



THE LEADER . . . and THE GROUP

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INTRODUCTION

The ultimate test of a leader is whether the group he leads accomplishes its goals with a minimum of friction and a maximum of efficiency. Although an individual may possess most of the characteristics we associate with a good leader, if the group he leads is not productive, he has not been an effective leader.

If we can determine a leader's effectiveness only by the performance of the group he leads, it is logical that a leader should understand the social group and factors that contribute to its productivity. The reason for this is similar to the reason a mechanic must know the working parts of a car before he can change its performance for the better.

Anyone can tamper with a car and probably change its performance. But unless he knows what he is doing the change is as likely to be worse as better. In somewhat the same fashion, anyone in the group can attempt to change things which affect the group's performance. But here again, unless the group member realizes the possible consequences of his action the change is as likely to be worse as better.

There are some things which the leader can influence and some which he cannot. For example, the influential leader can decide whether he will be democratic or authoritarian. On the other hand, the leader has little control over the number of groups in a community which are competing for the group members' time.

This publication will attempt to:

1. Increase the leader's understanding of the factors which determine the effectiveness of any group.
2. Discuss the implications of these factors for the leader.
3. Raise additional questions which the leader should ask as he works with the group.

The Group

The first step in understanding the social group is to define the group so that we are thinking about the same thing.



Though there are many definitions of the group, there is one which has most of the conditions which differentiate between those collections of people which are a social group and those which are not. This definition states that a social group is, "two or more persons who interact with one another over time, i.e., take one another into account in their own actions, and are mutually aware of some common elements binding them together".

From this definition we see that the family, the local ladies aid, the play group and an Army platoon are examples of social groups because they interact with one another over time. However, all Methodists, all 10-year olds and all the people working for General Motors are not social groups because there is little or no interaction between them.

In addition to meeting this definition, the kinds of (social) groups which concern us here are voluntary community and special interest groups with the following features:

1. Every person knows every other person in the group.
2. There is considerable cohesion (or closeness) among the members.
3. Most of the interaction is on a personal, face-to-face basis.
4. The members share many of the same attitudes, interests, beliefs and goals.

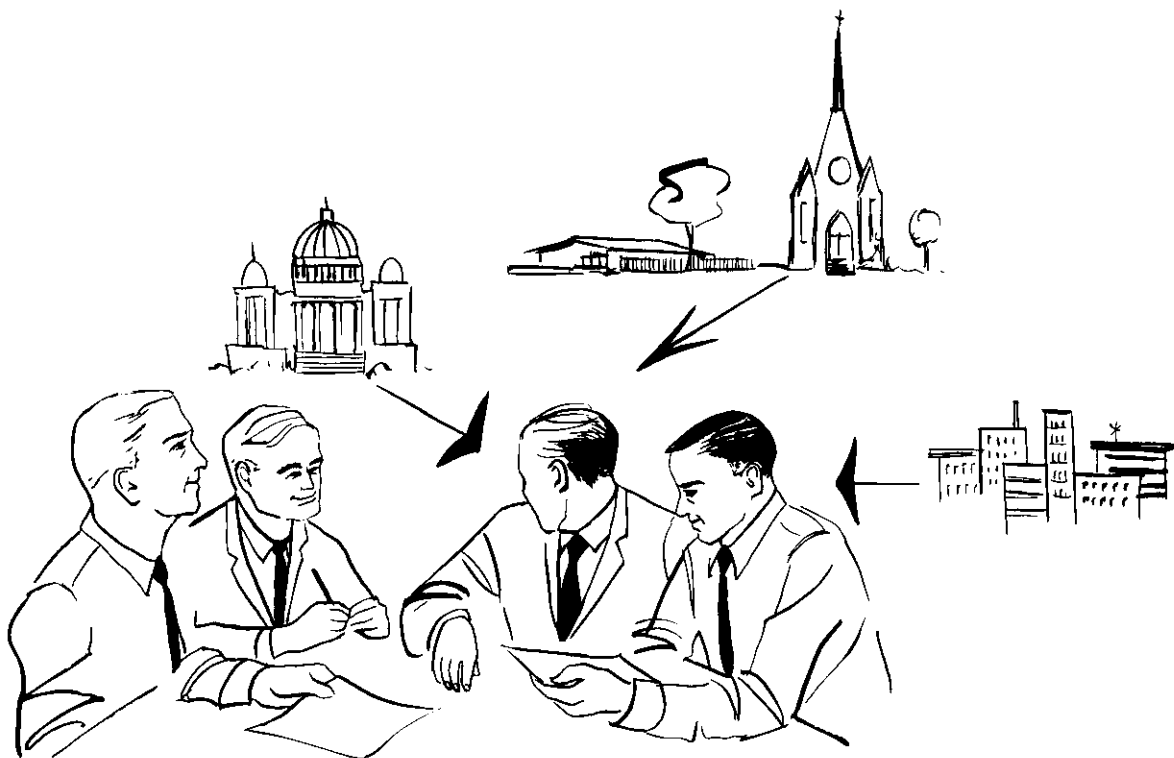
In more formal or secondary groups, such as an industrial plant, we would not expect to find these characteristics. Everyone would not know every other person. Interaction would be more impersonal. Only a part of each individual's experiences would be in common with the other persons'.

