

## Procedure 5.5

### **Guidelines for engaging Imago members in Dialogue about Board Decisions**

#### **1. Introduction**

From time-to-time the Imago Board makes decisions which have potentially have a huge impact on the Imago community. These decisions might include the following:

- Changing an email list from being open to being moderated
- Introducing incentives for completing Imago CEUs
- Creating a Resource Library to promote the creating of new Imago programs
- Etc:

#### **2. Dialogue helps us make better decisions**

The Board believes that the most powerful decisions for the community will be made in a way which reflects the relational paradigm in which Imago is rooted. We also deeply desire to lead and build our community with integrity to what we value and teach to others.

These concepts underpin Organizational Development theories such as “Appreciative Inquiry into Organizational Meaning” developed at the Taos Institute. William Isaac’s in “Dialogue: The Art of Thinking Together” highlights the power of a dialogical approach in overcoming what he calls pathologies of thought which can weaken individualistic decision making. Joseph Jaworsky in “Synchronicity: The Inner Path of Leadership” writes about how engaging a community in a dialogical process can aid the unfolding of the community’s meaning, and help align the majority to support the shared direction which become apparent to those who engage in the process.

#### **3. Dialogue strengthens the community**

Many members of the Imago community value the opportunity to participate in co-creating the future, together with the IRI Board. By establishing a dialogical process to enable them to participate we can also strengthen their awareness of involvement. Conversely, if we fail to provide opportunities to participate dialogically, members often feel frustrated, and sense that the Board is not “walking the talk” of Imago.

#### **4. Past Experience**

The Imago community has involved several hundred active participants, with many serving on Boards and committees, and participating in conferences.

During its 25 years history, there has been plenty of opportunity to learn by experience, and some have found these experiences painful. As we have struggled to learn how to create dialogical communications we have experienced the following:

- Some have felt rejected and invalidated by group-wide discussions
- Some have left the community because they have found group-wide discussions to feel aggressive, and non-relational
- Some have found group-wide discussions excessively long, and focused on the negative
- Some have found group-wide discussions excessively focused on the positive, with little room for expressing their frustration.

There have also been many positive experiences, often with the guidance of the Peace Project, and through use of communologue.

## **5. Community Input**

During spring 2007 surveys were sent out to the Imago community, asking for input to help to create a more dialogical process for group participation with the Board in decision-making. This document is based on the input from those surveys, and was discussed at a phone-bridge meeting on June 14, 2007, to which all IRI members were invited to discuss these issues with Board members.

## **6. Types of Opportunity to Dialogue**

In order to enable dialogue between the community and the board a number of channels are in existence or being created. These include:

1. Communologue based Appreciative Inquiry sessions at the annual conference
2. Town-Hall meeting at the annual conference (planned for 2008)
3. Participation with Board members in working committees
4. Meet with the Board on pre-scheduled phone-bridges
5. Sending concerns or ideas to the Board at any time (always welcome)
6. Virtual "Town Hall" process – using email and phone-bridge
7. Quarterly reports from the Board and summaries of Board meetings

See notes below:

1. AI sessions enable members to give feedback on specific issues. Groups are often run using communologue. The conclusions are discussed by the Board when they hold their retreat in the spring, to discuss new strategy.
2. Town-Hall meetings are planned to be scheduled on the Sunday morning after the conference finishes, starting 2008

3. Many members work closely with the Board in committees, including Finance, Programs, Professional Training and Standards, Fundraising, and Global Membership. Please contact us for details on serving with the Board on these committees
4. We plan to arrange regular phone-bridges, where you can attend and dialogue with members of the Board.
5. Please send any concerns, complaints or suggestions for the IRI Board to [info@imagorelationships.org](mailto:info@imagorelationships.org)
6. See section 7 for details of our email/phone bridge consultation process.

### **7. Virtual “Town Hall” dialogue process using email and phone bridges**

The virtual town hall dialogue process has been designed to involve Imago members from around the world. The process has been developed based on a community survey. Since we can't gather together frequently in a retreat to review decisions, the process has been designed to emulate a process of gathering and sharing input, leading up to a phone-bridge where it can all be discussed.

#### **Step 1: Establish subject, and key questions**

The Board will maintain a short-list of key issues which require community input, and will ask for ideas for the list periodically. The full process to discuss each subject is expected to take 6-8 weeks.

#### **Step 2: Board issues a request for input on a specific issue**

A specific issue is selected for discussion, and the intention of this stage of dialogue is to gather the full range of perspectives held within the community.

The initial invitation to comment is likely to be a short email, setting out the key questions on the specific issue, and perhaps even a couple of proposed solutions. A survey will be put together to allow community members to provide input. This will be structured so that members can reply anonymously if they wish – by using Survey Monkey, or equivalent third-party survey software. There will also be an option for respondents to ask to have their perspective mirrored back to them and validated.

We will ask members to send responsibly, so that it is easier for their perspective to be viewed without judgment and shared widely without fear of shaming, blaming or criticism.

Where possible, board committees will also be asked to join in and provide input during this stage.

### **Step 3: Gather results from survey – and re-issue for comment**

The intention of this stage of dialogue is to begin to generate a decision, based on the input.

A summary of the survey results will be reviewed by the Board, who will draft a proposed solution which reflects the perspectives that were heard.

The Board will issue a discussion document, which will include a summary of the key perspectives heard, together with their proposed solution. In addition the full set of responses will be available as a separate document.

Members will be invited to respond by email, and their comments will be included in final documents prepared for Step 4.

### **Step 4: Phone-bridge Dialogue**

The phone bridge will be an opportunity to talk through on the phone with the Board the range of perspectives received, and how these were used to co-create a solution, based on these perspectives.

Discussion may include both the process used, as well as gathering other perspectives and ideas which may alter the conclusions reached by the Board.

The conclusion may be to return to step 3, or continue to step 5

### **Step 5: Implement conclusion**

This may be the implementation of a plan, or approving of a new procedure. Any announcements to the community will continue to provide an opportunity for feedback, and concerns. The announcement is likely to include a new procedure, or an implementation plan

### **Step 6: Gather further comment and continue to refine the plan**

Even after implementation there are likely to be many who wish to comment, particular as they see things happen that might impact them. Comments and suggestions will still be welcome, and depending on response we may recycle through stages 3 and 4 to revise the plan or procedure in the light of further input and experience.

The nature of community, the leadership which emerges within it, and in relationships of all kinds, includes the reality that with any decision there will

always be people who disagree. That is the part of the richness of a diverse and vibrant community or relationship. In our commitment to create a dialogical environment, we seek to hear the concerns, hopes, fears and needs on all sides, even though it may not result in the exact actions desired by all involved.