

Proposal

AZG Participatory Decision Making Practice

Reaching Closure: Using Gradients of Agreement & Kaner's Meta-Decision

Submitted by:

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Introduction

As a faith based organization, Arcata Zen Group makes an effort to practice the Eight Fold Path with the awareness that this practice reaches into all aspects of life, every moment. Group and community processes can offer a unique opportunity for practicing together as a collective, in particular when making an effort to arrive at decisions for the benefit of the Sangha by unanimous decision.

Approaching **Consensus Decision Making** as a practice of faith-based ethical behavior invites us to explore what is required in how we understand and relate to ourselves, each other and the world. Taking part in **Participatory Decision Making** engages aspects from all three realms of the Eight Fold Path: 1) the Wisdom path with Right View and Right Intention, 2) the path of Ethical Conduct with Right Speech and Right Action, and 3) the path of Mental Discipline in Right Effort and Right Mindfulness.

Joining in **Participatory Decision Making** invites a shift in group norms, nurtures the growth of a collective by encouraging full participation, promoting mutual understanding, fostering inclusive solutions and cultivating shared responsibility with the goal being to build sustainable agreements. The process of building a sustainable agreement has four stages: 1) gathering diverse points of view, 2) building a shared framework of understanding, 3) developing inclusive solutions, and 4) reaching closure. This proposal submits a description of the process for reaching closure with an effort at unanimity by applying Gradients of Agreement and Kaner's procedure for use of Meta-Decision.

Description

The Arcata Zen Group is currently seeking a clear rule for how decisions are made as a collective. A decision rule answers the question “how do we know when we’ve made a decision?” and is helpful in bringing discussions to closure in a consistent manner with potential outcomes of sustainable solutions. Decision-making without a decision rule can result in decisions that don’t stick, the assumption that a discussion equated to a decision, confusion, inefficiency, dissatisfaction etc. Decision rules can vary from a requirement for unanimous agreement to a majority vote to simple delegation and can differ depending on the complexity and potential impact of the decision being made. This proposal recommends the use of a Five Point Gradient of Agreement and Kaner’s Meta-Decision for reaching closure.

Applying Gradients of Agreement and Kaner’s Meta-Decision

Part 1: Gradient of Agreement

The agenda writer(s) will provisionally assign the decision to a category of low stakes or high stakes. High stakes decisions require enthusiastic support or and low stakes decisions require lukewarm support (pp. 328-331). The ‘gradient of agreement’ is a polling tool used to assess the degree and kinds agreement disagreement or other positions in the group. The group is usually polled at some point in the convergent zone of the diamond of participatory decision-making, maybe multiple times, and then again after someone has called for a closure to the discussion. The poll can be made through

either a show of hands or “pick and say why”. A five point gradient of agreement will be used when calling for a poll. See table 1. “A five point gradient of agreement”.

Table 1. A five point gradient of agreement

Wholehearted Endorsement	Support with a Minor Point of Contention or Reservation	Neutral	Major Reservations	Veto
“This decision is good for our group”	“This decision is adequate for our group, but I have something to add or clarify”	“I don’t feel strongly one way or the other” or “I defer to the wisdom of the group”	“I don’t understand the issues well enough yet.” or “This decision is problematic but I’m not going to hold up the group” or “If we don’t address XYZ issues this will be a bad decision for our group”	“On principle, this would be a bad decision for this group”

Part 2: Meta-decision and Decision Rule

Establishing a decision rule for reaching closure in a participatory decision making process offers flexibility and clarity. The procedure for reaching closure is as follows:

1. End the discussion
2. Write a proposal on a flip chart
3. Using the Five Point Gradient of Agreement, Poll the group to assess the level of support for the proposal

4. Kaner's Meta Decision: a key person ("the person in charge") decides whether
 - a) s/he will now make a decision or b) the group should discuss the issue further.
5. The Decision Rule (criteria) is applied to both high and low stakes decisions.

The procedure for reaching closure helps groups to make simple decisions quickly and also supports a group in taking as much time as needed when making a high stakes decision. It is highly recommended that everyone in the group become familiar with the role of the "person in charge" for participatory decision making, as the person filling this role can vary--see page 359 of "Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision Making".

