

# IFAS Leadership Development: Have a Good Group<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

This article is part of the series *IFAS Leadership Development*, with eleven modules developed for use by Florida Cooperative Extension agents. They are designed for training agents and officers. Information and activities provided in this series will help Extension leaders in facilitating leadership development for their agents and officers. Handouts for audience use are labeled in the leadership development modules. These may be duplicated for use during training sessions. Each lesson is designed for a workshop approximately two hours long. Various parts of the modules can be shortened or expanded according to the needs of participants and availability of time.

## Recommendations for Leader Training

- Prepare to teach this lesson by reading and familiarizing yourself with the objectives, materials, handouts, and activities/exercises.
- Begin preparation several days in advance in order to secure whatever additional resources you need to make the lesson a "local" learning experience.
- Plan a learning environment with care so that the surroundings contribute to the achievement of the objectives.
- Begin on time, and end on time. Schedule a break at about halfway through the lesson.
- With each lesson after the first one, ask participants what they did as a result of the previous lesson. Record these!
- Introduce each lesson with an overview of how it fits into the overall major leadership development program.
- End each lesson with a summary and restatement of objectives. Explain what the participants are expected to do with the lesson after they leave.
- Heighten anticipation for the next lesson by sharing a brief description of it but be cautious not to give too much away.

## Objectives

1. To learn the dimensions of group development.

2. To distinguish between productive and nonproductive groups.
3. To become better group participants

## Lesson Outline

Introduction and Overview of Objectives (15 minutes)

- *Five Dimensions of Group Development*

Group Exercise and Discussion (25 minutes)

- *Productive Groups*
- *Group Process Evaluation*

Group Development Lecture (40 minutes)

- *Observing a Group*

Break (5 minutes)

Group Exercise and Practice (20 minutes)

- *Activities for Group Development*

Summary and Evaluation (15 minutes)

- *Characteristics of an Effective Group*

**Total time: 2 hours**

## Lesson Plan—Have a Good Group

### Step 1—5 minutes

Use *Five Dimensions of Group Development* as introductory lecture. Put each dimension on the chalkboard. Use questions under headings as a discussion guide.

Share objectives of lesson with participants and write them on chalkboard.

### Step 2—Five minutes

Use *Productive Groups* as background material for lecture. These may be put on chalkboard or may be used as a group exercise.

*Group Process Evaluation* is used as an application of *Productive Groups* lecture. Suggest that participants take this handout and work with other groups they may be a part of. It is assumed for this class that participants do not belong to one specific group in the class but function as a member of several groups.

### Step 3—40 minutes

To be a better group participant is the purpose of *Observing a Group*. Use this as lecture background.

Points to emphasize in this lecture are task functions and maintenance functions within groups. Both are important and both are within the leader's domain to improve.

### Step 4—20 minutes

Use *Activities for Group Development* as a discussion guide in small groups or in total group if size permits. Make handout of activities needed for group development.

### Step 5—15 minutes

Use *Characteristics of an Effective Group* as summary remarks.

Close lesson with review of objectives and call for questions.

Hand out evaluations, collect and adjourn.

## Five Dimensions for Group Development

There are five dimensions in which groups typically develop and grow. They have to do with clarity about membership, influence, feelings, individual differences, and productivity. People in new groups tend to concern themselves with these dimensions in the order given.

### Membership

When you become part of a new group, the first thing you are apt to care about is what it will mean to be a member. How will others expect you to act? When should you speak and how do you go about it? If you say something as a joke, will others laugh or will they think you were being serious? Is it all right to come late, to leave early, to smoke, to dress informally? Will members in this group hold the same values and attitudes? Will membership in this group facilitate or conflict with other roles you have in life? Will membership in this group be stimulating, boring, exciting, threatening, rewarding, inconsequential?

### Influence

As the meaning of membership becomes clearer, attention generally turns to questions of influence. Who is the leader of this group? Is there a chairperson? How do decisions get made? In what ways do people try to influence each other? Are individuals open to letting others influence them?

What opportunities exist for influencing decisions or carrying out leadership functions? Do some individuals in the group care more about the power of being leaders than they do about the goals and issues of the group?

### Feelings

As the norms of membership and influence become clear, the expression of feelings also becomes increasingly important. When others like an idea or action, do they say so? When there is boredom, frustration, or anger, is this shared openly so that it can be worked out constructively? Can feelings be expressed freely as they occur so they will not build up to a point of bursting through inappropriately? Do people wait until they get out the door to tell one or two colleagues how they really felt about the meeting? Is the expression of negative feelings seen as honest feedback that can help, rather than a destructive attack?

