

Effective Committees

Organizations often treat committees as necessary evils. Members avoid accepting appointment to committees like the plague. Accepting or being coerced into taking a committee job is often viewed as a life sentence. It seems the only way to get out of this is through a case of terminal burnout.

The potential contributions of committees to organizations and the morale of those assigned to committees are often lowered by the assumption that committee work is a waste of time.

In fact, working on committees can be a deeply rewarding experience, for committee members, and an efficient means for the organization to conduct its business. The key to success with committees is making them effective. The personal and organizational benefits of effective committees makes it worth the effort.

Effective committees contribute a number of benefits.

- They can and should do the bulk of the work of the organization.
- They can relieve officers of many of the details of the organization's activities, leaving them time for long-range planning, policy decisions, and other responsibilities.
- Committee work is a way to use the strengths of individual members for the benefit of the organization.
- A strong committee structure allows more members to get involved.
- Members are more likely to develop a feeling of worth and personal satisfaction as they contribute.

Advantages of Committees

Committees offer several significant advantages over trying to do all of the work in general meetings of the organization.

- The small size and informal nature of a committee allows it to work more effectively.
- Members often discuss ideas more freely in a committee than in general sessions of the organization.
- Committees are more likely to make progress because members are interested and familiar with the problem.
- It is easier to arrange meetings for small groups.
- A small group can reduce options for consideration thus operating more efficiently.

Ad Hoc or Standing Committees

Committees may be created as a temporary means to accomplish a specific task. These are called ad hoc committees and they disband when the task is done. Standing committees take on-going responsibility for ongoing functions of the organization like finances, program, facilities, etc.

Members of ad hoc committees are often motivated by the clear task assignment and end to it. To maintain motivation on standing committees, it is important to regularly add new and relieve old members, and also set fresh goals on a regular basis.

Selecting a Committee

The chair, officers, or board, who appoint committees, need to be aware of the contribution the committees can make. Several considerations will help in appointing effective committees:

- Interest in committee's focus, a willingness to serve, knowledge and skill, or access to information needed should be given special attention in the selection. Training, experience, and aptitude may indicate where members could best serve.
- Develop members for future leadership by assigning inexperienced members on committees with experienced members.

Committees need balanced representation. Four types of representation need to be considered:

- 1) points of view or opinions;
- 2) organizations or agencies;
- 3) geographic locations;
- 4) personal characteristics (age, gender, experience, etc.)

It is unusual to bring together a group of people without finding personality conflicts. Those who have demonstrated inability or unwillingness to work together should not be assigned to the same committee.

Committee Operation

The nature and size of committees generally permit informality. Parliamentary procedure can usually be dispensed. Unlike formal meetings, the chair participates in discussion and decisions. An agenda for committee meetings is recommended to help members prepare for the meeting. Committee meeting minutes should be more complete in terms of their discussion, because they are the basis of reporting to the organization.

Action on Committee Reports

Committees report to the general organization. The organization then decides what to do with the report. After a committee report is presented, discussion is in order. The presenter should move for acceptance of the report, or adoption of the recommendations contained in it, to place it on the floor. The organization then decides how to handle the report through discussion and a vote.

Reports may be:

- Accepted or filed – The organization is not bound by recommendations contained in the report. The chair can accept routine or progress reports without a vote.
- Approved or adopted – The group binds itself to the recommendations of the report.
- Rejected – The group can reject all or part of the report.
- Postponed – Postpones decision on the report to a later, specified date.
- Referred – Refers report to an officer, board, or another committee for consideration or further work.

Resources:

Adapted from NCR-18, NCRS-5 Series No. 1. Committees...A Key to Group Leadership, Sheldon G. Lowery, Revised 1980.

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