A Leader's Role In Community Change

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Chances are you don't consider yourself a "community or group leader," but the fact that you are taking time to read this paper indicates that you are. After all, just what is a leader? Any person who strives to find out what makes the community tick and how beneficial change can be brought about is a leader, or at least a potential leader.

To be an effective leader one must understand several points, such as:

1. Who comprises the "community" one wishes to change?
2. Why do people accept or reject new ideas?
3. How does change take place? Is it predictable to any degree?
4. What role should a leader take to bring about desired change?

This publication is designed to give you some insights into these important questions. After reading it, and filling in the planning work sheets at the back, you should have a better idea of where your community or group is going and where you fit in that precarious position as a "leader."

The Cause of Change

There are theories that deal with the difficult question, "Why do people adopt new modes of technical, social or economic behavior?" Unfortunately, very few of these theories have practical application. The theory discussed here fits our purpose to understand why change takes place because it is mostly based on common sense. It also can be applied directly to a step-by-step procedure of achieving desired community change.

Termed "the theory of rising expectations," this theory states that people desire change when their expectations rise faster than their perceived ability to meet these expectations. As the level of concern increases because of the discrepancy between rising expectations and the accompanying perceived ability to reach expectation, the chance that people will seek and accept change is enhanced.

Perceived Ability to Reach Expectations
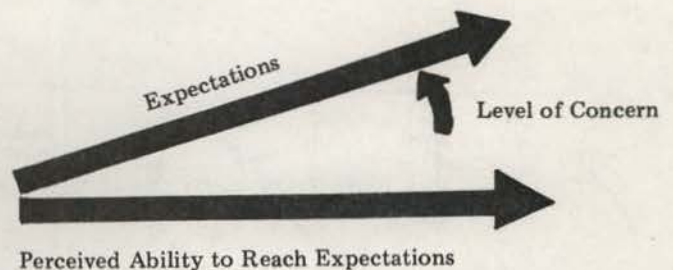
To this theory can be added one more ingredient — a decrease in the perceived ability to reach expectations in the face of rising expectations. Studies of small Oregon towns that sought industrial development after years of depending only on local resources showed that all of the towns began their quest for industries after the timber industry began to decline. They sought change when their perceived ability to reach their expectations dropped. In other words, when people want more and more, but don't feel

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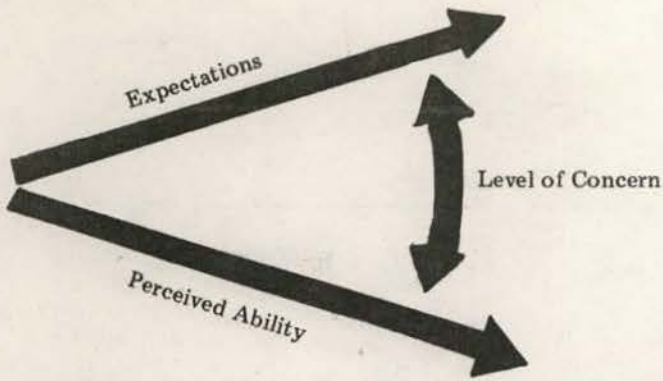
they can get it under the present circumstances, they are ready to change those present circumstances.

Change is created by an increase in the "level of concern" of a specified group. This level of concern is directly influenced by two factors: the expectations of the group and their perceived ability to meet these expectations. If expectations rise without an accompanying rise in the perceived ability to meet these expectations, the level of concern will increase. In the same manner, a decrease in the perceived ability to meet expectations such as could be caused by an economic setback also results in an increased level of concern. *As the concern increases, the chances of social movement become more likely.*

The Phases of Development

Community residents tend to believe that community change just happens and that each community is so unique that it follows its own unpredictable course as it undergoes change. In fact, while changes themselves may be unique, the process by which community change takes place is not. The community development process, that is, any community effort to attempt to solve a perceived problem, goes through set distinguishable phases. These phases are distinguished by a variety of perceivable behavioral and organizational elements which have varying importance in each phase. For simplicity, we will take one factor as a key to determine which phase of development a community is in. This factor is the level of concern.

