

Part 1

PREPARING TO LEAD

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Chapter 1

IDENTIFYING TYPES OF GROUPS AND THEIR LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES

In this introductory chapter, we provide some examples of what people say about being a group member and leader. We also review how small, short-term groups differ from natural work teams and how different types of short-term groups (committees, task forces, quality improvement teams, clubs, and boards) pose different leadership challenges. For those of you who want to know right away how to get started, the quick start guide in Appendix A is a resource to turn to whenever you begin to lead a new committee or task force. It lists steps to follow to get your group off to the right start, keep members motivated and involved, and be sure you are making progress.

After reading this first chapter, you will be able to:

- Recognize the reasons that members are part of your group and how they feel about it.
- Describe the different kinds of short-term groups and leadership challenges associated with them.
- Distinguish purpose, product, and process.
- Determine the extent to which members in your group need to work together cooperatively to achieve your group's goals.
- Identify different types of groups and the situations they face.
- Diagnose your own group's needs, demands, and challenges.

Let's Begin

When you are asked to chair a small group, lots of questions and concerns undoubtedly run through your mind:

- I've never done this before. Where do I start?
- Who should I select for the group? Should I let people volunteer?
- Am I going to be any good at this? Will the group members listen to me?
- How much of my time will this take?
- How will we spend group meeting time?
- What will I gain from this experience? Will it help my career? What are the risks?
- How important is this anyway to me, my group members, and my department?
- What should I do first?
- How much control over the outcomes should I give up to the group? If the group does a poor job, how will it reflect on me? Will I have to do most of the work?

You may be feeling puzzled, uncertain, and stressed. You're not alone. We'll look at typical reactions people have to being a member of a group and to being a group leader.

Here's what committee and task force leaders say about the challenges they face:

I've been a member of this board for seven years, and I never anticipated being elected president. Since no one else was willing to do it, I agreed. I believe in this organization, and I think my board members do too. Now I just need to get them to work together. We have some excellent paid staff, but our budget is too tight and we need to trim expenses while we raise more money to help the community. [Board president, local nonprofit mental health agency]

My charge is to implement a new online information data retrieval and analysis system to support our global sales staff. To get this done in only six months, I need a project team with technical experts who

can work with our consultants to customize the software. I need analysts who will provide the data for the system. Of course, I need representatives of the sales staff to be sure we are designing a product they can use. Also, I need people to write documentation and provide on-site training. This is going to be a massive effort. We will meet regularly, communicate frequently, listen to each other closely, and work fast and hard! [Headquarters sales vice president, international stock trading company]

Everyone on this committee is so different. We're only ten people. Three are older than sixty years of age, and two are under twenty-five. Four are African American, two are Hispanic, one is Asian, and the rest are white. Four are men. Two are very wealthy. How am I ever going to get us to agree on anything? [President, town civic association]

I'm a senior administrative assistant to the principal of a large high school. The principal asked me to chair a committee of faculty to develop ways to introduce problem-based educational modules that require students to draw on their knowledge in different areas to solve problems in groups. I asked, Why me? I have a college education, but I'm not a teacher. My principal wanted someone who is objective and who represents her office to lead the group, so I'm it. I've had to learn to be more assertive than I usually am in order to get the teachers to focus and take this seriously. At first, it was a struggle. Things improved when the principal asked for a presentation on our progress in two weeks. This got everyone's attention, and I was surprised at how helpful the teachers were in showing me how to put together the presentation and then asking me to give it. I'm learning a lot, and I'm getting to know the teachers better, much better than I did before. [School administrative assistant]

Here's what committee and task force members say:

Now I know what people mean when they say, "A camel is a horse designed by a committee." Committees sometimes produce crazy

results. You can only wonder, “What were they thinking!?” Everyone has a different perspective. By trying to satisfy everyone, we satisfy no one. [Architect in the facilities department of a large company]

We seem to do everything around here by committee. That’s because so many areas need to have their say. It slows everything down. I have to admit, I have little patience. [Bank executive]

