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Motivation in Voluntary Organizations

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Motivation in Voluntary Organizations

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Okay, you're a leader in a voluntary community organization. How do you "lead?"

With a whip? Or a carrot on a stick? Or do you, somehow, convince the members to individually believe, deep down inside themselves, that they <u>want</u> to work for the goals of your organization?

These three methods are called motivation. Whips are out, of course; this is a voluntary organization.

The carrot method, called <u>external motivation</u>, works well sometimes, but you can't continually dangle the carrot.

External motivation can also be called the "push button" approach, If the leader feels that motivation is low, he simply pushes the button. More awards are given out, more dinners are held, and more expenditures are incurred on motivation programs.

One method that works comes from inside the individual member, where his desires and needs impel him toward action. This is known as <u>internal motivation</u>. It is your job as a leader to channel that action so that it contributes to the organization.

Personal needs and goals are the basic elements of motivation, and people have similar needs and goals that can be effective motivators. Among these are the need for money, a sense of accomplishment, self-worth, recognition, status, and security.

Needs change over time and differ among individuals. A satisfied need is no longer a motivating need.

If you accept the fact that a satisfied need is no longer a motivating need, then it is much easier to explain why the "push button" or external motivation approach is not always successful because it tends to appeal to the same motivation time after time.

For example, a member may need recognition. However, once he has been recognized, this is satisfied--for a while, at least.

Increasing Membership Involvement

Members of voluntary organizations can be divided into three categories regarding their involvement.[1]

1. The <u>loyal members</u> who take part in almost every activity.

2. The <u>intermittent participants</u> who engage in only occasional activities.

3. The <u>big event participants</u> who come only to a few special events.

The loyal members are usually the minority. They do the work and are the nucleus of the organization. The problem of involvement is with the intermittent and big event participants. Your challenge is how to move them into the loyal member category.

But first, does a membership involvement problem really exist?

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[1] Robert C. Keen, Motivating membership involvement. Ag Gro Pac, Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana.

Can the organization obtain its goals and objectives with the present rate of membership activity?

Are the members' interests being represented? Are enough members active to assure trained people for future leadership roles?

Steps Toward Motivating Members

To help in identifying motivational problems, you should go through the following steps.

1. Decide to what extent members must be involved to attain the goals and objectives of the organization.

If you find you need more member involvement, there are at least two different ways to approach the problem. The first is the carrot, push button, or external approach. You are assuming, of course, that the objectives of the organization are important to the members.

The second approach looks at non-involvement as a symptom of more fundamental problems in the organization.

Apparently the members don't think attendance at meetings is all that valuable personally. Perhaps the meetings are boring. Perhaps there's little opportunity for members to take an active part. Or a select group of people runs the organization year after year.

When you can solve these problems, many of the membership problems disappear.

2. Define the problem. What are you trying to motivate members to do, and why?

When you work to motivate people, there should be a good reason for doing so, and it should be understood by you and the people you are trying to motivate.

Do you want people to come and sit in meetings? To serve on committees? Do you want them to vote on policy questions? Why? What difference will their vote make?

All too often, people are asked to serve on a committee or are given a job to do and never find out what is expected of them. The leaders feel that people are motivated enough to find out for themselves what they are supposed to do.

This is poor leadership.

3. Determine how members will benefit in return for their involvement. (See Figure 1)

While there may be any number of benefits to individuals, the first and most important to consider is the benefit to the organization. That is your primary responsibility.

Personal benefits which are common but still very important are friendship, fellowship, development of leadership skills, and educational opportunities. They can be provided at the same time your organization--and community--benefit from increased participation.

Other factors influence members to participate. A responsibility to support friends who are in organization leadership and a feeling of commitment to civic activities add to membership activity.

4. Determine the various costs that people experience in activities sponsored by the organization. (See Figure 1)

Costs include not only money, but time, effort, and the giving up of other activities.

There are other costs as well. People don't like to risk embarrassment, lose the esteem of their friends, or experience failure. They also dislike being subjected to rudeness, discourtesy, and rejection.

These kinds of experiences consti-tute a _cost_, and people will not accept such costs unless the benefits are greater.

5. _Determine the organizational choices given to your members in terms of the benefits and costs._

The benefits of your organization may be good, but not as good as those from another organization. Or benefits in your organization may be greater than in another one, but the costs may also be higher.

To better deal with this situation, it is necessary to understand people's choices. Recognize first that the pri-mary claim on a person's time is his job and family. Whatever time is left over can be spent on other kinds of interests and concerns.

