

Unit III:

Group/Organizational Leadership Skills

1. Productive Groups

Many different types of groups are involved with community activities. Some are loose and unstructured; others are formal organizations or associations. Some are temporary committees or task forces; others are ongoing parts of a structured organization or coalition. A productive group accepts and supports differences, communicates openly with respect, and works together for mutual goals. A newly formed group may not have clear rules on what is appropriate behavior. Fear of not being accepted or respected can create problems. It is important that all group members get to know and feel comfortable with one another. A variety of activities and approaches can help meet the needs of group members and encourage effective decision making and action.

When a new group is being formed or when an individual joins an existing group for the first time, similar problems are encountered by most people. The usual way of interacting with others does not work because the situation is not familiar. People often hold back, waiting to see what others are going to do. Not only is the situation strange, but it is also unclear what others think is proper behavior. In a sense, group members have an identity problem. They know who they are as individuals, but not who they are in relation to others in the group.

What Is a Group?

A group is a collection of individuals where:

- Interaction occurs among members. Members work together and relate to each other in an interdependent manner.
- Individuals see themselves and each other as a member of the group and find their membership rewarding. Greater benefits are provided to the group than to separate individuals.
- Members share a common purpose or goal that they understand and accept.
- Members have an established, mutually acceptable structure for accomplishing tasks and interacting with each other.
- Members successfully complete different tasks in order to accomplish a common purpose.

A collection of individuals is not a “group” at its first organizational meeting. The cohesiveness and team spirit that characterize a group comes with time while people gather to share ideas and skills to achieve a common goal (Heiny and Clark 1999; McFarland 1995).

Types of Groups

Groups may be very loosely structured or be a formal organization with bylaws and specific operational procedures. Committees, task forces, teams, clubs, and other organizations are examples of groups. The following defines each kind of group:

1. Collections of individuals with loose ties (for example, an informal network of people who know one another and who exchange ideas and sources of information)
2. Informal groupings (for example, volunteers for different

organizations who get together occasionally to discuss their activities)

3. Loosely organized groups (for example, a self-selected volunteer task force that meets a few times to carry out a community service project)
4. Formal groups (for example, organizations such as a civic club or hospital auxiliary)

Networks, Teams, and Coalitions

Many specialized types of groups are associated with organizational and community activities. Some are loose and unstructured, such as informal networks, and some are temporary, such as task forces designed to address a specific project or issue. Teams, while generally associated with sports, have become a more common method of organizing work groups and project groups. When goals require more resources than any one organization or agency can provide, coalitions, formal alliances, or collaborations often develop. A wide variety of committees, study groups, political action groups, and other special groups go through similar stages of development and action.

Coming Together

As a group forms, it goes through stages of development. The sequence and progression of group development are interrelated and each stage exhibits a different level of trust and dependence. Each stage builds on the preceding one. In the beginning stages of group formation, a group facilitator who understands the various developmental phases will guide the group toward the performing phase. If no progress is made, a climate of conflict or disappointment could spread quickly among group members (McFarland 1995; Lesmeister 1992).

Social Environment

The social environment is defined as the way in which group members relate to one another and is important to the emotional state of the members. Trust is one of the most basic parts of a satisfactory social environment for a group. Until the individuals learn to trust each other, little progress on the group task is made. Forming a climate of trust is one of the most important stages of group development. In fact, the first crisis most groups face involves the inability of two individuals to trust themselves and each other. A comfortable physical environment also contributes to the productivity of a group.

Basic Needs of People in Groups

If loyalty, interest, and the best effort from each person in the group are desired, the fact that individuals in groups have needs must be taken into account. The situations in which group members are placed should make sense not only to the leader, but to each individual as well (McFarland 1995; Pitrak and Hoopfer 1979). As individuals, group members look for:

1. A sense of belonging.
 - A feeling that no one objects to his or her presence.
 - A feeling that he or she is truly welcome.
 - A feeling of being honestly needed.
2. A share in planning the group goals.
 - A feeling that all ideas have had a fair hearing.
 - A feeling that the goals are within reach and make sense.
 - A feeling that the group is doing something worthwhile.

