

WORKING TOGETHER

PART I: PARTNERSHIPS

By Pat Corcoran

INTRODUCTION

Watershed groups are voluntary organizations made up of people with a wide variety of backgrounds and interests. Whether your group is called a watershed council, association, or coalition, members share a common interest in improving the ecological health of your watershed.

A watershed group is a diverse collection of people with a particular or common interest. This kind of group is described most accurately by the term partnership. Watershed groups generally have an open membership (allowing people to come and go as they please) and voluntary nature that make them similar than other groups such as church groups or service groups.

This section will provide you with a basic understanding of partnerships. It is the first part of the chapter on Working Together. It highlights some of the unique aspects of watershed groups and points out how they can be formed and sustained successfully.

In this part, we'll speak as if you were starting a partnership from scratch. In practice, most groups already are involved in some kind of partnerships. If that's the case with your group, you'll still find lots of ideas here to help you.

Other parts in this section build on this understanding of voluntary partnerships and are full of tips and skill-building exercises for increasing group effectiveness. Part II "Group Structure, Mission, and Goals," provides more specifics on organizational structures that can be used for your group, roles and responsibilities of members, and how to establish group vision and goals. Part III discusses decision making. Part IV discusses stumbling blocks to working together and possible solutions to them.

In this section you will learn about:

- ❖ What a partnership is and the value of forming one.
- ❖ Characteristics of successful partnerships.
- ❖ Key elements to consider when forming a partnership.
- ❖ The importance of a shared vision and measurable goals.

WHAT IS A PARTNERSHIP?

A partnership involves two or more parties working together to achieve common interests and goals. A partnership implies a willingness to collaborate with others to reach common goals, without giving up your own identity or personal interests. For watershed groups, it means a good-faith attempt to work together to enhance and restore healthy watersheds. It's an acknowledgment that cooperation may be the best strategy for getting things done.

The following list includes some examples of partnerships. This list includes business groups, government agencies, educators, and of course, watershed-focused partnerships:

- ☂ East Maui Watershed Partnership:
<http://www.eastmauiwatershed.org/>
- ☂ Potomac Watershed Partnership:
<http://www.potomacwatershed.net/>
- ☂ Valley Forward:
<http://www.valleyforward.org/main.htm>
- ☂ Arts Education partnership:
<http://aep-arts.org/>
- ☂ Southwest Strategy:
<http://www.swstrategy.org/>

Partnership members agree to set and follow certain guidelines in order to work together successfully. All groups, especially diverse groups, experience a certain level of frustration. However, people who share a common interest and goodwill—people in partnerships—spend the maximum amount of time and energy tackling problems.

WHY WORK TOGETHER?

With something as complex as a watershed, nobody can know everything. Partnerships add value to watershed restoration efforts by drawing on the expertise of a variety of people who know the watershed in different ways. Partnerships operate with the understanding that everyone has a piece of the truth. It often takes awhile to find out what each person's piece of the truth is, but with effort, the pieces fall into place. Involving a wide variety of people also multiplies the group's creativity since a wider variety of solutions can be generated. It also multiplies the groups ability to apply for funding.

The voluntary nature of these groups means people must choose to roll up their sleeves and implement projects. A key concept in the management of volunteers is that of ownership. If people are involved in selecting a project, they're more likely to have ownership of the project and are more likely to help implement it.

Furthermore, broad local involvement increases the likelihood that projects will be accepted and supported over the long haul. This support is critical given the time needed to show results of ecological enhancement. Skillfully maintained partnerships increase citizens' personal sense of responsibility, involvement, and commitment.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIPS

Given the great variety of partnerships, it helps to know what distinguishes a successful partnership from an unsuccessful one. As you look at the following list, you may think, "Our group doesn't have these characteristics, so we can't be a successful partnership." Keep in mind, however, that

we all operate under less-than-ideal circumstances. Your group can succeed as long as you identify what you need to do to improve the partnership. It takes effort. The following characteristics of successful partnerships are adapted from the Partnership Handbook (1995) by Ann Moote:

- ☂ Broad membership—A common guideline for partnerships is to involve everyone. Typical partners in watershed groups include government agencies, nonprofit organizations, professional societies, corporations, landowners, and private citizens.
- ☂ Local knowledge—Partnerships enhance stewardship and watershed health by drawing on the expertise of a wide range of individuals and groups who live in and intimately know the resource base and the local economy. No single individual, agency, or organization can do the job alone.
- ☂ Effective communication—Partnerships use communication to solve problems and reach agreements. Effective communication improves everyone's understanding of the issues and of each other's needs and concerns, thereby reducing conflict. See Part IV on stumbling blocks.
- ☂ Common vision—By generating a commonly shared vision, partnerships build long-term support that can improve project implementation. For watershed groups, this vision relates to the future of natural resources and local communities. Part II, "Choosing Your Group's Structure, Mission, and Goals," talks more about this topic.
- ☂ Collaborative decision making—Decisions usually are made by consensus to ensure that everyone's needs and concerns are addressed. In this way, partnership groups often come up with more creative and generally acceptable decisions than they would if only a few people were involved in making decisions. See Part III "Decision Making," for more information on effective decision-making methods.

- ☂ Pooled resources—Partnerships improve on-the-ground management by pooling resources of several organizations, agencies, and individuals. Pooling resources provides various benefits; for example, volunteer involvement may increase, and there may be a broader base of financial support.

CHARACTERISTICS OF UNSUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIPS

You also can learn from unsuccessful partnerships. Again, seeing characteristics of your group on this list doesn't mean you're doomed to failure. It does mean that you'll need to bring up these issues and address them openly and honestly in order to resolve them. Here are some characteristics of unsuccessful partnerships (also from the Partnership Handbook):

- ☂ Conflict among key interests remains unresolved.
- ☂ The group has no clear purpose.
- ☂ Goals or deadlines are unrealistic.
- ☂ Key interests or decision makers aren't included or refuse to participate.
- ☂ Not all participants stand to benefit from the partnership.
- ☂ Some members stand to benefit considerably more than others.
- ☂ Some members have more power than others.
- ☂ The partnership isn't needed because one entity could achieve the goals alone.
- ☂ Financial and time commitments outweigh potential benefits.
- ☂ Members are uncomfortable with the commitments required.
- ☂ Constitutional issues or legal precedents constrain the partnership.

KEY ELEMENTS IN FORMING AND SUSTAINING SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships are relationships, and all relationships require effort to sustain openness and effective communication. Relationships don't just happen; you have to work at them.

Sustaining partnerships requires basic relationship skills and more. By looking at Moote's lists, we can conclude that successful partnerships have three key ingredients—collective involvement, shared vision, and measurable goals. Conversely, partnerships aren't successful when membership is rigged or one-sided, members don't actively seek common ground, or goals are fuzzy. Let's look at each of these factors more closely.

Collective Involvement

Watershed groups are primarily voluntary groups and therefore require voluntary involvement. Of course, the nature of most partnerships means that the work is done voluntarily and based on a participant's level of ability or time. There is plenty of work for anyone interested, but it takes effort to synchronize each contribution in a way that supports the goals of the group.

There is a tendency to want to have a small group of decision makers tell a large group of workers what to do. This approach is efficient from a manager's perspective, but it seldom works with volunteers. You can't expect people to volunteer to implement ideas that they haven't been part of developing. In keeping with the adage "go slow to go fast," it's important to involve as many future implementers as possible right from the beginning.

If you're just starting a group, you will need to identify potential participants. In addition to the typical folks likely to be involved in your group, think about people who can interpret the various systems involved in the watershed (for example, ecological systems, economic systems, community and political systems).

Also consider some important “types” of participants. They may be from any field but have certain characteristics that serve the group. Examples include champions, sponsors, catalysts, doers, and youth.

Champions choose issues that are personally meaningful. They are willing to do battle for the collective interests of the group. Sponsors provide direct support to the group. They advocate, promote, assist, and further the goals of the group in many ways. Catalysts are initiators and prodders. They make things happen by their energy, integrity, and the force of their will. Doers get things done. They often work behind the scenes and are the backbone of any volunteer group.

Youth can be a phenomenal asset to your group. Young people have a fresh view of the world, lots of energy and ideas, and a huge stake in the outcomes of the group. Youth activities are a large component of family and community life. Youth involved in restoration work can extend commitment throughout the community.

At some point, you’ll need to generate a list of all major groups, landowners, and other people interested in or affected by watershed issues in your area. Then consider the issues your group will address. Who could be affected (both positively and negatively) by stewardship decisions of the group? Add these names to your list. When contacting potential participants, ask them to identify other people they think should be invited to participate. It often is easier to get people involved when they know they’ve been referred by someone they trust.

