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After the Election: How Do Governing Boards Become Effective Work Groups?

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In terms of group effectiveness, governing boards face a basic dilemma as soon as members take office. City councils and county commissions are not formed the way most effective work groups are formed. They are elected as individuals, not selected for their complementary skills, knowledge, or experience. Often, they have no clear work task that unites them. They may disagree fundamentally about the role of government and consequently, their role as elected officials. Yet despite these differences, virtually all of the principles of group dynamics apply to a governing board. Issues such as leadership, role definition, and conflict management all contribute to the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of board members' work with one another, with the manager, and with the community they guide.

We believe that inattention to and ineffective management of the elements of group effectiveness are primary sources of unnecessary board conflict. We have found that by addressing these elements early in their development, boards can eliminate much unproductive communication that increases animosity, destroys trust, and makes it more difficult for the board to address substantive issues. This article identifies some of the factors that make group development more challenging for city and county boards than for other groups; explains the importance of setting group norms for working together in the early stage of a board's development; and describes an intervention we often use to help a board establish an effective working relationship. By developing a shared understanding of both the role of the board and a set of expectations among board members, presiding officials, and managers, we have helped a number of elected officials and managers avoid potential conflicts and resolve existing ones.

Special Issues in City-County Boards That Make Effective Group Development More Challenging

Governing boards fit the conventional definition of a work group and thus are subject to the same principles of group dynamics as are other groups (Hackman 1987).

1. They have boundaries, interdependence among members, and differentiation of members' roles. This means that it is possible to distinguish members from nonmembers, even if membership changes over time.
2. They have one or more tasks to perform, and the group collectively is held responsible for the product.

3. They operate within an organizational context, so the group must manage relationships with other individuals and groups in a larger social system.

While the principles of group dynamics clearly apply to governing boards, there are special circumstances surrounding their work that do increase the challenges these boards face in becoming effective groups. In this section, we describe some issues that frequently come into play when we attempt to help a governmental board apply the principles of group effectiveness.

• John Carver (1990) points out that although governmental boards have much in common with for-profit and nonprofit boards, they are more likely to be bound by legal requirements in terms of both composition and process. They also differ "in how much public scrutiny they receive, a factor that produces differences in the amount of posturing involved in board dynamics" (1990, 5). Carver contends that many governmental boards have strong, long-established traditions that make it very difficult for them to apply modern management principles.

• Boards often do not see themselves as groups. Consequently, it never occurs to them to spend time on group development. On many boards, the chairperson is seen as the sole member responsible for "group dynamics," which implies keeping the group on track, giving everyone a chance to speak, and moving efficiently through the agenda. Carver and Carver argue that "board members expect too much of the chairperson, for example, when they ask him or her to save the board from being held hostage by its most controlling member.... If the board as a whole does not accept responsibility for the governance process, the best the chairperson can achieve is superficial discipline" (1996, 3).

The notion that every member of the board shares responsibility for group effectiveness is entirely consistent with our research on and experience with groups. However, the process of electing board members individually (often by wards or districts) makes it unlikely that board members will see themselves as group members who share equal responsibility for effectiveness. In communities where the mayor or county commission chair is elected separately, the notion of the chair as being responsible for the group may be further reinforced.

• Boards who want to work on group development often are faced with negative public perceptions about the value of this work. Boards that take group development seriously generally try to schedule time away from interruptions to have meaningful and open discussions about how to improve their effectiveness. Yet the media—and consequently, the public—often view retreats and special work sessions as pleasure junkets at public expense. At best, these discussions are perceived as a waste of board members' time.

• "Sunshine" and open meetings laws often have the unintended consequence of making it more difficult for board members to discuss issues related to their personal behavior, past ineffectiveness, and attitudes toward one another. It is generally difficult to address aspects of group culture without specific examples of occasions when norms and expectations were violated. Since retreats and work sessions are open meetings that may be attended by the press, some members may be reluctant to hold discussions at a level of specificity that allows the most difficult interpersonal issues to be resolved.

