

THE DYNAMICS OF GROUP ACTION

CITIZENS



COMMITTEES

By DANIEL R. DAVIES *and* KENNETH F. HERROLD

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THE DYNAMICS OF GROUP ACTION

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction to the study of group action and the role of committees in the process of decision-making.

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CHAPTER 2

The dynamics of group action and the role of committees in the process of decision-making.

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CHAPTER 3

The dynamics of group action and the role of committees in the process of decision-making.

Foreword

CITIZENS COMMITTEES is the first of a series of handbooks under the general title, THE DYNAMICS OF GROUP ACTION, which Arthur C. Croft Publications will bring out from time to time.

These handbooks are designed as a set of "working papers" on human relations for administrators and board members in school systems, hospitals, and other institutions which operate under a professional administrator and a lay board. They will present the latest findings of the rapidly growing body of research on human relations which result from investigations carried on by business, industry, government, the armed forces, educational organizations, and psychological clinics. They will translate these findings from the realm of theory into practical recommendations for action.

Future issues will cover such topics as board meetings, staff meetings, organization to solve problems, new concepts of leadership, the relationship between men of action and their expert advisers, the role of informality in human relations, and others.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'A. C. Croft', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Publisher

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Introduction

The dramatic increase in the number and kinds of citizens committees is a phenomenon of the past decade of school administration. When the National Citizens Commission for the Public Schools¹ began its operation in 1949, it knew of seventeen citizens committees for better schools. As of January 1954, the Commission was in touch with 2,230 school citizens committees and it estimated that over 8,000 additional committees were at work. The Commission is also in touch with some twenty-four state-wide citizens committees concentrating on school problems.

Citizens committees seem destined to be as much a concern of school administrators as budgets, books and buildings. They have established themselves as powerful administrative devices for marshaling and focusing wide human and material resources on problems of concern to education. Their effectiveness in solving problems and in producing a number of desirable by-products is being increasingly recognized.

Nevertheless, whether you are an administrator, a board member, or some other citizen of the community — when you look at citizens committees, you unavoidably face a series of *key questions*.

WHY SHOULD WE HAVE CITIZENS COMMITTEES?

WHY HAVE OTHER COMMUNITIES STARTED THEM?

WHAT KIND OF CITIZENS COMMITTEES SHOULD WE USE?

WHY DO SOME COMMITTEES RUN INTO TROUBLE?

WHAT DO CITIZENS COMMITTEES COST?

WHAT ADVANCE PLANNING DO COMMITTEES NEED?

WHO SHOULD SERVE ON COMMITTEES?

HOW DO COMMITTEES OPERATE, ONCE STARTED?

ARE THERE ANY SPECIAL TIPS FOR ADMINISTRATORS?

Actually, there is a rapidly accumulating body of information about successful practices and related theory on community participation in education planning. Much insight is coming from the science of administration, from the sociology of community organizations, from advanced social psychology, and from theory and practice in group dynamics and group procedures. Let us examine the help they offer.

¹ "The Commission is a nonprofit corporation for the improvement of the public schools . . . Following the Jeffersonian principle of local autonomy, the Commission encourages the formation of citizens committees to improve public schools."

• From a brochure published by the Commission, 2 West 45th St., New York 36, N. Y.



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Why Should We Have Citizens Committees?

1. *Citizens Committees are one of the emerging answers to the postwar demand for better school-community cooperation.* They are largely the product of the rising tide of popular interest in education. Hence, there is one feature such committees have in common: they provide for wider community participation in educational planning. Community representatives — be they lawyers, physicians, homemakers, businessmen, or day laborers — gather around a table with educators to discuss and to try to find answers to common problems in which education has a stake.

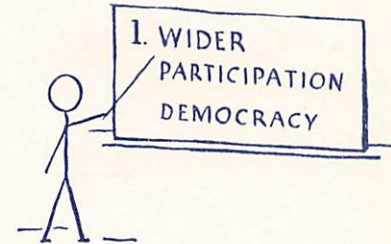
In all of this, citizens committees are consistent with our ideals of political democracy.² Looked at in the perspective of the history of our country, they represent a return to the very processes by which our founding fathers established public schools in the first place.

Originally in our country, school affairs were a concern of the whole community in its town meeting. Then special committees called "School Committees" were set up. Those School Committees still operate in New England. In other states they came to be called School Boards, School Directors, School Trustees, or Boards of Education. As time went on those boards tended to become separated in their operation from common community concerns and, unfortunately, got more and more out of touch with them.

And yet, when fundamental decisions and policies about education are to be made, all the people should be represented. We believe that public schools are the people's schools and that the people must remain in close contact with them, assuming a rightful share of responsibility for their effectiveness, if for no other reason than to prevent dictatorship and mismanagement.³ Only the people themselves have the right to determine what they want the schools to do for their children, what aims should be pursued.

We cannot obtain citizen support for a modern and effective school program by simply taxing them and building it for them. Many bitter board members and administrators who have felt, after many years of self-sacrifice and work, that they "were not appreciated" give mute testimony to this principle.

If you want to reduce citizen censure, criticism and disfavor, and above all, demonstrate your democratic beliefs in action, the best way to do it is to ask representatives of the community to



² "Can the principle of a democratic society with its tradition of freedom succeed in the modern world?" . . . The answer to that question will depend upon the action of people within their communities. For without thought, action, and participation by the people in their own community life no democratic society can long exist."

• Poston, Richard W. *DEMOCRACY Is YOU*. New York: Harper & Bros. 1953. p. 11.

³ "Till men have been some time free, they know not how to use their freedom . . . the final and permanent fruits of liberty are wisdom, moderation, and mercy. . . . If men are to wait for liberty till they become wise and good in slavery, they may indeed wait for ever."

• Macauley, on Milton.



⁴ "There were times during the school strikes when some school administrators and community leaders were convinced that all was lost. But there was sufficient energy, intelligence, confidence, and teamwork among the group as a whole for them to win out in the end."

- Tipton, J. H. *COMMUNITY IN CRISIS*. New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University. 1953. p. 180.

work with you. Involve them in the planning and in resulting action through citizens committees.

2. *Citizens committees are an excellent way to get things done.* Problems at all levels of education have felt the impact of citizen participation: elementary, secondary, collegiate, and adult; local, county, and state. Whatever the problems are which a citizens committee sets out to examine, its members bring to bear a wide variety of points of view, experiences, skills, knowledge, and special training.

Properly established and directed, citizens committees have demonstrated their productivity over and over again. They have helped find solutions for all kinds of educational problems. For example:⁴

- a) They have worked with administrators, school boards, and architects in determining the desirable features of a new school building.
- b) They have given months of advice and council to administrators and boards in the development of the next year's school budget.
- c) They have been asked to study the personnel policies and pay scales of the school system and to make recommendations to the board of education for their improvement.
- d) They have assisted in setting up selection standards for new teachers and administrators.
- e) They have been asked to join the board and staff in studying aspects of the educational program, as well as the curriculum as a whole.

There is scarcely a problem which citizens committees have not been asked to help solve. The combination of professional know-how and citizen opinion and point of view contributes to a better solution.

3. *Citizens committees are an excellent means of communication between the board and school staff and the public.* People want to know more about their schools.⁵ They want their questions answered; they want their own ideas considered. They are dissatisfied with one-way communication whereby school officials issue statements to the press, publish elaborate annual reports, or employ any other of the devices by which the people can be *told* with little opportunity to *respond*. They want to hear, of course. But they want a chance to express themselves as well. They want two-way communication.

⁵ This point has been well demonstrated by Benjamin Fine, education editor of *The New York Times*, in his national surveys about schools.

As schoolmen know, the more sophisticated types of public relations programs leave the public cold. That is, programs copied from modern advertising to "sell the schools to the people" by high pressure tactics will not do the job. People are asking, it seems, for the simpler face-to-face relationships which they once had with school people when communities were smaller and more closely knit, and everyone knew everyone else. Indeed, experience shows that enthusiastic support and new ideas for education are as likely to come initially from laymen as from professional educators.

