

Community Group Leadership

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Almost all that we know about leadership and group behaviors has been discovered in those formal organizations which occur in industrial, governmental and military settings. In organizations such as these, performance from an individual is encouraged and sometimes demanded through established systems of reward and punishment based on the intrinsic power the organization wields. In industry, government or any other formal organization in which individuals are on a payroll and can quit whenever they want, demotion, transfer, pay cuts, or threats of dismissal are the favorite instruments of coercion and compliance. Conversely, promotions, pay raises, bonuses, and time off are the elements of reward which inspire workers to increase their productiveness. In the military setting, where people have been conscripted or have enlisted for fixed periods of time, failure to obey orders can result in a variety of sanctions ranging from the loss of rank to dishonorable discharge from the service, to imprisonment, and to execution in time of war. Promotions, medals, and weekend passes comprise part of the military reward system.

Applying leadership and group process principles which have been developed in formal organizations to informal and voluntary community-based organizations poses some prob-

lems. Getting compliance with a leader's and group's wishes from a person who is not paid or otherwise compelled to remain a member of the voluntary organization is no easy job. Without the formal organization's bag of substantial punishment and rewards, leaders of neighborhood and other community-based organizations need to be far more sensitive and tactful in the application of leadership principles than do their industrial, governmental, and military counterparts.

With this discussion in mind, let's look at some basic leadership and group process principles and apply them to community-based organizations.

BALANCE OF POWER BETWEEN GROUP AND LEADER

As our starting point, it is necessary to highlight the various ways leadership of groups and organizations can be expressed. Figure 1, "Continuum of Leadership Behavior," depicts the balance of power that can exist between a designated leader and members of a group or organization. The numbers along the base of the figure refer to positions of the leader in relation to the group or organization.

Position #1: At this position on the chart, the leader is extremely authoritarian. A political scientist

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"leadership" as concepts. We will deal with that distinction shortly.

THE CONCEPT OF APPROPRIATE LEADERSHIP STYLE

Though the foregoing discussion has mentioned "positions" which have been numbered in sequence, it is not proper to view the various proportions of leader/group influence in decision-making as dynamic phases of development. Some leaders and groups start and finish their lives in the same position. But the phases could represent evolutionary development in a situation where a leader "gets the ball rolling" via highly authoritarian actions and then gradually relinquishes powers as the group matures.

While a dictatorial leadership style can quickly dissolve a grassroots, voluntary, community-based organization, a leader who is willing to take full command when necessary is essential to the group's survival. What is most important to remember is the concept of appropriate leadership. When a building catches on fire and we are in it, we want some forceful and knowledgeable persons to lead or, if necessary, push us safely out of the building. To call a committee meeting and go around the table for ideas as the smoke billows and the flames dance would be very silly. So, appropriate leadership is that which is proportionate to the urgency, importance, and life threat of the situation. Most matters that community-based organizations deal with are not emergencies and can be given the time to enable group input to the solution in a cool, deliberative manner. But every so often in the life of a community-based organization, there will be an emergency that threatens the life of the group and a leader will be needed who faces that emergency without the luxury of consulting the group. This is a fact of political life, too. While we elect leaders of this country democratically, we allow that there might be a need in times of flood, fire, war, or

other disasters to declare martial law and to suspend individual rights until the emergency has passed. We trust our leaders to restore our rights when normal times return.

It is also important to keep in mind the fact that even the best leader is not effective in his or her actions all the time. It is best to regard a leader as you would a good hitter in baseball. There is no hitter who gets a hit one hundred percent of the time at bat. In fact, getting a hit one out of four times at bat is good, while one out of three is outstanding and two out of five is stupendous. There are many more strike outs than there are home runs in a good hitter's overall performance. A good leader, then, is a person with a good "batting average" who does not expect to hit a "home run" each time at bat, who relies on the rest of the "batting order" (the group) for run production, who may be only the "clean up hitter" in an outstanding line-up and who, consequently, does not burn out prematurely.

LEADER AND LEADERSHIP

As was promised earlier in this discussion, we need to make an important distinction between two terms that have been used very generously thus far: leader and leadership. The term "leader" usually refers to a person who has a designated title or rank but, as we use it here, it refers to anyone who exerts influence on the behavior of others at any given moment in time. While we easily think of chairpersons, presidents, captains, etc. as "leaders" because of their titles, we often have difficulty regarding the untitled and unranked lowly group member as a leader. But, strictly speaking, each group member is a leader when he or she influences the behavior of the group. To cite an extreme example, if a group member who has not said anything all meeting long suddenly faints and falls to the floor causing several other members to come to his or her aid, that swooning group mem-

ber has influenced group behavior and is technically the leader of the moment. That may seem a bit absurd, but the underlying point is that exercise of influence--whether active or passive, positive or negative, and not merely a fancy title--is what really makes a person a leader.

