THE FIRST EVER

CAMERADOS COUNCIL MISSION REFLECTION
Wait a sec... what is the Camerados Council & what the flip is a Mission Reflection?

The Camerados Council is made up of five people who have direct experience of Camerados and work on behalf of the wider movement (although we do not attempt to fully represent the movement or constituent parts of it... more about that later).

We meet face to face at least twice a year on our own, as well as having monthly video calls with the Association of Camerados “AoC” Executive Directors.

Our role is to provide support and challenge to the AoC and to the wider movement of Camerados with a specific focus on ensuring that the mission and principles across the movement are upheld.

“We’re a roundtable of credible, critical friends who both contribute to and reflect on the movement, through our own eyes, via a filter of the Camerados principles we seek to uphold.”

HANNAH

This year we’ve chosen to cover three main topics:

Sustainability pg3-6
Control pg7-10
Diversity and Inclusion pg11-13

For each, we describe our reflections on the Camerados Movement as a whole, the AoC and the Council itself. We know, 3 for the price of 1.. friggin’ bargain!

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If we assume that movements grow naturally – like humans – what is driving the development and what is perhaps slowing it down? Our experience suggests it is often easier to undo the restraining forces – rather than trying to force more energy through the driving ones...

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THE CAMERADOS COUNCIL

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What does this mean for the Movement?

We believe the aim is to create a sustainable movement, to us this means a movement of people that runs under its own steam, without the need for constant external inputs of resources like funding... and it’s been happening...

It is also a huge step to move from the idea of ‘creating a service’ to letting go and letting a movement emerge, and our sense is that this is being better and better internalised every day. This is a simple idea and it is difficult at the same time, because of everyone’s experience of the alternative.

But which model is really being followed?

Some of this can happen face-to-face, but the media and communications strategy is also really important here. Firstly it means trusting people in different parts of the movement to formulate and run their own media and communications strategies; to do social media in the way they see fit, without control from the centre. Again the AoC can support and enable this by offering training to people around the movement. But it is very important that the AoC is not trying to enforce standards.

Where the AoC do offer centralised services – like the camerados website – they need to be effective at enabling lateral conversations across the movement. The forum on the website is not particularly effective for this at the moment, but we appreciate it’s new.

The Chronicle is another great example, but we wonder, is it truly a Chronicle of and for the movement? Or is it being controlled from the centre? To make the movement work we believe it needs to truly reflect the movement and what is emerging in it.

Obviously allowing the movement to ‘emerge’ means that it can start anywhere... is there some selection going on alongside? Hospitals and schools, for example, are big institutions that sound impressive to external funders, but are they really the right kind of organisations from which the movement can grow? Or are they eclipsing the community alternative?

Sustainability

Sustainability is about strengthening and deepening linkages between people in the movement (practically speaking!)

One way this can be done is by bringing the members of the movement together and letting them have plenty of opportunities to meet and work together. We know that the AoC are already trying to do this through campfires, but we believe it can be better!

At recent campfires our sense was that there was not always enough time or opportunity to do this. Too much time was taken up in structured activities that were in themselves useful, but which also meant that we didn’t get to know people we didn’t already know as much as we might have. The more recent campfire was better in this respect than the first of the year, but we still feel this could be better.

Outside of events like the campfire it also means encouraging people to take responsibility to cross-connect their activities without the need to go directly through the AoC. Perhaps some funding for travel expenses could be provided for this.

We also believe everyone in the movement would benefit from opportunities to learn about how to grow their own part of the movement outward by connecting to others - to their peers.

This is all delicate and subtle work and it is very likely that everyone will get it wrong sometimes. Knowing when to inform others or just to get on with it is difficult, so it is important that we remember the principle of learning and of forgiveness - “It’s OK to fail” – and to build trust so that when things go wrong people know that others are only human and trying to do the right thing – even if it didn’t work out.

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What does this mean for the AoC...?

We’ve already made some comments about the AoC’s relationship with the movement as we’ve gone along. We’re now going to get more specific about the restraining forces.

This idea of a sustainable movement emerging also raises some questions for us: What is the best role for the AoC to inhabit, so that the movement grows and becomes sustainable? And what kind of relationship between the AoC and funders best support this?

Our sense is that the AoC have been worried about becoming formally constituted as a service-providing organisation (funded and structured as a charity) and therefore are concerned not to become ‘shackled’ by a funder who approaches things in this way.

The current model is like a backbone organisation that:
▶ guides vision and strategy
▶ supports activities which are aligned with the mission
▶ establishes shared measurement practices
▶ builds publicity (e.g. speaking at events)
▶ advances policy
▶ mobilises funding

This requires higher levels of participation (as in the idea of Citizen’s Assemblies, for example). It means letting go of control sooner than it currently does. For the AoC, it means knowing ‘when to lead and when to leave’. For example, do the AoC need to know the results (or otherwise) of connections that have been made laterally in the movement?