• Contentious political campaigns may turn board members against one another even before they are sworn in. Research on organizations (see McKnight, Cummings, and Chervany 1998) suggests that in many cases, people begin new relationships with high levels of initial trust in one another. In other words, they assume all the other members are well intentioned, reasonable people working for the good of the organization as a whole. Until an individual proves differently, he or she is accorded respect and granted

serious consideration for opinions, ideas, and suggestions. The campaign process that is required to earn a seat on a governing board often encourages attacks on the past performance of that board and/or the manager. Candidates frequently promise to make drastic changes, if elected. Such behavior may create cynicism and a self-fulfilling prophecy that board members may be unable to work together. Thus, the election process is rarely conducive to a board with high levels of initial trust.[1] As a result, many governmental boards must begin the group development process at a much more difficult starting place than the average organizational work group.

• Board members are often elected based on a track record of community involvement and service on other boards and task forces. These individuals have a known history prior to being elected to a city council or county commission and often may have an allegiance to particular special interest groups, neighborhoods, or minority positions. Other board members may assume, sometimes incorrectly, that the intention of a board member is to drive the agenda of groups that the member previously served rather than focus on balancing the needs of the entire community. Again, the initial atmosphere is more likely to be one of distrust rather than trust.

• Board members are, in fact, frequently conflicted about their need to represent a particular constituency versus their need to deal with the "big picture." As Houle (1989) points out, the first efforts of many board members are at least partially self-interested and tied to special purposes for which they were elected. The new board member discovers later, "perhaps with consternation, that the inside viewpoint is not the same as the outside one; often, indeed, it is so different that the desire to carry out an electoral promise is lost" (1989, 28). This dynamic may contribute to fear of public indignation or possible legal attack, conflict among different jurisdictions, and apprehension about the chances of being reelected. While some work teams experience similar tension about representing others versus speaking for themselves, the issue seldom reaches the complexity of that faced by boards.

• The formal voting process required of governing boards as they reach decisions is often antithetical to open discussion of group process and structure issues. Experienced board members and managers tell us that they begin to feel that "as long as [they] have the votes, who cares?" They are encouraged to think and act in ways that will assure them of votes ahead of time. Many of the methods involve behaviors that some consider to be at best, a system of "good old boy" tradeoffs and at worst, manipulative and underhanded. For example, a member formerly in the minority and now in the majority on a bipartisan board told us that even when he understands and supports the interests of the other side, he is tempted to vote against them just to "show them how it feels for a change." A culture of arguing, of winning and losing, and of refusing to share relevant information develops. It is then difficult to discuss expectations and past communication problems at a level of depth that allows a group to separate conflict based on "getting even" from deeply held values and differences worthy of exploration and debate.

• The turnover rate among elected officials is much higher than on most other types of boards. As many local governments face the intense pressures of rapid growth, increasingly complex social problems, intense pressure from special interest groups, and divisive electoral processes, long-time board members increasingly are choosing to step down. Many board members with whom we work in North Carolina cite increasing difficulties of managing public and family life, which means it is unlikely that they see public office as a long-term part of their community contribution. It seems less and less likely that many members will serve term after term. Coupled with the fact that the av-

erage tenure for city managers nationally is now 5.9 years,[2] it is difficult for governmental boards and their chief executives to have a sense of commitment to one another and to long-term growth together. Some of the deepest levels of group development are probably impractical and unlikely under such conditions.

Although these factors may make effective group development more challenging for governing boards than for other groups, we believe the solution is *not* to avoid group process issues. Our strategy is to encourage board members soon after they take office to begin discussing how they want to work together as a group. The early period in a board's development is a critical time for establishing group norms.

