

LEADERSHIP IN COORDINATION

1. SHARED LEADERSHIP

Due to a scarcity of resources, over the years many communities have shared the leadership and chairing roles of their coordination initiatives. This has been done in a variety of creative ways in order to encourage shared ownership as well as distribute the workload.

For many communities it has been difficult to move quickly on the many issues identified. Where there has been success, it has been because members have taken ownership of the vision and are committed to sharing with the chairs the work that may result from discussions or strategies developed at meetings.

Examples of Shared Leadership

- a. The work is divided based on the skill sets of the partners. One might be responsible for the administrative duties—minutes and timekeeping—the other for the chairing and facilitation duties. If these roles are held consistently by the same members, and there is good communication and shared vision between the partners, this can be an effective method of sharing leadership.
- b. A system-based member will partner with a community-based member. This partnership has resulted in increasing the credibility of each partner's discipline in the group. The different perspectives of the co-chairs can be an asset in many ways including in the role of co-facilitation. As with all co-chair roles, to be effective, the partners will want to discuss any obvious differences in perspectives and power prior to meeting.
- c. All the work is shared including the in-meeting facilitation and time keeping, the out-of-the-meeting planning, preparation and follow-up. This allows both partners a substantial support system for the work, including a safe place to debrief meetings and strategize issues.
- d. The work of coordination is broken down into issue areas such as justice, health, children who witness violence, or offender accountability, and sub-committees are formed around leaders in these areas of interest.

- e. The chairing and minute taking role is rotated monthly, quarterly or yearly, thus giving everyone the opportunity to experience the work. While this is an often-cited example of shared leadership it has rarely been effective in keeping the work alive and rolling along. Too much seems to get lost by the passing of responsibility to another who will have a learning curve to become effective in the role.

1.1. Sharing Power

Regardless of how we share the leadership role in our coordination initiative, power dynamics will always be present. Even when we work with someone who appears to be equal in every possible way, there may be power issues. The most obvious reasons for power clashes are differences in gender, background, education, profession, class, ethnicity, ability, sexual orientation and age. But there are always the not-so-obvious personality traits that play out in relationships between people that may manifest at times in power struggles. This is human nature. Some of us are more aware than others of the power we hold in relation to others, and the ways in which we use or misuse this power.

To lead with integrity requires a certain degree of self-awareness and a willingness to examine one's own feelings about truly sharing power. No one is perfect and the dynamics of power and power sharing are complex. As leaders or co-leaders it is incumbent upon us to understand these complexities, and make them transparent so that the stage we set for others is one that *empowers*.

Get to know your co-leader. Build a relationship that is collegial and friendly *beyond* the work. Share your "buttons", the places where each of you can be brought to anger, defensiveness or tears. You will want to know your co-leader can step in at a meeting if one of your buttons gets pushed. Your integrity, and the integrity of your coordination initiative will be reflected in the *way* you as a leader respond to issues that arise in meetings. One useful leadership tool when feeling confronted is to *release resistance* and breathe. Some people call this "picking your battles". Another is to *enquire* rather than react. These are facilitation skills that are useful to cultivate if you desire to work effectively across disciplines.

To describe the work of chairing or facilitating a coordination initiative as *leadership* is even a bit contradictory to the principles of collaboration. But we understand the concept of *leadership* and therefore use it here. In this work of leading a coordination initiative, we have a unique opportunity to experience and model *equality*. We can intentionally set a stage where others will trust and believe this group can make a real difference to women's safety.

1.2. Building A Foundation

The most successful teams are those that have worked together to build a foundation. Every team has some people who are focused on *task*, and some who are focused on *process*. A team that thrives is one that values both task and process and finds ways to incorporate both into their work. The task (product) side of coordination will be the work done to fill gaps and recommend changes that will improve the community safety net for women experiencing violence. The *process* part of coordination will be the work done to build trust, relationships, common ground, mission statements and goals and objectives. This *foundation building* work is essential to developing a viable committed team who will be able to *produce* improvements to their local safety net.

1.3. Building A Learning Team

Coordination initiatives on violence against women and children have the mandate to promote and advocate for social change in an often political arena, the ultimate goal being to improve victim safety. When groups, despite the differing philosophies of the members, can have open discussion about the issues impeding safety their opportunity for making substantive change will be greatly increased.

Cross-discipline education of members of the group will be a strong component of the foundational work required to build an effective team in which open dialogue is possible. One of the key leadership roles in coordination will be to nurture an environment that encourages members to share their knowledge, viewpoints and values. In *Educating for Change* (Doris Marshall Institute for Education and Action, 1998) the authors make the following important points regarding the responsibilities of leadership in educating for change:

Education:

- must empower all people to act for change, and
- must be based on a democratic practice: by which we mean creating the conditions for full and equal participation in discussion, debate and decision-making.

Arnold Mindell, in *The Leader as Martial Artist* (1993), calls this “world work”: a method that helps groups of people to work and grow together. A good world worker is like the best therapist, a “democrat” merging psychology and politics. As a leader of a coordination initiative it is imperative that we stay aware of the small “p” politics between and among our colleagues that contribute to one’s sense of belonging in the group. As well, we must juggle this knowledge with our understanding of the

constantly changing “P” political environment in which we all work both at the local and provincial levels.

The tools of world work can only succeed with the attitude of deep democracy, that special feeling of belief in the inherent importance of all parts of ourselves and all viewpoints in the world around us. (Mindell)

Those who promote and work with organizational change now focus on how people *interact* and learn together rather than what they *do*. They begin by understanding how we learn and change as individuals. People learn in cycles. We act, reflect on the action, connect with new ideas and understandings, decide what the next best action could be, then act again and the cycle repeats. Groups learning together will follow the same cycle. Through open discussion of the various perspectives on an issue, common ground can be established and the group can eventually come to a mutual understanding that crosses all the disciplines at the table. From this place a group will “know what they know” and more effectively be able to move to their vision for change. If we as leaders understand these components of the learning cycle and stay aware of them we can gently facilitate team learning. In coordination, in order to effect change we must promote dialogue about the problems women experience on the ground. The more intentional this discussion is the better equipped the group will be to address problems with holistic solutions.

