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Other chapters in this section build on this understanding of voluntary partnerships and are full of tips and skill-building exercises for increasing group effectiveness. Chapter I-2, “Choosing Your Group’s 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. Chapter I-3, “Effective Meetings Management,” contains tips for managing meetings more effectively, while Chapter I-4 discusses decision making. Skills for improving communication are addressed in Chapter I-5. Common stumbling blocks to working together and possible solutions are identified in Chapter I-6, “Dealing With Stumbling Blocks.”

WHAT IS A PARTNERSHIP?

A partnership is a public agreement among a group of people to work together for a common interest. 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 means finding a way to tolerate people you might not like but agree to work with. It’s an acknowledgment that cooperation may be the best strategy for getting things done.

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 less time and energy fighting each other and more 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.

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 Mooto:

- **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 Chapter I-5, “Communication Skills,” for hints on how to improve your group’s communication.

- **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. Chapter I-2, “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 Chapter I-4, “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. (See Chapter I-5, “Communication Skills,” and Chapter I-6, “Stumbling Blocks.”) 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 Moots’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. People contributing their time and good will are rewarded when their contribution can be made with some choice and with varying levels of involvement. 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
Encouraging participation

Getting all potentially affected groups and individuals to participate requires more than simply announcing meetings. You’ll need to use every form 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.

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

Maintaining participation

Participant burnout is a common problem in partnership groups. 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 fishermen?” 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 regional office of the Oregon Employment Services Department
- The local provider for the federal Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) program
- Your local Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD)
- The Salmon Trout Enhancement Program (STEP)

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.

See Chapter I-2, “Choosing Your Group’s Structure, Mission, and Goals,” for more on visioning.
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 Chapter I-2, “Choosing Your Group’s Structure, Mission, and Goals,” is one effective method of goal setting. Chapter II-1, “Principles of Planning,” presents a method for setting objectives.

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. See Chapters I-2 and II-1 for more information.

Partnerships are a particular form of organization. Partners often have very different views of the problems in the watershed and the solutions required to address them. Partnership members need to keep focused on areas of agreement and build upon those areas.

To be successful, members need to regularly reaffirm their common vision, interests, and goals. Additionally, successful partnerships require broad membership, ample local knowledge, effective means of communication, a collaborative process for making decisions, and a knack for pooling resources.

As with any voluntary organization, your group will need to pay special attention to encouraging and maintaining member participation. A variety of social and economic incentives, such as public recognition of good stewardship and innovative marketing of products, can help you maintain active volunteers. You may need to obtain special expertise by contracting with local workers.

Ultimately, the success of your watershed group will be determined by what happens on the ground. The real-world outcomes of the partnership will result from a compelling common vision, supported by clear measurable steps that allow everyone in the watershed to contribute to the vision in the best way they can.

SUMMARY/SELF REVIEW

Partnerships are a particular form of organization. Partners often have very different views of the problems in the watershed and the solutions required to address them. Partnership members need to keep focused on areas of agreement and build upon those areas.

To be successful, members need to regularly reaffirm their common vision, interests, and goals. Additionally, successful partnerships require broad membership, ample local knowledge, effective means of communication, a collaborative process for making decisions, and a knack for pooling resources.

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EXERCISE

The following exercise will help you check how well your local watershed partnership compares to the ideal partnership. You can do this exercise on your own or as a group discussion.

1. 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?

2. 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?

RESOURCES

Training

The OSU Extension Family Community Leadership program at Oregon State University has excellent publications and training opportunities—often free or for a nominal charge—in many Oregon counties. Contact your county office of the OSU Extension Service for details.

University Associates offers a variety of training programs on group process and organizational development. They can be contacted at 3505 North Campbell Ave., Suite 505, Tucson, AZ 85719; phone: 520-322-6700; fax: 520-322-6789; email: info@universityassociates.com; Web: www.universityassociates.com

Christopher Roach, Dialogue Dynamics, is a Corvallis-based trainer who has expertise on this subject. He can be contacted at 966 NW Sequoia, Corvallis, OR 97330; phone: 541-754-5521.

Information

Collaboration Framework (The National Network for Collaboration, Fargo, ND). Phone: 701-231-7259; email: nncoinfo@mes.umn.edu; Web: http://www.reeusda.gov/4h/cyfar/cyfar.htm


The Conservation Technology Information Center (CTIC) at Purdue University has a great selection of materials, which are listed below. Many of these materials can be reviewed on the Web at www.ctic.purdue.edu/CTIC/Catalog/WatershedManagement.html

The address and phone number for ordering CTIC material is:

The Conservation Technology Information Center
1220 Potter Drive, Rm. 170
West Lafayette, IN 47906
Phone: 317-494-9555; fax: 317-494-5969

Better Wetlands. Full-color brochure that illustrates a dozen techniques for enhancing restored wetlands for wildlife, aesthetics, and personal enjoyment. Includes useful information on how to add food plots; goose, duck, and songbird nests; observation blinds; walkways; wildflower plantings; and more. Published by USDA NRCS Iowa in cooperation with other state and federal agencies and associations. 20 pages.


Building Local Partnerships Guide. Describes who should be involved and what they can bring to the group. 12 pages.

Farmer-led Watershed Initiatives Conference Proceedings. Manual includes case studies of five farmer-led watershed initiatives (Heron Lake, MN; North Fork Ninnescah/Cheney Reservoir, KS; Embarras River Basin, IL; Otter Lake, IL; Catskill-Delaware Watershed Complex, NY). Also includes brief descriptions of presentations on farming practices and innovative management practices. 32 pages.

Farming for Maximum Efficiency (MAX) Kit. MAX has been used successfully by farmers to evaluate return on their inputs (e.g., nutrients, tillage practices, pesticides, etc.). Now CTIC and corporate sponsors Monsanto, Bayer, and Case are working with 13 watershed partnerships in 5 states to emphasize watershed issues and help farmers understand the economic benefits of conservation practices.

Geographic Information Systems (GIS): Introduction for Public Agencies Manual. Provides decision makers the essential background and tools to learn how to implement a geographic information system. Provides essential background. Four sections: overview of GIS, data quality, implementation, and water resource management. Originally developed for public agencies; used by consultants, industry, watershed partnerships, and many others.

Getting to Know Your Local Watershed: A Guide for Watershed Partnerships. Booklet covering the range of biological, physical, social, and economic factors that need to be considered in watershed planning. 6 pages.

Getting to Know Your Local Watershed Guide. Describes what type of information is needed and where to get it to put together a successful watershed management plan. 8 pages.

Groundwater and Surface Water: Understanding the Interaction Guide. Describes the connection between groundwater and surface water. Discusses watershed management approaches that protect vulnerable groundwater uses. 16 pages.

Leading and Communicating: A Guide for Watershed Partnerships. Booklet covering listening, discussion, brainstorming, and other communication skills. 6 pages.

Leading and Communicating Guide. Describes the skills needed (and serves to refresh your skills) to facilitate a diverse partnership of stakeholders. 8 pages.

Managing Conflict Guide. Describes how you can turn conflict into a healthy discussion resulting in viable ideas. 8 pages.


National Watershed Library Directory. This directory on computer disk includes more than 450 entries of brochures, manuals, fact sheets, extension publications, videos, and other materials concerning water quality. Disk works on any IBM-compatible computer with at least 640K of memory.

National Watershed Network Directory. A listing on computer disk of more than 700 local and state watershed groups nationwide. Each entry includes the group's name, location, size, and focus (such as pollution prevention). Disk works on any IBM-compatible computer with Windows 3.1 or Windows 95 and at least 640K of memory.

No Matter Where You Live. . .You Live in a Watershed. This introductory brochure shows and explains what a watershed is, how it affects water quality, how you make a difference, the watershed address system, and more. A self-test is included to highlight watershed-friendly actions. Ideal for local festivals, fairs, mall shows, etc.

Operation Greenstripe Kit. This packet provides information on Operation Greenstripe, a program developed by Monsanto to provide monetary incentives for FFA chapters to work with landowners to plant filter strips (conservation buffers) in critical areas.