The rest of this paper will be devoted to the groups which we as community leaders are typically involved in and the group relations problems which arise for the leader.

The following section will bring to light outside factors affecting the group. By outside we mean those things which exist in the environment of the group and which are not controllable by the leader. The local PTA, for example, exists in a community which has scores of other groups. What difference does this make? How can it affect our group? What can be done about it?

The Group's Environment

On a day-to-day basis there are certain things which affect the group over which the leader or the members have little control. These forces are outside or external to the group itself. They can be changed to some degree over a long period of time, but in general a group will have to accept these forces as constant and adapt themselves to this environment.



The more important of these forces are:

1. Community value system--what is important to people in the community?
2. Competition for members' time.
3. Prestige of the particular group in the community.
4. Relationship of parent organizations to the local groups--groups that are affiliated with county, state and national organizations.

Community Values

No group or organization exists in a social vacuum. It is situated in a community of individuals that belong to a wide variety of groups. This community, itself a larger social group, has certain values. The individuals in the community collectively evaluate some things as good, others as bad. This emphasis on one kind of activity as opposed to some other describes the value system of the community. In some communities the church is a hub of community activity. In other communities the church is important but activity may center around the school or certain community organizations. It is within this value framework that any group exists. Decisions made by the members will be influenced by the values of the larger community. As such, there is little that the leader or the members can do except recognize these values and carry out their programs in light of them.

A civic group may desire to raise money for youth activities. This would generally be evaluated as worthwhile by the community. The group would not use games of chance to do this, however, if the community evaluates gambling as bad. Thus, the actions of the group are influenced by the community value system.

Competition for Members' Time

Multiple group membership limits the time which any individual can devote to a particular group. This is common in most communities.

Here again the group leader must recognize the facts of life. There is a tendency for people either to be "joiners" or "non-joiners." This means that those people who belong to one group are likely to join several. Each group is competing for the time of people most active in organizations.



What can a leader do about this? We must remember that any group exists only to meet the needs of the individual member. Thus the leader can help the members identify their needs and then carry out a program to meet them. If the members' needs are being met to their satisfaction by the group the problem of competing for their time will diminish. This suggests that as one group becomes more effective in meeting its members' needs, another group may begin to "lose out." The groups which fail to satisfy their members' needs will probably lose participation and eventually cease to exist.

Prestige in the Community

Another outside force which can affect the group is their prestige or status in the community. That is, how important are they considered to be in relation to the other groups? Low status groups may have trouble getting members or getting the community to accept their ideas. Low status does not mean the same as "bad." For example, the PTA may not have the highest status in the community, but few people would disagree that what they stand for is highly valued by the community.

