

About this Guide

This guide and the accompanying work-book are for the groups which hope to have a collective involvement from their members. The groups can be a community-based group which is formed to deal with the issues of their neighborhood. It can be a self-help group which deals with a very specific issue of interest for its members. It can be a support group which is in the process of transitioning from a professionally run group to a member-led group. It can be any task-oriented temporary group such as a fundraising task force. As long as your group is committed to having all members participate in running it and achieving its goals, this work-book can be helpful.

This guide and accompanying work-book will give you information and ideas that will help the group members to take responsibility for their group and achieve its goals together. It will give you ideas and tools which will increase the capacity of your group to include all its members in a way which will be appropriate for them. It helps you build an INCLUSIVE group.

What is leadership?

When you hear leadership what comes first to your mind? Do you think of an individual, or do you think of the action of an individual or group which brings forward some results? Chances are you will think of both.

Traditionally, leaders were considered as charismatic individuals who would lead people towards the desired outcome.

As people tried to define leadership and leaders, they came up with different theories of leadership. Some said leaders were born with qualities of leadership (Trait theory). When it became difficult to make up an exact list of traits, the focus changed from who leaders are to what they do (Behavioral theories). Some started to look at the situation in which a person acts as a leader. So they focused on situations which give a leader control and influence (Contingency theories). For some, leadership became a question of ability to lead their followers to higher common goals (Transformational theories).

Despite the above approaches the fact remains that there is one individual who will lead the followers to achieve a common goal. In summary, a leader is a person who; has the vision of what can and should be done; is able to communicate it with others; and motivate them to do what needs to be done.

As you will see in our resource section, most of these theories are used in the context of organization and managerial literatures.

This is not what this guide and work-book are about.

What is shared leadership?

In shared leadership there is not one leader. It is the collaboration of all those involved. It is about what each member of the group can contribute. It is about having a shared vision, setting goals together and identifying things needing to be done and getting them done based on members capacities, interests, expertise and skills. So, shared leadership in a group setting is a process which helps get things done. A group

functions more effectively when all its members accept responsibility for the work and life of the group. This shared sense of responsibility is also known as shared leadership.

In the shared leadership model group members need to:

- Have clear vision of what they want to accomplish:
- Be able to communicate with each other
- Be able to motivate each other to accomplish their tasks
- Be able to work together as a system in harmony

Adopted from Team Technologies, 1995, Section 8, Leadership

Is shared leadership something that fits your group?

Although shared leadership is a process which has proven successful in different settings, still there are conditions which need to exist or need to be created for a successful implementation of shared leadership. Together the whole group should examine the interactive pattern between members the way tasks get done, and that, individual members' needs and wants are met.

You can ask yourselves these questions about your group which will identify how the group members work together, how the tasks get done, and how the needs of the individual members are met.

- Do people feel comfortable to express their feelings?
- Do people negotiate when there is tension?
- Are people accommodating different points of view?
- Are people ready or willing to compromise?
- Are people aware of those who do not participate?
- Do they invite less active participants to contribute?
- Does your group have norms, guidelines, rules, standards?
- Do people feel comfortable to own up to their mistakes?
- Is encouragement happening in your group? Are there only a few who are encouraging or in general people are encouraging towards each other?
- How do you make decisions? Are the decisions made by certain individuals or are they made collectively?
- When tasks are identified, how do you assign them? Do people choose the tasks they can perform the best? Are tasks done by only a few? Or, will people have a chance to negotiate and pick and choose?
- Do people have a chance to talk about what they need to get from the group? Is the group atmosphere encouraging enough to make members comfortable in sharing their needs?
- How do you celebrate the group's accomplishment and the accomplishments of its individual members?

Before embarking on shared leadership

The questions in the last section were designed to make you think about the essential needs of a successful group. It is not necessary to have appropriate answers for all or even some of them. Asking these questions make you think about the essential needs of a successful group. As you embark on establishing a shared leadership model in your group, you can revisit these questions. Over time, you will see that a different pattern of interaction will develop in your group that tasks are more frequently shared, and people feel more motivated to participate in the group.

Before your group goes ahead with a shared leadership model, you should try examining the current status of your group by:

- Agreeing as a group that this is what you want to do
- Reviewing your group rules and guidelines
- Checking with all the group members about the main goal of the group
- Discussing the areas of responsibilities and identifying who does what.

Remember, that when you embark on a shared leadership models you will identify opportunities for learning new skills. This in itself is very motivating and rewarding. Some of your group meetings can contribute to, the enhancement of the group members' skills in communication, conflict resolution, facilitation, consensus building, confidentiality, group process, promotion, etc. In the resource section of this guide we have shared with you some resources that you can access.

Building your shared leadership model

A successful shared-leadership calls for the group members to:

- Agree on the goals of the group
- Develop together an action plan that helps them achieve these goals
- Describe in details the tasks tht will get the plan done
- Match their skills with the tasks
- Check with each other regularly to make sure every one is happy with what they are doing (because they are doing what they are good at)
- Celebrate individual and group accomplishments together.

