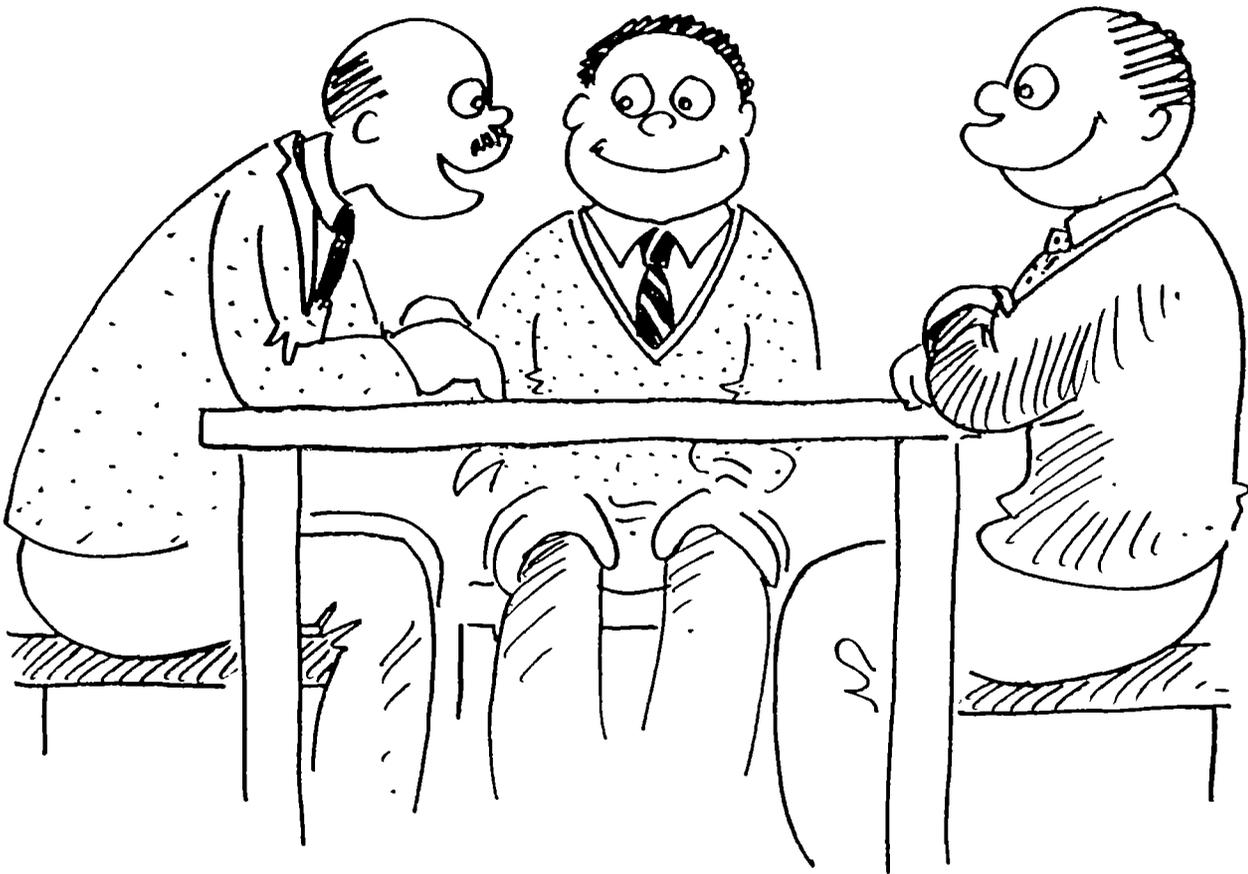


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Notes on

Communication Skills

MEETING SKILLS



LWSSP Sri Lanka
1993

133-14996



CHECKLIST

- Is a meeting necessary? Be sure of the purpose for the meeting. ✓
- Put a blackboard and flipchart into your committee room and encourage everyone to use them.
- Involve your members in shaping the agenda (Agenda Review).
- Prioritize and set time limits for agenda items.
- Start on a high note and end on a high note.
- Use Questions - to get people talking, to make people think, to clarify what is being said, to seek for consensus.
- Use Problem Statements → Analysis → Solution.
- Summarize Summarize Summarize
- Clear concrete action decisions with a deadline.
- Don't monopolize the followup - give everyone a task.
- Be a model - a good listener, questioner, and energizer.
- Draw out the silent and control the talkative.
- Use buzz groups, brainstorming, and "going around the room" - to get everyone talking.
- Get members to listen to each other without interrupting.
- Use humour to break tension or boredom.
- Ban technical jargon and play down status differences.
- Watch members' body language. They may be telling you it's time for a break.
- Evaluate your meetings and try using process observers.

REMEMBER

- Achieve the **task** of the meeting while ensuring an effective **process** - in which everyone feels **involved, respected, contributing, and listened to**.
- Quick meetings and time checks will keep your members coming back.

1. INTRODUCTION

THE BASIC QUESTION:

IS A MEETING REALLY NEEDED?



If it is then it should be organized properly. Many important decisions on development are made during meetings and yet meetings themselves tend to be unproductive, time-wasting and just plain boring. The reasons for this lie in the meeting process – how the committee goes about its business. Some of the problems are:

- *The leadership is not shared with committee members. The Chairman and Secretary direct and control the meeting, do a lot of the talking, and take most of the decisions.*
- *In response the members are passive and uninvolved: they feel no responsibility for the meeting and as a result make very little contribution.*
- *Agenda items are poorly presented, often in technical language (which inhibits understanding) and without sufficient information for members to make an informal opinion. As a result items are poorly discussed, with very little creative thinking and problem-solving.*
- *The meeting as a total process is unplanned. Items on the agenda are not placed in order of priority, nor are time limits assigned to each item.*
- *Members are often so concerned with their own ideas that they don't really listen to each other. Ideas expressed by some members are accepted, while the same idea by another member is not really heard.*

Does this sound familiar? Can you see some or all of these problems in your DLUPU meetings? What all these result in is:

- * *unproductive meetings*
- * *low morale of some members*
- * *slow and poor decision-making*
- * *a weak DLUPU*

**THERE IS ANOTHER WAY
OF RUNNING MEETINGS**



2. MAKING YOUR MEETINGS MORE PARTICIPATORY AND EFFICIENT.

The challenge of the committee is to:

- do the work, e.g. discuss issues, resolve problems, make decisions
- maintain the group by attending to the needs and concerns of members
- build the DLUPU team - strengthen the capacity of DLUPU to do its future work better.

This can be done by:

- 1) sharing the leadership - ensuring that all members are involved in the decision-making process
- 2) building up members' sense of responsibility for and ownership of DLUPU and ensuring that they get some real benefit i.e. - an opportunity to talk about and get feedback on why they are doing
- 3) finding ways to optimize participation and ensure that everyone feels respected and listened to.