Unfortunately, one complex element must be added to the process of determining a community's level of concern. This is that the expectations of community leadership are not always the same as those of the community at large. Therefore, it is important to determine both the level of concern of the leadership (even when you are the leadership) and the level of concern of the general citizenry. This is evident as we look at the phases of development in Fig. 1.
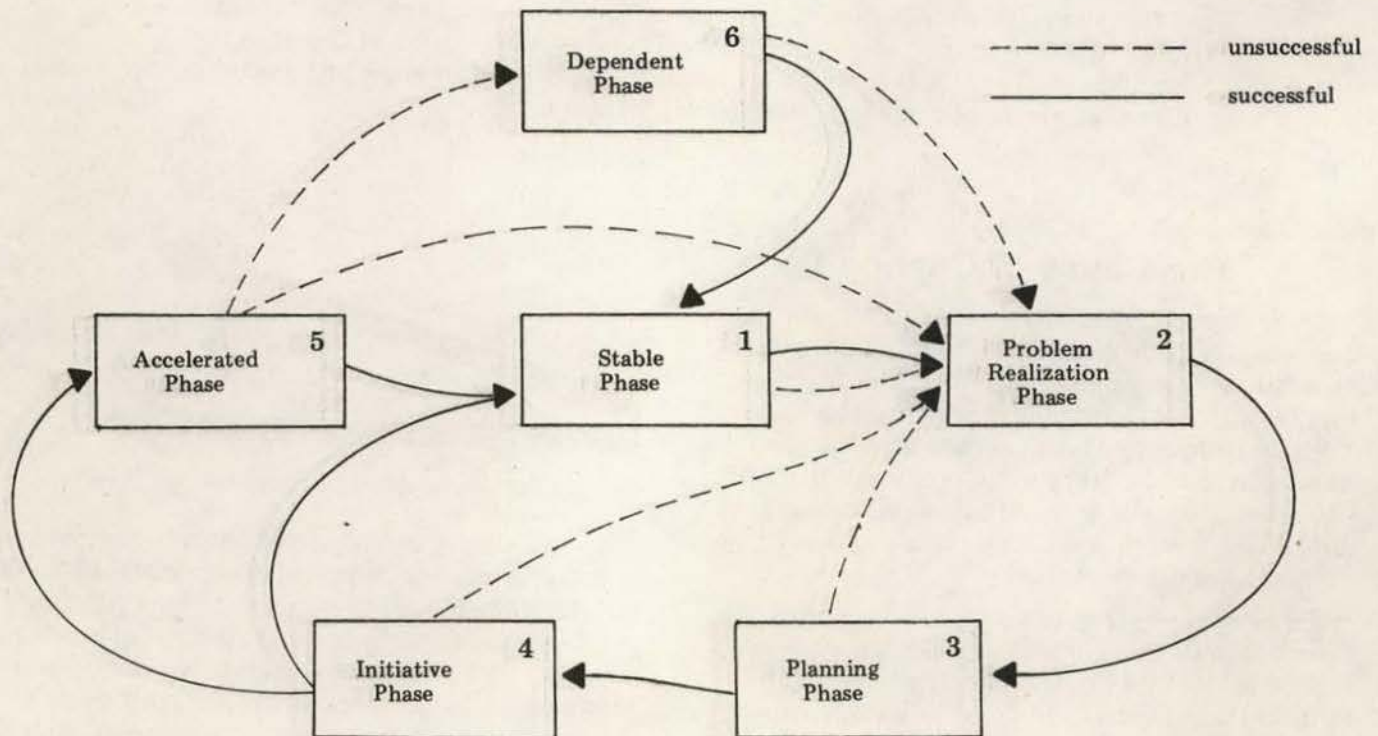

Fig. 1. Phases of development of levels of concern.

A community undergoing the development process will, if successful, pass through the phases shown in Fig. I. If all goes well, the community will pass from phase to phase following the path of solid arrows on the chart. If problems develop, the path may follow one of the broken lines. Each phase can be identified.

Stable Phase

The first phase of development, the stable phase, is that period in the community when there is a low level of concern by both the leadership and the general citizenry. This does not mean the community has no problems. Residents may not realize they do or they have learned to live with them.

