolve this, based on these arguments?" After two or three rounds, a way to revise the proposal might become obvious, based on people's suggestions. The facilitator and/or others could then amend it.
- (6) If the arguments for objections are not clear, the facilitator could ask two or three people to sit in the middle of the circle, "fishbowl-style," to talk about their feelings and arguments. Becoming more clear first about feelings and arguments for an objection may help circle members suggest helpful amendments.
- (7) The facilitator could ask several circle members to create a "Resolution Team" to amend the proposal, either before the next meeting or during a break in that meeting.

(8) If it seems additional information is needed, the facilitator could ask several circle members to become a “Research Team” to compile additional information with which to amend the proposal, perhaps before the next meeting or during in a break in that meeting.

(9) If the arguments indicate the issue is a larger, or more abstract issue than your circle’s more specific and concrete area of responsibility and aim — or that the proposal is controversial or is actually a community-wide issue — your circle could refer it a “higher” circle, such as the General Circle. Or if the arguments indicate it is a more specific and concrete issue than your circle’s area of responsibility and aim, it could be referred to a more appropriate “lower” circle.

Step Six — Announce Decision and Celebrate:

This step acknowledges that the circle has just accomplished one of its agenda items and can move to the next item. It may not celebrate the decision they just consented to. Rather they may celebrate that they just used the Consent Decision-Making process successfully (or more successfully than the previous time).

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Selecting People for Roles

1. Review Role

- * Term length, tasks, Requirements for Role, Desired Characteristics/Qualities

2. Submit Ballots

- * "I _____ nominate _____."

3. Share-Reasons Round

- * "I'd like _____ in this role because _____."

4. Invite-Changes Round

- * "I change my nomination to _____ because _____."

5. Consent Round

Facilitator proposes candidate w/strongest arguments re tasks, qualifications, desired characteristics, etc.

- * Numeric majority is less important than "arguments" of reasons.
- * Ask for candidate's consent last.
- * Re objections, use "Resolving Objections" in Consent Decision-Making.
- * If needed, amend proposal and repeat Consent Round.

DO NOT!

- * Elect someone for an unlimited term.
- * Ask for a volunteer.
- * Ask who's interested & who's not.
- * Have a dialog during a round.
- * Seek the perfect candidate (since each candidate has strengths and weaknesses).



Your name: _____

nominates:

Name of
candidate: _____



Your name: _____

nominates:

Name of
candidate: _____



Your name: _____

nominates:

Name of
candidate: _____



Your name: _____

nominates:

Name of
candidate: _____



Your name: _____

nominates:

Name of
candidate: _____



Your name: _____

nominates:

Name of
candidate: _____



Your name: _____

nominates:

Name of
candidate: _____



Your name: _____

nominates:

Name of
candidate: _____

THE SOCIOCRATIC ELECTION PROCESS, PEER TO PEER ELECTIONS

<http://www.sociocracy.info/about-sociocracy/the-sociocratic-election-process/>

The sociocratic election process is used to assign people to jobs, choose operations leaders, and elect representatives to policy-making teams. It can also be used when choosing between any of several options. As groups of people who work together toward a common aim, circles have both a vested interest in selecting the best person for a job and the most information about who that might be.

WHEN THE ELECTION PROCESS PRODUCES BAD RESULTS

There are several points at which a peer-to-peer election process can go awry:

1. Failure to read the job description or adhere to the job definition.

Not reading the job description will send the discussion off in the direction of favoritism, sympathy, path of least resistance, etc. The election leader should remind members of the job requirements when necessary. If an alternate decision-making method is used that requires a paper ballot, the job description should be included on the ballot.

During the election process, it may become clear that the job description needs to be amended. After amendment during discussion, the nominations round may need to be repeated.

2. Arguing against rather than for a nominee.

When arguments are given, they must be in favor of a nominee, not against another nominee. The election leader should stop any negative arguments or comparisons. During open discussion or discussion rounds, any person may raise concerns about a nominee based on previous actions or statements. Any other person present including the nominee may address those concerns. Both concerns and responses must be based on actual events or data, not potential actions or projected data or personal beliefs about the nature of the job or the person. In some contexts, personal feelings may be appropriate as data.

3. Asking the nominee before they are elected if they will serve.

Before an election some people will privately ask a person how they feel about being nominated, but generally this should be discouraged. The election is about the job to be done. The process is designed to determine the best available person for the job and to assure that person they are the most qualified. Circle members generally know, when a person will be unable to serve for personal reasons or because of other professional obligations. Asking them if they are willing to serve, short-circuits the process.

