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Leadership Roles Group Members Play

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Although personal freedom, independence, and the opportunity to “do your own thing” are highly valued, group activities dominate our lives. People willingly, even eagerly, give up freedom and independence to join groups and organizations. Calendars are filled with the activities of religious groups, business or professional organizations, recreational teams, civic clubs and others.

Effective leadership is a key element in the success of all groups and organizations. Whether the title is president, director, or chair, progress is measured by the success of the group or organization.

Successful groups are those which help members achieve common objectives while maintaining satisfactory relationships. These two concerns for success—productivity and satisfactory relations—are closely related to the roles group members play.

Task roles help the group accomplish its objectives while maintenance roles are played to improve relations and ease the tension often produced when sacrifice and compromise is necessary for group progress. While task and maintenance roles contribute to group success, self-serving roles do not. Members who play these roles are satisfying some personal need that is more important to them than group success.

Leaders and members share the responsibility for successful group performance. They contribute by recognizing essential roles when needed. While external factors are largely beyond control, internal factors can be used to encourage group participation. Leaders who take time to develop familiarity, group cohesion, acceptable behavior and use an effective two-way communication process lay a foundation for members’ participation in roles essential to group success.

Dimensions of Successful Groups

Members judge group performance according to their concern for both the achievement of group objectives and

satisfactory relationships; however, certain groups seem to emphasize one of these dimensions more than the other. In business, for example, where the firm’s profit-making objective is widely accepted and important to employees’ well-being, productivity is expected to be the primary concern. Similarly, newly formed groups tend to emphasize their concern for productivity in the achievement of recently identified objectives. However, as groups mature, those objectives often become obscure and emphasis shifts for group productivity to relationships. Many socially oriented groups, often less formally organized, place more emphasis upon a sense of belonging and good relations than productivity.

Successful groups shift emphasis back and forth between productivity and good relations. Periods of great productivity create a sense of group pride and accomplishment. Yet, during those periods the compromises and sacrifices that are necessary can increase tensions. Consequently, group-building activities are needed for satisfactory relations essential to restore group cohesion and members’ commitment.

Group Member Roles

Group performance improves when the president, chairperson, coach, or leader guides members through a logical problem solving process. Group productivity and member satisfaction tends to increase when leaders not only encourage wide participation in decision-making, but also help members recognize types of roles essential for group success. The three basic roles which members play are:

1. Task
2. Maintenance
3. Self-serving

Task Roles—are those which increase progress toward the accomplishment of the tasks or group objectives. Members who contribute new ideas are playing a task role.

Similarly, when members ask for or offer information and opinions about those ideas, they are helping the group accomplish its tasks. Members who summarize, elaborate, and integrate ideas play important task roles, as do those who record the discussions and arrange for comfortable, convenient facilities.

Maintenance Roles—are used to ease tension and build group relationships. In a productive group, decision making requires members to sacrifice and to compromise. When these conditions produce tension, members need to play group maintenance roles by encouraging, offering praise, and making people feel their contributions are important.

Self-serving Roles—are often detrimental to group success. People who dominate discussion, block discussion, present irrelevant information, or use distracting behavior are playing self-serving roles. These roles are played to satisfy personal needs that are not associated with group success. The group needs to examine the situation to consider the cause and agree upon an appropriate, mutually acceptable reaction. Selected task, maintenance and self-serving roles are briefly defined in the Glossary of Group Member Roles. For a more detailed discussion, see “Group Member Roles for Group Effectiveness,” Hobbs and Powers.¹

Glossary of Group Member Roles	
Task Roles	
t- 1	<i>Initiator-Contributor</i> —Suggests or proposes new ideas.
t- 2	<i>Opinion Seeker</i> — Asks primarily for a clarification of values.
t- 3	<i>Opinion Giver</i> — States beliefs or opinions.
t- 4	<i>Information Seeker</i> — Asks for clarification, for reliable information and facts.
t- 5	<i>Information Giver</i> — Offers facts, generalizations, or relates experiences.
t- 6	<i>Elaborator</i> — Spells out suggestions and tries to deduce how any idea or suggestion might work.
t- 7	<i>Summarizer</i> —Pulls the ideas together to help the group recognize their progress.
t- 8	<i>Integrator</i> — Tries to extract key points from several ideas and show what they have in common.
t- 9	<i>Orientor</i> — Defines the progress of the group toward its goals so that the group remains on track.
t-10	<i>Recorder</i> — Writes down suggestions and group decisions. The recorder is the group memory.
t-11	<i>Procedural Technician</i> —Distributes materials, rearranges the seating, opens the windows, etc.
Maintenance Roles	
m- 1	<i>Encourager</i> — Praises, agrees with, and accepts the contribution of others and makes them feel that their ideas are important and worth hearing.
m- 2	<i>Harmonizer</i> —Mediates the differences that exist between members by jesting or smoothing over disagreements.