### Individual Differences

Each member of a group represents certain unique experiences, knowledge, and skills. As trust develops, the members begin to both recognize and value the individual differences that each possesses. A new set of questions takes on meaning. Do the members take the time and effort to learn about the experiences, attitudes, knowledge, values, skills, and ideologies of each other? Does each one work at sharing his or her own ideas in order to get others' reactions and different ways of looking at issues? Do they let each other know they appreciate these differences even when they don't necessarily agree with the idea?

### Productivity

Most groups exist for a purpose that involves some kind of product. It might simply be to have fun together. It might be to improve the learning experiences for children, or to find a better solution to decreasing health services. Depending upon how norms of membership influence feelings and how individual differences get worked out, a group can reach a level of creative productivity. Each individual's ideas can be combined into new and better ideas, which would be impossible from a single perspective.

Is energy directed or spent towards developing new ideas by combining old ones? Is effort spent on diagnosing situations to bring out underlying issues? When problems arise, does the group work through them as opposed to taking actions too quickly? Do members make time to seek each individual's reactions and ideas? Do the organization's norms allow ways for every member to contribute reactions and ideas?

### Results

A new group uses the five dimensions of growth, which results in two types of group achievements. One concerns the **task** accomplishment, the other has to do with

**maintenance** of the group. Tasks may be accomplished efficiently or inefficiently, thoroughly or only partially, with high quality or in a shoddy manner. Group maintenance may produce a high esprit de corps where individuals are pleased and excited to be members, or there may be confusion and frustration with individuals readily leaving the group.

Adapted from *The Field Program Associate in the Partnership for Rural Improvement*, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) 1978.

## Productive Group

Why are some groups more successful than others? Why do some groups work together more easily than others? People who have worked with groups and studied group behavior report these differences:

### In Productive Groups

1. Members listen and pay attention to one another.
2. Members discuss the subject at hand.
3. Everyone's ideas and suggestions are welcomed.
4. Everyone has a chance to state his or her views.
5. The group uses its agenda as a guide for discussion.
6. One or two members are appointed to summarize the discussion and to see that everyone has had a chance to speak.
7. Members know how to use problem-solving steps.
8. Members are clear about group decisions and committed to them.

### In Less Productive Groups

1. Members tend to talk at the same time and do not listen.
2. The discussion jumps from one idea to another.
3. Some members do not participate because they feel their ideas do not count.
4. One or two people do all the talking.
5. The agenda is not clear and no written guide for discussion exists.
6. No one summarizes or checks to see if everyone who wanted to speak had a chance. Discussions can go on and on with no purpose.
7. No order is followed for identifying and solving problems.
8. Decision-making is muddy and people are not committed to the group's plans.

Adapted by Martha A. Snider, Instructor, Family Resource Management, Oregon State University from Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, Portland, Oregon, for the FCL State Training Institute, 1982.

## Group Process Evaluation Exercise

**Number of people:** all members of the group

**Minimum time:** 15 to 20 minutes

**Materials:** Group Process Evaluation Form, pencils

### Purpose

This evaluation is designed to give each group member an opportunity to check members' perceptions of the group process. This is a useful tool for spotting troublesome characteristics that may hinder productivity. The evaluation also gives members a formal method of giving feedback to the total group.

### Process

1. Hand out the *Group Process Evaluation Form* (see Table 1) to each member.
2. Have each member anonymously rate each variable on a scale of 1 to 5. (5 = operating ideally and 1 = malfunctioning completely)
3. Collect and average the ratings for each variable and discuss those that appear at 3 or lower.
4. It may be useful to discuss the highest and lowest variables also.
5. Have members make suggestions for improvement in group process.

*Note: This evaluation exercise is especially useful when done periodically throughout the duration of the formed group.*

## Observing a Group

Learn to observe and analyze what is happening in a group. Everyone has been in groups of various sorts—the family, gang, team, work group, etc.—but rarely have they taken the time to observe what was going on in the group, or why the members were behaving the way they were. One of the main goals here is to become better observers and better participants.

What should be looked for? What is there to see in a group?

### Content Versus Process

Observe what the group is talking about and focus on the **content**. Try to observe how the group is handling its communication; for example, who talks how much or who talks to whom. This is focusing on group **process**.

Most topics about the "back home" situation emphasize the content: "What is good leadership?" "How can I motivate my subordinate?" "How can we make meetings more effective?" These focus on abstract issues that are "there and then," oriented toward the past or future without directly involving the group. When focusing on group process, look at what the group is doing in the "here and now," and how it is working in the sense of its present procedures and organization.