Whenever we have a big initiative, such as implementing a new data system, we set up an interdepartmental task force instead of assigning the work to one person or department. These initiatives tend to be complex and touch many different areas. I’ve learned a lot about how other departments operate by being on these task forces. Also, I’ve met a lot of people and made friends. This has helped me get my work done. [Telecommunications company manager]

We pull together search committees when we have job vacancies. The committee usually has people from different departments. The committee reviews résumés, interviews candidates, and recommends the top three or four candidates to the hiring supervisor. We do this to ensure that the process is fair and that all applicants have equal opportunity. It’s time-consuming, but it works. [University human resource department manager]

These reactions to leading a group and being a member of a group are not unusual. People have mixed experiences. Some are enthusiastic and cooperative. Others are impatient and recalcitrant. Different members’ motivation, expertise, and willingness to cooperate with each other are likely to affect what you do as a leader.

You might wonder how to approach the leadership role. Should you be directive, plan meeting agendas, control who speaks when, and make decisions? Should you let the committee members participate actively and almost take over while you serve as facilitator? The answers to these questions depend on the group members—for

instance, their capabilities and personalities. The answers also depend on the task—what the group has to get done, by when, and the extent to which group members need structure and direction. How you lead also depends on what you feel comfortable doing, that is, your style of leadership.

This chapter begins the journey of group leadership and creating a high-performance group. It will help you understand the demands on you and your group members. We start by considering different types of groups and your role as leader.

Types of Groups

Now that you have been appointed or elected leader, what type of group is it: a committee, subcommittee, task force, club, or board? You need to understand the characteristics of your group to determine how you are going to lead it.

A group is simply two or more people who work together to accomplish a task. Committees and task forces are often short-term groups that meet periodically. Some of the work is done during meetings and some outside meetings. This book is about small, usually short-term groups. These are different from natural work teams in an organization. Members of natural work teams work together on a regular basis as the central part of each person's job. Team members have specific roles, structured work methods, and ample time to get to know one another. The teams have a clear identity, for instance, the members are all part of the training department.

Short-term groups initially lack identity and cohesion. They do not have extended periods of time to develop issues of values, culture, and coordination (Kozlowski & Ilgen, in press). The members of the group may vary in the extent to which their work is interdependent. Sometimes the members work almost in isolation; the only thing they have in common is their leader. Other times, they work in tight synchrony, as surgery teams, flight crews, and musical ensembles do. Even these teams may vary in composition over time, with members knowing their roles and able to function even if they

have not worked together much in the past. The people in such a team know their function and the behaviors they need to carry out.

This book is about temporary groups. They usually disband after the goal is achieved. However, they may have an ongoing function and meet regularly or when needed, but they do not work together on a daily basis. Note that we include clubs, boards, and councils along with committees and subcommittees as small groups. They may not be short term, but members come and go, they meet periodically, they work on short-term projects that have tight deadlines, and what they do may change over time.

Purpose, Product, and Process

There are three key elements to any group: purpose, product, and process. Purpose is the reason for the group's being. Product is the outcome of the group. Process is how the group goes about doing its work. The group's purpose determines the product it produces and the processes it follows. Of course, a group may have more than one purpose and produce more than one product, in which case it may vary its process to suit the particular purpose and product. Groups that do not alter their process to fit their purpose and product may have trouble achieving the desired outcome. Consider the following purposes:

- *Developing vision and strategy.* A group may be formed to create a strategy or vision for an organization. For instance, this may be a long-range planning committee, perhaps a subgroup of a board of directors. The product is a set of goals and action steps that will guide the organization. The process may be to (1) involve board members in discussions about the organization's performance, (2) collect information about the competitive environment today and opinions about changes or conditions on the horizon, (3) conduct a customer survey about their needs and expectations, (4) hold a series of meetings with people who have a stake in the organization (such as clients, suppliers, or members), (5) formulate ideas for future goals and ways

of accomplishing them, (6) circulate the draft of goals and strategies and hold open meetings to discuss them, or (7) revise the plan and present it to the board for further review and adoption.

- *Process improvement.* The group's purpose may be to identify and implement ways to improve productivity. The product is continuous improvement in measures of productivity. The process is a series of tasks aimed at outlining elements of the work process that is being improved, identifying frequent problems, determining the root causes of these problems, creating and trying ways to overcome these problems, and implementing solutions and measuring their effects.