3. A share in making the rules of the group.
 - Ground rules ensure respect and participation.
 - Guidelines describe the way in which the group works together toward common goals.
4. Knowledge of expectations.
 - Goals and responsibilities should be spelled out in detail so that work can be done effectively.
 - When addressing new issues and situations, the group members themselves may have to chart their own expectations.
5. Challenging responsibilities.
 - The opportunity to use their abilities to contribute to reaching the goals.
 - The chance to match interest with activities.
6. Progression toward the common goal.
 - This can be achieved by keeping everyone informed through updates, consultations, and briefings on current accomplishments and future expectations.
 - Allow time for sharing and discussion.
7. Confidence and trust in the leader and other group members.
 - The recognition that everyone has knowledge and skills to contribute toward solving problems.
 - The reassurance that everyone is working toward the common goals, rather than “hidden agendas.”

Forming a Group

Groups, large and small, are drawn together in a variety of situations that lead to some initial anxiety or expectancy, which is common with most new experiences. Groups commonly go through these stages: forming, storming, norming, and performing (see diagram on page 4). Most organizational groups do not go on forever—they may complete their work and then a new group may form or reform.

Other names may be applied to the stages. Forming may be called “preaffiliation” or “gathering.” Storming may be called “chaos” or “high power and control struggle,” while norming may be referred to as “unity” or “intimacy.” Performing is called “differentiation,” while reforming may be termed “separation.” However, the names are less important than recognizing the developmental stages (Heiny and Clark 1999).

Facilitating Group Development

Group facilitators can get things started on the right foot by employing some warm-up activities, often referred to as “icebreakers.” These activities help support the early stages of the group’s development or energize the group for work (McFarland 1995).

A group-building activity is an organized method used to acquaint the group members, form partnerships or teams, or promote openness and sharing. Before beginning a presentation, discussion, or other type of meeting, helping members get to know one another and building a sense of comfort and belonging is important.

Groups can be formed in a variety of ways, but one of the best ways to introduce group members is through

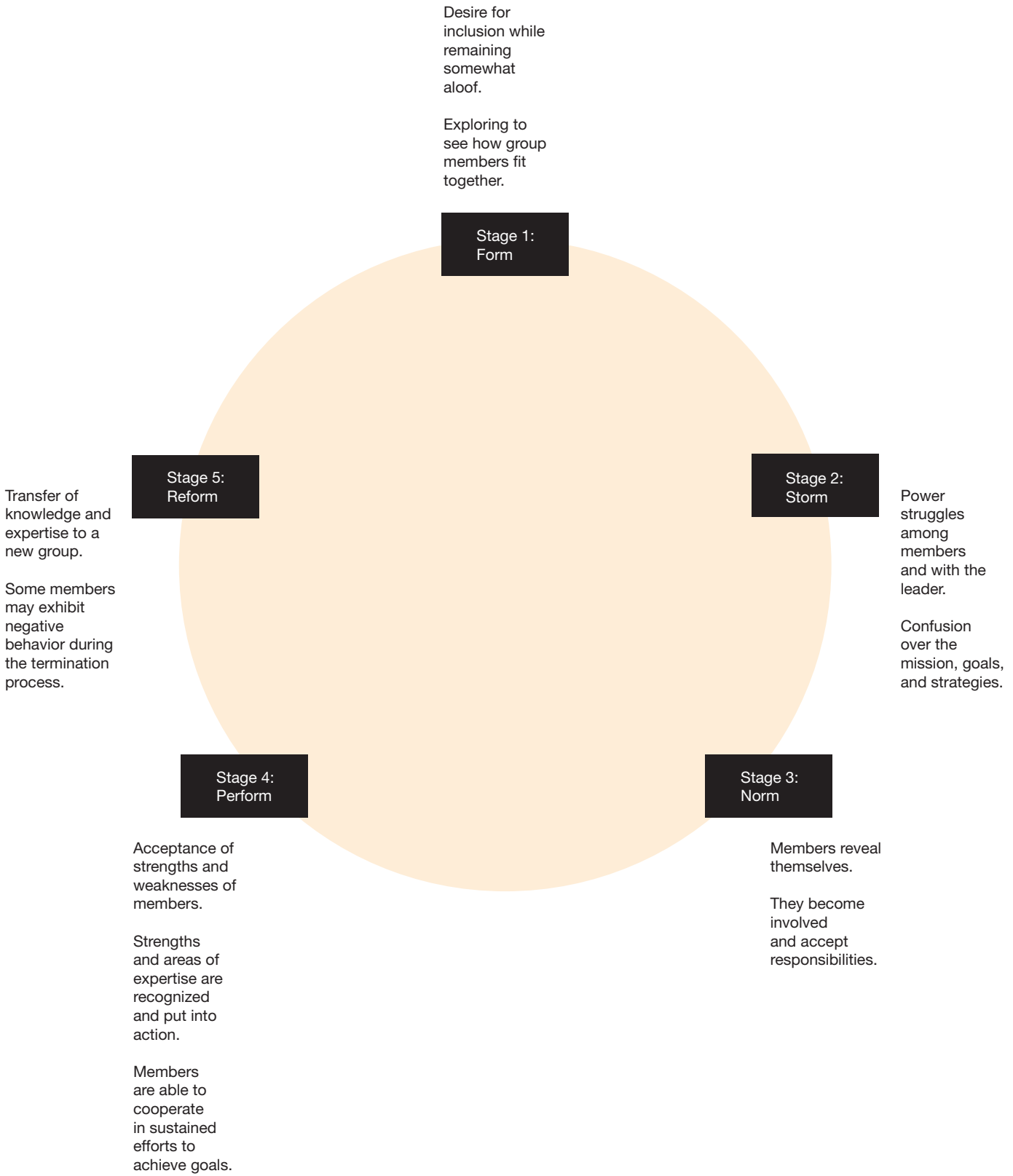
an activity that serves as a mixer or get-acquainted opener. Beginning group involvement in this way provides the facilitator with some direction from the start and promotes interaction among the participants.