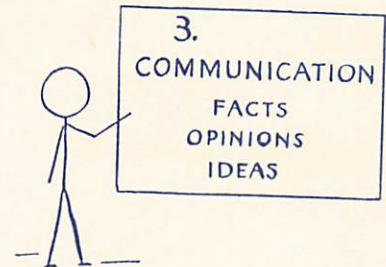
School boards want to know more about their communities, too. Mr. O. H. Roberts, Jr., an attorney from Evansville, Indiana, and a member of the National Citizens Commission for the Public Schools (NCCPS), recently expressed how different board members feel about citizens committees as communication channels:

"School boards are the 'legal trustees' of the public school matters and they cannot delegate that responsibility, nor can a citizen committee ever deprive them of it. They do need, however, every means by which they can feel the public pulse on school matters and it is in this area that citizens committees become very valuable. Committees can be helpful in guiding public thinking on better school practices and procedures, once a policy of leadership has been reached by the board of education. Citizens committees are helpful for research and fact finding; again, always remembering that the final decision ought to deal with the facts and must rest with the board."⁶

The ability to keep a finger on the public pulse is not easy for school boards. Their composition, the kinds of members, and their outlooks, rather effectively insulate them from many people in "the public." Two studies,⁷ one made twenty years after the other, showed clearly that school boards in America are drawn from the "upper classes" in our society. They are representative of the better educated, higher income, professional or business groups. They are usually selected from among the "better" people in the community.

Several sociological studies have pointed out what this means for communication between the school board and the community. Warner's study of a typical Midwestern community which he calls "Jonesville"⁸ gives the point of view of those studies.

He pointed out that the members of the board of education in "Jonesville" had social contacts almost completely with people



⁶ Mr. Roberts' statement appeared in the monthly bulletin of the NCCPS, *Our Schools*, Vol. 16, No. 5, May 1953.

⁷ The two studies, one made by George S. Counts, professor at Teachers College, Columbia University, in 1926 and the other by the NEA Research Division in 1946 showed that the typical school board has five members. Four are men; the woman is a housewife. Their income level and educational background are above average.

The Counts' report is out of print. The NEA report appeared in the *NEA Research Bulletin* for October 1946.

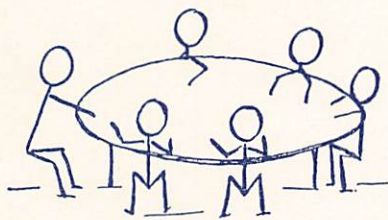
⁸ As is true in any study of a single community, there is always the question as to how far one can assume the results apply in other communities. With that reservation in mind, this book becomes fascinating reading on the inner sanctum of community mysteries.

• Warner, W. L., and others. *DEMOCRACY IN JONESVILLE*. New York: Harper & Bros. 1949.

in their own circles. They lived, ate, worshipped, worked, and played bridge with people who thought very much like themselves on educational and other questions, particularly on those where a raise in the tax rate might be involved.

On the other hand, they were out of touch with "some 75 percent of the people in the community." What contacts they had outside their own groups were largely superficial. Their social position made it difficult to bridge the gap to try to learn what were the opinions, hopes, fears, and desires of other groups.

While we may question how generally applicable the findings of such sociological studies may be, they do serve to point out the communication problem faced by most boards of education. They help explain why the defeat of a school bond proposal, for example, is so often a sudden surprise to a board of education. Where citizens committees have been employed in such a matter, the board has an excellent chance of knowing beforehand what the probable result of the election will be, and has powerful allies in seeking acceptance.



"WE MUST STUDY
THIS PROBLEM"

4. *Citizens committees are an excellent adult education device.* They help to develop better community understanding of the opportunities of modern education. From their ranks come people who can provide enlightened leadership in Parent-Teacher Associations, who can vote intelligently on issues involving education, and who can, if called upon, become superior school board members by virtue of their citizen committee apprenticeship.

In addition to learning "about" education — school costs, enrollment trends, curricula, methods, and a thousand and one other informational items — they learn how to cooperate and become accustomed to cooperating in solving school problems. When a considerable number of people in a community learn *how to cooperate* and become *accustomed to cooperating*, the danger of "battles" and long-term damage to community harmony decreases sharply.

You can expect even further dividends from wide participation of people. One of the more difficult problems which school administrators face is that of reaching the "nonparents" in the community. A common cry of school administrators is, "I can reach parents through conferences about their children or through the PTA. But how can I reach those who have no children in our schools? If I could only do that, I believe I could remove much resistance to school improvement!"

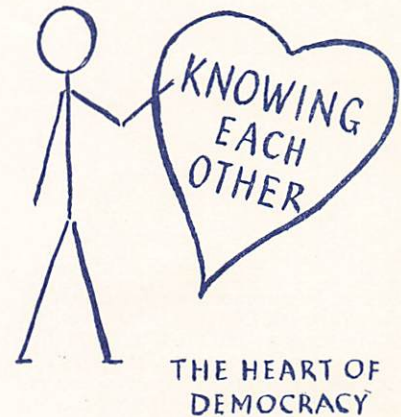
One of the answers to the problem is the citizens committee. Such persons, even though they have no close school ties, can usually be persuaded to join in solving educational problems of common concern. By this means the "base" of active, sympathetic understanding and support for good schools is spread just as wide and far as the number of committees and their membership permit.

As a practical and critical example, consider the question of dealing with the so-called "attacks" on the public schools. Citizens committees can do yeoman service here, either to set counterfires for conflagrations already under way, or establish preventive measures to help guard against attacks.

The preventive aspect is particularly important. In a sense *all* citizens committees serve that function. Without the opportunity to work together in the light of facts, even the best intentioned people, in their zeal to improve the schools, sometimes fall prey to misinformation or propaganda. They may be influenced by their present fear of communism and "reds" in the schools. Working together, citizens, school board members, and schoolmen can allay and prevent such suspicions.

5. *Citizens committees appear to be filling a need for all of us for a sense of community, of living and working together.* The heart of the argument for citizen participation is that people in the community *get acquainted*.⁹ As by-products of their working on problems and learning about good schools, they develop improved attitudes, morale, and human relations within the school and within the community. In coming to know and appreciate one another, they can settle many problems more adequately by consensus. Here, as sometimes happens in industry, the by-products may be worth far more in the long run than the "products" of the moment. Commenting about a city-wide committee which had worked a year on a new curriculum plan, a superintendent said, "If all its reports were destroyed today, we'd still have the benefit of what that committee did. They learned to work together — and nothing can keep that from helping our schools, even in areas far outside their curriculum study."

The trouble is, it is increasingly difficult to be neighborly, even in small towns. There are so many forces which divide us. Today we see ourselves hurrying here and there preoccupied with intense, personal pursuits, joining passively in mass entertainment, ranging widely in the seclusion of automobiles, and being driven further apart by the social and political pressures of our times.



⁹ "For each member, the group inevitably becomes an extension of the self; it must be acceptable within the framework of the criteria that the individual has set up for self-acceptance. In other words, if he cannot conceive of the group as representing himself, then he cannot very well behave as a representative of the group."

• Hartley, E. L. and R. E. *FUNDAMENTALS OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1952. p. 389.

With the aid of the TV camera, no doors need be closed to us; through supersonic jet flight the world may yet be our oyster. But what is to take the place of a friendly feeling of neighborliness to others in a little spot on the earth's vast surface? What can replace in people the secure sense of being important — a feeling once provided so satisfyingly by each individual's part in the church social, the husking bee, and the barn raising?