This is not easy. But it gets easier with practice.

One problem you will encounter is conflicting interests. People have different needs. For instance:

- power - our decisions will affect others
- belonging - we belong to a committee and others do not
- information - we are "in the know"
- variety - a committee meeting interrupts our routine
- responsibility - the challenge of responsibility helps us grow for instance by developing decision-making skills
- helping others - we feel good to assist our communities.

It helps to be aware of these different needs and recognize that they can be openly met through participation and involvement in a committee's work.



3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

There are two areas where planning and preparation can assist the leadership team:

- define the purpose
- plan the content of the agenda

DEFINING THE PURPOSE OF THE MEETING

There are two questions which need to be answered here:

- what is the purpose of holding this meeting?
- is the purpose going to be best achieved by holding a meeting?

Many meetings are ineffective because the purpose is not clear, not only to the person who called it but to others attending. This is particularly true of regular monthly meetings, for example. The main purpose of these sometimes seems to be the self perpetuation of the monthly meetings.

IS A MEETING NECESSARY ?

PLANNING THE CONTENT OF THE MEETING - THE AGENDA

Prepare an agenda well before the meeting so it can be circulated in advance.

Ask members for items to be included - remember : this is a good way of building up their involvement.

Organize the agenda in the following sequence:

- a. Agenda Review - a chance for members to modify the proposed agenda and agree on sequencing and timing

b. Main Items -

- If at all possible, start with something which can be dealt with reasonably easily. This will give the group a **sense of accomplishment and energy**.
- The more difficult or lengthier items, or those of most pressing importance, come next. If there are several, plan to have **quick breaks** between them to **restore energy and attention** (just a stretch in place).
- A **big item** may be broken into several issues and discussed one at a time to make it more manageable. Or it may be helpful to suggest a process of presenting the item with background information and clarification, breaking into small groups for idea sharing and making priorities, and then returning to the main group for discussion.
- Finish with something **short and easy** to provide a sense of hope for next time.

c. Announcements

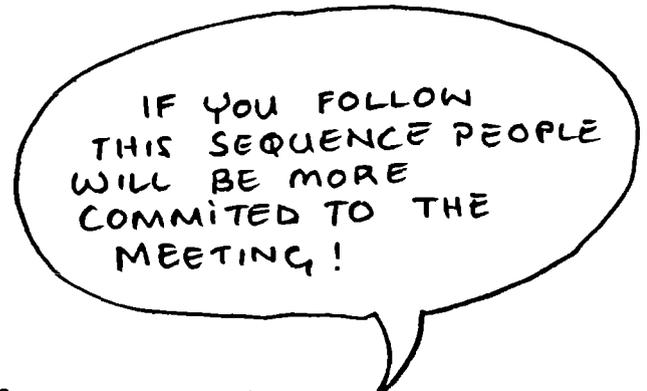
- d. Evaluation - for two purposes: to allow members to express their feelings about the meetings; and to learn to have better meetings in the future.



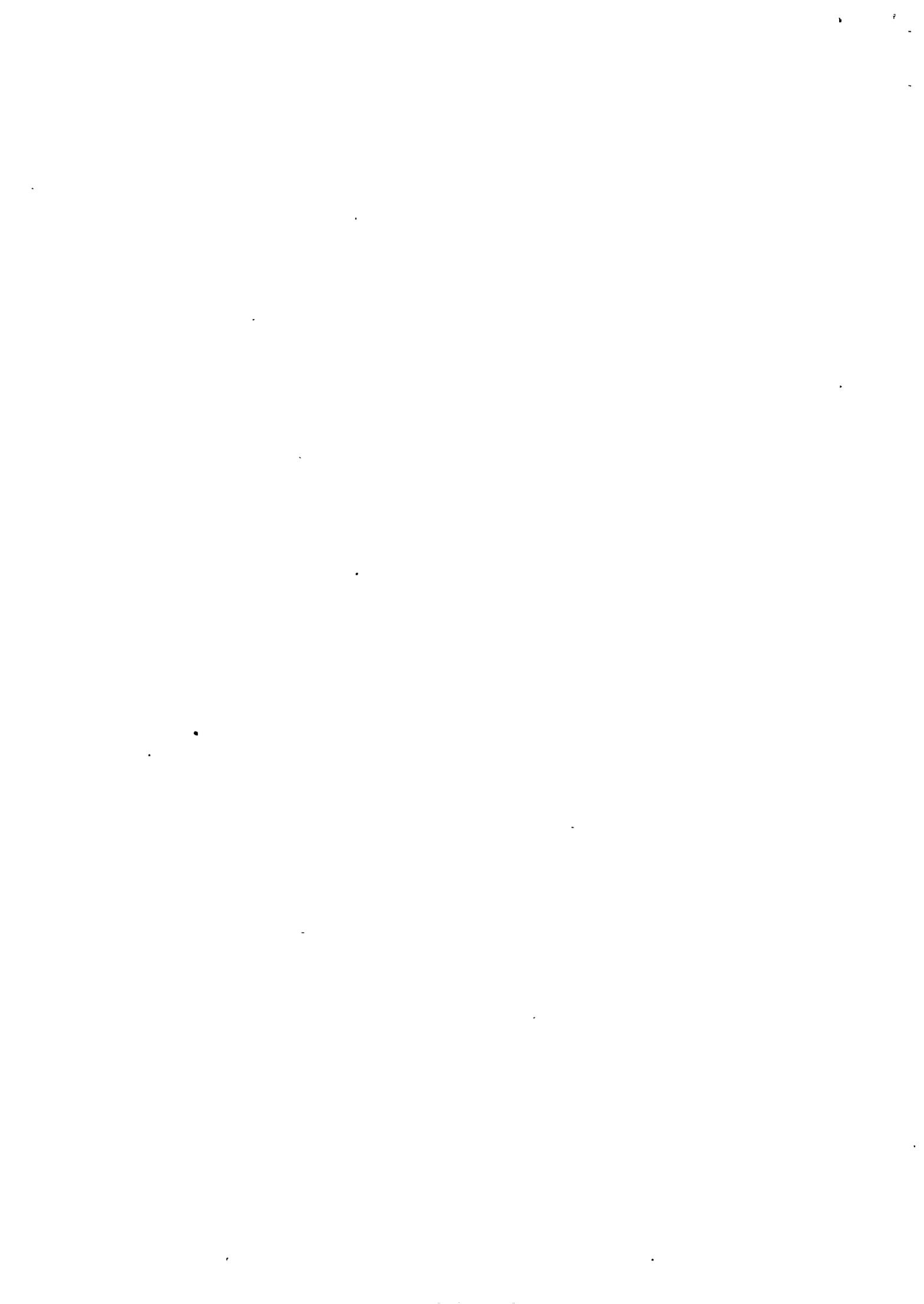


AGENDA REVIEW - During the Meeting

- a. Write the agenda on newsprint or a blackboard (before the meeting) so that everyone can see it.
- b. As members arrive ask them for **additional items** and write them on the newsprint blackboard
- c. Ask members to identify the **high priority items**. Beside these items write "H1", low priority items "LC".
- d. Together with the members **estimate the time** needed for each item and put it on the agenda. This will:
 - Indicate to participants the relative weights of the items.
 - Help participants tailor their participation to the time available.
 - Give a sense of the progress of the meeting.
- e. Agree on the **sequence** for items. For example members may want 1 or 2 items to come earlier, in the agenda than originally planned.
- f. When the agenda has been amended, ask members if they are willing to accept it - and insist on a response. They need to be aware of having made a contract with you about how to proceed. Besides, it is their meeting!



