

GOVERNANCE IN THE SOCIETY OF JESUS WHAT'S NEW?

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The adjective 'Ignatian' has been applied to various processes — spirituality, discernment, pedagogy, way of proceeding, apostolic criteria, and so on. Now this has been extended also to Ignatian governance or Ignatian leadership. The term 'governance' perhaps conveys better the idea of a concrete application of Ignatian leadership to the Society today. Governance could be considered as one aspect of leadership — and vice-versa too.

One can say that like some other decrees of the 35th General Congregation, the fifth one on "Governance at the Service of Universal Mission" includes: exploring areas where change is needed, placing more emphasis on certain aspects, encouraging the implementation of previous decrees, and endorsing current practice on some issues. Compared to other decrees, however, this one is more practical, concrete and specific.

In this decree, a clear option has been taken in terms of criteria. The central goal should be our Universal Mission. The choices and decisions to be made have to be considered in function, and at the service, of greater universality (n.1a). Hence, the new structures proposed have to be seen in the light of our mission and our spirituality.

Other decrees refer to our universal mission, for example the one on mission (D.2, n.37-38) refer to global preferences. Also the decree on our identity and charism

explicitly mentions the “Church’s universal mission” (D.1, n. 16), “Serving Christ’s mission today means paying special attention to its *global* context.” (D.1,n. 20) and “The entire world becomes the object of our interest and concern” (D.1, n. 23).

Whom should this decree interest? One delegate said this decree will be the least read! And yet it should be of interest to all Jesuits – superiors and others. Perhaps the grass roots might not be so enthusiastic about it although it does concern them as well in their dealings with local and provincial superiors. I would assume that provincials in particular will refer to this decree in their governance.

This decree adopts the three classical Ignatian levels of government in the Society, namely, general, provincial and local, as well as the internal dynamics among these levels. These same levels correspond to the individual Jesuit’s involvement and participation in the Society: as member at the local community, ascribed to a province/region, and inserted into the single apostolic body of the whole society (CN, 255).

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While the decree refers to, and incorporates, concepts found in secular organizations, it insists on fostering Ignatian values and their relevance today for our governance style and way of proceeding. Combining or integrating these two complementary orientations remains a challenge for us.

Let me now take up each of the three chapters in the decree and make some remarks on them. As in similar documents, the decree moves from enunciating principles to concrete directions and practical applications on current structures of governance. Here, as elsewhere, one comes across the difficulty of the diversity at the global level where situations and contexts vary enormously. Hence, one has to be careful not to issue ultra-specific directives or recipes but helpful principles, guidelines and criteria.

General governance

Regarding the **General Congregation**, the decree authorises Fr General to undertake a revision of the Formula of a General Congregation, that of Procurators and also that of Province Congregations. This revision should be guided by certain principles and respect the traditional role of a General Congregation.

In order for a General Congregation to function effectively, much preparatory work needs to be done beforehand. Various bodies in the Society could contribute in this preparation: provincials' meetings, conference presidents, assistancy electors, various apostolic sectors, and others. When a global organisation of 225 executives meets for two months, they have to find the basic groundwork already well prepared for them to reach some form of consensus.

What is new here is n.4c2, namely, the presence at a General Congregation of an adequate number of Brothers as electors and not only *ad negotia* but also *ad electionem*. This would ensure that the whole Society is being represented in the General Congregation.

When it comes to **Central Governance**, the decree directs Fr General towards a reorganization at this level for the service of universal mission through a comprehensive review (n.9). Such a review would, in my opinion, allow Fr General to exercise a leadership role and delegate certain managerial roles to other staff members.

In my article "Ignatian Spirituality and Leadership in Organizations today" (C.I.S. xxxvi, ii, 2005 No109) I explained the difference between

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leadership and management. Then I asked the question whether, according to this distinction, St Ignatius was a leader or a manager. Clearly, the answer is that he was both for he certainly practiced both leadership and management roles. He had a vision, a direction, and a mission to promote in view of apostolic effectiveness. At the same time, he presented efficient strategies, means

and methods, structures and resources adapted to attain the intended goals and objectives. Besides, in describing the qualities of a superior in the Society,

Ignatius mentions qualities or characteristics which require both leadership and managerial skills. However, the leadership qualities are given more importance than the managerial ones. When the management skills are lacking in a superior, his assistants (socius, minister, treasurer, etc.) can make up for that lacuna.

The review of the Society's central governance needs to be undertaken seriously and professionally by developing a strategic plan, establishing clear goals, defining roles and functions (for example for Curia officials and secretariats), formulating job profiles, designing an effective organigram and developing evaluation mechanisms. All these elements are essential ingredients in any company or organization.

The *Conference of Major Superiors*, together with the role of its president, had been a topic expected to be discussed fully at the General Congregation. While each conference has its specific characteristics, certain principles and guidelines had to be provided by the General Congregation. A good number of Jesuits felt these conferences would facilitate the co-ordination and collaboration among provinces and assistancies. Others were afraid this might create an additional level of hierarchical authority within the Society.

The decree steers a middle course. It presents these conferences in the perspective of the universal mission. In order to fulfil our universal mission we need to promote inter- and supra-provincial cooperation. For this purpose, some form of structure has to be provided which would also create a sense of solidarity and accountability among provincials themselves. However, the decree states clearly that "conferences do not constitute a new level of government between the General and the Provincials" (n.18b) but they do offer us an opportunity to take into serious consideration the Society's mission beyond our own province.