What a leader does to influence a group is called "leadership." Leadership is a dynamic process and not a commodity that belongs only to a person with a designated rank or title. In a democratic group atmosphere, leadership is free floating and can be expressed by any member of the group. Hence we speak of "leader-centered" leadership and "group-centered" leadership to contrast the two extremes and the in-between stages depicted in Figure 1, and to acknowledge the separateness of the terms, leader and leadership. The paramount lesson here is that a leader can give up leadership and still retain the honor and prestige of his or her rank. Those leaders who do not understand this and try to do it all overwork themselves and alienate members who would like to share in the influence of group actions.

SOURCES OF POWER FOR THE INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP

Incidentally, the word "influence" represents a soft way of saying "power;" the two words can be used interchangeably. The quest for power is the basic energizer behind the establishment of grassroots community-based organizations. These organizations empower themselves in order to deal effectively with local governments and other forces in their political surroundings. However, power is also an ingredient within the community-based organization itself. The six kinds of power available to leaders and groups have been identified² and are listed as follows:

REWARD POWER: *Where a person or group uses valuable things (money, goods, services or psychological supports) to get responses from others. Power is*

good as long as the "goodies" last. Ironically, concrete and expendable rewards such as money and goods are apt to be less durable because of their limited supply than nonmaterial rewards such as love, esteem, and recognition which are unlimited in supply. Mark Twain once said that he could live on nothing more than a good compliment for two whole weeks.

COERCIVE POWER: *Where actual punishment or a threat is used to influence others. Gangsters and totalitarians wield this type of power routinely. Democratic leadership uses it only in emergency situations such as national defense and public safety. In the Army, there are some sergeants who say: "We can't make you do it, but we can make you wish you had." This kind of power need not be brutal or physically painful to be effective; it can be nothing more than the threat of public exposure and ridicule. But, "when the cat is away, the mice will play," which means that coercive power needs to be applied continuously to be lasting. Very often, the resentment of oppressed citizens builds up and eventually explodes into violent overthrow of coercive leadership.*

LEGAL OR LEGITIMATE POWER: *Elected persons and legally-designated persons have this power. The leader's action is sanctified by law or by an election process. "No taxation without representation" was a slogan which questioned the legitimacy of a legal government which made laws without recourse to citizens' input through representatives. Legal is not the same as legitimate. It is possible for a leader to be legally chosen by a minority of the group's membership. That leader would then be subject to challenges to his or her legitimacy or right to represent*

people who did not vote for him or her. It is possible for a leader to lose legitimacy as he or she moves away, in actions and thought, from the majority which elected him or her. (Haven't you known presidents like that?)

REFERENT OR CHARISMA POWER: Some people are well-liked and respected because of intrinsic aspects of their personalities. Other people do things for them because they love or respect them for who they are more than for what they are. Because people with charisma are loved and respected right off, they can get other people to do things for them.

EXPERT POWER: When a person has a talent or skill that he or she shares. Probably a permanent source since talents and skills last as long as the health and vitality of the individual. However, the need for specific talents and skills may fade through time. A person who can shoe a horse, though admired, is no longer valuable where there are no horses.

INFORMATIONAL POWER: Where a person has knowledge, facts, data, and thinking ability of use to others. Lasts as long as the information does. Person or groups with this kind of power must keep informed.

The foregoing list indicates that some power sources are in limitless supply and are quite economical. Leaders of informal organizations need first to inventory the sources of power they have and then to use these sources to sustain the voluntary involvement of members.

WHY PEOPLE JOIN GROUPS

The word "involvement" in the preceding sentence brings up the question as to why people join groups and organizations. One researcher³ offers a plausible explanation of the needs people want satisfied through group membership. According to him, people expect to satisfy any of three kinds of needs in the group setting. These needs are affection, control, and inclusion. Each need has two dimensions: expressed (toward others) and wanted (from others). The needs and their dimensions are shown in Table 1.

Each person has his or her own unique proportion of these needs. Some may have very strong control needs in the "expressed toward others" dimension and could be expected to try to take over a group. Others may have strong inclusion needs in the "wanted from others" dimension and may feel terribly spurned if they are left out of group activities. Still others may have strong affection needs, desiring to cherish and be close to others.