The following list (also from the Partnership Handbook) identifies some of the types of groups and individuals typically represented in watershed partnership groups:

- ☛ Landowners
- ☛ Community organizations, citizen groups, and informal community leaders
- ☛ Local elected officials, chambers of commerce, and elected civic representatives

- ☛ Representatives from state and federal environmental, natural resource, and land management agencies
- ☛ Local agencies such as municipal and county agencies, conservation districts, and planning commissions
- ☛ Native American tribes and communities
- ☛ Environmental and conservation groups (both local and national)
- ☛ Financial institutions, commercial agriculture, industry, and professional organizations
- ☛ Individual citizens
- ☛ Young citizens

As your group develops, continuously monitor group participation. Ask yourselves which new groups or individuals might be recruited into the partnership. Always look to include new stakeholders who might otherwise be excluded.

ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION

Getting all potentially affected groups and individuals to participate requires more than simply announcing meetings. You’ll need to use various forms of communication and education available. Some tips (from the Partnership Handbook) include:

- ☛ Use the media both to announce ongoing events and to publicize special activities.
- ☛ Use peer-to-peer networking. Have members call or visit neighbors, colleagues, and others who may have an interest in or be affected by your group’s activities.
- ☛ Use field or site visits to make the issues tangible and build enthusiasm.
- ☛ Use newsletters and brochures to advertise your partnership’s efforts.
- ☛ Work through local schools to educate the public about partnership goals and activities.
- ☛ Consider innovative outreach methods such as photography, music, art, dance, and theater to publicize the partnership.

In order to encourage broad participation, try appealing to people's sense of stewardship, citizenship, and service. It is challenging to recruit all of the people your group needs to step up and volunteer for your partnership. Demonstrate how the problem you're addressing affects different groups and how each person can make a unique contribution to the solution.

MAINTAINING PARTICIPATION

Participants can get overwhelmed and overcommitted at times. It takes some additional—often forgotten—work to keep from losing people. Use the following tips (from the *Partnership Handbook*) to motivate participants and maintain enthusiasm:

- ☛ Start with small, manageable projects that are likely to be successful.
- ☛ Document and celebrate success.
- ☛ Use on-the-ground projects to give participants a sense that they are making a difference.
- ☛ Use positive feedback, recognition, and rewards as incentives for continued participation.
- ☛ Maintain a stable structure to reassure members that the partnership is accountable to them, and that something will get done.
- ☛ Offer opportunities to participate at different levels (regularly, occasionally, professionally, etc.).
- ☛ Build on sources of community pride.
- ☛ Make explicit what member organizations and individuals stand to gain; identify specific benefits.
- ☛ Demonstrate that these benefits will offset any loss of autonomy participants might experience.
- ☛ Continually revisit and stress successes and achievements.
- ☛ Make it fun—for example, provide refreshments at meetings, or plan social events.

ECONOMIC INCENTIVES

Current land-use and management practices exist not only within a complex ecological web, but also within an equally complex web of economic practices and incentives. These economic factors include everything from the interests of global investors with a corporate presence in the watershed, to state tax incentives for businesses and individuals, to local land-use ordinances and water and sewer prices.

When you think of economic incentives for changing practices, it's easy to focus quickly on the most visible symptom of the underlying condition. For example, you could rightly say that farmers, ranchers, and loggers should receive compensation for lost production due to changes in management practices. But someone else could rightly say, "What about recreationists?" Another person might say, "What about the public, who is paying more for water treatment and receiving less quality of life in terms of clean water and healthy wildlife?" And an important question not often asked is, "What is the cost of doing nothing?"

A very complex web indeed. Nonetheless, if you want landowners to change their stewardship practices voluntarily, you must help philosophically willing landowners find economic incentives to do so. Short of that, at least try to find ways to offset the financial disincentives of good stewardship.

Watershed groups need to be creative in providing economic incentives to those who want to change their stewardship practices in ways the group supports. Time-tested means include organizing work parties to do on-the-ground work and providing public recognition for voluntary efforts of landowners or managers. Larger scale efforts might include providing specific technical expertise, or helping people find available cost-share programs or appropriate tax incentives.

The most difficult economic issue may be making up lost income if production declines as a result of changes in management. One way to offset this loss is to increase the value of the remaining yield. Marketing the

product as being produced in an “environmentally friendly” manner can appeal to customers. The existing Salmon Safe program is an example (see the Resources section).

Another way to level the playing field is for all producers to employ the preferred practices. Industry associations can play an important role in helping all producers be successful in a new stewardship model of production. Alternatively, citizens can lobby for economic incentives that support preferred practices across the board.

CONTRACTING FOR SERVICES

While watershed groups tend to be voluntary partnerships, project implementation may require outside help. Despite broad membership in your group, you may need to look for skilled labor, scientific expertise, or special equipment. Contracting for professional services can be an involved process. Important issues to consider are the legal responsibilities of entering a contract and liability for injury or property damage. Someone in the group may have experience in contracting, or you may find help by talking to other watershed groups or similar organizations.






Contracting for stewardship services can be an important way to help local residents build skills and earn income. Restoration work often employs traditional skills and technologies in a new way. The opportunity (and challenge) lies in matching local labor with local restoration work. Sometimes the desire to implement projects quickly results in hiring non-local firms that have done this kind of work before. While this gets the job done in the short term, it misses the opportunity to develop these skills locally and help people find new careers in this field.

Whether your contractor is local or not, the key is to find the right one for you, your project, and your budget. When investigating firms, ask how their prior experience relates to your specific project. A successful project in one ecosystem may not transfer to another. Ask to see sites where potential contractors have worked in the past. Show them your project site and ask how it is

similar to and different from others where they have worked. Follow up by calling prior customers to see how happy they were with the firm.

If you still feel comfortable with the firm, request a proposal that includes an outline of the work to be done, a schedule highlighting various phases of work, start and completion dates, and a detailed budget for personnel, equipment, and materials. Once a contractor is hired and the work begins, ask for regular status reports describing the work completed, current schedule, and costs to date. A project can be considered a success only when your needs and objectives are met.

A variety of local sources can help you with contracting. They include:

-  Other watershed groups who have used contractors before
-  The Small Business Development Center (SBDC) at your local community college
-  Your local Natural Resource Conservation and Development Council (RC&D)
-  The local provider for the federal Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) program
-  Your local Soil and Water Conservation District

SHARED VISION

The most important element of any partnership with diverse membership is its shared vision—the basic reason why the group has formed. When times get frustrating, the vision serves as a positive affirmation of the group’s hopes.

It’s easy to forget the common vision during moments of controversy. During conflict, members often identify with the organization they represent rather than with the partnership. The vision can remind people of their common values and bring the conversation back to a more productive tone.

It's important for your group to revisit its vision during times of relative calm. Annual group exercises that restate common interests and update the group's vision statement are a good idea. Some groups find it useful to incorporate their vision statement into their letterhead and group mailings.

MEASURABLE GOALS



Your partnership will need to document and communicate its progress. Establishing clear goals and objectives makes it easier to measure progress toward them. There are many ways to establish goals and objectives. The method discussed in "Choosing Your Group's Structure, Mission, and Goals," is one effective method of goal setting.

Goal-setting typically occurs after a group articulates its vision, which sets the context for subsequent goals and objectives. While there is one vision, there can be several goals, many objectives, and scores of tasks. The language used to identify goals, objectives, and tasks must be increasingly specific. The more specifically stated the objective, the easier it is to measure whether you're making progress toward it.




Reprinted with permission from: Oregon State University Extension Service publication EM 8714, Watershed Stewardship: A Learning Guide (Oregon State University, Corvallis, Oregon, new July 1998, revised January 2002), 485 pp. \$42.00.

AN EXERCISE

Reflect on your experience with other, more homogenous, groups (for example, a commodity group, agency, or environmental group). Compare that experience with your experience in the watershed group and answer the following questions:

-  How does a diverse partnership such as a watershed group make participation in the group more difficult?
-  What outcomes can a diverse partnership achieve that can't be achieved by a homogenous group?

Next, evaluate your watershed group in terms of the ideals for a successful partnership:

-  How does it currently measure up to the goal of collective involvement?
-  How often do you review and articulate your common vision?
-  Could an outsider to your group look at the stated goals and objectives and see how they will be measured?



