

Participatory or joint decision-making strategies have been suggested as effective in groups with the task of solving unstructured problems or creating innovations. This longitudinal case study of a small task group suggests that there may be important differences between the desire of group participants to use participatory strategies and their ability to do so effectively. After 15 months, the group members failed to accomplish their task. Four problem areas that account for the lack of productivity are identified: expertise, self-oriented needs, permissive operating procedures, and formal status differences. Implications for other groups that attempt to use participatory strategies are discussed.

CHALLENGING THE ASSUMPTIONS UNDERLYING THE USE OF PARTICIPATORY DECISION-MAKING STRATEGIES A Longitudinal Case Study

CAROLYN J. WOOD
University of New Mexico

Over the past several decades researchers and practitioners have heralded the advantages of participatory or joint decision making in enhancing organizational effectiveness and efficiency. Political scientists and democratic theorists (Benello & Roussopoulos, 1971; Cook & Morgan, 1971; Pateman, 1970) have stated that involvement in decision making helps people overcome feelings of powerlessness and apathy and enhances feelings of self-determination. Believing in participation as an end in itself, these theorists favor direct participation on the basis that people possess the intelligence and inclination to make decisions regarding issues that affect them. Others view employee participation as a means to an end. Management researchers posit that subordinate participation improves

productivity by increasing general satisfaction, morale (Argyris, 1973; Bennis, 1966; Patchen, 1970; Richter & Tjosvold, 1980), and commitment (Fullan, 1982; Goodlad, Klein & Associates, 1970) and by reducing absenteeism, turnover (Bragg & Andrews, 1973), and resistance to change (Argyle, 1967; Coch & French, 1948).

Human growth and development theorists claim that participatory strategies enhance the satisfaction of members' personal goals (Gordon, 1955; Likert, 1961), facilitate the emergence of leadership based on the issue at hand and the recognized competencies of the participants (Argyris, 1964; Gibb, 1965; Horowitz & Perlmutter, 1970), and encourage full and free communication among members without regard to ascribed rank (Bennis & Slater, 1968; Leavitt, 1972). Additionally, practitioners' enthusiasm for participatory decision making can be seen in the assessment and referral teams, curriculum development groups, and school improvement committees that abound at both the school and district levels.

In essence, then, the popular notion of participatory decision making is undergirded by both ideological beliefs and empirical data suggesting the viability of this method, particularly in groups where the task is unstructured or the goal is creative problem solving (Anthony, 1978; Fullan, 1982; Goodlad, Klein & Associates, 1970). However, practitioners have experienced problems accomplishing tasks while using this process. Why has this been the case? Inasmuch as few researchers have conducted longitudinal, nonexperimental studies of natural participatory task groups, the existing literature does not shed much light on the processes and interactions that actually occur nor on the problems natural task groups may experience in using a participatory approach. This article provides insights into possible factors that contribute to a participatory group's failure or success by reporting on the experiences of one such group, the Affective Behavior Assessment Group.¹

It is important to note that the generalizations posited in this study should be viewed as working hypotheses rather than as conclusions. Because they are based on case study data and on a group with somewhat unique characteristics, the findings are gen-

eralizable only to the degree they assist others to understand three types of situations: (a) ad hoc or temporary groups in which individuals from two or more hierarchical levels attempt to work together as equals, (b) localist-based task groups created to develop innovations in which the participants are committed to emergent leadership and consensus decision making, and, more generally, (c) groups attempting to implement alternative group processes such as participatory decision making.

AFFECTIVE BEHAVIOR ASSESSMENT GROUP

Three principals and five teachers from five elementary schools in a large metropolitan area joined together to form the Affective Behavior Assessment Group (ABAG). The purpose of the group was to develop an instrument to assess affective growth in children. The ABAG was a volunteer group brought together by common interests and as such was typical of small ad hoc groups committed to resolving professional/educational problems. Like many volunteer groups, its members believed that participatory processes would best help them accomplish their task: Superordinates and subordinates agreed to work together as equals rather than in a hierarchical arrangement; they did not designate a permanent chairperson, believing that the leadership functions should be diffused among the members, and they were determined to make decisions through consensus.