Partners for Watersheds. Video that describes what a watershed is and how, by getting involved with a watershed partnership, everyone with a stake in it wins. 13 minutes.

Putting Together a Watershed Management Plan Guide. Describes the process of putting together a plan that all with a stake in the watershed can agree to implement. 16 pages.

Reflecting on Lakes Guide. Watersheds that feed lakes differ dramatically from those that feed streams or rivers. This guide explains some of the differences. 12 pages.

Riparian Area Management: A Citizens Guide. Offers practical tips, definitions, and illustrations to help riparian landowners avoid the pitfalls of improper stream management. Includes components of management, methods, household guidelines, illustrated landscape tips, and more. From Lake County, IL Stormwater Management Commission. 6 pages.

River Friendly Farmer Kit. Originally developed for use in Minnesota by a consortium of agricultural organizations and companies, this kit is ideal for use by watershed partnerships. You set the criteria that farmers must meet to receive a sign at the end of their lane and/or be recognized in the press and/or at an award banquet. The program is very flexible to meet the unique needs of your watershed and the people who have a stake in it.

“Think Globally-Act Watershed” bumper stickers. Also provides a telephone number for obtaining information about watersheds. $2 for 1, $1 for each additional sticker.

U.S. Watershed Map. This map shows the 2-digit, 4-digit, 6-digit, and 8-digit watersheds using the USGS numbering system. Originally printed by USGS.

Walk Your Watershed Festival Organizing Kit. This kit outlines practical how-tos of getting started, choosing activities, finding volunteers, and securing financial support. Included within the kit are a suggested checklist to help plan an event, a model watershed festival program, a sample press release, survey, and a Walk Your Watershed logo.

A Watershed Approach to Urban Runoff: Handbook for Decisionmakers. Guide. Outlines the process for understanding your watershed; the watershed management approach to assessing, planning, implementing, and evaluating; and an overview of assessment and management tools.

Provides detailed insights into structural and nonstructural best management practices and sample site plans. Produced by the Terrene Institute in conjunction with EPA Region 5. 115 pages.

Watershed Management Starter Kit. Want to start a watershed management partnership for your local watershed? This complete kit includes five guides (Getting to Know Your Watershed, Building Local Partnerships, Putting Together a Watershed Management Plan, Managing Conflict, and Leading and Communicating), a 13-minute video (Partnerships for Watersheds), 10 companion brochures, and an application to the National Watershed Network. In other words, it includes everything you need to get started.

What is a Watershed Partnership? Trifold brochure explains what a watershed is, how it works, similarities and differences between watersheds, and how our actions affect our watershed.
MOVING FORWARD—THE NEXT STEPS

On your own, use the lines below to fill in steps, actions, thoughts, contacts, etc. you’ll take to move yourself and your group ahead in strengthening your partnership.

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Choosing Your Group’s Structure, Mission, and Goals

Viviane Simon-Brown

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 chapter and Chapter I-1, “Creating Successful Partnerships,” 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.

IN THIS CHAPTER YOU’LL LEARN:

- Why organizational structure is important
- The characteristics of six typical organizational structures in America (and why it’s important to understand them)
- 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)
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.

**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 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-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?”

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.

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.

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.
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.

VISION, MISSION, AND 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 chapter.)

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 Chapter I-1: 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. See Chapter II-1, “Planning for Watershed Restoration,” for more about goals and objectives.

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.

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!
Right now, you’re either congratulating yourself for being part of an organization that has all of these components firmly in place, or... Backtracking to fill in the gaps saves time and headaches in the future. “Go slow to go fast.” (You’ll learn more about this in Chapter I-3, “Effective Meetings Management.”)

**Roles and 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. Chapter I-3, “Effective Meetings Management,” focuses on the process roles in more 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” (content)

**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)
- Have one member who acts as liaison to the full group (process)
- Are aware of what the whole group is trying to accomplish (content)

Some watershed groups are fortunate enough to have staff. Staff:

- 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:
  - 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.
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. (For more information on ground rules, read Chapter 1-3, “Effective Meetings Management.”)

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. Chapter 1-6, “Dealing with 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.

Sources for good facilitators are listed in the Resources section of this chapter.

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!
The following checklist will remind you of the key points in this chapter and will help you see where your group may need to do some work on its organizational structure, mission, and goals.

- Do you know what your group’s current organizational structure is?
- What would you like it to be 18 months from now?
- Is your watershed group governing or advisory? What entity makes the final decision on your recommendations?
- What is your group trying to accomplish? (All members should be able to answer this question in 30 seconds or less.)
- Are the definitions and differences between vision, mission, values and operating principles, goals, objectives, and benchmarks clear to you?
- Can you identify some of your group’s values, some beliefs that everyone in your group would agree with?
- Do you know the role you play and your responsibilities in your watershed group?
- Does your group need an outside facilitator to help it move forward?
- Does your group celebrate its successes?
EXERCISES

Think of a group you belong to. Because we’ve been talking about watershed groups, you might want to choose that one, but any group will do. Work together as a group to complete this exercise.

Visioning

This exercise will help your group quickly develop a working framework of vision, mission, values, and goals. It begins with individuals, who then “compare notes” in small groups, which bring the results to the full group.

1. **15 minutes**: First, ask each person to think about what the organization is and what it is trying to accomplish. Then, imagine an event in the year 2007. Your organization is receiving an award for innovative, outstanding work. You are at the podium to receive the award on behalf of your group. The master of ceremonies is reading the citation right now. You are listening intently, leaning slightly forward, focused on his every word. What is he saying? Write it down.

2. **30 minutes**: Get together with a group of three to five people. Ask each person to read his or her citation. After listening to each other, record the major points on flipchart paper. Also, write down individual value-laden adjectives and nouns such as “innovative,” “stewardship,” and “comprehensive.”

3. **60 minutes**: Now, hand all of the flipcharts to a committee of two or three people who really like to wordsmith. The committee’s job is to use the words and phrases on the flipcharts to draft vision, mission, values, and goals statements for the group.

   This task isn’t as difficult as it sounds. Use the definitions found earlier in this chapter. Vision phrases will have an idealistic “apple pie and motherhood” sound. Mission and goal statements may look similar at first, but missions are bigger and more encompassing than goals. Value-laden words can be developed into operating principle statements. One of the most famous operating principles of all time is: “We hold these truths to be self-evident. All men are created equal.” Starting your statements with “We believe…” can help. Don’t agonize over this process.

4. **After you’ve drafted reasonably good statements, put them on flipcharts and post them at the next meeting. Ask group members to write their comments on post-it notes and stick them on the charts. Tell them you welcome positive comments as well as suggestions for improvements. You’ll notice this technique prevents the deadly “everybody’s an editor” syndrome.**

5. **Now rework the statements, incorporating the suggestions as much as possible. The only trick to this job is to make sure you use the actual words and sentiments of the people who made suggestions, not just your own.**

6. **Now take the “new, improved” statements (on flipcharts) back to the group. Ask them to adopt them for a year. Remind them that you’ve merely wordsmithed what they wrote down. Almost universally, groups will accept the statements on a trial basis for a limited amount of time.**

   If the worst happens, and several people are adamantly opposed to the statements, suggest that since your committee has accomplished its task, you will hand over all of the working flipcharts to them. Encourage them to create their own draft for approval by the full group. Request a similar timeline. Guaranteed, this technique works!
Desired characteristics for group members

This short exercise will help your group easily identify the desired characteristics for new members.

1. First, when the whole group is together, ask each person to write on a post-it note the one, most important characteristic a group member should have.

2. Collect the post-its and give them to a committee of wordsmiths (a different group than the ones who worked on the first exercise). This committee will take about 30 minutes to draft the characteristics into “desired qualifications” statements. If the committee gets stuck, they can modify the Marines’ slogan, “We’re looking for a few good people who . . . .” Use these qualifications when recruiting new group members.