Importance of the Early Period in a Board's Development

Because a governing board fits the definition of a work group (whether or not the board defines itself as such), it follows that a board is subject to the principles of group development. Several theorists have emphasized the importance of a group's initial interactions in "setting the tone" for the group's work. Although some theories of group development suggest that a period of time must pass after a group's inception before the group can establish its norms (see Tuckman 1965), more recent research indicates that norms may be established very early in a group's lifespan. In her "punctuated equilibrium" model, Gersick (1988) found that (a) a framework for behavioral patterns emerges at a group's initial meeting and (b) there are few significant shifts in the group's approach to its work, until the group reaches the midpoint of its intended duration or project.

In one of the most comprehensive models of group formation and development, Schein (1988) posits that new group members initially demonstrate self-oriented behavior, which reflects the concerns that any new member of a group might experience. Before members can begin to pay more attention to each other and to the task(s) facing them, their personal concerns need to be resolved. Concerns include:

1. *intimacy*—"Who am I to be?"
2. *control and influence*—"Will I be able to control and influence others?"
3. *needs and goals*—"Will the group goals include my own needs?"
4. *acceptance and intimacy*—"Will I be liked and accepted by the group?"

Working through these initial concerns is important, because members will remain preoccupied with their own issues until they find a role that is comfortable for them and until the group develops norms about goals, influence, and intimacy. Given the special issues that make group development particularly challenging for city or county boards, self-oriented behavior may be even more pronounced as a new group of elected officials begins its work together. The board typically consists of a mix of incumbents and newcomers, which may accentuate new members' concerns about control and influence. Members may have information from other board members' campaigns that suggests that they will have difficulty accomplishing their desired goals because of opposition or competing goals of other members.

It is important to recognize that the board is essentially a new group, even if only one member changes. Each member has a new relationship with that person, which changes the dynamics of the entire group. Schein states that "every group must go through some growing pains while members work on these issues and find their place. If the formal structure does not permit such growth, the group never becomes a real group capable of group effort. It remains a collection of individuals held together by a formal structure" (1988, 47). We believe this early work is critical for governing boards because in the absence of group discussion and clarification of

these issues, much of a group's energy continues to be devoted to individual coping responses instead of to the job at hand. In extreme cases, board members can develop self-fulfilling prophecies about their early conflicts; instead of seeing these issues as a natural part of a group's development, they may view the difficulties as evidence that "this board will never be able to work together." This interpretation, in turn, could reduce their motivation to work through group process problems as they arise, thereby increasing the likelihood that the group will remain ineffective.

Intervention Methodology

Despite the challenges facing governing boards and the managers who work with them, we believe that boards can apply the principles of effective group development. In doing so, they can significantly reduce the level of unproductive conflict among board members. Included in "unproductive conflict" are differences rooted in a desire to get even, frustration with the mayor or chair for "not leading," personal antagonisms based on assumptions people have made about each other, and suspicion based on failure of individuals to explain the reasons behind their decisions or behavior.

A basic intervention we have used with a number of boards and managers to improve their working relationships is agreeing on roles and expectations for working together. This is simply an initial step in cultivating an atmosphere that makes possible a more open exchange of ideas and feelings. It helps boards reserve their energy for difficult, substantive issues rather than getting stuck over and over again on lesser problems. Although the intervention in no way eliminates all conflict or lessens the complexity of serving on a governing board, we believe it teaches board members valuable skills for communicating productively when there are fundamental differences.

Why Intervene on Roles and Expectations?

Whenever there are new board members, new presiding officials, or new managers, explicitly discussing roles and expectations can be helpful. By "role," we mean the cluster of activities that individuals perform in a particular position. In a group setting, a role is often thought of as the cluster of activities that *others expect* individuals to perform in their position (Hellriegel, Slocum, and Woodman 1983). As Schwarz (1994) observes, the set of behaviors associated with a role should be consistent and not dependent on the characteristics of the particular individual filling the role. However,

> [i]n practice, the role a person plays results from a combination of the formally defined role, the individual's personality, the person's understanding of the role, the expectations that others have for that role, and the interpersonal relationships that the person has with others in the group. This means that different people may fill the same role somewhat differently. Consequently, group members need to clarify their roles. (1994, 31)

During the intervention, we commonly use "role" to refer to the more formally designed duties and statutory responsibilities an individual should carry out. By "expectations," we refer to the ways in which the person assuming the role and others expect that individual to behave while engaged in formal duties. For example, it is normally part of the formal role of the mayor to preside at meetings. It may be an expectation of the group that, while presiding, the mayor will limit the time each board member or citizen may speak on an issue.