There is no easy road to community feeling, especially as we crowd more and more into urban centers and as old neighborhoods are being "improved" with housing developments. However, two practical suggestions that make sense come from the social scientists:

One suggestion is that just as husking bees and barn raisings were pleasant ways for getting something done that really *needed* to be done, our modern substitutes must do the same. They must combine both a genuine need and a pleasant, productive way of going about it.¹⁰

The second suggestion is that the more often we get together in a variety of social circumstances, the less likely that segregation and separation will persist. Our getting together, however, must be on occasions that we consider pleasant; that is, where the conditions are right for satisfactory interpersonal relations. Mere association in mass meetings is not enough to develop community feeling. Since large meetings and other situations demanding passive audiences do not provide for group interaction, they cannot be expected to help develop cooperative community spirit.¹¹

These two suggestions really open the door for citizens committees. Combine a task of critical importance to children with a pleasant, productive way for people to join in solving the problem, and the first suggestion is followed. Make sure that the committees are small enough to be *working* groups, and the social interaction will be supplied which the second suggestion calls for.

Perhaps it is precisely because citizens committees provide such a splendid opportunity for people to live and work together that they are spreading so rapidly. They may be answering the need met by the husking bees in a preatomic energy world.

Testimonials to the virtues of citizens committees are not hard to find. Recently two groups of school administrators and board members¹² — organized into school study councils — asked themselves whether citizens committees were worth while. Their findings agreed closely:

¹⁰ The TWENTY-SECOND YEARBOOK of the National Council for the Social Studies was devoted to a study of *Education for Democratic Citizenship*. In Chapter IV, Herrold examines the responsibilities of democratic citizenship in terms of personal mental hygiene. The major point of the chapter is that one must be mentally and emotionally healthy to be democratic and that autocracies thrive on mental and emotional disorder.

• Herrold, Kenneth F. "Personal Maturity and Democratic Responsibility," *Education for Democratic Citizenship*, Chap. IV; 22nd YEARBOOK. Washington, D. C.: National Council for the Social Studies. 1951. p. 37.

¹¹ Neprash, in a study, "Minority Group Contacts and Social Distance," published in *Phylon*, Vol. XIII, No. 2, at Atlanta University, Atlanta, Ga., in 1953, makes the point that the more we get together with people under different conditions and in different situations the more readily we are able to understand one another, to learn how to accept one another, and to work with one another.

¹² The two groups were the Metropolitan School Study Council, 525 West 120th St., New York 27, N. Y., and The Capital Area School Development Association, Albany, N. Y.

- a) People who participated found a new enthusiasm for developing education in the community.
- b) People developed a new sense of responsibility for school improvement.
- c) People learned more about the problems facing the board and school staff and became more sympathetic in their understanding.
- d) People contributed many excellent ideas; both staff and townspeople became more tolerant of new ideas.
- e) People gave freely of time, knowledge, skills, and other assets.
- f) People got to know their community better; and in that knowledge gave excellent advice that outside experts could not have given.
- g) People developed new heights of community responsibility, and pride in their schools and their communities.

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Why Have Other Communities Started Them?

Citizens committees get started for various reasons, not all commendable. Let us review the motives behind efforts made in various communities across the land.

1. *Some committees are started because "it's the style."* This can become serious in these days of excessive organizations and use of people's time, energy and money. Occasionally a school administrator launches a citizens committee in an attempt to make a good impression on high status groups in the community, or on the graduate department where he is seeking an advanced degree, or to please a state education department which has its eye upon him. Board members and other citizens with the same questionable, self-centered motives must likewise examine and weigh their behavior. Unfortunately, we do not always realize when we are attempting to use our institutions and fellow-citizens in this manner. The probability is high, too, that the citizens committee so begun will not be successful.

2. *Some committees are started because it is the "clever" thing to do* — because they may serve to strengthen policies or decisions already made. An administrator and his board may realize, for example, that unless they get the community stirred up the next bond issue will not pass. So, with utmost sincerity, they get a citizens committee (pressure group) started to support decisions already made. This may be practical politics, but it does not represent the best use of a citizens committee. In effect, it deprives the members of their basic democratic right to assemble freely and to weigh evidence. The committee is really a "rubber stamp" with very little if any opportunity to do anything really constructive or creative for better schools.

3. *Some committees are set up to grind a personal ax.* Every community has its share of "grippers," who have either real or imagined complaints. The bane of school administrators and school boards are those who don't have enough to do and who go around stirring up the citizens to become "organized." Regardless of who tries this type of artificial motivation — college professors, prejudiced pressure groups, or persons trying to work out their own individual frustrations and disappointments — this method of getting citizen committees started is not good.

Committees that count deal with genuine and existing educational problems. When they don't start their action from this basis, all sorts of difficulties may arise.



¹³ "Democracy has one great and wonderful secret weapon which, I believe, will never be duplicated by any totalitarian state. The secret weapon? People."

• Reynolds, Quentin, *LEAVE IT TO THE PEOPLE*, New York: Random House, 1948.

¹⁴ "Human punishment is customarily in the form of some action by another human organism, and it makes considerable difference *who* the other organism is. I doubt that 'punishment' strictly speaking can be administered by a person of little power to one of great power. In any case, I am sure that a slap delivered by a parent (or superior) to a young child (or subordinate) for some transgression has entirely different meaning and consequences than when the same blow is struck for the same transgression by a sibling (or peer)."

• Cartwright, Dorwin, "Toward a Social Psychology of Groups." Presidential address delivered before the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, Ohio, September 5, 1953. (Parentheses inserted by authors.)

4. *Some committees are intended to upset the status quo.* This kind of committee is usually started *outside* the school organization by a group of citizens interested in what, according to their own definition, they call *school improvement*.¹³ They may or may not be correct in their definition or in their assumption that only by upsetting the *status quo* can "improvement" be made.

If this kind of committee gets very far without the knowledge of the administrator or without his seeking to work along with the committee, at least two possibilities suggest themselves:

- a) The administrator is "asleep at the switch," or otherwise lacks the professional competence to deal with the problems confronting him.
- b) The committee is led by a person or persons frankly and definitely unfriendly either to the schools or to the administrator, or both, and works quietly at first.

5. *Some committees are to marshal intelligent support against attacks.* Well-organized citizens committees can provide support for school administration in times of crises.¹⁴ Without such backing to counteract sudden and irrational attacks, especially in these times, any school administrator is vulnerable.

Committees can help, too, in dealing promptly with minor grievances before they have a chance to grow into "large" issues. For example, one school principal organized what he called a "fire brigade" in the school district. He asked for and got the support of a large number of persons strategically scattered throughout the district who promised to report to him promptly any complaints about the schools, justifiable or otherwise. By this device he was often able to "nip in the bud" matters which otherwise might have grown into damaging crises.

6. *Some committees are organized to help harness the power of education for improvement of both school and community.* Most administrators and boards today honestly attempt to see that the committee is genuinely a citizens committee and not the pawn of the board, the school administration, or some pressure group. Many an able administrator has learned to work with more than one committee.

Superintendent Sam Hicks of Pearl River, N. Y., goes farther than most. He has had more than twenty citizens committees operating at one time — and claims he enjoys it! He has reason to. In spite of a rapidly expanding population bringing the usual influx of new residents with growing families, he has been able

to keep a school system operating at a high level of quality with few hitches, and with the backing of community pride in the schools.

Superintendent Hicks is typical of the new trend among school administrators to seek help where they can get it. They realize that they alone, even with the help of a strong board and enthusiastic teachers, cannot do the job of releasing the full power of education. They need the help of every citizen in the community. Only when the support of the schools is organized in a truly representative manner can they do their best job — not only in teaching children the 3R's but also in contributing to the total well-being of the community. Some exciting accounts of what schools and education can really do for children, youths, and adults have recently appeared in a number of popular magazines.

[illegible]



What Kind Of Citizens Committees Should We Use?

There are, of course, all kinds of committees in each community. You may find one or more already in existence which is a "natural" for the purpose you have in mind. If one does exist, give thanks that another one does not need to be formed!