In fact, the content of the conversation is often the best clue to recognizing what process issue may be on people's minds when they find it difficult to confront the issue directly. For example:

### Content

1. Talking about problems of authority back home could mean ...
2. Talking about how bad group meetings usually are at the plant could mean ...
3. Talking about staff men who don't really help anybody could mean ...

### Process

1. that there is a leadership struggle going on.
2. that members are dissatisfied with the performance of their own group.
3. that there is dissatisfaction with the trainer's role in the group.

### Communication

One of the easiest aspects of group process to observe is the pattern of communications.

1. Who talks? For how long? How often?
2. Who do people look at when they talk?
  - a. specific individuals who are potential supporters?
  - b. everyone by scanning the group?
  - c. no one?
4. Who talks after whom, or who interrupts whom?
5. What communication style is used (assertions, questions, tone of voice, gestures, etc.)

The kind of observations made give the group clues to other important things that may be going on in the group, such as who leads whom or who influences whom.

### Decision-Making Procedures

Groups are making decisions all the time, some of them consciously and in reference to the major tasks at hand, some of them without much awareness and in reference to group procedures or standards of operation. It is important to observe how decisions are made in a group in order to assess the appropriateness of the decisions to the matter being decided on; and to assess whether the consequences of given methods are really what the group members wanted.

Some methods by which groups make decisions:

1. The Plop: "I think we should introduce ourselves" ... silence.
2. The Self-Authorized Agenda: "I think we should introduce ourselves; my name is Jane Smith ..."

3. The Handicap: "I wonder if it would be helpful if we introduced ourselves? I think it would. My name is Pete Brown."
4. Unanimity: "Does anyone object?" or "We all agree."
5. Majority-Minority Voting.
6. Polling: "Let's see where everyone stands. What do you think, Sarah?"
7. Consensus Testing: Genuine exploration to test support and opposition, and determine if opposition feels strongly enough to reject the decision. A consensus is not necessarily unanimity, but essential agreement by all.

### Task, Maintenance, and Self-Oriented Behavior

Behavior in the group can be viewed from the point of view of what its purpose or function seems to be. When a member says something, is he or she primarily trying to get the group task accomplished (task), or is he or she trying to improve or patch up some relationships among members (maintenance), or is he or she primarily meeting some personal need or goal without regard to the problems of the group or others (self-oriented)?

As the group grows and members' needs become integrated with the group's goals, less self-oriented behavior and more task or maintenance behavior will evolve.

What kinds of categories can we identify?

#### Task-Oriented Behavior

1. Initiating. Proposing tasks or goals, defining a group problem, suggesting a procedure or idea for solving a problem, etc.
2. Seeking information or opinions. Requesting facts, seeking relevant information about group concern. Asking for expressions of feeling, requesting a statement or estimate, soliciting expression of value, seeking suggestions and ideas, etc.
3. Giving information or opinion. Offering facts, providing relevant information about group concern. Stating a belief about a matter before the group, giving suggestions and ideas, etc.
4. Clarifying and elaborating. Interpreting ideas or suggestions: clearing up confusions; defining terms; suggesting alternatives and issues before the group; etc.
5. Summarizing. Pulling together related ideas: restating suggestions after the group has discussed them; offering a decision or conclusion for the group to accept or reject, etc.
6. Consensus testing. Asking the group if it is nearing a decision, sending up a trial balloon to test a possible conclusion, etc.

#### Maintenance-Oriented Behavior

The following types of group behavior are necessary for maintaining good working order, having a good climate for task work, and developing good relationships that permit maximum use of member resources:

1. **Harmonizing.** Attempting to reconcile disagreements; reducing tension; getting members to explore differences, etc.
2. **Gate Keeping.** Helping to keep communication channels open; facilitating the participation of others; suggesting procedures that permit sharing remarks, etc.
3. **Encouraging.** Being friendly, warm, and responsive to others; indicating by facial expression or remark the acceptance of others; contributions, etc.
4. **Compromising.** Offering a compromise in a conflict involving own ideas or status, admitting error; modifying position for interest of group cohesion or growth, etc.
5. **Standard setting and testing.** Testing whether the group is satisfied with its procedures or suggesting new procedures; pointing out explicit or implicit norms that have been set and are available for testing, etc.

Every group should display both task and maintenance behaviors, and work out an adequate balance of activities.

### Self-Oriented Emotional Behavior

The processes described so far deal with the group's attempts to solve problems of task and maintenance. However, there are many emotional forces active in groups that disturb work. These underlying currents produce a variety of emotional behaviors that interfere with group functioning, but cannot be ignored or wished away. Rather, the issues and causes must be recognized and understood. As the group develops, conditions must be created that permit these same emotional energies to be channeled in the direction of group effort.