Problem Realization Phase

This is a period when either or both the leadership and the general citizenry have a growing level of concern. New leadership may form during this phase. The new leaders will take over if the old leadership does not soon lead the community to the next phase, usually the planning phase.

Planning Phase

This phase is a time of leadership organization and development. This may come with the emergence of new leadership or through the motivation of old leaders. The level of concern of the general citizenry usually continues to rise. Their level of concern will begin to lessen only when the planned solution to the problem starts to unfold. This is an unstable period politically in the community.

If the leaders fail to initiate an acceptable planned response to the concerns, a return to the problem realization phase will result. If the leaders are successful, the community enters an initiative phase of the development process. Many communities go from problem realization to planning and back to problem realization over and over again because of a lack of communication between leaders and the rest of the community.

Initiative Phase

This phase follows the first visual sign of development. During this phase, the level of concern of the citizenry begins to drop as they see that they are able to bring about needed change. This success usually causes increased expectations among the leaders which raises their level of concern to a point that can spur them to seek more and more development, leading them to the accelerated phase of development.

Accelerated Phase

This phase is a period of rapid development and growth. If checked in time, it can return the community to a stable but growing situation. If not, the level of concern of the citizenry will rise rapidly as they begin to feel disillusioned by the leadership's promises that growth and development would solve their problems. This level of concern may lead back to the problem realization phase, or the community may enter a dependent phase.

Dependent Phase

This perhaps is best described as the period of increased dependence on outside resources to maintain the community's ability to meet expectations. If a community carefully uses such resources it can move to the stable phase. Otherwise, the community will return to a problem realization phase after a long period of frustration because of being forced to follow the rules and regulations set down by the group or agency providing the resources they need to meet their desires. Many cities in America have been in this phase for years and now, as the federal well begins to dry up, they are in trouble.

The Process

Identify Community

Now that you are buried in community change theory, how can you apply it to go step by step through real problems using the rising expectations theory and the development process model?

The first step is to identify a target community. Quite often a leader's first real problem is identifying the community or group he or she *really works* with. One must also realize where that group fits in relation to other community groups. The exercise on page 8 may help you clarify the many interrelationships in a community.

In this exercise, the target group is the Chamber of Commerce, but other larger groups may share an interest and the success of a project may be determined by decisions made at the higher level. Any group contains subgroups which may not necessarily share common goals. For example, if our purpose of working with the fictitious Chamber of Commerce is to build a new mall on the north side of town, we may not get much support from the downtowners or the southside promotion committee. Maybe even the public safety committee would buck us if we didn't get them in on the planning of traffic flow around the new mall.

The point is, do not start any project until you know who all the actors are and you are sure you are working with the right groups. Successful programs involve all affected groups.

Evaluate Condition

Once the community or group has been identified and before any action is taken regarding change, we must evaluate the conditions that exist in that community. This is done by determining the expectations and perceived ability to meet expectations of the leaders (including yourself) and of the general citizenry. In the field, this is accomplished by using tools such as:

1. Attitude surveys
2. Attending public meetings
3. Listening to gossip
4. Reading newspapers (especially, the letters to the editor)
5. Knowledge of external events
6. Just being a member of the community
7. Keeping track of incoming and outgoing migration and employment trends
8. Personal interviews

Depend on your store of already accumulated knowledge. Write down on page 9 the expectations and perceived ability to reach expectations of your target community's leaders, and do the same for the citizens. Then determine what phase of development your community is in.

Choose Role

You are now ready to choose the role you will assume during the initial action in your chosen target communities.

Listed in the following discussion are various roles that one may find appropriate to elicit the type of group response desired.