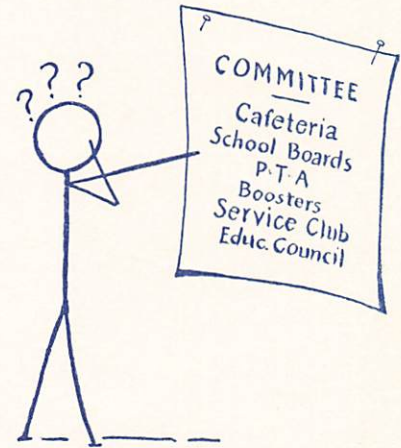
One of your first steps, then, will be to make an inventory of community organizations. Schoolmen who have done so have often been surprised at the number of organizations in existence of which they had never heard.

One way to make the inventory is to ask the teachers association and the PTA to do the job for you. Their contacts are so wide that if each is willing to list all the organizations they know and to ask friends and neighbors to help in the listing, the composite list will not miss many.

The next step is to classify the organizations listed. Here are some categories of committees at work in most wide-awake communities:

- a) *Boards of Education.* The legal relationship to the school and the state distinguishes this committee from other citizens committees.
- b) *Parent-Teacher Associations.* They are organized to help schools with the on-going program. They include professional workers as well as laymen. Their potentialities are much greater than many schoolmen realize. For example, the PTA in one community made a complete school census more accurately than had ever been done before. In another case they took on the job of conducting a comprehensive school survey at the request of the board and administration. Their chief limitation is that by definition they do not include nonparents.
- c) *Boosters.* These are special *ad hoc* committees which support specific school activities, such as sports and bands. They can be both a blessing and a curse.

As an example of the latter, one school principal, newly elected to his position, found that the school's Band Booster Club had become so influential and entrenched over the years that the school band director had been encouraged to mark out a little domain of his own on the school stage where the principal was not permitted to enter. The band director had keys to certain rooms and cabinets which neith-



er the custodian of the school nor the principal could enter. The new principal found that he had to line up some of the key power figures in the town along with the board of education to break this strangle hold on a vital part of the school program.

- d) *Auxiliary Committees.* These are community groups formed for purposes other than working with schools alone, but whose programs relate to schools. They include support groups such as church organizations, service clubs, women's clubs like the League of Women Voters, the Chamber of Commerce, and others unique to each community.

Each of these can be called upon appropriately. For example, Chambers of Commerce and labor organizations can be counted on to help in setting up B.I.E. Days (Business, Industry, Education) or to assist in Career Days. More than that, they can be asked to help survey job opportunities for high school graduates in order to guide school curriculum improvement and placement of graduates.

- e) *Student Committees.* Student-faculty or student-citizens committees can also be effective in improving educational programs. Several such groups have made inventories of the human resources in their communities. That is, they developed a card file of the special abilities, hobbies, interests, or travel experiences of people in the school district who might be consulted by teachers and students in the course of their classwork.¹⁵

¹⁵ A report of the advantages of this procedure is included in a booklet of the Metropolitan School Study Council, *Fifty Teachers to Every Classroom*.

To give one more example, a committee of teen-agers, parents and teachers of Bronxville, N. Y., recently developed a guide to teen-age behavior which holds much promise for other school systems interested in constructive efforts to deal with the stormy problems of adolescence.

We need to realize that young adults in the senior high school can be asked to carry on far more important tasks than adults usually consider them capable of handling. President Eisenhower recently pointed out that if we can ask young men of 18 to fight and die for us, we might well give them the privilege of voting, and other adult responsibilities.

But even after you have made your survey of community organizations and have learned to work with and through each of them in the most effective manner, you will still have need for a committee which cuts across all special interests in the school

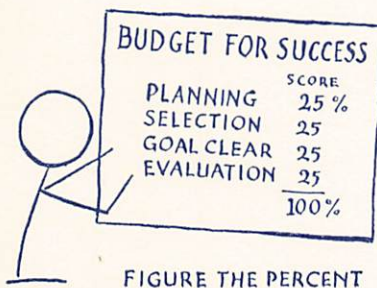
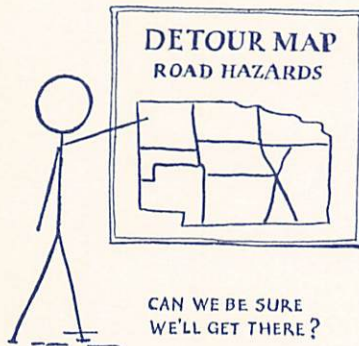
district, and has as its prime purpose the improvement of the school system. Such citizens committees fall into two general categories: the independent citizens committee and the citizens advisory or special purpose committee. Let us look at each in turn.

- a) *Independent Citizens Committees.* Citizen groups are organized to assist or support education in the community or in the schools. To cite an example, the Great Neck Education Association (Great Neck, Long Island) was originally formed by a group of citizens interested in better public schools. Any resident is eligible for membership. "Dues" of a dollar a year are solicited, but are not mandatory. Set up independently of the board of education over a decade ago, the GNEA works very closely with the board, administration and school staff. Most of the school board members of recent years have served an "apprenticeship" in the activities of the Association.
- b) *Advisory or Special Purpose Committees.* Such committees are initiated by schoolmen or school boards to provide advice, collect facts, conduct studies of evidence, and make recommendations. These committees are usually asked to do specific, limited tasks within a definite time span. A number of examples of tasks which advisory committees perform have already been given.

If you have had no experience so far with citizens committees — or even if you have had — the balance of this discussion will give you suggestions, based upon wide experience, for guiding them and helping them do their best work for the good of the schools.



Why Do Some Committees Run Into Trouble?



This question must be asked because reports from administrators about their experience with citizens committees are not all enthusiastic. Some reports tell of increased conflict and trouble.

While there can, of course, be no ironclad guarantee of success — no more than starting out in an automobile guarantees reaching the destination — much has been learned from cases where citizens committees went wrong. Here are the chief reasons why we might not cooperate with one another effectively:

We cannot communicate with one another.

We continually disagree, withdraw, or attack one another.

We fail to analyze previous unsatisfactory experience and prevent it from recurring.

There is lack of interest in the goal ahead.

There are personality clashes within the committee.

There is undue deference to status of "leading citizens," of experts, of professional people.

There is the feeling on the part of some that they are "better" than others.

Until recently we usually assumed that committees, like individuals, either "had it" or they didn't, just as we used to think about leaders. We know now that the real difference is one of training and preparation. Perhaps "it" is better called skill and understanding.

It adds up, then, to this: advance planning, careful selection of committee members, training in leadership skills, and continued care and attention to the committee once it is underway. If each step and phase is well done, the probability of success is high.

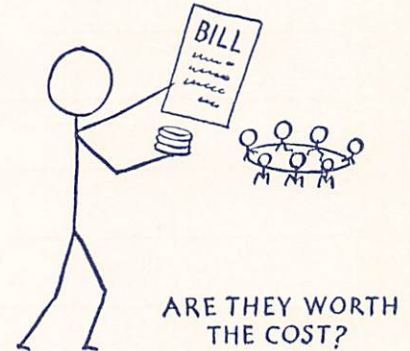


What Do Citizens Committees Cost?

In actual cash outlay, citizens committees cost the taxpayers little or nothing — in out-of-pocket cash from school funds — because they usually pay their own way. But sometimes the cost is greater than we think. All persons concerned — community representatives, administrators, and teachers — donate their time out of usually overcrowded schedules. Furthermore, through services on citizens committees, the community members pay a “hidden tax” to schools. Frequently thousands of man-hours of valuable time, otherwise unpurchasable, are cheerfully donated. Even a conservative estimate of the dollars-and-cents value of such donated time is often astonishing.

It must be pointed out that the cost in time and energy to the administrative staff needs careful watching. Superintendents and principals increasingly report excessive demands upon them for evening and week-end assignments. Some school officials find themselves scheduled to be away from their homes and families almost every night in the week for weeks on end. The release of community energies through citizens committees may require the addition of more personnel to the administrative staff to protect the health and happiness of the superintendents and principals.