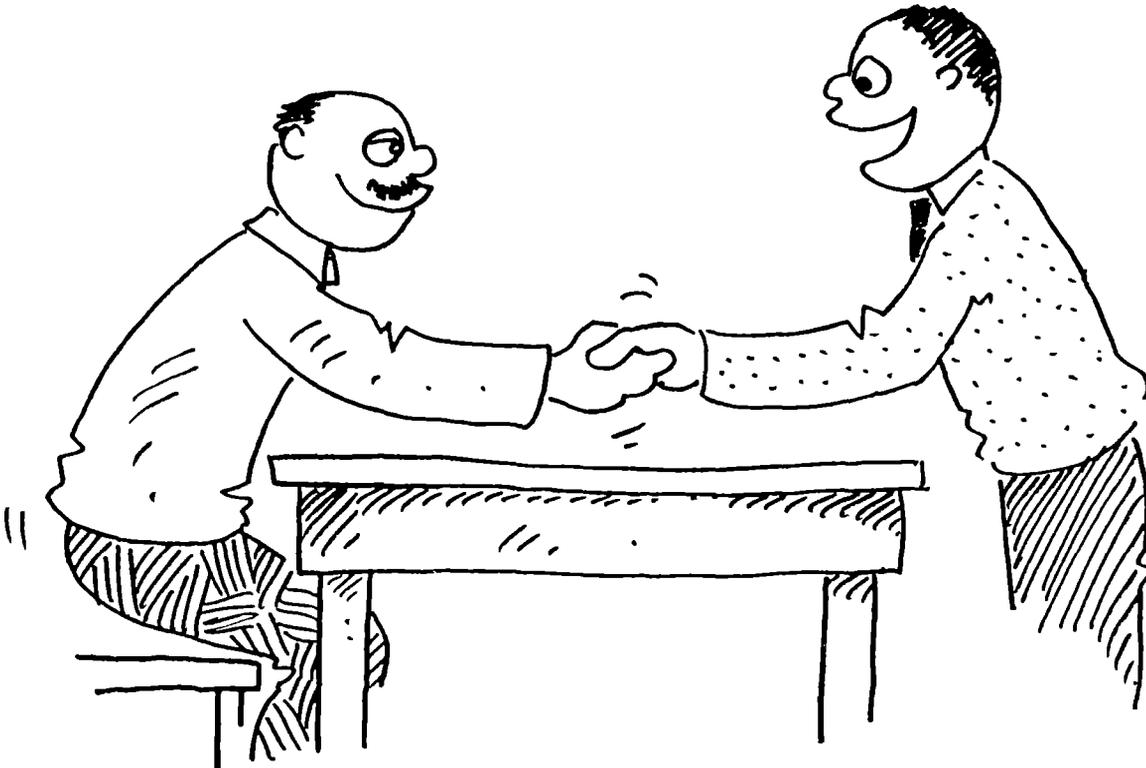
All of this can be done in 5 - 10 minutes. It gives people a sense of having helped to shape the meeting.



4. BEGINNINGS AND ENDINGS

BEGINNINGS

The tone of a meeting is usually set in the beginning. It's important to start on a note of confidence and energy and with the recognition that those present are people, not just roles and functions. One approach is to organize quick sharing of good things which have happened to individual people lately. The time it takes is repaid by the contribution it makes to a relaxed and upbeat atmosphere where participants are encouraged to be real with each other.



ENDINGS

Try to end the meeting in the same way it was started - with a sense of gathering. Don't let it just fizzle. Say something positive: talk about the group's achievements, and praise individual and group contributions. Even if the result has not been entirely satisfactory, try and emphasize the positive aspects.

5. THE ROLES OF A CHAIRPERSON

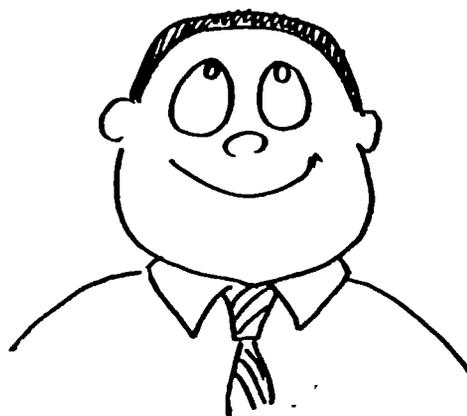
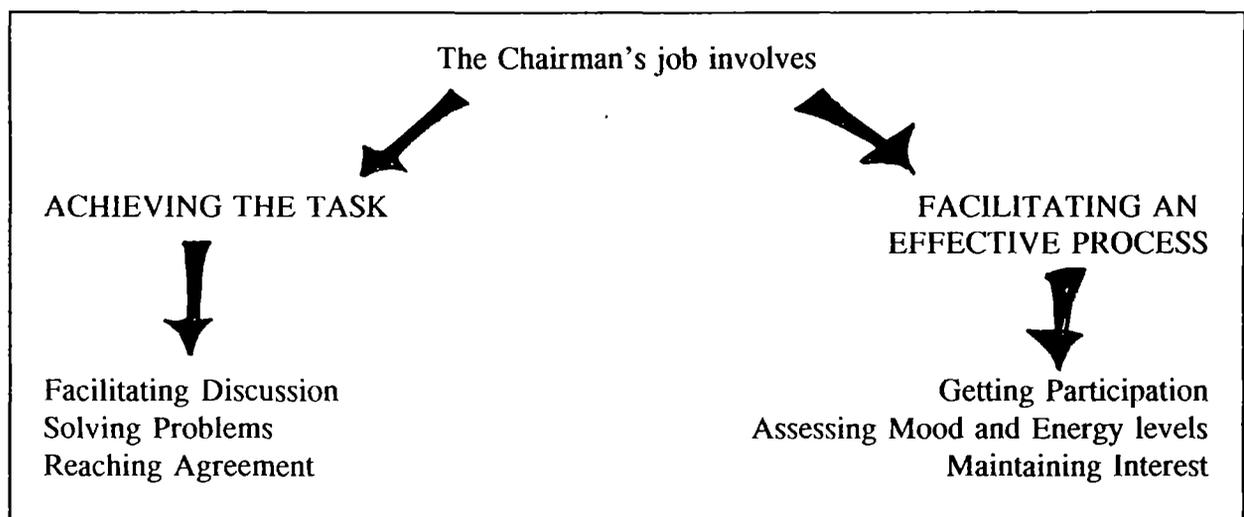
TASK AND PROCESS

In any meeting one can usefully separate two things:

- a. the **task** - what the meeting aims to do e.g. decisions to be made
- b. the **process** - how the meeting operates.