The reverse is also true. Those groups with the most prestige may not stand for the highest values in the community.

The group can change its status in the community. One way is to engage in activities highly valued by the community. However, the importance of status must be weighed against the degree to which other goals of the group may have to be compromised.

Parent Organizations

Many local groups are affiliated with state and/or national organizations. Often the objectives and means of achieving those objectives are spelled out for the local group. If the objectives and means of the parent organization are not compatible with the values of the local community, the leader and the group can expect some difficulty.

The solution to this problem usually lies in the parent organization allowing enough autonomy to local groups so that goals of the parent organization can be achieved within the framework of the local community.

These four factors are important to the performance of any group and for the most part are outside of their control.

The effectiveness of a particular group is also determined by several factors which operate within the group. These factors are more subject to change and are under control of the group and leader.

Inside The Group

Given the outside forces previously discussed, the group still has a great deal to say about their level of performance.



The leaders of a group are given responsibility for its direction. To be effective in directing there are several things a leader should know and do. One of these is to know the factors which operate within the group to determine its effectiveness. This knowledge and the skills to make it work are, ideally the reasons for choosing a particular person as leader.

Group Goals

One of the more important internal forces determining group effectiveness is the goal or goals of the group. Not only do they constitute the sole purpose for the existence of the group but they also help measure its effectiveness.

People don't like to work if they don't know what they are trying to accomplish. They are less effective in their efforts if they do not know what they are working toward. Numerous research studies have shown that individuals in a group are more productive if they understand the relationship between what they as individuals are doing and the end result of the process. In groups such as the Rotary or PTA, we would expect better performance from individuals (and consequently the group) if they each know the goals or objectives of the group.

The leader can initiate the process of setting goals and of restating these goals periodically to remind members of their purposes. Evidence is abundant that many group members (and leaders) do not know the goals of their group. A specific question about their goals will usually send the individual scurrying to the by-laws or constitution to seek the answer. A comparison of the constitution's goals with what is actually being done can be quite revealing. This does not mean that original goals should never be changed. It does mean that the group should frequently devote meeting time to considering and evaluating their goals.

Group Means

Means refer to the "ways" a group goes about achieving its goals. As with goals, we would expect better performance if the members know, understand and agree on the means.

So when a leader asks any group member to assume a particular responsibility, it is important to tell him: (1) what he is expected to do, (2) the means by which he may do it and (3) how much authority he has.

Too often we approach a person to ask him to accept responsibility and say, "It's not much of a job; it will only take a little time; would you be willing to do it?" Would you be apt to take a job if you were told in

effect that it really "isn't very important anyhow?" Most people either don't accept the job or they take it and proceed to treat it as it was presented to them--not very important and won't take much time.

The leader has an opportunity and a responsibility to keep members informed about the ways they might attempt to achieve their goals.

Communication Patterns

The pattern of communication can have considerable effect on the level of a group's performance.

If the pattern of communication is primarily one-way--from the leader to the members--there is a tendency for dissatisfaction among the members and a corresponding reduction in level of performance. Fig. 1a and 1b indicate one-way patterns of communication. These patterns



Fig. 1a

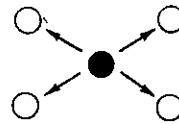


Fig. 1b

are typical of groups in which the leader has an authoritarian approach.

Two-way communication in itself will not eliminate the problem of performance. If the group members in Fig. 1b could communicate back to the leader there would still be opportunities for dissatisfaction because the members can only communicate with the leader and not with other group members.

In voluntary groups it is best if each person has the opportunity to communicate with every other person in the group, including the leader.

Schematically this pattern of communication would appear as in Fig. 2.

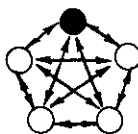


Fig. 2

Research has proven that when the above pattern of communication is used:

1. Hostility in the group will be at a minimum.
2. Cohesion of group members will be higher.
3. Decisions will reflect the consensus of the group.
4. The group will continue to be productive even if the leader is absent.
5. Productivity or effectiveness of the group will be higher.