Training

The OSU Extension Family Community Leadership program at Oregon State University has excellent publications and training opportunities—often free or for a nominal charge—in many Oregon counties. Contact your county office of the OSU Extension Service for details.

Information

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On your own, use the lines below to fill in steps, actions, thoughts, contacts, etc. you’ll take to move yourself and your group ahead in determining and evaluating your organizational structure, roles and responsibilities, vision, mission, and goals.

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In 1992, the Oregon Business Council surveyed 1,361 Oregonians about what they valued most—and liked least—about living in Oregon. Of course, no surprise, we love our tall trees, pristine beaches, and towering mountains. What do we dislike the most? Attending meetings, especially public meetings!

Since meetings are a required part of our lives, let’s see if we can make them better. After all, if your meetings are more effective, you’ll probably have more time to do what you really want to do, such as visit tall trees, pristine beaches, and towering mountains.

Fortunately, meetings don’t have to be bad. Bad meetings are nothing more than bad habits!

FAIR-OPEN-HONEST MEETINGS

For meetings to be effective, the process must be fair, open, and honest. Fair, open, and honest? It sounds like something from the book Everything I Ever Needed to Know I Learned in Kindergarten. But think about what those words really mean for your meetings.
Fair

Being fair means several things. For example:

- Providing opportunities for people to participate in ways that work well for them. For instance, you can schedule meetings at convenient times, acknowledging that the high school playoffs may be more important than your meeting.
- Being prepared to apply ground rules without bias
- Accommodating special access needs
- Making room for different learning and communication styles so everyone has a chance to participate
- Making sure the people who are affected by your group’s decisions help make those decisions

Open

We have open public meetings in Oregon. It’s the law. People need to be able to witness meetings, but too often this law has meant that anyone who wants to sit through a laboriously dull meeting, can. Check to find out whether your watershed group is required to have open meetings.

The true spirit of open meetings is more, however. True openness means:

- The process is straightforward, understandable, and explained, both verbally and in writing.
- The only agenda is the one hanging on the wall.
- Participants understand their roles in the process.
- There is a safe physical and intellectual environment for the exchange of ideas, with agreed-upon and enforced ground rules to protect people and ideas.

Honest

Honest means telling the truth. Here are some examples of honesty within the context of meetings:

- Posting desired meeting outcomes
- Eliminating hidden agendas; topics are addressed openly
- Taking everyone’s input at face value
- Not trying to fool citizens by asking for input when decisions already have been made
Acknowledging that some issues—e.g., abortion, gun control, and spotted owls—are so value-laden that you'll probably never reach common ground, so your group focuses its efforts on topics you can agree on.

- Not glossing over the amount of time people are expected to commit to the group's efforts
- Not promising what you can't deliver, whether it's a report or a legislative policy

Fair. Open. Honest. Can it really be that simple? Actually, no. The trick is to make sure all three principles are in place and in balance, something like an equilateral triangle (Figure 1). If one side is missing, the process doesn't work. For example, you could say to a fellow group member, “Fred, I want to be totally honest with you. The fact that you're tall makes it impossible for me to work with you.” It's honest. It's open too. But fair? No way!

This fair-open-honest concept is easy to understand and takes a lifetime to implement. It's worth the effort.

**Eleven Easy Ways to Improve Your Meetings**

Although the fair-open-honest principle sounds great, most of us need more practical suggestions to make our meetings go more smoothly. Try the following 11 ways to improve your meetings:

1. **Have an agenda and use it.**

A written agenda can make a huge difference in the success of your meeting, especially if you use it. Here are some situations that highlight this point:

   - “So Jim, you’ve asked me to come to this meeting of yours on Friday. What is it you want to accomplish?” (Maybe this meeting isn’t for you.)
   - “Denise, I’m sending you a memo about an upcoming meeting of our watershed coalition, but I wanted to talk to you first. I’d sure like to have you there. If all goes as planned, by the end of the meeting, we’ll have identified the evaluation criteria for the grant proposal, and we’ll have selected the people who’ll present our info to the County Commissioners.” (Wouldn’t you want to go to this meeting?)
   - “Carlos just brought up a really important issue. We don’t have it on the agenda, but I think we have to address it before we can make a decision on the Christmas tree project. Can we adjust the agenda?” (Agendas certainly can be rearranged to accommodate new issues and unforeseen discussions.)
2. Use a meeting manager.

You have several options here. The idea is to have people with good meeting management skills run your meetings. Meeting managers are like traffic cops. They guide the process, not the content. And like the police, often their very presence encourages good behavior. Here’s an example of good meeting management:

“Wow, we’re finishing right on time. All we have to do is confirm our next meeting time and place, and build the agenda. Ginny mentioned earlier that we should discuss the Christmas party at our next meeting. What else needs to be on the agenda?” (Doesn’t this sound like a great way to wind up a meeting?)

Here are some things your meeting manager can say to help the group along:

“Your agreed to spend 10 minutes on this topic. We’re running out of time. Can someone summarize the key points?”

“O.K. Joe has stated the problem as he sees it. Let’s go around the room and see if others see it the same way.”

“Let’s hear from the folks who haven’t had a chance to say something yet.”

For your regular meetings, try rotating the meeting manager role among group members who have these skills. It’s amazing how courteous and effective groups become when members realize they’re individually responsible for the success of the meeting. Rotating the meeting manager position also helps build group solidarity.

Having the chairperson “run” the meeting isn’t necessarily a good idea. The chairperson is integrally involved in the “content” of the group—what you’re trying to accomplish. Being simultaneously responsible for the “process” usually is more than he or she can handle.

You might consider using an outside facilitator as your meeting manager. Good outside facilitators are worth their weight in gold. You might be able to “borrow” one from a partner group, or you might choose to hire a professional.

A facilitator really comes in handy when bad habits threaten to overwhelm the group, when major differences of opinion arise, when an impasse is reached and the group needs a jump-start, or when you’re actively involved in strategic planning. Be careful, however, not to come to depend on a facilitator for the success of your meetings—that’s your responsibility.
3. **Have agreed-upon ground rules for behavior—and use them.**

You probably don’t play a new game without learning the rules. To minimize hurt feelings, misunderstandings, and wasted time, decide up front what your group’s operating principles will be. One quick way to get to the basics is to ask each member to finish this sentence, “At this meeting, all rules can be broken except this one. . . .” Post these rules at every meeting.

Here are some situations where rules come in handy:

“Hey, Jerry and Kim, we agreed to respect divergent opinions at this meeting. Please stop arguing.”

“Hold on! We all agreed not to evaluate ideas at this time. Let’s back up.”

“We agreed to hold all calls for the next hour while we work on this problem” (while gazing at Bill, who’s just picked up his cell phone).

4. **Use wall notes for group memory.**

Wall notes—chalkboards, butcher paper, flipcharts—are great visual tools. They help group members focus more on the issues than on each other. People can keep on track. To make it easier to use wall notes, set up your meeting room in a “U” shape with the wall note space at the open end of the U.

Here are some ways wall notes can help your group:

“Shawna, can you summarize what you just said so we can put it on the chart?”

“Bob, didn’t you already make that point? How is what you just said different from what’s already on the chart?” (This technique can really cut down on “air time.”)

“Yes, Alice, your comment has been recorded. It’s right here” (pointing to chart). “Did we get it right?”

“Great! Derek just volunteered to call the Governor’s office. Put his name on the flipchart next to that task. Thanks!”

5. **Accommodate different learning and communication styles.**

People perceive and take in information in different ways. Some people process information verbally, and most meetings cater to these people.
Other people don’t say a word at meetings. In the past, it was assumed that these people were shy or didn’t have anything to contribute. Now we know this assumption is wrong. Approximately half of the United States population is comprised of people who process information internally, mulling it over before speaking.

With just minor changes to the meeting structure, you can create opportunities for everyone to participate. Try these methods:

Try nonverbal communication.

“We’ve spent a lot of time talking around this issue. How about everybody taking 5 minutes to write down the situation as they see it.”