What are these issues or basic causes?

1. **The problem of identity.** Who am I in this group? Where do I fit in? What kind of behavior is acceptable here?
2. **The problem of goals and needs.** What do I want from the group? Can the group goals be made consistent with my goals? What have I to offer to the group?
3. **The problem of power, control and influence.** Who will control what I do? How much power and influence do I have?
4. **The problem of intimacy.** How close will we get to each other? How personal? How can we trust each other and how can we achieve a greater level of trust?

What kinds of behaviors are produced in response to these problems?

1. **Dependency-Counterdependency.** Leaning on or resisting anyone in the group who represents authority, especially the trainer.
2. **Fighting and controlling.** Asserting personal dominance, attempting to get own way regardless of others.
3. **Withdrawing.** Trying to remove the sources of uncomfortable feelings by psychologically leaving the group.
4. **Pairing up.** Seeking out one or two supporters and forming a kind of emotional sub-group in which the members protect and support each other.

These are not the only kinds of things that can be observed in a group. What is important to observe varies with what the group is doing, the needs and purposes of the observer, and many other factors. The main point, however, is that improving skills in observing what is going on in the group will provide important data for understanding groups and increasing effectiveness.

Adapted by Martha A. Snider, Instructor, Family Resource Management, Oregon State University from Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, Portland, Oregon, for the FCL State Training Institute, 1982.

## Activities for Group Development

**Number of people:** any size group

**Minimum time:** 10 to 20 minutes

**Materials:** copies of exercise sheets

### Purpose

This exercise calls attention to the difference in activities promoting group process or group task achievement and is a self-evaluation of the group and its individual members.

1. Give a brief introduction of group maintenance and group tasks.
2. For an ongoing group—or after the group has worked together, have them check either
  - a. what they personally do to help group activities.
  - b. what group members do to help group activities.
- a. Discuss what has been done to build group cohesiveness and what needs to be done. (For a large group, divide into smaller groups.)

Adapted from *The Field Program Associate in the Partnership for Rural Improvement* by R. E. Jongeward & J. M. Druian, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, Portland, Oregon, 1978.

## Activities Needed for Group Development

### Activities That Maintain Group Cohesiveness and Morale

- Get individuals acquainted through introductions and informal gatherings.
- Meet physical needs in terms of breaks, food, and comfort.
- Meet emotional needs by letting people tell their story, compliment a person, or express sympathy.
- Function as gatekeeper by bringing everyone into the discussion.
- Support members by listening attentively, showing interest, and encouraging them to give more details about their ideas.
- Compromise or be willing to give up own ideas when the group objectives require it.
- Harmonize and help people reach agreement or understanding, therefore reducing areas of conflict.
- Remind the group of the standards it has set, and individuals' rights.
- Reduce emotional tension by introducing humor or suggesting a break.

### Activities That Help the Group Attend to Its Task

- State the problem clearly, either by pointing out problems that need attention or getting others to state problems.
- Recognize the need for information and help to secure it.
- Offer proposals for solving problems.
- Evaluate suggestions and test their practicality.
- Summarize group progress, decisions or disagreements.
- Make procedural suggestions; for example, ask the group to consider forming subcommittees, use small groups, try a role-play situation, list suggestions on the board, or assign priorities to agenda items.
- Call attention to the amount of meeting time remaining and the agenda items still to be covered.
- Record suggestions and decisions.

## Characteristics of an Effective Group

*Members do not ignore seriously intended contributions.*

People need to know the effect of their remarks if they are to improve the way they participate in the group. When others do not respond, the speaker cannot know whether

1. they did not understand the remark.
2. they understood it and agreed with it.
3. they understood it and disagreed with it.

4. they understood it but thought it was irrelevant.

### Check Meaning

*Members check to make sure they know what a speaker means before they agree or disagree with his or her contribution.*

Group members should ask "What is it?" before they ask "How do we feel about it?" Group members need to paraphrase, observe feedback, and summarize discussion to clarify their assumptions of what others are saying and feeling.

### Speak for Yourself

*Each member speaks only for himself or herself and lets others speak for themselves.*

Each member states reactions as his or her own and does not attribute them to others or give the impression of speaking for others. Each member reports his or her own reactions honestly, so the group can take them into account.

### Group Ownership

*All contributions are viewed as belonging to the group, to be used or not be used as the group decides.*

A member who makes a suggestion does not have to defend it. Instead, all accept responsibility for evaluating it as the joint property of the group.