WORKING TOGETHER

PART II: GROUP STRUCTURE, MISSION & GOALS

By Viviane Simon-Brown

INTRODUCTION

This chapter contains some of the best-kept secrets for creating and sustaining successful watershed groups. Being clear about your group's organizational structure, roles, responsibilities, mission, and goals can make a big difference in how successful your group is.

Organizational structure means the pattern of relationships within the group. It may include hierarchy (who's in charge) and roles and responsibilities (who does what), but it also incorporates people's attitudes and perceptions, the quality of what is produced, the way decisions are made, and hundreds of other factors. The most effective structures are built out of conscious choices. They frame how we do business.

Few citizen groups spend time on this subject at first. They're too busy working on their project and getting things organized. But sooner or later, the initial excitement wears off, and the bothersome little details take on immense importance.

If your watershed group is just starting, use this part and Part I to help you form its basic framework. If your group has been in existence for quite awhile, it's not too late to step back and reassess your structure and mission.

Being clear about your mission also is important. Many groups have trouble identifying their mission. And if two of you from the same group don't say the same thing, the problem is even worse.

In this section you will learn about:

- ❖ Why organizational structure is important.
- ❖ The characteristics of six typical organizational structures in America.
- ❖ How to be clear about your group's vision, mission, and goals.
- ❖ The roles and responsibilities of all of the players in your watershed group.
- ❖ What to do when things go wrong (or right).

VISION, MISSION, & GOALS

Quick, answer this question: "What is our group's mission?"

If it takes longer than 30 seconds to explain clearly what your group does, you've got a problem. And if two of you from the same group don't say the same thing, the problem is even worse. It's important to define your vision, mission, and goals *before* you get into the details of who does what. (We'll discuss roles and responsibilities later in this section.)

Many groups have trouble identifying their mission. Part of the problem is vocabulary. You probably hear the words "vision," "mission," and "goals" all the time. Are you ever confused about which is which, or wonder why it matters? This section will explain these terms.

Vision expresses the ideal future, what life would be like in the best of all possible worlds. Linda Marks, in *Living with Vision*, states, "Vision is the foundation on which we create what really matters for ourselves, for others and for humanity."

“A world without hunger” is a vision. It’s powerful. You can see it. Is it attainable? Only if many people share the same vision. Is it worth working toward? Absolutely! Using this definition, your watershed group’s vision is the world you’re striving for. Remember what you read in Part I: successful partnerships are supported by commonly shared vision.

Missions are much more practical than visions. What’s the responsibility your organization is willing to shoulder to attain its vision? If a group’s vision is a world without hunger, it has lots of choices for a mission. It could choose to “provide healthy dinners for transients in the community,” “raise funds for overseas famine relief,” or “advocate for the preservation of family farms.”

The environmental, social, and economic issues we face are so overwhelming that most groups try to take on more than they can handle. Keep MinitLube’s motto in mind: “Other companies want to change the world. All we want to do is change your oil.” Take the time to narrow your focus. Your group will do a better job.

To be successful, all organizations need to articulate their *values* and *operating principles*. They are intertwined, underpinning everything we do (Figure 7). They tell the world who we are and how we go about our business.

We have personal values, such as “I want to be healthy; therefore I choose to not smoke,” “I value good education for my children, so I volunteer in their school,” or “I have an obligation to help those less fortunate.” In our work life, we live with a set of professional values. One of the best known is the physician’s Hippocratic Oath (in part, “First, do no harm”), but the rest of us have values too. We also have constitutional values, for example, to obey our nation’s laws and to pay taxes. (Values, like consciences, aren’t always fun.)

Groups often get into trouble when individuals superimpose their personal values onto the values of the organization, another example of mixing and matching. No matter what your values are about abortion, gun control, old-growth forests, or

the myriad other value-laden issues we face, you should be clear about the values you bring to the watershed group, and recognize that your personal values are not the same as the group’s values.

Because it’s so easy to confuse personal values with group values, it’s important to recognize diverse personal values, and to agree on the values your group shares in working toward your mission.

The best organizations define their value systems. These values become the foundation upon which all of their resources are built. Peters and Waterman, in *Search for Excellence*, say it best: “. . .we were asked for one all-purpose bit of advice for management, one truth that we were able to distill from the excellent companies’ research. We might be tempted to reply, ‘Figure out your value system. Decide what your company stands for. . . .’”

What does your group stand for? What kind of people are you? Continuing the food example, one value that would greatly affect how the group does business would be: “We believe that everyone deserves a good, hot meal in pleasant surroundings at least once a day.”

Action plans are the goals, objectives, and benchmarks your organization pursues to achieve your mission. Planning must come before action! Consider Abraham Lincoln’s words of wisdom, “If I had an hour to cut down a tree, I’d spend the first 45 minutes sharpening my ax.”

Racing to action seems to be a national value. It’s hard for groups to slow down enough to know where they’re going. A good action plan helps you slow down and go in the right direction.

Goals are specific, straightforward statements of expectations. One goal of our food group might be to establish a permanent location for storing and preparing food and serving meals.

Goals can be relatively short-term, for example 1 year, or ongoing, depending on their complexity. The hardest thing about goals is selecting which ones to go for first.

And remember, the greatest deterrent to meeting your goals is not having any!

Objectives are specific steps you'll take to achieve the goal. Sometimes they're even called actions, but objectives usually are broader than actions. The important thing is that these are tangible steps. To achieve the goal of a permanent location, the food group might agree to "contact other providers to explore purchasing and renovating the old armory." This is a very focused, specific objective. Objectives often are described as being measurable.

Benchmarks or *outcomes* are measures of success. Our food group might choose the benchmark "have identified three to five potential partners." When they achieve that benchmark, they can celebrate, check it off the list, and move on to the next task.

Evaluations and *assessments* are ways to measure what your group has accomplished. Let's hope you have more to show for your efforts than attending meetings! To evaluate your progress, benchmarks come in handy.

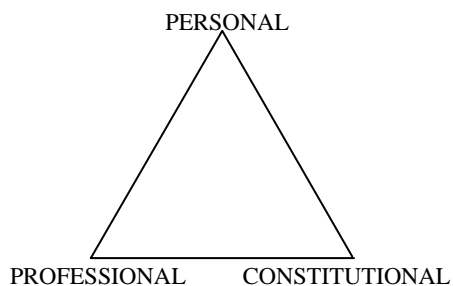


Figure 7. Our personal, professional, and constitutional values interact to define how we relate to the world.

Of course, you'll ask people who are directly involved with your group to assess its efforts, but also make sure to ask people with no direct connection to your activities. For your efforts to succeed, as many people as possible need to support them. Here's one sure way to know you're on the right track: If people are clamoring to be on your committee, obviously you've got a winner!

WHY IS ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE IMPORTANT?

Many organizational problems arise when: (1) the group didn't choose an organizational structure in the first place, or (2) they mixed and matched components from different structures.

Designing a flexible, informal matrix-type organization and then using Robert's Rules of Order, for example, creates confusion. It's like wearing a wool hat, mittens, and a down parka with shorts and sandals. They're all right clothing and they all can be effective in the right season, but together they just don't do the job!

As you read about various types of organizational structure in this chapter, step back and look at your local watershed group. Which model does it fit? Many watershed groups use parts of Model 4 (matrix), Model 5 (project organization), and Model 6 (organic). They also use Robert's Rules of Order and consensus decision making in the same meetings.

Acknowledging what you have now is the first step. The next, more important, step is to answer: "What would we like our organizational structure to be 18 months from now?" The third step is to identify what actions your group is willing to take to get there.

Ask yourselves this question: "Is our group a *governing* group, determining direction (goals), focusing on long-term outcomes, and legally responsible for its decisions? Or, is it *advisory*, meaning we can recommend, suggest, and advise, but have no legal authority?"

County commissions are examples of governing groups. Jack Ward Thomas' Blue Ribbon panel, which analyzed the spotted owl issue a few years ago, was an advisory committee. It gave its opinions to a decision-making body, which chose to implement most of the recommendations in the report. If you aren't sure which category your group fits, don't make another move until you talk it over. You may have major problems later if the group's intent isn't clear.

TYPES OF ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES

Gareth Morgan, an authority on organizational theory, wrote: “An organization’s structure strongly affects its ability to handle change. Though organizations can and do evolve, the transformation process is extremely difficult—and the required change is more than structural—it’s cultural and political as well” (*Creative Organizational Theory*).

The following six models are typical organizational structures in the United States. Each works effectively in particular situations; each has disadvantages. It’s easy to dismiss the more traditional structures as archaic. But when your house is on fire, you want a fire department with a clear chain of command and a plan for every contingency, not one trying to decide by consensus what to do next!