New board members in particular may be confused about the formal role and function of the council or commission. For example, it is not uncommon during campaigns for candidates to promise to change the city school system—a function over which the board to which the candidate seeks election has no authority. Clarifying the role of the

board as a whole can help clear up any confusion regarding the powers of a council or commission.

Even more common, board members and managers have differing expectations about how they and others will behave in their roles. Each assumes that similar expectations are shared. In a roles and expectations discussion recently facilitated by Institute of Government faculty, city council members said they expected their mayor to "keep board meetings on course," "use the gavel readily," and "keep peace and harmony." The mayor, however, said his expectations of council members included "avoid grandstanding," "exhibit professional behavior," "show respect for council members," "don't take cheap shots at other council members or city staff," and "quit asking the mayor to referee."

While these may seem like small differences, they frequently begin a process of increasing dissatisfaction with a mayor, board chair, or manager. Subsequent actions, seen through the subjective lens of "not performing your role as you should," are often negatively interpreted. Before long there is an escalating cycle: each party assumes that the other is not fulfilling expectations, and further assumes that as a result, information cannot be shared openly and differences cannot be discussed candidly. The relationship becomes increasingly strained. The inability to concur on how a role should be carried out is viewed as confirmation that the group cannot discuss difficult issues. Over time, serious communication gaps develop that ultimately lead to deep division and open conflict. The roles and expectations intervention is designed to prevent this negative spiral from developing while helping new groups learn good communication skills.

It is also helpful for experienced board members to periodically review roles and expectations. Using self-critiques, the group can measure effectiveness by tracking how well it is fulfilling agreed-upon roles and expectations. Roles and expectations may also shift and change, depending on the issues facing the group and the length of time the board has been together. It is not unusual for board members initially to develop relatively basic expectations of one another, such as "come prepared to meetings," "review everything in your packet," or "work closely and interactively with the manager and through her with the staff." As the group develops more sophisticated process skills, expectations may address more complex group issues, such as "we will respect our differences, separating differences in communication style and preferred ways of participating from fundamental values differences." The group may even create a conflict-management process for dealing with fundamental differences. Thus, reviewing roles and expectations is a good investment because it can foster continued growth.

Using a Group Effectiveness Model

We base our intervention methodology on the group effectiveness model described in Schwarz (1994) and Carlson (1998). Recognizing that group effectiveness has several components, the model uses three criteria to assess how a group functions:

1. The group delivers services and/or products that meet or exceed the performance standards of the people who receive or review them. It is not sufficient for a group to evaluate and be satisfied with its own work. The customers—those who receive the products or services—must decide whether the output is acceptable. For local government boards, citizens of the community typically make this determination.
2. The group functions in a way that maintains or enhances the ability of its members to work together in the future. Although some groups may come together for just one task, most groups—including governing boards—must work together over time, and it is important to maintain productive relationships in order to avoid "burning out" after a particularly stressful problem or issue.

3. On balance, the group experience satisfies rather than frustrates the personal needs of group members. Most work groups are not (explicitly) concerned with meeting members' needs; they exist to accomplish a task or set of tasks. However, people do hope to meet certain individual needs through the group experience; for example, the need for achievement or recognition. If this does not happen, they are not likely to continue their contributions to the group.

Our experience is that governing boards, and indeed most groups, focus their attention on the first criterion and neglect the second and third. At best, they may recognize the importance of group and individual maintenance functions after group performance begins to suffer. We believe it is important to attend to all three criteria because they work together, especially over time. A city council may be functioning well by the first criterion; for example, it may pass a budget that increases law enforcement services and holds the current tax rate—both of which are important to the voters. However, by the second and third criteria, the council may be suffering: for example, members may blame one another for delays in accomplishing the group's work and may avoid subcommittee assignments because working relationships are strained. Because the criteria of the model are interdependent, the quality of a group's product will likely be affected if all the criteria are not met.

