

June 10, 2007 Board Meeting

AAGT Board Meeting

Present: Ann Bowman, Peter Philippon, Dan Bloom, Phil Brownell, Tine van Wijk, Brian O'Neill, Peter Cole, Ansel Woldt.

Apologies: Bud Feder, Robert DeVos, Silvie Falschlunger, Jenny Edwards

Sarah Fallon - unable to connect to the call.

Absent: Jack Aylward, Marilyn Myles, Morgan Goodlander, Marcy Stern.

PROPOSED AGENDA ITEMS

A. Manchester Conference (Jenny and Sarah)

B. RCP (Tine)

C. Treasurer's Report (Peter)

D. e-Newsletter (Marcy and Phil)

E. Committee on our Process – Task Force on Decision Making (Dan)

F. Roving Ambassador

THE NEXT BOARD MEETING TIME – July 29, 2007 at the same time as this one. Please note Europe, USA, Canada and Bermuda are now in Daylight Saving Time, while Australia is not.

Welcome

Manchester Conference

In an email sent prior to the call, Sarah and Jenny wrote:

Conference Planning Report for June 2007:

Well, this has been an unusual month in that there has been such a lot of heavy processing both on the leaders list and, simultaneously, on the CPC. Tasks have become less figural, although things are still being done. Hopefully, the processing will be fruitful with regard to our longer-term commitment to the conference and to working together.

1) PPC:

The PPC is working on ironing out the difficulties in the PDF forms that Phil is putting up on the website. Various people are testing them out.

They are currently waiting for responses to come in from the invited presenters so that the Call for Proposals can include the keynotes and named presenters.

In discussion at the moment is the issue of us paying presenters, and offering their perspective for those on the CPC and the board to consider.

“Depending on Stern's acceptance and our decision about whether or not to pay him what he is asking, we will next move directly into planning”Stern's Day,” or directly into consideration of pre-conference workshops (so that we can get that information out to publicity folks right away and so that

we can distribute a general call for proposals for pre-conference workshops, for which we may have to establish some criteria that will guide our selection and scheduling of such workshops).” (Phil, for the PPC).

2) CPC:

The CPC is continuing to explore the social aspects of the conference. Janice is researching the Guided-Historical-Walk-Through-the-City option as an alternative to IIG night. Thanks, Janice.

Following research re various options, the general consensus seems to be moving towards us hosting a Ceilidh on the Saturday Night. For a definition of a Ceilidh, please click on the following link. (Back to the computer if you printed this off first!) <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/C%C3%A9ilidh#> This isn't a final decision yet.

We are also looking into what we refer to as “Conference Goodies” and we're researching ethically produced conference bags and various items to include in them. We're also in the very early stages of what products we may look to being available for purchase.

Jenny has written to the invited presenters and keynotes (see last month's report). She is away currently but will forward an accurate update on their responses (to the Board) as soon as she is able to.

Seán and Charlie have formally agreed to facilitate the Opening Plenary Experiment. A great big thank-you to both of them.

3) Publicity:

We have an advert in this month's very first edition of “Studies in Gestalt Therapy: Dialogical Bridges”. It is open on the desk in front of me as I type. It's a great-looking advert in a fantastic journal. A joy to behold! Thank-you, Dan, for producing such a wonderful setting for our advertising!

We have put together an A4 flier to give to each delegate at the GPTI conference at the end of this month. GPTI is an accrediting body for British gestalt therapists. Danny, from the Publicity Committee, will also say a few words about AAGT at the conference. Thanks to Danny for agreeing to do this.

The AAGT Manchester conference is being very well supported by GPTI. The Executive Committee have agreed to reduce their own 2008 conference to just one day - to enable its membership (in terms of both finance and time) to attend our conference in Manchester. I think this is a very generous, and co-operative, gesture.

At the time of writing, the Publicity Committee is looking at how it wants to configure itself. Also at what feels feasible – both in terms of how it is structured and in terms of its relationship to the CPC.

Flights:

Dan has sorted out the error that was in the contract (discovered at last month's Board meeting). I will send out the corrected version to you individually, as an attachment. Thanks, Dan.

Scholarship Fund:

As most of you aware, Peter P offered a scholarship-fund-raising workshop in New York this month. Thanks, Peter – hope it went well.

PPC/CPC Liaison:

I have continued to set up a monthly group-mail conversation between Phil, Jenny, Mae and Jenny. This was something we agreed upon during our conference call a few months back.

Most of you will be aware of the dialogue around PPC-CPC liaison that took place on the Leaders List. It looks like we will be trying out a different arrangement and seeing if it makes things easier. Hopefully, it will. Perhaps we could agree to trial it for this month and say if it's workable at next month's board meeting?

Finance:

Sharon will forward this month's board report to Peter C and the CPC. Thanks to Sharon .

Treasurer's Report

Peter C – several of his staff members have had tragic experiences over the past several months. This has resulted in the monthly financial report not being sent. Peter gave a total balance and noted that there is some outstanding money due to Warren from the Vancouver conference which will be paid.

The board members expressed gratitude to Bud and Peter P for the income that was contributed to the scholarship fund by their workshops.