Several conditions seemed likely to facilitate the group's work. The group itself, its task, and its processes were all defined by the ABAG members; the group's efforts were supported by a grant that provided adequate financial resources; and the group comprised individuals who had an average of ten years of professional experience. Additionally, all members were working on or held at least one master's degree, and two had earned doctorates.

The following provides a brief review of the ABAG's activities over the 15 months in which it was observed. Having struggled to

define a specific task from its first meeting in September, the group finally decided at the January retreat to develop an instrument to assess children's acceptance of responsibility. By the beginning of March the group had constructed a partial checklist instrument, but "shelved" this project in April to write an article publicizing the group's efforts. In May, members reworked the checklist on responsibility into a teacher in-service game, which was not well-received in a pilot test. Following the summer break and a meeting with an outside consultant in September of the second year, the group members abandoned their previous efforts and began to observe children's behavior. By December no product had emerged from these observations, and the composition of the group began to change. Also, its request to use the unexpended grant monies was denied. Teacher C's comments captured the sentiments of the granting agency board:

Some people on the Project Board don't feel the group produced what it should have produced last year. The analogy they used was that we got to the one-yard line on several occasions. . . . They are now questioning our strategy of going back to the fifty and changing our whole game plan. They see no connection between our new direction and what we did last year. (22nd Meeting Transcript, p. 4)

In essence, then, hours of meetings over a 15-month period produced no tangible outcome. The four major themes that emerged during the data analysis not only tell the more complete story of the ABAG's inability to produce a tangible product but also have implications for the use of participatory strategies in other small groups.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative methods were used to collect and analyze the data. Assuming an observer-as-participant research role while serving as group recorder allowed the investigator to engage in natural inter-

actions with members while refraining from participation in the meetings. Thus, the observer was "in," but not "of," the group. Data were collected through direct observation of 24 meetings and special events over a 15-month period. The base consisted of five data sources: (a) meeting transcripts, (b) interview transcripts, (c) field observation notes, (d) summary observation notes (Smith & Keith, 1971), and (e) collected documents. This methodological triangulation (Denzin, 1978) provided the means for checking consistency and accuracy during the analysis.

Data analysis was accomplished in four overlapping stages. After coding to designate participants' views of both substance and process, passages were cross-referenced under preliminary categories.² Next, a case study narrative condensed much of the raw data into a descriptive chronology. During a third stage, commencing with data collection and continuing throughout the analysis, "inter-pretive asides" (Smith, 1979) and "theoretical memos" (Glaser, 1978) were written as initial attempts to explain the data.

The fourth stage, a dual process of induction and deduction, was very similar to the "constant comparative method" described by Glaser and Strauss (1967).³ Only those categories that included indicators from at least two of the five sources and that were saturated with sufficient data to suggest frequent recurrence of a particular phenomenon were used. Sorting the data, identifying categories, and discovering relationships were thus accomplished in a systematic way, but it was what Patton (1980) termed "considered judgment" that drove the analytical process. Four criteria determined the citation choices: (a) cogency and representativeness of the statements, (b) inclusion of both teacher and administrator perspectives (c) variation in the person's remarks chosen, and (d) use of different data sources. The investigator also consulted with ABAG members to determine the degree to which the themes that emerged captured their issues, concerns, and interactions. General concurrence was established. These themes, which point to the

major factors that impeded the group's ability to accomplish its objectives, are presented below.

PROBLEMS IN ATTEMPTING TO USE PARTICIPATORY STRATEGIES IN A TASK GROUP

The analysis suggests four major reasons for the inability of the ABAG to accomplish its task: (a) The members neither possessed the requisite skills nor did they regularly seek that expertise from outside sources, (b) their affiliation needs interfered with their ability to attend to the task, (c) their operating procedures were ineffective in resolving critical issues, and (d) formal status differences adversely affected the group.

EXPERTISE

One argument advanced for problem solving by practitioners rather than outside experts is that practitioners will be more committed to implementing the innovations they develop. A second is that those closest to the problem are most aware of their own needs and thus are better able to develop solutions to their problems. The analysis of the ABAG's efforts raises questions about these assumptions.

