

Finding a voice within and through organisations

Presentation by Yo, given at Autscape 2013

Why join/form an organisation?

Groups get listened to! (Individuals are seen as representing only themselves, groups are seen as representing a section of society)

Combining skills and efforts can help achieve goals not possible alone

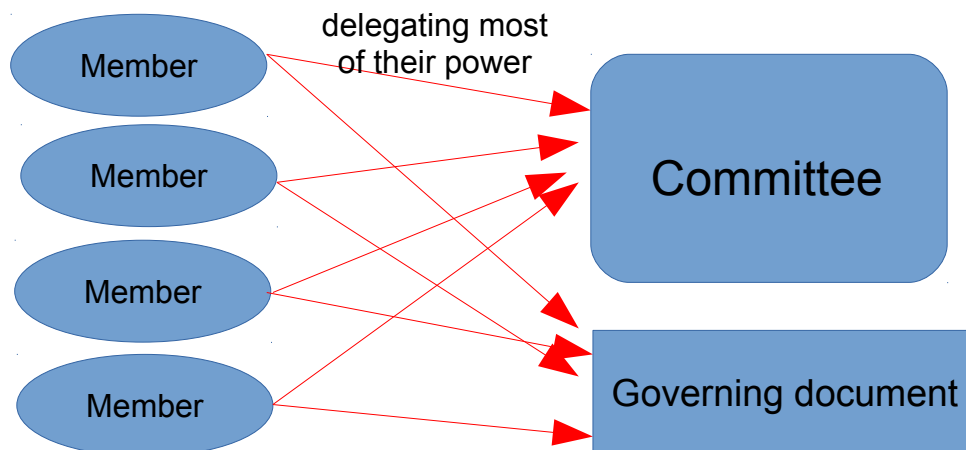
The problem with organisations

Everyone wants their own way and nothing gets done

The solutions:

- (1) Fair decision making → needs rules and structures → governing document
- (2) Efficient decision making → fewer people involved in most decisions → electing representatives

So in a functioning democratic organisation, the members delegate most of their power to representatives (e.g. committee members) who then take most of the decisions following the rules set out in a governing document (e.g. a constitution).



How organisations work

There are basic rules – some written, some unwritten

The law (mostly written)

e.g. charities can't make a profit, licences for things

Democracy (mostly unwritten)

e.g. majority rule (even if you are in the minority and think they are wrong)

Ethical rules (mostly unwritten)

e.g. conflict of interest

Procedural rules (mostly written in the governing document)

e.g. how many people can be on the committee

Ethical rules

Committee members are *representing others*.

They are expected to behave with:

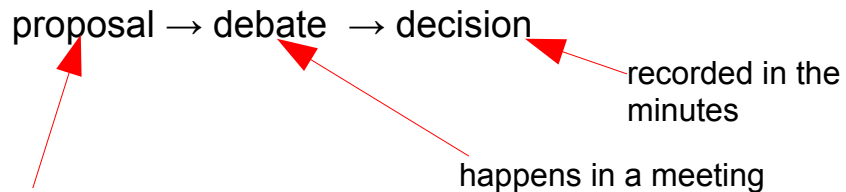
honesty integrity independence diligence

A representative must do what they honestly believe is best for the people they represent **not** just what is best for them personally. They must avoid *conflict of interest* (where what they personally want/need could be in conflict with what is best for the people they represent).

Getting things done

Find out what the procedural rules are (in the governing document) and follow them!

How decisions get made:



- clear (get help from secretary with wording)
- made by a committee member
- written in the agenda

Different kinds of decisions

Governance decisions (e.g. what should our policy be about accessibility?) - made by the committee

Management decisions (e.g. what colour folders should we buy?) - committee delegates authority to an individual to make those decisions (e.g. to spend an agreed budget on conference materials)

Who is who

Chair – leader and guide but first among equals not boss

Treasurer – the money person, advice as well as receipts

Secretary – not just a note taker, guide to procedural rules and support committee functioning

Getting things done effectively

- Find out what the rules and procedures are and follow them to get things done efficiently and effectively
- Remember you are a representative and think about what is best for the people you represent, not just what you personally think or feel
- Avoid it getting personal – focus on issues not people
- Make sure you have read and thought about all relevant information
- Make sure you are making decision for the right reasons (e.g. does the person have the right skills/qualities for the job, not a popularity contest)

Sources of information and advice

Secretary

NCVO, CVS and similar

Books (e.g. The ICOSA Charity Trustees Guide, Robert's Rules of Order)

Charity Commission (look for guides numbered CC*)

Companies house

Directory of Social Change

Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators (ICSA)