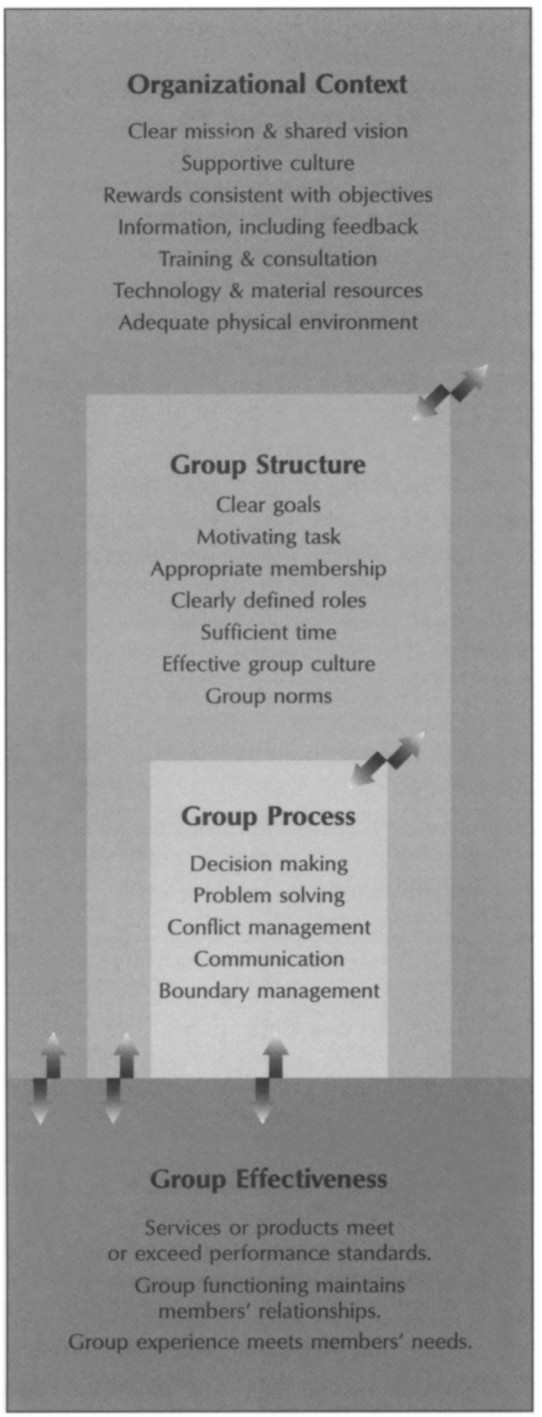
Three factors contribute to a group's ability to meet all three criteria for effectiveness: organizational context, group structure, and group process (Schwarz 1994). These factors and their constituent elements interact to create a complex system (see Figure 1). We will not describe the model in detail here; the relevant point to emphasize for the purpose of this article is that the model can be used to support initial group development as well as to diagnose and remedy specific group problems. The model provides a "checklist" of elements that are needed for effective group functioning, and it can be extremely helpful for group members (and those who work with them) to study the model to determine what needs strengthening for the group to do its work.

A primary reason why the roles and expectations intervention is so useful to boards in their early stages of development is that this discussion provides a point of departure for other elements in the group effectiveness model. As depicted in Figure 1, "clearly defined roles" is the fourth element in the Group Structure factor of the model. As discussed, role clarification is essential to effective board functioning.

However, a discussion of roles and expectations for how board members will work with one another, with the presiding official, and with the manager quickly leads to consideration of factors associated with group structure and process. As board members list their expectations, they may include items such as "I expect other members to talk to me directly when they have a problem with something I've done." This expectation relates to how members will communicate and manage conflict, which affects the Group Process portion of the model. Or a member may state, "I expect others to think about an issue before the meeting, but keep an open mind—don't make your decision until the board has thoroughly discussed it." This begins to establish norms for how the group will make its decisions.