Icebreakers and group energizers can help pave the way for the main subject area to follow. Sometimes selecting an activity that relates to the theme or goal of the upcoming session is helpful. The opening activity can be used as an experience from which inferences may be drawn pertaining to the discussion topic. It also provides an opportunity for participants to begin to feel comfortable with sensitive or emotional issues.

Generally, employing conservative risk-taking is better than having participants left feeling manipulated or vulnerable. This is especially true when the issues are sensitive or controversial. In this way, you will be able to lead the group progressively to new levels of skill, trust, and creativity.

Group size will also affect the choice of activities. The facilitator needs to match the process to the size of the audience. Suggested discussion areas and procedures are presented for most activities, but you should determine the activity’s appropriateness to individual groups. With a smaller group, you may wish to have every individual report. With a larger group, you may need to limit the discussion to the smaller work groups or have one reporter present for each team. Whatever procedure you choose to use, you should allow participants the opportunity to process what has occurred during the activity and relate it to the session that will follow. Generally, the larger the group, the longer the time required for the activity. Processing and discussion are essential to the development process.

Stages of Group Development



Building Group Trust

Group-building activities serve four main purposes (McFarland 1995; Pitrak and Hoopfer 1979):

1. To get acquainted or reacquainted.
 - The discomfort of not knowing each other is reduced.
 - People are recognized as human beings rather than by their official careers or volunteer capacities.
 - A positive social climate is promoted, which reduces the fear of speaking in front of the group.
 - Group-building is more fun and less threatening than going around the table introducing yourself and your affiliation, which often involves “one-ups-manship.”
2. To focus on the meeting.
 - A transition is made from prior thoughts and activities.
 - Attention is turned to the topic or issue to be discussed.
3. To build energy and willingness to participate.
 - Attitudes of coming in to just sit and observe are reduced.
 - People are put into the mood for active learning.
4. To bring closure to a project or series of meetings.

Elements of a Group

Environment

The environment of a group can help or hinder interaction among group members. A group can be affected in two ways: by the physical environment and by the social environment. A comfortable physical environment includes temperature, furnishings, space, noise level, and other surroundings that are satisfactory for the participants and the purpose of the group meeting. The social environment is defined by the way group members relate to one another, which is important to the emotional state of the members. If the social environment keeps the feelings of group members at a good level, they can work together effectively.

Coming Together

As a group forms, it goes through stages of development. To know and recognize these stages is the blueprint of forming a group. The sequence and progression of group development are interrelated. Each stage exhibits a different level of trust and dependence and each stage builds on the preceding one.

In the beginning stages of group formation, the group leader must understand the various stages of development in order to bring the group to the problem-solving phase. Anxiety levels are high within the group, and relationships are still formal and distant. When no progress is present, a climate of disappointment could spread quickly and might even terminate the group before it ever gets started.

