

Process Skills for Committees

Cohousing Conference

June 14th, 2008

Liz Logan, MA



Skills for Committees Slides

This presentation is copyright Liz Logan, 2008.
Permission is granted to download one copy to share
with your community, with attribution.
Please call or write if you have any questions about it,
or would be willing to let me know how it was
received by the community. I'd love to hear from
you!

770.527.7075 ~ liz@lizlogan.com

www.lizlogan.com

To solve problems, understand the source

- External factors from outside of the committee
- Internal factors within the committee

External sources

- Mandate from the community
- Procedures for proposals and decisions
- Topic that is controversial

Internal Sources

- Membership of the committee
- Formal and informal roles
- Communication climate
- Group norms and culture

Today's focus

- Group Roles
 - Formal or Task-related
 - Informal or Relationship-related
 - Dysfunctional rolls

Why attend to the roles?

- Increases the capacity of the group
- Increases the capacity of the individual members

Increase Group Capacity

- Self-Assessment
 - Group can identify specific behaviors that will contribute to higher and healthier functioning
 - Group may discover the source of problems
- Functional Norms
 - Group can develop norms that make it easy to fulfill all of the needed functions
 - Group can develop a shared language and understanding to talk about needs or problems

Increase Individual Capacity

- Self-Assessment
 - Individuals can identify their strengths and weaknesses
- Group Process Skills
 - Individuals can play to their strengths and practice new behaviors
 - Individuals can develop their ability to track the interactions of group members at the “process” level

Formal or Task-Related Roles

- Leader or Chair or Point Person
- Facilitator and/or Flip Chart Scribe
- Note or Minutes Taker (and distributor)
- Timekeeper
- Researcher and/or Writer
- Presenter (at general meetings)
- Heartkeeper



Leadership questions

- What formal authority and responsibilities does the leader have? Informal?
- What unspoken assumptions does everyone have about leadership?
- What are the skills needed for leadership? Does the leader have them?
- What are the skills needed for distributed leadership? Does the team have them?



Facilitation questions

- Should the leadership and facilitation roles be filled by one or two people?
- Do you need an outside facilitator?
- What is the purpose or objective of the facilitation?
- What style of facilitation is most appropriate for the situation?

To Scribe or Not To Scribe?

- PRO

- Captures the collective wisdom of the group
- Keeps people from repeating themselves
- Provides a record for later meetings
- Useful for generating action items
- Enables people to summarize more easily
- Helps the Visual Processors engage

To Scribe or Not To Scribe?

- CON
 - Can slow down the meeting
 - Requires aptitude and/or skill
 - Requires flip chart, pens, tape
 - Can be distracting or frustrating
 - Some facilitators don't like to scribe
 - Creates another role to fill

Note or Minutes Taker

- Key elements:
 - Action items
 - Decisions made
 - Questions yet to answer
- Helpful elements:
 - Dissenting positions
 - Rationale for decisions
 - Resources that were identified



Timekeeper

- Develop norms (common practices) for:
 - When to start countdown
 - How to signal countdown and time
 - Who will decide how remaining time should be used if adjustments need to be made (one person or whole group)
- The goal is for everyone to be comfortable with someone reminding the group about time (especially the timekeeper)

Researcher

- Are the expectations clear about:
 - What kind of data is needed
 - Depth of research required
 - Sources used
 - Deadline (before meeting or at meeting?)
 - Presentation format

Writer

- Is there clarity about:
 - Process of writing, reviewing, and rewriting
 - When reviewers are going to submit their comments
 - Who has final sign-off authority
 - Formatting, graphics, or sign making needed
 - Deadline (before meeting or at meeting?)

Presenter

- A good presentation includes:
 - Review of the overall process and what has happened so far
 - Explanation of the rationale for decisions (to forestall questions you anticipate)
 - Specific request about what the community needs to do next
 - Visuals for those that process visually

Presenter

- Generally, the presenter should *not* facilitate the clarifying questions
 - The presenter has a stake in the proposal, so is not neutral
 - The presenter should focus on content, not process
 - The facilitator should distinguish when the group is shifting from questions to comments and reflect that to the group (so the presenter can sit down)

Presenter

- Things to consider about choosing the presenter:
 - Are they perceived as strongly opinionated or relatively neutral? (there are pros and cons for either choice)
 - Do they know the history of the proposal?
 - Are they comfortable answering clarifying questions—including ones that might be challenging?