Although some elements may best be discussed in the context of a specific issue or decision (e.g., sufficient time to complete a task), many apply to the group's work as a whole. We have found that an initial discussion of roles and expectations seems to be a manageable way for a group to establish norms about many aspects of its process and structure. In a sense, this intervention structure follows the logic of Fisher and Ury's recommendation (1981) to "separate the people from the problem." Instead of becoming mired in untested inferences about the meaning of

Figure 1: Group Effectiveness Model



From Margaret S. Carlson, A Model for Improving a Group's Effectiveness. *Popular Government* 63 (Summer 1998): 39. The figure was adapted from Roger M. Schwarz, *The Skilled Facilitator: Practical Wisdom for Developing Effective Groups*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994. Reprinted with permission.

specific events or exchanges between board members, an open discussion of roles and expectations helps a board begin to think more broadly about how it wants to function.

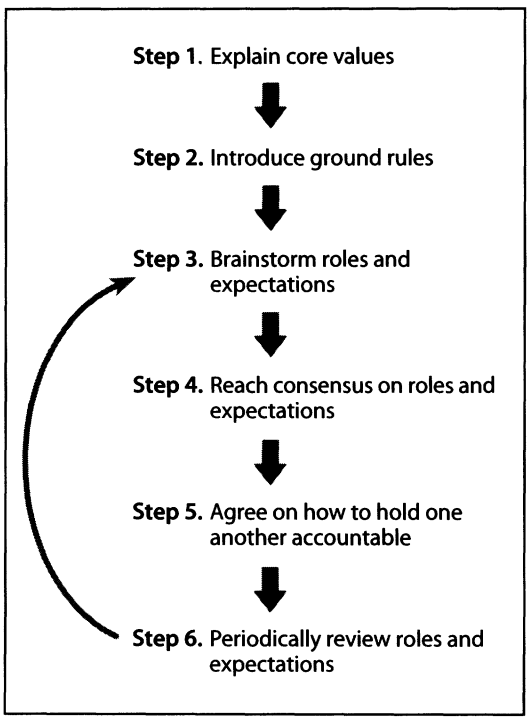
Steps of the Intervention

For the roles and expectations intervention, we have developed a format that contains six key steps (see Figure 2).

Step 1. Explain core values. As facilitators, we are guided by three core values: valid information, free and informed choice, and internal commitment to the choice (Argyris 1970; Argyris and Schon 1974; Schwarz 1994). "Valid information" means that people share all information relevant to an issue, using specific examples to help others understand and determine for themselves whether the information is true (Schwarz 1994). "Free and informed choice" means that people can define their own objectives and methods for achieving them, basing these choices on valid information. "Internal commitment to the choice" means that people feel responsible for the decisions they make and will work to see that they are implemented. The three values are highly interdependent. It is unlikely that groups or individuals will commit deeply to decisions unless those decisions are based on valid information and free and informed choice.

The core values serve two purposes: they guide effective facilitator behavior, and they guide effective group behavior (Schwarz 1994). When we work with a board, we share these core values and explain how they guide our behavior as facilitators. For example, we will not make decisions for the group, but we will share our observations about the group's decision process and allow the group to choose how it wants to proceed. We also share our belief that these core values underlie effective group behavior; we invite the group to adopt them for the roles and expectations discussion, but—consistent with the value of free and informed choice—the group makes the decision about whether or

Figure 2: Steps of the Intervention



not it wishes to act according to these values. Frequently, groups do adopt the core values or ground rules based on these core values (see Step 2) as part of their expectations of one another. Thus, introducing the values and modeling them in our facilitation teaches a board about key principles of group effectiveness.

