

THOUGHTS ON SHARED LEADERSHIP

By Kathleen Ryan

How can you tell when your group is demonstrating the characteristics of one that is extraordinary? One answer lies within the behaviors of Shared Leadership. But how will you recognize Shared Leadership when it appears?

Shared Leadership is the second of eight indicators of extraordinary groups. When leadership is shared *members lead the group together, taking mutual responsibility for outcomes and the way in which the group works*. This is usually the case if the group is self-organizing.

But it can also be true if the group has a designated leader. In this case, the team leader leads in a way that assures that the group is led, rather than being the one constant leader. In essence, the appointed leader performs certain important leadership functions, but only ones that cannot be done effectively by others in the group. (For more on this, see Chapter 9 of *Extraordinary Groups*.) By taking a minimalist approach, such a leader creates room for others to step in and lead as well. This sharing of leadership is a powerful catalyst for building a sense of shared accountability for the group's work among all members.

Below you'll find examples of Shared Leadership, what it looks like when it's flourishing in a group. Think about any of your groups. As you review this list, do you see items that are familiar? How do you, as a member, step in to share in fulfilling leadership roles? In groups that you lead, what do you do to encourage others to also take accountability for leading? Do any of your groups exemplify these behaviors?

Members share in leading a group when they:

- Volunteer to lead projects, based upon their expertise, interest, or available time
- Volunteer to research an issue or bring a draft proposal to the group in order to advance the group's work
- Offer content expertise related to the group's purpose, serving as a guide or thought-leader to help other members learn more about critical subject matter

- Take responsibility for facilitating group meetings or preparing the notes with decisions and next steps
- Encourage others to take a leadership role and support them when they do
- Get a meeting started when the leader or facilitator does not show up or is late
- Ask critical questions to focus a discussion
- Attend to effective group process: summarize conversation points related to a particular decision; suggest next steps; make sure that all members have been heard from when reaching a decision; model effective communication and deep listening, especially when differences arise
- When group conversation or becomes tangential or divisive, invite the group to talk about the dynamics in order to encourage group learning and refocus the meeting
- Propose shared leadership to the group, leading a discussion about who might do what to share the responsibility; once underway, encourage the group to reflect, at some point, about what has been learned and how members might become even more effective together

For further thought:

- What do you see as the benefits of Shared Leadership?
- When have you experienced in your group-life?
- What can you do to encourage it at work, in your community life, or at home?