Another dollars-and-cents facet of citizens committee participation deserves special mention, too. One result of such participation frequently is a raising of the sights of both community and educators. Then, because people pay for what they want, it can lead to unusual financial efforts and remarkable innovations and progress.



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What Advance Planning Do Committees Need?

When we plan a vacation motor trip, we usually find it advisable to prepare a "trip plan." This also seems to be a sensible thing to do when you plan to start a citizens committee.

There is a logical and purposeful way to begin. Citizens committees should not just grow up like Topsy. Here is a series of suggestions to anyone who is considering establishing a citizens committee or who has been invited to join a new one. Remember, of course, that there is no single pat answer on how to get started.

1. *Be sure your destination is clear.* Have you known folks who started off in a cloud of dust who were not sure where they were going? It's quaint and interesting to wander over the countryside, but if you want to get over the road with the least cost and in the most direct and efficient manner, it is well to know your destination and how to estimate your progress. A citizens committee that has only vaguely defined commitments will be a short-lived committee, or a troublesome one — or both.

Consequently, consider the possible targets for the contemplated citizens committee. One of the first and best antidotes to perversion of the committee into a political arena or free-for-all is to take time at the start to develop *a clearly stated and limited purpose* — and put it in writing.

2. *Be sure the destination exists and is important.* It should be apparent that the target must be a real one — one of importance to the people concerned. A bad mistake is made by boards, teachers, or administrators who, because they fear they might lose control of the educational program, are willing to have citizens committees "meddle" only with "little things."

To counter fears of this sort, the target should clearly include, also in writing, a statement of the relative responsibility of the committee, of the school board, and of the administration.

3. *Clarify in writing the organizational, jurisdictional and time details.* Two organizational ills can be avoided to a large extent with a little care. First, be sure that the committee technique is best for the task at hand. A principle of organization theory is that the organizational pattern should fit the tasks the organization is aiming to accomplish. For example, it would be silly to set up a committee to gather facts which a good clerk could get from the Census Bureau. It would be futile to set up a committee to write a document.



PRE-TRIP PLANNING: WHERE?
WHY? HOW? WHO? WHEN?

¹⁶ In the magazine *Adult Leadership* for September 1953, Kenneth Benne discusses organizational ills at great length.

¹⁷ Norton Beach, executive officer of the Associated Public School Systems, 525 W. 120th St., New York 27, N. Y., identifies four patterns for public participation in educational planning by groups:

1. Administration initiated groups.
2. Groups initiated by administrator but upon the suggestion of a staff member or layman concerning a special need.
3. Groups within existing organization which develop an interest in education.
4. Special purpose, *ad hoc* groups which are self-organized without the help or knowledge of the administration.

A second organizational misfortune is to continue a committee merely to give its members a chance to hold office or to gain public recognition. Now and then politically ambitious people will attempt to *use* a committee for that end. In that case valuable energy is lost in political campaigning which might otherwise go toward solving school problems.¹⁶ Constant reference to the task of a committee may remind it that it does *not* exist merely as a vehicle within which ambitious members may achieve personal political publicity.

Another jurisdictional matter which must be considered is where the initiative in the committee lies.¹⁷ If it is with the school administration, what has already been said can be carried out by the administrator. If it is with an outside group, the administration can, if it is invited to participate, still ask for the clarification of purpose, procedures and jurisdiction in writing.

When the initiative is with the school, such committees are usually organized through a letter of invitation by the school board to certain members of the community. In addition to outlining the nature and purpose of the project, and the limits of authority, the letter includes a time schedule stating when the committee is to report its findings to the board. After that report, the committee is usually discharged with thanks.

4. *Anticipate possible detours en route.* No discussion of advance planning would be complete without allowing for the possibilities of detours en route. Advance plans often sound as though no obstacles would arise and as though every plan were sufficient. There is always the need, however, to anticipate the accident or change of direction, and the probability that every course of action will need to be modified in one way or another. It may not always be smart to change horses in midstream, but it is smart not to try to ride a dead one.

One way to take care of this is to ask the committee to "back off" now and then from its activities to review its initial assignment and what it has accomplished since it began operations.

Another technique is to ask in advance for progress reports to the school board. Such "trial balances" provide an opportunity for checking on committee direction and progress, and allow for feeding in new data and needs from the board as necessary.

5. *Know what assistance and resources are available.* Remember that know-how is not exclusively the province of educators or

board members. Psychologists, social anthropologists, sociologists, lawyers, homemakers — all have a lot to contribute. Use everyone's resources. They may save a lot of headaches. The point is especially pertinent because so frequently staff members feel that educational planning is strictly the province of professional people.

If you have already made a survey (as suggested above) of community organizations and an inventory of special talents possessed by individuals, the files will be of great help to your new committee.

If you have not made the survey and inventory, the target of one committee might well be to make them. Card files of community organizations and individual talents will then be invaluable in activating other committees or in channeling in new resources to committees already working.

Committees, like the people who comprise them, need nourishment — physical, intellectual, and emotional. They cannot long exist on their own resources exclusively. Unless calories and vitamins for the mind and spirit are adequately supplied, the result can only be sterile thinking and impoverished action.

We must try, then, to the best of our ability, either as inaugurators of a citizens committee or as invited participants, to:

- a) Clarify the committee's task or goal. It will help to get it stated in writing.
- b) Be sure that the task is a *real* one.
- c) Clarify the limits of time, authority and responsibility of the committee. This should be a part of the written record of decisions.
- d) Provide for flexibility in committee procedure and strategy.
- e) Make a careful preliminary check of the resources available.
- f) Keep in mind that the related outcomes of goodwill, better understanding and directed energy may be more valuable in the long run than the immediate goals achieved.

This discussion of preliminary planning occurs because a common problem of wide-awake citizens committees is the drive to get started "doing something" before adequate preparatory thinking and planning have been accomplished.

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Who Should Serve On Committees?

The question of committee membership is just as crucial as a clear definition of goals — perhaps more so.

First, make up your mind as to the size of the committee. If it is to be a real working group, do not have more than twenty members; twelve would be an even better limit. Within those suggested size limits — which should permit full participation of all the members — make it as representative of the community as possible.

According to a committee of the Metropolitan School Study Council, *to start a committee for the first time*, nominations for membership on the committee should be solicited by the administration and board from a wide number of existing organizations in the community.

Support for this recommended procedure is offered by Minnis¹⁸ who showed how the school, or other organization, may know the community better by studying the composition, structure and function of organized groups within the community. Curiously enough, there is evidence that citizens committees, clubs and similar organizations tend, in their composition, to resemble a sample of the total community.

Once started, the committee organization may share with the superintendent and the board in formulating membership qualifications and procedures. Suggested bases for selection, according to the MSSC committee, are:

- Interest in education and its operation.
- Reputation as a community member.
- Membership experience in other community organizations.
- Professional or technical training and experience.
- Socioeconomic and geographical distribution in the community.

Remember that people join citizens committees for a variety of reasons. Some are vitally interested in education in their community and some are moderately interested or even indifferent. Certain members all too often enter such activities with either a feeling of opposition or possibly outright hostility.

The problem is to get people to realize that when they join citizen committees they should learn how to behave in these groups. They must learn what is appropriate and what is inappro-



¹⁸ This study by Minnis indicates that in most communities, "birds of a feather flock together" in community organizations. They reflect the composition of the community. This may be good; it may be bad. The study does not recommend that new organizations emulate old structures or compositions, but that you use these compositional characteristics as a guide to better understanding of the community.

• Minnis, Mhyra S., "Cleavage in Women's Organizations: A reflection of the social structure of the city," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 18, No. 1, 1953. pp. 47-53.

priate action. The schools and the school board have legal obligations or limitations which may prevent their doing what a committee may propose and even pressure them to do.