All of the above points are applicable to different groups regardless of their purpose. As a group, you will have an overall goal and possibly some sub-goals. To achieve them, you need to plan, and for the plan to work, you need to identify the activities. For the activities to get done, you need group members to take responsibility based on what they can do, and at the ends to celebrate and be appreciated. Here are some examples of groups which have embarked on shared leadership. Your group might not be listed here but you will see that some of the activities are very similar to what you have been doing in your group.

White Wing Parents is a community group composed of parents who are concerned with the rising rate of youth crime in their neighborhood. They have been meeting for over a year and have been planning different activities for youth in the neighborhood. Recently they were involved with organizing a bike-a-ton for youth;

Big-Divas is a group for large women which meets bi-weekly. Their purpose is to support each other in finding healthy life style changes which fit the individual members' life, while building self-esteem. Their main purpose is to keep the group going for women to join and benefit from it;

Raising Fund with Fun is an ad-hoc committee within an agency which brings volunteers together to organize an annual dance gala and raise funds for the agency.

QUE is a self-help group for smokers trying to quit cold turkey. The purpose is to keep the group going and make it known to those who need to know about it;

Collective Coops is a monthly meeting of a small housing coop composed of 12 members. They meet monthly to address issues related to their coop.

You can see that in all the examples mentioned above there is a general purpose for each group. For all of them there are overall goals. To achieve their goals, each group needed to identify the activities and assign tasks to its members. As you can see, the steps mentioned at the beginning of this section are applicable and useful in sharing the leadership amongst the members of these groups. Chances are they will work for your group as well.

Think of your group. Do you think you need to:

- Agree on the goals of the group
- Develop together an action plan that helps them achieve those goals
- Detail-out the tasks that get the plan done
- Match their skills with the tasks
- Check with each other regularly to make sure every one is happy with what they are doing (because they are doing what they are good at)
- Celebrating individual and group accomplishments together

If you do, the attached work book will walk you through these steps.

How to evaluate your success in sharing the leadership

Shared leadership does not negate accountability. It divides the responsibilities and therefore distributes the accountability. We call it, "Cooperative Accountability Model", where group members celebrate the achievements, while help each other account for the set-backs by finding alternatives to them. In each meeting, you need to discuss what you are doing in the individual member's areas of responsibility. This gives members the opportunity to discuss any problem and arrive at solutions.

In shared leadership, it is essential to regularly evaluate your progress in achieving that goal. This is achieved by checking on the progress of each member at the meetings. It should happen in a celebratory and comfortable way. Group member should not be left feeling that they are being criticized or condemned if the tasks have not been completed. The real focus should be on celebrating the group's achievements and then offering supportive alternative to the set-backs.

In the workbook you will find some suggestions for a Cooperative Evaluation.

Some trouble shooting

Shared leadership, although rewarding, has its own challenges. Mastering these challenges will set your group on the right course and will also deal with some other issues of group. Keep in mind that delegation is a real art, especially when it is done as a collective. Effective delegation in the shared leadership model involves giving people responsibility and freedom, -responsibility to find the information and resources needed to work on their task, and the freedom to do it in their own way. Not everyone does things the same way we do, or with the same timeline. However, they usually get the job done. Remember that in the shared leadership model, one person does not delegate, because members choose to do what they do the best.

If your group perseveres, In the long run, you will have a group in which its members are more connected, skilful and motivated. However, we will list some of the challenges here. Keep in mind that some of these challenges relate to the relationship between the group members, some relates to the specific tasks, some to the personality of individual members and some are the challenges beyond the control of your group. Remember that the key to shared leadership is group communication.

Here are some common challenges:

Some tasks and responsibilities do not appeal to any group members;
Some group members do not deliver what they have committed to;
Group members become frustrated with each other;
Group members drop out just because they have not been able to carry out their tasks
The decisions continue to be made by a few
Resentment builds up and finger pointing begins to happen

Some suggestions for dealing with these challenges are included in the workbook.

Useful Resources

Kofman, F., & Senge, P. M. (1993). Communities of Commitment: The Heart of Learning Organizations. *Organizational Dynamics*, 22(2), 5-23.

Michael, J. A. (Ed.). (1994). *For the Common Good: A Strategic Plan for Leadership and Volunteer Development*. Washington, DC: United States Department of Agriculture.

Nirenberg, J. (1993). *The Living Organization: Transforming Teams into Workplace Communities*. Homewood, IL: Business One Irwin.

Working Collectively Produced by Women's Self-Help Network

Robert A. Gallagher, 2001 Shared Leadership, The Maintaining of Task and Relationship Functions

http://www.infid.org/leadership/shared_leadership.htm

http://www.orgdte.com/shared_leadership.htm