Trust is absolutely essential for groups to grow and develop—it reduces one’s own and the other person’s fear of betrayal or rejection. Trust builds the hope of acceptance and support. Creating a climate of trust involves everyone’s self-disclosure. A person

who dares to entrust him or herself to others goes far in creating a climate of trust in a group. Forming this trust among group members is called bonding.

Trust is one of the most important ways of creating a good social environment for a group. Until the individuals learn to trust each other, little progress on the group task is made. Because of this, forming a climate of trust is one of the most important tasks. The first crisis most groups face involves the inability of two individuals to trust themselves and each other (Beal 1962; “Group Development” 1988).

Guidelines for Producing a Climate of Trust

- Accept others. If we are accepting of each other, we will feel safe in being honest with each other.
- Speak for yourself. We cannot accurately speak for anyone other than ourselves. No one else can accurately speak for us.
- Avoid put-downs. Our goal is to support, not criticize, either seriously or in fun.
- It’s okay to pass. We will agree to let each person determine the degree to which they can respond—without judging.
- You are responsible. It will be up to you to determine how much you will be involved and how much you will gain from the experience.
- Expect unfinished business. Learning and growth are never completed. We are constantly developing skills and uncovering ideas.

Other ground rules and procedures may be added by group members. Remember that it is not necessary for everyone to become best friends. Trust, respect, and accountability are the foundations for successful cooperation in the public arena.

Identity

Whether someone is joining a group for the first time or if a new group is being formed, the same problem tends to arise—people become unsure of themselves and how to relate with others. Because the situation is unfamiliar, the usual way of interacting with others may not work. Many people hold back, hoping to see what other people in the group will do. Beyond the awkwardness, new individuals are unsure about what constitutes proper behavior in the group. The result is no one feels comfortable. In a sense, group members have an identity problem. They know who they are, but not what they are in relation to others in the group.

Acceptance

Other responses to being in a new group are to like and dislike members and to be unsure of how to present oneself in order to be liked or not rejected. The group does not have clear rules on what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior. Fear of not being accepted and the fear of being left out are important concerns. Identity and acceptance questions are important issues in establishing a group because they may create tension and uneasiness. For this reason, it is important that all group members get to know each other and feel comfortable with one another.

Ownership

A group that learns how to work together from the beginning will have ownership in its plans and actions. Group formation certainly takes time and means hard work for its members, but it also implies their commitment. They are declaring ownership for the group's goals. Ownership of the group and its tasks are critical to the overall success of any project.

Group Work or Teamwork

Being part of a productive community or organization work team can be a very rewarding and fulfilling experience. What makes some groups develop into a cohesive team? What is the secret of successful teamwork and how can you develop into productive teams that produce the bonus of greater work output and greater personal satisfaction for everyone?

Teamwork is nothing new. Much of our lives are made up of team activities, even though we may not recognize it. For recreation, we participate in or watch athletic team competition; we spend time with our families, which informally operate as a team; and we participate in religious, political, or social groups. All of these usually demonstrate team principles (Beal 1962; "Group Development" 1988).

The word "synergism" is used to describe what teamwork can accomplish. Synergism means a cooperative action where the total effect is greater than the sum of the effects taken independently. This is the bonus that we can derive from successfully uniting our individual talents.

To fulfill these principles, members may need to adopt different behavioral roles. Real team development does not happen until members begin thinking of the team goals first and individual goals second. This is also important in the development of work teams.

Roles of Team Members

The following behavioral roles are described to help develop team spirit:

1. The involving role: A team member motivates others by getting them involved in an idea, opportunity, or problem.
2. The listening role: A team member makes an effort to actively listen to others, expressing that he or she is really hearing what is being said.
3. The compromising role: One member gives up something so that the team can progress.
4. The supporting role: A team member gives added dimension to good ideas through his or her support.

In addition to these roles, a team leader will need to perform additional roles. Keywords that describe these roles are:

- Guidance—The process of directing the discussion and also providing some structure for planning and action to take place.
- Stimulation—Subtle methods of reinforcing productive team efforts and checking to see if all members are involved in the process.
- Coaching—Asking members if they are having problems, giving helpful suggestions, and recommending outside resources that may be helpful. This can be done both formally and informally.
- Coordination—Checking communication and feedback among team members and indirectly doing things that help produce a harmonious work team.

The leadership role is challenging and somewhat specialized since the leader will need to provide some structure and support while still being a team member. Learning to be an effective team leader will take time and practice. The temptation to revert to a more directive style of leadership is always prevalent in the early stages of growth, but this change could hinder team cohesion and limit long-range output.