The task of the group was to develop an instrument to assess children's acceptance of responsibility. Although group members were by no means novices in the area of pupil assessment, neither were they experts on instrument construction. Nevertheless, they chose neither to review the literature on test construction nor to study previously published affective tests because of the time involved and the stated fear of being limited by the ideas and approaches of others. Believing that there were no experts in their particular area of interest, the ABAG sought outside assistance only twice, but as they continued to work, they experienced numerous

difficulties. Some of their frustration is captured in the following laments:

Sometimes I think we are over our heads. We don't know what we are talking about. We are experts but not in this field. (Teacher A, 11th Meeting Transcript, p. 9)

I don't have the expertise needed at this point. I'm not a statistician; I'm not a test man. . . . I'm fumbling around like a novice. (Principal B, First Interview, p. 18)

Although such comments were common in the individual interviews, they were not seriously discussed at meetings; members avoided this issue by engaging in abstract discussions, continually redefining the task, and, on occasion, avoiding substantive work altogether.

Abstract Discussions

The group members generally began their discussions of some facet of the task at an abstract level. When the time came for them to operationalize the ideas they had considered, their conversations often moved to an abstract level of a different topic, one only tangentially related to the original issue. Two group members spoke of this tendency:

The first two or three months it was almost imperative that we have this philosophical going back and forth to get a purpose generated. And I in no way suggest that we are ready to come up with a total instrument to take out and test, but I do feel very strongly that we are going to have to at least start being more concrete. (Teacher C, 11th Meeting Transcript, p. 21)

This group is good philosophically, and there are some of us who are better than others in rambling and talking and making our own points and being dramatic about it. But that doesn't help to produce an artifact. (Principal B, First Interview, pp. 11-12)

When discussions began to approach a concrete level, there was a tendency for someone to interject an idea that would return the group's attention to a more philosophical plane. This behavior pattern appeared to be one the group members fell into quite easily rather than as a conscious act of avoidance.

Redefining the Task

From September to March of the first year, the ABAG focused on creating an instrument to assess affective areas of child development. The members shared a copy of the partially developed ten-page "trial checklist" with approximately 60 area administrators, teachers, and curriculum coordinators. Although half the meeting was devoted to providing verbal and written reactions to the ABAG's work, this feedback was not compiled, nor did it become the focus of serious discussion at subsequent meetings. Instead, the next session commenced with a lively discussion of the favorable reception by the community educators. Flushed with feelings of success, the conversation soon turned to the idea of polishing and publishing a portion of the checklist as an article. As one member stated, "We need to protect ourselves . . . [and] have some proof that we are the ones who are doing this" (Teacher C, 15th Meeting Transcript, p. 19). Discussions of the proposed article diverted their attention from the original task during the next three meetings.

In mid-May, the focus of the group's work shifted yet again when the members created a game for use by teachers. The game was "field tested" by two ABAG members serving as workshop consultants in another state. In their words, it "really bombed." There was some discussion of this failure, but most of the time at the next meeting was devoted to other matters. At the beginning of the second year, the original project was shelved for a third time when the group opted to focus future efforts on observing and documenting the behaviors of children in classroom situations. In essence, then, each time the members encountered difficulties, they redefined the task. This enabled them to continue their association as a

group without having to confront the expertise question. The pattern had obvious dysfunctions for task accomplishment.

Task Avoidance

The ABAG members also averted questions regarding their expertise by avoiding the task altogether. The clearest illustration occurred during meetings following the January retreat. Having reached several agreements regarding direction and goals, group members were optimistic that they would make substantial task progress. However, they spent the next two meetings discussing events and issues only tangentially related to the task. One member speculated about the group's difficulty: "Maybe we had a basic approach-avoidance conflict. . . . There may have been some fear that kept us from pushing as hard as we could because we might have found out we couldn't do it" (Teacher E, First Interview, p. 9).

The evidence suggests that one cannot assume that because practitioners are close to a problem, they are best equipped to define and solve it, nor can one assume that practitioners will recognize their lack of expertise. The members of the ABAG did not face their inadequacies openly, and their patterns of behavior shielded them from seriously considering their common deficiencies. In addition, as noted in the following sections, the importance placed both on fulfilling group members' individual needs and on using participatory operating procedures clouded the members' ability to perceive the expertise problem.