“I know this sounds a bit weird, but we’ve been going around in circles on this issue for a long time. How about approaching it in a different way? Let’s divide into groups and draw a picture of what a solution could look like.”

Use small groups.

“We’re ready to start strategizing solutions. Let’s divide into small groups. Do you want to count off or just choose your own group?”

Allow time when possible for reflection.

“Now that we’re clear about the problem, let’s give ourselves some time to mull over some possible solutions. If everyone gets their ideas to me by Wednesday afternoon, I’ll put them all together and get them to your office by the following Monday.”

6. Start on time so you can finish on time.

7. Know how decisions will be made.

Chapter I-4 focuses on decision making, but it’s important enough to be mentioned more than once. Whatever your group’s decision-making process, make sure everyone knows and understands it. Here are some examples of being clear about the decision making process:

“OK, remember we agreed that since this is Orasa’s project, she’ll make the final decision.”

“Our decision-making process is consensus minus one. Everyone except Bart is comfortable with the proposal. Using consensus minus one, we can go ahead with the project.”

See Chapter I-4 for a detailed discussion of decision making.
8. Go slow to go fast.

Has the following situation ever happened in your group? You’re brainstorming solutions when, all of a sudden, part of the group jumps on one idea, obviously deciding it’s the one they want, effectively stopping the whole brainstorming process. We often race to a solution without being clear about what the problem really is.

Ernie McDonald, the father of meeting management and environmental education in Oregon, coined the phrase, “Go slow to go fast.” It’s worth trying. Here are some ways to put this principle into practice:

Check understandings before moving on.

“I don’t hear any complaints about Scott’s suggestion, but just to be sure, does anyone have serious problems with his suggestion? Great, let’s move ahead.”

Define the problem.

“Whoa! We’re rushing to solve this ‘problem,’ but I’m not sure we understand what the ‘problem’ really is. Let’s go around the room to hear everyone’s ‘read’ on it.”

Pay attention to the group’s emotional level.

“Whoa! Let’s cool down a bit. Let’s take a 10-minute break.”

Create time for rest and reflection.

“We seem to be floundering here. How about a 15-minute break? Then we can refocus our energy.”

9. Make sure everything you do works directly toward your mission.

Unless your group structure is an organic network (see Chapter I-2, “Choosing Your Group’s Structure, Mission, and Goals”), think twice before spinning off onto new projects and expanding your mission. Usually, volunteer committees barely have enough time to get the essentials done. Think about what you’re supposed to be focusing your time and energy on.

For example:

“You know, Billy Bob’s just had a great idea. Since we agree it doesn’t fit our mission, how about we share it with the Red Cross folks? I’ll bet they’d love it!”

Usually, volunteer committees barely have enough time to get the essentials done. Think about what you’re supposed to be focusing your time and energy on.
“What are we trying to accomplish here? Sure sounds like we're not clear about our mission. Let's back up a bit.”

“Buying the old bowling alley sounds intriguing, Janey, but I don't get how it fits with our mission. Help me out.”


Does this scenario sound familiar? You've been hashing out a complex situation for an inordinate amount of time, the meeting has gone on far too long, and everyone's worn down. Somebody jumps up and says, “Hey, all we need to do is...” Everyone agrees it's a great idea, grabs their stuff and dashes out of the room. Later, nobody can agree on what it was they agreed to. Taking time to “agree on what you’re agreeing to” is worth it.

“Let's make sure we know what we're agreeing to. Can someone restate their understanding of the solution? Let's get that down on the flipchart. Wait, before you dash out, do we have it correctly written down?”

If it's a major decision, you may even want to go a step further:

“To ensure we’ve got the wording exactly right, please come up and put your initials on this.”

11. Evaluate, evaluate, evaluate!

Your watershed group regularly measures its progress in attaining its content goals. (See Chapter I-2, “Choosing Your Group’s Structure, Mission, and Goals.”) You also should evaluate your process, especially when you’re changing to a new way of conducting meetings. After all, how will you know that the meeting's been successful? Here are three quick ways to evaluate how you're doing:

- 3 minutes: One person volunteers to record. On a flipchart, record what the group liked about the meeting and what they would like to change. Draw a line down the middle of the sheet, and draw a “+” on one side and a triangle on the other. (The triangle is scientific shorthand for change.) Then record people's comments in each column.

- 1 minute: Ask each member to do the same exercise individually. Have one person collect and tabulate results.

- 3 minutes: Hang a flipchart at the exit of the room. As people leave, have them mark on a line how successful the meeting was for them (Figure 2).
ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES FOR SUCCESSFUL MEETINGS

Making your meetings successful is your responsibility. It is not the chairperson’s job nor the high-paid outside facilitator’s job; it’s yours—the participants. The days of sitting back and reading your mail while someone else “runs” the meeting and makes the decisions are over! Shared decision making means shared meeting obligations.

The process roles and responsibilities are straightforward (Figure 3). None of the jobs is particularly difficult. Now imagine being in a meeting where everyone does his or her job. Doesn’t that look good? It wouldn’t take much to make it happen.

**Group memory (wall notes)**
- Helps group focus on task.
- Depersonalizes ideas.
- Is instant record of meeting progress.
- Minimizes repetition.
- Encourages participation because it respects each idea.
- Ensures that ideas are recorded accurately.
- Helps problem solving by preserving information through different phases.
- Helps late comers catch up without interruption.
- Improves accountability through recording who will do what and when.
- Costs little; easy to use; available to any group.

**Group members**
- Use facilitative behavior.
- Keep meeting manager (and recorder) neutral.
- Ensure ideas are recorded accurately.
- Focus their energy on the problem.

**Recorder**
- Remains neutral.
- Uses the speaker’s own words.
- Captures ideas on wall notes.
- May ask meeting manager for clarification.

**Meeting manager**
- Remains neutral.
- Focuses group energy.
- Does not evaluate or contribute ideas.
- Encourages everyone to participate.
- Suggests alternative methods.
- Helps group find agreement.

**Director and staff**
- Listen more and talk less.
- Use facilitative behaviors.
- Maintain final decision responsibility.
- Make sure that action is followed up.

*Figure 3.*—Meeting roles. (Adapted from Ernie McDonald of McDonald Communications.)
Summary/Self review

The following lists summarize the key points in this chapter. You can use them to evaluate your group’s meetings and to identify areas for improvement.

Are your meetings fair-open-honest?
- Are your meetings scheduled at convenient times?
- Does your group accommodate special access needs?
- Do you involve the people who will be affected by your group’s decisions?
- Do you offer a variety of formats—verbal and nonverbal—to ensure full participation?
- Is the meeting process straightforward and understandable to participants and observers?
- Is your group required to comply with Oregon’s open meeting law?
- Do participants understand their role?
- Does the meeting feel like a safe place to exchange ideas?
- Does your group have ground rules for behavior—and use them?
- Are meeting agendas and expected outcomes posted so all can see them?
- Is everyone’s input taken at face value (or are people trying to read more into it than was said?)

Ways to improve your meetings
- Does your group have a posted agenda? Do you use it?
- Do you use a meeting manager for your regular meetings? Do you rotate this responsibility?
- When your group has a crisis, do you bring in an outside facilitator to help you get back on track?
- Does your group have agreed-upon ground rules for behavior? Are they posted? Do you use them?
- Does your group consistently use wall notes (for example, flipcharts or a chalkboard) that everyone can see?
- Does your group accommodate different learning and communication styles?
- Do you ever write out solutions rather than talk about them?

- Are people asked to give input, and is that input used?
- Are time commitments clear?
- Does your group deliver what you promise?

Do you use small groups for brainstorming and problem solving?
- Does your group start its meetings on time?
- How does your group make decisions?
- How do you know that a decision has been made?
- Are your decisions written down where all can see them?
- Does your group sometimes rush to solve the problem before the problem is defined?
- Does your group call an unscheduled break to allow emotions to cool, or time to think?
- Do all of your group’s decisions move you closer to achieving your mission?
- How does your group evaluate the meeting process?