Step 2. Introduce ground rules. A group may find the explanation of the core values helpful, but these values are somewhat abstract and give little concrete guidance about how to communicate effectively. We employ a set of ground rules to help a group discuss its issues productively. These ground rules were developed by Schwarz (1994; 1995) and are based on the three values previously discussed. Examples of ground rules include test assumptions and inferences; share all relevant information; focus on interests, not positions; be specific and use examples; keep the discussion focused; and explain the reasons behind your statements, questions, and actions. Because these ground rules are specific strategies for creating effective group processes, we briefly describe them for the group and ask if members are willing to use them during the roles and expectations discussion. In most cases, boards agree to use the ground rules. However, even if the group decides not to adopt them, we as facilitators use the ground rules as a guide for diagnosing and intervening on group members' behavior. Frequently, groups like the concept of the ground rules and include an expectation such as "each of us shares all relevant information and how we obtained it" in their agreements with one another.

Step 3. Brainstorm roles and expectations. In the third step of the intervention, group members generate a list of expectations for how board members, the presiding official, and (frequently) the manager will behave in their respective roles. We use a prompt such as "I expect other board members (the mayor, the manager) to...." and ask group members to complete the sentence with statements that reflect their expectations for these individuals.

During the planning session for the roles and expectations discussion, the group identifies the relevant parties to include in the discussion. Almost certainly, the list will include board members and the presiding official; typically, the group also lists the manager or chief administrator. Beyond this, some groups will include the attorney, clerk, or others who report directly to the governing board. We usually suggest an order that moves from general to specific; i.e., list expectations that apply to all board members first, then to the presiding official, manager, etc. This helps avoid redundancy and allows group members to make reference to earlier statements when considering other roles. However, the group makes the final decision on the order of the discussion; for example, if the relationship between the board and manager has been particularly strained, the group may opt to begin with a discussion of expectations for the manager's role.

Step 4. Reach consensus on roles and expectations. In this step, the group members first examine the list of expectations in detail and ask one another to clarify or explain particular items. It is at this stage that we are most active as facilitators, helping group members to test assumptions and inferences they may be making about others' comments or motives, to share the reasoning behind their statements, and to identify the interests underlying their positions.

Next, group members reach consensus about which items remain on the list and the wording of each. Because the expectations are essentially agreements about how group members wish to work together, it is particularly important to reach consensus at this stage of the discussion; there is nothing officially "binding" about the agreements except group members' commitment to them, so buy-in by all members is vital. At this stage, we usually ask each member if he or she can fully support all of the expectations. If the list is more than a few items long, we often check for consensus with each person about each item on the list. While this may seem laborious, it often brings to light hesitations or concerns which seldom surface when board members concede to an overall question addressed to the group, such as "can everyone support statement number two?" Ultimately, the group develops a shared list of expectation statements that are fully supported by every member of the group.

Step 5. Agree on how to hold one another accountable. Agreeing to support a role description and list of expectations is only the first half of the commitment. To change group dynamics, board members must agree to hold themselves and other group members accountable for the degree to which they behave consistently with their shared expectations.

We have found that a good final question for a group's first roles and expectations discussion is, "What do you want to do if group members are not adhering to the expectations you have agreed on today?" Typically, group members respond that they would like to be told if others observe them acting in a way that is inconsistent with the group's expectations; however, they are reluctant to point out inconsistencies observed in other members. The group often recognizes that it faces a potential bind (i.e., everyone wants to receive feedback, but no one is willing to give it), which elicits an even deeper, more valuable discussion of the group's norms and values. As facilitators, we help group members reframe their thinking about giving feedback to each other. Rather than construing feedback as "constructive criticism" at best, or unkindness at worst, the group realizes that the fairest thing each member can do for one another is to openly discuss perceived inconsistencies. At a much deeper level, the group begins to value creating valid information over saving face.