4. Attempting to squelch campaigning before an election.

Elections by consent provide their own protection against electioneering. If the group is truly a group of peers, their sense of each other will be determined by their experiences working together. It would be unusual to be able

to change this perception by campaigning. Efforts to stop campaigning will distract the focus and place energy on the wrong issues.

5. Attempting consent without the conditions for consent.

Elections by consent are only workable when all members of a circle share a common aim, all participating members are willing to discuss together until objections to nominees are resolved, and all members consent on who may participate in the election.

To repeat, consent elections require a common aim, commitment to resolving objections, and defined decision-makers.

Role-Improvement Feedback

1. Feedback Team meets

- * Person in the role *One or two people from their circle
- * One to two from a "smaller" circle who may work with them, if applicable
- * One to two from a "larger" circle who work with them, if applicable
- * Someone who serves as Facilitator; someone who serves as note-taker

2. Feedback Team reviews the role

- * Term length, responsibilities, qualifications, and desired qualities

3. Person in the role describes what they've done well

4. Feedback Team describes what the person did well

- * The person summarizes the "done well" comments
- * Consent round for Feedback Team to consent to the person's summary

5. Person describes what might need improvement

6. Feedback Team describes what might need improvement

- * Person summarizes the "needs improvement" comments
- * Consent round for Feedback Team to consent to the person's summary

7. Person proposes plan for improvement

- * Plan can include actions other circle members take too, and/or changes in the functioning of the circle itself

8. Consent Round: For Feedback team to consent to plan

9. Consent Round: For whole circle to consent to plan

Why Critical Feedback Is Critical

Blog entry from June 4, 2019

<https://communityandconsensus.blogspot.com/search/label/cooperative%20skills>

Three years ago I almost died. I was close to renal failure and didn't know it. Pain—a crucial biological feedback system—saved my life.

Here's how it worked. Unbeknownst to me I had multiple myeloma (a blood cancer) that was producing an overabundance of plasma cells. My kidneys were working overtime to get rid of the excess and were wearing down. While I was not experiencing pain from that, it turns out that multiple myeloma also leaches calcium from the host's skeleton (a la osteoporosis). In my case that led to three collapsed vertebrae at the top of my lumbar section and I had excruciating back pain associated with that. So bad that I had trouble getting out of bed. That got me to the emergency room where the cancer and the renal crisis were discovered.

In the social realm, critical feedback serves the same function as pain in the biological realm. Just as pain comes in a wide range of degrees of severity, so does criticism. Some pain you can safely ignore; other pain can alert you to a life-threatening condition that requires immediate attention. (As many of us experience critical feedback as painful, this analogy is not such a stretch.)

In the social context, the important point I'm trying to make is that everyone *needs* honest reflections about how they're coming across to others. While you get to exercise discernment about what meaning to give that information, you can't work with what you don't have, and it is *never* in your best interest to put up barriers to receiving it... even though we do it all the time.

What do I mean? There are all manner of dodges and deflections we clever humans develop to keep feedback at bay, or to discourage observers from making the attempt:

- Defensiveness
- Denial
- Feigned deafness
- It's too embarrassing
- Our identity is so associated with our behavior that it's devastating to have our behavior criticized—because we translate it into "we're bad"—even though that's not what was said
- We attack the messenger if we don't like the message
- We dismiss the message because it didn't come in a respectful package
- Our egos are too fragile to handle criticism (we need six positives to tolerate a negative)
- I don't like the person who gave me the feedback and am suspicious of their motivation
- I don't know the person who gave me the feedback and therefore dismiss or discount the validity of their perception (how accurately could a stranger see me?)
- But I meant well

Sound familiar? Sadly, all of this is just so much shooting yourself in the foot. What's more, the stronger the reaction (which tends to be the hardest feedback to hear) is the most valuable of all. Think about it. If someone likes what you did and doesn't tell you, you're likely to continue what you were doing—which isn't a problem. If, however, someone is struggling mightily with what you did and doesn't tell you, your continuing to do what you've been doing could be incendiary.

Most of us come out of a mainstream culture that doesn't provide good models for how to do feedback well—either on the giving end or the receiving end. So we're mostly blazing trails when we move in this direction, with precious few models to guide us. While its necessary work, it tends to be awkward and clunky in the initial attempts.

How to Make the Shift

OK, suppose you're convinced that your group is better off consciously developing a culture in which members give one another direct honest feedback. How?