The **tasks** in any meeting involve: gathering information, discussion, solving problems, making decisions, evaluating the previous work of the committee, etc.

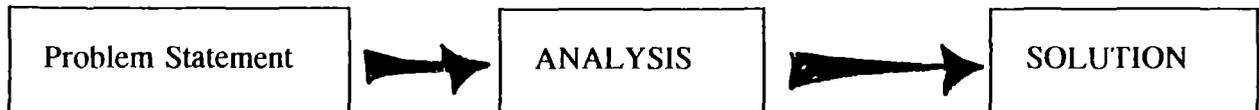
The **process** involves the way in which people work together - participation of members, consideration of individual needs, concerns and feelings, and the development of the committee into a strong and effective team.





FACILITATING DISCUSSION AND PROBLEM-SOLVING

- a. **Questions** are the chairman's major tool for facilitating discussion and problem-solving. On page - you'll find different types of questions to use in this process. Remember - it often helps to phrase questions in a positive manner. Instead of asking "Why won't this plan work?" ask "What problems will we have to overcome if we adopt this plan?".
- b. Organize the discussion in the following sequence:



- c. During a discussion of complicated items it often helps to **write things down**. Have a recorder (yourself or a group member) write each item on newsprint or blackboard, so everyone can see what material has been generated and refer to it at will. This list can also be used as a basis for further discussion.
- d. Encourage the **expression of various viewpoints** - the more important the decision, the more important it is to have all pertinent information (facts, feelings, and opinions) on the table. Differences of opinion, when handled well, can contribute greatly to creative solutions.
- e. **Providing Information or Clarifying**. At times it helps to feed in information which is needed for the discussion - doing it yourself or drawing it out of members. At other times you may rephrase something that has been said to make it clearer, or interpret what it means to you. Do this in a tentative way that leaves room for others' viewpoints.
- f. **Summarize**. This means pulling together various parts of the discussion and summing them up - including stating what progress you think has been made, where you think the group is going. Summarizing is one of the most powerful tools available to the chairperson, serving to
 - indicate the progress or lack of it
 - re-focus off track discussion
 - tie up one point and move on to the next issue
 - highlight important points
 - guide the minute-taker
 - clarify misunderstandings
- g. **Pace-making**. Keep the group aware of how it is proceeding and when it may be time to move on. This includes saying things like, "It looks like we understand each other's viewpoints well enough. I think we are ready to make a decision".

FACILITATING CONSENSUS AND DECISION-MAKING

- a. Keep looking for **minor points of agreement** and state them - it helps morale.
- b. Encourage people to think of **fresh solutions** as well as to look for possible **compromises**.
- c. Be suspicious of agreements reached too easily - test to make sure that people really do agree on essential points.
- d. **Summarizing:** When you test for consensus, state in question form everything that you feel participants agree on. Be specific: "Do we agree that we'll ask the applicant to provide more information on his financial situation and a better layout design and that the Secretary, LUO, CPO, and Land Board Technical Officer will meet with the applicant on 2nd July at Council?" Do NOT merely refer to a previous statement: "Do you all agree that we should do it the way it was just suggested?" This procedure makes it clear to members what they are agreeing to and helps the Secretary in writing the minutes.
- e. Insist on a **response** to a question of consensus. The participants need to be conscious of making a contract with each other.
- f. If there is strong disagreement on an issue, you may have to put it to a **vote** - but try to avoid this.
- g. Keep things **specific**. Make sure proposals are framed in terms of specific people undertaking **clearly defined actions** within an agreed **deadline**.
- h. **Sharing the Tasks.** Don't let one or two people monopolize the follow-up. Share the tasks so that every member is involved.
- i. If you find yourself drawn into the discussion in support of a particular position, it would be preferable to step aside as chairman until the next agenda item. This can be arranged beforehand if you anticipate a conflict of interest.

GETTING PARTICIPATION

We've all been in meetings where two or three people do all the talking and everyone else is quiet. Here are a few techniques to help the chairperson get more people participating:



- a. **Make sure everyone knows exactly what the discussion is about, and what the reason for having it is.**

If a discussion is not getting off the ground, if there are awkward silences where everyone looks around the room, waiting for someone else to say something, it could be because members don't know for sure what they are supposed to be talking about, or how to approach the subject.

- b. **Use questions to stimulate discussion.**

A simple question such as "How do you feel about this problem?" is a good way to start a discussion. On page xx you'll find different types of questions to stimulate participation.

- c. **Be a model.**

Your own behaviour can demonstrate to members how they can participate. You can help to set a relaxed, open, conversational tone for the discussion by being relaxed, open and conversational yourself during the meeting.

- d. **Give participants room to be involved.**

Being too directive in your role as chairperson may cause members to hesitate to take responsibility for what happens in the group. They may wait for you to provide all the guidance. You can encourage members to take responsibility by refraining from arbitrarily setting things up or making decisions yourself.

- e. **Listing.**

A technique to generate ideas or approaches that may be used as the basis for the discussion. For example in a discussion on the rationalization of extension areas you may begin by having the participants brainstorm a list of reasons why extension areas should be harmonized.

f. **Going around the room**

Asking each person for a quick response is a good way of starting off a discussion and getting everyone to participate. Once people say a few words (this is all that is expected in this technique) they begin to feel easier about participating.

g. **Buzz Groups**

Members pair off to discuss an issue as a lead-in to a full group discussion. This is another low key way to "warm people up" and build up their confidence. It demonstrates very quickly that everyone has a view and can make a contribution.



h. **Equalizing participation**

It is not realistic to assume that participation will be divided equally among all group members. Some will **want** to participate more or less than others. But you can try to keep one person or a small group of people from dominating the discussion and you can provide opportunities for silent members to contribute if they seem interested but can't break into the discussion.

i. **Relate the discussion to people's immediate experiences.**

It is difficult for people to feel very involved in a discussion that is highly abstract or far removed from their own experiences. This is often the case in planning discussions where professional planners use their expertise and even their own technical jargon to dominate in meetings. Try to put the agenda items in laymen's terms, giving everyone an equal chance to participate.

j. **Attitude of the Leaders or Managing your Leaders**

This point is the most important. **THE CHAIRPERSON AND SECRETARY SET THE CLIMATE FOR PARTICIPATION.** Their attitudes will determine the amount of participation in the meeting. If they genuinely want participation, they will encourage silent members and open decisions to the house rather than proposing everything themselves. On the other hand, if they see themselves as the only people in the know, they will dominate the talking, take most of the decisions, and monopolize the follow-up.

