# SHARED LEADERSHIP

Over many years we have participated in a number of groups, both volunteer and professional. As we began to take more responsibility in these groups, we soon realized we did not feel comfortable in a group that focused on one leader or allowed a few select individuals to control the organization. We much preferred the give and take of a group of equals.

But how would we get anything done without leaders? We soon discovered **shared leadership**. As we read more we found variations of this approach showing up in the oddest places: business management handbooks, negotiating techniques seminars and social change periodicals to name a few. We became convinced this approach has a lot to offer groups of all types.

This pamphlet sets out some basic suggestions about how to get started with a shared leadership approach. Clearly defined roles that must be assumed by many of the group's members are vital to shared leadership. In addition to completing tasks, roles are designed to support the group's emotional fabric which must be kept strong if the group is to accomplish its goals. We have touched on theses areas here and others that most frequently concern those interested in shared leadership.

By design, this discussion is brief in the hope you will start experimenting with these techniques immediately rather than waiting until you have more time to "study" them. Many of these techniques can also be combined with traditional leadership models. Incorporate them into your already on-going groups to make them more participatory, effective and just plain lively!

Elizabeth and Robert Fisher
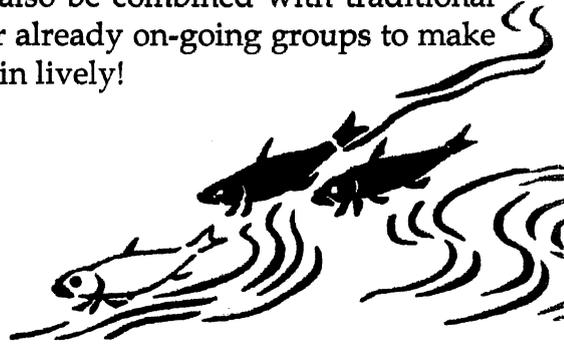
PARADIGM SHIFT IN SOCIAL PATTERN

Sociologists are currently seeing a shift from a hierarchical or pyramid model of social organization to a horizontal or network style. This change is being labeled a paradigm shift. (*Paradigms are simply patterns.*)

GOD
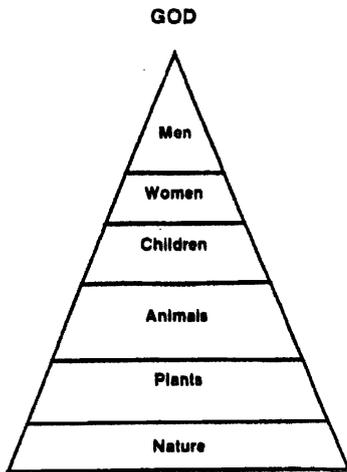
The old model, used until recently in biological theory and organizational designs, portrays people and other life forms as inherently unequal and ranks them hierarchically. Those lower on the pyramid must be controlled by whatever forms are nearer the apex. This model implements a machine-like view which demands conformity and allegiance to aggressive leaders. Others further down the pyramid become followers or unwilling bystanders, not included in the decision making process. Change can be initiated only by "authorities" who, because of a lack of a feedback mechanism within this model, often decide inappropriately.

The new model, a multidimensional web of equally valued participants, is dependent on high participation creating overlapping connections among those within the system. Shared leadership fits this model. Fostered by mutual respect, which leads to dynamic relationships, these groups often arrive at the most appropriate and effective decisions. Implementation and communication are enhanced because of a sense of involvement during the process of decision making. This model also stimulates regeneration and self-renewal due to the multiple styles of inter-action and the attention to the emotional health of the group as well as its accomplishments.
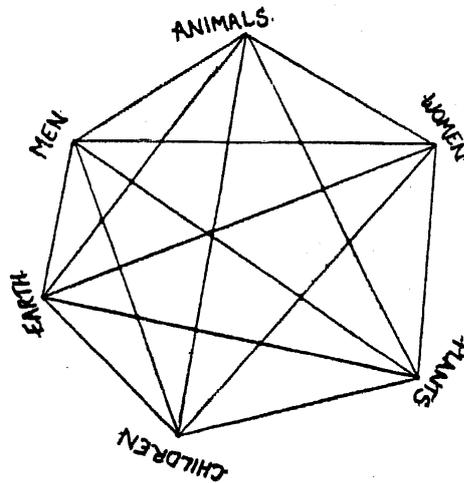
ROLES THAT MAKE THINGS FLOW

The following roles are designed to aid your group's functioning. Although most can be filled at the time of the meeting, it is preferable to have a facilitator(s) and recorder selected prior to the meeting.

FACILITATOR (CONVENER) Compiles agenda before the meeting. Moves the group through the agenda in the time available. Keeps the group on the topic. Points out agreements or possible compromises. Tests consensus or the need for further discussion. (*More on co-facilitation on back page.*)

RECORDER Keeps detailed minutes. The recorder reads back group agreements at the end of each agenda item if appropriate.

TIME WATCHER Keeps track of the pace of the meeting. If agenda items have been assigned specific time limits, the time watcher gives warnings with good humor when the time limit is approaching. The group then decides to finish discussion or extend the time.

VISUAL AID WRITER Writes brainstorming ideas, future agenda items, and summaries of small group reports on large paper for everyone to see.

LATECOMER/NEWCOMER BRIEFER Collects any handouts and gives them to people arriving late. Greets any late arrivals at the door and briefs them.

WHO-SPEAKS-NEXT WATCHER Keeps track of who wants to speak, calling on each in turn. Participants can indicate they want to speak and then follow the discussion without struggling for a chance to comment.

LIGHT AND LIVELY LEADER A quick tension reliever, a "light and lively" is a mood lightener such as a song, wake-up game or body movement. These should be humorous and energetic.

