



PEARSON NEW INTERNATIONAL EDITION



## Working in Groups

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3. *Help solve interpersonal problems and conflicts.* Use the conflict resolution skills to resolve conflicts constructively.
4. *Adapt tasks and assignments to members' abilities and expectations.* Don't try to fit the "square peg" member into a "round hole" role. Use group members' talents to enhance group productivity and members' satisfaction.

## Manage Group Process

From the perspective of group survival, managing group process may be the most important function of leadership.<sup>49</sup> If a group is disorganized, lacks sufficient information to solve problems, or is unable to make important decisions, the group cannot be effective. Four leadership skills can enhance this important function:

1. *Organize and fully prepare for group meetings and work sessions.* In some cases, you may take more time to prepare for a meeting than to lead one.
2. *Understand and adapt to members' strengths and weaknesses.* Capitalize on member strengths and help compensate for weaknesses.
3. *Help solve task-related and procedural problems.* When group members are working productively, help them organize their tasks and adjust timetables. Secure necessary resources.
4. *Monitor and intervene to improve group performance.* If you see a problem developing, intervene and assist members before it becomes a crisis.

## Make Decisions

A leader's willingness and ability to make appropriate, timely, and responsible decisions characterize effective leadership. Too often we hear disgruntled group members talk about their leader's inability to make critical decisions. A high school teacher described this fatal leadership flaw as follows:

Everyone agrees that our principal is a "nice guy" who wants everyone to like him. He doesn't want to "rock the boat" or "make waves." As a result, he doesn't make decisions or take decisive action when it's most needed. He listens patiently to a request or to both sides of a dispute, but that's all he does. Our school comes to a standstill because he won't "bite the bullet." The teachers have lost respect for him, students and their parents know that they'll get what they want if they yell loudly enough or long enough, and the superintendent often intervenes to fix the problem.

When you assume a leadership role, you must accept the fact that some of your decisions will be unpopular, and some may even turn out to be wrong. But you still have to make them. In *The New Why Teams Don't Work*, Harvey Robbins and Michael Finley contend that it's often better for a group leader to make a bad decision than to make no decision at all: "For if you are seen as chronically indecisive, people won't let you lead them."<sup>50</sup> One company executive also noted that as much as you may value collaborative consensus, "sometimes you just need to make a decision."<sup>51</sup> The following strategies can help you determine when and how to intervene and make a decision:

1. *Make sure that everyone shares the information needed to make a quality decision.*
2. *If appropriate, discuss your pending decision and solicit feedback from members.* As long as members don't interpret your "out-loud" thinking as an order, you and your group will benefit by discussing proposed options.

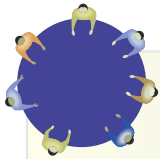
3. *Listen to members' opinions, arguments, and suggestions.* When you listen effectively, you may discover that the group only needs a little help to make a decision or solve a problem on its own.
4. *Explain the rationale for the decision you intend to make.* When you are about to make a decision, let your group know. Not only will they be prepared for the outcome, they may help you make a better decision.

## Mentor Members

Most successful people tell stories about significant mentors who helped them mature and move ahead. The word *mentor* comes from ancient Greece. In Homer's *Odyssey*, Mentor was the tutor and adviser to the hero Odysseus's son, Telemachus. Thus, the word *mentor* has come to mean a wise and trusted counselor who is usually older and more experienced than the *mentee*—that is, the person being mentored.

Good leaders are very busy people, particularly if they model leadership, motivate members, manage group process, and make decisions. Even so, great leaders find the time and energy to mentor others. They know that good mentoring does more than teach someone how to do a job—it also motivates that person to set high standards, seek advice when needed, and develop the skills characteristic of an excellent leader.

In his book *Great Leadership*, Anthony Bell urges would-be leaders to find a mentor because a good “mentor will challenge you to ask (and answer) the tough



## Virtual Groups

### Sharing Leadership Functions

Virtual groups need strong leadership. According to Jessica Lipnack and Jeffrey Stamps, the authors of *Virtual Groups*, “each member of a virtual team must adopt a leadership perspective.”<sup>52</sup> Why? Consider the added responsibilities required of someone who leads a virtual group—be it a teleconference, an email discussion, or an intercontinental videoconference.

When participants live in different cities or time zones, arranging a virtual meeting can be more difficult than calling a regular meeting in a conference room down the hall. To prepare members for a virtual meeting:

- Someone must develop and send a detailed agenda to all members well in advance.
- Someone must make sure that the technology required for the conference is up and running.
- Someone must lead the discussion in which participants may neither see nor hear one another in real time.

Effective virtual groups manage these added tasks by *sharing* leadership roles rather than by assuming that one superhuman leader can handle all of these challenges.

The 5M Model of Leadership Effectiveness also applies to the unique responsibilities of a virtual group leader. When virtual groups first “meet,” they often depend on a leader to model appropriate behavior for other virtual group members. Motivating a virtual group can be more difficult than motivating participants in a face-to-face discussion. Unmotivated members may ignore messages or respond infrequently. When this happens, a group is vulnerable to miscommunication, poor quality of work, missed deadlines, lack of cohesion, inefficiencies, and frustrated team members.