Roles and responsibilities
- Do you know what role you play in the meeting process?
- Do you contribute to the success of the meeting?
- What about the role of the meeting manager, or the decision maker?
- What steps are you going to recommend to your group to improve your meetings?
EXERCISES

Dealing with difficult participants

You can do this exercise on your own in about 10 minutes.

Every group has at least one member whose behavior sometimes slows progress. This person can be a talker who never seems to pause, or someone who waits until a decision is made, then drops the bombshell, or . . . . I’m sure you can come up with your own scenarios.

In this exercise, your job is to think up at least three ways to pleasantly deal with the situation. Keep in mind the fair-open-honest philosophy. Then, the next time he or she strikes, you’re ready to go into action!

Remember, every group member is responsible for helping the group move forward. Don’t wait for the meeting manager to take care of it.

Keeping your meeting focused

Do this exercise at one of your group meetings. It should take about 10 minutes.

If you’re intrigued about these meeting management ideas but aren’t ready to take on a whole meeting, here’s a low-risk exercise to get your feet wet. Talk to the meeting manager first so he or she will know what’s going on.

At your next meeting, as soon as everyone’s settled and the meeting is ready to start, grab a marking pen, walk up to a flipchart, and ask the group to help you answer this question: “What will make this meeting successful?” Write down their responses. Post the flipchart paper on the wall and sit down.

Now, during the meeting, focus on helping achieve these successes. At the end of the meeting, take 3 minutes to refer back to the chart and check off the items the group has accomplished. Are you surprised how easy it was to take these steps?
Resources

Training

The Family Community Leadership (FCL) program of the OSU Extension Service. Check with your county OSU Extension Service office.

CISPUS Inter-Agency Public Meetings Training. If you work for a federal or state natural resource agency, call Susan Saul at 503-231-6121 about the training schedule.

Information


We've Got to Start Meeting Like This! by R. Mosvick and R. Nelson. ISBN: 1-57112-069-6
MOVING FORWARD—THE NEXT STEPS

On your own, use the lines below to fill in steps, actions, thoughts, contacts, etc. you’ll take to move yourself and your group ahead in improving meeting management skills.

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Decision Making

Chapter I-4

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 chapter addresses several issues facing groups when making decisions.

The meetings management and communication skills discussed in Chapters I-3 and I-5 also can help your group become more effective at decision making.
THE IMPORTANCE OF 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 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 AND 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 (Miller et al.).

**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 decision making 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 Chapter I-2, “Choosing your Group’s 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. See Chapter I-3 for a more detailed discussion of meetings management and facilitators.

**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.

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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 Chapter I-6, “Dealing with 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.
SUMMARY/SELF REVIEW

By now, you should have a better understanding of how groups can improve the quality of their decisions. Different groups have different needs for their decision-making structure. The most important thing is for your group to agree on a process, make sure everyone understands it, and stick to it. Also, as your group makes decisions, be sure to document them and enter them into the meeting minutes.

Consensus raises the standard for decision making. It offers the best chance of finding effective gain/gain solutions. It also is slower and less efficient in terms of time. The trade-off is effectiveness over efficiency. Coming to consensus usually requires a skilled meeting manager or facilitator.

Big decisions need a more sophisticated process than little ones. Whether the framework, it is important to develop clear criteria about what a good decision would look like before making the decision. The generation of good alternatives is helped by thinking both creatively and critically.

EXERCISES

Decision-making methods

Review the section on different ways groups make decisions. During your next group meeting, notice which methods are used (e.g., majority decision, yes/no, or default). Do the methods change depending on the situation? Are there times when a more complex decision-making process is necessary?

Documenting decisions

At your next group meeting, pay particular attention to whether or not your decisions are documented. If necessary, propose formal adoption of a decision-making process and a means for documenting and tracking important decision.
**Training**

The OSU Extension Family Community Leadership program at Oregon State University has excellent publications and training opportunities—often free or for a nominal charge—in many Oregon counties. Contact your county office of the OSU Extension Service for details.

University Associates offers a variety of training programs on group process and organizational development. They can be contacted at 3505 North Campbell Ave., Suite 505, Tucson, AZ 85719; phone: 520-322-6700; fax: 520-322-6789; email: info@universityassociates.com; Web: www.universityassociates.com

Dialogue Dynamics, Christopher Roach, is a Corvallis-based trainer who has expertise on this subject. He can be contacted at 966 NW Sequoia, Corvallis, OR 97330; phone: 541-754-5521.

**Information**


*We’ve Got to Start Meeting Like This!* by R. K. Mosvick and R. B. Nelson (Park Avenue Productions, Indianapolis, 1996). ISBN 1-57112-069-6. A comprehensive treatment of how meetings are run and how they can be improved. Good chapter on decision making in groups.

The following Program for Community Problem Solving materials are directed at community collaboration for a broad range of purposes, including economic development and social programs as well as land-use planning. All are available from Program for Community Problem Solving, 915 15th St. NW, Suite 601, Washington, D.C. 20005; phone: 202-783-2961; fax: 202-147-2161.

*Involving Citizens in Community Decision Making*, by J. L. Creighton. Directed at government agencies, this manual covers the formation and development of public participation programs, how to prepare a public participation plan, and specific implementation techniques.

*Pulling Together: A Land Use and Development Consensus Building Manual*, by D. R. Godschalk et al. A detailed and comprehensive “guidebook for community leaders” with sections on developing a game plan, getting all parties to participate, building consensus, improving meetings, and learning from others. Includes case studies and sample materials.

*Solving Community Problems by Consensus*, by S. Carpenter. This guidebook geared toward local government managers and other community leaders covers strategies and techniques for using participatory group processes to resolve community problems, including: when consensus programs are appropriate; what types of problems lend themselves to the consensus approach; and the formats, phases, and considerations for running a consensus program. Includes case studies illustrating the techniques.
MOVING FORWARD—THE NEXT STEPS

On your own, use the lines below to fill in steps, actions, thoughts, contacts, etc. you’ll take to move yourself and your group ahead in improving decision-making skills.

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Back to Contents
**Communication—simple yet complex, easy to do but easy to blunder. It can be the source of conflict and misunderstanding that torpedoes your group into a war zone; ironically, it's also the only thing that can get you back to peacetime.**

Learning how to communicate effectively can help your group and its members build trust and respect, foster learning, and accomplish goals. Written, oral, and body language can be important tools for sharing ideas, feelings, and commitment. Clear codes of communication behavior, or *protocols*, can help individuals and the group as a whole match expectations to reality.

The move to establish partnerships that work to enhance and manage watersheds is exciting. It must, however, coincide with an increase in effective communication between individuals and within the group. Your group is made up of people who share a common interest and commitment but see things from a variety of perspectives and positions. Good communication is the only way this diverse group of people will be able to understand watershed processes and make decisions for effective enhancement.

In Chapter I-6, you’ll find some common pitfalls that many groups run into. Many of these pitfalls are related to communication problems. See that chapter for more ideas on how to prevent or overcome these problems.
ACTIVE LISTENING

When asked to define “communication,” most people describe the techniques used to express what they think, feel, want, etc.—namely talking, writing, or body language. However, when you confront difficult issues, listening is more important than speaking or any other form of expression.

One of the first steps to improving communication is to recognize the importance of listening and to make listening a key part of your organization’s culture. Active listening has several benefits:

- It saves time because you cut through people’s defenses and get more information without having to repeat the same conversations over and over.
- It helps you assess a situation accurately.
- It helps speakers clarify what they’re saying and makes them feel they’re being heard.
- It reduces emotions that block clear thinking.

The good news is that everyone can learn the art of effective listening. There are several models you can follow. They all revolve around the need to stop talking and concentrate on what’s being said. Stay an inch ahead of the speaker, not a mile. Don’t jump to conclusions and solutions. You’re not listening if you’re busy thinking about a response. As a listener, try to be relaxed, maintain eye contact, and avoid interrupting the speaker.