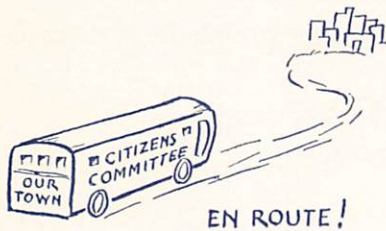
Committee members need to understand their relationships to boards of education and to the professional staff. They need to realize, as they tackle their job, that they are only a small minority of the general population which supports the school financially and has a stake in its program.

Hence, some kind of *induction* and *orientation session*, conducted by the superintendent or an outside expert consultant, is highly desirable.

The Schenectady, N. Y., school system approaches this problem by offering a leadership course as part of its adult education program. Potential as well as actual committee members and chairmen are urged to take the course. Everyone can recognize the unsatisfactory member in a group, but we find few suggestions on how to eliminate or adjust him to the group. Perhaps that is because in a democratic society we think in terms of "inclusion" and not of "exclusion." Proper preplanning and consideration of the problems mentioned above by all the potential members of the committee before they get underway will set up a group expectation that will help to keep the rebellious member in a cooperative relationship — or else help him to withdraw of his own volition.



How Do Committees Operate, Once Started?



Once underway, don't plan to sit back and relax. Catch your breath now and then, but don't take a nap. Democratic participation in community action is the most demanding discipline known to man. Action-research and continuous evaluation (that is *really* evaluation) are the only procedures that will keep such human organizations operating effectively and with respect for all concerned. Evaluation must show that more is happening than just having a lot of "busy work" going on which keeps people happy in their complacency.

Here are some points your evaluation should cover:

1. *Start with a meeting or meetings to get the committee fully acquainted with one another, oriented and squarely "on course."*

For Example: What is the task?

Case studies of citizens committees at work show several observable patterns in the methods and order of procedure for committees. They agree, however, that once the informal and formal organization is established, the group will need to examine the problem assigned to it carefully to decide on the major areas of discussion, agreement, and disagreement.

2. *What are the "ground rules"?*

After the problem is clearly defined and understood, methods of approach and all procedural questions may be considered in terms of the problem:

- a) *Where shall we meet?*
- b) *How often and at what time shall we meet?* How long will each session be ordinarily? It is recommended that a calendar be drawn up, and duplicated promptly for distribution to the membership.
- c) If an *executive committee* is established to handle routine business, fewer large meetings will be needed. However, the executive committee must be selected from and be responsible to the committee-at-large. Other special committees may be organized, such as membership, finance, research, to assist the total committee in its assignment. In every case, however, the special committees should report their findings and recommendations to the total committee for discussion and approval.

3. *What suggestions can be made regarding procedure?*

First, review the resources of the committee:

- a) Participants — what special abilities or knowledge can each contribute?
- b) Professionals and specialists in the community.
- c) Schoolmen — teachers and administrators.
- d) Community organizations.
- e) Subcommittees — composed of teams of committee members with special responsibilities for investigation and collection of evidence for implementing certain actions and procedures.
- f) State departments of education and others.
- g) Universities and colleges.

Second, consider how to maintain collective thinking, cooperative planning and problem solving in the committee:

- a) Every participant must be given opportunity to be responsible for preparatory planning, discussion, decision making, and conference- or group-promoted action.
- b) There is constant need to clarify and define goals and objectives in the committee.
- c) The participants in citizens committees must have an opportunity to make decisions and to implement those decisions, within the legal limits of their freedom.

4. *What role should the school administrator play?*

This is an extremely important question. You can neither neglect nor try to dominate a citizens committee. Either approach would be disastrous.

Once the introductory meeting or meetings are over, during which time you will necessarily play a supportive leadership role in the group, you will want the committee to take over with its own elected chairman. From then on you serve in either of two capacities, as resource person or as process observer and expeditor.

As *resource person* you represent the point of view of the school board, of the professional staff of the school, and of the education profession in general. You may find it possible and desirable to fill this role yourself at all meetings. Or, if you do not feel competent to supply all the professional help which the committee needs, you may suggest other persons — either inside or outside the school system — who can give the specific professional help called for.

There is no need for you to feel on the defensive here. The profession of school administration has become so broad that no one person can be an expert in all of its aspects.

If the committee, for example, happens to be dealing with school planning and building problems, you may be able to suggest specialists from your nearby university staff or from the state education department who can be asked to meet with the committee. Schoolmen in other communities with unique experiences or skills may also be consulted.

As *group process observer* and *expediter* you have a much more difficult task. It will help to keep a list of guide questions in your mind at all times in checking up on the "health" of committee operation. For example:

- a) Do members seem to be interested in their assignments?

Assuming that the purpose is clear in the minds of all, the more attractive the purpose is to the members the more likely they are to work with and for the committee as a group. They will be more inclined to modify and adjust their own behavior to the needs of the committee.¹⁹ When committee members have a keen interest in their task, not only will they make a strong effort to attend all meetings and join in making plans, but they can be counted upon to help put the plans into action.

- b) Do they appear to be content with the procedural and house-keeping arrangements?

If they are, procedural details will take their rightful place in the background. If they are not, and if procedure keeps getting in the way of production, you may want to review with them whether the "ground rules" suit the task of the committee.

- c) Do they appear to be growing in group solidarity?²⁰ In teamwork?

Watch how they regard one another. Notice whether each appears to respect the knowledge, experience and convictions of the others. If they do, what started out as simply an aggregation of individuals is now coming to resemble a team. Therein each member is finding some degree of fulfillment for the basic need of each one of us to feel important.

Said in another way, you should be able to see personal empire-building and political logrolling giving way to unified working on the group task. Keep in mind that a well-

¹⁹ Festinger and other members of the staff of the Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, published a collection of studies all directed toward understanding the implications of modern psychological theory for promoting better communication, learning, and social or community change. This is a progress report that contains important theory and research findings with broad implications for schools and schoolmen.

• Festinger, Leon, et al, *THEORY AND EXPERIMENT IN SOCIAL COMMUNICATION*: collected papers, Ann Arbor: Institute for Social Research, 1950.

²⁰ A study conducted at the School of Public Affairs and Social Work, Wayne University, and supported by a grant from the U. S. Public Health Service, indicated that the higher the status of an individual in a group the more influential he would be in the group. Furthermore, the higher the status of the individual, and apparently the more secure he is, the more likely he is to initiate changes in his own behavior. Changes in the high-status person's behavior in turn are contagious with other members in the group. Polansky and Lippitt are Project Director and Program Director, respectively, at the Research Center for Group Dynamics at the University of Michigan. Redl is Professor of Social Work at Wayne University.

• Polansky, N., Lippitt, R., and Redl, F., "An Investigation of Behavioral Contagion in Groups," *HUMAN RELATIONS*, Vol. III, No. 4, 1950. pp. 319-348.

conceived citizens committee with a compelling task is itself an educational device which has influence upon the attitudes and beliefs of the persons who participate. People who join such committees to maintain or improve their own social or economic status can lose sight of those initial motives in their new-found enthusiasm for the "cause."

Don't forget to review your own motivations, either. If you have promoted a citizens committee merely to "sell" people on *your* program, the committee is a false front. Its effect may boomerang dangerously. Keep your motivation in agreement with the purpose of the committee. If the committee is asked to solve a problem, presumably the problem is one which you, yourself, recognize and accept. If the committee is to pass on, or rubber stamp, a solution which you already have, be sure that the members understand that to be their task.

- d) Do the committee members feel that they are being kept informed of all developments and that they are helped to make their best contributions?

²¹ Gilbert David, writing in *Adult Leadership*, September, 1953, cites five "signs of poor health" in an organization. In addition to poor communication, they are: Tight grasp of authority; caution and conservatism; hierarchical levels of authority; no explicit or implicit reason for existing.

Every organization has its communication problems.²¹ Let's take a look at a citizens committee that is sick and perhaps doesn't know it. The chairman passes information down through channels only when he wants something done, and then sends as little as he can. He complains that people down the line make mistakes, that they send him back only a trickle of information, and that is often garbled; people down the line have no ideas, and they won't take responsibility. The people down the line complain that they don't understand why they are asked to do things, that they don't have a broad picture of what is going on. They have no way of telling which bits of information that come to them are important, which activities will further the purpose of the committee. They often build up doubts about the motives of the chairman and the control group. They frequently lose interest.