If the latter is the case, then it is up to the members to raise this as a problem and insist that meetings are more democratic.



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TESTING THE CLIMATE

The chairperson also has the job of checking on members' mood, feelings, and energy level at different stages of the meeting, and taking appropriate action. Here are some techniques to "test the climate":

Observe your members and pay attention to their

- **Body language:** are members yawning, dozing, sagging, fidgeting, leaving?
- **Facial expressions:** are they alert or "not there", looking upset, staring off into space?
- **Side conversations:** are they distracting to the group?
- People **interrupting** each other.

If any of these things are happening, it may be simply fatigue; or you may have spent too long on an item; or a member may have been excluded from the discussion.

If any of the above is true, **find out how they are feeling**. Simply ask: "How are you feeling? Are people tired? Are we going too slow? Do you want a break?"

It may be **time for a break**. Participants' attention spans can only be expected to last two hours, at the most. When people are tired, hungry, or physically uncomfortable from sitting too long, participation will quickly drop. Taking a break will help to re-energize.

It may be time to **move on to a new item**. Don't let people repeat their points over and over. Once the basic arguments have been made and there are no new ideas coming forward, get people to make a decision - and move on.

If **tension or conflict** is preventing people from hearing each other, a simple getting up and finding new places to sit might help. A period of silence might also be helpful when people may have a chance to **relax** a bit and look for new insights

You might also use **humour to break tension or boredom**. Sometimes if you say something preposterous or do something unexpected you can catch the imaginations of people whose minds have wandered or loosen up a formal situation so that hesitant members will feel more comfortable about contributing

It is important to keep a light touch: don't make people feel guilty or defensive. Also, be confident in your role - there is no reason for apologizing when you have an observation or a suggestion for the group - you are doing them a favour

BE CONFIDENT IN YOUR ROLE BUT NOT DOMINATING



QUESTIONS

Questions are a key tool for the chairperson. Good questions help to:

- promote critical thinking and problem-solving
- encourage everyone to participate
- check on what people have said (i.e. to clarify or ask for elaboration - to promote understanding)
- to test for agreement or consensus in order to reach decisions.

The following types are particularly useful:

Opening questions These should:

- be thought-provoking, and engage the attention of the whole group
- be specific, and relate to the experience of the whole group
- start with how, where, when, why, what or who, to avoid a 'yes' or 'no' reply
- point the meeting in the right direction

Example: What experience do members have on?

Overhead questions A question addressed to the group as a whole. This has the advantage of not embarrassing individual members who may be unprepared or unable to answer, and engaging the attention of all members, so there is a good chance someone will reply. An overhead question is useful as an opening question, or to refocus irrelevant discussion.

Example: What remedies for this situation have we found?

Direct questions A question addressed to a particular individual. This can be used for a variety of purposes: to bring in a person with special knowledge; in dealing with the shy, talkative and other problem individuals; to help the meeting when flagging, by asking the resourceful or talkative member for an opinion; to speed up the pace of the meeting.

Example: Mr A, what is your department's policy on?

A useful technique is: To turn a general question into a direct question, i.e. put the question to the group as a whole, pause to allow all members to reflect, and then appeal to a specific individual for an answer: 'What do you consider is the right action to take in this case Mr Sesinyi?'

Re-direct question To avoid the meeting moving back and forth between individual members and the chairperson, statements and questions raised by one member can be passed to another for comment. It can also be used as a link to co-ordinate a number of points and thus ensure continuity of ideas.

Example: Miss B, how do you think Mr A's policy would work in your department?

Reverse question The person posing the question is asked to answer it themselves. This may be used to encourage that person to think again, or because the person is known to have views which should be expressed.

Example: I know you have considerable experience on that subject: can we hear what you think? OR

I was about to ask you the same question - what do you think?



6. WHEN THINGS GO WRONG ?!

6.1 PROBLEM SITUATIONS



WHEN THERE ISN'T ENOUGH TIME TO DO WHAT YOU HAD PLANNED.

- This is the most common problem you are likely to encounter. The tendency is to underestimate the amount of time needed for an agenda item than it is to overestimate. Make allowances for this in your plan. Remember also to account for the fact that people may be late, that they will probably spend time chatting with each other before getting down to business, and that a few will always extend the breaks beyond the scheduled amount of time.
- If your agenda won't fit into the time you have, get the group to assign time limits to each section.
- Ask that someone in the group be responsible for keeping track of time. You may be too involved to remember to do this yourself.
- It helps to prioritize items on an agenda, dealing with the most important ones first. This makes later curtailment much easier to handle.
- Remind the group when time limits are being approached or exceeded. If group members want to continue in a particular area, and this will mean that something else will have to be squeezed out, make the group aware of this so they can make a decision about what to do.

WHEN MEMBERS LOSE INTEREST.

Recognize that every item on the agenda cannot be of equal interest to everyone. The possible causes of this are:

- wrong items have been selected



- too many items dealt with, so attention wanes
- case poorly presented so that relevance to members is not clear



Some remedies are:

- direct questions to individuals, e.g. 'How does this affect you?'
- drop the subject entirely and return to it later, dealing with a more interesting subject in the meantime.

WHEN MEMBERS ARE NOT PARTICIPATING OR APPEAR BORED.

Situation one: One or two people have obviously dropped out of the discussion, apparently from boredom, although the group as a whole appears to be functioning well. What should you do?

- Try to determine for yourself whether this behaviour is being disruptive to the rest of the group. (Is the dropout staring quietly into space, or blatantly distracting others?) If the behaviour is disruptive, the dropout may be expressing some kind of dissatisfaction with the group that he or she has not felt free or able to verbalize. One way of dealing with this immediately is to ask the dropout if there is any comment he or she would like to contribute. You are offering the person an opportunity to make any criticism that relates to the disruptive behaviour, and allowing the group an opportunity to deal with the problem. This solution has some potential dangers. One is that the individual involved may feel threatened at being singled out, even though the disruptive behaviour was calling attention to him or her. Another danger is that the group may become bogged down discussing the needs or problems of one person, which may not relate to the purpose of the meeting. You should try to read the situation to decide if the problem should be dealt with openly by the group.
- If no disruption is involved, and if normal attempts to include the dropout in group activity are ineffective, it is generally best to wait for a break in the meeting and approach the dropout privately to ask if he or she is bored or dissatisfied with the meeting. Try to do this in a low key, friendly, concerned manner not reminiscent of a teacher scolding a misbehaving pupil. A private encounter is often (though not always) less threatening and is more likely to elicit an honest response.