- *Issue resolution.* The purpose could be to address and resolve a specific issue, for instance, finding ways to cut expenses, create new uses for a product, recruit and retain more members for an organization, or overcome disagreement and conflict about opposing points of view. The product is evidence that the issue has been resolved (for example, the budget has been cut by a desired amount or the desired number of new members have been recruited). The process is how the group goes about accomplishing these objectives. This might be discussions to define and clarify the problem, brainstorm ideas, evaluate those ideas, and vote on the ideas to select those to be presented as recommendations or actually begin work on implementing them.

- *Committee action.* The purpose of a committee may be to make something happen: hold an event, raise money, advertise, create a budget, or select a new employee, for example. The process depends on the action to be taken. Essentially the group must be clear about what is going to be done, why, how, where, and by whom. The leader, working jointly with the members of the group, outlines the elements of the task that they need to address, assigns roles or asks for volunteers, obtains resources, provides advice, and monitors progress.

Throughout this book, we will be discussing group leaders who confronted challenging and sometimes daunting tasks with little

experience or guidance about what to do. The examples are from work and volunteer organizations. Sometimes we form groups for leisure activities. The outcomes are solely what we make of them.

Consider a group you are leading.

- Is it a committee, subcommittee, task force, club, board, or some other type of group?
- What are the key features of the group?
- What are the challenges?
- What does this mean for your role as leader?

Group Characteristics

To understand your leadership role, you need to know more about groups. Here, we explore characteristics of groups that determine what your group needs from you as their leader. Groups can vary in many ways. We look at ten major characteristics and then provide a tool for determining the characteristics of your group and how this can help you lead.

Purpose

What is the purpose for the group? Is it planning and running an event such as an annual meeting? Developing a new product or service or new use for an existing product or service? Designing and implementing a process such as performance appraisal? Determining ways to improve the quality of a product or process? Developing a new strategy such as new sales methods? Selecting personnel or deciding who gets a promotion or raise? Implementing a new data system? Formulating a vision and strategy? Resolving a conflict? The purpose has implications for the immediacy of the task, its importance to the organization and group members, and its difficulty.

Some tasks require merely following procedures that were designed previously, for example, repeating an annual event. The

event is basically the same, but of course the group can be creative in making it better than ever before. Other group goals and tasks are totally open-ended with no precedent to follow and no right or best way to proceed. As a leader, you can involve members in discussing and determining group purpose and increase members' motivation and buy-in in the process.

Motivation or Reasons for Joining the Group

Why did the members join your group? How committed are they to it? Did they volunteer, or were they assigned? If they volunteered, do they care about the group's goals, or did they join just to socialize? If they were assigned, are they committed to the group's mission, or are they just going through the motions, participating because they have to? Do your members differ in their reasons for wanting to be part of the group? Some truly care about your group's goal. Others may want visibility for themselves, or they relish the challenge. Are your group's members motivated to work hard and treat their participation in the group seriously? As a leader, you can give the members time to express what they have to offer the group.

Number of Members

How large is the group? A committee may be just three people charged with a discrete task, for instance, come up with a new marketing strategy in three days. A task force may be ten to twenty people who represent diverse functions or fields in the organization. This group may be split into subgroups to accomplish different parts of the overall tasks. In general, the larger the group is, the more demands there are on the leader in all respects. For instance, if you are leading a large group, you will need to work hard to communicate clearly, get everyone to participate, overcome different vested interests, and foster member commitment and motivation. As a leader, you can consider the size of your group, its composition, and whether subgroups will be needed.

Member Diversity

The group is likely to vary in diversity in terms of ethnic or other demographic characteristics, as well as expertise and background. Generally diversity challenges the leader to make use of different skills and not let differences in approach, opinions, or biases get in the way. As the leader, you can foster members' identification with the group and overcome differences between members.

Member Turnover

What is the turnover in members of this group? Will the membership change over time or stay about the same, at least while the group is accomplishing a specific goal? Suppose people drop out. You will need to cope with losing their expertise and the feelings others may have about why they left. Did they leave because they were upset with you or other members? If you need new members, you will have to select, entice, and integrate newcomers into the group midstream.