- m- 3 *Compromiser* — One of the parties in a conflict or disagreement who yields, admits an error or offers to come “half-way.”
- m- 4 *Gate-keeper* —Attempts to keep communication channels open so all members may participate in group decisions.

Self-Serving Roles

- s- 1 *Dominator* — Tries to assert authority or superiority in manipulating the group or certain members.
- s- 2 *Blocker* — Tends to be negative to all ideas, rejecting them without reason.
- s- 3 *Anecdoter*—Recalls incidents and past personal experiences unrelated to the group decision.
- s- 4 *Recognition Seeker*—Calls attention to personal characteristics, deeds, accomplishments and/or problems in whatever way possible.
- s- 5 *Distractor* — Displays a lack of involvement and disrupts the group’s decision-making, through horseplay, cynicism, fooling around with gadgets and other forms of distracting behavior.

In group meetings these roles are not always easily separated or identified. Members also change roles from time to time. The “Heavenly Days” script will help leaders and group members improve their ability to recognize these task, maintenance, and self-serving roles.

“Heavenly Days Cemetery Board”
—a Role-Playing Exercise
(Author Unknown)

Participants in this meeting play familiar group member roles. Identification of task, maintenance, and self-serving roles will be influenced by your interpretation of the situation. (Codes from the glossary present the author’s interpretation of these group member roles.)

The Scene

Seven members of the Heavenly Days Cemetery Board are holding a special meeting. The item of business being discussed is “Should the Heavenly Days Cemetery Board build a fence around the cemetery?”

The Cemetery Board

Judy	- Chairperson
Swen	- Vice President
Joe	- Secretary
Betty	- Treasurer
Carol	- Director
Andrew	- Director
Roger	- Director
Judy - (t-9)	Let’s call the meeting to order. As you know, we are here to discuss building a fence around our cemetery. Is there any discussion?
Carol - (t-1)	I believe we should build a fence. Furthermore, I believe this fence should be built with stones of the area. This would make a fine addition to our community and would blend into the natural setting of the cemetery.

¹Group Member Roles for Group Effectiveness, by Daryl J. Hobbs and Ronald C. Powers, Cooperative Extension Service, Iowa State University, Soc.-3, Reprinted March 1979.

Roger - (t-4) What would this type of fence cost?

Carol - (t-5) It should be fairly inexpensive. We can get the stones from the quarry so our biggest expense would be labor. I would estimate \$500.

Andrew - (t-3) I don't like stone fences.

Joe - (t-1) I think a stone fence is too hard to build. I feel we should build a board fence. We could paint it white and it would look nice. This type of fence could be built much faster too.

Roger - (t-4) How long would this fence last and what would it cost?

Joe - (t-5) A board fence wouldn't be as permanent as a stone fence, but it should last 15 to 20 years. I'm not sure about the cost, but I'd estimate we could build a board fence for \$800.

Andrew - (t-3) I don't like board fences.

Betty - (t-8) Well, Andrew, we've got to build a fence. We've had two ideas, natural stone and board. Perhaps we would combine these two and build a nice fence.

Andrew - (s-2) I don't like either a stone or board fence.

Judy - (t-7) We've got to build a fence. We've had two suggestions. Are there other suggestions?

Betty - (t-2) What kind of fence do you think people in the community would like?

Joe - (t-3) I think they want a simple, nice looking fence that will last a long time. A fence that will look good around the cemetery.

Andrew - (t-3) Most of the people in this community don't think and if they don't think, they don't really know what kind of fence they want.

Betty - (t-3) Well, I think we've got to build a type of fence that most of the people in the community will want and support.

Andrew - (s-2) We're on this board to run the cemetery. I don't think we have to worry about what the people want.

Judy - (m-2) Now, let's stop arguing! As I said before, we've got to build a fence. We've had some good ideas. Let's get some more so we can begin to sort out the best type of fence to build.

Roger - (t-1) Well, I think we ought to build a steel fence. A high steel fence like the type they put around football fields. This would be a permanent fence. We want something that will last. We also want a fence that requires little or no maintenance. I believe a steel fence is the best type of fence for us.

Carol - (t-5) This type of fence would be pretty expensive.

Betty - (s-2) It would be easy to build.

Andrew - (s-2) I don't like steel fences.

Judy - (m-2) Now Andrew! Be reasonable. We've got to build some type of fence. We won't get anywhere by ignoring every idea that comes along. What would a steel fence cost?

Roger - (t-5) I've checked cost. This type of fence should cost about \$2,000.

Andrew - (t-3) That's too expensive.

Carol - (t-5) A fence like this would last 50 to 60 years so on this basis it would be fairly reasonable in cost.