1. Have a plenary conversation about moving in this direction—about making it a foundational part of the culture you are purposefully trying to create. You are not likely to get there accidentally. While you're at it, ask everyone what kind of support they'd like to make this easier to sustain.
2. If you have a team whose job it is to help with interpersonal tensions, ask them to be available to help members say the hard thing if it feels too scary to do alone.
3. You might consider setting up an evening where people practice giving and receiving critical feedback, to test drive the model before you really need it.
4. Feedback is likely to land better if you are specific, describe how it landed for you (without attempting to ascribe motivations to the other person), and can state what would work better for you (a request, not a demand). To the extent possible, steer clear of judgments and globalization—just give the feedback straight.
5. Passing along critical feedback tends to work better if you negotiate the setting. Thus, you might approach the person you want to give the feedback to with, "I have something I want to discuss with you. It's about something you did that I had a reaction to. Is now a good time?"

People have all kinds of preferences. Why not give your audience whatever will put them more at ease? Maybe they want it first in writing so they can think about it before discussing it. Maybe they prefer to hear it in the morning rather than at night. Perhaps they'd like a third party to be present.

• • •

Please understand that I am not saying you have to agree with the assessment or necessarily change your behavior as a consequence of hearing critical feedback. You need to exercise judgment about what weight to give the feedback.

- Was it simply a misunderstanding?
- Did the other person understand context?
- What might you do to make it easier for the other person next time without altering the message you intend to convey?
- What might you be willing to shift because you care about the other person and want to make things to go better?

Your mantra, I believe, should be: what truth can I find in the criticism? And based on that, what am I willing to do about it? It's OK to take your time to think about it before responding. Good culture is not a race.

Emotional Diabetes

Blog entry from November 22, 2013

<https://communityandconsensus.blogspot.com/search/label/cooperative%20skills>

Groups are often sloppy when it comes to establishing norms around members giving critical feedback to one another. In fact, as a process consultant who has worked with perhaps 100 cooperative groups over the last 25 years, I've rarely encountered a group that has an *explicit* understanding about the responsibility of every group member to provide to every other group member a channel for hearing feedback about their behavior as a group member—and it's a huge problem.

When feedback channels get clogged, virtual sewage piles up, resulting in anaerobic dynamics. This is the ideal medium in which gossip bacteria multiply, leading to gaseous grumblings behind people's backs, the exhalation of which tends to foul the air. *Peuw!*

OK, let me frame this a bit tighter. First of all, not *every* reaction (thank god) needs to be processed through feedback. Often enough, the person with the reaction can let it go. Maybe they understand that their reactivity is more about them and has little or nothing to do with the other person. Maybe they're able to see that the stakes are low enough and their relationship with the other person is strong enough that they can accept the triggering dynamic as a trivial matter and move on. In any event, every fender bender does not require a police report.

Also note that I'm not talking about *all* behavior being subject to review—I'm only talking about behavior in the context of group functions. (Thus, you're probably not obligated to listen to someone's upset about how often you wear purple, or how distressed they are that you've named your ill-tempered rescue dog Hermione—which happens to be the same name as your favorite aunt. But you are, I think, on the hook for hearing their irritation about not having filled the tank of the group-owned pickup when you used it right before they did and they ran out of gas on the way to the recycling center.)

Further, I'm not suggesting that people need to be available to receive critical feedback on demand. There needs to be options (for instance, now or later; morning, afternoon, or evening; alone or with third party support; perhaps they'd like to see it in writing before discussing it). The prime directive here is what's most likely to land constructively (rather than *destructively*).

For many people, it's painful receiving critical feedback and they'd prefer to put it off until some in the next decade (if they could get away with it). Understandably, people tend to shy away from pain. But that's a bad idea.

Think about the analog with physical pain. If you step on a nail it's a damn good thing that you feel pain—which informs you that something is wrong with your foot. It's not about being happy that you're in pain; it's about being happy that you know you have a nail in your foot. Pain is an important—even essential— biofeedback loop. If you inadvertently put your hand in a flame, you burn your fingers, your hand hurts, and you pull your hand out of the fire. Whew.

If you're a diabetic, you may have nerve damage in your extremities, which could result in your stepping on a nail and not feeling anything (or fail to realize that your hand is burning). That's dangerous. Pain alerts you to do something about it. Despite how easily everyone can follow that physical example, it's amazing how many act as if they have emotional diabetes when doing something that's painful to others.

