

Outline for Governance Process Training

~(Q. 42:38) – *Those...whose affair is decided by consultation (shura) between themselves...this is better and more enduring.*

~Two hadiths reported by Ghazali: 1. *My community will not come to consensus on a wrong... 2. It is your duty to stand by the united community....*

~(Q. 3:64) – *None of us shall take for lords any but Allah.*

I) **Some Key Concepts** from the consent and integrative decision-making section of the new *shura* governance model – see www.suficenter.org under Our Community/Organization/Governance Circle.

Group wisdom – a group that is sincerely seeking a good decision, where people feel free to speak truthfully, take responsibility and pray for guidance, will usually come up with a high quality, inclusive, divinely-guided decision, insha’llah. Including all voices ensures all the needs of the group can be addressed as well as strengthens and refines the original proposal. This process of inclusiveness helps to bring forth the group wisdom, which is shown to produce better decisions than the most able member, individually.

Objection-based discussions – instead of dwelling on pros and cons or concerns, participants simply ask themselves if they object to a proposal or not. (E.g. Does it cause a conflict with a known value or objective of the organization?) If they object, then the reason for the objection is articulated and incorporated in the search for a solution. This keeps the decision-making process efficient.

Level playing field – every member’s voice has equal weight; respect is shown for all points of view as containing an aspect of the truth. Individual voices are usually not just individual – they represent a “pole” in the larger community.

Patience – it can take time to bring out all the relevant information and points of view. The benefit is the completeness and level of buy-in that occurs with the decision at which the group arrives.

Ground rules – guidelines agreed upon by the group to help facilitate group interactions, in accordance with the principles of the prophetic tradition (see “foundational principles” in the governance document).

Moderator role – is important in keeping the discussion both focused/efficient and inclusive/heart-based. Part of the moderator’s role is to maintain awareness of the various points of view/objections and encourage everyone to participate. Another aspect is keeping track of the emerging proposal/decision.

II) **One Hand One Heart Decision-Making** (*copied from governance model.*)

1. This holistic and integrative decision-making process is designed to prevent people or teams from missing or overriding an important perspective on an issue because they don’t see its value. **It is grounded in turning to Allah for guidance and assumes that each perspective emerging from this process probably holds a piece of the truth.** On important matters, some or all members of a circle may make use of the guidance prayer (*salatul-istikhara*) as used by the Prophet, *saws* – see e.g., “*How the Arrival is Realized*” pp. 178-179). **The goal is then to integrate perspectives as quickly and effectively as possible.**
2. **Decisions are crafted through integrating the core truth or value in each perspective put forth.** For a proposal to gain approval, the circle then addresses all “principled and paramount” objections, refining the proposal until it finds a non-objectionable path forward (consent).
3. **Decisions must be consistent with the mission and principles adopted by the tariqa, community, organization or circle. Feelings are respected, but objections are valid only if they present a reasonable argument for why a proposal will result in a breach of those principles or will create an unacceptable dysfunction.** Individuals cannot block a proposed action simply because they are

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fearful or don't like it. If their concern is strong, however, a sincere effort should be made to help them reflect to see if there is a principled and paramount objection, and if so, whether it can be integrated, since it is important that all circle members at least be able to live with each circle decision and support it. This allows us to hold each other in love and find the truth within each different perspective without judgment, blame or separation. Research shows that group decisions based on such integrative processes are reliably better than decisions made individually by the most able member.

4. **Decisions are made rapidly and in small increments based on present understanding**, then refined and updated continuously as new information and guidance emerges.
 - a. Any decision can be revisited and altered by consent at any time, allowing organizations to experiment, learn and adapt quickly in a complex, rapidly changing environment. This is a dynamic and flexible way of guiding the organization toward its goals by holding an aim in mind, staying attuned to emerging reality and making frequent course corrections along the way.
 - b. **The threshold for decision-making is a workable, non-objectionable decision, not the "best" decision.** The best decision is the one that emerges over time, based on guidance and learning in action.
5. In this decision-making approach **most authority is delegated**, via each circle's integrative process, to individuals or small working committees or teams (three-person teams generally work best). It is more efficient to assign the authority to make specialized decisions, within appropriate budget constraints, to those most qualified and motivated to act. Recipients of such delegated authority remain accountable to the circle, and if this authority later proves to be too broad or too limiting, the circle can change the allocation of responsibility at any time.
6. Similarly, **any circle may agree – by consent – to assign any particular decision**, either in advance or where consensus has not been achieved after repeated efforts, **to be handled in a different way.** For example, it can be handled by referring to an appropriate person or body in the tariqa for facilitation, mediation, guidance or decision, or for decision by majority vote.
7. It is recommended that each **circle also adopts a default process in advance, for situations where there is a failure to find consensus** on a significant issue, or failure to resolve a dispute or to clear ongoing tensions. The steps of this process (subject to variation by consent) are:
 - a. If the circle is unclear on the appropriate implementation of the *shura* process to reach consent on the issue, invite the Governance Circle or its nominee to provide training and/or **facilitation in the shura process** as needed to reach a decision.
 - b. If proper application of the *shura* process does not resolve the matter, schedule and hold a **special meeting for a sulha (reconciliation) process.** Acceptable, experienced facilitators for *sulha* should be agreed in advance by consent (see separate description). More than one 2-3 hour session may be required and should be scheduled in advance in case it is needed.
 - c. If the *sulha* process does not resolve the issue, elect by consent a delegation of three circle members to **consult Sidi and ask for his guidance.**
 - d. In the unlikely event that consideration of how to proceed on the issue in light of Sidi's guidance does not yield a consent decision, a **decision on the issue may be made by majority vote.**The circle may agree by consent to opt for an alternative procedure at any stage, such as skipping one or more of these steps; or referring the decision to a working committee or linked circle; or setting up a mediation between two parties; or if mediation fails, an arbitration as allowed by the SSC (or USHS) by-laws.
8. Any individual circle or committee member who stands to gain materially from a decision by that circle or committee should declare their interest in advance and not continue to participate in that decision.

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III) *Practice the process steps* using actual circle meeting agenda item(s):

1. Attendance and check-in at the beginning of the meeting
2. Agree on moderator, note-taker, and any other roles required
3. Agree on agenda and priorities
4. For each agenda item:
 - i. State proposal
 - ii. Questions to clarify proposal
 - iii. Any objections identified
 - iv. Discussion of concerns behind the objections
 - v. Possible solutions to objections considered
 - vi. Formulate and state new proposal – Any objections?
 - vii. Repeat steps ii-vi as necessary

Notes: These steps can be followed in more or less tightly focused “rounds”, depending on the working preferences of the group.

A group may engage in free-moving discussion on a proposal and still come to inclusive and clear decision points; or it may prefer to have more disciplined rounds with participants being more succinct and focused in their comments. Larger groups may need to use the more disciplined approach to achieve the necessary level of inclusion and space for all points of view, with a minimum of time for interruption or digression.

One additional round (between steps ii and iii) can be included explicitly to give time for everyone to turn to Allah for guidance, perhaps using the *istikhara* prayer if it is a major proposal; or perhaps just to check each person’s gut reaction and give respect to their feelings, using them to help identify any real objection underneath. This will be helpful for some proposals but is not always needed, given limited time: the expectation is that members will in any case be asking Allah for guidance on all decisions.