TABLE 1

	INCLUSION	CONTROL	AFFECTION
Expressed (toward others)	I join other people and I include others.	I take charge; I influence people.	I get close to people.
Wanted (from others)	I want other people to include me.	I want people to lead me.	I want people to get close and personal with me.

Community group leaders should expect to find all of these needs in any random grouping of citizens. They should develop programs and plan meetings which satisfy these needs in positive ways. People with strong control needs make good leaders and good followers of directions, depending on the dimensions of their needs. Those with strong inclusion needs are good joiners or good at getting others to join, depending on the dimension. Finally, there is always room for genuine human affection in any organization. A community-based organization, by virtue of its very mission, enables people to cherish, to be personal with, and to get close to one another.

PHASES OF GROUP DEVELOPMENT

The phases of development which a group or organization passes through on its way to maturity and functional effectiveness can also be described in reference to inclusion, control, and affection needs.

Inclusion needs tend to predominate the initial phase of group development. When people come together to that first organizational meeting in the community, they are expressing their needs to be included and to include others. It is very important that the very first meeting enable each person to be a part of the group by getting his or her "two-cents worth" into the discussion. An interim leader facilitating the first meetings of community-based groups must take pains to acknowledge the presence and value of all who attend.

The next phase of group development is typically dominated by power struggles among those who have strong control needs. Those who want to lead others and those who want to be led by this or that person come into conflict in this phase. Having several leadership functions (i.e., the officers and committee chairpersons) available to the membership helps provide outlets for those with strong control needs. Remembering, too, that leadership is

not the sole property of the designated leader results in membership sharing in decision-making, thus mitigating the severity of power struggles.

After the group has made everyone feel included and has resolved the power struggle conflicts, it is ready to deal with the affection needs which individuals have. Group members become aware of each other as sentimental beings and not just as fillers of organizational roles. They genuinely miss members who skip a meeting, and they become concerned with the mental and physical health of each other. Community-based organization leadership should allow time at formal meetings for informal socializing and might even schedule social events with no business agenda for the sole purpose of having fun and enjoying one another as real people.

Though a successful group satisfies the membership needs which dominate each of the three developmental phases, the needs never completely disappear. In mature groups, the needs remain in roughly equal proportions with no one of them ever dominating the group atmosphere. Sometimes a sudden influx of new members might bring the group back to the inclusion phase and might necessitate going through the control and affection phases again.

Another way of identifying the phases groups pass through has been cleverly provided by one researcher who calls the phases "Forming," "Storming," "Norming" and "Performing." These phases parallel the previously discussed inclusion, control, and affection phases.

FORMING: The group gets together, agrees there is a need for an organization.

STORMING: Power struggles erupt and prevail. The officers and committee chairpersons who will direct the organization precipitate from these struggles.

NORMING: The group decides

what behavior is appropriate to a "good" member, what values should guide the group as a whole.

PERFORMING: *The group is ready to deal with issues and problems and to take actions on matters which brought the organization into being.*

Knowing that all groups go through phases of development should provide some comfort to community leaders who may be easily discouraged by the first meeting of the group where it looks like a disaster is the only possible outcome. A group is a living, organic entity. The fact that the words "organism" and "organization" have the same root is no mere coincidence. As a living thing, a group or organization ripens, matures. Community leaders must exercise patience while the group occupies any given phase of development. Impatience might frustrate development and fixate a group at an immature phase or destroy it completely. Different groups will spend different amounts of time in the various phases depending on the personality mix which the group comprises. Eventually, however, all groups can be expected to reach the mature "performing" phase of groupness.

SEATING ARRANGEMENT AND GROUP GROWTH

Despite a sincere desire on the part of community group leaders to share leadership and to attend to the inclusion, control, and affection needs of group members, there are some physical circumstances which thwart these desires. For example, the seating arrangement chosen by a group leader can determine who leads, who talks, and who feels included or excluded. Recently much has been discovered about the effects seating arrangements have on leadership and participation. Figures 2 and 3 show two opposite seating arrangements. The circular arrangement facilitates inclusion and shared leadership. People tend to talk a-

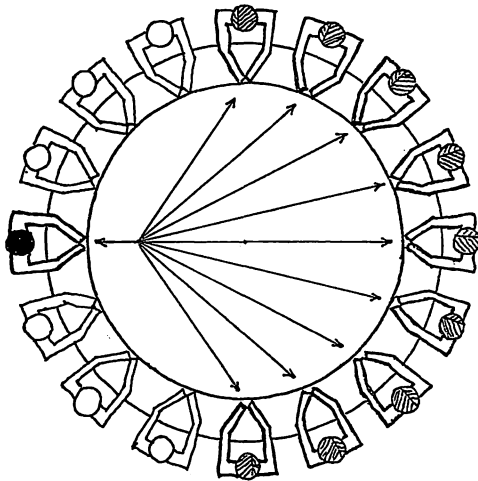
cross the circle, and this can determine who talks to whom, but the circle symbolizes equality and unity.