Below is one five-step model of active listening (Mary Zinkin, Center for Conflict Studies, 1993). Remember, the key to listening effectively is relaxed attention—listen with your whole body by using verbal and nonverbal listening skills (for example, face the person and maintain eye contact). Follow the steps in order.

Step 1. Acknowledge feelings first.

Acknowledge the feelings the speaker may be trying to express. Note that you recognize and hear the feelings, and show your readiness to listen. Use nods, “uh-huhs,” and comments that indicate you recognize the validity of the speaker’s feelings. For example:

- “It’s been one frustration too many. You’re wanting to give up.”
- “Wow, sounds like you’re really upset by this.”
**Step 2. Say it in different words.**

One of the most powerful and important components of active listening is reflection—otherwise known as paraphrasing. Paraphrasing lets the other person know you’re trying to understand, clarifies the communication, and slows the pace of the interaction, thereby reducing intensity and eliciting more information.

To paraphrase, repeat what the speaker is saying, in your own words, without adding anything not there in the first place. For example:

“Sounds like you’ve tried everything, and you don’t know where to go next, but you have to do something.”

or

“If I’m following you, you’re really wondering if this recent decision is going to affect your land or just the Feds.”

**Step 3. Ask open questions.**

Ask for help when you get lost in a conversation. Check out your interpretation of what the speaker is saying. But don’t get hung-up on being right or use defensive questions such as “why?” or “don’t you think. . . ?” Instead, ask relevant, open-ended questions beginning with “what,” “how,” “please explain,” or “describe.” For example:

“How will that affect what will happen to your coworkers?”

or

“If this policy goes through, describe for me how it will affect your ability to do business.”

**Step 4. Summarize and clarify.**

Now, pull together what you’ve heard. Getting clear keeps you from falling into “selective perception” and the problematic “as if” zone. In this case, you respond in a certain way (“as if”) because you expect the other person to react in a predetermined way (either because he or she has reacted that way before in situation X or Y, or because it’s how you would react in the same situation). When you’re in the “as if” zone, you’re not waiting for reality, you’re predetermining it. This scenario often happens despite the fact that it isn’t clear communication and is unhelpful for both the speaker and the listener.
In addition, getting clear can help the speaker clarify possible choices. For example:

“You’ve mentioned firing him or just letting it go. I wonder if those are your only options.”

or

“Sounds to me like you see several options, although some are more appealing than others. Is there any way you can get clearer on which one(s) will be best for you?”

Step 5. Give an opinion.

If you offer an opinion, do it with great caution, and only after doing steps 1–4. Remember, sharing your opinion is most helpful if you ask whether the speaker is willing or wants to hear it. Here’s one way to ask:

1. Pause for a moment.
2. Preface your opinion with a statement such as, “Would you be open or interested in hearing my opinion on this issue/situation?”
3. If they respond with “no,” let it go. Maybe they just needed to talk and they’ll figure it out on their own. If they respond with “yes,” use the skills presented throughout this chapter to guide you through a helpful exchange of ideas and feelings.

DIRECT, ASSERTIVE EXPRESSION

If half of the equation in communication is active listening, the other half is expressing what you think, feel, or want in a way that is clear, true, and nondefensive. Most of us don’t have a good track record in this arena. Often intention does not equal impact. In fact, it generally takes a speaker 3–10 assertions to deliver a message that a listener actually gets. The key to success is to be clear about “What I want” and “What I’m willing to give.”

The number one rule to follow when expressing yourself is to use “I” messages. Using I statements lets you share what you think or feel without sounding like you’re blaming or attacking. I statements are important for communicating your preferences (“It would be helpful to me if...”) and making your actions or intentions clear (“What I would like to accomplish is...”).
It may not feel normal to use I statements at first because most of us have gotten really good at using “you” statements. It’s worth breaking those bad habits, though, because if you do, you truly can turn around a problem communication.

For example, here are three ordinary and probably familiar comments you might say or hear. A n “I-statement alternative” is given in italics below each one. You can see how the I statement would be much less threatening to the other person.

“You know that’s not right.”
“I see it differently than you.”
“You are really irritating me.”
“I’m feeling irritated right now.”
“You’re not listening to me.”
“I don’t feel listened to.”

Another way to express yourself is to give feedback to someone who is open to receiving it. Feedback is a way for you to give someone information about his or her behavior in a given situation.

By being open to receiving feedback, people can learn how their behavior affects themselves and others. Feedback helps people keep behavior appropriate and focused on intended goals. Ultimately, the person receiving feedback—not the person giving it—can decide whether a change in behavior is desirable at this time.

Feedback is useful only when it is:

- Solicited and well-timed—“Would you be willing or interested in some feedback from me right now?”

- Specific, descriptive, and accurate—“I sense you’re angry right now about (this situation) by the way you’re raising your voice and your face is red. Am I correct?”

- A realistic request that is clearly communicated—“I’m feeling concerned/scared. I wonder if you’d be willing or interested in taking a short break—a couple of minutes to step back and breathe—and then continue our conversation?”

Through active listening and clear, direct expression, two or more people in a conversation—when willing—can truly communicate their ideas and feelings in a way that builds understanding, safety, and trust.

**Body Language**

Remember, we communicate as much or more through body language as we do through words! Body language includes facial expressions, eye contact, and the stance or movements of arms, hands, and legs.
Be aware of your body language and what it might communicate to others. A good way to become aware of your own body language is to become aware of it in others first. The next time you’re involved in a group conversation or watching one on television, take a moment to watch the body language of one of the listeners and consider how it might affect the speaker. Check out the speaker’s body language; does it tell the same story as his or her words?

Body language, and the thoughts and feelings it communicates, can be a very important tool to watch and use in groups. It’s especially important when a group is making a decision. Are people saying “yes” with their words but “no” with their bodies? Chapter I-4 talks about decision-making steps and strategies for groups.

**ANGER—EXPRESSING IT AND RECEIVING IT**

Anger probably is one of the least understood emotions. It’s hard for some of us to express anger or feel good about how we express it. Others find it easier to express anger but often do so in an unhealthy and unhelpful way.

Anger itself is not bad. It can provide information and produce energy that can be used positively. And it’s important to understand that other emotions, such as pain, fear, powerlessness, or hopelessness, often are hidden beneath anger.

Unless you live on a deserted island, you’re bound to encounter conflicts, and feelings of anger won’t be far behind. This is especially true as you work with others in a group setting. Here are some key things to remember when you’re angry:

- Remember rule of thumb #1: Use I statements.
- Use the A, B, C formula:
  
  **A.** I feel A . . .
  
  “I’m feeling really frustrated . . .”

  **B.** In situation B . . .
  
  “. . . right now because there is so much going on and noise in the room . . .”

  **C.** When you do C . . .
  
  “. . . and you keep talking to me, but I can’t hear everything you’re saying.”
By talking about yourself first, you avoid bringing out listeners’ need to defend themselves. By being descriptive, you let listeners know exactly what situation you feel angry about.

Avoid judgment. . . good or bad. Using words such as “better,” “worst,” or “should” can make listeners really defensive. Similarly, exaggeration can cause them to argue against the exaggeration rather than against the real issue.

Receiving another person’s anger also can be challenging, but there are ways to make it easier. For example:

- Understand your own anger or emotions and how they might affect your response.
- Acknowledge the feelings of the other person. When you show interest, an angry person often calms down.
- Rephrase what you heard the person say. The angry person won’t feel good or be receptive to your help until his or her feelings are communicated and understood.
- Get agreement on “what the issue is.”
- Invite the other person to join you in addressing the issue.
- Take action and follow up.

**Dialogue—What It Means and How to Do It**

What is dialogue? Mostly it is doing well what we’ve been talking about in this chapter: actively listening, increasing your inquiry skills, letting people finish thoughts before responding, noting your own internal responses, learning how to stay open in conversations even when unpleasant emotions arise, giving up blaming and judging, and so on.