Applying Kaner's Meta-Decision Procedure

Kaner's Meta-Decision procedure has been adopted and adapted to suit many organizations, one of these being Santa Cruz Zen Center. This proposal recommends that Arcata Zen Group adopt the SCZC modification of Kaner's Meta Decision procedure.

The Santa Cruz Zen Center model for applying Kaner's

1. A call for closure is made to end the discussion
2. Clarify proposal
3. Poll for preferences using gradient of agreement
4. The person in charge decides: a) there is enough agreement to make a decision or b) the group should discuss the issue further.
5. If there is no agreement after three rounds of discussion over three separate meetings, and if two thirds of the group in attendance want a vote, a vote will be taken.
6. To pass a vote, a two thirds majority is needed. Those who vote need to have attended all three meetings.

Arcata Zen Group's Core Values for Decision-Making

We root our participatory group process in the realization of non-self, in the understanding of interdependence, and with faith in practice-realization. We vow, together with all beings, to ease each other's discomfort through our thoughts, words and actions, by rooting them in the Noble Eightfold Path. In addition, we vow to do no harm, to do good, and to do good for others. This is the beauty and joy of the Sangha jewel.

Our Core Values for Participatory Decision-Making are:

- **Full Participation**
- **Mutual Understanding**
- **Inclusive Solutions**
- **Shared Responsibility**

Core Value: Mutual Understanding as Practice

Our group strives to integrate the perspective of each member through the practice of *mutual understanding*. Decisions made with mutual understanding are more fully participatory and result in lasting benefit for our shared practice life. Mutual understanding develops when each of us cultivates a sense of curiosity and openness to one another's views, a willingness to accept that other members' viewpoints are essential to our common effort, and trust that the shared wisdom of our group is greater than the sum of its parts.

**Taking refuge in the jewel sangha,
We strive for integration.
Allowing ourselves to know and be known,
Without clinging nor repulsing,
Our ideas are molded in common effort.
Woven together with each other,
Our common wisdom,
Made whole, thread-by-thread.**

Core Value: Shared Responsibility as Practice

Sustainable decisions require everyone's support, and responsibility for the decision-making process helps ensure that each person will be willing and able to implement the proposals. Our vows support us in relinquishing our self-concern and cultivating the qualities of empathy and assertiveness. This helps us realize that it is really only through the support of others that we can accomplish our goals.

**When the bell rings to begin the meeting,
I vow together with all beings,
to be ready to meet others
with don't know mind.**

3. Assume responsibility for designing and managing the thinking process during the meeting even when you are not the facilitator.

Other Suggestions for Practicing (from Maylie Kushin Seisho's Guidelines for Group Process)

1. Speak from your heart, without concern for what others may think of you.
2. Listen with your whole mind-body, taking in the whole person speaking, not just the words being said.
3. Speak from the perspective of your own practice.
4. Listen for what is right with what the other person is saying, not what is wrong.
5. Participate in the group fully, because without you, everyone else's experience is diminished.
6. Respect what you don't know.

**Opening my mouth to speak,
May I be mindful of my vow
To open Buddha's Wisdom Way
For all beings.**

How does our Tradition inter-relate with Participatory Decision Making?

In our tradition of Soto Zen Buddhism, we share values and insights that form the basis of our practice:

Our Core Teachings

The Four Noble Truths

Impermanence

Interdependence

Buddha nature

Practice-Realization

Dependent Co-Origination

The Middle-Way

Paramitas

Buddha, Dharma, Sangha

The Eight Fold Path and Precepts

How does our Tradition inter-relate with Participatory Decision Making?