Situation two: The whole group, or a substantial portion, is bored or unwilling to participate. What should you do?

- The discussion may have become too technical, using language and concepts that only the planners are familiar with. Get them to explain themselves and use simpler language and concepts so that everyone can understand and participate.
- The group may feel that the session is wandering, that there is no progress. It is important to preserve a sense of some sort of structure and movement within the meeting. This is where an agenda and timetable is invaluable.

WHEN DISCUSSION GOES OFF TRACK

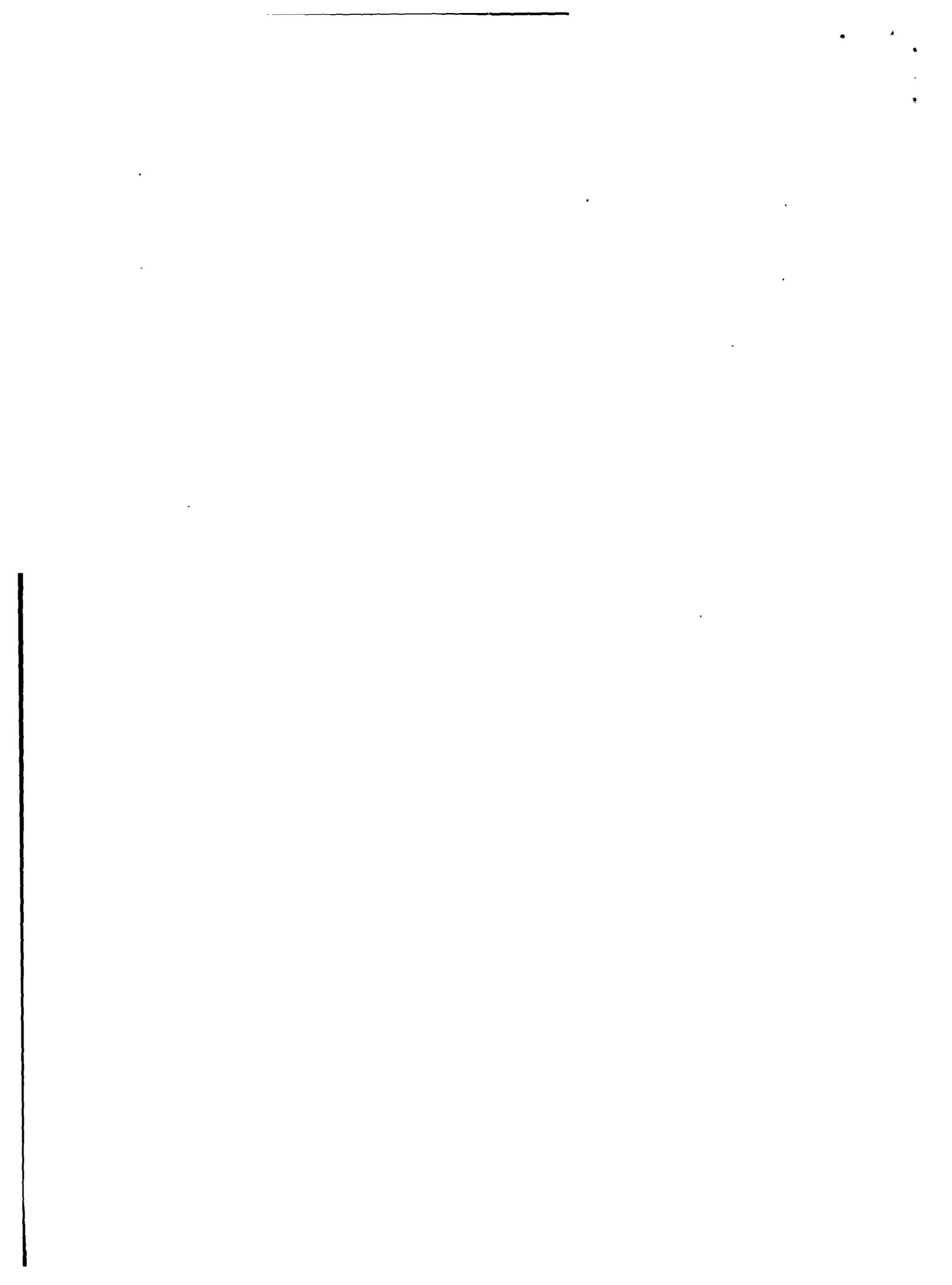
This can be indicative of lack of interest. The group may start talking about other things or asking irrelevant questions. If there is genuine concern over something else which is worrying the group, it is best to deal with it. Otherwise frequent summarizing will help to keep the discussion on course.

WHEN A MEMBER GETS EXCLUDED BECAUSE OF HIS/HER STATUS

It is the leader's responsibility to protect the weaker members of the group. If there are more junior members present, it is often a good idea to ask for their ideas first. They may be unwilling to express a view once more senior members have made their position clear.

WHEN SOME PARTICIPANTS CAUSE INTERRUPTIONS

One kind of interruption is when a participant has a tendency to cut off the current speaker with a comment of his or her own, or detracts from what the group is doing by leading the conversation to an irrelevant topic. Usually, if you diplomatically point out what is happening, the problem will be remedied. However, if the interruptions are occurring in a fast-paced, emotional discussion, some more definite measures may be needed. Suggesting a minute of silence may be enough to cool things off; so may asking people to talk slowly.



WHEN ARGUMENTS BREAK OUT IN THE GROUP

This is a difficult situation to handle, but the most important thing is to move the discussion away from personalities and toward the actual problem. Try rephrasing the comments made into general questions to the group. It is best to discourage a back-and-forth exchange between the two people and to emphasize drawing others (who are more neutral and less involved in the personal antagonisms) into the discussion. Some specific approaches you might take are:

- Ask the rest of the group to comment on the exchange.
- Restate the issue being discussed with the hope of clarifying it and giving a breathing space in a fast-paced discussion.
- Focus a question toward one of the involved parties, asking for more specific reasons for a particular point of view; then ask someone else with an interest in the discussion to comment.
- Ask each of the opponents to summarize the other's point of view. Sometimes simple misunderstandings of each other's position is at the base of an argument and by stating the opponent's beliefs, and giving the opponent the opportunity to correct any misperceptions, these misunderstandings can be cleared up.