Goal Clarity

What are your group's goals? Did you state them clearly? Do members share an understanding of what the group is trying to do? The clearer the goals are and the higher the agreement among members about the importance of achieving them, the easier the group's task will be. As a leader, be sure the group goals are clear.

Permanency and Time Frame

Is this group permanent or temporary? Permanent groups may have multiple tasks to perform over time, although the membership may change. A temporary group may have a single task to do and then disband. A related issue is how much time you have to complete the task. Is the group under a tight deadline? At what point in the process will you have to shift from a planning mode

to a doing mode? As a leader, you will move the group from discussion to action.

Clarity of Work Process

Do members agree on the process the group will follow to accomplish its goals? Do they know what needs to be done by when? In other words, is the structure for the group's work laid out clearly when the group gets started, or does the group have to invent a process? This is a decision you make as the leader.

Your Role as Manager and Leader

Standard management tasks are organizing work, planning meetings, delegating tasks, monitoring progress, evaluating members' contributions to the group, giving members feedback about their performance, and monitoring the success of the group as a whole. As a manager, you exert control and manage the transactions. As a leader, you transform your members by engaging them in the group process. Rather than use control, you use influence. You collaborate with them to develop a clear mission and purpose for the group. You motivate your members to attend meetings and complete assignments outside meetings, facilitate the group process, empower them to make suggestions and take responsibility for the group's efforts, and generally shape and reshape the direction of the group in response to changing conditions. Most groups require both management and leadership, or what we refer to in Chapter Four as transactional and transformational leadership.

Your Power and Influence

Your power and influence as a leader may depend on whether you were appointed or elected. Some groups begin without a leader and then elect a leader from among the members. Such a leader would have the loyalty and trust of the group members as long as he or she

behaves in a way that the members expect and want. Other times a person is the group leader because of organizational level, function, expertise, or assertiveness. For instance, the chief financial officer may chair the annual budget committee. This leader's power is vested in his or her position or knowledge. Other times, the leader may be appointed by a top executive because the executive has confidence in the leader. One of the leader's first tasks in such a case is to gain the trust of the group members by communicating clearly and meeting commitments. Even if you have the formal role as leader, you can share leadership with your members, empowering them to participate fully in the group process, shaping the group's goals, work methods, and products and representing the group to others. We will say more about shared leadership in Chapter Four.

Applying Group Characteristics

Now let's apply these characteristics to the group you are leading. For each of the following characteristics, circle the description that best applies to your group.

| | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| <i>Purpose</i> | Uncertain | Certain |
| <i>Motivation</i> | Low | High |
| <i>Size</i> | Large | Small |
| <i>Diversity</i> | Diverse | Homogeneous |
| <i>Turnover</i> | High | Low |
| <i>Goal clarity</i> | Ambiguous | Clear |
| <i>Permanency or time frame</i> | Limited time or tight deadline | Ongoing or no deadline |
| <i>Process</i> | Unstructured | Structured |
| <i>Leader's role</i> | Facilitating or Transforming | Controlling |
| <i>Leader's power</i> | Low | High |

Count the number you circled on the left column of the characteristics. If the number is ten, you have your hands full: demands

on the group and on you as the leader are likely to be high. Your responses might pinpoint areas that are likely to be problems or challenges, such as member turnover or low motivation, lack of clarity of purpose or process, or a tight deadline.

Cases

As examples, we examine the characteristics of two groups: a hospital quality improvement team and a product development team.

Example: Hospital Quality Improvement Team

This committee was established by the chief of medical services to improve emergency room operations. Team members were a nurse practitioner, a physician, a nurse, two lab technicians, and a systems trainer from the medical records office. The group's charge was to find a way to reduce the time it takes to obtain lab results in the emergency room. At the first meeting, the group elected the nurse practitioner as their leader. The nurse practitioner had worked in the emergency room for the last three years but had never led a quality improvement group.

Example: Product Development Team

This team was responsible for finding uses for a new technology. One team member was from the marketing department. There were two engineers, two people from manufacturing, one from product distribution, and another from sales. At the first meeting, the members suggested that the marketing department representative, who knew the customers and products well, chair the group.