We think getting this balance right is difficult but worth aiming for.

A related issue might be addressing any guilt that remains about the members of AoC making a reasonable living? Think about it this way: the movement is helping the people in the AoC (rather than the other way around) then does the 6th Principle (“If someone is struggling try asking them to help you”) come into play?

This principle is, as we know, about having a purpose, and being personally fulfilled. Looking from that reversed perspective, might we say that the movement is giving the AoC a purpose. In that case, perhaps the best thing the AoC can be doing in return is to invest in its own self-confidence, abilities and talents so that it serves the Camerados mission as well as possible.

Another way of saying this is: creating sustainability has gotta start at home!

Just imagine

Over time the AoC does not reduce in size or capability but that it continues the same size but decreases in size and scale relative to the movement...

In fact the AoC continues to develop and grow but in depth and capability, rather than in absolute scale.

This means:
▶ investing in training and development;
▶ spending time together as a group and team to develop stronger and more effective internal relationships;
▶ investing in new people and getting better at a whole host of relational and other personal skills;
▶ adding new capabilities to the team in sustainable ways.

AOC

What if the AoC moved more fully into a supporting and connecting role around strategy?

Strategy can emerge from the organisation as well as be decided centrally.

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AOC
What does this mean for the Movement?

There are some brilliant examples of things that are happening in the Movement that are growing under their own steam:

▶ Pip inspiring us with a one man pop up public living room at a marketplace in Oswestry
▶ The Alley folk, part of the way the movement continues to take root in Boro
▶ Bristol Uni, doing it their own way, expanding into halls of residence.
▶ The Space in Blackpool, taking over a council owned property.

There is an energy there.

At the same time we also see some things out in the Movement which are perhaps slowing things down:

▶ Some areas don’t seem to have enough sparks to take the public living rooms further, this is lack of knowledge or support? Or lack of confidence, need of permission?
▶ Lack of social media connection and presence laterally in the movement.
▶ Lack of stories being sent to the newspaper.
▶ No campfire follow ups – it doesn’t seem as if people are naturally swapping contact details.

What does this mean for the AoC?

The AoC has begun to give the movement a voice. Abandoning control through the newspaper, hosting a forum and trusting people to go off and create things on their own (like Pip’s market Public Living Room) have all allowed a freedom of expression that has caught people’s imaginations.

At the same time, there are some things that we think are restraining forces. We’ve gathered some compare and contrast stories and examples that we think will help illustrate...

Tameside hospital wanted to add extra things to the dome like books, childrens toys etc. Blackpool Victoria hospital wanted to facilitate craft sessions and meditation in the teepee.

The AoC didn’t want them to be used as ‘venues’ and wanted to keep them agenda-less (alongside the camerados principles), but this potentially prevented people building up a network of like minded individuals or stopped the connectivity of people coming together to use the dome/teepee as multi purpose places – which could have encouraged the realisation of the ‘friends and purpose’ mission.

The learning from this is to allow people to expand their horizons and learn for themselves what works in their own communities.

Power of Co-creation:

Public Living Rooms in hospital waiting rooms didn’t work as expected. There were many variables including staff, procedures and the time and reason people visited the waiting rooms even though in some areas there was high footfall.

Compare this with Bristol University, where the Students Union took the idea of the Public Living Rooms (after meeting Maff at the Wilderness Festival) and went on to create an amazing ‘product’ public living room of their own. The camerados branding is subtle, and it is the most successful Public Living Room to date with over 700 people through the doors daily. They are now expanding into halls of residence and co-creating a university template alongside camerados for other universities.

The learning here is about where and in what places Public Living Rooms work; the dynamics with people running them (are they ‘sparks’?), the freedom to co-create and personalise, to be trusted to create the PLRs according to their own needs, on their own terms.

Control

Too much controlling behaviour could really put a dampener on things, like camerados! Here
Tools for connection & encouragement:

The forum is a place where it should be easy to connect with the movement, create relationships and connections for now and in the future. However the functionality is currently really poor. This is a restraining force to its growth. It could be used to create events, opinions, feedback, gather stories etc.

Likewise, Campfires are great for bringing camerados together in one place, but how do you make the connections last longer than the weekend? This is a ‘big gesture’ event, which looks good and gets people talking at the time but how much of a real lasting impact does it have?

What does this mean for the Council?

We acknowledge also that we can do more to improve things in this area.