Joe - (t-3) I believe people in the community would buy this type of fence.

Carol - (t-7) Well, we've had three ideas for a fence. Stone, board, and steel. I think we should begin eliminating some ideas so we can come to a decision.

Judy - (m-1) That's a good idea. We don't want to spend all night or several meetings on building a fence.

Roger - (t-5) Well, I think we should eliminate the board fence.

Andrew - (t-5) That's cheaper than steal.

Roger - (t-5) Sure it's cheaper but it won't last. Over time a board fence will cost more than a steel fence.

Judy - (m-2) As I've said before, we have to build a fence. We need ideas. Somehow we've got to narrow our thinking to one type of fence. Let's don't argue—let's stick with facts and come to a conclusion.

Betty - (t-3) I don't think people in our community would like a board fence, so you can eliminate this idea as far as I'm concerned.

Andrew - (s-2) It's still a cheap fence.

Judy - (m-2) We're arguing again.

Roger - (t-3) Well, I still believe a steel fence is what we want.

Judy - (m-4) Swen, you haven't said a word all night. You're the oldest of the group. Perhaps with your experience you can help us decide between a stone, board, or steel fence. What are your ideas?

Swen - (t-1,9) Ladies and gentlemen. In my opinion you build a fence for two reasons—to keep people out or to keep people in. Now I'm sure that *no one* in this community wants in the cemetery. I'm also sure that *nobody* that's in the cemetery is *going to get out*. There's no reason to build a fence so I'm going home.

Judy - Swen is right. Meeting adjourned.

Leadership and Group Performance

A leader's effectiveness is judged by the success, or performance of the group. When the team wins, when profits increase, or when any group progresses toward its objectives and satisfactory relations are maintained—then the coaches, managers and group leaders are considered successful.

However, group success depends on members' participation in task and maintenance roles. Their participation is influenced in part by factors outside the group.

These external factors are largely beyond control of the leader or the group. Each team, business, or group operates in a larger community with a history of conditions or characteristics that influence group members. Some of these external factors are the community value system, competition for

members' time, the prestige or status of the group in the community and the influence exerted by a parent organization. Changing the influence of these external factors is a long term job. Leaders need to identify external factors important to the group and assess their impact on members' participation.

Internal factors are forces leaders can influence to encourage participation and improve group performance. Many groups are characterized by apathy and limited participation. Yet nearly everyone has experienced some enthusiastic group in which members willingly, often eagerly, volunteered to support some activity. The following descriptions provide insights which help explain factors within these groups that determine their effectiveness.

1. *Group Cohesion*: Members' sense of belonging and commitment to group goals affect the sacrifices they will make "for the good of the cause." The importance of that sense of belonging is most evident when a new member joins an established group where members recognize commonly accepted objectives and know how to achieve them. Yet, even without new members, group goals and the means to achieve them change. Leaders should periodically review, and if necessary, revise objectives to clarify the group's reason for being. Clear, widely accepted objectives can help members choose the best way to achieve them, recognize needed roles and measure group progress.

2. *Familiarity*: "I can't remember your name, but I rarely forget a face" is a common phrase. Yet, a successful leader must recognize each member's unique skills, values, education or experience to assign appropriate group responsibilities. Leaders who assign duties to the same "reliable workers," or because "it's your turn," are missing opportunities to develop new leadership and improve group performance.

3. *Effective Communication*: Leaders often rely on newsletters and other one-way communication techniques. When there is little opportunity for feedback, dissatisfaction tends

to emerge with a corresponding reduction in performance. A two-way communication system tends to minimize group tension, improve cohesion and productivity. Leadership development requires a communication pattern which offers members the opportunity to influence and be influenced by other members as they accept added responsibilities and play new roles.

4. *Acceptable Behavior*: This is usually defined by a host of unwritten but widely understood group standards. Those considered important may be formally adopted and written into group records. Each group uses a system of formal and informal rewards and penalties. Recognition, the silent treatment, or other controls are effective only so long as the group's approval continues to be important. Therefore the application of such controls needs to be generally accepted by the group, not by just a few members.

Group leaders and members may examine how external and internal factors influence group performance in more detail in "The Leader & The Group" by Hobbs and Powers.²

Lessons to Recall

Perhaps the most valuable lesson to be gained is that group success is the responsibility of the entire group, and not just its leader.

Leaders and members need to recognize essential and non-essential roles and their impact on group success. They must either play needed task and maintenance roles themselves or encourage others to do so.

The influence of external factors on participation must be recognized and accepted. Within that framework, attention given to internal factors may be used to build a foundation for effective, efficient group participation.

²The Leader...and the Group, by Daryl J. Hobbs, and Ronald C. Powers, Coop. Ext. Serv., Iowa State Univ., Soc.-4, Reprinted April, 1977.

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