The early stages of group or team development are the most critical. Here are some concepts to keep in mind:

- Every team needs a convener or facilitator. Therefore, if this role has not been preassigned, your group will need to get someone to serve, at least temporarily, in this capacity. This position can be rotated to give several participants experience in serving in this kind of leadership role.
- The team members need to know each other.
- In early stages of development, teams will need some added structure. This may involve:
 - Deciding how long meetings will last.
 - Developing an agenda of items to be covered.
 - Developing the priority of items to be dealt with.
 - Assigning team roles such as recorder and timekeeper.
 - Determining how decision making will take place — through consensus or voting.
 - Developing an evaluation of the group process and leadership.

- Get the group to discuss and agree on team-meeting ground rules. This gives them experience in working as a group and also helps members feel they are really an important part of the team. Work to agree on common missions, goals, and action plans to give direction and structure. This is hard work, but it is essential to accomplishing the group's task.
- Periodically check to see if work is progressing and working relationships are satisfactory. Extra effort may be needed when things bog down or tensions arise.

Effective Committees

Effective committees can be one of the most important working forces at the heart of an organization. Committee work can be an extremely rewarding experience to both the individual and the organization and can contribute significantly to the effectiveness and efficiency of groups.

The purpose and objectives of a committee may be clear and concise, but, as with any group of people trying to achieve a common goal, many other factors will determine whether or not the committee will, in fact, succeed in accomplishing its task. An organization should consider a number of factors when deciding to work in committee.

Determine Whether Committee Is Needed

Several basic reasons for setting up committees are common regardless of the tasks they are to complete.

- Responsibilities are shared.
- More members become involved.
- Specialized skills of members can be used to best advantage.
- Inexperienced members gain confidence while serving on the committee.
- Matters may be examined in more detail by a committee.
- The parent body is able to complete its business more efficiently by delegating some work to committees.

Unless the purpose of a committee can be stated in writing, the committee is probably unnecessary. If a committee is proposed, the following questions should be answered in developing its frame of reference:

- What is the purpose of the committee?
- What are the responsibilities and limitations?
- What are the specific tasks?
- When should the job be completed and what type of report is expected?
- What is the role of committee officers, and how is the membership decided?
- Is there a budget?
- What is the term of office for members, methods of filling vacancies, and appointment of the chair?
- What is the authority of the committee?
- What resources are needed? What resources are already available?

The organization—usually through the group’s leaders or executives—is responsible for defining the committee’s purpose, limitations, and responsibilities. These written guidelines should be included in the bylaws or recorded via the motion that created the committee. Names of members of standing committees should also be documented. All written reference to committees is then made available to members and readily accessible by the organization.

Types of Committees

There are two kinds of committees: (1) standing and (2) ad hoc. Standing committees are created by the standing orders, rules, bylaws, or regulations of an organization. They exist and function more or less on a permanent basis (e.g., finance, education, nomination). Ad hoc committees are appointed for a particular purpose on a short-term basis. Both types of committees may form subcommittees if the work loads are very heavy or complex in nature.

Forming Committees

Two key procedures will work to achieve the best committees: (1) member selection and (2) member orientation.

Committee Member Selection

Member selection depends on the skills needed by the committee, the interests of the members, and the anticipated size of the committee. Some committees are very skill specific and have clear member needs; others may not. The function of the committee will determine the type of members needed. Five to nine people on a committee is the best size for most situations.

Committee Member Orientation

The committee chairperson is the “key leader” of all committee work. This person should be selected after careful consideration by the organization. The chair should be interested in the committee objectives and be able to work easily with others. The chair’s role is not necessarily one of bringing technical expertise to the group. (The fact that a person is a good membership salesperson does not mean that he or she will be good at chairing the membership committee.) The chair must be organized and know how to organize both programs and people. He or she must know how to involve others—the experts and the workers—and to motivate them to do the work of the committee. The parent organization should orient the committee chair to the expectations of the committee.

The committee chair orients the committee members to the purpose of the committee and expectations of the organization. Structure of the organization, reporting procedure, roles, and responsibilities are clearly defined. Individual members’ expectations should also be brought out at this time. Other responsibilities of the chair include:

- Preparing and presenting committee reports to the organization.
- Ensuring that a successor is “groomed” to assume the chair’s role sometime in the future.
- Setting agendas, calling meetings, soliciting input from all members.