The values of participatory decision-making are based on values and insights related to the generation of suffering associated with group process (group dukka):

PDM Values

Origins of Group Process Dukka

Encourage Full Participation

Self-Censorship

Foster Inclusive Solutions

The Win/Lose Mentality

Promote Mutual Understanding

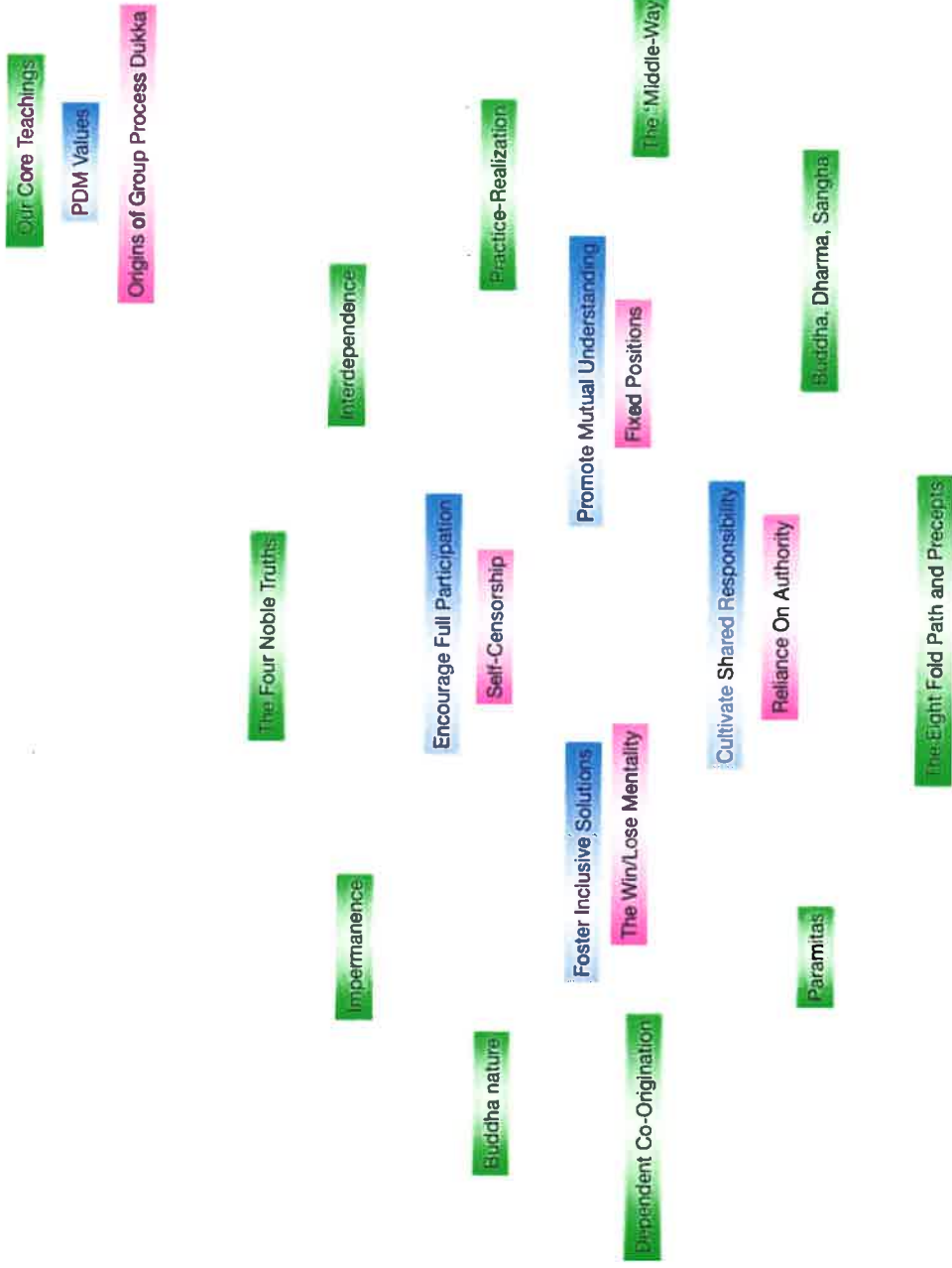
Fixed Positions

Cultivate Shared Responsibility

Reliance On Authority

How does our Tradition inter-relate with Participatory Decision Making?

The values and insights of participatory decision are rooted in our own:



We recognize that suffering of the group arises when we, as members of the group, become fixed in our positions, engage in self-censorship, develop a win/lose mentality, or rely too much on authority. By cultivating full participation, mutual understanding, inclusive solutions and shared responsibility, we recognize that liberation of the group arises.