SELF-ORIENTED NEED FOR AFFILIATION

Despite the official reason for the ABAG's existence, all participants stated that the major reason for joining and maintaining membership was that the group provided them an opportunity to associate and discuss ideas with like-minded educators. Enjoying the other members, of course, is not necessarily a deterrent to task accomplishment, but this affiliation need may have had negative

consequences for the group's work. It seemed to perpetuate meetings with a social orientation, avoidance of task work outside the meetings, and avoidance of conflict-producing discussions.

Social Orientation of Meetings

Group members occasionally admitted that the more social aspects of the discussions interfered with defining and accomplishing the task. Although the discussions usually revolved around some aspect of the task, they resembled social engagement rather than task engagement and problem resolution. Four quotations support this contention:

Principal C: We are just too darn amenable to each other and just enjoy talking about school and whatever. (10th Meeting Transcript, p. 23)

Principal B: Somehow this seems like a group to me, not a committee.

Teacher A: It's a bunch of friends! (15th Meeting Transcript, pp. 1-2.)

Everybody enjoyed everybody else so much socially at the retreat, and that carried over. The work didn't carry over, but the social part did. . . . The group wasn't strictly task-oriented, and that did hinder us. (Teacher E, Second Interview, pp. 9, 24).

Avoidance of Task Work Outside Meetings

During the seventh session one member suggested that each person work on the task outside of the meeting time. Everyone agreed; however, very little outside work was accomplished. It could be hypothesized that other obligations interfered with their ability to attend to these assignments, because they all had other commitments in addition to their jobs. However, the data suggest otherwise. As Teacher A remarked,

I don't know why I haven't put a lot of energy outside of this group into this group. I don't want to say I'm so busy I haven't had the time, because I take time for the things that matter. I'm not with this task, but I love coming to the meetings. (11th Meeting Transcript, p. 8)

Principal C suggested the following explanation:

Homework never got done. . . . One of the things that was holding us together was the social part of it. Well, you can't enjoy each other when you're all doing homework. So we weren't getting people that were doing homework. (Second Interview, p. 32)

AVOIDANCE OF CONFLICT: PRODUCING DISCUSSIONS

Although the members held divergent views, they tended to sidestep an open expression of these differences. During the second set of interviews several spoke of a tendency to avoid conflict. Principal A said, "I didn't want to raise a big fight with Teacher B. I didn't want to confront. I'm holding back and being polite" (p. 14). Meanwhile, Teacher B's feelings were, "Conflict just never came out in the open with our group, but you see, I think conflict is healthy. I can't deal with this other type of thing where everything is all right when I know it's not" (p. 57). Others echoed these feelings:

We may be awfully fearful of hurting anybody's feelings. . . . We take the responsibility for somebody else's feelings. It is sheer stupidity, but that is what we do. (Principal B, pp. 20, 37)

The group was controlled in a negative sense; it was nice and polite. They don't bring conflict out for fear of rupture. So it stays under even when they get down to critical issues. (Teacher D, p. 8)

The relative absence of conflict and the general tolerance for ambiguity, equivocation, and relatively easy accommodation allowed the members to act as if their ideas were more in harmony than they in fact were. Because they tended to view conflict as a negative and dissociative phenomenon, which might threaten the

continuation of the group, the members unspokenly agreed not to disagree.

In short, the social flavor of their meetings as well as the members' tendency to shun homework and to avoid conflict-producing discussions indicated that they were more committed to the "group as a group" than to the group as a committee with a task to accomplish. This tendency was not unique to the ABAG. One of the most dramatic parallel instances was recounted in Janis's (1972) research at a clinic to help people stop smoking. The affiliation motive was so strong that as they approached the final meeting, some members actually chastised others for decreasing their smoking behavior. Other researchers indicate that groups that evidence a high degree of cohesiveness are easily distracted by the more social aspects of group life (Collins & Raven, 1969; Schachter, Ellertson, McBride, & Gregory, 1951; Stogdill, 1972).