The implication for the leader should be clear. The decisions must reflect the consensus of the members. Thus, opportunity must be provided for two-way communication between each member and every other member in the group.

An interesting test for the leader is to ask himself, "What will the group accomplish if I'm absent?" If the answer is the group will continue to function and get things done the leader can pat himself on the back for developing an effective organization.

Those factors which determine the effectiveness of the communication process itself are discussed in a separate bulletin entitled, "Communication and the Role of the Leader".¹

Roles for Productivity

In order for any group to be productive certain jobs or roles must be performed by the group members. Three categories of roles which may be observed in a group are: (1) task roles, (2) maintenance roles, and (3) individual roles.

Task roles such as information giving, information seeking, initiating ideas and summarizing ideas are related to achieving the goals of the group.

Maintenance roles are aimed at maintaining the cohesion of the group. This may call for harmonizing a strained relationship or encouraging participation of certain members. These roles are necessary to keep tension in the group to a minimum. It is only when tension between members is low that the group is effective in achieving its purpose.

¹ Hobbs, Daryl and Ronald Powers, "Communication and the Role of the Leader," Soc. 2, Cooperative Extension Service, ISU, Ames, 1962.

Individual roles are detrimental to group productivity. These roles are played by members in an attempt to meet their own psychological needs. If these needs, such as recognition, are not met by the group, the individual will attempt to gain recognition in a variety of ways. He may block the progress of the group by attacking every idea presented. He may "anecdote" to build up his own ego even though there is no relationship to the problem which the group is solving.

Leaders and group members who understand these three types of roles which are collectively referred to as "group member roles" can use this understanding to increase group effectiveness.

Since this factor is of major importance to group performance a separate publication has been devoted to it. For a complete discussion of these roles and the implications of them for the leaders see the bulletin entitled, "Group Member Roles and Group Effectiveness".²

Group Identity

Most observers would include group identity as a factor which determines the effectiveness of groups. Group identity means the amount of "we-feeling" present in a group. Strong we-feeling would indicate that each member feels it is the group which is important. Consequently, he would be willing to make some sacrifices for the "good of the cause." Plainly stated, strong group identity suggests that each member is committed to the goals of the group and identifies them as goals which he is willing to work for.

The relationship between group goals, individual needs (goals) and group identity should be clear. If the goals of the group satisfy the individual's needs strong group identity is likely. If the group does not meet the needs of the individual it is likely that there will be low group identity. In the first case group effectiveness is potentially high; in the second case it would be low.

The implication for the leader is to make sure that the individual understands exactly what the goals of the group are. For if the individual understands these goals and they parallel his own goals or needs the chances for strong identification are high.

When a person strongly identifies with a group he is likely to want to take part in the group's activities. Furthermore, he will be a walking advertisement to solicit additional membership.

² Powers, Ronald and Daryl Hobbs, "Group Member Roles and Group Effectiveness," Soc. 3, Cooperative Extension Service, ISU, Ames, 1962.

Group identity is also promoted by the use of badges, pins, coats-of-arms, decals and certain rituals. These contribute to solidarity, but unless needs are met through the group, identification or participation will not be maintained.

Heterogeneity

Will a group be more effective if all members are alike or if they are different? We have said that one of the conditions for group formation is similarities of interests, experiences and goals. From this it would seem that the question of differences is irrelevant.

When we observe a group, though, we find many differences. There are differences in values, in skills, in education and in experiences. These differences can be an advantage if they are taken into account.

The leader can play an important role by evaluating these differences. Then as certain tasks need to be performed, match the job to the person on the basis of these differences rather than some other criterion such as, "It's his turn."

Group effectiveness can be improved if differences are used to advantage rather than ignored.

Social Control

Social control is the method of getting members to conform to the standards of the group. The techniques of obtaining conformity are many and varied depending upon the group. Rewards and penalties are two techniques of social control.