Real dialogue depends on us being passionately committed to our own world, and simultaneously passionately interested in other worlds. (*Excavating Our Frames of Mind: The Key to Dialogue and Collaboration*, Margaret McKee, 2003)

1.4. Fostering Strong Relationships

The mantra of a good team leader: ***Relationships, relationships, relationships!***

In science, in the quantum world, relationships are not just interesting; to many physicists, they are *all* there is to reality. One physicist, Henry Stapp, describes elementary particles (life’s creators) as, “in essence, a set of relationships that reach outward to other things”. In other words, nothing exists independent of its relationship with something else. And “if nothing happens except in relationship to something else, we can move away from our need to think of things as polar opposites.” (*Leadership and the New Science*, Margaret Wheatley, 1994)

This may not seem relevant to our role in coordination but in fact, what we are saying is that *nothing* we do as leaders will be more important than our constant attention to nurturing the relationships of the members, and upholding the value among our group

of our relationships with one another and the actions that will promote and strengthen them.

An ancient Sufi teaching captures this : “You think because you understand *one* you must understand *two*, because one and one makes two. But you must also understand *and*.” (Wheatley)

This relatively new way of thinking about the world is changing how we view group dynamics and organizational change. We no longer think of a group or organization as made up of only *parts* that contribute to a whole. Now it’s important to see a group as a constantly changing set of *connections* or *currents* working towards wholeness. And if we begin to shift our thinking in this way it is easier to see *disharmony* (chaos) in a group as a natural phenomenon that will ultimately result in *order*.

As Margaret Wheatley says, “*Disorder can play a critical role in giving birth to new higher forms of order.*”

1.5. Setting the Stage to Inspire

We have all been to meetings where it feels we are spinning our wheels. We enter a room where nothing much is happening, participate in whatever the agenda is and yet leave the meeting not feeling in the least impacted. Perhaps we don’t even remember much of the meeting. And then, on the other hand, there are meetings where the energy in the room is thick with connections and exchange, laughter or passion. Whether the meeting was harmonious or not, we leave feeling somehow enriched, having learned something new or made a connection important to our work. What makes the difference? Is it just leadership? Both meetings had leaders (chairs) but one was a *happening* and the other a dud. Why?

The difference we think is in *intentional* preparation and planning, tools leaders can use to develop the space for *happenings*. It’s important for us to understand why these tools work to generate the kind of energy we want in meetings. *What* we do prior to a meeting, to organize the space, materials, and ambiance and build and nurture relationships creates an energy “field” that is strong enough to influence behaviour (Wheatley). This “field” is invisible and really only reveals itself through the effect it has on our participation and work. The *field* we are speaking of contains the *unseen* and usually unexpressed intentions, emotions, beliefs, values and vision of the leaders and then eventually, of the group. “One of the primary tasks of leadership is to develop this unseen field as it is perhaps the only way that a leader can genuinely influence and inspire others.” (The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook)

Ways to create a field that has the potential to inspire:

- Follow-up on invitations to ensure people understand the importance of their role and begin to foster a sense of *belonging*

- Pay attention to details
 - Create an orderly room
 - Ensure enough chairs, etc
 - Consider the table/chair arrangement
 - Will those with special needs be comfortable?
 - Are your materials in order?
- Greet participants equally
- Ensure each participant is welcomed regardless of their arrival time
- Bring participants quickly up to date if late
- Keep the vision of the group alive in your discussions
- Demonstrate your commitment to a democratic environment by ensuring all are heard and all points of view are honoured
- Encourage *inquiry* when differing points of view are expressed
- Start and end on time

2. The Role of the Chair

Some of the duties and role of the chair will overlap with the work of *intentional* preparation:

2.1. Prior to the Meeting

- Membership
 - Insure all stakeholders are invited
 - Follow up with any who have not notified of attendance
 - Bring new members up to date on goals and objectives, members role and responsibilities
- Agenda
 - Prepare meeting agenda pursuant to last meeting and input from members
 - Determine time allocations for agenda items
 - Connect with any members who will be presenting, let them know the time scheduled on agenda
 - Determine any handouts
 - Distribute agenda and handouts
- Using Case Examples
 - (see handout Using Case Examples)

2.2. At the Meeting: The Chair as Facilitator

Leaders of any collaborative group could be seen as “super” participants - presenting ideas, advocating positions, responding to comments, facilitating consensus, promoting co-operation and follow-through. While some leaders will want to abide by formal

meeting rules, meetings of coordination initiatives will be the most productive when the leaders (chairpersons) act as *facilitators*. A facilitator's role is to focus on the flow of the meeting and ensure participation from everyone present so as to build the group as a constructive and cohesive unit. (Association Xpertise Inc.)

As a facilitator, some of what the Chair will focus on includes:

- Keeping the meeting focused
- Encouraging constructive discussion and debate
- Allowing new ideas or points to be raised without judgment
- Maintaining order so only one person talks at a time (keeping a speakers' list)
- Dealing with problems that arise in the meeting
- Keeping the meeting on time so the agenda can be completed
- Ensuring that views, positions and arguments are understood
- Balancing task and process
- Reframing and recapping discussion to encourage consensus
- Recognizing contributions and participation
- Facilitate *process* to ensure all points of view are heard and valued
- Evaluating the meeting effectiveness and how it could be improved.

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