DOER

When in this role, a community leader is almost indistinguishable from the other active members of the community. We all know that it is sometimes important to roll up your sleeves and join in some community processes or functions. This is a good technique only if used sparingly. Remember that you can lose your effectiveness as a leader if you do all the work yourself or can't be distinguished from the crowd. If you are "just one of the family" you may lose your ability to assume other roles and this would destroy your effectiveness as a change leader.

doer
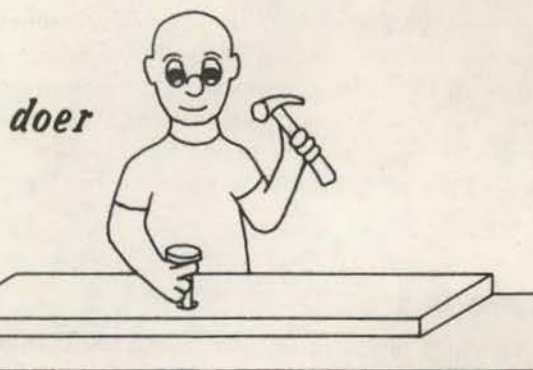
This role may be the most dangerous trap a leader can fall into. It is a lot easier "to just do it yourself," but remember that a group without direction is a mob. As a leader, you must keep the leader image, though that doesn't mean you must be a dictator.

ORGANIZER

This role is sometimes called the process technician. In this role a leader provides an organizational framework or process (i.e., a more effective committee structure) that will assist the group in problem identification or problem solving. The
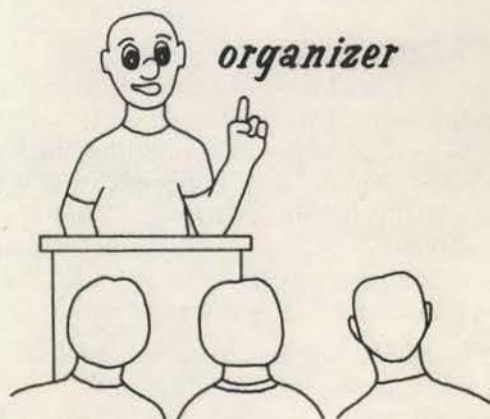

organizer

leader as organizer neither provides the answers nor actually takes part in the process. This role is critical in getting everyone to accept the challenge as something worthwhile for everyone, not just the leadership.

CONSULTANT/AUTHORITY

In this role the leader actually provides the answers, alternatives or new data. The ability to operate in this role definitely depends on really knowing the answers. If you don't know, **don't try to bluff.**
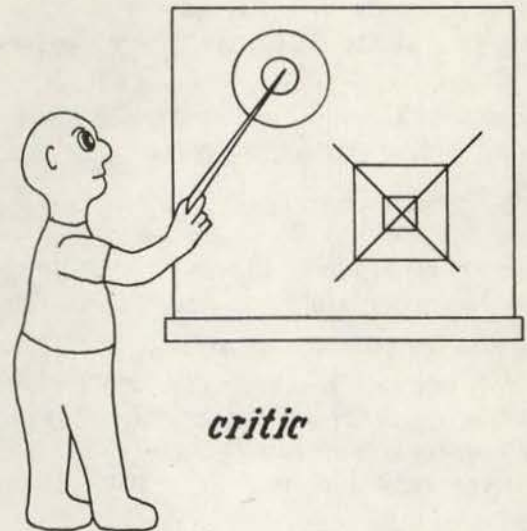
FACILITATOR

Because of status, a leader is able to initiate action that no one else can. The leader serves as a link between opposing citizen groups. But, a person in the

consultant

critic
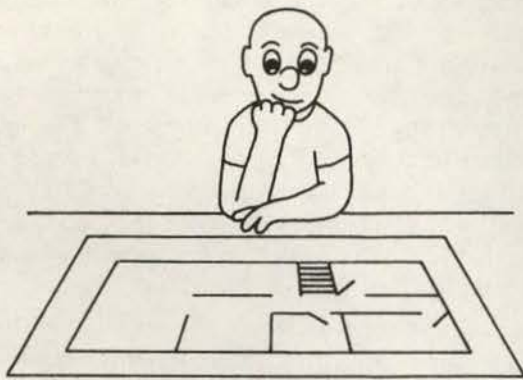
role of facilitator can also be a convenient scapegoat so this function should be undertaken with caution. In the role of facilitator one can operate as a grantsman and assist the community in seeking necessary resources. Another caution is necessary here also, since all too often a community may drop the full responsibility for staff and financing in your lap. Make sure they realize you are only one of the team.
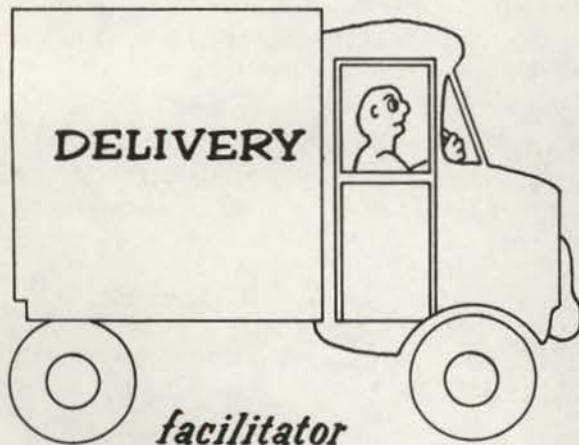