OPERATING PROCEDURES

Two operating procedures emanating from the group's participatory approach tended to impede task accomplishment: (a) using consensus as a decision-making process and (b) functioning without task-holding mechanisms such as a chairperson and other group-structuring devices. These also help explain why discussions remained at an abstract level and how the members were able to avoid conflict. In brief, the members frequently assumed consensus had been reached when it had not, and the task-holding mechanisms that tend to facilitate issue resolution were either absent from or ineffectively used in the ABAG.

Consensus Assumed Rather Than Obtained

Consensus decision making has been defined as a method through which agreement is reached after deliberating the pros and cons of an issue for a period of time sufficient to allow all members to feel they have had a fair chance to influence the decision (Falk, 1981; Mansbridge, 1973). The assumption is that if the discussion

is open enough to allow everyone to speak, the participants will take the opportunity to voice their opinions, and major differences will be resolved. The ABAG members chose this decision-making style for three reasons: (a) they believed that it would promote harmony and consistent task direction, (b) they were persuaded of the importance of truly hearing each other out, and (c) they believed it was essential for all members to be in concert so that any product emanating from the group would be more widely disseminated. However, as the following quotation indicates, the group members rarely tested for the existence of consensus.

You know, we're so informal. . . . Sometimes I find we move on when we've all pretty much had something to say, not necessarily having made a decision, but we've all shared some thoughts on something. See, consensus usually means you are making decisions, but we are not always making decisions. Sometimes we are just making sure that everybody is comfortable, and then we move on. And sometimes we don't have to make that explicit. (Principal C, First Interview, pp. 13-14)

This pattern of behavior, which both seemed to facilitate abstract discussions and to allow the members to sidestep the resolution of their differences, became an established procedure. Consequently, it was not uncommon for a member to believe consensus had been reached and to move to the discussion of another topic before consensus had *actually* been obtained or a decision made. As Teacher B observed, "We would think we had closure on something, and then, the next meeting it was brought up anew, fresh. All of this was very frustrating" (21st Meeting Transcript, p. 2).

Conscious of their lack of progress, the members deviated noticeably from a consensus style of working during the January retreat, when they agreed to vote in order to determine the form, content, and scope of the proposed instrument. The enthusiasm that resulted from having established more specified and concrete goals was shortlived, however, because very little substantive work followed. Over the next several months it became apparent that several members did not want to follow the established direction. Thus, issues upon which closure had supposedly been reached continued

to be discussed. It is likely that some of the very concerns that motivated the ABAG to choose a consensus strategy led the members to place a higher value on group harmony and on their own contributions than on decision making *per se*.

Absence of Task-Holding Mechanisms

Task-holding mechanisms, such as time deadlines, a feeling of accountability, and regular agenda-setting, were relatively absent from the ABAG. On those occasions when an agenda was prepared, its usefulness was contingent on the degree to which the items were narrowly defined and in need of immediate attention as well as the number of times members assumed responsibility for reminding one another of their commitment to discuss the items. The group also lacked a long-term chairperson. Responding to a need for expert assistance with the task, the ABAG hired a consultant, who served as chairperson for the January retreat, and the group resolved three major issues with which it had struggled. Aware that decisions were made when a facilitator provided structure, the group chose ad hoc chairs from among the members at several subsequent meetings. However, this arrangement did not tend to assist them in their deliberations. Either the temporary chairs did not perform the appropriate functions of soliciting ideas, providing clarifications and summaries of member contributions, and testing for consensus, or they experienced difficulty getting the group to follow their structuring suggestions. Comments from the fourteenth meeting address these difficulties:

One of the things I am frustrated with is we may each be leaders out in our own spheres, but when we get together, none of us takes that role and keeps us on track. (Teacher A, p. 29)

In the past we've identified the leader, and then we've expected him to either beat people on the head or be beaten down himself. . . . Teacher C tried it; Teacher D has tried it and had mediocre success not because it was their problem, but because we just refused to accept anybody who is going to regiment a meeting. (Principal B, p. 37)

One might expect that the three administrators would have assumed many of the task maintenance functions, but they did not tend to do so because of their commitment to the egalitarian spirit of the group. Principal A stated, for example, "I guess I am concerned with not taking over. I'm trying to see if the group can handle it themselves" (First Interview, p. 15).