Signs of a Well-Functioning Committee

- The purpose of the committee is clear to all.
- The time allotted for committee work is well managed.
- Members practice good communication and listening skills.
- There is an informal, relaxed atmosphere.
- The chair and members are well prepared.
- The members are interested and committed.
- Minutes are complete and concise.
- The committee periodically assesses their performance.
- The members are recognized and appreciated by the organization.
- The work of the committee is valued by the organization.

Recommendations for the First Meeting of the Committee

- Start on time and end on time.
- Use an agenda and be open to input.
- Chair welcomes members and reviews purpose of meeting.
- A secretary is appointed or volunteers to maintain records of the committee.
- Committee responsibility is clarified. A discussion of the responsibility is important to see that all have buy-in and to assess whether the purpose could be improved by the members.
- Discuss current committee tasks and goals.
- Set goal priorities:
 - List actions necessary to create priorities.
 - Determine what additional information is needed.
 - Is a resource person needed to advise the committee?
 - Identify priority issues, actions, or projects by exact name and agree on a time schedule for completion of each.
- Agree on date and time of next meeting.
- Adjourn.

Reporting

Committees are directly responsible to the organization that created them. Committee reports should be included as agenda items for general meetings. (See page 10 for sample report format.) The committee chair usually presents the report. Specific recommendations should be listed at the end of the report. Conciseness is essential—otherwise, the time saved by referring the business to a committee may be negligible. The report should clearly indicate, however, that full discussion was held and what options were considered. This will help the larger organization to see that the committee weighed all the options.

Following the report, the organization should give the committee feedback such as whether they will receive or adopt the report, request more information or refer to another committee.

In a meeting run by parliamentary procedure, motions dealing with the report (usually made by the committee chair) are:

- “to receive a report”—This is a common motion if no specific recommendations are made or no action is required/desired.
- “to adopt a report”—If the report is adopted, then any recommendations contained within become decisions of the organization and implies that action is to be taken. The responsibility (both legal and otherwise), becomes that of the parent organization.

A “thank-you” or other appropriate form of recognition by the group leaders and members for a job well done (even though there may be criticism included in the report) is essential to motivate future committee effectiveness.

Committees help define an issue, resolve a complex problem, and involve group members. Successful committees plan ahead usually as a result of the key role that the chair plays.

Committee Report Format

Name of Committee:

Committee Assignment:

Key Discussion Points:

Recommendations and/or Points for Further Discussion:

Names of Committee Members Attending Meetings:

Date:

(signed)

Chair

Summary

Groups may be loosely structured or formal organizations, but whatever the type, this “collection of individuals” needs to feel included and important in the workings of the group. Developing trust within the members will create a good social environment and progress toward the group’s goals will follow.

Committees are another way to move an organization toward their goals by helping to define an issue, resolving a complex problem, and involving group members. Successful committees plan ahead usually as a result of the key role that the chairperson plays. Committees, their chairs, and members are vital to the health of an effective organization!

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One of the most critical needs in Pennsylvania is strong local leadership for the future well-being of communities. This includes leadership for civic and nonprofit organizations, youth, the business community, elected officials, and citizens.

The *Learning Today, Leading Tomorrow* leadership curriculum was developed to help individuals develop and strengthen their personal leadership skills so they can play active and constructive leadership roles in their communities. The program focuses on developing and strengthening personal and interpersonal leadership skills, group and organizational leadership skills, and community leadership skills.

The curriculum is designed for use as a comprehensive, multiple-session leadership training program, taught by trained Penn State Cooperative Extension educators. Individual modules can also be used for stand-alone training within existing groups or organizations who want training on specific leadership or group process issues.

The entire *Learning Today, Leading Tomorrow* curriculum includes:

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- 3: Understanding Your Leadership Style

Unit II: Interpersonal Leadership Skills

- 1: Communications Basics
- 2: Facilitation
- 3: Managing Conflict

Unit III: Group/Organizational Leadership Skills

- 1: Productive Groups
- 2: Effective Meetings
- 3: Group Decisions

Unit IV: Community/Public Policy Leadership Skills

- 1: Dealing with Change
- 2: Public Issues
- 3: Understanding Pennsylvania Local Government
- 4: Active Leadership

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**LEARNING TODAY
LEADING TOMORROW**

DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP POTENTIAL