6.2 PROBLEM PEOPLE

Meeting leaders have to deal with group members each of whom has different characters and very often different interests to protect. It is useful to consider several types which leaders most frequently come across and to look at ways of dealing with them.

The Talkative Person

Some members may talk more than is necessary. In controlling this person, the chairperson has a difficult task: if he shuts up the individual too abruptly he may lose him for the rest of the session; if he lets him go on for too long he may lose the group who by that time have got bored and switched off.

A skillful way of interrupting this type of person is to take up one of his statements and summarize it or turn it into a question to be thrown back to the other members. Make it clear that everyone will have a chance of saying something.

The Silent Person

Some people may feel shy to contribute, especially if they are new to the group or relatively junior in status. Make them appear important in the eyes of the others. Ask them direct questions which they are sure to be able to answer. Give them encouragement - they may be valuable.

A Person who is Off-Topic

Say to them 'this is interesting, but could we discuss it another time', and start questioning someone else.

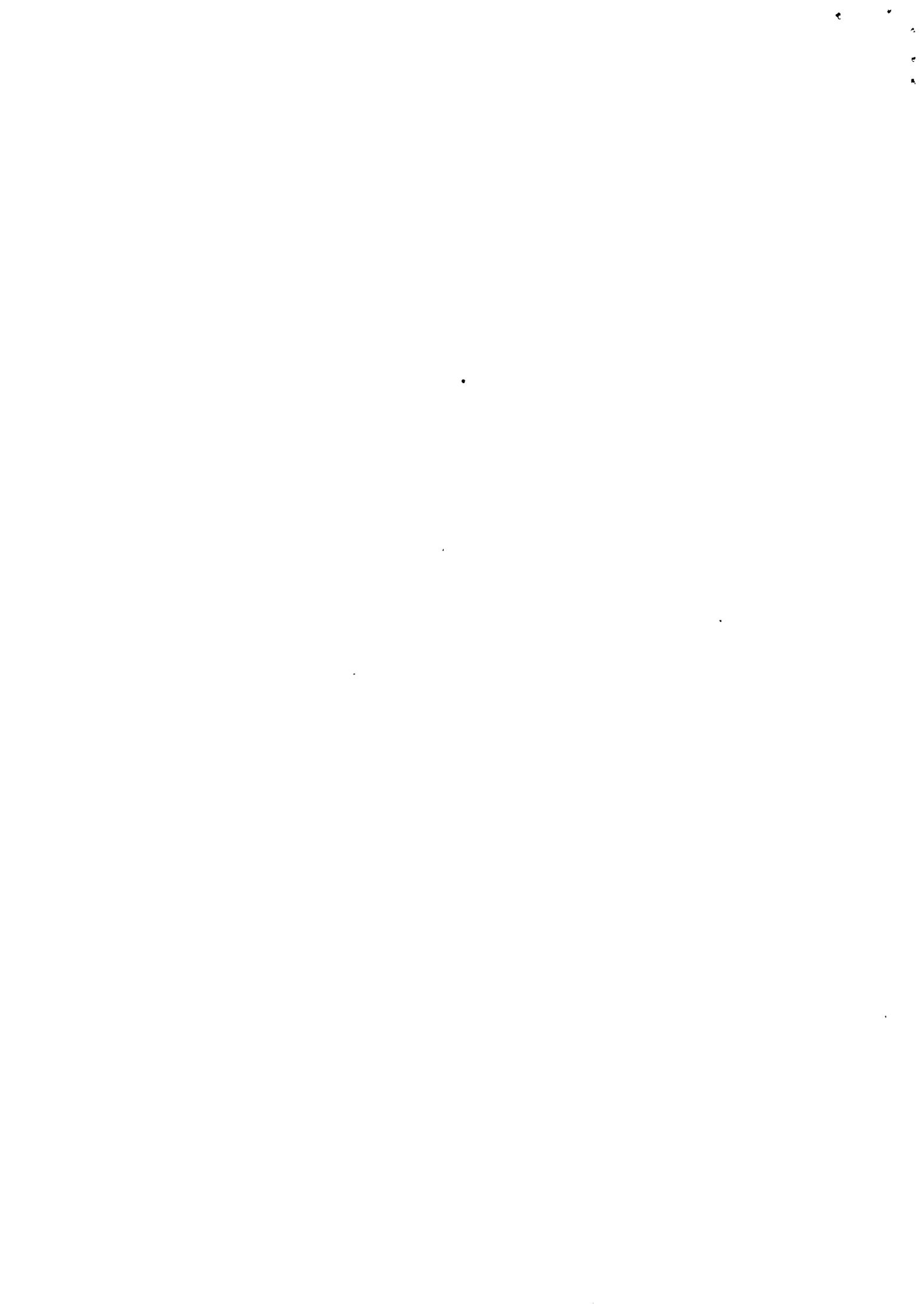
The Expert or Senior Man

Sometimes there is both a boss and his subordinate in the same group, or there may be specialists, e.g. land use planner. This may have the effect of damping down contributions from the junior or less experienced members of the group. Also, members are less likely to give thought to a problem when they think that one of their number has the answer readily available.

Treat the senior people with respect and show you are grateful for their contribution. At the same time try to play down status differences and encourage the junior members to participate. Discourage the use of technical jargon (which puts some members at a disadvantage) and phrase issues in terms that everyone can understand and therefore participate equally.

An Uncooperative Person

Some people have ability and things to contribute, but are not inclined to be helpful. Show them that it would be of benefit if they put their own experience and knowledge to the service of other members. Give them the chance to get their ideas accepted and this will make it possible for them to listen to the ideas of the others. Encourage them to make a worthwhile contribution and thank them when they do.



7 . EVALUATION AND PROCESS OBSERVATION

EVALUATION

In your meetings it is often wise to evaluate how things went (the meeting process, that is, not the content). A simple format: on top of a large sheet of newsprint or a blackboard put a + on the left side, a - in the middle, and a / on the right side. Under the + list positive comments, things that people felt good about. Under the - list things that could have been done better, that did not come off so well. Under the / list specific suggestions for how things could have been improved.

Don't get into arguments about whether something was in fact helpful or not; people have a right to their feelings. It is not necessary to work out consensus on what was good and what was not about the meeting.

A few minutes is usually all that is needed - don't drag it out. Try to end with a positive comment. Meetings almost invariably get better after people get used to evaluating how they function together.