In sum, the permissive operating procedures of the ABAG allowed the group to function without a locus of conscience. Findings from studies of therapeutic groups are instructive in this regard. The presence of a therapist has been found to suppress trust, independence, interaction, and leadership development in group members; the absence of a facilitator tends to produce less anxiety and more spontaneity but also less task orientation and less confrontive behavior (Coyne & Rapin, 1977; Seligman & Sterne, 1969). In their review of 28 studies of leaderless groups, Desmond and Seligman (1977) found that those groups that obtained positive results were structured rather than unstructured. Thus, it can be concluded that some formal structures in the shape of task-holding mechanisms are necessary for productivity.

THE EFFECTS OF FORMAL STATUS DIFFERENCES

Three reservations have been raised about bringing people from different hierarchical levels together to work on a task: (a) It is difficult for subordinates to oppose the judgment of persons with higher formal status; (b) subordinates are less willing to voice their ideas; (c) a high rate of idea initiation is curtailed by the presence of ascribed status differences (Blau & Scott, 1962; Bridges, Doyle, & Mahan, 1968). In groups where there is an emphasis upon equal participation and responsibility by all members, it is assumed that the ideas of persons with lower ascribed status will be given the same consideration as those of superordinates. This assumption was not, however, supported in the ABAG. Although group members were philosophically committed to the principle of equal treatment of ideas and the administrators even attempted to lessen the influence of status, the principals were generally perceived to

be the opinion leaders, and the teacher members seemed to defer to their suggestions. For example, Teacher A suggested repeatedly that the group change direction and create a product that would be useful in teacher inservice training. The group did not respond positively to these suggestions, but some months later when an administrator offered essentially the same idea, it was enthusiastically endorsed. Teacher D commented on a similar situation in which the work of two teachers was largely ignored by the others:

I thought the work Teacher A and Teacher C did had little impact. When they brought it back, the group really dropped it. I think it was the whole pecking order thing. It did not emanate from Administrator A, B, or C. . . . Leadership in our group always was a function of how we were when we began. If you were an administrator, you were a leader. If you were a teacher, you were not a leader. (Second Interview, pp. 23, 35)

The effects of such status differences have been observed in other studies. Falk (1981) has demonstrated that although consensus decision making facilitates group discussion and higher quality solutions in equal status groups, it does not necessarily promote the free expression and consideration of ideas in hierarchically differentiated groups. Bass and Wurster (1953) found that status in the company appeared to determine the amount of influence experienced by an individual. A growing body of literature (Mulder, 1971; Nord & Durand, 1975; Pfeffer, 1978) suggests that administrators actually gain more power under participatory conditions than when they serve as chairpersons of the group. In sum, the data from the ABAG and other studies suggest that the presence of hierarchical differentiation may tend to negate the positive benefits that are assumed to accrue in participatory groups.

CONCLUSIONS

The literature is replete with recommendations that various types of participatory group designs such as the adhocracy, project teams,

and temporary systems (Bennis & Slater, 1968; Hopkirk & Bryce, 1978; Mintzberg, 1983; Peters & Waterman, 1982; Toftler, 1971); quality circles (Thompson, 1982); and participatory management (Anthony, 1978; Greenberg, 1975) be adopted for innovative or unpredictable tasks requiring extensive problem solving. These approaches are said to result in higher quality problem solving and greater commitment to the implementation than are more formal, mechanistic arrangements. Although much of the current literature details the benefits of these approaches, the results of this longitudinal study raise several cautionary notes.

Believing that adherence to more formal group structures tends to inhibit creativity, the ABAG members consciously adopted a participatory approach. Although they tried for 15 months to develop an innovative product, they failed to accomplish the task. Although some of the difficulties they encountered may have been caused by factors that were idiosyncratic to the ABAG, this study has implications for practitioners who attempt to adopt this approach in problem-solving and decision-making situations. First, it is often assumed that school practitioners possess the requisite skills to solve school-related problems and to develop innovations, and that procedural flexibility releases creative potential. Although the ABAG members had a great deal of practical experience, they possessed neither suitable formal training nor sufficient skills in the area of instrument construction to complete the task. Other ad hoc groups whose members do not possess expertise directly relevant to the task may experience similar difficulties if a participatory approach is used.