facilitator

CRITIC

When operating in the role of critic, one must sometimes try to force the group into defending its point of view. If members of the group cannot do this, perhaps their point of view is indeed wrong. This negative or pessimistic critic role can be effective even if the leader, in truth, agrees with the group. As with any role there can be negative impact from this approach. Do not totally alienate yourself from your community. Remember also that a critic is not always negative. Being a positive critic can lend support to a project. The optimism of group members or an individual can be enhanced when someone, especially someone known as a leader,

agrees with them. Some people have labelled the positive critic role as "the legitimizer." If you always are a positive critic you may damage your reputation and become known as a "yes person" with no original ideas.
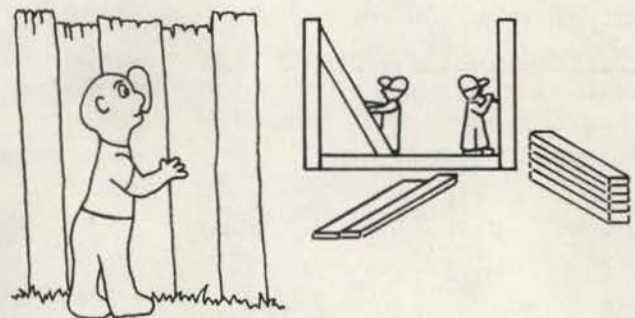
THE OBSERVER

This seems like the easy role but it is usually difficult. In some situations, the best action may be no action at all. This may occur when a group is near sure success and any move by you may be interpreted as an attempt to jump on the bandwagon to share the glory. This is also a good role to take when you are not sure what else to do. This passive role must not be assumed too often or for too long at one

observer

stretch. To be an observer is to be a total outsider. Too long as an outsider and you will endanger your community or group membership. As a community member who has been or may be in residence for sometime, you may find it difficult to be an observer because you have always been involved. Unless you can stand back from the crowd, you can fail to observe some critical problems.

When to Assume What Role
or How to Initiate Actions

According to our theories of rising expectations and phases of the development process, only 5 actions are possible as a change agent:

1. Raise expectations
2. Lower expectations
3. Raise perceived ability to reach expectations
4. Lower perceived ability to reach expectations
5. Reaffirm the present values

The role you pick can determine which alternatives to take or vice versa. Let us examine each phase of development and the role alternatives and action alternatives available to you for each of these phases.

STABLE PHASE

From the following diagram, you can see the three possible roles to take if the target group is in the stable phase of development. The first two (observer and doer) are alternatives only if you agree that all is rosy in your target group. If you feel that the target group for some reason has not identified some problems then you should become a critic. This leaves you two courses of action. If you feel the group can do better than it now is shooting for, you try to raise group expectations by such methods as introducing new technology or comparing with communities you feel are doing something better. If you feel the group is not really able to reach the goals it has set, you try to show the fault in the perceived notion that it can reach the expectations. Either way you are trying to increase the group's level of concern so that it does something.

Make sure that you have a plan of action up your sleeve when the group enters the problem realization phase or members will blame you for their discontent.