### Each Member is Unique

*All members participate but in different and complementary ways.*

While some members work primarily on tasks, others work on improving interpersonal relations. While some members are providing information, others are making sure it is understood and organized or identifying points of agreement or disagreement. However, each member does not always participate in the same way. Depending on his or her interest in the task, and on the behavior of the other group members, a member fulfills whatever function is appropriate and necessary.

### Barriers to Task Accomplishment

*Whenever the group senses it is having trouble getting work done, it tries to find the reason.*

Some symptoms of difficulty include excessive hair-splitting, repeating points over and over, failing to consider suggestions, holding private conversations, letting two or three people dominate the discussion, taking sides and refusing to compromise, attacking ideas before they are completely expressed, and participating apathetically. When such symptoms occur, the group needs to shift from

working on the task to discussing its own interpersonal processes.

## Open Group Decisions

*The group makes decisions openly rather than by default.*

When a group faces an issue, its members must make a decision. They may agree openly to take action or to take no action. On the other hand, they may decide by default to take no action. Deciding by default has the same impact as openly agreeing not to act, but decisions by default are regarded by group members as failures and create tensions among them. A group grows more by openly agreeing not to act than by not acting because they could not agree.

In a productive group, people view each decision as a trial that can be carried out, evaluated, and revised in light of experience. They know that each decision need not be everything-or-nothing, and need not last forever. When this kind of group makes a decision that it does not carry out, its members recognize that they really decided not to act. The group openly discusses why the apparent and real decisions were not the same. They try to learn why some members agreed with the decision, although they felt no personal commitment to carry it out.

An effective group makes decisions in various ways, depending on the kind of issue and the importance of the outcome. The group can vote, delegate the decision to a special subgroup, flip a coin, or require complete consensus. The crucial factor is that the group agrees on the way to make each decision.

## Conflict Management

*The group brings conflict into the open and deals with it.*

The members recognize that conflict is inevitable, and they can decide whether to discuss it openly or disguise it.

## A Helping Group

*The group looks at behavior that hinders its work as happening because the group allows or wants it; not just as the result of having a "problem member."*

A person who continually introduces irrelevancies can change the topic only if other members follow that person's lead. Instead of labeling the person as the problem, the group considers it a group problem. They determine why they all let it happen. Perhaps the other members welcome these digressions as a way of avoiding the open conflict that would occur if they stayed on the topic.

Likewise, the person who talks too much, jokes too much, continually attacks others, or never participates is a

problem shared by the total group. The group needs to discuss "their problem" openly to eliminate the disruption.

The group gives helpful information to individuals about the impact of their actions on the group. It does not, however, analyze, dissect, and work these people over.

Adapted by Martha A. Snider, Instructor, Family Resource Management, Oregon State University from Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, Portland, Oregon, for the FCL State Training Institute, 1982.

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## Reference

Jongeward, R. E., Druian, J. M. 1978. *The Field Program Associate in the Partnership for Rural Improvement*. Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED237269.pdf>

Table 1. Group Process Evaluation Form. To analyze the group process, have each member anonymously rate each variable on the scale from 1 to 5.

1. Listening						
Members don't really listen to one another; often they interrupt and don't try to understand others	1	2	3	4	5	All members really listen and try hard to understand.
2. Open Communication						
Members are guarded or cautious in discussions.	1	2	3	4	5	Members express thoughts and feelings openly.
3. Mutual Trust and Confidence						
Members are suspicious of one another's motives.	1	2	3	4	5	Members trust one another and do not fear ridicule and reprisal.
4. Attitudes Toward Differences Within the Group						
Members avoid arguments, smooth over differences, and suppress or avoid conflicts.	1	2	3	4	5	Members respect and accept differences of opinion and work through them openly without pressure to conform.
5. Mutual Support						
Members are defensive about themselves and their functions.	1	2	3	4	5	Members are able to give and receive help.
6. Involvement-Participation						
Discussion is dominated by a few members.	1	2	3	4	5	All members are involved and free to participate in any manner they choose.
7. Control Methods						
Subject matter and decisions are controlled by the chairperson.	1	2	3	4	5	All members accept responsibility for productive discussion and decision-making.
8. Flexibility						
The group is locked into established rules and procedures that members find hard to change.	1	2	3	4	5	Members readily change procedures in response to new situations.
9. Use of Member Resources						
Individuals' knowledge and experience are not utilized.	1	2	3	4	5	Each member's abilities, knowledge, and experience are fully utilized.
10. Objectives or Purposes						
Objectives are unclear or misunderstood, resulting in no commitment to them.	1	2	3	4	5	Objectives are clear, understood, and receive full commitment from members.
Adapted from <i>The Field Program Associate in the Partnership for Rural Improvement</i> by R. E. Jongeward & J. M. Druian, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, Portland, Oregon, 1978.						

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