When people talk about dialogue, Peter Senge’s name inevitably comes up. In his books, Senge talks about how dialogue is a different and often unfamiliar way of communicating. Dialogue is more than talking. It is continued, thoughtful exchange about the things that matter most to us. In short, it’s thoughtful conversation. In a sense, dialogue is nothing new. It’s what some folks do around kitchen tables or during a long ride in the car—sitting together, talking as ideas come to us, without an agenda, time pressures, or trying to solve something.

Perhaps dialogue simply is a new way of looking at conversation or communication. If the goal of communication is to decide
something, do something, or convince someone, then the goal of
dialogue is listening to understand.

Dialogue’s purpose is as important as what is being discussed. In
a sense, its purpose is to honor, at a deep level, the development of
human beings, ideas, and organizations. And, at the risk of
sounding too philosophical, we change the world by changing the
way we perceive the world, the way we think about cause and
effect, the way we conceptualize the relationship between things,
and the meaning we ascribe to events in the world.

Thinking about communication in this sense is important as your
group works together and communicates with each other and the
outside world about its benefits, challenges, successes, and failures.

Dialogue is a conversational practice. Like sports, exercising, or
other practices, you build skills as you work at it. Some important
dialogue skills to practice are:

- Allowing others to finish their thoughts
- Respecting others’ thoughts, feelings, views, and realities, even
  when they differ from your own
- Listening deeply without needing to fix, counter, argue, or resist

The best news is that to work on improving dialogue skills, you
simply need to make a note to yourself to listen in a supportive way
and see what happens.

**Effective Communication Protocols**

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 of this section talked about the importance of
having a clear organizational structure for your group, roles for
each member, and appropriate tools to ensure effective meetings
and optimal decision making. This chapter takes those concepts a
step farther by focusing on communication within the group
(internal) and with the outside world (external). To do so, we’ll talk
about communication protocols. Remember, communication can be
either written or oral.

Communication protocols are codes of behavior or conduct that
help an organization run smoothly. They are ways to interact and
communicate that are well-known and documented. In effect, they
help the group be clear about the what, when, who, and how of its
internal and external communications (how and when to get a
topic on a meeting agenda, communicating with the media, etc.).
They help you avoid the ever-present problem of mismatched
expectations and reality.
Clear communication protocols can improve understanding among group members, raise trust, and make working together more fun and comfortable. All of these factors will improve the effectiveness of your group.

Each group will have its own communication protocols. Setting protocols might feel time-consuming, tedious, and artificial at first. However, creating and following protocols is especially important for new groups. Even many well-established groups falter because of unclear communication protocols that erode trust and jeopardize the group’s success. With practice, good, clear communication protocols eventually will become part of your group’s culture—a safe, effective way to work on issues of mutual interest.

Communication protocols may need to change with time. Anticipate situations and set protocols. But when new situations come up, or the protocols aren’t working as well as intended, take the time as a group to revise them and create new ones as needed.

**Internal communication protocols**

The key to good internal communication protocols is to make sure they’re clear, documented, and understood by all members—post them on flip charts, have them in every group member’s notebook, etc. If all group members understand the protocols, they’ll know what is expected of them and what they can expect from others.

Below are some questions that clear internal communication protocols address. There are many more, but these examples can start you thinking:

- When will meetings happen? How often? Who calls the meetings or other duties requiring intergroup communication? Do these notices have to be in writing?
- Who is in the group? Who is on what subcommittees? Who needs to know what? Who gets notices about subcommittee work sessions, outcomes, etc.?
- How will subcommittee actions be communicated to the rest of the group?
- If someone hears something outside the group that deals with the group, whom do they tell and when?
- How will agreements or decisions be communicated to all group members?
There are so many possibilities! Think up as many as you can; others will become evident as your group continues to work together. And remember, if a protocol is not working (too loose, too restrictive, not clear, etc.), don’t resist a discussion to make appropriate revisions.

**External communication protocols**

When you move from communicating within the group to communicating outside the group, the basic principles are the same. However, the risk of unmet expectations, miscommunication, and ruptured trust increases greatly.

To the right are three examples of actual external communication protocols that were developed by one group (here called Group A) to enhance effectiveness, trust, and safety within the group. This group is made up of many different people, with diverse interests and perspectives, but a common mission. It’s set up as a membership group with a board of directors.

Your group’s structure may be different, and your group’s protocols should be suitable for its structure. See Chapter 1-2 for information about organizational structures and what makes them work.
GROUP A’S EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION PROTOCOLS

Protocol #1—Communicating with the media: Press releases

Step 1. When the need arises, one person writes a draft press release.
- If it’s subcommittee-related, that subcommittee or an agreed-upon representative writes it.

Step 2. Three members of the board of directors of the group must review this draft press release.
- The author faxes it to these reviewers within 48 hours.
- The Group A chair serves as a tie breaker or has the option to poll the entire board of directors.
- If it goes no farther than the board of directors, it gets shelved until the next membership meeting.

Step 3. All directors and members get final news releases.
- Each news release will have a contact person’s name and phone number.

Protocol #2—Communicating with existing/other groups

- Group A developed a mutually-agreed-upon “canned general statement” about their group and its mission, goals, etc. This protocol requires group members to use this statement when communicating with other groups.

Protocol #3—Sitting on some other group’s board of directors or advisory committee

- If membership is free, Group A members may join.
- Who joins should be based on comfort, area of interest (subcommittee members?), geographic location, etc.
- You must poll Group A’s board of directors before you commit.
- If membership costs, poll Group A’s board of directors and membership to see whether it is worth it to join.
- If you sit on existing groups (“wear another hat”), please poll Group A’s board of directors before you wear our (Group A’s) hat.
SUMMARY/SELF REVIEW

Active listening is important because it allows speakers to feel heard and gives them the opportunity to clarify their meaning. It helps people accurately assess the situation. The key elements of good listening include acknowledging feelings first, reflecting what’s being said, asking clarifying questions, and summarizing your understanding of the communication.

The key points of direct expression (including oral, written, and action) are being clear on what you want and what you’re willing to give. Tools for direct expression include using “I statements,” giving feedback appropriately, and being aware of your body language and what it might communicate to others.

The key considerations for expressing and receiving anger are using “I statements,” using the A, B, C formula, talking about yourself first to avoid bringing out the listener’s defensiveness, being descriptive, and avoiding judgment.

Dialogue is thoughtful communication. The goal of dialogue is listening to understand. Dialogue skills include giving others enough time and space to finish a thought, and listening deeply without the need to fix, counter, argue, or resist. By practicing dialogue, you can improve these skills.

Protocols are codes of behavior or conduct that help groups run smoothly. Internal communication protocols are ways to interact and communicate within the group. They improve the understanding of the group, raise trust in working together, and make the group more effective. External communication protocols improve how the group shares its goals and accomplishments with the world. The key to good communication protocols is to make sure they’re clear, documented, and in the hands of all group members.
EXERCISES

Giving feedback in a helpful way

You can do this exercise alone or as part of a group.

Most of us don’t have a lot of practice at giving feedback in a helpful way. This exercise will give you a chance to practice learning how to give helpful feedback.

1. Think about a group situation, preferably outside of your watershed group, where someone repeatedly did something that irritated you. At the top of a piece of paper, briefly describe the situation (one or two sentences will do).

2. Now draw a vertical line down the center of the paper, and on the left side write a brief description of what you normally would say or do to handle the situation (again, one or two sentences). On the right side, try a new way of giving feedback. Review the Feedback section of this chapter and write down your ideas using the “A, B, C approach.”

   I feel (A) ________________________________
   in this situation (B) ________________________________
   when you say/do (C) ________________________________

3. Lastly, write down what you are thinking of doing (your intentions) as a result of your feelings.

4. Once you are done, look over the Feedback section of this chapter and evaluate what you’ve written. If you are doing this exercise as a group, ask a couple of people who feel comfortable doing so to share their situation and their old and new ways of giving feedback.

Active listening

You’ll need at least one other person to help you do this exercise.