The quality improvement team, led by the nurse practitioner, was established to improve emergency room operations. The product development team, led by the marketing department representative, was responsible for finding uses for a new technology (see Table 1.1 for a comparison of the groups).

Table 1.1 Comparison of the Hospital Quality Improvement Team and the Product Development Team

| <i>Situation</i> | <i>Hospital Quality Improvement Team</i> | <i>Product Development Team</i> |
|------------------|--|--|
| Purpose | Certain, but the goal was not specific: Reduce time needed to process lab reports and get the results to the emergency room. | Uncertain: Not clear what the product would be; the committee needed to investigate current products and capabilities, be creative about possible new products, explore possible markets, and determine production and distribution capabilities, to name a few of the needed tasks. |
| Motivation | Low: At least initially, it was not clear that the appointed members believed that the lab time could be reduced. | High: Members did not volunteer, but they had a vested interest in finding new products and improving the company's bottom line while contributing to their own employment security. |
| Size | Small. | Small. |
| Diversity | Diverse: All the needed functions were represented. | Diverse: All the needed functions were represented, but the group would have to reach outside to get information from others in the company as well as, and perhaps more important, from customers. |
| Turnover | Low—as long as the group made progress and people did not drop out. | Low—but more people may have been needed, or possibly the members of the team would need to change depending on the product the group began to develop and as the focus moved from design to implementation. |

| Situation | <i>Hospital Quality Improvement Team</i> | <i>Product Development Team</i> |
|---------------------------|--|---|
| Goal clarity | Ambiguous: Purpose was certain, but specifics about the goal—how much time to cut and how quickly to implement the change—were not. | Ambiguous: Saying that the company wanted a new product said nothing about what type of product it should be, whether it should address a new market or existing market, the cost of development, and so on. |
| Permanency and time frame | Limited duration: This was not meant to be a permanent group; there was no firm deadline either. | Limited duration: This group needed to get a new product started. It was unclear how long this should take; however, the powers that be would get impatient if the group did not come up with something promising within a reasonable period of time—one or two months, perhaps. Note that this group did not meet continuously but only several times a week; maybe they would find that they needed to meet more often. |
| Process | Structured (or at least, semi-structured): The group could follow some standard processes used by quality improvement teams, such as brainstorming ideas, collecting data about times for different lab tests, and experimenting with alternative procedures (see Chapter Six for a description of such procedures). The leader would need to learn these techniques from the hospital quality improvement professional staff to facilitate their use. | Unstructured: The group did not have standard procedures to follow; some members who had been on product development teams in the past may have had ideas about how to proceed. |

(Continued)

Table 1.1 Comparison of the Hospital Quality Improvement Team and the Product Development Team, Continued

| <i>Situation</i> | <i>Hospital Quality Improvement Team</i> | <i>Product Development Team</i> |
|------------------|---|--|
| Leader's role | Influencing: Members needed to be convinced this was a worthwhile endeavor; each member had a different perspective coming from a different discipline. | Influencing: Although the leader was in charge, there were no set processes to follow and no one member had all the answers. All members would need to participate actively. |
| Leader's power | Low: As a nurse practitioner, the leader did not have the same authority as, say, the physician on the committee; however, the members knew that quality improvement teams in this hospital try to run in a way that all members of the group are treated, and treat each other, equally. | High: The leader could call the shots and was ultimately responsible for the outcome; however, the leader needed ideas and contributions from all group members. |

The two cases were similar in degree of leader challenge. The main differences between the groups were that the quality improvement team had a more certain purpose, a lower member motivation, and lower leader power compared to the product development team.

Leaders' Comments

What did the leaders of these groups think about the challenges facing them? The nurse practitioner who led the quality improvement team said the following about the start of the process:

I was very concerned that people on this group wouldn't listen to me. I thought that we could make a difference, but I was worried that the lab technicians would feel that we were telling them what to do. Actually, it occurred to us that improving time to get results may have less to do with processing specimens than getting them

from the emergency room to the lab and getting the results back. We needed some good information about how much time things take to convince the other members of the group that there was a real problem and that something could be done about it.