Cutting yourself off from their pain means the feedback channel is broken. It's important information to you that your words or actions have landed awkwardly and it's a poor bargain to impede or block that flow of information. Mind you, I'm *not* saying you're obliged to agree that you've done anything wrong or that you must change what you do, but if you interrupt the information reaching you then you don't have the chance to consider it. You may not know that your choices are painful to others unless they tell you. Metaphorically, you won't know to pull your hand out of the fire or the nail out of your foot (or perhaps more aptly, to pull your foot out of your mouth).

Keep in mind that I'm not saying this is easy. Especially if the delivery of the feedback comes with a charge and you don't feel there's substance to the complaint. It's a double whammy if you feel unjustly accused and dumped on into the bargain—requiring near-saintly equanimity to respond with grace and empathy instead of with defensiveness or outrage.

But isn't it better to cultivate grace than diabetes?

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Intentional feedback in organizations

Excerpted from an article by Ted Rau of Sociocracy for All (read the original at <https://www.sociocracyforall.org/intentional-feedback-in-organizations/>)

If we ride a bike, we need to check on our data frequently enough to be able to steer successfully. The counterpart of how we steer our bike in an organization are our policies (how we do our work) and our interactions as humans. Both areas will be addressed in this section.

Feedback about content

Every policy decision in sociocracy has a term end when the policy will be up for review. Why that? Because it keeps our policies up to date, fresh in our minds and it encourages to strive to improve in every aspect of our organization. It is like a regular check-up of our tools. All in order, all working and doing what we intend them to do?

Term ends are a way to remind us to do a check-up. For instance, we could make new policy and consent to reviewing it again in 3 months. Or in 10 years. What are useful terms for a policy? That depends on the nature of the organization and on how new the policy was. In general, we try to make the cycles long enough to not overload our circle meetings with policy reviews. Sociocracy is about getting work done, not only about talking *about* work! If you are a bike shop, you want to fix or assemble bikes. You might want to talk about tool maintenance and make policy around that but you also want to get your actual work done...

Feedback in the form of objections

In sociocracy, any decision on policy requires the circle's consent. Consent is defined as "no one has an objection". An objection is defined as a concern that carrying out policy might harm the circle's aim. The circle's aim is a description of the doing of their work. That means that an objection is a concern that carrying out a policy might interfere with the work of the circle. Having clarity both about the circle's aim and about the concern, makes it easy to object with reference to a need driving the objection. Expressing an objection with reference to a need also gives the circle information on how to address the objection because it points towards a direction: how could we amend/change/test the policy to be sure your need can be met...

Feedback loops vs. decision-making

In sociocracy, we want to learn as much as we can and work with all the data we can access to feed into our decision-making. We also try to keep the groups who make decisions to a reasonable group size. It is crucial to understand the difference between "hearing everyone's feedback" and "including everyone in the decision-making". Sociocracy clearly says yes to getting as much feedback as your circle can handle, while we are clearly against involving everyone in the decision-making process.

What's the difference? If circle A makes a decision about significantly raising the membership fees, they might want to hear people from outside the circle about that. They might even want to survey their entire membership. However, that only means that circle A now has more information. They are not bound to anything but to inviting and taking in the feedback they get. In an organization that is new to sociocracy, you have to be very clear on the difference between "being involved in the decision making" and "being heard". Sociocratic governance would be slowed down tremendously if not made impossible if we involved everyone in every decision. That is why we need to trust smaller groups – circles – to make decisions. The strength of sociocracy comes with the ability to make decisions effectively in a small groups while including a lot of data through gathering feedback.

Who do we get feedback from? Sociocracy comes with its own support system. The support system is built into the circle structure.

If a circle is making a decision they assume is uncontroversial, or that only affects their own work, they will probably just make a decision. If they would like to get more feedback – either because they would like to hear more opinions, test the waters, or get more expertise, there are several options. They can ask their next-higher circle for input. That circle might have a broader understanding of the issue and know more about the impact on other circles, for instance circle A's sibling circles. The next-lower circle might have some insights about some specific parts of the proposal, that might be in their domain. They could get feedback from (parts of) the whole organization, for instance in a survey or all-member meeting. They could ask specific individuals for input, if those have some expertise of if a policy would affect them specifically. Circle A could also form a helping circle to look more deeply into a topic.

This is not about involving everyone who might be affected. Instead, this is about gathering enough input to make a good decision. If you make a decision, and the reaction to your policy is surprise or outrage – then that is good feedback that you did not get enough input before making the decision or in explaining how you got to your decision. The small group mandate is based on trust – an organization trusts a small group of people to make decisions in their domain for everyone. This trust is earned through decisions that take input and feedback from other people in the organization into deep consideration.