Maybe there is a hidden hand on the chairman's shoulder restraining him, maybe the rank and file are acting as they think some hidden power-figure in the community would wish them to. Whatever the reasons, any factors which interfere with the flow of information and ideas both down and up need to be seriously examined.

The "top man on the totem pole" may see it this way:

"It's no concern of the subordinates; they wouldn't understand it; it will only stir up trouble. With all that comes down the line, why should anyone expect more?" On the other hand, upward from the subordinates may come this feeling: "I'll tell the boss what I want him to hear, but nothing that would lay me open to criticism. Let someone else stick his neck out." With these attitudes, the interchange of communication will be greatly curtailed or stopped altogether. Such a situation endangers the success of the committee.

Another communication problem of citizens committees arises out of the widely divergent backgrounds of the members. Each member brings his own vocabulary, his own special words and his own special use for common words. Each also brings a special set of assumptions and guiding criteria. All of this is likely to add up to beautiful, blooming confusion in early meetings until the give-and-take of free discussion can develop common understandings and a working vocabulary.

For example, a superintendent in Georgia carefully set up a citizens committee in an outlying section of the county to advise him and the board on the construction of a fine new high school. The initially cordial and enthusiastic group gradually became listless, blank-eyed and then restless as the superintendent discussed the task at hand. His perplexity mounted, too, as the meeting wore on because he *knew* that these people really wanted the new high school. Why this apparent show of resistance?

The secret came out when a man in the rear of the room finally put up his hand and blurted out, "Mr. Superintendent, why can't we have a first-rate school? We don't want no *secondary* school!" Only then did the superintendent see the semantic problem. He shifted to talking about the *high school* and everything went beautifully.

Be sure, then, that you listen for words which may not be communicating. Watch, too, for assumptions which appear to lie behind statements and behavior. A too common example here is that of the committee member who hasn't been back in a grade school or high school since his youth. His reasoning may be based upon the erroneous assumption that first-rate schools of today are like the ones he attended.

A superintendent in northeastern Pennsylvania was plagued with a committee almost entirely made up of such persons who pictured education as they knew it three to four decades ago. The strategem that finally worked was to pack them into a school bus and drive them 150 miles to visit some outstanding schools. There they saw enough fine examples of the best current practices to make a substantial change in their basic assumptions about education.

- e) Are you able to maintain your proper relationship (role) with the committee?

Notice that we have suggested that you play at least three different roles in launching and working with a citizens committee. During the planning and launching phase you are clearly in charge as chairman and promoter. Then, during the operational phase you become both a resource person and a process observer and guide.

Keeping your own thinking straight in such role shifts is difficult enough. Helping the members of the committee understand and accept the shifts is considerably more difficult.

Any human organization has its levels of authority. There is a "top man" and a "bottom man," with all levels in between. Except for the top and bottom men, everyone plays a dual role of superior and subordinate. You, of course, have observed how this condition exists in committees.

So long as the chairmanship remains constant and the other levels within the committee likewise stay put, there is a relative stability of operation. But just let there be a radical reshuffling to "demote" the top man and bring another of lower status to the top position, then trouble can break out. The common sense and good judgment of both "old" and "new" top man can make the difference between conflict and constructive readjustment.

Watch yourself, then, in shifting your role from that of top man to one lower down on the totem pole. If you jump out of your role as resource person and process observer and try to take the reins from the chairman every now and then when things don't suit you, your presence in the committee sessions may be more of a hindrance than an asset. You will create confusion in the minds of the members as to where their loyalties and allegiance lie.

You may have to work on this problem. Most of us in administration do, because we are so accustomed to "taking charge." It is a basic part of our behavior pattern. Watching a member of a committee falteringly chair a meeting, showing timidity and uncertainty, may irritate a practicing administrator into interfering by trying to help. Practicing restraint at a time like this is not easy. Make every effort to keep in role and you will earn added respect from those working with you.

- f) Do they seem to be getting somewhere?

It is trite to say, but important to remember, that nothing succeeds like success. A long-term goal may need to be broken up into a succession of short-term ones in order to maintain a feeling of progress.

It may be well for you to suggest to the chairman that he review periodically just what the committee has accomplished since it first met. Point out to him that he has the task of a coach working with a team. He has to give them a pat on the back, a word of encouragement, to keep them trying.²²

- g) How does the group react to destructive comments or divisive suggestions from the outside?

It is interesting to watch what happens when the "divide and conquer" technique is applied to closely knit committees. When any outsider, be he board member, administrator, or other individual or group of individuals, approaches a committee member with a divisive suggestion or destructive comment, the reaction he gets reveals the health of the committee. If the member approached has a strong sense of belonging, if he feels that the committee has a clear purpose and program, the suggestion will be met with determined rejection. Or, as Cartwright says, "Any effort to get such a person to deviate from the norms of the group will encounter strong resistance."²³

5. *Review your understanding of citizens committees periodically.* Citizens committees are on the right road when:

- a) They represent all organizations, vocations, and people in the community.
- b) They are composed of the best qualified, as well as honestly motivated members.

²² The administrator, or community educator, is likened by Biddle to a coach on the sidelines. He says, "He tries to keep meetings interesting by helping to plan challenging discussions. He encourages the timid to talk and the impatient and articulate to be patient with stumbling effort. He suggests ideas. When these are at all feasible (even though not as good as he would evolve) he offers enthusiastic support. This is not a process of seeking puppets to do his will. It is a process of encouraging people to have ideas and a will of their own. And his own desires should remain flexible, subject to the will of his co-operators."

• Biddle, William W., *THE CULTIVATION OF COMMUNITY LEADERS*. New York: Harper & Bros. 1953. p. 184.

²³ Cartwright is the Director of the Research Center for Group Dynamics and Professor of Psychology at the University of Michigan. This important work has tremendous implications for the work of citizens committees, in fact, for all organizations. It is common-sense psychology documented by intriguing research. Anyone interested in the process of social change in a community should be well acquainted with Cartwright's principles of social change.

• Cartwright, Dorwin, "Achieving Change in People: Some applications of group dynamics theory," *HUMAN RELATIONS*, Vol. IV, No. 4. 1951.

- c) They establish first a strong organization and intelligent procedures for operating.
- d) They know what their task is.
- e) They are properly oriented at the start to the limits of their responsibilities and freedom.
- f) They have the support and cooperation of the board of education, school administrators, and teachers.
- g) They seek to serve the interest of the community broadly.
- h) They create a better understanding of school problems, and those of education in general, in the community.
- i) They bring satisfactions to the participants.
- j) They achieve concrete objectives.



Are There Any Special Tips For Administrators?

1. *Remember that we are people first.* See that interpersonal relations are established and maintained on a firm, frank and friendly basis. Aids here are a cheerful, comfortable meeting place; coffee breaks or similar times for light refreshment; a touch of humor, a story at a tense point in the discussion.

2. *Know the "Who's Who" of your community.* Discover the power structure of the community. Who are the persons who wield unusual influence in determining community policy and action? Is there one dominant pattern or are there fairly well-balanced opposing forces?

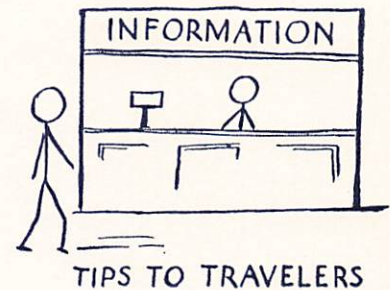
A knowledge of the community-power structure is related to our problem because of the effect the power structure will have upon the deliberations and eventual action recommendations of your citizens committee. If community forces are aligned behind the committee's task, success is almost sure to crown its efforts. If the reverse is true, if the community-powered people are opposed to what the committee is trying to do, you should know it. The knowledge will help in explaining some otherwise puzzling committee behavior and show why the final recommendations are either unsatisfactory or shelved, or both.