A virtual group leader also has additional managerial duties. For example, members may need training in the use of specialized software. In virtual groups, the leader may be responsible for determining when the virtual group will “meet,” the rules of interaction, and the criteria for group decision making. Finally, leaders can mentor members who are apprehensive about interacting in a virtual environment or members who lack the technical skills needed to keep up with the group.



questions.”<sup>53</sup> The following strategies can help a leader decide when and how to mentor group members:

1. *Be ready and willing to mentor every group member.* Although you cannot be a full-time mentor for everyone, you should be open to requests for advice. Eventually, you may develop a close relationship with a few mentees who share your vision.
2. *Encourage and invite others to lead.* Look for situations in which group members can assume leadership responsibilities. Ask them to chair a meeting, take responsibility for a group project, or implement a group’s decision. And make sure they know you’re there as backup.
3. *Inspire optimism.* When problems or setbacks occur, do not blame the group or its members. Instead, convert the situation into a teachable moment and make sure members learn to accept personal responsibility for a problem and its consequences.<sup>54</sup>

Effective mentors create appropriate balance and boundaries. They know when to intervene and when to back off. A mentor is neither a psychiatric counselor nor a group member’s best friend. At some point, even the best mentors must let their mentees succeed or fail on their own.

## Diversity and Leadership

Appropriate communication strategies and skills must be used to understand, respect, and adapt to member diversity. This chapter deals with this challenge at two levels. First, we tackle the negative stereotypes that often prevent women and culturally diverse members from becoming leaders. Second, we address the challenge of leading multicultural groups.

### Gender and Leadership

In the early studies of leadership, there was an unwritten but additional prerequisite for becoming a leader: Be a man. Even today, despite the achievements of exceptional women leaders, some people still question the ability of women to serve in leadership positions.

In a summary of the research on leadership and gender, Susan Shimanoff and Mercilee Jenkins conclude that “women are still less likely to be preselected as leaders, and the same leadership behavior is often evaluated more positively when attributed to a male than a female.”<sup>56</sup> In other words, even when women talk early and often, are well prepared and always present at meetings, and offer valuable ideas, a man who has done these same things is more likely to emerge as a leader. After examining the research on gender and leadership, Rodney Napier and Matti Gershenfeld conclude, “even though male and female leaders may act the same, there is a tendency for women to be perceived more negatively or to have to act differently to gain leadership.”<sup>57</sup>

Unfortunately, such negative perceptions can make it difficult for women to assume and succeed in leadership positions. If their behavior is similar to that of male leaders, they are perceived as unfeminine. If they act “like a lady,” they are viewed as weak or ineffective. One professional woman described this dilemma as follows:

I was thrilled when my boss evaluated me as “articulate, hard-working, mature in her judgment, and a skillful diplomat.” What disturbed me were some of the evaluations from those I supervise or work with as colleagues. Although they had a lot of good things

Researchers conclude that women are less likely to be selected as leaders and that the same leadership behavior is often evaluated more positively when attributed to a male than a female. What, then, should female group members do to ensure their selection and success as leaders?



to say, a few of them described me as “pushy,” “brusque,” “impatient,” “a disregard for social niceties,” and “hard-driving.” What am I supposed to do? My boss thinks I’m energetic and creative, while other people see the same behavior as pushy and aggressive.

Even though extensive research indicates that there are only slight differences between men and women leaders, stereotypical, negative expectations persist. These expectations make it more difficult for women to gain, hold, and succeed in leadership positions.<sup>57</sup> Our best advice is that instead of asking whether a female leader is different from a male leader, it is more important to ask whether she is an effective leader.

## Culture and Leadership

The ways in which a leader models leadership, motivates members, manages group process, makes decisions, and mentors members may not match the cultural dimensions of all group members. According to management scholar Andrew Dubrin, a successful multicultural leader has “the skills and attitudes to relate effectively to and motivate people across race, gender, age, social attitudes, and lifestyles.”<sup>58</sup>

A much-quoted academic program named Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) studies leadership attributes in a variety of cultures to determine which ones are associated with outstanding leaders. Their results show that some attributes are universal regardless of the culture, whereas others are valued only in some cultures.<sup>59</sup> For example, which of the following two attributes is, in your opinion, universal and which attribute is valued in only some cultures: (1) ambition and (2) decisiveness? The answer: Ambition is not valued as a leadership attribute in some cultures, whereas decisiveness is valued universally.

If, as a leader, you model leadership by strongly and publicly advocating group goals, you may upset members from high-context cultures who would be less direct. Your way of modeling leadership behavior may not reflect *their* view of a model leader. For example, people from Western cultures (the United States,





Canada, and Europe) often assume that group members are motivated by personal achievement and status. However, when group members' cultural backgrounds are more collectivist, the same motivational strategies may not work. A collectivist member may act out of loyalty to the leader and the group rather than for personal achievement or material gain.<sup>60</sup>

Managing group process in a group composed of culturally diverse members can be difficult. If your leadership style reflects feminine values (nurturing, collaborative, caring), you may find yourself fighting a losing leadership battle with members who are more competitive, independent, and aggressive. Your feminine-value leadership style may be interpreted as weakness or indecision.

The decision-making style of a leader may not match that of a culturally diverse group. If members come from a low-power-distance culture, they will not welcome an authoritarian leader who takes control of all decision making. Conversely, a leader who prefers a more democratic approach to decision making may frustrate members who come from high-power-distance cultures, in which leaders make most decisions with little input from group members.

Before accepting any list of multicultural leadership attributes, remember that these findings are generalizations. Some members from collectivist cultures may seek public praise from a leader, while some members from an individualistic culture may shun or be embarrassed by being singled out for praise.

Negative stereotypes about leaders from minority groups are prevalent, and such members have more difficulty moving up the leadership ladder.<sup>61</sup> Balancing the needs of culturally diverse group members may be difficult but is essential for effective leadership.



The leader of this FEMA logistics team must understand, respect, and adapt to the diversity of his team members in order to model effective leadership, motivate his members, manage the group process, and appropriately mentor team members.