The second set of alternatives open to people are voluntary associations such as churches, civic associations, social groups, sports, recreational groups, and farm organizations.

The third alternative is the indi-vidual's leisure time. While such activities may not offer the same types of benefits, they do offer fellowship, recognition, esteem, and a feeling of doing something interesting or impor-tant.

6. _Obtain and interpret informa-tion from members to help you understand how they feel about involvement, benefits, costs, and alternatives._

Members should be polled to find out how they feel and think about their membership. This can be done in person, by phone, or mail survey, depending on the size of the organization.

Because people's needs, interests, circumstances, and costs change, it is necessary to up-date the information periodically.

Information is needed from all, or at least an adequate sample of members.

After the information is collected, it should be analyzed and interpreted if it is to be useful. Interpret around the following points.

Most people are motivated by what they think and how they feel regard-less of what the actual situation may be. For example, if they think the organization provides them valuable benefits, they will act accordingly, even if they actually get no benefits at all. If they feel that the organi-zation has nothing to offer them, they will also act accordingly, even if it is not true.

People tend to select those parts of a situation that affect them and their interests most strongly and directly. Two different people can hear the same speech or pep talk, and one may be sensitive to its faults while the other may be enthusiastic.

Remember in your evaluating that, because some members may not have a good understanding of the organization, information from them may not be com-pletely accurate.

Quite often people will hold strong feelings that are contrary to those held by the organization. They are often reluctant to share their true feelings and will give the kinds of answers they think are expected of them. It is important for leaders to develop the trust and confidence of members so they feel free to get "below the sur-face" of their feelings.

7. _Build the organization's pur-pose, program of activity, and structure. This will help to encourage greater membership involvement._

The next step is to present the motivational program to the members, and gain their support and involvement.

The message to the members should consist of information in each of these areas:

1. What members should do in the organization and why.

2. What benefits are available in return for such involvement.

3. What inducements may lead to member participation.

4. The costs they can expect to pay for taking part.

5. How this organization compares with others regarding benefits and costs.

When this approach is used, it helps insure that the problem of membership involvement is treated thoroughly. If you recognize that low participation may be a symptom of underlying difficulties, you may be able to save the organization.

Building Motivation

The larger the group, the smaller the proportion of members who actively participate. Where size is a problem, one thing that can be done is to subdivide the group by types of activities.

Another important factor is the number of officers, committee positions, and other positions in the organization. Usually the more members who can be assigned specific responsibilities, the greater the membership involvement will be. Yet you should be cautious not to create more "busy work."

People can be rotated in and out of positions to avoid having the same few run the organization year after year. This is especially important if there are not enough significant jobs

to go around. Even among the inactive people in an organization there is a surprising number of persons with talent to be developed.

This can also serve another function, that of leadership training within the organization. As people become involved in leadership responsibilities in the organization they tend to be more loyal and committed.

A relationship should be built between the benefits a person gets and the activities he engages in. If a member can get all the benefits he wants from the organization without being very active, why should he take the time and effort to become more involved?

On the other hand, if the people who do all the work do not get any more benefits than the relatively inactive members, why should they do most of the work? Therefore, if you want to prevent some built-in problems of increasing involvement, be sure there is a direct relationship between the benefits and the degree of membership involvement.

When going through the process of providing members opportunities to work in meaningful positions within the organization, take care to appoint those people who will benefit individually as well as strengthen the organization.

There are many ways to approach the problem of membership involvement. The important thing is to determine how the programs suggested in this publication can help your organization and your current concerns. The processes outlined here require time and work, but there are no easy solutions to organizational problems.

Figure 1

MEETING SOME OF PEOPLE'S NEEDS

People's Needs	Organization Activity	How Involvement Benefits		Cost to Member
		Individual	Organization	
Contribution	Goal setting	Feeling and belonging	Member support	Different for each individual depending on his level of activity
Recognition	Appreciation day	Feeling of fulfillment from peers	Renewed commitment by member	Some costs might be:
Acceptance	Asked to serve on committee	Feeling of being part of the group	Project accomplished	1. Less time for job or family 2. Less time for other voluntary associations
Respect	Ask for member's advice	Judgment regarded as useful	Provides needed information	3. Less leisure time 4. Social costs, i.e. embarrassment and failure
Companionship	Social	Feeling of friendship	Builds unity and corporation	
Accomplishment	Serve in leadership position	Confidence and sense of responsibility	Accomplishes goals of organization	
Pride	Chair program committee	Recognized for ability	Successful programs	

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