

Sociocracy to the Rescue at Aldeafeliz Village (A summary)

Sociocracy to the Rescue at Aldeafeliz Village: How Sociocracy Can Help Communities, Part V, by Anamaria Ariztiabal.

NOTE: this is a summary based as much as possible on edited verbatim statements from the article. You can find the more extensive article at XXXX

Aldeafeliz is a community of some 20 people, not far from Bogota, Colombia's capital. People there strive for ecological, economic, social and spiritual sustainability. The group is very diverse and there is no common ideology. The community offers thematic weekends with organized activities, festivals (like an arts festival, a dance festival), workshops for organizations and schools, and workshops for individuals on holistic topics from ecology, to personal development. Individual initiatives include food products, exotic flowers, curriculum and education for kids, as well as T-shirts and memorabilia of Aldeafeliz.

In its starting phase, Aldeafeliz adopted a form of consensus as its decision-making modality. This slowly turned into a sense of exhaustion with stagnation of its processes, as any proposal took what seemed like eons to get approved. The meetings were excruciatingly long, and the position of facilitator was dreaded.

The move towards Sociocracy

Aldeafeliz organized a Sociocracy workshop taught by Diana, who came in March, 2014. A few weeks before the workshop, based on Sociocratic model, the community reorganized its teams. Before Sociocracy whoever wanted to fill a position ended up doing so. It was all according to willingness and volunteering. This turned out to be a headache, because often not the most qualified person would volunteer and create chaos or deliver a mediocre performance. There was no accountability system.

In Sociocracy positions are filled according to the nominations of community members. Roles are filled based on transparent criteria: how convincing is the grounding for nominations, based on the tasks of the role and the requirements to fulfill those tasks, and to a lesser extent, the people who get the most number of nominations from the community.

This Sociocratic election process was a success at Aldeafeliz. The group started by decreasing the number of teams in order to streamline the organization.

Consent Decision-Making

Sociocracy's consent decision-making process provides very clear guidelines of how to bring in a proposal and use a sequence of rounds. A round to ask clarifying questions, a round of quick reactions, a "consent round" to either consent to the proposal or bring up objections, a round to either resolve objections by modifying the proposal (or by postponing the decision until further work or research can resolve the objections), etc. Facilitators find this format much easier to follow than the previous one.

A key word in sociocracy is *consent*, which is different from consensus. This means that we each give our consent to this proposal because it is “good enough for now,” so we can start learning whether it will work out well. Each proposal has a date to be evaluated, with a set of evaluating criteria. So consent does not mean that people have no objections indefinitely, but until the project is evaluated.

Objections themselves need to follow certain guidelines to be acceptable. In this light, objections become contributions to the aim of the group, as well as to the proposals themselves; they are gifts to the group.

Evaluation

Here are some of the blessings the group identified from using Sociocracy during its first six months. At present all the energy used before to create noise and sabotage projects is now channeled into making useful changes to proposals to make them more effective. Some key issues that had lingered for years have finally been decided, like setting a common annual fee for both Turtles and Beetles (the turtles work within the community, the beetles outside). There is much more experimentation at many levels. New protocols have been proposed to manage the houses, the members, and the legal structures. They’re experiencing more effective management. There is more follow-up to the decisions taken; there is a clearer sense of responsibility for who does what; information has started to flow more. They now have more structures to share data and updates, creating greater transparency.

There is a stronger cohesion overall. The meetings are faster and feel lighter, there is a kind of rhythm to them that is satisfying. At the end of their last meeting they started dancing for joy!

In the most recent meeting the group evaluated the performance of cells (committees) according to the tasks that the community assigned each of them. There is a feeling that people are performing out of pure intrinsic motivation, and from a sense of responsibility to the whole group. These feelings were there before, but the actual structure of Sociocracy helped them to manifest them.

They judge they still have much to learn. One key area is feedback. In their last meeting they had some rounds of feedback that were meant to be different from the emotional processing they have traditionally done, focusing more on roles and tasks. However, they are not yet accustomed to this, so the feedback rounds were painful for some people. This is delicate, because people can lose trust in the process.