PROCESS OBSERVATION

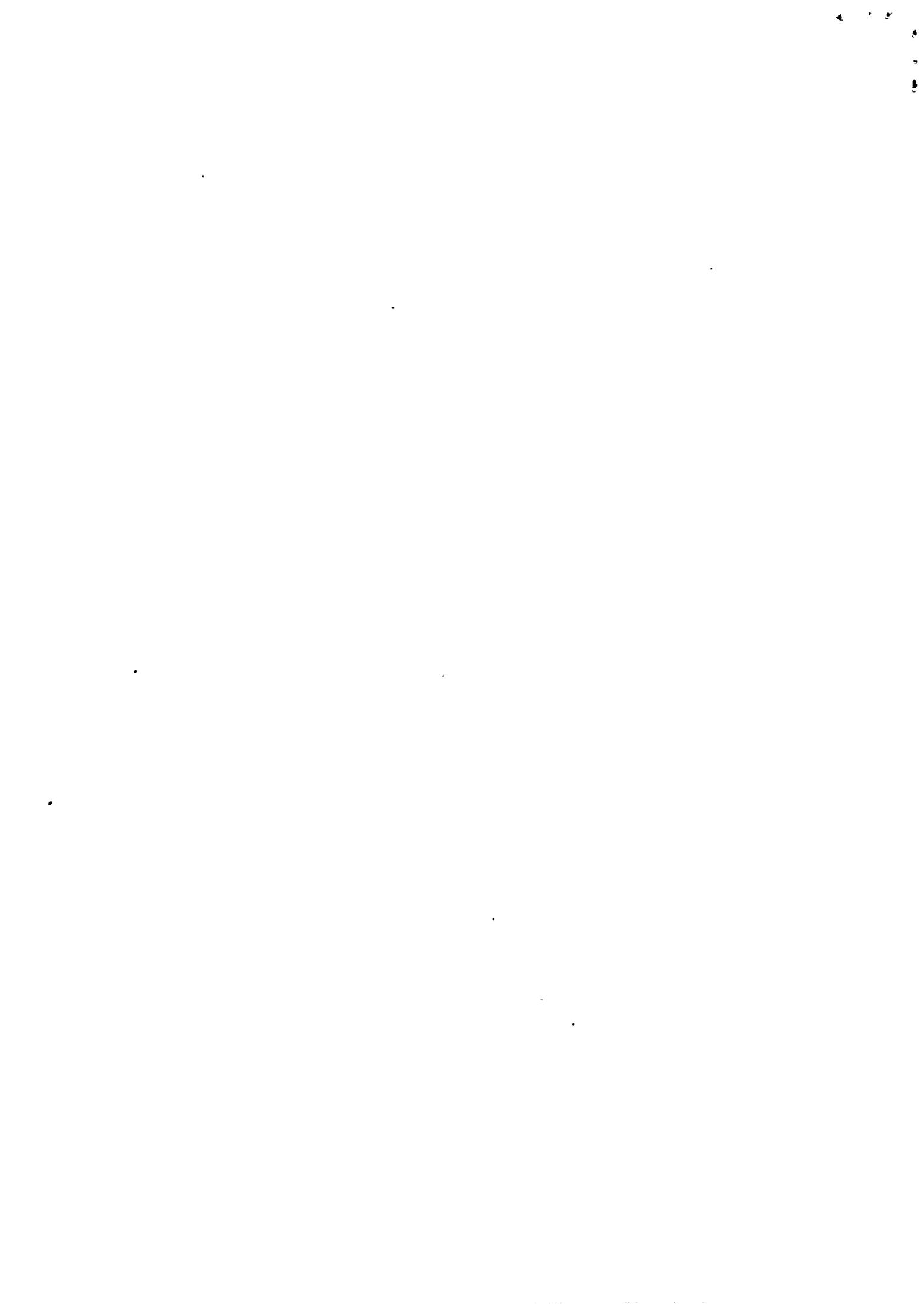
From time to time any group can benefit from having somebody observe how it works. The process observer should refrain from participating in the meeting and instead take notes. Remember to notice helpful suggestions or procedure that moved the group forward. Once a group has a sense of its strengths it is easier to consider the need for improvements.

Here are some specific things you might look for:

- What was the general **atmosphere** in which the group worked? relaxed? tense?
- How were the **decisions** made?
- If there was any **conflict**, how was it handled?
- Did everybody **participate**? Were there procedures which encouraged participation?
- How well did the group members **listen** to each other?
- Were there **recognized leaders** within the group?
- How did the group interact with the chairperson?
- Were there differences between **male and female participation**?

When you as process observer are paying specific attention to **patterns of participation**, an easy device would be to keep score on paper. In a small group a mark can be made next to a person's name every time s/he speaks. If you are looking for differences in participation patterns between categories of people, such as male/female, expatriate-Batswana, new member-old-member, etc. keeping track of numbers of contributions in each category is enough.

In giving feedback to the group try to be **matter-of-fact and specific** so that people do not get defensive and can know exactly what you are talking about. Again, remember to **mention the strengths** you observed in the group.



EXTRA TECHNIQUES

THINKING AS A GROUP

There are many reasons why group members might want to work together to generate a list of ideas. For example, they might want to try to define all of the factors affecting a certain situation, possible solutions to a problem, or ways of applying some new concept or technique. Two methods designed to tap a group's creativity in thinking this way are brainstorming and nominal group technique.

- A. Brainstorming is a common method used in groups to help members think of as many ideas as possible. During brainstorming the members are encouraged to produce ideas as quickly as possible without considering the value of the idea. The emphasis is on quantity, not quality. No criticism of ideas (your own or anyone else's) is permitted since people will feel more free to let their imaginations wander and to contribute freely if they don't have to worry about what others will think of their contributions. Each individual is free to make as many suggestions as he or she wishes. A recorder writes down every contribution on a blackboard or sheet of newsprint and participants are encouraged to build on other people's ideas. Very often an idea that seems useless or silly will trigger another idea that turns out to be very valuable. After brainstorming, the group can evaluate the suggestions.
- B. Nominal group technique is similar to brainstorming, but is designed to encourage every single member to contribute and to prevent the more forceful members from dominating the proceedings. The procedure begins with a silent period of five to ten minutes during which each participant writes down as many ideas as possible on a sheet of paper. The ideas should be in response to a specific question that the group has agreed on (such as "What should be done to improve this agency?"). The next step is for participants to take turns reading ideas from their lists. This is done by taking turns, each member reading only one idea at a time. Participants are encouraged to add to their lists at any time during this stage, and to build on each other's ideas. A recorder writes the ideas down in the contributors' exact words on a list that everyone can see. Members are free to pass at any time and may join in again at the next turn.

Only after every idea has been written down does the group discuss them. The group clarifies the ideas and, if the contributors agree, combines similar ones. After the discussion phase, one way of prioritizing the items is for each member to write down the five that he or she feels are most important, and then to rank the five. The recorder reads each item from the list and adds up the points assigned to it. (An item is assigned five points for each time it is listed as someone's first priority, four points each time it is listed second, etc.) In this way the group can determine what values the members collectively place on the ideas that have been suggested, after they have been generated.