MODEL 1: THE RIGID ORGANIZATION

Fire departments and the military are obvious examples of rigid organizational structure. If you watch the *Star Trek* series, you’ll recognize the Borg as consummate rigid organizationalists.

This structure is organized for stability, and its focus is on maintaining the system. Even the terminology comes from military culture—battle readiness, moving up through the ranks, chain of command. Decisions generally are made by the top people, with rank-and-file members implementing rules, laws, and regulations that they don’t have authority to change (Figure 1).

This organizational structure depends on two factors for success—strict control and an environment that is ultra-stable. Its nemesis is change. Contingencies are planned for; there are few or preferably no surprises. Moving quickly to handle never-

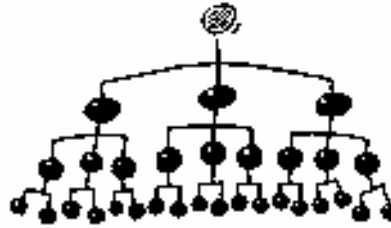


Figure 1. Rigid organization model.

before-encountered situations is almost impossible.

MODEL 2: SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

This model is similar to the first. It requires a stable environment. Standardization is important. In this kind of organization, you hear people say things such as, “Did you submit your request on an SF153-G form?”

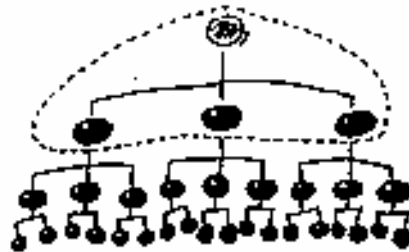


Figure 2. Senior management team model.

This model does expand authority for policy decisions to a senior management team. If there is disagreement on an issue, the decision is put to a vote using Robert’s Rules of Order, and the majority wins. In this kind of organization, everyone knows what his or her job is and isn’t. Authority is clearly defined by a chain of command (Figure 2).

The biggest corporate conglomerates of the 1950s and 1960s exemplified this model. Banks and some federal agencies still use it today. The major disadvantages are the inherent inability to change and the lack of recognition of the decision-making abilities of employees.

MODEL 3: PROJECT TEAMS AND TASK FORCES

The project team and task force model was developed as a way to respond to major change. Its official beginning was the Manhattan Project, in which government and private industry scientists joined forces in the early 1940s to develop the atom bomb. The focus changed from maintaining existing systems to improving them to handle new and specific problems.

In this model, teams of people from different organizations work together toward a specific goal (Figure 3). While Robert's Rules of Order are not as rigorously enforced as in the senior management team model, majority voting is the norm. Since this model derives from models 1 and 2, it carries their cultural values.

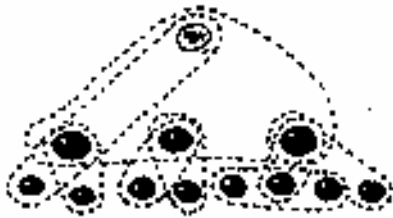


Figure 3. Project team model.

Although widely used today—United Way's Loaned Executive program is a prime example—this model has several disadvantages. Participants maintain their primary loyalty to their own sponsoring organizations. Since their paychecks still come from their employers, they know their priorities. Generally, the team members have a lot of expertise but little real power. Problems are delegated upward through the chain of command.

MODEL 4: THE MATRIX ORGANIZATION

This model looks different! The matrix organization model is organized for flexibility and change, and it acknowledges that the environment is changing rapidly. Its focus is on the end product (Figure 4). This organizational structure encourages flexible,

innovative, and adaptive behaviors. It diffuses influence and control, with an informal method of coordination. Most decision making is by consensus. Ted Gaebler, coauthor of *Reinventing Government*, states that most of America's companies will use this model by 2005. The disadvantages are that the boundaries of responsibilities are less clear, and there are more people to connect with. And achieving real consensus takes time.

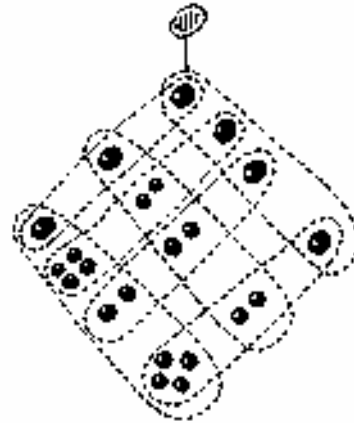


Figure 4. Matrix organization model.

Land's End catalog company is an excellent example of a matrix organization. Its employee teams determine direction and goals, and have authority as well as responsibility to solve problems creatively.

MODEL 5: THE PROJECT ORGANIZATION

When Boeing wanted to build the 777-model passenger jet, it selected a team, gave the team a budget and a nonnegotiable deadline, and said "make it so." The team's job was to create a prototype that flew, and they did. This was true outcome-based work!

In a project organizational structure, teams have free rein within clearly stated, agreed-upon parameters (Figure 5). Allegiance is to the project, not necessarily to the organization. All systems are designed to focus on the end product. Decisions are by consensus. Frequent cross-fertilization of ideas infuses the organization.

On the downside, there is more opportunity for miscommunication in this model simply because there's so much communication going on. It's harder to keep track of the process or to control its outcomes. If you're a control freak, this model might not be for you.

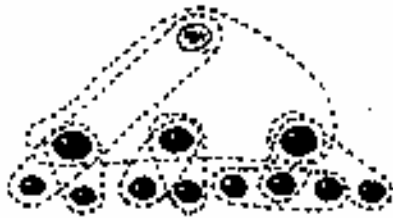


Figure 6. Project organizational model.

MODEL 6: ORGANIC NETWORK

This model is more of an open-ended system of ideas and activities than an entity with a clear structure and definable boundary. A core group of members sets a strategic direction, provides operational support, and then steps out of the way as others take over the idea and move it forward (Figure 6).

This model works in community action settings where the intent is to get people involved in making the community a better place to live. It provides the most flexibility and opportunity for spin-off organizations. The grassroots food co-ops of the 1960s epitomized this model.

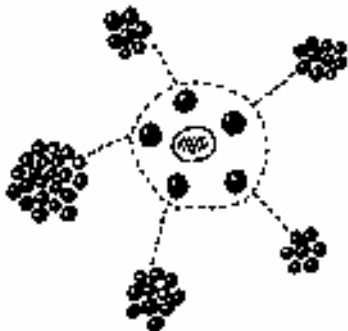


Figure 6. Organic organization model.

CONCLUSION

Organization is an important challenge for groups to tackle. It involves thinking clearly and strategically about the needs of the group, dealing with practical and sometimes philosophical ideas about power and control. It is important to think about organization as a process, not an end. Groups will change, partners will shift roles or leave. And overall the needs of an organization might shift—meaning it is important to develop an organization model that is open to change as well. Adaptability is an important key to success.

ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

Now that we've talked about organizational structure, mission, and goals, let's look at the responsibilities of watershed group members. Regardless of the organizational structure your group uses, each member has two distinct sets of roles and responsibilities—content and process. *Content* roles and responsibilities are **what** you do; *process* roles and responsibilities are **how** you do it.

The following is a general guide to the roles and responsibilities of the participants in watershed groups. After reading this section, you'll see that although roles and responsibilities are divided among group members for convenience, it is the whole group's responsibility to take care of the group. The next section will focus on this in greater detail.

A WATERSHED GROUP MEMBER:

- ☛ Advocates for the group's vision, mission, shared values, and goals (*content*)
- ☛ Maintains a holistic perspective (keeping long-range goals in mind while dealing with short-term tasks) to keep all members on track (*content* and *process*)
- ☛ Is a liaison between interested community citizens and group members (*content* and *process*)

- ☂ Helps create possible solutions (*content and process*)
- ☂ Arranges adequate time to carry out his or her group responsibilities (*process*)
- ☂ Listens to other group members and follows the rules of the group (*process*)
- ☂ Participates in group discussion and decision making (*content and process*)
- ☂ Serves on standing committees and appropriate ad hoc committees (*process*)
- ☂ Your group may choose to have an Executive Committee, which:
 - ☂ Includes two or three group members who can devote additional time to the group's work (*process*)
 - ☂ Is more big-picture oriented (*content*)
 - ☂ Reports back regularly to the full group (*content*)
 - ☂ Suggests items for consideration by the full group (*content*)
 - ☂ Ensures that it is not considered by outsiders as "THE Group".