Step 6. Periodically review roles and expectations. In addition to holding one another accountable and providing feedback, the board should periodically review the list of roles and expectations to critique group functioning and revise as necessary. The list can serve as a useful self-assessment tool as board members review their statements and decide what to keep, what to change, and whether or not the group as a whole is operating in a manner that is consistent with its expectations. Even during a group's first roles and expectations discussion, it can be helpful to ask members to imagine reviewing the group's list a year later. This exercise helps the group determine which expectations may need additional clarification or discussion.

A number of the boards we have worked with for several years begin their annual planning retreats by reviewing their roles and expectations list and rating themselves on their performance of each. Members may realize that an expectation that seemed important a year ago was actually designed to deal with a problem that no longer exists. For example, one board dropped the expectation "When you make an inference as a result of what is

said in the paper or by other public sources, check it out with the person quoted." During review at the end of one year, board members agreed that they consistently did this as part of their agreement to test inferences and assumptions. The group no longer needed a separate expectation about doing this specifically for items publicly stated or published. Members felt a genuine sense of accomplishment at their progress in becoming a more effective group.

What Specific Results Are Achieved?

In writing about board roles, Carver and Carver argue that "carefully designing areas of board job performance will profoundly channel the interpersonal process of a board. For example, job design influences the types of conflict that will be experienced and whether members will follow a commonly proclaimed discipline or their individual disciplines" (1996, 3). Carver and Carver cite benefits of clarified roles as "depersonalizing subsequent struggles when different individuals have opposing views about the appropriateness of an issue for board discussion" and as lessening "jockeying for power, control of the group through negativism, and diversion of the board into unrelated topics" (1996, 3). We share their view of the value of role clarification; however, it is difficult to quantify the outcomes of this type of intervention. One of the challenges in assessing the intervention's value arises from our belief that it is best to work with a board as early in its development as possible. If we do this, the board will have little or no time to form unproductive norms; therefore, a "before and after" test of group functioning would not be possible. If the group's subsequent interactions appear to be generally effective, we can speculate that the intervention contributed to the group's functioning, but it is certainly more difficult to measure the absence of a particular behavior (e.g., unproductive conflict) than its presence.

Despite the difficulty in measuring the effect of a roles and expectations intervention, we do have some data to indicate that boards find it to be valuable. We conclude each of our sessions with a group self-critique, in which the group identifies what went well and what members would like to do differently. In approximately 35 roles and expectations interventions that we have facilitated over the past five years, all of the boards reported that the discussion was very useful, and well over half invited us back to facilitate a similar discussion when board membership changed. We have also received information attesting to the lasting effect of this intervention; for example, a mayor recently said to one of us, "That discussion at our retreat four years ago about having conversations outside of board meetings was really a turning point for us; we still refer back to it." Comments such as these add credence to our view that boards achieve substantive, lasting results from these discussions.

Future Research

Our lack of quantitative data measuring the effect of these interventions points clearly to one avenue for future research. We plan to collect information on boards that have engaged in discussion of roles and expectations early in their development and to compare them to boards that have not had this type of early intervention.

We would also like to refine our definition of a "new" group. Although we believe—and have witnessed—that the addition of just one new member can profoundly change the dynamics of a board, it is also possible for a board to retain key norms and values even as its membership changes. What are some of the factors that determine whether a board is able to continue to develop effectively as a group in the face of frequent member turnover? If there is not an expectation that the group will stay intact for more than two years, will this affect the depth of the group norms that are established?

Local government boards are confronted with such complex community issues today

that they cannot afford to devote their energies and attention to intraboard conflict that does not increase their capacity to address substantive problems. We believe that the early intervention described here can help a board turn its attention to resolving the *community's* issues rather than its own.

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Together and individually, the authors have designed and facilitated sessions for city councils, county commissioners, management teams, and many other groups. They have also taught facilitation workshops for a variety of organizations.

Notes

1. For purposes of this discussion, we are using Rousseau et al.'s definition of trust (1998): "Trust is a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another."
2. This is the national mean "number of years in current position" from the International City/County Management Association's 1996 State of the Profession survey. We thank Sebia Clark, ICMA Research Assistant, for providing this data.

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