Heartkeeper

- This is someone who will track and ask the group to attend to the emotional tone of the meetings
- This can be either a formal role or an informal role

Examples of Heartkeeper duties

- Notice when members are upset
- Ask the group to pause and ask the member what s/he needs
 - S/he may need attention or they may need the group to continue
- Make sure both sides of a conflict get a chance to be heard

Useful capacities to develop

- “Hold the space” for feelings and emotional expressions
- Match the energy level of the other person—higher for anger, lower for sadness, etc.
- Concentrate on hearing them. Paraphrase.
- Be the bridge between them and the rest of the group if they feel alienated.

Informal or Relationship-related roles

- Gatekeeper
- Opinion seeker and opinion giver
- Supporter or devil's advocate
- Summarizer
- Consensus checker
- Process and emotional tone reflector

Gatekeeper

- This person supports equal participation
- They may ask someone who has spoken a lot to wait for someone else to speak
- They may ask someone who has not spoken to speak, especially at the end of discussion
- They recognize and honor that different processing styles have different participation needs

Opinion Seeker and Opinion Giver

- These roles allow for all points of view to be included
- The seeker makes sure that minority opinions are expressed
- The giver makes sure that their opinions are expressed—and recognizes that s/he represents just one p.o.v. that needs to be balanced with the others



Supporter or Devil's Advocate

- These roles also promote well-rounded thinking within the group
- The supporter represents opinions that are present in the community but not in the group
- The devil's advocate challenges accepted points of view and guards against "groupthink"

Summarizer

- This role helps the group keep tabs on what they have discussed so far
- It can be useful to capture the gist of what someone says who is “thinking out loud”
- It can prevent people from repeating themselves
- It can prompt the group to consider the next step

Consensus-checker

- Bottom line—if the group sounds like it has reached consensus, it probably has!
- Cut to the chase... and ask.

Process Reflector

- This role helps keep the group “on track” by:
 - Identifying the “track,” steps, or process
 - Making sure everybody is clear on the track
 - Identifying where the group is in the process
 - Reminding the group of the challenges that are inherent at particular stages in the process
 - Identifying the next step to be taken
- This is an important leadership skill

Process Reflector

- Key questions:
 - Do we need to make a process map so everybody is on the same page?
 - Are we in a divergent phase or a convergent phase?
 - Are we in the “groan zone?”
 - Do we have enough information to make a decision? Or should we stop and do research?

Everyone should note:

- Different people are comfortable in different stages of the process, so if someone is objecting to the process it may be because its not their favorite phase

Emotional Tone Reflector

- Acknowledging the emotional tone helps the group be present with its own process
- It helps the group avoid denial or creating “taboos”
- It makes the “feeling oriented” people more comfortable and the “thinking oriented” people more aware

Emotional Tone Reflector “duties”

- Name the undercurrent(s) in the room
- Ask the group to consider addressing unexamined or unexpressed feelings
- Identify when things need to get serious and when they need to be lightened up
- Suggest moments of silence or breaks to give people a chance to refocus

Dysfunctional Roles

- Airtime Hog
- Naysayer
- Judging Parent
- Whining Child
- Martyr
- Slacker
- Etc.

Increasing awareness in your group

- Be gentle with each other
 - Everyone fulfills the dysfunctional roles at different times
 - One of the benefits of group work is to get reflections of one's own strengths and weaknesses
 - Another benefit is to build capacity, if the space is safe for people to take risks

Increasing awareness in your group

- Have fun with it!
 - Assign dysfunctional roles along with the functional ones
 - Have people practice the opposite of their strengths
 - Take turns tracking who is fulfilling each role during the meeting, and report your observations to the group
 - Have each person announce which roles they are going to practice at the beginning of the meeting
 - Ham it up!

Conclusion

- Most of us have experience with groups that are task focused (i.e. “corporate”) OR relationally focused (i.e. “therapeutic”)
- The cohousing environment calls for committees to balance or blend both styles
- If your committee is having trouble, consider whether the current balance point is working for you

Bottom line

- The more people are able to fulfill the various roles at the appropriate times, the better
- This paves the way for sharing the responsibility of creating a functional group among everyone in it