The purpose of social control is to maintain certain standards. The application of certain controls, such as rewards and penalties, is one way to maintain the standards over time. In addition, the use of rewards may meet some of the needs of individuals. The need for recognition is a case in point.

The leader is in the position to exercise social control. At first glance it would seem that the authoritarian approach is the way to control group members. But the advantages of social control within the democratic framework hold here as well as they do in other aspects of group action.

We have said that autocratic methods can lead to hostility and frustration of group members. The exercise of social control by autocratic methods is no different. Social control can only work as long as the group member identifies strongly with the group. If something is done to reduce this identity the individual is likely to withdraw psychologically and physically from the group situation.

In addition to formal sanctions, such as restricting the voting privilege, there are often informal sanctions applied by the total group. An example is the "silent treatment" in closely knit groups.

Social control is more likely to be effective when a combination of several sanctions are brought to bear rather than one. In addition, a cardinal rule is that the sanctions must be accepted by the total group, not just by certain members.

Finally, perfect adherence to the rules is not likely. There will always be some degree of permitted deviation. The determination of when this degree has been violated is one of the difficult decisions for a leader. In the kinds of groups which we have been discussing it is likely that the leader should consider ways in which to reach group consensus on the action to be taken before meting out sanctions to individuals in the group.

Group Atmosphere

The atmosphere of the group is another factor which can determine the effectiveness of the group. Atmosphere is the mood, feeling or tone which is present in the group.

The physical setting of the group can affect the atmosphere. The size of the room in proportion to the size of the group should be considered. A rule of thumb is that it is better to have people standing up and crowded rather than seated in the middle of an auditorium several times larger than necessary.

The temperature of the room is also important. No doubt you have suffered through meetings in which it was either too hot or too cold. In either case, you probably kept wishing the meeting was over so you could get out of there.

The way in which the chairs and tables are arranged is also important. In most of the groups we are considering, the desire is to increase informality. One way to help accomplish this is to make the physical arrangement less formal.

The simple act of making sure each member knows every other member of the group can do much to generate a good atmosphere.

Each of the factors which increase group effectiveness contributes to the overall atmosphere. If each of these are considered along with the specifics mentioned above the chances for a good group atmosphere should be enhanced.

Summary

Many factors determine how effective a group is. Two general categories of these factors have been discussed here. We have referred to them as: (1) The group's environment or external forces and (2) Inside the group or internal forces.

Specific factors which were said to exist outside of the group and influence its effectiveness were:

- (1) The community value system.
- (2) Competition for members' time.
- (3) Prestige of the particular group in the community.
- (4) Relationship of parent organizations to the local group.

In general the leader and group members have little direct control over the degree to which these factors affect their group. It was pointed out, however, that the degree to which these factors become important is related to internal factors such as group identity, communication patterns and leadership patterns. For example, if the group is meeting the needs of the members the problem of competition for time is less likely to be a problem.

The leader should be sensitive to the community value system, the current standing of his group in the community and the relationship to parent groups, if they exist. Such sensitivity will allow the leader to raise pertinent questions about actions proposed by the group.

The things which have the greatest effect on the group are forces within the group which are subject to change by the group. Those discussed were:

- (1) Group Goals
- (2) Group Means
- (3) Communication Patterns
- (4) Roles for Productivity
- (5) Group Identity
- (6) Heterogeneity

(7) Social Control

(8) Group Atmosphere

Implicit in all of these were the advantages of democratic leadership in voluntary groups. The results of using democratic procedures were listed under the discussion of communication patterns. As a rule the group will be more productive and members will be more satisfied with their group experiences.

Suggestions for the leader were made under each factor. Certainly the list of alternatives for solving specific group problems was not exhausted.

If leaders who have read this publication gain one insight, the effort will have been worthwhile. That is, that the problems of group effectiveness or productivity are not only faults of the members but of the entire group, including the leader. Likewise, the solution of these problems is not an exclusive right of the leader only, but once again, of the entire group.

If the principles of democratic action are followed and each of the above internal and external factors taken into account, the problems of achieving group effectiveness will diminish.

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