GROUP CHAIR

Letting go of old assumptions is the hardest part of being the chairperson. We all remember when the chairperson "ran" the meeting, called for reports, kept everyone on task, made the decisions, and basically told group members what to do. The old job description for chairperson mixed content and process roles, combining the "what you do" with "how to do it."

But the assumption that group members share the responsibility for creating successful meetings eliminates the need for this duality. In fact, one of the biggest deterrents to group success can be a chair who isn't able to relinquish the process role.

So, what does an enlightened chair do? In addition to all the responsibilities of a group member, an effective chair does the following.

Before the meeting:

- ☂ Works hand-in-hand with the meeting manager to prepare and organize the meeting agenda.

During the meeting:

- ☂ Focuses on the content, ensuring that everything the group does moves the group closer to its goals.
- ☂ Embodies facilitative leadership.

Between meetings:

- ☂ Channels communications between staff/committees/members.
- ☂ Represents the group to the outside world.

STANDING OR LONG-TERM COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

- ☂ Focus on the steps needed to achieve a specific goal (*content and process*)
- ☂ Become informed about the overall process and content concerns of the group (*content and process*)
- ☂ Advocate for the group's vision, mission, shared values, and goals (*content*)
- ☂ Maintain a holistic perspective to keep members on track (*content*)
- ☂ Share useful committee information with the full group (*process*)

AD HOC OR SHORT-TERM COMMITTEES:

- ☂ Work on specific issues (ranging from one special event to setting up a complex collaboration with another group) (*content*)
- ☂ Include all affected constituencies (*process*) — Prioritizing and highlighting important things to know
- ☂ Providing background information as requested
- ☂ Providing objective analysis and recommendations on issues
- ☂ Offer technical assistance and logistical support

- ☂ Keep in close contact with colleagues in other agencies and organizations
- ☂ Take the lead in monitoring programs to determine their effectiveness
- ☂ Work together in a supportive and professional environment

If your group doesn't have staff, these responsibilities are shared by group members, often at the Executive Committee level.

WATERSHED GROUP STAFF

Some watershed groups will be fortunate or well funded enough for staff. Staff will often perform a variety of functions including:

- ☂ Manage the day-to-day operations in such a way that the group's goals are achieved.
- ☂ Perform all tasks delegated by the group.
- ☂ Keep group members informed by:
 - ❖ Having one member who acts as liaison to the full group (*process*)
 - ❖ Being aware of what the whole group is trying to accomplish (*content*).

WHO SHOULD NOT BE IN YOUR GROUP?

As you can see, every member of your group has important roles and responsibilities. Thus, a person who has no role to play shouldn't be a member of your group. Without a clearly defined role, a person isn't responsible for the success of the group. Neither do you want someone who is unwilling to play by the group's ground rules, or who sabotages group decisions.

WHEN THINGS GO WRONG

Every group goes sideways. While it would be nice to go from Point A to Point B in a straight line, that rarely happens. Generally, a mix of forward progress and detours can be expected. Consider how many times those "detours" actually get you to where you need to be.

The things that go wrong usually involve people problems or organizational difficulties. Part IV "Stumbling Blocks," discusses some common stumbling blocks that partnerships often face, and suggests some ways to avoid or overcome them. While the do-it-yourself approach works most of the time for community groups, when your group is in real crisis, it's time for an outside facilitator to help you refocus.

A group member could ask the same questions a facilitator would (What's our mission? What are our operating principles? What are the difficulties we face, and how can they be surmounted?), but an outsider is neutral, which makes all the difference in the world. The peace of mind a facilitator can bring is worth the investment.

WHEN THINGS GO RIGHT

It's so easy to focus on the negative that we have to make a conscious effort to celebrate the positive. People who have accomplished great things often say that at some point they were so discouraged that they were ready to give up, when, all of a sudden, they experienced one small, positive result that encouraged them to continue their efforts. Your group needs the same incentives. Take time to notice and cheer!

Reprinted with permission from: Oregon State University Extension Service publication EM 8714, Watershed Stewardship: A Learning Guide (Oregon State University, Corvallis, Oregon, new July 1998, revised January 2002), 485 pp. \$42.00.

WORKING TOGETHER

PART III: DECISION MAKING

By Pat Corcoran

INTRODUCTION

Most of our daily decisions are pretty automatic. When we need to make a decision, we very quickly measure the choices against our internalized personal values and interests. Typically, we then see a fairly obvious range of acceptable alternatives. We choose one and move on. We alone enjoy the benefits (or suffer the costs) of the decision.

We give up some of this autonomy when we become part of a group. What we gain in return is an ability to influence and add value to something larger—something that we care about but can't fully control ourselves.

Organizations of similar people pursuing similar interests often struggle with making decisions. When diverse groups of people are involved, the challenge is even greater. Nonetheless, the quality of your partnership is reflected in the quality of your decision making. A decision-making process that is clear, open, and understood will lead to better decisions.

This section addresses several issues facing groups when making decisions. The meetings management and communication skills will be discussed in the next section.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

It is critically important that your group agree on how it will make official decisions, and that your bylaws specify how those decisions are to be made. If the decision-making process is unclear, different people can leave a meeting with a different understanding of the decision. Conflicting

In this section you will learn about:

- ❖ The importance of your decision-making process
- ❖ How to document and track decisions
- ❖ Different ways to make decisions
- ❖ Using the consensus approach
- ❖ Robert's Rules of Order
- ❖ Decision making roles
- ❖ Two tips for making better decisions
- ❖ A framework for making big decisions
- ❖ Common pitfalls in decision making

pronouncements then are made, leading to confusion, mixed messages, and distrust among group members.

If there are official and nonofficial members, group bylaws and meeting protocols need to make that distinction clear. For example, some groups have an executive committee that has authority beyond that of the general membership. Similarly, technical teams may have the power to make decisions in their subgroup without endorsement by the general membership.

Member orientation packets (including bylaws, membership, officers, vision statement, etc.) can make these roles clear. Additionally, a one-page decision-making "flow chart" can be handed out at meetings to remind everyone how decisions are made. This reminder is especially useful for those who may not attend regularly.

DOCUMENTING & TRACKING DECISIONS

A common problem in groups is "discussing a decision to death" but not making a definitive decision. Often, the group's energy wanes before a decision is reached, again

leading people to different conclusions about the decision.

Whatever your decision-making process, you can manage this problem by using a flipchart dedicated to tracking decisions. When an issue comes up that warrants a formal decision, the meeting manager can instruct the recorder to write it on a flipchart visible to the group. The manager then determines whether the decision needs to be made immediately, deferred until later in the meeting, or saved for another meeting. Be sure to review decisions and non-decisions at the end of the meeting.

Include decisions and non-decisions in the minutes. The following is one possible ground rule: A decision isn't a decision until it is written down and entered into the minutes of the meeting. Make sure the entry in the minutes includes the following:

- ☛ The issue that needed to be decided
- ☛ Whether a decision was made at the meeting
- ☛ What the decision was
- ☛ Any necessary follow-up

When the meeting minutes are approved, documented decisions also are approved. Official documentation of decisions and leadership provides a way to track the implementation of decisions through time.

DIFFERENT WAYS GROUPS MAKE DECISIONS

There are many different ways individuals and groups make decisions. Most are appropriate for some decisions; none is appropriate for all decisions. It's important to select a decision-making process that is appropriate for the decision at hand. Listed below are six common ways groups make decisions and the limitations of each of these methods.

IMPULSIVE CHOICES

Sometimes we make decisions based on whatever feels right at the moment. This method lacks any thoughtful consideration of

how the choices relate to our key objectives and to other alternatives.

YES/NO CHOICES

When we phrase a choice as a yes/no question, it implies a choice between change and no change. There is no third option. This approach doesn't consider how the choices might affect the things that are important to us. It also eliminates consideration of other alternatives.

EITHER/OR CHOICES

These choices are similar to yes/no choices and have similar limitations. Also, we tend to structure either/or choices so that one alternative clearly is best. Then we collect information that supports that choice.

AUTOMATIC CHOICES

These choices are the crutches of noncritical thinkers. Examples include, "That's the way we've always done it," "Low bid wins," and "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." Such automatic behavior keeps us from looking at how the choices relate to what we value. They can keep us from making more appropriate choices.

"OBJECTIVE" CHOICES

"Letting the facts decide" gives more power to the people who collect the facts than to the people who have authority to make decisions. Unless the group's values are stated explicitly in the form of criteria for decision making, there is no guidance to the people who collect and interpret data. This approach also limits creativity and win/win alternatives and often leads to "analysis paralysis" because all of the data never are available.