STABLE PHASE
- Observer
- Doer
- Critic (neg., pos.) (good)
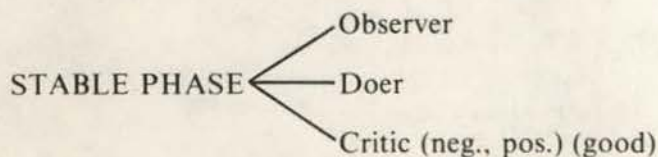
PROBLEM REALIZATION PHASE

When the group enters the problem realization phase, you must assume a different leadership role. If you were a critic during the stable phase, you can stay a critic only by switching the type of criticism. If you were being negative before and remain that way after the group realizes it has a problem, you run the risk of hearing, "All right, get off it! We
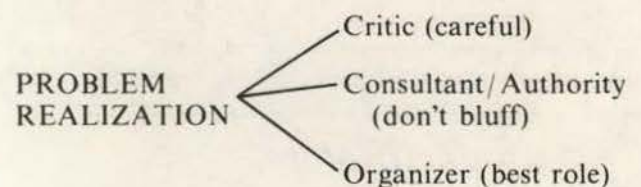
don't need to be reminded what the problem is." When this happens, you have lost or will soon lose your status as a leader. If you were being a positive critic and remain so, you are in effect saying, "you people are wrong. There is no problem." This may be true, but be sure before you jump. If people are hard to convince they have a problem, they are twice as stubborn in their conviction that they do indeed have a problem. The critic role is possible in the problem realization period, but dangerous.

Sometimes a group will enter the problem realization phase not being sure exactly what the problem is. If time is of the essence and you are sure you know the problem, the best role may be that of consultant/authority. Remember, you are not truly in this role until you are asked. Volunteered knowledge is usually not accepted. The group must ask for your guidance.

The premier role in this phase is that of organizer. Now is the time to provide the group with the forum necessary for members to identify their problem together. It is then their problem as a group and they are willing to do something about it. They will enter the planning phase together. This greatly enhances the chance of success.

The worst role is that of doer. A leader that sits with the crowd and moans when a need has been identified is not a leader but an anchor around the group's neck.

If you don't know what to do, be an observer. Just remember that to stay outside too long may mean that the door will be locked when you try to come back in.

PROBLEM REALIZATION
- Critic (careful)
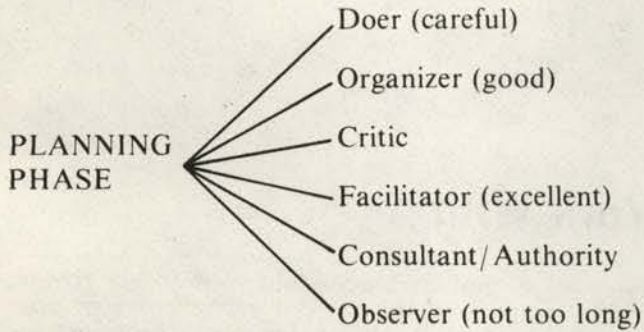- Consultant/Authority (don't bluff)
- Organizer (best role)

PLANNING PHASE

The planning phase is an action phase and takes an action role. In this phase all roles are open to you. In fact, you may have to change roles several times. This is a critical time for your group. If the group fails to create a good plan and falls back to the problem realization phase, new leadership may be required to get planning started anew.

It is in this phase that the role of facilitator has the spotlight. Your group needs all the help it can get. A leader who serves as facilitator even when he or she has been considered the authority on the subject is a brave but successful leader.

If the planning group has not been organized properly, either become an organizer or provide someone who can. Properly organized planning processes have more chance of success.

The other roles are open to you, but each must be handled carefully and not for too long.
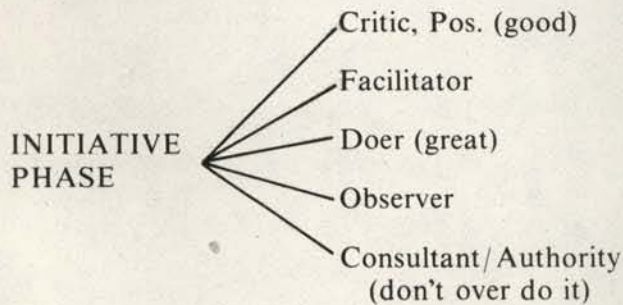
PLANNING PHASE
- Doer (careful)
- Organizer (good)
- Critic
- Facilitator (excellent)
- Consultant/Authority
- Observer (not too long)

INITIATIVE PHASE

The initiative phase is the fun one. It is the pay-off. At last the group can see that something can be done about its problems. If the planning phase was done properly, the leader need not be in an active role. Now is the time for positive, supportive criticism.