PROCESS OBSERVER From time to time a group can benefit from having somebody observe how it works. When reporting to the group, always point out helpful suggestions that were made or procedures that were used during the meeting that moved the group forward. Once the group has a sense of its strengths, it is easier to consider possible improvements.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS (COMPLETING TASKS)

Any group needs to complete tasks if its members are to feel the group is worthwhile. In order to achieve concrete goals, members should take responsibility for making sure the following activities get done by the group as a whole:

♦ EXCHANGING INFORMATION: offering facts, opinions, ideas and suggestions and soliciting the same from a variety of members.

♦ INITIATING ACTION: proposing goals and tasks that can lead to meeting these goals.

♦ SETTING DIRECTION: focusing attention on the task and developing plans concerning how to proceed.

♦ SUMMARIZING: pulling together relevant ideas, suggestions, plans, and proposals; stating major points.

♦ COORDINATING: keeping relationships clear between sub-groups, the larger group, and individuals; reminding group members of the relationship between activities it is committed to and proposed next steps.

♦ REALITY-TESTING: examining the practicality and workability of plans, drawing on past experiences and history.

♦ EVALUATING: comparing group decisions and accomplishments with long-range goals, analyzing implications for future action.

AND SOUL OF THE GROUP

RELATIONSHIPS (BONDING & MORALE)

A group has an emotional life just as any individual does. All members of the group should be aware of what it takes to keep this emotional life healthy. The following list includes the major areas of concern.

- ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION: supporting participation by recognizing contributions; respecting the ways individual members feel comfortable participating.

- HARMONIZING AND COMPROMISING: helping turn conflicts into opportunities for creative solutions; reminding group members to keep unity in mind during conflict.

- RELIEVING TENSION: creating a safe and relaxed atmosphere by taking breaks, doing non-work-related activities, and laughing together.

- AIDING COMMUNICATION: making sure that communication is accurate to help eliminate misunderstandings.

- EVALUATING EMOTIONAL CLIMATE: paying attention to how people are feeling about the group and each other.

- SETTING STANDARDS: restating the group goals to help maintain awareness concerning the direction of the group's work and accomplishments.

- PROMOTING AN OPEN ATMOSPHERE: supporting an openness where members are not afraid to take risks when expressing themselves.

GOOD FEATURES OF A MEETING

OPENING A poem, song or short ceremony, depending on the nature of the group, helps to bring the members together.

A *feelings check* where members go around the circle describing their current moods, helps everyone get in touch with each other, and clear their mind so they will be able to freely focus on the group's agenda. This can vary from several sentences to just one word depending on the length of the agenda or the tone of the meeting.

AGENDA Prepare in advance, write on large sheets, and post on wall. Review and amend. Estimate times for each item. Start and close with easier items. Try to break larger items into several, more manageable issues.

BREAKS Schedule several breaks. Also schedule longer times, lunch perhaps, when members have a chance to informally visit. Use *light and livelies* several times during the meeting.

EVALUATE This can be informal, perhaps a *feelings check* about the meeting. This will provide closure and give tips for how to improve following meetings.

CLOSING End with an upbeat or inspirational reading, song or chant depending on the nature of the group, to make members feel connected and positive about the meeting.

INCORPORATING NEW MEMBERS It is important to make new members feel at home. Giving them information about the group that explains its purpose is helpful. Making sure more established members take time during the breaks to speak to new members and find out why they came and what their concerns are is another ideal method of reaching out.
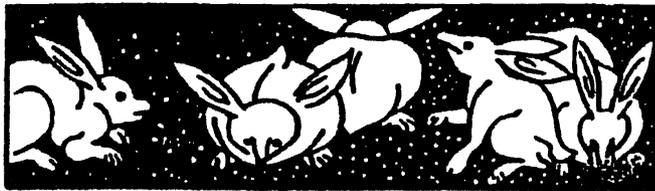
CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Conflict can be a creative dynamic. When conflict occurs, it invites the group to become more aware of the ways in which it works. Conflict can often offer an opportunity for growth and actually precipitate intimacy among the members if handled properly. Many conflicts arise from miscommunication. One way to avoid conflict is for the group members to actively listen to one another. Then if a miscommunication does occur, group members can clarify what was actually meant by each member involved in the conflicts.

A few helpful tips for handling conflict:
- separate people from the problem so individuals do not feel personally attacked;
- focus on the underlying interests and human needs of the persons in conflict, not on their stated positions;
- generate a variety of positions through brainstorming before deciding what to do.

A FEW WORDS ABOUT CONSENSUS

Consensus is a process for making group decisions without voting. Consensus fully incorporates both task and relationship aspects of group process into decision making and is particularly useful to groups in which members highly value their personal association.

Consensus, to be effective, requires careful discussion based on a variety of information and viewpoints. Decisions reached by consensus are usually a synthesis of proposals or new ones that develop as a result of the discussion.

Consensus does not mean unanimity. Individuals can stand aside when they disagree with a decision but feel its implementation will not violate their ethics or cause harm.

Groups can make many decisions using the consensus process even though they do take official votes. Such groups will often reconsider close votes, further processing the issue using consensus techniques. Consensus or modified consensus procedures are often adopted by groups using shared leadership techniques.

CO-FACILITATION

Instead of the usual practice of having one facilitator, it is often wise to have two facilitators. Here are some of the reasons and circumstances for team facilitation:

1. More information and ideas are available during the planning.

2. More energy (physical and emotional) is available to the group – especially during times of conflict or when handling complicated matters.

3. If a facilitator becomes personally involved in the discussion, it is easy to hand the job over to the co-facilitator for the time being.

4. Co-facilitation is a way for more people to gain experience and become skilled facilitators.

5. It is less exhausting, demanding, and scary.