WEIGHING PROS AND CONS

This is a more thoughtful approach, but still is overly simplistic and resembles yes/no and either/or choices. As in those approaches, the choices aren't weighed against values. This method implies that more than one alternative is being

considered (which is good), but creative “new” choices are unlikely to emerge.

To this list of specific ways people make decisions, Mosvick and Nelson add four general “approaches” to decision making: the authoritarian, majority, minority, and consensus approaches.

AUTHORITARIAN DECISIONS

In this method, a chairperson makes a final decision with minimal, if any, input from others. This method is fast, but rarely effective. It excludes valuable input from the people who will have to implement the decision.

MAJORITY DECISIONS

Voting is democratic and participative, but votes often are framed as either/or choices that oversimplify the issues.

MINORITY DECISIONS

In practice, majority rule often is distorted by two or three people who force a minority decision on the entire group. Persistent individuals can dominate the thinking of others and lobby for votes by appealing to factions in the group.

CONSENSUS DECISIONS

Consensus decisions are the easiest to implement because everybody affected agrees not to block the decision. The disadvantage is that this method is very time-consuming and is vulnerable to sabotage by ill-intended members.

USING THE CONSENSUS APPROACH

Many groups strive for consensus in their decisions; some are required to use it. Consensus typically is described as an agreement that all members can live with and support—or at least not sabotage—even if it is not everyone’s preferred decision. The protocols for coming to consensus vary widely. Consensus is an

approach for working through issues, and can be part of any decision-making method. The purpose of raising the standard of decisionmaking to consensus (instead of majority vote) is to encourage people to work *through* an issue rather than *around* it. It’s easy to avoid thinking seriously about the concerns of a minority when all you have to do is outvote them. Majority voting systems often create factions within the group and lead to power plays outside of meetings.

Deeper issues and fundamental interests emerge when people spend the time and effort trying to reach consensus. The group is forced to explore the assumptions and motivations behind each position. The key question to ask is, “What line of reasoning led you to your position?” This question seeks to identify people’s “interests” rather than their stated “positions.”

Groups often are surprised to find out how often supposedly “opposite” positions actually share many common interests. Decisions based on fundamental interests lead to solutions that everyone can support. A potential pitfall in trying to achieve a consensus decision is that you may end up with a “lowest common denominator” decision. The challenge of consensus decision making is to make decisions that incorporate the fundamental interests of everyone but still are worthwhile.

Frustration with consensus can result in a desire to institute a voting procedure, usually a “super majority” vote of some high percentage. Although this method is efficient, it is not always effective. Reverting to a vote reduces the imperative to get to the bottom of important issues and undermines the spirit of coming to consensus. A better solution is to develop good facilitation skills for achieving consensus (see below).

ROBERT’S RULES AND CONSENSUS DECISION MAKING

Most groups use some form of *parliamentary procedure* to run their meetings. Robert’s Rules of Order is the contemporary version of this ancient English

tradition (De Vries, 1994). The benefits of this method for managing meetings are its familiarity and use in many of the groups in which members are involved.

The down side to using Robert's Rules of Order in a consensus-based structure is its use of the majority vote for making decisions. Seeking consensus is the opposite of "voting." The point isn't to tabulate yea's and nay's, but to establish a consensus position on a motion. An initial "vote" gives the group a sense of how close it is to consensus, but mixing and matching processes can be confusing. See Part II, "Group Structure, Mission, and Goals" for more information.

The following approach can be used if your group blends Robert's Rules of Order with consensus decision making. Follow Robert's Rules through the "motion" step. Then, instead of asking for a vote, ask "can any official member not support this motion as stated?" If nobody speaks out, you have consensus. If any official member cannot support the decision, the meeting manager needs to assess whether to proceed with seeking consensus right then, postpone the decision, or see whether there is consensus not to make the decision. Whatever the decision, it needs to be documented in the minutes of the meeting.

THE ROLE OF THE MEETING MANAGER AND FACILITATOR

The job of the meeting manager is to run the meeting and make sure decisions get made. That is, to get the group through the agenda in the time available. It is a full-time job. When the group needs additional help with an issue, a facilitator can be very valuable.

Facilitators can be useful when the group moves from reporting and conducting general business to a more task-oriented situation such as decision making. These situations might include seeking consensus on a sticky topic, brainstorming lists of new ideas, prioritizing activities, mediating disputes among members, or going through a decision-making process.

The value of the facilitator is that he or she serves as the group disciplinarian. Once the group decides what they need to do and what the ground rules are for doing it, the facilitator holds them to it. It isn't always a popular job. Good facilitators develop skillful ways of helping groups be productive while maintaining civility and goodwill among members.

TWO IMPORTANT TIPS FOR MAKING BETTER DECISIONS

Many methods for problem solving and decision making are available to groups (Mosvick and Nelson). The book *Rural Resource Management* (Miller et al., 1994) offers a comprehensive framework and a clear process for making decisions. An important part of this method is that it checks the tendency to make hasty decisions.

Two important principles in this approach are: (1) separating *creative* thinking from *critical* thinking, and (2) establishing specific *criteria* for a good decision before coming up with a decision. Both techniques require people to make thoughtful decisions, not quick ones.

Creative thinking is the generation of ideas and solutions free from constraints. It lets you explore potentially better ways of doing things. Critical thinking is the challenging of ideas based on known constraints. It tests your creative ideas against reality. Both are essential to effective decision making.

For example, when brainstorming a list of ideas, facilitators ask that people not criticize any idea until after the brainstorming session. After brainstorming, all of the ideas are evaluated critically. This separation of creative thinking from critical thinking increases the range of possible solutions and then helps the group select wisely from that list. Criticizing ideas when they are offered stifles creativity and leads to "group think."

Establishing clear criteria for determining "what a good decision would look like" *before coming up with a decision* is critical to making sound choices among alternatives.

Criteria are “essential elements” that the group thinks need to be part of the final decision. Criteria are statements of values and key interests held by the group.

Identifying and refining criteria for decision making is similar to the consensus-building technique of focusing on people’s interests instead of their positions. When making complex decisions, the point is to first identify the elements that members think any good final decision must have. Sound decisions then are crafted according to key criteria shared by the group.

If groups spend adequate time agreeing on their criteria, adopting the final alternative is easy. This step is especially useful for groups that must use consensus.

A DECISION-MAKING FRAMEWORK

The decision-making framework at the left is a model for making important decisions on complex issues. The “deciding” in these cases actually is an extended form of problem solving.

After generating a few alternative solutions, the group decides which one is best under the circumstances. As business consultant Peter Drucker says, “A decision is. . . a choice between alternatives. It is rarely a choice between right and wrong. It is at best a choice between ‘almost right’ and ‘probably wrong.’”

The framework below incorporates a step-by-step process (in italics) that guides the sequence of your questions and answers in a way that helps separate creative idea generation from critical evaluation. It also forces the group to fully develop decision-making criteria before selecting an alternative.

Following this framework will lead to more thoughtful decisions. Probably the most important points are to generate more than one alternative and to compare the impact of alternatives on each criterion. These steps counter the tendency to jump to decisions.

COMMON PITFALLS IN DECISION MAKING

The decision-making approach described above takes discipline to put into practice. Unfortunately, many groups (especially those without facilitators) abandon the structured sequence once fast-paced interaction and conflict begin. Here are some common pitfalls that groups encounter and some tips for avoiding them (see Part IV, “Stumbling Blocks,” for more information):

☛ *Ignoring a full definition of the problem and moving immediately to a discussion of solutions.* Make sure you spend plenty of time exploring and defining all aspects of the problem so you can understand all of the implications of the alternative solutions.

☛ *Ignoring systematic analysis of the problem and paying attention only to the most current, dramatic, and controversial aspects of the problem.* Develop sound critical thinking skills and devote more time to understanding what caused the problem.

☛ *Ignoring the need to establish criteria or standards by which solutions will be evaluated.* Establish these criteria early in your deliberations, before solutions are discussed, in order to focus the discussion on relevant topics.

☛ *Concentrating solely on the quality of the decision while ignoring the need to gain group acceptance of the decision.* There usually are several equally good options from which to choose. Spend enough time selecting the option most acceptable to the group. You’ll find that this decision also is the one most likely to be implemented.

A DECISION-MAKING MODEL

What is the decision to be made?

- ☛ State the decision clearly.
- ☛ State the group's long-term goals and short-term objectives.
- ☛ Limit the scope of the decision to its essentials.

On what criteria will the decision be made?