Remembering that being a doer is an overt demonstration of support, a good leader rolls up his sleeves in the initiative phase and joins in as "one of the crowd." After the first flush of success, however, the leader must look toward the accelerated phase. After a period of observation, an active role may be taken to help the group into high gear.

By all means do not try to be an organizer. If the group isn't organized by now, it never will be. When a leader continues in the same role that was used in the preceding phase, he or she runs a very real risk of being a drag on the group.

INITIATIVE PHASE
- Critic, Pos. (good)
- Facilitator
- Doer (great)
- Observer
- Consultant/Authority (don't over do it)

ACCELERATED PHASE

This is a time of glory for the leader but also a time for caution. The leader must try to lead the group into a growing stable phase. This is a phase where the expectations of the community are rising, but the perceived and hopefully the real ability to reach those expectations is rising at an equal pace. This is the phase we all work for. The danger in the accelerated phase is that the group will outstrip its resources. When that happens, it may return to the problem realization phase and blame the leaders or become dependent on outside resources. If the group enters the dependent phase, the leader may become ineffective because of the rules set down by those who are now providing the resources.

During the accelerated phase the two best roles are critic and consultant/authority. As the critic, the object is to say, "Hey friends, this is great, but let's keep it under our control." Consultant/authority is the better role. By now the community should trust you as a leader. Members will look to you to give them the information and guidance to steer them toward the growing stable phase.

ACCELERATED PHASE
- Observer
- Critic, Neg., Pos. (use both together)
- Consultant/Authority (don't be afraid)
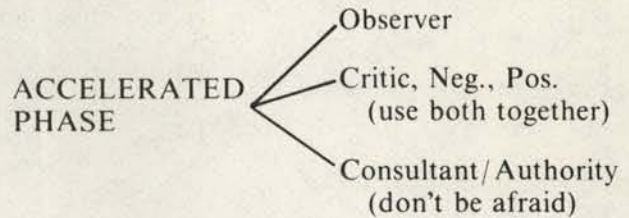
DEPENDENT PHASE

At times it is necessary and beneficial to enter into a dependent situation. When this happens, be sure you are the facilitator — a strong facilitator, one who has the power to withdraw the group from outside dominance as soon as possible.

If you fail to maneuver into this role, or help another local to become the strong facilitator, become a negative critic when the time comes to sever ties. Remember, groups or communities that remain in the dependent phase usually change leaders to break the habit.

DEPENDENT PHASE
- Negative Critic
- Facilitator (being in control)
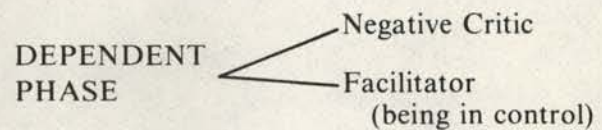
CHANGING ROLES

Everyone warns against "changing horses in the middle of the stream." As a leader you need to become adept at changing. To stay in one role too long is comfortable but not often helpful to your group. At the least, be sure to change roles when your community enters a new phase.

Now you should be ready to choose what role and action you will take in your individual target group.

Write your chosen role and action in the appropriate place on the form on page 10. Be sure to plan your strategy ahead so you can change roles when necessary. A leader in the wrong role is a liability to a group.

Being a leader can be a gratifying experience. It can also be a nightmare. The difference lies in thinking ahead and being in the right role at the right time.

Groups You Work With

Group	Groups it is a part of	Sub-groups within your target group
(example) Chamber of Commerce	I Dullville	1. C of C Development Committee
	II South Valley Chamber	2. Downtowners
	III Idaho State Chamber	3. Northside Promotion Committee
	IV	4. Southside Promotion Committee
	V	5. Dullville Industrial Development Committee
		6. Public Safety Committee

Target Group _____

	Expectations	Perceived ability to reach expectations
Leaders		
Citizenry		

Phase of development _____

9

Target Group _____

Phase of Development _____

Role	Action
If Successful:	
If Unsuccessful:	

10

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