We can:

▶ Take responsibility ourselves for speaking up about it when we see some of those behaviours happening in our relationships with the AoC. Hopefully writing this reflection is a first step in that direction.
▶ Model the kind of behaviours we wish to see – we know we can make our own decisions and reach out to others in the movement directly.
▶ We can move towards asking for forgiveness rather than permission.
▶ We can learn more constructive ways of offering and opening to feedback (this is a training opportunity we would like to pursue).
▶ We are also curious about exploring other ways of making decisions together (inside the Council, with the AoC) Perhaps using Sociocracy.
▶ Expand our council membership to better reflect the principle ‘MIX WITH PEOPLE DIFFERENT FROM US’.

Campaigning and publicity:

Speaking at events – ‘gathering’ ‘sparks’: Mařť has the charisma and likeability to speak at events and get people interested in the movement. Is he ready to fully embrace this and fully engage with his zone of genius. Is the restraining force that he doesn’t want to be the ‘face’ of camerados? Even though this would make the movement develop faster?

Social media use is sporadic across the movement; modern algorithms often determine which social media posts are seen or not seen based on frequency of posting, so camerados posts may not be seen. This needs addressing to grow the movement in the digital world.

“All together: There is a sense that the AoC really want people to take the camerados principles and ideals forward, and wish to allow people to run with them. This feels exciting and fulfilling to both people in the movement, and presumably to the AoC.”

Joe

However, we notice an anxiety and a tendency to hold on tightly in some areas by the AoC. This is confusing and sometimes means individuals doubt themselves and therefore stop thinking and creating things freely.

Is permission needed, or not?

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Which leads us nicely onto our final topic…

BTW give yourself a pat on the back, you’ve stuck with us for ten pages and hey, we appreciate it!
Diversity & Inclusion is vital in fulfilling our mission. What roles and behaviours does that require from:

**The Movement?**

Inclusivity in the movement is fundamentally achieved through embodying the principles on an individual basis and seeing yourself as connected elements – not little C-shaped islands!

It’s about championing that ‘human connection stuff’ whether you are an institution or a family. Another way of saying that is that inclusivity is about how we approach each other and talk to each other.

For us, that starts with purposefully considering and championing the progress and victories of others within the movement and encouraging those finding things tough.

**Some guidance for creating inclusive Public Living Rooms:**

Choose to use varied methods of communication.

Host your Public Living Room in an accessible space.

Have a participative approach to starting your Public Living Room, don’t host alone, seek out camerados to be part of your box adventure from the start.

Link up with other Public Living Rooms that are geographically local to you and create your own community, regardless of what parts of the community people come from.

Break down barriers wherever you can!

**The AoC?**

We think that diversity within the AoC would increase exponentially with the improvement of those mechanisms which are used to share the voices of the movement. This is reflective of our comments under ‘sustainability’, where successful growth would mean an increase in parts of the movement connecting and growing together, with the AoC playing a smaller and smaller part in bridging those connections.

This, of course, requires the AoC to be comfortable in ‘letting go’, remembering the rule “two ears, one mouth”, asking for help where it is needed; and perhaps looking within the movement first for desired assets or skills rather than seeking contributions from ‘professionals’ outside.

Inclusivity requires the AoC to be counter-culturally generous, letting people self-define as camerados – as long as the principles are upheld.

And, just as for the Council, when it comes to AoC recruitment it’s about levelling the playing field to encourage diversity and the same goes for partnerships. Can we really claim to benefit from the added value that diversity brings if we only collaborate with people just like us?
Diversity in the council comes from the individual and different experiences of the members. Their input into the council is limited to their particular understanding of the movement, so it’s important the understanding they bring is from a different perspective to that of the other members. We stress however, that the person’s understanding is not representative of a particular group. We also try to remember that it is their individual understanding, and there may be other views out there if we seek them out.

Inclusivity is about levelling the playing field so that all five council members can input. Ways to reduce the restraining forces to everyone being able to bring in their different points of view include:

▶ Our recruitment strategy - see the document “Camarados Council - Approach to Governance” and section 4 “Camarados Council - Member Recruitment and Selection Process”.
▶ Our remuneration - see the section 3 “Appointment, removal, pay and independence across the governance of the movement”.
▶ Respect and meeting etiquette - how we treat each other and the behaviours we adopt (for example, Sociocratic rounds go some way towards making sure everyone’s voice is heard).
▶ Staying aware of power in all its forms.

If we assume that movements grow naturally – like humans – what is driving the development and what is perhaps slowing it down?

But which model is really being followed - is camerados more Alcoholics Anonymous or Extinction Rebellion? Is the paper truly a Chronicle of and for the movement? Or is it being controlled from the centre?

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(MIC DROP)