- ☛ List all of the criteria the group thinks are essential.
- ☛ Refine the criteria. Group similar criteria, restate others for clarity, etc.
- ☛ Rank the criteria in order of importance.

What alternative courses of action exist?

- ☛ List several alternatives but do not evaluate them.
- ☛ Refine the alternatives.
- ☛ Review the list of criteria and the proposed alternatives.

What is the expected effect of each alternative on each criterion?

- ☛ For each alternative, go through the list of criteria.
- ☛ Discuss the likely impact of each alternative on every criterion.
- ☛ Record your opinions.

Which is the best alternative for each criterion?

- ☛ List each criterion.
- ☛ Identify the preferred alternative from the perspective of each criterion.
- ☛ Record your conclusions.

Which is the best alternative overall?

- ☛ Does one alternative meet all of the criteria?
- ☛ Does one alternative meet the highest ranked criterion?
- ☛ Is there a new alternative that can emerge from a short list of alternatives?

Reprinted with permission from: Oregon State University Extension Service publication EM 8714, Watershed Stewardship: A Learning Guide (Oregon State University, Corvallis, Oregon, new July 1998, revised January 2002), 485 pp. \$42.00.



WORKING TOGETHER

PART IV: STUMBLING BLOCKS

By Flaxen D.L. Conway

INTRODUCTION

Americans are independent people. Those who live and work in communities that are focused on natural resources are among the most strongly independent. Yet at times we need to work together to find solutions to issues facing our communities. Working in a group may not feel natural at first. But when we realize a task is bigger than anyone can do alone, we join together to get the job done.

Keep in mind that although the members of your watershed group share a common interest and commitment, they see things from a variety of perspectives and positions. Your group is bound to stumble from time to time. All groups do, and it's a normal part of the group development process.

Working together can be productive, creative, effective, and fun (believe it or not!) despite the unnatural way it feels or the challenges that come up. *The key is to realize that stumbling is normal and to not let the occasional stumbles derail your group's entire effort—the mission of understanding watersheds and making decisions for effective management and enhancement.*

In Parts I through III, you learned about creating successful partnerships, choosing an organizational structure, and making group decisions effectively. In each chapter, some common perils were introduced.

In this section, 10 of the most common stumbling blocks are described. If your group is running into problems, this section can help you identify exactly what the problem is and find solutions. In many cases, it refers you to another chapter for

In this section you will learn about:

- ❖ Ten stumbling blocks common to many groups.
- ❖ Key ways to overcome each of these stumbling blocks.
- ❖ Why stumbling happens.
- ❖ How to go with the flow and not give up.

more information and specific strategies to deal with the stumbling block.

#1—CONFLICT

Watershed groups and other groups are made up of people with many different ideas and feelings. Wherever people live and work together, conflict exists. In fact, a good definition of conflict is “a natural tension that arises from differences.”

One of the most common misperceptions or misunderstandings about conflict is that it always is a negative experience. In fact, conflict has at least three benefits: it produces energy, it can make you feel alive, and it can remind us of our interconnectedness. Ultimately, a conflict that is worked with and through can bring about very positive results.

The key to managing or transforming conflict is to understand and use three basic concepts:

1. The common causes of conflict are:

- ☂ Avoidance of conflict; most people, out of fear or habit, tend to change to be like the other
- ☂ Unwillingness to express feelings and thoughts directly or clearly
- ☂ Need to be right

☛ When you're involved in a conflict, ask yourself these questions:

- ❖ "Am I avoiding this conflict unnecessarily?" It might be easier in the long run to deal with the problem now, before it turns into something bigger.
- ❖ "Am I directly expressing how I feel or think?" Take a minute to stop, collect your thoughts, and share them clearly and directly with the individual or the group.
- ❖ "Is it really that important to me to be right?" Often we forget that both sides of a conflict might be right. A time of conflict is an important time to practice active listening and the principle "Everyone has a piece of the truth." By doing so, you may find out that others are as "right" in their truths as you are in yours!

2. Your personal history with conflict affects how you react to it.

Successfully managing conflict requires moving beyond past emotional experiences with conflict and learning new skills to deal with it well.

One way to do this is to recognize—first in yourself and then in others—the difference between positions and interests. In conflicts, people often voice their *positions*. They state their "stand" and then "dig in" on what seem to be two or more drastically opposing sides. Once a discussion or interaction gets stuck on positions, no deeper understanding or resolution occurs. On the other hand, when *interests*—the myriad beliefs and values that underlie positions—are explored and communicated, similarities can be noticed and built upon to acknowledge or create common ground.

3. Ironically, communication, or the lack of it, can get your group into conflicts, but it also is the only thing that can get you through conflict.

You'll need strong communication skills to manage all types of conflicts.

Conflicts will come and go throughout the life of your group. Remembering the concepts above can change how you respond to a conflict situation.

Good communication skills will help you make it through most conflicts on your own. There are times, however, when a neutral third party can be really helpful. Don't hesitate to call in someone to fill this role (for example, a mediator) if and when you or your group feels it's necessary.

#2—FACTS, MYTHS, UNKNOWNNS, & VALUES

To understand or confront important issues, people often break them down into parts. It's always easier to deal with life in bite-sized pieces. Problems often occur, however, when different people break an issue down into different elements. What one person calls a "fact" another calls a "myth" or a "value." Unknownns pose even more problems because most of us feel vulnerable admitting what we don't know. And so begins the difference of opinion or perspective, sometimes eventually leading to a full-blown conflict.

To begin dealing with this stumbling block, let's look at some definitions and examples:

- ☛ **Fact:** a statement of what is. It is verifiable and supported by evidence.
 - "Water runs downhill."
 - "The sun rises in the east and sets in the west."
- ☛ **Myth:** a falsehood, treated as if it were a fact. A notion based more on tradition or convenience than on fact.
 - "Girls don't do well in math."
 - "Certain ethnic groups are better at sports or engineering."
- ☛ **Unknown:** a statement that is ambiguous or characterized by great uncertainty. All statements are uncertain to some degree, but the degree of uncertainty may be important in resolving issues. Unknownns often are treated as facts.
 - "There is life on other planets."
 - "Arizona will have a major earthquake within the next 10 years."

☂ *Values*: statements of preferred end results or outcomes. Value statements can't be proven right or wrong, and they often differ among interest groups and individuals.

- "We can't trust government to clean up the environment."
- "Every American deserves a job."

☂ *Ethics*: special forms of value statements that describe what ought to be done and how things should be handled. They represent moral judgment for a preferred course of action, regardless of the preferred outcome.

- "Business is only interested in making a profit; it can't afford to protect the resources."
- "Basic human rights should be guaranteed to all people."

☂ The first thing to do in increasing understanding or managing any conflict about an issue is to deal with facts, myths, unknowns, and values. Here are a few tools to help you wade through the turbulence and confusion:

☂ Use the above definitions to *clarify facts, myths, values, and unknowns*. This step helps you deal directly with a situation where someone is using an unknown or a myth as a fact. Unknowns and myths aren't inherently bad, and facts aren't inherently good—they're just different and shouldn't be used interchangeably. When possible, destroy myths and replace them with facts or unknowns.

☂ *Anticipate and accept value differences*. Compare perspectives on the issue and focus the discussion on the most "productive" differences—those that can be built upon to create a stronger, more stable outcome.

☂ *Recognize your own values and ethics*. Articulate your own myths and unknowns about various aspects of the issue.

☂ *Support the orderly formation of policy alternatives* based on this new, clarified discussion of the issue.

☂ Remember, this process isn't magic. It's not going to make a world filled with

gray areas turn into one with clear and concise black and white areas. Nor should it. Frankly, the grays are what make life interesting. This process will, however, help you interact with others in your group in ways that let you be true to yourself and clear about what you believe, value, know, and don't know.

#3—RESOURCES AND BARRIERS

When groups talk about resources as a stumbling block, they usually are talking about the lack of enough financial resources. There are a couple of key points to remember when dealing with this stumbling block, and they both have to do with "who" rather than "how much."

For example, who is either on your watershed group or in some way a supporter of its mission? What are their resources? Don't think only of their financial resources, but also in terms of their ability to access funds and other means of support. Do they have grant-writing or other fund-raising experience? Do they have experience in generating support for projects?

Don't get stuck on the concept of money; there also are other "currencies" that can be resources—for example, energy, time, tools, community contacts, political contacts, technical or administrative expertise, and so on. It might be worthwhile to do a brief assessment of your group members and ask these questions:

☂ What do we need?

☂ Who's here?