The role and competence of the *President of the Conference* are clearly outlined. As a major superior, he has the responsibility for the *cura*

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personalis and the *cura apostolica*. The principles of subsidiarity, and that of giving him sufficient authority to exercise his role properly, apply to him as well. Managerial experience in organizations has shown that conferring responsibility to an employee without giving him or her the corresponding authority leads to frustration.

However, accountability has to be added to responsibility and authority as a basic ingredient to ensure effective leadership. The decree (n.20c2) specifies that provincials are accountable to Fr General for the internal governance of provinces and accountable to the President in the strict area of the latter's competence.

There is something new in this decree when it comes to spell out assignments of personnel for common works dependent on the Conference. GC34, D.21, n24 had stated that "when a major superior is asked to make a

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particular man available for a common work he should normally give this request a priority *at least equal* to the needs of his own province". Now GC35 on governance n.20a.1 affirms that "all other things being equal, the needs of Conference activities and works have **priority** over those

of individual provinces." There is therefore a modification here more than a radical change. In this decree, in fact, no radical changes are contemplated unless these will emerge in the tasks delegated to Fr General by the General Congregation.

Province governance

An important, though difficult, role of any institutional leader is to combine or integrate individual members' needs and gifts with the institution's goals. As an animating leader, the provincial's role is to integrate the *cura personalis* with the *cura apostolica* in view of fulfilling the mission of the province and its apostolic plans. The genius Ignatius came up with an original way of accomplishing this integration through the famous

manifestation or account of conscience which has become an important characteristic of Ignatian leadership.

In n.26, the General Congregation requests Fr General to establish a commission to reflect on provinces and their structures with specific criteria proposed for the establishment, reconfiguration and suppression of provinces. Ultimately, the required changes would reflect how provinces can be effectively governed.

The General Congregation is also encouraging a participative style of leadership and governance. Specifically, it recommends that in decision-making at all levels, a discernment-based approach should be adopted in planning and in decision-making processes. In this regard, the decree insists that the specific roles of the various commissions, officials and staff including those of the appropriate superior and province consultants, be clearly communicated. Interestingly, in n.28d, the decree adds among the list of tasks for the Ministries' Commission that of "ongoing apostolic formation of collaborators".

A topic that has been much talked and written about and which is now explicitly mentioned in a GC decree is that of *training for leadership* (n.30-32). Not a few Jesuits have complained that all of a sudden they are asked to take up an important leadership responsibility without the necessary training and preparation in leadership. This leadership training applies not only for those given appointments as superiors within the Society but also for those directing apostolic works. It is also intended for potential leaders and as ongoing formation for present leaders.

The decree (n.31) mentions some critical areas in the development of skills and formation of attitudes which are to be included in a training programme. To the list of skills I would add the following: intra-personal skills such as Stress Management and Time Management, inter-personal skills in one-to-one communication including dealing with difficult members, and other skills in delegating, public speaking and creativity.

Local governance

Apparently, the General Congregation realized that the important aspects concerning the local superior have already been said or written. These principles and directives regarding local governance may be found

in the *Guidelines for Local Superiors, Complementary Norms and Guidelines for the Relationship between the Superior and the Director of the Work*.

The decree often refers to these documents, emphasizing their relevance while highlighting certain issues and challenges. It acknowledges

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certain obstacles that have emerged in the superior's fulfilling of his mission (n.35). One example is when the principle of subsidiarity in governance is not respected because too much authority in

decision making is given at the provincial level vis-à-vis the local level.

The General Congregation also recommends regular meetings for local superiors to be set up by provincials as well as formation sessions at the province or conference level for new superiors. These recommendations are already being implemented in certain provinces or regions and are found to be beneficial to participants.

In the other decree on Obedience, there is a whole section on Superiors both major and local (n.47-52). That decree also mentions the importance of: the account of conscience in the practice of obedience, effective delegation, creative fidelity, the principle of subsidiarity and training for superiors.

Conclusion

I think the message of this decree to the universal Society is: Given our greater awareness of the Society's global identity and the universality of our mission, how best to organize, coordinate and develop the Society's governance? Which structures for collaboration would be most conducive to address effectively global issues and needs in the light of our Ignatian charism? Let us be open to change in our minds and be available in our hearts in order to respond to this renewed call and challenge for a universal mission.

Finally, this decree, like all the others, has to be understood in its context. GC35 had as its primary goal the election of a new Superior General. Lot of time and energy were rightly invested in that. The General Congregation also had the task of tackling important issues which have emerged since the last GC and was expected to respond to these.

The response came in various forms: by exhorting Jesuits to live our charism in today's world; by appealing to continuity, yet indicating the way forward for the future; by clarifying, rather than repeating, existing documents; by endorsing or confirming certain positions taken; by making recommendations for Fr General's consideration; and by establishing ad hoc committees and commissions.

The General Congregation did not respond only through the content of the decrees and documents. The positive outcome of the General Congregation was also due to the fruitful process used in its proceedings and to the corporate spiritual consolation experienced by the delegates. When the delegates share these with the rest of the Society, a genuine collective renewal in the Spirit will hopefully take place.