Feedback to people

See Section J, articles by Laird Schaub

Meeting evaluations

After the content part of every meeting, we evaluate our meeting in a round. Everyone says how the meeting worked for them. If you look at it from a needs/feelings perspective, they are sharing how well the meeting (a strategy to do work together) met their needs. Did the meeting meet your need for productivity? For connection? Did it give you clarity or maybe companionship. Or maybe you created a policy that contributes to your need for safety or harmony. This is a good moment to share those. You can also share feelings, for instance "I am happy about how the meeting went", or "I was anxious

before the meeting wondering whether the agenda was too full, and now I am relieved that we got through all the agenda items.”

What do we do with “negative” feedback? We share it as well: if you stay on the level of meets met or unmet (remember, no one can make you angry, unmet needs trigger feelings, other people do not trigger feelings), then it will be easy to share those.

Here are some examples of how to express our meeting evaluation with a universal need or a feeling and no blame of labeling, just talking about our very own experience with no expectation that we are accessing any absolute truth.

Which needs were met:

- “I enjoyed this meeting because to me it seemed effective for time.” (effectiveness)
- “I am glad about our decision and the sense of integrity it gives me.”
- “To me, it seems like there was balance in how much each of us contributed, so there was equality and harmony, and I enjoyed that. o “I want to appreciate Mary for giving me space to express myself during the consent round. I felt heard and understood by everyone.”
- “This was a fun meeting for me. Stimulating and connected, which works really well for me.”

Which needs were not met:

- This meeting was very effective but I would have wished for more connection and space for reflection.
- I noticed some cross talk in the meeting with people speaking out of turn, and that makes it hard for me to be at ease. I like the sense of equality that comes with rounds.
- The meeting did not work for me at all. I am curious to hear how other people experienced the meeting but I know that I was sitting with a lot of confusion because I was not really sure what we were doing.
- It is hard for me to be around what I perceive as hostility during the meeting.

Performance Reviews

See section J, Role Improvement Feedback process

Common Ground Ecovillage

Giving and Receiving Feedback Tips

Dancing with Feedback

0. Have a commitment to self-examination
1. Listen
2. Ask yourself, “How are they right?”
3. Attend to your own emotions
4. Repair damage as openly as possible
5. Move forward constructively and, if needed, with correction
6. Enjoy the stretch!

Developed by Laird Schaub, Mayana Ludwig, and Maria Silvia

Other feedback tips

- Prioritize. Voice the most important points; don't nitpick.
- Focus on the work and the process. Avoid personal comments.
- Describe; don't judge.
- Use positive comments to describe *what* is well done.
- Accompany negative or critical feedback with positive suggestions for improvement.
- Choose words that communicate respect for the person and their work.

COMMON GROUND ECOVILLAGE GOVERNANCE RESOURCES

REFERENCE LIST

Books

Many Voices, One Song, by Ted J. Rau and Jerry Koch-Gonzalez, Sociocracy for All, sociocracyforall.org

We the People: Consenting to a Deeper Democracy, 2nd Edition, John Buck and Sharon Villines

Websites

Sociocracy for All, sociocracyforall.org—excellent information and online, low cost training opportunities

Sociocracy Consulting Group, <http://sociocracyconsulting.com/> --consulting and training, particularly for facilitation

Sociocracy 3.0, <https://sociocracy30.org/>

Laird Schaub's blog: communityandconsensus.blogspot.com

Overviews

All of these articles by Diana Leafe Christian can be found on and downloaded from OnlyOffice. Hartsmill.onlyoffice.com>Common Documents>Community Core Documents>Governance Essentials

- *A Clear, Thorough Membership Process*
- *Four Benefits of Sociocracy*
- *Effective, Efficient, & Fun*
- *Feedback Questions in Proposals*
- *What Can Go Wrong When Communities Don't Meet the Four Necessary Requirements*
- *Three Aspects of a Healthy Thriving Community*

How Sociocracy Can Help Communities series, published in Community Magazine

- *Transparency, Equivalence, & Effectiveness, Part 1*
- *Self-Governance with Circles & Double Links, Part 2*
- *Consent Decision-Making and Community Vision, Mission, Aim, Part 3*
- *Why No Tyranny of the Minority in Sociocracy, Part 4*
- *Sociocracy to the Rescue at Aldeafeliz Ecovillage, Part 5*