☂ Who's missing that could help?

Other barriers may be legal, social, economic, or technical. Once again, do a brief assessment. Using the parts of this chapter as guides, determine where the barrier is. Is it internal—in your organizational structure, how meetings are managed, how decisions are made (or not made), etc.? Is it external—are you communicating poorly with the public or with decision makers, violating laws or regulations, or in some other way not fully grasping the external factors affecting your

group (for example, endangered species regulations)?

Systematically look at each level, identify your group's weaknesses and the threats facing you, and find ways to change as many as possible into strengths and opportunities. The idea is to exhaust every possibility about how to get through, over, under, or around. . . before you even consider stopping.

#4—COVERT AGENDAS

Covert agendas usually come up if a group has stumbled during the development of its partnership or group structure, or has a lack of clarity around group processes, meetings management, and communication protocols. Sometimes people leave things muddled on purpose, and the lack of clarity and inclusiveness makes it easier to carry out concealed, self-serving plans. But most often, unintentional confusion constructs an environment in which unwarranted paranoia creeps up that "some type of covert agenda is going on here."

There are several keys to keeping covert agendas from taking over the group. For example:

- ☛ Be deliberate about your partnership—take the time to get and keep the appropriate people involved.
- ☛ Learn about possible organizational structures and pick one that works for your group, given your members' geographic region, vision, mission, and goals.
- ☛ Keep the group's vision, mission, and goals visible, so everyone can help keep your activities guided toward them.
- ☛ Cultivate skilled participants and leaders.
- ☛ Build the decision-making and communication skills necessary to keep yourselves going along efficiently and effectively.

By cultivating an environment where trust and respect can exist among different viewpoints and perspectives, you'll be able

to overcome this stumbling block if and when it happens.

#5—DECISION MAKING OUTSIDE OF MEETINGS

It's especially easy to fall into this trap in the early stages of a group's life. During this time, trust has not developed, and protocols, structures, and agreements don't exist yet. Although it's usually not intentional, members talk outside of meetings and forget they're not the only ones with opinions or perspectives. These "decisions" can be treated as if they were made by the larger group, thereby leaving others "out." When this happens intentionally, it can splinter a group and damage relationships.

It's easy to paint a picture with only three or four colors, but it rarely has the depth or beauty that one with 20 colors might have. Typically, diverse members bring challenges to the group, but they also bring different skills and viewpoints that ultimately strengthen the group. Making decisions outside the group means some of these skills and viewpoints are left out. The keys to preventing this problem are clearly defined in Part III, "Decision Making": in the first meeting, raise this issue and make a temporary or permanent ground rule related to decision making. Then, as soon as possible, agree upon a clear group decision-making process.

Make sure this problem isn't ignored. Talk about it openly. Remember, people are less likely to meet group expectations when they don't know what they are.

#6—GROUP MEMBERS NOT TAKING OWNERSHIP OF THE GROUP PROCESS

Remember, although you might have a convener who calls meetings and a facilitator who manages them, *all* members play a part in helping your group work well or causing it to fall apart.

Good group meetings, or any other situations where people come together to accomplish or learn something, have four

things in common:

- ☛ They have a clear purpose.
- ☛ They're well organized and effectively handled so all participants can share, learn, and teach.
- ☛ They encourage all participants to share, learn, and teach.
- ☛ Participants leave feeling that they gained something from the experience and were encouraged to give something to others.

The key to dealing with this stumbling block is knowing what makes good group members—with regard to both content and process. There is nothing more fun and functional than to have the entire group understand and appreciate good group process enough to challenge themselves, each other, or the facilitator if a ground rule is broken or the environment becomes suspicious.

#7—LACK OF CLARITY REGARDING DECISIONS

This stumbling block is similar to, but not exactly the same as, #5 (decision making outside of meetings). It feels different and rarely is premeditated. When agreements or decisions aren't made clearly or documented in group memory or minutes, one of two things happens: either the topic is repeated at meetings or, worse, decisions are remade outside the group and denied later. Fortunately, like most stumbling blocks, taking the time and energy to form, or reform, clear structure and protocols really alleviates this problem.

The keys to doing just that are clearly defined in Parts I through III. Having a clear organizational structure and effective meetings management is the beginning. Add to that a clear understanding of how decisions will be made, and you'll have a framework to keep your group from stumbling over this problem. Any member of the group can help with this vital function by keeping track of whether or not decisions are clearly stated and recorded. At the very least, you will be able to pick yourselves up,

dust off your knees, and keep from stumbling over this one again.

#8—POLITICS AND HISTORY OF WORKING TOGETHER

Labels such as "it's the ol' boys club," or "that's the tree-huggers group," or any number of others are used to describe this impediment to good group work. If you've never run into this problem before, consider yourselves delusional, blessed, or both. Many groups have people that "are used to working together" or represent only one aspect of an issue. Although it might seem easier at first to work only with people you're comfortable with, this approach causes many groups to run into trouble or ultimately fail.

Effective watershed groups are effective because they have members that represent *all* aspects of the watershed's interests. When you're seeking members, ask yourselves, "What benefit/drawback will this person(s) have in relation to our purpose?"

As mentioned earlier, diverse members typically bring challenges to the group. But they also bring different skills and viewpoints that ultimately strengthen the group by helping it reach a broader audience, get the attention of new or different elected officials, or gain access to needed resources. Good group processes and a clear group mission help keep **all** members—no matter how diverse—on track.

The keys to avoiding this stumbling block are found in Parts I and III. In addition, look around at other groups—not just watershed groups, but other partnerships that have weathered the tests of time. You may be able to get some ideas from them to help your group successfully blend a variety of viewpoints.

#9—RULES, REGULATIONS, & BUREAUCRACIES

Legal stumbling blocks also can get in the way of working collaboratively. A few are listed briefly below. When in doubt about whether your group is affected by one of

these laws or regulations, stop and find out for sure!

Antitrust laws, designed to protect a competitive market, don't exactly foster collaboration. These laws are more of a problem for private commodity groups and corporations, but it's a good idea for your group to learn about what you can and can't discuss or agree to.

FACA, or the Federal Advisory Committee Act, limits the types of input from federal agencies and their participation in partnership groups. FACA essentially defines advisory groups as any group that a federal agency consults before making management or regulatory decisions. Under FACA, advisory groups must follow specific procedures, including formally announcing meetings and opening all meetings to the public.

Some people have interpreted FACA as prohibiting agencies from taking advice from partnership groups that are not formal advisory committees under FACA. If your watershed group includes one or more federal agencies, you should be aware of FACA and follow its prescriptions for advisory committees unless directly told not to. Consult with agency representatives about how FACA relates to your group.

Natural resource and environmental laws can further impede partnerships by dividing ecosystems by arbitrary political boundaries, legislating separate management of single resources, and being overly prescriptive and inflexible. Federal agencies attempting to manage resources on an ecosystem basis are restricted by these aspects of federal law.

#10—IF NOT YOUR GROUP, THEN WHO?

The pitfall of trying to do it all yourself is ever-present. If you've read and followed the principles in this chapter and you run into a task your group can't do or a problem you can't solve, ask yourselves, "Who else can, could, or should be doing this?"

There are many reasons why some tasks may not be appropriate for your group to undertake. Maybe key research or technology doesn't exist yet or isn't available to your group. Maybe an activity would make local people uncomfortable. Maybe the problem needs to be looked at not just from an ecosystem perspective, but also from a community and workforce perspective. Saddling yourself with impossible tasks creates frustration that could have been avoided.

Here's an example. Your group is laying out, or periodically revisiting, your watershed's master plan. As you focus on several watershed restoration projects, you notice some parts of the projects require technical expertise that just doesn't exist in your cadre of volunteers, landowners, etc.

You realize that you'll have to contract out these parts of the projects, but to whom? Do you want to just design the project contract and award it to the lowest bidder? Or do you want to set up clear design and contracting procedures that result in good work *and* sustain a high-skill, high-wage work for the local workforce?

The key to avoiding this and other "if not us, who?" situations is to not get tunnel vision. Even though you've done a remarkable job at getting lots of different people involved in your watershed group, you're still only part of the world at large. Maybe a good part, but not the only part. Take time to "look out the window: every now and then. With careful thought, multiple objectives can be accomplished and multiple rewards achieved.

Reprinted with permission from: Oregon State University Extension Service publication EM 8714, Watershed Stewardship: A Learning Guide (Oregon State University, Corvallis, Oregon, new July 1998, revised January 2002), 485 pp. \$42.00.

Revised on 9/24/05