The leader of the product development team said at the start:

First of all, this was my first time leading a product development task force. What made things worse was that we didn't even know what kind of product we should develop. Of course, we reasoned that probably the product should be related to something we manufactured and sold already, but also we recognized that it could be something totally different. We were going to have to think out of the box and stay focused on getting something done. I could see us spinning our wheels in never-ending discussions and not making any decisions. I felt good that we had some strong people on the team who knew our customers and understood sales and marketing. They should have good ideas about how to get into new lines of businesses. It was exciting. This could really make a big difference to our business if we came up with the right idea. It was a big IF, though.

Determine How Closely Members Need to Work Together

Within each of the different types of short-term groups, members may need to work together to different degrees.

Groups in Which Each Member Has a Separate Task

In some groups, the members work independently at first. They bring their work back to a central group and present it. The group might vote on decisions based on the information brought back by individuals. The members do not necessarily bounce their ideas off one another or work together to come up with solutions. They might each have totally different abilities and responsibilities to the

group as a whole. In other groups, members depend on each other to do the group's work.

Interdependence in Action

In athletics, all team members work together to win the game against their opponent. They pass the ball, run next to their teammates, cheer them on from the sidelines, allow a teammate to make a goal by passing the ball, and so on. In music, duo piano players are careful not to bump their partner's hand as they cross over to catch the next note on the keyboard. In orchestras, the violins play more quietly during the cello aria. Similarly, in work groups, the committee members may work together to produce their final report. Even if they do not totally agree on all issues, they come to consensus for the good of the group. All members contribute to the slide presentation that will be given by the leader to company executives, and the leader will give all members credit for participating in the work.

As an example, suppose an artist, designer, architect, contractor, banker, and developer form a group to design and build a new shopping center. They share a common goal but need each other's expertise to get the job done. They need to meet regarding the specifications of the shopping center, and then they may work alone and report back to the group about their progress. They may work in parallel. They each come up with an idea and bring their idea to the group. The group votes on which idea to choose. Then each member uses his or her expertise to develop part of the project. They meet again to show each other what they have. If they work as a team, they might brainstorm during one meeting and develop what the end result will look like. Then they will discuss how each can use his or her own expertise to contribute to the project. They might communicate between meetings, send each other ideas, or bounce ideas off one another. The leader provides feedback and keeps the group on task.

We can also talk about relationships between groups, for instance, several groups working together or in tandem. There are groups that

work toward a common goal but do not actually work together. Consider religious groups: they may have common beliefs and raise money for similar causes, but the groups never actually meet, except perhaps at large annual conferences. Or a company's CEO may form different groups to work on the same product: for example, regional sales teams working to increase the company's sales overall, with each team taking actions that fit the competitive conditions in their region.

Summary

This chapter reviewed different types of groups (committees, subcommittees, task forces, project teams, clubs, boards, and councils) and the challenges they present to a leader, including the extent to which members need to work closely together to accomplish the group's mission.

- The type of group you are leading determines the challenges you will face. A committee that is short term and task specific needs to make progress quickly. A task force that is long term and requires information from different functions needs considerable coordination. This type of group benefits from frequent and open communication, member participation in establishing group goals and work methods, and coordination to be sure the members integrate their different functions. A board that provides oversight of functions carried out by others has to collect information and track progress of the individuals and groups under their jurisdiction. A club that has a social agenda as its primary focus (even though it may do other things) needs members' active involvement and participation to be sure the group is meeting their needs.
- Groups differ in their purpose, members' motivation, task and organizational structure, and the way the leader is chosen. The purpose may be to create a vision or strategy, improve a work process, resolve an issue, or plan and implement an

action or event. The purpose and intended product guide the process that the leader and group adopt. External factors, such as deadlines, resources, and expectations, pose challenges for the leader and the group and determine what they do, how they do it, and how fast they work.

- Group characteristics are purpose, motivation, size, diversity, turnover, goal clarity, permanence, well-defined process, the leader's role in influencing or controlling, and the leader's power and command of resources. Assess the leader's role and the group on each of these characteristics to determine the degree of difficulty the group leader is likely to encounter and plan the leadership strategy.