3. *Your personal "acceptability" in the community will influence your effectiveness with citizens committees.* It is difficult to be everything to all people. Yet that is about what is expected of you. In this respect your role is not unlike that of the pastor of a church. You may line up solidly with worthy and noble causes, but you must avoid narrow factionalism.

Belief by all members of the community in your personal integrity is a greater asset to you in dealing with them than any number of "tricks" for dealing with people. Maintain, then, your personal and professional integrity as the basis for your acceptability.

To be accepted, too, a person must at least be known. Membership in various community organizations, ability to listen sympathetically, the good judgment to accept a favor or generous gesture gracefully — all are attributes needed to gain a measure of personal acceptability.

4. *Members of the school staff, both administrators and teachers, should be available as consultants to the committees.* They may either be specifically assigned or on call, depending upon the



topic being considered by the committee, as well as the committee's wishes. It may also be wise to suggest to the committee chairman that a member of the professional staff will be made available to serve as an "executive secretary" or "legman" to see that actions taken in committee meetings are followed up, that minutes of the meeting are duplicated and distributed, that detailed arrangements are made for each meeting, and that all the hundred-and-one other important actions are taken. Such items may make the difference between a properly productive committee and an unsuccessful one.

5. *Is everybody going in the same direction?* Check periodically to see that the committee has a full focus on the problem. Remember that it is difficult for committee members, board of education members, and the school executive all to see and accept a common problem.

6. *Don't get fretful at delays.* Try to understand them. They may be valuable indicators of the committee's health. It is easy to go wandering off on some attractive bypath which does not lead toward the committee's destination. It is easy to impede progress with poor communication or attempts at authoritarian manipulation. Try to understand. Fretting won't help. Sit back and relax at times.

7. *Alternate routes sometimes are better.* Not all plans work out as expected. Know when to encourage a change of direction and pace of committee work. Dead issues cause interpersonal conflicts and finally lead to dead committees.

8. *Learn to recognize when the problem is solved.* A succession of little problems gets solved, and finally the main one does. (Remember, of course, that few problems are ever completely solved.) Either provide for dissolving the committee or help the committee shift its energies and resources to new issues if you want to maintain the committee.

9. *Take time to look in the rearview mirror.* Keep enough records so that you may profit from your mistakes. Expect, too, that "dead issues" and "solved problems" will come to life again. Anticipating them removes much of their sting.

10. *Don't ride the clutch.* Talk that leads only to more talk is destructive of committee work. Decisions must be reached, commitment to action made, and action taken. Nothing succeeds like success. Give practical evidence that you will do all in your power to get action to follow committee recommendations.

11. *Check your instrument panel.* Have you enough gas and oil? Energy? Committee work is exhausting. Pace the effort so that energy reserves are not drained. If they are, reactions set in against even the most worth while of projects. This refers to *you* as well as to the others.

12. *How well do you drive?* Learn to check your own attitudes, skills and behavior. After all, *you* may be the worst stumbling block in the path of progress. Don't feel apologetic if you feel less than confident before a fine citizens committee. Other good men have, too.²⁴

You may be short on skill. That can be made up. But you must believe wholeheartedly in public participation as a vital force in improving education. Without such belief and conviction, you will be ineffectual as a leader, since your staff members and community will always sense your lack of sincerity, your lack of real feeling.²⁵

The key to all of this is the willingness and ability to look at yourself and your behavior objectively with the intent to improve yourself thereby. For example, do you try to do everything for the committee? You can so dissipate your energy by working on too many things that you never complete any of them and hence, never experience success. Skillful "drivers" are relaxed, and enjoy themselves at the wheel.

²⁴ "There is a new and grand scene open before me, a Congress. This will be an assembly of the wisest men upon the continent, who are American in principle. I feel myself unequal to this business."

—John Adams, Diary: June 20, 1774

• Bowen, Catherine D., JOHN ADAMS AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION, New York. Little, Brown and Company. 1949.

²⁵ This point is ably dealt with in Professor Norton Beach's book, PUBLIC ACTION FOR POWERFUL SCHOOLS, Metropolitan School Study Council, 525 W. 120th St., New York 27, N.Y. Beach had the assistance of an advisory council of fourteen superintendents in developing his book. Hence, it is a practical, useful document.

This image shows a single sheet of white, lined notebook paper. The paper has horizontal blue or grey ruling lines spaced evenly apart. There are approximately 20 lines visible across the page. A vertical crease runs down the center of the paper, indicating it was once folded. The edges of the paper are slightly irregular, and there's a small dark smudge near the top left corner.

A Broad View

Two groups of school administrators recently summarized their experiences with lay participation. Roy Haring, reporting²⁶ a study with the Cooperative Program in Educational Administration and the district superintendents of Pennsylvania concerning the interrelationships of school and community, puts it this way:

"Lay committees are a fine way to get the best thinking and help of a community. They work with the board and the school staff in solving school problems and in improving their schools. (One might add that they also should improve the total educational program of the community.) They keep the schools close to the people by providing two-way communication which enables the community to express its ideas and interests in the education of its children . . . Such committees are an example of democracy in action."

Even more definitely, the Metropolitan School Study Council's Committee of Fourteen developed a *Charter for Lay Participation* which may serve as a model for a school system in dealing with lay committees:

1. Public schools constitute an essential part of the democratic process. Social action brings them into existence to meet the needs of a democratic society. At the same time, public schools on their own part stimulate and produce social action.
2. Public participation in educational planning finds positive justification, because a democracy demands full participation of everyone concerned. Democracy opposes the separation of government from the people.
3. The process of education includes the reconstruction and evaluation of all experience, continually throughout life. It does not confine itself to the classroom, but penetrates the home, the community and the state. Therefore, it becomes a public concern.
4. All resources of the community, found both in people and things, should be used to develop the best educational programs possible in a community.
5. The interests, needs, aptitudes and capacities of each individual must be studied in order to determine the extent

²⁶ Haring, Roy J., *The Role of the Superintendent in the Interrelationship of School and Community*. CPEA Series, Department of Educational Administration, Teachers College, 525 West 120 St., New York 27, N. Y.





and nature of his participation. The maximum contribution of each individual is obtained in this way.

6. The local board of education, which represents the people in our system of government, possesses certain powers and prerogatives. Participation in educational planning should recognize the responsibilities of this group by placing before it all recommendations for approval or action.
7. As representative of the people, the board of education must establish channels for securing the contributions of the public to educational planning.

IN ESSENCE, PUBLIC PARTICIPATION ON A WIDE SCALE IN EDUCATIONAL PLANNING IS:

APPEARING IN MORE AND MORE COMMUNITIES.

HAS DEMONSTRATED HIGH POTENTIAL FOR GOOD.

CAN BE RATIONALLY EMPLOYED.

COSTS VERY LITTLE.

IS CONSISTENT WITH POLITICAL DEMOCRACY.

IS DEMANDING NEW LEADERSHIP SKILLS FROM ADMINISTRATORS.

POSTSCRIPT

The last word is far from being written. Additional evidence and testimony appears every month. Sherif and Wilson²⁷ in the introduction to their new book say:

“No other problem in human affairs today seems to be so crucial and so fateful as that of group relations. As a consequence, a host of government and other agencies on national and international levels are instituting programs, supporting or carrying out projects, to find practical solutions to the topics of morale, leadership, attitude formation and change, channels of communication, and other group problems. . . .

“Consequently, research proposals and reports in this general area are pouring in to agencies and journals. There is no dearth of practical prescriptions offered as short-cut solutions. *In spite of all the seething activity, it is becoming increasingly clear that there are no short-cut solutions to these topics.*”

²⁷ Sherif, M., and Wilson, M. O., *GROUP RELATIONS AT THE CROSSROADS*. New York; Harper & Bros., 1953, pp. 1-2.

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