A second assumption is that participatory decision making allows for the satisfaction of individual needs and thereby enhances group productivity. The members of the ABAG were committed to meeting as a group. Practices such as side-stepping conflict situations, avoiding outside work, and being more committed to the group as a group than to the group as a committee with a task did satisfy needs for affiliative relationships, but these same behavior patterns had negative consequences for task performance. When a norm of cohesiveness exists, members are well advised to ensure

that they are not preserving the group at the expense of the work at hand.

A third assumption is that group members will, either individually or collectively, perform the functions normally assumed by a chairperson. But shared responsibility may mean that no one has the responsibility for focusing the group's attention. Failure to use at least some task-holding mechanisms increases the likelihood that a task group will evolve into an informal group that fails to complete the task.

Finally, several theorists have assumed that individuals with different ascribed status positions can work together as equals in ad hoc task groups, but despite their careful efforts in this direction, the ABAG members failed to do so. Based on these findings, two recommendations may be in order. On the one hand, it is suggested that subordinates acquire knowledge, training, and experience in such areas as group dynamics and self-expression before they try to participate in decision-making enterprises on equal terms with superordinates. On the other hand, practitioners should be advised that hierarchical differentiation inhibits the possibility that leadership will emerge as a consequence of expertise and group interaction. In order for leadership to pass from one member to another as the situation demands, the group must begin with everyone relatively equal in status.

NOTES

1. The names of persons, groups, and places have been coded to ensure the anonymity of those who participated in this study.
2. Throughout the analysis process, one copy of the data remained intact so that context, vitally important in a project of this length and complexity, would not be lost. The 24 meetings observed included 21 sessions averaging more than two and a half hours, two eight-hour meetings, and one two-day retreat. Each of two interviews held with the eight participants ranged from one and a half to four hours in length. Transcribed tape recordings of these interactions resulted in more than 1,200 single-spaced typewritten pages of meeting transcripts and 600 pages of interview transcripts.
3. The constant comparative method was used in the following way to analyze the data: As the data indicators were grouped together to suggest recurring regularities, concepts

denoting finer distinctions in the data began to emerge. Many data indicator categories and some conceptual categories developed during the initial stage were recoded as a result of the sorting process. The indicators were continually compared with one another to ensure both "internal homogeneity," or the goodness of fit among data in a particular category, and "external heterogeneity," or the clear distinction between data assigned to different categories (Guba, 1978). The incident-to-incident comparison was followed by a process of comparing concept properties and establishing relationships between and among concepts.

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Carolyn J. Wood is Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Administration at the University of New Mexico. In addition to her research interest in organizational and group behavior, she has published in the areas of performance evaluation, participatory decision making, analytical approaches to problem solving, and learned helplessness. She received her Ph.D. in Educational Policy and Administration from Washington University (St. Louis).

This article urges caution in illuminating and interpreting spontaneous group metaphors. It encourages amplification of the metaphor as a less intrusive means for using this therapeutic tool. Case examples are provided supporting the discussion.

MORE METAPHOR Concerns and Considerations in Groups

BUD A. McCLURE

Southeastern Louisiana University

Several recent articles have discussed the benefits of using spontaneous metaphor as a therapeutic tool, in group work (Ettin, 1986; Gladding, 1984; McClure, 1987; McClure, in press; Owen, 1985; Rossel, 1981; Welch, 1984). Although it has been suggested that restraint be exercised in illuminating or interpreting metaphors, particularly in the first stage of a group's development (McClure, 1987), little discussion has centered on the implications of such direct interventions. The purpose of this article is to review the functions of metaphor, to discuss areas leaders must address before deciding to illuminate or interpret them, to encourage amplification of the metaphor as more natural and less intrusive, and to provide examples of how a metaphor can be developed at the analogical or latent level.

There are two levels of communication that operate simultaneously in groups: manifest and latent. The manifest refers to the group's concrete level of operation, which contains the communications and stories that are shared by the group members. The latent refers to the symbolic level, which is outside the conscious awareness of the group's members and is often expressed through metaphor.