Phil – raised the question of whether we should and how much we would invest in a paid presenter? There was a board discussion which included dialogue about contingencies, booking times, etc. At this time it was recommended that the PPC and CPC work together on this issue as it unfolds and let the board know how this will impact the conference budget.

Also out of this discussion, three issues emerged 1) principle of paying or not paying presenters, 2) roles of planning committees in planning budgets and 3) role of AAGT's general finances in floating the conferences.

The board also discussed that the ultimate decision on finances comes from the board.

Dan – AAGT members should not be paid. We could illicit a presenter like Stern (who exemplifies the bridges we are trying to build and could be a real opening for gestalt) who is outside the organization as someone who advances us and whom we also will most likely have an impact.

There was much discussion about this and the board agreed the discussion should be continued.

Phil – worked out a new way of discussion between PPC and CPC. He is also working on the call for proposals which will be in several formats including an email format.

Brian – appreciated the recent exchange of emails between the PPC and CPC. Really exemplifies our process and covenant of community.

Committee on our Process – Task Force on Decision Making (Dan)

Dan sent the following email to the membership list June 3, 2007:

“On the Process of Developing our Communication Infrastructure”

Report by Dan Bloom, Task Force Chair

I am pleased to distribute to this list a report from the Task Force on Decision Making. Our Task force had 2 missions. The first was to re-examine our Articles and By-Laws in order to remove inconsistencies in them.

The second task was broader: we began to reconsider our styles of communication and decision making as they function within the organization. AAGT, an international community, acts as a participant in the increasingly lively global gestalt therapy community. Do our Articles and By-Laws support us in this need?

I am grateful to all the members of the Task Force who have thrown themselves into this discussion. The Task Force has completed its work, and this report brings the discussion to you. There are many significant issues raised in this report. We cannot, and should not, proceed with these matters without all of us discussing this in detail.

These concerns now require your attention as citizens of this community –your attention, consideration, and your responses. The Articles and By-Laws are on our web site.

This email begins the first step towards our wider discussion. Your reply completes this first step.

Three items, immediately below, are without controversy and will be proposed formally at the annual meeting in October: correcting our documents to conform to the multinational character of the organization; providing for notice of items to be put on meeting agendas; and allowing for the election of officers by majority rather than by consensus.

1. The first issue to be considered is easy; we must simply change all references in our Charter and By-laws that reference “international.”

Proposal: Amend Article V, sect 1, D to replace “international meeting” with “biennial meeting”; Article V, sec 2, B, replace “international meeting” with biennial meeting.” Amend Article IV Section so as to delete location of special meetings or conferences.

We are ready to present this as a by-law amendment at the annual meeting at the SW Regional this October.

Note, however, that the SW Regional is being billed as a “biennial regional conference.” This would change that.

2. Another uncontroversial issue is the giving of notice of agenda items for any special meeting, annual meeting, or biennial meeting.

Proposal: Ninety days notice is to be given to the membership via e-mail and regular mail for any item to appear on the agenda of any meeting open to the membership and at which a vote of the membership is required. This does not restrict the right of any member to add a new issue to the agenda at any meeting of the membership.

What follows are controversial and, other than the final suggestion to change the election of officers, need a great deal of discussion.

3. Decision Making: This goes to the heart of our functioning as an organization and as a community. There are several issues nested within this, and, like all dynamic wholes, any decision regarding one part will affect the others. I am summarizing various perspectives.

The Task Force agreed that the requirement that the election of officers be by consensus could be changed to a majority vote. Elections by consensus would be unwieldy and is unnecessary. This was without controversy and will be presented to the annual meeting for consideration.

a: New business emerging from the membership meeting

Since some topics for discussion will spontaneously emerge from the process at meetings, and the membership is specifically empowered to do so by the Articles and By-Laws, obviously there cannot be prior notice to the membership as a whole. Yet how do we discuss these issues and what is the effect of a decision made on a topic raised without notice to the membership?

Can we distinguish between those issues of immediate importance, but which do not affect the community as a whole (such as administrative or bureaucratic concerns), from those that have deeper significance for AAGT (such as name change, by-law change or merger with other organizations) and need to be considered at greater length after notice to the membership? Note: at the time of the name-change vote, those at the meeting did not envision this change to me anything more than administrative. How do we clearly distinguish these kinds of issue?

Should there be "provisional" decisions that are carried-over from one meeting to the next for further consideration?

Should the Board be empowered to act on these provisional decisions with the proviso that further discussion is yet needed?

Should some provisional decisions then be referred to a committee for more detailed discussion and whose report to the membership would facilitate further discussion?

Sub-issue b: Decisions and Consensus: This is the most contentious of our questions. There are many different perspectives raised below for our consideration.

How intrinsic is consensus to the decision making process?

Is it a core value? Is it the core value? Is it an ideal to be sought, yet an ideal that is amenable to practical modification.

Is our current definition of consensus sufficiently clear that it is not a unanimous process?

We are agreed that consensus is a process where all voices are heard and considered so that they be included in the final decision. Unanimity is not its goal.