Row-and-column or theater style seating depicted in Figure 3 keeps group members apart, establishes a single leadership position (up front) and may leave many group members in the back rows and sides feeling left out. People sitting in the front and middle tend to talk most to the leader and thereby tend also to dominate the discussion and decision making of the group.

Community group leaders should provide seating arrangements where group members are facing inward. It may be necessary to have a circle within a circle within a circle, and so forth to accommodate a large number of people. Rows of seats arranged into rectangles facing inward are another way to satisfy inclusion needs and to share leadership or influence over the group's deliberations.

It is also appropriate to break a large group into "buzz groups" and "huddle groups" during a meeting to help generate feedback in the nature of questions and comments. A "buzz group" is nothing more than two people who are already seated alongside each other being allowed to talk about what they have heard at the meeting thus far. A "huddle group" is formed simply by asking anywhere from three to six people sitting near each other to meet as a small group for a while to discuss what they have heard thus far. Out of this conversation in the "buzz group" or discussion in the "huddle group" might come a brilliant question or comment that has already been "field tested" by at least one other listener. One of the conversational partners or group members might now have the courage to put his or her question or comment to the group at large. These techniques are discussed fully in a lively book⁶ on group dynamics and leadership.

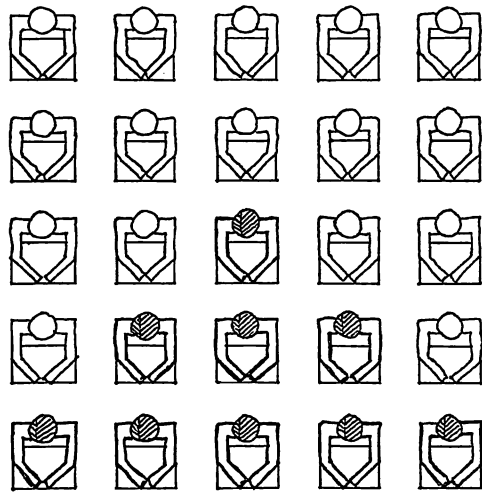
Figure 2: "Steinzor" Effect



GROUP SEATED IN A CIRCLE

- **Speaker**
- **Persons least likely to respond**
- ◐ **Persons most likely to respond**

Figure 3: Row and Column, Classroom, "Theater-Style" Seating



- ◐ **High Verbalizers**
- **Low Verbalizers**
-  **Teacher Leader Speaker**

SUMMARY

In summary, this discussion has merely scratched the surface of the knowledge and skills that are needed by community group leaders. Leading voluntary groups is much more difficult than leading paid groups, but the nobleness of the former is greater than that of the latter, if that is any consolation. Strong leadership; anticipating and satisfying group needs for inclusion, control, and affection; using available sources of power; and choosing physical settings that make for "groupness" and shared decision making are essential aspects of successful grassroots community leadership. The would-be community group leader must not merely ape his or her industrial and governmental counterparts, but must apply the leadership and group process principles developed there in ways that serve the unique setting of the voluntary, grassroots organization.

FOOTNOTES

¹Tannenbaum, Robert and Warren H. Schmidt, "How to Choose a Leadership Pattern," *The Harvard Business Review*, 36:2, March-April, 1958.

²Johnson, David W. and Frank P. Johnson, *Joining Together: Group Theory and Group Skills* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1975).

³Schutz, William, *FIRO: A Three Dimensional Theory of Interpersonal Behavior* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1958).

⁴Tuckman, B.W., "Developmental Sequence in Small Groups," *Psychology Bulletin*, 63:384-399, 1965.

⁵Koneya, Mele, "'Chairing' Public Meetings," *Community Education Journal*, October, 1981, pp. 4-7.

⁶Beal, G.M., J.M. Bohlen, and J.N. Raudabaugh, *Leadership and Dynamic Group Action* (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1962).