Most of us can’t boast about being effective listeners! This exercise will give you a chance to practice effective listening and to see how it feels to truly be heard.

If you’re doing this exercise in a group, break up into pairs. If you’re doing it outside of your group, find someone you can really do this exercise with and then laugh about it later!

1. Holding the Active Listening section of this chapter in front of you, take 5 minutes to listen to your partner talk about a topic that interests him or her (your partner’s choice). Use the steps in this chapter to guide your listening and responding.

2. Switch and repeat the exercise—you’ll be the talker and your partner will be the listener.

3. After you both have taken a turn at talking and listening, take 5 minutes to talk about what it felt like to be heard. If you are doing this exercise in a group, ask some pairs who feel comfortable doing so to share their experience.
**RESOURCES**

**Training**

The OSU Extension Family Community Leadership program at Oregon State University has excellent publications and training opportunities—often free or for a nominal charge—in many Oregon counties. Contact your county office of the OSU Extension Service for details.

Sharon Ellison, Ellison Communication Consultants, Eugene (phone: 541-485-2221), offers workshops on powerful, nondefensive communication.

Glaser & Associates, Inc., communication educators and consultants in Eugene (phone: 541-343-7575), offer workshops and excellent materials (audiotapes, etc.) on communication and conflict management.

**Information**


The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook, by P. Senge (Doubleday, New York, 1994).


Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes, by W. Bridges (Addison Wesley, 1980).
On your own, use the lines below to fill in steps, actions, thoughts, contacts, etc. you’ll take to move yourself and your group ahead in improving communication skills.

1. 

2. 

3. 

MOVING FORWARD—THE NEXT STEPS

Back to Chapter I-6

"Stumbling Blocks"
A
mericans 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 Chapters I-1 through I-5, you learned about creating successful partnerships, choosing an organizational structure, holding effective meetings, making group decisions, and communicating effectively. In each chapter, some common perils were introduced.

**IN THIS CHAPTER YOU’LL LEARN:**

- 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
In this chapter, 10 of the most common stumbling blocks are described. If your group is running into problems, this chapter can help you identify exactly what the problem is and find solutions. In many cases, it refers you to another chapter for 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. (See Chapter I-5, “Communication Skills,” for specifics.)

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

   The communication skills presented in Chapter I-5 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, UNKNOWNS, AND 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.” Unknowns 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. Unknowns often are treated as facts.
  
  “There is life on other planets.”
  “Oregon 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 Chapters I-1 through I-5 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 (see Chapters I-1 through I-5). 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.”

The keys to keeping either imaginary or real covert agendas from happening are in Chapters I-1 through I-5. 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 Chapters I-3, “Meetings Management,” and I-4, “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. Also refer to Chapter I-5, “Communication Skills,” and the importance of clear internal and external communication protocols.

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.

In Chapters I-1, “Creating Successful Partnerships,” and I-2, “Choosing Your Group’s Structure, Mission, and Goals,” you learned about roles and responsibilities as related to content—who needs to be part of your group and why. In Chapter I-3, “Effective Meetings Management,” you learned about roles and responsibilities as related to process—who does what and when. If
#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 Chapters I-2 through I-4. 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 Chapters I-1 through I-3. 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, AND 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 Chapters I-1 through I-4 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 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 if 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 only one part. Take the time to “look up and out the window” every now and then. With careful thought, multiple objectives can be accomplished and multiple rewards achieved.
1. Conflict

Conflict is a natural tension that arises from differences. The common causes of conflict are the need to be right, the lack of direct expression, and the avoidance of conflict. Your personal history with conflict plays a part in how you cope with it now. Communication skills are needed to manage all types of conflicts.

2. Facts, myths, unknowns, and values

Breaking issues down into bite-sized elements can help you confront or understand them. Delineate and clarify facts, myths, values, and unknowns; destroy myths and replace them with facts or unknowns; anticipate and legitimize value differences; recognize your own values and ethics; articulate your own myths and unknowns; and support the formulation of alternatives based on this new, clarified discussion of the issue.

3. Resources and barriers

Briefly assess and clarify your group’s resources and barriers. Think of resources in terms of various currencies. Figure out whether each barrier is internal or external, and exhaust every possibility about how to get through, over, under, or around it.

4. Covert agendas

To prevent covert agendas from happening, be deliberate about your partnership. Pick an organizational structure that works. Cultivate a group of participants and leaders with the skills needed to keep the group going along effectively.

5. Decision making outside of meetings

This problem happens a lot in the early stages of a group’s life. Prevent it by making a temporary or permanent ground rule related to decision making; then create a clear and agreed-upon group decision-making process.

6. Group members not taking ownership of the group process

The keys to dealing with this problem are knowing what makes good group members—both with regard to content and to process.

(continued)
7. **Lack of clarity regarding decisions**
   Taking the time and energy to form, or reform, clear structure and protocols alleviates this problem. 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 why, and you’ll have the framework to keep your group from stumbling over this problem.

8. **Politics and history of working together**
   Effective watershed groups are effective because their members represent all interests in the watershed. Successful groups are made up of people who share a common interest and commitment, but have a variety of perspectives and positions.

9. **Rules, regulations, and bureaucracies**
   Rule of thumb: “When in doubt, stop and check it out.” Always check with the “powers that be” to learn what you should and should not discuss or agree to.

10. **If not your group, then who?**
    If you come up with a task or problem you can’t do, solve, or figure out, research who else could or should be doing it. Avoid tunnel vision. Take time to look up and out the window every now and then.
Observing conflict

You can do this exercise on your own or as a group.

Most of us feel uncomfortable and unskilled at managing conflict. This exercise will give you a chance to practice listening—both externally and internally. Through this observation, you may be able to increase both your understanding of and comfort with conflict.

The next time you’re watching television, or are around at least two other people, pay close attention if you notice a conflict starting. Practice your listening and observation skills. Is one of the people trying to avoid the conflict? Are they both expressing themselves directly and honestly? Do they both express a strong desire to be right? What kind of communication skills are they using (“I” statements or “You” statements)? Is either of them exhibiting active listening skills? Is the conflict escalating? If not, and they seem to be coming to a resolution, why?

Facts, myths, values, and unknowns

Do this exercise with at least one other person.

Although these items should be clearly distinguishable, it’s remarkable how two (or more) people don’t necessarily identify them the same way. By doing this exercise, you’ll probably learn that distinguishing between these four is not always as easy as it seems. Inevitably, different people identify them differently. In a sense, it’s more important to think about and recognize the differences between perspectives than it is to be right or wrong.

Choose a newspaper article. Use four different colors of highlighters—one each for facts, myths, values, and unknowns. Highlight the fact, myth, value, or unknown in each sentence or paragraph. Have someone else do the same. Then discuss what each of you came up with. Use the section of this chapter on facts, myths, values, and unknowns to guide your discussion.
**Training**

The Family Community Leadership program at Oregon State University has excellent publications and training opportunities—free or for a nominal charge—in many Oregon counties. Contact your county OSU Extension Service office for details.

The National Civic League offers training and presentations in negotiation, collaboration, facilitation, and mediation, and maintains a network of professionals working in the field of community collaboration. For more information, contact the National Civic League, 1319 F St. NW, Suite Suite 204, Washington, DC 20004; phone: 800-308-9414.

Web: [http://www.ncl.org/](http://www.ncl.org/)

The Center for Conflict Studies, Portland, OR, offers workshops on conflict, negotiation, and mediation; phone: 503-236-3149.

**Information**


Guides for Watershed Partnerships, a series of guides from the Conservation Technology Information Center, 1220 Potter Drive, Rm 170, West Lafayette, IN 47906; phone: 317-494-9555.


Web: [http://ag.arizona.edu/azwater](http://ag.arizona.edu/azwater)
MOVING FORWARD—THE NEXT STEPS

On your own, use the lines below to fill in steps, actions, thoughts, contacts, etc. you’ll take to move yourself and your group ahead in avoiding and dealing with stumbling blocks.

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