Diversity of perspectives enlivens a community. Disagreement strengthens an organization

The Task Force agreed: The process of attempting to reach consensus has temporal and practical limits.

Our By-Laws speak to the end of a consensus process, when it is deemed not possible, or practical. But, it is not sufficiently clear, otherwise.

How, when, and by whom is it decided that consensus cannot be reached?

Can we specify that when all views have been heard and considered and a certain percentage of the members present votes, a decision may then be made by simple majority voting?

For example, if 85% of the members vote to end discussion, consensus is deemed completed and a new vote taken on the issue before the membership.

Does this encourage a tyranny of a minority, or does it encourage the tyranny of the majority?

How do we deal with a member who hijacks the consensus process in bad faith? Is unwilling to engage in dialogue, or fails to abide by our Covenant of Community by not being willing to engage in good faith dialogue?

We all understand that through consensus, or failing that, through a majority vote, the organization must include a statement from the dissenting members that adequately represents their perspective or perspectives.

Any decision is not simply to silence voices.

Alternatively, is the decision that consensus building should be ended to be made by the president alone, the chair of the meeting, by the Board or Executive Council. By their majority? Or by their unanimity?

Should this decision be so and consensus deemed impossible, the membership can express its disapproval at subsequent meetings and at the next election.

The making of any decision does not prevent the discussion to be resumed at subsequent meetings providing proper notice is given.

Respectfully, Dan

Dan discussed the above email. He has had a few responses from the membership and felt perhaps a more aggressive or provocative approach to the members regarding the report may be needed to get a more substantial discussion going among the members.

Peter – great job Dan! Probably need to send another email inquiring about the small response to the initial email.

Phil – perhaps need to take an issue at a time and resend this to the members.

There was a discussion among the board re: how many folks are really reading the emails from the members list? Suggestions again that Dan send a follow up email re: this and also consider changing the subject line to something that would catch the members' attention.

Tine stated that the email is somewhat tedious for her to read since it is in English (her second language) and is worded in a way which does not resonate with her very much. Because she does not relate to the way in which it is presented she moves away from it.

There was a discussion among the board and a suggestion to Dan that he send another report to the members that is more conversational rather than using the professional language of the original report. The professional language is of course necessary for the formal writing but not very inviting of a group discussion.

Dan will send out another email that invites more dialogue and is written in a more conversational language.

RCP (Tine)

Tine – RCP committee is growing in commitment from the committee members and they are still working on this. Susan Gregory will be on the call next time. Tine is unclear about whether this is a board position?

Peter – no this is not a board function. She will be on the RCP calls and will have the liaison functions.

Tine – was this originally a more technical position re: coordinating communication?

Tine – one of the RCP folks has been invited to present in Iran. Also Phil and Sylvia are working on a regional conference in the USA. This is all very exciting.

Tine also has some struggle with keeping the momentum going within the committee and therefore the power of the RCP's as a group. Individuals are doing things but the group as a whole is not as connected with each other as she had hoped.

Peter – Tine is doing a great job organizing and getting the calls together. He stated that Tine (or anyone else) cannot necessarily get the members to always participate in the forums.

Tine – would like to have more personal touch between the members. She also is having a hard time getting in touch with Marilyn who has a new email address.

Peter – will forward the emails to Marilyn and check the address.

Brian – international associations don't have AAGT on their radar. He expressed support for the energy that Tine has talked about.

Phil also agreed.

Brian – discussed the value of having Bud and Morgan from our OM involved with the Institute Leaders, Directors and Trainers – a group that Phil, Tine and Brian attended recently and now are becoming more involved with them. When Brian mentioned AAGT during the meeting, they did not know AAGT. This speaks to the need for AAGT to send delegates like OM leaders to interface with them.

There was a board discussion regarding how AAGT interfaces and the possibilities to interface with other organizations around the world.

There was appreciation expressed for Bud who is the OM who is a terrific Ambassador for AAGT. Since Morgan has not been on any of the calls for years, there was a discussion re: whether he is really interested in continuing his position and if he has energy for it.

Peter will talk with Bud about Morgan's involvement and whether adjustments need to be made there.

Roving Ambassador

Peter P – asked the board if this title is OK for Susan Gregory to do the following:

To make connections with people who are not involved with AAGT and to see if she can make connection with them for AAGT. He gave an example of her attendance in Cordiva in which she made connections there. She plans to continue to speak with them regarding sharing their writings with AAGT which would be made available through the website.

Brian supported this as did Tine especially since Susan has energy for this.

Peter – this will not be a board position but she will work with the RCP's.

Brian – pointing out that this is also a position which could coordinate with the OM's.

Ann – asked about whether this is a unique position for Susan or will it be ongoing?

Peter sees this as an ongoing role with others also being able to perform its functions when Susan no longer is willing.

Phil – why is this not a part of the president's role?

Peter – it is. And there is a limit to how much the president can do with this. There is also a need for others who have enthusiasm for this role and function without the encumbrances that also come with the president or vice president roles.

A lengthy board discussion followed with suggestions that we see if this is a valuable asset to AAGT and will see how this manifests itself. Dan suggested this be at this time seen as an experiment as time goes on.

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